Muslim Organisations in Hyderabad Campaign Against Extravagant Weddings

Hyderabad: Muslim organisations in Hyderabad have called for a boycott of ostentatious weddings in the community and even decided to fine its members if they are found spending too much on ceremonies.

They say lavish expenditure, besides the huge burden of dowry, has alarmed some sections of the community as many poor families cannot even perform the marriages of their daughters. Siasat, a leading Urdu daily known for many social campaigns, has thrown its weight behind the initiative with its editor, Zahid Ali Khan, calling for a boycott of lavish weddings, un-Islamic rituals, music and fireworks.

Khan has also urged the ‘ulema’ or religious scholars to boycott such marriages so that the community receives a clear message. The Hyderabad chapter of All India Jamiat-ul-Quresh, a body of meat traders and exporters, has even announced that it will impose a fine of Rs 50,000 if any of its members are found arranging lavish weddings.

The organisation, which has over one lakh members in Hyderabad, said it will constitute a ‘task force’ to monitor the implementation of the rules framed to ensure simple weddings. The body said it will take action against those who arrange ‘song and dance programme’ or fireworks during weddings. It also asked its members to desist from unnecessary rituals and displaying household items given to the brides.

Quresh’s president Mohammed Saleem, who is also a member of Telangana legislative council, said they took the initiative so that members of the community keep weddings simple and in accordance with the teachings of Prophet Muhammad. He pointed out that the poor and middle-class families are landing in a debt trap while trying to emulate the rich by taking huge loans to pay for the expenditure.

“Muslims in Hyderabad spend Rs. 3,500 crore to Rs.4,000 crore on marriages every year. If we succeed in our campaign, this will improve the economy of the community,” Mushtaq Malik, president of Tehreek-e-Muslim Shabban, said. The campaign was initially launched by Shabban, a city-based NGO, with the slogan ‘Ek khana, Ek meetha’ (One dish, One dessert) last year but it did not aggressively follow it through.

Hyderabad has few parallels when it comes to ostentatious weddings in the Muslim community. Lower-middle-class and middle-class families spend anywhere between Rs 5-15 lakh on weddings. The expenses on function halls and food constitute about 50% of the total expenditure. Families often compete with each other in the number of dishes served. There are at least 25 lakh Muslims in Greater Hyderabad.

The Hyderabad chapter of All India Jamiat-ul-Quresh has announced that it will impose a fine of Rs 50,000, if any of its members are found arranging lavish weddings.

Ongoing: HWPL to Host “2nd Annual Commemoration of WARP Summit”

The Heavenly Culture, World Peace, Restoration of Light (HWPL) is hosting its “2nd Annual Commemoration of September 18th World Alliance of Religions’ Peace Summit” from September 17th to 19th. At the 2nd Annual Commemoration, many of the world’s political and religious leaders, as well as women and youth leaders, will gather, as stated, Chairman, HWPL, Man Hee Lee.

Over 1,000 intellectuals from 120 countries around the world are expected to take part in this event, including former President of Croatia, Ivo Josipovic, Minister of Justice of Sri Lanka, Wijeyadasa Rajapakse, President of the Spanish Society for International Human Rights Law, Carlos Villan Duran, the Youth Representative of The United Nations Association of New York, Juan Pablo Celis Garcia, along with various ministers, chief justices, high level government officials, and former presidents. During the event, participants will interact in various meetings for the implementation of the Declaration of Peace and Cessation of War (DPCW).

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Haj Bhavan Inaugurated

The facility has come up after 20 years of decentralization of Haj arrangements in the country.

By Maqbool Ahmed Siraj

Bengaluru can now boast of a Haj Bhavan, a facility thrown open for Haj pilgrims after full 20 years after the city was directly connected with Jeddah in Saudi Arabia for Haj purposes.

A look at the grandiose Haj Bhavan on the Thansandra Main Road suggests that it was worth the wait. Situated close to the Kempegowda International Airport (just 15 kms south of it), the Haj Bhavan’s façade is a lookalike of the Grenada’s Al-Hamara Palace. Built over 2.75 acres of land, the built-up area provides over two lakh square feet of usable space for pilgrims departing to Makkah for the annual Haj pilgrimage. Topped with three onion domes, the external court is dominated by a large pleasing fountain.

Accommodation for 700

The Haj Bhavan with 100 rooms can accommodate nearly six to seven hundred inmates at a time. The prayer hall on the 4th floor can take around 1,000 namazis, with provision for separate compartment for both men as well as women. Separate wuzu facilities for men as well as women have been provided. The five-storey (ground plus four floors) edifice is fitted with seven large-sized lifts.

The large lobby has provision for reception, flight check-in counter, cloak room, immigration, baggage scan and departure of pilgrims. Cloakroom can take in 500 suitcases at a time. The auditorium has a seating capacity for nearly 700 people, while a conference room has provision for around 100 people. The latter has a provision for a library too.

RWH and STP compliance

The building addresses environmental concerns with provision for rainwater harvesting through mandatory RWH compliance with a special sump having storage for nearly a million litres of rainwater which can be used for bathing, washing and for gardening purposes. Besides, the facility has its own sewage treatment plant (STP) which can recycle the entire outwash from the facility. In fact, under the current BBMP (Bruhat Bangalore Mahanagar Palike) regulations, large facilities are supposed to have onsite water recycling facilities and mandated not to send their outwash to the BWSSB sewerage lines. The recycled water would be stored in a sump away from the sump that receives the municipal water supply. Yet another sump stores water for fire extinguishers. Altogether the three sumps could have nearly a million litres of fresh water at any point of time.

Dining Hall, Cafeteria

The Haj Bhavan has a large dining hall attached with state-of-the art kitchen, and will soon be opening its own restaurant as well as a cafeteria. The acoustics take care of the public address system for the entire building. The facility has a 20-bed hospital with separate wards for men and women. Power back-up can manage emergencies in the event of power failure. The basement parking can take around 250 four-wheelers.

The building is surrounded by wide open courts with considerable area under flower-beds and trees. Three large entrances provide access from the main thoroughfare while service gates on sides have provision for allowing luggage and delivery vans. Karnataka has a quota for nearly 6,000 Haj pilgrims under the Central Haj Committee, preponderant majority of whom depart from Bengaluru while a few hundred also take flights from Mangaluru and some (from Gulbarga region) even depart from Hyderabad.

The foundation stone for Haj Bhavan was laid by Mr. Sadananda Gowda, then Chief Minister of Karnataka in 2011. The actual construction began in 2012. The Government of Karnataka provided over Rs. 60 crore for the purpose. The construction work was undertaken by Ms. Shirke Construction Technology Limited while consultancy was provided by Prestige Developers. Ms. Sujad Architects prepared the plan and guided the development of the facility. The interior would be taken up by K2K interiors following the completion of Haj flights for the current year. The project has been executed with due concern for Islamic aesthetics. Minister for Urban Administration and Haj Affairs, Mr. R. Roshan Baig told this scribe that the facility would be used for holding of conventions and for housing students coming to the State capital for CET (Central Entrance Test) counseling for selection of professional courses during June every year.

Following decentralization of Haj arrangements from the country, Bengaluru became the embarkation point for Haj pilgrims in 1996-97 pilgrimage. However, promise of a Haj facility could not materialize for several years as location of the new international airport itself was mired in uncertainty for years. But once the work began, there was no stopping the project. The BJP government in the State (2008-2013) sanctioned Rs. 40 crore in 2010 for the project. The succeeding Congress Government allocated a further sum of Rs. 20 crore.

Chinese Haji Pedals his Way to Makkah

Makkah: Riding his bike for 8,150km, crossing several countries, a Chinese Haji has reached Makkah. Mohammed Bama Chun from Xinjiang took four months to reach Makkah despite extreme difficulties and hilly terrains. In Taif, he was accorded a warm welcome by the local cycling club. Following a brief stay in Taif, Mohammed was accompanied by members of the Taif cycling club to the holy city.

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Hajj Stoning Ritual to be Shortened after Last Year’s Stampede

Riyadh: The Jamarat stoning ritual will be more tightly controlled during Haj this year, after hundreds died in a stampede at last year’s pilgrimage. The period during which pilgrims can perform Jamarat will be reduced by 12 hours, the Saudi Gazette and Arab News said. The symbolic stoning of the devil will be performed as usual over three days beginning September 11 at Mina, about five kms east of Mecca’s Grand Mosque. But this year there will be no stoning allowed from 6am to 10.30am on the first day, from 2pm to 6pm on the second day and from 10.30am to 2pm on the final day, the Saudi Haj ministry said. “This procedure will enable the pilgrims to throw stones easily and will prevent any stampede that may result from overcrowding,” Haj ministry undersecretary Hussain Al Sharif told the Saudi Gazette. The stampede was the worst disaster in Haj history. It occurred outside the five-storey Jamarat Bridge, a structure resembling a huge parking garage which hoists the stoning ritual and costs more than US$1 billion to build. It is almost a kilometre long and allows 300,000 pilgrims an hour to carry out the ritual. Pilgrims blamed the stampede on police road closures and poor management of the flow of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims in soaring temperatures. In another crowd control move, pilgrims are not allowed to circumambulate the holy Kaaba one hour before or after regular prayers at the Grand Mosque when they begin their Haj.
**Bazm-e-Niswan Distributes Scholarships Worth Rs. 1.40 crore.**

Bengaluru: The 42nd annual scholarship programme of Bazm-e-Niswan was held last month and on this occasion, scholarships worth Rs one crore, forty lakhs (Rs 1,40,00,000) was distributed to 3400 deserving girl students from under-privileged sections. This will help the students to pursue their pre-university and Master degree courses. The scholarships were given through cheques to the students.

**IOS Organises Discussion on ‘Liberty and Fraternity**

New Delhi: The Institute of Objective Studies organised a discussion on “Liberty and Fraternity in the Constitution: A Review” at Nehru House, Jamia Millia Islamia in association with the Democratic People’s Lawyer Association (DPLA), Citizens For Democracy (CFD) and the All India Milli Council (AIMC). Introducing the theme, Prof. M. Afzal Wani, Professor, School of Law & Legal Studies, G. G. Singh Indraprastha University and Asst. Professor M. Manzoor Alam, exhorted the students to come up and define the issues confronting the nation. In his presidential remarks, the Chairman of the IOS, Dr M. Manzoor Alam, exhorted the youth to come up and define their role in the present context. Echoing views of Prof. Aslam, he said that the All India Milli with vision and foresight, it has continued its onward march with innovative approach. Bazm has emerged as a premier women’s organization in Karnataka with its sight on spreading its movement across the country. Husna Ziauila Sheriff is the president of Bazm-e-Niswan, and she has a team of committed women who are striving to help the poor and the needy girls and women.

**Workshop on Entrepreneurship & Innovation**

Mangaluru: The Bhatkali Jamatul Muslimeen (BJM), Mangaluru, organized a workshop for Bhatkali students in Mangaluru on the theme, ‘Awaken the entrepreneur in you’. Aftab Husain Kola, the workshop co-ordinator, said, “Navayaths are a mercantile community. Right from the period they arrived on the west coast of India around the eight century AD, Navayaths have been engaged in business. But of late, our business in India is vanishing. So, it is time we re-emerge as a strong business community. That is the reason we have taken this initiative to organise a workshop to foster the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship in our youngsters”. Professor Ziaulla Sheriff is vanishing. So, it is time we re-emerge as a strong business community. That is the reason we have taken this initiative to organise a workshop to foster the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship in our youngsters". Professor Ziaulla Sheriff is the president of Bazm-e-Niswan Charitable Trust, No 37, Muniswamy Road, Tasker Town, Bengaluru-51. Email: bazmeniswan@hotmail.com Ph: 22860023, www.bazm-e-niswan.org

KSP Releases Books for Weekend Classes

Goa: Konkani Shanti Publications (KSP), Goa released the “Isliamiat” books designed for the weekend Islamic classes conducted by the Board of Islamic Education (BIE), Goa. Abdul Waheed Khan, highlighted the activities of BIE, and Eijaz Ahmed Aslam, Editor-in-chief, Radiation View weekly, delivered a talk on “Guiding children in the present challenges.”

**Prophet’s Biography in Marwari Language**

Jhunjhunoo: For the first time, a biography of Prophet Muhammad has been written in the Marwari language which is widely used in the Marwar region of Rajasthan. Rajeev Sharma of the Kolsa village of Jhunjhunoo devoted ten years of his life to compile the biography. Titled “Paigambar ro Paigam”. Rajeev published the biography on the eve of Eidul Fitr in July this year. Rajeev has even translated Hanuman Chalissa and Shyam Chalissa in Urdu language.

In an interview with Rajasthan Patrika TV, Rajeev said that the Prophet Muhammad pardoned his blood-thirsty enemies and talked about ‘insaniyat’ (humanity) all through his life and that his teachings remain relevant to all times. When asked about Bangladeshi terrorists who had asked hostages to recite Quranic verses, he said they were “fasadis” (rioters). The Quran says that killing even one innocent human is like killing the entire human race. (Source: videoclip from Rajasthan Patrika TV)
COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

League Donates 1,000 Houses to Poor in Kerala

By A Staff Writer

Calicut: One would be wrong if he or she thought of the Muslim League in Kerala to be only a political party. The Kerala Muslim Cultural Centre (KMCC), a wing of the party has been active in the field of social welfare and relief for quite a few years. The Centre has built and donated houses to 1,340 families across the State in the last three years under its ‘Baithu Rahma (House of Mercy) project’. Another 129 are under construction for the purpose.

Rs. 100 Cr. Spent

The League initiated the programme in 2013 under the stewardship of Sadiq Ali Shihab Thangal, President of the IUML in Malappuram district. According to Mr. Siraj Ebrahim Sait, National Secretary of the League, the KMCC has so far collected and spent Rs. 100 crore on the housing scheme. Of this, Rs. 93 crore were mobilized by the KMCC members. Sait informed the Islamic Voice that the donors belonging to the KMCC chapters in 19 countries (in the states of the Gulf, the United States and United Kingdom) collected and mobilized the funds for the purpose.

Regardless of Faith

The scheme was initiated in order to help those poor families to own a house who had their own piece of land but could not afford construction of a house. The scheme envisaged constructing a house consisting of one bedroom plus hall, a kitchen and bathroom. Currently, it costs Rs. 7 to 8 lakh in the State. Criteria for selection of the individuals was economically underprivileged status rather than religious or community affiliation.

In one instance, a Hindu recipient woman wanted to perform the rite of Grihaparvesha by lighting a traditional Kerala lamp. The League leaders insisted that she must do whatever she thought was auspicious by her own faith. She lit the Kuthuvilakku (lamp) while accepting the keys and entered the house.

