

The auspicious month of Ramadhan

SYED ASHRAF ALI

THE holy Ramadhan, the ninth month in the Islamic calendar, occupies a unique place in the annals of history. It was in this glorious month that Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) was blessed with the divine Sahifa. It was in this month of divine majesty that the Holy Taurat reached mankind through Hazrat Musa (AS).

need of his giving up of his food and his drinks" (Bukhari).

Allah ordains in the Holy Quran: "O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint" (2:183).

Al-Siyam or Roza during the holy month of Ramadhan, one of the five pillars of Islam, is obligatory for every Muslim provided he or she is in full possession of his or her faculties. There are, however, exemptions for temporary causes such as menstruation or child-birth bleeding and persons in sick-bed or on a journey.

Islam introduced a new meaning, a new vision, a new idea, a new spirit into the institution of Fasting. Fasting was blessed with a systematic regulation, a scientific method, a noble justification. In the days before the holy Prophet (pbuh) Fasting meant the suffering of some privation in the hours of mourn-

The Christians were categorically commanded by their Prophet to fast: "Moreover, when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance..... But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face" (Matt. 6: 16,17). Again, when the Pharisees objected to Jesus' disciples not keeping the fast as often as John's, his only answer was that when he would be taken away "then shall they fast in those days" (Luke 5: 33-35).

Benign Providence himself loves this glorious and voluntary effort and attempt at self-restraint by His banda. In the words of the holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh): "By He, in Whose hands Muhammad's soul rests, Allah prefers the bad breath of one who fasts to the fragrance of musk" (Bukhari and Muslim).

Al-Siyam is indeed something unique. It enjoys, in the eyes of Allah, a divine grace unparalleled by any other act of piety and worship. According to a Qudsi Hadith (utterances attributed to Allah outside the Holy Quran), the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Allah, in His infinite Mercy, declares: "A man's work belongs to him. A good deed is repaid from tenfold to seven hundred times. Fasting belongs to Me and I repay" (Bukhari and Muslim).

Salman al-Farisi (RA) told of Allah's Messenger (pbuh) saying in a sermon which he delivered to them on the last day of Sha'ban: "A great month, a blessed month, a month containing a night which is better than a thousand nights has approached you people. God has appointed the observance of fasting during it as an obligatory duty, and the passing of its night in prayer as a voluntary practice. If someone draws near to God during it with some good act he will be like one who fulfils an obligatory duty in another month, and he who fulfils an obligatory duty in it will be like one who fulfils seventy obligatory duties in another month.

It is the month of endurance, and the reward of endurance is paradise. It is the month of sharing with others, and a month in which the believer's provision is increased. If someone gives one who has been fasting something with which to break his fast it will provide forgiveness of his sins and save him from hell, and he will have a reward equal to his without his reward being diminished in any respect.

The writer is a former Director General, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh.

Is it written in the stars?

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

ACCORDING to the Gospel of Mathew the wise men, or Magi, from the east came to Jerusalem trailing a bright star, which they interpreted as an omen that a King was born.

Research in astrophysics suggests that the celestial light around the time of the birth of Jesus Christ could probably be an unusual alignment of the planets, the sun and the moon. It is likely that the wise men were Zoroastrian astrologers who interpreted this planetary alignment as a sign that a powerful leader was born.

Apart from its religious significance, the biblical story illustrates that historically astronomy and astrology were intertwined. By simple definition astronomy is the observation and study of celestial bodies, while astrology attempts to predict how the planets' positions influence key events and the lives of human beings.

The intent of this column is not to support or contradict these viewpoints. However, as a student of physics (who has failed to make any significant contribution to her area of discipline) I would like to inject a somewhat different perspective to the discussion.

There is no question that astronomy is a science that helps us conceptualise and calculate the shape, size, nature and paths of celestial bodies with accuracy and precision. But the problem is that modern day astronomers tend to confine the study of the subject mostly to mathematical equations and theoretical calculations.

Whether or not we accept that Christ's birth was signaled by the appearance of a bright star in the heavens is a matter of choice. But let us not underestimate the benefits of simply looking up at the vastness of a starlit sky and accepting that there are things out there that we know very little of.

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ancient form of worship, prescribed for the Muslims as well as other nations which preceded us, ever since the time of Hazrat Adam (AS). According to the commentaries of Al-Manar, "Fasting is an ancient form of worship recognised by previous religions -- even heathen ones. It constituted an essential part of every religion. It was known to the ancient Egyptians, from whom it passed on to the ancient Greeks, who used to enforce it principally upon their women.

ing and sorrow. Islam introduced a revolutionary innovation -- Siyam stood not for mere suffering or abstinence but an institution for the moral uplift and spiritual elevation of the human soul. A Muslim Fast is undoubtedly stricter than other systems of Fasting, but it provides alleviations for special circumstances. The restraint from the animal instincts for food, drink and sex enables the attention of a man or a woman to be directed to higher or nobler aspects.

