

The message of Eid-ul-Azha

Let the spirit of sacrifice embellish our lives

THE second largest festival of the Muslim world with sacrifice in the name of Allah Rabbul Alamin as its core message falls due only two days away. The day will commemorate with great poignance and transcendental significance the legendary act of supreme sacrifice that Hazrat Ibrahim Alaisalam had prepared himself to perform on his son Hazrat Ismail (RA) in supplication before the Almighty. It is said that his bracing himself to do so was proof enough of his loyalty to Allah so that what he saw slaughtered in the end was not his beloved son but a ram instead.

The essential message being driven home here is the symbolism of sacrifice based on the pristine intent to put no limit on the sacrifice one can make for the sake of Allah Rabbul Alamin. This actually means parting with something valuable for the sake of humankind, starting with fellow-beings in the community and then reaching out to the broader society. The emphasis is surely not on glutony; for, if it were so, the injunction that two-thirds of the meat should be distributed outside the immediate household wouldn't have been there.

It is basically the spirit of sacrifice that has been underscored in a forceful way. And sacrifice can come in so many different ways; it can find expression through the spirit of mutual tolerance and accommodation of each other's points of view which forms the rock-bed of live-and-let-live philosophy of immense practical and spiritual value as well. If self-righteous ego-trips are eschewed for the greater good of the people and the country that will constitute a precious sacrifice made under the currently demanding circumstances.

If the Muslim countries around the globe share their collective wealth for the sake of alleviating poverty in the less fortunate countries of the Ummah it would make robust economic sense topped off by a spiritual sacrifice of high merit. Furthermore, the Muslim world remains the least advanced in spite of their huge wealth and manpower base not merely because of disunity in their ranks but also because of their lack of modern scientific temper. Muslims throughout the world on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha should take a vow to shake off the vestigial remnants of prejudices and forge ahead in the hitherto neglected field of science and technology.

Alongside such ennobling and liberating thoughts that pervade our minds today we urge the fellow Muslims who are preparing to perform *Korbani* and the municipal authorities to make sure the environment is kept clean and hygienic by a prompt disposal of animal carcasses and innards.

Eid Mubarak to our readers and patrons.

Ekushey for celebration and contemplation

Our achievements are tempered by our failures

EKUSHEY this year has special significance and not only because today is its fiftieth anniversary but also because its time for stock taking. It's not just linguistic and cultural achievements that define this moment of the birth of our consciousness as a nation but economic and political aspirations as well. There are certain achievements that we can be proud of and certain failures that drown us in disappointment. Both describe us.

The establishment of Bangla as one of the official languages of Pakistan, achieved before 1971 is a permanent gain and the platform of the national language as a means of conducting official business is a justifiably proud trophy.

Language and culture has also been better rooted in the social soil and meaningful products are more than ever before. Pride has also translated itself into the international arena. Ekushey has become the International Mother Language day, a permanent contribution to global culture in a especially necessary field.

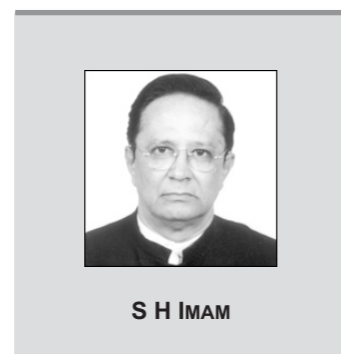
And of course, we have Bangladesh itself as the ultimate achievement of what began as a militant movement on the streets of Dhaka. Ekushey was clearly the spark of what we are today.

But there is an obvious need to look closer and not mask our failures with the light of our genuine achievements. For one, universal literacy not to speak of education is as far a distant dream as it was years before. It seems that the original spirit of cultural equality has been compromised. As the number of the education denied increase so does the size of the failure.

Ekushey is also about social equality of all and we have not yet reached there. The spirit of communalism still seems to exert its malignant influence and prevents full expression as a nation. Its corrosive nature seems to go more unchallenged than expected and that is disturbing. It's against what Ekushey was and what it achieved. Even its remnants are signs of unfulfilled victories.