According to Siraj Sait, the selection of the recipients is made following receipt of applications from various Panchayats in the State and the most deserving are given the priority. The Baithu Rahma charity project of the League was launched in the name of its former President Panakkad Syed Mohammedali Shihab Thangal. Sait said the KMCC is building another building which will be named Shihab Centre for Humanity. It will be ready by 2018 and provide stay for attendants of the inmates in the NIMHANS, a nationally reputed centre for treatment of the mentally sick persons. The KMCC also maintains several units of ambulances in the City for ferrying the dead to the respective place for funeral and burial in Kerala.

The KMCC is also sinking borewells in the coastal villages of Kerala where drinking water becomes scarce during the summer months from February till May. Siraj Ebrahim says the Muslim League seeks inspiration from the selfless service of its founder Mr. M. K. Haji, who also founded the historic Orphanage at Thirurangadi in 1921 when several children were orphaned in the Moplah Revolt against the British. Haji who used to sell halwa in the streets of Bombay had sheltered several children in his yet-to-be plastered house in Thirurangadi after the wagon tragedy.

The IUML’s cultural wing KMCC has built and donated nearly 1,000 houses to the poor and the deserving in Kerala. Criterion for selection has been economic rather than the community affiliation.
INSA Award for Jamia Teacher

Dr. Askandar Iqbal, a DST-INSPIRE faculty awardee at the Department of Biotechnology, Jamia Millia Islamia has won the prestigious Indian National Science Academy (INSA) Medal for Young Scientist (2016). It carries a bronze medal and a cash prize of Rs. 25,000. Dr. Iqbal received the DST-INSPIRE Faculty Award while working as a postdoctoral scientist at the University of Texas, MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas, USA. He had completed his Master’s degree in Biotechnology from Aligarh Muslim University and Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Dr. Iqbal’s research work focuses on the metabolic behavior of cancer cells and the role of pyruvate kinase M2 in metabolic transformation. The Indian National Science Academy in New Delhi is the apex body of Indian scientists representing all branches of science and technology. The INSA Young Scientists Award, considered to be the highest recognition of promise, creativity and excellence in a young scientist, is made annually to those whose research work carried out in India evinces these qualities. Until last year, 737 young scientists have been awarded by INSA.

Dr. Syed was not the one to live life alone. Come 1990s, he had all that he had aspired for in his life. He was Professor of Nuclear Medicine at the University of Louisville School of Medicine. His altruist nature was urging him to lift the members of fast expanding families of his siblings in Bellary from poverty. The process of sponsorship and migration that began in 1990 continued up to 2006 when the tailorend of the 45-member strong family landed in the United States. Some of the members by then had grandchildren. Accommodating them suitably, guiding the education of the younger ones and settling the elders in jobs were no mean feat. Marriages and births have taken their numbers beyond a hundred now. Retired, the grand patriarch in Dr. Ibrahim is a satisfied soul today.

Ibrahim has engaged himself in writing and delivering Fridaysermons at the Islamic Center Mosque in Louisville. He is a strong advocate of rationalism and feels no qualms in questioning the prevailing wisdom. He continues to inspire young minds through his speeches and writings. Some of the ethical dilemmas that Muslims face do figure in the books authored by him. Larger debates have found elaboration in his book titled Quranic Inspirations.

Some of the well-settled members of his family have penned their reminiscences. Rich tributes have been paid by those who have known him from close quarters. Sepia-toned photographs from the family album enhance the value of the book. The accounts are racy and sustain the interest of the reader.

The book can be had from the author who can be reached at irf.1988@yahoo.com. Knowledge Empowers You An Autobiography, By Dr. Ibrahim B. Syed, 44, II Main, ISt Cross, Cambridge Layout, Bengaluru, 267 pages, Price Rs. 500.

AMBULANCE DONATED

Jodhpur: Two ambulances worth Rs. 7 lakh were dedicated for public service under the care of Muslim Jamaat Nagarai Teliyan Society Jodhpur on August 2. Former Rajasthan Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot flagged off the two vehicles in the Circuit House. Former Culture Minister Chandresh Kumari and social worker activity Habebur Rahman Khiliji mobilized the funds for the purchase of the ambulances. Mr. Khiliji was also conferred with Samaj Ratan Award on behalf of the Teliyan Society for his long stint of social services.

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Bappu Haji

An Octogenarian Who Lives Only to Serve Others

Haji dropped out of school after Class 4, but this never stopped him from helping others pursue their dreams. His charity work is beyond caste, creed and religion.

By Shafeeq Hudawi

For Bappu Haji, charity has never been an option, it is more a way of life. Nearly 40 years ago, Haji built a school for underprivileged children in Adakkakkundu, a remote hamlet in Malappuram district in Kerala, and today the school is home to 3,000 children who would have otherwise found it difficult to attain formal education.

Speaking of the school, Haji says Crescent Higher Secondary School has now become a part of his family. “These are my children. I hardly feel that I am left without children when I engage with these kids, as it gives me immense pleasure,” he says.

But Haji did not stop at this. For the past decade or so, he and his association, Coordination of the Islamic Colleges (CIC), have been working towards realising Haji’s long cherished dream. The area, working towards realising Haji’s Islamic Colleges (CIC), have been his association, Coordination of the past decade or so, he and

He has become a role model for others by resolving to generously allocate a major portion of land to build decent accommodation for 12 tribal families, who find it extremely hard to build one on their own. Driven by the philosophy that peace of mind comes by helping the deprived, Bappu Haji has built a geriatric care centre on three acres of land. Named Hima, the centre boasts of ten houses, each with one hall, bedroom and kitchen.

Some of the inmates are talkative, while others are least interested in group activities. Unlike the typical geriatric care centres, the inmates are free to select the companions and houses of their choice,” says Faisal Wafy, a teacher of A d a k k a k u n d a Crescent Higher Secondary School, who assists Bappu Haji.

The idea to build the centre gained momentum during his visit to Wayanad. At the prime tourist destination in northern Kerala, Haji saw some hapless geriatrics. “That was an eye opening event. That day, I felt that I would be more at peace if I could help the geriatrics, thrown out by their kith and kin, and provide them with a homely atmosphere,” he reminisces. For Haji, helping others is the only way of life.

Haji says Crescent Higher Secondary School has now become a part of his family. “These are my children. I hardly feel that I am left without children when I engage with these kids, as it gives me immense pleasure,” he says. But Haji did not stop at this. For the past decade or so, he and his association, Coordination of the Islamic Colleges (CIC), have been working towards realising Haji’s long cherished dream. The area, flanked by greenery, is now turning into an educational hub and the air is filled with the noise of labourers and equipments working day and night to complete a multi-storey building, the future site of a Rs.40 crore educational project. Under the project, the headquarters and the PG campus will be built at Adakkakkundu. At the site, Haji, now 80, spends three hours a day inspecting the work being done. Haji dropped out of school after Class 4, but this never stopped him from helping others pursue their dreams. His charity work is beyond caste, creed and religion.

A Heart-Warming Gesture

““The religion of a person should always be humanism. It is just a simple sacrifice for a fellow being,” says Shamshad Begum.

By Faiz Siddiqui

Kanpur: Amid the cacophony of communal strife, here comes a heart-warming gesture. A Muslim woman from Fatehpur district has come forward to donate her kidney to a Hindu woman from Pune, who has been battling for life for over a year. Donor Shamshad Begum (40) and the recipient Aarti (38) both have undergone all required medical examinations. The donor, a native of Raribuzurg village in Bindki tehsil in Fatehpur district. The unusual story of two persons, belonging to different faiths and different places, unfolded when Shamshad, during her visit to Mansarovar area in Pune, where her younger sister Junaida Begum lives, met the latter’s friend Aarti, who was going for dialysis as both her kidneys had failed. Shamshad, without giving a second thought, decided to donate one kidney to the ailing Aarti.

Donor Shamshad Begum’s younger sibling, Junaida Khatoon, stays in Pune. “I was shocked by the pain being suffered by a person facing death. I underwent the blood group test which matched Aarti’s group,” said Shamshad Begum. “I am ready for organ transplant. The religion of a person should always be humanism. It is just a simple sacrifice for a fellow being,” she said. Shamshad Begum, whose husband expired about ten years ago, stays with her father Zakir Khan, and her teenage daughter in Raribuzurg village in Bindki tehsil in Fatehpur district.

The donor, a native of Raribuzurg village in Bindki tehsil of Fatehpur district, has submitted all the documents required at the district health department, and is now waiting for the nod from the state government’s authorization committee for organ transplantation.

The recipient, who is a friend of Shamshad Begum’s younger sibling, Junaida Khatoon, stays in Pune. “I was shocked by the pain being suffered by a person facing death. I underwent the blood group test which matched Aarti's group,” said Shamshad Begum. “I am ready for organ transplant. The religion of a person should always be humanism. It is just a simple sacrifice for a fellow being,” she said. Shamshad Begum, whose husband expired about ten years ago, stays with her father Zakir Khan, and her teenage daughter in Raribuzurg village in Bindki tehsil in Fatehpur district. The unusual story of two persons, belonging to different faiths and different places, unfolded when Shamshad, during her visit to Mansarovar area in Pune, where her younger sister Junaida Begum lives, met the latter’s friend Aarti, who was going for dialysis as both her kidneys had failed. Shamshad, without giving a second thought, decided to donate one kidney to the ailing Aarti.

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Over 73,000 Victims of Disasters in Muslim World in 2015

A new statistical study has revealed that 1,224 crises and natural disasters hit the 57 member states of the OIC and other Muslim minorities last year, a figure that is unprecedented in modern history.

Jeddah: The number of victims of crises and disasters in the Muslim world during 2015 accounted for 73,570 people, including 69,739 as a result of crises and wars, and 3,831 due to natural disasters, a new statistical study has revealed.

According to the study prepared by the Islamic Cooperation Humanitarian Affairs Department of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (ICHAD-OIC), 1,224 crises and natural disasters hit the 57 member states of the OIC and other Muslim minorities last year, a figure that is unprecedented in modern history. Statistics showed a significant rise in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in 2015, reaching 28,836,710 people, compared to 17,073,686 in 2014, an increase of 40.7 percent (11,763,024). The study revealed that the number of people affected by disasters or crises in the Muslim world reached 75,410,705, with Yemen's share mounting to 22,307,182 people, followed by Yemen 6,000. Yemen suffered the most human casualties resulting from disasters with 726 deaths, followed by Pakistan 460, while Niger suffered the human casualties due to epidemic diseases with 1,038 deaths, according to the new statistics.

The OIC seeks, within its Ten-Year Program of Action for 2015-2025 adopted by the 13th Islamic Summit Conference held in the Turkish city of Istanbul, to enhance joint Islamic humanitarian work and develop appropriate disaster-response mechanisms, as well as strengthening cooperation and coordination with partners at the regional and international levels, especially the UN agencies, on refugees and displaced persons in the member states.

Indonesia to Start an International Islamic University

Jakarta: Indonesia's President, Joko Widodo has signed a plan to make Indonesia the world's centre for Islamic studies. The government plans to build a new university called Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia ('International Islamic University of Indonesia'), the President said. Through the study centre, people from around the world could learn about 'moderate Islam' as exemplified by Indonesia. He said, “The time has now come for Indonesia to become a source for the Muslim world’s thinking. As much as 75 percent of the university’s students will be foreigners, said Minister of Religious Affairs, Lukman Hakim Syaifuddin. The Indonesian government will pay their tuition fees. Minister Lukman said that by financing their studies at UII, the government can expect the foreigners to act as 'ambassadors' for Indonesia. They will tell people in their respective countries about the values of Islam that are upheld and practised in Indonesia. Indonesia is currently home to 250 million people, of whom 87 percent are Muslims.

Azerbaijan Tourism Revenues Soar High

Baku: The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) experts predict that Azerbaijan will generate US$1.834 billion this year, a 6.4 percent increase compared to 2015. Tourism is set to become one of the main economic sectors of Azerbaijan, as new data indicates about one million tourists visited between January and June of 2016, Hotelier Middle East Business Magazine reported. The research also showed that approximately 600 to 1,000 visitors from Arab countries travel to Azerbaijan every day, mainly from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman and Iraq, spending a minimum of US$ 150-200 daily.

The total number of tourists coming to the country has increased by 30 times this May compared to last year, according to data indicates about one million tourists visited between January and June of 2016, Hotelier Middle East Business Magazine reported.

Tourism worldwide. The WTTC is an international organization of travel industry executives promoting travel and tourism worldwide.
### Fifty Books as Mehr!

**With a Rare Mehr, this Kerala Bride has Broken Stereotypes**

Sahla Nechiyil never dreamt of a perfect, fairytale wedding. But when she decided to get married, she also sent across a social message to the “gold-obsessed” community in Malappuram.

By Soumya Mathew

How often do you see a woman demand books as mehr, and not the customary jewellery or gold. In Kerala’s Malappuram district, a woman set an example for her community. A post graduate in political science from the Hyderabad University, Sahla Nechiyil never dreamt of a perfect, fairytale wedding. But when she decided to get married, she also sent across a social message to the “gold-obsessed” Muslims in Malappuram.

Nechiyil decided to demand 50 books from her fiancé as mehr. “One, because according to the religious texts, a girl can demand anything she wants and the groom cannot disagree. And second, because I wanted to show the Malappuram Muslims that a wedding can take place without obsessing over the amount of gold transacted between both parties,” she said. Her husband (they got married on Aug 11) cannot agree more with Sahla and supported her stand wholeheartedly. “Mehr is the right of the woman, not the generosity of the man,” he said. Anees Nadodi was promptly given a list of 50 books by Nechiyil, and he went all the way to Bangalore to find all the books that she wanted. All this amidst much disapproval from both the families. In Nechiyil’s case, however, more than her parents, her relatives disagreed. “They could not argue for long, because we were not doing anything against the religious texts,” said Nechiyil.

Nechiyil demanded a list of books that include Islamic feminist literature, feminist literature, fiction, politics etc. “The religious texts allow us to live according to our wish, yet these girls fear to speak up or decide for themselves,” she added. “Anees had to struggle a little looking for the books I demanded. Making your husband struggle a little is the idea of mehr, anyway,” she added.

Anees, on his part, enjoyed the “book-hunt” his wife had organised for him. He went to Bengaluru’s popular Blossoms, Gangaram and Bookworm bookstores looking for the rare titles that Nechiyil had meticulously listed.

### Scotland Police make Hijab Part of Official Uniform

**London:** The hijab or the headscarf has been made an optional part of Police Scotland’s uniform in an attempt to attract more women Muslim recruits to the force, which currently has less black and Asian representation.

