

## Festival of Sacrifice

The two great festivals of the Muslims are occasions of more than mere festivity. One stands for physical and spiritual abstinence. The other for sacrifice, no ordinary act of foregoing an item of endless desiderata, but something truly in the tradition of Hazrat Ibrahim. On the morrow is this second great day of the *tawhid* followers of Muhammad (SM). We rejoice at the thought of our people, together with those of the Islamic Ummah strewn all over the globe, joining in a show of rare camaraderie transcending social and economic barrier. At the same time shall we not ask of ourselves what sacrifice we are going to make?

Hardly in all history any Islamic community has ever had the dire straits befallen them as that in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In many ways the carnage recalls to mind the genocide foisted in 1971 on the Bengalee people nearly 9 out of 10 of whom are Muslims. The difference that, unlike in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the attacked multitude in Bangladesh was wholly unarmed and that the killing hordes were all Muslims themselves, did mitigate neither the injustice nor the suffering of that nine-month-long Satanic action. In Bosnia-Herzegovina things are for worse owing to the fact that, in spite of pious protestations all around, nobody is really going to help them, the Islamic nations included. With even Libya and Iran choosing to be discreet, the question of if indeed, there is any reality in the idea of an Islamic Ummah looms large with every Bosnian human being raped and child killed and resistance-fighter felled. Shall we not on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha give them all a thought and set aside a part, if not the whole, of our festival expenses for the succour of those victims of a grossly unjust war? As Muslims that should be our duty. As human beings that should be our duty and how are we sure we are all truly so?

The second sacrifice that could do our nation a very badly needed big good turn involves the question of our fast depleting livestock situation. And the depletion is essentially related with the fish-eating Bengali people's new-found infatuation for beef. The all year round demand for beef is met mostly by cattle brought from the neighbouring country. When we cannot meet our own demand of thing from our own resources, we hardly have a right to slaughter tens of thousands of these in one single day. Cows have more use for us the agrarian people than turning up on the dining table. And the mad race for the cows on the eve of Eid-ul-Azha has more to do with the said infatuation for beef or at best an unfortunate misconception of religion than with religion proper. Can we not ask of ourselves this little sacrifice: forsaking ostentation for frugality?

Let all in the nation meet in jolly goodness on this great occasion and make a truly happy event of it. With that let us also keep our minds on the sacrifice aspect of the day if only to sanction it religiously.

## Cambodia's Transition to Democracy

Belying the apprehended violence, which the Khmer Rouge threatened with, the UN-supervised election in Cambodia has surprisingly gone peacefully. Thanks are due to the UN that has turned the table on the dissident guerilla group with a most deplorable legacy. The Cambodians, by turning to the voting centres and exercising their franchise at as high a proportion as 90 per cent, have also demonstrated their courage and a firm determination to start anew and by doing so earned their share of respect and appreciation from the international community. Living in the looming shadow of one of the cruelest and worst regimes, like that of Pol Pot's, in human history, the resolute character the Cambodians have revealed certainly gives enough cause for celebration.

However, voting trends so far show no clear winner and this too is likely to go to the Cambodians' credit; for instead of hindering the process the close race will rather give the right impetus to the two major parties — the government's Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and the royalist Funcinpec Party — to work closely together not only for the adoption of a democratic constitution within three months but also for the success of the next government. The threat of Khmer Rouge now going underground will pose a greater challenge for the new government. This should give them further cause to close their ranks instead of sharpening the rivalry between them. The people's verdict shows why they must do this much.

Signs are already positive in that the CPP has expressed its willingness to accept any result, no matter if it goes against Hun Sen's party. Prince Norodom Sihanouk is expected to be equally gracious and should be ready to prudently move towards a political consensus aimed at establishing a stable government in Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge, also a party to the UN-brokered peace plan, has isolated itself by not taking part in the election. It will try to disrupt the country's transition to peace and stability. Now people will be closely watching how the UN and the government, soon to be installed in Phnom Penh, will run down the strong guerilla groups. The UN cannot be expected to keep its forces stationed in Cambodia for an unspecified period of time. China's role in this matter however will prove decisive. If the Chinese patronage for Khmer Rouge dries up, the guerillas will have no option other than capitulating to the joint pressure. A new government can hardly chart the desired course if it has to contend with powerful insurgent forces.

