

International students enjoy U.S. holiday

By Nat Melnicove
Staff Reporter
ncm128@psu.edu

When many international students come to America, they have a pre-established image of what the country will be like. Arriving from India over a year ago, Ishaan Joshi had always looked at America through a Hollywood prism. Now he is going to celebrate his second Thanksgiving in the states, and his perspective has changed.

"Thanksgiving is a very intrinsic experience of Americana," Joshi said. "Family, food, it's very homely. It's the least commercialized (holiday) because you spend it at home."

At the sound of this comment, Indonesian native Ezra Nugroho lobbed a verbal reminder from the other room. "But the next day is the biggest shopping day," he said.

No matter how Thanksgiving is viewed, international students at Penn State Harrisburg are getting a first-hand experience of this country's most unique holiday. But how do some international students give thanks on America's laziest Thursday of the year?

Info-tech grad student Joshi has three options for his second turkey day. Last year, he went to the home of a friend, Sean Pendrak, in Pendrak's hometown of Scranton, Pa, and that option is still available. Speaking on his first Thanksgiving, Joshi said, "That was nice actually. When you go to another place, the fun part is taking part in their customs."

For finance and international business grad student Pendrak, having his friends from other countries over for a northeast PA turkey day was never a question. "I've traveled to other countries, lived in other countries, and I know what it is to be in a foreign place and be away from family," he said.

Pendrak said, "My family is totally receptive and the exchange of cultures is awesome."

He added that some students who come here may have a poor

impression of the American family, so experiencing the holidays gives them a real taste of the American family. "I've noticed they are surprised at how family-oriented we are."

They may also be surprised by some of the food, as Indian

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native and electrical engineering grad student Vittal Balasubramanian found out last year at the Pendraks. His first experience with pumpkin pie was most likely his last. "That wasn't my favorite," said Balasubramanian.

Food is a part of the equation no matter how and where Thanksgiving is observed. Electrical engineering grad student Prithiv Thomas is ready to experience his first Thanksgiving. He will be going to the Pendrak residence for a taste of the holiday spirit. "I am looking forward to the turkey and mashed potatoes," he said. "I hear they really stuff the bird."

One must do more than eat and give thanks, so the native of India is looking forward to the annual Thanksgiving pro football games. Thomas is not a fan of the Dallas Cowboys or Detroit Lions, however he is a fan of the traditional mixture of food and sport which unites family and friends.

Nugroho, also an info-tech grad student, says he will be making a road trip with friends from church. He has celebrated a handful of turkey days as an undergrad in Indiana. Those who know Nugroho will not be surprised that he spent last Thanksgiving cooking the turkey

for his friends in Indiana. He has been known to appear in friend's kitchens cooking away.

Nugroho also has other options. He is sure he could find festivities at a professor's house. "My sixth Thanksgiving dinner in Indiana was like that," he said. "Usually we'd get invited to a professor's house for dinner."

An option would be to visit the home of Associate Professor of Engineering Dr. Peter Idowu and his wife, PSH Marketing Manager Panna Idowu. The Idowu's will be entertaining family and students for the day. This is their fourth year of hosting dinner for students. After coming here five years ago, their first Thanksgiving was a small affair of three people. That has quickly changed. "This year we decided to buy a bigger table," said Panna Idowu.

Sharing their Thanksgiving with guests has been a tradition for the Idowu's. Panna said, "My husband experienced the same type of hospitality as a student." She said, "I grew up in a university town and my mother was a professor who did it all the time. So it just rubbed off."

Meeting new students is one of the benefits for the Idowu's. Panna explained that they moved closer to campus to have more of an opportunity to interact

with international students, whose plans can unfortunately be dictated by a lack of transportation.

Electrical engineering grad student Lakshmi P. Baskaran will be spending her first Thanksgiving at the Idowu home. The holiday get-together will remind her of family in India. "I miss my family. I am Hindu and we have similar festivities," she said. Even though she has a lot of homework that she could be doing, she is excited to spend the day hovering over a turkey with friends, rather than hovering over her notes and a computer screen.

