

## Eid-e-Miladunnabi

Let us resolve to establish religious harmony

TO DAY we solemnly recall the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), marking the day he was sent to us, an occasion that also coincides with his demise from the temporal world. The light of truth and the criterion between right and wrong that the Almighty had sent down to Mankind through him 1400 years ago is more relevant than ever before.

The Prophet (PBUH) lived his life through setting examples for his followers, which we need to emulate more than ever today. Also, he preached before us the great egalitarian belief system of Islam, according to which all human beings, rich or poor, young or old, are equal before the Almighty, it is only one's submission to the will of Allah and a life lived in a totality of piety and truth in the service of mankind that sets one apart.

Essentially, his message of peace, harmony and universal brotherhood is more pertinent than ever, especially in this ruthless, apathetic world where the gulf between rich and poor are widening at an alarming speed and the advent of violent extremism in its different shades and forms and distortion of the true teachings of Islam have seen a marked rise across the globe. In a world torn at the seams with an array of moral crises, what else but the teachings of love and compassion can deliver us from the morass?

The Prophet's life sets the guidelines for us to attain both worldly success and spiritual atonement. Indeed he was sent down to us as a mercy and the fitting way to show him respect is to follow his teachings as best as we can. On Eid-e-Miladunnabi we renew our pledge to uphold the values of truth, honesty and tolerance. Let us resolve to put an end to bigotry, discrimination and intolerance forever.

## Another suicide after public humiliation

Unlawful arbitration must be stopped

WE express our outrage and grief at the news of 16-year-old Afroza Khanom of Satkhira who took her own life because she could not bear the humiliation she had been subjected to by a village arbitration. Her crime was that she had been in an 'objectionable relationship' with a boy. For this she and the young man in question were held by locals while recharging her phone at a shop and then taken to the Chairman of the union with their hands tied. The Chairman then beat them up in public, after which the young girl went home and hanged herself, unable to take the public shaming.

There is no doubt that those who were involved in apprehending Afroza and taking part in shaming her and the young man, should be held responsible for her death for they in effect killed her with their despicable behaviour. Being a public official the Chairman abused his power and actually caused the death of a minor. Surely that is enough reason for him and his cohorts to be given exemplary punishment.

Unfortunately this is hardly an isolated case. It is quite common to see influential individuals of villages and unions taking it upon themselves to impose barbaric punishment on the helpless especially girls and women, for what they consider 'immoral' activities. But who has given them this authority? And what right do they have in inflicting such punishments that are so humiliating that they may lead the victims to commit suicide? The state must immediately put a stop to this medieval law of the jungle that seems to supersede the law of the land.

LETTERS  
TO THE EDITOR

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PHOTO: STAR

## Why are children being abused?

A recent survey states that 82 percent of children aged one to fourteen in urban areas of Bangladesh are abused physically or mentally. Although Bangladesh has developed in various sectors in the recent years, the position and treatment of children still continues to be far from satisfactory. Children, being physically weak, are unable to stand up for themselves against the innumerable cases of torture, persecution, exploitation, and sexual harassment.

The culprits behind such acts must be punished immediately under the law that protects the rights of children. The government should further their initiatives towards the protection of children and ensure more efficient implementation of the laws and regulations in place.

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## Aung San Suu Kyi's 'buddy' solution

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PERSECUTION of Rohingyas in Myanmar is continuing with impunity and without a break.

Dieng and Yanghee Lee, UN special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar, have confirmed these atrocities and "requested independent UN investigations on the alleged 'ethnic cleansing' and other mass atrocities in the Rakhine region of Rakhine State". But Aung San Suu Kyi has remained defiant to an extent that when asked by her admiring Myanmar crowd of these allegations during her recent visit to Singapore at a town hall meeting she responded callously that these are "external fabrications" and then "laughed out loud" - Hillary Clinton did the same when she reported to her colleagues, Gadhafi's murder.

As pressure on Aung San Suu Kyi mounted, Myanmar government established a "national inquiry commission" with vice president Myint Swe, a former lieutenant general who once headed the dreaded military intelligence and coordinated the border army division, one of the main persecutors of the Rohingyas, as chair. What was even more intriguing was that Aung San Suu Kyi invited Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General, under whose watch as the UN Secretary General the Rwanda and Balkan massacres happened, who is also known to be her admirer, to "guide" the Commission to recommend measures to "ease tensions between the Muslim Rohingya and Rakhine Buddhists in the Buddhist-majority nation." Intriguingly, Commission's task has been to "ease tensions" and not to find permanent solutions for a community that are dispossessed and disenfranchised by law and face persecution from military and 'Buddhist' thugs on a daily basis, without any entitlement to justice.

Indeed, given the nature of Commission's terms of reference that are quite limiting and that its recommendations are also non-binding and furthermore, that its composition that included on the one hand friends of Aung San Suu Kyi (Kofi Annan, for example) and on the other, the Rohingya tormentor himself (the chair of the Commission) it looked a non-starter from the start.

