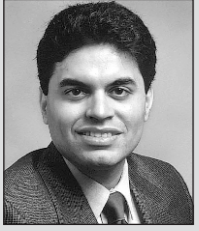


# Osama needs more mud huts



**FAREED ZAKARIA**  
writes from Washington

The West, and the United States in particular, has a long history of seeing the enemy as 10 feet tall -- think of Soviet Russia and Saddam Hussein. But as we paint al Qaeda in those lofty terms, let's please remember last week, when Osama bin Laden appealed on a crackling audiotape for a little money to build a few huts in Waziristan.

They operated at a high plane, rarely revealing anything about al Qaeda's operations. In fact, intelligence agencies looked for small signs -- an off-hand reference, an item of apparel -- to reveal where al Qaeda would strike next. Bin Laden's most recent appeal is a mishmash of argument and detail, and seems slightly crazed. He has broadened his verbal attacks against the "Zionist-Crusaders" to include the United Nations and China. The latter he condemns because it "represents the Buddhists and Pagans of the world."

Like Hitler crazily declaring war on the United States after Pearl Harbor, bin Laden is adding to his slew of formidable enemies: China was the only major world power that was unconcerned about him. (And his reference to the United Nations as a "Zionist-Crusader tool" would surely surprise most Israelis.) Bin Laden also makes some plaintive appeals to Muslims to rise up and attack the "crusaders" in the west of Sudan. This shows desperation because there are no "crusaders" in Sudan. The troops there are African Union peacekeepers. But more interestingly, the victims in Darfur are Muslim. Bin Laden's real objective appears to be to support the government in Sudan -- which once housed him -- as it brutally exterminates tribes that oppose it. What does this have to do with Islam? Most revealingly, bin Laden makes a parochial appeal for foreign aid, to help those al Qaeda supporters in Waziristan who have been rendered homeless by Pakistani Army attacks. That suggests he and his

friends are having a rough time. Strip away the usual hot air, and bin Laden's audiotape is the sign of a seriously weakened man.

It is now widely accepted that al Qaeda Central no longer has much to do with the specific terrorist attacks -- even the most bloody ones, in Madrid, Sinai and London -- that have taken place in the past three years. These appear to be the work of smaller, local groups, often inspired by al Qaeda but not directed by it. The result of this decentralization, however, is that the attacks lack coherence and strategic sense. Al Qaeda Central would attack large symbolic targets (the World Trade Center) or government facilities (embassies, ships), but smaller groups do what they can, going after cafes, hotels and train stations. The result -- local civilians die, which enrages the public. After a while the attacks also begin to feel less cataclysmic. People realize that life goes on. In Egypt, the stock market shrugged off last week's terror attacks; hotels in Sinai (where the bombs exploded) reported a small number of cancellations, and the public seemed increasingly angry at the terror groups.

Next in the communications department is Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi's appearance, and for the first time we got to see his face. Zarqawi's motive in doing this is debated, but almost certainly it was an effort to show that he is still relevant. Conditions in Iraq are bloody and dangerous, but they also might be moving out of his control. Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds are struggling, both on the ground and across the table, to see if they can live together.

Whatever they decide about this power-sharing arrangement, Zarqawi's appeals for jihad seem beside the point and appeal to a dwindling number of Iraqis.

The danger from global Islamic terrorism is real. But it is the product of small and scattered groups, spewing hate. It has much less support in the Muslim world than people think. There is much to be distressed about in that world -- oppressive regimes, reactionary social views, illiberal political parties, mindless and virulent anti-Americanism. But these trends are not the same as support for jihad or for a Taliban-like Islamic state. And it is the latter -- terror and theology -- that are al Qaeda's basic goals. The evidence suggests that they are not gaining adherents.

The West, and the United States in particular, has a long history of seeing the enemy as 10 feet tall -- think of Soviet Russia and Saddam Hussein. But as we paint al Qaeda in those lofty terms, let's please remember last week, when Osama bin Laden appealed on a crackling audiotape for a little money to build a few huts in Waziristan.

