

Eid-ul-Azha

Its true spirit should not be lost on us

EID-UL-AZHA, the second biggest festival of Muslims, will be celebrated in the country tomorrow. People look forward to the day with a sense of anticipation and prepare themselves to celebrate it in a befitting manner. Eid-ul-Azha has great religious significance as it coincides with Hajj -- the largest congregation of Muslims from all over the world.

It is an occasion for both celebration as well as introspection as Eid-ul-Azha reminds us of that supreme sacrifice that Prophet Ibrahim (SM) was ready to make to honour divine wishes. It was an event that taught the followers of the prophet that all earthly possessions were subservient to the pronouncement of the Almighty, and also that the only way to attain spiritual purification was to accept it unconditionally. It was a triumph for all believers as the prophet demonstrated that he could sacrifice even his beloved son if that is what the Almighty wanted him to. Unflinching loyalty got the better of infinite love. Eid-ul-Azha takes us to the domain of spiritual elevation where the need for surrendering to the wishes of the Almighty is emphasised symbolically.

Eid-ul-Azha like all other festivals of Muslims also conveys the message of equality and brotherhood -- the fundamental teaching of Islam. For, on the day, the differences and social divisions are forgotten as people embrace each other in a mood of joy and happiness.

The day begins with people sacrificing animals which is a religious rite commemorating the event that saw Prophet Ibrahim (SM) finally undergoing the much less severe test of offering an animal as sacrifice.

The message of Eid-ul-Azha has become all the more relevant in a world where absence of peace and stability is being felt acutely. Muslims will be praying for the welfare of mankind at large which is still continuing its quest for a just world order, social justice, equitable distribution of wealth, and so on.

Eid Mubarak to all our readers, patrons and well wishers.

Blair's trust rating

His moment of truth arriving?

THE various opinion polls in Britain conducted after the much talked about Hutton inquiry was made public only vindicate the broadcasting corporation that prides itself on the authenticity of its news. In his report, Lord Hutton castigated the BBC calling its editorial policy defective and cleared the British government, Prime Minister Tony Blair specifically, of lying about WMD in Iraq. But a majority of Britons finding the report as 'whitewash' and trusting the BBC all the more clearly tell us that such inquiries can not shift people's opinion on what's wrong and what's right.

It all started with the suicide of British arms expert, David Kelly who was quoted by one of BBC's correspondents, though anonymously, that the British government had 'sexed up' the Iraq dossier in the prelude to going to war. An allegation that was vehemently denied by Blair's government. A fierce battle between the government and the BBC ensued after Kelly was named as the source of the BBC's claim. In the midst of a media frenzy over the naming of the source, Kelly committed suicide. Thus began the next round of battle between the government and the broadcaster ending in Blair claiming victory after Hutton report was released.

Blair may bask in glory, but for how long. The opinion polls have already shown his trust rating sliding, support for the cause of invading Iraq also showing a downward trend. These are, no doubt, good enough reasons for considerable concern for the Blair government. The fact remains that not a single WMD has been found till now, not even a shred of evidence about any such weapons in Iraq has been located. Bush administration has already begun to shift its stance over WMD, maybe it's time for Blair to do the same serious rethinking too. That is if he really wants to increase his popularity among his own people. Hutton inquiry report may have got him the 'unreserved' apology that he desperately wanted from the BBC, but it has apparently also cost him his standing in the public mind which he may not have asked for.

How effective was Bush's state of the union message?



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

PRESIDENT George W Bush Jr. delivered his State of the Union Message to the US Congress on 20 January. The customary annual ritual that took place at the joint session of the House and the Senate was significant for more than one reason. President's speech was significant because it was the last such opportunity he would avail of before the nation goes to polls to re-elect him or to have a democrat as the next President. It was different because, unlike similar other messages, it was characterised by a heavy overtone of issues on foreign affairs. It varied with others because it did little to fulfil its mission to unite the nation with a common agenda.