While the full report of the Commission is awaited (not sure whether this would be published at all, untampered that is) reading of Kofi Annan's recent responses in the press, of his findings that he is only "deeply concerned" - a diplomatic cliché meaning irritation; saw few 'burned houses' and that "We went to the region but we didn't walk into a live conflict" and also that it was not possible to "witness rape" and that Rohingya persecution is not 'a genocide', leaves no doubt as to which side he is on.

Priscilla Clapp, a former top U.S. diplomat who served as chief of mission and permanent chargé d'affaires - the most senior U.S. position - at the U.S. embassy in Myanmar from 1999 to 2002 who also regards Aung San Suu Kyi as a "buddy" believes that the

issue of Rohingya is "overblown" and referring to reports of abuse she asserts, "The human rights people only think about human rights" [a profound discovery indeed] and that... "they don't look at the whole picture, and it is not in their interest to think about the context within which this is happening." What context? Regardless, Clapp has done her 'buddy' job to water down the issue. A friend in need, indeed.

Neither Annan's denial of 'genocide' nor Clapp's claim of 'overblown' assertion of what is a human carnage going to exonerate Aung San Suu Kyi of gross apathy she has demonstrated so far to the

military colleagues would do well not to play games and get their 'buddies' to wash their dirty linens on their behalf, it will not make the Rohingya issue go away.

The world especially Myanmar's powerful ASEAN partners are watching. Malaysian Prime Minister Najib has already termed the issue as an act of 'genocide' and demanded immediate end to the killing. His Army Chief has hinted that if need be, Malaysia would commit its Army in peace keeping mission in Rakhine state, implying that Malaysia is looking at the issue as something that may need



Aung San Suu Kyi delivers her address while former UN secretary general Kofi Annan looks on during their meeting at the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre in Yangon on September 5, 2016.

PHOTO: AFP

on-going pogrom of a minority community of her own country.

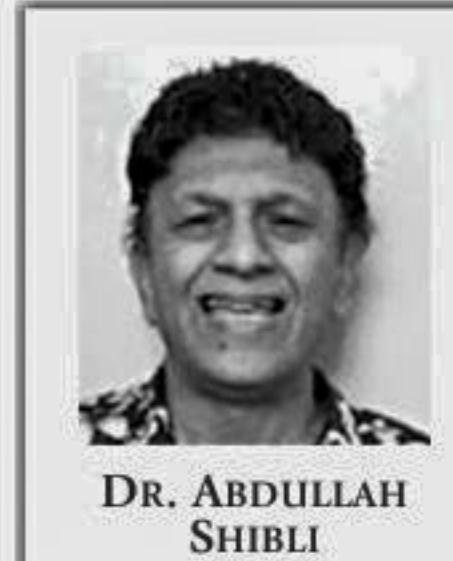
Even though Annan and Clapp have tried portraying the Rohingya issue as a conflict of two faiths, it is not though in the West's current political mood branding of the conflict as a Muslim/Buddhist issue is a perfect ploy to dehumanise the oppressed (who in this case are Muslims) and exonerate the oppressor. The Rohingya issue is a minority dispossession and disenfranchisement process that is being pursued through well thought-out plan. The whole world knows it and therefore, Aung San Suu Kyi and her

prolonged international intervention. Indonesians are also fuming. Myanmar's neighbour, Bangladesh, especially its government, is a bit more circumspect but there is mounting pressure from within to act.

Therefore, the sooner Aung San Suu Kyi forgets the 'buddy' solution as a way to sideline the Rohingya issue, the better it is; for it is no more an internal affair of Myanmar, its neighbours sense that if it is not solved quickly, fairly and indeed permanently, it would threaten regional security.

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## Can President-elect Donald Trump deliver on his economic promises?



DR. ABDULLAH SHIBLI

DURING his presidential campaign, Donald Trump, the candidate, made a number of promises to the US voters, and now it is time to ask whether he can

deliver on them! Some of his promises are easy to keep, and these include his opposition to Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Paris Climate Change Treaty, and his desire to build a wall on the US border with Mexico. However, some of his other well-publicised initiatives would surely face strong opposition from Congress, international leaders, and even the American public. And then, there are those measures that might be too expensive to implement and President-elect Donald Trump might find it easier to backtrack rather than fight to push forward with. However, even if Trump expects that his adoring supporters will forget some of his promises or hopes that a miracle will happen to lift the US economy out of the current state of lacklustre growth, they will not forget his most memorable slogan, "Make America Great Again", and he needs to come up with a plan to address the problems of this country, some of which he brought to the forefront during a very contentious electioneering.

Let me go back a little. We all know that Donald Trump won the US presidential contest because of his powerful agenda. He promised to destroy ISIS, stop China from taking away US jobs, and to halt the flow of illegal immigrants from Mexico. However, these are only some of the more popular ones, and if we go over the campaign speeches, parse his countless online outbursts on Twitter, rerun the three Presidential debates, and scan the innumerable statements that came from him during the long campaign, it would be difficult not to wonder whether some of his promises are not purely wishful thinking! Just to take one of the more outrageous ones, Donald Trump offered to create a registry for the Muslims, including the citizens, and ban Muslims from entering the USA. It is very well known that these discriminatory steps would create legal problems for his administration and might even be ruled unconstitutional.