Previously officers could wear the religious headscarf with approval and personal qualities that our officers and staff bring to policing the communities of Scotland,” he said. A report earlier this year showed that just 2.6 per cent of applicants to join Police Scotland were from ethnic minorities. In order to reflect the 4 per cent figure across Scottish society, the force said it would need to recruit an additional 650 ethnic minority candidates. There are currently six Muslim women officers working for Police Scotland, but none of them wear the hijab either on duty or outside the force, BBC reported. The most recent figure for the overall strength of the force, released at the end of June was 17,242. Official figures showed that there were 127 applicants to join Police Scotland but it is now formally part of the police uniform. Police Scotland said it is working to make the force “representative of the communities we serve”. Chief Constable Phil Gormley said, “I am delighted to make this announcement and welcome the support from both the Muslim community, and the wider community, as well as police officers and staff.” “I hope that this addition to our uniform options will contribute to making our staff mix more diverse and adds to the life skills, experiences and capacities.

### Syrian Refugee Girl: A Winner in the Water

When archer Zahra Nemati carried the Iranian flag into the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro, she broke new ground for the Muslim country. Never before had a woman led Iran’s team into the parade of athletes in an Olympic opening ceremony. In Iran, female fans are traditionally barred from attending male-only sporting events. Arriving in the stadium in a wheelchair, wearing a green head covering, Nemati was the flagbearer for a team made up overwhelmingly of men. It’s quite a way for the 31-year-old Nemati to make her mark on her first Olympics.

It was what Yusra Mardini left unsaid, rather than the conventional words of excitement, that made the bigger impression after the teenager’s debut in the Olympic pool in Rio de Janeiro. “I was only thinking about water and the last competitions and where I am now,” the Syrian, swimming for a refugee team at Rio Olympics, told reporters when asked what went through her mind ahead of the 100 metre butterfly heat. Rio is a life away from where she started. To get to the point where she could discuss simple stokes and times involved fleeting Syria, making a treacherous sea crossing from Turkey to Greece and arriving in Berlin with her sister last year. She swam part of that crossing over to the island of Lesbos, helping other refugees who were in the water and were unable to swim. “It was quite hard to think that you are a swimmer and you might end up dying in the water,” she said later. A competitive swimmer in Syria, she is now part of a refugee team backed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). **Afghan Woman Appointed Human Rights Commissioner in OIC**

An Afghan woman has been unanimously appointed Human Rights Commissioner from Asia group in Organization of the Islamic Cooperation. Asila Wardak received the most votes among the candidates from all three zones (Asia, Africa and Middle East) during the election process for OIC Human Rights Commissioners. Wardak completed her Bachelor’s in agricultural economy from Kabul University and received a Master’s degree in International Relations and Diplomacy from New Jersey University.
Assembly Elections in Uttar Pradesh

Unifying Muslim Choices

By Syed Zafar Mahmood

Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly has 403 seats. Muslims constitute 35 to 78% in 68 Assembly segments. Of these 8 seats are reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SC). These are: Nagina (Muslim voters 68%); Nihore (42%); Rampur Manihar (38%); Balha (35%); Milk (32%); Balrampur (32%); Hastinapur (31%); and Dhannaur (31%).

But what is more surprising is that 32 of these seats which are not reserved, did not elect a Muslim candidate for the Assembly last time i.e., 2012. These segments (with proportion of Muslim voters given in brackets) are: Kairana (63%); Thakurdwara (52%); Sahibabad (49%); Bihat (50%); Deoband (48%); Qaiserganj (45%); Dhampur (43%); Saharanpur (Deh(44%); Meerut (43%); Nooorpur(41%); Bareilly Cannt (40%); Gainsari (39%); Bareli Town (39%); Ismouli (39%); Itwara (38%); Talahar (36%); Bhangi (36%); Bijnore (35%); Nanpura (35%); Nawaganj; Meerut Cant; Meerut South; Shamli; Saradana (all 33%); Garh Mukteshwar, Muzafarnagar; (both 32%); Nikaur; Harchandpur; Bithari Chainpur; (all 31%); Central, Ferozabad: (all 24%); Lucknow Cantt, Modinagar; Anola; Dataganj, Ferozabad: (all 23%); Katra Bazar, Ramnagar, Sultanpur, Kidwainagar, Bansi; Chhatra, Lakhipur, Nimzamabad: (22%); Azamganj, Nautarwa, Gauriganj; Karnelganj, Barauli, Allahabad (all 20-28% Muslims in 89 Segments)

Besides these, there are another 89 Assembly segments in UP, where Muslims represent 20 to 28% of the voters. Even here the community can consolidate its voting strength to elect a candidate either from the community or one who can effectively represent them. Currently, of these, only 18 have Muslim MLAs. Eleven of these seats are reserved for the SCs. The seats where they were not able to elect a Muslim representative are:

Bilaspur; Gangoh: Shahratgarh; (all 30%)

All that it means is that of the 68 Assembly segments where Muslims are in such numbers that they can elect one of their own candidates, they are being represented by non-Muslim MLAs. It is all owing to the fact that 12% of them are reserved for the SCs while in another 48%, they have taken no interest and have not initiated any steps to consolidate their votes in favour of a single candidate who can represent their grievances effectively.

20-28% Muslims in 89 Segments

Besides these, there are another 89 Assembly segments in UP, where Muslims represent 20 to 28% of the voters. Even here the community can consolidate its voting strength to elect a candidate either from the community or one who can effectively represent them. Currently, of these, only 18 have Muslim MLAs. Eleven of these seats are reserved for the SCs. The seats where they were not able to elect a Muslim representative are:

Rudauli; Barkheda; (both 28% Muslims); Meerapur, Mehdawal, Anupshahar, Barabanki: (28%); Dhaulana, Siwata (26%); Shahjanpur, Dadaul, Bishwanathganj, Chaprauli, Gonda, Mehauna, Shekhpur, Mahmoobabad, Bughpat: (all 25%); Lucknow Eas, Mahasi, Badaut, Biswan, Piaypur, Lucknow North, Sarojini Nagar, Lucknow West, Allahabad North, Patiali, Daryabad (all 21%); Ghaziabad, Paliya, Khadda, Padrauna, Sitapur, Ghosi, Pratapgarh, Varanasi Cannt, Dhaurahara, Siwupuri, Kushtagar, Varanasi East, Rauhaniya, Shivpur, and Fazilnagar (all 20%); Analysis shows that 83 of these 89 seats are not represented by Muslims in the UP Assembly. It is understandable that 12% of the seats are reserved for the SCs, hence could not elect a Muslim. But in 71% of the seats, Muslims could not think of a common strategy to unite their choices on one candidate, hence they go without Muslim representation despite the community commanding 25% votes.

Even in other seats, Muslims constitute 15 to 19% in 44 segments, and 10-15% in 91 segments and 5-10% in 108 segments. Even here they can influence the trend of voting in favour of secular parties.

Pressure on Secular Parties

The community should exert pressure on the secular parties to put up a Muslim candidate on those 68 seats where Muslims constitute between 35 to 68% voters. They should nominate a Muslim candidate on at least half of the 89 seats where Muslims represent 20 to 30% of voters. The community should exert pressure on the secular parties to put up a Muslim candidate on those 68 seats where Muslims constitute between 35 to 68% voters. They should nominate a Muslim candidate on at least half of the 89 seats where Muslims represent 20 to 30% of voters.
Pedalling for the President

Tailor who cycled 2700 km to meet Kalam narrates how the former President ignited his mind

Chennai: Seventy-year-old S Nagoor Meraan is a tailor by day and a watchman by night. Meraan is one of those scores of people whom you wouldn’t bother giving a second glance unless you come across his photograph with former President Abdul Kalam that adorns his makeshift workplace under a tree in Thiruvannmiur, in Tamil Nadu. Pointing to the photograph, he recollects the story of pedalling all the way from his hometown Tenkasi in Tamil Nadu to Rashtratapi Bhavan in New Delhi (over 2700km) in 2003 to meet the former President.

The journey lasted 35 days. During the journey, he cycled at police stations, open spaces and even strangers’ houses. “Curiously enough, not even once did my cycle tyres get punctured,” says Meraan, who’s now into his 70s. Initially, his plan of meeting the former President was met with uncertainty. “When I reached Delhi, I couldn’t meet him immediately. I wrote a letter of my mission and dropped it in a guest box on the Rashtratapi Bhavan premises. Fortunately, he read the letter and extended an invite,” he says.

Meraan dined with Kalam during the rendezvous that spanned 35 minutes. “I had taken along with me a shawl to present to him. But he declined the offer citing the presence of many homeless houses.”

In the capital city suffering due to extreme cold and asked me to Meraan dined with Kalam during the rendezvous that spanned 35 minutes. “I had taken along with me a shawl to present to him. But he declined the offer citing the presence of many homeless houses.”

The president, secretaries and the managing committee of Azam Baitul Maal is immensely happy to see the good appreciation of activities of Azam Baitul Maal which was published in the August 2016 issue of Islamic Voice. Our sincere thanks to the full team of Islamic Voice for the report which has enhanced the image of Azam Baitul Maal, and in their personal lives, Muslims need to look deeper spiritually, reflect on their moral lives, ethical conduct and day to day interaction with people. Muslims lack leadership and here they need to introspect deeply.

Nisaruddin Ahmed Jeddy
nisaruddinjedy@gmail.com

A Big Thank You To Team Islamic Voice!

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Prof Riaz Ahmed Secretary, Azam Baitul Maal Mysore

Dear Readers

I read Islamic Voice and I am in agreement with you about the deteriorating conditions of Muslims. Please implement mass literacy amongst Muslims. Higher education like medicine, engineering, architecture, law and so many other fields are available for Muslims. For those who cannot afford, they can go into vocational job oriented courses.

Mysore

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Dear Readers

Muslims must introspect

We thank you immensely for your continued support and encouragement all through these years and God willing for many more years.

Your feedback is extremely important for us. We welcome your letters of appreciation or brickbats which we will take in the right spirit. Let us know which pages inspire you in Islamic Voice which, if any, you think we could improve or even do without.

We welcome your suggestions for improvement.

Please email to workmailabledit@gmail.com or you may drop a postcard to The Editor, Islamic Voice, No 3/1, Palmgrove Road, Victoria Layout, Bangalore-560047

LETTERS

anonymous Letters will not be published. Thanks

Editor
A decade after Sachar Committee report on social, economic and educational status of Muslim community of India was tabled in Parliament, things seem to be brightening up for the country’s biggest minority community, which accounts for 14.23 per cent of the total population. As per 2011 census, the literacy rate among Muslims has surged ahead to 68.5 per cent, compared to 59.1 per cent in 2001, indicating a jump of 9.4 per cent in 10 years. Literacy rate among Muslim males soared to 74.79 per cent in 2011 compared to 67.6 per cent in 2001. Literacy rate also grew to 62 per cent among Muslim females in 2011, compared to 50.1 per cent in 2001. However, the literacy rate among Muslims was the lowest among all the religious communities and it was also much lower than the national average. While the overall literacy rate for India was 74.04 per cent in 2011, it was 82.14 per cent among males and 65.46 per cent among females. Muslims lagged behind not only Hindus but also behind all other minority communities (Parsis, Jains, Christians, Buddhists and Sikhs). There were also wide variations in the literacy rates among Muslims (males & females) in various states. Muslims in the southern states reported higher literacy rates compared to their counterparts in northern, western, central, eastern and north-eastern states.

New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia will be starting MD and Ph.D in Unani Medicine from the current academic year in collaboration with the Hyderabad based Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine (CCRUM) under the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India.

An MoU between the two institutions was signed here on August 24 by JMI’s Officiating Registrar, Dr. Abdul Malik and Director General of CCRUM, Prof. Raisur Rahman after the proposal was endorsed by the Ministry of AYUSH to foster research in indigenous systems of medicine in India.

As per the MOU, signed in the presence of JMI Vice Chancellor, Prof. Talat Ahmad, seven seats each have been allocated to General Medicine and Pharmacology, while three seats will be in each Ph.D programme. CCRUM through the Central Research Institute of Unani Medicine (CRIUM) shall provide all necessary facilities in respect of infrastructure such as hospitals, laboratories and other resources to run the programmes. JMI will conduct entrance test for admission to these courses besides holding interviews for the Ph.D programmes. Jamia will conduct examination in consonance with the regulations of Central Council of Indian Medicine (CCIM) and JMI within the broader framework and guidelines of Ministry of AYUSH and shall award the degrees accordingly. The fee structure for these programmes shall be at par with the National Institute of Unani Medicine, Bengaluru. The CCRUM will also help set up Hakim Ajmal Khan Chair in JMI to promote Unani Studies and Research.

Speaking on the occasion, Prof. Talat Ahmad said that the MOU marked a new chapter in the long history of Jamia. He emphasised the need to modernise the old discipline by actively collaborating with advances sciences like biochemistry and biotechnology. Prof. Raisur Rahman said that in the coming years, the face of Unani medicine will change and the world will realise its potential. He also hoped that in the next five years, a Unani medicine college will be set up in Jamia Millia Islamia.

**Guidance and Facilitation Centre Opens in Nagpur**

By Moin Qazi

Nagpur: An “Information and Guidance Centre” was inaugurated in the Jafar Nagar area of West Nagpur on August 15, by Syed Fayaz Hussain, Chairman, Dulocos Conveyors and Moulds Pvt. Ltd. S W Nagpi, Ex-Chief Executive, Forest and M.I. Shaikh Rtd. Executive Director of Irrigation Department, government officials and NGO representatives were present on the occasion.

Explaining the concept, Abdul Rauf Shaikh, Retired Dy. Commissioner and Chief Coordinator of the Program said that there was a long standing need felt by students, from the underprivileged sections for permanent “Single Window Guidance and Facilitation Centre” in the city, which could approach for guidance on government schemes, private and govt. scholarships, career opportunities through UPSC/MPSC and other competitive examinations as well as self employment opportunities.

The Centre will be open from 11 am to 2 pm, and from 6 to 9 pm in the evening, where retired personnel from various sectors would be providing guidance.
The issue of triple talaq is a very sensitive one. On the one hand, there are traditionalist Muslim scholars who wrongly regard even the slightest deviation from the opinion of their school as unlawful. On the other hand are thousands of Muslim women whose lives are being destroyed under the evil effects of a particular method of divorce.

By Waris Mazhari

The issue of triple talaq in one sitting has once again become a subject of heated discussion. Many Muslims continue to oppose the argument that uttering the word talaq in one sitting cannot dissolve a Muslim marriage. This is because triple talaq in one sitting as constituting an irrevocable divorce has been the position of many (though not all), of the scholars affiliated with the four major schools of Sunni jurisprudence for centuries. Some Muslims wrongly believe that any rule whose origin is from outside the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence is prohibited, and that is why they oppose the argument for making three talaqs in one sitting to be just one, not three. However, this concept has no authentic foundation in Islamic jurisprudence. In Sunni jurisprudential history, there are many instances of practices which were followed by the followers and disciples of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH), who were not from the four schools of the companions. If the companions were not under the pressure of circumstance would they have reformed their laws in accordance with this view. This is also the view of some Muslim sects, such as the Ahl-e Hadith and the Shi’ah of the Jafari school.

