

## The Eid Bonhomie

If Ramadan is a month of one's own purification, Eid is something that joins all to each, to the other and blesses man with the virtue of the collective, the virtue of shared weal and even woe. Eid is a great portal opening up to world pervaded by the thought and care of the many.

Returning after the festivities to the daily chores of the livelong day with a sense of well-being born of surfeit and satiation, how one wishes to the spirit of Eid to touch and colour our world of the collective man — politics and governance, enterprise and sharing of austerity and wealth being the pillars of that world. Why cannot the majority give up wearing its strength on the exterior for effect and those less than a year out of power cool down and take a rest from the relentless push they are exerting to get the other out of power? Who but the nation suffers if its leaders fail to rid themselves of these and related vices. We do not know about their abidance by the virtues upheld by the Ramadan but many a political leader is on record to have mouthed vituperatives violating the sanctity of the holy month and *iftar*, the very plain breaking of the required fast and redolent of no ritual whatsoever, has been made into an instrument of politicising, socialising, conspiracy, gluttony and ostentation, all rolled into one.

The nation however needed of them all to lower their voices as also their hostile posture and come closer to complement each in the charting of a course to national fulfilment. This exercise in bonhomie, in the best tradition of the Eid, could make the sides on either side of the power fence think of the collective weal of all which is the inner meaning of the Eid. After all when the muezzin calls the believers to prayer, he asks them to join in the welfare — *jalah* — of all.

We believe these are no idle wishes. This nation cannot march on with one leg travelling contrary to the other. Those who will be incorrigible in their persistence not to cooperate for collective weal will work their own doom first.

## To Stay in Business

The readymade garments sector has its back to the wall. It needs shoring up with some interim measures to stay in business right now, pending longer term steps enabling it to survive beyond 2005 AD. That is the point in time when the preferential quota access to the international markets will have completely evaporated.

The RMG sector's present difficulties will have to be sympathetically considered having regard to the hard truth that competitiveness has not been its given, natural strength. Except for the low labour cost, in all other ingredients of production, the so-called competitive edge over other countries has been the hand-maiden of bolstering fiscal doses thrown in amidst assured markets and virtually toll free access to them.

The political turmoil in 1995-96 led to severe losses in terms of productivity and cancellation of orders. No sooner had some of the orders been regained than came the EU's threatened shut-down of the generalised system of preference (GSP) to knitwear exports, the major component of our forex earning from the RMG sector as a whole. The goodwill our garments manufacturers and exporters latched on to in the sequel to the political adversities took a drubbing — first in the hands of the US importers insisting on child labour restrictions and then from the European Commission which detected 'dubious' certification of origin issued by the EPB in respect of knitwear export.

The apparel sector leaders had asked for government subsidy to tide over the present crisis. But Finance Minister S A M S Kibria has ruled this out in no uncertain terms harping on his favourite theme of how all sorts of hidden subsidisation have been ruining the national economy, let alone the dreaded overt form of the same.

If subsidies cannot be given, at least no credit crunch should be allowed to come in the way of the sector's productive operations. Secondly, whatever is needed to be done administratively with the banks, insurance companies and customs authorities ought to be accomplished without any ado. The service charges may be reduced where possible. In two particular areas a reasonable degree of success can be achieved: toll collection and erratic supply of power. If a definite improvement can be effected in these two parameters, coupled with an acceleration in the administrative dispensation, then other demands of the garment sector might, in all likelihood, appear in a mellow light.

## Paperless Days

This is possibly a world record. This is a record shouting shrill the measure of our uncivilisation. For ever, since newspapers started publishing daily, on no occasion anywhere in the world all the dailies closed down for four continuous days — to enjoy a festival. Bangladesh has just now been deprived of all its newspapers from Sunday last to yesterday.

For quite some time a three-day holiday was just doing fine for both the Eids. What necessitated the extra newspaperless day this time? What was different this time from the other occasions? A holiday spanning the eighth to the tenth of February could have taken the best care of accommodating everyone's need. Why was it made to start a day later although all the indications very clearly said the ninth would be the day of days?

