

## The message of Eid-ul-Azha

**The glorious attempt of Hazrat Ibrahim to slaughter his son Hazrat Ismail (peace be upon them) as a sacrifice in obedience to God's Command, however, stands unique in the annals of history. Never, never indeed, on the clay of this cold star has any other father tried unhesitatingly to slaughter his own son with his own hands, and in full senses, simply to obey the Master's Command. Never in history has any other son submitted himself wholeheartedly to his father to be a sacrificed only to appease God.**

**SYED ASHRAF ALI**

EID-ul-Azha, one of the two canonical festivals in the Islamic calendar (the other being Eid-ul-Fitr), brings for the Muslims a divine blessing, a rare opportunity not only to enjoy an auspicious day of joy and happiness but also to receive Allah's Mercy and Reward through sacrifice and benevolence, patience and constancy. Celebrated concurrently with the slaughtering of the animals in Mina by the Hajjis and the days of Tashriq in the auspicious month of Dhul-Hijja, Eid-ul-Azha is popularly known in this subcontinent as Bakrid. The glorious festival is also known as al-Eid al-Kabir or "the Great Festival." Some call it Eid-ul-Qurban or the "Sacrificial Feast." This sacred Day of Sacrifice is also hailed by many as Yaum an-Nahr.

Eid-ul-Azha is celebrated by the Muslims all over the world on the tenth of Dhul-Hijja through sacrifices and prayers in memory of the inimitable sacrifice of the Prophets Ibrahim Khallillah and Ismail Zabiullah (peace be upon them). But it does not simply

commemorate the unique sacrifice made by Hazrat Ibrahim and Ismail (pbwt), it also testifies eloquently to the patient way in which both father and son cheerfully offered to suffer any self-sacrifice, however painful or difficult it might be, in order to obey the command of Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds. Although the word Eid in Arabic means "Joy," Eid-ul-Azha is certainly not an occasion for unbridled fun and frolic, not an opportunity for immoderate gluttony or gourmandism, but it is a solemn, sacred festival which enables a person to enjoy, in the right kiln of Islam, through Azha, - sacrifice and surrender, resignation and renunciation, selflessness and total submission to the Will of God.

Sacrifice has been in vogue from time immemorial. It has always played a significant role in the chequered history of mankind. Sacrifices have been made to get rid of natural calamities like flood and cyclone and earthquake, to evade famine, to solicit rain, to stop volcanic eruptions, to win wars, to ally tyranny, to appease or eulogise gods and

goddesses -- human sacrifices have indeed been made by various nations in various forms and for various purposes since the dawn of civilization.

The glorious attempt of Hazrat Ibrahim to slaughter his son Hazrat Ismail (peace be upon them) as a sacrifice in obedience to God's Command, however, stands unique in the annals of history. Never, never indeed, on the clay of this cold star has any other father tried unhesitatingly to slaughter his own son with his own hands, and in full senses, simply to obey the Master's Command. Never in history has any other son submitted himself wholeheartedly to his father to be a sacrificed only to appease God.

It was indeed a great and momentous occasion when two men, with concerted will, "ranged themselves in the ranks of those to whom self-sacrifice in the service of Allah was the supreme thing in life." The unparalleled incident, which took place in Mina in Arabia 3800 years ago, commenced a new era in religious history.

It teaches us the very essence

of our religion that the keys of life and death, and the mysteries of everything around us, are in Allah's Hands, that our honesty, determination and upright conduct are not matters of policy or convenience, that all our life in this world must be lived as in the presence of Benign Providence, that no task or responsibility, however difficult or heavy a burden it may be, is greater than what we can bear. It teaches us, in the words of the Holy Quran, that "short is the enjoyment of this world: the Hereafter is the best for those who do right." It teaches us that a Muslim does not live with his body, but he lives with his spirit. It teaches us not to love life over much, seeing that we must one day part with it. It teaches us to face death with resignation.

The glorious incident in the valley of Mina put an end to the horrible system of human sacrifice which was common among most ancient people. Prophet Ibrahim's (pbuh) seeing in a vision that he, too, was sacrificing his son, his preparation to fulfill it literally, and lastly the Divine Commandment to sacrifice an animal in his stead indeed marked the abolition of the savage custom of human sacrifice. The world today stands indebted to the righteous patriarch and his dedicated son for their noble example in uprooting the age-old savage custom.

