

# Eid without Mahid

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■ Dr. Mahid Mutilan

THE missionary and "guro" (teacher) who rose to be the country's most powerful Muslim religious leader and Lanao's longest and highest-serving politician was an uncle, a husband to five wives and father to many poor Muslims.

Aleem (learned Muslim) and Dr. Mahid Mutilan died a tragic death after meeting a car accident on the way to Cagayan de Oro (CDO) in December 6 speeding to catch an early seven flight, after praying the *Subuh* (four in the morning) in Marawi (two hours away from CDO airport).

Every year, my Eid celebrations in Marawi would be special with congregational sermons laced with *Bapa* (Uncle) Mahid's jokes and moniker laughs. Listening to his Arabic was like romancing the unknown. I could only appreciate the glory of the Holy Qur'an's message with his Maranao anecdotes and fiery quotes.

This year, Muslims will be celebrating Eidul Adha (the Feast of Sacrifice, without Mahid, the president of the *Ullama* (plural for *aleem*) League of the Philippines and co-convenor of the Bishop-Ulama Conference of the Philippines.

I realized how important he was even to foreign guests when I was organizing the Environmental Conference on Lake Lanao in Marawi City last year with my group, the Philippine Muslim Women Council (PMWC). This was to be the first Marawi visit for US Ambassador Kristie Kenney. He always reminded us to invite Mahid Mutilan.

During the first Southeast Asian Forum on Islam and Democracy at the Manila Hotel on December 10, former President Fidel Ramos asked the delegates for a minute of silence to remember Mutilan. Marawi hosted national leaders who paid their respects to Mahid. Secretaries Norberto Gonzales and Jesus Dureza, former Senator Santanina Rasul and former ARMM Governor Parouk Hussin were in unison that the country had lost a national figure, a bridge between Muslims and Christians.

Former dean of King Faisal Center for Islam, Arabic and Asian Studies Hamid Barra, who is writing a book about Mutilan, said Mutilan was unique in that he "filled many shoes"—as Grand Mufti of the Philippines, Ulama League President, Bishop-Ulama Conference co-convenor and OMPA party chairman.

When his body arrived aboard a chopper flown from Cagayan de Oro at the Campo Ranao in Marawi, a mourning crowd from Lanao's 39 towns had gathered to see his body wrapped in white (in Islam, the body is buried in white, symbolic of man returning to his natural state). Calls came from Sulu and as far as the Middle East, where many Maranaos are working, to inquire his time of burial.

Just a day before, he had called on all Muslim leaders to support the Mindanao Week of Peace with caravans and gatherings. Last month, he had distributed sacks of rice to the poor for the Eidul Fitr celebrations.

Nobody can fill the shoes by a man just a little over five feet. He had an aura that made him larger than

life with his gift for gab. Although he was a busy man usually entertaining ulama in his house in Marawi, he provided specific time for his wives (after an Egyptian wife, he had married the five Maranao wives at different times) and inspired the brood to study hard. My cousins who were accountants and medical doctors finished their degrees with his support.

Orphaned by the father and from far-flung Tamparan, Lanao del Sur, Mutilan was schooled in the madrasah and obtained a scholarship to study English and Islam at the world's most prestigious Islamic university, Al-Azhar University in Egypt. He organized the Muslim Filipino students in Egypt to recognize the Bangsamoro struggle. Elected president of the multi-tribal Philippine Students Association in Cairo or PHILSAC, Mahid assisted many students who came to Cairo for studies. Many students were able to enroll and seek scholarship grants in various educational centers abroad through his assistance.

He served in Japan for more than 10 years as a Muslim missionary. He helped build Islamic schools in the secular society. Mutilan was fluent in Nihonggo as well as Arabic and English.

But he is best remembered as a politician and ulama. When Lanao politics was dominated by the traditional elites with large clans in the 1980s, Mahid was a nobody in local politics coming home from abroad. He organized the Ompia (Reform) party in 1986, the first Islamic populist party, that banked on the growing Islamization by ulama of the Maranao public in the '80s. Ompia helped him to become mayor of Marawi, three-term governor of Lanao del Sur and even Vice-Governor of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and concurrently held the controversial post as Secretary of Department of Education (DepEd).

