

PAKISTAN'S "SABBATH"

TRANSLATION

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If the first deviation of the mandate of February 3, 1997 (elections) was the nepotistic doling out of the posts of state authority, the second moral and ideological aberration was the cancellation of Friday-holiday through an order in his national address by the Prime Minister, and instead the restoration of Sunday as weekly off-day, only to win the good-will of specific secular Western and Indian lobbies. This is a step which overlooks the history of the Muslim society, traditions and ideological identity, and attempts to break up again Pakistan's relationship with the Muslim World and links it with Europe, America and India. Most unfortunately, the blow has not been inflicted this time by the British imperialism, but through the hands of the leadership of Muslim League which claimed to revive and consolidate the Pakistan ideology. As Prime Minister, the first speech of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif carried many positive and pleasant aspects, yet it is not understood why he considered it necessary to attack in that very first speech the country's ideological and cultural identity - an act not expected of him. In search of some religious justification, the translation of the verse from the Qur'an, inserted in his speech, was sheer disrespect of the Holy Book on the one hand, as well as it added insult to the injuries of the Ummah.

We consider it necessary to place before the nation various aspects of the issue so that the record stays correct and also Mian Sahib, the Muslim League leadership and the Parliament avail the opportunity to think over the matter once again and hopefully reverse the mistake that has been committed. Otherwise they will not be spared by the history and the Pakistan's Muslim millat for this uncalled for retrogression. The Sunday holiday, that was thrust upon us by the British colonial rule was abandoned during the 1977 mass movement. God willing, the true representative forces of the Muslim millat will once again eliminate this heresy and restore the pious tradition of observing Friday as holiday.

The problem is to be considered from different angles. One is the pure religious aspect. The second pertains to political, cultural and civilizational concerns. The third consideration relates, to economy and trade. We will study the problem from these varied angles and invite all those interested in the issue, to examine our arguments with open mind and free of prejudice.

Let us take up the religious aspect first. Most religions have earmarked some particular day for worships and for taking rest, attributing it to God and making special arrangements for certain performances and observing inhibitions. More particular are the Sabbath of the Jewish creed and Sunday of the Christian world. Similar peculiarity is found in other faiths, of which detailed mention has been made under the two articles of "Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics."¹

According to the Islamic faith, all days of the week belong to Allah and there is no Muslim tradition of specifying a day only for the sake of taking rest. That is why the problem of Friday should not be considered in the background of Jewish Sabbath. Friday does have special significance in the Muslim traditions, but not as a day of rest, to abscond from work or to avoid what are considered 'worldly' affairs. Friday also does not have any such stupid concept linked with it that, "the Creator created the universe in six days and took rest on the seventh day so man must also take rest for one day!"

¹ Vol, X, "SABBATH" pp 885-895, and Vol XII, "SUNDAY" PP 103-11.

Friday in Islam was introduced to strengthen the centrifugal force of the Ummah and to organize a system of collective prayers that brings unity with Muslim society. The day was to be shined with the light of sublime worship and service in the way of Allah and for the welfare- of His creatures. It is very important that the first Friday was organized after migration (hijra) to Madina, as primary step towards establishing an Islamic society and state. Since then and todate and God willing, till the Hereafter this pivotal role of Friday will remain as the distinct sign of the Muslim Ummah. Friday is as prominent a sign of Islam as are the institutions of Haj and Ramadhan and its role is unique in the social integration of the Millat.

In the Islamic calendar, Friday is the seventh and last day of the week, which in the pre-Islamic era was called 'Yaum-ul-Arub' and after the establishment of Islamic social order in Madina was named 'al-Jumm'ah. The central importance of the day is the gathering of the Muslims for the Friday prayers, which is obligatory (fardh). It is a prayer that can be offered only collectively.²

We find clear cut directives regarding the observance of Friday in the three Qur'anic verses (9-11) of Surah (chapter) "al-Jummah", in which the said prayers and other related matters have been commanded, and the 'Ahadiths' (sayings of the Prophet p.h.u.h) related to the subject:

