

The Moro Times

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Peace diplomacy and interfaith dialog highlight worldwide iftar

WORLD leaders are celebrating Ramadan with the Muslim ummah by tendering iftar—the evening meal for breaking the daily fast during the Islamic month of Ramadan. Several are also pursuing interfaith dialog and peace diplomacy as they break bread. The United Nations, through its secretary general Ban Ki-moon is set to host a meeting of the so-called Middle East peace quartet composed of the UN, the European Union represented by the EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov and Condoleezza Rice, the US secretary of state to discuss the status of the “roadmap” for achieving peace in the Middle East. After the meeting, Quartet members are to sit down on Sunday night with representatives of the Arab League at an Iftar dinner.

French PM participates in Iftar meal at Grand Mosque of Paris

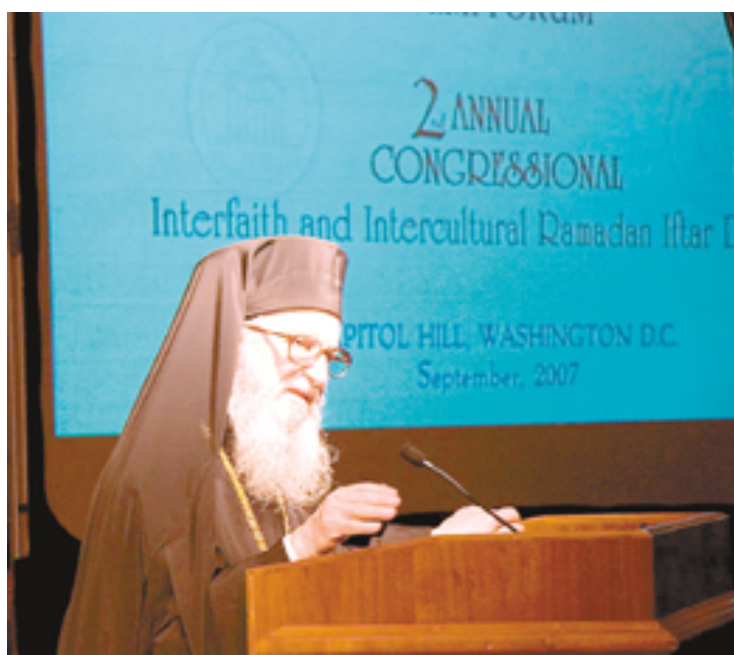
In what was described as a “great gesture” French Prime Minister Francois Fillon attended an Iftar meal gathering at the Grand Mosque of Paris, the first Prime Minister to have participated in an Iftar dinner with the Muslims of France. PM Fillon used the occasion to call for measures that would establish good relations between the French state and Muslims.

Emphasizing the priority of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s in creating harmony between religions, German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schauble, attended an iftar meal organized by leading media institution World Media Group in Berlin. Maria Böhmer, the minister of state for integration in the federal chancellery, agreed that gatherings like the Iftar can help Muslims and Christians know each other better.

Meanwhile, Muslim, Christian and Jewish leaders and other prominent guests attended the Iftar dinner at the US Congress organized by The Rumi Forum and sponsored by 21 members of Congress and attended by religious leaders, academics and other prominent guest.

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), gave the keynote speech stressed the need to energize interfaith dialogue. Professor Ihsanoglu said that any terrorist or radical cannot represent Islam. Ihsanoglu pointed out that Islam was not a religion of violence and expressed concern about the rising sentiment of islamophobia around the globe. “Extremists exist in all religious traditions. Sometimes extremists have spoken on behalf of Islam,” he stated.

In the Philippines, a number of diplomatic missions are also set to celebrate Iftar dinners. The embassy of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia organized their fast-breaking celebration last September 21. The ambassador of Egypt to the Philippines Salwa Moufid Kamel will host Iftar dinner tonight. US Ambassador Kristie Kenney will host an Iftar reception on October 2 while Australian Ambassador Tony Hely will share iftar on October 7.



■ The grand Paris mosque was built in 1927 in morrocon style and offers a place of prayer and tranquility in the heart of Paris near Jardin Des Plantes. There is an amazing cafe restaurant (called Hammam) attached to it where mint tea and all kinds of north west African sweets are on offer. Francois Fillon, French Prime Minister, partakes in an Iftar dinner at the Grand Mosque.

■ At the Iftar in US Congress, leaders of the 3 Abrahamic faith—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—gather for interfaith discussions.



