

Spirit of Eid-ul-Azha

Adhere to it at any cost

EID-ul-Azha is an occasion of great commemorative value to the Muslims all over the world. Much that its genesis is remembered every year with great awe and admiration its relevance to worldly affairs has been of tremendous contemporaneous significance. So, here is that quintessential blend between the spirit and the matter whose renewal we today experience and welcome afresh.

When Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) had prepared to forgo his son, Hazrat Ismail (AS) in the name of Allah Almighty it was a ram which lay slaughtered in a symbolic sacrificial redemption. Deeper down, one finds two highly meaningful messages inscribed: first of all, Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) raised the spirit of sacrifice to a new height leaving a perennial message for others to abide by the spirit of giving, especially alms to the poor, in the name of Allah. Secondly, the symbolic slaughter of a ram provides a significant insight into the emphasis being put on the spirit of sacrifice, not the form.

But what we have seen around is not quite an unalloyed manifestation of an atmosphere conducive to the expression of the true religious fervour of sacrifice but an aberrant form of business networking pandering to mutual greed, money-making, gluttony, and what have you. It is the form or the ritual of the occasion that is seemingly taking precedence over the inner substance of Eid-ul-Azha. With each passing year, the prelude to the holy occasion gets increasingly blighted by mastaans collecting toll, wayward policemen embarking on collection drives of their own and a general rise in the incidence of petty crimes. These are patently antithetical to the spirit of sacrifice that Eid-ul-Azha embodies.

Our hope is that Dhaka City Corporation will better their animal carcass or innards disposal records of last year so that the already degraded environment does not receive an added setback. In the absence of designated places for slaughtering, the denizens of their own need to choose outbacks rather than open streets for the purpose. Cleanliness is next to Godliness.

New CJ's call

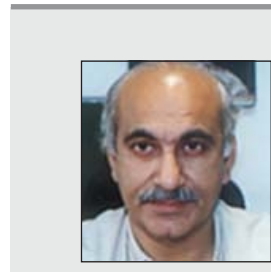
Lawyers better pay heed

UNITED We stand. That was the crux of Chief Justice Mahmudul Ameen Chowdhury's statement to the Supreme Court Bar Association. It is a sentiment we endorse fully and have done so in the past. Unfortunately, the law profession has succumbed, both over the years and in the recent past, to divisive influences especially in matters that ought to have remained distinctly non-partisan. This is a dismaying fact, abhorred in principle by members of the profession and by civil society in general. The question is, how would the precedents set so far be reversed, not just through words, but in deed? When it has come to the crunch, we have seen time and again that members of the bar have arranged themselves along political affiliations, to the detriment of the profession to which they belong. Such posturing has to be abandoned.

What is required is obvious. Lawyers must not only refrain from allowing political preferences to influence their stand on professional issues, but also they must act positively to cross their own party lines when conscience and the interests of the greater good dictate otherwise. In other words, the aim ought to be not just to stand united, in order to preclude a 'fall', but also to place national considerations above narrow party affiliations. We urge the members of the bar to keep these higher truths uppermost in their mind, particularly when beset by the forces of political polarisation.

Intrusive political influences, wielded by the executive arm of the state must take a back seat. It is imperative for the executive to avoid partisanship that encouraged polarisation among the law profession. In a democratic polity, the strength of convention must be ratified by consistent and respectful adherence to it by the executive. We have to build a meritocracy, bolstered by a non-partisan legal profession, and protected by an independent judiciary. To depart from these time-tested guidelines would be to tamper with the democratic tradition that we have struggled to install.

A tyranny of the closed mind



M.J. AKBAR

IS Mullah Omar the first Muslim to live in Afghanistan? Were there no Muslims before him? Does he have the temerity to believe that for more than a thousand years since Islam came to his country, no one was a true believer? Even Mahmud of Ghazni left Buddha alone, and Bamiyan is much closer to Ghazni than Somnath. Why has every Afghan Muslim, whether ruler or ordinary citizen, left these great Bamiyan Buddhas, a symbol of the world's heritage, untouched?