THE first thing that will impress a foreign visitor to Pakistan these days is the freedom enjoyed by the press. The current political and economic situation has probably provided a unique opportunity to the press to exercise this freedom. Articles and commentaries are appearing on issues which have plagued Pakistan's political history for a long time. Scathing attacks and counter attacks are common on all sides.

The domestic political turmoil in Pakistan has come at a time when the country is facing formidable challenges in its international relations. The relation with India is perhaps at its worst since 1971. US foreign aid has been suspended for several years and the USAID is reportedly preparing to wind up its office in Pakistan. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Algeria are accusing Pakistan of helping and training fundamentalists who launch terrorist activities from its soils. The threat by some powers to declare Pakistan a 'terrorist state' is hanging like a sword of Damocles over its head. Drug trafficking originating in and passing through Pakistan is repeatedly causing Washington serious concern.

The most notable thing is that economic policies have become a major subject of controversy side by side with politics. Economic reform policies and their constitutional implications were being debated every day. During the recent Supreme Court trial, the Attorney General said that privatisation was against the Constitution as the proposals were never discussed in the Council of Common Interests. He went on to say: "The Chief Ministers of Sindh, NWFP and Baluchistan wrote letters to the President and to the former Prime Minister listing complaints of their provinces about privatisation, but no attention was paid to them." He also added that "Draft of a law to privatise the Pakistan Telecommunication Corporation was prepared in Washington to sell it to a foreign party. The proposed privatisation was against the solidarity, integrity, sovereignty and defence of the country."

Nawaz Sharif has a large following in the business and trading community and also in a section of the bureaucracy.

One PR exercise played by Sharif was interesting. The business and trading community had called for a strike on May 17 in his support for the second time. But Sharif appealed to them not to go on strike which would disrupt economic activities and public life, and ultimately they did not.

It is true that he had liberalized Pakistan's economic policies on a broad front. Deregulation of industrial investment, privatisation of a large number of public enterprises, banks and insurance companies, measures for attracting foreign investment permitting upto 100% equity, dismantling of foreign currency regulations and building infrastructure, particularly in the communication sector, have made a significant difference in the economic environment. Other policy reforms include opening up power generation, telecommunication and airlines to the private sector (two private telephone companies and two airlines have started operations), and permission to a number of private banks and investment companies. The optimism of economic expansion was reflected in the fast growing stock market. Nawaz Sharif is being described as "a man of vision". But others do not agree. They point out that it was the former Benazir Bhutto government which introduced privatisation as the central pillar of its economic policy, but with a view to broad-based economic ownership of public enterprises, selling to small shareholders though stock exchange. Sharif's privatisation was with the 'mindset' of an industrialist with built-in bias against industrial workers and ignoring labour welfare. His privatisation policy was "reckless and thoughtless" they say. He sold private units to 'favoured' parties, reneging his promise to sell them to workers, and in the process creating monopolies, the critics say. A number of economic zones were excluded

# Challenges Overshadow Privatisation, Compounded by High-profile Schemes

by M. Syeduzzaman

As experts say, with over so-called 1,000 sick industries owing Rs 16 billions to banks, Pakistan can come out of the economic quagmire if all the political parties work out a national consensus. Here also lies a lesson for policy-makers in Bangladesh.

from operation of labour laws violating ILO regulations. The 'middle roaders' say that perhaps Nawaz Sharif was a 'man of vision', but without having his feet on the ground. At a press conference, the Finance Minister of the now-outsted caretaker government had listed the following charges of mismanagement of the previous regime:

Domestic public debt rose from Rs. 380 billion at the end of FY 89-90 to Rs. 600 billion when the caretaker government took over, budget deficit soared, budgetary discipline and excessive growth in money supply caused prices to increase by about 30% in the past two years (the official figure is 20%), which eroded profitability of Pakistan's exports and capacity of domestic producers to compete with foreign imports.

