

Defrauding the Economy

THIS sticks out as a sore thumb ironically when our export trade is picking up. Finance Minister S M S Kibria has said in a recent television interview that there has been 20 per cent growth in the country's export during the last six months. Happy as we are over this break with a rather persistent sluggish export pattern in the earlier years of this government we cannot help being dismayed by a negative development that seems to undercut that positive trend. The fact of the matter is that the gap between the volume of merchandise shipped out and the foreign exchange earning posted at the central bank end is yawning. This is reflective of an increasing reluctance on the part of many an exporter to bring his money into the country. The Export Promotion Bureau's shipment figures are US\$ 650 million higher than those of Bangladesh Bank which works out to a three per cent variation in place of the one per cent that one has known to occur thus far. The usual gap between the two sets of figures has been of the order of US\$ 200 million, but its widening by US\$ 450 million beyond that normal range certainly sends ominous signals against macro-economic stability.

The exporters use all the incentives they have been liberally offered by the government to carry out their business in an export-led economy with sizeable dividends netted in foreign exchange. For the same purpose, they also enjoyed import duty rebates or other related incentives to have produced exportable goods in required quantities. But when it comes to bringing their earnings into the country they seem to employ all sorts of tricks to retain parts of their income abroad. Add to this the bane of under-invoicing of export earnings or stashing of profits away and you have a complete picture of defrauding the economy and the country - right, left and centre. All this is illegal, unethical and criminal rolled into one as a big offence.

We have two suggestions, to make for a quick turnaround: one, the government should put a stop to this virtual flight of capital, first by persuasion, and if that fails, by punitive measures. Secondly, the Chambers of Commerce and Industry ought to play an effective role in getting their fellow members to desist from robbing the national economy of its dues.

Since we do not want disquiet in the market-place, let the exporters voluntarily submit themselves to the business rules to avert legal action.

Rot Within the System

WITH the Eid shopping and travelling season in full swing, criminals and extortionists are having a field day. As sales have increased and the shopping venues have become more crowded, incidents of harassment and extortion, muggings, snatchings and street crime have risen. As travellers have made their way to ticket counters to arrange rail, bus or launch journeys to their villages and towns, scoundrels have fleeced them without a conscience. Unable to rely on the police for protection, shopkeepers have been mounting their own vigilante squads and arming themselves with whistles, clubs and even iron rods. For millions of ordinary people, as well as for countless shopkeepers, vendors, retailers and traders, life has been increasingly precarious. They have been preyed upon at every turn in the road.

What makes these circumstances simply unacceptable is the horrific reality that the culprits against whom these people have to protect themselves are not just the criminals, but also our law enforcement personnel, the police, who are engaging in brazen "rent collection" from the public. The police are supposed to be our protectors, but instead they are at the helm of the crime wave. In the shopping centres, where they are supposed to protect against extortion and crime, the police have been collecting a fixed daily "toll" from seasonal vendors who have set up shop along the sidewalks, or illegally alongside existing markets. On the pretext of checking the validity of documents, traffic police have been harassing bus, truck, auto-rickshaw drivers, who usually pay a bribe quickly even if their papers are in order. It is too risky to oppose or expose the police for they have the power to harass the person in many cruel and dangerous ways, and there is little confidence that a corrupt policeman can be brought to book by an ordinary person.

This lack of public confidence in the police force erodes public morality and discipline on an immeasurable scale. When the gatekeeper himself is caught poaching, morality in general takes a severe beating. Public faith in the system as a whole is shaken while at the same time, crime is bound to escalate. Police corruption can only encourage professional criminals, and other dangerous elements in society to operate with confidence and further abuse the innocent, ordinary person.

The sustained abuse of the innocents must stop. Since the police are contributing to the crime wave in no uncertain manner, mere cosmetic measures such as the deployment of more police personnel, will not work. By and large, the police force includes many, possibly a majority, who are honest and dedicated and they must be allowed to work without fear. What is needed is leadership on this matter from the very top. As matters now stand, only a ruthless clean-up campaign, with support from the top will rid us of the rot within the police force.

To the Editor ...

"Preaching to India?"

Sir, This refers to the letter (DS, 22 December) from Mr Rajeev Kumar in which he indicates his inability to "digest" an editorial in this newspaper.

It is undoubtedly true that Bangladesh can benefit from greater tolerance in matters of religion. This fact in no way assuages India's responsibility to protect the religious freedom of all its citizens, nor does it lessen the responsibility that must be borne by a number of cabinet members in the current Indian government.

