

A Day for All Mankind to Rejoice

What was Fatah Eazdaham decades back now is popularly called Eid-e-Miladunnabi. But substance has remained the same as it ever will. This day 1425 years back, the 12th of Rabiul Awwal, Muhammad, the messenger of God and the last of the nabis, was born to an Arab mother in a social milieu steeped in idolatry. His coming and his life's work and his messages together with the divine Book revealed to him and spread to the wide world by him — brought civilisation to the portals of modern times in one mighty leap. What he wrought in that tribal milieu was a people's revolution and this ignited the revolution of the mind that was to change the cultural and spiritual horizon of the whole of mankind.

Time has sapped man of the elan that the Rasullullah had blessed it with. His dynamism, as against the world-renouncing immobility of earlier savants, as also his prizing the earthly life as the gateway to a worthy life hereafter galvanised his tribe into a nation, and that nation into a world nation. The transformation bridged the classical world to the modern. In following his model of not only tolerating people outside of the ummah but also learning from them, the Islamic world absorbed all of the Graeco-Roman learning, developed it and in a manner that the 15th century Italian Renaissance would have its foundation in it.

Removed by so many centuries and so many cultures from that incomparable epoch-making presence, we marvel the more at his remembrance.

Balagal ula bekamalehi
Kashafadduya bejmalehi
Hasnatjamiyeh khesalehi
Sallallahu walehi

Appeal for Negotiation

Ground-work is already afoot for fresh agitation programmes by the opposition parties. This is to press home the relatively advantageous political positions enjoyed by them. As the ruling party is running short of time, the initiative for political manoeuvring has been wrested away by the rival camp. The ruling party seems to be unruddled and is in no haste to make the first move to get all the parties across the table for a negotiated accord on the conduct of the next national election which is approaching fast. The government, true to its nature, seems to be relapsing into its delaying tactics. As we had expressed our apprehension, it appears to have opted for by-election to the vacant seats. Maybe, at the last moment it will cancel the by-election and subject the whole process to a time constraint so that the opposition parties too are under pressure.

We have warned through this column earlier that the move may prove dangerous — perhaps even suicidal for the ruling party. If the country is led to a serious constitutional crisis, all the political parties will be held responsible for it; but because of its position it is the ruling party which will have to bear the major share of the blame. After all the political bickering, development of acrimonious relations and refusal to talk, a meeting-point must now be found by the national leaders if not for anything else at least for the sake of the country's interest.

Political scientists and constitutional experts have been trying their best to help the politicians out. The opposition's agitational programme is contingent upon non-holding of a political dialogue on the basis of one of the formulae advanced so far. They have expressed their readiness to talk on it. Now is the time for the ruling party to come forward with a concrete proposal. The onus clearly is on the government. The prospect for political reconciliation looks more real now than ever before. The government and the opposition have expressed their willingness to make a few concessions like the prime minister's stepping down a month before the election and the opposition's readiness to hold election under the president. But the problem is that they are not placing them on the table for discussion. So we urge the government to expedite the process of negotiation before it is too late. We hate to experience the disruption of civic life, economic loss and street violence once, again. Before all that happens, please sit together. You will not lose your face.

End of a Folly

The irrationality of an evaluation system that yields outcome in an inverse pyramid design is etched on Dhaka Board's SSC exam results this year. DB has placed 53 per cent of successful examinees in the first division, 44 in the second and a next to nothing 3 per cent in the third. There are many schools now priding in having distinction achievers only — those scoring a star — among the pupils they sent up for the exams. Many school leaders are sad; for, some — a few indeed — of their examinees did so bad as to secure first division. Evaluation of academic achievement is, as a universal norm, a matter of being weighed more seriously and accurately than precious metal or gem. It was here a complete madhouse these four years.

This year the weird thing is easier to take in the thought that the bloated foolishness which led to all this will be finaled out from next year with the question bank system ceasing to operate.

We had long been admonishing the boards for publishing the so-called combined merit lists. The nature of marking the science and of the arts answer scripts are basically so different that combining the lists would be grossly unfair, weighted till eternity in favour of the former. Heeding the point Dhaka Board has sent in merit lists titled, incredibly: Combined Merit List Science Group, Combined Merit List Social Science Group Female, Combined Merit List Social Science Group Male. What is combined in the Science Group or Social Science Group merit list? Flabbergasted, some people suggested, well you get both males and females there in the list, that's why! Fantastic, are the boys and girls appearing in different science group exams? The wisdom and the inherent attitude behind publishing separate merit lists for girls are wide open to question. Merit is merit and gender differences have got nothing to manipulate its evaluation.

