

Celebrating Eid-ul-Azha

Uphold its spirit

EID-UL-AZHA, the second biggest religious festival of the Muslims, will be celebrated tomorrow. Prayers will be offered for world peace as well as prosperity of mankind. That's indeed one of the most remarkable aspects of any Muslim festival -- Divine blessings are sought and the solemnity of the occasion maintained in a joyous mood. Eid-ul-Azha revives the memory of Prophet Ibrahim's (Pbuh) faith in Allah and his complete readiness to sacrifice his dearest son as a token of surrendering himself to the divine wishes. That's where lies the message of Eid-ul-Azha. The Almighty, in His infinite kindness and being satisfied with the prophet's resolve, finally withdrew the decree and permitted him to sacrifice an animal. So, it was much more than an act of sacrificing an animal -- a triumph of belief in the Almighty's endless beneficence over any earthly possession.

The Eid is being observed in our country at a time when a huge number of people are still struggling to recover from the devastations caused by cyclone Sidr last month. Obviously, they are not in a position to celebrate Eid the way they would have liked to. So, it is our moral and religious obligation to share their grief and refrain from doing anything that would show a lack of sensitivity to these people. We fully echo the views expressed by Islamic scholars on the need for being austere when our fellow citizens are passing their days amid great uncertainty. We should also not forget the people in the northern region who have to grapple with severe cold-spells during this period of the year. If sacrifice is what this festival primarily revolves around, then the people in distress should be the prime beneficiaries of whatever we do on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha.

The affluent don't have to go through the trying conditions where people find it hard to manage two square meals a day, but they have social obligations to help alleviate their plight. The glory of Eid-ul-Azha doesn't lie in joining the race for buying pricey animals; rather it lies in how much one can offer to others as per the teachings of Islam.

We wish our readers a very happy Eid.

TIB's findings

Plug the holes in relief operations

EDIA, both electronic and print, have on and off highlighted the shortcomings of the relief efforts. The focus has been on lack of coordination, relief material not reaching the needy, particularly in remoter inaccessible areas, UP chairmen and members being accused of distributing these to their favourites.

Now comes the TIB observation report laying bare in greater detail the incidence of corruption, nepotism and other forms of mismanagement. Among their findings, seem to be the most scurrilous embezzlement of relief material by local public representatives, misappropriation by fake outfits and relief medicines finding their way to drug stores. An unholy nexus between government officials and public representatives is behind derailing the relief operations.

The government seems to be aware of the malpractice as a number of public representatives of union parishes and a few government officials were arrested on charges of corruption, especially misappropriation of relief goods. The corrective approach is a matter of being effective and this can be ensured only through the response being equal to the degree of corruption and mismanagement.

There are many players and stages involved in relief operations and it is the government agencies and the NGOs that must ensure transparency and accountability in their conduct. The coordinating committees that are in place to supervise the overall operations must demand compliance with accountability standards.

The TIB suspects that vested interests including political ones are at play in selection of affected areas and beneficiaries for relief at the local level. Their report observed, "Relief being manipulated as vote banks by the local government representatives". Why during a non-party interim government's rule, vested interests would get such free rein, is a question that is bound to arise.

Let's not forget that huge quantum of money and materials are being funnelled from all directions into the Sidr affected areas. The greedy people may be up to exploiting the situation; the government must beware of them. The rehabilitation phase entailing huge amounts of cash and kind is about to begin requiring the government to be extra cautious in the use of resources.

Destroying is more difficult than building ...



Brig Gen
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STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

The gross irregularity must be taken note of by the government also because of the fact that the very slipshod manner of the operation had put and might still put a large number of people and structures in the vicinity of the said building at great risk. After the demolition disaster in December the inmates of houses in and around Rangs Bhaban have been asked to vacate. Such a notice should have come before the demolition started in August, with adequate time for these people to make alternative arrangements.

demolition without expert advice nonetheless?

Could one ask how many lives were lost in the construction of all of the twenty-two floors of Rangs Bhaban? Not one, at least not that one is aware of, during the three or four years of its construction. And we have already lost twelve precious human lives in trying to bring it down.

But not all bodies have been recovered as yet, one suspects, (no fault of the fire service or other agencies involved in the recovery operation) although bodies of five dead labourers were recovered only the other day, after ten days of effort by the fire service.

Rajuk insists that there was a systematic program, but have acknowledged that they did neither have the experience nor the expertise to carry out such a demolition. But one fails to understand their assertion that the rest of the building below the sixth floor was not deemed unsafe while the demolition was being conducted above.

And if their call for advice and support from various agencies had not been responded to, one could ask why Rajuk went ahead with the

He said that the apparent lackadaisical manner in which the recovery work had been conducted would have been different had the dead been 'human beings' and not 'labourers.'

That is indeed a sad observation on the lot of the poor in Bangladesh, which must touch the heart of everyone except the most insensate. Not only are the indigents in Bangladesh not able to live a life of dignity, they are also often denied a dignified death or a final rest as has been in the case of the unfortunate labourers -- being buried in the debris or left impaled by a rod for ten long days.