Mr Kumar's indignation with respect to the "preaching" of secularism by Bangladeshis is unwarranted. I must confess that not having read the original editorial I can only surmise its content. Nevertheless, unless that editorial held up Bangladesh as a bastion of a perfect secular state (which I hope it did not) his reference to Bangladesh's state of tolerance, or lack thereof, and therefore its citizen's ability to comment on such matters in India, is a non sequitur. Constructive criticism should be welcome from all quarters with-

out getting one's gander up. This, I believe, should also hold true when non-Bangladeshis put forward constructive criticisms of Bangladesh or point out its failings.

Mr Kumar's response was overly defensive and, in my reading, there was an insidious dimension of Hindu nationalist sentiment expressed in it. He states that "Indians cannot be denied the right to regain their self respect [caused by the invasion of India by the Muslims]." He seems to overlook the fact that "Indians" are not just Hindus but also Muslims as well as Christians and to speak of "Indians" as being synonymous with the Hindu population is in itself an indication of a non-secularistic view of India. Mr Kumar refers to the "disputed structure in Ayodhya". I would point out to him that there is no dispute as to the fact that a mosque stood on that site until it was demolished by a group of ultra Hindu nationalists whose agenda, I dare say, was not the propagation of secularism in India.

I am very aware that there may be good historical reasons for believing that the site was also

It was their triumphant hour. For years, they had struggled to get recognition. New Delhi's invitation gave them that attention. So has Islamabad's realisation that they, not the tripartite conference, came first. The All Party Hurriyat Conference could not have asked for more.

True, their leaders and workers have borne untold sufferings. There is probably no Kashmiri family which has remained unscathed. If ever a cause has forced the rulers to reckon with the realities, Kashmir is the one. Still, the Hurriyat leaders have not risen to the occasion. They have been found wanting in their hour of glory.

It is not the scuffle outside the Hurriyat meeting place which forebodes ill. The age-old crack between the pro-Pakistan elements and the pro-Azadi forces was bound to appear, sooner or later. The sloggonging and the stone-throwing episodes were a natural fallout. The statement issued after the meeting indicates the pressure. The Hurriyat leadership had to speak in general terms: "The conglomerate will join any meaningful political process for a permanent legislation of the Kashmir dispute." Even if the differences have been spanned only temporarily, it suits New Delhi. A divided Hurriyat would have been still more a difficult proposition than the Hurriyat that has now emerged. The tragic point, however, is that it is not going about in a manner it should have.

By its acts of omission and commission, the Hurriyat confirms that it is interested only in the Valley. No doubt, their lead-

What is important is to find a common denomination to reach a settlement. The Hurriyat leaders are in a better position to do so. But if they too continue to indulge in rhetoric, or live in the world of their own, as most of them do, they will waste the opportunity which their blood and sacrifice, and many of those like them, has brought about.

ers' contact, not to speak of the hold, in Jammu and Ladakh is nominal. But they are not even making an effort to associate their representatives or those who count in the two regions. By this time, the Hurriyat should have sought them and tried to assuage their fears.

I recall when I broached the subject of Kashmiri pandits' return to the Valley with the present Hurriyat chairman, Abdul Ghani Bhat, at Srinagar a few years ago, his reply was that their future would be decided when the Kashmir question was settled. It was unfair on his part because the pandits are the warp and woof of Kashmir. Still he, and even Syed Ali Shah Gilani, stuck to those views, not realising that they were unwittingly giving support to the communal divide. They may have changed by now but they have never made their position clear.

It is still not too late for the Hurriyat to reach out to people in Jammu and Ladakh. They may want regional autonomy, their aspiration, which the Hurriyat fighting for the Kashmiri identity, can appreciate. Talking to Jammu and Leh directly will be far better for them than going through New Delhi. Even within the Valley, the Hurriyat should talk to others, like Shabir Shah, Mehbooba Mufti and the National Conference, because they represent different points of

view, ranging from the idea of splitting the state into Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh. At present, it is not even clear who are the real leaders of the three regions.

