

CROSS TALK

Imbibing the essence of sacrifice

The spirit should go beyond the day

THE significance of Eid-ul-Azha, second largest festive occasion in Islamic calendar, is as much spiritual as it is worldly. It is profound in its symbolic manifestation and demonstrative of the ultimate sacrifice Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) was set to perform as an unparalleled example of allegiance to Almighty Allah.

Eid-ul-Azha in a transcendental sense is celebration of life both in our world and in the hereafter not through pleasure-seeking but by a reassertion of values. Limiting observance of the occasion to the mere act of sacrifice is ritualistic whose soul resides in the spirit of giving in service to others.

The core value the occasion emphasises is fellow-feeling reflected through helping the needy in our families, neighbourhood and beyond across the society at large. As a matter of fact, in a country of immense poverty it is a societal duty for the well-to-do to look after the have-nots. Of course, it is a responsibility enjoined by religion on us but no less important would be a self-driven motivation to come in aid of the less unfortunate. The spiritual blends with the mundane there.

In an extended sense, sacrifice should signify a whole lot of ethos such as mutual accommodation, tolerance of dissent and spirit of healthy coexistence. Exchange of Eid wishes between our leaders should be followed through living by the positive spirit that the occasion generates all around.

It is a call to sharing and cementing ties within fraternity and beyond. We would like the rifts in the Islamic world to be healed with peace and unity replacing divisiveness and pulling away in different directions. We know ceasefires in flashpoints take place for a few days of the festival; one only wishes this to lead to permanent peace in Palestine.

At an important mundane level, we should be alive to the need for keeping our homes, streets, villages and cities clean even as we devote ourselves to the acts of sacrifice. Energetic municipal services would have to be blended with the citizens' active cooperation to effectively allay all sorts of health and hygiene concerns.

Wish you Eid Mubarak.

Vitriolic talk show touching a new low

Decency given an indecent burial

WHAT happened on RTV talk show on October 22 was the height of distasteful behaviour on the part of a minister who clearly crossed the line vis-à-vis an opposition leader. When things go wrong and the media pick it up, some ministers bristle all their quills and berate the media for alleged misreporting. The account that the Shipping Minister Shahjahan, in particular, gave of himself on the show, does not require media to smear his image. He is enough to do so himself.

In any talk-show, it is possible to lose one's temper. But Mr. Khan being a seasoned politician should have been able to control his temper, especially when speaking on a TV programme that is being telecast live with an audience involving people who are in their formative years. Statements like "I will rip out your eyes" are not utterable in educated and civilised circles. This sort of crude statement is unbecoming of a person holding a senior position of the republic.

Admittedly, Rafiqul Islam was provocative. But then that is in the very nature of the encounter. Even if he was, he did not go to the vulgar extent the minister did. So the onus is more on the minister than on Rafiqul to have contained himself within acceptable limits. Decorous behaviour and normal courtesy are expected both from the government and opposition leaders. Let's not forget that Rafiqul is also a former minister. Our question to the minister is whether it is necessary for him to come out in public with bellicosity that had better be kept private. Must he come out with 'fangs and claws' to make a scene in full public glare? Through this demonstration of brute verbal onslaught, the minister has not only brought himself down in public esteem, but also bad name to his

Indian secretary's existential crisis



MOHAMMAD
BADRUL AHSAN

THE Indian home secretary was in town lately, when he supposedly said more than he was willing to listen. He

talked about terrorism, extradition treaty, border security and other issues of interest to two countries. But he left us in the no-man's land when the journalists asked him about the border killings. What the secretary said in response was obtuse jugglery of words. He said that when the Bangladeshis are gunned down by BSF, it should be called death instead of killing.

Who knows why on earth he came up with that distinction, but a matter of life and death for us was play of words for the Indian civil servant. It was as if death was lesser dying compared to killing. That reminds us of the moral of a fable written by Aesop 2,500 years ago. Some mischievous boys were playing on the edge of a pond, and they began to amuse themselves by pelting frogs with stones. After several of these creatures got killed, one of them pleaded that what was sport to the boys was death to them.

Maybe the Indian secretary slept better that night after his scurrilous comment. His superiors must have congratulated him on his presence of mind, on how quickly he mustered a ridiculous riposte without so much as a twitch in his face. It was

also no less amazing how his Bangladesh counterpart swallowed that insult in an exalted state of intellectual equivocation. And our journalists, who had asked the question, readily froze. It was as if a strutting horse was abruptly numbed with tranquilizer shot.