The democratic hopefuls, whose campaigning for the presidential election being at the peak at present, were highly critical. It is but natural that the Democrats would deride the Republicans, especially in an election year. But this year it is more different than the usual. People would like to assess whether the President has been able to convince his fellow countrymen with his case on different issues to form a common work schedule for the year. Is the American economy really booming or unemployment falling? Was he able to repair the damage caused to his allies and new friends across the Atlantic? Finally,

did his address contain any pledge or hope for restoring the status of the United Nations and make it more effective? These are some of the questions that agitate the minds of politically conscious people both at home and abroad.

Let us take up the issues. The tragic 9/11 events, indeed, transformed the world in many ways. It had its impact also on the stance and contents of US President's State of the Union message. It was

inspector Hans Blix or the last CIA appointed inspector David Kay. On the other hand, the self-confessed perpetrator of the 9/11 events, the Al-Qaeda chief Bin Laden, is still at large. This scenario was not revealed in its due perspective to the generally simple and complacent American people.

The President, however, aptly and correctly described the fact that war against global terror was

they like much less the way American troops started maltreating them, and abhor midnight swoops on innocent women and children. Violence begets violence and insurgents become stronger with every passing day, despite Saddam being held captive. Every day some US soldiers, many of whom being young draftees, are being killed. The death toll has exceeded half a thousand, to the consternation of the American people, since the

principal one, and as per commitment by all its subsequent members.

Over and above these, the President's declaration not to seek a "permission slip" before taking further preventive military action against another state testifies to his deliberate and unfortunate slight on the international community and the United Nations. The question of a worthwhile role of the United Nations in the im-

inherited the exchequer with a \$200 billion surplus and has already indebted it with over \$500 billion in deficit. His long-term plan for the economy over a decade will cost the nation trillions of dollar in debt. The funds he had pledged to an improved and expanded health care are yet to be released in full. President's claim on reduction of unemployment was strongly disputed by the democrats. Over and above these, the highly outstretched military forces of the United States have put progressively heavy burden on American taxpayers.

The American people are generally good, God-fearing people, who live contented in a land of plenty. Pursuit of liberty, good life and happiness has kept them generally unconcerned about international politics, as the country is self-sufficient and, if necessary, has the capacity to remain isolated. Domestic issues affect them more and they are deeply concerned if anything costs them more in terms of dollars and cents. The American President being the most powerful man on earth is also in a position to distribute fishes and loaves in securing compliance with his policies and actions. The Republicans have the added material advantage over the Democrats of being protégés of big business and industry. So, irrespective of serious lapses, big wrong-doings and unpardonable follies, it may still be difficult for a Democrat to defeat a sitting Republican President in re-election. President George W Bush knows it well and is determined to take full advantage of it.

M.M.Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador, is a member of BNP's Advisory Council.

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

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horrible to witness the catastrophe caused by terrorists in 2001. They struck at the hearts of the two most endearing elements the American nation, being the leader of the uni-polar world, nurtured as their symbol of wealth and strength the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. The people of America had, therefore, very good reasons to demand punishment of the evildoers and the President acceded to their demand.

But, in doing so, the President invaded Iraq and held it.

President as a prisoner, repeatedly insisting that Saddam Hussain possessed weapons of mass destruction and posed an immediate threat to America and the West. Most of the usually good natured people of the United States believed in what the President had said. But it was a well-known fact that Iraq had no connection with the Al-Qaeda and no capacity to pose immediate threat to America and the West. Nor was any evidence found of the weapons of mass destruction on the Iraqi territory either by the UN

not over and must continue. But why was it so? How did the 9/11 events take place and unleash the elaborate and intensive operation of war machinery for the hunt of the fugitives, the terrorists and the insurgents? Did not the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces have any responsibility to take preventive action to protect its citizens and property? Inability to do so, it was argued, was the outcome of intelligence failure. The same was attributed to the story of the massive stockpile of WMD in Iraq with the consequent threat to the security of the United States and the West. Another catastrophic folly, another unpardonable case of intelligence failure to which the Administration is yet to admit. Or, was it a deliberate ploy?

