

Militancy in the name of Islam

There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism by targeting civilians' lives and properties. The condemnation of violence is deeply rooted in true Islamic values based on Quranic instructions and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Regardless of how legitimate the cause may be, the Quran never condones killing of innocent people. Terrorising defenseless civilians, and bombing and maiming of innocent people are all detestable acts according to Islam.

ZAHID ZAMIR

TERRORISM is a crime against humanity, and its aim is to spread fear in society by killing innocent people. Unfortunately, we live in a time when violence, hostility, vandalism, sabotage and greed have become common phenomena. Innocent people's lives have become valueless in most cases. Terrorism has threatened peace and security in societies as well as countries around the globe.

Different ideologies have resorted to terrorism in the past. In 1794, Robespierre first used terrorism by sending thousands of people to the guillotines. From 1870, the racist Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in the United States ruthlessly used violence, oppressing African Americans and other religious, social or ethnic groups. Racial terrorism came to Nazi Germany in the 1930s. The Nazis implemented a bloody policy of terror against those whom they thought were opposed to their ideology, beginning with Jews.

The term terrorism came into

wide usage only a few decades ago. One of the unfortunate results of this new terminology is that it limits the definition of terrorism to small groups or individuals. Terrorism, in fact, spans the entire world, and manifests itself in various forms. Its perpetrators don't fit any stereotype.

An individual, irrespective of his or her religious belief, who blows himself or herself up on a civilian bus or in any other place, has committed an act of terrorism. Likewise, carpet-bombing of entire cities, and killing of thousands of children is also an act of terrorism. Most of the electronic and print media label the activities of some marked groups or individuals as terrorism, while completely ignoring others.

Some groups have adopted the method of destruction just to achieve some political motives, using the great religion of Islam, thereby blackening the name of Islam in the eyes of many people. Those perpetrating in this heinous act might have Muslim identities, but this dreadful act

cannot be labeled as Islamic terrorism due to their Muslim identities, just as it cannot be called Jewish terrorism if the perpetrators are Jewish or Christian terrorism if the perpetrators are Christian. Murdering innocent people in the name of religion is absolutely unacceptable.

Religion commands love, peace and mercy, while terrorism is the opposite of religion -- it is cruel and brings bloodshed and misery. The narrow definition of terrorism that implicates only individuals and groups, and the mass hysteria in the media, has caused Muslims to be associated with acts of destruction and terror and, as a result, to become victims of hate violence, specially in the West.