We take the occasion to contest even the wisdom of a three-day newspaper holiday. Pakistan, the Islamic Republic, allows a two-day Eid holiday for newspapers. Malaysia, another Muslim majority state, lacking nothing in Islamic piety and a greater devoted nation to religion would hardly be found, has a one-day Eid holiday for newspapers. If newspapers cannot but be shut down for 72 hours at a stretch — and all newspapers at that — why aren't electricity and water and the conservancy services shut down even for one day? The *essential services* have a way of allowing holidays and still not shut down. The newspaper is an *essential* daily feature of the national life, indeed of all civilised life. They should be able to do what the electricity people do. They can do it. In fact they do it on occasions, unknown to its readers. The popular word for it inside the industry is 'however-holiday' — because in spite of a holiday being declared, arrangements are *however* made to bring out the paper all the same. This way we may not at all need to close the newspapers for more than one day on any occasion.

An extra day's closure doesn't benefit any quarter. The industry, the hawker, the reader, the advertiser, the nation and the world abroad. Let us do away with this practice the soonest we can.

# Is a Two-party System Possible in Bangladesh?

Despite the limited and specific role the other political parties are likely to play, people are expected to veer round the two existing major political parties, who might in the distant future form the nucleus of a two-party system. Who knows? Qui Sait?

tional movement, was unfortunately a miserably poor administrator. The post-independence Awami League misrule bears witness to that. Irrespective of whether he was ill-advised or he acted with conviction, he committed the gravest mistake of his life by instituting one-party system with the establishment of BAKSAL. He paid the heaviest price for this folly by his own life and with the lives of his near and dear ones. To err is human; only the angels are perfect. Bangabandhu was also human and should be accepted as such. A great similarity is found in the life of Mao Ze Dong, the founder of modern China and who was also the perpetrator of the so-called cultural revolution, the greatest man-made disaster the Chinese nation faced in this century.

However, the present Awami League, claiming succession to its pre-Liberation predecessor, regained power in June this year after long 21 years. The Awami League got about 37 per cent of popular votes in contrast to the BNP's 33. It is an improvement over its own 1991 performance of 37 of the popular votes which included those belonging to its allies, the Left Front and others.

It goes to the credit of the Awami League leaders who had undertaken painstaking and relentless efforts to devise and implement a well-chalked out election strategy, which was eventually crowned with success. The Awami League's vast and well-knit nationwide organisational set up became the

most important tool in carrying out the grand design. Both leaders and workers were fully aware of the great disaster the party would face in the event of an electoral defeat. Their stake was high. The were desperate. They put their heart and soul towards achieving success. The intellectuals, who proudly associated themselves with the Awami League during the liber-

and religiously prone general people rallied round the BNP as against leftist and anti-religious forces. The unexpected electoral victory of the BNP in 1991 look all by surprise but made many of BNP leaders headstrong. The latter hoped to ride on the crest of popularity without really trying for it. They perhaps hoped to cash in on the personal popularity of

ment even with the support of other political parties. Anyway, the BNP is generally regarded by people as the party treading the political path on the right of the centre.

The Jatiya Party has done remarkably well in the last election. It owes its success to the personal charisma, dogged perseverance and selected good deeds as well as, strangely enough, misdeeds during the long 9-year rule of its leader, General Ershad. An exceedingly fine gentleman with perfect manners, aptly manifested by his ingenious way of dealing with wealth and women, he is, according to many, the most unscrupulous of the leaders ever born in this land. He is a past master in the art of hypocrisy and has the way about to please men also. Otherwise, it was not possible for him to break the record in history to be elected from 5 constituencies by insulating himself, sitting behind jail bars. In spite of his personal straits and resources, his party is not embedded at the grassroots, except perhaps among some well-sustained industrial workers. The party being devoid of a meaningful philosophy is expected to be dissipated ultimately with the eventual disappearance of its leader from the scene.

The Jamaat-e-Islami, as all know well, draws its strength by exploiting sensitive religious susceptibilities of ordinary folks of the land and comes somewhat close to what may be termed as fundamentalist. Despite its anti-Liberation role, it has brought into its fold a siz-

able section of the religious populace and their preachers. Nevertheless, its last electoral catastrophe tantamounts to its utter rejection by the general people. Despite these signs of weakness, Jamaat will no doubt play a significant role in country's politics.

The Gano Forum is the platform of a select group of intellectuals, who find it ill at ease to translate into reality the pious wishes they nurture for the good of the people. Its leadership likable may they be, are unable to put in the input of labour and resources needed to achieve their objective. The emergence of Gano Forum as the third political force in the country will depend upon how and to what extent these deficiencies are met.

