



Caring for Our Common Future Advancing Shared Well-Being

'The majority of humanity, both in the East and in the West, still believes in the possibility of coexistence and rejects the rhetoric of violence and hatred.'

By Shaykh Abdullah b. Bayyah
(President, Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, Abu-Dhabi)

In the Name of God, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. May God bless and send peace upon the Prophet Muhammad and all of God's emissaries to humankind.

[...] Ladies and Gentlemen, the destinies of nations are intertwined with one another: there is no future for some of us, if we do not care for the future of all. Such is the nature of the age in which we live. All of humankind is on one ship, like the one described by the Prophet Muhammad God's peace and blessings upon him in the parable of passengers on a two-story ship, in which those on the lower deck wished to make a hole in the hull of their part of the ship (in order to draw water so that they wouldn't have to disturb those at the upper level where the drinking water

was stored). According to the parable, if those on the upper deck allowed those on the lower deck to carry on with what they wished to do, "they would all perish; if they instead worked together, they and everyone else on the ship would survive." Like the passengers on this ship, we are bound by our shared destiny and path. None can be saved without a course of action designed to save everyone. There is no Ark of Noah; instead, there is only the ship of solidarity and cooperation between people of goodwill, faith, and wisdom.

Planning seriously for the future has become a pressing duty that can no longer wait. Each time we delay actions we know we must take in order to ward off harm for the future of humanity, we are setting future generations upon courses they will not be able to reverse, such as population growth, civil wars, migration, environmental degradation, and the growing disparities between the rich and the poor.

Before us lie the promises of a civilizational failure that has degraded the value of the human being. What is the purpose of venturing into outer space, seeking out other planets, when we are incapable of taking care of our own planet's environment when are still incapable of living in harmony with our fellow human beings, our neighbors, on our own planet?

This failure, if it continues, does not bode well for a better future. Many voices have sounded alarm bells, alerting us to the failure of the contemporary model of civilization in which humanity as a whole has bought into, in the hopes of prosperity and stability.

Last century, we experienced the phenomenon of globalization with two forces acting on us simultaneously. On the one hand, we have the all-encompassing pressure to abolish religious and ethnic identities and restructure the world with one identity. On the other hand, there are those



Shaykh Bayyah with Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby

desperately clinging to narrowly defined identities, with all of the hate speech and xenophobia that come with that, focusing on differences, instead of searching for what we have in common.

For the first time in history, we now have the technological capability to annihilate the human race: with the spread of extremist thought in all its forms, the misuse of this capability is quite possible. On the other extreme, this unguided technological development has extended the human lifespan through the manipulation of the human genome along with its resultant ethical dilemmas.

All of this has led to a widespread sense of anxiety, apprehension, uncertainty, and loss of trust. Hence, it is more imperative than

ever before for humanity to strive ardently to keep moral progress in pace with scientific progress so that it may inform and augment these innovations with the values of goodness, love, and peace.

In spite of our technological advancements, mass communication and global transportation have not been able to erase from our memories the long-standing misconceptions various peoples have held of one another. Instead, we have seen tragic and senseless acts carried out by various peoples against others without any jurisdiction from either a religious or temporal authority. Hence, the misconceptions have multiplied and increased the accumulated historical rancor that reinforce every day the suspicions of those

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MWL & Christian 'Evangelical' Community Seek to Foster Coexistence

Jeddah: Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL) Sheikh Muhammad Al-Essa met with a delegation of the 'Evangelical' Christian community from the USA in Jeddah recently. The two sides discussed ways to promote coexistence and harmony around the world. In a joint statement, the two sides reaffirmed their common values and pledged to strengthen cooperation in achieving them. They also stressed the need to renounce all forms of extremism and hatred and work together to build bridges of cooperation among peoples of all religions and cultures. The two sides commended the contents of the historic Makkah Document, which was adopted by the international conference organized by MWL during this



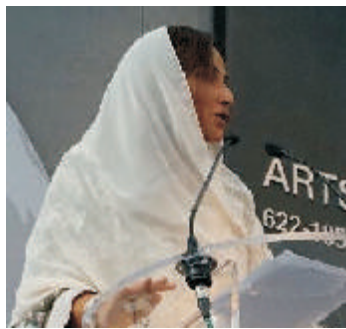
Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL) Sheikh Muhammad Al-Essa in a meeting with a delegation of the Christian 'Evangelical' community from the United States of America in Jeddah

summer. They stressed the need to build bridges of cooperation, coexistence and love for all peoples, while stressing the

importance of dialogue as the most effective tool to build rapport with others while identifying common bonds.

New Islamic Art Space at Louvre in Paris

Paris: A new space at the Louvre Museum in Paris showcasing more than 12 centuries of Islamic art was unveiled recently by Lamia bint Majed Al-Saud, the secretary general of Alwaleed Philanthropies. Hosting one of the most extensive collections of Muslim art and artifacts in the world, the new department contains 3,000 items collected from Spain to India via the Arabian Peninsula and dating



from the 7th century to the 19th. Visitors to the exhibition will be shown the evolution of

Islamic art and how it influenced and, in turn, was influenced by, other artistic traditions. The expansion over two floors was supported by Alwaleed Philanthropies, which has a longstanding partnership with the Paris museum dating back nearly 20 years. The global foundation chaired by Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal donated \$23 million in 2005 to help build the museum's department of Islamic art.

Antalya Congress to Bring Together Vets, Cat Lovers



Ankara: KEDVET, a non-governmental organization promoting affection towards and awareness regarding cats, is organizing International Feline Medicine Congress between Oct. 6 and 8 in Turkey's southern province of Antalya. The event, whose tagline is "Just for Cats" is bringing together under the same roof, volunteer veterinarians and cat lovers. Participants of the conference will catch up with the innovations in feline medicine, meet scholars who are experts

on felines, and learn and exchange opinions. KEDVET chairman Dr. Tarkan Özçetin says on the event's website that the cat population in Turkey was counted to be at 3.4 million as of 2017, citing official data.

"The fact that feline-specific vaccines, medications, litters etc. rapidly run out of stock each year and supply has become increasingly problematic can also be shown as evidence to this data. One could easily say that the interest in cats will continue to augment at a similar rate for years to come, Özçetin says. Founded in 2015 as the first "Association of Feline Medicine" in Turkey, KEDVET was accepted as representative of Turkey for the International Society of Feline Medicine (ISFM) the same year.

UAE's first official synagogue to open in 2022

Construction on the United Arab Emirates' first official synagogue will begin next year and be completed by 2022, according to media reports. The synagogue will be part of the multi-faith "Abrahamic Family House" complex in Abu Dhabi, which will also feature a mosque and church of which full construction will be completed in 2022. The complex was

announced in February following a visit by Pope Francis to the UAE, the first by a pontiff to the Arabian Peninsula. Presently, a small Jewish community of expatriates currently use a house in Dubai for private worship. Other official non-Muslim places of worship in the country include Christian churches, a Hindu temple and a Sikh Gurdwara.

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St Francis Xavier Church Opens in Salalah

Oman is a model among Gulf States, both in the fight against terrorism and in terms of religious freedom.

Salalah (Oman): Recently, a thousand Catholics attended the inauguration of the new St Francis Xavier Church in Salalah, Oman, about 10 minutes drive from the city centre. The building has a seating capacity of 600, a balcony over the main altar and a multipurpose hall, for a total capacity of a 1000. Christian and Muslim dignitaries and clerics were present at the first function, including Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Francisco Padilla, the Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia (United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen) Bishop Paul Hinder, and Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs director Ahmed Khamis Masood Al Bahri. Archbishop Padilla thanked Sultan Qaboos Bin Said Al Said for granting the building permits. "May this new Church be a sign of hope for all of us, a sign that God always walks at our side in good and bad times, even if our prayers are not answered instantly," he said.



In his address, Bishop Hinder acknowledged all those who worked on the project on land granted by Sultan Qaboos bin Said in 1979. In 1981, an ecumenical centre was opened in the same place by Bishop Gremoli, Hinder's predecessor.

The prelate thanked the government for their support and cooperation and offered prayers for the welfare of the monarch and the country. Speaking on behalf of Omani authorities, Minister Al Bahri

said that it was a "pleasure" to attend the opening of the place of worship and that he was very happy to share this moment of celebration with Catholics.

Oman is a model among Gulf States, both in the fight against terrorism and in terms of religious freedom. State interference in people's lives in Oman is limited, unlike Saudi Arabia. Overall, Christians are around 6.5 per cent, Hindus 5.5 per cent and the vast majority, around 75 per cent, is Muslim.

After Dictator's Ouster, Sudan Calls On Jewish Emigres To Return

Sudan's new minister for religious affairs called on Jews who previously resided in the African country to return following the ouster of long-time leader Omar al-Bashir.

"Sudan is pluralistic in its thought, pluralistic in its culture, in its ideologies and Islamic religious sects, and even religions. There is Islam, Christianity, and a minority that follow the Jewish faith," Nasr-Eddin Mofarah told Saudi broadcaster Al Arabiya in an interview recently. "It is possible that they [the minority] have left the country and from here we would like to call on them through their right of citizenship and nationality to come back to this country because this country, Sudan, as long as there is a civilian government, the basis of nationality is rights and obligations," he added.

Few Jews are believed to remain



in Sudan, which at its peak had a Jewish community numbering some 1,000 people. But the creation of Israel in 1948, and a series of Arab-Israeli wars, made daily life uncomfortable for many Sudanese Jews. Anti-Israel protests erupted, and rhetoric at times became anti-Semitic, bringing on suspicion, hate and intimidation. The nationalization of big businesses in the early 1970s added to doubts about their future. Feeling threatened and uncertain, most Sudanese Jews reluctantly decided to migrate to the United States, Britain, Switzerland or Israel, leaving

their homes, shops, friends and wealth behind. Many Sudanese Jews had warm relations with their Sudanese Muslim and Christian neighbours. In an interview with Sudania 24 TV, Sudanese writer Haidar Al-Mukashafi said the Jewish community and Sudan was "very old" and possibly dated back 1,000 years.

The comments by Mofarah and Mukashafi came as Sudan transitions to civilian rule following nationwide protests that removed dictator al-Bashir.

In this 1950 handout photo, a Jewish wedding is held in Khartoum synagogue, Sudan. The synagogue was established in 1926 in downtown Khartoum, replacing an older small one. The synagogue was sold in 1987 after most Sudanese Jews left the country and currently is a bank.

Madinah Museum Showcases 2,000 Rare Artefacts



A view of the exhibits at the Dar Al-Madinah Museum. (SPA)

Madinah: Dar Al-Madinah Museum offers visitors the opportunity to view historical pieces associated with the Prophet's life. It features artefacts that capture the history, heritage, social life and culture of Madinah. The museum's executive director, Hassan Taher, said that it aims to promote the noble values of Prophet Muhammad, encourage a sense of belonging and capture the history, culture and heritage of Madinah. The exhibits start with the Prophet's life. Taher said: "The museum carries out specialized research in

Madinah's architectural heritage. It contains a library of relevant books, research and magazines, all of which are accessible to researchers." He said that the museum has issued more than 44 books and publications on Madinah's architecture.

Taher added: "There are around 2,000 artefacts in the museum's exhibition halls. These include antiquities, handicrafts, manuscripts, documents, correspondence, old publications, postage stamps, photographs and artworks."

Myanmar Interreligious Group visits Indonesia

Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla on September 9, welcomed some inter-religious figures from Myanmar at his office in Jakarta, and held a discussion on tolerance, harmony, and situation of interfaith people in both countries. The event was held through cooperation between the government and the Indonesia Inter-Religious Council (IRC) initiated by Din Syamsuddin, a national Muslim figure. "The delegations of Myanmar's inter-religious figures were here to share their views on how Indonesia maintains inter-faith harmony," Syamsuddin remarked. According to Syamsuddin, the vice president had highlighted Indonesia's founding principles of Pancasila and Bhineka Tunggal Ika, an old Javanese term translated as "Unity in Diversity," the official national



motto of Indonesia. They have helped people lead a harmonious existence. Furthermore, religious moderation is expected to serve as a reference for other countries home to different religions.

Leader of Myanmar's delegations Cardinal Charles Bo lauded the meeting and expressed the hope of taking a cue from Indonesia on equality among people of different faiths. "We have seen a wide body of experience on how this Muslim-majority nation upholds equality without any discrimination," Cardinal Bo remarked.

By Syed Farid Alatas

Backward and extremist ideologies and orientations have always been held on to by a minority in Muslim societies. But that is enough to cause problems. As a result, the question as to what constitutes a progressive interpretation of Islam arises. When we refer to progressive Islam, we are really referring to the progressive thinking among Muslims on various issues.

The idea of progressive Islam or its variant, progressive Muslims, is generally held to be a notion that developed in the West during the early years of this century, and more so after Sept 11, 2001. Various Islamic organisations and movements have emerged that qualify themselves as progressive. Examples are the Progressive Muslim Union of North America (New York) and Muslims for Progressive Values (Los Angeles).

The idea of progressive Islam was discussed systematically by Omid Safi, an American-based Iranian scholar, about 15 years ago. Progressive Muslim thought is associated with the UK-based journal, *Critical Muslim*. Also relevant is the idea of progressive Islamic hermeneutics, advanced by the Australian-based scholar, Adis Duderija.

However, it has hardly been recognised that the idea of progressive Islam actually emerged in the Malay world. It was the name of a journal founded by Syed Hussein Alatas while he was a student at the University of Amsterdam. *Progressive Islam* was published for two years in 1954 and 1955, in Amsterdam.

The editorial of the first issue of the first volume states the following: "This monthly, which we have called Progressive Islam, is the realisation of an attempt to formulate a serious view concerning the nature of Islam and its relation with modern thought. The condition of the Muslim people, the nature of the Islamic religion and the impact of Western thought upon the societies of the East shall be the primary concern of this monthly..."

Apart from dealing with prejudices and misunderstandings about Islam in the West, the objective of *Progressive Islam* was to publish articles on various aspects of Islam, "laying a great emphasis on its rational and philosophical foundation". This was with a view towards dealing with some of the fundamental problems of Muslim society. The editorial of the second issue, entitled "The Regeneration of Islamic Societies", lists five fundamental problems faced by the Muslim world. They are the nature of the group in power, the lack of sound planning, unconsciousness of the vital

Against The Grain: The Meaning Of Progressive Islam

problems of society, desultory influences from the West, and materialism and positivism.

The problem of leadership was a concern that was to occupy the thought of Alatas for the rest of his life. In 1977, he published a book entitled *Intellectuals in Developing Societies*. His numerous books and papers on corruption also highlighted the problems of vicious and irresponsible leadership.

A symptom of the predominance of bad leadership was the lack of sound planning. With reference to Ibn Khaldun, Alatas noted that the sphere of thinking and action was influenced by the social situation, which formed the background of such thought and behaviour. Sound planning was necessary in order to create adequate conditions in society such that people could live to their potential in the spheres of thought and behaviour. Of primary importance was planning for economic reforms. This is because social vices were the outcome of economic maladjustment and exploitation.

Such planning, however, was not forthcoming because of the lack of awareness of the vital problems of society. This, in turn, was due to the absence of a group of thinkers large enough to constitute a force in the regeneration of Muslim societies. The result is that few Muslims were aware of the vital problems confronting their societies. Alatas considered it to be "a task of great magnitude to disseminate ideas and instil attitude into the minds of millions of men". His interest in the role of intellectuals in Malaysia and other developing societies continued till the end of his life.

The backwardness of Muslim society, however, was not only a result of deficiencies to be found within the Muslim world. There were also the desultory influences of the West.

Definition And Objectives Of Progressive Islam

It was not till about 50 years later that the term and idea of progressive Islam re-emerged. In 2003, Safi, a prominent proponent of progressive Islam, described it in the following manner:

"Progressive Islam encompasses a number of themes: striving to realise a just and pluralistic society through a critical engagement with Islam, a relentless pursuit of social justice, an emphasis on gender equality as a foundation of human rights, and a vision of religious and ethnic pluralism."

Progressive Muslims have a

universal approach in that they see themselves as advocates of all human beings, not just Muslims. The concern is with subalternity in all its forms, that is, poverty, oppression and other forms of marginalisation. As Safi said, the task of progressive Muslims is "to give voice to the voiceless, power to the powerless, and confront the 'powers that be' who disregard the God-given human dignity of the *mustad'afun* all over this Earth".

Furthermore, progressive Muslims derive their concern with social justice both from within the classical Islamic tradition as well as from modern orientations, drawing from sources as diverse as the Quran and Sunnah as well as scholars and activists such as Ali Shari'ati. In addition to that, they

enthusiastically draw from non-Muslim traditions to the extent that such traditions are instrumental to the pursuit of their aims. Such external sources include the liberation theology of Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Rebecca S Chopp, and the secular humanism of Edward Said and Noam Chomsky.

Progressive Islam is, therefore, Islamic humanism, premised on the idea that, as Safi said, "all members of the human race have this same intrinsic worth because each of us has the breath of God breathed into our being".

Apart from being rooted in tradition, however, progressive Muslims, as noted by Duderija in his book, *The Imperatives of Progressive Islam*, are also

nourished by "movements and schools of thought that are not necessarily part of the historical experience of Islam's concrete historical trajectory but which are considered as being in accordance with its overall ideals, values, objectives, and, therefore, imperatives".

In terms of their methods, progressive Muslims seek to develop "systematic and sophisticated non-patriarchal Quran - Sunna / hadith hermeneutical models which affirm gender-just interpretations of Islam ... characterised by rationalist, contextualist-driven, and holistic hermeneutics which privilege the purposive and values-based approach to the Islamic tradition, as embodied in certain values considered to form the very core and spirit of Islam such as justice, fairness, and mercy".