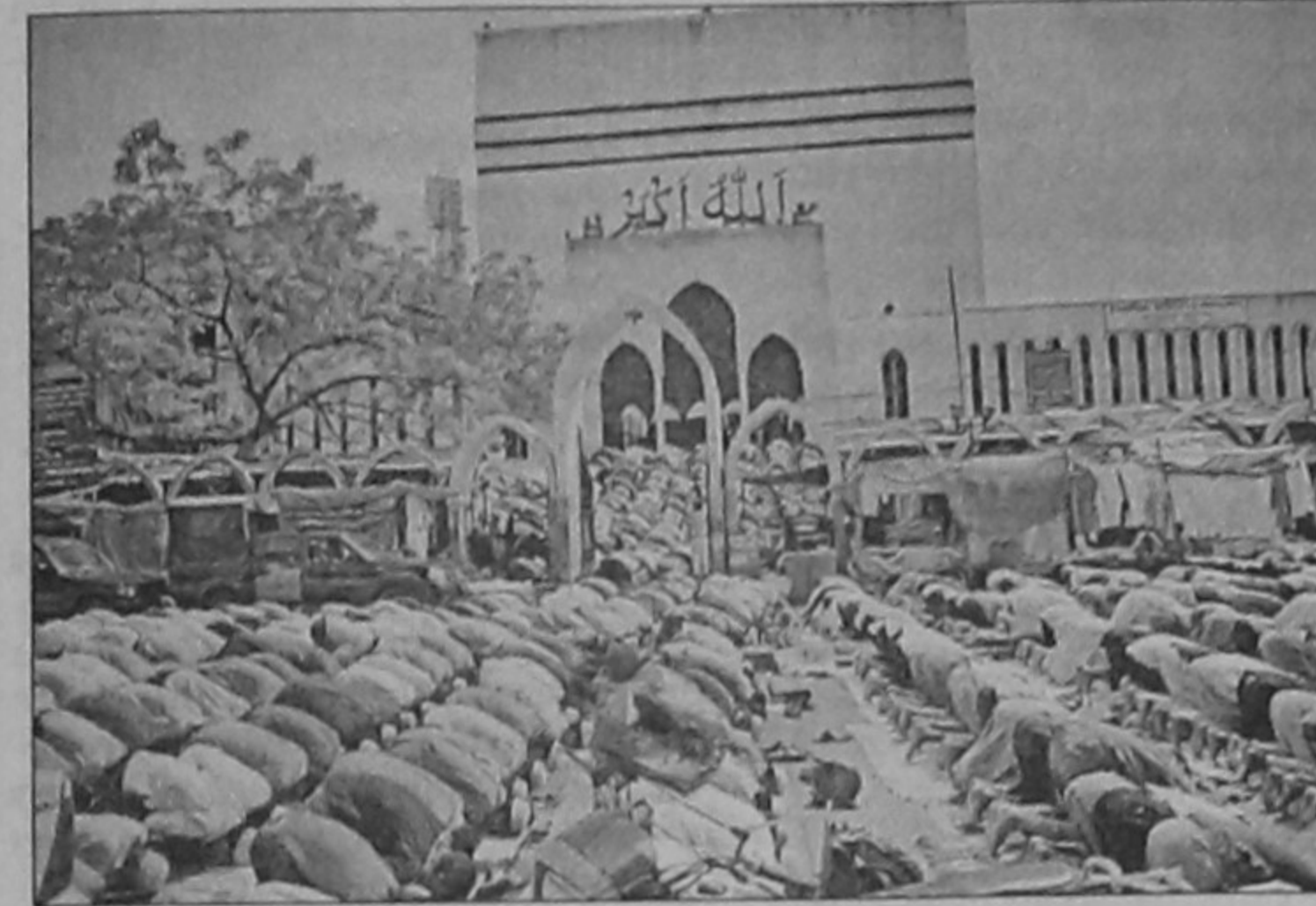
Sometimes, Islam is held responsible for the acts of a handful of Muslims. Could a faith that has 1.2 billion followers worldwide actually advocate the killing and maiming of innocent people? Could Islam, whose name itself stands for "peace" and "submission to the will of God," encourage its adherents to work for

destruction?

There is no room for terrorism in Islam, as it is stated in the Holy Quran (3:140): "God does not love wrong doers." In another verse, those who resort to terrorism that is causing corruption in the earth are referred to in this way (13:25): "As for those who cause corruption in the earth the curse will be upon them. They will have evil abode." God commands all the Muslims to bring peace, harmony and brotherhood to the world.

The word Islam came from the same Arabic root as the word peace. The fundamental characteristics of Islamic morality are virtues such as love, compassion, sacrifice, tolerance, forgiveness and justice. In the Quran, God commands Muslims to treat all people well and fairly. In verse (41: 34) God commands Muslims to respond to evil with goodness.

In Islam, life is considered to be very sacred, and the sanctity of human life is accorded a special place. The first and foremost basic right of a human being is the right to live. It has been stated in the Holy Quran (Ch5, V32) about the one who kills an innocent person -- it would be as if he killed the whole of mankind and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of whole of mankind. The Holy Quran prohibits murder in clear terms. Even in a state of war, Islam enjoins that one deals kindly with the enemy on the battlefield.



Islam preaches peace, not violence

Islam has drawn a clear line of distinction between combatants and non-combatants of enemy country. As far as the non-combatant population is concerned, such as women, children, and the old and infirm, the instructions of the prophet are as follows: "Do not kill any old person, any child or any woman;" "Do not kill the monks in monasteries;" and "Do not kill the people who are sitting in places of worship." Thus, non-combatants are guaranteed security of life even when their state is at war.

As Dr. Jamal Badawi writes: "The Quran gives various reasons why each human being must be honoured and dignified on account of being human, and irrespective of his or her chosen

beliefs. Such honour is symbolised by the way the Quran describes Allah's creation of humans in the best of molds and commanding the angels to bow down in respect to Adam.

No human is entitled to dehumanise or punish another on the sole ground that the latter is following a different religion or no religion at all. Sanctity of human life is affirmed in the Quran (Sura 17:33). Forcing people to believe in God runs against his free will, which includes the fact that some will reject Him.

