

## Eid-ul-fitr

Eid-ul-Fitr indeed is no ordinary festival. It is a festival with a difference. It has a definite purpose, a norm to convey, a lesson to teach. None of us can afford to celebrate this extraordinary occasion through extravagance and prodigality, through unbridled fun and frolic, through gaudy and expensive dresses, through spectacular functions and feasts.

SYED ASHRAF ALI

**E**ID in Arabic means 'joy' and 'fitr' means 'return to normalcy.' Eid-ul-Fitr is celebrated in the Muslim world as a day of joy and happiness, fun and frolic, pleasure and gaiety. But it was an Eid-ul-Fitr and yet the great Caliph Omar bin Khattab (RA) -- the man whose 'walking stick' in the words of Emerson, 'struck more terror into those who saw it than another man's sword,' -- was weeping and trembling like a lamb ready for slaughter.

No ordinary man was Caliph Omar. A giant among men with unbelievable courage, indomitable spirit, unshakable conviction and incomparable dedication as he was, no earthly fear or danger could cow him down. Many a battle had he fought, many a crisis had he faced, many a storm had he weathered, many a danger had he tidied over, but never had this colossus among men faltered or wavered, never even for a moment had he felt nervous or shaky, not to speak of weeping or trembling in fear.

Omar was the undisputed leader of a vast empire and yet, in

the words of Emerson: "His diet was barley bread, his sauce was salt; and often time, by way of abstinence, he ate his bread without salt. His drink was water. His palace was built of mud; when he left Medina to go to the conquest of Jerusalem, he rode on a red camel with a wooden platter hanging on its saddle, with a bottle of water and two sacks, one holding barley and the other dried fruit." That is not all. Even the Khatamun Nabiyeen Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him), according to many a reliable authority, claimed that if there were any Prophet after him, it would be Omar bin Khattab (RA). But even such an illustrious man was weeping on the auspicious day of joy and happiness.

What was it that he was afraid of? He was weeping simply because he was not sure whether his Siyam in the preceding holy month of Ramadhan had been accepted by Allah, because he was not sure whether he would be able to avail himself of the glorious

and coveted chance of receiving Divine Mercy and Reward directly from Benign Providence, because he was one of the few who knew

well that the joy of Eid-ul-Fitr is not meant for one and all -- it is meant only for those who have practised Siyam in the true spirit of Islam through Taqwa and Tarawwi during the auspicious month of Ramadhan.

For those who did not bother to practice Siyam in the month of Ramadhan, the new moon of Shawal, heralding the advent of Eid-ul-Fitr, brings no joy or happiness at all in the eyes of Islam. To them, Eid-ul-Fitr is a day of lamentation, a day of sorrow, and not certainly a day of 'return to normalcy.' Eid-ul-Fitr, indeed, is a festival with a difference.

It may be mentioned in this connection that Siyam does not merely mean fasting from dawn to dusk. Al-Siyam is something more significant, something more difficult, comprising much wider dimensions than mere fasting. The word 'Ramadhan' is derived from the word 'Ramz' which means 'to burn', 'to scorch', the root meaning of 'Ramadhan' means excessiveness of heat. Fasting in Islam means to refrain and abstain, from dawn till sunset, from various things forbidden by Islamic law.

In Islam, Al-Siyam stands for an institution for the moral upliftment and spiritual elevation of the human soul. It helps us overcome lust and greed and hatred, and thereby sets us on the road leading to perfection -- to be achieved not through self-torture, not through mere abstinence from food and drink and sex, but through Taqwa and Tarawwi, contemplation and acts of charity, total abstinence from all evil acts and thoughts, all unholy dreams and desires. Such a noble act of piety militates against extravagances like sumptuous iftar parties or colossal wastage in the name of religion. Any ostentation of this kind certainly negates the core spirit of Islam, which is basically one of abnegation of temptation and an abundance of spiritual fulfillment.

Taqwa, essentially, is a function of the heart and a voluntary effort comprising the elements of caution, alertness and fear of Allah. The Holy Prophet (pbuh) used to point to his chest saying: 'Here is the seat of Taqwa.' Al-Siyam, indeed, is a glorious opportunity unparalleled by any act of piety of worship. According to a Qudsi Hadith (utterances attributed to Allah outside the Holy Quran), the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Allah says: 'Every man's work belongs to him. A good deed is repaid from ten-fold to seven hundred times. Fasting belongs to Me and I repay.'

