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Muslim students organize Eid ul-Adha cultural celebrations on campus

By: *Areeba Kamal* October 1, 2014 2:23 pm

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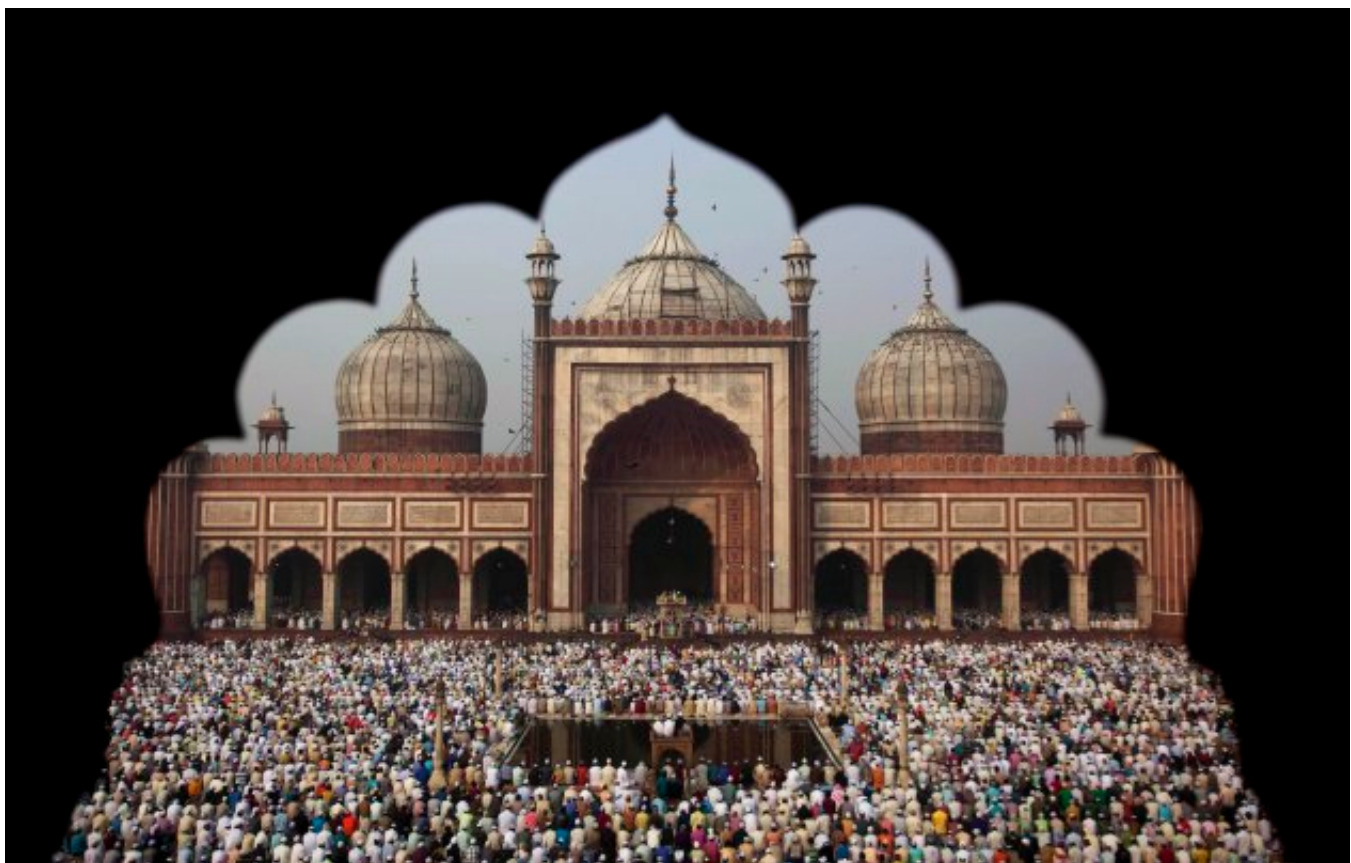
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Indian Muslims pray at the Jama Masjid mosque, one of India's largest, during morning prayers on Eid al-Adha in New Delhi, India, Nov. 17, 2010. (AP Photo/Kevin Frayer)

“The Penn Muslim Students Association (MSA) wants to celebrate Eid with you! Come join us as we celebrate one of Islam’s major holidays with Eid Prayer, Eid Barbecue and Eid Downtown Dinner,” blare posters and invites on University of Pennsylvania’s campus.

