

75th birthday anniversary of H M King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand



DURING the past more than half century the world has witnessed tremendous changes in science, technology, economics, society and environment. Thailand itself has gone through unprecedented changes to its way of life, both good and bad. Throughout this turbulent period, the Thai people have had one person in whom they were able to place their trust, love and respect: His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, the great sovereign of the Thai nation.

Not only has he weathered the changes alongside his subjects during the period, but His Majesty the King has also brought prosperity to the country and happiness to the people, no matter where they live or how they earn their living.

Thailand is indeed fortunate that its reigning monarch is fully committed to developing his country, with the aim of improving the people's livelihood and well-being. His Majesty is not required by tradition nor by law to take such a heavy burden upon himself. He considers it his duty to the nation.

In April 1959, Their Majesties the King and Queen began making private visits to the people in areas around the Summer Palace in Prachuab Khiri Khan Province, south-west of Bangkok while in residence during the hot season. Shocked by the hard condition they saw, Their Majesties decided to help. True to their characters as real development workers and leaders, innumerable royal projects were initiated to provide solutions to long-running problems in all parts of the country. The process has been accelerated with the establishment of royal residences in the north, north-east and the south, which became the private headquarters for development projects closely supervised by Their Majesties themselves. Each year The King and Queen spend up to eight months in the provinces to follow up their projects.

From his continuous visits to all areas of the country in the years that followed, His Majesty realized that the deterioration of natural resources has become a national problem. He recognized the urgent need to solve the grave problems faced by farmers of soil degradation and the shortage of agricultural land, which he proposed to do through two main methods -- water and soil conservation, and land redistribution and reform, endeavouring to create models for farmers to follow, so that they can implement each project by themselves.

The King's great ingenuity and perception has created such worthy programs as the Royal Rain-making Project, seeding rain clouds to ease drought and increase water in the river basin for electricity generation and agriculture, the "New Theory" on land management and development of small water sources as integrated and full-cycle agriculture projects; and the Chai Pattana Aerator for waste water treatment, patented under His Majesty the King's name in Thailand and internationally, the first such invention by a monarch.

In his endeavours, the King made clear to all concerned that his ultimate aim in agricultural development is farmers' self-sufficiency in food items, such as rice, vegetables, fruits, and livestock, diversification of income sources, so that farmers are not reliant on cash crops alone. On the other hand, natural resources and environmental conservation has to be conducted at the same time. The principles of self-reliance, invention and economical living area personal traits that His Majesty the King has inherited from his beloved mother, Her Royal Highness the late Princess Mother.

His Majesty encourages the reduction of expenditure or production costs in agriculture, through the harnessing and full utilization of natural resources. He promotes the use of cows and buffaloes in place of machinery, the use of crop rotation systems for soil improvement, the use of organic fertilizers and natural substances in improving productivity as well as pest and insect eradication, the production of bio-gas, and the use of natural products to earn extra income for the people. Such an inventory is collectively known as sustainable agriculture.

His Majesty's ideas in agricultural development have been implemented in earnest and on a wide-scale, from royally-initiated projects royal projects and projects under the royal patronage to project under the jurisdiction of various ministries and government agencies, and in recent times, royally-initiated projects in the neighbouring Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Over the period, His Majesty the King has dedicated himself to relieving the hardship and poverty of the nation's farmers. Each and every day has been a working day for His Majesty, no matter where he stays, at Chitralada Villa in Bangkok or at the various provincial palaces. For him, the main tasks has always been the happiness and well-being of the people.

A qualified engineer, His Majesty has also excelled many other fields as well. For example, his both an accomplished photographer and artist of repute. As a sportsman, he is a master sailor who won a gold medal in the 1969 Southeast Asian Games. He is also a superb musician who has played the clarinet with some of the world's best musicians. Besides playing numerous musical instruments, His Majesty is furthermore a renown composer with more than 40 compositions to his credit. Most of all, the King has excelled in raising the quality of life of his people from all walks of life, bring hope where there was once despair. For giving so much of himself to help the nation he was bestowed with the title "The Great".