The Workers Party and the other Leftist parties have a limited but definite role to play. The very fact of their programmes being aimed primarily at satisfying the poor and the needy will always remain a potent force for them in a perpetual land of wants like ours. Their success will depend largely on the success or otherwise of the ruling parties' ability to transform our land into a prosperous one or not.

All these limited analyses merely point to the direction that the evolution of a two-party system in the present politico-economic set up of our country is too much to expect. It may take time. It is also not imperative for the sustenance of a multi-party democracy, which we have in vogue now in our country. If the present system deliver the goods, why should one forsake it? Anyway, despite the limited and specific role the other political parties are likely to play, people are expected to veer round the two existing major political parties, who might in the distant future form the nucleus of a two-party system. Who knows? Qui Sait?



## Currents and Crosscurrents

by M M Rezaul Karim

ation period, were, by and large, extended their support for the Awami League, hoping that the latter would shun the principles and practices of the monolithic BAKSAL. The minority remained the mainstay of the support for the Awami League, for historic reasons. Notwithstanding its policies and actions at different periods of time, the Awami League has been and will be regarded as one with policies veering to the left of the centre.

The other major political party, the BNP, owes its origin to a soldier, who through sudden and somewhat uncontrolled turn of events, found himself saddled at the helm of state affairs. He later legitimised his rule through election. Most of the nationalistic

their leader, Khaleda Zia, who had bagged in the election the maximum votes with maximum seats an individual candidate could aspire for.

BNP's strategic imprudence was appalling. The political ally of Jamaat was totally alienated; little and ill-planned attempts were made to befriend the unfriendly media and inept handling of the civil service became the order of the day. The cadre was found more often than not in a disarray. Besides, the general public thought it could be worth their while to give the other party a chance to prove its worth. Had only the defeated national leaders of the party been able to evade the electoral catastrophe, it would not have been easy for the Awami League to form govern-

# The Internal State of the Federation

Mian Nawaz Sharif has a wealth of human resources available to him, he must utilise them to get the best use of the material resources remaining, the vultures having stripped this country bare.

## AS I SEE IT

Ikram Sehgal writes from Karachi

THE easy part for Mian Nawaz Sharif was to win the elections hands down after almost three years out in the political cold. Among lessons learnt, the first must be that 'pragmatism' does pay, the second must be that 'naivety' does not.

In the order of priorities the economy has pride of place. The good news is that the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), it being time we dropped the 'N' symbol, has a full spread in all the Provinces, a strong base in two major Provinces and a moderately useful one in the other two. Even better was the fact that though there was a tilt for regional parties, it was nowhere near a majority. Whenever there is unfair sharing of an already inadequate economic pie, regional tendencies tend to surface. Instead of showing issues under the carpet, they must be addressed on a national basis in order to adequately satisfy all the partners in the federation, economic disparities and perceived discrimination have had unfortunate consequences for this nation before. The first and foremost task is to put together an effective economic team led by an experienced person having an inherent command of an overwhelming bureaucratic machine engaged in choking the economy instead of running it. 'Kitchen Cabinet' insiders may prefer someone amenable to their beck and call, if that should happen, Mian Sahib would have lost the battle for economic Pakistan before it even begins. The 'Asif Zardari Syndrome' would come back with a vengeance with a change in name and style only. The chosen Economic Czar has to ensure that along with reforms, accountability is a dire necessity to rid this country of very real demons.

Institutions that have been destroyed have to be restored and rejuvenated. Instead of depending upon the FIA, the exorcism must be put in the hands of a focused team of professionals capable and motivated. Along with accountability, national census is most important on an urgent basis. While it could be deferred for some time because

of the economic emergency, it has to take place. Without real statistics, all planning for the future would be wrong. The unequal sharing of the economic pie is a direct result of an imperfect population count that fails to recognize that 60 per cent of Pakistan's citizen now reside in urban areas instead of 40 per cent according to the last census. Fresh delimitation of constituencies must be carried out to recognize this fact. The Armed Forces monitoring the census-count to verify its accuracy as 'rigging' in this exercise would have unfortunate long-term overtones. It is of paramount importance to give power back to the people at the grassroots level. Without such devolution of power, democracy is an imperfect exercise. Local Bodies Elections on a party basis must follow with the concept of both Proportional Representation (PR) and Majority Vote (MV) i.e. having a run-off election among the first two candidates if the first election does not produce a more than 50 per cent. Regionalism can only be avoided by ensuring every part of the electorate has some representation in the National Assembly. On the basis of another 100 seats distributed on the percentage of votes cast, with 50 per cent reserved for women.

