

Eid market distortions

Govt move welcome, follow-up necessary

THE Eid-ul-Azha market has three features. In order of prominence these are: essentials market, cattle bazaar or *gorur hat* and apparel-footwear shopping complex.

The commodity prices have soared ahead of Eid calling for corrective measures. The essentials like vermicelli, soybean oil, onion, red pepper, ginger, garlic and clove are selling at much higher prices than these had about this time last year. In some areas, even the price-level recorded during Eid-ul-Fitr in November last has been overshoot. The high soybean oil price is attributed to a rise in international price and low yield of crude oil in the USA. These led to a reduced import to Bangladesh.

The current stock in the country is estimated at around 4000 to 5000 tonnes. The usual stock position hitherto has been around 50,000 tonnes. The deficit, needless to say, is glaring in view of the Eid demand. There are other imported essential items. Therefore, we need to make a fresh appraisal of their stocks and make it public so that speculative trading can be stemmed. Currently, a land port strike is going on requiring to be sorted out urgently. As for the locally produced commodities, the supply-lines need to be flushed clean of the exploiting middlemen and so-called toll collectors. The wholesale and retail markets should have a high degree of coordination to be made possible by regular consultation between their associations or elected bodies.

Whatever mechanism the government has to checkmate hoarding and speculative trading must work at its optimal level.

Eid-ul-Azha is one occasion distinctly marked by extortionist hyper-activity. It almost wholly revolves around the sacrificial animal market. As cattle-laden trucks set out from different parts of the country for the city markets, the traders are fleeced all over from road-junctions or ferry-ghats to the points of destinations. Cops, influential persons, thugs all have a finger on the pie. Resultantly, there is price mark-up impelling consumers to be at the losing end of the bargain. There is also the scramble for setting up markets or grabbing leases mostly by elements having or claiming ruling party connections.

Having regard to the potential for violence, it is good to see, the government has a law and order angle. Five mobile courts are at work at the city entry points to ensure safety of traders and home-bound holidayers. Beyond that, the government has decided to entrust combined BDR-Armed Police-Ansar squads with wider security responsibilities like it did during the Eid-ul-Fitr festival with some success. We welcome the steps, but would like to stress that the animal market is a different ball-game where maximum alert is called for.

Programme on HR

A laudable move by the Liberation War Museum

THE Liberation War Museum, a repository of the most glorious saga in the nation's history, is going to launch a special programme on peace and human rights for school children which, in our opinion, is a commendable initiative.

Violation of human rights is a major problem in the present-day world and the fresh approach might help the young learners to have a better grasp of the issue if they become familiar with our glorious heritage early in life. The Liberation War itself, in the ultimate analysis, was the result of our long struggle against violation of human rights.

The museum is now part of the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums and Conscience which has established better communication between the organisations preserving relics of a bygone era, and which are actually a bridge between the past and the present. The exchange programmes of the coalition will certainly give our Liberation War a sustained projection to the outside world. People around the world will come to know a great deal more about the war that ultimately led to the creation of Bangladesh. This will help us in image building.

The schools, colleges and other academic institutions should attach due importance to inclusion of human rights in their curricula. It is also imperative that students become familiar with social maladies like dowry and violation of women's rights at the budding stages of their life. A society should equip itself adequately to eliminate the nagging ills which have a debilitating influence on its growth. And one way of doing so is to disseminate information about the problems as part of the awareness-building campaign. We believe students are a potent force that can play a vital role in the fight against social discrimination and violation of human rights. So they are the ones who should be empowered with knowledge of various social problems and discrepancies.

Corporate capitalism and theft



NURUDDIN MAHMUD KAMAL

CORPORATE capitalism and theft of the global commons is no more an unknown phrase. Enron blowout, for instance, has showed the world how it happened. In late 2001, this global giant, was filed for bankruptcy in the US courts. With assets strewn across the world, Enron's collapse impacted many, for greater or lesser. However, the failure of Enron provoked more discussions in the US on the ethics of the CEO class -- the chief executive officers and their inner circle. Their authoritarian management of firms is now legendary. Talk of enhanced regulation of firms as well as of the market had to be quickly suspended by the money managers and the CEO politicians.

The bankruptcy of Enron seemed to be the iceberg that rocked the Titanic of US-driven capitalism, but it turned out to be its tip. WorldCom, Xerox, AOL-Time Warner, Anderson, Citibank, JP Morgan -- hallowed names of the US-based transnational -- either could not cook their books any longer and had to declare bankruptcy, or else came under scrutiny from the moth-eaten US government regulators for various types of

fraud. Things got so bad that on 9 July 2002, US President George W. Bush went to Wall Street and chided the bankers for their unethical behaviour.