As a political leader, Mahid was appointed as Secretary of the Committee on Preamble and National Identity at the Philippine Constitutional Convention in Manila; he assisted in drafting the constitution. In this present GRP-MLF talks, Mahid is supposedly assisting the Moro leadership in convincing the government of its demands.

Former Representative Michael Mastura said Mahid tried to balance secularist politics with dialogue in peace with religion. UNESCO Commissioner Taha Basman said his legacy for peace advocacy/interfaith dialogue will remain with us for a very long time. Former Mindanao State University—General Santos Chancellor Moner Bajunaid fondly remembers Aleem Mutilan when he once argued that power lies not in the knowledge of men, but in the will of Allah who is the source of power and knowledge.

The *Moro Times* Editor Amina Rasul recalls Aleem Mutilan as one who believed Muslim women could contribute to good government, advising her to run for the Senate in 2004, contrary to the belief of many that Islam prohibits women from seeking elective positions.

He will be missed.



December 28, 2007

GU DO ★

■ WORLD FROM C4

## Mecca diary: It's a small world after all

(P18,000). There were not many people milling around these chic shops, so I concluded that the moneyed sheiks, the princes and the princesses had simply packed off to Palma de Mallorca, Torremolinos or Monaco for the holidays.

### Cellphones: Don't leave home without it

The most important possession that a pilgrim must have is the cellphone. Thanks to it, missing persons were drastically reduced. In a place where the tents all look alike, where every pilgrim is garbed in white, cellphones make the difference that Saudi Boy Scouts had to do less work in herding people who lose their way going back to their camps. You can now take pictures to your heart's contents. I see upraised hands holding aloft their 3G phones for the people back home to view the Al-Haram. The only hazard is taking pictures at the *Jamarat*. Many cellphones have been cracked from the hails of pebbles that the pilgrims throw to stone the devil at the *Jamarat*.

But I feel that pilgrims should be discreet with their mobiles especially during the circuit round the *Ka'aba*—the Cube. I was on my fifth circuit when suddenly a cellphone from another hajj rang with the ring-back tone of the *Police's Every Breath You Take*. This could befuddle your concentration.

### Easiest hajj

For years, the worst accidents happened

in the *Jamarat* area. The stampedes that claimed lives seemed to be a thing of the past. If the success of managing the throwing of stones at the *Jamarat* is to be taken as a gauge, then this is the easiest and most convenient hajj so far. The Hajj authorities of the Kingdom have to be commended: they are close to reducing the hajj routine to a science. The flow of the people was orderly, with one-way routes that redistribute the pilgrims back to their tents. For those who wish to go to Al Harem for the *tawaf* (circuit), there is a 1.4 kilometer tunnel that leads through to the holy place. To demonstrate their confidence, the authorities have allowed people on wheelchairs to cast their stones at the *Jamarat*.

### Lodging

The Philippine contingent was dispersed in many buildings near and far from the holy mosque. The Philippines is always late in putting up the needed deposit in getting lodging contracts with the service providers. Apartments which are a walking distance from the holy mosque are at a premium. Because the decision to go on hajj among Filipinos is always done in the last hour, the lack of funds for billeting reservations relegated many of our hajjis to the outskirts of town. The service provider had promised to ferry the hajjis to and fro Al-Haram on shuttle bus which held good only for a few days.

The Saudi government has constructed new apartments for the

pilgrims, a far cry from the cramped and old lodgings we used over a decade ago. In fact, the elevators were so new in one apartment that the contractor obviously had forgotten to apply grease along the runners. We had a hard time opening and closing the elevator doors. This was corrected only when a hajj was trapped and a little drama ensued.