What better time for Mian Nawaz Sharif than to do it at the present time with his two-third majority? At the very base of the democratic process, the smallest unit, the Union Council must be formed from a slate consisting of the first 10 candidates having more votes, that is the only way to ensure that almost everyone has a voice at the basic level. The first two with most votes than have a run-off election to determine the Chairman i.e. unless the first candidate is elected on a vote of 50 per cent or more.

This concept of PR and MV is

to be carried out till each district, not more than 1 million people, have an elected mayor on the basis of adult franchise. This devolution of power at the very base of the democratic unit must include the authority to not only impose and collect taxes, but to spend as per the need of the community, the direct relation between taxation and spending thereof will allow the people to physically see what their taxes do for them. The present abstract system attracts lot of cynicism from the electorate and unless the public perception is changed to their being part of the budgetary process in some manner that cynicism will only become deeper and revenues will remain proportionally small as time goes on.

For every accountable post from the President downwards. Even the Senate must be voted for directly so that the many ills of indirect elections being manipulated by vested interest can be avoided. Ms Benazir Bhutto is only making the right noises because she realizes that the masses have given her a stinging rebuke, there were too many international observers and foreign journalists around to be fooled by her initial outburst about widespread rigging. This despite the best effort of BBC to contrive controversy about low turnout. The sudden silence from her previous histrionics points to a realisation that since she cannot negate the obvious, it is replaced winning by cunning method in her madness. She is desperate to 1) avoid accountability from focusing on her husband and her, 2) cause friction between the President and PM-elect, and 3) somehow become part of a coalition government in Sindh so as not to lose the remaining part of the PPP, already up in arms in serious revolt at the loss of their three decades investment in the Bhutto family because of Zardari's greed. The respect that is obligatory for her as a leader of a major political party should not exclude accountability. Benazir must be kept at arm's length, she has proved in the past that she can never be trusted and if anyone should fall into her honey-trap he willfully deserve the consequences of his naivety. The President, his discretionary powers and the Armed Forces must be left alone.

If Nawaz Sharif's government is on the right-path and with such an overwhelming mandate, why should there be any fear of retribution? Moreover, the President has not only proved his mettle, but also sincerely of purpose towards the nation. For starters, the President and the Armed Forces must let the constitutional process proceed without any interference. The intelligence agencies need to be monitored closely. Their capacity to harm the individual citizen without any rhyme or reason is monstrous, worse is the penchant of intelligence operatives to use the power of their office for personal vendettas or personal gain. The former Head of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), Major (Retd) Masood Sharif had the

audacity to give an affidavit to the Supreme Court (SC) that he had ordered tapping of telephones on a massive scale, including that of the Chief Justice SC, under the general blanket of 'curbing anti-State elements', on his own authority. He should be tried for perjury. Who brought him to the position of Head of IB from virtual obscurity? Who gave him the courage to have this enormous contempt of the laws of the land that protect the freedom of the citizen? As for the ISI, it is only after Lt Gen Nasim Rana assumed the charge of DG ISI and brought in a fresh team that ISI's political adventurism was circumscribed from motivated purpose to a position of strict neutrality. The ISI has now got on with they are supposed to do (which is of vital national interest) rather what kowtow to the desires of Asif Zardari as was subtly done by Rana's predecessor, who deliberately avoided alerting the national leadership to the economic sabotage of the nation at the hands of Zardari and his cronies.

Intelligence Oversight Committees must be constituted to avoid such compromises of national security at the altar of personal combination. For the ISI and MI must comprise of former senior Armed Forces officers and for the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Provincial Police Special Branches (SB), by a combination of retired police officers and Armed Forces Officers. Law and order, education, health, transportation, food, foreign trade, lowering of energy prices, etc., all have priority that requires movement on a broad front. Mian Nawaz Sharif has to harness all the energies of this nation so that a simultaneous offensive is possible. That movement cannot take place unless he has broken the crust of the bureaucratic shell that is choking the entrepreneurial spirit of Pakistan. Corruption can only be controlled by taking the government out of the lives of citizens. Whole sets of Mickey-Mouse regulations since imperial times have to be consigned to the same dusty bin of history that he has sent Benazir. Unless we cut down drastically on bureaucratic red tape and make both authority and justice available at the doorstep of the citizen, corruption will keep on having full breed upon.