But we have not achieved economic well being either. With more than 50% people below the poverty line and the rest barely surviving, this is a miserable state of being and causes us shame. It must go beyond development programming and become the dominant goal of Ekushey. Otherwise the spirit and the sacrifice are both rendered meaningless.

Mother Language Day obligations



S H IMAM

BA NGLADESH was just born then. With fists gone up in jubilation and traces of birth-pang in evidence, there was something about the idiom the people spoke that struck as different. It warbled with more native intonation in a variety of ways than had been associated with Bangla hitherto spoken in Dacca, the just liberated provincial capital of the then East Pakistan.

It was 20 years since the Language Movement. The language like a caged pigeon just set free was flapping away into sprightly flights.

So, there was a mellifluous spurt in the use of all kinds of local dialects, quite distinct from the smatterings one had heard beforehand. This was observed not merely in the privacy of households or intimacy of social gatherings alone, but also in the formal and official circles of rendezvous, contact and discourse. A cross-dialect idiom emerged and its fusion took place with the colloquial language which has been the exclusive preserve of any capital city to shape

since the Fort William College days. One would have thought linguists had a job on hand, not of rigorous research but of delightful interpretation. Some of them might well have gone about it; yet there is nothing to our knowledge that we can readily draw on for the sake of some self-enlightenment on a sort of new trend that had set in at the birth of Bangladesh. However, we stand corrected, and should anyone

in the likeness of the Roget's Thesaurus. Notably, this received acclaim in West Bengal including that of Satyajit Ray himself. Nevertheless, so much remains to be done in the domain of science and technology education through suitable adaptation of words from foreign languages, not just English to be sure, into the Bangla glossary compendium.

Besides, the expression of high

intellectuality through the seminars and symposia being somewhat exclusively reliant on English, Bangla is denied opportunity there to grow more useful through creative fine-tuning in modernist settings.

After the Language Movement culminating in the birth of Bangladesh marked our close bonding with the common people in no unmistakable terms, expectations naturally

filled the air for jump-starting the mass literacy drive based on Bangla. What we have got is disappointment three decades since independence. If we minus the literacy rate we had had at the time of our break-up with Pakistan, the spread of literacy achieved in free Bangladesh cannot but read uninspiring. And should one take into account the decreasing population growth rate the cause for despair

ment obligated us to spreading literacy in the country, the compulsion on us is even greater to do so following our attainment of the International Mother Language Day status.

Our principal inheritance from the Language Movement is secularism that proved to be the moving force for our Liberation Struggle. And a secularist outlook on life, not quite devoid of our ethos, but as distinguished from the fundamentalist streak one observes in the society, sits in well with the constructive space in the present-day world.

The UNESCO's historic recognition of 21st February as the International Mother Language Day implies both a global and a domestic message. Internationally, many mother tongues, around which revolve different life-styles and cultures of various aboriginal and ethnic minorities, are dying out. The UNESCO by singling out the glorious struggle for establishing our right to Bangla language for the rare honour is putting out a robust message for the protection of the mother tongues that seemed set on an extinction course. By the same token, Bangladesh for its part has to protect and promote the different aborigine languages by way of invigorating the whole of the country's culture.

The issue of Bangla's further development need neither be confused with the politics of the day nor with the unquestionable efficacy of English as the second language into this new millennium.

SH Imam is Associate Editor of The Daily Star.

JUST ANOTHER VIEW

If we minus the literacy rate we had had at the time of our break-up with Pakistan, the spread of literacy achieved in free Bangladesh cannot but read uninspiring. And should one take into account the decreasing population growth rate the cause for despair would be greater.

volunteer to shed new light on the subject, he or she will be most welcome.

