

Message of Ashura

Ashura, the tenth of Maharram in the lunar Islamic calendar, sends us on an emotional pilgrimage — back to fourteen hundred years ago on the banks of the river Euphrates.

What we reap out of the commemoration of this landmark event are not just pathos and tears but a great natural reverence for the exemplary sacrifice and dedication shown to a cause held so dear.

It no doubt represented a political watershed in Islamic history, one of far-reaching consequences at that; yet, it is the human appeal of the tragedy that has proved to be of timeless value.

When it comes to the issue of humanity, divides and conflicts cannot be stretched too far without imperilling the very fabric upon which the progress of human civilization hinges.

Dhaka's Future

In The Daily Star-BUET Roundtable held last Thursday, a strong recommendation was made to bring the various government agencies like WASA, DESA, Titas Gas, Rajuk, DMP, etc. under a single broad-based authority.

The question that puzzles us is that why are we not learning about city management from the rest of the world. Earlier when we had our first ever elected mayor, we felt that we finally got started on the right direction and the system of city government will be instituted here.

Point was also made that whom is the city for? So far all facilities are geared towards catering for the rich, while 80 per cent of the urban population is poor.

The bottom line is that Dhaka's population is growing at 6 to 7 per cent per year. This will result into doubling of this city's inhabitants within the next 10 years, given the compound rate of growth.

Dream Figures

Who are feeding the Prime Minister with such fantastic pieces of statistics? The people who told Begum Khaleda Zia that school enrolment of children in Bangladesh now stands at 92 per cent and that drop-out rate has come down to 20 per cent or that 80 per cent of the enrolled would complete the five-year primary level should right away lose their job.

The national target was to achieve 82 per cent enrolment at the primary level in 1995. If we have to believe the Prime Minister's advisers this nation has overshoot the target by as much as 10 per cent or enrolled more than a million children beyond the target by '95.

As to the question of drop-outs, the national target was to take the completion rate to 52 per cent by '95. The PM has been told that it has indeed risen to 80 per cent. This is a world-beating achievement. Only it is most improbable figure.

Government coffers are being depleted by all kinds of imaginary and fictitious establishments and manpower. The libraries getting government help for giving public service do not simply exist in most cases. So is the case with thousands of schools. The average school size of primaries in 1993 was 260. By this token we should now have 64,000 primaries of that size.

Such ill-advised figure-flaunting notwithstanding, there has lately been some remarkable progress in the primary sector. The gains made are not that modest either. But still there remains a wide gap between reality and official record.

Macro Economic Scenario: Promises and Premises

AFTER having witnessed a plethora of policy shifts since the early 1970s, Bangladesh is reported to have been placed on an appreciable state of macro economic stability. To bear this out, one needs to look at the most recent (especially of the early 1990s) trends in the movement of macro indicators.

The Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD) of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) produced a review of the macro economic scenario of Bangladesh focusing on its attendant prospects and problems.

The trend growth rate of GDP since the early 1980s hovered around 4 per cent per

The current investment level in Bangladesh is hovering around 13-14 per cent of GDP. To pull the economy out of the low-level equilibrium trap, a massive dent is urgently needed. The most pertinent question is: Is it possible to achieve such a jump in investment given the prevailing macro scenario?

annum and that of the most recent sub-period does not appear to be much different either. The official production index for large-scale manufacturing tends to show that between FY '90 and FY '94, nearly three-fourths of the overall growth in manufacturing production originated from the growth in RMG industry while fertiliser, drugs and pharmaceutical industries accounted for the rest one-third.

Larger share of GDP, of late, seems to originate from the service sector. Over the period FY '89 to FY '94, nearly 60 per cent of the incremental GDP has been in the service sector compared to only 12 per cent in the manufacturing sector.

workers' remittances rather than by export earnings from merchandise exports. Given an undiversified manufacturing base of the economy, it may be premature for Bangladesh to focus exclusively on a 'medium-term growth' agenda that relies on an export-oriented, private manufacturing sector.

Over the last couple of years, the growth in foreign reserves also continued to herald happy news. The average annual increase in foreign reserves has been about 2.5 per cent of GDP during 1990-91-1993-94, accounting for nearly half of the annual capital receipts.

The most striking (and, perhaps, the most exulting) development of macro economic balance in the 1990s is said to be the steep rise in the national savings rate. From as low as around 6 per cent of GDP in the late 1990s, savings rate perked to 12 per cent in 1993-94.

substantially shrank from 7 per cent of GDP to less than 2 per cent during the same period. The beefy savings rate could be adduced to (i) a significant improvement in the government's budgetary position (revenue as share of GDP rose from 9.3 per cent in 1989-90 to 12 per cent in 1993-94) and (ii) increased flow of remittance which rose, in volume, by 1 per cent of GDP during the same period of time.

