

The great martyrdom

SYED ASHRAF ALI

THE tenth of Muharram is a red letter day in the annals of history. Known as Ashoura in the Muslim world, it is the anniversary of the supreme and inimitable sacrifice which Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA), the youngest grandson of the holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), made, alongwith seventy-two near and dear ones, to uphold the true teachings of Islam befitting "the Prince of Martyrs." No wonder, Muslims all over the world observe the tenth of Muharram as a day of mourning and solemn remembrance.

Death is inevitable for every mortal. But the *Shahadat* of Imam Hussain (RA) was no ordinary demise. Allama Iqbal rightly claims: "Although all deaths are sweet for the *Momin*, the death of Ali's son is unique indeed, for it passes beyond the death that is content with the grave." The great *Shahadat* of Karbala, inspired by the most divine love – love for Allah – indeed showed superhuman courage and conviction and endurance, enabling the beloved grandson of the holy Prophet (pbuh) to overcome so easily the wellnigh insuperable forces of contemporary evil and untruth. It is this dying nobly for the cause of truth and justice that confers immortality on man, the immortality which the great son of Hazrat Ali (RA) won on the banks of the Furat (Euphrates). The Holy Quran eloquently testifies: "And say not of those who are slain in the Way of Allah: 'They are dead.' Nay, they are living, though ye perceive it not." (2:154).

The heroic episode of Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) has passed into a legend. The deeds of this "Prince of Martyrs" are sung by minstrels throughout the length and breadth of the Islamic world. He reigns supreme in the hearts of thousands and millions of persons, both Muslims and non-Muslims. He has indeed passed into history, he has become a name.

With the rise of Mu'awiyah, the oligarchical rule of the heathen times displaced the democratic rule of Islam. Paganism, with all its attendant depravity, revived and vice and immorality followed everywhere. The wealth which he pitilessly extracted from his subjects, he lavished on his mercenaries, who in turn helped him to repress dissent. Before his death, Mu'awiyah convened the chief officers of his army and made them take the

oath of fealty to his son Yezid, whom he had designated as his successor to the throne – a gross and treacherous violation of the terms of peace signed between Mu'awiyah and Hazrat Imam Hassan (RA), the eldest son of Hazrat Ali bin Abu Talib (RA).

On Mu'awiyah's death, Yezid ascended the throne founded by his father on fraud and treachery. As cruel and treacherous as his father, Yezid however lacked the cunning and capacity to clothe his cruelties in the guise of policy. An out and out sadist as he was, he killed and tortured just for the sake of pleasure. Addicted to the grossest of vices, his close companions were the most abandoned of both sexes. Imam Hussain (RA), on the other hand, had inherited the chivalric nature and all the virtues of his great

accompanied by his brother Abbas, a few devoted followers, and a retinue of women and children. But as he approached the confines of Iraq, he was alarmed by the solitary and hostile face of the country. He saw no signs of the Kufan army which had promised to meet him. Suspecting treachery, he encamped his small band at Karbala near the western bank of the Euphrates. The great Imam's apprehensions of betrayal only proved too true and he was overtaken by an Ommeyyade army sent by the brutal and ferocious Ubaidullah bin Zaid, surnamed the Butcher. For days their tents were surrounded.

The cowardly huns dared not come within the reach of Ali's son, but they cut the victims off from the waters of the Euphrates. Three days and nights of

moral and spiritual victory which was definitely much more glorious and lasting than a victory on the field of battle.

The valour and indomitable spirit of the Fatimides were invincible and every single combat and close fight was readily won by them. They slew many more than their own numbers. But the enemy's archers treacherously picked them off from a safe distance. One by one the defenders fell, until at last there remained but the noble and virtuous grandson of the last and greatest Prophet (pbuh). Severely wounded and dying, he dragged himself to the riverside for a last drink; the inhuman cowards turned him off with arrows. As he returned to his tent, he took his infant child in his arms but they transfixed him with a dart. Alone and weary, he seated himself at the door of his

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and illustrious father. He united in his person the right of descent from the Sher-e-Khuda Ali (RA) with the holy character of the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Great as a devout Muslim, great as an idealist, great as a patriot, great as a valiant warrior, great as a man of action, a dreamer of dreams, he was a man daring and adventurous, reckless of consequences and yet intensely practical, one who embodied the highest qualities that giants among men might desire.