The Americans went to liberate the Iraqi people from the atrocities of Saddam Hussain and to overthrow his dictatorial regime. As opposed to that, they conquered Iraq and stayed there as an occupation force. The majority of the Iraqis condemned the way Saddam Hussain had ruled. But

President declared in May that the Iraqi war was over. One senior official of the erstwhile inner circle of the President has since revealed that the invasion of Iraq had been planned by the President much before the events of 9/11. This seriously questions the credibility of the Administration and invalidates, once again, of its argument in justification of war against Iraq.

As for America's relations with the United Nations and her Western allies, the situation is far from satisfactory. The President enumerated an impressive list of those countries, which had lent diplomatic support and, except for Britain, provided token military personnel or non-combatant troops in Iraq to vindicate American invasion and its aftermath. But he made no reference to the initial American military action taken in Iraq without specific sanction of the Security Council. The Security Council is entrusted with the maintenance and promotion of world peace, as ordained by the founding fathers, among which the United States was a

diatribe post-Saddam era in Iraq, unless the United States hands over the authority to the world body, appears remote. The group of traditional European allies of the United States led by France and Germany did not also perceive any indication of improvement of relations with America following the Presidential address.

The President, however, made some good points on domestic issues. The American people are generally moved more on domestic issues than on foreign affairs. Every President strives to make positive impact on citizens, to reach the ultimate goal of securing more votes. The President claimed that the economy was thriving. There was more investment and less unemployment. The interest rate has been cut and people have more money to spend and invest. The health care has expanded. The democrats, on the other hand, countered that the President had, in fact, plunged the nation in unprecedented debt and resorted to severe deficit financing. The US dollar is weak. The President

A new mood in Pakistan



KULDIP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

Iam amazed at the optimism of the Pakistanis. Even after the military enjoying the highest authority for some four decades, they continue to pine for a civilian rule and free elections. During all these years I have not witnessed any movement, not even the making of an uprising, to evoke such a hope in the country. The military governs firmly and enforces obedience.

Still people talk about democracy all the time as if the end of the army rule is round the corner. However, there must be a bit of defiance in their psyche. Their elected representatives, who were screened by the military before the polls, have made President Pervez Musharraf promise to quit his position as the chief of the army staff by the end of this year. This does not mean that the military is ready or willing to go back to the barracks. It has developed a vested interest in power and has roots reaching even the countryside. Yet, the fact that Musharraf will abandon the uniform speaks volumes about the limited National Assembly and the Senate the country has.

Ungrateful religious parties whom Musharraf gave support

during elections to push out the political parties were in the forefront of the demand. Never before did they win more than five to six seats. But today their combination of six parties, the Majlis Muttahida Ansal (MMA), is the largest group in the National Assembly. The MMA also rules half of Pakistan, the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan.

Musharraf probably rues the day when he allowed the religious

only reason for his discomfiture. His own life is in danger and the last two attempts to kill him have shaken Musharraf. He has found that the religious ragtag he once encouraged is after him because he has changed his track.

But what could he have done after the 9/11 attacks? He was given 24 hours to choose between the Taliban's Afghanistan and America. As then foreign minister Abdus Sattar in the Musharraf cabinet told me, they had no

zealots, he had to agree to make Kashmir as one of the items for a composite talk to break the log-jam and not insist on having a solution on Kashmir first before moving further. His words of welcome for talks between the Hurriyat and New Delhi fitted into the change. He realised that the breakaway group which Islamabad supported was not in the good books of New Delhi.

Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri on whom Musharraf

countries begin Kasuri prefers the political level Kashmir will have to be discussed in depth and soon, even though New Delhi's first item is reportedly Sir Creek, something left from the Kutch award.

The ruling BJP's own compulsions as well as elections may not allow the Atal Behari Vajpayee government to go beyond dotting the i's and crossing the t's. But I found the Pakistani intelligentsia resenting even the lapse of time between now and the assumption

Musharraf's job is, however, arduous when India's chief of army staff says that some 85 militant camps are still in existence in Pakistan.

Musharraf can achieve much by harnessing the goodwill which the joint statement and the people-to-people contacts have generated in Pakistan. His priority should be to relax visa restrictions and do away with reporting to the police. In fact, India should take the lead and initiate these steps unilaterally. But this can only be possible if the Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani's home ministry does not insist on screening visa applications.

When Kasuri uses the words "imposed conditions to discontinue," he probably has in view the impediments in the way of free travel and trade. He fears that the dialogue "can run into a deadlock and impasse" because of "our mutual acrimony" which I believe can disappear with free contact.

Kasuri warns against any "breakdown" in the talks because he dreads that the failure would begin "the blame game syndrome once again." His fears are not totally unfounded. Some top members of the Pakistani establishment told me that the joint statement was like so many declarations and agreements in the past. They came to naught and so would the joint statement. What they miss is the change in the mood of people who want to befriend India and begin a new chapter of amity and peace.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

BETWEEN THE LINES

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parties to fill the vacuum that displacement of former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif created. The MMA is openly combining politics with religion. It is supporting religious seminars and at the same time giving the Al-Qaeda all the assistance to needle Kabul.

The religious parties are doing still something worse: they are spreading fundamentalism within the country. Many in the upper middle class have discovered to their horror that either a son, nephew or the son-in-law in their family has become a jihadi. The Punjab chief minister's son is proud to be a mauvi.

Such a scenario has made Musharraf's position untenable. America's pressure to curb fundamentalism is not the

alternative and they communicated their full support to Washington in less than 24 hours. But Musharraf's dilemma is that he has to give space to politicians if he wants to confront the deeni (religious) forces.

Benazir may be willing to accept some part of military rule or Musharraf in some shape. But Nawaz Sharif is uncompromising on the subject. He wants the military to go back -- lock, stock and barrel. Musharraf cannot allow even Benazir to return until he has established a Turkish pattern of polity -- a permanent role of the armed forces in the governance. His political options are limited.

In the circumstances, conciliation with India was the best choice before him. Harassed by

depended immensely gave a better formulation while talking to me in his office at Islamabad for one and a half hours. He said that the joint statement had generated hopes in Pakistan, India and Kashmir about the commencement of a dialogue process. He equated Kashmir with India and Pakistan as if it was a separate country. Even when he listed the outstanding issues he kept Jammu and Kashmir as the first item.

This may do for the time being. But New Delhi would have to move quickly on Kashmir. In the perception of the Pakistanis the concessions which India made on the problem would determine how sincere it was in its efforts to make up. At whatever levels the talks between the two

of power by the next government. It is, however, taken for granted that Vajpayee would be the Prime Minister after the polls. He is not only popular in Pakistan but also trusted, unlike the BJP which is considered anti-Muslim.

Musharraf can manage the mercurial mood -- Pakistan's trait -- for some time. But he would feel let down if nothing "visible" emerged on Kashmir after a few weeks of the formation of the government at New Delhi. He too has a responsibility that cross-border terrorism is not resumed after the snow melts on the Kashmir hills. But if he is able to stop infiltration, he will be on a stronger wicket to demand from India that it makes good the words in the joint statement: "to the satisfaction of the two countries."

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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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.

National unity

I appreciate the views expressed by Mr. AZM Abdul Ali in his letter published in your esteemed daily on January 9, 2004.

Why don't we decide and arrive at a consensus to bestow Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Shaheed Ziaur Rahman with their due honour, respect and status in the greater interest of national unity and understanding? This is most essential with a view to doing away with belligerence and hostility among our political leaders and maintaining a cordial atmosphere in the country.

It may also be recalled here that during the Pakistan days we stood divided between Punjabi and Bengali and we opposed each other. Why in an independent and sovereign Bangladesh we are divided under two different identities Bengali and Bangladeshi?