Like countless Muslim students' groups across the nation's colleges and universities, Penn MSA is engrossed in coordinating festivities for one of the largest religious and cultural holidays of the Muslim community, Eid ul-Adha, which this year takes place from Oct. 4 to Oct. 6.

Also known as the Festival of the Sacrifice, the Greater Eid and the Major Festival, Eid ul-Adha is celebrated in the last month of the lunar Islamic calendar. Over the three days of Eid ul-Adha, Muslims mark the end of the great pilgrimage to Mecca and commemorate Abraham's sacrifice, when he unflinchingly agreed to surrender his son in the name of faith.

Eid ul-Adha is widely recognized as a time for prayer, reflection, philanthropy and community building, as Muslims across the globe share bounties and honor familial and communal bonds.

In the United States, between [3 to 6 million](#) Muslims will celebrate the holiday this year, organizing morning prayers and evening festivities with family and friends.

However, unlike Thanksgiving or Christmas, those celebrating Eid rarely have official school or work breaks for the three-day holiday. College students may struggle to balance Eid celebrations with academic work, especially as midterm papers and exams pepper the first few weeks of October.

Sundus Mujahid, who graduated from Macaulay Honors College at City College of New York last May, has made a yearly ritual of balancing school work with family celebrations of Eid. "I discuss the holiday with my teachers or professors in advance, finishing a quiz or homework assignment early if it can potentially interfere with Eid."

Other students like Alvi Rahman, a junior studying health sciences at Boston University, cannot always make it back to see his family for Eid. "I am from New York City and it's not feasible for me to go back home for Eid, when I might have class the day of or the day after," Rahman says.

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However, instead of letting time restraints get in the way, student leaders like Rahman use Eid as a means of strengthening communal bonds on their own college campuses.

Rahman who leads Eid banquets at BU every year, says "We have an annual Eid ul Adha dinner with over 400 attendees every year. It's important for me to help with Eid celebrations on campus ... I want everyone to feel welcome and have a great time!"

For international Muslim students, going back home for Eid is often impossible. Regardless, these students build their own "Eid family," piecing together celebrations in a myriad of ways regardless of how far they are from home or how busy school schedules look.

“We wear cultural clothes on the (first) day, and go for Eid prayer early in the morning with the larger New Haven Muslim community,” says Farheen Maqbool, a Pakistani international student in her second year at Yale University. “It’s pretty heartwarming ... Eid may fall smack-dab in the middle of midterm season, but we spend time bonding, even if it means just studying together.”

Nishath Rahman, a junior at Mount Holyoke who helps coordinate Eid festivities across the Five College Consortium, a network of five campuses and 30,000 students in western Massachusetts, echoes Maqbool’s sentiments. “I share these moments with my second family at school ... It may be different from celebrating at home but we certainly have developed our own sense of pride and Eid traditions on campus.”

Besides facilitating shared bonds and traditions, in several college communities, Eid festivities honor the intrinsic diversity of Muslims in America.

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Approximately one third of the [Muslim community in the U.S.](#) is African American, whereas one third is of South Asian descent, one quarter of Arab origin and more than 5% are of Latino heritage.

Elkhansaa Elguenaoui, president of Muslim Students Association at University of Massachusetts in Amherst, emphasizes the importance of diversity in her work. “We hold an annual Eid dinner, where hundreds of Muslims and non-Muslims alike fill the campus center auditorium. This year the theme of the night will be ‘Tolerance: Embracing Differences and Diversity,’ with a guest speaker, and performances showcasing local talent.”

Eid festivities have taken on new meaning at schools like Boston University, helping to raise cultural and religious awareness beyond Muslim student communities. Rahman shares, “An extraordinary amount of non-Muslim families, community leaders, students and staff share in our Eid festivities. We hear every year how much Muslims and non-Muslims alike love our events, thanks to their informational nature and the remarkable diversity (of organizers, performers and attendees).”

In the spirit of community, reflection and inclusion, students all over the country will acknowledge Eid later this week, whether it is in their own homes or on campus within close-knit college communities.

As Maqbool puts it, “Whether you are religious or not, Eid is about being around your people. At home, it is a time for family. At school, you find ways to bring a piece of your old home to your new (chosen) home.”

Areeba Kamal is a junior at Mount Holyoke College.

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