Hazrat Hussain (RA) never deigned to acknowledge the title of the tyrant Yezid, whose vices he despised and whose character he regarded with abhorrence. Naturally, therefore, when the Muslims of Kufa besought his help to release them from the curse and cruelty of Ommeyyade rule, he felt it his duty to respond to the Iraqis' appeal for deliverance, and with the assurance that the whole of Iraq was ready to rise to the occasion to hurl the despot from his throne, he set out for Kufa with his family. He traversed the desert of Arabia undisturbed,

intense agony ensued, but the indefatigable Imam and his dedicated followers endured this unflinchingly. But everything has a limit and sufferings of the poor entrapped band became too terrible to bear. As a last resource, Imam Hussain (RA) besought the cruel monsters not to wage war upon the helpless women and children, but to kill him and be done with it. But the devil was in the hearts of his enemies and the brutes knew no pity. He pressed his friends to ensure their safety by timely flight, but none would desert their beloved master. The sacrilege of warring against the holy Prophet's (pbuh) grandson struck one of the enemy's chiefs with horror and he deserted with thirty followers "to claim the partnership of the inevitable death."

On the morning of the fateful day of the tenth of Muharram, the auspicious day of Ashura, Hussain's (RA) faithful band of heroes arrayed themselves in battle formation. No hope of victory was there against the thousands of well-equipped and merciless mercenaries of Yezid. Yet they knew that they had come to fulfil their destiny not to win a battle but to achieve a

tent. One of the women handed him a cup of water to assuage his burning thirst; as he raised it to his lips he was pierced in the mouth with a dart. He lifted his hands to heaven they were full of blood and uttered a funeral prayer for the living and the dead. Not merely a grandson of the holy Prophet (pbuh) but also a devout and ideal follower of his tenets, the great Imam even in his last hours displayed the highest ideal of spiritual and moral greatness by praying for the very enemies who had killed his infant son and were ready to put him to death. Raising his finger for the last desperate charge, the valiant fighter threw himself among the Ommeyyade brutes, who fell back on every side. The beautiful lines from the great poet Anis gives a graphic description of the Imam's legendary sword and its strokes:

And driven by hand alone whenever it smashed,

There out a gushing pool of blood had splashed;

And changing a hundred colours it flew;

And drinking blood, it vomiting rubies flashed.

But the gruelling ordeal was too much even for the indomitable Hussain (RA), and faint with the loss of blood he sank to the ground." The murderous cowards rushed upon the dying hero like vultures; they cut off his head, trampled on the holy body and subjected it to every ignominy they knew.

Hussain (RA) indeed did not die in the ordinary sense of the term. He simply shuffled off the moral coil and set sail towards the Great Unknown through the glorious channel of Shahadat. In the memorable words of Nazrul, "Death itself was immortalised at the touch of his life." His precious life indeed was sacrificed for the salvation of the suffering humanity, testifying so eloquently to the fact that the brows of the martyr shall eternally reflect the brilliance of the elect of Allah, that those who submit to God and suffer and bleed unto death for the cause of righteousness, truth and justice, for the unfortunate millions that knock about the straits, for the sustenance and durability of their rights and privileges, never decay, never die, never perish; they live a newer life, a fresher life, a higher life, a sublimer life in the recurrent ethos of community and country.

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Katle Hussain Asal Margaye Yezid Tha;

Islam Zinda Hota Hai har Karbale Ke Baad.

(The Martyrdom of Hussain was indeed the Death of Yezid; Islam is rejuvenated after each and every Karbala).

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Ahmadiyya issue Rocking the boat without reason

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

BANGLADESH has more than its share of problems and issues that it deserves. It is tragic for a small country burdened with a large population of 140 million and with no notable resource for consolation. Yet a proliferation of issues, homegrown and imported is rocking the boat without much reason since its birth. The country is passing through a perennially tense time disturbing national stability and civic peace. It is ironic that many of the issues serve to build the profile of virulently dogmatic firebrands. These days the Ahmadiyya issue is growing in its pugnacity. The fury of its advocates gives the indication that they are trying to generate enough steam to force a showdown.

