

Sprit of Sacrifice

Eid-ul-Azha, the second biggest festival of the Muslim World, is just a day away. A fervour of both commemoration and festivity fills the air. The commemorative part is highly important because that is where essentially lies the cause for rejoicing over something truly great and ennobling that happened in the pre-Islamic era.

So, the mirth and festivity we see have solemn origins and therefore need to be associated with sobriety and restraint. The sum-total of the moral is sacrifice in the name of Allah which in effect is for the spiritual and material benefit of the people.

With the rising urban population Qurbani is being performed on an increasing scale year after year. It is imperative that we put knife to the animals, skin and disembowel them at designated places rather than doing all these wherever we wished.

While the individuals can dig holes to bury the things topping these off with suitable disinfectants, the municipal ward commissioners better keep tab of things and handle the problems as they arise rather than waiting for rains to wash out.

The largest collection of animal hides and skins takes place in this season, and, for all we know, the leather industry is bank-rolled heavily to purchase the skins, season them and make these into leather and leather products.

Balkans Flash-point

The NATO assault on Yugoslavia on the plea of ensuring peace in the Balkans and security for the Kosovans of Albanian descent, and forcing Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic into an agreement with the KLA has certainly come as a severe blow to the United Nations.

The NATO intervention has apparently done more harm than good to the Kosovans, multiplying the degree of atrocities unleashed on the ethnic Albanians by the Serbs. They are now at the mercy of Milosevic's men.

Certainly, the Serb leader's obstinacy has given rise to the crisis. He has simply dismissed the idea of a negotiated settlement. His indifference, first to the call of the peace-brokers and then the warning from NATO, has, for the moment at least, pushed the whole issue out of the negotiators' reach to the territory of the generals.

There should be an end to the crisis in the Balkans sooner than later and, in our opinion, it is only possible through diplomatic, not military, manoeuvres.

Explosives in MP's House!

The recovery of explosives by Army experts from the house of a sitting MP of the ruling party from Chhatak, has been quite an eye-opener. According to press reports a 9-member Army explosives expert team headed by a senior officer in presence of local police recovered a huge number of homemade bombs from the house of the local MP Muhibur Rahman Manik.

While people are already groaning under terrorist activities across the country by individuals as well as organised gangs resulting in wanton killings and maiming of innocent people, the least we need is such news. The government is already upto its neck with deteriorating law and order situation and the revelation about the MP's house has only added an insult to the injury.

Much have we heard about the determination of political leaders to the Home Minister to root out terrorism and terrorists, irrespective of party affiliation and allegiance, but in vain. This is one good example, for the government to redeem its pledges. What is the party position of Awami League on this issue? We believe appropriate action will be taken in this regard to instill confidence in the minds of the law-abiding citizens of the country.

NATO's Big Gamble on Kosovo

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

There is a strong view that there is no guarantee the bombing will achieve anything without stationing ground troops by the NATO countries. Strategists believe that air strikes without ground support appears to be futile. It is like a work half-done with the result that the Kosovo Albanians will be left more vulnerable to the attack of Serbs.

NATO, an essentially a defensive Trans-Atlantic alliance, has launched missile and bombing raids on 24 March on Yugoslavia aimed at bringing President Milosevic to the negotiating table to accept the peace plan with NATO troops stationed in Kosovo to monitor the peace deal.

It may be recalled that the second phase of peace-talks started in France on 15th March. On 18th March the Kosovo Albanians unilaterally signed the peace deal calling for an 'interim autonomy' and 28,000 NATO troops to implement it. The Serbs delegation refused to sign and the talks were suspended.

Both President Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair had taken the opportunity to explain why Kosovo was important to the West and hence its security. The Balkan area continues to be volatile. For more than one year the Yugoslav military machine attacked the Kosovo Albanians and more than 2000 people were killed. Almost 450,000 Al-

banians refugees have been forced to leave Kosovo. Geographically Kosovo is located between Asia, Europe and the Middle East and the meeting point of Islam, Orthodox and Western Christianity.

President Clinton said that Kosovo 'had all the ingredients for a major war.' He argued that in both in World War I and II Europe was slow to recognise the dangers and the world did not act quickly enough to stop that war either.

Prime Minister Blair justified the military attack on humanitarian ground and said that the strikes were aimed at halting Serb's assault on ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. He further said that it would continue until President Milosevic ended the repression in Kosovo.