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Documentary Captures Real Picture of Assam Post NRC

By Waquar Hasan

A documentary on the NRC titled "The state of stateless" has captured the ground realities and its impact on the Assam society. The documentary which was made by the fact-finding team of the United Against Hate (UAH) shows what different sections of the Assamese society feel about the mammoth exercise undertaken to weed out the so-called illegal immigrants. Grievances, opinions and feelings of various sections of the society – laborers, students, and activists, Nepalese, Hindu and Muslims – the documentary reveals it all. The maker of the documentary, Afroz Ahmed Sahil, told Caravan Daily that he and his team had not planned to make the documentary when they were visiting people for the fact-finding purposes. However, they were shooting videos of those whom his team spoke to during the course of this mission. The idea of making the documentary occurred to Sahil out of blue only after they came back Delhi. "With regard to the NRC,



People get their names checked on the draft list at a National Register of Citizens (NRC) Centre in Nagaon-IANS)

people in Delhi have different kinds of information and thoughts. The media is showing things in a very different way. This is building up a strange kind of perception regarding this. Our aim of making this documentary is to make people aware of the pain of the people living there," he said. Sahil, who is a journalist and student of film making, said that he wanted to bring to the people the humanitarian crisis in Assam. His motive behind the

documentary is to bring out the complexities of the NRC process and thoughts of native people on the Citizenship Amendment Bill and the NRC process.

In this documentary, those who have been excluded can be seen recounting their ordeal, the pain and trauma while the experts on the issues are pointing out the prejudices and bias in the NRC process.

(Extracted from caravandaily.com)

Magsaysay Award for Ravish Kumar is a Victory for Truth



There could not have been a better choice than Ravish Kumar for this year's Magsaysay Award. Ravish has demonstrated exemplary courage in questioning the sectarian, communal, jingoistic and irrational politics which has dominated the narrative in this country over the last five years when one by one most of the saner voices were made to disappear, some made compromises or simply surrendered and worst there were others who decided to collaborate with this insidious project of right wing fundamentalism. Only a few voices like Ravish Kumar's held the fort and reminded us the role of media in a democracy. Otherwise, the media, especially the TV channels have started resembling more like the lynch mobs on free run. NDTV must also be commended for having

pursued with Ravish, in what would have been very tough situation for them. Ravish, coming from Bihar, a politically very aware state, also highlights the issues that common citizens of this country face.

Ravish is Gandhian in his thought process. He holds the value of truth very highly, like Gandhi. And he has the courage to speak the truth, however inconvenient, with complete humility, a quality which Gandhi had mastered very well but where most of us falter. This is what makes him different and also may be a reason why he still keeps his job and has won the admiration of even his opponents.

(Extracts from an essay by Sandeep Pandey, social activist and Magsaysay award winner. Source: sabrangindia.in)

Gallup: Nearly 50% of Women Want to Leave Afghanistan

A new poll shows that nearly 50% of the women in Afghanistan want to leave, migrate to another country. In addition, 41% of the entire Afghan population wants to leave. In the survey, Gallup asked, "Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move PERMANENTLY to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?" Forty-seven percent of the women said they would like to permanently move to another country; 35% of the men said the same.

Since 2016, the rise in the percentage of all Afghans who would like to migrate has been accounted for entirely by results among women, nearly half (47%) of whom in 2018 said they would like to leave, reported Gallup.

Gallup surveys in 2018 showed Afghan women were the least

satisfied women in the world with the freedom to choose what they do with their lives. With 80% of women out of the workforce and 91% with a primary education or less, these choices remain rather limited.

"Amid rising fears that they could lose what freedoms they do have as the Taliban continues to take more control over their country," the percentage of Afghan women who say they would like to move has nearly tripled since 2016, and for the first time, significantly more women (47%) than men (35%) want to leave, reported Gallup.

When the polling firm asked Afghans overall if they would like to permanently move to another country, 41% said yes. This is a record high, according to Gallup.

"Afghans who say they would like to move to another country are most likely to name

Germany (19%) and Turkey (19%), the two countries where Afghan refugees make up the second-largest refugee populations after Syrians, as their preferred destination," said Gallup.

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Haifaa Al-Mansour and Shahad Ameen

Saudi Women Directors Bring Empowerment Message to Venice

Female Saudi Arabian directors Haifaa Al-Mansour and Shahad Ameen brought a message to the Venice Film Festival along with their movies: Women must be seen and heard. Mansour's "The Perfect Candidate" tells the story of a woman doctor facing gender-based challenges while running for municipal council. Ameen's "Scales" focuses on a young girl surviving against superstitious villagers who believe she is a curse. Both directors hope their films will convey a message of empowerment at a time when Saudi Arabia has been easing male guardianship rules.

The start of Mansour's film reflects the changes in the Saudi Arabia, with protagonist Maryam driving her car to work. Recently, Saudi Arabia also ended travel restrictions for adult women, allowing them to do so without permission as well as giving them more control over family matters. Asked what she wanted, Saudi female audiences to take away from the film, Mansour said: "That it is about time to put themselves out there and not to be afraid of failure or to be judged." "We come from a very traditional society so even with the liberties, like ... (women) driving is legal, but not a lot of women drive because it is not accepted still socially. So it is



very important for women ... to take advantage of the new freedoms given to them because that is ... how to move forward."

In "Scales", Hayat has been saved by her father from a village tradition of families sacrificing their daughters to sea creatures, making her an outcast. "It was my story, it was my experience ... of people treating me in the country that I was in, in a very segregated society, in a society which obviously they prefer men over women," Ameen said. "Do we come to accept these bodies that they've disfigured for years in our head with their voices? Do we come to have our own voice at the end? I think it's every girl's story, not just in the Middle East."

In 2018, Saudi Arabia lifted a nearly 40-year ban on cinemas.

Mansour has previously described how she at times had to hide in a van while directing her 2012 film "Wadjda" about a young Saudi girl determined to buy a bicycle.

Bengaluru surgeon finds new anatomical opening in lower jaw



Researchers continue to unravel intricate mysteries of the human anatomy and the latest to board the discovery bandwagon is oral maxillofacial and cleft surgeon Dr Nyer Firdoose from Bengaluru, who has found a new anatomical opening in the lower jaw. The opening, referred to as 'foramen' in anatomical terminology, is a passageway through which blood vessels and nerves run to different organs and sensory structures of the body. Dr Nyer's discovery might help dental surgeons and anaesthetists in ensuring their treatment protocols are precise and in avoiding failures in treatment techniques. The discovery is also expected to play a role in treatment of oral cancer, in which patients have to undergo surgery to get the tumour removed.

Dr Nyer, who is currently practising in Saudi Arabia, said: "In several cases, patients have

complained to their dentists about pain during routine surgical procedures despite administration of anaesthesia in adequate doses. One of the reasons for anaesthesia being ineffective is the presence of additional nerves in the foramen, which is overlooked during the surgical procedure. My discovery revolves around the presence of such additional nerves within the foramen, which often seems to go unnoticed as we are not taught to look at anything beyond the teeth. This discovery will help surgeons and anaesthetists be more cautious and customise treatment accordingly."



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Elangbam Valentina Devi

Girl who cried over felled trees made Manipur Green Ambassador

The Manipur government has appointed a nine-year-old girl as the state's green ambassador, less than a week after a video of her crying for two trees axed for a road-widening project went viral. An order from H. Balkrishna Singh, Manipur's Director of Information and Public Relations, on August 7, said Elangbam Valentina Devi of Hiyanglam Makha Leikai in Kakching district had been made the brand ambassador for the Chief Minister's Green Manipur Mission and all official tree-plantation activities taken up in the state. This, the order said, was in recognition of her immense love and affection for trees and for generating mass awareness on conservation of the environment for a "period of one year from the date of issuing the order."

A Class V student of Amutombi Divine Life English School in Kakching town, about 45 km southeast of Manipur's capital Imphal, she had planted the saplings of two Gulmohartrees by the side of a river when she was in Class I. She had been tending to the saplings, which grew up into healthy trees in about four years. One Saturday, the two trees, along with other vegetation, were axed for a project to widen a road beside



the river. A videographer filmed her crying over the trees.

"I saw the video of this girl crying like anything, as if someone very near to her had passed away. Her feeling for two felled trees, which we adults would probably not think much about, moved me. I asked Yengkhom Victoria, the district's Superintendent of Police, to meet her, console her and give her at least 20 saplings to plant at a suitable place," Manipur's Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren told *The Hindu*. But he felt this was not enough. "Later, I realised there could not be a better ambassador than her for the Green Manipur Mission we had launched in June. Her passion for trees at such a young age was so infectious that I took a decision to have an order issued and hand it over through government officials to her," he said.

(Extracted from mattersindia.com)

Maldives Appoints Two Women as Supreme Court Judges

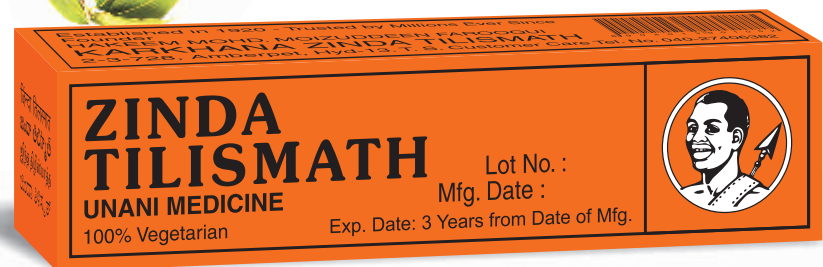
In a historic vote recently, the parliament of the Maldives confirmed the president's nomination of former judges, Dr Azmiralda Zahir and Aisha Shujune Mohamed as the first female justices of the country's Supreme Court. Shujune, who signed from the civil court in 2014, was among the first two female judges appointed to the bench in 2007. Dr Azmiralda was the most senior female judge in the country until her resignation from the High Court in May 2016.



Dr Azmiralda Zahir and Aisha Shujune Mohamed

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Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Masjid,
Putrajaya (Malaysia)

(Extracted from aboutislam.net)

Religion must be part of the solution in the Middle East

By Rabbi David Rosen

When political and civic leaders seek to engage religious figures to come together to promote human dignity across sectarian lines and contribute to stability in the region, they have overwhelmingly responded with alacrity. The Amman declaration of July 2005 initiated by His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of Jordan, when 200 of the world's leading Islamic scholars from 50 countries were convened at an international Islamic conference, is an impressive case in point.

However, all too often political and business leaders in our region think that it is best to have as little to do with religious leaders as possible and perhaps even with religion itself.

Two main factors are at work. One is that often such leaders represent

a more secular world outlook, and are often even quite ignorant about religion. But more importantly, they see how religion is often terribly abused, and think that in order to prevent extreme religious elements from torpedoing their interests, it is better to have little to do with religion. Of course, I understand their fears. When we see how religion is exploited by extremist interests, there is good reason to be wary of the abuse of religion.

However, if one does not want religion to be part of the problem, the answer is not to ignore it. If doing so, one stifles the voice of responsible religious authority and plays into the hands of the extremists, as it will be their voice alone that will be heard as the voice of religion, leading thousands astray.

If one does not want religion to be part of the problem, it must be part of the solution. All our Abrahamic religions teach the principles of the sanctity of human life and dignity. All of them seek the welfare and flourishing of society. They all affirm the obligation to promote justice and peace, and to avoid needless bloodshed. It is essential that the voices of religious leaders and representatives articulating the most sublime values are heard and are seen to be the mainstream authentic voice of our religious traditions.

However, this will happen only when political, civic and business leaders recognize that they must engage with religious communities and their leadership as allies, and not see them as threats.

Students' Mental Health in Yemen

A Yemeni Professor Sounds an Urgent Call to Help Traumatized Students.

By Mansour Jubara

The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is the largest in the world, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the crisis is growing. Around 24 million people are in need of humanitarian aid.

Yemeni youth are possibly the most affected by the ongoing war, especially in light of its direct impact on their educational, academic and vocational futures. Their psychological and mental status is suffering as a result of personal and food insecurity.

For example, students are facing increasing problems at Sa'dah Public University, in the far north of Yemen on the border with Saudi Arabia and in one of the most war-affected Yemeni provinces. This is where I teach. Founded in 2010 and now home to some 11,000 students, the university has been heavily damaged. Most buildings have been leveled to the ground, including student accommodations, the central library, lecture halls and laboratories. Equipment, tools and demonstration facilities have also been destroyed.

Even with the university in this condition, it is still open and trying to accomplish its mission, even if irregularly. The university has had to decrease the number of lectures and shrink the curricula because of the lack of usable classrooms, the dwindling operational budget and the lack of electricity, internet and other communications.

Of course, the overall security situation and that of the university in particular is causing significant changes in student



Many university students in Yemen have psychosocial trauma from witnessing the airstrikes and other effects of war. Here, rescue workers pull a body out of rubble in September, 2019

The students who are still attending university have lost much of their enthusiasm to study seriously because they have lost hope for a better future. Instead, they monitor the fighting.

"I have witnessed times when all the students will run out of classrooms when they hear the roar of airplanes for fear they will be bombed." Mansour Jubara, a professor at Sa'dah University in northern Yemen

behavior. Professors notice a reluctance to attend lectures and a high dropout rate among students due to their parents' difficult living conditions and inability to help them financially.

Many families were forced to move to other areas far from the university, which made it difficult for their sons and daughters to reach the university, due to the lack of transportation and fuel. Many students were also injured due to shelling and left with physical disabilities that prevent them from continuing

their studies at a university with buildings that cannot accommodate the disabled.

The students who are still attending university have lost much of their enthusiasm to study seriously because they have lost hope for a better future. Instead, they monitor the fighting.

"I have witnessed times when all the students will run out of classrooms when they hear the roar of airplanes for fear they will be bombed."

Mansour Jubara A professor at Sa'dah University in northern

Yemen

All of these conditions contribute significantly to the increasing psychological pressure on students, and they feel fear and sadness about what seems like an endless war. I have witnessed times when all the students will run out of classrooms when they hear the roar of airplanes for fear they will be bombed. Not surprisingly, most students are unable to concentrate and appear distracted in classrooms.

Yemeni university students need psychological care and support to mitigate the effects of the war on their lives. The fact that this condition remains untreated now will seriously affect their future

training and related activities for students.

- Immediately set up emergency centers to give urgent mental health care to students so they can continue their education.

- Develop large-scale mental-health awareness programs.

- Organize workshops and courses to explain the psychological effects of war.

The issue of students' mental health in Yemen is deeply neglected by the local authorities and the international community. But it needs considerable attention today to save the youth, who are the country's real wealth, from loss since they are the basis of any reconstruction project in the future. This cannot wait until tomorrow.

(Mansour Nasser Saleh Jubara is an assistant professor of psychology and head of the department of educational and psychological sciences in the College of Education at Sa'dah University).

► Page 4

Against The Grain: The Meaning Of Progressive Islam

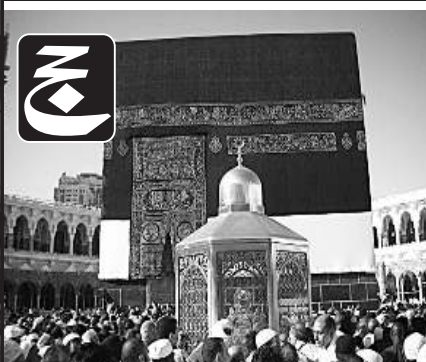
As Syed Hussein Alatas had said in the first issue of *Progressive Islam* in 1954, "[t]he name Progressive Islam does not imply any dissection whatsoever as to the nature of the Islamic faith ... By calling this paper Progressive Islam, we do not mean that we have extracted one part of Islam which is progressive and left the other part of Islam which is not progressive. Rather, the name Progressive Islam should be regarded as another way of saying that Islam in progressive".

(Extracted from an article hosted on the Net)

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33
Years of
Service

By Hisham al-Najjar

The current version of political Islam is losing ground because of the destruction, violence and terrorism it caused and because it sowed seeds of hatred and division in societies and between peoples. To prevent political Islam from regaining its influence by playing on contradictions and exploiting narrow agendas of some forces, the vacuum must be filled with a tolerant and rational version of Islam.

Sufism in Islam is popular and has a broad presence among Muslims. Sufism embraces the essence of religion, which calls for peace and love among human beings and conceives Islam as a tolerant religion that renounces violence, accepts through its values and intentions the principles of freedom and human rights and does not clash with progress and change that benefit humanity.

The Idea of Brotherhood

To be a Sufi means to rise above racism and sectarian rivalries and arrogance in the name of religion. Sufism rejects slogans such as "We are on the right path and everybody else is in the wrong" that political Islam used in trying to wipe out the idea of brotherhood and social cohesion.

On the contrary, Sufism is open to everyone, regardless of their faith or ethnic origin: "Come, come. It doesn't matter who you are or why you're here" for all human beings are partners in seeking divine proximity. A Sufi tolerates all religions, beliefs and ideas. He is like "the land that is trodden by the righteous and the evildoer and like the cloud that hovers above all and like the rain that quenches everything."

God is Everywhere

Contrary to political Islam, Sufism passionately calls for the protection and preservation of the human species. It warns against the destruction of the human structure because its destruction amounts to demolishing God's most complete and perfect image. Sufis care about every human being, regardless of his or her beliefs, and will always seek to protect the sanctity of life and property, for respecting others and sanctifying their well-being is akin to sanctifying the Creator and demeaning them is akin to demeaning Allah.

Sufism has taught large segments of the populations of Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo,

Is Sufism an Alternative to Political Islam?

Contrary to political Islam, Sufism passionately calls for the protection and preservation of the human species. It warns against the destruction of the human structure because its destruction amounts to demolishing God's most complete and perfect image.



“There is a need for a paradigmatic shift in the Sufi approach. Instead of attracting individuals and isolating them from society and helping them pursue spiritual salvation, Sufism must start focusing on the societal role of the Sufi.”

for example, that God is everywhere and that believers should love Him more than fear Him.

Knowing one's self as a human being before anything else is one of the cornerstones of the Sufi experience. It is the basis of all knowledge. Sufi literature states that man is a model for the universe and the main gateway to the knowledge of God.

Therefore, Sufi theorisation has delved deeply in the essence of humankind, trying to understand human qualities and behaviour to diagnose man's shortcomings for the purpose of imagining therapeutic alternatives to correct his path towards salvation and finding God.

Return to Noble Values

What is required is to combine the individual character of the Sufi experience with a collective

societal character it lacks. There is a need to shift Sufism from a movement of self-knowledge and self-transformation in search of one's salvation to a reform movement that affects the social reality through the return to noble values and ideals, not because of a worldly need or because one's desire to please authority or attain power, but on the basis of one's love for humanity and for one's homeland and one's desire to reform them for their own sake.

