

Eid Pledge

This year's Eid-ul Azha comes in the 25th year of our independence and in a close proximity to a general election about to be held under an arrangement endorsed by all political parties.

The spirit of Eid-ul Azha relates to both these national events in that the underlying theme of this great religious occasion is sacrifice in its essence and variety. It is the negation of self for the sake of love to Allah, the Creator.

We urge our politicians to make only those pledges they can keep — not the ones they cannot honour. For long the common people have been assured of a rosy future — particularly during the election campaign the rhetoric reaches a feverish pitch.

Test for Secularism

With India going to polls for the eleventh consecutive time in her history, predictions are rife that the outcome could mean a dramatic change to the country's polity, based traditionally on the mutually reinforcing principles of secularism and unity in diversity.

The pollsters are saying almost in a chorus that it would be a hung parliament resulting in the formation of a rather fledgling coalition government. This by itself could not be that worrying given India's occasional stunts with governments formed on a wafer-thin majority like in the case of V P Singh or of Narasimha Rao himself.

The secular forces are fighting the elections from different platforms and are predicted to be faring something like this: The ruling Congress could come second falling short of the BJP strength by 10-30 seats with the Rashtriya Morcha of the Left Front and the Janata Dal trailing the Congress in the third position.

Although the public opinion surveys were based broadly on a wider sampling this time around — in one case as many as 28 thousand voters had been involved — these, nonetheless, must be taken with a pinch of salt when there are as many as 58 crore 19 lakh voters in the country.

The bed-rock of India's pluralistic co-existence and the safety-vault of democracy in that country have been its firmly-upheld secularist traditions. These have proved to be of immense benefit not only to the Indian society but also to intra-regional balance and equanimity.

After HSC, What?

The prospects for admission to higher education this year look very bleak. Some two lakh HSC-passed students await entry into the portals of universities, colleges and institutes which are altogether having 65 thousand seats to offer.

The fact is most of them could not meet the stiff eligibility criteria in their earlier try and are hoping now that this time luck might smile on them or that they could perhaps manage to be admitted somehow.

Their craving for admission to higher education is only natural and the best way to cater to their need would be not only to increase the private sector participation in setting up more and more new educational facilities but also to incentivise it by lending bank money.

Basically though we would like higher education to be selective with a provision made for job-based terminal education at the post-HSC level for a large majority of students joining the vulnerable ranks of the unemployed youth.

Don't be Wobbly When it's Time to be Firm and Swift

MOST people who expected a rapid change in the overall security situation in the country are getting increasingly concerned. The government of Mohammad Habibur Rahman seemed to start on a positive note but then all its initiatives have stalled.

All they wanted was a peaceful and secure environment in which a free and fair election could be held. Given the hesitant action taken so far one wonders whether their sacrifices were in vain.

Notwithstanding the Chief Adviser's emotional appeal to the officials on 25 April, the impression of a wobbly government wilting under the pressure of the fallen BNP government continues to persist.

not harassment if the armed terrorist belongs to some other political party. One wonders if the neutral government has accepted the logic of such arguments and this most novel definition of harassment.

What is the response of his government? Largely ineffectual gestures which neither lead to the recovery of arms nor to arrests! As a matter of fact, terrorists caught with illegal arms are being released on bail.

Of course, it is ironic to hear these complaints of harassment by the BNP because for long five years they turned a deaf ear to such complaints

recovery drive. The links between the goons with arms and the officers who protected them has to be severed if the arms recovery campaign is to succeed.

Before concluding let me refer to a startling report in a Bengali daily, Bhorer Kagaj of 23 April, 1996. The report gives very precise and specific information on the number of criminals who have been released by presidential pardon on the recommendation of the former BNP Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury.

According to the report, since the middle of 1994 until the end of 1995, 406 persons suffering prison sentence have been set free by the Home Minister using the president's prerogatives under article 49 of the Constitution. These criminals were sentenced to prison terms of various length for committing serious crimes such as murder, extortion and use of illegal firearms and crimes against women.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah A M S Kibria



Let us therefore look at the question of recovery of illegal arms. In the midst of deepening concern about a host of problems faced by the citizens, it is the vast arsenal of illegal arms in the hands of terrorists which is uppermost in their mind.

BNP's support for arms recovery is not only lukewarm but it is reported to be conditional upon not harassing their party activists. Indeed, BNP leaders have been fulminating against the neutral caretaker government and its arms recovery drive on the ground that their party activists are being harassed in the name of arms recovery.

by their political opponents. Out of office, the BNP is claiming that even the neutral caretaker government is harassing their party activists. No other party wants to protect its members who possess and use illegal arms.

No one will be fooled by these pleas unless one is determined to see no evil and hear no evil. BNP leaders are vehemently protesting even the very limited transfers ordered by the neutral caretaker government.

Can a government which is committed to holding a free and fair election, free from intimidation by armed hoodlums, afford not to withdraw arms during election time? One hopes the neutral government will not let the nation down.