In a very real way, the existence of the fifth century Buddhas testifies to the prevailing spirit of Muslim society. The likes of Mullah Omar have also existed in the history of Muslims, but they were far fewer than some partisan historians suggest. Mullah Omar is less a Muslim and more a tyrant. The tanks that rolled against the Buddha have also rolled against the people of Afghanistan, against women in particular and men in general, creating a state that has disconnected with civilisation.

A letter in the International Herald Tribune on March bears repetition. It is written by Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan: "I was distressed to learn that the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan had ordered the destruction of all statues, including the unique giant fifth century Buddhas located in Bamiyan. Like the Pharaonic monuments of Egypt, the Babylonian treasures of Iraq, the pre-Islamic masterpieces of Persepolis in Iran, the Greco-Roman temples

and statues of the Northern and Eastern Mediterranean as well as the numerous Christian churches and monasteries, all of which lie in Muslim countries, the Bamiyan Buddhas are part of the artistic and cultural heritage of Afghanistan and of humanity as a whole. They must be preserved. Long before the Taliban seized power in Kabul, these statues stood at the crossroads of many faiths and civilisations nurtured by the Silk Road. How would Pakistan react if some cleric ordered the destruction of all the Indus Valley Gandhara Buddhas?"

Good question. The fact that the Gandhara

step across the border for the publicity photograph that would confirm their presence on the soil of the Soviet Vietnam. What Washington started Islamabad completed.

Governments that congratulate themselves privately upon their ability to use others, become remarkably dim when others use them. When the United States used the elements that later emerged as the Taliban, they comforted themselves with the illusion (if they thought about the subject at all) that these partisans would melt away, or go quietly back to their towns and villages from where the CIA had recruited them, leaving space for a government in Kabul that would

see a government of its preference in Islamabad. Big brothers have this tendency towards a mental block.

That block is clearing. Hindsight is not respectable, but it is useful, since it offers clarity. The mullahs of Afghanistan view Pakistan as a fertile neighbourhood for their plans. Their approach has been to cultivate the grassroots and distance the people from a political establishment that did not conform to their concept of an Islamic government, whether civilian or uniformed. The madrassas were given charge of one side of this pincer attack.

Islamabad was also happy to use Talibanists in its war against Indian

archy was replaced by authoritarianism in the name of socialism; when this began to weaken, civil war wreaked havoc. There are no institutions around which a challenge to the government can be constructed. This government rode in on tanks and can be rolled back only by tanks. No outside force has the stomach for another war.

The Talibanisation of Pakistan is an invitation to extreme danger; it is not a prospect which either India or the world can take in its usual stride. The social consequences are bad enough. But Pakistan is also a nuclear state, which is a temptation to the mullahs and a dreadful possibility to the rest of the world. It has been argued, successfully, that nuclear status may actually be an insurance against war. This is the MAD theory, based on the view that neither antagonist would want Mutually Assured Destruction. But to be MAD you have to be rational. Fanaticism is not rational.

Are India and Pakistan rational? We certainly claim to be. The churn of events demands a greater impetus in the peace effort. It is necessary to understand what we want, and what we can achieve. We may all want a solution, but it will be achievement enough if we can reach peace...The Indian subcontinent is entering a grim, dangerous phase. This is the eighteenth century once again, this time with a bomb in its hand.



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Buddhas are still there indicates that 'some cleric' has not been able to take over Islamabad yet. But complacency would be dangerous for Pakistan, as well as for India and the subcontinent.

It is perhaps futile to blame the fathers of the Taliban. The United States nurtured and used them in its successful war against the Soviet Union. Successive Pakistani governments, including those of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, supplied and armed them in the search for a "friendly" victor in the civil war that followed the departure of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. The sins of sons are now visiting upon the fathers. Pakistanis, when asked, point towards the time when no visiting American VIP could be persuaded to take a flight back to Washington without a photograph in the company of a few gun-and-beard warriors. Many American politicians took no more than one

eventually join the WTO, take loans from the World Bank, and be a steadfast bulwark of western interests in the Great Game against Moscow. What they got was a different story.