Quranic Restraint on Quick Divorce

When formulating the law about divorce, it appears that the Quran tends to put a restraint on quick divorce since it clearly suggests that ‘A divorce is only permissible twice: after that, the parties should either hold together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness.’ (2:229) According to this verse, there must be room for retaining the wife after uttering the word talaq, which would not be possible if triple talaq in one sitting were considered an irrevocable divorce. It seems illogical and unnatural that a marital relationship of, say, 30 years breaks off within thirty seconds, without leaving a chance of reconsideration. The Quran (4:22) refers to the agreement which a husband and a wife pledge together as a ‘strong covenant’, and obviously, that cannot be so vulnerable and easily broken by a one-sided decision taken in a state of anger or depression.

An Innovation is Condemnable

Another important point to consider is that according to all Islamic scholars, uttering talaq thrice in one sitting and taking it to mean a final divorce is an innovation (bid’ah), and innovation is condemnable, as is clearly mentioned in the Hadith that reports attributed to the Prophet. This being the case, how can an innovation be enforced and made a rule in the matter of divorce?

By Subodh Varma

Divorce and separation rates are higher among Christians and Buddhists, and lowest among Jains, according to freshly released Census 2011 data. Although separation rates are higher for Hindus than Muslims, divorce is more prevalent among the latter. The share of those who have lost a spouse to death is the highest among Buddhists, followed by Christians. Widowhood rates are much higher among Hindus and Sikhs than Muslims. A complex web of religious and social factors is responsible for these trends, which are similar to those discovered in the previous Census. Although divorce is legally allowed for Hindus, it may still carry social stigma. This could be the reason why the separation rate for Hindus was 5.5 per 1,000 married people, while the divorce rate was pegged at just 1.8 per 1,000. Separation includes wives abandoned by husbands.

Among Muslims, it seems the triple Talaq provision pushed up the share of female divorcees to five per thousand, against 2.3 per 1,000 among Sikhs and Jains. However, Christians and Buddhists have similar rates of women divorcees. The rate of widowhood is directly linked to the well known demographic fact that women live longer than men. This results in two to three times the number of widows compared to widowers across all communities. Another factor at work is life expectancy. Muslims have the lowest average life expectancy of all communities and this results in the least number of widowed people, at about 73 per 1,000 married persons. Among Hindus and Sikhs, the share is about 88 per thousand, while it is higher for Christians (97) and Buddhists (100).

An interesting dimension of the marital status details released by the Census relates to never-married persons across different communities. Among those who have attained the marriageable age, that is, 21 years for men and 18 years for women, Hindus have the lowest share, at 16% unmarried men and just 10% unmarried women. This indicates a very high drive towards early marriage, with many tying the knot before attaining the legal marriage age. Christians have the highest rate of unmarried persons of marriageable age, at 21% among men and 18% among women. Accepting a spouse from outside the four schools of the companions, a smaller share of women is still unmarried after the legal age than men, indicating the relentless pressure on women to get married.

Triple Talaq Effect?

Recently released census 2011 data shows, Muslim women have a higher divorce rate of 5 per 100 compared to 2-3 per thousand for Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. Christians have the highest rate of unmarried persons of marriageable age.
Learning From the Past, Living For the Future

We learned that Albania has a culture of harmony. It may lack the wealth of many other European Countries, but it certainly has one priceless export: the love and protection of the stranger.

By Sheryl Olitzky

I just returned from a trip to the Balkans. This Building Bridges Journey brought Muslim and Jewish women from the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom to Bosnia and Albania. The trip had two goals. First, we went to witness the results of the attempted genocide against the Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) in the early 1990s. Next we traveled to Albania to honor the only country in the world that opened its borders to the Jews during the Holocaust, providing them full protection. Against the backdrop of increasing hateful rhetoric in the U.S. media, we gained additional state-wise protection. Against the backdrop of increasing hateful rhetoric in the U.S. media, we gained additional protection.

Our time in Bosnia was painful. We met many of the mothers still awaiting the bodies of their loved ones to be identified in newly-discovered mass graves. We heard first-hand accounts of how the Dutch UN peacekeeeping force, in charge of protecting the Bosniaks, deserted their posts, which allowed the Serbians to murder those they considered “other.” While the war in Bosnia is over, the fighting continues. Beyond the physical reminders-buildings scarred with holes from bullets and shrapnel—evidence of distrust of the other remains. While presidential leadership is shared among Croats, Serbs, and Bosniaks, the so-called minority populations of Jews and Romans are not permitted to be elected to the presidency.

The Jewish Benevolent Society

We also heard stories of hope. We met with Jacob Finci, the head of the small Jewish community. This community’s benevolent society, staffed by volunteers from all sides, operated throughout the war to provide food and medical care to all in need. Mandated by its Jewish value construct of the sacredness of life, this benevolent society also helped several thousand victims escape during the war. During our conversation, Jacob was asked “Would you do it all over again today?” Would he risk his life in the midst of a war that was between other communities, not his own? After a few minutes of thought, he said “No, it was too risky.” Yet, when the moment came to step up and take such risks, Jacob did so without a second thought. We all felt certain that he would probably have done so again.

Darkness into the Light

The travel from Bosnia to Albania through the beautiful country of Montenegro gave us the opportunity to begin to process what we had experienced. It was a journey through the darkness into the light. A predominantly Muslim country, Albanians believe in the promise to protect the stranger, their guest. They applied this value during World War Two. At a time when the world turned its back on the Jewish community, every Albanian family was directed by the country’s king to shelter a Jewish family in their homes. They provided these Jewish families with Albanian identification. The number of Jews increased twenty-fold during the war. As Albania’s neighbors complied with Nazi orders to round up their Jews, the Albanians refused to identify even one of its Jewish citizens or guests.

We had the privilege of meeting with family members of these righteous individuals who saved Jews during the Holocaust. We came to Albania to thank these families for standing up to the Nazi hate machine. They didn’t consider themselves heroes. They simply considered their actions as “the right things to do.” They were perplexed by our admiration. We wanted to make sure that the Albanians knew that we recognized this special country and their people as exemplary. And we were determined to share what they did with the rest of the world.

The Sustaining Power of Dialogue

The leaders of each religious party in Albania welcomed us. They opened their hearts and their homes to make us feel like the most honored guests, just as they had done during the war years to those who came before us. Albania’s president and first lady met with us and entertained us with a special dinner. Women to women, we learned from the Alliance of Parliamentary Women how the women in government, regardless of party representation, refused to let political differences drive a wedge in their own consensus-building. Together they protect the needs of women and exhibit the sustaining power of dialogue.

Every person whom we met expressed an outpouring of gratitude for coming to visit and to hear their stories. We were desperate to understand how this small, poor, rural country broke out of the mold of hate to protect one another. We learned that Albania has a culture of harmony. It may lack the wealth of many other European Countries, but it certainly has one priceless export: the love and protection of the stranger.

We met many people during our trip to the Balkans. One thing was clear: our character—the “stuff” out of which we are made—is truly tested not when things are calm and the world seems peaceful. It is tested when there is no time to think. And we are not called to speak. Rather we are called to act. This trip will help all of us navigate our future. It helped us to see with our minds and our hearts. Only then will we be able to learn from the past and help shape a bright future.

The women of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom traveled on this Building Bridges Journey because we believe in the words found in our sacred texts (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:9/ Quran 5:32) which is best translated as “One who saves a life, it is as if one saves the world.” What we do in times of peace determines what we do in times of war.

(Sheryl Olitzky, is Co-Founder and Executive Director, Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, a group of Muslim and Jewish women working together for peace. She can be contacted on sheryl@sosspeace.org)

Learning From the Past, Living For the Future

By Abdur Rasheed Agwan*

The divorce rate of Muslim women was 5.3 per thousand women in 2001 Census, which has risen to 5.63 in 2011 Census. It is only a slight increase in a decade’s time. What can be concluded is that nothing unusual has happened within the community as far as divorce is concerned.

An article in the New Indian Express in April 2015, while quoting Census 2011, had observed: “The proportion of divorced and separated has marginally increased in case of women.” Last year, The Hindustan Times had reported, “This is an unusual trend in a country where the divorce rate was just 1 in 1,000 ten years ago, and is still relatively low at 13 per 1,000 – as compared to the US average of 500 per 1,000.” While India has no central or even state-wise registry of divorce data, family court officials say the number of divorce applications has doubled and even tripled in cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Kolkota and Lucknaw over the past five years. These reports make it evident that the general divorce rate is constantly on the rise whereas rate among Hindus has been going up.

Huffington Post remarks: “Census 2011 further reveals that 5.5 in 1,000 Hindu couples tend to get separated, including cases of wives being abandoned by husbands, though the rate of divorce among Hindus is 1.8 per 1,000.” Thus, both legal divorce and separation among Hindus will amount to be 7.3 per thousand women. If this is the fact then the ‘Hindu’ rate of divorce is basically due to lesser divorce rate among lower echelon of society, otherwise in Hindu upper castes and Hindu middle and upper classes it should have been more than 13 per thousand women as some studies reveal.

Zeeshan Sheikh who wrote the piece in the Indian Express observed: “Nearly 44% of divorced Muslim women belong to the age group 20 to 34” hence he seems worried that Muslim women are vulnerable in that age group. Let us quote another study of divorce cases filed in family courts, which underlines, “Couples in the 25-35 age group accounted for 70 per cent of the cases, and 85 per cent of them were filed in the first three years of marriage.” This clearly establishes that it is the younger couples which are most vulnerable for separation rather...
Contours of Israeli Lobby in United States

Objectives:
- Maintaining consistent support of the United States for Israel’s policies against the Palestinians.
- To ensure US help to Israel to remain the dominant regional power in the Middle East.
- The West Asian states (read politico-geographical map) should be transformed in such a way that only regimes friendly to Israel survive there.
- To make the US fight Israel’s enemies in the Middle East.
- To be the only undeclared ally in the Middle East.
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- To make the US fight Israel’s enemies in the Middle East.
- To ensure US help to Israel to remain the dominant regional power in the Middle East.
- To be the only undeclared ally in the Middle East.
- To pose itself as a strategic power in the Middle East.
- To make the US fight Israel’s enemies in the Middle East.

Modus Operandi:
- To push all the critics of Israel into ‘richly-deserved obscurity’.
- Not to allow any candid and fair discussions on merits of relentless US support for Israel.
- To get the US to veto all resolutions in the Security Council against Israel.
- To retain focus on US and Israel sharing the same values, democracy, human rights etc.
- To portray Arab states in negative light, supporters of terrorism, in possession of WMDs etc.
- Use US’s good offices to disallow the issue of Israel’s nuclear status on the agenda of the IAEA.
- Some Lobby groups police the academy and prepare dossiers on activists and groups that support Arabs, Palestine and peace process.
- To Defame the critics of Israel as Anti-Semites.

Major Israeli Lobby organizations in the US
- American-Israeli Public Affairs Council (AIPAC), American Jewish Congress, ZOA, the Israel Policy Forum, the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Americans for a Safe Israel, American Friends of Likud, Mecraz-USA, Hadassah, and many others. The American Jewish Yearbook listed more than 80 national Jewish organizations specifically devoted to Zionist and pro-Israel national Jewish interests.

The lobby includes thinks tanks such as the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), the Middle East Forum, and West Asian Institute for Near-East Policy, (WINEP).

AIPAC is the largest Israeli lobby group in the US, and it includes thousands of pro-Israel think tanks and pro-Israel national Jewish organizations. "AIPAC is the largest Israeli lobby group in the US, and it includes thousands of pro-Israel think tanks and pro-Israel national Jewish organizations."

Some Lobby groups police the academy and prepare dossiers on activists and groups that support Arabs, Palestine and peace process.

To Defame the critics of Israel as Anti-Semites.

V’tShalom (Jewish Alliance for Justice and Peace), Israel Policy Forum, Jewish Voice for Peace, Mereitz-USA, and the Tikkun community—strongly favour a two-state solution and believe Israel needs to make significant concession in order to bring it about.

Notable Exception:
A notable exception is Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) which has called for the US government to suspend military aid to Israel until it ends the occupation of the West Bank.

How does the Lobby Work?
Israel's lobby is effective because motivated groups can influence policies, fund campaigns, get their nominees appointed to important posts and cultivate sympathetic journalists. In a democracy even relatively small group can exercise considerable influence if they are strongly committed to a particular issue and the rest of the population is largely indifferent.

Important
Israel Supporters in the US
- Media
- Journalists like William Safire, A. M. Rosenthal, David Brooks were passionate defender of Israel.

In Washington Post, Jim Hoagland, Robert Kagan, Charles Krauthammer, George Will were all consistent supporters of Israel.

Michael and William Kristol who runs the Weekly Standard not merely tended to favour Israel, but were staunch supporters of hawkish Likud Party.

In Los Angeles Times, Max Boot, Jonathan Chait and Jonah Goldberg were all defenders of Israel.

Wall Street Journal’s former editor Robert Bartley once even declared: Shamir, Sharon, Bibi (Benjamen Netanyahu)— whatever those guys want is pretty much fine by me. Editorials of Chicago Sun-times, the New York Sun often look like have been written by the Israeli Prime Minister’s press office. New York Times has often been critical but remarks about himself by its former editor Max Frankel can be insightful: “I was much more deeply devoted to Israel than I dare to assert…” Israeli lobby’s most energetic media watchdog group is: Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA).

Important Soundbytes
The phenomenal support Israel enjoys in the US gets portrayed through some frank comments and forthright remarks in the US media. Some specimen: Yitzhak Rabin, former Israeli Prime minister: America’s generosity toward Israel is “Beyond compare in modern history.”

Richard Arney, former Majority Leader: "I was much more deeply devoted to Israel than I dare to assert…” Israeli lobby’s most energetic media watchdog group is: Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA).

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Died: noted writer and former chairman, Karnataka State Urdu Academy, Dr. Abdul Ghaffar Shackle, passed away on August 1 in his hometown Mysuru. He was 87. A linguist, Dr. Shackle headed the department of Linguistics of the Aligarh Muslim University for several years. Author of nearly a dozen books in English as well as Urdu, Dr. Shackle was connected with several literary, cultural and social organisations in Mysuru.

Formed UN chief Annan to Head Myanmar Commission on Rohingya

Yangon: Myanmar’s government has set up an advisory panel headed by former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to find “lasting solutions” to the conflict in Arakan state, where human rights groups have documented widespread abuses against the Rohingya Muslim minority.

A statement by the office of State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi said an agreement will be signed between her office and the Kofi Annan Foundation to set up a nine-member advisory commission to resolve “protracted issues in the region”. The council will comprise three international and six national experts. Rohingya Muslims have lived in the northwestern state of Arakan for generations, but are denied citizenship because they are considered outsiders.