Just as universities produce scholars and scientists in various disciplines who do their part in advancing their country, Sufism must do its part in nourishing and developing an individual's spiritual, intellectual and moral abilities to become an active and reliable element of the society.

There is a need for a paradigmatic shift in the Sufi approach. Instead of attracting individuals and isolating them from society and helping them pursue spiritual salvation, Sufism must start focusing on the societal role of the Sufi.

Anchored in Reality

The civilisational role of Sufism requires that it shifts its paradigms. Instead of building the spiritual and moral fibre of the Sufi individual for the purpose of freeing him or her from the shackles of reality and letting him or her fly high in the rarefied air of spirituality, Sufism should also start developing the individual for the purpose of walking with both feet anchored in reality and for reforming this reality.

Thus, Sufism will start producing creative individuals who will actively contribute to

society's renaissance, fully aware of their roles in the divine plan of giving them the responsibility of being God's agents on earth for the purpose of colonising it and making it prosper.

There is room for having scholars and intellectuals specifically dedicating their efforts to transforming Sufism to a state free of eccentricities and charlatanism, as some have said. Their mission would be to redirect the Sufi discourse, energies and spiritual manifestations towards reforming and improving reality while preserving the ceremonial and folkloric manifestations of Sufism because they represent its biggest capital for attracting millions of people to Sufism.

Some scholars argued that Sufism is not suitable to compete with dynamic Islam because it focuses on being good to others and on worshipping the Almighty without giving importance to political gains. However, this is exactly what is needed and desired.

The Sufi current should not have political wings that would represent it, as was the case with political Islam in post-revolution Egypt. If Sufism is to achieve success as a reform movement, it must remain a purely independent social movement that cannot be politicised, nor should it be allowed to politicise religion and exploit it for political gain.

(Extracted from an article from the Internet. The author is an Egyptian writer from Cairo)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thanks for the good articles!

Thank you for publishing many good articles. I particularly appreciate the articles on interfaith/inter-community harmony, a subject that is of immense relevance today. Indeed, one could say that the future of humankind depends crucially on this issue.

You might consider publishing more articles by people from different religious and spiritual traditions, focussing particularly on religiousness, rather than institutionalised religion. I think there is a need to move from a dogmatic understanding of religion, as based on dogmas and rituals (which necessarily divides people), to universal spirituality, based on the awareness of the presence of God everywhere, within the universe and beyond (a consciousness which can help unite people beyond religious and other boundaries). If you ask me, latter is precisely what the true spiritual men and women of God in different parts of the world have taught.

'Rohail', Bangalore

Website Badly Designed

I first came across 'Islamic Voice' many years ago and I have found it to be a very useful source of information. Thank you for the service you are doing. Your earlier website was very good and easy to navigate. However, your present website is very confusing and, if I may say, so badly designed. Please revert to the older version of your website. Please ensure for a complete e-paper version of the magazine to be uploaded every month. Please update the Archives page as of now, past issues are available only till 2012 on the website, while the world has moved on to 2019!

Saleha, Bangalore

Iran - Neither Military Action nor Economic Sanctions

The time has come for people everywhere to reject military action and self-serving economic sanctions as means towards certain nefarious ends. Since the former is a threat and the latter is a reality in the case of Iran, the Iranian crisis should serve as a platform for the mass mobilization of global public opinion against the use of these two weapons.

By Chandra Muzaffar

It would be utterly immoral of the United States to launch a military attack upon Iran if it is true that one of the missiles that destroyed an oil refinery in Saudi Arabia on the 14th of September 2019 had a casing bearing a number that suggested that the weapon was manufactured for NATO forces. The alphabets preceding the number denote the type of missile it is and one of its uses. The picture of the missile was inadvertently supplied to the media by the Saudi Defence Ministry.

A theory that has emerged in the wake of the picture of this missile is that the assault on the oil refineries in Saudi's Eastern Province could have been a false flag operation initiated by John Bolton who was sacked by President Donald Trump as National Security Adviser around that time. It was his way of orchestrating a 'parting shot' which he could then blame on Iran - a State that he has always targeted in pursuit of his neo conservative agenda of emasculating Israel's regional adversaries in order to ensure the latter's supremacy and hegemony.

A false flag operation would exonerate Iran which has consistently maintained that it had nothing to do with the attack on the refineries. Besides, Iran does not stand to gain in any way from such action. Its current preoccupation is with getting crippling sanctions imposed on it by the US, lifted immediately. A false flag operation would however raise a question or two about the Houthis (Ansar Allah) claim that it destroyed the Saudi refineries. Indeed, if anyone in the region has a reason to act against the Saudi regime, it would be the Houthis and the people of Yemen in general. Since 2015 at least 50,000 bombs and missiles have been dropped in Yemen by the Saudi military and its regional allies. More than 15,000 children, women and men have perished. Farms, hospitals and schools have been bombarded. The constant daily attacks have spawned the worst humanitarian crisis in the 21st century. Preventable diseases such as

cholera have spread and malnutrition and starvation haunt tens of thousands of families. It has been estimated that a child dies every 10 minutes in Yemen as a result of all this.

It is this terrible catastrophe that the world should address. False flag operations divert attention from the root

A false flag operation would exonerate Iran which has consistently maintained that it had nothing to do with the attack on the refineries. Besides, Iran does not stand to gain in any way from such action.



causes of a catastrophe ignited by the Saudi and US elites years ago. Those causes in turn are related to geopolitics, power and hegemony. The ordinary Yemeni has paid a huge price.

If a military assault on Iran is not to going to help the ordinary Yemeni neither will the tightening of economic sanctions against the people of Iran. Already the sanctions re-imposed upon that country since the US withdrew from the six nation nuclear deal have led to a great deal of pain and suffering within the populace. The sick including children have been deprived of much needed medicines which are presently imported from abroad.

Military action and economic sanctions it is obvious only exacerbate dire situations. Whenever it is initiated by a mighty power in collusion with its allies and agents, it fails to achieve its objectives. Take US helmed military campaigns aimed at furthering their own often diabolical agenda. The US attempt to crush what was in reality a nationalist movement

in Vietnam in the sixties and early seventies resulted in its own ignominious defeat. Under the banner of NATO, it took control of Afghanistan in October 2001 and in the process ignited a war of resistance which after 18 years has undoubtedly enhanced the Taliban's grip upon power.

Together with Britain, it invaded and occupied Iraq, convinced that it would not only be able to control the nation's rich oil resource, but also determine the region's politics in favour of Israel. Neither goal has been achieved and Iraq continues to be in a quagmire. Libya is another country in West Asia and North Africa (WANA)

where the US and its NATO partners initially succeeded in overthrowing Muammar Gaddafi and murdering him brutally but is now bogged down in a chaotic terrain where there is no effective functioning government. In Syria for at least seven years, starting in 2011, the US and its allies sought through covert and overt means to oust the government of Bashar Al-Assad mainly because it refused to kowtow to them.

Though

they even employed terrorist outfits to achieve their objective, Bashar is still in the seat of power, supported by the Hezbollah, Iran and Russia. Syria has proven yet again that it is not possible to accomplish regime change through military means orchestrated by external actors.

Economic sanctions however harsh have also not succeeded in bringing governments that value their independence and integrity to their knees. An outstanding example of a nation that has withstood US sanctions and enhanced its sovereignty is Cuba. One of those rare occasions when sanctions have worked is the global movement

against Apartheid South Africa in the eighties. There was a universal moral principle underlying those sanctions that transcended any self-serving agenda which was one of the reasons that explained its success. One can argue that such a principle is also present in the Boycott, Divest Sanctions (BDS) movement in relation to Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab lands.

The time has come for people everywhere to reject military action and self-serving economic sanctions as means towards certain nefarious ends. Since the former is a threat and the latter is a reality in the case of Iran, the Iranian crisis should serve as a platform for the mass mobilization of global public opinion against the use of these two weapons. Let Iran be that moment in history that will persuade humankind to eschew what is vile and vicious, what is cruel and callous in our setting as we journey towards a civilization that is just, humane and compassionate.

(Dr Chandra Muzaffar is President of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST), Malaysia).

(<https://www.just-international.org/mediastatement/iran-neither-military-action-nor-economic-sanctions/>)

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Archbishop of Canterbury prostrates at colonial era massacre site

Jallianwala Bagh: The Archbishop of Canterbury Reverend Justin Welby says he had a deeply humbling experience at Jallianwala Bagh, the site of British colonial era massacre. The spiritual head of the Church of England visited Jallianwala Bagh in Punjab on September 10 and said the time at the site provoked "feelings of profound shame." The massacre took place at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar during the Baisakhi festival on April 13, 1919, when the British Indian Army under the command of Colonel Reginald Dyer opened fire at a crowd staging a pro-independence demonstration. At least 400 people, including 41 children, were killed and more than 1,000 wounded in the firing.

In the presence of a sizable gathering inside the Jallianwala Bagh, the Canterbury archbishop, who was on 10-day tour of India, read out a prayer seeking God's forgiveness for the heinous act. The most senior bishop in the Church of England, prostrated himself to pray in front of a memorial to the Jallianwala martyrs. Asked if he would ask British government to seek apology for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, the archbishop said, "I think I have been very clear about what I feel and that will be



broadcast in England." Terming the massacre misuse of power, the archbishop said, "I came in seeking the sorrow and repentance suffered at the hands of British soldiers". "I am personally very sorry for this terrible atrocity," the archbishop said. "I recognize the sins of my British colonial history, the ideology that has too often subjugated and dehumanized other races and cultures," he said. "Coming here arouses a sense of profound shame at what happened in this place. It is one of a number of deep stains on British history. The pain and grief that has transcended the generations since must never be dismissed or denied," the archbishop added. He continued, saying that Christ called us "to turn away from sin

not just repenting old ways but to live in a new way that sought the kingdom of God."

Later, Welby went to the Golden Temple where he paid obeisance at the sanctum sanctorum. He also went to the Akal Takht, the supreme seat of Sikhs.

The archbishop arrived at the headquarters of the Church of North India's Amritsar diocese on September 9. The visit marked the last leg of his 10-day pilgrimage to the Indian subcontinent, which has seen him visit churches and cathedrals around the country and meet with Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Jain leaders to discuss the need to combat growing religious intolerance and violence.

(Extracted from mattersindia.com)

NRC Violates Citizenship Act, Says NALSAR University Vice-Chancellor Faizan Mustafa



New Delhi: Faizan Mustafa, the Vice-Chancellor of the NALSAR University of Law in Hyderabad, in an interview with The Wire has argued that India's concept of citizenship has been

restricted and undermined. Mustafa also claimed that the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam violated the Citizenship Act, 1955. "The NRC is a clear violation of

Section 3 of the Citizenship Act. I am clear about it," he said.

Citing legal problems, Mustafa asserted that the final NRC list for Assam published on August 31 was unconstitutional.

Mustafa also compared the Foreigners Tribunals to "Kangaroo courts", claiming that they were not independent of the government.

He pointed out that their members served at the government's pleasure and those tribunal members who did not declare enough people as foreigners are often dispensed with. He called the Foreigners Tribunals "citizenship exclusion entities".

(Extracted from <http://www.newindianexpress.com>)

Islamic Relief Committee Hands Title Suit of Houses to 70 Gujarat Riot Victims



By Waquar Hasan

Ahmedabad: Islamic Relief Committee (IRC), Gujarat, an organization that provided relief to the victims of 2002 riots, handed over the title suit of the houses to 70 displaced people living in Ahmedabad's Batwa colony. The IRC bought land in various parts of the state and established several small colonies with houses built for the settlement of the displaced people. Though the riot victims were living in these colonies for the last 17 years, they were not in possession of the title suit of the houses. Now that they have got the title suits, they can retain or sell these houses according to their needs. Demands were being made in the past to hand over the title suits. Mohammed Umar, secretary of the IRC, told the Caravan Daily that they have given title suit of the houses to 70 of the 90 people whose documents were found in intact.

He said though there was no bar on living in the houses even without title suits, they decided to hand these to the residents as it was creating some hurdles in their jobs and other requirements. The IRC, which is being run by Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, Gujarat, has provided all basic amenities including water, electricity and sanitation to the households in the colony established to shelter the victims of Gujarat riots. A Gujarat-based social activist, Shamshad Pathan, said, "In 2002 riots, more than 1.5 lakh people were displaced directly or indirectly. The Gujarat government has no policy regarding the displaced. Various organisations have got the house built having bought land for 5,000 people. There are 86 such colonies all over Gujarat. It's heartening to note that these houses were built with the money of people."

(Taken from Caravan Daily)

JMI Launches Open Online Course

New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) has launched its first ever Post Graduation level Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) namely Media Content Production on Multiple Platforms under SWAYAM, an initiative of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). The duration of the course, jointly organised by JMI and University Grants Commission (UGC), is 15 weeks. Any learner irrespective of their location can approach this extensive, "up-to-date"

course in media studies to gain benefits of video lectures along with E-text, reading material, additional study material and weekly quiz from the best educators. On completion of the course, the students will be gaining 4 credit points in their respective university. This is a full-fledged course, no less than classroom based learning where one gets lectures along with study material and also deadline based assignments. The most interesting aspect is that this course is free of cost.

Nikah Forever

New Digital Matrimonial Platform for Muslims

Nikah forever, a digital matrimonial platform, founded in 2018 by Hammad Rahman, an alumnus of Aligarh Muslim University and Jamia Hamdard, has already crossed more than 6000 registered users in India and is on the way of becoming the largest matrimonial site for Muslims in India and at global level. The mission statement of the site is 'Your Forever is our Priority'. Based on the Islamic value where marriage is considered the gateway to

completing half of the religious obligations, the website offers its services to the users at a nominal cost. Registration for the site is however free. The website uses easy algorithm for searching and connecting with the desired profiles along with filters like age, state and preferences.

NikahForever.com also assures privacy and keeps the information of the client confidential. And photos of women users will be kept hidden

unless the user herself wants to display her profile picture and changes the settings. A feature of the site is the policy of constantly monitoring the profiles to update the information and keep an eye on the new profiles. The site works only on authentic identification proof and background check. The site also has blogs contributed by writers on marriage and other related topics.

(Taken from TCN News)

Iranian Corner Proposed at MANUU

Hyderabad: Mr. Masoud Ahmadvand, Deputy Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Islamic Republic of Iran visited Maulana Azad National Urdu University last month. During his visit, he offered to establish an "Iranian Corner" at MANUU's Central Library. Iranian Books, Journals and Research support materials will be the part of this Corner. Dr. M. A. Sikandar, Registrar, MANUU welcomed the delegation and said that Persian language played a very important role in promoting Sufism and Spirituality in India. The Iranian community staying in Hyderabad is the proof of strong and time tested Indo-Iranian relations. He also



Mr. Masoud Ahmadvand and Dr. M A Sikandar with Prof. Shahid Naukhez Azmi, Prof. Saneem Fatima, Prof Aziz Bano and others.

proposed the exchange of MANUU and Iranian students and teachers between Universities.

Masjid One Movement' Launched for Elimination of Muslim Backwardness



New Delhi: The All India Muslim Development Council (AIMDC) on launched the 'Masjid One Movement' with an aim to eradicate educational, economic and social backwardness of the Muslim community at the grassroots level. The council has developed software to collect the necessary data on each of the Muslim localities under a mosque. Speaking at the launch of the Movement at India Islamic Cultural Centre, former Union Minister for Minority Affairs K Rahman Khan called it an innovative approach and said if implemented properly, it will go a long way in eradicating the backwardness of the community. Referring to the well-known Sachar Committee report, which assessed the overall condition of the Muslim community, the former minister said the 80 per cent recommendations of the report

is to be carried out by the community itself. "Backwardness cannot be removed by only relying on the government, the community needs to take major initiatives for this," he stressed. He expressed concern over the state of Muslim youth saying despondency and helplessness are creeping in their minds. Mangalore-based Mohammed Imthiyaz, general secretary, AIMDC, introduced the 'Masjid One Movement' concept and software. He said masjid can be made the nerve center of developmental activities which will be a unit in this programme. Residents around the mosque can be broadly divided into four categories: affluent, middle level, needy, and badly needy, he said. The data of all these families will be helpful in charting the development programme.

(By Abdul Bari Masoud | Caravan Daily)

Marathi Book on Tipu Sultan



In an attempt to highlight Tipu Sultan's personality, diplomacy, relationships with other rulers, foreign policies and other facets of his rule, two youths from Solapur city, Sarfaraz Ahmed and Wayez Sayed, are bringing out a Marathi book named "Tipu Sultan - Patre, Hukum Name aani Itihasache Sadhne" ('Tipu Sultan - Letters, Orders and History materials). About 415 letters and 10 orders (Hukmname) of Tipu Sultan have been collected by

these two youths and translated into Marathi.

The book containing Tipu's written material is ready for release and will be published by Adv. Gaziuddin Research Center, Solapur, Maharashtra. This research centre has released five books on Tipu Sultan. Speaking with Twocircles.net, Sarfaraz Ahmed informed that they worked for nearly six years to translate this 300-page book. They had to



travel across India to collect these 415 letters written by Tipu which have been preserved in different libraries of the country, he added. "These letters show that he had very good

relations with Maratha Sardars of Maharashtra, Nizam II of Hyderabad and other Indian kings. He also contacted foreign rulers, including Napoleon Bonaparte and British rulers as a part of foreign policy," Ahmad added. Renowned activist Ram Punyani, who has written the introduction for this book, lauded the efforts and the hard work of Sarfaraz and Wayez.

(Extracted from twocircles.net)

'Know My Religion: Interfaith Youth Dialogue'

Kolkata: The British Deputy High Commission in Kolkata hosted a 'Know My Religion: Interfaith Youth Dialogue' in collaboration with the Indian Pluralism Foundation to mark the International Day of Peace recently.

Bruce Bucknell, British Deputy High Commissioner to Kolkata, said, "The 'Know My Religion' workshops supported by us brought together young people from different backgrounds and helped their understanding of other religions and beliefs. This celebrates the diversity in India."