Around the world, the story is different, it is alleged that coward and greedy politicians went into alliance with Enron to rehabilitate enterprises, mainly in the energy and water sector. Abandoning the sensible policy of keeping within the public sector such crucial components of socio-economic

water. They insisted and won guaranteed returns on an investment that it did not make, and has now collapsed with the assets on the ground of no buyers and with bleak future.

We, in Bangladesh, were about to enter into a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Enron in 1998 under the Barge Mounted Power Project (BMPP) programme. That was the first negotiation by Bangladesh Power Development Board

captive market for their products (electricity) in a franchise area they identified. We (in the Board) didn't agree, although there was tremendous pressure to do so. In recent months, the government has conveniently allowed AES to sell out, violating the contractual provision!

For us, the Enron case is important as it was the first of the fast track power projects in Bangladesh and received special attention. It was also responsi-

ble for validating the Private Power Policy enunciated by the government in October 1996. Indeed, we were lucky that the influence peddling, for which Enron is famous, could be avoided during the PPA negotiation in 1997-98. Nevertheless, it also proved that the argument for inviting foreign capital in the power sector was that it provided much-needed resources in building critical infrastructure. Unfortunately, the State Minister for Power Mr. Iqbal Hassan Mahmud perhaps had an unknown fear about IPP participation in the generation of electricity. Story goes that he has recently overcome the mental block and is now seriously planning, after a lapse of about

twenty-six months, to encourage private power generation. But doubts are high in public about the proposed 450-megawatt plant in Sirajganj. Already about 300 MW generation capacity exist in the same area. Therefore, as a part of decentralisation policy, new capacity creation should instead be in Bogra and Rajshahi. I only hope that new generating plants come into steam in time because almost three years have passed without

ment efforts, people would be able to draw the line against the artificial calculations, and call privatisation what it really is: the theft of commons by corporate capitalism.

It is ironic that Enron should fall prey to the same 'sacro-sanct' market forces that it espoused with such zeal in many countries. In 1991, India initiated a policy of neo-liberal economic reforms. This policy was extended to the power sector as well. Contrary to the claims of those who initiated and guided the reforms, their new policy has been unable to address the problem of supply shortage in various parts of the country. Nor has it provided power to the people at affordable rates. The lessons for the Indian government came out crystal clear. The wisdom of the High Court panel that responded to the CITU (with Abohay Mehta) case against Enron is worth repetition:

"Multinationals who want to invest in developing countries should not indulge in tall talks about educating the people of those countries. The decision of multinationals to invest in that country is based on the security of its investments and lucrative returns on the same. It is not activated by the desire to help resource-starved nations. They do no charity. They move out of their country for greener pastures or better returns. They should, therefore, act and behave like an investor or an industrial house and not a government."

Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal is a retired government official.



life as power and water in particular, countries like India, the Philippines and Argentina went in for privatisation. Argentina has already proved the worst of privatisation in the world. It has become the proverbial gobble-dy-gook!

Dabhol Power Corporation in Maharashtra (India) and the many pipelines that crisscross South America, were overcapitalised and enticed to run at a loss for some time to come. In fact, Enron garnered public money, whether from the US government, from commercial banks, or from central banks in the developing countries. These funds were used to build unnecessary expensive physical assets for the generation of power or

(BPDB) team under my stewardship as Chairman of the Board. Our inexperience allured us to move into the booby trap. Thanks to the Almighty Allah for saving us from a disaster. On the hindsight, the lesson we learned helped us to draw unbelievably low power tariff deal (for Bangladesh) with Messrs AES of USA in our negotiations on Haripur 360 Megawatt (US\$ 0.273 per kilowatt hour) and Meghnaghat 450 megawatt (US\$ 0.279 per kwh). Everything one said about Enron has now come to a pass, but it is a bitter experience that we went through. Luckily, today we consider that as a sigh of relief (from Enron). At that time Enron insisted on the PPA to guarantee it profits, a one hundred per cent

ble for validating the Private Power Policy enunciated by the government in October 1996. Indeed, we were lucky that the influence peddling, for which Enron is famous, could be avoided during the PPA negotiation in 1997-98. Nevertheless, it also proved that the argument for inviting foreign capital in the power sector was that it provided much-needed resources in building critical infrastructure. Unfortunately, the State Minister for Power Mr. Iqbal Hassan Mahmud perhaps had an unknown fear about IPP participation in the generation of electricity. Story goes that he has recently overcome the mental block and is now seriously planning, after a lapse of about

generating a single megawatt. Nevertheless, adequate care should be taken on this sensitive issue because any new effort on IPP can be jeopardised if a contract is reached through fraud. Friends of the Energy Ministry, however, would rather not discuss such unpleasant issues now.