One of its leaders is operating from a vantage position, the theocratic leadership of the national mosque of the country. The other is leading under the banner of restoring caliphate. He has went to the extent of saying with vehemence that the question of declaring the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim is a national issue and it will determine the formation of the next government. There is no question that they are revered, but they are definitely not acting sensibly to serve the national cause. The issue of declaring the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim has theocratic relevance but surely does not have the importance and urgency of a national issue in a civil society governed by constitutional laws.

Bangladesh is not a theocratic state and cannot deviate into the field of theocratic functions of deciding the religious identity of its citizens. It is fraught with the ominous consequences of the theocratic invasion of the state and of executive and legislative transgressions into the fields of theocracy. Good and peaceable leaders, both religious and political, should always exercise discretion and resolve in not disturbing the balance of the order. It is a settled fact that Bangladesh is an overwhelmingly Muslim country and the beliefs and the ways of the greater populace is reflected in national life. Besides Islam is the state religion. Any meddling into the settled issue will spell constitutional doom for Bangladesh.

One does not have to be a theocratic student to understand what Islam says on the matter. Yes, *Sura Ahzab* says that Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him) is the '*khatamunnabiyyin*' or the last prophet. There is little in the word '*khatam*' or last to make it ambiguous, because even in Bengali we use this word to signify the end. So far I have gathered, the Ahmadiyyas interpret it in a different way, stating that Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) is the last prophet with the seal or the last prophet with the book. They explain that prophets following his line may come adhering to the commandments of Holy Quran. In accordance with it they regard Mirza Ghulam Ahmed born in the village Qadiyan in the district of Gurudaspur of Indian part of Punjab as a prophet or messiah. Mohammed Marmadeuke Piktal in his English version '*The Meaning of Glorious Quran*' has translated '*khatamunnabiyyin*' as the prophet with the seal. The matter is for the theocratic scholars to explain. An ordinary Muslim like me will however be inclined to faithfully accept that indeed Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) is the last prophet. In case the theocratic scholars of Ahmadiyyas err in interpreting the word '*khatamunnabiyyin*' in order to establish Mirza Ghulam Ahmed as a lesser prophet preaching the Islam of Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) their accountability lies with Almighty Allah. For Allah understands better than we do.

It has been stated time and again in the Holy Quran that He is all knowing. Besides has it not been stated in the Holy Quran that He does not love the transgressor of the limit, nor does He love the trouble makers, or that He loves the middle path? A good Muslim cannot and should not incite trouble. The revered Khatib Sahib and the Mufti Huzoor have greater knowledge of what Quran says on '*khatamunnabiyyin*' and also of Allah's commands on maintaining peace. I would cite here the most recent example of Ayatollah Sistani, the grand Ayatollah of Iraq, on maintaining peace. Even the firebrands of Muqtada Al Bani Sadr's standing submitted to his course of moderation in withdrawing from Najaf. Sistani has great following in Iraq and the Shi'ites are in a majority, yet very little is heard of him. He is a noble example of clerical rectitude. The great ones unite and shun paths of division. There is no great piety in forcing issues of chaos and division.

In our times and in our region we have seen the tragic outcome of bigotry and religious fanaticism, of stoking the fires of religious schisms. Fanaticism in any from has ravenous appetite for spiteful fury subjecting innocent human beings to suffer in unrelenting distress. In our region sharing the common religious demography Pakistan is witnessing frequent orgies of Shia-Sunni fratricide. It has taken the diabolical form of mayhem in mosques perpetrated by co-religionists. Recently

curfew had to be imposed in Gilgit to quell the violence. Even the microscopic Christian community is brutalised by the frenzy of indiscreet religious intolerance unleashed by clerical haranguing. The most gruesome orgy of religious fanaticism was committed by the *karsevaks* of India taking 2,000 human lives in Gujrat. It was a murderous and unjust reprisal as vindicated by the findings of the judicial committee observing that the cooking stoves of the *karsevaks* caused fire to break out inside the railway compartment.