Any Indian high official visiting Bangladesh should know that border killing would be the first thing on the minds of the journalists in a room with him. The fact is that the secretary didn't come prepared for that burning issue and it showed he didn't give much thought to it

Any Indian high official visiting Bangladesh should know that border killing would be the first thing on the minds of the journalists in a room with him. The fact is that the secretary didn't come prepared for that burning issue and it showed he didn't give much thought to it either.

either. That explained why he tried to tackle it with a misplaced sense of humour. His absurd distinction between death and killing sounded like the punch line of a sick joke.

The size of a country is always inversely proportionate to its share in a bilateral crisis. The big country has the smaller percentage of the problem, while the smaller country has the bigger percentage of it. Border killing isn't a problem for India because all the killings are done by BSF. Our BGB have been goody two-shoes, who never had

anything to shoot in their cross-hairs.

How does it change BSF atrocities whether we call it death or killing? Perhaps the Indian secretary was hinting that BSF didn't take any life just because they were trigger happy. Okay, many of those who were killed were trespassers or smugglers. May be, at times some of these people get pesky or cheeky. May be, at times they get on the nerve of BSF men and ask for it. But they are not by any means subversive of Indian interests, surely not terrorists.

Then why should they get killed?

They can be punished with fines or prison terms or even instant justice of a few slaps or beatings. But is it justifiable to shoot and kill them when they are mostly innocent farmers, cattle traders or often emotional folks who would like to frequently visit their relatives living on the Indian side of the border? Although one wonders why none of these ever happens between Indian citizens and BGB.

Death is a generic name for the cessation of life, whether it's due to

natural causes or accidental killing or cold-blooded murder. Accidental killing resulting from lawful acts of violence is excusable as homicide. But accidental killing resulting from unlawful acts of violence not directed at the victim is punishable as manslaughter. Where the BSF killing comes in between these two extremes is for their conscience to tell.

Even if the Indians choose to call it death on their side of the border, it's still killing on our side because we carry the dead bodies on our shoulders. If that isn't enough to convince him, the Indian home secretary should ask families in his country, whose sons get killed in Siachen or Kargil. They will tell how the killer's cruelty hurts immensely more than the victim's fate. Death is end of journey, but killing is when that end comes at gunpoint.

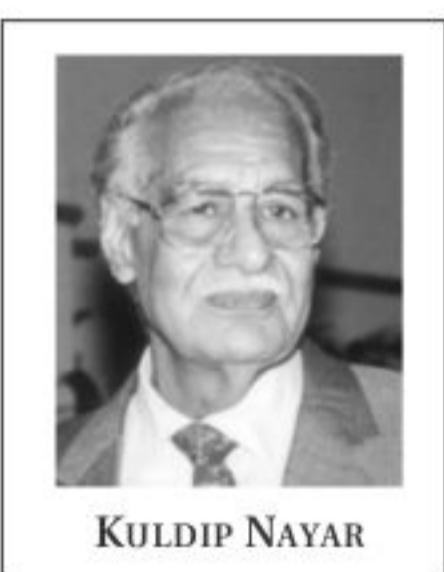
It is common sense that watering a sapling is futile when chopped at the base. If India truly wants to secure its borders with Bangladesh and discourage terrorism, it shouldn't only deal with the downstream but also work on the upstream. It doesn't help to send negotiators suffering from existential crisis, because the same despondency also makes the terrorists.

The Indian secretary's poor sense of humour should get us worried. Anybody, who can diminish death, can diminish anything.

The writer is Editor, First News, and an opinion writer for The Daily Star.
Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

BETWEEN THE LINES

The unimportance of Modi



KULDEEP NAYAR

THE Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) is testing the water. It too realises that elections are many months away but wants

to know whether Hindutva is acceptable to the voters. Spreading the name of anti-Muslim Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi is meant to assess if his non-secular image would attract the ordinary Hindu voter. The party has not yet got over from the defeat of last parliament elections when it was all set to occupy the treasury benches only to find out that the communal tag attached to it had pulled the party down. Its Hindutva image brought the surprised Congress back to power.

The BJP is open to all options this time. The RSS is in the picture from the beginning. Its chief Mohan Bhagwat has not only welcomed Narendra Modi at the RSS headquarters in Nagpur but has also announced that Modi would get a higher position in the BJP after the Gujarat assembly election next month. This, indeed, reaffirms who controls the reins of the BJP.

However, to lessen the party leaders' humiliation, Bhagwat has said that the selection of prime minister's candidate is the prerogative of the party. Yet, on the other hand, he has rubbed the salt on their wounds by making it clear that Modi is the best candidate available in the party.