■ A Balik-Islam Cebuano boy grins as the hand of the wall clock edges on 5:55, the time to break the fast.



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Ulama from Luzon and the Visayas call for Mindanao peace summit

QUEZON CITY: Expressing their concern about the conditions of their brothers and sisters in Mindanao, 38 Ulama from all over Luzon and the Visayas demanded the suspension of all military offensives in Sulu and Basilan and the convening of a multi-sectoral Mindanao peace summit that will “map out a roadmap towards peace in Muslim Mindanao.”

The government has stepped up its military offensives in Sulu and Basilan in what it described as an attempt to crush the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf in the area. The operations have resulted in major casualties for the military as well as the displacement of around 4,000 families caught in the middle of the conflict.

The statement, signed by ulama from Cebu, Bohol, Iloilo, Dumaguete City, Palawan, Legaspi, Cavite, Nueva Vizcaya, Nueva Ecija, Baguio City, Lucena City and Metro Manila, also urged all parties to exercise restraint and to go back to the negotiating table. In particular, the statement called for the cessation of hostilities with the advent of the holy month of Ramadan.

In calling for the peace summit, the ulama rejected the notion that military force can solve the problems of Muslim Mindanao which has remained “poorest of the poor.” The summit, the statement recommends, should include rebel groups, government, religious groups, civil society and other stakeholders.

The group of ulama—a

term that refers to Muslim scholars or those learned in Islam—have gathered in a consultative forum as part of a project dubbed, “Empowering the Ulama of the Philippines” organized by the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID). The forum is the last of four regional forums that will culminate in a national summit in January next year which is expected to gather ulama from all over the country.

The project is supported by the British embassy and the Royal Netherlands embassy. British Ambassador to the Philippines Peter Beckingham stressed the importance of engaging Muslims all over the world. He noted that in Britain, Muslims are the fastest growing minority population with 15% comprising London’s population. Former Senator Santanina Rasul meanwhile urged the ulama to unite so they can provide a voice for the Muslims. “You are learned in our religion, the people believe in you so I hope you can use this opportunity to come together and serve our people,” she said.

Explains Dr. Hamid Barra, the project director, “this is an opportunity for the Muslim religious leaders to provide leadership and guidance in the interpretation of Islam as a way life at all levels.”

Regional ulama forums were previously held in the cities of Zamboanga, Cotabato and Cagayan de Oro. The project hopes to provide assistance in creating a network of ulama and Muftis nationwide.

Heavy on prayer



■ A young student in supplication, solemnly oblivious to the traffic of downtown Manila, and using broadsheets for prayer mat.

Ramadan: A Balik Islam experience

RAMADAN. The holy month when the Quran was revealed to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. Ramadan is a time of great joy, a month when we renew our faith in our Creator, and share the love of our brothers and sisters for each other. Indeed, fasting during the holy month of Ramadan was one of the spiritual experiences that convinced me to become a Muslim, seven Ramadans ago. I am one of those who have returned to the true faith of worshipping One God, those we call Balik Islam.

Ever since the crackdown by the authorities and closure of the Islamic centers in Manila, it had been difficult to find a place close by where one could spend the whole night celebrating Ramadan with all our brothers and sisters. When the *Moro Times* asked me to do an article on the Ramadan celebration of the Balik Islam, it gave me that extra motivation to drive out to visit the Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG) Center in Salitran, Dasmariñas, Cavite.

The Jihadist Abdullah Yusuf Abu Bakr Ledesma

Earlier, I had prayed in the mosque before visiting brother Nuh, and had found many little children, both Filipino and Pakistani, preparing rows of colorful plates and dates across the carpets of the mosque. They smiled broadly when I greeted them, "Assalamu alaikom. Ramadan kareem." Now those plates were surrounded by people sitting in rows chatting, smiling and eagerly awaiting azan (the call to prayer) that breaks the fast.

We feasted on a simple meal of dates, soup and bread. It is said that the believer who fasts is happy twice. When he or she breaks the fast, and when he or she is rewarded in the hereafter. After the evening prayer, we shared the packed dinners provided by the Center. Mine was a tasty beef stew with lots of

"Bilang tunay na diwa ng Ramadan, isinasantabi natin ang pagkakaiba't iba ng tribo at lahi. We are one."

