

## Eid for a better tomorrow

Sharing joy and responsibility

**E**ID-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 stocktaking 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 compassionate to the have-nots and disadvantaged in the communities. Since the month of Ramadan has been observed in a spirit 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 fashions 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

**P**EOPLE 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

**T**HE 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 platelet 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 scruffy salt-and-pepper beard. His trademark black-and-white checkered kaffiyeh headdress, 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.

The world perhaps is not going to see another consummate patriot like Arafat in many years to come. He lived for Palestine, and he died for it as well, slowly and painfully under the watch of a powerful enemy who had restricted his movement. In his last three years, he lived in the fear of assassination and tension of betrayal as the Israeli and the U.S. governments decided to boycott him and attempted to promote alternative leadership to challenge his authority. In the early hours of last Thursday, Yasser Arafat went beyond everything, beyond the love of his friends and challenge of his enemies.

Arafat never smoked, he never drank and he didn't have much time for women. His love for Palestine dominated his life, it encompassed all his passions and emotions, permeating his thoughts and actions. This is a man who traveled 45 countries in one month, on average 10 countries in a week, the peripatetic revolutionary with the bearings of a diplomat. In the speed and force of his personality, he had carved out a national identity for millions of Palestinians.

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. 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 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.



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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 mere

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 embossed in the quest for the Palestinian identity until they are given a homeland. Arafat's legacy will remain embossed in the gratitude of the Palestinians once that homeland will be given to them. That legacy has been obvious in the reddened and luffy 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 he be 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.

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.

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is a banker.

## Second Bush Administration



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

**A**AINST 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 problem 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 did 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 tradi-

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. The only remedy lies in the second Bush Administration forsaking the one-dimensional approach and undertaking a more multi-dimensional and multilateral approach.

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.

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 all the activities of the United Nations.

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## 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 has also lost 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, mid-level 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

sunflowers towards rising Suns 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 unperturbed 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, a threat to its neighbours. Iran continues to be a headache as it thumps its nose at both Europe and the USA.

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, reflecting

tional ones which went up in the smoke of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon.

One can only agree with Kissinger with regard to the difficult task that faces Bush. Nevertheless, a comprehensible effort needs to be undertaken to win back the high moral ground that has always been the trademark of his country.

One of the first steps should include addressing his attention to the controversial juridical 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 'Economic' (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 even-handed. A degree of trust has to return 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 caudron, particularly Iraq, requires greater internationalisation. That is

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Ohio verdict and the world

Being a resident of Ohio, I was, like most others, closely watching the election coverage, and was no doubt amused when it all came down to Ohio. I live in the small town of Delaware, Ohio, a small college town that lies about 30 minutes north of Columbus. Delaware is the chief city of Delaware County, and is mostly populated by college students who, like me, attend Ohio Wesleyan University. Over the past few months, I personally noticed that most college students here in Delaware were hoping for a Kerry victory. A lot of students also mobilised themselves as canvassers for John Kerry, and I personally had high hopes of Kerry winning in Delaware County, if not elsewhere.

Come Election Day, however, I was bitterly disappointed. George Bush won in our county, 66% to 34%. I was shocked, but a closer look at the figures showed that over 56,000 people had voted for Kerry in this

county alone, whereas only about 25,000 had voted for Kerry. With a student population of about 1,900, Ohio Wesleyan University obviously did not have much of an impact on the election in this county.

I think that it is important to understand why Ohio voted the way it did. As Mr. Ali pointed out, the Republicans prioritise religion. Ohio is part of the Bible Belt, which means that a lot of Ohio voters are more influenced by what is preached in their churches than any presidential debate or any presidential laws. Further proof of this influence of religion upon voting preferences can be seen in the fact that a ban on homosexual marriages was passed overwhelmingly in this state.

Another important factor in Ohio voting practices is the fact that minorities like African-Americans, Hispanics and Asians are an endangered species outside the big cities. As a result, while Franklin County, which is dominated by the city of Columbus, and other counties housing big cities went Kerry, the remaining counties, dominated by

small towns and large tracts of rural land, went Bush's way. It is no surprise, therefore, that the minority vote was important in this election. Minorities prefer Democrats, and areas that were low on minorities voted for Bush.

