

Muslim Americans fear reprisal for Sept 11

DR. FAKHRUDDIN AHMED writes from Princeton

IN the aftermath of every terrorist act on US soil, perturbed Muslim Americans offer the same prayer: "Dear God, let this not be the act of a Muslim!" Muslims' prayers were answered after Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995 when Timothy McVeigh turned out to be the mass murderer. God was not, apparently, about to absolve the Muslim American community of the sins of nineteen of its coreligionists who perpetrated the most heinous act of terrorism the world has ever witnessed, on September 11

Ever since that infamous September morning, Muslim Americans have been depressed and despondent. Attendance at the mosques dwindled during last month's Ramadan. Fewer Muslim Americans are signing up to make the Hajj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia next month. Countless Muslims have lost their jobs. Anyone with a surname of "Muhammad" or "Ahmed" can kiss hopes for quick renewed

LETTER FROM AMERICA

None of the nineteen September 11 terrorists were longtime residents of the US; they came here solely to simultaneously commit mayhem and suicide. The deeply wounded, yet fiercely patriotic Muslim Americans on the other hand are here to stay, and have a vested interest in America. It is in the government's interest to befriend, rather than alienate them. Muslims are in a far better position to know someone in their midst with suspicious inclinations.

employment good-bye. For fear of reprisal, some Muslims are beginning to hide their Islamic identity. Ours is a frightened community, deep in shock, looking everywhere wistfully for elusive friends.

To his credit, President W. George Bush set the correct tone by stating categorically at the outset that the war against terrorism is not a war against Islam. The President's plea, unfortunately, has fallen on the deaf ears of the omniscient "experts," pontificating through the electronic media. With a cursory

glance at the Qur'an and little understanding of the context, they make the most sweeping, erroneous and derogatory statements about the Muslims and Islam. Few Muslims are invited to correct them; and if one is, he or she is incessantly interrupted, humiliated and shouted down. Some anti-Muslim bigots in the media perpetuate the myth of the terrorist "sleeper cells" in America, to implicate the whole Muslim American community.

Sacrificed in the one-dimensional Muslim-bashing is the fact that the

Muslim world does nurse some genuine grievances, such as America's enthusiastic support for the brutal Israeli suppression of the Palestinian civilians, and the decade-long American bombing of Iraq.

In their horror, disgust and anger Muslim Americans mirrored the rest of America on September 11. In every mosque special prayers were held and funds were collected for the victims, over five hundred of whom were Muslims. Despite the profiling of Muslims and their charitable

organizations by the law enforcement agencies, and the detention of thousands more Muslims without charges, only one out of seven million Muslim Americans has been linked to September 11. Isn't it time the government relented and stopped treating its Muslim American citizens as enemies of America, which they are not?

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yet fiercely patriotic Muslim Americans on the other hand are here to stay, and have a vested interest in America. It is in the government's interest to befriend, rather than alienate them. Muslims are in a far better position to know someone in their midst with suspicious inclinations. There are other advantages to encouraging Muslim Americans to integrate and flourish. Muslims who immigrate to America from over a hundred nations are forced to leave their cultural baggage behind. American-born Muslims go to the source, the Qur'an, and practice the purest form of Islam shorn of all unauthorized, belligerent interpretations accumulated over the centuries. If there is to be such a thing as an Islamic "enlightenment," chances are pretty good that Muslim Americans, the freest and the most highly educated Muslims in the world, will lead the movement.



All health information to keep you up to date

Is snoring making you tired?

People who snore may be a source of amusement to others although they often cause much irritation to those who share their bedroom.

Far more serious is the fact that snorers are at risk of the potentially dangerous condition known as obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA). Apnoea literally means stopping breathing, which is just what people with OSA do often several times each hour when they are sleeping. Usually after 10 or more seconds of no breathing, lack of oxygen causes the snorer to partially wake up, often with a jerk or choking noise. Normal breathing with the accompanying snore is then resumed until the next episode, and the whole cycle is repeated.

These episodes of lack of oxygen can cause heart problems, strokes and even sudden death.

More commonly, OSA produces a chronically tired individual who nods off during the day, has poor concentration and performs badly at work.