- (1) Arrangements for the Friday prayers is essential in the Muslim society. A part of that is the Friday Call (Adhan), after which every adult Muslim man has to stop forthwith all business of life, whether concerning trade or anything else, and to prepare and proceed to the grand Mosque {Masjid-e-Ja'amah} only to offer the prayers.
- (2) The details of the special preparation and arrangements before the Friday prayers, as we find in the 'Ahadiths' and 'fiqh' (jurisprudence) in fact explain the varied aspects of the "hastening earnestly towards the remembrance of Allah" and the observance of which with religious fervour is the essence of Muslim society. Imam Ghazali makes a detailed mention of them in his famous work "Ahya-al-Ulm".³ The pious scholars and doctors of the Ummah, used to make arrangements for the Friday prayers just like 'Eid'. The obligatory bath taking of the Friday, arranging clean and neat dress and usage of perfume, are different, dimensions of the special efforts (sa'ii) for Friday prayers.
- (3) Undertaking various activities of life, whether concerning trading or other business, is lawful before the Call (adhan) for Friday prayers and after its performance. However, abundance of the remembrance (dhikr) of Allah is made essential, so that the limits and penal ordinances imposed by Allah are duly respected, the essence of the worship remains dominant and deep involvement in picnics, amusements or trading may not become a source of getting careless with respect to Allah and His Prophet (p.b.u.h.) or lazy in obeying-the Shariah injunctions,.

In the light of these directives it becomes clear that whereas Friday and its special, congregation are of basic importance and significant signs of the Muslim society, permission to undertake other business of life before the Call (adhan) and after the prayers, is also granted. There is no Muslim tradition of complete abstinence from all worldly affairs as observed by the Jews. As Islam has given a religious touch to all acts of life, exactly the same way it allows business undertaking on Friday along with prayers and invocations. If now someone uses this permission for work on Friday

² See, "Lisan-alArab" and "Mufradat-al-Qur'an" under "Jam'a Al-Kashaf" Vol, iv, p.532 "Roohal Ma'ani" Vol xxviii, p. 100

³ See Vol. 1, Section V "The Excellence of Friday"

to nullify its observance of general holiday, he will only be confusing the matter. Permissibility of work on Friday is there, and is well established as a practice in Muslim history. It has been so because Islam does not provide any tradition of a holiday wherein no work can be done like the taskless and passive Jewish 'Sabbath'. The question that warrants answer, however, is that, if for various good reasons, a day has to be declared holiday in the Muslim society, then, keeping in view the Muslim culture, civilisation and overall behaviour of the Ummah, what could be the best day? There is general consensus of the Ummah that Friday is the lone choice for this purpose. That is why since the concept of general holiday was introduced in the Muslim society, only Friday has been chosen all over the Muslim World. Main reason being that the day selected and ordained by Allah and His Prophet (p.b.u.h.) for prayers, should also be the day for Muslims when they could break the weekly schedule and use the spared time for social contacts, collective programmes, general welfare and other cultural activities: In a very natural manner Friday took this position in our history and was accepted as holiday in the areas of education, courts and official business, duly followed by the trade markets and other economic circles. Although on a relatively limited scale, business was done before and after the prayers, but with due regard for the day's special status.

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) himself said, "Allah has ordained Friday, as the leader of the days and its significance is more than the days of Fitr and al-Nahr (Eid days).⁴ The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) also informed, "Gabriel (as.) came to me, he carried a white (transparent) mirror and said, 'This is a revelation, which Allah has transformed into Eid for you and your Ummah after you'. This day for us, is the leader of the days. And we shall call it "Yaum-al-Mazeed" that is the day of Growth and Increase, till the Hereafter".⁵

Mufti Muhammad Shafi, the Grand Mufti of Pakistan, while, interpreting the verse "al-Jumma" in his "Ma'arifal-Qur'an"⁶, writes:

"There is an indication in it that though the prohibition of trading in the verse is obligatory for all those selling or buying, but its practical arrangement should be to shut down the shops so that there is no transaction possible. Its inherent wisdom, is that buyers are countless and therefore difficult to be stopped. (Contrary to it) the number of sellers/shopkeepers is limited and fixed. If they are banned to sell, the rest will automatically stop from buying. That is why the order given (in the Qur'an) is only to stop selling."

Mufti Sahib declares the Friday holiday as desirable (mustahab)⁷ in one of his fatawa. The original questions and answers were in Arabic. Below is given its translation (from the Urdu version):

"Q. Observing holiday on Friday and the day of 'al-Adhha' is proved from the Qur'an ' Hadith' and 'Fiqh', or has it been adopted artificially (self- imposed)?