Iqbal Ansari is Patna High Court CJ

Patna: Justice Iqbal Ahmed Ansari was today sworn in as the Chief Justice of Patna High Court by Bihar Governor Ramnath Kovind on July 29. Justice Ansari had worked twice as Acting Chief Justice of Patna High Court since December 2014 before being sworn in as its 39th Chief Justice. Born on October 29, 1954, Justice Ansari did his B.Sc. from Darrang College, Tezpur and completed graduation in law from Tezpur Law College. After joining Assam Judicial Service in 1991, he had been District & Sessions Judge, at Karimganj, Dibrugarh and Nagaon. He also worked as Registrar General of Gauhati High Court. Justice Ansari, who was elevated to the bench of Gauhati High Court as Judge on March 4, 2002, joined the Patna High Court on November 11, 2013. He would retire on October 29, 2016.

Devaraj Urs Award for Mohiuddin

Former Karnataka Minister and leader from the Beary community Mr. B. A. Mohiuddin has been named the winner of the Devaraj Urs Award for 2016. Mr. Mohiuddin was a moving spirit behind promoting modern and women’s education in the Dakshina District. He was first elected an MLA from Bantwal constituency from the district in 1978 and was later elected MLC for the Karnataka Legislative Council for two terms. He inspired a generation of Muslims in setting up modern educational institutions in the district. He was also a minister for some time.

The Award is given to persons who have followed ideals of Mr. Devaraj Urs, the former Congress Chief Minister of Karnataka who initiated agrarian reforms in Karnataka in a big way and raised the reservation limits to almost 70% in the State as early as 1970s while Mandal Commission was yet to be set up at the Union level. The award was presented to Mr. Mohiuddin on August 20, the birth anniversary of Mr. Urs.

TIDBITS

Cytecare Hospital for Bengaluru

Bengaluru: The Cytecare Hospitals, a group of specialized Cancer treatment hospitals plans to raise Rs. 700 crore within next 18 months, Ferzaan Englineer, co-founder of the Group informed on August 18. Located in Yelahanka on the road to the Bangalore’s International Airport, the 150-bed Cytecare Hospital has already raised Rs. 165 crore from high net worth individuals, he said. It will work on hub and spoke pattern with Bengaluru hospital serving as hub for three hospitals. More centres would come up in cities of north Karnataka. The hospital on 16,000 sq. feet area will begin operation from October. Engineer said the Group expects to make break-even in three years. The Group plans to have centres overseas too.

Tablez Launches 2 Outlets

Bengaluru: Tablez has launched two restaurants, namely Galito’s and Coldstone Creamery in Bengaluru. The Tablez Food Company is part of the Kerala based Lulu Group, International owned by Yousafali which also runs shopping malls in Dubai. Shaheena Youssuf Ali, CEO of the Tablez Food Company informed the press that the Group plans to set up a dozen outlets of Cold Stone Creamery and six Galito outlets by 2018 in India. The company runs six Galito’s outlets in the UAE and is in the process of starting six more. After Kochi, which is the home base in Kerala, Bengaluru is the second place to see the group’s operations. Galito’s is a South African casual dining restaurant and Cold Stone Creamery is a US based ice cream brand that has been brought to India.
Liverpool was the first city in Britain to be awarded the title, “European Capital of Culture” in 2008. It is also home to a sizeable Arab population, particularly Yemenis who were the first known Arab community. One cultural draw growing in popularity and stature in the city is the Liverpool Arab Art Festival (LAAF) which was held from 15-24 July, 2016. Celebrating its 15th anniversary this year, it is a celebration of all things Arabic. The festival showcased stand-up comedians, talks, film, live music and spoken word across different venues and spaces throughout Liverpool.

Pope Francis Disagrees with Identifying Islam as Violent

Pope Francis, global head of the Catholic Church, has questioned the claim that Islam should be identified with violence. “I do not believe it is right to identify Islam with violence,” the Pope told journalists during the July 31 papal flight to Rome following a journey to Poland. “This is not right and it is not true.” “I don’t like to speak about Islamic violence,” the Pope said, taking into account that one sees violence every day in the newspapers, even at the hands of baptised Catholics. “There are violent Catholics!” he said. “If I speak of Islamic violence, I must speak of Catholic violence.” The Pope expressed his belief that every religion has its fundamentalist groups, including Catholicism. Such fundamentalism, when it is present, can “kill with language,” he said. “Terrorism is everywhere,” the Pope said. “You think of tribal terrorism of some African countries,” he said. “Terrorism grows when there are no other options, and when the center of the global economy is the god of money and not the person – men and women – this is already the first terrorism!” “You have cast out the wonder of creation – man and woman – and you have put money in its place. This is a basic terrorism against all of humanity! Think about it!”

Supercomputer by 22-year Lad

Under the theme of “Undocumented” – it explored the various ways art can provide a deeper insight into the human experience of lives devastated by war, displacement and conflict. It opened with The Queens of Syria, a play written and performed by an all-female cast of Syrian refugees. A screening of the Palestinian film, Speed Sisters, highlighted the five-woman-team taking to the racing circuits of Palestine, and Arabs Are Not Funny, the stand-up comedy show originally from London, had the crowds roaring in laughter. Taher Qassim MBE, the chair and founder of LAAF, is a Yemeni who has been living in Liverpool for 20 years. Qassim, who launched the first Arab Art Festival 15 years ago, proclaimed this year’s event was already the most successful to date with “the depth of the programme of the ten days being very rich”.

California’s State Assembly Takes Stand Against Islamophobia

California’s State Assembly has taken a strong stand against a rising climate of Islamophobia in America. Recently, it passed a resolution that declared August 2016 as ‘Muslim Appreciation and Awareness Month’, as part of an effort to acknowledge the “myriad invaluable contributions of Muslim Americans in California and across the country.” The resolution was introduced by Assembly Member Bill Quirk. The writers of the resolution pointed out that California is home to over 240 mosques, more than any other state in the country. The resolution also decried the discrimination that Muslim Americans have had to endure in the years following the September 11 attacks. “Muslim Americans have made contributions to education, science, entertainment and medicine both nationally and globally,” Quirk said. “Unfortunately, the Muslim community has been, and continues to be, the target of harassment and assaults.”

Pope Francis has urged hundreds of thousands of pilgrims in Poland to show compassion for migrants. He told young people gathered in Krakow “a merciful heart opens up to welcome refugees and migrants”, a statement that puts him at odds with Poland’s anti-immigrant right-wing government. He urged young Catholics to “associate with the people of the PILGRIMAGE without any distinctions, making the gesture of fraternity. They’ve told us, and we know they’re sincere, that it’s not Islam which killed Jacques Hamel”, he said. (Stringer/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

Muslims Attend Catholic Mass in Show of Christian-Muslim Unity

Muslims gathered for Catholic Mass on Sunday, last month, in churches and cathedrals across France in a powerful display of unity and solidarity with Christians following the killing of an elderly Catholic priest. France’s Muslim council, the CFCM, urged Muslims to show “solidarity and compassion” over the murder. Dozens of Muslims attended Mass in Rouen, a few miles from the church in Saint-Étienne-du-Rouvray where two Muslim teenagers slit the throat of 85-year-old Rev. Jacques Hamel after pledging allegiance to the ‘Islamic State’ terrorist group. “We are very moved by the presence of our Muslim friends and I believe it is a courageous act that they did by coming to us,” Dominique Lebrun, the archbishop of Rouen, said after the Mass. “I thank you in the name of all Christians,” he said. "In this way you are affirming that you reject death and violence in the name of God." “It’s an important gesture of fraternity. They’ve told us, and we know they’re sincere, that it's not Islam which killed Jacques Hamel”, he said. (Stringer/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

Pune: Saad Memon a 22 year old boy from Chhattisgarh has developed a mini super-computer with speed and efficiency that can match an assembly of 32 computers. The software is similar to Apple and Microsoft’s Siri and Cortana, which accepts voice commands to operate computers and smart phones. With this, he is believed to have become India’s first mini super computer developer. Having 18 Gigabyte Ram space, the computer through automated voice command can automatically operate a car and humanoid robots. It has the capacity to give access to one lakh users at a time if a social media group is developed through it. Saad original hails from the backward Bastar district in Chhattisgarh and has graduated in Computer Science from Pune University and is working with first super computer developer Vijay Bhatkar.

Saad has job offers from Japan and USA, but he intends to pursue higher studies in the United States. Saad credited his mother Halima Banu and father Ihsitiqay Memon for the success of his project. He appealed to parents to encourage their children in the field of their interest and not force them to become engineers or doctors if they are not interested. Instead they should be provided with other options that they can enjoy and in which they can work efficiently.

To the youth he said that time is real wealth which should never be wasted. “We should never waste our time, and keep pursuing our dreams with all our heart” Saad said.

Saad said that he would like to go to the US for further studies and take his research to a further level.
Calling for Equality that is at the Heart of the Qur’an

Women in the Quran—An Emancipatory Reading
Asma Lamrabet
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(www.kubepublishing.com)

Reviewed By A Staff Writer

Islam, Muslims and women—this is a subject of a huge number of writings that reflect diverse, mutually-contradictory positions. This book is a welcome contribution to the corpus of writings on the issue. Lamrabet, a Muslim womanologist based in Morocco, provides a detailed account of women mentioned in the Quran to highlight the issue of women and gender relations in Islam.

At the same time Lamrabet stresses the fundamental equality and dignity that the Quran provides women and critiques critics of Islam for providing a skewed image of women in Islam, she recognises that patriarchy is deep-rooted in many Muslim societies and even in Muslim discourses about Islam, through which women are sought to be suppressed. “For a long time,” she rues, “the question of the status of Muslim women has been taken hostage between two extreme interpretations: a very rigid conservative Islamic approach and a Western, Islamophobic and ethnocentric approach.”

Discourse of the Reclusive Muslim Woman

Both these approaches feed on each other. Lamrabet explains that “the discourse of the veiled, oppressed and reclusive Muslim woman” serves as an “alibi” for “political attitudes” of Western “cultural domination”, in line with the notion of the West’s ‘civilising mission’.

While critical of Western notions of the ‘oppressed Muslim woman’, which is used to justify Western domination over Muslim societies, Lamrabet also recognises “a culture of oppression of women in Muslim lands”, often in the name of Islam, or what she elsewhere describes as “this culture of demeaning women which continues to plague our Muslim societies.”

“Between these two diametrically opposed visions,” she points out, “the Muslim woman ultimately remains a prisoner, despite herself, of a discourse which in both cases denies her person, her aspirations and her will […] Between a frozen Islamic thought which assiduously ringsfences women’s issues and a Western ideology which takes pleasure from denigrating Islam through those same issues, one struggles to think of a third way, through which Muslim women can emerge from this ideological impasse.”

The Real Contradiction

This “third way” lies in distinguishing between dominant Muslim discourses about Islam that are deeply patriarchal, on the one hand, and Islam itself, on the other, a task that Lamrabet handles with great dexterity. She shows what she calls the “real contradiction which exists between the spiritual message of the Qur’an and the lived reality of Muslims” that results in patriarchal readings of the Qur’an. She highlights the fact of human interpretations of Islam bearing the imprint of the geopolitical and socio-cultural contexts in which they are produced. This suggests the critical need for Islamic thought to “evolve, in order to redefine itself, to be rethought.”

Lamrabet notes that this reform is indeed happening “despite an overall chaotic general assessment in the Muslim world” at a number of Muslim scholars, including believing Muslim women, “contest, in particular, a classical analysis which stipulates that the inequality between men and women and its corollary of discriminatory measures are an inherent part of the sacred text by demonstrating that, in fact, it is certain biased readings, bolstered by patriarchal customs, which have rather legitimated these same inequalities.”

These approaches highlight the need “to understand the Qur’an, to highlight the issue of women and gender relations in Islam.”

Lamrabet provides a detailed account of women mentioned in the Quran, to highlight the issue of women and gender relations in Islam.

Context Sensitive Readings

Much of the book is devoted to reflection on references in the Qur’an to particular women, such as Mary, Hagar, Sarah, Zulaykha, the mother of Moses, and Asiah (wife of Pharao), highlighting the positive, respectful attitude of the Qur’an towards women. These references highlight the women’s independence, spiritual worth, and other lofty qualities.

Lamrabet also discusses issues such as polygamy, women’s testimony, inheritance rights and so on that are mentioned in the Qur’an and that have been taken by both patriarchal-minded Muslim exponents as well as critics of Islam to indicate women’s subordination to men. She provides alternate, women-friendly, context-sensitive interpretations, a process she has been unpacking patriarchal interpretations thereof.

Lamrabet concludes that Islam gave rise to “a movement of women’s liberation” that “shook the social sphere of the time, which was essentially grounded in a merciless patriarchal system.”

It encouraged women to speak for themselves as they entered the social sphere and sought their rights that tribal tradition had denied them. However, later patriarchal misinterpretations of the Qur’an led to the erroneous impression of it being a patriarchal text, she notes. Yet, she stresses, “Nothing could be more false than this assertion”, since “from the beginning of revelation, on the contrary, Islam fought against patriarchal traditions and customs”. Hence, she writes, “One can even assert that the Qur’an is an anti-patriarchal text. In numerous verses, one finds a critique and even a categorical rejection of the main manifestations of patriarchal culture.”

A wonderful, must-read book.
Hajj: A Spiritually Uplifting Journey

Pilgrimage is an assembly of great significance. It has its historical associations which centre around the noble concept of faith which highlights the link between man and his Creator.

Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to Allah by all people who are able to make the journey. As for those who disbelieve, Allah is in no need of anyone in all the worlds.

One thing which attracts our attention when we read this verse is the fact that the duty of pilgrimage was made in absolutely general terms: A duty owed to Allah by all people. may also infer from the way this verse is phrased that mankind is required to accept this faith, fulfill its duties, offer its worship and make the journey of pilgrimage to the House at which the believers in Allah turn.

Pilgrimage is a personal obligation on every individual once in a lifetime, and it becomes due year of the Islamic calendar, and polytheists were banned from tawaf in the Ka'bah altogether. The Prophet offered his pilgrimage in the following year. Hence, the duty of offering pilgrimage may have been legislated earlier, and this verse may have been revealed in the early part of the Prophet's settlement in Madinah, probably around the time of the battle of Uhud which took place in the third year of the Islamic calendar.

This clear statement imposes this obligation of pilgrimage, in the terms of a right which Allah demands from all people who are able to make the journey. Pilgrimage is the Muslims' annual general assembly which is held when the condition of ability are fulfilled, including physical health, ability to travel and safe passage. There is difference of opinion among scholars with regard to the time when this duty was imposed. Relying on the report that this passage was revealed in the 9th year of the Prophet's (Pbuh) settlement in Madinah, which is generally known in history books as “the year of delegations”, some scholars believe that pilgrimage was made an obligatory duty in that year. They support their argument with the fact that the Prophet himself went on his pilgrimage later. The point, that the timing of the Prophet's pilgrimage may not be taken as an argument in support of the view that pilgrimage was made obligatory at a late stage in the life of the Prophet. Several considerations might have contributed to that delay. One of these may have been the fact that the polytheists use to delay. One of these may have been the fact that the polytheists use to delay.

