

## Keeping to the Core of the Spirit

It is not a flight from the mundane that Ramadan is all about. The occasion is no doubt evocative of a hallowed religious fervour — in memory of the revelation of the Holy Quran during the month — but its spirit coheres with worldly affairs in very essential terms. For, the Ramadan puts to a severe test our capacities for self-restraint in personal lives which in their totality have an unquestionable bearing on our social or collective well-being.

The Ramadan actually seeks to bring out the best in us in relation to fellow-beings at large. You are supposed to burn in the kiln by being famished until sundown to feel the pinch of hunger of the starving and be empathetic towards them. You better not go on the binges at the Iftar parties and overspend thereby making a casualty of both empathy and austerity.

The core message of the month is to avoid all forms of excesses, regardless of whether these are committed swathed in an overzealous religiosity or done deliberately to reap the benefits from a demand-driven market. The sensitivity of the restaurant business and hotelery is understandable but incidents should be avoidable so long as these are pursued without hurting the sentiments of *Rajdars*. While the appeal is to the good sense of both who may go for the hype and the others who are to show respect to the fasters, there is no reason why normal economic activities should be upset.

But what worries most is the sharp rise in the prices of essentials that has already occurred boding extremely ill for the rest of the month. The daily necessities were reportedly selling dearer by 10 to 25 per cent on the day before Ramadan. The gradual upward climb in the prices from the levels of last month is a repetition of the same old story of trading speculatively and exploitative on high demands. Making a whole year's profit in a month leading to Eid-ul-Fitr has been too much of a lure to spread the profits thin on high demands for a month and still make good money in the end. There are sure to be *Rajdars* among the tradesmen who are expected to give a better account of themselves. At any rate, overenthusiastic policing of the market better not stray into disruptive raids on the shops which invariably make for another spate in the price rise. Efficient gathering of market intelligence ought to enable us to do the job quietly at the roots rather than go crazy in the open. Let the law enforcers move against toll collection.

Fasting is often made an excuse of to work less at the offices. The net result of this happens to be a slow-down in the economic and administrative activities. This even goes to affect decision-making. Actually there should be more efficiency and greater output during the month for its corrective emphasis on ethics and social commitment. It is more focussed and responsible work that is expected during the month.

The high-profile Iftar parties thrown by the Prime Minister, ministers, leader of the opposition and other political personages, under pangs sometimes, during the last year, did more of PR job than account for rewarding interactions among the various groups. These rather expensive events came aplenty in a flurry, with one set of organisers trying to steal a march over the other. The parties would be justified this time around if instead of serving as a medium of public posturing they advance the cause of live-and-let-live in national politics.

## Power Failure: Whose Fault?

Uninterrupted and fail-safe supply of electricity in this country is perhaps too tall an order to be met. But a reasonably regular supply with prior notice for unavoidable load-shedding is not too much to ask. For a few weeks now there is no knowing when the power failure will come about and once it has taken place when the supply will be restored. The fact that the Power Development Board (PDB) or for that matter Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) does not even feel the necessity of informing the public of the intermittent snapping of power is what people find unacceptable. The idea of expressing regret through a public notice or notices seems to have failed to appeal to the authorities.

The way the electricity authorities are treating the people is outrageous — not so much because of the irregular supply but because of the callous mentality working behind the awful system. Even within limitations, the system can be made more accountable and transparent — provided that the men in charge are aware of their obligation to the consumers. If the people are taken into confidence, they will be only too willing to bear with the generating and distributing authorities. The fact that reporters have to unearth what really has gone wrong with the PDB shows that the authorities have no intention of sharing with the public the department's or shortcomings or exposing anything suggesting its inefficiency.

In the mean time common people have given free rein to all sorts of wild imagination, none of which being on target or charitable. The chairman of the PDB has briefed the diplomatic community on Friday about the power situation and has expressed his optimism that the present crisis will soon be over. The question is why the PDB chairman took so much time to go public about the crisis and its possible cure. His sense of obligation shown to the foreign residents in the country is well appreciated but would it not be in the fitness of things to explain the matter to his countrymen as well? The elaborate presentation, including slide shows — that was made to convince the dignitaries of the PDB's effort could be repeated on the BTV and it would have helped people understand the situation better and avoid needless confusion.

That the power generating plants are old and need urgent repair is understandable. But what is less clear is the authorities' lack of any attempt to bring their houses in order. We have time and again been appealing for doing away with the inherent weakness and irregularities responsible for system loss in power supply. The World Bank and other international donor agencies have refused to fund the much-needed overhaul of the plants and machines because of the maligned system loss. No doubt, the seed of the problem lies within the system. Without making the system right, the problems cannot be solved.

# Russia Looks at the Spectre of an 'Islamic Invasion'

by Andrew Wilson

**Moves by Crimea to secede from Ukraine and re-integrate into Russia, and Kiev's riposte that it will "use all possible options" against any steps to undermine "Ukraine's territorial integrity," raise the spectre of another civil war in the republics of the former Soviet Union. Moscow has responded cautiously. As Gemini News Service reports, although Russia is taking a more assertive line on security, its immediate concern is with Muslim intentions to the south.**

UNDER pressure from the army and from populist nationalist politicians, Russia is taking a more assertive line on national security.

In so doing, it is sending shivers down the spine of the neighbours with which it was once united in the Soviet Union.