The date, December 5th, is therefore considered the most auspicious day on the calendar of events in Thailand, being the birthday of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of the Chakri Dynasty, the revered and beloved monarch of the Thai nation. All Thais are joined together as one: "Together, we can show our gratitude for all that His Majesty has done for the country and the people. Together, let us do good for our Great King."

selected disks with short intervals and with guests and friends popping in and out it was a din of a sort in a house that was known for quiet homeliness. The whole locality thrilled in a fit of joy and fulfillment and for me it was the world of uninterrupted festivity.

In the afternoon, after lunch and a short respite, my parents would go out to visit some of their close contemporaries but this did not happen on all Eid days. Whenever it happened we would quickly grab the rare opportunity of their being away from home. It would be a loud and unbridled cacophony within four walls as we played and sang and hollered in total freedom. Then, in a flick, it went all quiet at the creaking of the front gate signaling our parents' arrival. Well, it was Eid day and we knew our parents would have to be forgiving. The late evening would generally be sluggish though someone might step in anytime to exchange greetings but things were cooling off by then. As the sun hid itself behind the horizon and darkness began to engulf the shimmering land below, we would be taken by pinches of grief as the day would soon be on wings to disappear beyond the stars leaving us far behind. Even our parents seemed to be good sympathisers with our sentiment and consoled us saying there would be many more Eid days in our life.

These are like tales from the forgotten days but today even when I am retired from active life with a heart behaving erratic, I get the feel of the same excitement and joy when Eid knocks at my door. Our children from beyond the seven seas cannot participate but they want us to celebrate the occasion in the manner we did when we all lived under the warmth of the same roof. Their lonely parents do not fail them. We get busy buying things and preparing plans for the day as we always did during the crisp days of our childhood and youth. The day dawns and as I look round I find it is the same smiling faces everywhere, the same blaze of colours, the same noise and fun. Nothing has changed really. We are happy to be a part of the great treat that lives on.

Eid -- a sparkle in fading memory

MOHAMMED NAWAZISH

EID is one occasion that often carries me back to the misty years of my childhood. Those were the days of close social relationship and people loved to live in company of friends and near ones. We siblings grew up in a close-knit family and we moved from place to place with our father who had a transferable job. It was a large dwelling house everywhere in the midst of a green leafy expanse. For we the tiny humans life was just a carefree and playful piece of a fleeting time quite unlike the children of this age who are asked to take up the challenges of life at the age of five. We were not aware of the woes and evils of mortal existence nor did our parents take pains to educate us on these dark realities. Our primary involvement was school and there we had a disciplined and extensive approach to a well-set learning process and we had to be punctual and attentive.

Eid was the happiest occasion in our life. The very name pulsed with merrymaking, mouthwatering dishes and a sort of a pleasant escape from the daily grind. In those days children did not know much about fashionable dresses and costly presents, whatever their parents decided was gladly accepted. More important in our life was the fun and freedom that we would enjoy on that particular day. When we were in small towns my mother used to make beautiful frocks for my sisters in her sewing machine, for me some local tailor would deliver a shirt or a Punjabi and a pair of pyjamas. Once when we were at Sylhet, my father bought me a fez like cap all studded with glittering artificial gems and filigree with a long glittery tassel. I still remember how bloated I felt walking about with the twinkling headgear on. If we needed new pairs of shoes it was time we got them. A glossy story book and some earthen toys or a queer wind-driven paper wheel would add immensely to our already overcharged ambience and we eagerly awaited the arrival of the auspicious day.

In later years as we grew bigger market facility and the scope of choice expanded but children did not learn to be demanding. In mid fifties when we were in Dhaka my

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father would go out shopping before the Eid day taking me beside him and would invariably purchase packets of sweets from Bombay sweetmeatwallahs, some quality attar and one or two pieces of records for our 1935 model HMV gramophone. Obviously it was my

choice that prevailed over my father's. My sisters got pretty dresses mostly made by good tailors.