Alongside this trend, however, and as something of a contrast, one noticed a certain stiffening of the official Bangla language – thanks to the pedantic loyalty to the *Prakrit* root-words that would initially shrink the avenue for adaptation, something of a predisposition to difficult Bangla we have not quite been able to shake off. Afterwards, however, in all fairness to individual efforts at excellence, the intelligibility of English words translated into Bangla improved a good deal downstream, especially since the publication of *Jathasabda* by Justice Habibur Rahman, former chief advisor of a caretaker government,



FILE PHOTO STAR

Homage to language martyrs, they are in our hearts.

would be greater.

Need we go into the polemics of what constitute literacy? The stark reality is nearly two-thirds of our people remain unlettered, functional literacy being a far cry. Does it not deal a body-blow to the concept of bottom-up participatory democracy or development process?

By hindsight, the rapport that had developed with the people under the strenuous passage through the challenging times diminished down the road. The elitist flair bounced back to its former rhythm as the asymmetrical allocations between different tiers of education proved the point. Otherwise how does one explain the "inexplicability" of such a poor literacy attainment on the level of masses?

If the fruits of Language Move-

Bangladesh as LDC: To be or not to be

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

LEAST Developed Countries (LDCs), as a sub-strata within the developing nations, was first categorised by the United Nations in 1971. Identification of such a group originated from a shared concern of the global community about development prospects of the most underdeveloped of countries that belonged to the developing world. Countries in the group of LDCs, currently numbering 49 subsequent to the recent inclusion of Senegal, were perceived to be faced with structural weaknesses which could be overcome only with special and targeted effort on the part of the developed world. It was recognised that these countries required adequate technical and financial support from the international community if they were to overcome their backwardness, structural weaknesses and formidable supply-side bottlenecks.

As mandated by the UN, LDCs were to be accorded special treatment in the various UN initiatives and they were to be favourably treated in the allocation of resources under the various UN cooperation programmes, by various UN agencies and the development partners of the LDCs. More specifically they were to be provided assistance in the area of *development finance* and in the *multilateral trade framework*.

The UN periodically updates the list of LDCs. In its latest triennial review of the list of Least Developed Countries in 2000, the *Economic and Social Council of the United Nations* used the following three criteria for determining the new list, as proposed by the *Committee for Development Policy*:

- a **low-income criterion**, based on a three-year average estimate of the gross domestic product per capita (under \$900 for inclusion, above \$1,035 for graduation);
- a **human resource weakness criterion**, involving a composite

Augmented Physical Quality of Life Index (APQLI) based on indicators of: (a) nutrition; (b) health; (c) education; and (d) adult literacy; and

- an **economic vulnerability criterion**, involving a composite *Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI)* based on indicators of (a) the instability of agricultural production; (b) the instability of exports of goods and services; (c) the economic importance of non-traditional activities (share of manufacturing and modern services in GDP); (d) merchandise export concentration; and (e) the handicap of economic smallness (as measured through the

fora, the LDCs have been waging a relentless fight for greater financial and technical assistance from, and special and differential treatment by the developed countries. The need for reinforcing this struggle became ever more urgent in the context of the ongoing process of globalisation. There is a growing concern to the effect that opportunities stemming from globalisation have continued to remain *unrealised* and *illusory*, whilst the risks have become *real* and *threatening*. Bangladesh, as a leading country in the group of LDCs, has been at the forefront of the fight to make globalisation work for the LDCs and playing a proactive role in a number of important global platforms and

resources.

Secondly, in organisations such as the WTO there are specific provisions which provide *special and differential* (S&D) treatment to the LDCs in the form of deferred implementation of Agreements, preferential market access treatment and technical assistance commitments. LDCs stand to gain substantially from these. Flexibility accorded to LDCs in the TRIPS Agreement of the WTO (which may create very good opportunities for pharmaceutical industries in Bangladesh) is an example.

Thirdly, as member of the LDC group, countries receive preferential treatment under GSPs which are specifically targeted to the

ingly, her interest in being considered as an LDC is pretty obvious. It may be recalled here that because of the potential benefit, some time back, no less a country than China wanted to be considered as an LDC in the WTO, a claim that was turned down by the WTO for obvious reasons.

