



Dialogue Key to Tackling Islamophobia Says MWL Chief



Sheikh Mohammed Al-Issa

On the first day of the Saudi Media Forum in Riyadh, the secretary-general of the Muslim World League stressed the importance of dialogue in tackling Islamophobia. "There are many different far rights. Many of them have it implanted that they just hate

Muslims without a reason. It may be difficult, but discussion is key and has fruitful outcomes," said Sheikh Mohammed Al-Issa. "As Muslims and Islamic organizations, we must clarify the true picture of Islam and Muslims."

"We had sessions with people who hated Islam, but now we

call them good friends after our transparency and discussions with them. Therefore, discussion is pertinent," Al-Issa said. Some far-right people are against Islam "because of what they've heard or seen," he added. "These people are much easier to have a discussion with (than those who do not have a reason for their prejudice). They're found in a lot of European countries." Other far-right people "respect Muslims and live with them, but worry about the outcomes" of immigration and demographic changes, Al-Issa said.

One issue that has led to difficulties in terms of coexistence is that some Islamic laws are not applicable in non-Muslim countries, he added. "We urge everyone who lives in a country to respect its laws, culture and constitution," said Al-Issa, adding that "the media plays an important role" in promoting Islamophobia, as do movies. He said the answer is to raise awareness.

Karnataka Waqf Board Directs Mosques To Help Muslims Preserve Documents

The Karnataka State Board of Waqfs has urged the state mosques to create awareness among the local Muslims to keep all the required documents ready to prove their citizenship. In order to keep the local Muslims updated with the necessary legal documents to prove their domicile, the board have asked mosques to create registers with information on local Muslim families, along with certified, updated documents. A circular has been issued by the

board regarding the same. "There is a need to preserve the important documents individually and collectively at Masjid level for convenience and easy accessibility for the community," the circular read. "In order to equip ourselves with relevant convincing data, it is proposed to have a register in every Masjid containing the details of all Muslim residents in the jurisdiction of Masjid along with the certified documents," it added.

Mega Job Fair in Bangalore

The Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) organized a mega job fair in Bangalore on 30th Nov, 2019 in association with Nexus Info, Hasanath College, United Vision Foundation and Meritude Skills Development, which was a huge success. The job fair was conducted at Hasanath College, Hennur Bande, to help unemployed youths to get placed

in reputed mainstream corporates and to provide opportunities to the needy without any discrimination of caste, community and creed. Through this unique event, the organizers endeavoured to give back to the nation what they have received by helping youth get Jobs. Tehzeeb TV provided significant support in promoting the fair.

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Report Highlights Religious Shifts In USA

The United States is steadily becoming less Christian and the number of people with no religion is rising. Those are the twin headlines from the latest Pew Research report released recently, which shows a dramatic decline in American religious habits over the course of a decade. The report, an aggregation of yearly political surveys that ask about religion, shows rapid changes in generational attitudes towards religion. It finds that two-thirds (65%) of Americans describe themselves as Christians, down from 77% in 2009. It also shows that the number of Americans who say they have no religion sometimes called 'nones' has risen to 26%, up from 17% a decade ago.

"The rate at which Christians are declining is very striking," said

Greg Smith, associate director of research at Pew. "And the share of Americans who have no religion is growing very rapidly, which is just as striking."

Protestants now make up less than half of all U.S. adults or 43% (down from 51% a decade ago) and Catholics make up 20% (down from 23% in 2009). Those figures are reflected in attendance at religious services as well. For the first time, more Americans say they attend religious services a few times a year or less (54%) than those who attend at least once a month (45%). The study notes that while overall church attendance is down, 62% of Christians say they attend services once a month or more about the same as a decade ago.

"It's quite shocking," said Scott Thumma, a sociologist of religion

at Hartford Seminary. "This rapid shift is about generational replacement. The most religious folks are the ones who are dying and the least religious folks are the ones coming in."

To put it most graphically, 84% of the Silent Generation (born between 1928 and 1945) identify as Christian, compared with 49% of the millennial generation (born between 1981 and 1996).

The report also showed a slower decline among black and Hispanic Americans. Both groups are more likely to describe themselves as Christians and to attend religious services. Among African-Americans, 58% say they attend church more than once a month (compared to 42% of whites) and 51% of Hispanics said the same.

(Extracted from religionnews.com)

Saudi ends gender segregation in restaurants

Saudi Arabia has abolished rules requiring restaurants to provide separate entrances and areas for women and families and for male patrons dining alone. The decision was announced by the Municipal and Rural Affairs Ministry on the state-run Saudi Press Agency, in the latest step towards overturning gender restrictions. The ministry said it was "removing a requirement by restaurants to have an entrance for single men and another for families", and that restaurants no longer need to "specify private spaces". Some restaurants and cafes in Jeddah and Riyadh's upscale hotels had already been allowing unrelated men and women to sit together but the norm was that they were not permitted to mix in public. Restaurants and cafes in Saudi Arabia are segregated into "family" sections for women on their own or accompanied by male relatives, and "singles" sections for just men. Many also have separate entrances for women and partitioned areas or rooms for families where they are

not visible to single men. In smaller restaurants or cafes with no space for segregation, women were not allowed in.