The essence of Islam and its Prophet's mission is mercy (Sura 2:107). To remove any particularisation of this mercy, the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him) explained that

mercy is not being merciful to one's companions but being merciful to all. The Prophet also explained that: "He who is not merciful to others, will not be treated mercifully." In fact, mercy applies as well to animals and other creatures of Allah. A logical fruit of this attitude of mercy is to love humankind as persons and fellow honoured creatures of Allah."

Suicide bombings are contrary to Islam. A very famous scholar of Islam in the West, Sheikh Uthaymin, when asked: "What is the ruling regarding acts by means of suicide, such as attaching explosives to a car and storming the enemy, whereby he knows without a doubt that he shall die as result of his action?" His response was: "He (suicide bomber) is regarded as one who has killed himself and, as a result he shall be punished in Hell, for it is authenticated that the Prophet (PBUH) said: 'Indeed, whoever (intentionally) kills himself, then certainly he will be punished in the Fire of Hell, wherein he shall dwell forever.' " Thus, Islam enjoins upon its believers to strive in purifying themselves, as well as establishing peace and justice in the society.

Terrorism in the name of Islam is not only un-Islamic and unholy, it is also foolish and unwise. It is foolish because committing these heinous acts of terrorism in the name of religion

to draw strength for their political purposes has turned out to be counter-productive. Every time some so-called Muslim individuals or groups commit an act of terrorism, they not only fail to achieve any political gain, they also put the lives of millions of innocent Muslims in danger and tarnish the very good image of a great religion.

So, there is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism by targeting civilians' lives and properties. The condemnation of violence is deeply rooted in true Islamic values based on Quranic instructions and the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Regardless of how legitimate the cause may be, the Quran never condones killing of innocent people. Terrorising defenseless civilians, and bombing and maiming of innocent people are all detestable acts according to Islam.

The misinterpretation of Islamic teachings has taken its toll on the Muslims, and has strengthened a misplaced perception that Islam is obscurantist, and a religion of intolerance. A true follower of Islam must, therefore, stand up against all sort of terrorism and violence, and propagate peace, mercy and forgiveness.

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Inflation, income inequality and equity

The fixed income earners, pensioners, housewives, small savers all suffer as they see the value of money deteriorate. Inflation also has a pernicious effect of redistributing wealth among individuals. Most of the loans taken by our well-to-do industrialists and business enterprises are at nominal interest rate, which is based on the rate of inflation at the time of agreement.

SYED REZAUL KARIM

BANGLADESH experienced low to moderate inflation over the last one decade, except for the year 1997-98 when the consumer price index climbed to 9%. The index hovered around 7% or below till 2005-2006. The rise in food prices averaged at 6% per year during 1996-97 to 2005-06. But in 2007-08, we are confronted with a high-price level that promises to stick around for an unforeseeable future, given the scarcity in food supply and Bangladesh's vulnerability to weather.

In the last several months, the prices of rice, flour, edible oil, sugar, milk all registered an increase of 50% or more. Last year, bird flu damaged the burgeoning poultry industry by an estimated Taka 4100 crore and pulled down the demand for chicken and eggs. Thus, demand for beef, mutton and fish has driven up the prices of these items to such a level that it has excluded these items from the

food basket of many.

Now that bird flu has subsided, the poultry farms, denuded of birds, are coming up with increased prices of chicken and eggs in the market.

The rise in oil prices worldwide, from \$60 per barrel to \$100 or more per barrel, is yet to hit the consumer because the government has taken the brunt on its shoulders, denting its coffers to subsidise the consumers, particularly farmers who need diesel for irrigation. The state owned petroleum enterprise, as a consequence, is piling up losses to a staggering amount.

The construction sector is witnessing an abnormal increase in the price of steel rods, which registered more than 50% increase last year; the cement price has gone up in the same period by 40% or more. The steel price worldwide has gone up and is having an impact on Bangladesh's domestic market.

There is no doubt that the economy is presently under

inflationary pressures. The "supply shock" or "price shock" internationally, and the domestic shortage of food have stimulated the present inflationary situation. The "hoarding" and "profiteering" tendencies on the part of some in the business and trading community may have also contributed to the overall price scenario.