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Total real investment grew at 2.8 per cent per annum during 1980-81 to 1993-94, at 2 per cent during 1986-87-1993-94 and at 4.1 per cent during 1989-90 to 1993-94. After a dip, investment seems to have picked up in recent years both in the public and the private sector. However, it remains to be seen whether

the recovery in investment ... represents a transition to a higher rate of sustained growth or a mere return to the low growth trends of the earlier years.

Potential vs Actual

There is no denying the fact that the current investment level in Bangladesh is yet to be up to the mark and is hovering around 13-14 per cent of GDP. To pull the economy out of the low-level equilibrium trap, a massive dent into this sphere is urgently needed.

According to the IRBD report, the macro economy appears 'crisscrossed by crossroads'. There is potential to move into an accelerated growth path but the actual performance lies much below the potential.

Concluding Remarks

While Bangladesh economy continues to keep up favourable macro indicators — the sine qua non of high economic growth — its failure to enter into a higher growth path seems to vex politicians, academics and policymakers.

Beneath the Surface

by Abdul Bayes



or sub-sectors (non-crop sector, rural industries, formal and informal service sectors etc). An appropriate development strategy, thus, should go hand in hand with a market-oriented liberalising policy reform.

Concerting Views

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Significance of Ashura: Struggle against Injustice and Inequality

by Siddiqur Rahman

Will the teachings of Karbala and Ashura, where and when Hussain risked his life for the sake of his principles, inspire the Muslims in bringing the 'Islamic ummah' to its original and correct path of justice, equality and brotherhood?

ASHURA, the tenth day of the sacred month of Muharram, is observed by the devoted Muslims as a voluntary fasting day. It is related in the Hadith book Mishkat Sharif that the great Prophet Muhammad (SM) observed fast on this day and said that it was the day respected by the Jews who were used to observe fast on this day in gratitude to Allah because He liberated Hazrat Musa (AS) and Israelites from the oppression of the Pharaoh (Pharaoh) who was drowned to death along with his troops in the river Nile in Egypt on this very day.

Ashura is the day observed by the Sunni Muslims, being also the day on which, it is said, Allah created Adam and Eve, heaven and hell, the tablet of decree and the pen (Lauh wa Qalam), life and death, etc. It is also said that the universe was created on this day and will be destroyed on this day.

But all the above have been superseded by the most tragic shahadat (martyrdom) of Hussain, the second son of Ali and Fatima, the Prophet Muhammad's (SM) daughter, in Karbala on this day in the year 680 A D (61 A H). The greatest tragedy in the Muslim history, the most cruel, and tragic 'qatl' (killing) of Hussain, the beloved grandson of the Prophet (SM) in an unlawful and tricky way unleashed by Caliph Yazid, son of Caliph Muawiyah, occurred on this day of the sacred month of Muharram.

The deviation of the Muslim leadership from the social principles of Islam was the root cause of this tragedy. But even after this great tragedy, it seem, the religious leaders, instead of struggle for justice and equality, used this day of Ashura to encourage the faithful to beat themselves with chains, to beat their own chests, to slash themselves with swords and daggers and so on. It appears that to dissuade the

people from their struggle against injustice, inequality and autocracy, the rulers encouraged them to forget the cause for which Hussain sacrificed his life and to remain satisfied and consoled by self-torture. The 'matam', and 'marthia' depictions of the sufferings of Imam Hussain and his family in Karbala, had been used in the countries such as Turkey, Iran, etc, to console them in their own misery, instead of arousing them for struggle for justice.

Islam meant the brotherhood and equality of the believers, limited only by their freely given and revocable loyalty to their chosen leader.

The Islamic Caliphate was established to serve the cause and spread the message of Islam. Upto four pious Caliphs, it somehow served the actual purpose. But later, it seemed to serve the interests of a small group of rich and powerful men, who maintained it by methods that approximated, to those of ancient Roman and Persian Empires that Islam had conquered. Wealth and status, power and the absolute authority which the Arab conquerors brought, were regarded by the pious Muslims as a derogation from the authentic message of Islam. Pious and earnest men denounced the Caliphs as worldlings, usurpers and tyrants; angry and ambitious men joined them in seeking to overthrow this tyranny, and the state and community of Islam were convulsed by a series of bitter civil wars. The declared issues were the Caliphates (i.e., who should rule and how) and the restoration of authentic Islam. Each victory, whether of the rebels or of the defenders, ended with a reinforcement of the sovereign power and a further step in the direction of a centralized autocracy in the Middle Eastern style. By a tragic

paradox, only the strengthening of the Islamic state could save the identity and cohesion of the Islamic community. And the so-called Islamic state, as it grew stronger, moved further and further away from the social and ethical ideals of Islam. Feudalism and autocracy replaced the Islamic social system. Resistance to this process of change was constant and vigorous, sometimes successful, but always unavailing. Out of this resistance, there emerged only a series of religious sects and factions.

