

Holy Ashura

An ennobling message put across

TENTH of Muharram today, a great day of transcending radiance in Islamic calendar. It marks the culmination of mourning over the tragedy enacted on the burning sands of Karbala by the tyrannical hands of Yazid's army. But in truth, it went down in history as the triumph of Karbala. This is because of principles emerging victorious through an undaunted sacrifice over the forces of tyranny and debasement represented by Yazid. Furthermore, the sheer grief that the cruelty of the evil incarnate engendered emboldened the faithful into a stony resolve to stand their ground. The saga of the Prophet's (pbuh) grandson Hazrat Imam Hossain (RA) embracing martyrdom with members of his immediate family and an indefatigable followers has left indelible imprints on the subsequent course of Islamic history. It is the much fabled sacrifice for the sake of principles steeped in real-time history that confers on it a dignity far beyond legends. In terms of immediate power struggle, Yazid could boast he pulled off a success, but evidently it was a triumphalism full of deceit.

In everyday life, we have to make all kinds of choices -- between good and evil, between benign and pernicious and between right and wrong. What makes winning the chafe from the grain difficult in today's complex world is that things are no longer separable as black and white. There are variegated tinges to them. That's why we need to be uncompromising with time-honoured norms and principles with a flair for modernist rationality characterising our pursuit of truth, fairness and justice.

Given the far-reaching significance of Ashura, let's not turn it into a ceremony of mourning but draw from it a robust inspiration to live by principles.

Cost of corruption

What counter-measures are being taken?

THE various government ministries have a troubling habit of refusing to acknowledge either their own shortcomings or many of the difficulties that the people of this nation face. We are thinking, for instance, of the official response to the steep rise in the price of essentials or the munga that devastated the northern region last year. In this context, it was gratifying to note the law minister's admission that corruption is widespread and holding back economic progress.

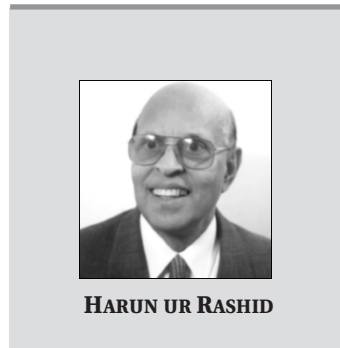
Corruption and graft in the system are so extensive that the law minister estimated that it was responsible for limiting the nation's GDP growth to 5 percent instead of the 7 percent growth which would be possible if corruption were reined in.

It should be borne in mind that this shocking figure comes not from the opposition, nor even one of the civil society organisations whose impartiality the government might question, nor even Transparency International, whose recent report on corruption in Bangladesh was contemptuously dismissed by the government but from the mouth of a cabinet minister. And, as such, it has the imprimatur of the government behind it.

One thing which we would like to point out is that the difference between 5 percent GDP growth and 7 percent GDP growth is not a de minimus difference of only 2 percentage points, as the more mathematically challenged might think, but actually represents a difference of 40 percent in the rate of growth. Corruption is responsible for the rate of economic growth being fully 40 percent lower than it should be. This is an astonishing number, and the one that we must focus on.

The second thing is that it is not enough to merely acknowledge the problem, though this is an encouraging first step. The blame for corruption lies squarely with the government in power. It cannot, by definition, reside anywhere else. So the question is, what is the government doing to combat this epidemic of corruption. The government has acknowledged the problem and so surely the next logical step would be to take legal and disciplinary action against those who are guilty of cheating the public exchequer and to institute measures to clamp down on corruption. But this is something we are still waiting to see.

Social entrepreneurs: Why we need them?



HARUN UR RASHID

NOBEL Peace Laureate and Human Rights activist Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) once said "True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring". This implies that the causes of begging are to be addressed through innovative interventions. And that is exactly what social entrepreneurs try to do by inventing ideas to ease a problem confronted by poor people.

The designation of "social entrepreneur" has gained popularity in recent years. Journalists, philanthropists, human rights activists and development workers frequently employ the term. America's leading universities offer courses on this subject. Put simply, social entrepreneurs are people with new bold ideas to address major problems in the community.

Who are the social entrepreneurs?

