

Holy month of Ramadan

Let's live up to its expectations

LIKE Muslims the world over, the faithful of Bangladesh begin their month-long abstinence today. Fasts are kept from dawn to dusk as a means of mental and physical self-purification. The holy month, though, goes far beyond material abstinence and brings us face to face with the reality of deprivation and poverty that so many people in the world suffer from. During this month, a Muslim renews his pledge to be virtuous, to abstain from sins and clear the heart of hatred and ill will. Ramadan brings us closer to the spiritual essence of our being and, in line with Islamic values, preaches to us the virtues of brotherhood, fraternity and communal harmony. It also involves engaging in charity to benefit those among us who are less fortunate.

Ramadan is a month of introspection and it puts into perspective the many petty squabbles and stand-offs in our lives, be it social or political, that can and should be overcome. Imbued with the spirit of accommodation and sacrifice, we hope the political parties of our country can set aside their differences and engage in healthy dialogue that will be fruitful for the nation. It is also our sincere hope that the camaraderie during Ramadan be carried over and applied throughout the year and across the globe so that the Muslim population can come together to extol the virtues of peace and harmony in every day life. Let us all embrace the spirit of Ramadan and seek out the humanitarian principles of equality and fraternity.

Whitening black money

Every new lease encourages impunity

FINANCE Minister AMA Muhith has backtracked on his post-budget press conference announcement to the effect that thenceforth the provision for legalizing black money stood cancelled. Just three weeks on, during the passage of the finance bill, the finance minister treated us with a retraction. He has declared that undisclosed or unearned incomes would be allowed to be legalized and that two options will be available for this purpose: Investments in real estate by paying tax, and legalization of unearned or undeclared incomes by paying a 10 percent penalty in addition to normal tax. The scope has been withdrawn only in case of investment in treasury bonds.

We have three comments to make about the continuation of the virtual amnesty provisions: First, this has met with negligible response is from the holders of such obviously questionable money; that brings us to the second issue of morality, that of enjoying the waiver without any questions being asked about the origin of such tainted money; third, and the most important question relates to rewarding the black money holders as against the honest businessmen who create genuine wealth and pay tax on it.

With the magnitude of black money in existence and circulation -- much of it having been stashed away overseas -- we have a real issue here of meeting the challenge headlong rather than doing kid glove boxing, that too with a shadow.

The Statesman

Putin's geo-strategy backfires

EDITORIAL

RUSSIAN history entered a critical phase on Friday with Ukraine concluding the long-delayed trade agreement with Europe. In a mark of profound symbolism, the former Soviet satellite has reinforced its equation with the European Union, pending full membership. Profound no less will be the impact on international power-play; Kiev under President Petro Poroshenko, the confectionery magnate, has dealt a defiant blow to the Kremlin which has consistently opposed the pact. A former satellite has challenged the seat of authority as it was till 1991. It is a setback, above all, to Vladimir Putin's expansionist intent and his robust attempt to reassert Moscow's influence in what they call the "near abroad" -- Russia's term for the territories of the former Soviet Union. The Russian president's warning of a reprisal against Ukraine has been greeted with renewed threats of tighter sanctions. Clearly, the West and pre-eminently US Secretary of State John Kerry have ratcheted up the pressure on Putin. Just as the attempted trade agreement had lent the spark to tumultuous developments in Ukraine since last November, so too will the economics of the region influence the course of its subsequent political history... in a faint echo of the rise of the East India Company in British India. Indeed, Poroshenko has revived a deal which was rejected seven months ago by his predecessor, Viktor F. Yanukovich. This had ignited months of pro-European protests in Kiev; the rest is history, not least the fact that the ensuing crisis was reminiscent of the Cold War. The week-long truce could well be in tatters. Verily has it turned out to be a test of wills between Russia and the West. Of course, Poroshenko has taken a calculated risk in his dealings with Putin; but as a president elected as recently as May, the world must acknowledge that he has spoken at a defining moment in the history of Ukraine, however truncated it may be after the annexation of Crimea.