The very sighting of the much-awaited new moon in the month of

Shawal, bringing to an end the month-long period of fasting during Ramadhan, therefore, brings for the Muslims the coveted and unique opportunity to offer heart-felt gratitude to Allah for kindly permitting them to receive Divine Mercy and Blessing directly from Him. It is this promise of joy and happiness on the 1st of Shawal, the tenth month in the Arabic calendar, announcing the advent of 'return to normalcy' together with an auspicious day of thanksgiving, that is known as Eid-ul-Fitr.

What is more, the month of Ramadhan is not only Shahrul Azimun, but it is also described by the Holy Prophet (pbuh) as Shahrul Muassa, or the month of fellow-feeling, the month in which each and every Muslim should feel and work for the welfare of his or her friends and relatives and neighbours. For Islam is not a religion only guaranteeing the betterment and uplift of an individual's private and personal life. Nor is it a religion comprising some dogmas, rituals and customs. It is an organised, disciplined, scientific and complete way of life, which guides men according to the dictates of Almighty Allah and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (pbuh).

If that be the true picture of Eid-ul-Fitr, there is nothing surprising that even a salt of the earth like Caliph Omar could be found weeping on an Eid-ul-Fitr, because he knew not whether he would be able



to receive the much-awaited and coveted Mercy and Blessing directly from the Almighty. For him there simply could be no charm or joy or happiness on an Eid-ul-Fitr if he had failed to avail himself of the rare opportunity of receiving reward directly from Benign Providence.

If a towering personality like Omar was not sure of his right to enjoy the 'joy' of Eid-ul-Fitr, can ordinary persons like you and me be sure and sanguine that Eid-ul-Fitr brings for us a day of pleasure and joy and happiness? Where Omar trembles, can lesser mortals like us remain unnerved?

Eid-ul-Fitr indeed is no ordinary festival. It is a festival with a difference. It has a definite purpose, a norm to convey, a lesson to teach. None of us can afford to celebrate this extraordinary occasion through extravagance and prodigality, through unbridled fun and frolic, through gaudy and expensive dresses, through spectacular functions and feasts. There can indeed be no Eid-ul-Fitr or any festival in Islam if we forget the unity of mankind under one banner, the universal brotherhood of man, with no distinction between black and white, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, king and slave.

There can be no Eid if we cannot forget the artificial differences between haves and have-nots.

What is more, there can be no Eid if we fail to feed the hungry and the destitute, if we fail to cater to the needs of the poverty-stricken multitude. There simply can be no Eid if genuine attempts are not made to feed each and every hungry mouth, to clothe each and every unclad person, to ensure that the poor and helpless relatives and neighbours and friends are not left unwept, unhonoured and unsung.

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## Back to 'Square Two'?

It now seems that whatever the government aspired to achieve in terms of political and electoral reforms has been largely frustrated. The massive campaign against corruption also appears to have slumped, at least for the time being. The signs seem to indicate a return to the pre-1/11 scenario. Are we then set to go back to "Square Two," where the familiar political forces will call the shots pretty much in the same manner they used to do before January 11, 2007?

MIZANUR RAHMAN SHELLEY

**A**spectre is now haunting Bangladesh. Politico-economic uncertainty stalks the nation. A non-political interim government presides while politics becomes increasingly fluid. Constitutionally described as a caretaker government, it is one with a difference. The like of such a caretaker government has not been seen since its formal inception in 1996 or its informal beginning in 1990.

The present caretaker government was put in place through a series of unprecedented happenings. The story of its origin in the events of January 11 and 12, 2007, is common knowledge. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that it was the product of failed politics and ineffectual democracy. Fifteen years of resurrected parliamentary democracy failed to realise its purpose. Lip service was paid to the principles and practice of democracy. Neither the culture nor the way of life of a democratic order really took roots.

Elections were held at constitu-

tionally stipulated intervals. These were largely accepted as free and fair. In reality, however, elections represented a zero-sum game in which the winner took all. The purpose of the party system, making constitutional opposition respectable, was not realised. The winning party rode roughshod over the opposition which, in turn, responded with non-cooperation and militant protests. The Parliament remained ineffective and public administration was increasingly politicised. Politico-administrative and commercial corruption spread alarmingly and ate into the vitals of the society. Power became an end in itself. The entire society was riven along the divide represented by the two major political forces, which constantly confronted each other.

The backdrop of the dramatic arrival of a reconstituted caretaker government supported by the armed forces created a potential context of reformed politics. It was hoped that far-reaching, meaningful and effective reforms would put the country back on an even keel. It was hoped that the institutions of democracy would be

cured of ailments and the stage would be set for a functional system of check and balance among the various branches of the government. It was also expected that the administration would be enduringly de-politicised and corruption significantly reduced. It was further hoped that the independence and efficiency of the judiciary would be securely established and local government institutions strengthened to help flower a thriving democracy.

