

OPEN SPACE



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Meeting a president

Rarely do ordinary mortals like me get an opportunity to shake hands with royalty, the mighty and the powerful. But, he shook hands warmly with everyone at a recent Harvard Alumni meeting. His handshake was remarkably firm, he carried his 86 years with levity. He dazzled us with his energy, vitality and desire to meet everyone.

"I am a professor and a peanut farmer!" he asserted delightfully. Like all noteworthy leaders, he connected with everyone in the room with a smile, a nod, a kind word, a touch, a handshake, a gesture.

I asked him, how would America manage its debt of almost \$13 trillion. Secondly, how could the Afghanistan imbroglio be resolved expeditiously to avoid further deaths and injuries?

"The answer to both your questions is that I do not know the answers," he replied, with disarming frankness. Then, he expressed confidence on how America with its history and fortitude would eventually resolve these issues. He analysed lucidly the factors leading to these problems. His oratory and sense of purpose

were spellbinding! When he talks or looks at a person, he is fully focused — a fantastic leadership quality. He has the magic to make you feel you are the only person in the room!

Family values are his lifeline. He was profuse in his admiration for his elegant wife, Rosalynn, who stood by him for 64 years. He was joyous that his family, including grand children numbered 35.

The plight of the barricaded Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, was of intense concern to him. He underscored the need to address this heart-rending human situation on a priority basis. He was enthralled that many of us had read and admired his book, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. He was courageous in asserting, that the walls around the Palestinians must come down. He was clearly pained by the abandonment of the 1978 Camp David Agreement involving a comprehensive framework for Middle East peace, envisioning the return of occupied territories to the Palestinians.

He acknowledged forthrightly that some of his po-

sitions on the Middle East were not very popular. But, he believed in the sustainability of his views. Here was a mature statesman, expounding the virtues of peace and humaneness, at the cost of not being universally popular. "Be courageous and do what's right," was his advice to President Obama, in ensuring peace between Israel and Palestinians.

He spoke with passion and eloquence, about the work that his Centre was doing to guard human rights and alleviate hunger, poverty, HIV, wars in 75 countries in Latin America, Vietnam, Africa and Asia. "Our goals are to wage peace, fight disease and build hope. All of you can help," he counselled.

Naturally, we were inspired. Here is a man, who became the President of USA, won the Nobel Prize for Peace for his passion to usher peace in Middle East, energetically espouses the cause of homeless Palestinians, has authored 23 books and touches everyone with his vibrant intellect and genteel humility!

He signs his name, simply, as Jimmy Carter!

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