Saudi Arabia now regularly hosts international sporting events and musical performances that women and men can attend. Two years ago, women for the first time were allowed to attend sports

events in stadiums in the "family" sections. Young girls in recent years have also been allowed access to physical education and sports in school. In August 2019, the country lifted a controversial ban on travel by allowing all citizens to apply for a passport and for women to travel freely without a male guardian.

Church Courtyard Turns Namaz Ground For CAA Protesters

Munavarali Shihab Thangal leading prayer in front of Kothamangalam Cheriya Palli

KOCHI: St Thomas Church in Kothamangalam has sent out an important message by opening its doors for hundreds of Muslims to offer namaz. The Muslims were taking part in the 'Secular Youth March' organised by the Kerala chapter of All India Professional

Congress (AIPC) on Saturday, against the controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens. When the march ended and they needed a space to offer their prayers, the church, popularly known as Cheriya Palli, was opened up for them. "Going to a mosque would have delayed the namaz. So we requested the church authorities to permit the Muslims to do the namaz there. They, in turn, went above and beyond to make all arrangements for the Maghrib prayer," said Mathew Kuzhalnadan, AIPC state president. In fact, while the Muslims offered namaz on the courtyard, Metropolitan Elias Mar Yulios and church vicar Fr Jose Paruthiveli were leading the evening prayers inside the church. The march was flagged off by Congress leader Joseph Vazhakkann from Central Juma Masjid, Muvattupuzha.

(Extracted from newindianexpress.com)

HISTORY & HERITAGE

Beautiful Samarkand

Samarkand grew up as the most important commercial centre in Central Asia



Imam Bukhari shrine

When the famous Muslim traveller Ibn Battuta visited Samarkand, in Uzbekistan, in 1330, he described it as "one of the greatest and finest cities, and most perfect of them in beauty". He was right! After Tashkent, Samarkand is the second largest city of Uzbekistan. With its 2,750 years of history, Samarkand is considered as one of the oldest cities in the world. Once, it was the capital of the powerful state Sogdiana: the old civilization and the most important province of the First Persian Empire. Surrounded by mountain ranges, deserts and steppes, Sogdiana was a very rich and fertile area thanks to irrigation.

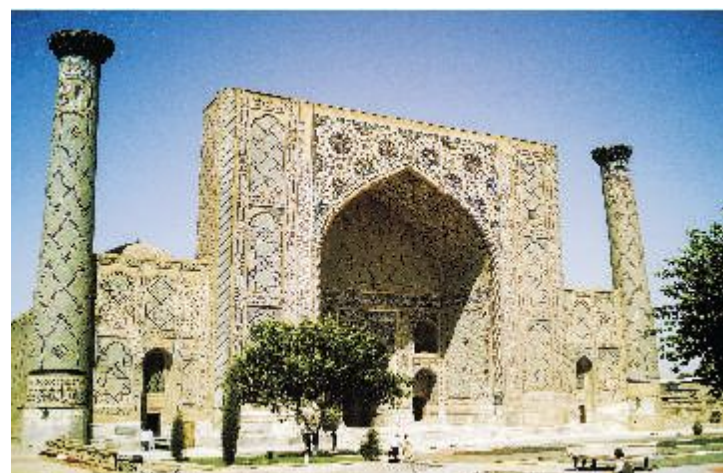
Due to its location on the Silk Road, Samarkand became one of the most flourishing cities in Central Asia for centuries, before and after the Arab-Islamic advent. International trade was very important in Samarkand. Samarkand grew up as the most important commercial centre in Central Asia. Merchants from different empires met, traded and exchanged ideas with each other in Samarkand. No wonder that Alexander 'the Great' conquered this jewel in 329 BC and said: "All I have heard about the beauty of this city is true, it is

just much more beautiful in reality."

In the 8th century, Samarkand was conquered by the Arabs. During the Umayyad Dynasty, Samarkand prospered as a trading centre on the route between Baghdad and China. During the reign of the Abbasids, Samarkand became the capital of Central Asia and developed into a very important center of Islamic civilization. It is here, near Samarkand, that the great theologian Imam al-Bukhari, is buried. The darkest period in the history of Samarkand was marked by the Mongol invasion in 1220 led by Genghis Khan.

