



EID-E-MILLADUNNABI



The Prophet (pbuh) and poverty

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THE Prophet of Islam, Hazrat Mohammad (Allah's peace be upon him) said: "Poverty is my pride." What is the nature of that poverty and what is the essence of that pride? Materially and spiritually the Prophet personified in himself poverty so as to be addressed by his Lord as servant (Abd) first and then messenger (Rasul).

The Prophet was born an orphan. His grandfather Abdul Mottalib, the leading man of the Quarish, was a wealthy person but Abdullah, the father of the Prophet, died young and had left his son five camels, a small flock of sheep and goat and a slave girl. The Prophet's mother, Amina, was poor. In the absence of a father, Halima, foster mother to the Prophet, demurred at first to nurse and foster Amina because she herself was not so well to do.

The Prophet lost his mother at the age of seven and his guardian grandfather at the age of nine. He became dependent on his uncle Abu Talib, earning his livelihood by pasturing sheep and goat and occasionally accompanying his uncle's merchant caravan to Syria. He found himself in the employment of a business woman, Khadija, solely on his reputation as an honest and trustworthy person. Impressed by his honesty and beauty she proposed to marry him.

When the proposal was conveyed to him, the Prophet exclaimed: "And how could such a marriage be mine?" He had to give only 20 camels as dowry.

The Prophet's simple propagation of the faith: "There is no God but God and Mohammad (pbuh) is His prophet," with all earnestness and an unflinching conviction so unnerved and shook the pagan belief in idol worshipping that the leaders of the Quraish said to him that if it was money he wanted, they would make him the richest among them; if it was honour, he should be their prince; if it was sovereignty they would make him king; if it was a spirit which got possession of him, they would exhaust their means finding medicines to cure him. The answer the Prophet gave was that he had conveyed to them God's message and they could either accept it to their advantage or reject it and await God's judgement.

The Holy Quran which Allah revealed through the Prophet declares that man is poor before the majesty and munificence of Allah. Sura *Fatir* (Ayat 15) says: "O ye man! It is you that have need of Allah but Allah is the One free of all wants, worthy of all praise. *Fukara*" is the Arabic origin of the Bangla word fakir. Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) internalised the absolute need of Allah so deeply, so

dearly and so unquestionably, that he wanted poverty and said: "O God, make me live lowly and die lowly and rise from the dead among the lowly."

Lowliness and servitude before the Almighty are attributes the Prophet of Islam adorned. Lowliness before God is a spiritual stage which the Prophet and the sufi saints after him preferred in order to reach the glorious Lord. Hazrat Abdul Quader Jilani (God's mercy be upon him) narrates in his book of discourse, *Al-Fat Al Rabbani*, that one day a man came to the Prophet and said: "O Messenger, I love you." The prophet answered: "Be prepared to wear the garment of poverty." That is, be ready to accept poverty. Another man approached the prophet and said: "I love Allah the glorious." The Prophet said: "Go, be ready to wear the garment of agonies and afflictions." Hazrat Abdul Quader maintained that the love of God and His Messenger is related to poverty and affliction.

Lowliness in the eye of God is an attribute of His servants; it is not a divine attribute. The Prophet was proud of this attribute which was his own and through which he gained proximity to his Lord, hence he said: "Poverty is my pride." Both the Quran and Hadith mention the honoured status of the poor in the eye of Allah, the compassionate. "Poverty has a "rasm" (form) and a "haqiqat" (essence). Its form is destitution and indigence but its essence is fortune and free choice. He who regards the form rests in the form and failing to reach his object flees from the essence; but he who has found the essence averts his gaze from all created things and in complete annihilation, seeing only the All One, he hastens towards the fullness of eternal life" (*Kashf Al Mahjub* by Al Hijwari, the 11th century sufi saint and writer -- also known as Hazrat Data Ganj Bux).

The Prophet said: "Poverty is glorious to those who are worthy of it." Al Hijwari explains that the glory is that the poor man's body is divinely preserved from base and sinful acts and his heart from evil and contaminating thoughts because his outer parts are absorbed in contemplation of the manifest blessings of God while his inner parts are protected by invisible grace.