Moreover, Allah makes it clear that only with a blow of Allah's spirit, man has acquired his humanity. It is a worthy concept as a basis for human unity. Hence, it is appropriate that people should assemble every year at the Sacred Place which witnessed the birth of this call to mankind, to unite on pure faith.

Having provided this clarification, the surah instructs the Prophet to address the people of earlier revelation denouncing their attitude towards the truth of this message. They know this truth fully well, yet they try to turn people away from it. They disbelieve in Allah's revelations although they bear witness to them and they are certain that these revelations are true: Say: People of earlier revelation, why do you disbelieve in Allah's revelations, when Allah Himself is witness to all that you do. Say: People of earlier revelation, why do you try to turn those who have come to believe, away from the path of Allah, seeking to make it appear crooked, when you yourselves bear witness (to its being straight)! Allah is not unaware of what you do. The essence of divine faith is the same. Anyone who knows it, is certain to know that whatever is preached by subsequent messengers is true.

Aware of the Truth

Those people who adhere to a divine book can no longer be so deceived as they listen to Allah's words declaring the truth about those people branding them as total disbelievers: Allah Himself is witness to all that you do. Allah is not unaware of what you do. Moreover, Allah makes it clear that they are aware of the truth which they deny and away from which they try to turn people: You yourselves bear witness to its being straight. It is absolutely clear, then, that they were aware of the truth of what they rejected. They knowingly tried to turn people away from what they realised to be a straight path. What a wicked attitude. Anyone who adopts it is not worthy of trust. He is indeed worthy of nothing but contempt and denunciation.

We need to reflect on Allah's description of those people in the following terms: Why do you try to turn those who have come to believe away from the path of Allah, seeking to make it appear crooked. This is a statement of great significance. Allah's path is straight, and every other way is crooked. When people are turned away from Allah's path and believers are forcibly barred from following Allah's constitutions, nothing remains straight. Our standards become faulty and nothing remains on earth except crookedness which can never be set straight.

Corruption thus wins the upper hand. Human nature becomes corrupt as it deviates from the straight path, and life becomes corrupt as it follows a crooked line. All this corruption is the result of turning people away from the path of Allah which generates erroneous concepts, deviant conscience, crooked morality, wicked behaviour, unfair transactions and injustice in all relations within human society and between man and the universe around him. Either people follow the path of Allah which is straight and leads to everything that is good, or they deviate from it in any direction, and this will inevitably lead to crookedness, evil and corruption.
Hajj is one of the five tenets of Islam and every Muslim having its presence.

On the ninth day of the Prophet's (Pbuh) Hajj, the pilgrims proceeded to the Plain of Arafat to stand on the Mount of Mercy. There they stood and prayed to Allah for His mercy.

The Journey of Forgiveness

By Rabail Altaf and Fahad Altaf

For those on the annual Hajj, the journey can be one of great discovery and self-fulfillment. Two Muslim kids share their experience of Hajj, Rabail Altaf, 10 grade student and younger brother Fahad Altaf, 7 grade student with their parents join a local group from Orlando, with Caravan of Lights. It is a journey more than anything else about forgiveness and helping you to focus on your own spiritual well-being. Any body can change no matter who you are.

A Very Personal Thing

For me going on Hajj was very personal thing. Most people I have spoken to say one thing when they return. It is indescribable.

I feel as if I came here with an empty spiritual wallet and returning with an unbelievable amount of spiritual richness.

The centerpiece of hajj is a day-long vigil on Mount Arafat, the open ground was full of an incredible hum of people. It was the day where tears fell and hearts overflowed with thankfulness to Allah, with a strong belief in His mercy that all our sins will be forgiven. The day of Arafat is the day I’ll never forget.

In Muzdalifah as far as the eye could see, all I could see was millions of people spread out on the floor, under the clear black sky. It truly is an enriching experience, it gave me the international experience of the ummah. There are people here from every corner of the world, of all diverse cultures, colours and classes. However here every one is sleeping on the floor. This spiritual equality of the races the rich and poor is the main foundation of Hujj, wearing an Ihram further reinforces this feeling of equality.

After Fasting, the Prophets performed two saeeks. At the last saee, the Prophet looked up and cried, “My Lord, Have I delivered the message I was charged with and struck by a stone and at same time make sure that I don’t accidentally harm anyone, either. After Mina, we sacrificed a ram to be sacrificed. From the sacrifice, the meat was sent directly to the Kabah where Allah had tested Ibrahim by ordering him to sacrifice his son Ismail. At the last moment, Allah stopped Ibrahim and sent a ram to be sacrificed instead. After the sacrifice, the Prophets performed the Tawaaf around the Superior Abode of Allah. Then the pilgrims returned to perform the farewell tawaaf of the Kabah. The meat from the sacrifice was sent to the poor and the needy.

Fasting on the Day of Arafah

Abu Qatada reported that the Prophet (Pbuh) said: “Fasting the Day of ‘Arafah expiates the sins of two years: past one and coming one.”

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**Contributions of Islamic Theology to Modern Day Public Health**

**Practices of good hygiene and nutrition, disease prevention, and infectious disease control revealed through prophetic tradition - and essential elements of public health today - are just a reminder that Islam was revealed as a comprehensive way of life, that even extends to public health.**

By Affan T. Shaikh

Exploring Islam’s contribution to public health has been an astounding journey for me. Working across the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia in Muslim-majority countries, I’m amazed at not only the history of Islamic theology in contributing to our modern day understanding of public health, but also its potential to improve its practice. Yet, what is puzzling is that very little attention is given to the relationship between Islam and public health, especially in academia. Practices of good hygiene and nutrition, disease prevention, and infectious disease control—recognized as hallmarks of public health today, were supported over 1400 years ago through the teachings of Islam.

Islam’s Spiritual Foundation

The impact of Islam and medicine is documented in the life and scholarly contributions of the likes of Ibn Sina, Al-Razi, Ibn al-Nafis, Ibn Zuhur, and al-Zahrawi (Albucasis), as well as in European medieval texts that utilized their works. While the 14th century Arab polymath, Ibn Khaldun in his renowned text Muqaddimah, recognized that “God did not send the Prophet Muhammad to teach us medicine, but to teach us religious law,” it is from within Islam’s spiritual foundation and mandate to pursue knowledge that scientific thought flourished and advances in public health can be traced. Perhaps more than any other intervention, none has been simpler and more effective than improving sanitation and hygienic practices. Improving poor hygiene, inadequate quantities and quality of drinking water, and lack of sanitation facilities prevents many communicable diseases and has helped increase life spans across the world.

Centuries before the Sanitary Movement of Europe, Prophet Muhammad taught Muslims “cleanliness is half of faith” (Sahih Muslim). This hadith alone encompasses the breadth and depth of which a significant number of hadiths elaborate on the idea of cleanliness. From extolling the benefit of washing hands before and after eating to dental hygiene, from access to clean water to personal hygiene acts, were understood as not only acts that benefit the body, but also bring a Muslim closer to God.

Matters of Nutrition

But not limited to oneself, Islamic teachings further instilled an awareness of preserving a clean environment by protecting water sources, especially standing water, from pollution and defecation. Medical steps to protect against diseases, per the Prophet’s advice that “whoever takes measure of prevention is protected.”

**A Smile is a Charity!**

**Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) encouraged cheerfulness. He encouraged us to smile and to be good-natured. Even meeting another person with a cheerful disposition is a powerful act of kindness. He taught us to be happy and to spread happiness to others.**

By Sheima Salam Sumer

◆ Abdullah bin Harith reported, “I have never seen a man who smiled as much as the Messenger of God” (Recorded in Tirmidhi No:2641)
◆ “A smile is a charity.” (Prophet Muhammad as recorded in Bukhari)
◆ “Do not belittle any act of kindness, even that of greeting your brother with a cheerful countenance.” (Prophet Muhammad as recorded in Muslim, At-Tirmidhi)
◆ “Do not abuse anyone. Do not look down upon any good work, and when you speak to your brother, show him a cheerful face.” (Prophet Muhammad as recorded in Sahih Muslim: Book 302, Hadith 6359)
◆ Anas narrates, “Allah’s Messenger had the best of manners. I had an adopted brother whose name was Abu Umai. He had a sick sparrow called Nughair. Allah’s Messenger used to be playful with him and ask him: “O Abu Umai, what has happened to your Nughair?” (A playful rhyme) (Recorded in Bukhari)
◆ A man once requested from the Prophet the use of a camel. The Prophet replied, “I can loan you a camel’s baby.” “What use to me is a camel’s baby?” queried the man. Laughing, the Prophet quipped, “Isn’t every camel the baby of another?” (Recorded in Abu Dawud, Adab, 92; Tirmizi, Birr, 57).
◆ “Much silence and a good disposition, there are no two things better than these.” (Prophet Muhammad as recorded in Bukhari)
◆ “Shall I tell you of him who will shut out from the fire of hell? Every one quiet and good-natured fellow.” (Prophet Muhammad as recorded in Tirmidhi)

(Sheima Salam Sumer is a trained Counselor and can be reached at howtobeahappymuslim@outlook.com)

**Guidance**

**Where faith and science were at odds in much of the West, Prophetic traditions from the same era relay to us that Prophet Muhammad taught that, “For every disease, there is a remedy, and when the remedy is made apparent, the disease is cured by the permission of God.”**

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**By Affan T. Shaikh**

Islamic Voice, September 2016
Old Age: Burden or Blessing?

Caliph Umar said, Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) sought refuge from five things: cowardice, miserliness, old age, narrow-mindedness, and punishment in the grave. The Prophet’s prayer was: ‘O Allah I seek refuge in You from idleness and old age.’

Like any other phase in life, old age can be a burden or a blessing. It all depends on what you want to make of your life and what you see as its purpose.

By A Staff Writer

Not all of us will live to ‘a ripe old age’, but today, when the average life expectancy has increased, many of us might. There are fundamentally two ways of viewing life, and they offer two distinct ways of viewing old age. One way of viewing life is the materialistic way. According to this view, we are just the body—a collection of some billion molecules of matter—and when we die, that is the end of us. Accordingly, for materialists’, life has no real or ultimate purpose, or, if one has to find a purpose to live for in order to remain sane, it is to ‘enjoy’—to maximize the stimulation of the five senses as far as possible.

The second way of viewing life is the religious or spiritual. According to this view, we are spirit beings or souls that happen, for a temporary period, to inhabit physical bodies. When our term on this earth comes to an end, our bodies go back to the earth while our spirit or soul lives on. Accordingly, for religious or spiritually-minded people, life has an ultimate purpose—and that is, the development or realisation of the true nature of the spirit or soul, generally in relation to God. These two distinct and mutually contradictory views about life—the materialistic and the religious/spiritual—give rise to two very different ways of handling old age.

Making Merry While the Sun Shines

In his 80s, X may not be a self-confessed atheist. He may even claim to believe in God. Yet, God and religion hardly play any role in his life. For all practical purposes, X’s ‘god’ are the club that he haunts and the beer-guzzling friends he spends every second night out with. He loves partying, and every now and then he flies off to this or that country for a holiday. “I know that I’ve very little time left,” he thinks. “So, why not make merry while the sun still shines?”

Z is an 84-year-old grandmother. From morning to evening, she’s at her one’s ear, doing things for them even though she needs’t because they are old enough to do these for themselves. She irons their clothes, packs their school-bags, makes breakfast for them and walks them down to the school-bus. When they are back from school, she even volunteers to do their homework for them. While they are away at school, she is busy on the Internet, searching for recipes of ‘exotic’ dishes to make for them. She’s constantly heckling the children: “Do this!” “Don’t do that!” “What time will you come back?” “Have you washed your face?” “Have you done your homework?” “Wear your socks!” “Comb your hair!” “Have you put away your books?” “What will you have for lunch tomorrow?” “Will you have scrambled egg or omelet?” “Do you want butter or cheese on your toast?”

Going Mad With Boredom

“I don’t know what I would have done with myself if I didn’t have my grandchildren,” Z says. “Because they are there, at least I have something to do, to keep busy with.” She dredges the day when her grandchildren will no longer be around. “What will I do then? I might go literally mad.” But R is in his mid-80s, but that hasn’t sapped his enthusiasm for helping people in need. Twice a week, he volunteers at the help-desk in a charitable hospital. He also occasionally helps out at a home for mentally-challenged people. He is part of a group that gets together once a week to cook food for people living on the streets. “Serving God’s creatures is a way to serve God,” he explains.

Like any other phase in life, old age can be a burden or a blessing. It all depends on what you want to make of your life and what you see as its purpose.

Old age provides people the opportunity to strengthen their relationship with God, through prayer, meditation and reflection, and to seek forgiveness and make amends for the wrongs they may have done in the past, thus helping to smoothen their impending departure from this world and their entry into the eternal Hereafter.

Life is not Just Time-Pass

In contrast to them are people for whom life is not just ‘time-pass’, but, rather, a God-given opportunity for their spiritual development. Such people think of old age as a blessing from God, each moment a valuable treasure to be carefully spent in order to please God and do God’s Will. For such people, old age is an opportunity, rather than a burden. It provides them the opportunity to strengthen their relationship with God, through prayer, meditation and reflection, and to seek forgiveness and make amends for the wrongs they may have done in the past, thus helping to smoothen their impending departure from this world and their entry into the eternal Hereafter.

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Assembly Elections in Uttar Pradesh...

Muslims should even prepare their own Manifesto for the 2017 UP Assembly elections in order that the parties that are looking for Muslim support could align their manifestos in keeping with the aspiration of the community.

Don’t Outsource Leadership

Muslims should now take up two initiatives, first to organize voting by cent per cent Muslim voters, and take the women of the household to the polling booths. Preparations should start for the voting, days ahead of elections. Secondly, they should try to unify their choices in a particular constituency in order that a candidate of their choice receives consolidated support of the community. During the last elections, the Muslim electorate of the Bhopijpara, Tulsipur, Kathore, Mirgan, Aligarh, Lucknow West, Allahabad South and Didarganj took some measures to homogenize the Muslim choices and succeeded in getting a favourable candidate to win the election. The Muslim voters from Thakurkwarda, Qaisarganj, Bijnore, Nanpara, Nawabganj, Meerut Cantt., Panchandpur, Anola, Kart Baazaar, Rauhaniya and Fazilnagar should review their voting records of the past elections in order to ascertain their choice for the candidate beforehand. The community should seriously do some soul-searching and should not allow outsiders of their leadership to other communities.

Now that we know for sure the situation of Muslims in matters of education, employment, economic status and representation in Government services, how could we sit content and allow bringing them any development dividends for the last quarter century.