The demolition work may not have cost much money, till now at least, but we could have saved a great many human lives, even if they were of labourers, if the knocking down operation had been planned well. The entire saga had not only a touch of theatrics, it was marked by a display of undue haste that demonstrated an attempt to settle scores.

The time taken to implement a court order i.e. from the time when the court ruling was made declaring the building beyond its sixth floor illegal, till the first Rajuk worker set upon it to bring it down, has perhaps surpassed all records. But it could not hide the very amateurish manner in which the entire operation was conducted.

One wonders whether it was at all necessary to break up the windowpanes and that too without taking adequate safety measures for the passersby and those living in and around the building, that being also situated on the so-called VIP road frequented more by the commoners mostly than the gentry.

If a portion of the Bhaban was illegal, there were perhaps among the crowd of officials that afternoon some who had more than a small part in the construction of the illegal portion of the building taking a convoluted delight in its destruction.

In fact these were the common faces that one noticed going about

demolishing illegal structures in may parts of the city not very long ago, whose job it was to ensure that the plans and building code were not violated in the first place. Nobody has as yet called them to explain how the illegal structures came to be there at all.

When the demolition started in August the owners and the users of the premise were hardly afforded adequate time to remove their moveable belongings. It is irrational to suggest that a multi-storyed building could be made absolutely safe for demolition, overnight.

But that is exactly what happened. What was the hurry? Neither was the building flying away nor was there a chance that the order of the highest court would be reversed. (How one wishes that the building had actually vanished. That might have saved us all these pains)

We are told that never before had the authorities been faced with a task of bringing down a structure of the magnitude of Rangs Bhaban. They neither had the experience nor the requisite equipments for the job.

Surprising that when people are landing on the moon we still have to grapple unsuccessfully with the task of knocking down a building in the prescribed and proper manner. What is more galling is the allegation made by experts that the provision of the national building code, of which Rajuk is the sole guarantor of compliance, has not been conformed to by Rajuk itself.

The materials from the demolished structure were allowed to pile up on one floor while these should

have been disposed off outside. The result was the accretion of load, resulting in a domino effect. One understands that there were the required equipment for doing so, but for whatever reason, these were not used (contrary to the assertion of Rajuk officials). That suggests a serious lack of supervision by the authorities concerned over those entrusted with the demolition, whose expertise in the matter has also been questioned.

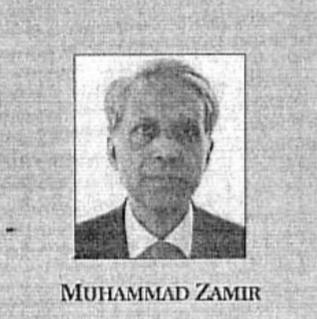
The gross irregularity must be taken note of by the government also because of the fact that the very slipshod manner of the operation had put and might still put a large number of people and structures in the vicinity of the said building at great risk.

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Listening to the concerned officials explain away, unsuccessfully though, in the media their careless handling of the project appears to be a cruel joke, particularly at the dead. It demonstrates once again the culture of impunity that allows the public agencies in our country to go about committing one mistake after another. But the authorities must take note when such mistakes result in the loss of innocent lives.

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Will the EU ever have a common foreign policy?



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

POST BREAKFAST

EU member states till now, have not been able to show the necessary political will that could enable such a matrix to operate properly. There has been a lot of discussion in the European Commission in Brussels and also in the European Parliament in Strasbourg about this. However, no clear consensus appears to have still emerged about the organic nature of either a future proper European External Action Service, built "from the bottom," or the establishment of a European Diplomatic Academy. Demonstrable support from policy planners in this regard has also been lacking.

It is now generally agreed that a genuine EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) would greatly help in containing unilateralism in international affairs. The importance of such a common platform is being viewed with urgency given the gradual polarisation in international affairs.

On the one hand, there is the re-emergence of an energy-rich Russia (made more complex by the political uncertainties of a post-Putin era) and the re-affirmation of China on the global stage with regard to its quest for additional energy sources), and, on the other the electoral worries associated with the coming US presidential election. Unfortunately, despite the high stakes, a CFSP for the EU does not still appear to be round the next corner.

Analysts believe that a CFSP might have evolved had there been implementation of the Constitutional Treaty provisions for a European External Action Service. It might have made a significant difference.

It is also commonly agreed that the absence of such a paradigm and the growing multi-polarity within the EU itself has delayed the flowering of a real CFSP. Consequently, many consider that instead of a CFSP, what we are witnessing today is a more flexible approach in EU foreign and security policy with different groups of member states working together on different issues.

EU summit meetings held this year have shown that effective

multilateralism within the group have become more of a myth than was anticipated.

Instead of a Common Foreign and Security Policy, key EU heads of government around the G8 table have been seen as acting mostly in their national capacity, while the EU "as an entity" was nowhere to be seen.

The reality appears to be that some EU member states have more political clout than others, and larger countries seem to have more experience in negotiations. This is implicitly creating problems.