- A.** If Friday is observed as holiday for education with the impression that, teaching is not permissible, then this is a wrong view and heresy, and therefore should not be acted upon. But if (this weekly) break in teaching is done to follow the tradition of the pious ancestors, as they reserved this day for prayers and considered it a day of Eid then it is desirable

⁴ "All Dur al Muthur" Vol. vi, p. 218. "Al Kashshaf" Vol, p. 532

⁵ "Al Kashshaf", Vol. iv, p. 532

⁶ Vol. vi, p. 1441

⁷ "Fatawa Dar-ul-Uloom Devband" Dar-al Isha'at, Karachi, Question No 281, pp 405-406

(mustahab) because this fact is proved from the injunctions (nusus) as Ibn Qayyam wrote⁸, that 'Friday be reserved for worship and with reference to various obligatory and desirable prayers, it holds special significance. God Almighty, appointed one full day for each nation, wherein they abandon all other activities and stay free for prayers only. So (for us) Friday is the day of prayers and its status against other days is like the month of Ramadhan (against other months). Allah has the real knowledge."

Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi, in his exegesis "Tadabbur-al-Quran" writes under the title "A desirable way for Muslims on Friday":

"From the style and manner in which Qur'an narrate, it appeal's Allah Almighty considers it desirable for the Muslims to spend the pre-call time on Friday in the preparations for the prayers. Unless absolutely essential he (a Muslim) should not initiate an engagement that proves inhibitive for this preparation. This is so deducted because it is said that 'when the prayer is terminated, then scatter in the earth and seek Allah's providence'. The worlds hold the messenger that the proper time for trading business is not before the Friday prayers, but only alter that. Particularly for the type of trading for which people are compelled to get out of the 'township' and scatter in the land, and that such a flight would adversely affect the Friday congregation, which is the desired objective. A common person must get a day during the week in which he shaves, cleans his dress and takes (special) bath, life appropriate day for the purpose is Friday, because the said activities are part of it God Almighty, therefore, directed that if other economic and trade activities are unavoidable on Friday, then these better start after the prayers. This has been the tradition of our ancestors and even today favoured by segments of the society in which the Islamic modes and consciousness of the Islamic culture is alive."⁹

Maulana Sayyed Abul A'ala Mawdudi explains the historical background of the verse of 'al-Jumma' and other relied essential matters, in his famous Qnr'anic exegesis "Tafheem-al-Qur'an and says:

"Notable here is the fact that although in the Qur'an, Friday has not been declared a general holiday as the "Sabbath" of Jews or the Sunday of the Christians, yet nobody can deny that. Friday is a national {milli) sign for the Muslims exactly as Saturday and Sunday are for the Jews and Christians. And if to have a general weekly holiday is considered a civic necessity, then as it is national for the Jews to choose Saturday and for a Christian to opt for Sunday, in similar manner a Muslim (if he really has some Islamic sense), will decide Friday for the purpose. The Christians did not hesitate to impose Sunday even on countries where Christian population was negligible. When the Jews established their state in the Palestine, the first action they took was to declare Saturday as holiday instead of Sunday. In the pre-partition sub-continent, the difference of the British India, and the Muslim states was that one part observed Sunday as holiday, the other went for Friday. However, in countries where Muslims have lost their Islamic touch, they stick to Sunday even after availing political sovereignty, as we find in Pakistan. And if beyond this a state of senselessness prevails, then Friday is annulled and Sunday declared holiday instead, as did Mustafa Kemal in Turkey."¹⁰

⁸ Zad-al-Me'ad",1/11.

⁹ Tadabbar-al-Qur'an", Vol. vii, p. 389

¹⁰ Tafheem-ul-Qur'an, Vol. v, pp.497-498..

Alas! The tyranny and injury inflicted in the secular Turkey, has been repeated in Pakistan by the leadership of Muslim League, when Friday had been observed as holiday here for 20 years. This cruel action is taken in the background that all local Islamic forces had, since the creation of Pakistan, been demanding Friday to be declared holiday. On 24th August, 1972, a proper resolution was presented in the National Assembly in this regard and discussed threadbare. Many members of the Muslim League and Peoples' Party favoured the resolution. The resolution was presented by Sahibzada Saifullah¹¹ (of Jama'at-e-Islami), the Assembly passed it on to the concerned Parliamentary Committee, which in its report unanimously recommended its approval. In November, 1976, the resolution alongwith the report, of the Committee was again presented in the Assembly.¹² At last, the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto announced the holiday of Friday instead of Sunday, as a result of the PNA's mass movement, of which Muslim League was an integral part.