Perhaps, fresh elections in the state may become inevitable. The Farooq Abdullah's government is only a 12 per cent government. The Hurriyat's boycott had made the state polls a mockery. Even the Jammu and Ladakh did not

opposed to have any truck with the Hurriyat leaders only a year ago, is now keen to hold a dialogue. Still the Hurriyat will have to prepare the ground and start devising a formula which may find acceptance in New Delhi and Islamabad. The Hurriyat leaders' travel to Pakistan presents no difficulties. They would help establish their credentials and cause far better if they were to force militants in the Valley and elsewhere to stop firing guns. A complete cease-fire, to begin with for six months, would create the necessary climate.

The association of Pakistan is only a matter of time. The situation will automatically lead to it. The Hurriyat took some time to realise this. Islamabad appears to have played a positive role from behind the scenes. The immediate point which Pakistan and the Hurriyat have to attend to is to silence every gun, in the Valley and across the border. In fact, the Hurriyat has to build an atmosphere where any individual or group violating peace would be denounced by all.

This does not look so difficult at present as it did some months ago, particularly after the Kagil operation. In fact, the problem is not that of cease-fire, not even of talks. The real issue is what should be done to sustain the talks. Maybe, one way could be to go slow on Kashmir. Both India

and Pakistan, after breaking the ice through official level talks, will be well advised to take up the nuclear safeguards and free trade. The progress on these subjects may be quicker and may generate understanding which will stand a solution on Kashmir in good stead.

It has to be admitted that Track Two, people to people contact, has brought about the thaw, not Track One, between the governments. Now is the time for some persons from Track Two, both from India and Pakistan, to meet and hammer out some alternatives on Kashmir and other matters. If they, like-minded and liberal as they are, cannot agree among themselves, the officials with their mindset will never be able to do so. Really speaking, the governments in the two countries are prisoners of their own actions. Even the non-officials working behind the scenes are acting on their brief. New Delhi and Islamabad have to tear away from the web they have woven around them that they cannot sell to their people anything beyond a particular stand. The two should show determination and stamina because peoples of both countries are sick of hostility and hiatus.

What is important is to find a common denomination to reach a settlement. The Hurriyat leaders are in a better position to do so. But if they too continue to indulge in rhetoric, or live in the world of their own, as most of them do, they will waste the opportunity which their blood and sacrifice, and many of those like them, has brought about.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

Valley. But there are others who cannot be ignored. Before making up its mind, New Delhi will have to hold talks with the non-Hurriyat elements, particularly the National Conference, when it is part of the ruling National Democratic Alliance at the Centre.

Presuming the Hurriyat insists on representing the Valley solely, what about Jammu and Ladakh? The Indian people, whatever be their views on the RSS proposal, will not agree to trifurcate the state on religious grounds because it will spell ruin to the secular polity, already shaky. Some leaders within the Hurriyat, like Yasin Malik, are wholly

go the National Conference way. The Hurriyat may insist on the UN supervision if the idea of fresh election is mooted. But it should realise that no sovereign country can agree to such a suggestion. Were the Hurriyat to ask the election to be supervised by the Indian human rights activists, New Delhi would find it hard to say no. The Hurriyat has to do some home work. It has succeeded, thanks to many in India, Pakistan and elsewhere who have articulated the Kashmir problem so much in the world, that the government had no choice except to concede to the talks without any pre-condition. The same Home Minister LK Advani, who

Pakistan: Musharraf Pulls the Strings

Musharraf will definitely try to prolong his rule. But the timeframe for election by October 2002 cannot possibly be ignored. It is possible that he is meticulously charting a plan for creating a situation to eliminate the spectre of main politicians who may cause trouble for him. The exile of Nawaz and possible return of Benazir may form a part of the design.

of his interviews soon after taking power sacking the elected government of Nawaz Sharif last year. And there is no denying of the fact that he is definitely relishing the enormous responsibility. However, possibly the 57-year-old General cannot hide signs of increasing pressure on him on stemming from the gap that the people expected from him and what he has delivered during the more than fourteen months in charge. Although the political parties could not mount any effective pressure on early return of democracy, he is certainly not fully happy about the way the Pakistanis are looking at things in one hand and international attitude towards his regime on the other.

However, he may have reasons to look back with certain degree of satisfaction at the one year's time since being at the helm of a country whose record is not anything to cheer about as far as the pattern of governance is concerned. His satisfaction may stem from the fact that he has effectively kept politicians at the bay during this period. Nawaz was serving jail sentences after being convicted in several cases related to terrorism and corruption with little sign of overcoming this situation in the foreseeable future till the dramatic exile. Benazir is abroad in self-exile having little truck with domestic political milieu except occasional giving statements although her party and is seeking to keep the pot boiling under the tough rigours of the military rule. Furthermore, the military ruler had banned politicians from leading their respective organisations by an ordinance which outlaws leaders from heading political parties if convicted for two years in criminal charges. Evidently, the tough measures were designed at both Nawaz and Benazir because both the former prime ministers fall in the same category.