Eid following the Ramadan always contained an element of surprise as the declaration on the sighting of moon would reach us

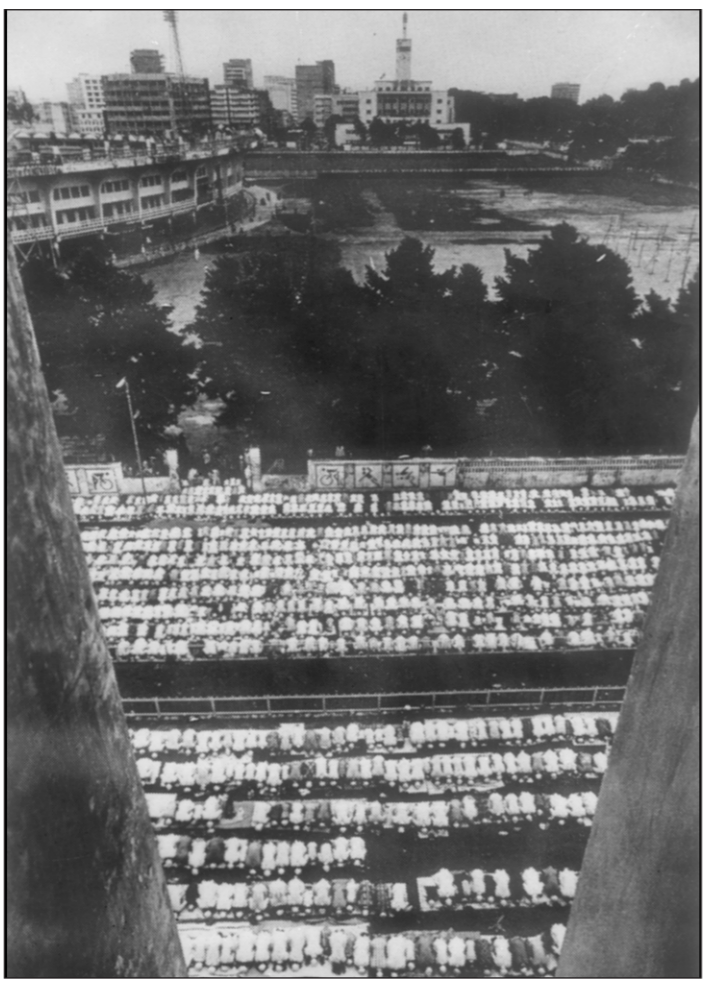
quite late. People hotly debated on possibilities and were seen eagerly looking at the western sky in search of the feeble crescent. What a crescendo of shouts and hullabaloo when the faint outline of the object was finally discovered! Eid in fact was set to motion from that moment and we scattered and shouted and made ourselves busy over everything and nothing. In most cases we would not succeed in getting a glimpse of the moon and would wait impatiently for public announcement. In later years we remained glued to radio. Once it so happened at Mymensingh that we were shaken up on bed at about midnight at the noise of the marching police band followed by loud announcement that the moon was sighted and Eid would be celebrated the following day. Imagine the excitement that gripped us at that great moment of revelation and the entire sleepy locality woke up on feet in no time in muffled rejoicing. This 'surprise' element is almost gone these days as we can fairly work out the probable day well in advance.

The evening preceding Eid day represented the busiest part of the episode. Ladies wanted to be free on the crucial day as they would not like to spoil the rare opportunity of displaying their grace and finery while socialising with friends and relatives. Everywhere the kitchens would turn into the centre of ceaseless activity under direct command of the house mistress. Markets heaved in last hour shopping spree and neither the streaming customers nor the jovial sellers under the lanterns and pump lights appeared tired or reluctant. Girls and maids got busy cleaning the house and arranging dresses and ornaments for the following morning. Boys hurried about for no apparent reason but blurring out comments here and there. In bigger towns the vignette would be slightly different with a thicker crowd in markets,

sparse electric lights, a lot of cycles and rickshaws and honking vehicles few and far between. While the children dozed and fell asleep by ten, the elders and support hands would continue till mid night only to get up in early morning.

My first priority in the morning was to take shower and put the formal cloths on and splash some fragrant attar on my body. Next the cap and a few coins for distribution. My father was even quicker and soon we would have the early taste of some Eid delicacies. Just a few bites and out we stepped to attend the congregation at a nearby ground or mosque. We came across many other chattering groups on way to the same destination and it all looked so brisk and refreshing. While we were away my mother and sisters with my toddling brother would have their shower and new clothes on and then they would hasten to set the house in immaculate order.