PAKISTAN'S 48 years since independence from British tutelage can be divided into two equal 24-year segments, the period before 1971 and the period since. It was during our hour of greatest need that we had the maximum support of our friends. 24 years later we do not have the same close relationship with any of the nations that then stood by us. Theoretically we hold that only democracy can strengthen external relationships, paradoxically our foreign relations has been strong during periods of dictatorship in comparison to the periods of democratic rule. This has mainly been because of circum-happenstance rather than any logical policy. While remaining an anti-communist (for communist read Soviet Union) bulwark in the Cold War (SEATO and CENTO), our relationship with Communist China expanded till reaching a symbolic peak during the 1965 war with India. During 1971, we had overwhelming support of China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and others.

To the credit of late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto he built on the Ayubian era and formed personal relationships with many heads of state and government, the symbolic peak was the OIC Summit in Lahore in 1974. Since 1965 our relationship with US and been headed steadily downhill, particularly because of the arms embargo imposed on both India and Pakistan, post-1965 war. Given that almost all our arms and equipment came to us under US Military Aid to Pakistan (MAP) programme and that India's major supplier, the Soviet Union, continued to replenish the Indian arsenal, we had reasons for being upset. Even the famous US "tilt" in December 1971 came too late to save our forces in then East Pakistan. With India exploding a nuclear bomb in 1974, we were committed to the search for a commensurate deterrent. Late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's famous "we will eat grass if we have to get the bomb" or some such pushed us into an early confrontation with US and its non-proliferation policy. All US economic aid to Pakistan came to an end by 1978 under the Carter-Invoked Symington Amendment. By the time (and also because) PM Bhutto was hanged in 1979 we were well and truly in the western diplomatic doghouse, singled out not only for our unclear policy but in the post-Shah period, we were pilloried as potentially a dangerous bastion of radical Islam in western perceptions. Despite their quiet reservations (and anguish) about Bhutto's unfortunate hanging, our tradi-

Pakistan's Foreign Policy A Passage to Nowhere

There is no doubt that the US preferred Ms Benazir to Mian Nawaz Sharif, given the fact that the then DG ISI Lt Gen (Molvi) Javed Nasir had taken some unfortunate initiatives that landed us into the company of nations like North Korea, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Sudan etc as countries exporting State terrorism.

tional friends stayed firmly allied to us.

The Soviet adventure in Afghanistan in December 1979 changed our relationship with the west in a hurry. Gen Zia's military regime was transformed from international pariahs to the West's frontline State to check perceived Russian designs towards the warm waters of the Indian Ocean and the oil-rich Gulf Area. Even the insulting "peanuts" Zia exclamation to turn down the first offer of US\$ 300 million by US President Carter in early 1980 was laughed away as a witty response of a proud soldier. Our nuclear aspirations and Islamic bent were conveniently forgotten, Gen Zia's image was re-built by the western media in the form acceptable to the western public. The Pakistan Armed Forces started receiving US military aid, to cater for the massive influx of refugees humanitarian aid was coordinated by UNHCR and beefed up by the US and other western states along with economic aid. In return Pakistan became a conduit for western military aid to the Afghan Mujahidden. Realpolitik dictated that we should have realized that the west gave two hoots for the Afghan people, their primary objective was to take the pressure off NATO by getting the Soviet military machine involved in a debilitating Vietnam-type land conflict in Asia. In that they succeeded beyond all expectations in the destruction of the Soviet economy followed by the collapse of the Soviet empire. As the requisite platform and fire-base for the West's war by proxy, Pakistan came under Scud missile attacks as well as cross-border air and artillery bombardment. In the process we also laid ourselves open to socio-economic and political problems along with the proliferation of drugs and Kalashnikov throughout the country, a new culture took hold that has eroded the very foundations of our traditional society. The main staging port city of Karachi, polarised politically, suffered unfortunate side-effects, criminal activity turning into outright terrorism.