Muslims throughout the world venerate the Prophet with endearing and eloquent titles. But the prerogatives and graces did not induce the Prophet to take pride in them; he was so detached that all the wonderful qualities notwithstanding he could say: "Poverty is my pride." And he could pray: "O Lord, keep me one day full fed and one day hungry."

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PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Egotism is an anesthetic



THE Republic of Ireland has just one game plan. If plan A fails, resort to plan A," said Mark Thomas Lawrenson, a former professional footballer who played for Liverpool and Ireland football teams in 1980s.

This quote fits in with how our top political leaders stick to their guns, no matter what! Like in sports in politics too, plan B, even C would be in place as fallback positions while the goal is kept intact and unwavering.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said it again about Padma Bridge soft credit line currently under renegotiations with the WB following revival of a cancelled pledge. It went down as a rare gesture of goodwill for the Bangladeshi. The World Bank's special panel investigating the "conspiracy to corruption" allegations against specifically named persons had sent a note to ACC seeking clarifications on specified points. But in the meanwhile, the prime minister has taken it upon herself to vent out her reactions, albeit prematurely. She says World Bank has until 31st of January to decide -- one way or the other. But the WB awaiting a reply from ACC, is yet to draw its conclusions. Yet, the PM presumes a negative response from the Bank, God forbid, she may not have provoked it by her naive remarks.

In an oblique reference to the text of WB panel's note appearing in a national daily before the same was received by the ACC she asked her audience whether it was a "conspiracy." Actually, it was published in the newspaper after it had reached the ACC.

We are mortified to see her being so reactive when the curtain is yet to be drawn on the fresh negotiations. She has talked about alternative sources of funding which in her own words, "are in place." Of course, if the World Bank finally decides to walk out of it, we would turn to other sources -- that goes without saying. But, remember the government's appeal for private donations met with little success.

In any case, World Bank is preferred for its easy lending terms, and technical supervision which is important for modern bridge building, a complex undertaking when you have both rail and road connectivity in mind.

The fulcrum is Abul that neither the World Bank nor GoB seems willing to concede on. Why should it be a tug of war between a multilateral financial organisation and the government of Bangladesh unless it is a matter of principle on which each side has reasons not to compromise? What seems over-

riding is across-the-board transparency.

On another plane, the prime minister whilst meeting senior members of the press corps to share the outcome of her eventful trip to Russia sounded acerbic. On the arms purchase deal with Russia she asked why some quarters quibble over it when they had no qualms striking weaponry deals with countries opposed to our liberation war. With due respect to the prime minister, we wonder why should she have made such an

impolitic and undiplomatic remark, even obliquely pointed to countries with whom we have had excellent relations.

Obviously, she should have the benefit of informed advice and not

sycophancy. The two famous dictums one of which she herself reaffirmed, namely, our foreign policy is guided by the principle of "friendship to all and malice towards none" are overlooked. The other dictum is there is no permanent friend or foe only permanent national interest. Where Bangladesh's best interest lies is pretty much clear to any student of geopolitics. We need friendship with regional giants like India and China, and in an extended sense with the USA. Friendship with Russia is not tantamount to moving

into another orbit because there isn't any, although we would love to see a balanced multi-polar power structure.

British weekly The Economist has recently maintained in its article titled "The Begums and the two giants" that Bangladesh is seemingly getting isolated from the South and Southeast Asia connectivity swipe currently spanning India, China and Myanmar. An alternative Indian transit project connecting Mizoram state connecting with Myanmar is underway.

Significantly, India is helping Myanmar build Sittwe deep sea port which could be used by India's North East, and diagonally, even China. The road and rail link projects encompassing Kunming in China, Bangladesh and Myanmar with forward linkages to other Southeast Asian countries as had been originally conceived should be revived without ado.

At the same time, the Sonadia deep sea port should emerge for Bangladesh to benefit alongside India and China. Do we sit idly by as the full potential of the Bay of Bengal in the geo-strategic, political and economic scheme of things unfolds layer by layer?

No, we embrace a farsighted vision with a sense of continuity infused in our inter-and-intra-party leadership structures.

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Sahifat al-Madina: A gift to Mankind

RUBY AMATULLA

THE 7th century "Sahifat al-Madina" -- otherwise known as the Charter of Madina -- was the first written constitution known in human history. Originally laid down by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to govern Medina, present-day scholars marvel at the amazing similarities between this document and documents such as the Constitution of the United States of America drafted eleven centuries later.