Muslims throughout the length and breadth of this world celebrate Eid-ul-Azha every year and hundreds and thousands of

sheep, cows, goats and camels are sacrificed in the name of Allah on this auspicious day. Unfortunately, however very few of us celebrate this auspicious occasion in a befitting way, in the true spirit of Islam. Very few realise that Rabbul Alameen does not need the flesh and blood of the animals. What He asks for is the Taqwa (which has been mentioned 211 times in the Holy Quran) and not lives in a physical sense. Sura al-Hajj declares very clearly: "It is not their meet nor their blood that reaches God: it is your piety that reaches Him. He has thus made them subject to you, that ye may glorify God for His guidance to you. And proclaim the Good News to all who do right."

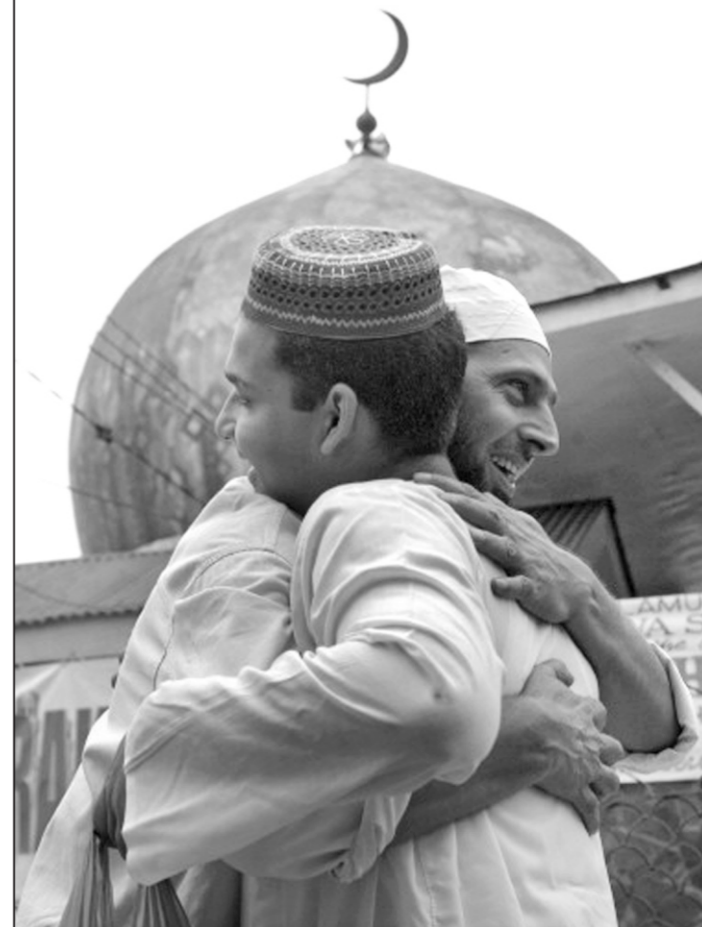
It is very clear that what Allah, in His infinite Mercy, desires from the bandages on this sacred occasion is giving of our whole being to him. It is by the mention of Allah's Sacred Name that an animal is sacrificed. The utterance of the Quranic verses affirms and asserts over and over again: "Truly my prayer, and my sacrifice, my life and death, are all for God, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds." It is not an empty mention of a word that Muslims make, the very hearts of the *Momsen* tremble at the mention of the Holy Name.

Each and every Muslim sacrificing an animal should bear in mind if he can sacrifice an animal over which he has full control for a particular period of time, how much more necessary it is that he

should lay down his life in the Way of Allah, Who is not only his Master but also his Creator and Sustainer. It will indeed be a sin if we forget the supreme sacrifice made by the Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (peace be upon them), buy an animal from the market, slaughter it just for the sake of fun and gourmandism, and celebrate this auspicious day through mere pleasure and gaiety, extravagance and dissipation, unbridled merry-making and uncouth entertainment.

