

The message of sacrifice

We need to be imbued with it

EID-ul-Azha, the second biggest religious festival of the Muslims, will be observed tomorrow across the globe with due fervour and solemnity. The festival rekindles the memories of Prophet Ibrahim (SM) who was ready to make everything subservient to the wishes of the Almighty Allah and accepted the divine decree that required his son to be sacrificed -- but only in symbolic form. The testing event of the preparedness for supreme sacrifice left a priceless message: nothing is more valuable than the unflinching faith of a believer in the infinite greatness and munificence of the Creator.

The festival is being celebrated at a time when the nation and the Muslim world are facing problems on several fronts. And what is missing among our politicians is the spirit of accommodation and tolerance to an extent that it has now become a matter of sacrifice for them to be demonstrated through some special efforts on their part. Partisan interests need to be subordinated to the common stake we all have in collective national wellbeing. The sacrifice that Prophet Ibrahim (SM) was asked to make was too great for any ordinary mortal to even think of, but surely, we can make smaller sacrifices to improve the life around us.

Islam was perhaps never a more misunderstood religion in the past than it is now due to the profiling of the religion and also because of a handful of zealots' hijacking the essence of our religion. We in Bangladesh are also experiencing the malady called terrorism. It is time the nation rose in protest and put an end to all sorts of violent activities in the name of religion.

A word about festival time do's and don'ts. The DCC performed well in the last few years by launching a special drive to clear the entrails of the sacrificed animals from the roads. Hopefully, it will repeat the feat with more efficiency this time around. The city fathers should also think of designating certain places for animal sacrifice like abattoirs, instead of allowing roads and open spaces to be used indiscriminately. This is an issue that can no longer be kept on the back-burner.

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

Taking cue from BB report

Overcoming risk factors challenge to economy

THE potential risks of increased political in-fighting are self-evident in this election year. The most important item on the nation's agenda this year is to ensure that we have good elections that are beyond controversy and are thus able to continue on the path to sustainable economic development.

To the extent that intransigence and lack of dialogue between the government and the main opposition might put into jeopardy the holding of elections that would be acceptable to all, we have called on both sides to decrease tensions and work together to bridge their differences and ensure that a workable solution is reached.

Bangladesh Bank's annual report suggests that there is another reason that we should be concerned with the escalating political tensions.

This is the damage that will potentially be done to the economy in 2006 if the political tension is not ratcheted down. Spiking politics is one of the four risk factors that the Bank identified in its report, and as we enter the year 2006 it is necessary for our leaders to focus on the economy, which if left untended could lose some of its steam in terms of sustaining the growth level.

The international price of oil remains volatile due to the unstable situation in the Middle East, and though we have survived (indeed thrived) one year in the post-MFA era, we cannot afford to be complacent. It is still incumbent on the government to improve the business climate and implement structural reforms so that the economy does not slow down in the new year.

The report brought into sharp focus many of the problems that have bedeviled the economy for a long time, from inadequacy of infrastructure and utilities to high taxes to lack of continuity and consistency in government policies.

Amidst all the acrimony and name calling and positioning in terms of elections, let us not forget that the economy needs careful stewardship in these uncertain times. Whatever the distractions, we must not lose our focus.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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.

Eid time travelling

Idul Azha, one of the two big religious festivals of Muslims, will be celebrated tomorrow and this is why most of the city dwellers will go home to spend time with their kin. Eventually, it will put pressure on the transport system. But the transport authorities don't appear to be concerned about the passengers. Moreover, fog or rough weather may cause poor visibility.

So there is reason to believe that accidents may occur if necessary precaution is not taken by the drivers.

Is anybody listening?
MAHMUD
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Why this (un)fare meter?

The public transport fare meters (taxis and auto-rickshaws) should be

withdrawn, as the regulatory authorities cannot run, monitor and enforce it. It is a farce due to the incompetence of the benign government, elected to power by a disillusioned electorate, hoodwinked by false promises. Politicians get elected to deliver miscarriage (of justice, not babies).