Fareed Zakaria is Editor of Newsweek International.

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# Biological sciences: The way ahead

Our yearning should be for a faculty of high esteem devoid of demeaning religious fanaticism. Teachers and students alike must remain alert against a certain vested group who is always involved in spiteful activities. Communal groups are like poisonous distillates; one needs to come out of the meanness and endeavour to build a finer and higher academic culture. This culture will fuel our fires to make excellence in all branches of the biological science -- the science of the twenty first century. The Faculty of Biological Sciences will lead that expedition.

**PROFESSOR M. ANWAR HOSSAIN**

At the end of the last century, a well focused telephonic conversation took place between two very illustrious persons. One was Bill Clinton, one of the most successful presidents of the United States and the other, Stephen Hawking, who has been termed as one of the most brilliant scientific minds since Einstein. Both of them opined that Biological science will be the science of the 21st century. Since then many thinkers, experts and researchers of various and diverse branches of science voiced the same opinion about biological science.

During the middle of the last century, Watson and Crick made their epoch-making discovery of the structure of DNA, the repository of the mystery of life. This timeless finding gave a tremendous speed and momentum to the research of bio-sciences that solved many unknown riddles about life. Proceeding on those footsteps, by the end of the last decade of the last century, the entire sequence of the human DNA became known to man. The human genome project was successfully completed ahead of the expected time. This resulted in the uncovering of key mysteries of life at an unimaginable speed and the influence was vividly visible in all branches of biology.

In the astronomical expanse of the universe, existence of life is, until today, found only in our minute earth. Scientists of biological sciences study the various aspects of life on this earth. Time has entrusted upon them with this huge responsibility. The Faculty of Biological Sciences of Dhaka University has the opportunity to share this responsibility. But for that it shall have to have the needed capability to accept the challenge in becoming frontline leader in advanced ideas and practices in the field of education and research. This requires intricate planning.

The Faculty of Biological Sciences that started its journey in 1974 is very fortunate to be situated in the historic Curzon Hall campus which turned 100 years old in 2004. Names of some greatest scholars like Satyen Bose, Meghnad Saha, P. Moheshwari, Mukarram Hossain, H.K. Yusufzai, M.O. Ghani, Mafizuddin Ahmed, Kamaluddin Ahmad, B. Karim, Anwarul Azim Chowdhury, and Mahmudul Amin are synonymous with the glorious advent of science

at Dhaka University. These educator-researchers have devoted their entire teaching and research lives among the beautifully architected red brick buildings of the Curzon Hall.

Treading the path of their impetus, this campus also witnessed other scholars like S. Zahir Haidar, A.K.M. Nurul Islam, Mughtash Hossain, Harunar Rashid, Hironmoy Sengupta and others. There was a time when Curzon Hall campus was mostly known by the Faculty of Science, but now the campus is predominantly the seat of different departments of Biological Science Faculty. The faculty has become entwined with the glorious past of Dhaka University. In near future we have plans to celebrate through a gala program the one hundred years of Curzon Hall, the icon of glory of the University of Dhaka. The Biological Science Faculty will also shine with the same intensity under the aegis of its brilliance.

Keeping in view of a bright future, as a Dean of the faculty, I have envisaged a work plan an outline of which is given below:

1. Make each department of the faculty a wealth of learned and skilled teachers and researchers.
  - a. The existing teachers will have to keep pace and enhance their knowledge at par with the rapid advances in the field of biological sciences.
  - b. New appointments of faculties and researchers will only be on the basis of merit following stringent scrutiny adhering to strict laws and regulations.
2. To achieve the target described in (a), the following steps must be taken:
  - Reward the best teachers and researchers of each department.
  - Introduce continued in-service training programs for teachers as per the syllabus and research demands.
  - Create endowment fund for research work by the faculties especially the young teachers by collecting funds from government and non-government sources.
  - Rejuvenate research programs in the departments by appointments of Ph.D. research students with the same salary of the lecturers. Initiate sandwich/joint/collaborative research programs with the reputed domestic institutions like ICDDR, B and also with the renowned overseas universities.