Pakistan has used the Taliban, and Talibanists, if one can coin a term, both to the west and the east. Kabul has historically been wary of Islamabad, protecting its national identity with an independent foreign policy. This recognised the need to maintain a non-hostile relationship with the Soviet Union and extended to a reaffirmation of traditional people-to-people as well as government-to-government ties with India. It was in Pakistan's interest to alter this spirit of independence into a culture of dependence. Pakistan was convinced that the Taliban would form the kind of government that Islamabad had always wanted. It never recognised the reverse possibility, that the Taliban might

forces in Jammu and Kashmir. Here was the perfect policy, the blind-eye, have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too ploy. If Afghan "jihadis" went over to the Valley, Islamabad could always feign a pained helplessness. But fire tends to disrespect a cage. The Pakistan government is now staring at a growing conflagration, with no extinguisher in its fire engines. Kashmir has become an effective excuse for a wider confrontation in the gameplan of the "jihad" clergy of Pakistan, who collect funds and create romance around the memory of teenage "martyrs". When the Pakistan interior minister tried to take on this lobby, and attacked what he called a false jihad he was brought to heel. He had to "clarify" that he was not fulminating against those who wanted to fight in Kashmir. (The minister's remark that there was corruption in fund-raising seemed to be less controversial.)

The Taliban strategy is not fan-

Musharraf government criticised

M J ZAHEDI

PAKISTAN'S one and only cricket-turned-politician Imran Khan has recently been in the news. Once a "supporter" (not a critic) of the present military regime, he recently took the Gen. Musharraf government to task on a number of issues. He also expressed disappointment over its overall performance. The main object of Imran's critique is the accountability process, which he said had failed to fulfill the expectations it had initially aroused. He also expressed a sense of disillusionment over the country's media many of which, he said, were government controlled. According to him, it continues to project, as it had been doing under the previous regime, only the administration's viewpoint. The people are being called upon to offer sacrifices for the country while the elite continues to enjoy its perks and privileges as before.

Imran Khan also demanded lifting of the sixteen-month-old ban on political parties; the mainstream political parties have also been demanding the same. But the government so far has not acceded to this demand although the interior minister said the other day that the government would allow a party to hold meetings if such permission was sought. Khan used a simple argument to back up his demand: Experience has taught the people to differentiate between the honest and the corrupt, he hoped that the people would make better choices in the next election whenever it is held.

How far Imran's expectation in this regard is fulfilled remains to be seen, but many would agree with the argument. Also many people feel that unless this restriction is removed from the political process, the voter response in the next elections would be far less than enthusiastic.

Imran Khan now believes that revolutionary changes in the system can be brought about only

through the exercise of the ballot. 'The Nation' thinks that some of the movement supporters may impute personal motives but there might be others who would say that experience has made the Khan a wiser politician. 'The Nation' said that the government would not be right if it pooh-poohed Khan. It must realize that it is fast losing the few pockets of support it had commanded sixteen months back. It said that some parties were veering towards the other side of the barricade, already manned by the mainstream parties. By not allowing peaceful political activity the government could only force the politicians to take to the streets in defiance of the ban on political activities. The gulf between the general public and a highly

moment of realisation nearer. What is required is that those ruling the country also draw the right conclusions from all too obvious portents on the political horizon, 'The Nation' said.

MQM leader takes up British nationality

The MQM leader Mr Altaf Husain, currently self-exiled in Britain, has taken up British nationality. But, surprisingly, not many eyebrows have been raised in Pakistan over it, although it is the only example in over a hundred and fifteen years. In 1885, A O Hume became founding president of the All-India National Congress. This is the only other example of a Briton heading a political party in the sub-continent. Only one English daily, 'The Nation',

closely guarded secret and would be highly embarrassed if it came to light. But Altaf's party men have created a first not by just making it public but they seem to have adopted a self-congratulatory attitude towards something 'that should normally be unthinkable'.

It is true that the MQM has taken a position towards the creation of Pakistan that questions the basis of the country's existence, which might well be a preparatory measure for Altaf Hussain's personal agenda, 'The Nation' continued and added, but it should be pointed out that not even the most rabid separatists openly gave up their Pakistani passports, or adopted another nationality.