Swaraj's visit will hopefully revitalise India-Bangladesh relations

SYED MUNIR KHASRU

THE recent visit by external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj to Bangladesh is an important gambit for India-Bangladesh relations. The strong mandate received by the BJP in the polls gives it a rare opportunity to resolve long-outstanding bilateral issues.

500,000 Indians from West Bengal, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, and Mizoram illegally work in Bangladesh, remitting a considerable amount to India. The border is porous both ways and economic migration is not something only poor Bangladeshis do.

a trade surplus of \$4.5 billion in 2012-13. The previous Indian government was widely perceived as meddling in the recent elections in Bangladesh. A non-partisan India friendly to all Bangladeshis and not any particular party or ideology is important for sustainable ties.

Water is a contentious issue and the BJP manifesto vows to implement the "inter-linking of rivers based on feasibility." The implications could be devastating for Bangladesh as it would dry up the Padma -- one of the three main rivers of Bangladesh.

Swaraj is well poised to have a perspective characterised by mutual benefits as opposed to narrowly defined self-interest. When former PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka in August 2011 brought mixed results, Swaraj, then opposition leader, showed her vision of India-Bangladesh relations by saying that border killings should be brought down to zero for good neighbourly relations.

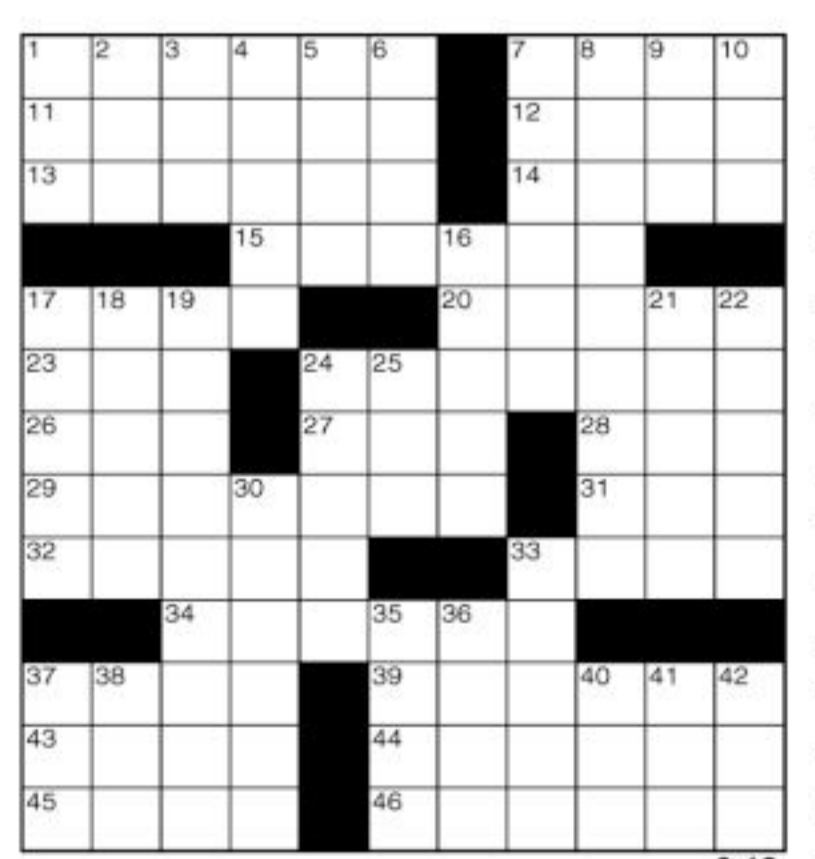
India-Bangladesh relations in the past five years give a lopsided picture. While Bangladesh has helped to eliminate insurgency in the North-East, India has not always acted reciprocally. Even with duty removal for all Bangladeshi exports, except 25 goods, India enjoyed

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QUOTABLE Quote O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint. [al-Baqarah, 2:183]

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

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Yesterday's answer

BARBS CARAT ABOUT OLIVE JIMMY FALLON ATE LOX END LUGES ATHOS DAZES LEAN TALL EDGES TIPSY RAYON AWE TAN ALP JIMMY KIMMEL ARMOR CAMEO READS STORY

CRYPTOQUOTE 5-17

VKI MYZHCDG OYHVIV HP CMV KI OKM YIRYDHP RYMT FTHVDVHCZ MVKIYP, FQVKI OKM UDC F I HTHVDVIN FX CMCI. -- RYDCUMHP - YICI NI UKDVIDQFYHDCN

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: LOVE IS THE SUBSTANCE OF ALL LIFE. EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED IN LOVE, ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING. -- JULIA CAMERON

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



HENRY by Don Trachte

