

Sacrifice and Pilgrimage

There is no shortage of festivals, religious or secular, in this country as elsewhere in the world. But few can claim to possess the kind of deep significance or demand the kind of commitment from its followers as the festival of Eid-ul-Azha. For hundreds of millions of Muslims across the globe, the day means a great deal more than slaughtering animals and having a feast. The act of slaughtering animals itself is nothing more than a reenactment of the supreme sacrifice that the prophet Abraham was ready to make at Allah's command. Abraham was ready to sacrifice his own son Ismail because Allah had commanded him to give up the thing he cherished most. On seeing the genuineness of Abraham's faith in Him, the Ever Merciful replaced the prostrate body of Ismail with that of a lamb. It was a supreme test of faith.

The modern believer, of course, does not have to put himself through the same kind of test on Eid-ul-Azha. He can, and does, show his devotion by sacrificing an animal in the name of departed dear ones so that their souls may rest in peace. The significance of the act of sacrifice lies in its inherent message, and not in the ritual of slaughter itself.

The question that is often asked, especially in the context of a primarily agricultural and resource-poor country like Bangladesh, is whether there might not be another way of observing Eid-ul-Azha. That is, if the essential expression of devotion and sacrifice could not be achieved in a way which did not involve slaughtering of so many animals.

There is a school of thought which suggests that it may not be obligatory of every Muslim to sacrifice an animal to observe Eid-ul-Azha. However, it is upto Islamic scholars of this country to ponder the point, drawing on their vast knowledge of the subject and the history of how animal slaughter evolved to form the principal ritual through which devotion is expressed. The most prominent of the country's theocratic scholars can form a board, and debate the point to see if Bangladesh's socio-economic realities cannot be balanced with religious requirements. If the scholars found that the ritual of animal slaughter is beyond and above the scope of reform, then there would be no point to debate. However, if they came to the conclusion that such slaughters did not form a hard and fast obligation, then there would be scope to initiate a public discussion, involving the ministry of religious affairs, leading citizens and socio-political bodies, to find the best way to carry out our religious duties without depleting our meagre livestock resources. Either way, the ulemas would be doing the nation a tremendous service by addressing the issue.

The occasion of Eid-ul-Azha brings us to another issue which is of far more importance because of the obligatory nature of its observance. This Eid is related to the pilgrimage or Hajj. In the past, particularly during the tenure in office of former president Lt Gen Hussain Muhammad Ershad, we had the unsavoury sight of officials performing hajj at state expense, meaning at the expense of the tax-payers. At the same time, thousands of would-be pilgrims could not make it simply because either they did not have the money or they were not lucky enough to get on to the lottery. However, with a change in the system of governance from an arbitrary, personalised one to a more representative one, it would perhaps not be too optimistic to hope that "official hajj" would be curtailed. Instead, the government could set aside a fund which could be used to send retired citizens with meagre pensions and little savings to perform hajj. To enable poor citizens to carry out their religious obligations through tax-payers' money would be money well-spent.

Old Wounds, New Hopes

The Japanese government has crossed a major hurdle when the country's Senate on Tuesday approved a controversial bill clearing the way for its troops to serve abroad in UN's peace-keeping operations. Approved by reasonable margin, by 137 votes to 102, the bill now goes before the more powerful lower house where it must be passed by the scheduled end of the current Diet session on June 21. With the left-wing opposition determined to kill it, it is by no means certain that it will get through the lower house. If it is rejected or delayed, the Government will call a new election and take the controversial issue to the people for a mandate.

In a way, the issue has already touched off a national debate—and, indeed, a divisive one. There are strong arguments on both sides. There is a vocal opposition to the whole idea of a Japanese contingent in military uniform serving abroad even under the UN flag, a sight that would recall in many minds, within Japan and in several Asian countries, Tokyo's militaristic past, with all the horrors of the Second World War. It is also argued that the bill contravenes the country's post-1945 "peace constitution" and other laws forbidding the use of military force to settle international disputes. Last but not the least, critics of the bill, at home and abroad, have openly expressed the fear that the move would serve as the first step towards Japan's rearmament with full support of the West, especially the United States, just as it has happened in Germany.