The reason is simple: there is no Ministry of Transport! It is called by some other name (Communications), which cannot communicate! The same is the pathetic condition of the other ministries. This is the pattern of good governance: the 64 ministries cannot minister to the public needs. The politicians won't admit that the highest systems losses are in the political sector--mother of all evils! Another denial is the absence of public toilets. The very call of Nature is denied! This is worse than Greenhouse Effect. Prosecute the taxi drivers and the owners, and

let them call strike, hartal, and demonstrations (What else?).

For how long? If the fare structure has to be revised, then do it, and convince the owners. The rules have to be enforced or reviewed. The violators are not prosecuted. Why this corrupticiency?

The current official mood is self-survival during the coming general elections. What for? To continue with one public toilet for each million residents of the metropolis? Should the passengers burn the fare meters (violence imitated from political demonstrations) and set fire to the vehicles? The governors are blissfully unaware of the basic concepts of public and mass psychology.

Newton picked up a few grains of sand on the seashore. How many the regime has picked up?
AlifZab,
Dhaka

Death of a worker

When people across the world were

celebrating the New Year 2006 with fresh hopes and promises we witnessed yet another tragic death of a garment worker-- a young boy was beaten to death for wearing a shirt or the sort from the workplace just to get rid of the cold. The boy admitted his act and explained the reason to the concerned personnel and got the cruellest punishment for such a trivial, but important for him, act of putting something in order to protect himself from the piercing cold in this wintry season on the eve of a fresh year in his life. Unfortunately or anything you call it, New Year brought him the unexpected and unannounced death--extinction of light at a time when he had many miles to go in his life--many dreams were waiting to come real.

A strange nation we are turning out to be. You see the insane acts being perpetrated at almost all levels of life in the country by peoplean incredible nation we are

indeed. It's such a sorry phenomenon. The inhuman plight of the garment workers in the country has been addressed by different sections of the society yet they remain where they are. Violation of human rights, unhygienic work atmosphere and the unexpectedly low pay are the common phenomena.

Furthermore, the abuse that the working women undergo on a regular basis inside the factory and outside on their way back home is manifold. Sexual molestations, threats, pay cuts and the teasing/harassments are a daily affair that is simply barbaric. Garment owners are repeatedly being asked to meet the demands set by the authorities and the owners are claiming that they are going by the law. But things are not going like.

It is quite frustrating that these human beings are being treated like mere pigs when their efforts earn us the invaluable foreign currencies.

We, the politicians, social leaders and others, constantly talk of high hopes for the people of all walks of life that in fact end up in: "We bring you fantasy--we bring you pain" state.

One with the slightest of sanity will applaud the garment workers, specially the women workers, when you watch them coming back from the workplaces in the evening or late evening by bus or on foot in a jig jag line, all exhausted from their hard work that begins early in the morning. My salute to you, all the working people.

At present, I strongly urge the government to take the necessary steps to protect the rights and overall welfare of the garment workers in the country and deal with the above-mentioned case of the sad death of the boy in a serious manner.

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrahad, Chittagong
Doctor's
'negligence'

Any news of death, natural or otherwise, saddens us immensely, especially if the person concerned is young. So, I was deeply shocked when I read the news "Doctor's negligence costs a youth's life" [The Daily Star, December 23, 2005]. I extend my heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved parents and pray to Allah to grant them the strength to bear the irreparable loss.

I would, however, beg to submit that the report in the newspaper did not seem to cover all aspects and therefore seemed to be somewhat biased.

First, it never mentioned the link between the Gulshan health care centre and BIRDEM, the most renowned health care institution of the country. The report even called the centre a clinic. A reference to BIRDEM would have

clearly explained the objectives and priorities of the centre. BIRDEM has founded such health care centres in different areas of the city. This has reduced the rush and congestion in the BIRDEM main centre and at the Dr. Ibrahim Memorial Hospital at Shahbag. This has also helped the diabetic patients by providing services near their homes.

Secondly, the report was published a long time after the incident. The delay has not been explained.

Finally, the report seems to have been based solely on the views and comments of parents. Interviewing some other doctors and the staff of the centre might have made the report truly objective.