- Lavishly decorating the Prime Minister's house with public resources and buying a Boeing 737 aircraft for \$37m for personal use, showing utter financial irresponsibility.
- Selling public enterprises to favoured parties leading to creation of monopolies (rise of cement prices from Rs. 105 per bag to Rs. 150 per bag within six months of privatisation was cited).
- In privatisation many decisions were taken in ad hoc manner, bypassing the ECNEC and the Cabinet, high profile ill-conceived financial projects were introduced like the 'yellow cab' project with provision for automatic credit to every applicant (reportedly Rs. 680 billion was disbursed under this scheme).
- Many of the officials under the past government had large business interests, who blatantly used the discretionary powers of the government to their own advantage.
- Special credit available at low rates of interest for the

purchase of machinery was abused, a large share of the credit having gone for purchase of sugar mill machinery and other items supplied by the Ittefaq Group of Industries (owned by NS's family), etc.

Professor M. Rashid, a veteran economist, has cited many instances of mismanagement pointing out that loans of Rs. 16 billion is overdue to banks from 1000 sick industrial units, while another Rs. 14 billion is overdue to development financing institutions. Many economists and politicians (and also bureaucrats in private) are criticising the high profile grandiose projects like the 'motorway' and 'bullet train' as inconsistent with the country's priorities and financial realities. Another subject of criticism is the large investment in the Telecom Corporation before disinvestment.

Supporters of Sharif point out that budgetary deficit is an inherited feature of the economy with defence and debt service charges pre-empting nearly 80% of government revenues. They cite that in the full year of Bhutto government (1988-89) budget deficit was 7.4% of GDP, and later the deficit reached 8%. Current year's deficit, they say, is because nearly Rs. 20 billion was spent in the wake of devastating September '92 floods for relief and rehabilitation. Moreover, narrow and restricted tax base, incentive package for industrialization, exemption of duties on capital goods and tax holidays naturally had their impact on revenue generation.

Pakistan's economic reforms, liberalization and privatisation policies have earned acclaim in the western press, but some of these criticisms, particularly about lack of transparency in privatisation decisions, grandiose projects of doubtful merit and growing fiscal imbalances (attributed to reckless spending) appear to be relatively unknown.

For seeking clarification on some of these issues I met my old friend Sartaj Aziz, finance minister of Nawaz Sharif. Sartaj is a born optimist, and he forcefully defended the policies of Nawaz Sharif's government. He said that all privatisation decisions were open, and even journalists were invited to be present when bids were opened. Some decisions were also cleared with the Monopoly Control Authority.

As for rise in price of cement, he thought that in the short run there was this risk when the previous policy of nationally pooled price was abolished with privatisation, but more capacity is being built up, and market forces would stabilize the prices, he said. As for the 'yellow cab' scheme, he said that 80,000 new jobs were created. Asked about re-payment, Sartaj said that it was better than industrial and agricultural loans. But his defence of the motorway project did not appear to be convincing taking shelter behind Nawaz Sharif's 'Vision'. It has been planned at a cost of \$1 billion parallel to the Rawalpindi-Lahore grand trunk road (in fact 50 km extra length). 40% of the cost is being met from a Korean supplier's credit, and the project was taken outside the purview of the Planning Commission and the ECNEC under orders of the deposed Prime Minister. (It reminded me of the Tarbela dam project which was also taken outside Pakistan's third and fourth five years plans, thus distorting inter-regional balance of resource allocation.) Nawaz Sharif's vision was linking Pakistan's heartland with Muslim republics of central Asia, though the project created distortion in sectoral investments and there were gossips about the award not being on all fours. The 'yellow cab' project appeared to have created serious misgivings in many circles. In order to make the scheme attractive duties and taxes were waived with the results that a 1000/1300 or 1600 c.c. 'taxi' costs less than half the normal price of the automobile.