All these arguments have considerable validity and strong emotional content. Yet, the question is, can Japan be a full member of the international community if the country continues to be barred from taking part in UN peace-keeping missions? Should Japan be trusted as a peace loving country any less than Germany, a member of NATO? If Japan seeks to commit aggression again, it can do so, with or without the law approving its participation in UN peace-keeping operations. Under its cover of self-defence operation, it has enough muscle power to wage another war. To ensure the continuance of Japan's constructive peace-loving role in world affairs, the international community should give Tokyo the position it deserves in the United Nations system to which its financial contribution tops the list of donors, when it is not second only to the United States. This may be the only way to heal the old wounds and offer Japan new hopes in a changing world.

Need for Global, Regional and National Actions

by Shah A M S Kibria

MANKIND seems to have put a lot of faith in the Earth Summit being held in Rio de Janeiro from 3rd June for two weeks. In little over two decades — since 1972 when the Stockholm Conference was held — the international community has travelled a long distance in recognising the protection of the environment as one of its major concerns. However the linkage between environment and development has been recognised only in recent years although this recognition is yet to be fully accepted in the developed countries. Scholars and experts are agreed that the two issues are inextricably linked. Indeed these are seen as two sides of the same coin. Thus we are witnessing a unique event — a summit conference in which these twin concerns of mankind are being addressed at the highest level. A vast assembly of statesmen, diplomats, scientists and scholars, non-governmental organizations and journalists will deliberate for two weeks on issues which, most people believe, will shape the earth's future.

The conference will deal with issues of global concern. The depletion of the ozone layer, the greenhouse effect, the rise in sea level and consequent climate change are some of the most important problems to be addressed by the Rio conference. Rapid increase in desertification, deforestation, industrial and agricultural pollution resulting in the deterioration of the air and water quality are some of the other concerns which affect us all in varying degrees even in our daily life. These questions are relevant for the whole world — both developed and developing. However, the developing countries face not only the dangers posed by these problems but also the challenges of massive poverty. It is here that the leaders assembled in Rio will face their biggest challenge. Will they rise to the occasion? Will the industrialised North learn the lessons of history and make available the resources necessary for taking urgently needed actions? We are eagerly waiting to see the results for what happens next is more in the hands of developed countries than the countries

of the Third World. Resource allocation and determination of priorities are the crux of the whole issue. Alleviation of poverty and environmental protection must be addressed simultaneously if the conference is to have the kind of impact which we all expect. The Industrial Revolution which started in Europe some two hundred years ago has taken its toll on global environment. Scientists have documented how the West has fouled up the earth's environment by its unwise and profligate use of the earth's resources. Dire predictions that we keep on hearing about the emission of harmful gases and the greenhouse effect, rise of the sea-level and other dangers for mankind can be easily attributed to the Western World's industrial and technological policies. The developing countries have contributed very little to this degradation of the earth's environment. With 78 per cent of the world's population, the devel-

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oping countries still consume only 12 per cent of the world's minerals (most of which are found in the developing countries) and 18 per cent of the world's commercial energy.

Industry, mostly concentrated in the developed countries, produces environmental problems everywhere. Industry consumes 37 per cent of the world's energy, and emits 50 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide, 90 per cent of the world's sulphur oxides and all the chemicals now threatening the ozone layer with depletion. Every year it produces 2100 million tonnes of solid waste and 338 million tonnes of hazardous wastes.

There is also widespread concern about the disposal of radioactive wastes from nuclear reactors. The problems faced by humanity are indeed daunting. It has to be recognised however that it is the developed countries which are today in the forefront of the movement for the protection of the environment as well as for more rational use of the earth's limited resources. Asia-Pacific countries have been slowly but increasingly getting

sensitised about the actual and potential threat posed by the mindless destruction of the environment. While their primary focus has been, ever since they gained independence some four decades ago, on economic development, today they recognise the integral nature of these issues.