Associate Professor of Humanities and History Dr. Louise E. Hoffman has also hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for family, friends and some international students. In 2001, Hoffman wanted to reach out to international students who were away from family and feeling alienated due to the social climate after 9/11. She had two students over for a traditional dinner. The students, from Thailand and China, added to the dinner and atmosphere by bringing native dishes and telling the children about life in Asia.

"Thanksgiving seemed a good way to introduce some international students to an important

American custom," said Hoffman. "Since it's not a religious holiday, students from any culture could enjoy it."

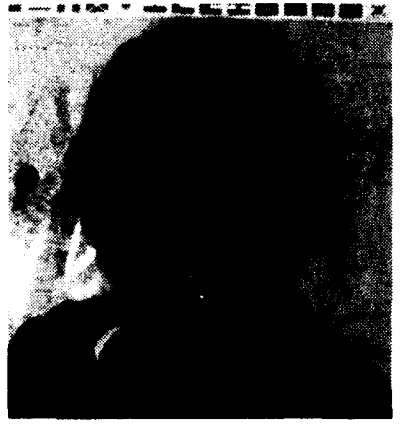
The Hoffmans will be spending this Thanksgiving out of town. "If we were going to be home, I'd certainly renew the offer," she said. "It was an enjoyable experience for everyone involved."

Khaled Al Woqayyan will also be traveling this holiday season. He will be visiting the nation's capital and the embassy of his homeland, Kuwait. The embassy plans to entertain over 3500 Kuwaiti students from all over the U.S. Activities include elections for student organizations, soccer tournaments and, what no turkey day lacks, dinner.

The architectural engineering undergrad is excited for a couple of reasons. "My first Thanksgiving and the first time I see Washington," he said.

Whether visiting family and friends, experiencing a new holiday in a new city, going to a professor's house for festivities, or planning a road trip, these plans represent only a small sampling of how PSH international students plan to experience some traditional American merrymaking. Their plans are as diverse and interesting as Thanksgiving is unique to America.

World View



Osman Abdalla, staff reporter

Osman Abdalla
Staff Reporter
oaa106@psu.edu

Conservatives are the same anywhere in the world. Whether they are Muslims or Christians, Americans or Middle Easterns, the result of what they do pretty much is the same. If it is not war and destruction, it is pulling the whole community back by their revitalization thoughts. Therefore, they create more enemies than friends. The worse thing that can happen is when two conservative groups fall into a conflict. This is what is happening between the Middle Easterns and the Bush Administration.

This real world's first challenge is the population growth. Let us all focus on resolving this issue instead fighting for irrelevant thoughts and population decline. Number of people living outside U.S. who have died in wars since World War II: 25 million. Estimated number of Iraqi civilian deaths in the 1991 Persian Gulf War: 35,000. Estimated number of retreating Iraqi soldiers buried alive by U.S. tanks in 1991 War: 6,000. The number of casualties because of 9/11 attack approximately: 2,819. Looking at these statistics, the two parties are ideologically wrong. We should not let that idea continue in our lives. The least that can be done is voice your opinion.

The reason the Middle Eastern states hate the American administration is because of the Americans' continuous support to Israel, as opposed to the notion that Arabs hate the American administration because of our freedom. That is what Bush and most American politicians speculate in order to get enough votes and support from the swayed Americans. And the reason the Middle Eastern states hate Israel is that Israelis, as stated in the Torah, dream of occupying the land between the Persian/Arabic Gulf to the Atlantic Ocean, which is currently occupied by Arabs.

Somehow, there are a lot of war in the air nowadays. Don't you think so? Leaves a very bitter taste in the mouth. Benjamin Franklin said, "There never has been a good war or a bad peace." I say anyone who think about going to war or goes to war is abnormal and should seek help. Mahatma Gandhi said, "What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?"

However, the main reason for all this religious and racial tension in the world is the lack of virtue-reliance in politicians' mentality nowadays. We need to rely on a better philosophy

Please see WORLD on 6



Photo courtesy of Dr. Peter Idowu

Dr. Peter Idowu, left, PSH engineering professor, hosts a Thanksgiving dinner for international students each year.

There was no genocide in Sudan?