By all counts, it was a desirable and impressive agenda. The objectives posed no problems, the difficulties lay in the very nature of the mechanism built for achieving these. The vehicle itself had its built-in limitations. The current caretaker government is a halfway house deriving initial legitimacy from the provisions of the constitution. When the stipulated ninety days of its permissible term ended it was covered in a way by the hundred and twenty days of emergency. After that limit was also exhausted the government drew its strength and legitimacy from the acquiescence of the people, broadly interpreted as consent.

Such a government, by its very nature, is non-political. Its leaders are not politicians. Its canons are political neutrality and detachment. Its tone and temper are tinged by a clinical administrative mindset. All this makes it eminently unsuitable for dealing with the exacting demands of the politics of reforms. Reform is a transformational venture and cannot, therefore, be effectively implemented by administrative measures. Transformation of societies can be brought about only by transformational reformist political leadership or by revolution.

The present predicament of the interim government amply proves the point. Its experience during the one year and eight months in office has been an intriguing mixture of encouraging achievements and disappointing failures. The administrative and economic steps it took were procedurally correct. Doing things by the book, however, may not, and often does not, bring desirable results. Clinically correct administration without the guidance of a politically trained leadership results in stagnation. This has been the case in the present instance.

Excessive concern for observing outmoded rules and regulations coupled with fear of being perceived as corrupt reduced public administration to virtual impotence. This is evident from the record of significant failures in implementing Annual Development Programs. Economic development suffered.

The adverse impact of natural disasters such as the cyclone Sidr and floods worsened the situation. The economic scenario became grimmer as a result of the negative impact of global happenings, including the unprecedented rise in energy price, shortage of 'production and supply of food grains and consequent increase in food price.

A correct but timorous administration led by detached and neutral leadership failed to inspire strong and vibrant measures to ensure reduction of the economic woes of the people. Lack of business opportunities in the private sector, shrinking scope of employment in both the public and private sectors, and sloth in overall economic development put severe limits on the purchasing power of common men. Soaring prices of essentials, especially food-grains and edible oil, caused serious strains on popular tolerance. The illiterate masses and even the conscious and educated middle-classes, despite their knowledge of global crises, have been driven to the outer limits of their patience. Active support for the government of the day, therefore, underwent significant reduction. All this set the stage for the erosion of the political strength of the incumbent administration.

It is no wonder that the government chose the soft option in dealing with increasingly restive politics. Despite the state of emergency, a crisis of hope led to diminishing confidence. Various

potent segments of the society, including the organised labour force and politicised students' communities staged agitations. Sporadic incidents of violent confrontations kept on threatening law and order. An avowedly non-political government could not effectively implement its agenda of politico-administrative reforms and anti-corruption drive.

Civil society organisations, non-political entities as they are, also remained limited in their impact on the people. Lack of capable leadership and popular appeal also made the efforts at fabricating credible alternative political forces largely ineffective. The government has, thus, been left helplessly alone on its reformist track. Its avowed detachment from politics seems to have boomeranged in the return of politics and politicians in evident triumph. Despite cases of alleged corruption pending against them in the courts both the top political leaders of the country are at large.

The Awami League leader and former prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, was released earlier by an executive order for treatment abroad. The BNP chairperson and former prime minister, Begum Khaleda Zia, was enlarged on bail in early September. The rigid requirements of emergency regulations were relaxed in the cases of other political leaders held in jails on charges of alleged corruption. Consequently, many of them were

released on bail within a short time while others are waiting in the queue.

It is clear that the government is treading the soft path to pave the way for a participatory election to the national assembly before the year-end. Chief Adviser Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed announced in a televised address to the nation that the Election Commission has scheduled the national elections for the December 18 and, in deference to the wishes of the major political parties, the upazilla elections on December 24 and 28.

Meanwhile, the political parties, especially the principal ones, are stepping up pressure on the government and the Election Commission to modify the rigid provisions of the amended Representation of People Ordinance. They are also demanding that the upazilla elections be held at a later time. Further, they are going ahead with the preparations for elections and formation of electoral alliances.

It now seems that whatever the government aspired to achieve in terms of political and electoral reforms has been largely frustrated. The massive campaign against corruption also appears to have slumped, at least for the time being. The signs seem to indicate a return to the pre-1/11 scenario. Are we then set to go back to "Square Two," where the familiar political forces will call the shots pretty much in the same manner

they used to do before January 11, 2007?