M. Lutfullah Majid
Gulshan, Dhaka

Those worried police officers and nation's concern



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

petent personnel do not man the organisation, who is going to provide the much-needed relief to the common folks? Coming to the unpalatable specifics of getting an appointment in police ranks by greasing the palms of the influential, one may say with a degree of certitude that appointees from such process mostly turn into bitter individuals from the very start. Only the affected and the insiders know the extent of financial hardship

mentioned psycho-social dimension. Therefore, if the police has to provide service it has to induct capable and psychologically appropriately disposed individuals.

Impact of unusual intake and truncated training
The disconcerting part of the alleged politically motivated appointments and shortened training is that it cripples the training scenario and

depends not only on his knowledge and skills but also on his ability to function in a group and to interact effectively with the people. The higher the level of the official, the greater will be the input of managerial and conceptual skills required in training programs. Regular training should thus be considered as an investment in human resources.

The Trainee Assistant Superintendents of Police who are the

professionals, taxpaying citizen and an apprehensive civil society. Sadly, these issues and queries are bothering all concerned because the recruitment of partisan elements as law enforcement officers will dangerously complicate an already fearfully polarised public life. If managers do not grow as they are supposed to be, then not only the government but also the entire society stand to suffer. The unhealthy consequence on enforce-

sad time when doubts are being expressed publicly about the efficacy and honesty of the state investigative body. Must we not realise that vital regulatory functions like criminal investigation and maintenance of public order can neither be arrogated to other agencies or be privatised.

The remedy

We must sanitise the recruitment process, especially of subordinate police ranks before it is too late. In order to ensure apolitical recruitment and professional competence, a high-powered committee consisting of police officers, academicians and judicial officers may be formed. A retired justice may head the committee. This committee may profitably adopt the procedures followed by the Public Service Commission. Training needs of police should be accorded greater priority and such expenditures be deemed as investment in the financial exercise.

The real interests of the state must not be allowed to get diluted and mixed up with the interests of the government of the day. Our politicians including the chief executive have to display an understanding and appreciation of the requirements of the state and the government in a democratic and pluralist society. If we fail, professionalism will become the worst casualty, the desired sense of direction will be lost and the police organisation will dip further into a frustratingly lackadaisical environment.

experienced by the ordinary people in such dubious exercise.

So when bitter individuals occupy positions of coercive power, the result cannot be wholesome. The minds and motivations of such individuals remain preoccupied with the compulsions of recouping their initial investment at the earliest. Quite naturally, the lure of the lucre takes its toll. The imperatives of acting neutrally and with sympathy and compassion recede into the background. No wonder therefore that many of our police stations are not sympathetic listening posts from where the people can expect service delivery.

The important point to note is that most people visit police stations or come into contact with the police only when under stress and strain. It is in these circumstances that every victim expects a sympathetic and understanding response. The expected support and sympathy are not there because the disgruntled and bitter appointees can not appreciate the

makes a mess of career planning. Ad-hoc short term measures are introduced which in the end produce half-baked and ill-trained officials. It is in this background that the reported bulk recruitment and reduced training schedule has to be viewed. Already our police training is in a general state of neglect. The training arrangements are unsatisfactory, qualitatively and quantitatively. The number of policemen have increased substantially but the facilities have not kept pace with this. In Bangladesh context the consideration of the state objectives as enshrined in the constitution highlights the need for training in attitudinal development. Time, therefore, is essential to enable the training process to act as a catalytic agent, the total impact of which, in course of time, will affect the organisation. Training efforts need to be sustained to ensure the achievement of desirable objective. In the police, in particular, the over-all efficiency of an individual

potential leaders of the service must be equipped with all such professional knowledge, skills and attitudes that will prepare them for effective performance of their tasks and higher responsibilities.

They need to be helped to develop a proper sense of values, faith in the rule of law and a spirit of public service. They should have an understanding of the socio-economic changes occurring in the country and their thinking should be in tune with the national goals and value systems, urges and aspirations of the people. All these can not be done in a shortened training course.

Premature field exposure to a duty post without basic orientation will surely ruin the career prospects of young officers.