OPINION

32 DU Senators' Allegation Politically Motivated

This writer was dismayed at pursuing a fallacious allegation of 'corruption, nepotism and partisan activities' made by 32 senators, out of 104 total senators of Dhaka University, appearing in various sections of the Press on April 20.

Firstly, the claim that the Senators 'had sent a notice to the VC to convene a meeting of the Senate to discuss these irregularities, but the VC did not respond' is a travesty of truth. It is well-known that unlike previous VCs, the present VC attaches more importance to democratic values, and is more responsive, accessible and rational in his approach to teachers of all shades of opinion and in addressing the administrative and academic problems.

In response to the request of the above senators (belonging to the Blue Panel supporting Awami League), the VC, to our knowledge, announced a date, i.e. March 30, to convene a Senate meeting, but due to hartal and 'non-cooperation movement' this meeting could not be held.

To the Editor...

Accountability and transparency

Sir, Most of our BNP, AL, JI, JP and other political leaders make indiscriminate criticism and allegations against each other, on the one hand and stress upon the need for accountability and transparency of works and functions of the government, on the other.

these are to be solved internally with the co-operative participation of all. But unfortunately, without doing this, some politically motivated members of the Senate have circulated baseless allegations through Press Conference.

If any investigation is to be made against the so-called irregularities and corruption, let it be done for a period of 20 years, instead of five years. It could then be proved what the earlier VCs supporting the same political ideology as the 32 senators, have done or achieved during their tenure.

It is a matter of common prudence that appointments in the university are made by the Selection Boards and Syndicate in which members with the above political ideology also exist. Hence question of 'corruption' does not generally arise, although, admittedly, there might be some differences here and there.

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We would therefore request our all political parties to make accountability and transparency of their own deeds and activities apparent and simultaneously ask the government to make its works and functions 'accountable and transparent.'

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

Lebanon Bombing — Misguided Election Strategy of Shimon Peres

I could not count the bodies, there were bodies without heads. There were people without arms or legs — said Mikael Lindial, a UN official who visited the UN compound in Qana, about 10 km from Tyre, in Lebanon.

Incidentally, Israeli bombing of Lebanese villages started in response to a katyusha rocket fired by Hezbollah from southern Lebanon that landed at a village in northern Israel, injuring one man and damaging parts of buildings. Of course, Hezbollah has been occasionally firing katyusha rockets which are most obsolete and terribly inaccurate to northern Israel in violation of the unwritten agreement of July 1993, brokered by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, which was meant to stop Hezbollah and Israeli security forces attacks on each other's civilian targets.

deeply involved and also some European powers and particularly France have quite a different set of political and cultural interests than the US in the area immediate ceasefire.

Iran's overall strategy has wider implications as it wants to counter anything that the US does in the Middle-East. The US is also bent upon cornering Iran diplomatically as it thinks that Iran has been engaged in state terrorism in fact, the recent conference in Cairo on 'terrorism' was directed mainly against Iran.

makov and Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. However, sustained efforts by Christopher and his team and support of some European powers including France ultimately brought the Lebanon misadventure to an end. It has just been announced (while completing the comment) that Israel, Syria and Lebanon agreed on the ceasefire draft. The agreement reached has the following main elements: (a) Both Hezbollah and Israel will not attack each other's civilians and civilian targets (b) Civilian population areas not to be used for launching the attacks (c) Monitoring Committee consists of Israel, Syria, Lebanon, US and France.

This is basically the 1993 unwritten agreement now put in writing. Lebanon, Israel and Syria are the parties to the agreement. Hezbollah also agreed to abide by the agreement.

How, during the last 16 days of Israeli bombing, Shimon Peres apparently did not score any points in terms of his political win at home against Benjamin Netanyahu, the main rival in May 29 general election. In fact, the last opinion poll shows 'Benjamin Netanyahu' only 5 points behind Peres though in earlier poll he was 6.8 points behind Peres.

Now everything would depend on how Israeli public react to the ceasefire. So far as Israeli Arabs are concerned he is facing boycott from them because of Lebanon bombing. Though

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Spotlight on Middle East

Muslehuddin Ahmad



rocket attacks on Israel's occupation of South Lebanon as a self-declared security zone. Israel has been responding to such rocket attacks from time to time but the present Israeli army response to Hezbollah's katyusha rocket attacks was terribly disproportionate and undoubtedly a political one to boost Shimon Peres' election prospect on May 29, 1996.

Shimon Peres thought he must act as he was already losing in Israeli public opinion because of repeated suicide bomb attacks by Hamas terrorists against Israeli civilians. Shimon Peres did take tough actions short of bombing Hamas establishments in West Bank but these were not enough to recover his flagging position among Israeli public.

Shimon Peres took for granted that Israeli military action called 'Operations grapes of Wrath' against Lebanon will not wreck the M-E peace process though he might face international pressure at some point to stop this. But he thought such pressure would bring along some additional benefit i.e. halt in Hezbollah's katyusha rocket attacks against northern Israel at least temporarily up to his election time.

Shimon Peres has really gambled in Lebanon. The serious crackdown on Hamas and the closure of Israel-West Bank borders for weeks after the suicide bombings already antagonised the Palestinians. The attacks of Lebanon coupled with Qana disaster made things worse in terms of Israel's relations with rest of the Arab world.