We must remember that Enron collapsed because it took its own greed too seriously. In fact the corporate fat cat made demands upon the plant that the people would not accede to without a fight and it failed to take the kind of cover from the US army as its cousin, Halliburton, did. However, when the inside story of Enron is read with our country's disinvest-

A top scientist's predicament over alleged sale of nuclear secrets

A.H. JAFFOR ULLAH

EVERYONE in Pakistan knows who Dr. Qader Khan is. You see, he is a national hero over there because he played the key role in developing Pakistan's nuclear military capability, which culminated in successful tests in Chagai Hills of Baluchistan -- a no man's land -- in May 1998. However, he is now going through a tough time in Pakistan where interrogators are asking him questions concerning possible transfer of nuclear technology to Iran. Despite all this, Dr. Qader Khan is a very popular figure and a living legend in Pakistan.

The architect of Pakistan's Atom bomb, Dr. Abdul Qader Khan, and one of his top aides, General Mirza Aslam Beg, are now in proverbial political hot water. Contrast this news with that of the architect of India's Atom bomb, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, who is in limelight being selected in July 2002 by BJP as the president of the Republic of India. Both of them gave leadership to their respective nation's nuclear bomb-making effort in the 1980s and 1990s, which had culminated in successful testing in May and June of 1998. Both of these highly accomplished men were born in 1930s in India, Kalam in Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu and Khan in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, but their career path took a sharp turn. While Dr. Kalam became the ceremonial president of India, his counterpart in Pakistan, Dr. Qader Khan did not fare that well. Dr. Khan and his military aide, Gen. Beg are about to be prosecuted under Pakistan's 'Official Secrets Act' when that nation's investigators unearthed some very damaging evidences that point out the duo's involvement in selling nuclear secrets to Iran during 1980s. The Wall Street Journal on January 26, 2004 published an article on Dr. Khan and Gen.

Beg's complicity to sell Pakistan's one of the top secrets to a neighbouring Islamic nation. A senior Pakistani official was quoted by the journal to be the source of this revelation.

The authorities in Pakistan who are investigating the alleged wrongdoings now say that they have traced quite a few bank accounts in foreign countries that were used by the Pakistani nuclear scientist Dr. Qader Khan and a fellow scientist, Mohammed Farooq, the WSJ article states. The authorities in Pakistan believe that the scientists had received payments after passing highly secret documents relating to nuclear technology to

Pakistanis comprising of clerics, jihadists, and patriots who abhor India for myriad reasons. Dr. Qader Khan is considered a hero and he plays a role model in Pakistan. Therefore, we have to wait and see.

General Pervez Musharraf has acted to "rein in Islamist extremists," as pointed out in the WSJ article in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in America. The Islamists may label the arrests of Dr. Khan and his associates as betrayal by the Pakistani president. Hundreds of Muslim hardliners had gathered in the capital city of Islamabad denouncing the government's move to question the nuclear

recruited to complete the job. He knew how to enrich uranium by centrifugation. He learnt this while he was in Germany in the 1960s. Because of his pivotal role in making Pakistan a member of the nuclear club, Mr. Qader Khan has received many accolades from his countrymen. He held the position of Pakistan's main nuclear facility for 26 years. In 2002, he was appointed an adviser to the government of General Musharraf.

Because of his stature, the authorities did not detain him. However, he was asked not to leave the capital.

The investigation of Dr. Qader Khan and his associates is not a

However, because of the events of last two months in which two attempts have been made on Musharraf's life, the General has finally changed his policy. He is now determined more than ever to go after the Islamists in Pakistan. His administration also wanted to know if there are any connections between the Pakistani nuclear scientists and the government of Iran and Libya.

Whatever General Musharraf does with Dr. Qader Khan and his aides vis-à-vis 'selling' of nuclear secrets to 'rogue' nations, he does not like to come out as a stooge of Mr. Bush. An investigation to look into the matter of selling Pakistan's nuclear secrets by Dr.

who is involved. Our nuclear assets are in extremely safe hands. We have ensured rings of security measures around that, especially since I took over in 1999."