The demand for Friday as holiday was not confined to political parties alone. The Islamic Ideology Council had pointed it again and again that as a first step towards establishing an Islamic social order, the government should take that decision. In its preliminary annual report for 1975-76 (Chapter 2), the Islamic Ideology Council proposed a nine-point agenda for an Islamic society. Its very first two points were:

- (1) Friday be declared weekly holiday all over the country; and
- (2) Hijri calendar be introduced in Pakistan with corresponding dates of (the Gregorian solar calendar on it).¹³

The Council repeated these demands in its report for 1976-77 (page 259) and then in the annexures to the preliminary report 1976-77, it wrote with utmost emphasis:

"The Friday holiday: The-British during their reign, selected Sunday as weekly holiday only because it was a day of worship for the Christians. The vile and ugly custom persists since independence. Contrary to this for the Islamic Millat, Friday is reserved for special prayers and its importance is well established. True there is no clear cut order in the Qur'an and Sunnah regarding holidays, but if a weekly holiday was necessary, then respecting the general Muslim sentiments and the honour of Friday, only this day should be declared the weekly off-day. Therefore, the Council unanimously recommends that Friday be declared the weekly vacation day."¹⁴

This just and natural demand is in conformity with the historic tradition of the Muslims. The famous orientalist S.D. Goitein writes in the Encyclopedia of Islam (Leiden):

"Friday, the weekly day of communal worship in Islam, we have reports about government offices and schools being closed on Fridays in Abba'sid times find a query addressed to Maimornides (Jewish scholar of the 12th century AD) around 1200 speaks about Jewish and Muslim partners in a jewelry workshop who replaced one another on Fridays and Saturdays (ef. Moshe Ben Maimon, Respona, Jerusalem 1934, 62). In modern times (1960s) most Muslim states have made Friday an official

¹¹ See proceedings of the National Assembly of Pakistan from 24th to 31st August 1972.

¹² See proceedings of the National Assembly of November, 1976.

¹³ Three-years report of the Islamic Ideology Council, 1974-76, page 97.

¹⁴ Islamic Ideology Council, "Three Years Report" 1974-75, 1975-76, 1976-77, p. 307.

day of rest. Turkey has chosen Sunday, while in Pakistan Friday is a half holiday, Sunday a full day of rest.¹⁵

Before proceeding further, let it be clarified that the primary concept of holiday in various cultures and civilizations got introduced on religious basis. The English word "holiday" is derived from 'holy day. According to the 20th Century Chambers Dictionary:

"Holiday: originally a religious festival, a day or season of idleness and recreation."

Sunday is defined in the Dictionary as follows:

"Sunday: The first day of the week, anciently dedicated to the sun, now regarded as a Sabbath by most Christians."

And Sabbath is defined as under:

"Sabbath: among the Jews, Saturday set apart for rest from work; among Christians Sunday."

The "Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics" has, under the title "Sunday" reviewed the day in length, as holiday. Its essay writer, M.G". Glazebrook writes:

"The need of bodily rest at short intervals is a fact of human nature which all civilized nations have recognized by instituting public holidays. Constantine's decree of A.D.321, therefore, not only conferred a benefit upon the individual and satisfied a requirement of the Church, but also solved economic mid social problems which were growing very difficult If any positive commands are laid down for the weekly holidays, they must issue from religious authority which appeals only to spiritual sanctions and affects only those who acknowledge its right. The Christian church is an authority, and has strong reasons, besides those just mentioned, for requiring its members to observe Sunday."¹⁶

After having examined the issue from religious, political, cultural and historical perspective, it is appropriate to look at the economic desirability, which the trading circles present in favour of Sunday's rest Yet, before speaking about that legacy, it needs to be noted that in the relevant verses of Surah 'al-Juma a fact of principle has been revealed. That if we are to choose between the religious wisdom and honour of faith on the one hand and on the other the economic expediency and urge for recreation and personal liking, then a Muslim's attitude in this conflict will be to uphold Deen (religion) and no other interest;

"But when they see some bargain or some amusement, they disperse headlong to it, and leave you standing. Say: The (blessing) from the presence of Allah is better than any amusement or bargain! And Allah is the Best to provide (for all needs)".

It is a pity to see that the present political leadership did in essence the same with Islam and its holy signs, what the Muslims were ordered to avoid in the Quranic verse. Alas! The Prime Minister had recited all the three verses and not just the one he referred to (in his national address).