The question that arises is: whether NATO's air action against Yugoslavia will be able to achieve the declared purpose. There is a strong view that there is no guarantee the bombing will achieve anything without stationing ground troops by the NATO countries.

ground support appears to be futile. It is like a work half-done with the result that the Kosovo Albanians will be left more vulnerable to the attack of Serbs. One big unanswered question remains is what is the exit-strategy of NATO? What if the bombing did not stop Serbs from attacking Kosovo Albanians and President Milosevic holds out against peace?

One may argue that Yugoslavia is no Iraq. The Serbian forces are better equipped than Iraq's. Yugoslavia has MIG fighters, substantial anti-aircraft defences, surface-to-air missiles and fighter planes as well as major combat experience. Another factor is that Kosovo is known to be Serb's heart land and Serbs regard Kosovo as a symbol of their history and faith.

What is President Milosevic's Strategy? Serbs believe that without Kosovo there is no Yugoslavia and the country will disintegrate without Kosovo. Even the emotional ties with Kosovo of the millions of overseas Serbs (1.2 million Serbs live in NATO countries) run strong, although they remain hostile to the authoritarianism of President Milosevic as many had left under the post-war communism and others after Yugoslavia's

1991 war of secession. In Switzerland, the home of 80,000 Serbs, the head of the Voice of Yugo-Diaspora Milan Bodi appears to have summed up the mood in the following words: 'The Serbs suffered greatly from communist terror. Now they all support Milosevic despite the fact that he does the greatest harm to the Serbs.'

Given the strong feelings among the Serbs over Kosovo, President Milosevic knows that he is better off than he had conceded to the peace plan. He thinks that he will lose support from his people if he does not retain power over Kosovo, no matter how small that Kosovo is over which he presides.

Military experts were surprised by the lack of obvious resistance from Yugoslav's reportedly substantial anti-aircraft facilities. Why is he not serving his military might? The reasons are not far to seek. There is a view that that he is prepared for a prolonged fight and that is why he is not using his military power. Probably he is waiting for the NATO ground troops. Secondly, as the days pass, he thinks that the unity of NATO alliance may crack.

The NATO governments, if there is any casualty of NATO airmen, the opinion is bound to change. Vietnam and Afghanistan are constant reminders to them as to what can happen in an unpredictable war in a foreign country. A group of western public think that the attack is immoral without the sanction of the United Nations. Under these circumstances it appears that President Milosevic is very much hoping that the NATO will want to negotiate with him and he then can set his own terms.

Opposition to the Airstrikes

Russia opposed the air strikes. Prime Minister Prikhov cancelled his trip to Washington while he was on his way to the US. Russia has expelled the NATO representatives in Moscow and ceased all cooperation with NATO. The nationalist Russians consider that NATO is restarting the Cold War again and the relations between the US and Russia would undoubtedly change.

China objects to the NATO's action on the ground that the strikes had no approval from the Security Council of the UN. The Secretary General of the UN gave a cautious support and maintained that the Security Council should have been con-

sulted. The left wing newspapers in Italy opposes the air action and termed it illegal and immoral. India, Vietnam and South Africa opposed the action. Russia's resolution in the Security Council against the air strikes was rejected by the majority of its members.

Islamic Countries

The Islamic countries are watching closely the situation. It appears that they are not so involved with Kosovo as they were with Bosnia. During Bosnian conflict men and material were supplied by many Islamic countries and this phenomenon does not seem to exist in the case of Kosovo. It appears that the US's inactive role in the Middle East, in particular to the Palestine issue, alienated many Islamic countries and they see the US condones Israel but not others pursuing a double-standard policy. It is reported that air strikes were being opposed by Libya, Iraq, Indonesia, Algeria and Pakistan.

Conclusion

After 1945, this is the first time the West, led by the US, has taken military action in Europe. In a way it is a big gamble because air strikes may not resolve the Kosovo issue. The question is whether the West would commit their troops on the ground, if necessary, to save the Kosovo Albanians. It remains to be seen how committed they are to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in Kosovo. If they leave the job half-done, the Kosovo Albanians will be in worse situation.

The writer is Former Bangladesh Ambassador to the United Nations in Europe, Geneva.

The Politicians and Our Entreaties

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

There has been a news in the air that the Government was preparing itself to initiate a formal dialogue with the opposition soon. This is indeed a good omen and should be very carefully pursued towards a mutually acceptable solution of the problems confronting the whole nation.