The MQM's argument that Altaf is now free to travel to any part of the world does not appeal to logic, as his freedom to travel was not restricted by his holding a Pakistani passport. This kind of argument implies that Altaf views his citizenship as a shortcut to a 'flag-of-convenience' passport. His announced intention to use his new passport to travel to India and Geneva to expose the barbarities committed upon the Mohajirs, i.e. refugees, may be playing to the gallery, justifying his actions to his constituency. But it does not pull much wool over the eyes of the rest of the Pakistani people, and perhaps may disillusion many Mohajirs still committed to Pakistan. The paper also criticised the British government for granting Altaf Hussain nationality. It noted that Mr Altaf Hussain has no known source of livelihood although it denied the same privilege to Muhammad Al-Fayed and J P Hinduja, both billionaire international businessmen.

It remains to be seen whether India relaxes for Altaf Hussain stringent visa restrictions it applies to those of Pakistani origin, even if they hold a second nationality. "There certainly seem to be more than meets the eye in this episode," concluded 'The Nation'

LETTER FROM KARACHI

There is no shortcut to political maturity, 'The Nation' said, but one can always hope that the punishment the parties have received for being bad learners might bring the moment of realisation nearer. What is required is that those ruling the country also draw the right conclusions from all too obvious portents on the political horizon, 'The Nation' said.

prestigious institution would be unfortunate and its continuation could be disastrous, the paper thought. The new chief of the PML(N) has asked the military government to allow the political parties to operate and learn from their mistakes, although many people believe that the political parties have taken too long to learn from their mistakes and some of the blunders committed by them have proved to be too costly.

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has editorially commented on it. One major difference between Hume and Hussain, the paper noted, is that the former betrayed his imperialist mother country for the cause of the downtrodden masses of the colony while the latter has gone into exile from his motherland (or should one say, abandoned his eastern motherland for the greater comforts of a much more developed and western country). The paper also commented that Altaf Hussain is not the first Pakistani to have done so and it cannot be said for certain that he is the first parry leader to have done so, but if any others have, they keep it a

OPINION

Cultural 'invasion' by Hindi films

SONIA KRISTY

THERE has been quite a furor over a decision by Ekushey TV to air two Hindi feature films on the third and fourth nights after Eid day. ETV, which claims to be the channel of the 21st century, took the decision to make their Eid programming attractive and probably to keep pace with changing times. But no sooner had this decision been announced than it attracted the attention of ordinary people, as well as intellectuals. Ordinary people like myself were intrigued by a newspaper advertisement in which intellectuals raised serious objections. They stated that by airing Hindi commercial movies Ekushey would be promoting a Hindi cultural 'invasion' of the country. Columns were written on the issue by eminent sci-fi writer Muhammad Jafar Iqbal, and another by well-known director Saidul Anam Tutul. Ultimately, in the face of this objection, Ekushey TV had to withdraw its decision.

What an absurd objection by our intellectuals! In today's world of free culture, is there anything called an "invasion"? We regularly air English movies and serials on our TV channels. Are these invasions too? Or is it just Hindi culture that we are dead against?

If we take the last statement to be the correct one, then we are being hypocritical and suffering from a serious inferiority complex. Hindi culture, especially Hindi movies, have emerged immensely in the past few years and are being acclaimed as international culture. This is proven when we see Hindi Movies (commercial) acquiring places in the US and UK top ten charts. But what about our own movies? I'm sorry to say that the way our movies are being made, forget about us taking a place in the international movie charts, we cannot even attract the

general audience of our own country. I'm sure the intellectuals would agree with me in this respect.

However, the intellectuals do not oppose the airing of vulgar and violent Bengali movies on our TV channels. Is it just because they are products of our own culture? I wonder who would be insane enough to term Bangladeshi commercial movies as representative of our own culture.