No Muslim, nay no human being, has any right to humble the unparalleled sacrifice of the Prophets Ibrahim and Ismail (peace be upon them) by equating it with the mere slaughtering of an animal with no taqwa behind it. We will certainly insult those salt of the earth if we celebrate Eid-ul-Azha only through expensive cattle and clothes and delicious dishes, and not through prayers and penance, sacrifice and benevolence. Allah has very kindly given us power over the brute creation and permitted us to eat their meat but that too if we pronounce His Holy Name at the solemn act of taking the animal's life.

Through this solemn invocation, without which we are apt to forget the sacredness of life, we are reminded that wanton cruelty is not in our thoughts and is never permitted in Islam. Nor does the Most Perfect Deen of Allah permit extravagance or wastage in the name of religion on any occasion whether through slaughtering of cattle on the day of Eid-ul-Azha



or through any other means. Eid-ul-Azha is the system of denying ourselves the greater part of the food derived from the sacrificed cattle for the sake of poor brethren; our symbolic act finds practical expression in benevolence and Samaritanism, in fraternity and

fellow-feeling, in sacrifice and solicitude for the indigents and have-nots. That exactly is the sublime message conveyed by Eid-ul-Azha.

Syed Ashraf Ali is former DG of Islamic Foundation, Bangladesh.

## Saddam's end

**The body of Saddam, as it swung from the gallows at 6 am Saturday Baghdad time, cast an ominous shadow over Iraq. The execution provoked intense questions about whether his trial was fair and about what the fallout will be. One thing is certain: The trial and execution of Saddam were about revenge, not justice. Instead of promoting national reconciliation, this act of revenge helped Saddam portray himself one last time as a symbol of Sunni Arab resistance, and became one more incitement to sectarian warfare.**

**JUAN COLE**

THE body of Saddam, as it swung from the gallows at 6 am Saturday Baghdad time, cast an ominous shadow over Iraq. The execution provoked intense questions about whether his trial was fair and about what the fallout will be.

One thing is certain: The trial and execution of Saddam were about revenge, not justice. Instead of promoting national reconciliation, this act of revenge helped Saddam portray himself one last time as a symbol of Sunni Arab resistance, and became one more incitement to sectarian warfare.

Saddam Hussein was tried under the shadow of a foreign military occupation, by a government full of his personal enemies. The first judge, an ethnic Kurd, resigned because of government interference in the trial; the judge who took his place was also Kurdish and had grievances against the accused.

Three of Saddam's defense lawyers were shot down in cold blood. The surviving members of his defense team went on strike to protest the lack of protection afforded them. The court then appointed new lawyers who had no expertise in international law. Most of the witnesses against

Saddam gave hearsay evidence. The trial ground slowly but certainly toward the inevitable death verdict.

Like everything else in Iraq since 2003, Saddam's trial became entangled in sectarian politics. Iraq is roughly 60 percent Shiite, 18 percent Sunni Arab and 18 percent Kurdish. Elements of the Sunni minority were favoured under fellow Sunni Saddam, and during his long, brutal reign this community tended to have high rates of membership in the Baath Party. Although many members of Saddam's own ethnic group deeply disliked him, since the US invasion he has gradually emerged as a symbol of the humiliation that the once-dominant Sunni minority has suffered under a new government dominated by Shiites and Kurds.

Saddam was a symbol of Sunni-Shiite rivalry long before the US occupation. In 1991, while he was in power, he had ferociously suppressed the post-Gulf War Shiite uprising in the south, using helicopter gunships and tanks to kill an estimated 60,000. After the invasion, many Shiites wanted him to be captured, while many Sunnis helped him elude capture.

When Saddam was finally caught by US forces in late 2003, Shiites in the Baghdad district of Kadhimiya crossed the bridge over the Tigris to dance and gloat in the neighboring Sunni Arab district of Adhamiya, provoking some clashes. After his capture, students at Mosul University, in Iraq's second-largest and mostly Sunni Arab city, chanted, "Bush, Bush, hear our refrain: We all love Saddam Hussein!" and "We'll die, we'll die, but the nation will live! And America will fall!"