According to the management expert, Peter Drucker, the term "entrepreneur" (from the French, meaning "one who takes into hand") was introduced 200 years ago by the French economist Jean-Baptiste Say. To him, an entrepreneur is someone who shifts "economic resources out of an area of lower and into an area of higher productivity". Some say social entrepreneurs have existed throughout ages. According to David Bronstein who specialises in writing about social innovations (he wrote a book on Grameen Bank), St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) would qualify as a social entrepreneur, having built multiple organisations that initiated changes in religious community of his time.

At present the word "social entrepreneur" has been ascribed to individuals who are self-initiators, innovative thinkers and successful doers. They usually go beyond the traditional mode of things. They invent. They create. They build. They uplift the lives and improve the quality of living of

the disadvantaged or poorer segment of society. They employ social, economic or ecological interventions to pursue their altruistic objectives.

Examples of social change through powerful ideas

Every change begins with a vision and a decision to take action. Often it has been found that an important social change begins with a single entrepreneurial author. Consider these examples.

people are credit worthy and productive. Microcredit has changed lives of millions of poor women in Bangladesh.

Fazle Hasan Abed founded in 1972 a non-governmental organisation, BRAC, to initially handle rehabilitation programme of displaced persons who were victims of brutal war in 1971 in Bangladesh. BRAC is now the largest non-governmental organisation in the world, having a large number of development programmes that

organisations exist. Slovakia in Eastern Europe has more than 12,000. In Brazil in the 1990s the number of registered grassroots organisations jumped from 250,000 to 400,000, a 60 per cent increase.

Prevailing gross inequality among people

In today's world, the rich are getting richer and the poorest poorer. In 2002 Earth Summit II was held in Johannesburg (South Africa) and

the mental shake up and rethinking of an individual. Furthermore values are integral to the human sciences. Human beings act according to certain standards of truth and of right and wrong, whether or not they are conscious of them as "values".

Peter Goldmark, who was the President of Rockefeller Foundation (1988-97), was asked about this new phenomenon in the community. In reply he said: "You have restless people seeking to deal

and information to move quickly and cheaply around the globe

Social entrepreneurs are not easily daunted when contemplating social problems and they have the ability to see problems that grow slowly and affect society through their cumulative effect on individuals. This brings to mind what Indian human rights activist and film actor Sabana Azmi said of communal riots in Gujarat in March 2003: "What you saw in Gujarat and the recent alarming trend of the rise of Hindu nationalism did not happen overnight. It has been a gradual process that took eight years to take this shape. To counter that I think we need to network ourselves better and build more bridges with like minded people".

Global network

Social entrepreneurs link up across the globe to exchange ideas as to how to alleviate sufferings of poor people. What unites them is their role as social innovators. They have powerful ideas to improve people's lives and they have implemented them in their own countries. The World Social Forum that met in Mumbai January 16-21 afforded an opportunity for exchange of their experiences among social entrepreneurs. Even the founder of the World Economic Forum, Klaus Schwab, created his own foundation to cater to social entrepreneurs and invited several of them to the 2004 Forum in Davos (Switzerland).

Conclusion

Social entrepreneurs invest their time, energy and often their wealth and they give it year after year (many say they even give away their sleep). They are selfless breed of people who dedicate their lives to create happiness and well being for others. Although social entrepreneurs have constructively contributed to society, yet they often are misunderstood and under-appreciated. In some cases they are subject to unhelpful criticism and even to vilification.

No organisation including government agency is perfect. It must be admitted that social entrepreneurs' good and highly commendable work in areas that were not touched before far outweighs any of their alleged lapses. It is time that their valuable contribution to society by implementing their powerful ideas is publicly admired and fully recognised. After all, what business entrepreneurs are to the economy, social entrepreneurs are to social change.

Barrister Harun ur Rashid is a former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

BOTTOM LINE

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In Sri Lanka, the Sarvodaya Movement began in 1958 when a teacher led a group of high school students to rural areas to experience the true state of affairs of poor people. Later they found ways of building a more just and happy life for them and over the years the movement has improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of poor people in Sri Lanka through self-help endeavours.

In South Africa, one woman, Veronica Khosa, developed a home-based care model for AIDS patients that changed government health policy. In Brazil, Fabio Rosa helped bring electricity to hundreds and thousands of remote rural residents. Ibina Rios of Peru created a loan fund to help residents develop small but profitable recycling and garbage processing business. Residents pay a small fee for clean streets.