Unlike the terrorist character that has stuck to Islam in the recent times the Holy Quran in unambiguous terms speaks of a kindly and forgiving God. The fundamental attributes of Allah are that He is beneficent and merciful. Allah's commandments in Quran do not hide behind the ambiguity of words and clearly lays down the duties of the faithful. The prophet is told that he has been sent to perform two basic functions, to call on the faithful to pursue the rewards of a straight and virtuous path in this world and to awaken them to the inexorable nature of His judgment in the day of reckoning. The Holy Quran speaks of Allah Rabbul Alamin commanding our prophet (PBH) to leave the detractors and deviationists to their paths till the time of reckoning overpowers them.

Fanaticism in any form ethnic, linguistic, colour or religion brings out the bestial in human beings. Pride in one's belief, the driving force in fanaticism overwhelms the thinking. It brooks no opposition and grows irrationally intolerant. This is why it has wrecked havoc whenever in any period of time nations submitted to it. The Germans suffered heavily and caused worldwide suffering when German ultra-nationalism in the form of Nazism overwhelmed Germany. Apartheid savaged South Africa for decades when the Afrikaners relied in the name of the supremacy of the white race. Radovan Karadzic's marauding hordes carried gruesome genocide of Bosnian Muslims in the name of religion. The Ireland is yet to be one country because of sectarian divisions between the Protestants and the Catholics.

For Bangladesh the challenges of development is mighty, with a large and rising population caught in poverty. Luckily for it the country does not have any major population divide to present the fanatics with sentiments to play on. The one in Chittagong Hill Tracts can be contained with trust building governance and by an enduring policy of fairness and justice. The Ahmadiyya issue has to be dealt with gentle firmness. This should be allowed to run out of its steam. The outcome of allowing it to get its way has grim consequences. One should judge it by the harshness of the pronunciations of many of the theocratic scholars of the major Islamic sect in our country and in other parts of the world. As in Pakistan, many of the theocratic scholars in our country are harshly critical of the ways of other sects. A few of them go to the extent of calling the Shiites and the Muharram mourning as something beyond the pale of Islam. One can but feel shocked by the fiery nature of their observations. It will amount to opening the Pandora's box.

A great religion like Islam will naturally have tributaries. But there is very little variations on the basic issues, like, the oneness of Allah, and about the five pillars of Islam. It is the primacy of the intellect that predisposes human beings to differ and to argue and to pursue different ways. However so long the passion is kept under leash by rational and sensible conduct the differences remain within deferential bound. Once the leash is lost the civil order is rocked, intolerant fury leads to rabid confrontation. It is the responsibility of a good government to stand vigilantly watchful over the decline of differences into issues and issues into civil strife.

The Muslim countries of the world are passing through a testing time of history. Unfortunately an idea has grown dominant in the western world (albeit without any rational basis) that Islam is a confrontational religion and the Muslim countries are the breeding grounds of terrorism and are potential threat to western civilisation. It is principally up to the Muslim countries to rise above this adverse characterisation by keeping their house in order founded on sensible and discrete action. The fanatics and the hot heads may find it an inglorious submission to western commands and ploys. That is not the fact, for the Muslims can take rightful pride of presiding over glorious periods of peace and prosperity in lands as far away as Spain.

Our prophet accepted the apparently adverse terms of *Hodaibiya* to pave the way for the conquest of Mecca without any bloodshed. He is a magnificent example of uniting the feuding tribes of Arabia and later of the other parts of the world. The fundamental value of Islam lies in uniting people not dividing it. Its holy book, the Quran, forbids the faithful from crossing the limit, of becoming fodders to feud. Let us then submit to the eternal peace of Islam and let Allah decide who is faithful and who is not. Amen.

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The teachings of Ashura

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

THE 10th day of the lunar month of Muharram, that is, "Ashura" reminds us the supreme sacrifice made by Hazrat Imam Hussain (A), the grand-son of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) for a just and noble cause. To the great Imam, it may be recalled here, his own life was less important than values of a noble cause. There are shining examples of sacrifices made by illustrious persons who were princes among men. Although the background of these sacrifices are different they teach us to be pious, God fearing and honest.