When we returned we found an impressively decorated house with Eid specials like cooked vermicelli, a variety of halwa, paratha, korma, rezalla, kabab, pilaw, and assorted sweets and fruits dished up on the table. We would first offer salam to our parents and older ones touching their feet and then swoop on the table for a grand breakfast. It seemed we were hungry for days and really we did justice to what our mother served and we ourselves could pick up. A short pause and guests would start pouring in. Relatives apart, most of the guests were my father's colleagues and friends accompanied by lavishly attired spouses. My mother and sisters remained busy serving them food and arranging things in order. Some playful school mates would trot in and soon be drawn to the tempting stuff stored on the table. My mother was unusually liberal with each of them. Our HMV went harping on



Eid congregation at Baitul Mukarram would spill over Bangabandhu Avenue as usual in the 1970's.

Of festivals and Eid-ul-Fitr

SYED ASHRAF ALI

EID-UL-FITR is comparatively a new festival and is not as old as Eid-ul-Azha. Whereas Eid-ul-Azha, commemorating the glorious sacrifices of the Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (peace be upon them) goes back to the days of yore in the eighteenth century before Christ, Eid-ul-Fitr is a comparatively new festival and originated in the 7th century A.D. In fact, Eid-ul-Fitr is the most modern and youngest major festival amongst the celestial religions. It saw the light of day only 1380 years ago.

Eid-ul-Fitr was not known to the Muslims till the Holy *Hijrat* to the then Yathrib (now Medina) in 622 A.D. After his *Hijrat* to Medina, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) found the people there regularly celebrating two festivals of Persian origin -- the *mihrijan* and the *Nawroze* on the nights of the full moon of spring and autumn respectively. The way these two festivals were celebrated in then Arabia and Persia were not only highly objectionable but also not compatible with the norms and practices in Islam.

Nawroze and *Mihrijan* festivals celebrated by the people of Arabia prior to the holy Prophet's (peace be upon him) *hijrat* to Medina were mere Arabic versions of the two great festivals of the Zoroastrians namely, *Nauruz* and *Mihrajjan* respectively. Both *Nauruz*, the Festival of the New Year, and *Mihrajjan*, the Feast of Mithra, used to last six days, the number perhaps being based on the six Persian *gahanbars*. The first day of the new year was called *Nauruz-i-Amma* ('of the people') or *Kucak* ('little') and the sixth day was *Nauruz-i-Hasa* ('noble') or *Buzurg* ('great').

It was the custom of the *Kisra*

(Persian Kings) that the King opened the *Nauruz* festival and then proclaimed to all that he would hold a session for them, and bestow benefits upon them. On the second day the session was for men of high rank, and for the members of the great families. On the third day the session was for his warriors, and for the highest *Manbadh* (Priests), on the fourth day it was for his family, his relations and domestics, and on the fifth it was for his children and clients..... when the sixth day came, and he had done justice to all of them, he celebrated *Nauruz* for himself and conversed only with

The Arabs used to celebrate *Nawroze* and *Mihrijan* from the night of the full moon of spring and autumn respectively almost exactly in the same way as the Persians celebrated *Nauruz* and *Mihrajjan*. To both these two occasions were of great honour and significance. It is well illustrated by the following saying of Salman al Farsi as cited by Al-Biruni: "In Persian times we used to say that God has created an ornament for his slaves, of rubies on *Nauruz*, of emeralds on *Mihrajjan*. Therefore, these two festivals excel all other days in the same way as these two jewels excel all other

days in the mornings of which are the Muslims supposed to say a two-*rakat* special congregational prayer. And, as in all other prayers in Islam, there is no discrimination of race and nationality, no difference between black and white, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, slave and master, have and have-nots in this thanks-giving congregational prayer of Eid-ul-Fitr.

The word *Eid* in Arabic means "joy" and *Fitr* and stands for "break of Fast" and symbolises "Return to Normalcy". Eid-ul-Fitr stands for the joy of breaking of fast or the joy of returning to normalcy. It reaches

Eid-ul-Fitr is really an exceptional occasion -- something totally different from an ordinary festival. The month-long fasting of *Ramadan* teaches a Muslim how to practice *Taqwa* or self-restraint in the most scientific way. Sex and food and drinks are prohibited for every able-bodied Muslim from dawn to dusk during this holy month, but these are permitted not only throughout the remaining eleven months but also from dusk to small hours in the night even during the month of *Ramadhan* -- a scientific scheme which is quite reasonable. This hitherto unknown system not only

Mercy, Himself distributes the prizes to the winners who have successfully practiced not merely fasting but *Al-Siyam* in true sense through prayers and penance, self-restraint and abstinence from vices in the right kiln of Islam. According to a *Qudsi Hadith*, Benign Providence Himself declares: "Every man's work belongs to him. A good deed is repaid from tenfold to seven hundred times. But Fasting belongs to Me and I repay."