As for the so-called Hindi cultural invasion, hasn't Hindi culture already invaded our country? During these days of satellite television, Hindi programmes have entered our living rooms and have become a part of our lives, whether we admit this or not. From rickshaw-pullers to students of English medium schools, everyone keeps abreast of newly released Hindi movies, the latest heartthrob, popular gossip and the life-style of Hindi movie personalities. And if our intellectuals answer honestly, they'll have to admit that Hindi culture has invaded their lives as well - if not their own but surely their offspring's lives. If they aren't convinced, I would request them to ask their children about this.

Ironically, at a recent international film festival in Dhaka, inaugurated by our state minister for culture and sports and attended by intellectuals, the Hindi movie, 'Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge' supposed to be aired on ETV during Eid, was screened. Interestingly, nobody objected. It was claimed that such film festivals would promote a sane culture in our country and improve relations between neighbouring countries.

We cannot keep on living in a cocoon and shut ourselves from the rest of the world. We have to accept the challenge of the day and keep pace with the times. We have to improve our own culture to attract people, not discourage others. Only then can we stop the so-called cultural 'invasion'.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

Learning to love water

According to the United Nations, 21st century wars will be fought over water, a basic necessity of life that is dwindling faster than it can be replenished on this earth. Worldwide, 1.3 billion people experience "water stress" because they live with water shortages. By 2025, predicts the UN, two out of three people on earth will live in water-stressed conditions.

We need to learn to appreciate this precious resource and we need to teach our children to treasure every drop of it. These are the reasons that drive the "Water for Life" campaign that the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) Malaysia has been running for the past three years. WWF is organising a water carnival to raise funds for its efforts to educate the public on the need to conserve and manage water. The carnival will take place between 8am and 5pm on April 8 at Lake Titivangsa, Kuala Lumpur. If readers in Bangladesh are interested, please visit the website <http://www.wwfmalaysia.org>

Teoh Teik Hoong

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Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia

Congratulations PM

I want to congratulate our Prime Minister for taking the responsibility of bearing the educational expenses of the orphan boy Mamun, a student of the High Secondary Certificate of Juntab Ali College of Comilla. It is a noble step by the prime minister. We know that it is quite impossible for her to

take the liability of all such students. But definitely, such a high-minded work is a great example. I also came to know from The Daily Star (February 15) that Dhaka University is going to establish relations with Omani higher educational institutions. As a student of Dhaka University, I want to praise the concerned authority. I would like to draw the attention of our prime minister in this regard. I think if she tries her best to create similar opportunities for students we would be very grateful. As the holder of various university degrees, I believe she will be able to understand our necessities. If she would give us the opportunity to establish ourselves as we desire, we would remember her and certainly that will be a milestone of fulfilling the dream of our Father of Nation.

Fazle Rabbi Swajan

University of Dhaka.