Now, dear readers, I think it would not be irrelevant to state a few words about the background of the supreme sacrifice made by Hazrat Imam Hussain (A) in an unequal fight with Yazid's army on the 10th day of the lunar month of Muharram. The holy day of Ashura marks the culmination of grief and mourning over the tragedy enacted on the burning sands of Karbala some 1300 years ago. As regards the pertinent question as to why the great and valiant Imam had to embrace the martyrdom which is unprecedented in human history, the dauntless Imam preferred to sacrifice his life than to surrender to the unreasonable demands of unscrupulous and licentious Yazid.

History records that in flagrant violation of an agreement entered into earlier the sitting Caliph Muawiah nominated his son Yazid to be the next Caliph of the Islamic state after his death instead of Hazrat Imam Hussain (A). Consequently, Yazid declared himself as the next Caliph and wanted to perpetuate the rule of his father Muawiah. It may be mentioned here that Muawia's nomination of his son as the next Caliph was against the normal practice of electing a Caliph through mutual consultation hitherto followed, and it paved the way for establishment of kingship in various Muslim countries of the world in future. And this was unfortunate, undesirable and unexpected.

In the circumstances Hazrat Imam Hussain declined to owe allegiance to Yazid and accept such unjust and illegal nomination made by Yazid's father Muawiah. Meanwhile, something unexpected did happen. Being oppressed by the governor of Kufa Ubaidullah-bin-Saad the people of Kufa invited Hazrat Imam Hussain (A) with a view to helping them, and on receipt of this invitation the kind-hearted Imam left for Kufa with a small band of soldiers and some members of his family including his infant son Asgar. When the Imam and his party were not far from the provincial capital (Kufa), Al-Hore, a tribal chief blocked the Imam's way, and as a result the Imam was obliged to change the course of is route, and subsequently encamped with his party at a desert site known as Karbala on the bank of river Euphrates some 25 miles

away from the city of Kufa.

As an agent of Yazid the governor of Kufa did not like Hazrat Imam Hussain's stay and movement in his jurisdiction. So he immediately dispatched a 4,000-strong cavalry under the command of Umar-bin-Saad for siege with instructions to block the way leading to the river so that no one from the Imam's camp could have any access to water in order to quench their thirst. It was certainly an unequal fight. The great Imam was in an awful predicament, and suddenly he and his party men became victims of a deep-rooted conspiracy hatched by cruel-hearted and selfish Yazid and his sycophants. Finding no other way out the courageous Imam fought with the last drop of his blood and sacrificed his life for a just and noble cause. But cruelties perpetrated on him and the members of his party have no parallel in human history. And that is why a noted historian E Gibbon has aptly observed: "In a distant age and climate the tragic scene of the death of Hussain will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader".

The tragedy of Karbala and the selfless sacrifice of Hazrat Imam Hussain (A) teach us to fight for a just and noble cause. Let as observe the auspicious occasion of Ashura with due solemnity.

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Iraqi elections may not be what they seem

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JUDGING by the jubilation and self-congratulation of the Bush administration in the aftermath of the January 31 Iraqi elections, one can be forgiven for thinking that the Iraqis had just endorsed the American invasion and occupation! The Iraqis did no such thing. Such interpretation will closely vie with the overly optimistic pre-invasion rhetoric that "American soldiers will be greeted as liberators, with flowers" in Iraq. The world now knows the tragic consequences of such deliberating hyped propaganda to promote the invasion, both for the Iraqi civilians and for the American soldiers.

With international monitors absent on the ground in Iraq, it is difficult to divine what actually happened in Iraq. On critical issues, these days the American press prints only the official version. Therefore, the figures for the percentage of Iraqis voting and their joy at it as depicted in the American media, have to be taken with a pinch of salt. Did the Iraqis know what they were voting for, anyway? The answer may surprise you.