The name of our country is Bangladesh. The name of our state and national language is Bangla. Why don't we also have a proud common national identity and nationality for our 130 million people?

OH Kabir
6, Hare Street
Wari, Dhaka

Politico FP

While the politicians in power harp on human and domestic family planning (FP) with relentless monotony, there is no sign of FP practices inside politics and bureaucracy. The latter, as per some popular principle, always expands, as creepers or moss. Today the young political field workers are being indoctrinated in the wrong way on ways of rendering public service without expecting bakshish (bribery) at every step; and the campus environment is based on violence and confrontation.

Now the official PERC probing committee has pointed out (DS Jan 19) that the PMO (PM's office) is exerting its influence on the political harem; and that the number of ministries need to be reduced for an LDC, as bureaucracy is diverting a big percentage of the GDP; and the systems loss in the local political culture is very high.

The governors themselves are inefficient; hence the question of raising the efficiency of public administration is a moot point. RAJUK, PDB, BTB, BRTA and the city corporations are glaring examples of white elephants coming out of the political forest.

The two major political parties are all the time engaged in fighting over the leftovers. What was the logic behind the amusing tamasha of changing the historical noticeboards at the intellectual graveyard? Tribalism (we are very fond of district-ism) in politics has to go

before this young nation can get a clear vision of its bearing to the final destination. The politicians got the chance since 1991 when they came out of hibernation, but bungled it up. That is why today there are voices all around on the formation of a third platform to redress public grievances and clean up the political garbage generated under sterile leadership.

The old style of politics goes on merrily year after year, taking the voters for a 'joyride' in the political fantasy-land.
A Zabr
Dhaka

Police uniform

I would like to talk about the recent change in police uniform. It seems we are a developed country and we have no task but to do the unnecessary things. It is totally ludicrous and politically motivated. I think it is a

mockery with our people while thousands of citizens are suffering due to lawlessness. It is a funny thing that the police dress is being held responsible for the poor law and order situation. Nowadays few people have any faith in the efficiency and honesty of police. But I believe that police have been made 'scapegoat' by the politicians.

It is said that police can arrest any criminal any time. But the 'Godfathers' prevent them from doing so. That's why it is the so-called politicians not the police who are responsible for our sufferings.
Foyed Ahmed
Shyamoli, Dhaka

Something is wrong!

Our politicians, and the government, cannot generate news. The media is full of speeches, ceremonies and sermons. We seem to be a talkative, emotionally charged

society. Poets and artists get top ratings. We can only wish but cannot plan and develop. We have few foundations, many structures and infrastructures. It is a society basking in the 'glories' and 'achievements' of the past.

Prune the leaders, first the rest will adjust.
Abdali
Dhaka

Provosts or puppets?

I would like to write something about student politics. We all are familiar with the term. The actual meaning of student politics has already been converted, it means capturing halls, extortion and violence. It creates session jams which are very detrimental to the academic life of students. My cordial request to those political leaders who patronise student politics is that they instruct their followers not

to disturb campus life. Student leaders are using general students as pawns in their game of controlling and dominating the academic arena. As a result, many students cannot lead their life peacefully. In case of residential halls, the provost supervises the hall but unfortunately the student leaders distribute seats. Here the provost plays the role of a puppet!

I would request the university authorities to look into the matter in the interest of general students who can do nothing on their own in the presence of outsiders masquerading as student leaders.
Md. Rezaul Karim (Reza)
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University
Dhaka

Attention, education planners

There are now more than fifty pri-

vate universities in Bangladesh. Only a few of these institutions are offering quality education and producing students who can contribute to society. But there are hundreds of public institutions like Jagannath University College or Eden University College across the country where students of reasonably good calibre are studying. Moreover, these public institutions have their own campuses and some truly competent teachers.

Our government is establishing new universities but overlooking the prospects of these existing institutions. A government initiative can make these institutions centres of state-of-the-art education.
Tawhid Shams Chowdhury
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Dhaka