In the immediate context, Mr. Putin has suffered a major loss of face. Having exacerbated the ferment in the Ukraine, he has managed to push the country further within the ambit of the West than it ever would have gone before. It would be no exaggeration to suggest that the Russian president's geo-strategy has backfired, reinforced on Friday when Moldova and Georgia concluded similar agreements with the European Union. The predominant mood was mirrored in the celebratory grandstanding at Independence Square, the venue of street protests for the past several months. The trade agreement at once signifies a victory for Europe and a setback for Russia. It is the way history often works. This time, it carries a lesson for a vast swathe of the world.

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MAHMOOD HASAN

THE Bangladesh foreign ministry must have heaved a sigh of relief at the end of Sushma Swaraj's 3-day visit to Dhaka. The reasons are not far to seek.

During the Indian election campaign BJP stalwarts, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, had threatened that they would deport so-called "illegal Bangladeshi immigrants" living in India. Dhaka evidently was distraught that an unpleasant non-issue would probably be pushed to the fore by Delhi in its relations with Dhaka. When BJP came to power in 1998 this issue created immense strains between Dhaka and Delhi.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister Mahmood Ali told the press that the issue was not raised by the Indian external affairs minister. That, indeed, was a matter of relief.

Swaraj went through a busy schedule of meetings during the short time (June 25-27) she was in Dhaka. She has made all the vibes that would please Bangladesh. She was accompanied by a 7-member delegation which included Foreign Secretary Sujatha Singh, Spokesman Syed Akbaruddin and Prio Raganathan (Joint Secretary, Bangladesh Myanmar Desk).

Bangladesh has a number of issues to settle with India, but lately three of them have dominated Bangladesh's agenda -- Teesta river water sharing treaty; ratification of Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) and killing of Bangladeshis on the border. For the Indians, amongst others, the issues of security and connectivity continue to be paramount.

Bilateral talks at the delegation level covered all the major issues. Swaraj has assured Bangladesh that all pending issues will be resolved through discussions. She, however, did not indicate any time frame. The Teesta deal was supposed to be signed when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Dhaka in 2011. That did not happen because of opposition from Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal. The LBA also could not be ratified by the Lok Sabha during the last monsoon session (September 2013) because BJP refused to support it. Manmohan Singh's UPA government did not have the numbers to get it through the Lok Sabha.

At the press conference, Akbaruddin said that Swaraj had telephonic conversation with Mamata Banerjee before coming to Dhaka. He did not say what exactly the two leaders discussed but alluded that the process of building a consensus over the Teesta Agreement has been initiated by Delhi. Anandabazaar Potrika (June 26) from Kolkata reported that Swaraj and Mamata did have a conversation, but there was no discussion on the LBA or the Teesta deal. Mamata apparently asked Swaraj not to miss tasting the hilsha fish from Barisal or Bhola.

Given the numbers in the Lok Sabha, BJP does not need to look for support from its NDA partners to ratify the LBA



or sign the Teesta Agreement. But it is unlikely that the Modi government will ignore Mamata Banerjee when dealing with Bangladesh. No wonder Swaraj did not lay out any time frame. Actually, the Indian Constitution empowers the Union government to sign international treaty with any country without involving the state governments.

Delhi knows quite well the importance of Bangladesh as a fast growing economy and a burgeoning market for India. Bangladesh also leads in some crucial social indices in South Asia, and has been making steady progress economically over the past two decades.

Trade between the two countries stood at \$6.6 billion in 2013-14. India exported \$6.1 billion to Bangladesh as against \$462 million imports from Bangladesh. Indian exports to Bangladesh are expected to double by 2018, according to Confederation of Indian Industry. Bangladesh is also an important source of forex earning by Indians working in Bangladesh. Evidently, India would like to see politically stable Bangladesh for Indian exports and investments. As a matter of fact, Swaraj has asked Bangladesh to create a special zone for Indian businesses.

Her speech at BIISS covered all the agenda issues of the two sides. She touched upon mutually beneficial development, friendship, connectivity, regional cooperation, cultural exchanges, building relations between the two peoples, etc. The speech contained all the positive elements that Bangladesh wanted to

hear.

Swaraj was particular in thanking Bangladesh for not allowing North East Indian insurgent groups any sanctuary in Bangladesh. Nevertheless, Delhi should take steps to rid the region of insurgents. Opening up of the region for Bangladeshi businesses could probably go a long way in uplifting the situation of this otherwise economically depressed area.