An American, Bill Drayton, a graduate of Yale Law School, created a pioneering foundation, Ashoka, Innovators for the Public that has funded and supported social entrepreneurs in Asia (including Bangladesh), Africa, Latin and Central Americas. To Drayton "social entrepreneurs are not content just to give a fish or to teach how to fish. They will not rest until they have revolutionised the fishing industry."

Examples in Bangladesh

Two Bangladeshi organisations which are internationally known and have swept across with their branches in the country are Grameen Bank and BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee). Dr. Yunus has demonstrated through Grameen Bank's microcredit programme that poor

cover the areas of non-formal primary education, primary health, maternity health care and income generation activities. These two organisations have become models for other developing countries.

In addition, there is a history of social entrepreneurs in the country, for example in the past, there were some truly great female social entrepreneurs such as Nawab Faizunnessa and Rokeya Shakawat Hossain who pioneered spread of female education, when very few people thought that female education was a right and a necessity.

These extraordinary stories highlight a massive transformation in the community around the world by imaginative ideas and actions undertaken by some visionary social entrepreneurs.

Community or non-governmental organisations

Social entrepreneurs have set up hundreds and thousands of community or non-government organisations (NGOs) mostly in developing countries in various social sectors with a view to promoting poor people in better livelihood activities without degrading of environment. Twenty years ago, for example it has been reported that Indonesia had only one independent environmental organisation. Today it has more than 2,000.

In Bangladesh most of the country developmental work is handled by about 20,000 non-governmental organizations -- almost all of them were established during the last 25 years. In India well over a million grassroots

the UN came up with grim statistics that demonstrated extreme inequality among people of the world. Some of the statistics were as follows:

- About 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1.85 a day
- 800 million people do not get enough food to lead normal lives
- 1 billion people lack access to clean water
- 2.4 billion have no proper sanitation

On the other hand, 200 richest people (64 new billionaires have been added to its billionaires' list in 2003, --headed once again by Bill Gates) doubled their income in past six years to US\$ more than 1,000 billion; the richest people have more assets than the total assets of the poorest 600 million. Richest one-fifth of nations get 86 per cent of world's income while poorest one-fifth of nations get 1 per cent of world's income.

Income inequality exists not only between rich and poor countries but also within developing countries. For example, in Bangladesh, the richest 10 per cent of the population controls 40.72 per cent of national income while the poorest 10 per cent of the population has access to only 1.84 per cent of national income (Bangladesh Economic Survey, 2003). Gross inequality between urban and rural people also exists in other developing countries including China and India.

What is driving social entrepreneurs?

Human beings are instinctively herd animals. They are by nature social and practical doers. The first stage in social change is internal,

with problems that were not being successfully coped with by existing institutions. They escaped the old formats and were driven to invent new forms of organisations. They found more freedom, more effectiveness and more productive engagement."

Many social thinkers believe that altruistic motives prompt a social entrepreneur to think of innovative ideas to assist poor people. Altruistic attitude implies spirit of benevolence, compassion and empathy. They operate in the realm of the heart and mind. Heart which feels for the people and the mind which thinks for and with the people.

A compelling reason is that some people recognise that social ills cannot be solved either with outdated conceptual models or with old pattern of planning. New approaches are urgently needed to solve problems. What sets social entrepreneurs apart is that they have taken action to do something about it, namely, devise a solution for the need and follow through to make that solution to others. Their activities are not specialised activities but are based in the activities of everyday life at their best.

Another major change is that electronic media has made global inequalities far more visible than ever before. Many people or governments in rich countries ponder the fact how can 1.2 billion people in the world living on less than US\$ 1.85 a day be helped to improve their quality of life without simultaneously degrading the environment? They have come forward to provide funds in poverty alleviation and environmental projects in developing countries. In addition, technology permits people, money

A cult guru gets an expected sentence

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

AFTER an unusually lengthy process of trial that prolonged almost for eight years, the Tokyo District Court has sentenced the former leader of a religious cult that released deadly sarin gas on Tokyo's subway system in 1995 killing 12 people, injuring 5,500 and shattering Japan's image as one of the world's safest nations. Chizuo Matsumoto alias Shoko Asahara, the founder of the now defunct new religious sect Aum Shinrikyo, was found guilty of masterminding the attack and the presiding judge pronounced guilty verdicts against him on 13 charges.