### Nostalgia

I tried to mingle with the elderly and get their stories and views on the new Makkah. An old man lamented the speed in which technology has taken over. He said that in the past when pilgrims traveled by boat, they use to bury the pictures of their loved ones in the plains of Mina and Arafat. They would call from atop the hills, the names of kin echoing along the valleys, inviting them to go on hajj, on the belief that this would hasten their kins' going on hajj. "Nowadays," he went on, "you simply dial your cellphone and in seconds you are talking to your wife. The conversation, mind you, are not the tear-jerkers ones. It could be as mundane as reminding her to look over the pockets of your trousers before laundering it, because you have some receipts or money left in it."

After the third-day of stoning the *Jamarat*, the 2.5 million pilgrims started dispersing out of Mecca after performing their farewell circumambulation (*tawaf*) of the *Ka'ba*. Some went to Medina some 600 km away to visit the Prophet's Mosque.

Some went straight to the airport for their flight back home. Others go to the seacoast of Jeddah to buy things to bring back.

I went to the Holy Place to snap up some pictures. Flocks of birds, chased away by millions of pilgrims, were now returning to the square. I was lazily ambling along the edges of the square when I saw a familiar figure setting on the edge of a marble hedge along the stairways of Ben Dawood. It was Toni Leviste, the famous equestrienne, her feet dangling and swaying in a playful mood. Sweat beaded her forehead after performing the Farewell Tawaf.

I had met her and her father, Ex-Governor Leviste, earlier at the Jeddah International airport when I discovered that we were together on the same incoming flight. My editor Amina Rasul had asked me to get an interview with her some few months back, but I was never successful. When she recognized me, Toni smiled. She said she was waiting for her Dad who was doing his Tawaf. I said, "What about the promised interview?" She said, "Okay, why don't we do it in Jeddah. We have to catch our breath first." I said, OK.

In a while we saw her father emerging from the Grand Mosque, his head freshly shaved. He gave me a wide grin. Toni sort of complained what took him so long. He only smiled. They waved at me and mingled with the throng until they were just a smear in the landscape.

## Muslim feast demands more 'sacrifice'

GAZA CITY: As Muslims across the world celebrate Eid al-Adha with the ritual slaughter of animals, charity, and joyous feasting, the weary residents of the Gaza Strip brace for more sacrifices.

Six months after the Islamist movement Hamas seized power, the territory remains in the grip of Israeli and international sanctions, battered by near-daily military strikes aimed at Palestinian militants.

"The Islamic world celebrates Eid Al-Adha with joy and happiness, with family visits and travel... but we in Palestine celebrate the Eid with martyrs and blood," Hamas leader Ismail Haniya told a crowd of thousands on Wednesday.

On December 18, 12 militants were killed across Gaza in a wave of Israeli air strikes, including a top leader of Islamic Jihad, a radical group behind many of the rocket attacks on Israel.

"We sacrifice, not only meat for our Eid, but ourselves, our lives, our hopes, our young men and our leaders, all for God," Haniya, prime minister in the sacked Hamas-led government said after leading prayers in a Gaza stadium.

In a normal year the streets of Gaza would be doused with blood as Muslims remember Prophet Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son Prophet Ishmael by slaughtering animals and sharing the meat with poor neighbours and loved ones.

But again this year few people can afford the ritual. Since the takeover of Gaza by Hamas, a group pledged to Israel's destruction, the Jewish state has brought the economy to a grinding halt by limiting imports to little but essential humanitarian aid.

The measures are aimed at putting pressure on Hamas and curbing rocket attacks launched at Israeli communities near the Gaza border.

"We had to buy a smaller cow, because that was all they had. The price of a kilo has gone from 11 shekels last year to 20 this year," says Eyma, a 38-

year-old police officer, as he slices chunks of meat off a hanging carcass.

He will share the meat with his five brothers and their families—some 60 people—and according to Islamic tradition will donate a third of the meat to the needy. In past years he purchased much larger animals.

On another normally crowded street a group of men stands in the cold early morning, a giant skinned cow at their feet, hosing blood into a narrow river running past empty sidewalks and shuttered shops.