Whoever may be responsible for the plight we are in, we simply cannot sit back and relax in the belief that after all, we are not to be blamed for the mess we are in. In fact the rapid pace of the industrial development in the Asia-Pacific region has lent a sense of urgency to the whole issue. I have had the privilege to observe and study the economic growth process of this region for more than ten years. In my view, while industrial growth and consequent pollution is rapidly becoming a serious problem one must also recognise that in most countries of the region widespread poverty

is expected to be worried about the future. What future do they have? They live in the present and they must derive sustenance from their surroundings.

It is thus not difficult to see why we can effectively address the environment issue if we simultaneously take up poverty alleviation as the highest priority. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development will fulfil our expectations only if the question of resources for the poor countries is seriously considered. Most of the poorer countries of the world will not be able to take effective action for the protection of the environment because of lack of funds even if they are fully committed to take such action.

The Asia-Pacific region is going through a period of rapid and dynamic change. Led by Japan the East and South East Asian countries are making phenomenal progress in both industry, agriculture, infras-

structure development and other nation-building fields. The South Asian countries are also making some headway though at a slower pace than the rest of the region. This, in my view, is the time to formulate national policies to integrate environmental concerns in our development strategy. How are we going to utilise our natural resources? What safety measures are we going to adopt in our industrial development policy?

Environmentally safe technology is available these days for most manufacturing processes but it costs money. Can we afford the bill? What alternatives are there? The so-called green revolution in agriculture is based on the extensive use of fertilizer and pesticides. Is it not time for us to take a stock of the situation so as to formulate sound and balanced policies to safeguard our fields and rivers as well as the air we breathe and the water we drink?

Under the auspices of ESCAP — the UN Regional Commission I had the honour to lead for 11 years — a Ministerial Conference on Environ-

ment and Development was organised in October 1990. The ministers unanimously issued a declaration and also adopted the basic elements of a regional strategy. Later the regional strategy was further refined and approved by the Commission. These documents constituted this region's inputs for UNCED. Regional co-operation is naturally one area which was highlighted by the ministers. In a number of vital fields we can take effective action only when we will act in concert.

An area which deserves our close attention is increasing public awareness about the environment. Until the common men and women realize that progress, growth and development can be sustained only if we are wise and prudent in the use of our resources, we will fail to develop national consensus around these policies. Indeed development will become counter-productive if the sustainability of such development cannot be assured.

In this vital task the news media can and must play a key role. Recognising the importance of the news media ESCAP initiated a programme to organise socially conscious and responsible journalists into what is known as the National Forum of Environmental Journalists. I was very pleased at the success of our initiative. As many as 12 countries have set up these National Forums and in 1988 an Asian Regional Forum was established at a conference held in ESCAP headquarters. These are today highly active and dynamic bodies dedicated to a selfless campaign to generate public awareness about the importance of sustainable development. Building up public opinion in a non-partisan spirit for the common good is a mission which deserves all the support and encouragement from all quarters.

The significance of UNCED can be hardly over-emphasized. Global agreements are essential to protect the earth and its finite resources. Let us hope that the leaders assembled at Rio will rise to the oc-

casion and respond positively to the twin challenges of alleviation of poverty and environmental protection. Their vision of the future, statesmanship and above all their commitment to safeguard the interests of the global community will make a permanent impact on the shape of things in the coming years. As a densely populated country Bangladesh can not afford to stand idly by. We must press those who have done most of the damage to help us in this task.

The developed countries cannot shirk their responsibility. All the preparations for the last two years will be in vain if the Summit ends only with a high sounding declaration. There must be more concrete outcome to justify the massive preparations made by the entire international community. There must be a global consensus as to how the earth's future can be assured and how the resources can be mobilised to implement the programmes.

While Bangladesh can, in all fairness, expect financial support from the rich countries, we must not consider our responsibility to have been fulfilled simply by making our needs and requirements known to the developed countries. Despite constraints of resources we must learn from the mistakes of others and do what must be done in our own self-interest. Poverty alleviation and environmental protection must be considered as our twin goals around which the entire nation must be mobilised and united. We certainly owe this to our coming generation. Economic growth and development must be sustainable. We must protect our rivers, our forests and fields, our sub-soil waters, the coastal eco-system as well as the biosphere. We must ensure that development is sustainable and not achieved at the cost of reckless misuse of precious resources or the future generations.