Had there been any abnormal money supply over the last five years to give a push to the price level now? It was the famous monetarist Professor Milton Friedman who said: "Inflation is always and everywhere a monetary phenomenon." A look at the growth of money supply for the period February 2005 to March 2006 shows an increase of 19.16%. Then again, between February 2006 and March 2007 money supply grew at the rate of 20%.

These percentages are undoubtedly high (Bangladesh Economic Review, 2007), and the monetary expansion over the past two years must have also contrib-

uted to the price pressure, which coincided with shortage of food items caused by devastating floods, Cyclone Sidr, and the international price shocks. The situation has been compounded by the delayed response by our administration in the procurement of rice and wheat, and by the traders in edible oil business. The price level will remain high as long as the supply curve remains flat.

The government is making efforts to import enough rice to meet the shortage in the interim period till the *boro* harvest reaches the market. So far, the indication is that the *boro* crop will be a bumper one (16 million tonnes), thanks to the efforts of the farmers in extending acreage and selecting the seed variety that gives high yield.

But, does that guarantee that availability of food will automatically ensure food to the people living below the poverty line? 27 million people are in the category of the extremely poor and another 56 million people are the poor who, in the absence of regular employment and income, are going through great hardships to buy food. Professor Amartya Sen has analysed the Bangladesh famine of 1974 in his "Poverty and Famines," where he showed that despite availability of food -- which was higher in 1974 than in

any other year between 1971 and 1976 -- starvation and famine could not be prevented.

The Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh (2004) reveals that average monthly income of 7 million households, having 27.2 million members, ranges from Tk. 750 to Tk. 2500. Households having an average income of Tk. 2500 upto Tk. 5000 total about 9.5 million, having about 50 million members. These two categories constitute about 50% of the population of the country, who now stand to seriously suffer from the inflationary pressure of essential food items.

With a limited or fixed income, the priority of expenditure is, of course, on food first for survival, then comes health, and then perhaps education of the children. It is easy to guess that higher expenditure on food would automatically reduce the health care expenses, even at the cost of suffering, and the spending on education will take a serious knock. The scourge of price upheaval distorts the equity in health, nutrition, and education.

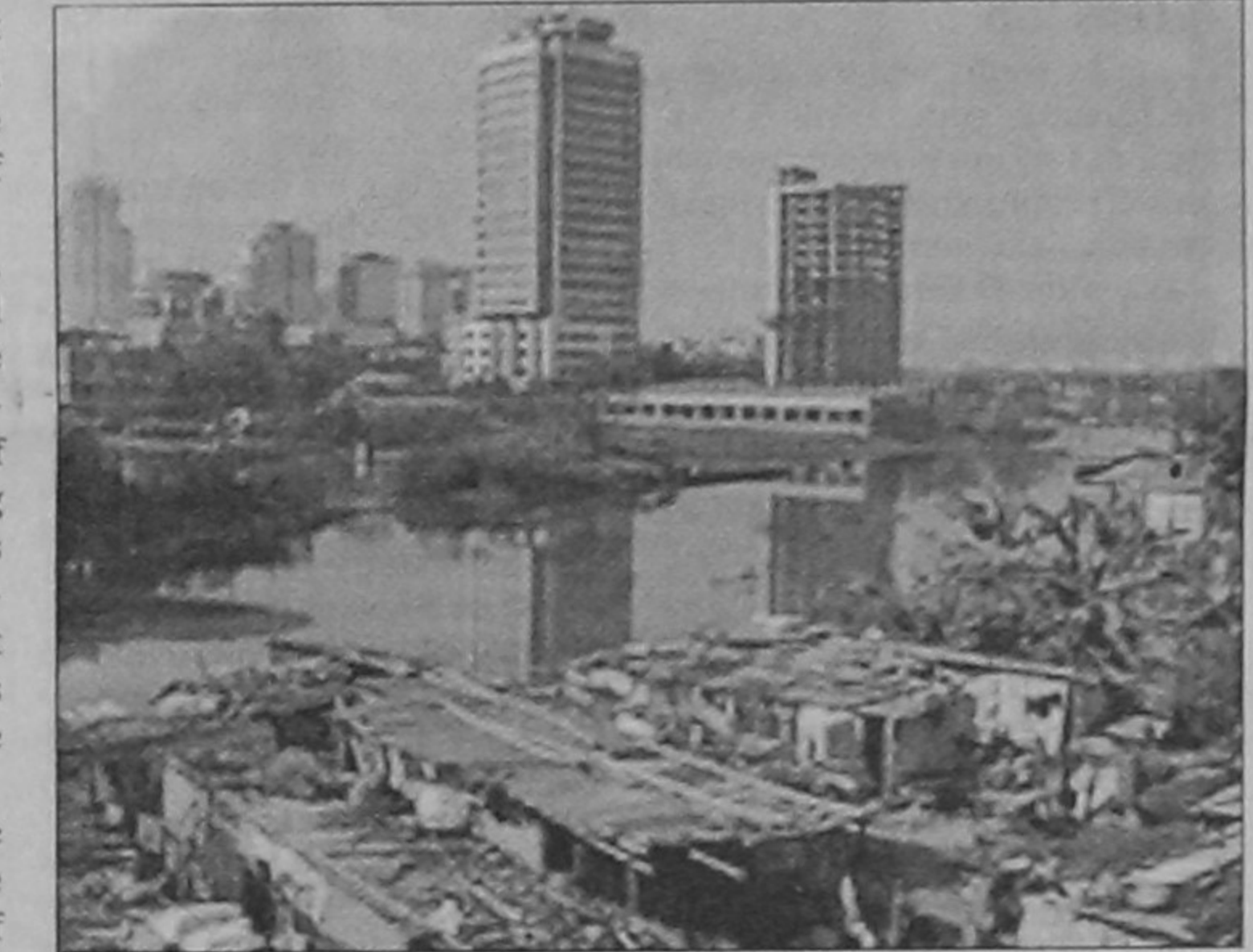
While moderate inflation, say 3% to 5%, is thought to be acceptable in the wake of development activities, which include investment in infrastructures that generates output after a period of time, higher inflation is economi-