Let me now turn to some of Donald Trump's economic plans. While many

items in his economic programme did not raise any eyebrows including his plan to build infrastructure, reduce regulations, and offer tax breaks for new parents, there are others that are more problematic.

How does he plan to support the agriculture sector which relies partially on Mexican immigrants, many of whom are undocumented? These are jobs that the average Americans do not want to take! Similarly, his plan to restrict immigrants from Muslim countries are already causing concern in the high tech industry which has always found it difficult to recruit all the software engineers and technically skilled managers it needs from US colleges. In this short note, I will focus on three of his highly publicised campaign slogans: bring the jobs back, impose higher tariffs on cheap imports, and scuttle President Obama's healthcare programme known as Obamacare.

Donald Trump has repeatedly claimed

because of trade deals."

Another reason why manufacturing jobs moved overseas is that it was hard for US companies to find cheap labour to keep the production line open in the USA. Again, to quote Jeffrey Rothfeder who wrote in the New Yorker, "Many of those jobs remain lost—since 1979, when the number of manufacturing jobs in the US peaked at nineteen and a half million, the country is still down some seven million factory positions, all told. And the kernel of truth in the political rhetoric about China is that many of those jobs were originally lost to that country, although by no means a majority of them (outsourcing began in 1970, well before China became a global economic force). But the more low-skilled of those positions are not, despite Trump's claims, among those that could be brought back to the U.S. Nor are they ones that Americans would necessarily want to see

tax plans, infrastructure building, and other expenditure measures can all be accomplished without a sky-rocketing national debt level! Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen has already warned Congress on November 17th that Trump's plan would stoke inflation and create massive debt problems.

Turning to trade and tariffs, President-elect Trump has spoken repeatedly against trade pacts including TPP and NAFTA and higher import tariffs are on his game plan. He believes that cheaper imports are taking jobs away from American workers and US's trading partners benefit more from trade than do the Americans. In a previous column in this newspaper ("Is U.S. public opinion turning against free trade?" November 8, 2016), I have argued that the remedies for loss of jobs are retraining and other fiscal measures. I had a hard time finding any discussion of these issues in Trump's campaign propaganda. US multinational companies have already voiced their concerns about any radical change in import tariffs since it will hurt Ford, Apple and others who rely on parts manufactured overseas.

Finally, it is no secret that the US healthcare system is a national shame. We spend a larger percentage of our national income on health care than other major countries but measure poorly in public health metrics. President Obama tried through his Affordable Care Act to offer health coverage to more than 25 million uninsured and to bring this industry to be responsive to rising costs. While Obamacare may not be perfect, it accomplished some major goals. Donald Trump joined the Republican Party bandwagon and has made ACA one of his targets. Unfortunately, he has not offered any indication how he plans to offer healthcare coverage to those who will be left without any healthcare coverage. As for bringing down costs, the Republicans including President-elect Trump have shied away from offering details on how to offer affordable healthcare to the majority of people who are reeling from high insurance rates, hefty deductibles, denial of coverage for pre-existing conditions, and exorbitant costs of medications. It is my prediction that even with Republican majorities in both houses of the Congress, Trump will discover that it is one thing to come up with a popular election platform but a totally different challenge to deliver the goods.

*Let me go back a little. We all know that Donald Trump won the US presidential contest because of his powerful agenda. He promised to destroy ISIS, stop China from taking away US jobs, and to halt the flow of illegal immigrants from Mexico.*

that his economic and tax policy plans will bring back jobs to the USA. "Bring back jobs" initiative has two aspects: a) rejuvenating domestic manufacturing industries that collapsed due to lack of demand or cheaper imports, and b) providing incentives to US corporations that relocate overseas to take advantage of lower domestic taxes. While both of these appear to be very simple propositions they would require concerted and complicated manoeuvres to accomplish progress on these fronts. Let us take the case of US steel mills. US steel mills closed in the 80's and 90's not only because of cheaper imports, but partly because automation and increased productivity in manufacturing meant fewer workers were needed.

According to Michael Hicks, an economist at Ball State University, "80 percent to 90 percent of the manufacturing jobs lost in the US since the peak in 1977 have been

returned. Typically, the lost jobs involve making products, like T-shirts or pressed-wood desks and chairs, that are now profitable to manufacture only if labour costs are at a bare minimum, and that companies can afford to maintain excess inventories of in order to obviate concerns about lead times and transportation costs."

President-elect Trump is counting on tax incentives to bring jobs back. His economic manifesto includes sweeping changes in the tax code including reduction of taxes for the lower income earners. Some of the other key points are: reduction in taxes across-the-board, especially for working and middle-income Americans; elimination of tax loopholes; and cut in business tax rate from 35 percent to 15 percent. Now here is the catch. Trump has also railed repeatedly against the growing national debt levels and it needs to be seen if his

writer is an economist and writes on public policy issues.