(The author, a former Foreign Secretary, has recently returned to Bangladesh after serving 11 years as Executive Secretary of ESCAP. He started the ESCAP programme of setting up the National Forum of Environmental Journalists.)

RP's May Polls Reflect Choice for Status Quo

Paul Icamina writes from Manila

Barring future coups, what is certain is that democracy is alive and kicking in the Philippines

Adding colour to the spectacle of the irrepressible Imelda Marcos, flitting around town in a limousine, flying to the provinces for her presidential campaign. Surprisingly, she fared rather well, overtaking two veteran politicians. Her son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr won his father's old congressional seat in north Philippines.

As usual, there was vote-buying on a local scale. Votes went as high as 1,000 pesos (US\$38) for a group of, say three persons, or anywhere from 100 to 500 pesos per person. There were even reports of mayors and local wards going for the highest bidders to deliver a town's votes for a congressional or gubernatorial bet.

It was a heyday for gamblers. Crossing party lines, bettors took their pick of candidates most likely to win. In the end, however, intelligent votes carried the day. If it is any indication, those elected senators reflected a middle-of-the-road stance: it includes people from the entertainment industry but there are also men and women who have reputations for doing their homework — and well.

Some senators come from the days of Mr Marcos, but their association with the former dictator will not hinder their work as they are well respected. Senators who voted the American bases out were also re-elected. But more senators who voted for the retention of the American bases were re-elected. It will be a Senate very sympathetic to America and free enterprise.

So will the lower house, an

establishment Congress unlikely to rock the boat. If any, it will be strongly averse to land reform, its membership coming mostly from the landed.

Incredibly, despite all the in-fightings and the election speeches, the new set of officials have in common. They will continue to lure foreign investment and encourage free enterprise, to court international aid and pay the foreign debt.

Which should be good news for Mr Ramos, the new president? A cousin of the late President Marcos under whom he controlled the national police, he helped topple the Marcos regime in 1986 by joining a military coup. Later he defended the Aquino administration against seven attempted coup d'états. He is very much for the status quo.

The son of a career ambassador, Mr Ramos went to West Point Academy in the US. A paratrooper, he served in a Philippine contingent to Vietnam in the 1960s. In the 1970s, he was chief of the Philippine Constabulary, the national police, and arrested many opponents of the martial law regime he enforced for Mr Marcos.

Mr Aquino has said that Mr Ramos, who was his minister of defence, has made up for that role by defending democracy against rightist coups. But on the eve of the national elections, the outspoken Cardinal Sin referred to Mr Ramos as a "non-repentant."

Many in the political left still do not trust him. Muslim

secessionists have said Mr Ramos will go for the military solution to the Muslim problem in southern Philippines. Critics say he might be open to an American military presence in the country.

Others fear he might de-

clare martial law. But rightist military rebels have insisted Mr Ramos is part of the problems which breed coups.

Barring future coups, what is certain is that democracy is alive and kicking in the Philippines. — Depthnews Asia

OPINION

Dr Sattar — A Tribute

I wish to thank Mr S M Ali for his Tribute (published in The Daily Star on 31st May) to Dr Sattar who died in Islamabad on 26th May 1992. I had known Sattar since 1953 and would like to add a few words on this brilliant son of Bangladesh. He was born in September 1934 in Shahrazay Upazila under Chandpur. He joined the erstwhile Civil Service of Pakistan in 1958 and voluntarily retired in 1989. He served with great distinction as Secretary, Planning Commission of Bangladesh; Director General, IIRDB; Secretary, Ministry of Population Control and Textiles. Since 1981 he was serving as the Executive Director of ICOMP in Kuala Lumpur. ICOMP is an international voluntary agency for management of Population Programme. In all his assignments he exerted himself with efficiency and dedication. He had a super abundance of physical and intellectual stamina; well read and highly articulate, he always stood out to be counted in any company. He had deep and abiding commitment to social action for the uplift of the poor and the disadvantaged both at home and abroad. He lived a full life with dedicated work, cheerful participation in sports, reading, travelling, gardening, photography. And yet he was a loyal family man who could never forget his village home and community at Naora. His wife Ellen and he established Bangladesh Association of Community Education (BACE) initially for his home village which later extended beyond. He was one of the founders of the Swanirvar, Bangladesh.