Sixthly, implementation of the decisions of the third UN Conference on LDCs held in Brussels in May, 2001 is still very much on the agenda. LDCs will stand to gain much from any concrete initiative in terms of implementing the *Plan of Action* adopted by the LDC III.

Seventhly, in regional free trade agreements or preferential trading agreements, Bangladesh is claim-

that a country would or not like to be considered as an LDC. The logic of economic development will, of itself, resolve this dichotomy. The task at hand is to expedite our graduation by making the best use of all the opportunities that are available in an increasingly competitive global trade and aid environment.

It should also be noted here that there are strong lobbies in the developed countries which would like to see Bangladesh *not being* a member of the group of LDCs. This is because, Bangladesh's exclusion from the group of LDCs makes it rather easy for the developed countries to favourably respond to the demand for global preferential market access including zero-tariff access for exports from LDCs including exports of RMG products. With the best-positioned country, capable of reaping the maximum benefit from such an initiative, remaining outside the ambit of the LDC, the potential cost of any such initiative for the developed countries will be rather insubstantial. Hence powerful lobbies, including the apparels and textile lobby in the USA, will be happy to see Bangladesh considered as a non-LDC developing country.

The issue, thus, is whether it is in Bangladesh's interest to fall into a trap whereby she either voluntarily withdraws from the group of LDCs, or is pushed out of the group by vested interests in developed countries. Evidently, distancing herself from the group of LDCs is not in Bangladesh's greater national interest. On the contrary, Bangladesh's effort should be directed in pursuing a proactive agenda in the WTO and other global fora towards greater market access, effective technical assistance and more trade capacity enhancing aid. Continuing membership in the group of the LDCs is in Bangladesh's national interest.

Dr Mustafizur Rahman is Professor, Dhaka University and Research Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue

It does us no credit to belong to the group of LDCs. Our national effort must be geared towards overcoming our economic weaknesses and get into the trajectory of higher growth....The task at hand is to expedite our graduation by making the best use of all the opportunities that are available in an increasingly competitive global trade and aid environment.

population in logarithm).

In the 2000 review of the list, it was stipulated that a country qualified to be added to the list if it met the above three criteria and did not have a population greater than 75 million. Application of this rule resulted in the inclusion of Senegal in recent times, as was mentioned above.

It is true that over the last three decades not much has been achieved in terms of changing the fortunes of the LDCs. Of the 25 countries listed in 1971, only one, Botswana was able to graduate from the group of LDCs (the sad part of this is that this lone 'success story' is now experiencing an epidemic of AIDS which threatens about a-third of her adult population). In the mean time another 25 countries have joined the group. Evidently, the experience of LDCs has been rather depressing, discouraging, and disappointing. There should be no illusion about that.

On the other hand, over these past years, in various platforms and

organisations in championing and pushing forward the agenda of the LDCs. Her role in the third UN Conference on the LDCs and in the WTO in support of the LDC cause is well known, duly recognised and has been well appreciated. Issues such as preferential market access, technical assistance, transfer of technology, debt-write offs and trade capacity enhancing aid continue to receive prominence in various global fora often because the LDCs such as Bangladesh are driving force behind those agendas. As a group which comprises almost fifty countries, the LDCs represent a formidable force to be reckoned with.

The benefits originating from membership in the group of LDCs are several.

Firstly, there is a global consensus that in major initiatives of the UN such as financing for development, debt write-offs, aid etc., the interest of the LDCs be given priority attention and consideration. This creates a *necessary condition* to pursue LDC interest in allocation of

LDCs. EU's *Everything but Arms Proposal* (EU-EBA) which provides quota-free, zero tariff access for all products from the LDCs (excepting arms) and the recent revised GSP scheme of Japan providing zero-tariff access to many products including apparels/textile products from the LDCs are some important examples in this regard.