The drive of more than two hours from my home in Greenhills was plagued by the awful traffic jams on the Aguinaldo Highway and the usual rudeness of the drivers. Arriving at ISCAG was well worth it. I was immediately greeted by a group of brothers, led by Abdu Rahman Solis, a 40ish Balik Islam from Bicol. Though I had never met them before, I was welcomed like an old friend. When I explained that I was there to do an article on the Ramadan celebration of the Balik Islam, brother Abdu Rahman reminded me that there were no tribes here, every one was a brother or sister whether they were born Muslims from Mindanao or Pakistan, or reverts to Islam.

I was escorted to see brother Nuh Caparino, who headed the dawah (missionary outreach) office. Brother Nuh also did not like the theme of Ramadan celebration of the Balik Islam. He explained, "Bilang tunay na diwa ng Ramadan, isinasantabi natin ang pagkakaiba't iba ng tribo at lahi. We are one." (Keeping to the true spirit of Ramadan, we should put aside the differences of tribe and race. We are one.)

Close to 6 pm, we walked quickly across the open field and basketball court in front of the big madrasah (Islamic school) building, towards the mosque where we would break the fast. Sisters veiled in their abayas walked in groups, heading in the same direction.

rice. While eating, Abdu Rahman pointed out to me all the people from different tribes of Mindanao and from different regions of the Philippines.

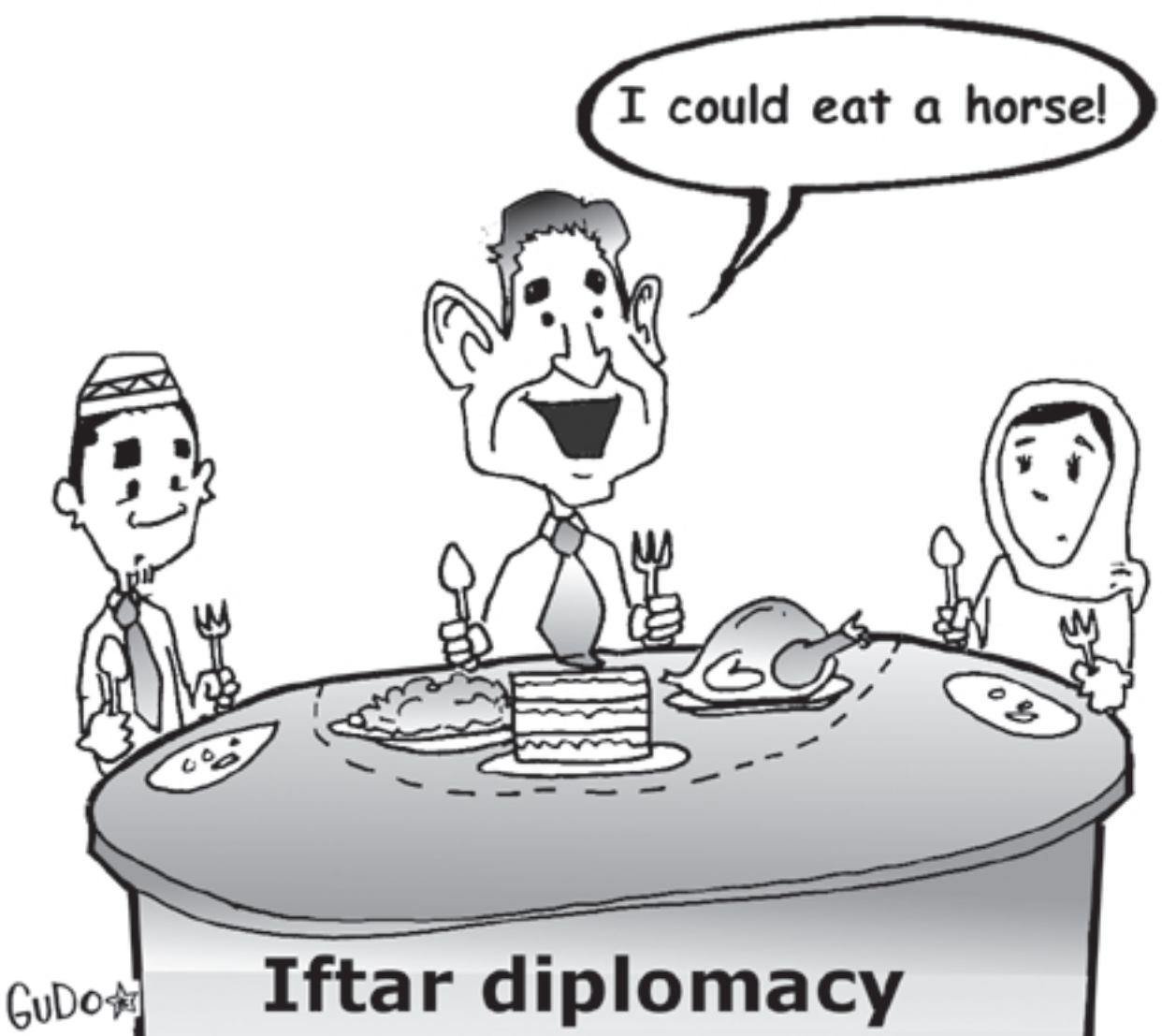
That evening, Jay Galit, a cousin of an ISCAG member, embraced Islam. We greeted him with shouts of "Allahu akbar!" (God is great!) as we lined up to welcome, hug and kiss him on the cheek. While trying to snap a picture, I accidentally invaded the prayer space of Eman, a Pakistani brother. As I apologized, he quickly said that there was no need: just a simple greeting of "salam" (peace) would suffice.