The first civil war ended in 661 A D with victory of Muawiyah and the establishment of new Caliphate, in his own family, that lasted for ninety years. The discipline and order of Muawiyah's regime, in contrast to the anarchic factionalism of many of Ali's supporters, seemed to offer a better prospect for the unity and survival of Islam and its protection against the forces of disruption, and many even of the pious transferred their allegiance to the less attractive but more effective Umayyad. The Umayyad Caliphate, in its successive phases, set up an imperial system that gradually borrowed more and more of the structure and methods of the defeated empires. The Abbasids followed suit.

The process was not unresisted. The Kharijites continued to oppose the Umayyads and after them the Abbasids. The Shi'ites showed their allegiance to the Prophet's (SM) family (through Fatima and Ali, not through Abbas, the son of Abdul Muttalib) and followed a series of rebels. It may be noted that the martyrdom of Hussain at Karbala, more than any other single event of the Shi'ites from a political faction to a religious sect with strong messianic overtones. The new converts as well as the pious and discontented Arabs, especially those who suffered from

the sharper economic and social differentiation that came with conquests and riches, were readily attracted by the claims of the house of the Prophet (SM), which seemed to offer an end to the injustices and inequality of the existing order and a fulfilment of the promise of Islam. But the situation did not change. The conflicts between the rich and poor, between the possessors and the dispossessed were not ended.

At present in the oil-rich Muslim states, there is the accumulation of private fortunes under an avowedly western capitalist economy. For instance in Kuwait, it is possible

for a businessman like Khalil Osmann, born in Sudan, to move to a financial position which he describes as '30 to 40' times over 'subject to the market being healthy' (The Rose and the Rock, by Bruce B Lawrence, page 164). The wealth of such magnates as Abdul Aziz Suleiman and Adnan Khashoggi of Saudi Arabia for example, is measured in hundreds of millions of dollars. The accumulation of personal fortunes is rapidly having profound implications. The austerity and restraint characteristics of Bedouin life, sustained by Islam, is now seriously challenged by conspicuous consumption and ostentation. Only

'time will tell what this will have on the Islamic social order.' (ibid)

The derailing of the Islamic society from the track of the Holy Prophet (SM) and the four pious Caliphs was consciously initiated by Muawiyah and his son Yazid. The derailing continued during Umayyad and Abbasid periods and it continues till now. Will the teachings of Karbala and Ashura, where and when Hussain risked his life for the sake of his principles, inspire the Muslims in bringing the 'Islamic ummah' to its original and correct path of justice, equality and brotherhood? Let us hope that Muharram and Ashura would teach us to stand up and fight for what we believe to be right and just.

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Bureaucratic, Mystique in South Asia

A K M Jalaluddin

What the CSP's were Taught-X Hard Work, Very Hard Work; the Elitist Way

THE CSP and PFS probationers were gradually broken into the rigours of official life. Indeed, they had to put in very hard work; but the elitist way.

First, the residence. It was a palatial building, of Anglo-Mughal architectural design. It was the residence of the British Resident to the PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States Union). More often than not, he would be a Lord or a Knight and live in a grandiose style. The rooms were very big and the ethos and whole environment took one away supposedly to the wonderland of power and glory — far from the maddening crowds of Nawabpur (Dhaka) and Bunder Road (Karachi).

Henry Frank Goonow, the reputed American expert on public administration took particular exception to the beautifully maintained spacious driveways which, he thought, were enough to create an impression of 'unreality' of some kind in the minds of the would-be administrators. 'You live on the laps of luxury,' a friend of ours concluded after having seen only the lounge and the dining room. 'I am not sure,' I told him, 'please see us riding horses at five o'clock tomorrow morning.'

The training schedule for us was as follows: October 66 — June 67: Academy training; July 67 — Sept 67: District attachment (to the wing other than the probationer's domicile); 1st Week of Oct 67: Final Passing Out (FPO) examination conducted by the CSPC (Central Public Service Commission); Oct 67 — Jan 68: Training as assistant commissioners (on-the-job training); Dec 67 — Mar 68: Settlement training; Mar 68 — Jan 69: Departmental examinations (four chances allowed)

Aug 1968: Secretariat training; Jan 69 — Feb 69: Army attachment (with 2 EBR); March 69: Appointment as SDO.