No Eid, however, can be successful if it is spent only through fun and frolic, pleasure and gaiety, joy and happiness. There can be no Eid for a Muslim if his neighbours remain unfed and unclothed. No orphan, no helpless person, no hapless soul on this day of a cold star can remain unhonoured and unsung on this auspicious occasion. Each and every hungry mouth has to be fed, every nude has to be clothed, every neglected and despised person had to be looked after in right earnest. The very joy of Eid will be marred if the poor neighbours still remain uncared for, if the poverty-stricken near and dear ones still groan in misery and helplessness.

Syed Ashraf Ali is Director General, Islamic Foundation Bangladesh.

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special friends and those who were admitted into his privacy. As in the case of *Nauruz*, the first day of *Mihrijan* was known as *Mihrijan-i-Amma* and the last *Mihrijan-i-Hasa*. As stated earlier, this festival like *Nauruz* also lasted six days. But at one period it spread over thirty days, the first five being, according to Al-Biruni, 'feast days for the princes, the second for nobility, the third for the servants of the princes, the fourth for their clients, the fifth for the people, and the sixth for the herds-men'. Thus instead of each of the six *gahanbars* being represented by only one day of the festival, it was at one time honoured both at *Nauruz* and at *Mihrijan* by a period of five days.

Both *Nauruz* and *Mihrajjan* were originally New Year festivals. The Avesta year originally began about the time of the autumnal equinox and during the closing years of the reign of Darius I (522-486), it was changed to conform with the regular Babylonian year, the thus commencing about the Vernal Equinox.

The general scheme of celebration of *Nawroze* and *Mihrijan* not only laid emphasis on the artificial differences between rich and poor, have and have-nots, which was not at all compatible with the concept of equality in Islam, but it normally led people to drunken orgies, frequently ending in brawls and bloodshed. Even the *Kiyar*, the women practicing immoral dancing and singing, whose immorality was proverbial, used to command wide respect during celebration of these festivals, and even the great chieftains used to pay public court to them during these festivals.

The holy Prophet (pbuh) was literally shocked and surprised and reported to have observed: "Allah has given you two days better than these days -- the days of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha." The age-old practice of celebration of *Nawroze* and *Mihrijan* festivals were very rightly stopped and the Muslims started celebrating the two auspicious Eid-days in right earnest --

making every year as a Divine Boon, with a promise of joy and happiness, culminating as it does the month-long period of *Siyam* and *Taqwa*, fasting and self-restraint, *Tarawwi* and *Itikaf*, prayers and penance. Eid-ul-Fitr, the day of rejoicing and offering heart-felt gratitude to Allah through *Sadqa-i-Fitr* and the two-*rakat* congregational prayer in the morning, is indeed a great and auspicious occasion. It is so auspicious that even women, who are always equal participants in the hardship, austerities and pleasures of Ramadan, have been told by the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) to go out and say the Eid prayers at the *Eidgah*. Even the nights of *Eids* have special importance in the eyes of Islam. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: "He who passes the nights of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha through prayers will never waver or be afraid on the Day of judgement, while others will tremble or quiver on that Fateful Day.

makes hardship of self-restraint bearable but also pleasant, and the temporary renunciation makes the fulfillment of the basic desires even more pleasant. Naturally, therefore, at the end of month-long arduous *Siyam* and *Tarawwi*, *Taqwa* and *Itikaf*, Eid-ul-Fitr reaches us as a pleasant climax and teaches us that Islam is no static system of worship. It is a living and dynamic movement of thought and action which frees men from the grip of animal instincts, from the idea of artificial differences between rich and poor, high and low, and makes them act upon Divine Guidance. It teaches us over and over again that Islam is a comprehensible code of life, a perfect "*Deen*" which covers every aspect of life, and imposes the authority of Allah in all its dimensions, in every sphere of activity, in every domain of thought.

