

World leaders greet president on Eid

UNB, Dhaka

Heads of state and government of Muslim countries and US President George W Bush yesterday greeted President Iajuddin Ahmed on the occasion of Holy Eid-ul-Fitr.

Egyptian President Mohammed Hosny Mubarak, Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, UAE President Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan and his wife, Fatima Bint Mubarak, UAE Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai Maktoum Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, King of Bahrain Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa and Bahrain Prime Minister Khalifa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa sent messages of greetings.

In the messages, they prayed to Almighty Allah for continued peace and prosperity of Bangladesh and welfare of the people. They also wished greater unity among the Muslim Ummah.

US President George W Bush, in a separate message to President Iajuddin, offered his best wishes on the occasion of Holy Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr.

"Bangladesh and the US enjoy a strong relationship based on common values of freedom and tolerance," he said.

Bush also looked forward to continue to work together with the government and people of Bangladesh to promote democracy, religious freedom and economic growth.



PHOTO: STAR

Rickshaws and motor vehicles remain stuck in a gridlock on a road in Sadarghat area in old Dhaka yesterday, the last working day before Eid holidays, as home-bound people rush towards Sadarghat Launch Terminal.

Iraq eyes tourism as US troops leave Saddam palace

AFP, Tikrit, Iraq

US commanders moved out of a complex of palaces that once belonged to ousted president Saddam Hussein, a site Iraqi officials hope to turn into a tourist destination.

The complex overlooking the Tigris River was built just outside Saddam's hometown of Tikrit in northern Iraq soon after the country's defeat in the 1991 Gulf War over Kuwait.

It served as headquarters to the 42nd Infantry Division, responsible for military operations in north-central Iraq.

Their replacement, the 101st Airborne Division, will be staying at a former Iraqi air base a few kilometres up the road, and local officials will take control of the palace complex.

"This place is the symbol of how one man spent Iraq's wealth," said Major General Joseph Taluto, the outgoing US regional commander. "Now is the time to return it to the people."

The closure of the heavily-fortified base, the 30th to be shut down this year in Iraq, is also designed to concentrate US troops and reduce their visibility and exposure to attack.

US soldiers Tuesday packed their bags, emptied the garbage, rolled up cables and took some final snapshots of the complex, which comprises 136 buildings, including 18 palaces.

"We've maintained the buildings," said Taluto, even though "it's not the greatest of constructions".

Taluto himself worked in one of the palaces, but set up his private quarters in an outside trailer.

The palaces, now mostly empty, have grand marble staircases, huge carved wooden doors and vast rooms with ceilings covered in stucco or coloured arabesque designs.

The departing US troops however

say the marble is little more than frosting that masks shoddy brickwork and failing plumbing. Tiles regularly fall from ceilings where massive chandeliers hang.

The main palace was bombed at the start of the US-led invasion in March 2003 and never repaired, though statues of an Assyrian warrior and a modern-day soldier remain.

Saddam kept his movements so secret that few even today know whether he ever spent much time here.

Provincial governor Hamed Humud Shikiti said plans are afoot to turn the complex into a tourist or leisure park when he officially takes over.

"First we shall open the gates to allow the people to see the palaces," which have always been off-limits to the public, he said.

Then "as a temporary measure I shall move my office here, along with those of the police chief," he added.

Sergeant Jason Mastroianni, from Albany, New York, stood outside a palace built for Saddam's mother burning documents in a large metal drum.

"These have been very good conditions, considering we're at war,"

he said. The palaces, he said, offered safety from mortar attacks and air conditioning during the hot summer.

"We're not roughing it," he added.

The complex is surrounded by watchtowers on one side and the river on the other. It stretches for several kilometres, similar to a large village resort.

Small palaces and large villas are built on small islands on the river or stand atop a bluff, overlooking the Tigris.

One structure built on a large pond has water running under it. Another, amid palm trees, includes a large terrace looking onto a quiet corner of the river, surrounded by bulrushes.

Another resembles a small Chinese teapavilion on a reflecting pool, while yet another is a swank cave dwelling cut into the side of a cliff.

DEBATE AT UN SECURITY COUNCIL

Dhaka supports greater role of women in peacekeeping

UNB, Dhaka

President of the UN Security Council to mark the 5th anniversary of adoption of a key resolution 1325 (2000) on "Women and Peace Keeping."

Referring to domestic experience back home, he said "we believe that gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment are critical factors for development. We know such policies help marginalise extremist thought and action which includes the

scourge of terrorism".

Prime minister Khaleda Zia and her government are committed to the implementation of such policies, which are bringing about "a quite social transformation" in Bangladesh, he said.

During adoption of Resolution 1325 Bangladesh was a member of the Security Council and played a key role in the process, said a message received from New York Mission yesterday.