Sharif and Benazir were robbed of their scopes to lead the organisations either from prison or abroad although both had not bowed to the decisions. Their respective parties are also somewhat in disarray because of leadership crisis and being haunted by a regime which comes down

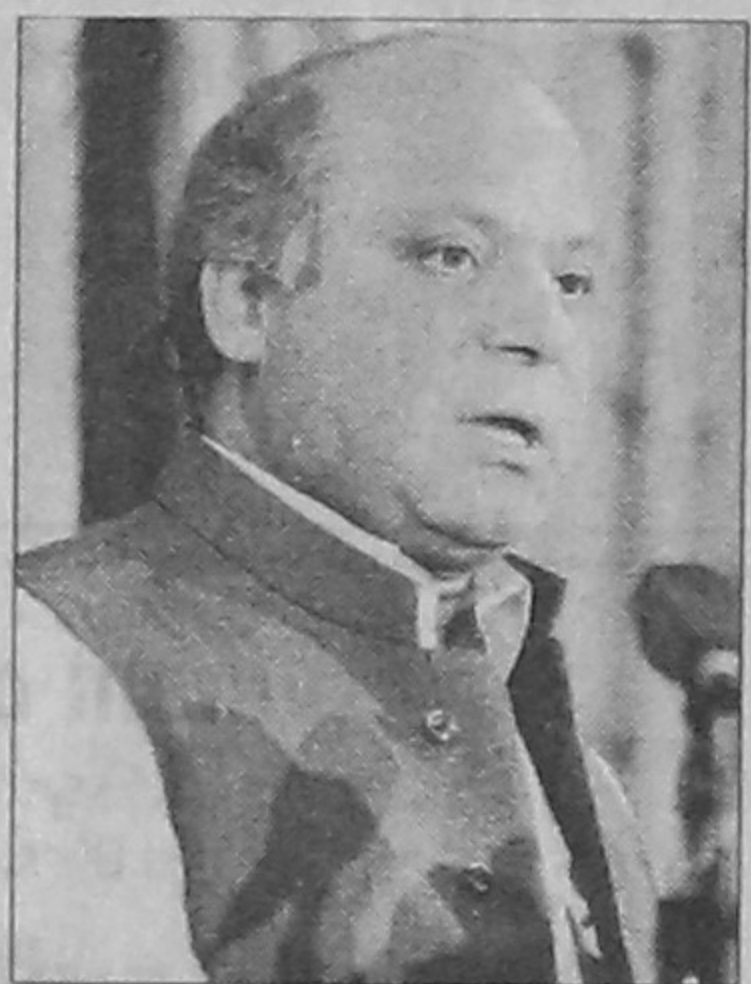


heavily on the politicians. The politicians are clamouring for immediate polls but this has fallen on deaf ears of the military strongman who says he has clear the Arabian Stables left by the politicians.

This favourable scenario notwithstanding, all are not bed of roses for Musharraf as quite a few thorns are there as the army tries to legitimise its rule in the country in one hand and seek international support for its existence. He came under severe criticisms when he toppled the elected government. He said the takeover was because of alarmingly increasing "misrule and corruption" by Sharif government. However, he exploited the public sentiment on the Kargil debacle which is seen in Pakistan as a kind of capitulation to rival India and Nawaz's government was viewed as responsible for the setback while the army was known as less keen to withdraw from the occupied mountain peaks in the Indian side of the line of control (LOC).

The allegations of corruption against the elected government were not baseless but this cannot be the basis of seizing power from representative authorities. The US, EU, Commonwealth and other democratic forums are asking him to give a timetable for restoration of democracy which the military ruler refused but relented only when the supreme court while validating the army take-over ruled that Pakistan must get new elected government within three years from October 12 since this period is enough for the military to create grounds for elections. Musharraf said he would abide by the verdict. Politicians were disheartened by the ruling junta that legitimised military rule but the timeframe for elections gladdened them since military rulers in the past like general Ayub Khan, Gen. Yahya Khan and Gen. Ziaul Haq quit the

scene after long stay when forced by either pro-democracy agitation or circumstances beyond their control. Musharraf is hell-bent on denigrating politicians and tarnish the "political culture". True, both Nawaz and Benazir are largely seen as corrupt by the people and this is one reason that few shed tears when their governments were prematurely and undemocratically dismissed. But military rule cannot be a pretext for this failure since people will