By talking of safeguarding national interests, President Boris Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev are hoping to head off competition from Vladimir Zhirinovsky and other nationalist winners in December's parliamentary elections.

But the start of the nationalist swing goes back to last September when Yeltsin abruptly withdrew his agreement to the possible entry of Poland and Czechoslovakia into NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation — the main Western military alliance).

The principal instigator of change is the army, now presenting the bill for its support of the President against Parliament in October. The military leadership wants to regain its former powerful political position and to establish a hold on the country's rapidly diminishing resources.

It is also exercised by concern over external challenges to Russia's security and stability. These come not from the West (where its objections to NATO's enlargement have more to do with Russia's place in the international hierarchy than with any security threat) but from forces south and the east of the country's borders.

The south is the more immediately worrying quarter. What the generals foresee is



the invasion of the Commonwealth of Independent States by forces serving Islamic fundamentalism — in short, a revival of the Afghan war, which was ended by the Soviet withdrawal five years ago.

The challenge from the East remains in abeyance — but only as long as China, now overtaking Russia in modernisation, is busy with internal economic problems and unlikely to reactivate claims on parts of Kazakhstan.

Potential threats from both

are reflected in the new mili-

tary doctrine adopted by the Russian government last November.

The key part of the doctrine (a document spelling out defence priorities) is a passage stating the need for the armed forces to be able to deal with threatening or destabilising situations in the "near abroad," as Russians call other ex-Soviet republics.

What Moscow wants, and has more or less obtained, is Western recognition of its right and duty to enforce peace in this area — which is

clearly beyond the West's own competence.

With or without Western approval, it intends to protect its interests, which include the well-being of millions of Russian expatriates and of industries vital to the formerly integrated economy.

To implement the doctrine, the Soviet system of military districts is being replaced by so-called strategic forces commands, from which forces can quickly be sent in any direction.

Up to six in number, the new commands will combine ground, air and (where appropriate) naval forces, with the army element consisting of highly mobile airborne or air-portable forces.

At the same time, the overall system of command based on armies and divisions is being replaced by a leaner and more flexible system of corps and brigades.

All of this will necessitate a re-equipment programme, giving helicopters and lighter weapons precedence over tanks, and replacing strategic transport planes lost to other republics in the post-Soviet shake-up.

Not all this can be achieved overnight, if only because of a shortage of money. At present the armed forces have barely the funds to pay for subsis-

tence: procurement of equipment is at a standstill.

In addition, the high com-

mand

and

the

structures sent into northern Afghanistan by Pakistan-based Islamist groups including one led by a former head of Pakistan's inter-service intelligence organisation.

The lack of clarity of long-term purpose on the part of the leading actors makes it difficult to construct the kind of scenario used by military planners in such a situation.

But it is easy to understand Russian anxieties about what could happen if the southern "shield" of Central Asian republics were to fall apart, and Islamic Central Asian governments were to spark moves for secession by the millions of Muslims in Russia itself.

In the Russian Federation, six Muslim-populated republics (Chechnya, Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia) have already set up national guard formations, and Chechnya and Tatarstan have clearly stated their ambition for independence.

In a recent paper for the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies, it was suggested that the unravelling could go even further if as a consequence of military reorganisation, regional commanders with greater autonomy were moved to support the creation of new independent republics, for which there have been proposals in the Urals, Siberia and the Far East.

For the moment, however, that is beyond even the most powerful crystal ball.

ANDREW WILSON is former defence and Moscow correspondent of the London *Observer*.

self-torture. The holy Quran says: "Allah does not want to put you to difficulties. (He wants you) to complete the prescribed period and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance ye shall be grateful."

Fasting in the month of Ramadhan, indeed, brings for mankind every year a period of unique divine importance and excellence. According to Al-Bukhari and Muslim, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said: "With the advent of Ramadhan, the parades of Paradise are opened, the gates of Hell are closed, and the devils are chained. In this month there is one night (Lailat-ul-Qadar) which is worth more than one thousand months". "Whoever fasts during Ramadhan out of faith, seeking no reward, will have all his past sins forgiven". According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

The Fast of Ramadhan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadhan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hijra. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

As the Fast of Ramadhan

continues with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadhan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hijra. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

The Fast of Ramadhan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadhan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hijra. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

The Fast of Ramadhan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadhan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hijra. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

The Fast of Ramadhan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadhan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hijra. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

The Fast of Ramadhan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadhan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hijra. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

The Fast of Ramadhan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadhan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hijra. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

The Fast of Ramadhan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadhan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hijra. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

The Fast of Ramadhan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadhan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hijra. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

The Fast of Ramadhan commences with the sighting of the new moon and ends when the new moon of the next month of Shawal is seen. The Ramadhan was first prescribed on the second Monday of the month of Shaban in the second year of the Hijra. According to Ibn Kathir, the Muslim Fast went through three stages of development until it reached its present state. When the holy Prophet (Sm.) came to Medina, he used to fast for three days every month in addition to the day of Ashoura, the day on which God delivered Moses and his people from their enemy. According to Ibn Abbas, the holy Prophet (Sm.) said, "He who has already eaten shall abstain the rest of the day, and he who has not, shall fast the day. Today is the day of Ashoura".

Quran: "Whosoever of you is present in this month (the month of Ramadhan) shall fast it, and whosoever is sick or on a