¹⁵ Encyclopedia of Islam. Vol. II, p. 593 – Remember, the volume was prepared during 1960-65.

¹⁶ Encyclopedia of Religions and Ethics, ed. By: James Hastings, New York, Vol. zii, p. 110

The ruling junta beats about every bush, yet the real intent about which it feels shy to make just a mention (practice, that it surely does), is to gel in conformity with the Western system. The expediency now is more sharp and double-stilled, because the eagerness that prevails to establish trade link and political friendship with India will have yet another common cause and similarity in the shape of Sunday as the public holiday. These people in the Government of Pakistan probably forget that in the Indian held occupied Kashmir, the Muslims observe Friday as holiday and work on Sundays.

It is said, that because of Friday being rest day, we get isolated from the world for three days, as they observe Saturday and Sunday and we (here add to it) Friday. Thus practically we are said to be working four days a week. This statement carries many delusions and fallacies. The first being that in the present-day world decision regarding the working days and timings is taken according to the nature and performance of workers, the national tradition and the historic experiences. It is not done to imitate others. Most western countries observe two days rest and in some it is even three days per week. When the European Commission criticized Britain that compared to other European countries why it was insisting on more working hours, the Kingdom bluntly replied: "Our action depends on our own requirements, what the hell you have to do with it? We do not accept the European social chapter."

Israel observes Saturday for Sabbath, and the whole surrounding Arab world closes on Friday. Israel never felt the necessity to look for any economic or other excuse. About 60 percent of the Indian trade today is with the Arab and Muslim countries, yet it never even thought to switch over to Friday only to get in line with this vast market. This 'distinction' is only of our 'Islamic' leadership that it is always ready to sacrifice for the sake of others, its religion and the rest:

Look at the global geographical position and you find that time in America is 10-12 hours behind us and 8-10 hours ahead of us in Japan and Korea. Because of rotation of day and night, the difference is one full day between Japan and America. When it is day time here, it is night in America. When sun rises on Monday in Japan, Sunday is yet to fully dawn in America. Did this extreme differences ruin the trade? Has investment slowed down? Or, did the economic relations shattered?

Europe and America are now introducing the new flexible or revolving system of "Time Management". Under the system, attendance according to timetable is not requirement in the administrative matters, particularly for the high professionals. Only the number of hours is fixed, then everyone decides working time according to his or her own convenience. Thus, work is spread on a broader time canvas. Fax, computer, Internet, E-mail and electronic devices have made it possible to keep contacts seven days a week and 24 hours a day and there is no need to open or close the offices at specified times. Direct banking business is now done in Europe and America for 24 hours daily. Plastic money/credit cards checked electronically are used anywhere anytime the world over. The computer instantly verifies the deal. All these matters require neither opening the office nor presence of the staff. Now every house, rather every pocket (carrying a mobile phone) has turned into mini-office. With all these modern facilities and instruments at hand, to talk about difficulties in external trade or fiscal transactions, do not seem a bit more- than some 'pre-historic story-telling.

The whole case is built on the assumption that the real constraint of a common Pakistan trader and civilian is in the area of external trade and dealings with Europe and America. Fact of the

matter is that hardly 10-15 percent of Pakistan's GNP is dependent on the international markets and only about one half percent traders in Pakistan rely on exports and imports. A well known fact is that newspapers are published daily irrespective of weekly holiday. If, therefore, some institution - say like the Stock Exchange - feels necessary, if can opt to work inspite of the rest day; why the common citizen be punished? We have been observing Friday as holiday since the last 20 years, yet there is no evidence at all that because of closing on Friday or opening on Sunday there was any adverse effect on our international trade or other relationships. The whole Arab world stretching from Morocco to Gulf keeps closed on Friday (not after the invention of petroleum, but for centuries), but has never faced a trade recession or retardation. The International Monetary Centre of Bahrain keeps shutters down on Friday, yet is as successful, as the centres in London, New York and Frankfurt; why then this whole hue and cry in Pakistan? It seems the real trouble is not economic; it is rather intellectual and psychological.

In a nutshell, that is our tragedy. We have gained corporal freedom from the West to some extent, but our mind and our intellect are yet slaves.

We cannot complain the West have lament for our own country fellows, who in their love for the West and their deep desire to expand trade wife India, are ready to cross all limits. They speak of the public mandate, but wish to be in line with and conform to the U.S. New World Order and the Indian business and economic adjustments.