Anti-regime activities

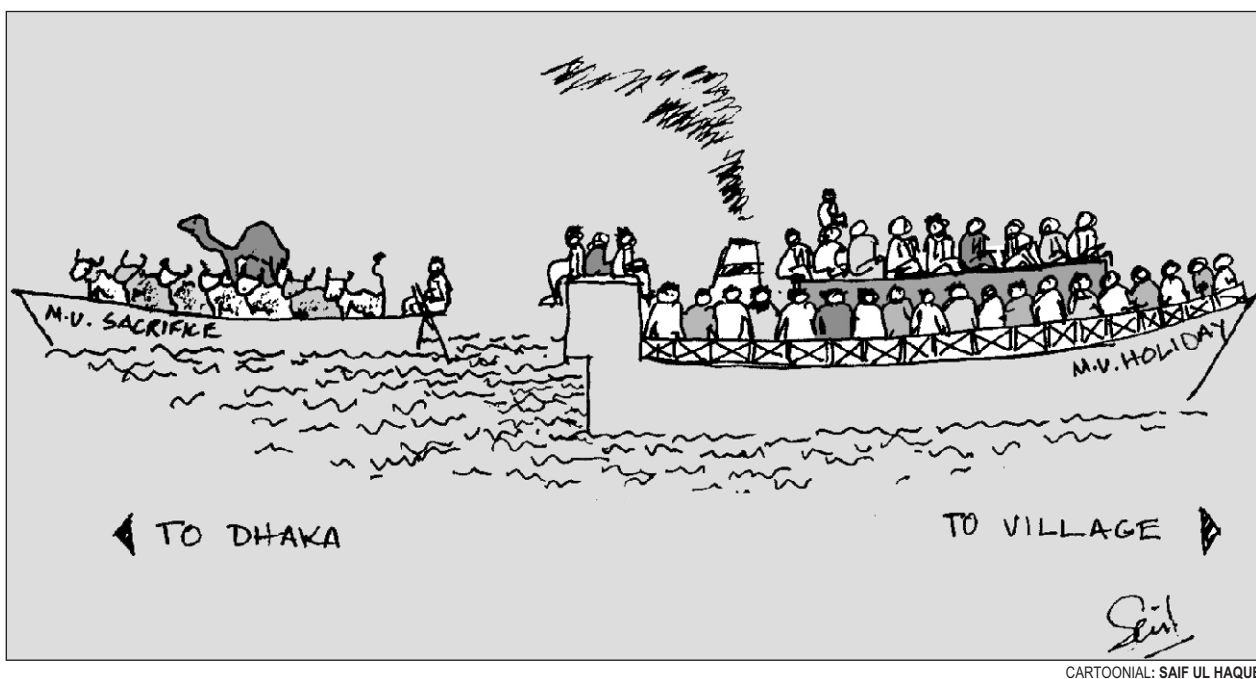
The timing of the kidnapping of the foreign consultants in CHT cannot be ignored. It came one day before the siege of the Secretariat in Dhaka by the opposition alliance. Are these activities against the regime or against the country and the people? The party in power will never own up to the former assumption, and bank on conspiracy theories. The railway sabotage was a shocking reminder that the party's opponents are well prepared with planned programmes to discredit the regime. It is not so easy to establish democracy in a backward state.

The involvement of innocent foreigners as hostages justifies the gravity of the

CARTOONIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive cartoons, colour or black and white, with relevant information. We cannot return original material.

Eid Traffic



TO DHAKA

TO VILLAGE

CARTOONIAL: SAIF UL HAQUE

volatile political situation prevailing in the country, which the politicians have failed to solve so far, in spite of tall talks. The situation may reach critical proportions if some harm happens to the foreigners.

The ruling party has to do further heart-searching of its declining public image, and squarely face the realities. It is not as popular as it appears from its own self-projection. This party is now facing the greatest test of its existence; and the public are aware of it.

ABD

Dhaka.

Reduce the gap

Professor Shamsud Mortuza's analysis "Let arguments be the only weapons" (February 17) on the basic issue confronting the nation on secularism on the one side and a religious bias on the other, is welcome. Suppression and oppression are not the solutions. The communication gap has to be reduced. Society is suffering acutely from different types of polarisation, - political, religious, and cultural - and many feel that political lobbies are trying to monopolize the outcome. This is not fair. The issue is beyond the political arena. Hard-line, soft-line, or diplomatic stance, the issue should not be kept pending - as inflammable material is involved. Bangladesh has accumulated a lot of mental garbage in three decades. The cases have to be disposed off, in the public interest. Sometimes waiting is not a solution. After a national debate, political extremism should be made an election issue.

ABD

Dhaka

Newspaper holidays

We cannot think of modern life without getting the newspaper for even a single day. In developed countries newspapers are published twice in a day, morning and evening. But what about our country? During last Eid, from December 27 to 30 (Eid holidays) the nation had to go without any newspaper. This would be unthinkable in the developed world. Once the prime minister also expressed her dismay over the situation. Publishers of newspapers should find a way to bring readers their newspaper: the whole year round, irrespective of public holidays. Would the authorities concerned kindly give this matter top priority in the greater interest of the public?

SM Shoriful Huq

Toot Parra, Khulna.

Deer for sale

It is simply abhorrent to learn from your news report (March 4) that anyone would report of selling the rare spotted deer for sacrifice during Eid! As a nation, we have become callous and selfish so much so that we have forgotten the beauty and splendour of our natural habitat and the creatures who have given this land its serenity and richness.

I would sincerely hope that those responsible are severely punished!

Nature lover

Dhaka