As the US consolidated control over Iraq, meanwhile, Sunni alienation increased. The American occupiers adopted punitive measures against members of the Baath Party, who were disproportionately though by no means universally Sunni Arab. The army was dissolved, sidelining 400,000 troops and the predominantly Sunni officer corps. Thousands of Sunni Arab civil servants and even school-teachers were fired.

A "de-Baathification" committee, dominated by hard-line Shiites like Nouri al-Maliki (now prime minister) and Ahmed Chalabi, denied large numbers of Sunni Arabs the right to participate in political society or hold government positions on

grounds of links to the Baath Party. Sometimes politicians were blackballed simply because a relative had been high in the party.

As Iraq spiraled down into a brutal civil war with massive killing and ethnic cleansing, many Iraqis began to yearn for the oppressive security of the Saddam period. After the destruction of the golden dome of the Shiite Askariya mosque in Samarra last February, Iraqis fell into an orgy of sectarian reprisal killings.

By the time of Saddam's trial, sectarian strife was widespread, and the trial simply made it worse. It was not just the inherent bias of a judicial system dominated by his political enemies. Even the crimes for which he was tried were a source of ethnic friction. Saddam Hussein had had many Sunni Arabs killed, and a trial on such a charge could have been politically savvy.

Instead, he was accused of the execution of scores of Shiites in Dujail in 1982. This Shiite town had been a hotbed of activism by the Shiite fundamentalist Dawa (Islamic Call) Party, which was founded in the late 1950s and modeled on the Communist Party.

In the wake of Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini's 1979 Islamic Revolution in neighboring Iran, Saddam conceived a profound fear of Dawa and similar parties, banning them and making membership a capital crime. Young Dawa leaders such as al-Maliki fled to Tehran or Damascus.

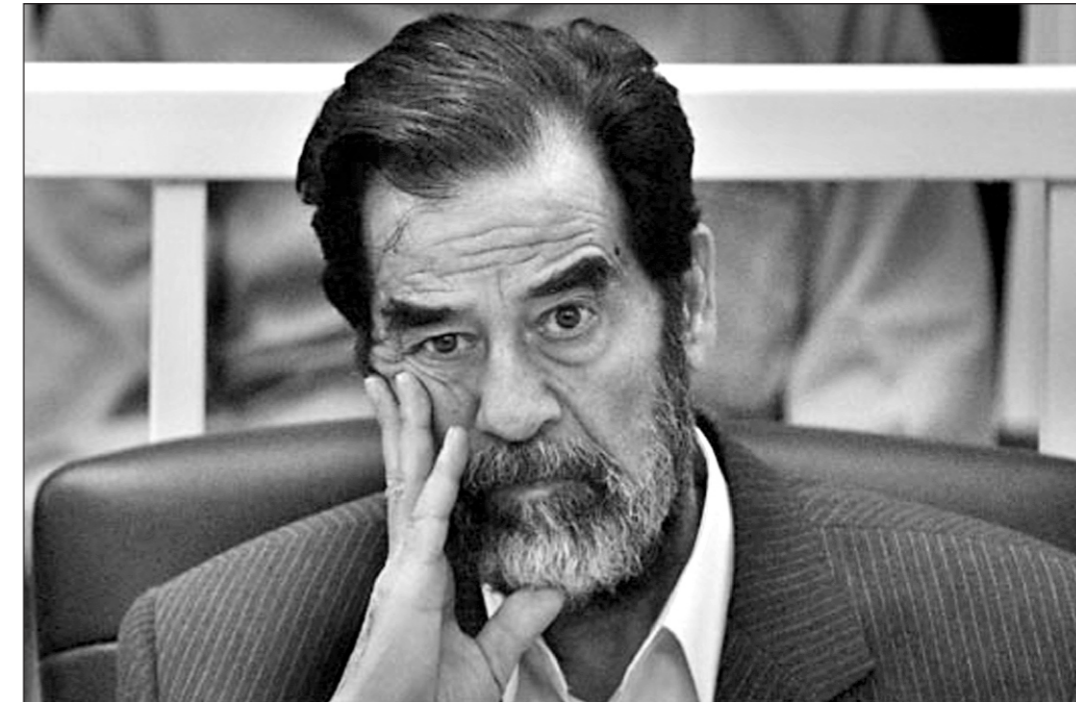
When Saddam visited Dujail, Dawa agents attempted to assassinate him. In turn, he

wrought a terrible revenge on the town's young men. Current Prime Minister al-Maliki is the leader of the Dawa Party and served for years in exile in its Damascus bureau. For a Dawa-led government to try Saddam, especially for this crackdown on a Dawa stronghold, makes it look to Sunni Arabs more like a sectarian reprisal than a dispassionate trial for crimes against humanity.