PROFUSELY cajoled and infuriated by a group of peevish yemen in the party who have been day-dreaming that their leader Hossain Mohammad Ershad would again come back to power, the ex-President has tentatively confirmed opening yet another front within Jatiya Party. It is likely to take a positive shape when the scar of the last breach between him and Kazi Jafar, Shah Muazzem and others is yet to heal.

This time the feud was obviously on the issue of boycotting the municipal election and accepting Begum Zia, or for that matter, BNP leadership. Mizan Chowdhury could not but detest the unholy alliance with Jamaat-Islami - an abettor in the 1971 holocaust. From his statement on non-participation in the municipal election any one could read the farsightedness of the seasoned politician. Ershad felt utterly ridiculed

and this time he stripped Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury of even the primary membership of the party. Such a scenario is now taken to be prelude to a major tremor rocking the party citadel to a collapse.

The city unit of the Jatiya Party including its student wing has also risen against Ershad's autocratic management of the party. A major portion of the leadership has already pledged its support to the formation of a new, democratic Jatiya Party under the leadership of Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury and Anwar Hossain Manzu. Sardar Amjad Hossain, one of the stalwarts of the Jatiya Party and now representing the new, emerging faction was found wondering how Ershad could join hands with BNP vis-a-vis Begum Zia whom he contemptuously described as a 'tyrant' on January 17, 1997 in a public meeting at Rangpur. Sardar Hossain recalled that Ershad publicly vowed that as long as he was alive he would resist Begum Zia's coming to power any more. He lamented that she didn't allow him to attend Jatiya Sangsad for a single day. Begum Zia's boastful prediction that Ershad would have to live behind the bars for hundred years was also alluded to by Sardar Amjad Hossain. He considered Ershad's conduct of the party affairs as autocratic, high-handed and whimsical. His decision to be a part of the opposition was again, he (Mr.

Amjad) thought, an extension of a perverted thinking. By all these he (Ershad) has allowed himself to be led by his potential 'killer'. Even though, it is commonly said that there is no last word in politics, Ershad's change of mind and shifting of principle would continue to fringe upon his most known moral turpitude over the past several years.

Ershad is yet to realize that his strategy in joining hands with BNP and the Jamaatis would not grant him any dividend. Because, Begum Zia would never agree to come to an electoral compromise with any party to the detriment of her own party interest. Even then if he goes for any such alliance his own party standing would be further jeopardized. The current rift in the Jatiya Party giving rise to another independent group would also drastically curtail his strength in the parliament. He is already watching a rapid erosion in his stronghold Rangpur. If he can read the writings on the wall he shall withdraw from the BNP-Jamati alliance right now. Shall he display that wisdom before it is too late?

Internal rift within the party has of late turned out to be a very common feature in all the major parties including the party in power Awami League. Among other places, both BNP and Awami League were having had times with their respective partymen in Chittagong. BNP

central leadership made several attempts at patching up the differences between two groups headed by two different central leaders Abdullah Al Noman and Col. (Retd.) O Ahmed - the latter supporting Mr Nasiruddin. BNP's probable nominee for the ensuing Mayoral election there. Although there is a temporary suspension in the intra-party activities and antagonism the leaders in the center aren't very sure if their efforts at rapprochement would abort or not.

However, the situation in the Awami League continued to be volatile for quite sometime. Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury was at loggerheads with Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury Babu and another local leader. Their personal conflict had been so embarrassing to the central leadership and demoralizing to the party workers there that it eventually called for the personal intervention of the party chief and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina herself. During her recent visit to Chittagong she talked to the fending leaders individually and also collectively. That she was able to iron out their animosities and differences found its testimony in the public meeting she addressed, where, among others, Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury Babu spoke eulogizing ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury's services to the party and to the city profusely. Prime Minister Hasina announced that Mohi-

uddin Chowdhury would be her party's nominee in mayoral election and that there was no rift in the party. She exhorted all to work unitedly in support of the party candidate.

And away at Kishoreganj the flamboyant BNP MP Major (Retd.) Akhtaruzzaman has again been in the limelight. He has been among those in the party second/third rankers who quietly and loudly thought the decision to boycott the municipal election by their party had been suicidal. The retired Major named Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Khondkar Mahbubuddin and Akbar Islam to have misguided the Chief Begum Khaleda Zia. He demanded their immediate removal from the party or else he would resign. In fact, he went to the Chairperson to tender his resignation whence she asked him to see the BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. On this, there ensued a bit of amusing drama and it is yet to be known if there was any settlement within.