India Pluralism Foundation had organised six interfaith workshops in August-September at St Andrew's Church, Matri Mandir, Beth El Synagogue, Gurdwara Sant

Kutiya, Lake Mosque and the Tollygunge Buddhist Monastery. The objective was to support freedom of religious belief by involving faith leaders to create understanding of different religions' beliefs and practices amongst the next gen. Over 150 young people in the age group of 18-40 participated in the dialogues on Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Sikhism at these venues.

Owaiz Aslam, secretary, India Pluralism Foundation, said, "We must learn to highlight the importance of seeking common ground to build mutual respect, mutual admiration and mutual appreciation for the beliefs of others, and the need to protect and expand our common spaces."

Sifiya Haneef gets Neerja Bhanot Award

Chandigarh: In a solemn ceremony, a young braveheart from Kerala, Sifiya Haneef, was conferred the prestigious Neerja Bhanot Award by the chief guest, Wendy Sue Knecht, who had come down specially for the award function from Los Angeles. Wendy was also working with Pan Am in the 80's and was a Trainer of Neerja Bhanot in 1986. The award was instituted in 1990 in memory of Neerja Bhanot, who had saved hundreds of lives while sacrificing her own, during a hijack at Karachi airport. A specially constituted jury comprising three Rotarians Sneha Popli, Manjit Kaur and Anu Dhirga decided that Sifiya deserved the award as she met the criteria laid down by the Trust which stipulated that the awardee has to be an Indian woman, who, when faced with social injustice, overcomes it with guts and grit and helps other persons in similar social distress.

According to Akhil Bhanot, managing trustee, Neerja Bhanot Pan Am Trust, "Sifiya got married when she was 16



Kerala-based social worker Sifiya Haneef (2nd from left) with Wendy Su Knecht, former trainer of Neerja, along with Bhanot family.

and her studies were stopped. Unfortunately, her husband died when she was 20. She had two children by then. Sifiya wished to continue her studies, but did not get any support. Not willing to give up, she took on a part-time job and resumed her studies." He added, "After a lot of struggle and realising that life was very tough not only for her but for other widows as well, she started spending her salary on helping widows. She started a Facebook page called 'Chithal' where she wrote about

issues faced by widows. She met a lot of sick mothers, children, elderly people, cancer patients and more. She would update her page, documenting the problems these people were facing and started getting public support to solve their issues. Today, she is helping more than 300 families by providing homes, constructing toilets in colonies, distributing medicines, giving pension etc."

(Extracted from indianexpress.com)

Irmim Shamim

Irmim Shamim becomes first Gujjar woman to clear MBBS AIIMS

Rajouri (Jammu and Kashmir): Irmim Shamim became the first Gujjar woman in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district to qualify for the medical studies at the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences after she cleared the MBBS AIIMS entrance exam in June. Shamim, who hails from Dhanore village, worked hard beating all adversaries to make it to the institute. She had to walk a



distance of 10 kilometres on foot every day to go to school as there was no good school near the

village. Struggling with financial woes, Shamim took all the challenges coming on her way head-on. "Everyone has some problem in their life. You have to fight the challenges and success will definitely come to you," she said. Speaking to ANI, Shamim's uncle Liaqat Choudhary expressed happiness on her success and said that girls are the hope of the region.

(Extracted from siasat.com)

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Religion must be part of the solution in the Middle East

The latter approach will not serve their long-term interests, and will convince religious communities that those political and commercial goals are not in their interest. When these are expressed in an overwhelmingly secular manner, many religionists conclude that these interests must be inimical to theirs, and that the world is painted in

simplistic Manichean colours of black and white – the good versus the bad; the godly versus the godless.

Above all, it is those with the political and economic power who need to understand the importance of a constructive dialogue with religion, and of the necessity of involving religious leaders and representatives in initiatives to

promote the values of human dignity, of providing a decent income for families, of good citizenship, and of transparency and accountability. When these forces come together in seeking the welfare of society, then one will have the most powerful alliance against extremism and fascism that threaten stability everywhere.

Thai Woman Receives Magsaysay Award Angkhana Neelapaijit

People have marvelled at the transformation of the self-effacing housewife into a leading human rights defender.

Angkhana Neelapaijit's quest for justice started when her husband, a human rights lawyer and activist, disappeared 15 years ago. She went to the police, appealed for help from legislators, and took her case to the media, but to no avail. Her husband remains missing to this day. The Thai housewife never expected to be thrust into the limelight. She said her only priority in life was for her and her children to survive. For Angkhana, aged 63, it was her faith that helped her stand strong amidst the "ambiguity between life and death." She said that in most instances, the biggest monsters are the insufferable thoughts of the possibilities of what could have happened to your missing loved one. What keeps her calm is her trust in God and her belief that her husband is in the hands of God. "I always tell my children that whatever happens, we trust God. If God will allow us to know [the whereabouts of her husband], he will tell us the truth," she said. "But right now, God doesn't allow us to know, so we have to be patient and continue to do good to others," Angkhana says.

Born and raised in Bangkok, Angkhana has a "multi-cultural" background. She describes herself as "half Buddhist, half Muslim, with 14 years of Catholic education." "I see that all religions teach people to be kind, and patient to others, to do good to your neighbors," she says. She said her religion is "kindness," and it's the same kindness that turned her anger at the loss of her husband into sympathy and courage. "I think that this is the heart of all religions, that they share not only faith but also sympathy to other human beings," she said. She served as a human rights commissioner in Thailand until recently.

For her "unwavering courage in seeking justice for her husband and many other victims of violence and conflict in southern Thailand," Angkhana has been named one of this year's recipients of the Ramon Magsaysay Award, known as "Asia's Nobel Prize." The award-giving body cited Angkhana's "systematic, unflagging work to reform a flawed and unfair legal system" and described her as "shining proof that the humblest ordinary person can achieve a national impact in deterring human rights abuses." Other awardees are Ko



Swe Win from Myanmar, Ravish Kumar of India, Raymundo Pujante Cayabyab of the Philippines and Kim Jong-ki of South Korea.

Work for Human Rights

In 2009, with the help of non-government organizations and her own family, Angkhana founded the Justice for Peace Foundation, a network of human rights and peace advocates that documents the human rights situation in southern Thailand.

A predominantly Muslim region in a majority-Buddhist country, southern Thailand has struggled with religious and ethnic conflict since a separatist insurgency began taking hold in the region in 1948. Insurgency and militarization have exacted a heavy toll: it is reported that of the more than 6,000 people killed in the conflict since 2004, some 90 percent were civilians.

There have also been "enforced disappearances," one of the most high profile of which was the 2004 disappearance of Angkhana's husband, Somchai Neelapaijit, a Muslim lawyer and human rights activist. He was last seen in Bangkok's Ramkhamhaeng area where eyewitnesses saw four men dragging him from his car. He has not been seen since. Somchai was abducted outside a Bangkok hotel the day after he publicly accused the military of torturing detainees in southern Thailand. After he vanished, Angkhana lobbied the government to act on human rights cases, provide legal assistance to victims, and trained women on human rights and the peace process.

In 2015, Angkhana was named a commissioner of Thailand's National Human Rights Commission, the only member with grassroots human rights experience. People have marvelled at the transformation of the self-effacing housewife into a leading human rights defender.

By **Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz**

The Quran teaches us that human beings have been placed on planet Earth as God's *khalifa* or vicegerent. In other words, we are guardians or custodians, not owners, of this planet. Accordingly, our relationship with Nature should be one of stewardship, not mastery.

Wrong conceptions of the position and status of human beings have resulted in ecological havoc across the planet. In my childhood, I remember hearing the slogan: 'Man is the Conqueror of Nature'. Much of the ecological devastation that we have witnessed stems from this completely wrong notion of our role on Earth. Thankfully, this notion is being increasingly recognised as false and dangerous. Many people are realising that human beings need to be humble before Nature and that we need to be in sync with it. There is an increasing recognition that the natural model of things is the best.

Ecological Significance of the Quranic Understanding of Humans as Custodians

Our relationship with Nature should be one of stewardship, not mastery.

God is the Owner

From the Quran we learn that the Earth, along with everything else in the Universe, has been made by God and that God is the Owner of everything. God has placed human beings on Earth simply as custodians. In this role, it is binding on people of faith to take proper care of the abundant resources that God has blessed the Earth with and which we have inherited from our ancestors. If we pass them on in a better shape to the next generation, it would be good, but the least we should do is to leave them in the shape that we inherited them that is how we should behave as good custodians.

We human beings have been

“ We human beings have been accorded the right to use natural resources, we do not have the right to abuse them with impunity.”

accorded the right to use natural resources, we do not have the right to abuse them with impunity. Here it is easy to see how 'Development' models that are based on materialism, stimulation of desires and endless consumption, entailing uncontrolled plunder of natural resources, go completely against the understanding of

custodianship that the Quran teaches us.

Another point to consider here is that this Earth is but a temporary abode for human beings. One day, we will all have to leave it. According to the deeds we have done on Earth, God rewards or punishes us here, in this world, and in the Hereafter. This fact has very significant ecological implications: those who do not behave as good custodians of the Earth and its resources will have to face the consequences of their actions. In contrast, those who do behave as good custodians may hope to be rewarded.

The verses of the Quran are signs or *ayats* of God. They indicate or

draw our attention to God. In addition to these are the *ayats* or 'signs' of God that fill the entire universe all the many created things and beings. They too point us to the Creator. These 'signs' of God include birds and animals, trees and mountains, deserts and lakes, and so on. Respecting these 'signs' of God is also binding on people of faith, as is respecting the signs of God in the Divine scriptures. Those who work to preserve and nurture these 'signs' of God in Nature, be it working for forest regeneration or protecting an endangered bird species or inventing a method to control atmospheric pollution may hope to receive rewards for their good deeds. In contrast, those who act against God by wantonly destroying these 'signs' of God in Nature will have to face the results of their actions. In fact, unwarranted destruction of these 'signs' is also a form of blasphemy.

(The writer is Vice-Chancellor, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad)

Resource Drain and Social Inequalities

You have people whose bathrooms and kitchens have things worth lakhs of rupees



By Dr **Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz**

What makes a person what she is? In many cases, it is the opportunities that she gets in life, which are generally shaped by which family she was born in. In many societies, a large section of people are deprived of opportunities.

I always studied in government schools and colleges. I never studied in a self-financing educational institution. Now, who supported my education? My education was financed by contributions from taxpayers, citizens of the country, who included Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and others. It was these people who funded my education.

Brain Drain

Now, after one has passed out of university and has settled in one's job and has one's dream five or six figure salary, what does one do with one's money? Typically, we consider it 'our own' money and spend it on our self and our family. We don't care to give at least some of it back to the society

“ If 80% of my education was funded by the society, shouldn't 80%, or at least 30%, of my income be spent on the needy sections of society? ”

that has groomed us, that has financed our education. To me this resource drain is worse than brain drain. It is rampant in our Indian society.

This resource drain is a one-way train. Society spends on people, and once they start earning they don't return anything back to society. At least 90% of their money they spend on themselves. And much of this on what? On what they consider as their 'upward social mobility'. So, they want to 'graduate' from a Maruti car to a BMW. Or, they dream of a fancy flat, in a locality with an 'address to be identified with', so that others can come to know that they have 'arrived'. You have people whose bathrooms and kitchens have things worth lakhs of rupees.

All these are forms of injustice, and we are instrumental in perpetuating it, making society more unjust and unequal. If 80% of my education was funded by the society, shouldn't 80%, or at least 30%, of my income be spent on the needy sections of society? Wouldn't that be justice? But do we have the courage and the heart to do this?

Interview with Shahin Ashraf Ali, author of *Super Stories With Tips And Activities*

Shahin Ashraf Ali's collection of short stories has some wonderful tips and fun activities that your kid will love

By **Vidhya Thakkar**

What made you write this book (Super Stories With Tips & Activities)?

I believe it was an epiphany. During every academic year, one day my alma mater Duruelo Convent High School, Bandra had nuns (from Pauline Publications) visiting every class and introducing the students to a marvellous range of children's books. It was one of the high points of my childhood.

Like a magician pulling out a rabbit from a hat, the nun would draw a book from her bag and give us a glimpse of a wonderful world full of magic, mystery, wonder, adventure and fun.

And more than once, I had this inexplicable experience of 'seeing' my name on a book the nun held high for the class to see! Somehow, I held this belief that it was a sign of things to come.

Is it difficult to write this genre?

I love it. I write what comes naturally to me. Since I conduct

workshops for children and am also a freelance journalist, I draw from empiricism and then take off on my wings of imagination to create stories for children.

If you have to write a book in any other genre, which genre would you write in?

My years of teaching experience have convinced me that fables are fantastic teaching tools. So yes, God willing, I would love to create some fabulous fables. I have some strong spiritual leanings. So, Spirituality is another genre I wish to explore. At present, I am working on a non-fiction book that I hope will inspire young readers to make their learning a lot easier and fun.

How long did it take to write the book Super Stories...?

When my previous book, *Once Upon A Summer Vacation*, was released, I celebrated its birth with several workshops in different places for groups of children, young mothers, teachers and other care givers.



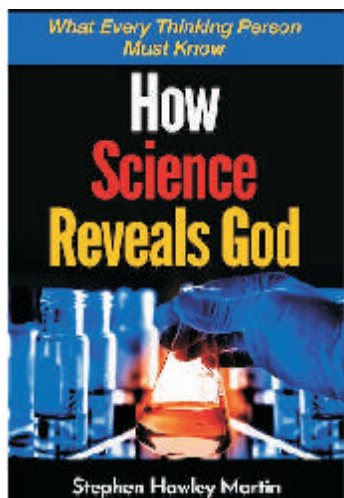
The response was so heartening it inspired me to work on a new set of stories.

So in 2015, I started work on *Super Stories*. By and large, I adhere to the spiritual guidance, 'Go with the flow.' And so, there are times when I am occupied with my freelance journalism assignments, teaching schedules or housework. Then there are days when I am just writing stories. But yes, no matter what I may be doing at a given point of time, a part of me maybe creating or dwelling upon a character or plot of a story. I guess it must have taken around a year or so for my manuscript to be ready for submission.

How Science Reveals God

A new book uses evidence from five areas of scientific exploration to make a case for the existence of God and the creation of the universe and life.

According to its publisher, "Not since the release of Charles Darwin's 'Origin of Species' in 1859 has a book been published that has such high potential to change Western culture's worldview and to reinstate God as an unquestioned fact." Just released by The Oaklea Press Inc., "How Science Views God: What Everything Thinking Person Must Know," draws upon the following to make the case for the existence of God and of intelligent design of both the universe and life: 1.) Evidence showing that the material universe had a beginning; 2.) Evidence showing that, from its beginning, the universe was finely tuned to allow for the possibility of life; 3.) Evidence from biology showing that after the universe came into being, large amounts of genetic information similar to computer code came about in DNA that made, and continue to make, life possible; 4.) Evidence from research conducted at the University of Virginia School of Medicine showing that the brain does not create consciousness, but rather, that the brain can be



compared to a cell phone or a radio that receives consciousness that originates somewhere else, and then integrates it with the body; 5.) Evidence from quantum mechanics and a number of other sources that consciousness or mind the medium of thought is nonlocal and appears to be present everywhere.

Drawing upon more than three dozen credible sources, Stephen Hawley Martin, the author, lays out evidence that textbooks produced and distributed over the past hundred or so years are

woefully incorrect that propagate Scientific Materialist dogma stating that: 1.) Nothing in the universe exists except material substance; 2.) The universe and life came about by chance; 3.) Evolution came about solely through random mutations and the mechanism of "survival of the fittest" or "natural selection;" 4.) Consciousness and intelligence did not exist until evolution produced a brain.

Martin draws two conclusions he maintains are clearly supported by the evidence. They are that God or "Infinite Mind" not only was the "First Cause" but also continues to be involved in our universe today. He then speculates about the nature of God and the meaning and purpose of life.

"How Science Views God: What Everything Thinking Person Must Know" is published by The Oaklea Press Inc. in trade paperback, ISBN 10: 1687528594, for \$11.95 and Kindle, ASIN: B07X7FHG1H

(Contact: Steve Martin: Steve@hawleymartin.com)

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Interview with Shahin Ashraf Ali, author of *Super Stories With Tips And Activities*

What is a learning that you would like a reader to take from your book?

I hope and pray my young reader looks upon the world as a wonderful place that offers up an eternity of things to do and see and explore and learn from.

What is your work schedule like when you are writing?

I do not have a formal work schedule as such. Time spent writing children's stories are happy hours for me. Such happy hours happen at any time during the day or night.

What types of book do you enjoy reading?

I enjoy reading. Having said that, I like various kinds of books—biographies, autobiographies, classics, fiction, non-fiction, children's books, comics, books on spirituality, among others. I feel you are drawn to a particular book according to your state of being at that time.

A recent book that you read?

I just finished reading Khaled

Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, and am now revisiting *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach.

What's success for you?

Being true to yourself.

What is your advice for aspiring writers?

Write about what you truly believe in.

What was one of the most surprising thing you learnt in creating your books?

Many times when I reread the stories, I wondered, "How did I write that?" "Where did this thought come from?" I learnt there is a 'Force' within you that takes over when you are honestly dedicated to the task at hand.

(Extracted from vidhyathakkar.com)



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Making of a 'Great' Scientist

In this wonderful book, author Joseph Mani documents the personal life of nine well-known men and women who have played a major role in the development of modern science.

Nine Luminaries of Science: Interesting and Inspiring Facts about the Personal Lives of These Great Men and Women

Author: Joseph Mani

Publisher: Notion Press, Chennai

Year: 2019

Pp: 188

Price: Rs. 200

Every person's life is, without exception, a fascinating story in itself. Each such story recounts how an individual has negotiated with the mere fact of being alive. Even simply because of this, it has at least something that others can gain from. One can draw valuable lessons from the life-story of even someone who is considered very 'ordinary' and 'unremarkable'. That said, learning about the life of people who have made outstanding contributions that have benefitted many others can be a great joy as well as a major inspiration.