The most impressive place in Samarkand is the Registan Square, which means "a sandy place". The Registan Square is a huge public square surrounded on three sides by religious complexes of mosques, khans (a khan is a kind of overnight stay for caravans) and madrasas. The Registan Square was rebuilt several times between 1370 and 1500.

Samarkand fell into the hands of Russian troops in 1868. In 1925, Samarkand became the capital of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, but in 1930 it was replaced by Tashkent.



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Muslim Woman Named in 2020 New Zealander of the Year Semi-Finalists

Muslim woman political and human rights activist has been named as a semi-finalist for Kiwibank's New Zealander of the Year. *This award honours someone who, through inspiration and leadership, contributes to the wellbeing of New Zealand.* "Community worker Anjum Rahman is a political and human rights activist working for the right of



Muslim women, especially speaking against discrimination

of Muslims," New Zealander of the Year Awards website wrote. "Her overarching desire is to create a better world for her own children and for all New Zealanders." Rahman, who spent years campaigning against racism and

bigotry, is one of ten semi-finalists for the annual award, which is now in its 11th year. Rahman was the founding member and the first secretary of the Islamic Women's Council in New Zealand that brought women of Islamic faith together since

1990. Over the past two and half decades, she has been vocal on the rights of Muslim women and raised concerns about racial discrimination against the Muslim community and Muslim women in New Zealand, especially after the 9/11 attacks.

Norwegian Muslims to Distribute Qur'an After Burning Attempt

Three Norwegian Muslim organizations are set to distribute thousands of free copies of the Holy Qur'an to Norwegians. This is designed to create dialogue following uproar created by the recent attempt to set fire to the holy book. "I believe many people are curious about what the Quran contains and what Muslims stand for. We hope this project can help demystify the Quran's content," Hamza Ansari, board member of the Minhaj-ul-Quran mosque in Oslo, said.

The Norwegian Muslim Arts and Culture Association, the Islamic Literature Association and the Minhaj-ul-Quran

Mosque in Oslo reportedly intend to distribute a total of 10,000 copies of the Qur'an. The free copies will be given out at several stands in the Norwegian capital and possibly Bergen, Norway's second-largest city. The initiative was seen as a response to the Qur'an burning attempt by the organization Stop Islamization of Norway (SIAN) during a demonstration in Kristiansand some weeks ago. Announcing the plans, the Islamic Literature Association said the Qur'an teaches how to "show love and spread knowledge", which is why it is seen as an effective vehicle against "hate and racism".

Global Study on Faith and Children's Rights

The first ever global study focusing on the role of religious leaders and religious communities in promoting children's rights was launched recently in Geneva to honour the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The study "Faith and Children's Rights" is intended as a resource to support the efforts of religious leaders and religious communities to expand their advocacy and action, mobilise new partners and further engage their own faith communities to protect children from violence and promote their healthy development. It provides perspectives from seven religious traditions: the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and

the Sikhism. In total, these traditions have more than 5.5 billion adherents globally. The study highlights the often-significant role that diverse communities of the world's faith traditions have played in the preparation, adoption, ratification and implementation of the CRC over the past three decades. It recognises innovative work and good practices carried out every day to further children's rights and contribute to child protection by religious groups. It also contains new ideas for collaboration and recommendations for further action by all stakeholders, including fostering interreligious dialogue as a way to facilitate the protection and promotion of children rights.

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'Export love': New Zealand imam continues to spread message of peace

On March 15, 51 people were shot dead by a lone gunman at two mosques in Christchurch. A week later Imam Gamal Fouda of Al Noor Mosque, one of the mosques attacked, gave a speech to thousands gathered at Hagley Park. His words "we are heartbroken not broken" and "we will not let anyone divide us", encapsulated the response from the Muslim community in New Zealand. More than nine months on, Mr Fouda is still sharing his words of love and peace. "New Zealand now, they set a role model for the whole world and we are sitting on the international stage to export love, tolerance and understanding - and we should continue this message from the top person in this country to the normal person like me," he told TVNZ1's Breakfast today. "We should continue the message of love and tolerance



and understanding and to tell the whole world New Zealand is still one of the safest places in the world and we are working together so that this, something like this won't happen again in our country."

Mr Fouda said when he moved to New Zealand 16 years ago from where he grew up in Egypt he didn't know a lot about his new home he just thought it was "the safest place on earth" but going out for the first time was still a nervous experience. The first time he went for a walk a man

passed him on the street and said, "Hello, bro." Mr Fouda said the words were "very unfamiliar" at the time, but upon learning New Zealand's slang, he realised it was the same words of those spoken to the gunman who entered the Al Noor Mosque on March 15. "We felt very safe as we know about New Zealand and this also brother in front of the Christchurch mosque, he said to the gunman, 'Hello brother.' He did not expect him to shoot him," he said.