OSA is most common in men as many as 10 per cent of men over 30 experience it but women and children can also have the condition.

The problems of snoring and OSA are due to narrowing of the upper part of the breathing passage during sleep. When the narrowing becomes a complete obstruction, apnoea occurs.

A number of factors contribute to this narrowing. They may include obesity, consumption of alcohol, lying on one's back, and the natural relaxation of the muscles around the throat during sleep.

Enlargement of the tonsils and adenoids can be a cause, especially in children. OSA is not easy to treat. Weight loss is important and alcohol and other sedatives should be avoided. Severe cases may need to sleep with a device that pumps air into the nose under pressure, keeping the airway open and stopping attacks.

This can produce a dramatic improvement in the wellbeing and daytime performance of someone who might not even have been aware that they had the problem because it exists only when they are asleep.

If you lie awake at night listening to your partner snoring and then stopping breathing at intervals, persuade him or her to discuss it with the doctor.



Next : Children don't wet the bed on purpose

The world must help Palestinians

PETER HANSEN

AFTER 16 months of bloody strife in the Middle East the Palestinian population is showing clear signs of distress. There has been a doubling of stillbirths in the West Bank, in Gaza 65 per cent of the population is now living below the poverty line, school exam results have collapsed and there has been a dramatic upsurge in the mental health problems.

The cycle of violence often seems immune to the efforts of mediators or the initiatives of visiting diplomats. Yet hopeless as it might seem the United Nations is calling on the international community not to give in to the temptations of disengagement. If there seem to be no immediate remedies on the political front, there remains a very direct impact the world can have on the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the West Bank.

The tragic running total of deaths of course captures most headlines but the conflict has cast a wider shadow of misery across Palestinian society. There are now over 80 permanent military checkpoints in

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the West Bank and Gaza. Tight restrictions on freedom of movement, in addition to prolonged curfews, fighting in civilian areas, house demolitions and the destruction of agricultural crops, have exacted an alarming toll. Over and above the loss of life, the strife means factories and farmers cannot get their goods to market; over 100,000 labourers have lost their jobs inside Israel; around 4,500 people have been made homeless and thousands of households have lost their only breadwinner to a disabling injury. Among the hardest hit have been the 1.5 million innocent and vulnerable Palestinian refugees who live in the territories.

So far, families have been able to survive by tapping their savings, borrowing from relatives, selling jewelry or buying on credit. But after

16 months of crisis the reserves are running dry. Even if peace breaks out tomorrow it will take many years for families to climb out from under the debt and destruction that have come hand in hand with violence.

According to a UN survey in October 2001, the conflict has cost the economy of the Palestinian territories as much as \$3.2 billion -- or nearly 50 per cent of total GDP. In all, 50 per cent of all Palestinian households have seen their already-meager incomes halved. In the third quarter of the year unemployment reached 31.5 per cent in the West Bank and an astonishing 48 per cent in the Gaza Strip where 65 per cent of the population was living in acute poverty. These statistics will only have worsened in recent months.

It hardly needs stating that the

prevailing widespread economic, social and psychological distress, with serious consequences on the population's health, is not fertile ground for the seeds of peace. Further deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinian people -- the overwhelming majority of whom have nothing to do with the violence the world sees nightly on its television screens can only damage further the chances of an eventual settlement to the crisis.

The UN has a presence on the ground. That means there is an effective tool that the international community can use to immediately mitigate the damage caused by the conflict. Since the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the UN, in the form of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), has been the embodiment of the interna-

tional community's concern for the innocent victims of the conflicts that have blighted the Middle East. Currently in the Gaza Strip there are 850,000 UN-registered refugees and in the West Bank there are 607,000. Even in peaceful times, the United Nations delivers health, education and relief services to half the population of the territories.

UNRWA has just launched an appeal which aims to raise \$117 million to cover its ongoing emergency work in 2002. The funds will be used for emergency food aid, a job creation programme, medical supplies, trauma counselling for children and other urgent needs like rebuilding demolished homes.