The aftermath of the Gulf War showed us the absolute bankruptcy of our negotiating stance in the early 80s. As a

reward for standing by the US, countries like Egypt that peripherally came into contact with the crisis, were forgiven their entire debt by the US (upto US\$ 14 billion in the case of Egypt) while Pakistan, that besides terrorist targeting and acquiring massive debt in the 80s to shore up its economic position in the wake of the influx of about three million Afghan refugees that flooded into the country, was content with being feted as a frontline State for a decade plus. In retrospect we could have had, among other things (1) all our debts (at least US origin) forgiven, (2) transfer of technology including sophisticated military infrastructure including arms manufacturing, facilities for aircraft, tanks, naval vessels, etc, (3) entire national highway

status persisted when Ms Benazir Bhutto came to power in 1988 but she had to satisfy the US that she was not the socialist firebrand that her father was and that she would continue Zia's policies. Anxious to transform her electoral lead into power, she readily accepted the guarantees that the US sought. President Ghulam Ishaq and Foreign Minister Sahibzada Yaqub Khan, among others. The US made it clear to the Pakistan Government that the "halcyon" days of the early 80s were over, that the Pressler Amendment which was used as a device for Pakistan to circumvent US Congress in providing US Aid on the strength of a Presidential certification that Pakistan was not pursuing nuclear aspirations would now be reversed (simply by

guided by street dictate instead of evolving Pakistan's policy in the selfish interests of the country and the country alone. While Mian Nawaz Sharif jetted off on mediation missions, his COAS Gen Aslam Beg came out with the now famous "Strategic Defiance" which seemed to line Pakistan behind Saddam Hussain on the one hand while on the other hand we sent in our ground forces to Saudi Arabia to oppose Iraq. Some of us thought that this confused hatch-patch policy was a ploy by the COAS to bail out the PM from the pressures of street power. Much later it dawned on us that the then COAS was in earnest, the net result was that we managed to annoy friends and foes alike. By the end of Mian Nawaz Sharif's tenure as PM we had come back a full circle to the same foreign policy doghouse that Zia was in 1979 on a "watch list" for a variety of universal "sins".

There is no doubt that the US preferred Ms Benazir to Mian Nawaz Sharif, given the fact that the then DG ISI Lt Gen (Molvi) Javed Nasir had taken some unfortunate initiatives that landed us into the company of nations like North Korea, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Sudan etc as countries exporting State terrorism. Of our friends in time of need, China became estranged with us over the issue of some of our Mullahs promoting Islamic fundamentalism in Sinkiang Province, Iran shies away from our overly dependence on the US and our policy in Afghanistan that seems to militate against Shias. Saudi Arabia remains miffed at our Gulf War responses and Turkey has been shocked at our ambivalence over Cyprus, cancellation of motorway contracts, etc. Despite great fanfare by the Ms Benazir Regime about its impending demise, the Pressler Amendment remains in place, what to talk to getting F-16s already paid for we are not ever likely to get (at least for the time being) the other equipment also paid for and agreed upon by President Clinton during the PM's recent State visit to the States. Our whole foreign policy seems to revolve around a couple of squadrons of F-16s, we are a hostage to this issue resolution.

By backing the wrong

horse in Afghanistan in the post war period or rather, not remaining neutral, we have pushed President Rahbani and Ahmad Shah Masood, into the Indian/Russian camp in effect with respect to Afghanistan, we are roughly back in the same place as we were in 1985, outsiders. This time we are without any western economic and military support to shore up our efforts, in effect up the creek without a paddle. Central Asia was one area of Mian Nawaz Sharif's success, after a short period of indecision Ms Benazir has regained the momentum. We have a genuine identity crisis whether to be South Asian, Central Asian or even may be Middle Eastern. We do not have any close links with any of the South Asian countries except Bangladesh, our relations with Sri Lanka having changed substantially after the advent of Ms Chandrika Kumaratunga Government. Perhaps the only thing keeping us in South Asia (and SAARC) is the historical and emotional links with Bangladesh, now further deepened by the economic fabric of two-way trade.

While appeasement of the only Superpower in the world, the US, may be pragmatic for longevity of the incumbent regime's tenure, nations have to, in the ultimate analysis, look to their own national interests rather than succumbing to various external pressures. The US has its own national and security considerations (as every sovereign nation should). After the end of the cold war economic interests have come to the forefront. Our nuclear potential is a deterrent we cannot part with in the face of Indian nuclear potential, its conventional armed might, its known expansionist designs and the unresolved Kashmir question. Over Kashmir, one can be thankful that we have survived the tenure of Lt Gen Javed Ashraf Qazi, the previous DG ISI, another few months and we would have been in the same sinking boat in which he had managed to put our Afghan policy into.

Ms Benazir inherited a royal foreign policy mess, and foreign policy remaining her strong suit but despite innumerable State visits she shows no proclivity to take full control over the running of foreign policy despite her domestic pre-occupations. One could compare our foreign policy to the fact that the title of this article could have been left in place and the rest symbolized by a blank. That is certainly nowhere for a country's foreign policy to be.

AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

structure built according to most modern specifications particularly because they were getting a beating moving heavy supplies to Afghanistan, (4) enhanced quotas for cotton made-ups in conformity with our raw cotton production so that our cotton-based economy could have taken off, (5) obtained US acceptance about parity with India in treatment with respect to nuclear potential as well as missiles and (6) development of Belochistan including the ports as staging areas to counter any possible southern thrust by Russian forces. For a few squadrons of F-16s and assorted other equipment, we sold our future down the river, with nothing but regret to show for our pains for over a decade. It is amazing how far and fast we dropped in western estimation, we have only ourselves to thank for the bad deal. Rather than having the country's best interest at heart, the Zia Regime seemed to be more interested in currying US support towards their own longevity. Zia and his colleagues failed us badly. No amount of rhetoric or media hoopla can cover this great betrayal.

Our most-favoured nation

withholding the Presidential certification) to ensure that Pakistan adhered to US policy on nuclear non-proliferation. Other than this we were now the target of a long list of "sins" which included (1) promoting and exporting State terrorism (2) obtaining missiles (and technology thereof) from China, (3) not doing enough for drug eradication and interdiction, (4) breaking textile quotas by third country operations, (5) overlooking child labour, (6) not controlling illegal immigration, etc. In the post-cold war era, where only one Super power remained on the block, there was no need for the US to compromise on issues with client-states on the usual pattern of client-patron relationship. The Gulf War heralded in the "New World Order".

The dismissal of Ms Bhutto's government by President Ishaq in early Aug '90 meant that Pakistan's foreign policy went into hibernation during a critical three-month period before an elected government took office. Thereafter our policy in the Gulf crisis was quite ambivalent, mainly due to our the then leaders being

Towards Financial Accountability in Government

Despite its high constitutional status, the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) is notorious for its backlog and non-performance. Very few people even know of its existence.

HERE are two interrelated aspects of financial accountability in government, namely maintenance and audit of accounts. Unfortunately, the manner in which organisations responsible for these two functions are now operating leaves much to be desired. The common experience of citizens in the establishment of our Accountant General or Chief Accounts Officers is one of inordinate delays, harassment and petty objections. One disgusting aspect of these petty objections is that these do not generally arrive at one go, but one after another. In other words, soon after you deal with one objection, you find another on your table, and this may turn into an almost unending process. The rules and regulations are archaic, records are in shambles and dependence on clerks is heavy. The general attitude is rather negative and much is left to the official's discretion, mainly because of loopholes in the rules.

I do not wish to raise the issue of rampant corruption

in our accounts offices, particularly regarding payment for completed government contracts, because corruption is not unique to these offices, although the specific modus operandi of corruption differs from department to department. All these problems, including that of corruption, can easily be addressed by constituting a suitable task force to set quantifiable standards of performance in the accounts offices through wide-ranging discussions with the concerned officials. This task force could also suggest specific changes in the existing accounts manuals through a participatory approach to investigation. The adequate implementation of these measures should be able to improve the situation to a large extent.

Despite its high constitutional status, the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) is notorious for its backlog and non-performance. Very few people

even know of its existence. Audit parties are generally noted for being either highly fastidious, at one extreme, and for being highly "amenable" at the other, depending on how they are "treated" by the organisations and officials being audited. The audit generally scruti-

ensuring accountability and improving the quality of government's financial operations. A number of suggestions are, therefore, in order in this regard.

Firstly, steps should be taken to bring the office of CAG into the limelight since merely according it a high

Accounts Committee (PAC) so that the PAC meets regularly and its meetings are businesslike and concluded within a specified timeframe. On the other hand, the PAC link should also activate the CAG's office. Thirdly, in addition to expenditure audit, the CAG's office should carry out revenue audit in order to identify lapses in the course of revenue generation by NBR and other income earning organisations of the government. This should go a long way in gearing up domestic resource mobilization at a time when aid fatigue has made it a high priority task. Fourthly, in addition to regularity and propriety, emphasis should also be placed on value for money audit, that is scrutinize economy, efficiency and effectiveness against realistic organisation specific standards pre-determined through investigation and practical experience. Fifthly, the CAG's annual and special reports

should be published in time, and these should concentrate on substantive issues and future guidelines rather than trivia, and these should also be made easily accessible to members of the public. Sixthly, the expenditure of the CAG's office should be audited by an independent body and on a regular basis so that, more than anything else, it gives the CAG's office the moral right to audit the accounts of other bodies.

Finally, internal audit in all government organisations should be geared up and carried out regularly. The terms of reference and standards of internal audit and guidelines on the composition of internal audit teams should be spelt out by the CAG in consultation with relevant organisations.