- Provide support to regular publications of high quality journals from the professional societies of different branches of bioscience. Assist teacher-researchers in publishing their research-papers in international journals.

- Expand exchange programs of teachers-researchers between our university and the advanced universities and research centres of the East and West. Introduce visiting programs by expatriate scholars with attractive benefit package.

- Engage teacher-researchers of various areas of the biosciences in an uninterrupted and long term program to translate the text books in Bangla in collaboration with Bangla Academy.

- Find alternative sources of earning for teacher-researchers, so that they can avoid spending time out of department interests.

2. Demand of the era is attracting the most brilliant of students to study in the Faculty of Biological Sciences. To ensure and impart the best education for them, the newly introduced grading system at the University of Dhaka has to be effectively applied. For this, it is imperative as an interim arrangement to revise syllabus, make changes in the teaching methodologies, change the nature of question papers, reduce the mark allocation of the final exams and distribute it among the yearlong in-course exams, impart an attitude of positive marking and take steps to meet deadlines of the academic calendar. Keeping in view the experience of the interim program mentioned above and considering the overall national situation, we have to introduce the semester system in place of the ongoing yearly sessions in the shortest possible time. We must make provisions to appropriately reward the bright and successful students for their outstanding results.

3. Physical facilities of all the departments of the Faculty of Biological Sciences should be improved. The buildings of the Curzon Hall campus are a grand sight, but through time these have withered. The century old buildings need facelift through restoration and refurbishing. This can be done by bringing it to the notice of UNESCO and declare it as 'World Heritage Site'. It is absolutely necessary to restore and protect the grandeur of Curzon Hall with the help from government and non-government coffers. Behind the main Curzon Hall building is the science workshop. In place of

this grotesque-looking useless structure, a high-rise replica of Curzon Hall needs to be constructed. This will house a conference hall, a modern research laboratory for conducting frontier research in biosciences, a reference library with internet facility and a central cafeteria. Uninterrupted supply of electricity and water is a prime necessity in the Curzon Hall. Air-conditioned dust-free laboratories at each department are essential for conducting meaningful research. Keeping these in mind, adequate power supply and a central standby automatic-switching generator is to be installed. It is imperative to modernize the laboratories of the undergraduate programme and allocate adequate funds to conduct up-to-date practical courses.

As in other countries, the government of Bangladesh should consider the importance of research and education in biological sciences as a priority agenda. A special budgetary allocation should therefore be made by the government year to year as well as on a long-term basis to support the activities described above.

A university is a seat of free thinking. There may exist differences of opinions and philosophies among the teachers. But the primary responsibility of every faculty must be education and research. On this basis a congenial coexistence through mutual respect, cooperation, and human values should prevail and strive to build a community of superior culture.

At the same time, the members of the faculty will preserve their individual identity, integrity and honour. Our yearning should be for a faculty of high esteem devoid of demeaning religious fanaticism. Teachers and students alike must remain alert against a certain vested group who is always involved in spiteful activities. Communal groups are like poisonous distillates; one needs to come out of the meanness and endeavour to build a finer and higher academic culture. This culture will fuel our fires to make excellence in all branches of the biological science -- the science of the twenty first century. The Faculty of Biological Sciences will lead that expedition.

Professor M. Anwar Hossain is Dean of the Faculty of Biological Sciences, University of Dhaka.

# A look at bio-fuels

**SA MANSOOR**

Bio-fuel is an alternative non traditional fuel made from vegetable or animal oil and fat. It can be used blended with traditional petroleum based diesel oil or gasoline in any diesel or petrol engines. With some engine modification it can also be used unblended. Since the source of bio-fuel is of vegetable or animal origin, it is a renewable fuel. It is generally processed by chemically combining any natural oil, fat or used oil or fat with alcohol followed by subsequent processing. With rapid escalation in price of petroleum based fuels, it is the appropriate time to look into the prospects for bio-fuel manufacture in Bangladesh.

