

Eid for a better tomorrow

Sharing joy and responsibility

EID-UL-FITR touches everybody. It is not just the biggest festival for the Muslims, it also is the most stirring event in an otherwise mundane annual cycle of their lives. As well as these being challenging moments in the national life they are also difficult times internationally. That way, the festivities come as a break. The occasion also provides an opportunity for stock-taking and soul-searching with the purpose of improving upon the bleak trends of events and circumstances surrounding us today.

Eid marks the happy culmination, one could even call it a crowning glory, of a month spent in self-abnegation and inner-purification that put spirituality over the material and waxed body to the have-nots and disadvantaged in the communities. Since the month of Ramadan has been observed in a spurt of self-sacrifice, it should be only natural and logical for us to regard Eid not as something opening the flood-gate of joy and mirth that are exclusionary to the rest of the society.

We must endeavour to practise the values of equality, fraternity, fairness and social justice which form the bedrock of the Eid message. Since establishment of an egalitarian society remains as elusive as ever, it is imperative that we adopt a national plan for poverty alleviation based on joint efforts and contributions from both public and private sectors. To this end, the political parties need to eschew the path of confrontation and place economic development at the top of our national agenda.

It is important to note that Eid is increasingly becoming the rallying point of a festive flourish. There has been a surge of creativity in the fashion world and the artistry displayed in different forms of merchandise was splendid. Various Eid options in terms of cuisine, apparels, gift items and the like were highlighted. All these have enhanced the festivity ambience.

We wish our readers and patrons a happy Eid.

Travel safety

Time for precautions

PEOPLE have already begun to leave the capital for their eagerly-awaited annual sojourns in hometowns or villages to celebrate Eid with their near and dear ones. But concerns for security as they travel by various modes of transport do arise given the enormity of public mobility during the vacation. In their rush to reach destinations on time, or at least before the celebrations begin, the travellers, in many cases, might lower this guard on safety. Lack of adequate transports, rarity of tickets at the counters, tyranny of ticket black marketeering -- all these create a sense of uncertainty among Eid home-goers.

We understand their desperation to get on a transport at any cost, but they should also remember that nothing can be more precious than their own lives. We have noticed that tragic accidents claimed human lives during the homebound and return journeys of Eid passengers in the past, be it on the roadways or the waterways, which could be avoided easily. All that's needed is that the transport owners do not break the law and put the lives of people in jeopardy. We do not want to see passenger ferries drowning because of overloading, not just with human beings but also cargo of all sorts. We do not want to see an abrupt and tragic end to lives on the highways simply because the drivers were not careful. We appreciate the vigil mounted by the authorities concerned at the ferry, road and railway terminals, which must, of course, be extended during their return journeys.

Lastly, the decision to patrol the capital round the clock for ten days starting just before Eid, augurs well for the denizens' security. As it is, thanks to the deployment of extra police in the city streets, also at markets, shopping malls, bus and launch terminals, people could feel safer than before, especially during Ramadan, when the muggers and small time criminals had ruled the roost earlier on.

Cry no tears for Arafat



MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

THE short man had a very long name. Mohammed Abdel Raouf Arafat al-Qudwa al-Husseini, who was 5 feet 4, proved larger than life when he died last Thursday, 13 days after he arrived for treatment in a military hospital in France. He died from many complications, which finally disturbed the chemistry of his blood as the plateau count started to fall. In as much as old age was a sufficient cause of his death, it is believed that his body had finally succumbed to the prolonged confinement in the Ramallah compound where insufficient oxygen cut down the nutrition of his body and wasted it to the end.

So the survivor of 40 assassination attempts, wars, rebellions, car accidents, a plane crash and a stroke, finally gave in to the demands of death in a hospital bed, hundreds of miles away from the homeland he wished to have. Yasser Arafat died as the most celebrated oxymoron of our time, the president of a government without a country, a stateless statesman. No other man so exemplified the dream of his people for such a long time, as did this bald, thick-waisted, bug-eyed man with scrubby salt-and-pepper beard. His trademark black-and-white checkered kaffiyeh headress, folded and draped meticulously to describe the shape of Palestine, will remain etched as the most prominent symbol of a liberation struggle, which is yet to come to its successful end.

How is history going to treat him now that he has vanished from the scene? George Bush has already said that he saw an opening for peace in the demise of Yasser Arafat. Israelis also feel the same way, branding him as an obstacle to peace, which could have been achieved long ago, only if he were not so rigid. The Russians have expressed their condolences,

but again hoping that the new Palestinian leadership would try to make progress in negotiation with Israel.

But how this perception contradicted with the deportment of a man, who had adopted the name Yasser as a college student, which is Arabic for "easygoing"! The easygoing man proved unassuming when it came to the question of the Palestinian homeland. The self-determination and statehood for the Palestinian people was his obsession, which put him between a hard place and a rock. The USA and Israel criticised him for supporting and tolerating terrorism on one hand. On the other hand, his closest advisers were unwilling to sign a peace agreement with Israel, considering it tantamount to a sellout.