Passions did not subside with time. When the death verdict was announced against Saddam in November, Sunni Arabs in Baquba, to the northeast of the capital, staged a big pro-Saddam demonstration. They were attacked by the Shiite police that dominate that mixed city, who killed 20 demonstrators and wounded a similar number. There were also pro-Saddam demonstrations in Fallujah and Mosul. Baghdad had to be put under curfew.

The tribunal also had a unique sense of timing when choosing the day for Saddam's hanging. It was a slap in the face to Sunni Arabs. This weekend marks Eid al-Adha, the Holy Day of Sacrifice, on which Muslims commemorate the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son for God. Shiites celebrate it Sunday. Sunnis celebrate it Saturday -- and Iraqi law forbids executing the condemned on a major holiday. Hanging Saddam on Saturday was perceived by Sunni Arabs as the act of a Shiite government that had accepted the Shiite ritual calendar.

The timing also allowed Saddam, in his farewell address to Iraq, to pose as a "sacrifice" for his nation, an explicit refer-



ence to Eid al-Adha. The tribunal had given the old secular nationalist the chance to use religious language to play on the sympathies of the whole Iraqi public.

The political ineptitude of the tribunal, from start to finish, was astonishing. The United States and its Iraqi allies basically gave Saddam a platform on which to make himself a martyr to Iraqi unity and independence -- even if by unity and independence Saddam was really appealing to Sunnis' nostalgia for their days of hegemony.

In his farewell address, however, Saddam could not help departing from his national-unity script to take a few last shots at his ethnic rivals. Despite some smarmy language urging Iraqis not to hate

the Americans, Saddam denounced the "invaders" and "Persians" who had come into Iraq. The invaders are the American army, and the Persians are code not just for Iranian agents but for Iraqi Shiites, whom many Sunni Arabs view as having Iranian antecedents and as not really Iraqi or Arab. It was such attitudes that led to slaughters like that at Dujail.

In his death, as in his life, Saddam Hussein is managing to divide Iraqis and condemn them to further violence and brutality. But the Americans and the Shiite- and Kurd-dominated government bear some blame for the way they botched his trial and gave him this last opportunity to play the spoiler.

Iraq is on high alert, in expect-

ation of protests and guerrilla reprisals. Leaves have been canceled for Iraqi soldiers, though in the past they have seldom paid much attention to such orders. But perhaps the death of Saddam, who once haunted the nightmares of a nation, will soon come to seem insignificant. In Iraq, guerrilla and criminal violence executes as many as 500 persons a day. Saddam's hanging is just one more occasion for a blood feud in a country that now has thousands of them.

Juan Cole is a professor of modern Middle Eastern and South Asian history at the University of Michigan and the author of "Sacred Space and Holy War" (IB Tauris, 2002).

## The railroading of Saddam

**All eyes are going to be on Iraq in the coming days to see if violence escalates. The Sunnis will blame the ruling Shiites for railroading Saddam to the gallows. Stay tuned for more developments in the troubled land of Tigris and Euphrates.**

**AH JAFFOR ULLAH**

ANY intellectuals all over the world may agree with me that Saddam was tried in a Kangaroo court in Baghdad. Perhaps it would have been a proper thing to try him at the Hague in the International Court of Justice. However, the Bush Administration has been stage managing everything in Iraq since April 2003. Saddam's death by hanging is therefore the handwork of Washington.

The news of Saddam's impending execution was buzzing in the news media all day today. At about 6:00 am Iraqi time on

December 30, Saddam was executed by hanging. Minutes after the execution, two Iraqi television stations, Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya and the US-financed Al-Hurra, broadcasted the news. Within 30 minutes, CNN in America also carried the news. Within an hour of the execution the Yahoo news site in the Internet posted the news.