Swaraj's meeting with BNP chief and former prime minister Khaleda Zia is also significant. Khaleda Zia is no longer the opposition leader in the parliament. India recognises that BNP is a major party in Bangladesh.

One wonders whether the extreme right-wing BJP would eventually follow through with the statements made by Sushma Swaraj in Dhaka. The nagging feeling for a timeline on the Teesta deal and the LBA would be there till some concrete developments are made. One hopes that Modi will come to Dhaka soon, but before that he will ratify the LBA. And sign the Teesta treaty in Dhaka. That would be the proof of "goodwill" from Delhi. For the time being, Dhaka should be happy with a "good" visit, in which Swaraj expressed her "will" to take the relations between the two countries to newer heights.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.

Don't forget Gujarat-2002 or Delhi-1984

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN

PRAFUL BIDWAI

AFTER President Pranab Mukherjee's address to Parliament, many people believe Prime Minister Narendra Modi is turning to "moderation"; some predict he'll evolve into a liberal "Modi 2.0."

They point to Mukherjee's announcement of a "national plan" to control communal violence, and emphasise that Modi regretted the lynching of a Muslim professional in Pune by a Hindutva mob.

Many plead that Modi must be treated leniently. He has put the 2002 butchery of Gujarat's Muslims behind; 12 years on, that "one-off" error must be forgiven; Indians must learn to live with him -- like millions of Gujaratis.

But announcing plans to control communal violence isn't new. In 2005, the government adopted a 15-Point Programme for minorities, including "prevention" of communal violence, speedy prosecution, and victims' rehabilitation.

Modi hasn't spelt out his own plan. So we shouldn't be lured into believing that his attitude to communalism has radically changed. He refuses to express remorse for the carnage. He's yet to get a clean legal hit. Zakia Jaffri's appeal hasn't yet been decided even by the Gujarat High Court.

The Supreme Court indicted Modi in 2003-04: "The Neros... fiddled as Gujarat burned." It transferred some Gujarat cases to Maharashtra for trial. The conviction rate in these was eight times higher.

So while it's churlish to deny that Modi won a basically free and fair election, it doesn't follow that we should abandon the perfectly lawful and reasonable demand for bringing Gujarat's culprits to justice.

The Gujarat violence falls under the 1948 UN Genocide Convention, which defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group," including killing, or causing serious bodily/mental harm.

Gen. Pinochet was indicted by a Spanish magistrate 25 years after perpetrating human rights violations in Chile. He was eventually sent home for trial, but died before being convicted. There's no time-bar for mass-murder trials.

Forty Indian and international citizens' enquiries have shown that the post-Godhra violence was conducted with the Modi government's complicity. Mass killings and rapes occurred as the police refused to intervene -- under instructions. The Gujarat High Court convicted minister Maya Kodnani and Babu Bajrangji for the Naroda-Patiya genocide.

In a "sting," Bajrangji later confessed: "I am telling you if Narendra-bhai had not been there, we would have never come out... If I did not have the support of Narendra-bhai, we would not have been able to avenge Godhra... He

posted a judge [who] neither saw the file or anything.... He just said granted.... We were free...."

Communal killings occurred under Congress rule too: the 1984 Delhi anti-Sikh riots, and anti-Muslim violence in Bhagalpur, Bhiwandi and Mumbai. These must be condemned and their culprits punished.

The 1984 violence was the worst of these. Yet, as scholar-activist Jairus Banaji argues, no "genocidal consensus" got consolidated in Delhi. The city suffered a shock, and the violence soon stopped.

In Gujarat, a "genocidal consensus" stabilised; the killing went on for many weeks. To this day, there isn't the slightest trace of remorse for this among millions of Gujaratis.

There's a lesson here from Italy and Germany, where millions worshipped Mussolini and Hitler and delighted in their terrible crimes. In post-War Germany, these Hitler supporters refused to express remorse for this complicity.

Psychologists Alexander and Margaret Mitscherlich explored this in their 1975 classic, *The Inability to Mourn*, using Freud's ideas to explain Germany's extended melancholia after the Holocaust. Germany, they concluded, was unable/unwilling to mourn. There was no release of emotion.

As psychologist Robert Jay Lifton put in the book's Preface, "to be unable to mourn is to be unable to enter into the great human cycle of death and birth -- to be unable, that is, to 'live again'." Hitler's former admirers blamed the Fuehrer for everything (just as they had earlier blamed the Jews) while erasing segments of their own life from memory.