Yasser Arafat must have been the longest-serving revolutionary in the world, who died before the end of his revolution. We have got Fidel Castro, who secured the freedom of his people and then positioned himself as their ruler. Che Guevara was a roaming revolutionary, who took it on him to go from country to country to spread the revolution until he was hunted down in the jungles of Bolivia. But Arafat hovered somewhere in the middle, a revolutionary who never got a country but died a natural death. His state funeral has been held in another country, fate bringing him the full regalia and honour associated with the heads of states.

There is an uncanny iridescence to the destiny of Yasser Arafat similar to the afterglow of a fire that has burned out its life. The sparks will still fly from the embers of his legacy, which has left an indelible mark on the hearts and streets of Palestine and rest of the Arab world. He has finished his earthly journey, escaped the torments of confinement, the worries and tensions of politics and rivalry. Arafat has become Yasser ("easygoing") again.

It is believed that leaders are

CROSS TALK

The lyrics of a Billie Holiday song goes like this: "Cry no tears, I'm going to cry no tears/Each time that I happen to hear his name/.... 'Cause I'm tired of running around/With just a memory/...I'm going to weep no more/ Till somebody weeps for me". Let us cry no tears for Arafat to mourn his death. He has lived a full life, if not a full dream. Tears are for ordinary folks, not for giants like him.



chosen to turn the pages of history. They stand at the turning points of time and bring the changes embedded in their destiny. Such leaders walk upon the earth and go through the trials and tribulations of ordinary life like anybody else. They are also made of flesh and bones, powered by the steam of breath like locomotives of fate. Yet they accomplish more within the bounds of their earthly lives, inspiring and influencing more

mortals like them, and earn their place in history.

Has Yasser Arafat earned his place in history? The answer is yes, despite the insensitive remarks from the Israeli and US authorities. Arafat's legacy will remain emblazoned in the quest for the Palestinian identity until they are given a homeland. Arafat's legacy will remain emblazoned in the gratitude of the Palestinians once that homeland will be given to them. That legacy has been obvious in the reddened and fluffy faces of millions of Palestinians across the world who wept to mourn the loss of their great leader.

It is an irony that death erases even the most tenacious life. Even the fiery revolutionary like Arafat succumbed to it as he sank deeper into the deepening coma, leaving behind the void of a dream that could not come true in his lifetime. In this manner, the last of the Mohicans has left the world, the last warrior of nationhood and the last passionate patriot, who put his love of Palestine above any other call.

Today, the dead body of Yasser Arafat is going to be buried in a stone coffin in Muqata, the compound of his West Bank headquarters, in a symbolic act of resurgence. His remains will be raised again and buried in Jerusalem, once it becomes the capital of the Palestinian state. Arafat may be gone, but his dream goes on. May be he knew it all along, confident that, with or without him, his dream will endure and come to its logical end. One day he is going to lie in rest on the soil of free Palestine.

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Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

Second Bush Administration



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

AGAINST all conventional wisdom and past tradition, President George W. Bush and his team have proved many pundits wrong in most parts of the world. Specialists and political scientists from different think-tanks including Harvard University's Institute of Politics had suggested that if the voter turnout was high, and included occasional voters, swing voters and independents, then the election would swing towards Kerry. They had also pointed out that there was a pro-Dem trend for young new voters. In hindsight, their assumptions were far from the mark.

The Republicans adopted a centralised approach and relied more on party loyalists and volunteers than on paid canvassers. This approach appears to have paid dividends. Contrary to expectations, the Republicans were able to bring out as many supporters to vote as the Democrats, thereby negating the idea that if there was a big turnout on election day, Democrats would win. What had held true since 1964, was not so this time round.

Karl Rove, Special Assistant to President Bush for his re-election, has since made some interesting observations. He has claimed that for the first time in recorded history -- since the time we have been taking accurate public opinion surveys -- more Republicans voted than Democrats. He also pointed out that President Bush had received

more than 50 percent of the popular vote and had also secured not only the majority of electoral college votes but also an expanded representation in the Senate and in the House. This was 'even better than Clinton'. In this context, he also noted that 'late deciders, undecided and younger voters' all seem to have broken with the past tradition of voting against the incumbent.

There were some other significant aspects. Bush also benefited

less of a factor. Their vote indicated that it was not the right time to 'jump ship' as it were. It also reflected the unwritten and inherent 'advantage of incumbency'.