Modi does not go higher in the estimate of people just because Britain says that it wants to do business with him, though it does not endorse his actions. Taking the initiative of sending its envoy, James Bevan, to Modi after maintaining

the touch-me-not stand for a decade conveys London's keenness. America or other countries may follow suit in due course of time.

Yet this does not make him acceptable to India, which is the subject matter. Modi has bamboozled Gujarat in the name of identity as if its people have a different entity than the rest of Indians. Had Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal done it, the entire nation would have pounced upon him for leading the Sikhs to separatism.

Modi is responsible for misleading the Gujaratis, who look like re-electing him. They have been daring the country for almost for 15 years that for them the state government is more important than the nation

Modi himself should withdraw his claim for the post of prime minister because he reduces the stature of the position as well as the chances of the BJP. If he were to say sorry and undo the wrongs he has done to the Muslims, he would perhaps come to be known as a reformed Modi.

which is sworn to the principles enunciated in the constitution. For the Gujaratis, equality before the law and separation between state and politics has stayed on paper because their Chief Minister Modi has been determined to flout the principles. This was visible in 2002 when some 2,000 Muslims were butchered because they were not considered equal and because they were sacrificed at the altar of Modi's innovation of mixing religion with the state.

Had the guilty been punished in 1984 when the Sikhs were the victims at Delhi, the Gujarat Hindus would not have dared to indulge in ethnic cleansing. The burning of 46 Hindus in a compartment at

Godhara was a provocation. But the pogrom in Gujarat would have taken place even without the Godhara incident as a few plucky journalists have brought out in their write-ups.

The guilty in Guajrat have not yet been brought to book. There are some pending cases in which Modi's name is mentioned. To project him as India's next prime minister tantamount to dragging down the country to the dust of shame and oblivion. How can a political party think of Modi even if it shuts its eyes to the murders, rapes and lootings?

The BJP has been hurt by another unexpected quarter. Its chief Nitin Gadkari is allegedly possessing bogus firms which he has created to make money while he was the PWD

minister in Maharashtra. The charges against him are so serious that even the RSS sources have reportedly said that the BJP's image has been severely dented. The Congress has been given a god-send opportunity and it has already ordered what it refers to as "soft inquiry." In any case, the BJP will not bse in a position to roar in parliament as it did in the last session. Its image of cleanliness has got a serious beating.

The party will have to reckon with Gadkari's episode in the next election. Therefore, it does not have to confine its strategy of finding out whether the wind is blowing in favour of Hindutva by giving currency to Modi's name. There are

other issues which the opposition will be exploiting. And corruption, so far tagged to Congress, will be a charge against the party to which it will have to reply. One's scams will be pitted against another's to the confusion of the electorate.

As for Hindutva, India, with all its faults and failings, is a country which prides itself in the spirit of accommodation and a sense of tolerance. Unfortunately, communal riots still take place, not at the scale as they used to be in the fifties, sixties and even later. But the nation is sensitive enough not to return those who have only religion to sell.

In the last six decades, India has come to settle down as a democratic, pluralist nation. Whatever else happens -- it happens to the country's shame -- democracy has got entrenched deep. Religious slogans cannot destabilise it. It may well be truism but the fact is that there can be no democracy without pluralism. It is a pity that the BJP has not yet understood this very basic thing. It should remember that when it came to power at the centre, it had to cut off its communal fangs and give an undertaking, among other things, on giving a special status to Kashmir and not build temple on the place where the Babri masjid stood before destruction.

In fact, Modi himself should withdraw his claim for the post of prime minister because he reduces the stature of the position as well as the chances of the BJP. If he were to say sorry and undo the wrongs he has done to the Muslims, he would perhaps come to be known as a reformed Modi. Then there may be a chance for him and his party.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

October 26

1341

The Byzantine civil war of 1341-1347 formally begins with the proclamation of John VI Kantakouzenos as Byzantine Emperor at Didymoteicho.

1912

First Balkan War: The Ottoman occupied city of Thessaloniki, is liberated and unified with Greece on the feast day of its patron Saint Demetrius. On the same day, Serbian troops captured Skopje.

1947

The Maharaja of Kashmir and Jammu agrees to allow his kingdom to join India.

1967

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi crowns himself Emperor of Iran and then crowns his wife Farah Empress of Iran.

2002

Moscow Theatre Siege: Approximately 50 Chechen terrorists and 150 hostages die when Russian Spetsnaz storm a theater building in Moscow, which had been occupied by the terrorists during a musical performance three days before.