During the Academy training we undertook extensive tours all over West Pakistan. We saw nearly everything that was worth seeing: visited the principal offices, all the service headquarters, PIA, the Central Secretariat at Islamabad, the State Bank (including the vault where our gold reserve was kept). The tours were no excursions — they were truly educational tours requiring us to take extensive notes. These were later translated into full-fledged reports. They were very carefully evaluated by DDT Tariq Siddiqui and counted for our over-all final seniority. So these tours were no pleasure trips at all — they were hard work.

We were required to maintain a detailed diary of everything we saw, heard and experienced. The diary was an open-ended multi-dimensional exercise designed to — convince our trainers that our intellectual horizon was being widened, surely and significantly; — provide us with a larger number of tools of analysis/frameworks of reference; — grow the habit of on-the-spot assessment of various problems.

It was, of course, as already mentioned hard work the elitist way. The CSP/PFS probationers would travel by special trains with their personal bearers, cook etc. When we went to Comilla by train the timing was odd for arrival (3 am). So arrangements were made that the coaches carrying us would be detached at Comilla and we were expected to get down at 7 or 8 — as we normally did on other touring days (in the academy, we, of

course, had to get up much earlier for riding etc.)

I could not do any better than quoting from the official circular given to all trainees.

Instructions: Arrangements have been made for travel by a special train comprising the following coaches: FS ... 2, FS ... 2, CDAC ... 1, TIL ... 1, Power Charging ... 1, Plant ... 1

With the following accommodation: 1st Class berths, 46; 2nd Class berths, 36; and servants approximately 25. There are 9 1st Class 2 berth coupes and 7. Four-berths 1st Class compartments and 6 berths three 2nd Class compartments.

Three two berth coupes will be reserved for the (Directing) Staff and the remaining first and second class berths shall be available for use by the probationers. It should mean 40 probationers will travel first and eight will travel second. The reservation chart is being issued separately.

Six room bearers will travel with the train and each bearer will look after 8 probationers. PMC should assign duties to room bearers accordingly.

Messing Arrangements: The mess will comprise of the following: 4 room bearers; 2 cooks; and mess steward.

There will be a dining car attached to the special train, in which the mess will be located. The mess will cater not only for the probationers and staff but also for the room bearers travelling with the train and the railway staff i.e. guard, engine driver etc.

The probationers will be served breakfast, lunch, dinner, evening tea in the dining car. The PMC will have to regulate the timings according to the programme and the seating capacity in the dining car.

Probationers have to be strictly punctual in attending the different lectures and visits, arranged for them. Any delinquency, in this regard, would be seriously viewed with as this not only defeats the very purpose of the study tours, but also creates a very bad impression in the minds of the organizers of these programmes regarding the Academy and the probationers.

To the Editor...

Bengalee Muslim ICS

Sir, This has reference to Syed Ashraf Ali's letter published in your 'Letter to the Editor' columns on May 31, 1995. As far as I know there was no Muslim Bengalee ICS in British India. There were, of course, a number of Muslim IPS officers like Late Zakir Hossain, Late A M S Doha, Late Hafizuddin Ahmed, Mohiuddin Ahmed and Anwarul Huq. But there is no record, at least to the best of my knowledge, of any Bengalee Muslim who joined Indian Civil Service through open competition. The only Bengalee Muslim ICS, whom my generation knew was Mr T I M Nurunnabi Choudhury. But then, he was an ICS by 'nomination'. Some of my learned senior friends also spoke of one Mr Mujibur Rahman as a 'nominated' ICS of whom I have no knowledge. But none of us has ever

heard the name of Mr Akhtaruzzaman Khan as an ICS officer from Bengal. Even if there was one, he may not have been a Bengalee.

T A Khan Dhaka

Imran's marriage survey

Sir, Pakistanis have expressed mixed feelings over the wedding of former cricket star Imran Khan with British heiress Jemima Goldsmith. Some approve the marriage while others maintain reservations. According to a survey conducted by Gallup Pakistan, a Gallup International affiliate, Khan has lost ground among a group of those who were in a mind to support him, should he form a political party. The

survey also revealed that the proportion of those willing to donate to Imran Khan's cancer hospital dropped from 29 per cent before the marriage to 19 per cent afterwards.

Whatever, I wish the couple a happy and prosperous life.

Meanwhile, it would perhaps be better for Khan to adhere to his philanthropic mission instead of getting involved in politics. And everyone should help Imran in setting up his cancer hospital in Lahore which he is building in the memory of his beloved mother and to serve the humanity. Let this cancer hospital be developed as a modern and sophisticated cancer treatment home where cancer patients, from rich to poor, can get equal treatment facilities at a cheaper rate.

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