Finally, another important factor in the election, contrary to Mr. Ali's opinion, was job losses. The entire Northeast Ohio was hardest hit by job losses, and so they voted for Kerry. Most northeastern Ohio counties voted for Kerry, which is why Kerry got as much as 49% of Ohio votes. The remaining areas of Ohio were mostly rural, and George Bush's support of farms proved important in their decisions. Delaware County, where I live, is one of America's fastest growing counties, and has been growing steadily, with barely any effect of the recession seen. As a result, voters in Delaware County saw nothing wrong with Bush's economic policies, and thus voted for him.

I think the answer to Mr. Ali's question, "What is wrong with America",

lies in one single word: apathy. Shihab Ansari Azhar Delaware, Ohio

### Americans made the right choice

Maybe they didn't make the right choice from the Muslim point of view, but when have Americans ever cared about the Muslim point of view? After 9/11, Americans were faced with the stark reality that their atom bombs are ineffective against suicide bombs. To win the war on terror they have to fight fire with fire, terror with terror, fundamentalism with fundamentalism. After Bush lies to the American people and misleads them to a pre-emptive, unjustified, unprovoked war in Iraq, Americans vote in record numbers to give Bush a clear mandate with a historical majority of the popular vote, and a majority in Congress, the Senate and the Supreme Court. If that doesn't strike fear into the heart of every Muslim terrorist, what else will? Kerry? Ironically, if Bush had

not invaded Iraq, he would not be viewed by the rest of the world as the NUMBER 1 terrorist, and he probably would have lost the election. So don't condemn the American electorate; they made the right choice. Omar Chowdhury Uttara, Dhaka

### Visit of Prime Minister of Pakistan

Two critical letters on the visit of the Prime Minister of Pakistan attracted my attention (Pakistan PM's visit; DS November 8th). I agree with their criticisms for Pakistan is one country with which we should be wary about showing fraternal and brotherly ties; if we have any pride in ourselves and our history that is. In 1971, the Pakistanis committed genocide in Bangladesh. The genocide that the Pakistani military junta perpetrated should rank as the worst case in history of throttling a democratic election by force. It makes the attempts of the Burmese military junta against Aung San Suu

Kyilook like a humanitarian gesture! Yet, the Pakistanis never bothered to acknowledge their inhuman act. Their attempt to portray our glorious war of liberation as India inspired campaign to break Pakistan only adds insult to injury. Thus when we see a Pakistani PM or President being accorded honour in Dhaka brings back memories that are just too disgusting to bear. For those who lost near and dear ones, the days that a Pakistani dignitary spends in Bangladesh is tantamount to a feeling of suffocation that only those who suffer can tell. Those politicians who express solidarity with Pakistan without questions of 1971 being answered are traitors about whom the less said the better. True, the Government must maintain diplomatic ties with Pakistan, even in the face of Pakistan's intransigence but if we have self-dignity and honour, we should never demonstrate any warmth of friendship and just be correct protocol-wise.

Pakistan has its sights elsewhere and in Bangladesh; it has no interest except in playing its anti-India game. This is one other reason for Bangladesh to be cautious about Pakistan for we need India for our future and not Pakistan whose influence in Bangladesh can be only negative. We should make our relations with Pakistan dependent on their apologising for their misdeeds in 1971. On our part, we should set records straight and revise the figure of 3 million deaths. The emphasis should not be in figures but on intent. The Pakistanis killed ONLY Bengali speaking people in 1971 which is genocide. But 3 million deaths? Hitler could kill only 5 million Jews in 6 years through mass extermination that should hint how many were killed in Bangladesh in 1971. Three lakhs is a more realistic figure to lend credibility to our just claim.

Shahjahan Ahmed  
Dhahmandi RA, Dhaka

### Price of rice

Recently the government has taken initiative to sell rice in open market

at lower price to ease the general people. According to newspapers reports market price of the rice is not going down and every day thousands of people are returning from the OMS centre in empty hand. It is the responsibility for the government to feed the people if they are unable to work, unemployed or poor. But now it is the sympathy of the government to the poor ones. Is it not basic need of the people? People are starving in the northern districts and even the children are keeping fast as an alternative to taking food. They are not getting food for sheri and for iftar whereas our government is making arrangements of some gorgeous iftar mahfil at Sheraton or Sonargaon. What is the source of income of this money spends on iftar? Is it not the revenue from the tax of the people? Who gave them the right to spend this money in such a gorgeous iftar?

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