That evening, I shared a small dormitory room with brother Maher Loberiano, an old friend who had studied shariah (Islamic law) for two years in Baguio and who now taught Arabic and social studies in the madrasah. His cramped quarters were overshadowed by his generous hospitality.

After taraweeh (the long night prayers during Ramadan), we chatted into the night. Brothers Jamil Almarez and Omar Pinalver, two of the pillars of dawah here and in Saudi Arabia, expressed their concerns that ISCAG should be known as a center for peace, and not linked to terrorism. Amid hot mint tea and dates, many brothers told their stories of conversion to Islam. Many were workers in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East. Some were relatives or friends of those who had reverted earlier. All said that they had been seeking for the truth. And that they had come to know that God is One.

At 2 am, brother Maher woke up to cook suhor, the final meal before the fast starts at dawn. At around 3:15 am, Maher, two of his students and I sat down on the floor of his crowded quarters to eat a simple suhor of corned beef, canned tuna and spicy sardines. It was a far cry from the cold suhor that I eat from the refrigerator at my mother's home, where I am the lone Muslim. The best part was that I was sharing the meal with others rather than eating alone as usual.

I left the Center at 5am after prayers, bearing gifts. Brother Omar Pinalver gave me a lovely prayer carpet from Saudi Arabia. I will always remember the words of a sickly brother I had met that night, a gift of wisdom. Brother Mohammad Quintos reverted to Islam when he was jailed in Dubai. When he came home, his family would not accept him because he had become Muslim. He has been living at the Center for two years now. His eyesight and health are failing, which has prevented him from getting a good job. For him, "Nawala na ang pamilya ko, nawala ang kalusugan ko, pero nandyan pa rin si Allah" (I have lost my family and my health, but Allah is still there.) This I think is the essence of being a Balik Islam.



September 28, 2007

The virtues of Ramadan

Khutba Moner M. Bajunaid

ALL praises be to Allah, Lord of the universe, who revealed in His Noble Qur'an, "Oh you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those who came before you so that you may keep your duty to your Lord (attaining taqwa or self-restraint)." (2:185) May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon His last Messenger, Muhammad son of Abdullah.

Dear brothers and sisters in Islam. Ramadan is a sacred month wherein Allah Almighty is constantly testing His creation and giving humanity the opportunity to attain infinite blessing. Fasting is a process of cleansing and a means of developing the consciousness of Allah Almighty's presence. The consciousness of Allah's presence or self-restraint (*taqwa*) is a protection against anything evil coming from the cursed devil, *Shaitan*. Almighty Allah tells us in the Qur'an, "Whoever keeps his duty to Allah (having achieved taqwa), He ordains a way out for him and gives him sustenance from where he imagines not. And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him. Surely Allah attains His purpose. Allah has appointed a measure for everything." (65:2)

Fasting in Ramadan ranks on par with prayer and *zakah* in its importance. Indeed, it enjoys a special status, since it can only be fulfilled through abstention, rather than through a direct or positive action. For this reason, Allah is quoted by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as saying in a hadith *qudsi*, "Everything a human being does is his, with the exception of fasting, which belongs to me and I reward it accordingly" (Reported by Al-Bukhari).

Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Fasting is a shield. Let no one who is fasting commit any obscenity or foolishness. Should anyone engage him in a fight or a shouting match, let him answer him by saying: I am fasting, I am fasting."

code of conduct in Islam that requires a person to abstain from quarrels, especially when fasting.

During fasting, a Muslim must constantly seek for Allah's mercy and His divine blessing. Mercy is a divine characteristic manifested in human relationship through kindness and affection for others, in contrast to harshness and wicked intentions to friends and foes alike. *Rahmah* (mercy) in Arabic literally means "womb". Islamically, whenever there is *rahmah* Satan disperses. Harshness or cruelty descends in the absence of *rahmah*.

Prophet Muhammad has been epitomized as the very embodiment of *rahmah*. Almighty Allah says in the Qur'an, "And We have not sent you but as a mercy to the worlds." (21:107).

The secret behind Islam's spread across continents and the harmonious interaction with cultures throughout its 1,400 years of existence is this innate intrinsic value of *rahmah*. Even animals are not exempted. The Prophet reprimanded his companions for over-working camels, burning ants, and killing sparrows. On Isra' Al-Mi'raj, the miraculous ascension of the Prophet of Islam, Allah exposed a cruel, hardhearted woman who starved her pet cat to death and so wallowed in the flames of Hell.

Muslims are commanded to pursue every appropriate means that lead to enjoining good and forbidding evil, based on one's ability, knowledge, and authority. This action is, indeed, a safety valve for securing peace, tranquility and stability in any society or community. A community where this practice is prevalent would be safe against oppression, corruption and the spread and application of the "law of the jungle".

This is based on Surah al-Ma'idah, verse 2 of the Glorious

Qur'an, "Help ye one another in righteousness and piety, but help ye not one another in sin and enmity. Fear Allah, for Allah is strict in punishment".

Allah's Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said, "He, amongst you, who sees a vice being practiced should correct it by hand. If one is not capable to correct it by hand, let him use his tongue (and declare such practice as un-acceptable and not condoned). If one is not able to raise his voice, and use his tongue to reject the ill practice, the least one could do is to disapprove it by heart. Such is the lowest form of iman (faith)." (Reported by Muslim).

Finally, the Almighty Allah says, "Pray to Me and I shall answer (your prayer)".

O Lord, You are the Source of Peace. You are Blessed, Most Honored & Majestic. O Lord. Grant us peace and justice in the land.

Honor our people with your blessings of Ramadan in their hearts, in their minds, and in their selves. Make us love one another for Your sake, O Lord, and for the sake of humanity. And do not despair us with those who plot discord and enmity in our ranks.

We seek refuge in Your Infinite Wisdom and Mercy from the evil spirit, and from the evil mind that causes destruction and havoc in our homeland.

O, Lord of Mankind. Grant us to see the path of Your Mercy. Guide us towards the Straight Path and allow us not to deviate from it.

Grant us, O Lord, the good life in this world, and the good life in the Hereafter. Save us, O Lord, all from the torment of fire. Save us, O Lord, from the destructive effects of war and conflict.

Shower our Prophet Muhammad, his family and his companions with Your blessings and mercy, O Lord. Praise be to the Almighty Allah, Lord of the Universe.

Knowing about Ramadan

Islam 101 Hamid Barra

month that Muslims are required to fast but also because it was during this month that the Glorious Qur'an was revealed. Allah Most High says in the Glorious Qur'an:

Ramadan is the month in which was revealed the Qur'an as a guide to mankind and clear signs for guidance and criterion (between right and wrong). So everyone of you who is present at home during this month should spend it in fasting... Surah al-Baqarah 2:185

The revelation of the Qur'an took place in two stages according to a tradition of the Holy Prophet (pbuh). The first stage was its revelation in whole from the *Lawh Mahfuz* (Guarded Tablet) to the *Baytu 'l-'Izzah* (the heaven near the earth). This revelation was made during the

month of Ramadan. The second stage was its revelation in piece meal to the Holy Prophet for a period of twenty three years, beginning with the first revelation in the Cave of Hira which took place during the month of Ramadan.

Thus, Ramadan is not only a month of fasting but also of the revelation of the Glorious Qur'an. It is the month when a Muslim is trained to learn patience and perseverance, to practice sharing, caring and being compassionate to others. It is also the month of triumph and victory for Muslims as all major battles fought between the Muslims in pursuance of the truth and their enemies who tried to block that struggle happened during this holy month. It is the month of worship and remembrance of Allah, of learning attitudinal change. It is a training institute for self-restraint and Allah-consciousness.

