

Reflections on Eid

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SYED ASHRAF ALI

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Eid-ul-Fitr was not known to the Muslims till the Holy Hijrat to the then Yathrib (now Medina) in 622 AD. After his Hijrat to Medina, the holy Prophet (peace be upon him) found the people there regularly celebrating two festivals of Persian origin -- the *Mihirjan* and the *Nawroze* on the nights of the full moons of spring and autumn respectively. The way these two festivals were celebrated in the then Arabia and Persia was not only highly objectionable but also incompatible with the norms and practices in Islam.

Nawroze and *Mihirjan* festivals celebrated by the people of Arabia prior to the holy Prophet's (peace be upon him) Hijrat to Medina were mere Arabic versions of the two great festivals of the Zoroastrians namely, *Nawroze* and *Mihirjan* respectively. Both *Nawroze*, the festival of the new year, and *Mihirjan*, the feast of Mithra, used to last six days, the number perhaps being based on the six Persian *gahanbars*.

The first day of the new year was called *Nawroze-i-Amma* (of the people) or *Kucak* (little) and the sixth day was *Nawroze-i-Hasa* (noble) or *Buzurg*

(great). It was the custom of the Kisra (Persian kings) that the king opened the *Nawroze* festival and then proclaimed to all that he would hold a session for them and bestow benefits upon them.

On the second day, the session was for men of high rank and the members of the great families. On the third day, the session was for his warriors, and for the highest Manbadh (priests). On the fourth day it was for his family, his relations and domestics, and on the fifth it was for his children and clients. When the sixth day came and he had done justice to all of them, he celebrated *Nawroze* himself and conversed only with special friends and those who were admitted into his privacy.

As in the case of *Nawroze*, the first day of *Mihirjan* was known as *Mihirjan-i-Amma* and the last as *Mihirjan-i-Hasa*. As stated earlier this festival also lasted six days. But at one period it spread over thirty days, the first five being, according to Al-Biruni, "feast days for the princes, the second for nobility, the third for the servants of the princes, the fourth for their clients, the fifth for the people, and the sixth for the herdsmen." Thus, instead of each of the six *gahanbars* being represented by only one day of the festival, it was at one time honoured both at *Nawroze* and at *Mihirjan* by a period of five days.

Both *Nawroze* and *Mihirjan* were originally New Year festivals. The Avesta year originally began about the time of the autumnal equinox and, during the closing years of the reign of Darius I (522-486), it was changed to conform to the regular Babylonian year, thus commencing about the Vernal Equinox.

The Arabs used to celebrate *Nawroze* and *Mihirjan* from the nights of the full moon of spring and autumn respectively, almost exactly in the same way as the Persians did.

To both, these two occasions were of great honour and significance. It is well illustrated by the following saying of Salman al Farsi (RA) as cited by Al-Biruni: "In Persian times we used to say that God has created an ornament for his slaves, of rubies on *Nawroze*, of emeralds on *Mihirjan*. Therefore, these two festivals excel all other days in the same way as these two jewels excel all other jewels."

The general scheme of celebration of *Nawroze* and *Mihirjan* not only laid emphasis on the artificial differences between rich and poor, haves and have-nots, which was not at all compatible with the concept of equality in Islam, but also normally led people to being drunk, which frequently lead to brawls and bloodshed.

The Kiyan, women who practiced immoral dancing and singing, used to command wide respect during celebration of these festivals, and even the great chieftains used to pay public court to them during these festivals.

The holy Prophet (pbuh) was literally shocked and surprised, and was reported to have observed: "Allah has given you two days better than these days -- the days of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha." The age old practice of celebration of *Nawroze* and *Mihirjan* festivals were very rightly stopped and the Muslims started celebrating the two auspicious Eid days in right earnest -- days in the mornings of which the Muslims say a two-rakat special congregational prayer. And, as in all other prayers in Islam, there is no discrimination of race and nationality, no difference between black and white, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, slave and master, haves and have-nots in this thanks-giving congregational prayer of Eid-ul-Fitr.

The word Eid in Arabic means "joy"

and Fitr stands for "break of fast" and symbolises "return to normalcy." Eid-ul-Fitr stands for the joy of breaking of fast or the joy of returning to normalcy. It returns every year as a Divine boon, with a promise of joy and happiness, culminating as it does the month-long period of *siyam* and *taqwa* (fasting and self-restraint), tarawwi and i'tikaf (prayers and penance).

Eid-ul-Fitr, the day of rejoicing and offering heart-felt gratitude to Allah through *sadqa-i-fitr* and the two-rakat congregational prayer in the morning, is indeed a great and auspicious occasion. It is so auspicious that even women, who are always equal participants in the hardship, austerities and pleasures of ramadhan, have been told by the holy Prophet (pbuh) to go out and say the Eid prayers in the Eidgah. Even the nights of Eids have special importance in the eyes of Islam.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "He who passes the nights of Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha through prayers will never waver or be afraid on the Day of Judgement, while other will tremble or quiver on that fateful day."