Tuesday's air strikes—in which a car filled with militants was struck by an Israeli missile just a few blocks away—were still on everyone's mind.

"Every year the Jews commit some kind of massacre and turn our joy into sadness. We want to enjoy the holiday, but we think of the martyrs and their families," says Azmi, 33, as he holds his bloody hands away from his shirt.

The cow's head rests a few feet away on the sidewalk, its eyes open, its slack tongue hanging from blood-encrusted lips.

Hamas has called on Gazans to reject the recently revived peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian government in the occupied West Bank and to redouble their efforts to resist the Israelis by any means.

Haniya called on Gazans to remember Abraham's example, to "surrender to God, seize the knife, and be willing to sacrifice your son," but this year the message fell on the ears of people weary from the struggle.

"We can sacrifice, we are able to, but for how much longer? We do not see anything ahead of us, any future for our children," says Azmi's brother Nail, 30, a shopkeeper with two children. "How will this end?"



■ Muslim pilgrims buy religious ornaments and gifts in the Saudi holy city of Medina. Hajj pilgrims heading home from Mecca are not only carrying mental "souvenirs" from their unforgettable spiritual journey but also taking home gifts to their loved ones who were not fortunate enough to do Hajj. AFP PHOTO

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**AFTER** roundtable meetings in Manila, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, efforts to build closer cooperation between and among Muslim leaders and Muslim communities of Asean came full circle.

The Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy [PCID] played host to the First Southeast Asian Forum on Islam and Democracy (SEAFID) held at the Manila Hotel on December 10 to 12, 2007. The delegation of 44 experts and leaders representing various think tanks, universities, religious, and civil society groups came from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines.

The 2007 Manila conference gathered Muslim advocates of democracy, human rights, and peace in what could be the first platform that could represent the multifaceted voices of the Muslims in Southeast Asia—the region that is home to the largest Muslim community in the world with more than 200 million adherents of Islam.

**Welcome Banquet**

Gracing the forum's welcome dinner was former President Fidel V. Ramos. In his keynote speech, Ramos congratulated the participants for the regional forum which he felt was a vital step toward addressing concerns on issues such as security, human rights and democracy in the Southeast Asian region. According to Ramos, regional efforts such as SEAFID are necessary to stress the fact that "Southeast Asia is not a hotbed of terrorism nor is the region teetering on the brink of anarchy and sectarian violence as is sometimes suggested." He adds that political will, democratization, and regional strategies would be the most effective strategies in addressing the problems in the region. Ramos noted that the rich experiences of South East Asian Muslim communities in democracy should be shared with the Islamic world.

Organized by the PCID with support from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Australian Embassy, The Asia Foundation, and the Magbassa Kita Foundation, Inc., the forum is actually the fifth in a series that has been organized for the region, according to the PCID's lead convenor and chair of the Manila conference, Amina Rasul. "The first roundtable discussion was held in September 2005 in the Philippines, and then subsequently held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Jakarta, Indonesia; and finally in Bangkok, Thailand in September of 2006. We hope this will evolve into an effective forum that contributes to democratization in Muslim communities."

**Regional platform for cooperation**

"This is a strong commitment of Southeast Asian Muslims to enhance democracy, pluralism, human rights and justice" says Dr. Syaifi Anwar from the Jakarta-based International Center for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP). Haji Maarof Bin Haji Salleh from Singapore's Center for Contemporary Islamic Studies expressed their happiness to participate as it gave them "an opportunity to share success stories of how the minority Muslim community in Singapore has



■ The drafting committee of Southeast Asian Forum on Islam and Democracy prepared the proposed charter for the regional group. From left: Dr. Hamid Barra, Dr. Abdul Rahman Bin Awang, Amina Rasul, Dr. Shafi'i Anwar, Haji Maarof Bin Haji Salleh and Dr. Sukree Langputeh.

# Charter on Islam, democracy drafted

contributed to nation-building in the context of their multiracial and multi-religious society."