Ramadan is the month of

worship and remembrance of Allah, of learning attitudinal change. It is a training institute for self-restraint and Allah-consciousness. Every year, Muslims are trained during Ramadan to renew their 'Muslimness'.

The lessons that a Muslim learns during the fasting month can be summed up in the following:

1. Fasting strengthens the intellectual foundation of a Muslim through a renewed attachment to the Glorious Qur'an by reading, studying, understanding and meditation on the message of the Holy Book. Ramadan is the month upon which was revealed the Glorious Qur'an as a guide to humanity. Hence, a Muslim seeks guidance from his Creator by personally communicating with Him through a thorough study of the Glorious Qur'an.

2. Fasting revitalizes the ideological foundation of a

See ISLAM D3

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Asian democracy and its discontents

Excerpts from Keynote Address by Anwar Ibrahim, Former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia at the Second WFDA Biennial Conference, Philippine Plaza Sofitel Hotel, Manila, 20 September 2007

MORE than a century ago, here on this land, an Asian hero sacrificed his life on the altar of freedom and democracy. He wrote that "humanity will not be redeemed while reason is not free." Faced with rising religious tolerance, he warned against the imposition of faith on others and that mankind would be doomed while laws are based on whims and the rich and the powerful nations subjugate the weak and the poor.

How true these words are for us even today. Even more significantly of course is that the martyrdom of Jose Rizal became the catalyst that precipitated the Philippine Revolution and it was in the Philippines that the first democratic republic in Asia was declared on June 12, 1898. True, it would take another 50 years before full independence could be achieved, but the demands for freedom and democracy by the Katipunan led by Bonifacio and Aguinaldo set in a tide which could not be reversed. And it was here too in recent history that we witnessed the first "people power revolution" that overthrew the dictatorship of Marcos.

Today, the subject of democracy and freedom in Asia has become doubly pressing in view of the rising incidents of assault on the institutions of civil society and the increasing tendency of the powers that be to rob us of our liberties and undermine our constitutional foundations. Of course, this is not an overnight phenomenon. Following a period of sustained economic growth and political stability in the eighties and nineties, there was already a fervent discourse on the state of democracy in Asia. But this was informed partly but a new sense of confidence brought about by economic success and relative political stability. Confidence gave way to complacency and because of that, the discourse sometimes floundered on the slippery slopes of scholastic disputation. Then came the financial crisis of 1997 which shook us out of our slumber. The wave of destruction that came along brought



■ Anwar Ibrahim, former senator Santanina Rasul and PCID Lead Convenor Amina Rasul discuss issues interlocking Islam and democracy at the conclusion of the 2nd WFDA Biennial conference.

PHOTO BY JAY DIRECTO

about phenomenal changes. While some countries enjoyed new found freedom and democracy, others suffered either a reversion of autocracy or plunged deeper into the depths of dictatorship.

Today we are looking at a report card on the state of democracy and freedom in Asia that is dismal and damning. The prospects are therefore dim and the challenges daunting. Many countries have maintained the dubious distinction of being classic examples of pseudo-democracies.

A few months ago in Pakistan, we witnessed the ravaging of the judiciary by the powers that be. We then saw people power being marshaled to restore its rightful position, followed in quick succession by judicial decisions which also restored our faith in the independence of the Supreme Court of Pakistan. Likewise, the movement for greater democracy and justice seemed to be moving forward but where is the prospect for freedom and democracy when the Executive continues to thumb its nose on the rule of law? Yet I do believe that with the rising tide of opposition to military rule, the resurgence of judicial independence and courage, and the people's conviction that dictatorship and tyranny are not their best options, freedom and democracy is only a matter of time.

In the case of Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, we see

resilience and a steadfast attempt at preserving constitutional democracy in spite of great challenges being presented along the way. But the latest decision by the Supreme Court on the libel suit by the family of Indonesia's erstwhile dictator is worrying. We would have thought that the case should have been decided as a vindication for freedom of speech. This display of judicial aberration, which if allowed to persist, would shake the very foundations of democracy. The Indonesian press has been a bulwark in the defense of freedom and democracy. Attacking it this way is akin to attacking the very pillars of Indonesia's new found freedom.

