

# Eid in a time of uncertainty and change



## BLOWIN' IN THE WIND

Dr Shamsad Mortuza  
is professor of English at Dhaka University.

### SHAMSAD MORTUZA

For those who have fasted for a month, the morning breakfast before heading for the Eid-ul-Fitr jamaat feels slightly odd. The otherwise familiar mealtime feels unfamiliar, and the body hesitates to consume food at an "untimely" hour. The return to the usual meal schedule is not only of joy but also of a spiritual solace that has been achieved through a month-long disciplining of the body and mind. We fast to experience hunger, to feel empathy for those who go hungry throughout the year for various reasons.

The process of experiencing hunger is completed through mandatory acts of charity (*zakat al-fitr*). It is designed to spread the joy of Eid. The small gestures of those who "have" allow those who "have not" to partake in the joy of Eid. The *fitra* is more than a monetary contribution. It is an act of solidarity informed by the divine will: end class barriers and don't let anyone feel excluded. For Swiss Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan, Eid is about "reasserting the ethical imperative to build a just society". He writes in *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, "Eid is not merely an event but a reminder that our collective duty is to create spaces where no individual is discriminated against based on poverty, ethnicity, or gender."

Often, we tend to narrow down this brotherhood as a homogenous entity. But Allah (SWT) reminds us of this diversity in one of the verses in Quran: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous" (Surah Al-Hujurat, 49:13). Being righteous is not an inherited legacy of being born into the right religion; it is the responsibility of practising righteous acts in everyday life.

As we stand on the cusp of a new era, there are lessons to be learnt from Eid. After all, the fall of the old regime has created possibilities for something new for the nation. Lest we forget, the call for ending all forms of discrimination led to the fall of the old regime. The fall happened due to the pride and stubbornness of the ruler. It happened because of the insistence on

violence to prove that might makes right. However, some old fear overshadows the crescent moon's promise of renewal. We are still afraid to voice our opinions. Criminal syndicates are the latest manifestation of the might/right reality.



'Eid celebrates gratitude, compassion, and renewal for the well-being of the entire community. Hence, it demands an end to discrimination and marginalisation.'

FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The interim government is trying its best to restore the broken economy, establish law and order, and earn the trust of local and international communities. But they seem to be losing their way in the treacherous terrain of a fragmented society. In a way, some of the fragmentation is their own doing. The election countdown should have started by

righteous during the season of holy festivity?

Experts predict 1.5 crore people will leave Dhaka during this season. It is refreshing for those of us who have chosen not to go to our ancestral homes or fancy resorts for the holidays, allowing us to experience Dhaka in its rare, pristine form. But many of those people will leave Dhaka knowing that they

the nation. The home adviser's 3am press conference last month could hardly assuage the tension.

Decades of autocratic governance have polarised the country. The new government could not do much to embalm the distrust and division. Instead of seeking truth and reconciliation, our politicians and would-be

have lost their jobs. The industrial sector has felt the brunt of political transition. Many factories and business houses of the former regime are destroyed and put out of operation. Political vengeance, mobbed by lingering animosities, has left thousands of workers unemployed and pushed entire communities into economic uncertainty. The country's main export sector has witnessed a slump, as many factory owners have either fled or hesitate to invest further. As factories shutter and businesses fold, we witness an unprecedented rise in crime. Reports of burglaries and street muggings have become the new norm. Even during the holy month, such crimes have continued. There is a sense of insecurity gripping

politicians are locked in a zero-sum game where victory for one side is still perceived as an existential defeat for the other. We are stuck in the myth of the snake eating its tail.

The interim government, despite its best intentions, has failed to untangle themselves from this toxic web of political animosities. A new interest group has emerged and is busy creating its own legacy. Some of them are "crafting" family heritage. Some of them are adapting to luxurious lifestyles. Some of them are enjoying the power. Some of them are keeping an eye on the situation from a distance to swoop in at a convenient time. In all probability, the fate of Awami League has taught them to secure a free get-out-of-jail card in this game of political monopoly. The result is a domino effect that's polarising society even further. Bangladesh Bank sources revealed that there were about 5,000 new millionaires (with more than Tk 10 million in their bank accounts) in the last quarter of 2024.