One may wonder if there is an unhealthy motive in the recruitment of more than usual number of officers in the penultimate year of a political government. The capacity and ability of our training outfits are not satisfactory in the estimation of the profes-

sionals, taxpaying citizen and an apprehensive civil society. Sadly, these issues and queries are bothering all concerned because the recruitment of partisan elements as law enforcement officers will dangerously complicate an already fearfully polarised public life. If managers do not grow as they are supposed to be, then not only the government but also the entire society stand to suffer. The unhealthy consequence on enforce-

ment ethos can not be overlooked.

Corrosion in investigation

The Bangladesh Police remains the principal investigating agency for the state. Despite the accumulated complaints against police for faulty and perfunctory investigation there is as yet no other body in place for carrying out the major part of the criminal investigation. Under such circumstances, the alleged recruitment of politically partisan elements, who will very soon acquire investigative powers, will shake public confidence. The apprehension is that such elements will remain preoccupied with largely inconsequential matters to the detriment of proper investigation. Needless to mention that real investigation is to ascertain facts and circumstances and therefore impartial ascertaining of facts and circumstances would be an impossibility.

In view of the above, we must realise the gravity of the situation because we are now passing through a

seat providing greater space to narrow partisan considerations. Power will have to change hands but the values of a democratic polity that are universal demands unconditional adherence to it.

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If you are on the edge of tears already, let them flow freely in the company of Alec Douglas Home (pronounced, naturally, Hume), who became Prime Minister of Britain after Harold Macmillan only to hand over power to Harold Wilson and the Labour Party.

"To my deafness I'm accustomed,
To my dentures I'm resigned,
I can manage my bifocals,
But O, how I miss my mind."

As Alan Bennett, the acerbic British playwright notes, "In England, you see, age wipes the slate clean. If you live to be 90 in England and can still eat a boiled egg, they think you deserve the Nobel Prize."

Being a nationalist, I began to wonder why an Indian was not being quoted. Even the Chinese was not a look-in, albeit in the form of a proverb, ("I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand." Very inscrutable.) The book is clearly littered with wisdom from all manner of nationalities. The Chinese have built up a terrifying reputation for wisdom: is our international reputation limited to the Kamasutra, which requires expertise in gymnastics rather than intellect?

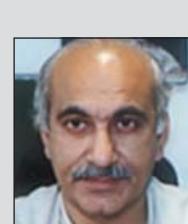
Or was the Indian quota filled by Socrates?

Hear anyone over fifty in India and all you hear is moans about the younger generation: they don't listen, they want everything, they don't care.

Thank God for such children. India's future is bright.

M.J. Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

Who said this?



M.J. AKBAR

CHILDREN nowadays love luxury, have bad manners, contempt for authority, disrespect for elders."

Who said this?
One of the more educative joys is to read intelligent book reviews. The success of a review is generally measured by the speed with which you order the book afterwards, or cancel any such intentions. Very occasionally there appears a review that is so intelligent that it makes purchase of the book redundant. This is hard luck upon the author and the publisher, and my heart goes out to both for predictable reasons. I saw one such review in the Christmas issue of the Spectator. The unfortunate publisher is Hodder and Stoughton, and the unlucky compiler of Keeping My Words: An Anthology from Cradle to Grave is Magnus Magnusson. The review did nothing more, or indeed less, than string together a selection of the best quotes; it is doing what your parents do not want

them, Mark Twain's take on sons and dads finds a place in just about any anthology: "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years." As Einstein pointed out, everything is relative, but nothing is more relative than relations between father and son.

Those who have read Gore Vidal

I suppose the point of such an anthology is to provide a working philosophy for the reader, but trust the Russians to take it too far. Since Anton Chekhov is 19th century Russian I expect gloom, but this is life with a permanent overcast: "If you are afraid of loneliness, don't get married." How do you recognise a married couple in a restaurant? They are the two who aren't talking.

Americans, unlike Russians, are not

BYLINE

Bertrand Russell, who could not have been less French, was not talking of Dumas, but he could have been: "Men who are unhappy, like men who sleep badly, are always proud of the fact." Check out the content of any male conversation. If it isn't about what has gone wrong, then there is no conversation. If there were no bad news, men would go home,

presumably to sleep badly. This is one of the few aphorisms that seems to me to be of universal application.

It is remarkable how poignant the stiff-lipped English can get when they are helpless. When they help themselves, they help themselves to