Both manifestos laid down a democratic federal system of governance, and both were also successful at integrating unruly autonomous groups -- the many independent Median tribes, the 13 independent colonies of the United States -- into a confederate system.

Prior to this confederation, Medina suffered from inter-tribal blood feuds that ripped the region apart. After hearing about the wisdom and diplomatic abilities of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), a delegation from Medina invited him, residing in Mecca at that time, to become their leader in order to help them find solutions and bring peace. The Prophet accepted the invitation and migrated from Mecca to Medina in 622 AD, known as the Hijrah at the start of the Muslim calendar.

One must keep in mind that at this time no concept of a "state" actually existed. There was no system of police, no army, and no judiciary. But in spite of all these difficulties, the Charter of Medina helped build a strong and resilient community that won three major wars launched by far superior Meccan military.

In spite of occasional dissension and treason initiated by some groups, the overall community grew more vibrant and prosperous, earning the trust and confidence of many outside tribes. Overall, this event left a legacy that helped Muslim communities to become a formidable force in Arabia and beyond.

With the Charter of Medina, various tribes were incorporated into a single confederation with rights and responsibilities. The Prophet called this confederation an "umma," or a single community composed of different ethnic and religious sub-groups. Freedom of religion and lifestyle were enforced, with shared community responsibilities involving maintenance of internal discipline as well as external self-defense. The Prophet served as a leader, an ultimate arbiter or judge in settling disputes and major conflicts. Thus, his decision was often the final decision.

Scholars such as Dr. Aziza al-Hibri, Imaudin Ahmed, and others point out the similarities between *Sahifat al-Madina* and the American constitution, not only in their content but also in their tone. Dr. Robert D. Crane, a convert and a former advisor to President Nixon, revealed in his research that Thomas Jefferson -- one of the most prominent founding fathers of America who drafted the "Declaration of Independence" and contributed to the American constitution -- was deeply influenced by Islam. Jefferson had a Qur'an in his library, and when his library

got burned down he ordered another copy. Keith Ellison, the first Muslim Congressman in America, used that same Qur'an to take the oath of office after his election.

Unfortunately, these scholars point out that ever since the Prophet's death the Muslim world has drifted away from the brilliant example established in Medina. Succeeding generations often built empires, dynasties, and monarchies that ran contrary to principles of democratic confederation laid down in the Charter of Madina. As Islam spread and Muslim rule expanded, retention of Median principles might have helped Muslim regions avoid much of the bloody disputes and social disintegration seen over the centuries.

Sadly, Muslim regions might have been able to assist the rest of the world towards democracy at a much faster rate than that which actually happened. In the process of promotion of peace, justice, and progress, Muslim leaders would have retained their position as global leaders. If they had used wisdom, they would have utilised the Charter of Madina as a "gold standard" to advise their own region as well as other regions on nation-building techniques.

Ever since the American Revolution, the rest of humanity has gravitated towards a manner of governance modeled after the United States. In the beginning, the reality of the United States was a far cry from US constitutional principles. Black slaves were not citizens, and women could not vote until the 1920s. But the nation still remained mindful about the ideals of equality, dignity, and liberty of all citizens irrespective of differences.

We can see these ideals throughout the Civil War, the collective bargaining movement, the women's liberation movement, and the immigrant rights movement. Eventually, the nation became more integrated as well as enormously successful.

Today, America is one of the most powerful and influential nations in the world -- not because of its military might or wealth, but because of an impartial rule of law that helped to integrate one of the most diverse immigrant societies in the world.

Many countries of the world have increasingly gravitated towards this system of governance, as they see the benefits of this governing method for increasing national stability and economic growth. Even China's leadership has conceded that they must move towards increased democracy in order to ensure sustained economic growth.

The Muslim world has unfortunately lagged behind this change. But the Muslim world can still learn from the past. Hurdles still exist towards democracy in these regions. Many Muslims maintain erroneous ideas about democracy, and incorrectly categorise it as a Western-bred concept.

They forget that the foundations of democracy were laid down in the "Sahifat al-Madina" more than fourteen centuries ago -- by none other than the Prophet himself.

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