

The people of Iran today celebrate the birth centenary of Reza Shah Pahlavi the great and remember with deep gratitude his singular contribution to the making of modern Iran.

Reza Shah, the great founder of Pahlavi dynasty, belonged to a traditionally military family of Boyandaran from the upper Mazandaran region of Savad Kuh. He was born in a small village called Al-Ashk on 15 March, 1878. Following the tradition, Reza Khan joined the Persian Cossack Brigade at the age of 14. The Brigade had been created in 1879, the year after his birth, by Nasseruddin Shah, the Qajar monarch, after the failure of British, French and Austrian military experts to set up a European style fighting force in Iran.

The young Reza Khan belonged to a generation of new nationalists which had made up its mind to break the hold of superstition over their people. Reza Khan, like other young Iranians of his group wanted above all to educate himself. His desire turned into determination once he realised how the ruling classes of the then Iran had gone to a great length to keep the people illiterate and superstitious. Each day, at the end of the army duties, he sat patiently in his barracks learning to read and write with the help of one of his educated friends. From the beginning he aimed at a successful military career and his entire education and outlook were to be moulded by the needs of the army. He succeeded step by step during his twenty-seven years in the Brigade and when his son, the present Monarch, was born, he held the rank of Colonel and was a member of the high command of the Brigade.

The years of Reza Khan's advance in the hierarchy of command within the brigade were those of a gathering political storm in Iran, caught between the rival claims of the two mighty colonial powers then dominating Asia, Russia and Britain. The short-sighted Qajar monarchs, Mohammad Shah (1834-47), Nasseruddin Shah (1847-96) and Muzaffaruddin Shah (1896-1907), had either lost in battle or traded away, piece by piece, large portions of Iranian territory and several integral elements of national sovereignty.

Monarchy has been the most ancient and consistent institution in the civilisation of Iran. The resilient character of the Iranian civilisation is an exceptional example in western Asia of a nation which refused to lose its identity.

An international personality has rightly noted that in the origin of Iranians there



REZA SHAH THE GREAT

Founder of modern Iran

SYED EQBAL RIZVI

is a power who will swallow and devour the conquerors of Iran and digest all their thoughts. That power will always resist and eliminate those external forces. During the past 2500 years of its history, Iran was occupied by so many foreign forces, but Iranians routed those elements in such a way that now the banner of sovereignty and nationalism pulsates in the life and living of Iranians who are pledged-bound to keep them ever alert.

During the state of a bankrupt, dependent economy and imperilled territorial integrity, the 1919 coup took place in Iran. Six years later, in 1925, the man who had played a determining role in bringing about the change was chosen as new monarch.

In his 18 years in power, Reza Shah achieved a great deal towards building modern Iran. His first major accomplishment was to establish a strong centralised authority needed for Iran in view of the foreign intrigues in Iran. A modern army was set up acting as a significant lever of social change. Social chaos and social insecurity gave way to social order.

Reza Shah the great's enlightened historical vision enabled him to recognise the determining role governments were to play in the development scenario of the Third World. During his reign the central government played a very active role in all spheres of the Iranian economy, particularly in the development of industries. The ex-

tent of this industrialisation effort was to include the ill-fated attempt to set up a steel industry in Iran, late in the 1930's and the construction of the first trans-Iranian railroad, which brought a new vitality to the troubled economy. Along with the new railroad, major road construction projects were undertaken and financed by the government, creating a very essential, and hitherto non-existent, transportation network.

Yet another historic step taken by Reza Shah the great was the sale of some government agricultural property, traditionally a significant source of income, to the peasants. In a sense he championed the first land reform in Iran.

On the cultural front the efforts and the results were also praiseworthy. Particularly attention was paid to the field of education. The construction of the first university in Iran, in itself an act that left its impact on the very fabric of the future Iranian society, the sending of students abroad to acquire advanced technical skills, compulsory education along with the construction of many new schools, the forced separation of education from the influence of the clergy — all these were meant for the development on the education front. The first law directly dealing with the liberation of women from the oppressive traditions of obscurantism was put into effect with the personal initiative of Reza Shah.

While striving for economic and political independence constituted the bulwark of Iranian domestic politics in his period, Reza Shah also reflected the international posture of Iran at the time. He was a staunch nationalist and, as such, stood against any infringement upon the rights of Iran. His fierce struggle against Britain on two occasions (the oil agreement and the border question) signalled the emergence of a New Iran, resolute in defending its rights.

The freedom-loving Iranians today celebrate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Reza Shah, the great founder of Modern Iran, and rejoice and remember with deep gratitude his singular contribution in consolidating Iran's territorial integrity. The people of Bangladesh join them on this great day and share the happiness and prosperity of Iranians in strengthening the bonds of fraternal feelings and solidifying them in the sublime interest of Islamic fraternity all over the world.