Forging a CFSP is proving to be difficult because of the differences of opinion on whether EU should drop the 'purist' approach in favour of a more flexible one, where the Council could mandate different groupings of member states to represent the Union in negotiations on different issues.

Developing the CFSP has also become increasingly difficult following the enlargement of the EU from 15 to 27 members. New member states have inevitably introduced different perspectives to the debate. For example, Poland and other Baltic states, which share a specific history with Russia, want their concerns given more weight when dealing with Moscow.

This is not always accepted by the other EU states.

Having a CFSP within the EU is becoming a more significant issue

than before because of emerging problems related to the Middle East and in areas pertaining to international trade mechanisms.

The need for a CFSP is also being underlined more often than not by the US which has a strong influence on the European Union. For years, Washington has insisted on a strong united Europe that can speak with one voice, and have "one telephone number" for expressing viewpoints. Some of this is happening but a lot still needs to be done.

Political scientists and analysts have suggested that the only way to achieve a more binding CFSP is to

achieve a common foreign policy to boost their chances of success in negotiations. Finance ministers have also noted the financial advantages of such an arrangement because it would lead to reduction in costs and cutting down on the number of diplomatic missions and associated staff.

It would be interesting at this point to undertake a historical perspective.

The EU, over the years has developed an unprecedented range of instruments on crisis management.

This process began in 1989; after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This event marked the beginning of a new world order, based on international law, multi-nationalism and multilateralism.

There was, at the same time, a parallel development within the EU.

A movement was initiated within Europe that may be termed as a progression from a common to a single entity. This was reflected in the move from the common to the single market, and a general institutional tightening which resulted in a move within Europe towards "Brusselsisation."

Over time, Europe has developed capacities in civilian crisis management -- expertise, which it is able to inject today into the international

arena. It has also developed the capability of being able to deploy the entire gamut of instruments for nation building.

This has indicated EU's growing strength and a gradual development of their own joint strategic culture in relation to war and peace.

Another important factor has evolved within the EU equation. This pertains to EU's key policy goals that include the promotion of regional stability and the ensuring of security, good governance and justice.

The EU believes that the best way to achieve such a profile would be through the EU projecting its economic power. It may be mentioned here that at present it has one quarter of the world's income and 20% of the world's trade.

They try to convey to others that this success in the economic sphere is largely due to the EU agreeing on core values of democracy, freedom and the rule of law.

In this context, the European Commission tries to project that such achievements would also be possible in the case of others if they pursue as their core foreign policy objective effective multilateralism and multi-stakeholder involvement.

It is this principle of management that has led the EU to expand their presence by helping to organise elections outside the EU, by providing development assistance, by contributing military missions to support the United Nations at critical moments, and by using ESDP missions in the fields of peace and security.

In Africa, the EU has disbursed a quarter of a billion dollars to Sudan through the African Peace Facility. In the Middle East, where it is a member of the Quartet, it has provided critical funding to the Palestinian population; and in Iran, Mr. Solana is playing a crucial negotiating role.

Recent polls in several European capitals have indicated one important element -- expertise, which it is able to inject today into the international

the conscience of those who are holding the sceptre of power can be stirred with regard to the victims of 1971, little can be achieved.

No individual can, at this stage, legally prove his grievance. Therefore, it is only the authorities who can move the matter to some consequences. It is also they who will have to work out a modus operandi to dispense justice for the tormented souls, only for our sake.

Ominously, like in 1991, even this time there are people who are raising the bizarre question of trial for the "crimes" of freedom fighters also, and resorting to sophistry to forestall the collaborators' trial. The Jamaat and its cohorts are past masters of scheming with their domestic and trans-national nexus. But, the last laugh should not be theirs.

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Jamaat's piece de resistance

PERSPECTIVES

Many crosscurrents of events and paradoxical factors have brought us to a pass where we are facing these dangerous elements in a country brought into being by us in the face of stiff opposition of these elements. Yet, in a deeply religious country like ours, they thrived by resorting to religious pretensions. Religion being the most saleable trademark of our politics, they hoodwinked our simple public by putting on the garb of Islam although, both during and after our independence war, all that they did was blatantly unislamic.

six years of independence.

The people are indeed flummoxed that not only did Jamaat survive all these years, it also grew in strength. Thanks to the subtle support it is believed that it receives from the establishment and asserted groups of sympathisers the party thrives, and has gathered courage to heap innuendoes on our intrepid freedom fighters to add insult to injury with impunity.

Now, they are about to assail our values, history, and the glorious achievements of our struggle for independence. What do we do with the growing menace?

Since the dawn of our independence, the mistakes have been piling up with regard to our handling of war criminals.

As Razakars' killing ground, torture centres, and mass graves of those who succumbed to the barbarism of notorious Al Badr activists.'

The cry of the hour is to defang the remorseless dangerous species, who had no qualms in participating in a mission to kill three million innocent people, dishonour two hundred thousand of our mothers and sisters, drive away one seventh of our population from their home and hearth, as well as to brutally wipe out our greatest sons of the soil on the eve of the victory.

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