Coming back to the Philippines, with her impressive track record in the struggle for freedom and democracy, the very citadel of people power in every sense of the word, I find myself of two minds. Last week's conviction of President Estrada by the Supreme Court, for example, has been touted by some as "a pure victory for the Philippine Justice system." This is said to be a landmark case which shows that even bug fish can be caught. On the other hand, there are indeed lingering doubts about the court's independence which in turn is said to cast further doubts due to the perceived lack of resolve in strengthening institutions of governance and the issue of selective prosecution in the midst of pervasive corruption.

This brings us to my earlier rather despondent statement on the state of freedom and democracy in Asia. It is clear therefore that political reforms are sorely needed across the region. We cannot have a government which continues to violate our fundamental liberties and at the same time call it a democracy. We cannot have a government which uses state powers to punish political rivals and yet call it a democracy. And we most certainly cannot have a government which thrives on corruption, abuse of power and the rule of man and call it a democracy. I say this regardless of the majority support that these governments purport to have from the people.

Speaking of support gleaned from the electoral process, we are all too familiar with the issue about the perversion of the democratic process. Serious questions continue to be raised about the impartiality and competence of the institutions entrusted to ensure free and fair elections particularly where they are controlled by the powers that be. Too much has been read into so-called landslide electoral victories but the truth is that the greater the margin of victory, the greater is the manipulation.

The discourse on freedom and democracy cannot be divorced from the implications of economic and social issues. Poverty and inequitable distribution of economic opportunities, rising income disparities and the consequent marginalization of many; these are said to be even more pressing than issues of freedom and democracy. They say that the threat of totalitarian control over economies has all but disappeared under the onslaught of free markets; but the socio-economic problems have not.

We are certainly not here to advocate command economies but the unmitigated preaching of Western free markets is not cast in stone. Admittedly for some schools, it is as good as the Gospel. To my mind, the truth is that apart from the obvious necessity of pursuing monetary and fiscal policies that promote macroeconomic stability, the demands of social cohesion and political stability would warrant a sustained policy of social justice. Such a policy is not based on some ideal Utopian state but on the foundation of balance. It stems from the belief that the marginalization of one segment of society whether on grounds of race, color

or creed will bring more harm than good. This is precisely the reason why our dialogue initiatives: be it religious or civilizational must involve a wide spectrum, of society. We should neither dictate the language of discourse nor marginalize communities due to their ideological or religious persuasions. Similarly, marginalization brought about by income disparities and deprivation of economic opportunities will eventually tear the fabric of society itself. In this regard, democracy and freedom are but the means to an end which is the attainment of humane governance, the restoring of the dignity of man.

At the root of these issues is the question of accountability, governance and transparency in the exercise of the powers of state. Contrary to what the opponents of freedom and democracy say, accountability does not lead to weakness; nor would an independent judiciary lead to the death of the Parliamentary process; ensuring the rule of law to protect the constitutional freedoms of free speech, of assembly and of religion would not cause dissension and confrontation. Denying these fundamental liberties and eroding the democratic space would. It would also be a gross affront on the dignity of man.

The early figures of the Asian Reform Movement such as Jose Rizal, Rabindranath Tagore, Muhammad Iqbal, Sun Yat-sen and Mahatma Gandhi showed us that Asia and the Asian tradition are part and parcel of a world built on this dignity. Today, with Japan and South Korea as torch bearers, it is clear that Asian nations can indeed move successfully from repression to democracy without its economy being jeopardized or its society torn asunder.

As Winston Churchill once said, "the cause of freedom has in it a recuperative power and virtue which can draw from misfortune new hope and new strength." Despite the red flags and the litany of discontents in our assessment of the state of freedom and democracy, let us not give up hope or lose our strength in striving for what we believe in. Let us instead renew our resolve to strive even harder for what we cherish; and even though freedom and democracy may not be handed to us on a platter, it is still our birth right and we must never forsake it or allow anyone to take it away from us.

Chocolate Mosque



A chef puts the final touch to a giant replica of Masjidil Haram mosque in Mecca made out of chocolates at a hotel in Jakarta on Thursday, was made of 150 kilograms of white, dark and brown chocolates, with dimension of 2.5 x 5 squares meters, a height of almost 1.5 meters as well as the ten towers. The replica was made to celebrate the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, when practicing Muslims abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and any sexual activities from dawn to dusk.

AFP PHOTO/ADEK BERRY



A typical breaking of fast at the Islamic Studies Call and Guidance Center in Dasmariñas, Cavite.



The Sawadjaan family ready to break their fast at home in Manila. Muslims prefer to eat at home in Ramadan, preparing traditional dishes.