In this wonderful book, author Joseph Mani documents the personal life of nine well-known men and women who have played a major role in the development of modern science and whose contributions have had an important impact on the world. He provides us with an engaging account of how the life of these noted individuals unfolded over time and how they were led to make the scientific inventions or discoveries that they did.

Era of Modern Science

The nine characters that the author highlights are Nicholas Copernicus (b.1473), Galileo Galilei (b. 1564), Isaac Newton (b.1642), Marie Curie (b.1867), Jagdish Chandra Bose (b.1858), Albert Einstein (b.1879), C.V. Raman (b.1888), Richard Feynman (b.1918) and Stephen Hawking (b.1942). Taken together, their period covers a span of some 500 years, marking the emergence and development of what is considered to be the era of modern science.

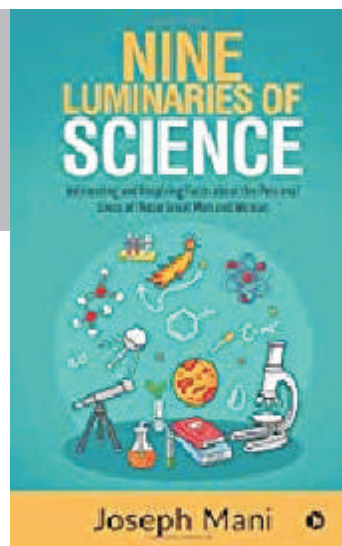
The author's description of the life of these nine scientists is not intended to be a detailed biographical account. Nor does it deal in detail with their various scientific works (which would perhaps require an entire book for almost every case). Rather, the book seeks to highlight how these noted scientists were as persons, rather than just as scientists as

Reviewed by Roshan

human beings who had their genius, no doubt, but who also had their faults and, in some cases, idiosyncrasies, just like the rest of us. Condensing their life-stories into just a chapter each, the book provides us with interesting insights into what for most of us is a lesser-known side of their personality. We get to know them as persons, rather than just as scientists. We learn, for instance, of their family background and education. We discover something about the great odds some of them had to face in their scientific quest, including from 'religious' authorities, as well as economic hardships and struggles. We learn about troubled marriages and tangled personal relationships. We also come to know about the oddities of some of these people, which we might never have expected of a 'famous' scientist (for instance, did you know that Richard Feynman, considered one of the world's greatest theoretical physicists in the area of quantum mechanics and who won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1965, refused to brush his teeth and also advised others not to do so on TV? Or, were you aware that the late Stephen Hawking delighted in riding his wheelchair over the toes of people he disliked?). The book also provides fascinating details about the religious beliefs (or lack of them) of some of the world's most well-known scientists: some of them believed in God (understood diversely), while some others were atheists.

Early Childhood Experiences

This beautiful book highlights multiple factors that go into the making of a 'great' scientist. It suggests that perhaps it isn't some supposed innate academic 'brilliance' alone that counts here. Other factors, such as early childhood experiences, relationships at home, difficult economic conditions, personal encounters and even emotional



“The book also provides fascinating details about the religious beliefs (or lack of them) of some of the world's most well-known scientists: some of them believed in God (understood diversely), while some others were atheists.”

challenges can also have a powerful impact on individuals, leading them, in ways one would never have imagined, to go on to become famous scientists.

As an introduction to the fascinating life of nine people who have made a major contribution to modern science, this book excels. Written in an easy, relaxed style, it can resonate with both school students and 'adults' alike. The author deserves our thanks for providing us a thoroughly-engaging account of the personal side of these men and women, which we may completely ignore even as we may benefit in many ways from their scientific achievements.

That said, I have just one complaint: we aren't told about why the author chose these particular nine scientists to profile. And why nine, and not say, ten, the closest round-figure? And then again, why not scientists from other parts of the world and civilisational zones? Highlighting the life of scientists from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds would probably have added to the richness of this book. But perhaps that is something that Joseph Mani will deal with in a future book!

A Delightful Book for Children

Written with young hearts in mind, this short, easy-to-read book is a wonderful way to introduce children to the prayers from the Quran and the Hadith.

My First Book of Dua

Compiled by Mohd. Harun Rashid & Mateen Ahmad

Published by Goodword Books, New Delhi

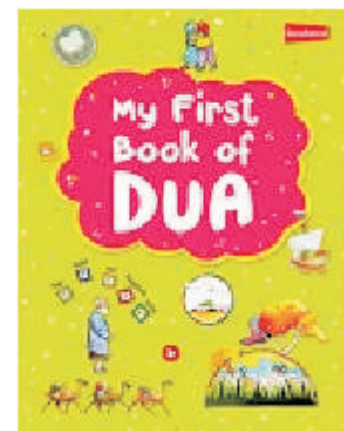
Email: info@goodwordbooks.com

Website: www.goodwordbooks.com

My First Book of Dua might seem a bit heavy to carry around for a seven year old, but its beautiful cover with lovely illustrations might certainly attract any child of seven years and above to read it! This is a delightful book for children, which they may call their very own! Written with young hearts in mind, this short, easy-to-read book is a wonderful way to introduce children to the prayers from the Quran and the Hadith.

My First Book of Dua helps children to learn to remember and thank God in a way that is meaningful and charming. This is a bright and appealing collection designed to be used at home or at school. With bright and colourful illustrations, this book can encourage kids to explore their own ways of praying.

The best prayers are often the ones we say naturally, when we are happy, excited or sad about something. But at that time, we do not always find the right words to express our inner feelings. Reading these prayers



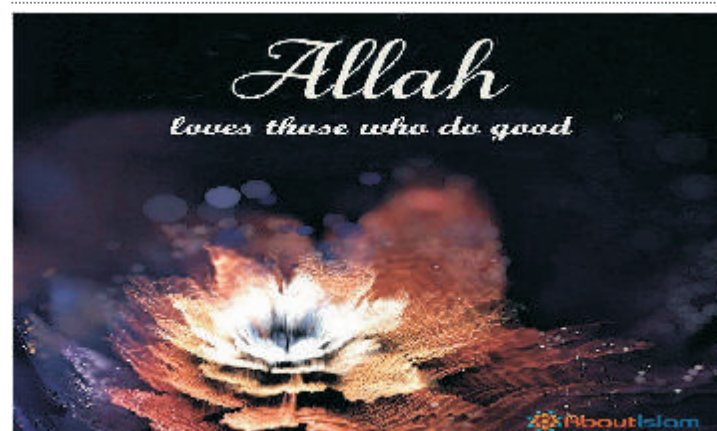
from the Quran, children might be able to find appropriate words and phrases to pray with, at any time and in different situations. In that way, they can find themselves closer to God, as if they were whispering to Him. Then it will be an exchange between them and the Almighty.

This book is packed with excellent illustrations, and the quality of printing is superb. However, the book could certainly have done with more careful proof-reading so as to avoid spelling errors.

India Inclusion Summit Bangalore (17th November, 2019)

India Inclusion Summit, started in 2012, seeks to create awareness about disabilities and the need for inclusion in mainstream society. This annual event is hosted by the India Inclusion Foundation, a registered public NGO trust. The event brings together thought leaders and unsung heroes from the field of disability and inclusion to deliberate, discuss, and help drive change in society.

To register, click on <https://indiainclusionsummit.com/register/>



Chris Buckley & Heval Kelli

How a Former White Supremacist & a Muslim Refugee Became Friends

Newnan (USA): At first glance, Dr. Heval Kelli and Chris Buckley could not be more different. Buckley is a former member of the white supremacist outfit Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Kelli is a Muslim man who came to America as a Syrian refugee and is now a cardiologist and influential civil rights activist. Despite their vastly different pasts, Buckley and Kelli have found an incredible friendship with one another.

"This is my friend, this is my brother. I legitimately love him and trust him," says Buckley. Two years ago, Buckley and Kelli never would've crossed paths, but an intervention changed everything.

From an early age, Buckley said he learned racism and hatred from the adults in his life. He harbored it inside, until it culminated on a tragic day in U.S. history. On September 11th, 2001, a teenage Buckley gathered with his classmates around the television. A plane had just crashed into the Twin Towers in New York City. "I would sit around and think about it, just like the angrier and angrier I would get. I guess I started tapping into those hurtful, resentful emotions that I had trapped inside of me and used it to fuel that anger and that hate. I kind of felt like it was my duty to attack back," says Buckley. Buckley enlisted in the U.S. Army and was deployed to Afghanistan. "Going through Afghanistan, getting blown up, learning to be angry all the time," says Buckley. Buckley returned home in 2010, and he broke his back in an accident. "That was my introduction to opioid painkillers. Coupled with the anger of being overseas, not understanding what I went through, coming home, you mix that with drugs, and you get real angry. You just want somebody to blame," says Buckley. "You find yourself in midst of going from what people call you as an American hero to purely destructive force to this country and everything it stands for." That's when Buckley joined the KKK.

Buckley's family was in crisis. Community members began to single out his wife and children because of Buckley's

involvement with the KKK. For several kids in his town, hearing his name was like hearing about a ghost; many feared him. Buckley says: "I had the raging drug addiction, the brainwashed ideology of the supremacist movement, the hate group. And on top of that, I was suffering with the issues that I brought home from overseas with me"

It was clear to his wife Melissa that Buckley wasn't going to change on his own. She reached out to Arno Michaelis, a man who had been in Buckley's shoes. Michaelis was once a neo-Nazi skinhead. He had a drastic change in mind and heart in the early 2000's. Now Michaelis spreads messages of inclusion and forgiveness and helps other people get out of hate groups. He flew from Wisconsin to Lafayette, Ga. to help Buckley leave behind the hateful life he was leading.

"Buckley's change was gradual and met with resistance. Buckley says things once got so heated that he threatened Michaelis with a shotgun. But Michaelis didn't give up."

Buckley's change was gradual and met with resistance. Buckley says things once got so heated that he threatened Michaelis with a shotgun. But Michaelis didn't give up. As time went on, Buckley showed gradual progress, opening up his mind to meeting and accepting new people. He also received treatment for his drug addiction. Michaelis ran into Kelli at a discussion on Islamophobia. Michaelis mentioned he was about to meet up with Buckley and asked Kelli if he wanted to come along. Though he was on call for his job that day, Kelli agreed to meet him another time. Kelli and Buckley messaged one another on Facebook, growing a sense of familiarity prior to their first in-person meeting.

The day finally came about a year later in the summer of 2018. With slight apprehension, Kelli, whose name Heval means



Friends Arno Michaelis, Chris Buckley and Heval Kelli gather for a selfie.

"friend" in Kurdish, drove to Buckley's home. Buckley's greeting took him by surprise. "He was like, 'Hey man, can I take a picture with your Mercedes?'" recalls Kelli with a laugh. From there, a conversation evolved from skepticism to appreciation for one another and their experiences. The two learned they had more in common than

they might have thought. They were more alike than different. Most importantly, they shared a love of their family and a love of the United States.

"I always tell people there's not only a life after hate, there's life after change, and it takes time," says Kelli.

Kelli and Buckley developed a close friendship. Kelli even

invited Buckley to a Ramadan iftar dinner, hosted at Refuge Coffee Co. in Clarkston, Ga.

Kelli says Buckley is changing for the better and becoming an advocate for accepting people of different ethnicities and religious backgrounds. Buckley is also working on a 12-step program to help other people leave hate groups as well. "If people have a problem with what's going on in our country, they need to sit around Chris and take notes from him, how this guy changed, and scale it because there is a scalable model here because people are reaching out to him," says Kelli.

Kelli and Buckley are coming together to normalize their friendship and encourage other people to reach out to those who are different from them. In addition to creating a hate recovery program, they're starting a conversation on a community level. Their outreach began with an event "When two different worlds unite," hosted by the Newnan Presbyterian Church. The event focused on unity was in response to a neo-Nazi rally held in 2018. Buckley and Kelli hope to bring people together. They're sharing their stories to help other people break down their barriers of prejudice and fear.

ISSUES

KAICIID Board Speaks Out

On First UN Day for Victims of Religiously-Motivated Violence

To mark the first International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief, established by a United Nations resolution earlier this year, the multi-religious Board of Vienna-based King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), recently issued the following statement:

"The Board of KAICIID extends its heartfelt sympathy and prayers to all those who have suffered death, injury and bereavement on the basis of their religion. We condemn in the strongest terms those who identify their victims based on



their faith, or who seek to distort and misrepresent religion to justify violence.

We reiterate, on the first UN-sponsored commemoration of the sacrifice of such victims, that no justification can be found in any belief system for the harming of innocents. Those gathering for collective worship have a particular right to security and freedom of expression.

All faiths are grounded in the

fundamental dignity of the person, centred on the values of peace and tolerance.

We note with increasing alarm the escalation of attacks on religious communities, from the recent attacks on churches in Sri Lanka, to the targeting of mosques in New Zealand and synagogues in the United States. We call upon local authorities and the international community to do more to protect those engaged in worship or otherwise wishing to express their beliefs without fear.

We call also for more to be done to protect and nurture the religious identities of all believers, to counter trends such as hate speech and to provide space for religious minorities who routinely face threats of violence, social exclusion or discrimination."

Two Brave Sikhs Stand Up For Muslims

A Sikh lawmaker from Britain recently called for United Kingdom's Prime Minister Boris Johnson to apologize for the "derogatory and racist remarks" he made last year about Muslim women. Speaking during Johnson's first formal question-and-answer session in the House of Commons, Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi excoriated the Tory leader for the way he described Muslim women in a newspaper column. In it, Johnson compared women wearing burqas to "letterboxes" or "bank robbers."

"For those of us who from a young age have had to endure and face up to being called names such as towel-head, or Taliban, or coming from bongo-bongo land, we can fully appreciate the hurt and pain of already vulnerable Muslim women when they are described as looking like bank robbers and letterboxes," Singh, a Labour Party politician who became the Commons' first turbaned Sikh in 2017, said before the UK's Parliament. "So rather than hide behind sham and whitewash investigations, when will the prime minister finally apologize for his derogatory and racist remarks?"



Singh went on to ask the UK's PM Johnson when he would order an inquiry into Islamophobia in the Conservative Party, noting that it was something he had promised on national television. The comments quickly ignited a round of applause from lawmakers.

Johnson vociferously pushed back against the criticism, arguing that the column in question was a "strong liberal defense" of individuals' right to wear whatever they'd like in Britain. He also defended the diversity of his Cabinet, before calling on the Labour Party to apologize for the "virus of anti-Semitism that is now rampant in their ranks." He did not address Singh's call for an inquiry into Islamophobia.

Johnson faced widespread



criticism in 2018 for the column in The Telegraph that deemed the burkha "oppressive" and "ridiculous." The monitoring organization Tell Mama revealed data this week showing that hate crimes against Muslims rose by 375 percent in the week after the column published, The Guardian reported.

Meanwhile, in Canada, Sikh MPP (Member of Provincial Parliament) from Brampton East, Gurratan Singh denounced Islamophobic remarks made toward him at Muslim Fest. Singh was at the three-day Mississauga event to bring comments about empowering the Muslim community and confronting Islamophobia. Singh said while he was speaking, he noticed a man acting aggressively and shouting. When he left the stage, he saw the man walk through security, lock eyes with him and

"effectively beeline" toward him, he said. In a video of the incident posted online, Singh speaks to the man while the man says, "I'm not racist. I'm not racist at all." The man can be seen asking, "what about sharia? Political Islam? You're hiding bud. I'll debate you anytime." The man in the video was Stephen Garvey, the leader of the National Citizens Alliance, an anti-immigration political party.

Singh said in that moment, he thought of a lesson his brother taught him: to always confront racism. "Whenever I am confronted with Islamophobia, my response is not, 'Yeah I'm not Muslim', [it's], 'Hate is wrong,'" he said in a tweet from his verified Twitter account. He recounted his response to the man: saying "I condemn your racism" and "This has no place in Canada."

Asia Bibi Pleads for Justice for Victims of Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws

As Asia Bibi sits free at last in a secret location in Canada, the Pakistani Christian woman who spent years on death row after a false blasphemy charge thinks of those left behind still facing the same ordeal. Nearly four months after the 54-year-old finally left Pakistan following a miscarriage of justice that caused worldwide outcry, she has the opportunity to rebuild a new life for her and her daughters. Yet while she is enthusiastically grateful for the international efforts to free her, she says the world should know that Pakistan's harsh blasphemy laws have left many others still behind bars.

In her first ever newspaper interview, she told *The Sunday Telegraph* she had at times fallen into despair after being sentenced to death in a case condemned around the world. She also spoke of her heartbreak at being forced to leave her homeland, amid fears

she would be murdered by religious extremists even after Pakistan's supreme court had quashed her flimsy conviction.

Her freedom was finally secured with mediation from a European Union special envoy, Jan Figel, a Slovak politician. While she is currently in Canada, she is hoping to move to an undisclosed country in Europe in the coming months.

Mrs Bibi, also known as Asya Nooreen, said her wrongful conviction had devastated her life. "My whole life suffered, my children suffered and this had a huge impact on my life," she said in a series of voice messages sent in response to questions from the Telegraph. Mrs Bibi thanked the supreme court for acquitting her, but said others also needed fair trials. "There are many other cases where the accused are lying in

Islam cannot be reduced to Political Goals, Says MWL World Chief



MWL chief Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa inaugurates the organization's pavilion in Rimini, Italy.

Jeddah: The secretary-general of the Muslim World League (MWL), Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa recently inaugurated the MWL's pavilion at an exhibition held on the sidelines of 40th edition of the Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples in Rimini, Italy. The MWL is the first Islamic organization to take part in the international fair, which registered more than 1 million visitors. The pavilion featured pictures and movies about the league's projects and its relief and health care world association, in addition to a number of documentaries telling the stories of people who the league saved from poverty, illness and illiteracy. The pavilion stressed the attention that the MWL accords to the humanitarian values of Islam in helping those in need regardless of their religion, ethnicity or culture.

The pavilion received a large number of diplomatic and academic delegations and political leaders, most notably the head of the European Parliament, the head of the Italian Parliament, as well as a large number of young Europeans, especially Italians.

In a speech, Al-Issa underlined

jail for years and their decision should also be done on merit. The world should listen to them."