Bio-diesel is widely used in Europe both as blends with petroleum based diesel or as a pure fuel in itself. Compared to Europe, USA and Canada is still lagging behind, but production capacity there is rapidly increasing. Ethanol (a bio-fuel) from sugar

cane has been used as a gasoline additive in Brazil for a number of years.

Among the benefits of using bio-fuel are: (a) it is sustainable, and there are no possibilities of it being exhausted, (b) bio-diesel is nearly carbon-neutral, and emits almost zero carbon dioxide, and its exhaust even smells better, and (c) studies have shown that it reduces engine wear by almost half, basically as it leads to better lubricity. Also the engine noise is improved. It runs quieter and produces less smoke.

Cost of production of bio-diesels could be approaching the current price levels of petroleum based diesels that we use. Lowest grade of crude vegetable oils or soap making fats and vegetable oil and sludge along with used oil after cooking can be converted to bio-diesel for diesel engine use. With economy of scale, larger units will show a better cost base.

For petrol engines, pure ethanol or mixtures with normal petroleum based gasoline is the alternative

available. This gasoline substitute can be produced from sugar cane, cane husk and molasses, Brazil is one of the pioneer and largest producer and user of ethanol as an automotive fuel.

Ethanol can also be produced from forest and plant wastes, orchard, garden and agricultural trimmings. Further wastes from sugar, maize, palm and rubber plantations, grass, rice husk; even organic garbage and rubbish from abattoir can also be used as raw material for producing gasoline and diesel fuel substitutes.

Among the advantages of bio-fuels over conventional petroleum fuel particularly for motorized water transport vessel which is popular in Bangladesh is its low aquatic toxicity. It is completely biodegradable in about thirty days! This makes it safe for fish and other marine creatures, against spillage in rivers and other waterways. When blended with regular diesel fuel, bio-degradation is accelerated about three times compared to

normal diesel fuel.

With the increasing demand for petroleum based liquid fuel, Bangladesh should explore and start the process towards bio-fuel production. Government should provide handsome incentives to encourage entrepreneurs to take up pioneering effort for producing bio-diesel and ethanol, to be blended to normal diesel and gasoline. This will gradually decrease our fuel import bill, even if we start from low grade vegetable crude import.

A secondary, but no less important advantage for our over populated country is that it creates more low-level employment. The production process is between three to six times more labor intensive per unit of output compared to petroleum based fuels. Given these considerations it is high time that our fuel and energy ministry give a hard and serious look to the prospects of bio-fuel production and use in Bangladesh.

The writer is Director, Engineering, Partex Group.

# Preconditions to dialogue with Hamas

The credibility of the election was certified as very fair by none other than former US President Jimmy Carter, who led an observer team of eminent American personalities. Thus, if the US does not engage Hamas, instead attempts to sideline it, this would tantamount to collective punishment of the Palestinian people. The fault of the Palestinians: they exercised their democratic and fundamental rights to choose their own legislators.

**MASOOD AZIZ, NDC**

The electoral victory of Hamas has many interesting facets which are now unfolding. Whilst it highlights the hiatus between the Palestinians and the erstwhile Palestine Authority (PA) represented by the dominant Al-Fatah faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), it also raises serious questions about the resolve of the two principal partners of the Quartet, the US and the EU, to attain durable peace in the Middle East based on justice, equity and fair-play.

This article will mainly focus on the US and EU's reaction, thus far, to Hamas' victory and its subsequent formation of the government. For ostensible reasons, the clout of the other two partners of the quartet, viz. Russia and the UN, to shape the events in the region is marginal. This Hamas-led PA now faces a serious challenge given the suspension of direct aid by the US and EU; and how Hamas uses its mandate to realize the aspirations of the people of Palestine remains to be seen.

The US and the EU regard Hamas as a terrorist organization and, not quite unexpectedly, have suspended all direct aid to the PA. The preconditions for resumption of aid are: Hamas must (i) recognize Israel, (ii) eschew armed resistance, and (iii) pledge adherence to all bilateral accords signed by the PLO with Israel and the international community. The three preconditions, prima facie, seem fair

enough, but an in-depth analysis of these will put the context in its true perspective.