cally and socially undesirable. It robs-off the savings of the fixed income earners as the real value of money declines at the rate of inflation.

The fixed income earners, pensioners, housewives, small savers all suffer as they see the value of money deteriorate. Inflation also has a pernicious effect of redistributing wealth among individuals. Most of the loans taken by our well-to-do industrialists and business enterprises are at nominal interest rate, which is based on the rate of inflation at the time of agreement.

If inflation turns out to be higher than or even equal to the expected rate, large borrowers of bank loans will gain as they will pay back with a less valuable Taka. We have witnessed this huge windfall to the borrowers in the wake of inflation immediately after independence, when borrowers who borrowed before liberation paid back at a nominal rate of interest, thus, in real terms, paying no interest at all on their loans.

The other socially undesirable effect of inflation is the redirection of the resources from the productive to the non-productive, speculative areas. Investment in land, real estate, or even a flight of capital in strong foreign currencies, may



Glaring contradiction

occur.

But the danger also lies in the adverse impact of high price levels on our export trade, which is heavily dependent on garments exports. The garment workers, already under pressure of living costs, may come up with demands that may put the management in difficulty for competitive cost reasons. The competitive edge of Bangladesh garments due to low wage structure will face turbulence. We may here quote what the guru of macroeconomics John Maynard

Keynes once wrote: "The sight of this arbitrary rearrangement of riches strikes not only at security, but also at the confidence in the equity of the existing distribution of wealth. To those whom the system brings windfalls beyond their expectations or desires, become 'profiteers' who are the objects of the hatred of bourgeoisie whom the inflationism has impoverished, not less than by proletariat."

Syed Rezaul Karim is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

Our fiscal year should be based on Bangla calendar

In contrast, if we switch to Bangla calendar year, then our fiscal years would both begin and end in relatively dry season, and all these willful wastages could be avoided. For similar pragmatic considerations, United States switched its fiscal period from July-June to October-September period not too long ago. We have to take objective assessment of our climatic consideration and tradition.

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

PAHELA Baisakh, the first day of the Bangla year, was recently celebrated with much gaiety and enthusiasm all over the country. The celebrations over, we now ponder the question: How can we go beyond the rituals and make *Nobo Borsho* more relevant in our national life? The Bangla calendar, as is well known, was codified by Mughal Emperor Akbar in the sixteenth century, primarily on our harvesting cycle or "*fasholi shons*" to facilitate payment of land revenue by our peasants. Our main focus, therefore, should be to connect it with our national activities in the economic arena.