Mrs Bibi was first convicted of blasphemy after she quarrelled with two Muslim women while they picked falsa berries for a landowner in rural Punjab in 2009. Her accusers claimed she insulted the Prophet Mohammed in an argument because the women would not

the dangers of political Islam, noting that some movements try to achieve their political objectives through exploiting the Muslim religion and playing on emotion, so as to deceive and encourage people, especially younger people, to commit harm.

The secretary-general highlighted ways of combating terrorism and violence, stressing the importance of eradicating extremism by confronting terrorism advocates through strong arguments that would undermine their discourse based on manipulating text interpretations and confusing some young people who lack adequate knowledge. "Political Islam concepts have harmed Islam. Besides being a religion, Islam is a way of life and cannot be reduced to political goals as some violent and terrorist groups do," said Al-Issa. He also pointed out that ethnic, religious, intellectual and political extremism, terrorism and violence are not peculiar to a certain category. Toward the end of his address, Al-Issa stressed that nations and peoples must understand the concept of difference and diversity required to build bridges of brotherhood, love, cooperation and coexistence.

drink from a container she had touched. The accusation was taken up by the village mullah and she was taken to court and sentenced to death in 2010. But Mrs Bibi said she had been made to confess at the hands of a village mob who nearly beat her unconscious. She denied she had ever committed blasphemy. She spent eight years on death row, constantly fearing for her life, before the case was quashed in the supreme court last October.

Corruption

"And devour not one another's possessions wrongfully, nor offer them to those who rule, so as to wrongfully and knowingly devour what is owned by others"

Surah Al-Baqarah (The Cow) Surah 2: Verse 188

Corruption is a serious peril for the relations between the rulers and the ruled, and it can occur in both directions: there may be an attitude from the ruled to corrupt and an attitude from the rulers to be corrupted. These attitudes often develop simultaneously, but sometimes one party may take the initiative and persuade the other to participate in the corruption.

The above verse addresses the ruled who may use corruption to deprive one another of their rights or possessions. A tradition of the Prophet condemns the person who offers a bribe, the person who accepts it and any who mediate between both [reported by Ibn Hanbal]. The

Honesty is a social value that should be observed by the whole society, and any dishonest initiative may start an epidemic.

same rule applies also to any transgression of public rights or property.

Honesty is a social value that should be observed by the whole society, and any dishonest initiative may start an epidemic. Thus, moral education and God-consciousness should be

combined with social justice. Those who enjoy authority, be it political, administrative, judicial or another kind, have to resist any temptation to invite or encourage corruption directly or indirectly, or to receive it. However, **the wide masses are more important in maintaining honesty in the society as a whole and guarding those who are in power against any corruption.**

Yet despite this, it may be remarkable that in any given time and place there are honest have-nots and corrupting and corrupted haves!

(Compiled From: "Concepts of the Quran" - Fathi Osman, p. 767)

HADITH ILLUMINATES THE PATH

Monopoly of Speech

Abu Hurayrah reports that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: **'The worst of my community are those who talk too much, resorting to pedantry and insolence; while the best of my people are those who have the best manners.'** [Ahmad]

People should be precise and limit themselves to making their meaning clear without unnecessarily harping on about what is already clear. This is not surprising. We know that the Prophet included rich meanings in few words. In this hadith the Prophet mentions three qualities that make a person join the worst type of people. These are **the chatters who almost speak non-stop.** They admire their own speech and feel that they

have a claim to being listened to. They love to hear themselves speaking. This is an attitude of arrogance that some people often exhibit. If such a chatterer adds pedantry and insolence to his speech, then he is really a pain in the neck. What is worse is that he merits the Prophet's description as being one of the worst in the Muslim community. By contrast, **the best people are those whose manners are fine and who are kindly to people. They listen to others and accept what is right, without claiming any monopoly of speech or knowledge.**

(Compiled From: "Al-Adab al-Mufrad with Full Commentary: A Perfect Code of Manners and Morality" - Adil Salahi)

REFLECTIONS

Loving-Kindness

The Way to Interfaith/Inter-Community Harmony

By Valea

Over several decades (I'm in my sixth decade now!) I've attended numerous interfaith dialogue meetings, in different parts of the world. A principal ostensible purpose of many such events is promoting interfaith / inter-community harmony.

Despite minor differences, almost all these events have followed the same pattern. A group of people from different faith backgrounds gather together in a university or a hotel, in many cases (and sometimes, even in a luxury resort!) and talk theology, with 'experts' insisting that their respective faiths generously accept and respect other religions and their adherents. If only people understood their religions properly, they claim, there would be no problem of interfaith/inter-community conflict.

One-Sided Talk

Whether or not this point is valid is something that can be endlessly debated. Critics might argue that such assertions can be very simplistic, to say the least. But whatever the case might be, a question to be asked here, as far as the goal of promoting inter-communal harmony is concerned, is whether such events (where interfaith dialogue often comes to be reduced simply to 'goody-good',

That 'little' act of 'big' kindness a Muslim woman spontaneously reaching out to support a Christian girl in need helped build a bridge of love between the two.

superficial and one-sided talk about religion) do indeed make any positive difference at the grassroots level in terms of how people perceive other religions and their adherents. Also, do the practical outcomes of this approach to interfaith harmony justify the time, effort and funds that are invested in them?

Of course, such meetings may be better than nothing at all. At least they afford a platform for people from different faith traditions to gather together for a while, to exchange a couple of words (even if it's sometimes just pleasantries) and to share a meal. But be that as it may, if such meetings are intended to influence for the better the way 'ordinary' people, at the 'grassroots', from different religions relate to each other, what difference do they actually make?

No Talk of Action Plan

The other day, I attended one such interfaith dialogue meeting. The panel of speakers included men (there were no women something quite typical of many such meetings) from four different religious traditions. The speakers made their speeches, after which we were treated to lunch and then



everyone dispersed. There was no talk of any action plan, of practical efforts that we as a group could do to promote interfaith/intercommunity harmony.

I wouldn't say such meetings are pointless as far as interfaith/intercommunity harmony is concerned. But if you ask me if they are worth the money, time, effort and energy that often go into them, I'd say that there is a much more effective way to achieve their ostensible purpose. And what is that? It's 'little' acts of kindness and service for people from different religious backgrounds that can unite hearts across religious barriers in a manner that possibly no amount of theologising and syrupy talk of

religion by (often self-appointed) religious 'experts' can.

To illustrate, shortly after I attended the interfaith programme mentioned above, I was at a Christian-run centre, accompanied by N, a Muslim friend of mine. It so happened that B, a Christian woman who worked as a cook at the centre, needed to rush to her village (located several hundred kilometres away) because her father had taken seriously ill. B had to pay for her ticket herself which must have been a big sum by her standards. When N learnt

of this, she felt for B. In a spontaneous act of compassion, N gave the head of the centre a sizeable sum of money (perhaps more than what the ticket cost) to give to B for her travel expenses. Later, B came to know of what N had done, and I am sure she was very touched.

That 'little' act of 'big' kindness a Muslim woman spontaneously reaching out to support a Christian girl in need helped build a bridge of love between the two that possibly no amount of theological chatter about interfaith harmony spouted by scholarly 'experts' at an interfaith event ever could have!

Love, then, is all we need. And what is love? It is going beyond concern simply with oneself or with the group one identifies with to embracing others and being concerned about their wellbeing, this being expressed through practical acts of compassion. And so, if you ask me what I think is the best way to promote interfaith/intercommunity harmony and solidarity, while I wouldn't dismiss formal theological discussions as happens in many 'interfaith dialogue' events completely, I'd unhesitatingly vote for engaging in 'little' acts of kindness and love in the service of people from diverse faith/community backgrounds.

“Love, then, is all we need. And what is love? It is going beyond concern simply with oneself or with the group one identifies with to embracing others and being concerned about their wellbeing, this being expressed through practical acts of compassion.”

Bounty of Water

It is in fact a part of Islamic teachings that one needs to be mindful, cautious and responsible in using God's bounties.



By Amin Valliani

Allah has blessed humanity with innumerable bounties and water is

perhaps the topmost amongst all of these. He has made all creatures out of water as He mentions in the Quran: "...We have made every living thing from water. ..." (21:30). After oxygen, water is considered to be one of the basic needs for living creatures.

At another place, the Holy Book says: "Allah has created every creature from water. Of them there are some that creep on their bellies, some that walk on two legs, and some that walk on four. Allah creates what He wills ... Allah is able to do all things" (24:45).

The above verses hint not only at creation from water, but the latter's continuous importance in all spheres of life. The very survival and sustainability of all creatures depends on water. It is in fact a part of Islamic teachings that one needs to be mindful, cautious and responsible in using God's bounties — the scrupulous use of water and other God-given bounties is an

implied way of thanksgiving.

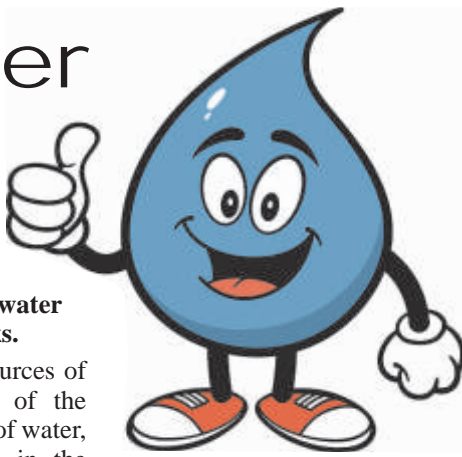
The scrupulous use of water is a way of giving thanks.

We see innumerable sources of water on earth; 71pc of the earth's surface consists of water, much of it contained, in the oceans. Seawater is yet to be made fully potable and usable for irrigation through the development of cheap desalination technology. Other sources include rain, rivers and glaciers, etc.



The general public needs to be educated about the conservation of water, reminding them about Allah's commandment which says "...Eat and drink but waste not by extravagance. Certainly He likes not Al Musrifun" (7:31).

Until recently, many people used to think that water is free and an inexhaustible treasure. Therefore, the usage of water in a profligate way was rampant. But now, that thinking is beginning to



change. We are sensing various ominous signs of water scarcity as opposed to rising demand. Intellectuals, experts and other concerned citizens are raising their voices about the impending dangers of water shortage. Some countries are drying up and there is the potential of inter- and intra-state violence over water that could lead to instability in different regions.

Most Prized Commodity

According to some renowned environmentalists, water is going to be the most prized commodity in the future, which may instigate man's animalistic traits to fight for the commodity he needs.

There are a number of ways to pre-empt the emerging crisis. The first and foremost is education. The general public needs to be educated about the conservation of water, reminding them about Allah's commandment which says "...Eat and drink but waste not by extravagance. Certainly He likes not Al Musrifun" (7:31).

Secondly, it is necessary to build extra reservoirs where people can save rain and floodwater for later use. During monsoon, we get enough rain which sometimes turns into floods, destroying homes and hearths, crops and cattle. Experts need to look into ways to develop technology to harness rainwater and retain it for later use. Waste water also needs to be treated primarily for industrial purposes. In short, we must awaken before it is too late.

(Extracted from an article available on the Net)

Page 1

Caring for Our Common Future Advancing Shared Well-Being

who predict a clash of civilizations.

Terrorism, with the efficiency of its methods and its polarizing force, poses an existential threat to all peace lovers. It can be said that all religions stand accused some consider them responsible for violence and war. Some even call for the removal of religion from the public sphere, for they consider it a factor that divides rather than one which unites one that harms and does not benefit.

Nevertheless, in spite of the changing, dark view we see before us, we cannot forget that there is a very bright side: the majority of humanity, both in the East and in the West, still believes in the possibility of coexistence, rejects the rhetoric of violence and hatred, and engages in civic initiatives, public service campaigns, and coalitions of solidarity, such as this conference of ours.

The rhetoric of hatred that has infected the body of humanity invites us to despair from one another and calls us to fight for self-preservation, which, in reality, leads to annihilation and to ignoring the many commonalities that unite us. Our greatest defense against this rhetoric is to keep the flame of hope alive in our hearts and not let despair seize the hearts and minds of people.

The shared values of humanity are universal values that rational minds do not differ over they are not affected by the changing times, the contingencies of place, or human tendencies. This is because such people have foundations and roots that protect them from the vicissitudes of time and the abuses of those who are destructive. These shared values must be restored for people everywhere, and they are found in the messages and calls of all the prophets. They are the unchanging values of peace, which are confirmed by reason and human welfare.

People of all the various religious

backgrounds around the world continue to strive for peace, and prayers continue to be made to attain peace. Our collective efforts must increase: the spirit of solidarity and cooperation must emerge and produce initiatives on the ground proving to the world that religion, at its core, is a force of mercy for the worlds. It is time for religious leaders to demonstrate greater effectiveness and greater involvement in the concerns of human societies to rationalize and ward off the specter of wars and deadly strife.

This is our vision in the United Arab Emirates, which offers a model of happy coexistence between different religions and ethnicities, framed by initiatives that have delegitimized extremists. Among these initiatives are the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities and the American Peace Convoys of the Abrahamic Family. Abu Dhabi recently witnessed the Document on Human Fraternity signed by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar and the Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church. We also participated on behalf of the Forum for Promoting Peace supporting the historic Mecca Declaration organized by the Muslim World League that was signed by more than 1,200 scholars representing diverse Islamic thoughts.

All of this reflects a dynamic and positive movement in the region in which hatred and violence are rejected, and the true narrative of religion of love and tolerance is presented. That is our shared story and vision that we all share with you in this great forum, supervised by my good friend, Dr. William Vendley. Our meeting gives hope and renews the conviction that the day when we reject stereotypes and hatred and foster the feelings of brotherhood and sisterhood in humanity and love of goodness will indeed be a bright day in the history of humanity. And so here, from Germany, we join the call of religions, the call of all humanity, the call of love and harmony the call to work towards a future that honors humanity everywhere.

(Extracted from Shaykh Abdullah Bin Bayyah's Opening Ceremony Speech at the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace, recently held at Lindau, Germany. He is President of the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies based in Abu Dhabi)

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Buddhist Monk from Mandalay



This Buddhist monk works for communal harmony in Myanmar.

While the world keeps its eye on Myanmar's firebrand monk U Wirathu and his encouragement of anti-Muslim sentiment, another prominent monk is also making headlines there, for entirely the opposite reason. Ashin Ariya Wun Tha Bhiwun Sa, a Buddhist monk from Mandalay, better known as Myawaddy Sayadaw, is regularly seen with leaders of Christians, Muslims and Hindus in interfaith gatherings at home and overseas, fighting the persecution of minority groups. Myanmar is a Buddhist-majority country which has always advocated harmony, peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among its religions. Now, however, Ariya Wun Tha acknowledges the greater role of religious leaders in a strife-torn country ruled by the military for more than five decades. "We, the religious leaders, need to play a greater role in promoting harmony among the various religions instead of sowing hatred against minorities," said the monk. He says monks need to guide the people on what is

right and wrong and to regard it as their duty to publicly criticize unruly monks and those who spread anti-Muslim sentiment.

Myanmar has witnessed several bouts of violence with religious overtones in recent years, much of it targeting Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine State. Hard-line Buddhist monks from what was formerly called the Committee for the Protection of Race and Religion, or Ma Ba Tha, encouraged anti-Muslim violence in 2012 that left more than 200 people dead and forced tens of thousands to flee their homes.

AriyaWunTha has been an active participant in interfaith activities across the country in collaboration with Cardinal Charles Maung Bo of Yangon, another vocal supporter of peace, justice and the rights of minorities. He was also among Buddhist leaders who held an interfaith meeting with Pope Francis in Yangon when the pope made a historic visit to the country in November 2017.

(Extracted from catholic-sf.org)

Pew Research Survey

Survey Highlights Need for Education to Bring People of Different Faiths Together

Citing a recent Pew Research survey, Oklahoma (USA) state experts have highlighted the importance of bringing college students of different faiths together to become more aware of the diverse faith traditions around them. "People don't have any interaction and when they don't have any colleagues, neighbors or friends, they have no idea about Islam, Judaism, Hinduism or other faiths. We want them to build relationships. I think that is the first step," Muhammed Ali Sezer, a Muslim who is executive director of the Dialogue Institute-OKC, said. Sezer said the Dialogue Institute and the Raindrop Turkish House each focus on bringing diverse groups together to learn more about each other and establish bonds and friendships based on

commonalities. "We have to love each other; then you are able to see the humanity in each other. Yes, we have differences but in the end, my neighbor is a human being like me," he said.

Citing the July survey, Lisa Wolfe, an Oklahoma City University professor, said that college students with limited knowledge of faith beliefs other than their own were becoming more aware of the wide range of diverse faith traditions around them. "I can see this change before my eyes when small-town Christian students meet a rabbi for the first time or visit a mosque for the first time," Lisa Wolfe, an Oklahoma City University professor, said. "I remember a Christian student talking about how he had only ever read negative information about

Islam, and then he went to visit the Islamic Center of Oklahoma City, because I required him to do so for class, and one person after another came up to him shaking his hand, welcoming him, ultimately asking him to spread the word that they were good people." "He was astonished, humbled and returned with a completely changed attitude. A Jewish student visited a Catholic church and made the connection between the holy water there and the ritual cleansing in her own tradition; suddenly there was commonality where there had been distance. These kinds of connections bring us together, and often bring students to greater respect for their own tradition, as well as the others."

(Extracted from aboutislam.net)

Former enemies using faith to spread peace

They were leaders of violent rival militias in Nigeria. Now Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye are working together to spread messages of peace and reconciliation. In the 1990s the two led opposing armed religious militias in the city of Kaduna, northern Nigeria.

Dr Wuye said their home city had a "population delicately balanced" with Muslims from the north and Christians from the south. In the late 1970s, there were waves of 'evangelisation' and 'Islamisation', driven by university students. "They grew religious fundamentalists and zealots." As a Pentecostal Christian, he hated his Muslim counterparts in the city and involved himself in fierce

battles with them.

In one fight over the relocation of a market, Dr Wuye's hand was severed by a machete.

Similar battles took the lives of Dr Ashafa's spiritual mentor and two close relatives. In 1995, the two were forced together by a journalist. After some years of distrust they began touring the country and spreading interfaith peace across the country. They are now co-directors of the Muslim-Christian Interfaith Mediation Centre in their city, which leads task forces to resolve conflicts across Nigeria.