Nobody knows for certain. Evidently, the government is trying to mount a rear-guard operation to salvage whatever is possible of the reform agenda. The advisers and others are engaged in overt and covert activities to get the two principal leaders to meet and decide on a virtual national charter of reform politics. It is difficult to predict whether this desirable objective will be achieved in time. If the attempts do not succeed and confrontation between two major political forces stages a return, the country may face grave uncertainty. This is the last thing the nation desires.

We cannot afford the luxury of further incertitude. The times are grim. Those who are still in the driving seat must be careful. So must the major political leaders, their parties and political alliances. They can fail in the task of reshaping politics and administration only at their own peril. Lack of success in this all-important task will deepen and complicate the crisis of the state. That will be a prescription for disaster at this troubled time of global economic crisis and political uncertainty. Nothing succeeds like success. As in Tudor England so also in today's Bangladesh, "nothing will succeed but success."

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## Let them also smile on Eid day

And there are quite a number of such moneyed persons in almost all the areas of this country, but many of them are quite oblivious of the needs of the indigent persons, including the helpless widows and orphans. These wealthy persons certainly can do something to bring smiles on their melancholy faces in pursuance of the said Ayat of Sura Maun.

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

**A**FTER observing siyam in the holy month of Ramadan, when the moment the Shawal crescent is sighted in the sky, the people become joyous at the advent of Eid. Why is this great religious festival of the Muslims called 'Eid-ul-Fitr'? The reason is not far to seek. It is obligatory on the part of every well-to-do Muslim to pay an amount of money, called 'Fitra,' equivalent to the cost of about 2 kg. of wheat, to an indigent person living in his neighbourhood, because it will

enable him to also celebrate Eid properly. We must remember that Islam is a scientific religion. Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) very much desired that the message of universal brotherhood should be discernible in the Islamic way of life. Besides, it would be certainly worthwhile to recall here what Almighty Allah has declared in Sura (Chapter) Maun, or neighbourly needs, of the Qur-an:

• "Seest thou one who denies the Day of Judgment (to come)?  
• Then such is the (man) who repulses the orphan (with

harshness)

- And encourages not the feeding of the indigent
- So woe to the worshippers
- Who are neglectful of their prayers
- (Those who (want but) to be seen (of men)
- But refuse (to supply) even neighbourly needs."

This clearly and unmistakably indicates that Islam particularly champions the cause of the neighbours, apart from the orphans and other people who suffer from the sharp pinch of hunger. Islam wants to bridge the existing wide gap between



Unaware of the joys of Eid.

the haves and have-nots.

In this context, we may also refer to another very important Ayat, Ayat, 7 of Sura Hadid (Iron) of the holy Qur-an where Almighty Allah says:

"Believe in Allah and His Messenger and spend of that whereof he has made you trustees, and such of you as believe and spend (aright) theirs will be a good reward."

Here Merciful and Almighty Allah has cautioned the rich and wealthy persons. The money and wealth they have accumulated do not actually belong to them, they are merely trustees or custodians of the wealth on behalf of the Lord Creator and they must spend that rightly as enjoined by Him in the said Quranic Ayat. The poor and the needy must have a share in that.

Eid-ul-Fitr is undoubtedly an occasion when Muslims think of gastronomic delight besides new clothes and exchange of gifts

among the relatives and friends. The occasion presupposes mirthful atmosphere and festivity. But, Islam is totally against misuse and wastage of money and wealth on any occasion, as clearly indicated in the relevant Ayat (Verse) of Sura (Chapter) Baqara of the holy Qur-an.

While discussing matters relating to celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr festival one may reasonably ask how many of us follow the relevant Quranic injunctions, how many of us think of the poor and the indigent, how many of us think about hapless orphans and needy neighbours, and last but not the least, how many of us think about the widows and elderly women who are obliged to put in back-breaking labour, for say, construction of a multi-storied building, from morning till evening every day without enjoying any weekly holiday, to keep their body and soul together and support their chil-

dren? Also, when the greatest Muslim religious festival Eid-ul-Fitr is just knocking at the door? The number of such people is, unfortunately, very small.

The tycoons and the wealthy of our society owe a duty to these needy and helpless people. On the occasion of Eid, a prospective buyer is ready to spend one lakh taka for his family. And there are quite a number of such moneyed persons in almost all the areas of this country, but many of them are quite oblivious of the needs of the indigent persons, including the helpless widows and orphans. These wealthy persons certainly can do something to bring smiles on their melancholy faces in pursuance of the said Ayat of Sura Maun. Then the Most Bounteous Allah will certainly shower his bounties on them. Let them not fail the have-nots.

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