The trial started in 1996 and continued for an overly long period causing frustration on part of relatives of the victims of gas attack as well as ordinary citizens. The verdict given last Friday, hence, is being seen by many as a rare occasion that provided some kind of emotional satisfaction to those who had suffered too long for an act of extremely heinous nature. The presiding judge took about four hours to read the verdict before pronouncing the death sentence. In the verdict the judge said the cult had planned to kill almost everyone in the capital by spraying 70 tons of deadly sarin gas and had envisaged a kingdom of Aum ruled by its all-powerful head as the King. The cult leader, who has been referred to in the court case by his real name Chizuo Matsumoto, was found to have masterminded 13 different criminal acts that led to the deaths of 27 people and thousands were

injured.

Matsumoto, known to the people as a nearly blind, bearded man with shoulder-length hair, formed a yoga club in 1984. In 1986 he made a trip to Nepal and on his return to Japan proclaimed that at the Himalayas he was blessed with a divine doctrine that entrusted him the responsibility of guiding his followers to a utopia where they would find safe haven from the devastation of Armageddon. A year after he changed the name of the group to Aum Shinrikyo or the supreme truth, and started recruiting followers who would be ready to make

extreme sacrifice for him. The cult guru also cherished the political dream of becoming a national figure and in February 1990, he along with 24 other members of the cult contested in the lower house election. But none of the 25 candidates won a seat and Matsumoto realised the limitation of success in political battle, which is of completely different nature than the battle of winning the hearts of devotees by preaching for salvation of their souls through dubious

ways.

In its heyday during the first half of 1990s, Aum Shinrikyo had 1,400 hardcore followers who were living in its compounds in Tokyo and other places, as well as 14,000 believers nationwide. The cult also had its overseas branch in Russia, where the collapse of communism created so much a vacuum in the moral teachings that even a religious cult as dubious as the Aum didn't have much problem in gathering scores of followers. Like many other new religious cult groups that have become a common feature of the Japanese society after World

War II, Aum also had in its rank a few who had devoted everything of their material possessions for the cult and its leader. This no doubt was the main channel of funding for the cult, and by using that accumulated financial resources, the cult soon started to acquire real estates and other properties in different parts of the country and became a prominent name in the wider field of new religion in Japan. The trend continued until its final fall triggered by the sarin gas attack.

the general feeling among people in Japan of the verdict is that of a sense of relief. The sarin gas attack has no doubt shattered people's perception about various new religious groups that have always found a fertile ground in Japan to spread their roots. The verdict would obviously have a serious repercussion on some of them who from time to time appear in news headlines for performing acts that raise eyebrows of those who are unaware of this particular trend in a country

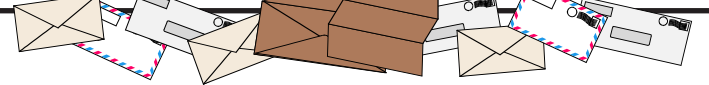
known for going through economic miracles.

People were seen lining up in front of the Tokyo District Court early in the morning on the day verdict was given against the Aum leader. It is obvious that nobody went there with a sympathetic heart for the accused and many simply wanted to be the witness to an event of profound significance. But at the same time, the verdict also leaves many riddles unsolved of which the people of Japan are eager to find correct answers ever since the subway attack back in 1995. The first and foremost of those are

a religious group might be involved in criminal acts. Aum's first sarin gas experiment in Nagano prefecture a year before the deadly attack in Tokyo was in fact overlooked by the police, who wrongly accused another person and arrested him. As Aum has now simply declared itself dissolved and a small number of its former members regrouped to form a new cult under the name Aleph, the question of how far the disease of the society has been cured since the Tokyo attack remains unresolved, for dubious religious cults are the obvious outcome of a society where not everything is going normally.

The verdict also didn't address the important issue of the responsibility of the state in helping the victims who fall pray to such attacks. A victim's group of Aum's sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system in 1995 is calling on the government to pay compensation to survivors and bereaved families. The Japanese government has not offered any compensation at all to any of the victims, despite the fact that negligence of the police agency in tracking down the group at the planning stage can easily be cited as an example of failure on part of the government in ensuring the safety of its citizens. As many such questions related to the attack were not addressed in the court verdict, victims and their families are still not convinced their physical and psychological scars will ever heal. The total silence that the Aum guru has kept throughout the trial shrouded further only the atmosphere of distrust and anger.

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.