What will happen to the retired Army General Aslam Beg, who was one of the associates of Dr. Khan, is an open question. For one thing, Gen. Beg is quite well known for his anti-American rhetoric. He served as Pakistan's army chief from 1988 through 1991. The alleged transaction of nuclear secrets and money transfer took place at the time. It was reported earlier that the army chief came to meet Mr. Nawaz Sharif, whom General Musharraf deposed in October 1999 coup, in January 1991 when Sharif was the PM for the first time, to discuss a proposal to sell nuclear technology to Iran for billions of dollars. General Aslam Beg then proposed that the money received from Iran could underwrite Pakistan's defence-budget for the next 10 years. The General now says that he did not do anything wrong.

The Pakistani ex-nuclear chief, Dr. Qader Khan, now told the investigators that he cooperated with Iran on nuclear technologies that were authorised by Pakistan's top military commander. He is a staunch nationalist and holds strong views against West vis-à-vis their anti-Islamic views. The wild card in this game is Pakistan's tens and thousands of Madrassah graduates and clerics. Will they rally for Dr. Qader Khan in the event he is arrested, put in a trial, and found guilty? You never can tell what is in store for General Pervez Musharraf. In the meantime Dr. Abdul Kalam, the President of India who was Dr. Khan's counterpart in India must be watching all these new developments with an eager eye.

Dr. A.H. Jaffor Ullah, a researcher, resides in New Orleans, USA.

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Iran and other nations. Under this backdrop, it remains to be seen whether Pakistan's President, General Pervez Musharraf, would give the green light to formally charge the scientists by the end of this month. The political nature of the case would make the Pakistani President shy away from giving his approval to sue the nation's top nuclear scientist. Besides, Dr. Qader Khan has strong ties to Islamists in Pakistan many of whom dislike General Musharraf for supporting the Bush Administration in rounding up al-Qaeda jihadists all over Pakistan. Is it possible for the Musharraf Administration to issue an arrest warrant for Dr. Qader Khan, Mr. M. Farooq, and General Aslam Beg because they had broken country's 'Official Secret Act'? General Musharraf may not take a risk lest his move may alienate a large section of

scientist and his aides. The WSJ article wrote, "The prosecution of such prominent figures may prove embarrassing to the military, Pakistan's most powerful institution and one that brought Gen. Musharraf to power. The army has overseen Pakistan's nuclear programme for decades."

It is true that Pakistani government had expressed in the 1970s to undertake a mission to make nuclear bombs. The late President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had once proclaimed that Pakistan ought to make nuclear bomb even if it means eating grass. This famous utterance by Bhutto came in the wake of India's experimental detonation of atomic device in May 1974 in Pokhran, Rajasthan, during Mrs. Indira Gandhi's time. Pakistani military always wished to have their own nuclear bomb in their possession. It became a prestige issue. Dr. Qader Khan was

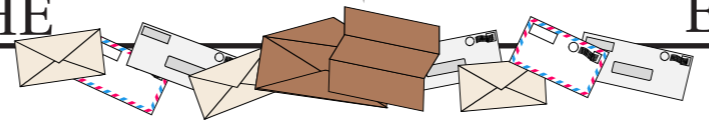
homebrewed exercise. In November 2003, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) made the accusation that Pakistani scientists in the 1980s had helped Iran develop centrifuges to enrich the purity of uranium without which one cannot make any nuclear bomb. Dr. Qader Khan has expertise in this crucial area. In the past the IAEA also have accused Pakistan of providing such crucial information to other 'rogue' nations such as North Korea and Libya.

According to the WSJ article the Bush Administration has been urging General Musharraf for the last two years to investigate how Pakistani nuclear scientists passed top-secret nuclear information to other nations. However, because of the urgency to apprehend al-Qaeda soldiers in Pakistan the Bush Administration did not press hard this issue on Gen. Musharraf's regime.

Khan may be interpreted by his countrymen as a mini war against corruption by the government officials. In that way, the reputation of Dr. Khan will be tarnished. The corruption charge levied against Dr. Khan and his two associates if found to be valid, will confer General Musharraf the title of a warrior against rampant state-level corruption. This image may play out very well in Pakistan and strengthen Musharraf's foothold into Pakistani politics.

In his defence, General Musharraf said on January 23, 2004, that his administration is not acting at the behest of the U.S. or any other nation. He played the 'patriotism' card rather well when he mentioned that he vowed to prosecute anyone found guilty of selling state's secret. According to the WSJ article, Musharraf said in Davos, Switzerland, "We will sort out everyone

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



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

Appointment of Chief Justice

The Daily Star in its 27 January issue published a news item on the appointment of the 14th Chief Justice of the Republic. The news item mentions that Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, while defending the appointment of Justice Syed JR Mudassar Hussain in supersession of two of his seniors, has said "we have corrected a wrong by doing the right."