We will deal with the second precondition first. The post 9/11 dispensation precludes the possibility of armed struggle even for legitimate national liberation movements. The invasion of Iraq, should we suppose, must have been an exception, as in the words of the occupiers they had liberated Iraq -- never mind the use of massive force and colossal "collateral" damage (i.e. the death of tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis). More intriguing than this is the related question of US commitment to democracy, which the occupiers have vowed to establish in Iraq in the wake of their failure to find any traces of weapons of mass destructions (WMD) -- the raison d'être for the invasion of Iraq. The Iraq analogy is germane because the US is now in Iraq purportedly to nurture democracy. Hamas has been catapulted to power through a transparent and democratic process.

The credibility of the election was certified as very fair by none other than former US President Jimmy Carter, who led an observer team of eminent American personalities. Thus, if the US does not engage Hamas, instead attempts to sideline it, this would tantamount to collective punishment of the Palestinian people. The fault of the Palestinians: they exercised their democratic and fundamental rights to choose their own legislators. If such an attitude does not militate against universal adult franchise, what does? The US of course, has

records for selectivity in its mission to spread democracy. Its support to the Algerian military to thwart the Islamic Salvation Front led by Dr. Abbasi Madani from coming to power in the early 1990s, and the loss of countless lives in the violence that followed, still resonates across the world.

Curiously, the decision to boycott Hamas is an affront to the Bush Administration's Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI). Those familiar with the GMEI concept, a neocon brainchild, are aware that through this initiative the Bush Administration, inter alia, wants to promote democracy in the Greater Middle East, stretching from Morocco to Indonesia. This belt, viewed as the "Islamic Crescent" is supposedly a great threat to Western civilization. Hence, is the need for promotion of democracy in the Greater Middle East.

Neoconservatives believe that democracies do not threaten one another; hence is the need for promotion of democracy in the Greater Middle East. If that is the case, isn't there an urgent need for dialogue between the US and EU, on the one hand, and Hamas on the other? The US can shun Hamas at the expense of its further alienation from the Palestinians, and by extension the Arab masses. It is common knowledge, and the US knows it very well, that if universal adult suffrage was applied elsewhere in the Arab world, results similar to those in Palestine would be replicated. This is simply because of the yawning gap between the legitimate aspirations of the Arab people vis-à-

vis the policies of their rulers.

Alternatively, American apathy towards Hamas implies, or at least can be interpreted, that the US would stand for democracy in the Middle East, provided that such democracy suited and served the interests of Israel. For that to be the case, the elections in Palestine would need to be doctored and not free and fair. Across the political divide in the US, the anti-Hamas attitude is quite pronounced.

Senator Hillary Clinton was quite bellicose in her address to an audience at Princeton University on 18 January 2006, a week before the Palestinian elections. Anticipating a Hamas victory, she not only demanded that the Bush Administration should not recognize Hamas, but cautioned other sovereign states of the world from doing so. Such a mindset indicates that the US is likely to pursue the GMEI selectively.

The inherent absurdity of this precondition has been succinctly exposed by columnist Michael Scheuer, in one of his recent articles titled "Embracing a Lethal Tar Baby." He recalls how angrily Nikita Khrushchev, the late Soviet Premier, pounded the desk in the UN with his shoe and vowed to "bury" the United States. All leaders of the former USSR preceding and succeeding him (except Mikhail Gorbachev) were firm believers in the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism which prophesied the demise of the US and all other capitalist states. Faced with such a formidable adversary who overtly denied America's right to exist, the US never demanded that the Soviets unilaterally disarm or renounce their Marxist-Leninist ideals. In striking contrast, the US is now seeking to impose on Israel's arch-foe, Hamas, a precondition that it never sought to impose on its own sworn enemy.