Fourthly, as is known, global zero-tariff access for exports from LDCs is very much on the agenda of the WTO. If granted, countries such as Bangladesh stand to gain substantially from such preferential access since tariffs on many of her exports in the developed country markets continue to remain at relatively high levels.

Fifthly, it is not to be forgotten that amongst the LDCs Bangladesh is perhaps the best positioned country in terms of the ability to access the incremental benefits accruing from any initiative favouring the LDCs. This is because of her relatively strong supply side capacities and proven competitive strength in a number of exportables. Accord-

ing (as in the context of SAPTA) and can claim preferential treatment as an LDC (e.g. in terms of *fast track* approach providing zero-tariff access to LDC members).

Eighthly, even if Bangladesh stays away from the group of LDCs, obviously she will not be in a position to discontinue with the current practice of seeking support from the international community. In the context of this necessity, there is no valid reason why she should not take the advantage of the incremental opportunities exclusively meant for the LDCs.

As a nation, it does us no credit to belong to the group of LDCs. Our national effort must be geared towards overcoming our economic weaknesses and get into the trajectory of higher growth. However, as was pointed out above, the group of LDCs is identified on the basis of *three concrete criteria*. If a country can overcome the attendant vulnerabilities she will be recognised to have graduated from the status of LDCs. There is no point in simply making a *declaration* to the effect

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

Our next Eid prayer

Soon we are going to celebrate Eid-ul-Azha. In our different religious congregations we raise our hands to pray to Allah, usually for the peace and wellbeing of our nation and country as well as Muslim Ummah if not for the whole human beings both in this life and in the after world.

It's very much evident from the present miserable condition of our country as well as nation that Allah has not been granting our prayers. What has been wrong with us that our prayers are not being granted by the All Mighty? Why Allah does not bestow His grace on our nation and the country? We know that Allah the most merciful does not grant prayers of the insincere, dishonest and greedy people, no matter how much they cry in their prayers. Is it for the wrong imbedded deep in our hearts that Allah ignores our prayers? If that is so, and it seems to be so, then onward to our next Eid congregation, let us pray with new words, discarding the old ones, that Allah may have compassion on us.

Instead of praying for the peace and prosperity of our nation and the country, let us pray, in the coming Eid congregation, to Allah with the words, such as: "O Allah, please make those political leaders, bureaucrats and government



Politics and prayer

employees scrupulous who are not so. Please fill our hearts with deep shame whenever we seek for bribes while discharging official duties. Please make our political leaders feel for the sufferings of the general mass. Please give us all the strength that we do not give in to enticements, as strong as those may be, to betray our national interests while signing contracts with the foreign governments and companies. O Allah, please make our businessmen honest and sincere that they desist themselves from adulterating foodstuffs, medicines and goods. Please make our professionals sincere to their duties and responsibilities. O Allah, please depoliticise those university teachers who are too obsessed with party politics. Please save our students

from the clutches of the so-called political cadres that they can continue their study in peace and without any session jams. Please rescue those intellectuals who are pursuing the path of petty personal interests ignoring the interests of the nation. Please give us the mentality that we can at least hate, instead of glorifying, the unscrupulous and immoral people of our society. O Allah, Please help us that we can uphold our morality, honesty and sincerity which have so mercilessly been down-trodden by us in this beautiful and fertile country."

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Costly browsing: Back to the '90s

The government decisions to impose high fees on the ISPs and to meter telephone calls came as a surprise to me. How can a democratically elected government take up such an anti-people and anti-development measures? The previous government's decision to end VSAT monopoly started an Internet boom across the country. Browsing became cheaper and thousands of educated youths started using it to their benefit. Now, those hasty decisions will act as a big blow to these Internet browsers

across the country and our progress towards the development of IT will be set back by ten years to say the least. We will be going back to the '90s when the Internet browsing was considered a luxury.

It seems that the government is maintaining a double standard as far as IT is concerned. On the one hand, the PM and the ministers are churning out rhetoric on the development of IT and on the other hand, they are trying to make IT out of bounds for common people. The earlier the government realises its mistake the better it will be for their popularity and for the future of this country.