Eid-ul-Fitr is really an exceptional occasion -- something totally different from an ordinary festival. The month-long fasting of ramadhan teaches a Muslim how to practice self-restraint in the most scientific way. Sex and food and drink are prohibited for every able-bodied Muslim from dawn to dusk during this holy month, but are permitted not only throughout the remaining eleven months but also from dusk to dawn even during the month of ramadhan -- a scientific scheme that is quite reasonable and bearable. This system not only makes the hardship of self-restraint bearable but also pleasant, and the temporary renunciation makes the fulfillment of the basic desires even more pleasant. After a month of *siyam* and tarawwi, *taqwa* and i'tikaf, Eid-ul-Fitr reaches us as a pleasant climax and teaches us that Islam is no static system of worship. It is a living



Celebrating the festival.

and dynamic movement of thought and action which frees men from the grip of animal instincts, from the idea of artificial differences between rich and poor, high and low, and makes them act upon Divine Guidance.

It teaches us over and over again that Islam is a comprehensive code of life, a perfect "Deen" which covers every aspect of life, and imposes the authority of Allah in all its dimensions, in every sphere of activity, in every domain of thought.

None can afford to ignore or fight shy of this auspicious day -- a unique prize-giving ceremony in which the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious Allah, in His infinite Mercy, Himself distributes the prizes to the winners who have successfully practiced not merely fasting but *al-siyam* in true sense through prayers and penance, self-restraint and abstinence from vices in the right spirit of Islam.

According to a Qudsi Hadith, Benign Providence Himself declares: "Every

man's work belongs to him. A good deed is repaid from tenfold to seven hundred times. But fasting belongs to Me and I repay."

No Eid, however, can be successful if it is spent only through fun and frolic, pleasure and gaiety, joy and happiness. There can be no Eid for a Muslim if his neighbours remain unfed and unclothed. No orphan, no helpless person, no hapless soul on this day of a cold star can remain unwept, unhonoured and unsung on this auspicious occasion.

Each and every hungry mouth has to be fed, every person has to be clothed, and every neglected and despised person has to be looked after in right earnest. The very joy of Eid will be marred if the poor neighbours still remain uncared for, if the poverty-stricken near and dear ones still groan in misery and helplessness.

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The Eid-ul-Fitr dilemma

We can announce the date of Eid-ul-Fitr at least 10 days earlier so that people can celebrate Eid without hassle, dilemma and uncertainty.

KAZI MAHBUB HASSAN

EID-UL-FITR comes after Ramadan, on Shawwal 1, and fasting is forbidden on that day. The Islamic calendar is based on the lunar cycle and important days are scheduled by seeing the crescent moon of the month. Our beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also followed the lunar month for ramadhan.

Some people in Bangladesh will celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr on the same day as Saudi Arabia, while the majority will celebrate as per government announcement. Saudi Arabia (KSA) is likely to celebrate on September 20, but it is unlikely that the Shawwal moon will be seen on September 19 in Bangladesh.

The people who celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr with KSA are followers of some ulema, but have deviated from the instruction of our Prophet. Saudi Arabia is 3-hours behind Bangladesh,

so sunset in Saudi Arabia will be 3 hours after Bangladesh. For this reason, KSA observes Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr before Bangladesh. So, how can people be made to understand the difference in the timing? The responsibility lies with the ulema, imams and religious clerics.

The Islamic calendar is used primarily for religious purposes, and for official dating of Islamic events and documents in Muslim majority countries, while the Gregorian or other calendars are used for administrative purposes. The Supreme Judicial Council of KSA has forecasted the dates of Eid al-Adha for Saudi Arabia up to 2020. Future dates are calculated according to the Umm al Qura calendar of Saudi Arabia.

If KSA can forecast the Hajj and Eid-al-Adha on the basis of the astronomical calculations, then why can't we use the same system to calculate moon-rise and moon-set timings in Bangladesh? We can announce the



Science provides exact times, why shouldn't we follow them?

date of Eid-ul-Fitr at least 10 days earlier so that people can celebrate Eid without hassle, dilemma and uncertainty.

The time difference between the South (Teknaaf) and the North (Tetulia) is only 16 minutes. Sunset

takes place at Teknaaf/ Cox's Bazar 16 minutes earlier than at Tetulia. This time difference may not be a big one, but may be a deciding factor in moon sighting and, consequently, on the observance of Eid. We must accept science and astronomical data,

because the predicted times are correct to the second. We shouldn't follow KSA's timing.

The timings of sunrise, sunset time, moonrise and moonset are very important to mariners. These times are predicted and published by many organisations in the world.

The moonrise, moonset, sunrise and sunset times of any place depend on its latitude and longitude. The geographic location of Dhaka is 23°43'N, 90°26'E. On September 19, moonset will be at 6 pm, along with the sunset, and will be the day after amabashya. So, there is no possibility of moon sighting in Bangladesh on September 19.

On September 20, the phase of the moon will be hilal (crescent) and the 2nd day. The exact time of moonset over Dhaka on September 20 will be 18h 57m 30sec. (24 hr time system), while the sunset time will be 17h 56m 18sec. (These times are not in Daylight Saving Time.) So there is every possibility that moon will be visible over Cox's Bazar, Chittagong and Dhaka subject to clear sky.