Dr Wuye said part of the problem was scriptures were open to manipulation and



Imam Muhammad Ashafa (left) and Pastor James Wuye

misinterpretation. "If it's handled by good drivers, religion is the best thing to bring about peace in the world."

Dr Ashafa said religion had been hijacked to justify "violence, destruction and division in the name of God".

However, people such as Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X and Mahatma Gandhi showed faith could be used to create positive change in the world.

(Extracted from odt.co.nz)

Hindus in this Village take Care of Mosque

In a heart warming instance of communal harmony, the Hindu residents of Mari village, in Nalanda district in Bihar, take care of an old mosque. According to an ANI report, the Muslim population in the village slowly faded out and there was no one left to care for the mosque. That's when the people in the village joined hands and preserved it. Hindu residents of Mari now take care of the mosque and play azaan with the help of pen-drive. After a wedding, newly-weds come here first to take blessings.



From painting the walls, sweeping and mopping the premises to playing azaan at the right hour, the locals here are making an effort to do everything like the people who left it behind. That's kind of inter-community understanding, love and harmony India and the whole world need today!

Gesture of Communal Harmony

A group of Muslim villagers in Assam's Kamrup district has performed the last rites of a Hindu man, who had stayed at a Muslim friend's residence with his family for over 25 years. Sixty-five-year-old Rajkumar Gaur used to stay at Saddam Hussain's residence in Rangia's Khandikar village after the death of his father rendered him homeless in the 1990s. After Rajkumar Gaur died, Hussain and his friends pooled money to purchase the items required for a Hindu cremation and arranged a priest, said Shukur Ali, a resident of Khandikar village. Hussain said he had given shelter to Gaur after he was forced to vacate the Railway quarters where he was living following the death of his father who had come to Assam from Uttar Pradesh. "I had built a dwelling for Rajkumar inside my premises so that he could live with his family," he said.

(Taken from newageislam.com)

An Inside Look At Interreligious Reconciliation

Extracts from an interview with Rabbi David Rosen, international director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee.

Rabbi David Rosen, international director of interreligious affairs at the American Jewish Committee (AJC), has been advancing understanding and good relations between religious communities for more than 40 years. He has been involved in this area from the time he served as rabbi of the largest Orthodox Jewish congregation in South Africa, during his tenure as chief rabbi of Ireland and throughout more than 30 years based in Jerusalem. In addition to interfaith representation and education, his work involves mediation and peace-building, and he is heavily involved in multi-religious engagement on ecological issues.

Q: At a time when there is political deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, do you see any possibility for progress on the religious or interfaith front?

A: Let me start by saying that I think one of the main reasons that past initiatives have failed, including the Oslo Accords, was the failure to take the religious dimension of the conflict seriously. This conflict is not only about tangibles but involves intangibles, including identity and culture rooted within religious tradition. If that is not taken into account at a deep psycho-spiritual level, then the superficial initiatives will flounder. This is not to suggest that rabbis or imams should take the place of politicians in negotiating agreements, but it is important to bring them in on the process.

Q: What do you see as potential solutions for contentious religious sites that are holy to two or more faiths, like the Temple Mount and Al-Aqsa compound?

A: There can be no solution on issues of this importance and



Rabbi David Rosen (far left) during a private audience with Pope Francis

sensitivity if there is no interreligious understanding and collaboration around it. In the case of Hebron, for example, at the Cave of the Patriarchs, we have seen the implementation of a principle that, when religions share a particular holy site, methods can be found to divide it in such a way that enables each side to use it according to their own liturgical needs.

The situation regarding the Temple Mount is a unique one. According to the Chief Rabbinate and the vast majority of the Jewish religious authorities, Jews are not meant to go up to the Temple Mount. That is precisely why Moshe Dayan could tell the Islamic Authority, also known as the Waqf, that they need not worry and, though they were now under the political authority of Israel, that the government would not interfere with the religious management of the site.

Of course, if we could put an end to the conflict and thereby put an end to the politicization of religion, then there is a possibility that those Jewish people who want to go to the southern end of the Temple Mount to pray could do so. This would not infringe in any way on the ability of Muslims

to worship in the Haram al-Sharif [Al-Aqsa compound]. However, so long as our societies remain in conflict then fundamental suspicions regarding each other's intentions will persist.

Q: I understand that you are heading to Auschwitz with a senior Saudi religious official on the 75th anniversary of its liberation.

A: I have been in contact with Saudi religious leaders for the past decade or so as a result of an initiative taken by the previous king of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz. Even though many perceive Saudi Arabia as only beginning to change now under King Salman and his son Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the truth is that many positive changes started under King Abdullah. He was the leader who launched initiatives to send tens of thousands of Saudis abroad for education, to develop women's education, and to get involved in interfaith relations in order to change the kingdom's attitude towards other religions and its presentation of Islam.

In 2005, together with Austria, Spain and the Vatican, King Abdullah established an institute for interreligious relations, the

King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). The board of the center consists of nine people: three Christians (representing the Vatican, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Ecumenical Patriarch), three Muslims (two Sunni and one Shi'ite), one Hindu, one Buddhist, and I am the one Jewish representative. For the Saudis to agree for an Israeli rabbi to serve on the board of an institution they established was a big deal. I think I am the only Israeli rabbi to have ever been received by the king of Saudi Arabia.

Five members of our board met with the king and at that meeting he said to us, "The Torah, the New Testament and the Koran all have the interest of humankind at their core. Therefore, it is our obligation to work together for the betterment of humanity."

KAICIID has provided me with the opportunity to meet with Muslim religious leaders, especially from Saudi Arabia, who have never met a Jew before. Let alone a rabbi. Let alone an Israeli rabbi. More often than not, the vast majority

of their knowledge of Judaism and Israel has come from very negatively prejudiced, if not anti-Semitic, propaganda. Therefore, it is very important for me to have the opportunity to engage them. At the end of our conversations, when they see we can discuss important issues in a way that is both productive and respectful to their religion, it is quite dramatic to see how attitudes can change.

One of the most important religious leaders I have had the opportunity to meet through the KAICIID is the secretary-general of the Muslim World League (MWL), Muhammad bin Abdul Karim al-Issa. Appointed by King Salman to this position two years ago, the secretary-general of the MWL is bureaucratically the most important figure in the Muslim world and he has completely changed his organization's orientation.

Historically, the MWL has disseminated a hardline or ultra-orthodox view of Islam around the world which would sometimes influence traditionally moderate societies to become more religiously extreme. It is now seeking to propagate a brand of Islam that is tolerant and moderate, and has issued statements condemning Holocaust denial and standing in solidarity with victims of anti-Semitism.

Al-Issa believes in dialogue and wants to conduct it with the Jewish community both in the Diaspora and in Israel. Two months ago, I shared a platform with him at a United Nations conference on the subject of responsible religious leadership. Prior to that, the AJC hosted him at an event where he and AJC CEO David Harris signed an MOU that included, inter alia, an agreement on the part of al-Issa to visit Auschwitz with us on the 75th anniversary of its liberation. I hope we are going to see that agreement come to fruition next January.

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Canada

Child Inspires Muslims to Support Kids Hospital

A Muslim non-profit organization, Yusuf's Day of Hope, has raised \$220,000 over the past 13 years to support Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children and to honor Yusuf Ally, a young child who suffers from a rare genetic disorder. "An overwhelming successful 13th annual Yusuf's Day of Hope (YDOH) in support of the Complex Care Initiative at the Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto," said Imam Imran Ally, father of Yusuf and Imam of TARIC Islamic Centre, thanking supporters following the annual picnic at the TARIC Mosque.

"Over the 13 years, this annual one-day outdoor family style picnic event has so far raised an astonishing total of just over \$220,000 all of which is donated to the Complex Care Initiative. Jazaakumullaahu khairaa for your generous support, much appreciated."

Yusuf's Day of Hope raises funds to support the Norman Saunders Complex Care Initiative at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. Yusuf's parents, Imam Imran and Kameeza Ally, started the organization in 2007 after Yusuf's health continued to deteriorate. It is their hope that this small initiative will be a way to give back to the hospital, and bring awareness of the tremendous work the Norman



Saunders Complex Care Initiative at the Hospital for Sick Children is doing. Every summer, friends, family come together for Yusuf's Day of Hope picnic. The event is a fun way for the community to come together to thank and to raise fund for the Hospital for Sick Children.

Yusuf's Story

Within weeks of being born, Yusuf was diagnosed with Klebsiella Meningitis, an inflammation caused by bacteria that affects the protective covering of the central nervous system. He was treated at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children (Sick Kids), but during his stay additional serious conditions developed. Yusuf suffers from a rare genetic disorder that causes multiple organ dysfunction and numerous infections. His life is

anything but normal, as he spends a significant amount of time in the hospital battling one complication after another. After countless admission to the ICU and his progression to Palliative Care, Yusuf's doctors did a trial treatment as part of their humanitarian effort that made an incredible difference in his life. As a result of this treatment, Yusuf is now at home with his family.

In 2016 Yusuf underwent another one of his many surgeries and spent four months in hospital due to complications and his need for rehabilitation. He still goes to Sick Kids every couple of weeks for a transfusion and treatment but despite his complexity, he remains a happy and playful child.

(Extracted from aboutislam.net)

Europe's Largest Mosque Inaugurated In Russia



Shali (Russia): Chechnya has inaugurated what may be the largest masjid of Europe. The ceremony was attended by many officials, including UAE Minister of Tolerance, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Islamic Affairs and the Kuwaiti Amiri Diwan Adviser and Chairman of the International Islamic Charitable Organisation (IICO).

Chechen authorities claimed that it is the largest masjid of Europe. The area of the masjid is 9700 sq. meter and it can accommodate 70000 worshippers.

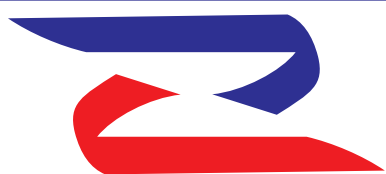
The first Friday sermon was delivered by the Muslim World League Secretary-General Mohammed bin Abdul Karim Al Issa.

(Extracted from siyasat.com)

وَجَعَلْنَا بَعْضَكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ فِتْنَةً أَتَصْبِرُونَ
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And we have made some of you as a trial for others, will you have patience?

Quran Surah al-Furqaan 25:20



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Romania

A Beacon of Coexistence For Muslims In Eastern Europe

A mosque in Dobromir, a Turkish majority village in southern Romania, near the border with Bulgaria



Sevil Shhaideh, a politician with the Social Democratic Party, is of Muslim Tatar descent and was nominated for prime minister in 2017

The Grand Mosque of Constanta in southeast Romania has a hulking minaret nearly 50 metres high overlooking the Black Sea. It was constructed as a symbol of gratitude to the city's Muslim community on the orders of King Carol I in 1910. Much has since changed in Romania, but that sentiment remains. Constanta lies in Dobruja, an ethnically diverse region split between Romania and Bulgaria, where the River Danube meets the sea. Ottoman Turks invaded the region in the late 15th century and subsequently expanded further into Romania. Several centuries of Turkish rule followed, bringing settlers from across the empire.

Northern Dobruja came under Romanian control only in 1878, after the young kingdom defeated the ailing Ottoman Empire with assistance from Russia. Some of the region's Muslims left for Turkey, but others stayed on; their descendants now form the backbone of Romania's Muslim community of about 64,000 people, roughly 0.34 percent of the country's population.

Compared with other countries in Eastern Europe, Romanian Muslims say their experience has largely been one of peaceful coexistence.

"When Muslims here were still the majority in the 1870s, the Muslim mayor of the town of Medgidia appealed to the authorities in [Romania's capital] Bucharest for money to build a church for the local Christians," said Murat Iusuf, who has been Romania's Chief Mufti since 2005, speaking to Al Jazeera from his office in Constanta.

About 26,000 ethnic Turks, 20,000 ethnic Tatars, and an undetermined number of Muslim Roma –who generally declare as Turks in censuses – form the country's diverse Muslim community. Turks and Tatars speak related Turkic languages and the two communities have a high rate of intermarriage.

Recent years have also seen the growth of a 10,000-strong Muslim community in Bucharest (Romania's capital), comprising foreign citizens and converts. They attend the Carol-

Hunchiar Mosque on a leafy side-street in the capital, where 78-year-old Osman Aziz serves as the imam

Romanian Muslims appear to have largely been spared the Islamophobic vitriol seen in neighbouring countries at the height of the refugee crisis in 2015.

But that year, while there were no rallies against refugees from Muslim-majority countries, protests did erupt over plans to construct a large Turkish-funded mosque in Bucharest, which was ultimately shelved in 2018. "The presence of Muslims in Romania remains ... a marginal issue on the political and public agenda," concluded the authors of the 2017 European Islamophobia Report. "Much of society's anger in recent years has been directed towards corruption and the 'deep state' rather than poor migrants or Muslims," said Cristian Pirvulescu, a political scientist at the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest.

In 2017, Romania nearly got its first female Muslim prime minister when the Social Democratic Party nominated Sevil Shhaideh, a politician of Tatar descent who was serving as deputy prime minister at the time. "You might find anti-Islamic discourse among some nationalist intellectuals, but if you stop ten ordinary people on the street here, you won't hear it," said journalist Vlad Stoiescu, who coordinates Sa Fie Lumina, an online magazine about religion in Romania. "The Muslims in Dobruja are well integrated - Romanians are accustomed to their presence and so are they to the Romanians".

(Extracted from aljazeera.com)

Syria's 'Cat Man' brings Hope to Abandoned Animals

Mohammed Alaa Aljaleel recently went on a dangerous rescue mission to Syria's north western province of Idlib. His goal: to save animals left behind by people fleeing heavy shelling and airstrikes. It was not the first such mission for this animal rescuer, who has already garnered international fame as the "cat man of Aleppo." Years after first gaining that title in his home town, the "cat man" who goes by the name Alaa has found himself doing it all over again.

"A few months ago, rescue teams in the countryside of Idlib called me and told me 'we are rescuing people, but we cannot rescue starving animals,' so I decided to make this mission," Alaa said.

The southern rebel-held areas of Idlib have been under heavy aerial and ground shelling by Syrian government forces and their Russian allies since April, prompting the displacement of some 400,000 people, according to U.N. estimates. So, Alaa, a 44-year-old ambulance driver and paramedic, went on a new mission: He would arrive in southern Idlib between five and seven in the morning, when there were usually no heavy airstrikes, and look for abandoned or hungry animals.

"I went to Khan Sheikhoun, Maaret al-Noumaan, Kafnabel while ignoring the shelling and managed, despite the difficult task, to get most of the starving cats out of the area," Alaa said. His estimated rescue haul in the region: 80 stray cats from Kafnabel, 40 from Maaret al-Nouman and more than 100 from Khan Sheikhoun. This was not Alaa's first effort to save abandoned animals in dangerous places.

He gained recognition in 2014 during the bombardment and siege of rebel-held areas in Aleppo, his home town. Foreign media highlighted his story as he was protecting the animals while also helping people as an ambulance driver. In 2015, friends asked him to start a Facebook page, through which he became connected to people from around the world. He also decided to set up a sanctuary for cats.

"I loved taking care of cats since I was a little boy," he said, adding that he used to buy leftovers at butcher shops and feed animals on the streets. It is like my hobby to feed cats or dogs in the streets as I know they are hungry," Alaa said. "I learned from ancestors



Mohammed Alaa Aljaleel carries one of the cats he rescued in a cage to take it to a safe house in Idlib, Syria.

that whoever has mercy in his heart for human beings should have mercy for all living things."

In Aleppo, despite the siege, Alaa was taking care of hundreds of cats, some of which were left behind by their owners who fled the city. At one point, Alaa had 170 cats and a dog to care for. Then, shortly before eastern Aleppo was captured by government forces in December 2016, Alaa's sanctuary was bombed. Most of his cats were lost or killed. After the capture of eastern Aleppo, many people fled to Idlib, while others including Alaa went to western Aleppo. Alaa, who also lost his house, left with only 22 cats.

"I left in the car with some injured people and two cats. The rest of the cats were being carried by other people in plastic vegetable baskets, which I prepared like cages so the cats would not be scared and run away," he said.

After losing his home and his sanctuary, the first in Syria at the time, Alaa managed to buy a farm and set up a new sanctuary in the Kfar Naha area of western Aleppo, where he currently lives. He did it with the help of friends, as well as a crowd funding campaign and the proceeds of a book telling his story. He has since expanded the sanctuary to include a health center, an orphanage and a kindergarten.

"I have in my center 85 child orphans, 13 of them have lost both parents," Alaa said, adding that he expects more orphans will be admitted to the center due to the ongoing government offensive on Hama and Idlib.

Now, he has set up another sanctuary for animals in Idlib as well. "Children and animals have suffered the most in the Syrian war. This is why I will continue to help them," Alaa said.

(Extracted from dailysabah.com)

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Grandmother who stands in Solidarity with Reading's Muslim Community

A 69-year-old grandmother who stands outside an Islamic Centre in the UK with a sign that says 'I am your friend, I will watch while you pray' has been nominated for a **Pride of Reading Award**. Jean Scott-Barr, from Woodley, has been standing outside the Aisha Masjid and Islamic Centre in **Earley** every week since the Christchurch mosque shootings on March 15. Her **gesture of friendship** was seen by people all across Reading and the world when she was photographed with her sign by Dr Saqib A Choudhary on March 22. The sign, which said 'I am your friend, I will watch while you pray' was shared on Twitter. Her thoughtful gesture has earned Jean a Pride of Reading Award nomination, in

"I was horrified by the attack and about the way Muslims are being vilified in the media and by politicians, but had felt helpless to do anything about it." Seeing Andrew, I thought 'this is something I could do'. "I wanted to show that there are people in this country, and in the world, who do not subscribe to the demonisation of Muslims and Islam.

"I started doing this on my own because I really wanted to get started but my husband, Frank Spence, was unwell for the first couple of weeks. When he was better he came along too and has been present every week since.

"We still go because the friends we have made at the mosque have

Jean is a Quaker and a member of Reading Quaker Meeting. She said: "One of the things Quakers say is 'Do what love requires of you' and 'Let your lives speak'."