As for the first precondition that Hamas must recognize Israel, sure enough, for durable peace in the

region there has to be a viable two-state solution. But, doesn't recognition have to be quid pro quo? It can not be unilateral in the sense that only Hamas recognizes Israel and its right to exist, while Israel remains indifferent, or at best ambivalent about Palestine. Hamas must have factored in what its predecessor the PLO gained, despite the latter's recognition of Israel in 1989. The humiliation and indignity suffered by the PLO despite its renunciation of arms and political engagements, notably participation in the Madrid "land for peace" deal of 1990 and the Oslo peace accords of 1993, must be weighing heavily in the minds of the Hamas leadership. Thus far, the Hamas leadership responded to this challenge with reasonableness and great acumen. In a recent interview with the Daily Guardian, Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya stated that the issue of recognition of Israel is not the responsibility of Hamas, Al-Fatah, or any other political faction, but depended on the collective decision of the Palestinian people. This was a clear hint for a referendum.

The PLO had recognized Israel in 1989, and if Israel had sincerely adhered to the 1993 Oslo peace accords, a Palestinian State should have been a reality by 2000. In fact, Hamas published a draft of its government program on its website on 11 March 2006; the fifth article of this program which stipulates that the question of recognizing Israel is not within the jurisdiction of one faction, a party, or government, but a decision for the Palestinian people, may pave the way for a referendum.

There have been a plethora of plans and resolutions on the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Of these, the one adopted in the Arab League Summit in Beirut in 2002, stipulating that Israel withdraws to pre-1967 war borders in exchange for recognition by all 22 member states of the Arab League, was not given the consideration it deserved. King



Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniya

Abdullah of Saudi Arabia was instrumental in piloting this resolution which was by far the most fair and objective one. Withdrawal to pre-1967 war borders is not a big ask by any standard, in fact, it is quite conciliatory. Israel would be required to vacate from: (1) East Jerusalem, (2) the Gaza Strip (which it has already done chaotically and unilaterally), (3) the West Bank, and (4) the Golan Heights. However, the Israeli mindset equates withdrawal from illegally occupied lands with making tremendous sacrifice. To Israel, even the most benign resolution is not acceptable unless it meets its unspeakable agenda of "Bantustanization" of the future state of Palestine, a state which would only be viable and survive contingent on Israeli's mercy or sympathy. It may be mentioned that the Hamas leadership is also agreeable to the pre-1967 war borders as the basis for a future Palestinian state.

In a statement posted on its website in April 2006, Hamas Deputy Prime Minister Nasserddin Al-Shaer said that the Hamas government was willing to end the Middle East conflict and considered the Arab League resolution adopted in the Beirut summit of 2002, a

viable option. DPM Al-Shaer also stated that Hamas was not afraid of paying a political price for peace, but underlined that it must be done in concert with all Arab League members and on a legal basis. Mr. Ghazi Hamad, official spokesman of Hamas also corroborated that they were seriously discussing the plan.

It is necessary to re-examine the second precondition, cessation of armed resistance, again simultaneously with the issue of recognition. Hamas had been observing a ceasefire over a year now, and its leaders have spelt out on occasions that if required it would observe a long-term ceasefire for 20 or 30 years to facilitate the peace process. Theoretically, this falls short of a formal declaration of cessation of hostilities. But, if the objective of the road map, i.e. a viable two-state solution, is not feasible within 20 to 30 years, it perhaps never will be. As such, Hamas' response is not specious. Once a viable state of Palestine is established, there will be no reason for recourse to armed struggle by Hamas. Israeli and Palestinian coexistence would naturally follow.

As for the third pre-condition, Hamas' adherence to the PLO's agreements, it is appropriate to mention what PM Ismail Haniya had

to say when recently interviewed by Lally Weymouth (of Newsweek and The Washington Post) at the former's home in the refugee camp in Gaza. Premier Haniyeh stated that his government would review all agreements signed between the PLO and Israel and abide by those that are in the interest of the Palestinian people. Elaborating, he observed that Hamas would honor those accords which would guarantee the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the pre-1967 war borders as its international frontiers. It would also respect those agreements which would facilitate the release of Palestinian prisoners. Overall, Hamas' position has been consistent and accords fairly well with the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

Masood Aziz is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.