It took decades before the deliberate forgetting began to abate. A watershed came in 1970 when Chancellor Willy Brandt fell on his knees in Warsaw to accept guilt for the suffering Germany had imposed on Poland. Central to the process were public intellectuals like novelist Heinrich Boell.

In Gujarat, the process hasn't even begun; nor are there many public intellectuals. Large numbers of gullible Gujaratis, under the influence of communalism and regional chauvinism, remain in a state of self-delusion and support Modi.

Modi has spread that delusion nationwide through his massively corporate- and media-backed propaganda about Gujarat's "development" claims which hide its middling-to-poor social indicators. Crucial here is his managerial "great-doer" style.

Delusions cannot last. Modi will soon find that his promise to provide jobs to the 12 million who enter the labour market annually cannot be delivered -- not through his ultra-capital-intensive Big Business-subservient model.

Nor will be easy to restore economic dynamism and balance. Modi's test will come as the mega-projects he's pushing fail to fructify and ecological devastation grows.

Whatever happens to Modi's government, justice for Gujarat is imperative if India is to become a society based on the rule-of-law, accountability and compassion.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Shamim Osman and the word 'please'

Shamim Osman recently said, "I don't say 'please' to anyone." Our politicians think that being polite is a weakness of personality. So obviously, Shamim Osman will never utter the word 'please'. As we already know of him, saying 'please' doesn't go with the nature of Shamim Osman.

The great Osmans are not only blessed but also protected by the Awami League. So, be cautious, you, critics of Shamim Osman! If you criticise him, you may face serious consequences.

Sohel Rana Raj
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Why can't we build our own football?

It is so fascinating to see the large number of football fans in Bangladesh. Just step out of your house, and instantly you will see flags of different participating countries of the World Cup, mostly Brazil and Argentina, all around.

This makes me wonder what will the Bangladeshis do, if Bangladesh ever goes to the World Cup? It would surely be a great pleasure for the football lovers of Bangladesh. So, Bangladesh government should invest in football to build a strong team which can participate in the World Cup Football in the near future.

Ahmed As Sami
Anandeniketan School, Sylhet

Trauma of a rape victim

The recent gang rape of two girls again proves how hapless women are in our society. I was really upset to see The Daily Star report that a victim's mother broke down in tears because society was blaming her daughter for the sad incident. She said her daughter's life was finished. Our society's attitude towards rape victims is so shameful. They have to face so much harassment by society which increases their trauma.

Rifat Darina Kamal
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Comments on news report, "Biman staff beats up passenger," published on June 25, 2014

Naabila Riaj
How could a staff hit a lady with an iron chair at the Biman office?!

Kazi Salim
This Biman staffs are not even capable of working at the footpath tea stalls. Biman should also be forced to pay compensation for the injured lady passenger's treatment.

Akhtar Shah
Beating up a customer and, that, too, a woman, takes Biman's customer service to a new level. "We offer you blood, sweat and tears commitment" should be the next advertising slogan for Biman (with a small footnote saying "yours" not ours!). The customer may well have been awkward, angry and difficult, but nothing justifies beating her up! Violence is the 'one and only mantra' in BD these days!

Salahuddin Ayubi
Because of their lousy service, I have stopped flying Biman many years ago. Nothing can justify what its staff did to a passenger. For employees like these, Biman is losing passengers.

Jafar Iqbal
We know that officials of Biman are corrupt, but we didn't know they are terrorists, too.

Ibrahim Zaman
This is the last thing an airlines passenger would ever expect: getting beaten up by an airlines staff. I have flown at least half a million miles in about 35/40 sessions and have witnessed rude behaviours by the passengers towards the crew members on several occasions, but never did I witness or even hear about any airlines staff bullying a passenger, let alone beating up.

Enayet Mowla
What a beautiful service Biman is giving! No wonder it is running at a loss.

"Worry is not over" (June 22, 2014)

Mofi
Very timely proposal of forming a scientific committee! But, kindly make sure that it doesn't turn into a bureaucratic committee. Apart from a number of chemists, the committee should include the representatives from Science Laboratory, Institute of Public Health, BSTI and scientists concerned at the field of agriculture.