Faced with such a seemingly intractable conflict, growing political uncertainty and increasing instability, donor fatigue and despair are

tempting responses. But they would be the wrong ones. Instead the world can act to show its concern for the innocent who have been injured and disabled, the families who have lost their breadwinner or their home and the children who have been traumatised by the everyday violence that blights their lives.

-- UNIC, Dhaka.

Peter Hansen is the Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees.

Euro creates political cohesion in Europe

MOHAMMAD AMJAD HOSSAIN

IN about one month's time euro, a new European common currency, which is in circulation from first of January 2002, will phase out the existing currencies of twelve European countries from the market.

In spite of different cultural traits of the member countries of euro zone the euro, as rightly pointed out by the president of the Frankfurt based European Central Bank, Wim Duisenberg on 29 December 2001, is the symbol of European integration. The president of the Bank also said that euro was much more than just a currency. Practically a unique chapter has been added to European countries following introduction of the single currency, apart from unrestricted travel across the frontiers of many European countries. This has happened because of Schengen visa abolition agreement initially among seven

It is expected that euro will turn out to be a strong currency if British currency joins in euro zone, and will become a formidable challenge to world's strongest currency, the American dollar.

countries of Europe. Later, three more countries viz Italy, Austria and Greece have joined the group of seven.

From 28 February 2002 euro will say good bye to Deutsche Mark of Germany, Franc of France, Spanish Pesetas, Italian Lira and other respective currencies of Finland, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Austria and Belgium. Only Britain, Sweden and Denmark of the European Union have opted to remain outside euro zone to see the prospect of the common currency. In 1990, the euro had a debut when 11 countries pegged their exchange rates to the new currency and allowed control of monetary policy by the European

Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany. Since the introduction in 1999 euro has been in use for accounting purposes and electronic transactions. This is for the first time euro coins and paper money have been released.

Despite pessimism expressed by certain quarters about the future prospect of euro because of idiosyncrasies of language, euro seems to provide immediate benefit to the tourists, who will be travelling in euro zone. For example, exchange booths in 12 countries would automatically shut down as euro will be regarded as legal tender in shopping complexes, hotels, restaurants, clubs, amusement parks, casino etc and no more commission

charges will be there. This is contrary to the earlier system of changing currency at every station that entailed commission charge each time. The tourists, therefore, will have an easy sailing in euro zone area and that will be an added attraction for more tourists to visit these countries. Over the last three years of trial period euro has gradually been accepted by financial markets, multinational corporations and consumers. Euro thus has brought in a new era in the existing economic system of Europe.

It may be recalled that the question of introducing one currency in Europe arose in 1960's when academic discussion began to bring the economic power of different coun-

tries in line with one another before introducing the single currency concept. After a decade of debates and discussions it was agreed in principle to have both political and economic union side by side.

The process of integration took a concrete shape i.e. European Union after the signing of the treaty of Maastricht, which came into force on 1st November 1993. The leaders of the European Union took steps to achieve an economic and monetary union to be safeguarded by political union. The second Maastricht summit of European heads of state and government, which was held on 16-17 June 1997, concentrated on economic and monetary union, the expansion of the European Union eastwards and a reform of European Union itself including introduction of euro, a single currency on 1st January 1999.

In view of the rapid growing popularity as seen in the total switchover to euro from guilder of the Netherlands, the British Trade and Industry Secretary Ms. Patricia Hewitt on her return from a trade mission in the Far East in the last week of January 2002, said that manufacturing industry of Britain would benefit from British membership of the single currency. Pro-euro campaigners in Britain now are determined to put pressure on the government to join the single currency following the disclosure of the British Trade and Industry Secretary. According to London Times of 23 January 2002, manufacturing industry is "currently mired in its deepest recession since 1992 and has been declining steadily as a share of national income over the past 30 years. Since 1995 the sector has barely registered any growth." The British accountancy firm, Ernst and Young, in a recent survey found that "indecision on euro membership may have already begun to damage the outlook for inward investment."

Against this backdrop it is expected that euro will turn out to be a strong currency if British currency joins in euro zone, and will become a formidable challenge to world's strongest currency, the American dollar. The concept of one single currency for Europe conceived by German and French politicians will certainly contribute towards political cohesion among the countries of 300 million people, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Arctic circle.

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