President Bush has been re-elected, but it is generally agreed that he will enjoy a negligible, if any, post-election honeymoon from a closely divided country. Many in the Republican Camp will also see him as a lame-duck and their attention will inexorably turn, like so many

on current world order in the 'Newsweek' of 8 November, has made an interesting assessment. He has commented that "no President has faced an agenda of comparable scope. This is not hyperbole; it is the hand that history has dealt this generation. Never before has it been necessary to conduct a war with neither front lines nor geographic definition and, at the same time, to rebuild fundamental principles of world order to replace the traditional.

continue.

It is equally important that the White House also gives more attention to jumpstarting efforts to find a solution to the problems faced by Palestine. It was encouraging to hear President Bush state in his first post-election news conference that 'life is bigger than just politics'. He has also remarked that he intends "to work for a free Palestinian State at peace with Israel". At this juncture, when Arafat is no longer the active focal

probably the only realistic path toward stability inside Iraq. Meaningful internationalisation would require a focus other than just security needs. It should also involve the participation of countries other than -- or in addition to -- NATO. One step might be the creation of an International Contact Group under UN auspices after the January elections in Iraq. This Group could be constituted to advise on the evolution of Iraq's future socio-economic and political processes.

The next four years will test US resolve. The USA will also have to understand that unilateralism in its own way can be self-defeating. The USA is a vast country and the sole super-power. However, it will need to reconcile consultation with its perceived strategic interests. This is probably the only way that it can achieve the required security system for Northeast Asia.

President Bush will also have to overcome other challenges in the socio-economic sectors and in the arena of trade and environment. It will include the need for a period of discipline in economic policy and for compromise on social policy. Environmentalists feel that his Administration will also have to take into account the repeated natural disasters, the increased air pollution and the steady deterioration in the degree of climate change. Unless he takes the lead, and the USA conforms to international regulations, we are looking at severe glacier retreat. Such a scenario is bound to have disastrous impact on island States, the South Asian subcontinent and China's east coast. We are talking here of half a billion people.

One of the first steps should include addressing his attention to the controversial jurisdictional aspects of incarceration in Guantanamo Bay. It offers constant evidence of America flouting international legal norms. The current Administration claims to be fighting for justice, the rule of law and liberty. Yet it is incarcerating hundreds of people, whether innocent or guilty, without trial or access to legal representation. The 'Economist' (30 October, 2004) has correctly stated that 'the White House's proposed remedy, namely military tribunals, merely compounds the problem.' Moral probity demands that such a situation should not

point, it is vital that some concrete initiative is undertaken that will persuade the people of Palestine to believe that the USA can be evenhanded. A degree of trust has to be returned to the scene if the post-Arafat era is to avoid greater upheaval. We are all hoping that a confident president will now make an effort to develop a European-US position as a part of a 'reinvigorated peace process' that might encourage reluctant parties to break the deadlock. This will also reduce anxiety in the neighbourhood, particularly in Syria and Lebanon.

Mr. Bush has been re-elected and will in all probability have changes in his team. He will also hopefully, after his victory, be able to shake off his fealty to the extreme religious right. A more flexible approach might contribute towards the meeting of existing challenges.

It has to be understood in Washington that the world political cauldron, particularly Iraq, requires greater internationalisation. That is

probably the only remedy lies in the second Bush Administration forsaking the one-dimensional approach and undertaking a more multi-dimensional and multilateral approach. This should apply not only towards Africa but also in the all the activities of the United Nations.

Muhammad Zamir is a former Secretary and Ambassador -- any response to mzamir@dhaka.net

POST BREAKFAST

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from a higher support from the Jewish lobby (22 percent as opposed to 19 percent in 2000) and also from the Latino speakers (40 percent as opposed to 35 percent in 2000). The swing was also evident particularly in New Mexico and Florida, where Bush won this time with clear margins. The Republicans have also won a rash of seats in the South, further consolidating their grip on the Congress. The fact that Democrat Senator Tom Daschle will also lose will be a bad blow for the Democrats in the future.

The electorate in the 'heartland' of the USA has let its moral and traditional values determine the final vote. The centre has moved to the right and there appears to be a change that is here to stay. Despite overwhelming world opinion, middle America did a referendum of GWB and decided that security counted for more than 'lack of credibility' in Bush's 'war on terror'. It also proved that issues like economy and jobs were less of a consideration and

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, reflecting

sunflowers towards rising Sun and the prospect of a Republican 44th President. In this regard they will be watching more critically how Bush handles the ongoing problems.

Bush knows this, and so do his strategists.

There has been diverse reaction from the rest of the world to the re-election of Bush. One thing has however been constant -- reminders about the many complex problems that Bush will need to solve, and that too urgently.

Terrorists have not gone out of business. Osama bin Laden has shown through his latest video footage that he is well and unperurbed by efforts to capture him. Musab Abu al-Zarqawi also continues to threaten the United States and its friends. North Korea's nuclear programme remains unchecked, threat to its neighbours. Iran continues to be a headache as it thumps its nose at both Europe and the USA.

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