The Night of Honour: Its Importance

by Kazi Aulad Hossain

THERE are three very important lunar months in the Islamic calendar viz: (1) the month of Rajab, (2) the month of Shaban and (3) the current month of Ramadan. Again, these three important months are also very much known for three very important nights such as, (1) the Night of Miraj or the Journey by Night, (2) the Night of Bara'at or the Night of Salvation and (3) the Night of Qadar or the Night of Honour. But of all these three sacred nights the best night, however, is the Night of Honour or the Night of Qadar. And how best this Night of Honour or Qadar is can be gauged if we go through the four Ayats of Sura Qadar (Honour) of the Holy Quran. These Ayats are quoted below:

In the name Allah Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
(1) Lo! We revealed it (the Quran) on the Night of Honour.
(2) What will convey unto thee what the Night of Honour is?
(3) The Night of Honour is better than a thousand months.
(4) Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by God's permission on every errand.
(5) Peace..... this until the rise of Morn!

It is apparent from the aforesaid five Ayats of the Holy Quran that the Night of Honour or the Night of Qadar is simply unique and matchless vis-a-vis all other nights. While commenting on Ayat 3 of the Sura Qadar of the Holy Quran, that the Night of Honour or the Night of Qadar is better than a thousand months, Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali, a translator and commentator of international reputation has observed, "It must be taken in an indefinite sense as denoting a very long period of time..... this does not refer to our ideas of time but to 'timeless time'. One

moment of enlightenment under God's Light is better than thousands of months or years of animal life, and such a moment converts the night of darkness into a period of glory." So, the said glorious Night of Honour, that is, the 27th night of the holy month of Ramadan, is better than numerous months, that is, unlimited number of months.

Regarding revelation of the Sura Laila-tul-Qadar I may refer here to a background account relating to its revelation. Our dear Prophet (peace be upon him) was one day in course of discussion with his "Ashab" (companions) told them that, "A saint from among the Children of Israel (Bani Israel) achieved spiritual and physical power as a result of his continuous prayers and supplications to Almighty Allah for a long period of one thousand months". On hearing this the holy Prophet's companions were surprised and became sad for they would not be able to offer prayers to Almighty Allah for one thousand months continuously. But Benign Allah appreciated the despair and sadness of the companions of the holy Prophet (pbuh), and revealed the aforesaid inimitable Ayats which certainly made them happy and mirthful.

As regards observance of Laila-tul-Qadar on the 27th night of the holy month of Ramadan it may be said that there is difference of opinion about fixation of the exact date on which the night should be observed with due solemnity and fervour. According to the saying of the holy Prophet (pbuh) we learn that the night of Qadar is the night after 20th day of the holy month of Ramadan, and it falls on an uneven date (after 20th) that is, on 21st, 23rd, 25th, 27th, and 29th. But as

most of the experts hold the view that 27th night of the month of Ramadan is the Night of Honour, Muslims all over the world generally observe the Laila-tul-Qadar on this night.

As the holy month of Ramadan is the most important month for the Muslims in the same way the Night of Honour or the Laila-tul-Qadar is the most important night for them. There are so many reasons why this night of the nights, is so exquisite. But what appears to be the most important reason is that on this glorious night Benign Allah was graciously pleased to reveal five Quranic Ayats (5 Ayats of Sura Alaq) in the year 610 AD for the first time. And after this First revelation of Al-Quran, revelation of this Holy Book continued for a long period of about 23 years till 632 AD. The whole of mankind was fortunate to get a new and complete code of life. Al-Quran for its guidance in every sphere of life through Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him).

While abstaining ourselves from food, drink and sex from dawn to dusk every day and also from all kinds of evil deeds during this holy month of Ramadan, let us hail the holy Night of Honour (Laila-tul-Qadar) and prepare ourselves fully to observe this night with due solemnity and fervour, and achieve Almighty Allah's forgiveness through night-long prayers and supplication to Him. When Benign Allah has Himself declared through the Quranic Ayat that the Night of Honour (Laila-tul-Qadar) is better than a thousand months then Allah-Gafur-ar-Rahim will surely grant us forgiveness if we are true to ourselves and earnestly offer our prayers and supplication to Him.