Reportedly many Mercedes yellow cabs have been imported by 'waderas' in the name of 'harris'. The soaring demand for cheap cabs led to \$400 million worth of private import of cars as the domestic assembly plants were unable to supply them. The banks disbursed nearly Rs. 680 crore, and first year's repayment was only 65%. Most people believe that in the coming months repayment rates will steeply decline as there is now a glut in the market.

The economic problems which the government has to address are numerous and tricky. For '92-'93, GDP growth rate was projected at 3% by the caretaker government though the Nawaz Sharif government had estimated it at over 5% only a few days before it was unseated. The Fourth Five Year Plan was supposed to be launched from July 1, 1993, but it is yet unapproved, and has been delayed due to political changes.

The debate was still on last week whether the caretaker government, now replaced by Sharif administration, would prepare a 4-month budget for 93-94, or for the full year. Understanding with the World Bank and the IMF on reduction of budget deficit as a condition for substantial balance of payment support is unlikely to be implemented. The caretaker government was not in a position to impose new taxes or raise utility charges which were on the cards before the Nawaz Sharif government was unseated on April 18. But they had reportedly assured the donors that the underlying concepts and principles of economic policy reforms pursued in the past few years would be continued.

It is to be seen whether Nawaz Sharif will opt for new

TAXES now after restoration. Foreign exchange reserves are reported to have declined by about Rs. 4.26 billion in the first twenty days of May, and exports are apprehended to fall below the target of \$8 billion by nearly 10%. Postponement of the eighth five year plan will delay the launching of two nationally important programmes — the Social Action Programme (SAP), and the 25 year Forestry Master Plan. The SAP is an ambitious programme for making a significant attack on poverty and improvement in the social sector (primary education, primary health care, drinking water supply and sanitation) at a total cost of \$8 billion for the rest of the decade. Similarly, the Forestry Master Plan for 25 years is crucial for arresting environmental degradation. Donor meetings for considering financing packages for these two programmes will now be delayed consequent upon postponement of the Aid Consortium meeting. The social sector in Pakistan has suffered over the past two decades due to inadequate resource allocation and poor implementation. Currently the project aid pipeline is of the order \$10b — representing roughly 5 years' disbursement. Higher disbursement will need local currency resources which can be made available either by raising taxes, going for more deficit financing or cutting expenditure. Options are difficult. Currently the government is borrowing from the domestic market at 15% interest.

The political changes in Pakistan are, therefore, likely to have significant economic dimensions. In the face of the prevailing controversy over privatisation and allegations about lack of transparency in some earlier transactions, the process now is undoubtedly going to be slow. Foreign investors may wait and watch for a while. The stabilization programme is likely to suffer as hard decisions are likely to be postponed until a stable political environment emerges. Meanwhile the rate of inflation is unlikely to abate and export growth may slow down.

The 'middle roaders' are pleading for a 'national consensus' on economic policies. One expert writes:

"The problem of making both ends meet has created so seriously a paradoxical situation that no government — selected, elected, or even autocratic — can hope to cope with it singlehandedly. The only way out is to bring about a national consensus on economic policies and modalities for its practical application in order to mobilize internal resources and that can be achieved by developing a 'tax culture' and inducing the people with taxable incomes irrespective of the sources to make their contribution voluntarily to the national exchequer as a patriotic duty." The same author goes on to say: "There is no denying the fact that never in the history of Pakistan has such a trying and difficult economic situation arisen during peacetime as we are experiencing at the present moment. Irrespective of the verdict of the Supreme Court, let our political elite make a new start by giving up the help of apportioning the blame on their political rivals, realizing that the national interest dictates that we must forget the past and establish a real 'national consensus'. All political parties and groups should join hands with the sole objective of taking the nation out of the present economic quagmire and marching towards sustainable economic and industrial progress, the fruits of which may be equitably distributed among all factors of the economy."

There are perhaps lessons to be taken by Bangladesh policy makers and political leaders from the current controversy in Pakistan on implementation of economic policies and plea for 'national consensus'.