None can afford to ignore or flit shy of this auspicious day -- a unique Prize-giving Ceremony in which the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious Allah, in His infinite

For a meaningful celebration of the day

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

EXHAUSTIVE reports, attractive ads and colourful pictures appearing every day in our national dailies clearly indicate that craze for Eid shopping has begun this year much early than the past years. Siam (Fasting) is one of the five strong pillars on which Islam stands, and it is obligatory on the part of all able-bodied Muslims to observe fasting every day for full 30 days from dawn to dusk during the holy month of Ramadan. And what is the idea behind such fasting? The object is that the fasting person according to a Quranic Ayat, (Ayat 183 of Sura Baqara), will learn self-restraint. In other words, a fasting Muslim will not only abstain himself from food, drink, sex etc, he will also practice abstinence from all kinds of misdeeds during the holy month of Ramadan in such a way that he will be able to abstain himself from all kinds of misdeeds during the remaining period of year also. And for his achievement in this field, he is required to glorify the Lord Creator and supplicate Him to bestow

His bounties on him so that he will be able to help the poor and the needy, the neighbours and those unfortunate and distressed persons who are in the grip of debt as enjoined by Almighty Allah in the relevant Ayats of Holy Qur'an.

But the pertinent question is, how many of us including those who observe fasting during the holy month of Ramadan follow the Quranic injunctions; how many of us think of the poor and the indigent; how many of us think of the helpless orphans and the needy neighbours, and last but not the least, how many of us think of widows and elderly women who are obliged to put in their back-breaking labour from morning till evening every day to keep their body and soul together and also to support their children when we prepare for the greatest Muslim festival Eid-ul-Fitr? It is a matter of great regret that the number of the wealthy and the well-to-do; who hail from the upper strata of the society although is not few, any of them are unmindful or oblivious of the dire needs of the needy and the indigent. May I take

the liberty to cite an example for a clearer exposition of my humble viewpoint: According to a newspaper report if an eager and prospective lady buyer is ready to spend a lakh taka for a nice 3-piece "Lahenga" suit for her beloved daughter, then the whole family is undoubtedly ready to spend at least five lakh taka on apparels for all members including children on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr. There are thousands of such wealthy and well-to-do Muslim families in Bangladesh and heads of these fortunate families are thinking right now to spend similar amounts of money for celebration of Eid festival in a "nice way" and while thinking like this do they ever think for a moment that there are needy and indigent persons living within bow shot from their cosy air conditioned apartments or bungalows for whom they could spend at least an amount of Tk 5000/- (which is a mere fraction of their total Eid-ul-Fitr budget) in order to bring smile on their melancholy faces? We must remember the poor and the needy can claim a share of their money and wealth.

In this context, I would like to refer to Ayat 7 of Sura Hadid (Iron) of Holy Qur'an wherein Almighty Allah says in clear and unambiguous terms: "Believe in Allah and His messenger and spend of that whereof He has made you trustees; and such of you as believe and spend (aright) their's will be a great reward"

So, it is evident, that Benign Allah has specially commanded all His "*bandas*" (servants) in the Quranic Ayats referred to above to give alms or charitable gifts not only to the poor and the needy, but also to certain other classes of people including those in bondage; those in the grip of debt and those who are striving and struggling in the cause of Allah. Such payment of alms or charitable gifts by all well-to-do Muslims irrespective of the fact that they pay "Zakat" (poor-due) every year at the prescribed rate sanctioned by the religion.

After a long journey a thirsty and weary traveller will naturally enjoy to his heart's content a glass of sherbet, that is, a cooling drink. In the same way, a devout Muslim,

after observing "Siam" (Fasting) every day from dawn to dusk for full 30 days during the holy month of Ramadan and carefully going through other rigid concomitant religious duties will obviously long for rest and relaxation; he will think of mirth and harmless merry-making; he will think of new dress and delicious dishes on the day of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Immediately after the appearance of the Shawwal crescent in the sky, a man fasting every day for full 30 days can obviously think of such a diversion; he can also think of offering gifts to his relatives and friends on the day of the greatest festival of the year. Islam is not certainly against all these. Islam, however, wants while enjoying oneself on this day of days, the poor and the indigent living in the neighbourhood should not be forgotten. According to Sura Maun or Sura Neighbourly Needs of the Holy Qur'an it is our duty to bring smile on their faces. And in that case Benign Allah will be pleased and our celebration of the Eid-ul-Fitr festival will be meaningful.