■ ISLAM From page D1

Knowing about Ramadan

Muslim through constant Allah-consciousness. When a Muslim fasts without anyone supervising him, he renews his commitment to his testimony of faith that Allah is the only Overseer of his thoughts, words, and actions, and that He alone is the One a Muslim serves and worships.

3. Fasting reinforces his sense of communal belongingness and social consciousness. During the month of Ramadan, a Muslim is enjoined to share and care for his brothers, relatives, and neighbors. He will only become a true believer if he loves for others what he loves for himself.

4. Fasting renews a Muslim's commitment to Islamic moral values. Such values and virtues as *sabr* or patience, *taqwa* or self-discipline and Allah-con-

sciousness, *rahmah* or mercy, *ukhwah* or brotherhood, *ITQAN* or excellence, *nashat* and *juhd* or being active and exertion of one's efforts, *'ilm* or love for seeking knowledge are learned from the performance of fasting.

5. Fasting establishes a Muslim's economic consciousness. The love for wealth is being diffused from the mind of a Muslim by encouraging him to share whatever he has for others. He learns that wealth is only a trust from Allah. While striving for economic affluence is encouraged, a Muslim is made to realize that wealth is not an end in itself but only a means to seek the pleasure of Allah through serving others. Fasting teaches a Muslim the value of budgeting. While during ordinary days, a Muslim

may have normally three major meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) and two minor ones (snacks at around 9:00 am and at around 4:00 pm), during the month of Ramadan, he has only two major meals (*sahur* or early dawn meal and *iftar* or breaking the fast after sunset, and one snacks after the *Tarawih* prayer.

6. Fasting teaches a Muslim the actual practice of *jihad*. During the days of fasting, a Muslim learns that he dedicates his prayers and sacrifices, his life and his death only for Allah. Without a guard, a checker or a supervisor, a Muslim suffers the pangs of hunger and thirst, survives the rigors of fasting only to seek the pleasure of Allah. During the fasting season, a Muslim is able to establish Allah's ultimate power and sovereignty in his heart.

Thus, a Muslim becomes a liberated person who does not submit to the authority of any being except the authority of Allah.

7. Fasting lays down the universality of Islam and the oneness of the *Ummah*. When Ramadan comes, Muslims all over the world welcome the month with joy and commitment to the faith. Every Muslim, rich or poor, educated or not, exercising political authority or not, shares the pangs of hunger and thirst felt during the daytime of Ramadan, and vies with one another in seeking the pleasure of Allah through prayers, remembrance of Allah, sharing blessings with others, reading the Glorious Qur'an and contemplating on its meaning and message.

A Call for Peace

WE, the concerned ulama of Maguindanao, Shariff Kabungsuwan, Sultan Kudarat, SOCSARGEN, Zamboanga del Sur, North Cotabato, and Cotabato City having gathered in Cotabato City for the second "Empowering the Ulama of the Philippines" regional forum,

Deeply alarmed about the worsening peace situation in Muslim Mindanao precipitated by the Basilan incident,

Believing that any military response, such as an "all-out-war" strategy, will just aggravate, rather than resolve, the situation,

Profoundly conceived that peace is the only way out of this current predicament,

Hereby resolve the following:

1. Call upon all parties to exercise restraint and sobriety;
2. Urge for the suspension of military operations in Basilan;
3. Join calls for an impartial investigation of the Basilan encounter;
4. Call upon media to be responsible and not resort to "sensationalism" so as not to exacerbate the already tensed situation; and
5. Urge government as well as all other parties to return to the negotiating table and exhaust all means to resolve the matter peacefully. (SGD.)

Agum, Abdullah A.; Alabat, Abdulsalam D.; Moner Bajunaid; Esmail Ebrahim; Abdullad, Nhorul-Am; Abduwahab Pairat; Balt, Omosalam Haron; Baulo, Camarudin M.; Bawarte, Arabie M.; Daud, Mohammad Taha H.; Dimaporo, Samsodin M.; Dimaporo, Shaira P.; Agum, Bashier A.; Ali, Abubakar L.; Ali, Mansor S.; Arab, Anisa T.; Arab, Sarip D.; Badrolin, Albaya G.; Badrudin, Mohammad A.; Mala, Ahmad A.; Mohd. Taha, Abdulgapor U.; Musa, Maimona H.; Pakil, Norhaya I.; Pangaliwan, Abdulbasit A..