The writer who once served in high-level positions in the administration of the erstwhile Pakistan is a former Finance Minister of Bangladesh. He is a guest columnist of The Daily Star.

## Eid-ul-Azha and Thoughts on Sacrifice

by Mujibul Haque

AMONG Allah's many wishes one of the most important is the act of performing 'Qurban' on occasion of Eid-ul-Azha which signifies Allah's forgiving nature and our sense of parting with something dear to us. We do not and are not supposed to 'sacrifice' only; but prepare ourselves anew to remind us, here in this world we have come not to accumulate wealth only but to GIVE. For in the holy Quran there are pages where Allah has ORDERED us to extend our right arm to offer monetary belongings for the NEEDY. This is CLEARLY mentioned!

As I have taken the liberty to write upon a subject I am not at all an expert on, but only have dared to do so as a common simple minded individual and a human being who believes and has faith in Allah, I pray those who are experts and dedicated scholars would forgive me with grace if I've faltered anywhere in this article. The rest I leave upto Allah to judge and decide. This reminds me of the very many times when one 'demands' to know from me whether or not I pray five times, keep fast, sacrifice an animal during Eid-ul-Azha and so on. But the most 'shocking' question I have to tackle with is the one when a religious minded person having Full Knowledge of Muslim customs asks me whether or not I would go for the prayers before he is about to begin his. For, I have read it in the holy Quran: 'No Muslim shall ask another to come to prayers while he is to offer one since the call for prayers (Azan) has already been made on behalf of Allah. And... even if one does ask, the person asked is not supposed

to answer because he is answerable to Allah only.

The 'sacrificial' part during the Eid-ul-Azha I presume also lies upon Him and no man or woman should demand of another why he or she is not slaughtering a goat or a bull in the name of Allah on Eid-ul-Azha day or why a person has not gone for Haj since that person happens to be very rich! I wonder if a woman has been asked to 'sacrifice' during Eid-ul-Azha since I have not come across such declaration made by Allah in the little reading I have done of the holy Quran. After all now-a-days there are quite a large number of women in our country and all over the world who are earning and are making a good living. Nevertheless, I did come across a couple of women who do sacrifice a goat each year since their earnings are quite large and they believe they are equally duty bound to follow the menfolk of our country.

The Quran has mentioned so many things that are to be followed without one's own choice. It is a wonder why even after so much sincere trying and mentioning by the learned Muslim Ulemas we are simply ignorant and indulge into things that leave us with no alternatives but to receive Allah's wrath! Why does the Satan have to win over our faith so often and in such greater number is a question I shall have no satisfactory answer to. But I do pray some readers would come forward in aiding me and others. Is it not a wonder that Satan tried to lure Hazrat Ismail on three occasions but did not even consider approaching Hazrat Ibrahim once?

Eid-ul-Azha has come. And this day is to remind us of the supreme 'sacrifice' mankind is to make in the name and honour of Allah out of love and true faith as well as to be aware of the Satan who remains active all along, and may be that is why Allah has clearly reminded us and tells us in the Quran: 'He does not help those who do not call upon Him sincerely and shall put those followers of the Satan into hell in anger and in dissatisfaction. May be in 'despair' too, I think. About 'sacrifice' during Eid-ul-Azha, sometimes I feel very depressed and dejected. Those who offer animals in the name of Allah do so in such careless ways that even a child of two wants to know why we the elderly persons 'mess up places and spilt blood all over'. And what happens a couple of days later can well be explained by our City Corporation authorities! Not that they have not been doing so for years together but to no avail. There have been so many occasions when one had to 'walk over the blood of sacrificial animals'. I wonder who would be punished more. Of course there have been many days when Allah Himself came to our aid! He showered rain all over the country or just those places or cities urgently needing it and washed away all the blood before some one had to step on it! It is not too difficult to dig a hole in the soil; specially if the soil is not too hard. A five or even lesser, say three feet deep hole can serve the purpose of burying the waste materials of the sacrificial animals which is not done. But

simply no one can or should dare challenge their doings for these are the people who feel more loved by Allah and can be very aggressive I am afraid.