It is true that, in this era of globalisation, we have to follow the Gregorian calendar virtually for everything. Of course, I have seen some oil-rich Arab countries

Country	Gregorian calendar period
United States	October 1 - September 30
United Kingdom, Canada, Japan	April 1 - March 31
France, Germany, Egypt	July 1 - June 30
China, Russia, Italy	Gregorian calendar
Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia	Persian calendar (March 21 - March 20)
India and Sri Lanka	Saarc members:
Pakistan and Bangladesh	April 1 - March 31
Maldives and Bhutan	July 1 - June 30
Nepal	Gregorian calendar
Afghanistan	July 16 - July 15
	Persian calendar (March 21 - March 20)

and Iran strictly follow the Hijri and Persian calendars respectively. We are not as lucky but, in our own way, we do follow different calendars for different purposes.

For example, we follow the Hijri calendar for our Muslim festivals, and Hindus, Christians, Buddhists and others celebrate

their religious days on the basis of their respective calendars. Our fiscal and academic years, though based on Gregorian calendar, run from July 1 to June 30.

Perhaps the last two areas offer some flexibility to all countries to determine the period on the basis of their tradition and climatic

conditions. A quick glance at the table below would show how different countries have determined their fiscal years on the basis of their own objective conditions:

Bangladesh also offers interesting anomalies. While the land revenue is collected by our land revenue department on the basis of the past Bangla calendar year, all other taxes and financial management by the other branches of the government are strictly governed by the existing fiscal year period. The current July-June fiscal year was determined prior to our independence. This time period perhaps is not unsuitable for Pakistan as they do not have a long rainy season like we do. Even in the provinces of Pakistan where they have some rainfall, the rainy season does not start before late July/early August.

In case of Bangladesh, the existing fiscal period directly clashes with our rainy season, which creates problems every year. People familiar with our budget are well aware that our allocations take place in July, i.e. at the beginning of the fiscal year, but the development work is held

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up due to rain. The work starts when the dry season commences and, as a result, there is always a big backlog.

At the end of the fiscal year, a vigorous effort is undertaken by all the departments and bodies to utilise the allocated funds before they lapse on June 30. In Dhaka city, we are all familiar with these feverish projects. Every year, in the

midst of thick monsoon, roads are dug up to install a new storm sewerage, or projects are undertaken for the extension of roads, culverts, canals, as well as telephone, gas and power lines. The costs are intentionally jacked up and the results have always been less than satisfactory. This year, the utilisation of Annual Development Program has been unusually

slow, and we should not be surprised to see a record number of such projects in June.

In contrast, if we switch to Bangla calendar year, then our fiscal years would both begin and end in relatively dry season, and all these willful wastages could be avoided. For similar pragmatic considerations, United States switched its fiscal period from July-June to October-September period not too long ago. We have to take objective assessment of our climatic consideration and tradition.

Previously, there were some practical difficulties, as the days in each Bangla month had varied from year to year. That problem was resolved in 1966, when the solar-based Bangla calendar was modified by a Bangla academy committee under the stewardship of celebrated scholar Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah. The Committee had made important adjustments on the basis of some astronomical facts. Consequently, Bangla New Year is now celebrated every year on April 14 in Bangladesh.

If we switch, our Bangla calendar would find its rightful place in our official business, and it would

be relevant in our national life. Otherwise, our Bangla New Year celebration would remain largely ritualistic, and restricted to only our cultural and literary activities.

When can we make the switch from July-June period to Bangla calendar with minimum dislocation? The answer is, Now. The caretaker government (CTG) will prepare the next budget soon. Since a new democratically-elected government is scheduled to take over next January, this budget, in any case, will come up for review.

Given this scenario, the practical course could be to prepare the next budget for the period from July 1 to April 13, 2009, so that the new government could prepare the budget from April 14, 2009, or Pehela Baisakh, to April 13, 2010. The required adjustment would mean cutting down the next budgetary period from 12 months to 9 ½ months. This minor adjustment would pave the way for synchronising our fiscal year with our Bangla calendar from next year, and people will always remember the CTG for taking this innovative step.

Syed Muazzem Ali is a former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh.