

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SUNDAY MARCH 17, 2019, CHAITRA 3, 1425 BS

## How can we stop hate crimes like the Christchurch massacre?

### Extreme ideologies across the board must be defused

WE join the world in mourning the 49 (so far reported) lives lost in the horrific Christchurch (New Zealand) massacre of Muslim devotees who were offering their Friday prayers. As the story develops we have learnt that at least two individuals of Bangladeshi origin have died in the attack with three missing; we offer our heartfelt condolences to their families along with those of all the victims of this meaningless act of terror. We are relieved that our national cricket team narrowly escaped the attack.

It has been heartening to see the sensitivity and compassion shown by New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern who has described this as the country's "darkest hour" and has rejected firmly the "extremist ideology" which she said had no place in New Zealand's society. Such a strong message has no doubt given some solace to the Muslim community in New Zealand which is in a state of shock and unease. Many of New Zealand's non-Muslim have shown solidarity for the Muslim community. Revising gun laws as the New Zealand's authorities have stated they will do, is definitely a step to prevent such mass murders and this should be emulated by other countries like the US, a country with one of the highest number of shooting deaths in the world. As we have seen, ideology that breeds hatred of those perceived to be different knows no logic and can often spread as it appeals to other like-minded individuals or groups with twisted minds. It is reassuring that the main culprit, a self-proclaimed "saviour" of the white race, has been apprehended although it is not known whether he has any accomplices. Thus it is crucial that the authorities of New Zealand and the region remain extra vigilant of other such attacks by extremists who have a pathological hatred of immigrants, especially Muslims. We hope the authorities will take extra precaution to provide security to the Muslim communities in these countries.

Ultimately, however, governments of all countries that have immigrant populations have to make concerted efforts to remove the mistrust and antagonism between communities they govern. Acceptance of all faiths, colour and races, compassion for those who have taken refuge in the land and acknowledgment that they are all equal human beings—these are values that have to be reiterated through dialogue, education, social campaigning and changes in policy. Defusing and shunning extremist ideology—no matter where it is coming from—is the only way to prevent these mindless acts of terror.

## He charges only Tk 1 as school fees!

### These are the real heroes in society

SCHELDOM do we come across a person so selfless that he dedicates his life to spread literacy among children for the token sum of Taka 1 a day for his labour. Nobody asked Lutfar Rahman to do what he has been doing for the last 40 years in Baguria village of Gaibandha. Today, his reach has increased to at least three other adjacent villages. The man in question couldn't study beyond SSC, and yet here he is going from village to village on his bicycle teaching primary schoolgoing children and the children of low-income families who can't afford to send their children to school.

What is interesting here is that he does not want to make money out of teaching. It's about the respect he has earned from the people he has helped along his unique journey as a selfless person who is only interested in educating children. The children of poor farmers send their children because they understand the importance of education and the local administration recognised his service to the community and gave him a bicycle for his troubles. The fact that Lutfar never raised his fees nor took help from any quarter makes him unique and reminds us that all is not lost. We haven't all fallen prey to the race to riches and there are people like Lutfar in our midst to remind us that one does not have to be accomplished in life to help others less fortunate than ourselves.

## COMMEMORATING BANGABANDHU'S BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

# An album on the poet of politics

SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

MY first impression of Bangabandhu dates back to around the mid-sixties. A helicopter service had been in operation between Dhaka and Faridpur for a couple of years by then. A corner of the Tejgaon Airport was designated as a heliport. I had just disembarked from a helicopter arriving at Dhaka from Faridpur. As I was approaching the small terminal building, and still some distance away from it, my eyes swung on to Bangabandhu seated majestically with what felt like an air of defiance.

The majestic aura was the signature of his leadership stature attained through sacrifices and frequent imprisonments. The defiant mode he reflected was an indignant response to the manner in which the authority had stalked his footsteps.

He was waiting to take the flight to Faridpur on his way to Gopalganj, his birth place on one of his rare respites between periods of incarceration. My eyes remained transfixed on him till he ambled across to the



Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

*The majestic aura was the signature of his leadership stature attained through sacrifices and frequent imprisonments. The defiant mode he reflected was an indignant response to the manner in which the authorities had stalked his footsteps.*

helicopter with a spring on his feet. For soon he would be back into the pure charm of his first home, evocative of tree-lined ponds he had bathed in, in his childhood days. He would, I reckoned, reminisce about it, all soaking up fresh energy to attend to his wider call of political duty. His long walks through villages and the big rallies he inspired since his adolescent days right up to the defining 1970 elections were simply legendary.

One of his hallmark grassroot connections was the amazing intimacy with which he nurtured and sustained rapport with masses. He knew by name the presidents, general secretaries and other office bearers of Awami League Thana committees, and could recite them when he needed. You have to passionately love people and care about their personal welfare to remember them with such ease. Actually, such a trait would have effectively meant keeping track of thousands of

names all over the country. He did it as a true leader of the people.

Another image of his etched on my mind can be traced to 1973. In the inner lawn of the old Jatiya Sangsad at Tejgaon—not before the eighties would the Parliament Bhaban as we know it today be ready for use—I saw him seated upright making points to a group of people prizing every moment of the experience.

Speaking of his charisma, a retired secretary recalls an incident in Bangabhaban, seemingly flustered now as he was then by it in real-time. Along with a senior colleague who worked at the president's office he was walking inside the Bangabhaban. Suddenly, they noticed that Bangabandhu accompanied by the then president Abu Syeed Chowdhury was coming in their direction. And as the two VIPs were passing them by, they summoned enough courage to greet them with customary courtesy. Bangabandhu reciprocated it with his baritone, leaving the ex-secretary and his senior colleague experiencing as though "a current had just pulsed through them".

A relative of mine studying at Mymensingh Agriculture University immediately following the birth of Bangladesh would share his experience of discovering "something special" in him. As Bangabandhu was being given a tour of the campus, by the university authority, my cousin, glued to the proceedings, would marvel at the flashes of his inspiring finding.

I remember having tuned into Akashbani and heard the news reader breaking the news of his assassination

with the closing words: "Unki ek sammohini shakti thi" ("He had a hypnotic power").

He was a humanist and large hearted. When some Bangladeshi politicians who had collaborated with Pakistan occupation forces were put in jail, Bangabandhu would send succour to their families.

Politically, he was so principled about the course East Pakistan should be taking that he spurned the notion of the so-called two-unit system indicating "parity" between the two wings. He could see through the bluff intended to deter the movement against disparities. It was then about to heave into a struggle for autonomy.

Admittedly, however, he drew criticism for having switched over to one-party rule in a break with AL's consistent legacy of working in a multi-party democracy and upholding it. Future historians will judge him on that but I can add two points to share with the readers as to how my mind works on the issue.

Let me put on record a fact I came to know as an officer of the Bangladesh Bank: the Annual Report of the central bank for fiscal 1974-75 had come to the conclusion that the economy was evidently on an upswing based on positive indicators on major macro-economic parameters. But after the heinous assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with most members of his family, the coup leaders issued a white paper claiming the exact opposite of what the Bangladesh Bank Annual Report mirrored as a positive state of the economy. I had already distributed the annual report to listed addresses including the Bank of England. So, the authentic word had got around.

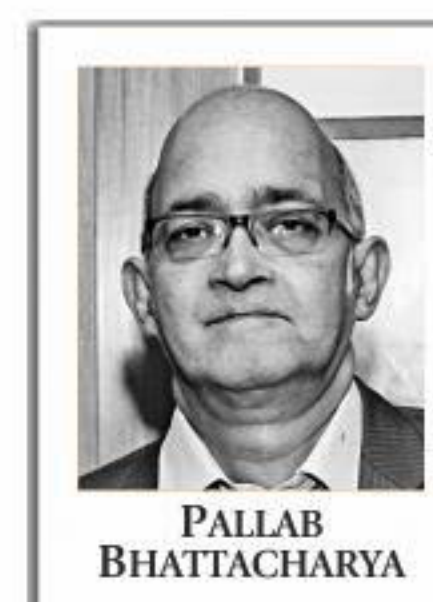
The Father of the Nation wanted to put smiles on the faces of *dukhi manush*, which is difficult to translate aptly into English except to say the phrase referred to people in distress or the disadvantaged ones. In fact, it was a part of his mission to create a *Sonar Bangla*. But his life was cut short, allowing him less than three years to pursue his mission.

The national economy is firmly set on a growth trajectory and the country's prospects as one of the select group of the next genre of emerging economies are widely talked about. Now Bangabandhu's daughter Sheikh Hasina has the precious opportunity to fulfil her father's dreams.

A final word. Whatever his critics may say, one thing is for certain: Bangabandhu's creation is Bangladesh, and as long as we live and breathe in it, we must be grateful to him and keep him above controversy.

Shah Husain Imam is adjunct faculty, East West University, a commentator on current affairs and former Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*. Email: shahhusainimam@gmail.com. This article was originally published on March 17, 2017 in *The Daily Star*.

# India and the Islamic World in the March of Time



PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

WHEN former foreign minister of Bangladesh (under the previous Sheikh Hasina government) AH Mahmood Ali spoke at a meeting

of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Foreign Ministers in Dhaka in October last year, in favour of a bigger role for non-OIC countries like India with a large Muslim population, it was reflective of a growing line of opinion in the Islamic world. Four months down the line, that trend was strengthened further with the United Arab Emirates inviting the Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to speak as a "guest of honour" at the OIC Foreign Ministers' meeting in Abu Dhabi on March 1. And when she spoke there, she became the first Indian Foreign Minister to do so at an OIC meeting.

History has a strange way of repeating itself but at times differently. It is that "differently" which shows how much time has passed and has the potential to make a difference. In 1969, Pakistan had succeeded in blocking India's participation, despite an invite, in the OIC meeting in Rabat, Morocco, which led to the organisation's birth. But on March 1, 2019, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj spoke at the 46th session of OIC at Abu Dhabi as a "guest of honour" on an invite from the host United Arab Emirates, considered one of the closest allies of Pakistan, which chose to boycott the event in protest against India's presence. Swaraj rightly pointed out in her speech India's close engagement with the Islamic countries, including the UAE, and the keenness of Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh and other Islamic countries to listen to India's voice in the OIC.

The invite by the UAE was not just an assertion of its privilege as the host of the meeting but a recognition of what the Indian External Affairs Ministry said was a recognition of India's "growing stature and a strong Islamic component". It was the first time in more than half a century that the OIC extended this gesture to India. More importantly, it reflects the thinking among a section of the OIC that India, with a Muslim population of 180 million, the third largest in the world, should not be kept out of an organisation dealing with issues pertaining to Muslims globally. Countries like Bangladesh and Turkey have been wanting an important role for India in the OIC.

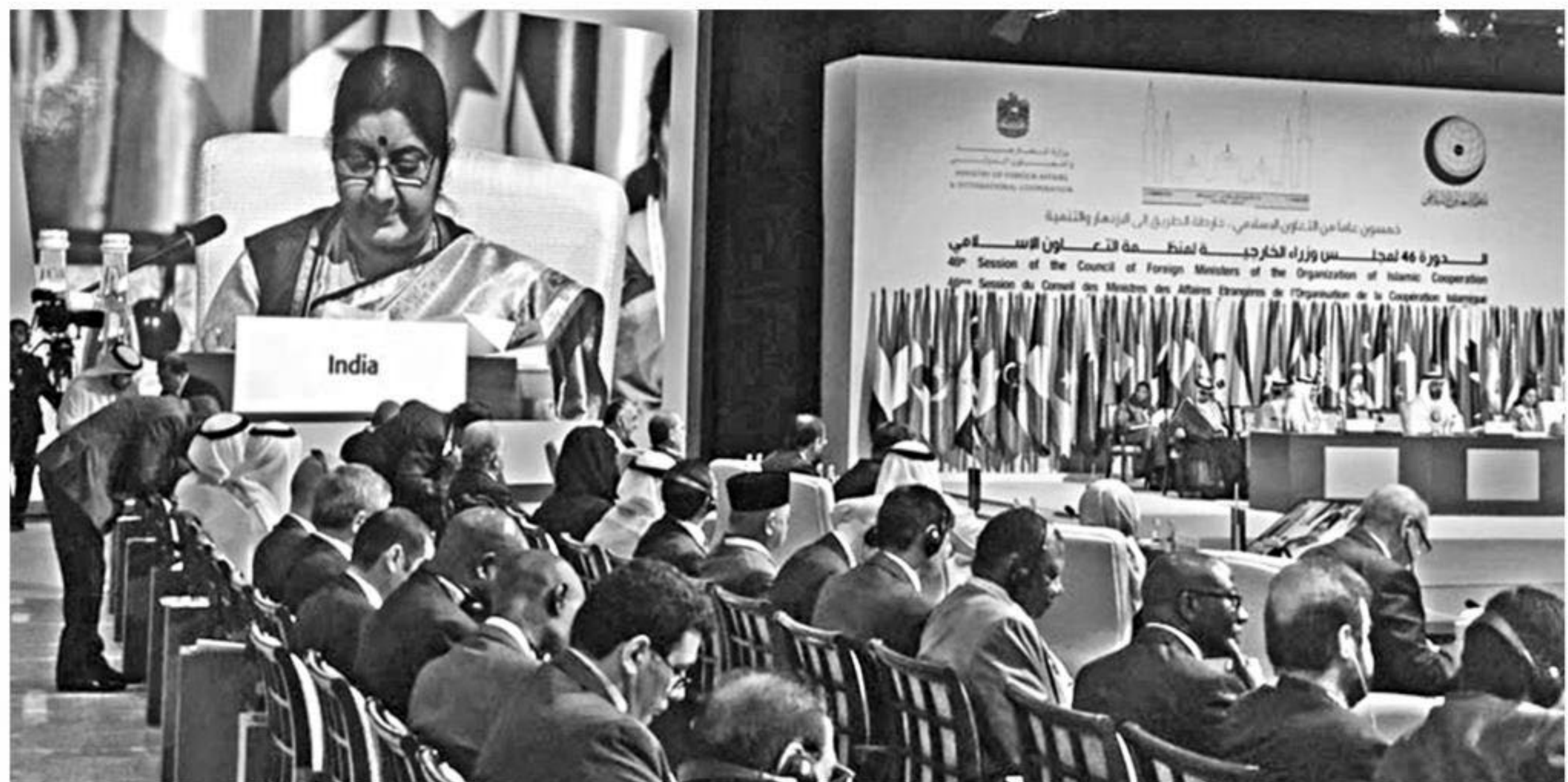
Over the decades, India has all along maintained close ties with Islamic countries, carefully navigating through the minefield of sectarian strife in West

Asia and the resultant conflicts between countries of the region, an exercise that has seen New Delhi successfully insulating its ties with Tehran and its regional rivals Saudi Arabia and Qatar. India is no longer defensive about its robust relationship with Israel as well as the Islamic countries, a few of which have strong trade ties with Tel Aviv. India's traditional engagement with the Arab and the Gulf countries is underpinned by three key reasons: (i) overwhelming dependence on them for oil and gas; (ii) the presence of an estimated ten million Indians in those regions whose remittances help add to India's foreign exchange reserves; and (iii) investments from Saudi Arabia and the UAE in downstream energy and infrastructure projects. The Arab countries, particularly Iran and Egypt, have been an important market for

partnership. Besides, India also offers around 4,500 Information Technology Economic Cooperation slots and 2,000 educational scholarships annually to OIC countries contributing to their capacity-building in a major way. The trade between India and OIC countries is estimated at around USD 230 billion, amounting to 30 percent of India's total foreign trade.

It is true that the OIC has for long been routinely critical of India on the issue of Kashmir for alleged human rights violations there. It is equally true that India has routinely dismissed those allegations. There is recognition in India that some of the Islamic countries have funded radicalism abroad and spread the Wahhabi brand of Islam. But India has not held this against enhancing its engagement with the Islamic countries. In 2006, Saudi King Abdullah bin

A section of the Indian media has described the UAE's invite to Swaraj to the OIC Foreign Ministers' meeting as a big diplomatic gain in the immediate context of the tensions with Pakistan in the aftermath of the Pulwama terror attack. True, in Abu Dhabi, the Indian External Affairs Minister will get an opportunity to flag India's concerns over cross-border terrorism sponsored by Pakistan, an OIC member-country. But only that much and nothing more. An over-the-board optimistic reading of the invite should be adequately tempered with the reality that no radical departure is to be expected in OIC's known stand on Kashmir at the behest of Pakistan. The same story may be repeated in Abu Dhabi this time around with India rejecting the OIC's likely statement on the subject. All the same, some OIC countries like Indonesia, with the largest



India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj addresses as 'Guest of Honour' at the 46th Foreign Ministers' Meeting of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Abu Dhabi.

PHOTO: oic

Indian exports, including textiles, engineering goods and chemicals. Iran's Chabahar port provides India with surface connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing Pakistan which refuses to grant this facility. Security, defence and maritime cooperation between India, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE has also gone up in the last so many years, bringing in tangible results: a logistics base to Indian Navy in Qatar, Saudi Arabia's handing over of Abu Jundal, the handler of the deadly terror strike in Mumbai on November 26, 2008 and the UAE's deportation of fugitive economic offenders from India.

India has extended more than USD 12 billion in soft loans and nearly USD 4 billion as grant assistance to OIC member-countries under development

Abdulaziz was the chief guest at India's Republic Day parade and in 2012 it was the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to be given that honour. India's economic clout today has made it a country of choice which no Islamic country can ignore. India's ties with Islamic countries have gone from strength to strength. If skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled Indians have found jobs in West Asia, the latter has benefitted from cheaper cost of labour. As the Arab and the Gulf countries today seek to diversify their economies beyond energy and look to the east, they find India as a key country in terms of investment in the downstream oil and gas infrastructure sector like setting up refineries and big underground storage oil facilities.

Muslim population, and Algeria and Syria, where secular ethos have been strong, have been resisting a hard stance by the OIC on the Kashmir issue at its annual summit-level meetings.

However, some change seems to be noticeable already. The Kashmir issue did not figure in the communiqué of the last two Gulf Cooperation Council summits and the joint-statement issued after Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's recent visit to India talks about the need for dialogue between India and Pakistan in an atmosphere free from terror. Implicit in it is that the Kashmir issue is bilateral between India and Pakistan as against Islamabad's bid to internationalise the matter.

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent for *The Daily Star*.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

## Australia needs to take Christchurch attack seriously

I express my deepest condolences to the victims of the terrorist attacks in the two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. I am a Bangladesh-Australian and I am very relieved to know that our Bangladesh cricket team in New Zealand escaped the terrorist attacks and equally saddened by the loss of lives—including those of the Bangladeshis—in the gruesome attack.

Over the years, as an academic, I have travelled overseas—from Europe to America and Asia. One question that I have often encountered is: "Is Australia a racist country?"

The reason they ask me this question is because Australia has a controversial refugee policy which detains asylum seekers in its neighbouring island countries such as Nauru and Manus Island for indefinite periods. Now the horrendous terrorist attacks by the "White" Australian on the two mosques in Christchurch in New Zealand have totally tarnished Australia's reputation worldwide. The Australian government needs to address the menace of "White Supremacist Terrorism".  
Nahid Afrose Kabir, Dhaka