To bring back confidence, the rule of law must be established. The judicial process for trying the criminals involved in atrocities must be visible. We must put an end to witch-hunting and allow professional bodies to carry out their mandated tasks. The challenge is to establish a just society.

While we celebrate Eid, we need to reflect on our actions. The new moon should not be tainted by the stigma of the old. We have seen the evil of a monolithic narrative. We need to create a system that eschews class barriers, and promotes plurality and inclusivity, and above all, righteousness. That is the true spirit of Eid-ul-Fitr. It is more than the feast, the sharing of gifts, or participating in a communal prayer. There is a deep ethical dimension to this otherwise spiritual and social event. Eid celebrates gratitude, compassion, and renewal for the well-being of the entire community. Hence, it demands an end to discrimination and marginalisation.

Eid Mubarak!

# Will Trump 2.0 end the liberal international order?

**Kawsar Uddin Mahmud**  
is a geopolitical analyst and a researcher at the KRF Center for Bangladesh and Global Affairs. He can be reached at kawsardurin@gmail.com.

**Md. Obaidullah**  
is a visiting scholar in the Department of Development Studies at Daffodil International University. His research focuses on international relations, great power competition, geopolitics, and Asian politics. He can be reached at buobaidullah@gmail.com.

**KAWSAR UDDIN MAHMUD and MD. OBAIDULLAH**

After the United States presidential election in 2024, many geopolitical analysts speculated that "Trump 2.0" would be more "assertive" and "protectionist" in his policies than the previous term. In reality, it has become more palpable nowadays as the second presidency of Donald Trump has given rise to concerns regarding the future of the liberal international order (LIO).

The LIO emerged in the mid 20th century as a response to the devastation of two world wars. A coalition of liberal democracies, led by the US, constructed a system intended to promote "peace, stability and prosperity" through idealist and liberal institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The underlying logic of the LIO was that "international cooperation and peace," underpinned by democratic norms and economic integration, will prevent conflicts and wars. John Ikenberry described it as "The most ambitious and far-reaching effort to organise world politics in modern history."

With the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, the US came forth as the sole superpower in the world political system through its LIO structure. Over the years, the US has integrated itself into the system and has been leading the world politico-economic environment as the "single most dominant power" with its military and economic might and by offering "public goods" and "free ride" to its allies and the developing countries through international institutions. However, the system has recently been exposed with significant vulnerabilities as Trump's "America First" doctrine directly challenged the US's traditional role as this order's principal architect and guarantor.

### The retreat from multilateralism

Donald Trump's "America First" policy

prioritises the "protectionist" and "national-interest-first policies" of the US over international collaboration, focusing on a transactional approach. This led to the US's withdrawal from pivotal global institutions and agreements, including the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization (WHO). It clearly signals a retreat from collective efforts to address pressing global issues. The executive order issued on January 20, 2025, officially withdraws the US from the WHO, resulting in the WHO's consideration of cutting part of its budget by \$400 million. The US

has historically been the largest financial contributor to WHO, and its withdrawal could have serious consequences for global health security and the US hegemony in the arena since the most dominant hegemon should provide "public goods" to preserve its "preponderance of power." Critics argue that by retreating from a key pillar of global health governance, the Trump administration risks ceding influence to other global powers—Russia, China, and even members of the BRICS—thereby, fading America's ability, as the hegemon, to shape the international response to pandemics and other health emergencies.

Moreover, Trump has always been a sceptic of NATO and the UN, organisations he criticised as "outdated and financially burdensome." Trump recently criticised NATO allies for not meeting the current goal of spending two percent of their GDP on defence. Also, the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, said, "Washington will no longer allow its NATO allies to rely on American taxpayer dollars to fund their defense budgets." In addition, Trump's close billionaire backer Elon Musk sanctioned a suggestion from X user @GuntherEagleman, who wrote: "It's time to leave NATO and the UN." Although Trump has not directly stated plans to exit NATO, he has consistently urged European nations to increase their defence spending, warning that the US should not shoulder the alliance's financial burden alone with providing "free ride"—what Randall Schweller previously termed as "No More Uncle Sugar."