Dr Sattar belonged to a small group of public servants, never more than 150 in number in Bangladesh known as CSP. They came from diverse background: rural and urban, poor and rich. But by training and commitment they became an elite corps dedicated to public service without fear or favour. They were feared and respected. They could be detested or disliked but never ignored. They performed and

had produced results against odds. Because they were holding many sensitive public positions, they were at times perceived as arrogant and high handed. There is now a better understanding of the contribution of this declining group. From Shafiqul Azam to Sattar, Shamsur Rahman to Noorul Quader, Moazzam Chowdhury to Mujibul Huq, Sanaul Huq to Obaidullah Khan, Sarajuddin, Rafiq Chaudhury to Nurul Amin they were bright stars of this unfortunate country. They were used or abused but never fully appreciated and in many cases their potentialities were not actualized. The attrition was high and fatal beginning from the Screening by the Martial Law of Ayub Khan and Yahya, followed by PO 9 and MLO 9, the draining effect of OSD (officer in serious difficulty) are but few to mention. Consequently the best and the brightest could never fulfill their mission. Mr Aziz Ahmed was the Chief Secretary in Dhaka in 1947. He was going strong in Pakistan in 1977 as a Foreign Minister. Shahebzada Yakub was head of Eastern Command in Dhaka in 1970 and even today he is in active service under the UNO. But in Bangladesh...?

Sattar was truly a citizen of the world. His wife Ellen is from England. They have four sons: David (30) an architect, Danyal (26) an environmental scientist, Aziz (20) and Enayet (16). They were born in four different countries: Bangladesh, Pakistan, England and USA. Sattar was working for an international agency in Kuala Lumpur, he died in Pakistan and was buried in his village home at Naora. That 25,000 people of his neighbouring areas collected at his funeral to pay him last homage on 2 June 1992 clearly attests to his loving commitment to his place of birth. With his death, a star has fallen. May his soul rest in peace.

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To the Editor...

Protect the people from lawbreakers

Sir, My heartfelt congratulations to Dr Kamal Hossain and his Coordination Council panel for bagging nine out of 14 seats and also the Jatiya Ainjibi Samity for winning the remaining five seats of the Bar Council election held on 24th May.

My earnest request to them is to protect the 11 crore people of Bangladesh from the clutches of the lawbreakers and killers. As the Bar Council members are the protectors of law and also a large group of intellectuals, their bounded duty is to face the challenge and overcome all storms and cyclones that might try to sweep them away.

I am sure the Most Powerful and Almighty Allah will always protect them for their sincere efforts and the people will be behind them and support them always to achieve this goal.

It's a plea from a patriotic citizen of Bangladesh.

Edward Gomes
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CHT problems

Sir, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia recently announced her government's readiness for holding dialogue with all the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) with a view to finding a political

solution to the problems of the area. We very much appreciate the democratic government's willingness and hope that the devoted people will avail this golden opportunity. We don't find any scope for making any discrimination with the people of CHT; as Bangladeshis we are equal and we are brothers. Considering the backward situation, all the governments after our independence have been giving special facilities and funds to ensure rapid development of CHT. In educational institutions and in different services, the government has kept reserved quota for the CHT people. The present democratic government has given even more autonomy to CHT admin-

istration. I think, all our national political parties should work unitedly to help resolve the CHT problems. No political leader should take advantage by tantilising facts pertaining to CHT issue for narrow political gains.

On the other hand, if the devoted people of CHT still want to create disturbances and to destabilise peace in the area, I strongly feel that such terrorist activities should be dealt with severely. A majority of the CHT people are working for the economic uplift of their country with great patriotic zeal.

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