Ahmed Zamil
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Your misleading TV Guide

In the Daily Star TV Guide of 18 February, the timing of the film "Autumn in New York" was given 10.00 pm. However, it was shown at 8.15 pm. My wife is a Richard Gere fan and she was eagerly waiting to see the movie. But due to your misleading TV guide she missed it. This is not the first time you have misled us with wrong timing. We starve for good movies. Therefore, I request you to show the correct timing so that we get an opportunity

to see a good movie like "Autumn in NY".

Sharifuzzaman Choudhury
Uttara, Dhaka

"Valentines Day and Islam"

I wish to respond to the opinion of Mr Naveed Iqbal regarding Valentine's Day and Islam. I wonder from where he got his ideas on Valentines Day.

Culturally and on Islamic point of view this day has no value. It evolved from western culture as on this day a Saint named Valentine was killed.

I would like to remind Mr Naveed Iqbal that Islam strongly forbids premarital relationships between men and women. From my experience this day mostly gets celebrated among the unmarried couples, thus encouraging the young people to engage in such relationships. Such relationships cannot be encouraged because it is bound to tempt people to get involved in premarital sex.

Here in USA, I see teenagers becoming parents and blaming each other all in the name of love. Just imagine growing up with a 17-year-old dad!

Love is a divine thing and it is definitely a blessing but why should one celebrate love on only one day

of the year? I thought that love is something you nurture everyday and enjoy its blessings 365 days of the year.

Mr Iqbal is trying to justify the celebration of this day. That is what is wrong with the young generation of our country. They always pick up the negative values of the western culture but never the good ones.

Sharmin Zaman
USA

About Tagore songs

This is in response to a number of letters published in your esteemed daily expressing love for Tagore and his songs. After more than a hundred years the beauty and attraction of Tagore songs remained strong among the millions of its fans around the world. I remember when Debabrata Biswas started singing Tagore songs he was criticised by many for his unique style of singing. But time has proved that he did not change anything rather he made Tagore songs more popular. The genius of Tagore is so unique that there is no place for modification there. His was a life where truth was the colour, humanity was the theme and love was the voice. His songs have crossed the barrier of time and space. During our fight against the Pakistani rule, Tagore was a great

source of inspiration. The Bengali culture has been greatly enriched by Tagore. In fact it is he who brought honour and recognition to Bengali language and culture.

It is heartening to see that in this age of globalisation when the human soul is on sale for anything which gives us only sensual pleasure, there are so many of your correspondents who still loves and takes care of Tagore songs. Our destiny lies there where we have the power to embrace the eternity and Ravindranath Tagore was the proponent of that spirit. His greatness shines more brighter when he says "*Mor naam aie boley khanto hok, Ami tomaderie lok*".

Akbar Hussain
Toronto, Canada

"Islami Bank maintaining interest system indirectly"

I have read Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd.'s "clarification" on the above comments of the Finance Minister Mr Saifur Rahman. They have chosen to make a clarification rather than refute the allegation.

This Bank started investment banking in 1983 and never published their modes in newspapers and also did not disclose what sort of permission they got for doing

Islamic banking. There was no law in existence at that time to do banking business other than at interest and Bangladesh Bank could not have legally permitted interest-free and profit and loss sharing banking business.

The Bank has tried to mislead people by giving an impression that laws about Islamic banking were enacted by Jatiya Sangshad by amending Banking Company Act before they started business in March 1983. The less said is better about Shariah Council. This is a pocket organisation and sooner the government constitutes a National Shariah Council the better for the country. Moreover an investigation about the activities of all Shariah based banking business should be made. There should also be comprehensive law defining what Islamic banking is, the definitions of various modes, what sort of fees/commissions the banks should charge and whether the participatory banking with bank's director in the Board be at all come within the purview of Artha Rin Ain.

Ahmed
Dhaka