All Forums for Unity

Prime need of the hour is to bring a turnaround in the fortunes of the community and enable it to regain its Constitutional status. If people from across the nation could be brought together through Yoga, why not utilize the Namaz to consolidate the community members. If a community which deserves to have 70 of the Lok Sabha seats is reduced to less than half its numbers, then it is high time and take notice that the promised dividends of democracy are not reaching it. This is certainly not a privilege of the political parties in power. It is the role of a social component which goes unrepresented.

Muslims should even prepare their own Manifesto for the 2017 UP Assembly elections in order that the parties that are looking for Muslim support could align their manifestos in keeping with the aspiration of the community.

If Muslims raise a demand for reservations in Uttar Pradesh, it might lead to counter polarization of votes in favour of the communal forces. This would be harmful for us. I may focus on issues that are more important than reservation in the State in my write-ups in future. Let me conclude with the appeal that we need to make a decisive step towards consolidation of our choices at every constituency level and should not allow the opponents to take any advantage of our disunity.

(Reform: The writer is a student pursuing Engineering in Bengaluru, and can be reached at asha@nafeeafshin.com)

We welcome original articles based on real life experiences from last readers for the “Open Page” column... something positive and inspiring. We received this from Nafees Afshin, a student in Bengaluru.

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Contours of Israeli Lobby... 

My no. 1 priority in foreign policy is to protect Israel.

Tom DeLay, Armey’s successor as Majority Leader: “I am an Israeli at heart.”

Morton Klein, the President of ZOA had quoted him saying: “He said about the five pillars of Islam, of the obligations of a believing Muslim, of the prescribed ablation and laid the prayer mat on the floor in front of her. Shortly afterwards, with brisk movements and characteristic of her native origin, the young teenager walked around the small room preparing herself in her brand new Islamic clothes. With the ends of her emerald-green scarf flowing in the soft breeze and a silver brooch pin gleaming from the side, she paced her steps faster than usual through the dim-lit venerated corridor, towards the end of which her classroom was situated. Making a dash at the stroke of dawn, waking her room preparing herself in her class to the polling booth. Preparations should start faster than usual through the dim-lit venerated corridor, towards the end of which her classroom was situated. Making a dash at the stroke of dawn, waking her up, energetic and fresh. She jolted out of her bed, hurried to make her way to her class in the morning, she declared to her roommates that she would change her dress code as ‘quite an intrepid step’, her lecturers unexpectedly appeared to be reproachful. Not even a month passed and they began ostracizing her altogether. They criticized her so much so that one of them even pointed out that offering prayers ‘way too much’ would consume a lot of her time which she could otherwise have spent in reading lessons or doing experiments. She was being judged for not what was in her head, but what was ‘on’ her head.

The mid-semster holidays had culminated and the classes were to begin full-fledged from the very next day in her college in accordance with the timing of the class.

As she sat down to glance through its pages, until contents. Hour upon hour, she sat immersed into its profound Braden. She skimmed through the pages (just so bored that she was) and her favorite novels, carefully placing them in the travel bags. The brutal world that lay outside. She brought up with a detestable degree of pampering, she had by then little of her lovely set of parents. Her plane landed on the hot soils of the Valley City of Guwahati, post a four-hour flight all the way from the metropolitan Bengaluru. In about an hours’ time, she was home, with her loving set of parents.

One, at home, while looking for a journal in her father’s book shelf, she stumbled upon an old book, “Islamic Reminders”, the book was titled. As she sat down to glance at its pages (just so bored that she was), she found herself staggeringly immersed into its profound contents. Hour upon hour, she sat reading through its pages, until she felt a drop of tear slide down her cheek and fall onto the page. Such was the case, the Peace, the Might and the Mercy in the words of the Almighty, which conquered her and softened her heart in nothing more than just half a day.

She read about the five pillars of Islam, of the obligations of a believing Muslim, of the prescribed dress code and about the correct codes of conduct. All her life, she times her father mildly requested her to wear ‘a bit more loose clothing that would cover the arms and the back, only if she would like to.’ Her soul roared in disgust of her own neglectfulness.

One afternoon, while she was sitting with her family chatting about the flight timing that was scheduled for the following morning, she declared to her parents’ that she would change her style of dressing. Filled with joy and as much as surprise, they backed her up in her decision and advised her go ahead in implementing it. Stuffing her travel bag with bright colored hijabs (head and neck scarfs) and black abayas with elegant laceworks, she felt contented at her prudent yet bold decision of complying with the rules set by Allah.

In the classroom entrance door, she stood there still for a moment with her heart pounding abnormally loud and her legs trembling. What actually would have been only a few seconds at the entrance door, seemed very nearly as an eternity to her. A questioning silence seized the entire room as she made her way to one of the empty benches.

By Nafeea Afshin

‘Did you see my fishnet stockings anywhere?’ questioned a frowning adolescent, in her peculiar cadence, to her roommate. The frowning adolescent was also the only child of her parents, a fact that was evident enough in her demeanor. Being brought up with a detestable degree of pampering, she had by then little of her "I am an Israeli at heart."
The Wisdom Well
Power of the Word

By Hazrat Inayat Khan

There may perhaps be someone among our friends or acquaintances whose one word has weight and power; whereas another person says a thousand words that go in at one ear and out at the other. And this is because in one person his mouth speaks, in another person his heart speaks, and in another his soul speaks. There is a great difference. The word has a magic in it, it can make your enemies turn friends into your enemies, and it can make your enemies your friends. The mystery of all success in every direction of life is in the word. The word has power to turn the mind of the listener warm or cold. The word can produce the effect of earth, water, fire, air, or ether. The word can produce depression or joy. The one who knows the chemistry of the word does not need drugs or herbs. He has medicine for every disease in the world, not only for bodily disease, but also for the disorders of the mind, which still remain unexplored by science. By a constant study of life, by special thought given to one's word, by careful watching of the effects of one's speech upon others, one arrives at a state of realization where one can heal hearts.

When We Do Not Understand
The whole purpose of your life is to make yourself ready to understand what God is, what your fellow man is, what the nature of man is, what life is. We often suffer because we do not understand. Many conditions and many people are difficult to tolerate because we do not understand them, but once we understand we can tolerate almost anything.

All tragedy of life, all misery and disharmony are caused by one thing and that is lack of understanding. Lack of understanding comes from lack of penetration. The one who does not see from the point of view from which he ought to see becomes disappointed because he cannot understand. It is not for the outer world to help us to understand life better, it is we ourselves who should help ourselves to understand it better. What a great thing is understanding! It is priceless. No man can give greater pleasure to his fellow man than by understanding him. The closest friend in life is the one who understands most. It is not your wife, brother or sister, it is the one who understands you most who is your greatest friend in the world. You can be the greatest friend of God if you can understand God. Imagine how man lives in the world -- with closed eyes and closed ears! Every name and every form speaks constantly, constantly makes signs for you to hear, for you to respond to, for you to interpret, that you may become a friend of God. The whole purpose of your life is to make yourself ready to understand what God is, what your fellow man is, what the nature of man is, what life is.

A Positive Aspect of Illness

The sick person must develop positive thinking, and that in the face of illness, he must not yield to despair.

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

Illness appears on the face of it to be something very undesirable. But if you think about it deeply, you will discover that there is a positive aspect even in it. It is said that whenever the Prophet visited a patient, he would say to him, “Don’t worry, God willing, it will be a means of purification.” (Sahih Bukhari. Vol. 6, No. 56)

With regard to this hadith, the noted Hadith scholar Dr. Inayat Khan said that the phrase “God willing” here proves that this saying of the Prophet is not to be taken in the sense of khabar, or a definite statement of fact, about sickness, but is rather a dua or supplication of the mind, which still remain unexplored by science. By a constant study of life, by special thought given to one’s word, by careful watching of the effects of one’s speech upon others, one arrives at a state of realization where one can heal hearts.

If you lop off the branch of a tree, a new branch will begin to grow in just the same place. If a person falls sick, then, in line with the law of nature, he can regain his health. In this way, in this world, one can gain something that one has lost.

The sick person must develop positive thinking, and that in the face of illness, he must not yield to despair.

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Looking at the human body from a purely physical point of view, one finds that it is just made up of water, carbon, oxygen and some other chemical elements. One can even work out, as scientist Robert Patterson has done, the price of material constituents of the human body. According to his calculations, the market value is about six and a half US dollars, about four hundred Indian rupees today. Yet out of this four hundred rupees worth of matter, God has created a human being so wonderful that no price can be set upon him. No even four hundred billion rupees can buy the priceless masterpiece that God has fashioned within the human frame.

One can appreciate the pricelessness of the human body when some part of it is lost. If one loses a hand, for instance, millions of dollars will not buy a new one like it. If one loses one’s sight, all the wealth in the world will not win it back. If one’s power of speech fails one, there will be no tongue in the shops of the world which will put one’s thoughts into words. How incredible is it that God should fashion something so wonderful out of things of no value. It is only He who can bring the dead to life; only He who has the power to convert insensate matter into conscious life, to make something out of nothing. If a magician were to cast a spell on a stone, making it break into speech, everyone would be spellbound at his feat. The feat which God has performed is one of much greater complexity. He has made the inanimate matter that constitutes man’s body into a moving, talking, thinking human being. Yet God’s feat does not cause people to wonder. How blind are those who can see the skill of a conjurer’s magical feats, but not the infinitely greater feats of God’s creation! How ignorant are those who rush to become devoted disciples of anyone able to perform false tricks, but are without feelings of any adoration for the One who performs truly wondrous acts of creative genius. If only man were to truly discover God, he would become totally absorbed in the Lord’s wondrous feats of creation. Everything in the world would appear to him as a remarkable sign of God’s power and perfection. While dwelling in an earthly abode, he would see and feel nothing but the Lord on high.
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Lighting Up Lives: A Little Bag Can Go A Long Way!

Walk down the narrow paths, riddled with giant pot-holes, that wind through the sprawling slums of Rajendranagar and LR Nagar and you’ll discover a totally different world from the malls and fancy eateries just beyond. It is in this area that Swabhimaan, an NGO, headed by Venkatraman Iyer (or Venkat as he is also called) has been working for several years now, bringing hope to many.

Swabhimaan works on several fronts: it provides English teachers to several schools in the area that lacked this facility and awards scholarships to children. It runs a free clinic and distributes groceries free of cost to some 500 families every month. Every day, its volunteers distribute cooked food to around 150 families in the area.

By Yoginder Sikand

You have to see it to believe it—the grinding poverty, the terrible stench, the almost non-existent basic infrastructure, the mountains of accumulating garbage... Who would think that such misery abounds in the fringes of Koramangala, considered to be one of Bangalore’s most economically-affluent localities? Walk down the narrow paths, riddled with giant pot-holes, that wind through the sprawling slums of Rajendranagar and LR Nagar and you’ll discover a totally different world from the malls and fancy eateries just beyond. It is in this area that Swabhimaan, an NGO, headed by Venkatraman Iyer (or Venkat as he is also called) has been working for several years now, bringing hope to many.

Gainful Employment

Swabhimaan works on several fronts: it provides English teachers to several schools in the area that lacked this facility and awards scholarships to children. It runs a free clinic and distributes groceries free of cost to some 500 families every month. Every day, its volunteers distribute cooked food to around 150 families in the area.

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One of Swabhimaan’s latest initiatives is a cloth-bag making unit, which is providing gainful employment to some 40-50 women. It was Venkat’s response to the huge piles of rubbish that dotted the area, much of it consisting of plastic bags. “When efforts were being made to ban the use of one-time plastic carry-bags, traders were in quandary,” Venkat says. “They wanted to know what the alternative could be—something available easily and at reasonable price. We realized that this was a huge opportunity to avail the services of a large number of women from economically very poor families in the slums we work in. Most of their husbands are daily-wage earners. Some of their husbands don’t earn at all. Some of the women are widows. Most of the women had sewing machines, but very little work they could do with them. We started the bag unit to provide such women a chance to work and earn while being in their own homes.”

Bringing Meaning into their Lives

Swabhimaan provides the women with the cloth, needles and thread. The women collect the cloth, needles and thread. Swabhimaan provides the women with the cloth, needles and thread. The women collect the cloth, needles and thread.

Some of the women are widows. Some of the women are widows. Some of the women are widows.

Mary, a young widow with three kids, is the sole breadwinner in her family. She works as a maid in homes in the neighborhood and stitches bags in her spare time, earning about 100 rupees a day. Each month, Swabhimaan provides 150 rupees daily. Swabhimaan provides the women with the cloth, needles and thread. The women collect the cloth, needles and thread.

Empowering Women Economically

“This is a complete social and not-for-profit enterprise,” Venkat explains. “The income that the women earn is far more important, because 100% of it is used by them on their families, which is rarely the case with men’s income. Often, men spend their money on cigarettes, tea and drinks, but women spend all they earn on their children and on buying food for the family. That’s one reason why it is so important to empower them economically.”

“Using reusable cloth bags instead of plastic bags is much more environmentally-friendly. They take plastic out of the system,” Venkat says. “The bags give women an income source and also ensure that shopkeepers have a good quality alternative that’s available at a price—ranging from 10 to 20 rupees per bag, depending on the size—and that makes it fairly easy for them to transit from plastic to cloth-bags.”

“Right now we make and sell some 800-1000 bags a day, and we want to expand the programme,” Venkat continues. “We appeal to shopkeepers and customers to buy our bags, which are far more durable than plastic bags and are very reasonably priced. We also appeal to people who can help fund this initiative so that it can provide employment to many more women.”

(Venkat can be contacted on venkatraman.iyer1958@gmail.com)

For more details about Swabhimaan, see http://www.swabhimaan.org/
US Servility to Israeli Objectives

The Israel Lobby and American Foreign Policy
By John J. Mearsheimer, and Stephen M. Walt

The US foreign policy in the Middle East is guided by Israeli petty interest rather than the US's own national interest.

The authors comprehensively demolish twin pleas for relentless American support for Israel for being a strategic ally in a region festering with 'rogue states' and moral imperative for supporting a state that has been victim of the Holocaust, shares political values with the US, and is a democracy in the Middle East and an island of civil liberties.

The US foreign policy is shaped by the power of the Israeli lobby within America and totally ignores the misconduct of Israel. Israel bombed Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981; annexed the Golan Heights (belonging to Syria) in December the same year; invaded Lebanon in 1982 and rejected Reagan Plan for Peace in September 1982. Yet it faced no reprisals. Not alone this. It was rewarded in multiple ways with favours and freebies without any scope for candid discussion. Israel and US have joint Anti-Terrorism Working Group (formed in 1996); an electronic hotline functions between Pentagon and Israel's Ministry of Defence; Israel has access to the US satellite based missile warning system (since 1967); the two states have an intelligence-sharing system in place (since 1950); Israel maintains active chemical and biological weapons programme and is yet to ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; non-compliance of which led to US sanctions on several countries including Iran.