### Economic nationalism and trade war

Trump has given rise to confrontational trade measures by placing excessive tariffs at 25 percent against Mexican and Canadian goods (with the exception of a 10 percent rate on Canadian energy) while enforcing an additional 20 percent duty on Chinese

imports in what he called a "deficit correction effort" against economic imbalances with the countries. In this regard, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum quickly vowed retaliatory measures, pledging that Mexico would respond by targeting specific US imports. Canada, one of the closest allies of the US, found itself embroiled in an equally pugnacious exchange. Calling Trump's move a "dumb and nonsensical policy" and promising an "unequivocal" response, former Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau pointed

forcing businesses to raise prices or cut jobs. Retaliatory tariffs further reduced demand for American exports, which is weakening industries rather than protecting them. Ultimately, this grotesque policy signalled a new era of "protectionism" that challenges the longstanding LIO and forces both allies and adversaries alike to re-examine their strategic economic interests.

### Undermining democratic alliances

Trump's continuous threat to withdraw from NATO, using his demand for everyone



Under Trump, the US administration treats international alliances as 'bargaining chips' rather than as pillars of global stability.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

out that Canada would retaliate by imposing tariffs on US goods. Beijing reacted similarly, imposing tariffs on a broad array of US farm exports. China expanded its export controls to include more US companies, exhibiting a stark message of readiness to engage in a prolonged economic confrontation. Signalling the development, China's embassy said, "If war is what the US wants, be it a tariff war, a trade war or any other type of war, we're ready to fight till the end."

However, while Trump justified his policies as "a way to strengthen the US economy," the decisions led to increased costs for American manufacturers reliant on imported materials,

to pay as an "economic transaction," shows his clear contempt for European political leaders. Trusting relationships have fallen apart outside Europe as well. South Korea and Japan, which traditionally aligned with the US, have faced difficulties because of Trump's unpredictable diplomatic approaches. US allies in Asia remain in strategic uncertainty because Trump has not confirmed a policy defence of Taiwan against potential Chinese attacks. Trump's erratic diplomatic approach has caused significant strain to established strategic alliances that existed for a long time.

Trump has also shown a preference for authoritarian leaders on several occasions.

One of the most concerning manifestations involves his favour toward Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The US president praises Orbán as a "champion protector" of Western values while Hungary develops into an authoritarian political system. Similarly, Trump has developed a stronger admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin. Trump's praise for leaders such as Kim Jong Un and Mohammed bin Salman also attracted criticism because these governments have been internationally criticised for conducting authoritarian rule.

### Global security at risk

In his first term, Trump abdicated his responsibility to international treaties, starting with his departures from the Iran nuclear deal, the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the Open Skies Treaty, thus demonstrating his disdain for agreements meant to prevent disastrous errors. His derision for arms control agreements is not simply a matter of policy preference; it is a fundamental shift in the role the US plays on the world stage. Allies, who once trusted Washington to serve as an honest broker in international security, now find themselves isolated by the US administration that treats international alliances as "bargaining chips" rather than as pillars of global stability. The erosion of trust has real consequences as longstanding partners such as France and Germany may begin to pursue their own model of security, seeking alternatives to the US structure that appears increasingly unpredictable and self-interested.

In addition, the climate crisis looms large as Trump's policies jeopardise global security. Climate change is not just an environmental issue—it is a grim peril for the world that is likely to worsen the world's political and economic instability and trigger resource conflicts. Trump's recent administration, marked by its climate denial and retreat from multilateral environmental agreements like the Paris Climate Agreement, seems to prioritise short-term fossil fuel interests over long-term planetary stability.

In the end, the implications of this retreat from global leadership, marking a departure from multilateral engagement and a transactional approach to alliances, are profound for the US as well as the whole world. The future of global stability depends on whether the US chooses to reclaim its role as the linchpin of the LIO or continues down a path of isolationism that wanes its standing on the world stage.