Whether or not the issue was taken care of fairly only time would prove but Begum Zia's disclosure a couple of days ago would send us pondering. She said that the 4 point demand was not to be construed for boycotting the municipal election but it was to ensure a fair election with participation of all the political parties. She further added that it was not even intended to unseat the govern-

ment. And since the Government paid no heed to the 4-point demand it would automatically transform into a 5-point one - the addition being the ouster of the present government. A formal declaration is yet to come from BNP or the combined opposition because the 'spectre' of the Upazilla election - to be completed by June 23, 1999 in terms of the constitutional provision - is likely to call for a great deal of farsightedness and political wisdom. It is good to see that at this critical juncture the Telephone and Works Minister Mohammed Nasim telephoned BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan which was though ostensibly described as a mere 'courtesy contact' could be prelude to a formal discussion on the issues raised by the opposition in their 4-point demand.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has also been urging upon the opposition, mainly Begum Zia to come to Jatiya Sangsad to discuss and to get a settlement. Almost the same time there has been a news in the air that the Government was preparing itself to initiate a formal dialogue with the opposition soon. This is indeed a good omen and should be very carefully pursued towards a mutually acceptable solution of the problems confronting the whole nation. In this we shall pray that both the entities would gracefully shed all the elements of stubbornness in their respective approach, see reasons without being ostracized by narrow party interest and uphold the greater interest of the whole nation. Let the perpetual and mutual distrust, at times viciously personal, be buried once for all.

To the Editor...

Who'll rescue us?

Sir, Everyday in the morning, I notice some unpleasant news in the newspapers. The news of hooligans, robbers, decoits, and terrorists are common in all the newspapers. I see that somebody is murdered and some good people become victims of terrorism. In some general stores the extortionists demand money from the shopkeepers. During hartals many people are killed, and the bullets and bombs used by terrorists injure many others. I felt shocked when I saw that a girl of 8 years lost her two hands.

For years, she will remain impaired. Everyday when I open the newspaper, I see some men are killed by some terrorists, the children are kidnapped, and the industrialists are murdered.

This is the grim picture of our society that afflicts me very much. These things are happening mostly because of the negligence of the government, police administration and all others concerned. These have been particularly increasing since the present government assumed power. The government always cares about its own interest but does not think about the future of the country. Sometimes hijacking occurs in front of the police, but they do not arrest the hijackers.

Mustakim Standard-6 Manarat Dhaka International School Gulshan.

"Practical Advert"

Sir, Mr Zahidul has raised two issues in his letter (Practical Advert on Detergent March 24, 1999). In addressing the first issue we would like to point out that under existing law, it is mandatory to print

Statutory Warning: 'Smoking is injurious to Health', on all packets of cigarettes and bids produced in or legally imported into Bangladesh. As law abiding citizens, British American Tobacco Bangladesh believes in adhering to all laws including this one.

Mr Haque has suggested having our executives shown advocating smoking in print and ADN advertisements. We would like to inform him that all advertisements that we produce are duly tested with our consumers and they have been happy with the way we communicate with them.

Mahmudur Rahman Head of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs British American Tobacco Bangladesh

Separate transport for women

Sir, It is true that in the public buses in the city there are arrangement for seats for women. But the fact is that the women get little chance to get on the bus and travel especially during the office hours when the bus is crowded. Even if there are women who take the risk to get on the bus, they cannot reach their seat because of the predominance of man there.

In fact, the very transport system in the city is problematic and to travel from one part of the city to another is really hazardous. A man has to experience a lot of difficulties while

going from one place to another, let alone a woman. The problems of women are much more. A woman has to get into rivalry with men when trying to get on a bus. Sometimes she can get on a bus and more often she fails to win the game against her male counterpart. Moreover, the bus driver is reluctant to take a woman and he advises his helper 'Moshila tubina' (don't allow women in the bus). Nevertheless, when a woman gets on a bus, she has to face bitter and shameful experiences inside the bus as well. But she has nothing to do. Because she has no other means of travelling.

The number of women in the job market has definitely increased. But her commuting to her work place has not been made safe. The authority seems to have no concern about the safety of the female jobholders. The garment factory workers are mostly women and they are playing a great role in the development of our economy. But we feel aggrieved to see them neglected both in their workplace and their way to the workplace.