As various reports indicate, US Secretary of State was finding it hard to bring Syria in line with the US proposals for immediate ceasefire. Indeed, it was a diplomatic setback for Christopher when Hafez Al Assad avoided meeting him early this week whereas Assad met Russian Foreign Minister Pri-

US felt uncomfortable diplomatically as Russia and some European Foreign Ministers maintained contacts during ceasefire negotiations with Iranian Foreign Minister. Whether the US likes it or not Iran has a solid role in Lebanon. Iran is a power in the region and its influence on Hamas, Hezbollah and other radical groups is big and strong. This cannot be ignored any more.

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political experts say this is a temporary threat and might change with the ceasefire in Lebanon, still much would depend on how Shimon Peres behaves with Arabs in the next couple of weeks.

However, despite Lebanon debacle, Shimon Peres stands a good chance on May 29 election because of timely help by his 'friend' Yasser Arafat who succeeded in getting overwhelming YES (504/54) from Palestinian National Council (PNC) in favour of revoking all provisions of 1968 PLO Charter which call for destruction of Israel. This is undoubtedly a brave action by Arafat at a time when a part of the Arab world (Lebanon) was facing Israeli bombs and Arafat himself with his Palestinian people was under collective punishment from Israel as West Bank borders with Israel stand closed bringing untold sufferings to the Palestinian people.

Shimon Peres was very happy and said — PLO leader is a partner for peace. Hamas said, 'Arafat had committed a crime'. However, a day after Palestinian National Council voted to annul the clauses that call for destruction of Israel, Peres' Labour Party dropped its opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian State. Peres said, 'With the Palestinian, we wish to arrive not at yet another interim settlement but a permanent settlement, a fundamental solution'. Negotiations for determining the final status will start in May, '96. If Labour Party returns to power which seems very likely now not because of Shimon Peres' bombing of Lebanon but because of Palestinian National Council's decision to share Palestinian land with arch enemy — the Jews.

Eid-ul Azha: The Spirit and Significance

by Abu Imran

FOR the Muslims, there are two main festivals — the Eid-ul Fitr and the Eid-ul Azha. In the strictest sense, Muslims' festivities are not the moments of unrestrained merrymaking or crossing the limits of decency. In this sense, Muslim festivities are sort of thanks-giving to Allah for His kindness and bounties and sharing of joys and happiness with others even the poor and the helpless.

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he was asked, and finally he could know that he was to sacrifice his dearest of the dear meaning his son, Ismail (AS). He then prepared himself for this, then told his son about his dream.

The son was not an ordinary child — he said to his beloved father, to carry out Allah's instructions, and he (Hazrat Ibrahim) would find him (Hazrat Ismail) patient calm and obedient, if Allah willing (Al-Quran). Then both the father and the son went to a lonely place. There, Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) blind-folded himself by the neck and failed to discharge the hard task and placed the knife on the neck of Hazrat Ismail (AS) to cut him. But the more he (Ibrahim) tried, the more he felt the knife not working. He then struggled. But Allah told him that he had turned out successful in the test and should open his eyes. He did so and was surprised to find a dumba slain in place of Ismail. That animal was sent by Allah from the heaven.

The above story of supreme sacrifice in the way of Allah is an example to be followed by Muslims the world over that at the command of Allah, the faithful should sacrifice their dearest thing. And to let people keep remembering this supreme sacrifice, now the faithfuls of means are required to sacrifice halal animals like goat, lamb, cow, camel etc., on Eid-ul Azha with the intention to please Allah. The meat of the sacrificed animal is required to be shared with relations, friends and the poor. This, therefore, besides helping a faithful to re-invigorate his sense of sacrifice, also helps the poor people to share the joy of festivity. The poorest of the poor at least on this day can also partake a delicious dinner.

frustration and a sense of deprivation. Therefore it is necessary that this sort of competition be avoided since it is said that only the good intention of sacrifice pleases Allah, neither the blood nor the meat.

Islam being a complete code of life, besides invoking Allah's pleasure, it also helps boost economy. For instance, it is said that alone in Lalbag area of Dhaka trading of hides and skin worth around Taka 200 crore takes place during Eid-ul Azha. The system thus also creates employment and trading opportunity for many. There, some of the poor people all the year round keep busy in rearing their goats and cattle for trading during the Qurbani Eid.

As said earlier, the sacrifice is meant to please Allah, and is never meant in any way to be a competition among the affluent lest its every purpose is defeated. But for the lack of knowledge and appreciation of the true spirit of Qurbani or sacrifice, a temptation among some Muslims has become apparent to earn name and fame through this practice. It now even seems that buy the biggest and the costliest animal to win people's applause is an act of piety and religiosity forgetting whether such an intention would be acceptable to Allah or not. This sense of competition is never desirable since this creates a show-off devoid of the real intention of pleasing of Allah through sacrifice.

Moreover, those who could not afford such luxury feel bad, their children think that their parents are not as worthy as others who are rich and could buy big animals. This breeds