According to Dr. Abdul Rahman Bin Awang of the International Islamic University of Malaysia, the forum is "an excellent platform for the Muslims in the region to exchange views and share experiences on Islam and Democracy," with Dr. Sukree Langputeh of the Thailand Center for Muslim and Democratic Development states that this exchange of experiences and success stories is an important part in spurring the democratization process in each country in Southeast Asia.

**Islam, democracy and peace**

"Islam is often associated today with terrorism or violence. This is not a true reflection of Islamic values. Muslims, particularly Muslims in Southeast Asia, firmly believe in human rights, tolerance, and equality, as do the majority of Muslims in the world. We want a mechanism by which we can systematically engage and educate the world to the true tenets of the Islamic faith," said former Senator Santanina Rasul, one of the co-organizers of the event.

In an unprecedented move, after only two days of discussions, the participants approved a draft charter. A work in progress, the draft charter would guide the process of institutionalizing the forum as a platform from which Muslims in the region would promote, among others, peace, tolerance, mutual understanding, economic opportunity, good governance, sustainable development, human security and human rights.

Rasul, praised the efforts of the participants in not allowing their political, historical and social diversities to get in the way of organizing the historic forum. She described the forging of the charter, despite debates and contestations, as proof of the possibility of democracy in Muslim communities.

Foreign Affairs Undersecretary Enrique Manalo, who delivered the



■ The Southeast Asian Forum on Islam and Democracy was attended by 44 religious, academic and civil society leaders from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and the Philippines.

closing speech on December 12, congratulated the group for their landmark act, highlighting the need for interfaith initiatives and strengthening pluralism in the region. Manalo stressed the need for collaboration bridge the gulf of misunderstanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Philippines is a leader in UN led global interfaith dialogues.

■ Former President Fidel V. Ramos converses with Dr. Syaifi Anwar of the International Centre for Islam and Pluralism (ICIP), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's country representative Klaus Preschle and Amina Rasul of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID) during the welcome banquet for the participants of the First Southeast Asian Forum on Islam and Democracy.



■ Pilgrims circumambulate around Ka'aba as one of the rituals during Hajj.

## Mecca diary: It's a small world after all

BY NASSER SHARIEF THE MORO TIMES

IN 1992, I made my farewell circuit round the Ka'aba after working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for 13 years. Last month, I received notice that I would be joining the supervisory team for the Filipino pilgrims this year. I immediately dusted off my jogging shoes and renew my membership at a gym. I know how rigorous the hajj can be. I was flabby and out of shape, a man past forty, and busy working to get his kids through college. Immersed in the details of life in

Manila, the Kingdom seemed to me a faraway world. So ill-prepared was I for the shock that awaited me.

**Al-Haram: The old and the new**

Entering the holy city of Mecca—barred from non-Muslims—is like getting through the cracks of an eggshell. I lost my bearing because the old markers I was counting on were gone. The good old zouqs (shops) surrounding the holy mosque Al-Haram, where expatriates and exiles used to hold congress in small cafes, had given way to high rise hotels and

sleek shops. They have chipped off the mountain cliffs for more space. Famous hotels now ring the holy mosque—the Hilton, Sofitel, Sheraton, Intercontinental, Novotel, etc. Hobbit-type tunnels now worm their way in and out of Mecca going to and from the plains of Mina, Arafat, Muzdalifa and the Rhub Al-Khali desert beyond.

"This can't be Mecca!" voiced an elderly hajj veteran who sat besides me in the bus, which has Star Trek-like interior consoles.

From your stool at a McDonalds you can watch people emerging from the hastening ritual at the Safa and

Marwa hill-mounds. Yes, you can have Colonel Sanders' Kentucky fried chicken at a to-go counter just across the square. My feet were a bit sore from the hastening that commemorate Hagar's plight looking for water for her baby Ishmael some thousands years back, so I went inside a Starbucks cafe and ordered mocha latte.

When the balls of my feet felt healed, I window-shopped. I went inside a GUESS shop and had to retreat just as quick when I saw the price of a low-ride jeans for Saudi riyal 1,697