While in a couple of days when the atmosphere gets filthy I suppose these people 'pray' Allah shall cause them no harm or punish them for it is they who have 'remembered Him better' on the Eid-ul-Azha celebrations. Sometimes I wonder how, when Allah seems to have 'failed' in His mission through his Quran the Municipality guys or the BTV and Radio can expect to succeed!

Nevertheless I shall pray and seek similar prayers from our readers that 'humane' sense begins to prevail all over the world and while we feel sorry for the suffering Muslims we may also begin to try and put some sense to those who are responsible for it. Whether we can reach them or not is not our look out. I, as a helpless person and bestowed with limited powers can only pray. May Allah be merciful to those who have been cruel and punish those who willfully have chosen the path of the Satan. We have not the power even to mention the particular 'group' by religion in fear that those suffering Muslims shall be more brutally tortured or killed or made to starve! No, all do not happen because of Allah's wishes. After all, why is and what is the Satan for? On this occasion, I sincerely hope our hearts will not only 'beat' to the 'tune' of a mighty celebration but also towards an achievement that shall find a way to His mercy and forgiveness and kindness. May Allah save us from the doings of the Satan. A very happy Eid-ul-Azha to all.

grandmother and mother-in-law respectively.

We urge the BTV authority to look into the matter. Md. Delwar Hossain North Shahjahanpur, Dhaka.

Mrs Yasmeen Murshed Bonani, Dhaka

**"Lady politicians"**

Sir, This is with reference to a letter by Mrs Munira Khan published in your columns on May 25 in which she mentions about the Muslim lady politicians of Bengal elected in 1946. In fact the first two Muslim ladies were elected to the Bengal Legislative Assembly in 1937 not in 1946. They were the late Begum Farhat Shahabuddin and the late Begum Hasina Murshed, my

changed when the war of liberation began. The participants in that war came from all strata of the society, all religions, all sexes, classes and, most important in this case, from all political and non-political parties.

Similarly, at this point in the history of our nation, we are facing a very critical time. Those who opposed the war of independence and were pardoned subsequently, have re-established themselves in our society and are involved in a conspiracy to disgrace our great liberation war.

The nation needs once again to be united, irrespective of individual political and ideological viewpoints to keep the

**The Spirit of 1971**

Sir, It came to my notice, in a national daily, the chief of Awami League Sheikh Hasina as claiming that liberation that was brought by Awami League while speaking at the conclusion of their workers meeting. I would request the AL leader not to make such claims. Although Awami League was the majority party elected in the election of 1970 to represent the people of this region, the scenario

spirit of 1971 alive, in this respect Mrs Jahanara Imam, mother of freedom fighter Shaheed Rumi, has played the most vital role. Let us forget, Mrs Imam has been a non-political entity. Her participation and involvement came from her commitment she made for the nation back in 1971 by sacrificing her son.

Like her, millions others continue believing in this nation and in the spirit of 1971 as true patriot and not necessarily do they belong to any political parties.

Akku Chowdhury Tejgaon, Dhaka

## To the Editor...

**TV programmes on Eid day**

Sir, Eid day is day of celebrations for Muslims. We have two Eids (Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha) each year. About all the Muslims in our country rich and poor alike expect to spend the day in pleasure. From the Eid day until two or three days, people are seen busy going to their relatives and spend some time with them. Eid being a happy occasion BTV, as usual, telecasts a series of programmes in the course of two or three days, beginning from Eid day, to entertain the viewers. But it is

regrettable to say that BTV has been telecasting programmes for the last few years during day-time on Eid day which causes much disturbance to the viewers in performing other rituals. Because of the programmes during day-time on Eid day, people cannot go out of their home to meet their relatives. This virtually confines people in the house depriving them of other festivities.

Eid day can really be an enjoyable one, if BTV shifts its day-time programmes of the day to night. Let's spend the day time on Eid day with our friends and relatives and enjoy BTV's programmes in the night.