In both the organisations, the effectiveness of the suggested reforms will ultimately depend on the drive and initiative of their top leadership. Therefore, the selection of capable persons should receive top priority from the government.

Making Government Work

by Analyst

nizes financial propriety only, and that too based on outdated concepts, and it has no concern for performance, results and output. In short, given the manner in which it is now operating, it would have hardly mattered if the existing audit paraphernalia was windup up for good. On the other hand, if adequate measures were taken, it could also have been turned into a powerful tool for

constitutional status is not good enough. Bringing the CAG's office directly under the Parliament rather than keeping it with the Finance Ministry, allowing it to place its budget directly before the Parliament and staffing it with qualified professionals, etc. are some of the measures which could give this organisation a shot in the arm. Secondly, it should be made the Secretariat of the Public

To the Editor...

Bosnia and Europe

Sir, The Europeans are not interested in saving Europe. Uncle Sam cannot be expected to take a giant step for Europe. There are Muslims in other East European countries. Their fate will not be preserved in the cold storage of history. Like the open market, history is opening up. We can expect some salt in the open wounds.

The Islamic world has been shaken up; therefore has to shape up into a new configuration, once the internal consensus is achieved. The delay is a purging, a cleansing, the wazoo before the proceeding. The next generation will be different, depending upon how the present moulds the future.

A Husnain Dhaka

MQM and Pakistan

Sir, I was really impressed by your concern which you had been showing from

time to time for the Law and Order problems in Karachi specially in the context of MQM's two groups fighting each other and resulting in loss of lives of passers-by and innocent citizens of Karachi.

As you are fully aware Government of Benazir is trying its best to overcome the problem and presently the MQM Government negotiations are in progress.

It is hoped that soon the matter would be resolved.

In the meantime, I was shocked to see a few passing remarks in your editorial of August 5, when you wrote that the very fact of existence of MQM raises serious questions about how successful Pakistan has been in keeping to the promise of its birth?

As you know Pakistan was the outcome of the continuous struggle for separate homeland of Muslims of the sub-continent. Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haq and the thousands of searants of freedom (students) from Dacca University were among those

who took vital part in the struggle.

In the shape of Pakistan and through Pakistan, Bangladesh are the two biggest sovereign and independent Muslim countries, which are the living fruits on earth of the said struggle.

So far as Pakistan is concerned, it is Mashallah a living heaven for Muslims on earth, specially when you compare it with India in the subcontinent.

I am confident that you had not written this in the perspective of a notion against the Freedom Movement which succeeded only to achieve the rights of the Muslims of the subcontinent.

The Independence Movement was against the political, economic and educational domination of Hindus sided by their imperial masters, over the Muslims and those were none else but Qaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Maulvi Fazal Haq and Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Haq who followed by millions

of Bengali Muslims and specially Dacca University students were carrying the lamps and flags of freedom.

MQM, as you know have its roots outside Pakistan rather is working not less than the agents of our enemies who from the very first day of establishment of Pakistan cannot see it progressing and flourishing in the comity of nations.

Salahuddin Leghari Textile Engineering Consultant, C/O High Commission for Pakistan, Dhaka

Law breakers and law enforcers

Sir, These days I observe law breakers and criminals are prevailing over the law enforcing agencies in our country. The incidence of Rayer Bazar area in the city speaks of the whole situation of our country. Right now is the case of Mr Taher Ali

Fakhr, a businessman of Chittagong who was kidnapped by "mastans" on 5th August. I understand that a few such cases were also published in the newspapers by now.

I feel that if such incidents go on occurring unabated, then life of our common people will be miserable as well as the image of our country abroad will be shattered thereby discouraging overseas investors.

I would, therefore, request the concerned authorities to take immediate and stern measures to prevent such incidents from occurring in future.

Mohd. Mofleuddin Shethk Advocate, Judge's Court, Dhaka

Frankenstein

Sir, The film industry, through actor Salman Shah, has appealed against victimisation by mastans and extortionists. What an irony! The very role they have been portraying and glorifying in film

after film has become their death trap! They have created their own Frankenstein. They are now facing their true images and are fearful.

The film industry has a greater role to play in the society than just creating handsome heroes and glamorous heroines. It is also the spokesman of the society. Through films we are educated, entertained, influenced even brain-washed.

I think the film-makers need to look seriously into themselves, their stories, their messages, their exposures, everything. Only their awareness of what the effects of their creations are: will be their protection not the police nor the law.

Haspia Bashirullah Asst Prof, Dept of English Teachers' Training College, Chittagong