Such has been the condescending attitude that the US even ignores the openly hostile Israeli actions against itself (the US), e.g., Israel agents tried to bomb several US offices in Egypt in an attempt to sow differences between Egypt and the US; Israel sold military supplies to Iran while the US hostages were being held captive there; Israel purchased $36 million of Iranian oil in 1989 under a barter by Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard (imprisoned in 1984 and released after five-year civil war. Anti-American forces like Hezbollah, Nasrullah and Hamas are much stronger today than they were two decades ago. Besides a host of terrorist bodies like Al-Qaeda, Al-Jihad and ISIS are running amok through the chaotic Levant. Suicide bombings are the order of the day and threatening peace more than ever. The US is far from transforming the Middle East the way it imagined and Israel's security has been compromised more seriously at the hands of non-State actors than the despots who ruled earlier. Is it not the time for the Americans to shun the Israeli servility and have a look at where they have been led in pursuit of objectives of the Israeli state?

One could genuinely question as to why wealthy Arabs cannot counter the Israeli lobby within the US. Arab lobby is mainly represented by Arab-Americans who are too weak and too divided into disparate groups to be focused like Israeli lobby. The authors debunk the myth that the US media is controlled by the Jews but do concede that Israeli lobby works in a variety of ways to silence the critics; works overtime to cultivate positive image of Israel among the general populace; organizes all-expenses paid trips to bring hundreds of university students to Washington DC to listen to the Israeli lobby; tars the critics with the charge of anti-Semitism (something increasingly getting debunked due to overseas); and has developed vested interests in portraying Israel as beleaguered and vulnerable inasmuch as today Israel has become a need for their own viability and existence. No wonder then why a Pew survey in 2005 found that 39% of Americans considered American support for Israel a major cause for global discontent. Stifling criticism of Israel to cultivate sympathy in the US has now become an industry to the extent that criticism of Israel cannot even be imagined.

Weak Arab Lobby
One could genuinely question as to why wealthy Arabs cannot counter the Israeli lobby within the US. Arab lobby is mainly represented by Arab-Americans who are too weak and too divided into disparate groups to be focused like Israeli lobby.

The US has been blocking diplomatic and military aid and financial assistance to Iran and remains ally of despotic Arab sheikdoms and Nuclear Israel, why not deal with Iran, Iraq, Libya and Syria on similar terms which would then become more attractive.
Grapes

Consideration for feelings of others and graciousness in accepting gifts are etiquettes we can learn from the Prophet (Pbuh).

One day a poor man brought a bunch of grapes to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as a gift. He was very excited to be able to bring a gift for the Prophet (pbuh). He placed the grapes beside the Prophet and said, ‘O Prophet of God, please accept this small gift from me’. He was a poor man who could not afford more. His face beamed with happiness as he offered his small gift. It was evident that he loved the Prophet a lot. The Prophet thanked him graciously. As the man looked at him expectantly, the Prophet ate one grape. Then he ate another one. Slowly the Prophet finished the whole bunch of grapes by himself. He did not offer grapes to anyone present. The poor man who brought those grapes was very pleased and left. The companions of the Prophet who were around him were surprised. Usually the Prophet shared whatever he got with them. He would offer them whatever he was given and they would eat it together. Usually he would start first, out of respect to the person who had given him the gift. But he would always offer it to others. This time had been different. Without offering it to anyone, the Prophet finished the bunch of grapes by himself. One of the companions asked respectfully, “O Prophet of God! How come you ate all the grapes by yourself and did not offer to any one of us present?” The holy Prophet smiled and said, “I ate all the grapes by myself because the grapes were sour. If I would have offered you, you might have made funny faces and shown your distaste of the grapes. That would have hurt the feelings of that poor man.”

Learn To Forgive

Forgiving each other, even forgiving one's enemies remains at the core of Islamic teaching.

By Sadia Dehlvi

Humanity is created in the divine image and we know that God is absolute knowledge and compassion. Amongst the 99 known names of Allah, the two primary ones are Rahman and Rahim, most merciful and compassionate. Except for one chapter, the remaining 113 chapters of the Quran begin with Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Rahim that is an invocation of these two names. It is God’s compassion that sustains the journey of our lives. The Quran says, “By the morning hours and the night when it falls, your Lord has neither forgotten nor forsaken you.” Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) often said that God’s mercy was akin to the love and compassion that a mother has for her child. Allah endowed women with his primary attribute of mercy. Just as it is important to believe in God’s mercy, it is necessary to base human relations on forgiveness. We cannot expect Allah’s forgiveness unless we also forgive those who wrong us. Forgiving each other, even forgiving one’s enemies remains at the core of Islamic teaching. In one of the prayers that the Prophet taught, he said, “O Allah, you are most forgiving one, you love to forgive, so forgive me.” We need to invoke God’s love, mercy and forgiveness all the time. Love, compassion and mercy are attributes of a sound heart that is aligned with God. Prophet Muhammad once pointed to his heart and said, “Renunciation is here, the love and fear of Allah is here, sincerity is here.” When the heart becomes pure, serene and sound, it is able to hear the call of God, the call of the prophets, Sufis and sages. A sound heart is tender, compassionate and detached from worldly lusts and acts in accordance with the will of God.”

(Sadia Dehlvi is a Delhi-based writer)
The Discover Yourself Personality Development Workshop was held by Dr. Sadathullah Khan for the BET Sadathunisa Degree College girls on 19, 20 & 21 August, 2016. (Organized by: Bismillah Education Trust, Bismillahnagar, Gurappana Palya, Bengaluru, Karnataka.) Around 170 students participated in the Workshop and some of them share their experiences.

A. TAJ: Before the workshop, I was comparing, judging and having wrong opinions about others. I had lots of burden and tension in life. My life was complicated. But after the workshop I discovered a ‘NEW ME’ and I submitted my life to Allah and accepted the reality. I stopped asking the questions like why me? And I used to always compare my life with others, I stopped this now. This workshop changed my life and attitude. Now I am in the present and my ego is dead.

NAHID: Before the workshop, my life was in darkness, revolving around the false things, not able to see the real me. After the workshop I am able to distinguish between good and evil, truth and false, and now I know the purpose of my life. Now I know who Allah is and what he wants from His human beings and who actually a human being is? I am able to see the real world and will reach the goal to seek Allah's love, that is all, nothing else a human being needs.

SHAZIA: First of all I would like to thank you. Before this workshop I was very rude to others and I would not forgive the people easily. By attending this workshop I really changed myself, it helped me to come out of that negative behavior.

SAKEENA: My life was boring before the workshop. I was very much busy with mobile phone, or TV, I was not concentrating on my studies and was living in the past with lots of anger. Now I have started to be responsible and now able to take control of myself and my anger. Thank you so much sir, for coming to our college and hosting this workshop.

AMRIN: I didn't expect that my problem which I was facing from a long time can easily be solved. Thank you so much for showing the way to solve all our problems in life. I will never think of the past or the future, just enjoy the present and serve humanity.

I have no words to describe this workshop, it is a beautiful gift that changed my whole life.

LUFNA: Well, Before I was very sensitive, very frustrated. Now I have got confidence that nothing is impossible, to achieve our goals without negativity. I will be responsible and not dependent on anyone. Thank you for helping me to overcome all the negativity.

SUSHMA: I am very glad that I attended this workshop. I never thought this workshop will improve my life style and my way of thinking. I am very much benefitted from this workshop. Sir, you are a very good coach and your talk is very useful for people to overcome all their troubles in life. I changed myself to be responsible.

A Life Changing Workshop! Every Student must Attend!

The Discover Yourself Workshop was held at Al – Muminah School, Mumbai, for the 9th and 10th Std students, on 25, 26,27 & 28 July 2016. Around 130 Students participated in the Workshop and some of them share their experiences.

NUWAIRA: Before the workshop, I was carrying the burden of others and became their slave. After forgiving everyone, I set myself free. Truly I changed myself. I came to know myself.

FATIMA: The workshop was of great benefit to me. I thank Allah for giving me this opportunity to attend it. I learnt many morals and values and I believe I have begun implementing them and will continue to do so. I have truly discovered as to who I am?

LIFE & RELATIONSHIPS

Coming Out From Falsehood to Reality!

It was a great experience. It was indeed mind awakening to discover one’s real self.

It is a life changing workshop, every student must attend.

I used to be rude with my family members, but now I am trying my best to behave well.

The experience was amazing. I used to fight with my brother daily, but now after the workshop I say ok and forgive him.

Before I was lacking in confidence, but after the workshop I became very bold person.

It was very useful to change myself from evil to good.

It changed my perspective to see everyone as human beings. Really a life changing experience.

Before I never used to offer Salah on time, but now really I enjoy praying my Salah on time and I feel peaceful. I learnt that the real key to success is Salah for me.

After the workshop, life is full of peace, I am living my life with happiness, enjoyment and fun. It is now easy to tackle any problem in my life.

After the workshop, I took off all my glasses of judgments, assumptions etc. so that I am able to see everyone as their true self, as human beings and not an object.

SHAZIA: It was a wonderful experience. I enjoyed the workshop and learned many things. It has changed me from an animal to a responsible and accountable human being. I got the tools for a successful life. I have forgiven everyone and I feel myself as free as a bird flying in the sky.

NASHITA: Before the workshop, I was a very shy person. I never thought of going on stage. Going on stage was my biggest fear. But after this workshop, I had the courage to go on the stage and speak. Attending this workshop was a wonderful and useful experience for me. It helped me to remove all veils to see the real human beings as human beings and not as an object. Thank you for this workshop.

SIDRA: I was a very attitude girl. It helped me to come out of my ego and attitude. Thank you so much for such a wonderful opportunity and experience. My life is fully changed because of this workshop.

(Al-Muminah School, Principal Dr. Shehnaz Shaikh, 45/47, Sharif Devji Street, (Chakla Street), Near Zakaria Masjid, Mohammed Ali Road, Mumbai-400 003. Contact No.: 23450702/03 www.almuminahschool.org)
EAT NATURAL
YOUR BODY DESERVES THE BEST

No Artificial Fortification • No Added Preservatives.

Physically Refined Sunpure contains Natural Vitamins and Natural Oryzanol.
Terms Related with Mines and Minerals
(کان کنی یا معدنیات سے متعلق اصطلاحات)

**Mine**: Underground spaces from where useful substances are excavated. (کان)

**Mineral**: Naturally occurring substance with a definite chemical composition. (معدنیات)

**Shaft**: Vertical, narrow and long corridor to enter a mine. (کان کی تنگ راہداری)

**Extraction**: The process of separating useful metals from ores. (معنویات کی نویں فرم)

**Ore**: Natural state of metals in mines. (گچی یا خام دھات)

**Meteor**: A solid body from outer space which burns upon entry in earth’s atmosphere. (شہابِ ثاقب)

**Meteorite**: A meteor that reaches the earth. (شہابی پتھر کا پتھر)

**Bauxite**: Naturally occurring aluminum oxide. (الومنیم کی کچی یا خام دھات)

**Graphite**: Naturally occurring form of carbon. (شنگِ سرمہ)

**Sapphire**: Precious stone of transparent blue corundum. (نیلم، شفاف نیلا قیمتی پتھر)

**Emerald**: Bright green precious stone. (بزی یاقوتِ زرد)

**Ruby**: Precious stone of red corundum. (لعل، یاقوتِ احمر)

**Quartz**: Silicon dioxide found in hexagonal crystal form. (ینیا راہداری، شنگہ مینگ)

**Granite**: Very hard crystalline rock. (شنگِ خارہ، عمارتی پتھر)

**Limestone**: Hard rock formed by sediments of calcium carbonate. (جوں یا جہاں)

**Sandstone**: Porous rock consisting of sand grains. (یا جہاں)

**Fossil**: Remains of plants or animals turned into stones. (بستر پتھر سے سنگی بھون)

**Crater**: A bowl-shaped cavity created in the earth due to fall of meteorite. (شہابی سے پتھر جوڑا ہو)

**Fossil**: Remains of plants or animals turned into stones. (بستر پتھر سے سنگی بھون)

**Topaz**: Precious stone of yellow colour which is a compound of aluminum and silica. (یاقوتِ زرد)

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**Less Is More**

By Mohammed Ali Vakil

I like this story because it reminds me of how short life is, and it puts things in perspective.

If I live my life thinking I’m going to be here forever (or for a looong time), I find myself getting stressed out very easily. Why? Because I’m either running after new things or holding on to other things that by nature are transient. So when it slips from my hands, I get frustrated.

But when I accept myself as a traveler who’s in this world for a short time, I’m more relaxed. Things come and go in my life. I can play with them without the need to get attached and let it go when the time comes.

Life is short. Enjoy this journey.

And I’ll see you soon. If not in this world, definitely in the next! Safe travels!

(Sufi Comics)
I felt a bit like Alice in Wonderland as I stepped into Baitus Shifa Unani Pharmacy. Nestled in a quiet area called the Mandi Mohalla in Mysuru, this quaint place is owned and managed by Hakim Syed Moinuddin, a 68-year-old Unani physician who embodies kindness and humility despite the fame he enjoys not just in Mysuru, but across Karnataka.

Hakim Moinuddin’s Unani Pharmacy building takes visitors back to the good old times. It is packed with antique furniture, pretty bottles in which are stocked Hakim’s medicines, a wooden staircase, a copper water samovar and giant goblets from Iran, which once upon a time were used to fetch rose water!

It was in 1921 that his father set up a “Dawa Khana” in this antique building. “My father would work at the Government Ayurvedic Hospital and also manage the Unani Pharmacy here. Apart from many needy and poor people who consulted my father for their ailments, there were also members from the Maharaja’s family in Mysuru who would consult him. He would never accept any money from the poor and needy,” says Hakim Moinuddin.

Born in Mysuru, Hakim Moinuddin has six brothers and a sister. At the age of 10 months, he suffered a polio attack. All efforts by his parents to get treatment for him failed and it seemed like he had to live life with polio. Coming to terms with this reality and encouraged by his parents to pursue his education, Hakim Moinuddin completed M.A. in History from Manasa Gangotri in Mysuru.

It was a turning point in his life when he began to be guided by his father with the Unani medicine treatments. Picking up the skills and the gentle ways of his father, Hakim Moinuddin began to meet patients, talking to them, listening to health issues and assisting his father in making Unani potions. After his father passed away, in 1979, he took over the responsibility of running the pharmacy. Today, he is assisted by his wife Azra in making the Unani medicines and continues the tradition of treating the needy and poor without charging them anything. “My medicines work well for gastric problems, kidney stones, blood pressure, and even diabetes. I am grateful to God that I am able to serve people who belong to different faiths, and that is my service to God. I never looked upon my polio as a handicap at all. Today, I want to help people in whatever way I can by healing their ailments, with God’s help of course,” says Hakim Moinuddin.

Baitus Shifa Unani Pharmacy is really a little wonderland and Hakim Moinuddin and his family are wonderful people. It’s all quite something one finds today only in fairy tales! If you ever visit Mysuru, do stop over to meet Hakim and his family. Their kindness and simplicity are healing and overwhelming!