In his op-ed piece on January 31, *The New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert writes:

"And we should keep in mind that despite the feelings of pride and accomplishment experienced by so many of the voters, yesterday's election was hardly a textbook example of democracy in action. A real democracy requires an informed electorate. What we saw yesterday was an uncommonly brave electorate. But it was woefully uninformed.

Much of the electorate was voting blind. Half or more of those who went to the polls believed they were voting for a president. They weren't. They were electing a transitional national assembly that will have as its primary task the drafting of a constitution. The Washington Post noted that because of the extreme violence that preceded the election "almost none of the 7,700 candidates for the National Assembly campaigned publicly or even announced their names."

As John F. Burns put it in *The Times* yesterday:

"Half a dozen candidates have been assassinated. As a result, the names of all others have not been made public; they were available in the last days of the campaign on Web sites inaccessible to most Iraqis, few of

whom own computers."

"Democracy," according to "The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World," "refers to a form of government in which, in contradistinction to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule."

That is not the case in Iraq and is not likely to be the case soon. In much of Iraq the people exist in a kind of hell on earth, at the mercy of American forces on the one hand and a variety of enraged insurgents on the other. Despite the pretty words coming out of the Bush administration, the goals of the U.S. and the goals of most ordinary Iraqis are not, by a long stretch, the same.

day. Unemployment rates are sky high. With many women destitute, prostitution is a growth industry.

Iraqis may have voted... But they live in occupied territory, and the occupiers have other things on their minds than the basic wishes of the Iraqi people. That's not democracy. That's a recipe for more war."

All the Iraqi candidates running for office were approved by the occupying power, America. It should, therefore, not be automatically assumed that those who did vote were converts to the American version of democracy, as Bob Herbert points out. The majority Shiite Arabs in the south may

LETTER FROM AMERICA

The desire of the U.S., as embodied by the Bush administration, is to exercise as much control as possible over the Middle East and its crucial oil reserves. There is very little concern here about the plight of ordinary Iraqis, which is why the horrendous casualties being suffered by Iraqi civilians, including women and children, get so little attention.

What most ordinary Iraqis have been expressing, not surprisingly, is a desire for a reasonably decent quality of life. They are a long way from that.

In large swaths of the country, death at the hands of insurgents seems always just moments away. It's also extremely easy for innocent Iraqis to get blown away by Americans. That can occur if drivers get too close - or try to pass - an American military convoy. Or if confusion arising from language barriers, or ignorance of the rules, or just plain nervousness results in an unfortunate move by a vehicle at a checkpoint. Or if someone objects too vociferously to degrading treatment by U.S. forces. Or if someone is simply suspected, wrongly, of being an insurgent.

Crime in many areas is completely out of control. Kidnapping for ransom, including the kidnapping of children, is ubiquitous. Carjackings are commonplace. Rape and murder are widespread.

In a country with the second-largest oil reserves in the world, drivers have to wait in line for hours at a time for gasoline. Electric power is available just a handful of hours a

have seen the voting as an excellent opportunity to grab power. The Kurds in the north may have looked at the election as the first step towards independence. And as is well-known, the Sunni Arabs in the middle pretty much boycotted the election. With the three factions in Iraq viewing the election in conflicting terms, conflict is what will result. The simmering tensions will now boil over, and will probably result in the disintegration of Iraq once the American soldiers leave.

America did succeed in planting democracy on the soil of Germany and Japan after defeating them in World War II; America even wrote Japan's constitution giving women equal rights. But, Germany and Japan were the aggressors in WW II, who were defeated by America and the Allies. America is the aggressor in Iraq. After the American occupation of Germany and Japan, there was no resistance or insurgency against the occupiers. By all estimate, the insurgency in Iraq is only intensifying. History is not on the side of democracy when the occupying power attempts to install it in a country where insurgency is surging. To de-legitimize the Awami League's absolute triumph in the elections of December 1970, the Pakistani occupiers held an "election" in the middle of Mukti Bahini insurgency in the autumn of 1971 in "East Pakistan." They did not quite succeed, did they? The US, too, held elections in South Vietnam. Most of those that ran for and won office were either killed after the US's withdrawal, or left long before

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