The Constitution of the Republic, vide Article 48 read with Article 95, confers upon the president full and unfettered discretionary powers to appoint the chief justice and he is not supposed to seek, or act on, the advice of the prime minister in the matter of appointment of the chief justice. And the president is not bound by any law to appoint the

senior most judge of the Appellate Division as the chief justice -- an inherent deficiency in our Constitution. Hence, strictly speaking from legal point of view, the appointment cannot be questioned. But the comment of the law minister quoted above goes to suggest that the government, not the president, made the selection which like other businesses of the government was approved by the latter as a matter of routine. Does it not constitute a violation of the Constitution?

M Hafizuddin Khan
Utara

Belief of Ahmadiyyas

There has been much misunderstanding about the true belief of Ahmadiyyas because of one-sided propaganda against them.

The Ahmadiyyas believe in all the tenets of Islam and is spread over almost 180 countries of the world, having 200 million members, and preach Islam in a most rational and peaceful way. They believe in Holy Prophet Mohammad (SM) as the last Prophet in the sense that there will be no new sharia after him. It is inferred from the Holy Quran, Hadith and writings from earlier Muslim divines that the promised reformer (Imam Mahdi) of the latter age would be an 'ummah' (follower) of the Prophet not bringing any new law and not discarding any teachings of the Holy Quran. This sect was not founded by the British and is run by the money of its own members.

Annie Habib
Stuttgart, Germany

Messed up politicos

Sure, the politicians are messed up, but where do they come from? Our own schools, own households, own parents, and straight out of our own values.

We ought to look at the fact that these messed up politicians are coming out of an overall messed up system. Where are the bright and hardworking ones? They're designing software in Silicon Valley so that America can have a higher GDP next year. It's not just the politicians. We need to rethink something here.

Abak Hussain
On E-mail

Faezul Huq's reply

I have read Syed Hamde Ali's letter published in the DS on 24 January

2004. As a matter of fact we are both personally in touch with each other and it was very kind of him to send me the copy of his letter under reference in advance through e-mail. I was actually waiting for its formal publication in your daily for my reply/clarification, least there be any doubts in the minds of other readers. In fact, there is no question of 'vehemence' as Mr. Ali writes. I just tried to put some force behind what I was saying, because I was rather surprised to see a historical error committed by a learned professor (Waheeduzzaman Manik) who wanted us to believe that the great leader Moulana Bhashani was annoyed with Sher-e-Bangla for the simple reason that the latter joined the late lamented Mohammed Ali Bogra's Cabinet, when actually he never did. Obviously the question of flouting the elec-

tion pledges also by late AK Fazlul Huq as written by Professor Waheeduzzaman in his article in DS November 17, 2003 does not arise at all. Syed Hamde Ali, on the other hand, is perhaps more than convinced now of my good faith in that forceful 'assertion' and I shall further make it a point to explain the other details of the history of that era to him of which he is genuinely so inquisitive. By the way, the cabinet of Mohammed Ali was not called the 'Cabinet of Dreams', rather it was called the 'Cabinet of Talents', which actually it was. I hope no further clarifications are needed on the subject. If someone else is further interested in the subject, he or she may write directly to me at: faezul@hotmail.com. I shall try my best to reply to all the queries as soon as possible.

Let me also take this opportunity of thanking one of your readers---Shibly Azad---who wrote directly to me after going through my letter.

AK Faezul Huq
Atlanta, USA

Anti-Ahmadiyya agitation

By banning the books and publications of the Ahmadiyya sect, our government has caved in to the unjustified demands by the fanatics. It is not the business of the government to declare anybody as Muslim or non Muslim and in fact it is beyond its constitutional powers. Ahmadiyyas in Bangladesh are mostly educated and law-abiding citizens and they deserve freedom of worship and protection. Many people of the main-

stream Sunni sect do not consider Ahmadiyyas as Muslims and are free to have their reasons. They are free to do so and let them, if they wish, shun the Ahmadiyyas in religious and social matters. But that does not justify attacking Ahmadiyya mosques or bully them right and left.

Today it is the Ahmadiyyas, tomorrow it will be some other sect. We have to ask ourselves whether we want to end up in the same situation as Pakistan is facing now where Shias are massacred in their mosques and bombs thrown inside Christian churches.

The real losers of this anti-Ahmadiyya agitation are the country as a whole and the tolerant society that we have had so far.

Sakhawat Hossain
Gulshan