Smoking in public places

A few days ago I started my classes at university. The first day I went to my university canteen I was appalled by the lack of ignorance of students and university authorities about smoking in public. I know that these students know about the harmful effects of smoking and still people consciously indulge in smoking. So I am not going to deliver a lecture on why or how you should quit smoking which you may claim as your "personal matter", but when your personal choices affect us badly, there is something you should know about and care about.

I believe not many are concerned about how deadly passive smoking can be. While 90 percent of lung cancer is caused by smoking, the remaining 10 per cent is caused

primarily by second-hand or passive smoking. In the USA alone more than 50, 000 people die annually because of passive smoking. It doubles the possibility of developing heart diseases.

If smoking can be prohibited in California in public places like bars and casinos why cannot it be banned in public places here at least in the educational institutions and offices? Why should I, being a non smoker, die of lung cancer because of your choice?
Kainat Kabir
Dhaka

An appeal to PSC

Bangladesh is an agriculture-dependent country. The lion's share of the resources of our country is the product or by-product of agriculture. Agriculturists play a vital role to

produce better and more crops as well as HYV. So the agriculturists are the helmsmen of our nation.

On the basis of PM's proclamation, the PSC is going to issue the circular for the 25th batch of special BCS. I would request the PSC to allot at least 15% reserved seats for agriculture.
Rezaul Karim (Reza)
Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University
Dhaka

BBC and VOA

As a regular listener of BBC and VOA news, I find both the news media biased while circulating news about Palestine and Israel. To them, the killing of an Israeli soldier is much more important than the deaths of a large number of Palestinians.
DAK Chowdhury
Sylhet

Our police

In any country the police is a law-enforcing agency that ensures justice through protecting people against crime. In modern days police is the only force that we can count on for social security. In the distant past, people used to take the law in their own hands. There were clashes between clans, families and individuals. To avoid this kind of bloodshed people were looking for a neutral force to maintain peace and harmony. That was the driving force behind the creation of police in the modern sense.

We all know that police is bound by the law to arrest criminals. Even in developed countries if there were no police criminals would get a free-hand. But our case appears to be very different. Despite having a large police force (police bosses do not admit it), our country has become a

haven for criminals. In most of the cases, they go unpunished. It seems the presence of police makes little difference. But we must admit the fact that it is not due to the fault of our police alone. Rather, we ourselves have pushed them to a lower position. Criminality is taking an unusual course. Hardened criminals are moving freely. And every day we hear about some gruesome crimes being committed. It seems we are caught in a vicious circle with no way out. The government has failed to address the issue in right earnest.

It is really not credible that nothing can be done against those criminals thriving on the sufferings of people. Discourses on ethics and morality to arouse human sensibilities may work well in checking moral degeneration. We want to build up a new future where justice will prevail.

Protic
HSC student
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Hartal

Following the completion of my studies in Aerospace Engineering and work on several NASA advanced propulsion contracts, I came to Bangladesh to work as an adviser to SPARRSO on the former government's plans to launch a telecommunication satellite.

Since I was born in the UK, this opportunity afforded the chance to gauge if I could bear living in the country of my parents' birth. As much as I enjoy visiting Bangladesh for limited periods of time, I decided against relocation - even though I had an employment opportunity to work as a lecturer at the Independent University of Bangladesh and a possible lecturing position at the

Military Institute of Science and Technology. One deciding factor was the destructive culture of employing the use of "hartal" as an extension of political agenda. Over the past few years of reading your online paper, I found that all opposition parties use the excuse that "they have no other option" then to enforce hartal and then the following day they go on to "thank the people for supporting them".

Forgive me for my comments, but the reason why people stay at home is that they are afraid of being raped or killed by the thugs who are employed by the enforcing parties and "not" because the people support the call of "hartal". Also, since Bangladesh has over one calendar month of national holidays, why don't these political parties consider the hardship that the normal working people have to endure

because of "hartal"?

This self-centred, egotistical attitude may only come to an end if the presidential rule is reintroduced similar to the system used in the USA, where all proposals have to be ratified and agreed upon by the Senate prior to becoming law.

However, rather than the direct election of a president by the people, this neutral and well respected individual should be voted in to lead the country and form a government by mutual consensus from all political parties in a lower house.

This would ensure that politics does not spill into the streets which only affects those who are vulnerable.
Abdul M. Ismail