(Extracted from getreading.co.uk)



the Smile of the Year category. An anonymous person nominated Jean for the award, saying: "Jean's display of solidarity, consideration and friendship is very inspiring, and it sends a really strong message out about the importance of standing together in unity in the face of adversity, regardless of faith or background. "I think that Jean is an inspiration to the people of Reading, and to people all over the world." "I believe she deserves this award, as a thank you from all of those who she continues to motivate with her kind nature, and to maybe encourage others to do more in their community to help one another."

Learning of her nomination, Jean said: "I'm amazed by it, I didn't ever expect such a thing. However, if it helps to spread the word about the value of such a small action, then I'm very pleased.

"After the Christchurch attacks I saw a photo of Andrew Gray stone who was standing outside a mosque in Manchester with a similar sign.

told us that they regard it as important; a sign of love made visible."

"We have received such a warm welcome that it has become one of the most enjoyable times of the week", she says.

The couple say that their experience in a Calais refugee camp back in 2015 gave them an understanding of the problems faced by victimised minorities. Jean explains: "In 2015, we visited the refugee camp at Calais, commonly known as The Jungle, and were so horrified by our experience there that we subsequently spent time volunteering with l'Auberge des Migrants at their warehouse and kitchen in Calais.

"We are too old and infirm for that sort of work now, but we volunteer with Reading Refugee Support Group, including helping refugees and asylum speakers with their English.

"It was that experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers that opened our eyes to the problems experienced by victimised minorities."

A message was left among flowers and tributes by wall of the Botanic Gardens in Christchurch



Italy: Jewish, Muslim And Christian Leaders Join To Oppose Violence On Women

Jewish, Muslim and Christian leaders in Italy have come together to fight violence against women. The project "Not in my name – Jews, Catholics and Muslims against violence on women" includes several initiatives to make high school students aware of the issue, such as dedicated lectures and a student contest aimed at creating a communication campaign to fight prejudice and discrimination.

"Violence against women is an unacceptable and yet present-day reality. For this reason, we Jews, Catholics and Muslims decided to come together as bearers of values and launch a clear message: no

violence can find justification in faith," said Livia Ottolenghi, a member of the board of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI), as reported by the Italian Jewish paper *Pagine Ebraiche*.

The UCEI is one of the project's organizers, together with the Italian Islamic Religious Community (COREIS) and the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum (APRA). "Not in my name" is funded by the Italian government. According to the organizers, perspectives, values and self-criticisms of the three religions are going to be presented to the students within a secular approach, also highlighting the

more general historical, social and psychological context.

"Not in my name" was launched recently at the Italian Ministry of Education.

"Only by making young people aware that the problem affects them personally, as well as their relationships and their daily life, it is possible to bring out their own stereotypes and challenge them," said Raffaella Di Castro, UCEI coordinator for cultural and education projects. "Only through this kind of awareness, they can become a vehicle of a wider social and cultural transformation."

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Experiencing Peace in Akola

The Discover Yourself Workshop was held in Akola on 13,14, & 15 September 2019 at Kohinoor function Hall, Lakdhi Ganj, Akola. It was organized by Maharashtra Rajia Urdu Shikshak Sanghatna, Akola.

Some of the Participants Share their Experiences:

- To change your life, this is the best workshop.
- In the workshop, I got the eye that can see the truth. Earlier, I was most of the times irritated, and but now I am calm and happy.
- This workshop changed me from an animal to a human being.
- After attending this workshop, I experienced peace, I started to see everyone with love and they also responded to me with love.
- I have attended many workshops, but this workshop is unique and best.
- Everybody who attends this workshop, walks out as a human being.
- In this workshop, I got the ability to distinguish between Truth, Falsehood and Good and Evil and between mind and heart.
- I was carrying the past baggage due to which I had high blood pressure. Now I have let go of all the baggages and forgiven everybody and feel light.
- Before the workshop, I was stone hearted, irritated and had satanic characteristics. After the workshop, I started to be a human being and started seeing and treating others as human beings and I feel so good.
- I got the solution in this workshop for all our domestic problems which not only me, but every family is going through. Allah created us as human beings and our purpose is to spread humanity.
- This workshop changed my life and gave me a new way to lead my life. Before the workshop, I was only a thinking machine and was living a mechanical life. I benefitted a lot from this workshop.

AMEEN: These types of workshops must be held regularly as in life, there are ups and downs, sometimes we listen to the mind and sometimes to the heart. Being a Maulvi, I was aware of all the things said in the workshop, but was not able to put into practice, but now



onwards, I shall practice.

ANAM: The workshop was outstanding. Before the workshop, I used to judge everyone, but after attending this workshop, I have started to see others as human beings. This workshop has helped me in shutting my mind and opening my heart. It was worth attending.

AQZIM: By participating in the workshop, many things in my life altered. I had the habit of creating opinions of others and believed it to be the truth. I recognized the human being inside me, and this changed my life. I came to know the reality of life.

ARSHIYA: Before attending this workshop, I was full of anger, and my family members would reprimand me, but after the workshop, the anger disappeared and I am able to control it. Now my family members feel that I am a good human being and humanity was flowing all around. Earlier I was under the impression that others were bad, but now I see that it is my perception about them.

FARHAN: For the first time, I learned many things which I never knew before. Teaching techniques were excellent. Sadath Sir's explanation with both religious and worldly

examples were clear to understand our lives. My family members saw some changes in my life and were happy. I want to practise, Inshallah, what I learned here.

IQRA: I am a student, before attending the workshop I used to misbehave with those younger to me as well as the elders, also sometimes with my mother also. Now, after attending the workshop, I took control of myself, I realized that how I was the slave of my mind and reacted. I experienced peace and satisfaction internally.

MEHVASH: Before attending the workshop, there was no peace and happiness in my life. I was always asking the question.... why it always happens to me only? I used to blame Allah and complain. I had bad relationships with my family members. Now after attending the workshop, I am at peace with myself and able to see things clearly. If I had not attended this workshop, I would have lived in ignorance all my life. This workshop guided and showed me a new way to live my life and come closer to Allah.

NOORIN: Before attending the workshop, I did not have self-confidence. I had the grief of the past and fears of failures in the



future. Always I had negative thoughts about failures. After attending the workshop, all my fears have disappeared. I am thankful to Allah for what He has blessed and for what I have not got also. I am grateful for there must be some wisdom in it. I am content and happy now.

NABIHA: After the workshop,

I began to see life from a totally new perspective. I learned to forgive myself. I have learned to respect equality. I have learned to express my anger in a totally different way. I was earlier thinking and expressing through my mind and body, but now I have learned to follow my heart, which is the center of Allah.

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Email: saqtifoundation@gmail.com

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DATES: 8, 9 & 10 OCTOBER 2019

Timings: 9.00 am to 6.00 pm

Venue: Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)
Jangipur, Murshidabad Centre, West Bengal

For detail:

Contact: Aminul Haque: 9002567380

Email: draminulhaqueamu@gmail.com

DYS WORKSHOP IN GHAZIPUR

DATES: 12, 13, & 14 OCTOBER 2019

Timings: 9.00 am to 6.00 pm

Venue: CBSC SCHOOL

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For details Contact:

Mohd Shamshad Khan: 9831263451

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We need to consciously connect to other creatures of God, such as animals and plants, understanding our deep interconnectedness with them and cultivating love and compassion for them.



So busy are most of us that we do not make time to watch the moon floating in the sky or even take more than a fleeting glance at the rose blooming in a pot in our balcony. We fail to connect with the beauty of Nature around us, which remains abundantly evident even in a busy metropolis.

Just beyond a busy road that's littered with craters and clogged with heavy traffic lies an island of green calm—Mount St. Joseph campus—an ideal place to savour the beauty of Nature even in Bangalore's urban sprawl. That's where I was blessed to spend some time recently, at the Prerana Ignatian Spirituality Centre, as a participant in a two-day residential course on Eco-Spirituality. The campus exudes the cheerfulness, neatness and order that characterises almost all other such Catholic institutions I've been to. The abundantly green surroundings are really something like a bit of Heaven!

The course was conducted by a Jesuit priest Father Lumnesh, who is passionate about issues related to ecology and has a wonderful way of linking them to spirituality and science. He took us participants on a nature walk in the campus, where we could talk to plants and trees or simply observe animals like cows, hens, roosters, pigs and rabbits or learn to observe a chilli plant! I was lucky to connect to an emu that was pacing up and down leisurely (the giant bird reminded me of a school examination invigilator who was taking his task very seriously!)

Fr. Lumnesh's concern for the ecology was clearly evident and quite infectious. From him we learnt how human beings are part of Nature (rather than standing outside it) and of our deep interconnectedness with all other beings. One needs to cultivate a spiritual sensitivity to discern the oneness of all beings, beyond differences of things like religion, ethnicity and even species.

We had plenty of time for group discussions, where we reflected on issues such as the root causes of the destruction of nature, global warming, noise and air pollution, plastic accumulation, floods and water scarcity, the extinction of species and the fact that human beings are the main culprit behind the ecological crisis. Greed, lack of God-consciousness, materialism, senseless urbanization, and other such factors lay under the current crisis.

But we didn't just lament the state of affairs that we are faced with. Fr. Lumnesh also wove in issues related to spirituality and suggested the root of the issue of ecological destruction is a spiritual crisis. That means that it requires spiritual transformation in individuals and a revamping of our worldviews (including about such existential questions as to the purpose of life) to seek to address it. Fr. Lumnesh also encouraged us to think about some practical things that could be done to address the issue. While we cannot change or solve all ecological problems, at least we can bring about some changes at our personal level such as being more conscious of our

usage of things like water, electricity and plastic and trying to lead a minimalistic lifestyle. We need to consciously connect to other creatures of God, such as animals and plants, seeing our deep interconnectedness with them and cultivating love and compassion for them. The flowers, birds and animals, trees, all are our 'cousins'—that's another of the many things I learnt from Fr. Lumnesh. Every species is performing a valuable function in the grand scheme of things, where all beings are closely interdependent. Even a little earthworm is doing so much good, by helping the composting of waste.

The eco-spirituality course did a world of good for me. I hope it has made me more sensitive to the environment around me and to walk more lightly on it, in terms of my use of its 'resources'. The course strongly underlined the fact that 'development' is not about building concrete structures and encroaching into green spaces. Nor is it the mindless production and consumption of 'goods'. We are digging our own graves by chasing out animals and trees from their homes. Nature will show her fury, and already signs of it are happening all across the world.

Working to protect the Earth and the manifold life-forms that it hosts can be a great way for interfaith cooperation and solidarity, with people from different communities, countries and religions joining hands to make practical efforts to care for our common global home that is Planet Earth. Eco-spirituality can be a firm basis to unite people from different religious, national and ethnic backgrounds.

My heartfelt thanks to Prerana for hosting such a wonderful course, and my thanks, of course, to Fr. Lumesh, for conducting it so beautifully.

(Prerana organises regular courses, on a range of issues. These are of short duration, which makes them particularly convenient for people with busy schedules. Course fees are quite affordable by middle-class standards. To know more about the courses, see Prerana's website: www.preranaisc.org)

(By Nigar & Dolcy)

Plant More Trees

How I miss the missing trees, and the green spaces where we grazed our goats. Today, many cities are turning into veritable deserts: that's the sort of life we are living in the name of being 'civilized'.

By Shaban Ali

As urbanisation spreads, trees are mercilessly cut down. In antiquity, in contrast, trees were loved, treasured and saved. It was a common practice in the past for people to plant trees near their homes. But as cities expand and available space contracts and land prices go up, how many people can afford to do that or even care to think of it?

There is a Divine logic behind the existence of everything in this world, including trees. Trees perform numerous functions in the eco-system, including producing food through photosynthesis and emitting oxygen, which we need to breathe. In the Quran, the word "shajr", meaning tree, has been used in many places. Several types of trees are mentioned in the Quran. By reflecting on trees we can find out God, the Almighty.

I recall in my childhood, when we played in the summer and got exhausted, with sweat running down our foreheads and we would rest under a tree. On my way to the madrasa, I would spot some trees, and on a few occasions I rested under them but now they have been chopped down. Just in front of my house, there was a pool

surrounded with some trees, where people, including children and women, gathered and spent a long time chatting. How I miss the missing trees, and the green spaces where we grazed our goats. Today, many cities are turning into veritable deserts: that's the sort of life we are living in the name of being 'civilized'.

Planting a tree is a charity which can benefit one even after death. Needless to say, it can benefit others too by sending out oxygen into the atmosphere, by sharing fruits and flowers and by being a home to birds, squirrels, ants and other beings.

(The writer can be reached at shabanali0917@gmail.com)

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TALE TIME

Rustam and the Birds

By Roshan

Rustam lived with his parents in a flat in a tall building in the middle of the city. His daily routine was, as he would often say, 'boringly predictable'. He would wake up early in the morning and would rush about to get ready for school. He would return home in the late afternoon. After a quick bite and a short nap, he would be off to attend Maths and Science tuitions, returning home just before dinner. Then, after watching TV for a while, he would go off to bed by which time, as you can imagine, he was really very tired.

That was how life was like for Rustam almost every day of the year!

One summer, Rustam's parents took him to a holiday resort, located in a village up in the mountains. It was the first time Rustam was in a place like that. He thoroughly enjoyed himself! He spent much of his time strolling about, awe-struck at the things he saw around him the tall trees, the neatly-terraced rice fields, the mountains in the distance and the village folks, whose pace of life struck him as being so relaxed!

But the thing that Rustam liked the best were the many different types of birds that he got to see. Living in a crowded city, where there were hardly any trees left, Rustam hadn't spotted many sorts of birds before besides crows, mynahs and pigeons. But

here, in the village, he spotted several species of birds: water-birds like herons, ducks and storks, parrots, hawks, kites and eagles, sparrows, barbets, weaverbirds, swallows and peacocks, and many, many more. One night he even spotted

“Birds manifest God's beauty in a marvellous way,” Rustam's father said to him encouragingly. “Serving birds can be a great way to serve God.”

a family of bats and also heard an owl hooting in the distance!

Rustam fell in love with the birds! He was struck by their beautiful colours, the music that they made, their intricate nests, and, most of all, their ability to soar up into the sky and fly off and away! “How I wish I were a bird”, he said to his parents. “I'd go flying about all over, and I wouldn't have had to suffer school.”

“Birds manifest God's beauty in a marvellous way,” Rustam's father said to him encouragingly. “Serving birds can be a great way to serve God.”

When Rustam's mother explained to him how the very survival of birds (and many other forms of life) was being



threatened by ecological devastation caused by human beings, Rustam was aghast. He felt very sad for them. He announced to his parents, “If I can't be a bird, at least I can work for birds when I grow up.”

And do you know what? When Rustam became big, that's exactly what he went on to do. Today, Rustam runs what he calls a “Birdarium” in the very same village that he visited as a child many years ago with his parents. The 'Birdarium' is filled with trees and little ponds that are home to many different types of birds. Many people visit the centre. Rustam shows them around and helps them grow in their appreciation of birds and of the need to serve them. He hopes that at least some of the children who visit the 'Birdarium' will fall in love with birds, just as he did when on his first visit to the village many years ago!

Dolcy, Chinku & Marvel the Mouse!

Do please remember: When you wish to do a good deed, God will always help you!

Dolcy and Chinku, two little kids, lived in Austin Cottage in a big city. They loved animals, birds and plants.

Dolcy was a very kind child and did not hurt even ants or mosquitoes. He would try to be careful not to stamp on an insect while walking and would tell Chinku (and the grownups too) to do the same. Once, Dolcy helped Smarty, a cute snail, from being crushed by silly serious grown ups who were rushing about, by lifting it up from a busy path and placing it safely on a plant bed.

One day, Dolcy and Chinku were about to munch their lunch when Chinku spotted Tabby the cat peering at a drain-hole in the backyard. Chinku quickly scampered out to see what the matter was. She lifted Tabby up, and lo behold, what did she see? A tiny baby mouse squeaking and struggling to come out from the hole!

"Dolcy, Dolcy, come soon! There's a mouse that's fallen inside the hole," Chinku called out.

In the backyard, Pretty the fluffy cat, was lazing around in the sun. Soon, Socks, a big white cat, and Greeny, a wild tom-cat, would also come along, to munch their lunch.

"Chinku, we have to rescue the baby mouse before the cats

come," said Dolcy.

"How are we going to do that?" wondered Chinku.

To begin with, Dolcy was hesitant to put his hand into the hole to rescue the mouse. He didn't want to get dirty. But almost at once he thought of a brilliant idea. He pulled a pair of socks over his hand and put his hand inside the hole. Then, mustering all the courage he had, he gently lifted the mouse and brought it out!

"That's marvellous!!" exclaimed Chinku in joy. There and then she decided to name the mouse 'Marvel'.

Chinku placed Marvel on a dust pan with the help of a broom. Then, she and Dolcy took him out of the backyard and placed him amidst a clump of trees. That way Marvel was saved from being caught by the cats!

Kids, wasn't it brave of Chinku and Dolcy to have rescued Marvel the baby mouse? Dolcy didn't mind dirtying his hand. He didn't let the fear that Marvel could have bitten his hand stop him from rescuing him. And it was so sweet of Chinku to have called Dolcy out to help the mouse, wasn't it?

Do please remember: When you wish to do a good deed, God will always help you!

And do please share Dolcy, Chinku and Marvel's lovely tale with your friends!



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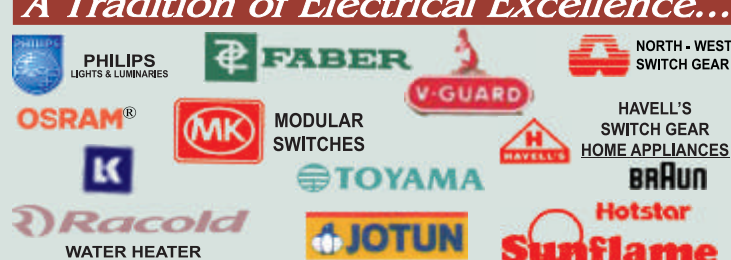
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