

REMINISCING EASTER TIME



By Abdulrazak Fazal *Updated July 2020*

EASTER in East Africa since the time of the British colonial days has had a charm of its own, a Christian event but with a universal appeal. Everyone looks forward to this time of the year when its consecutive holidays stretching from Good Friday to Easter Monday involve hectic schedules. In Zanzibar in the 1950s we referred to it as 'Sports Festival' when people from Dsm would pay us a visit and vice versa. I vividly recall my mother's anxiety as she awaited the arrival by air of her brother from Dsm. In those days air traveling was less frequent. Mostly people journeyed by the ships 'Al Hazra' and 'Al Said' which would be fully packed with passengers.

One of the sporting events in Zanzibar was the participation of Dsm's leading cricket team AK Sports Club comprising star cricketers like Mamda Kassam, the Kalyan brothers, Bhamji brothers and several others who assembled at the Khalifa ground to play Zanzibar's Arabs team. The formidable KT Karim led his 'Tuskers' team. Years later an old and fragile KT had become part of our 'Limra Group' but to me always a vision of a tall and smart figure in his blue blazer and red muffler around his neck treading imperiously over the first pitch at Mnazimoja.

In the 1960s and 1970s when in Dsm everyone seemed obsessed with the East African Safari rally during Easter. It was a real craze as people glued to their radio listening to the live commentary and the latest rally position. The rally covered Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and was considered the toughest in the world contested by renowned drivers. The rough passage through the Usambaras and the Masika rains provided a real challenge. It made headlines on the 'BBC Sports Roundup'. The rally was flagged off outside the Kilimanjaro hotel and greeted by a roar of applause from the crowd that had gathered there. The Tanzanian hero was Bert Shankland, the General Manager of Peugeot Motors', who driving his Peugeot had won the rally on a couple of occasions. The other local drivers were Zully Rhemtulla and Nizar Jiwani. The Peugeot car had become the talk of the town. I remember my uncle buying a green coloured Peugeot 404, TDS 500, and priding himself on its possession.

I had even experienced a dreadful Easter once in the early 70s when at the NBC's Jamhuri St Branch where I was working its Savings Department would just not balance with its Control. Those were the days when everything was manual

involving thousands of accounts and hundreds of entries. We were given an ultimatum to balance it before the commencement of Easter holidays. Unfortunately, it did not balance, and we were deprived of our holidays spending the entire Easter at the bank.

Mainly Easter is the time for the locals to visit their native place to be among their dear and near ones. Those days we could travel at night by bus leaving Dsm in the evening to enjoy cool weather en route and reaching early in the morning Moshi where my sister and brother in law stayed and who would come to receive us. We always had a lovely time in Moshi as they would show immense affection to us. They resided on the ground floor apartment block adjacent to the Karim and Daya blocks. At night we all sat outside in the open where my sister cooked barbecue over an open fire on a charcoal grill and feasting all of us. Behind their house was our beautiful Shia mosque with the splendid insertions of Allah's names inside it and outside His naturalness and relentless chirping of the birds with the beautiful snowcapped Mount Kilimanjaro in the background. So picturesque!

My sister would then accompany us to Arusha where my brother and his family resided. In Arusha also we would have lovely time and be treated to sumptuous meals. One of the spots that we must visit while in Arusha was 'Mountain Village' around the beautiful and scenic Lake Diluti. It is a few miles drive from the city. The children would enjoy the horse ride there escorted by a trainer. A sizable portion of land around Lake Diluti is now said to be owned by the former US President Jimmy Carter. In Moshi, our favourite spot was Marangu Falls where we would descend the slope and relax down there staring at the wonders of nature. The Kibo Hotel around there is all serene and commands a scenic view. Of poignancy is the ringing of bells and hymns emanating from the chapel behind the hotel. The locals with their families in moderate outfits and wearing broad smiles liven up the spirit of Easter despite life's miseries and gloomy outlook. Salute to them. Our visits to Moshi and Arusha have come to a halt as sadly my brother, sister and brother in law remain no more (RIP).

Here is wishing all a very blessed and happy Easter. Happy Holidays!







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