By Osman Abdalla
Staff Reporter
oaa106@psu.edu

Now, finally the Darfur of the Sudan dilemma has been resolved and a peace agreement has been signed and in effect. According to Sudan.net, the Sudanese government and rebel leaders have signed an agreement on security and humanitarian issues in the troubled Darfur region. The agreement was signed after two weeks of African Union mediated peace talks in Abuja, Nigeria. In a major concession, the Sudanese government agreed to establish a no-fly zone over Darfur. The government and the two main rebel factions also pledged to allow unrestricted access to the region by humanitarian relief agencies. Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo called the breakthrough a step in the right direction, although he cautioned that more work needs to be done.

The signing occurred a week before a special U.N. Security Council meeting on the Darfur crisis in Nairobi, where sanctions against the Sudanese oil industry could be considered. U.N. officials say the Darfur conflict has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with more than 1 1/2 million people driven from their homes and tens of thousands killed. Two black rebel groups took up arms against the ethnic-Arab Sudanese govern-

ment early last year, saying the government had ignored Darfur's needs. In response, Arab militiamen called Janjaweed attacked African villages across the region. Residents and aid workers say the Sudanese military provided air support for the raids - making the no-fly agreement particularly important. The African Union is moving about three-thousand troops and police officers to the region to monitor a ceasefire.

According to the European-Sudanese Public Affairs Council, it is a matter of simple fact that a significant amount of the international press coverage of Sudan over the past decade has been questionable. Misinformation and propaganda wars have been particular features of most, if not all, wars over the past fifty years. The international news media has clearly been a target for those who wish to manipulate the way in which conflicts are presented. The reasons for this are obvious. International "reporting" is in many instances the only image many outside observers will have of the country itself.

International press coverage is also sometimes the only material many commentators and even legislators will have in mind when addressing issues either directly or indirectly related to the Sudan. Journalists have in many instances managed to get away with some appalling reporting on

Sudan. There has been a mixture of simply bad journalism, misinformation and deliberate disinformation.

The Sudan News Agency (SUNA) said the Minister of

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Humanitarian Affairs, Ibrahim Mahmoud Hamid, held a press conference in Nairobi, which brought together representatives of the local and international media in Kenya. The minister reviewed at his press conference the strategic plan for humanitarian action for 2005, prepared by representatives of the government, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), and the United Nations. The strategy included evaluation of the relief work as well as the rehabilitation, development and

implementation of mechanisms. The plan also includes the joint assessment and urgent priorities. The minister also reviewed the humanitarian situation in Darfur saying the conditions had greatly improved in Darfur, referring to the efforts that the government has been exerting in this regard, as well as the coordination between the government and the United Nations and other international bodies. He said that some displaced people camps had been transferred to better equipped locations, stressing that the government is keen about the well-being of its own citizens. He refuted the claims on genocide in Darfur, saying that the whole international community would have been aware about any genocide if it really happened. He called on the journalists to get first hand information about the situation in Darfur through field visits. The press conference was attended by the Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, Hassabo Mohamed Abdul-Rahman, Sudan Ambassador to Kenya, Ali Nemairi, and the Press Advisor at the embassy, Neimat Mohamed Bilal. The minister and the accompanying delegation returned to Khartoum on Tuesday evening.

The agreement negotiations will resume next month discussing the rest of the issues that furnished the dispute, such as government representation,

resources distribution, and other local issues for the rebels.

According a recent Reuters article, "Peace talks between Sudan's government and Darfur rebels ended on Wednesday, a day after Khartoum bowed to international pressure and signed agreements on security and humanitarian issues with rebels. African Union mediators said the talks would resume around Dec. 10 in the Nigerian capital Abuja to negotiate a political settlement for the conflict that has been dubbed the world's worst humanitarian crisis by the United Nations. Now it is clear for the world that what was happening in Sudan wasn't genocide at all."

The European-Sudanese Public Affairs Council speaker said, "American Secretary-of State Colin Powell's decision to describe the conflict in Darfur as GENOCIDE is set to damage prospects for peace in the Sudan." This is for several reasons. This action will damage Sudan's faith in the Bush Administration as an honest broker in securing peace in Sudan, either in southern Sudan or Darfur itself. For Washington to choose to put electoral expediency - diverting media attention away from the Iraq fiasco and pandering to anti-Sudanese and anti-Arab pressure group politics - before the truth of the situation in Darfur will dramatically undermine its reputation.