In November 2006 the court in Baghdad brought in a guilty verdict and the punishment, death by hanging, was handed down. Saddam's legal team appealed but the verdict remained. The Iraqi government, which is dominated by Shiites, wanted to execute the

punishment. Hoping against hope, a lawyer for Saddam challenged the verdict in a US court, but the judge dismissed the plea by saying that the trial was conducted in an Iraqi court and that American court system has no jurisdiction over Iraqi judiciary.

The Iraqi government was making all the preparation to hang Saddam before the end of 2006. The American army took control of Saddam immediately after his arrest in December 2004. They kept him in the Green Zone inside the city of Baghdad. Therefore, the US wanted to hand over Saddam to the Iraqi authorities before the execution. The US also

wanted to have the execution done outside the Green Zone by Iraqi lest the world view the hanging an act performed by the Americans. In other words, America wanted to come out clean from this messy execution.

The Iraqi government framed Saddam and few other associates of the deposed president for the killing of 148 from an Iraqi town where assassins tried to kill Saddam in 1982.

Also to be hanged were Saddam's half-brother Barzan Ibrahim and Awad Hamed al-Bandar, the former chief justice of the Revolutionary Court, the Iraqi government's spokesperson said.

The Iraqi government, which is practically run by Shiites, has decided not to bury Saddam in Iraq. The country of Yemen is mentioned as a possible place where Saddam's body will rest in

peace.

Saddam was born in 1937, in Tikrit, the seat of Saladdin province. He joined Arab Baa'th Socialist Party in 1956. He was sentenced to death in absentia on February 25, 1960 for taking part in an assassination plot against the dictator Abdul Karim Qassim. He then escaped first to Syria and then to Egypt where he completed his education in 1962. A year later he returned to Iraq when he was elected as member of the Baa'th Party leadership.

In late 1969 he was elected to the post of vice-chairman of the Revolution Command Council. In 1979 he was elected secretary general of the regional leadership of the Baa'th Party in Iraq, chairman of the Revolution Command Council, and president of the Republic of Iraq.

From that period on he ruled

Iraq continuously until late March 2003 when American soldiers invaded Iraq and marched into Baghdad, toppling Saddam's government. He went into hiding for 20 months but was finally arrested in December 2004. It took two years for the Iraqi government to bring Saddam to justice and the final verdict came in a month ago in November 2006.

The Bush Administration was instrumental in bringing down Saddam's government. It took almost two years to come up with a constitution based on which election was held all over Iraq. The Shiite majority has elected a parliament dominated by Shiite politician. This has led to sectarian violence with disastrous result. Will violence increase in the aftermath of Saddam's hanging? We shall have to wait and see.

Saddam's popularity among his

people (read: Sunni Iraqis) and in Sunni dominated Muslim world is bound to grow. He was a hero figure among poor Arabs. In the eyes of these Muslims, Saddam will be viewed as a person who stood tall against America.

It should be pointed out that Saddam fought the Americans in January 1991 with disastrous results. In the aftermath of that war Iraq was isolated from the rest of the world and his people paid a heavy price for Saddam's misadventure into Kuwait.

President George Bush's father, President George HW Bush, ordered the US army to invade Kuwait to oust Saddam's army. After the defeat, Saddam never ventured to any other country, but he did use extreme brutality to subjugate the Iraqi Kurds.

Saddam may have been a cruel dictator but somehow he managed

amity among his divided people. Ever since the US ousted him in March 2003, the country has fallen into anarchy and lawlessness. Now on the average 50-60 Iraqis are dying every day because of a civil war that is raging in the beleaguered land. Now President Bush is asking for 30,000 additional soldiers to bring a semblance of law and order in and around Baghdad. Whether he will get the funding from the Congress is not a certainty.

All eyes are going to be on Iraq in the coming days to see if violence escalates. The Sunnis will blame the ruling Shiites for railroading Saddam to the gallows. Stay tuned for more developments in the troubled land of Tigris and Euphrates.

Dr AH Jaffor Ullah, a researcher and columnist, writes from New Orleans, US.