It is a good sign that some special services have been introduced in the city and these are quite comfortable. The authority can do a good job for the convenience of the women by starting separate services for the women. We request the authority of these services to introduce separate services for the women at least in the peak hour of the day.

Monalia Sadiya D.U.

Cricket and Calcutta

Sir, First and foremost, enthusiasm for a game cannot and shouldn't be equated with rowdism and hooliganism.

Calcutta is known the world over as a sport loving city, be it soccer, cricket or even table tennis. And every city hosting international sporting events has witnessed some untoward, embarrassing incidents in its past. But, it doesn't necessarily have to effect a ban on hosting further events due to this. Secondly, India - Pakistan matches are always electrifying as compared to ones played by newly appointed members of the ICC.

Events on the pitch affect the mood of the spectators watching, especially if they are not within the framework of the game. For instance the deliberate blocking of India's star batsman Sachin; resulting in a run-out in that controversial game. Or even unsportsmanlike gestures by the opposing team while fielding. This culminated in the crowd's fury and outburst, which, of course, should have been avoided in the best interest of the game.

But, if banning was the only option, shouldn't the entire Sri Lankan team be banned for interrupting and walking off the pitch due to an umpiring decision? Or the English and Australian teams isolated for ball tampering and 'sledging' respectively? Lastly, it needs to be mentioned that prompt action was taken at the Eden Gardens to evacuate the stadium, which unfortunately meant that thousands of innocent spectators because of a handful of ruffians.

Anish V Kshy West Agargaon, Dhaka

Delusions of grandeur

Sir, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry when I heard the comments made by Saber H

Chowdhury and the captain of the national cricket team during the recent one-day international between Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Mr Chowdhury seems to believe that it is Bangladesh's God-given right to be given test status. How hollow his words seemed in the context of the thrashing doled out to us by Pakistan. Old fashioned as it may seem, I would like to remind him that the honour of being given Test-playing status has to be earned. Comparison to Sri Lanka, a nation which played cricket for test decades before getting Test status, doesn't become us.

As for Aminul Islam, I am happy to hear of his confidence in Bangladesh's 'superiority' over Zimbabwe and Kenya. I would like to remind him that both countries have the ability to give us a run for our money, and that actions should speak louder than words. This misplaced arrogance is particularly galling when one hears about the internal politics rife within the team. The recent debacle with Gordon Greenidge in which all the dirty laundry was hung out to dry only goes to prove this point. Everyone is so caught up in vying for power or position, that the sport has been forgotten. The sufferers are the future of cricket in Bangladesh and the supporters of the national team.

Sadat Omar Dhaka

The Emir of Bahrain

Sir, The obituary of the Emir of Bahrain came out in your daily as well as in other dailies of the city with respect. Our President and Prime Minister sent condolences on his sudden demise. Our Prime Minister despite her busy schedule, worked out time, flew to Bahrain for

few hours to pay respect to the departed Emir and to the people of Bahrain on her behalf and on behalf of the people of Bangladesh through the new Emir of Bahrain. It was a great gesture from a poor country of the World... and why not? By whose kindness Biman, The Bangladesh Airlines could make a start in the world of Civil Aviation.

Do the employees of Biman in particular and air passengers of the country in general remember a little how worried and perturbed were the then Management of Biman to operate the charter flights from UK? In 1972 residents and Mon-Resident Bangladeshis in UK were made eager to come to see their country. But for the late Emir's kindness, and if late Emir had no love for our Bangabandhu, the chattered flights from London and for that matter scheduled flights 1974 onwards by Biman's own and sole Boeing 707 would not have been possible. Biman tried almost all the Middle-East and Gulf countries for permission to make 'technical landings' for the flights - but failed. Only the late Emir of Bahrain accorded the approval thereby enabling Biman, to spread its wings across.

The late Emir of Bahrain was rather God sent for Biman. Passengers were very happy so were the crew, and those few Bangladeshis living there from before.

But after the killing of Bangabandhu the scenario changed over night. It was rather insulting for the crew to lay over. People in the motel, in market, on the streets were very unkind and were very sarcastic - even the taxi drivers were full of taunts. Their warmth, their kindness just evaporated in the hoot air of Bahrain, one of the reasons for Biman to shift to booming Dubai lock stock and barrel. Mazhar Haq Hse 52, Rd 28 Gulshan, Dhaka-1212