To do all this, and much more that needs to be done (and cannot even begin to be recounted here) internally in Pakistan, Mian Nawaz Sharif has to set in place within the next 100 days a working team that will convert his promises to the people into fact. He has to shun routine. Pakistan cannot afford holidays. For starters, the administrative machinery must be partly kept open with a skeleton staff on Fridays for the benefit of the citizens, the public servants doing duties in rotation (at least once a month) so that each individual gets a break in turn. The tremendous setback that we have had to endure in the last 1400 days, this break of journey into our perceived destiny as an economic entity of some note, needs to be revived on a war-footing. Mian Nawaz Sharif has a wealth of human resources available to him, he must utilise them to get the best use of the material resources remaining, the vultures having stripped this country bare.

Tomorrow: The External State of the Federation

# An Inconsolable Parting

by Waheedul Haque

KHAIRUL Kabir was a one-man institution. There is a ring of cliché in saying that. Truth was he was two institutions, running parallelly. One of these was the Farid Bhai institution. The other and the more public one? It is difficult to catch in one epithet that power in him that enabled him to cut through state, social and political — and later economic — establishments exactly as a hot knife does travel through a thick slab of butter. The supreme go-getter with guts rising up to his throat and bland audacious handling of things was, strangely, best to be described as Khairul Kabir Esquire — a gentleman nonpareil who would not raise his voice above just-audible chatter level and yet not take no for an answer from anyone and in any matter. He was decidedly a modern man but still carrying, very lovingly indeed, a feudal weight and pomp made the more impressive by these being perceptibly subdued. Both as a dear, perhaps indulgent Farid Bhai and as the country squire making his way through high and mighty institutions of the Pakistani vintage — he was irresistible. His loss very plainly means so many adorable things going out of this society, so many endearing things we shall have to live without from now on.

Starting his career as a remarkable writer, service correspondent he almost overnight

years, he never looked back to professional journalism after his agreeing to go on an overseas assignment to Indonesia. Well, possibly not even the closest of his friends suspected that of all things he would emerge as a financial wunderkind, a surprise of a Vice-President of the dynamic Punjabi financial house, the limited bank. This was made most unlikely by a chain of achievements he had made in the mean time. He was certainly the most effective operator among the founders of the East Pakistan Press Club, first of its kind in Pakistan.

And he was instrumental in the founding of the Pakistan Arts Council — a silver lining in the unmitigated darkness of the Pakistani pseudo-colonial stranglehold over the then Pakistan. I am not clear about his place in the matter but I am certain he was a keyman in the realisation of the Dhaka Stadium. These seen against his pivotal role in the organisation of Moulana Bhasani's historic Kargamir Cultural conference of 1957 should be enough to indicate the range and size of Khairul Kabir's pasture. There have been as diverse other doings as the above making a low-down on his achievements both endlessly long and interesting.

Unlike his two younger brothers, the elder of whom has a striking athletic build and the last somewhat gaunt, Farid Bhai was spare of physic and



with his less than medium build and a rather dorkish complexion could be called Mr Average Bengalee. Corporeally then his was no presence to take any account of. But then there was a man inhabiting that

mortal coil, character that is, which always made it impossible to ignore him. Was he a beguiling conversationalist? Perhaps not. Was he adept in spectacular speech, shooting out pithy maxims and aphorisms or quotables? Perhaps not. Was there overbearing condition in whatever he deemed to let out (he was the opposite of a blabber-mouth)? Perhaps not. Was he strikingly punctilious in manner or accoutrement? Perhaps not. What is it that made him so impressive, attractive and able always to get his way? A suave and demure faultless presence, sure of himself and always arraying himself well and agreeably. Farid Bhai had a whiff of a Mark Twaine about him, feeling next to nothing to abandon his dear new-dressed and fetching plot for an uncertain and virgin pasture. And all the time he was after something big and pioneering. Something of social good. But he did not choose to be a builder of his own self in career or riches or anything. He was the last man to cash in on his past successes and achievements. And he wanted to have things big or nothing. That was the kind of a man we shall not have with us anymore, leading without letting anyone know about the leader.

From journalism to film production, to public institutions, to politics, I do not even dream of consoling all who knew him. They must all suffer the parting, choosing to do it.

The rolling stone that was the public Khairul Kabir started to manifest itself soon after. And a true rolling stone gathering neither moss nor weight of