Prophet Mohammad's sermon was "see the moon and start Ramadan: see the crescent moon of Shawwal and

celebrate your Eid-ul-Fitr." Every year, the moon sighting committee sits under the auspices of the Islamic Foundation. In the past, instead of settling the problem they created more confusion.

The Islamic Foundation should include the Director of Naval Operations as a member of the moon-sighting committee, who will provide the astronomical parameters to make the correct decision. The Eid-ul-Fitr date can be announced 7 to 10 days early because these predictions are correct to the second.

We shouldn't celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr according to the Saudi date and time. Riyadh is located at 24°39' N 46°46' E. If we compare the lat and long of Dhaka and Riyadh, we see that Dhaka is far to the east of Riyadh (Long difference 47d 04m East). Mainly due to the longitudinal difference, there is the time difference of 3 hours between Dhaka and Riyadh, which is why Saudi Arabia will always start ramadhan one day before Bangladesh and celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr one day earlier too.

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In a class of his own

It might be worthwhile to remember that economy class on Indian commercial flights is not full of peasants and workers. Only 2% of India travels by air, so this mode of travel has not even extended yet to the middle class. There are more movers and shakers in the back of the Indian jet than in the front, and when they are moved, they can shake anyone out of a chair.

M.J. AKBAR

SHASHI Tharoor has to be the only Indian who was safer last week in Liberia than in Jaipur. After all, no one in Liberia had asked for his resignation, but the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Ashok Gehlot, a fellow Congressman, did suggest that the best option for Tharoor would be to resign. I cannot think of a previous occasion when a Congress Chief Minister has asked for the head of a Union Minister from his own party. This must, incidentally, also be the first time that a politi-

cian is in trouble because of a misplaced sense of humour.

We must all be familiar with the *cause célèbre* by now. For the few who need a reminder, it began with a newspaper report that Tharoor was waiting for his luxury ministerial home in Delhi not in the limited comfort of a state government hostel, as is the norm, but in a five star hotel. He was not alone; his senior minister in external affairs, S.M. Krishna, was waiting in an even grander suite, although not in the same hotel.

Pranab Mukherjee, the guardian angel of the nation's finances, was not

amused, and publicly reprimanded both for self-indulgence at a time when large parts of the nation had been hit by drought. This must be another first in the history of politics: a foreign minister being told by the finance minister to get out of his stately abode and live it down like the rest. Krishna moved out and on. Tharoor, who is so confident about his celebrity status that he informs his fan base about every minor detail of his life through a tweet [is twitter the plural of tweet?], was a trifle superior about his enforced downgrade, pointing out he could walk into the home of any well-heeled friend et al.

The austerity flu, defined by some cynics as an epidemic caused by the humbug, left upper class airline seats indisposed as well. Ministers were told to shift from the front of the plane to the back, where mortals sit. Tharoor, provoked by another kind of bug, a bugbear called the unremitting journalist, decided that he too would descend to "cattle class in solidarity with all our holy cows."

Since India is the land of the holy

cow, a literal translation of the term did not go down very well with either the politician or the voter. But a qualified apology by Tharoor sent on Thursday-Friday midnight through his favourite medium of public communication, the cellphone, might make things worse for him.

It may be irregular to place analysis before proposition, but it could be helpful in this case. I do not think it is Tharoor's fault that he just cannot fathom the mindset of India.

He has lived too long within the mindset of New York where holy cows are neither holy nor cows.

Second, he has been a bureaucrat in the United Nations, where a tin ear comes with the salary. The first law of democracy is that what you say is less important than what the other person hears.

He clearly suffers from regional-language-deficiency syndrome as well, another symptom of those who have lived abroad for too long. He observed, for instance, that he had been told that his comments sounded worse in Malayalam than in the Queen's English.

If he had been more familiar with Malayalam he would have realised it himself. How do we know this? Tharoor said as much on his tweet. You never recognise how much you expose yourself when entranced by the spotlight. He added: "I now realise I shouldn't assume people will appreciate humour. And you shouldn't give those who would willfully distort your words an opportunity to do so."

Not quite. Indians do have a sense of humour, but it is not the same sense as the humour of western sensibility. Nor is it a question of distortion. Every civilisation has its own mores, and it is not a matter of being better or worse than any other. The West lives by its own laudable values and its separate definition of sensitivities. India has a different code; China a third one.

No one is better than the other, but we have to live by the code that is acceptable to a particular civilisation. There is an in-built screen that monitors, in Indian conversation, anything that might be construed to be offensive, even if you did not mean to be offensive.

Gehlot may not be able to compete in the Queen's English, but he recognises the line over which you cannot step. You cannot rule India without understanding India. This is why the Congress has publicly distanced itself from a cultural implant on the body politic that it cannot fully comprehend.

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Since Liberia is not yet a holiday destination for Indian VIPs, even for those with expensive bank accounts, the junior minister for external affairs was obviously there on work. I hope he did not have to make an austere journey in cattle class.

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