Mr Fouda said learning about love, understanding and tolerance of different cultures and beliefs should start from primary school age. "As I've talked before in many events, that I need to see a book called Peace Education, and peace education - the children are going to learn about other cultures, other religions, other faith and even language, and the teachers,

educationalists they need to talk about tolerance and understanding and make the inclusive society in the school culture. "The school culture

should be a culture of tolerance and understanding," Mr Fouda said.

(Extracted from www.tvnz.co.nz)

UK Gets Europe's First Eco-Friendly Mosque



Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan joined British singer-songwriter Yusuf Islam at the official opening of an eco-friendly mosque in Cambridge recently. Mr Islam, formerly known as Cat Stevens, is patron of the Cambridge Mosque Trust according to the mosque's website.

The mosque is described on its website as 'Europe's first eco-mosque' which has green features including air-source heat pumps, rainwater harvesting and solar panels. The facility relies on green energy and aims for a zero-carbon footprint. It was funded by more than 10,000 donations, 'private and public, local and international', according to the

mosque's website. The site said: 'The main donor has been a consortium of government agencies in the Republic of Turkey, together with a Turkish private company (YapiMerkezi), and the Qatar National Fund.'

According to the mosque's website, its design was inspired by both Islamic and English religious architectural traditions. "We sought to develop the idea of a British mosque for the 21st century," the website says. "With everything from solar panels and grey water harvesting to state-of-the-art heating and cooling technology, it is a pioneer in 'green deen (faith)', reminding us of our connection to nature."



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Oman recently launched a major initiative, "Towards United Human Values", to promote religious tolerance, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The initiative, which is also known as the Sultan Qaboos Declaration Project on United Human Values, was launched by Oman's Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs Sheikh Abdullah Bin Mohammed Al Salmi at a celebration to mark the International Day for Tolerance in Jakarta.

Oman's Sultan, Qaboos Bin Said Al Said, issued directives to spread the concepts of mutual understanding, religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence to foster human relations through this new initiative around the world. With a population of around 5 million, Oman is an ideal place for mutual understanding, peace and tolerance. This Muslim-majority country has a multicultural society in which people from different religions and cultures live in harmony. "It is strategically well-placed to spearhead a new national drive for religious understanding. Geographically, Oman's near neighbours include both Sunni and Shiite heartland [...] For thousands of years, Omanis have traded in peace with other cultures," said advisor to Oman's Endowment and Religious Affairs Minister, Mohammed Said Al-Mamari.

The Oman initiative is very timely given the present turmoil in the world, which has emanated from hatred, terrorism and misinterpretation of teachings of various religions. Oman's initiative calls for transcendence over rhetoric by proposing a method of action for a balanced life, in which people live on the

Oman Launches New Initiative 'Towards United Human Values'



(Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman Al SayyidNazar Al Julanda Bin Majid Al Said and advisor to Oman's Endowments and Religious Affairs Minister Mohammed Said with participants of an international conference on tolerance in Jakarta recently)

basis of dignity, fundamental rights and psychological security. Oman's Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs says there are three steps to reach this strategic target. The first step in rebalancing interests is to achieve a universal agreement on the goals to improve people's lives; to achieve a basic level of dignity and rights, and to preserve human cohesion against annihilation and extinction. The second step is to adopt a global system of ethics which promotes mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence, and to motivate people to unite in their efforts toward the protection of the environment. Religious, cultural and ideological differences do not prevent, and are not an obstacle to, our ability to share common ground and values. The third step focuses on the need to instill or revive spiritual values in mankind and reconcile them with the evolution of reason. The main focus of these three steps will be on a human civilizational trilogy to achieve peaceful coexistence

and acceptance among human beings, represented by the intellect, justice and morality.

The ministry says the intellect is all about honouring human beings, which calls on people to respect their mutual humanity and reject all forms of discrimination, extremism, violence and hatred. Justice is about the balancing of basic human rights in soul, society and living and benefiting from it. As far as ethics is concerned, it is the sum of human values, especially those of spiritual and philosophical dimension.

According to the ministry, these three directives diverge from the natural classifications and differences between people such as religion, language and culture. But the focus is on the united values, which form the core of the Omani initiative.

Why Indonesia?

Indonesia, home to the world's biggest Muslim population, is well known as a land of tolerance. "Indonesia is the land of Pancasila. That is why we chose Indonesia to launch the

Oman initiative and celebrate the International Day of Tolerance in Jakarta," says Ambassador of Oman to Indonesia SayyidNazar Al Julanda Bin Majid Al Said.

Pancasila is Indonesia's state ideology based on five important principles. The five principles are faith in God, humanity, unity, democracy and social justice. Further, Pancasila embraces diversity and plurality of ethnicity, culture and faith.

(Extracted from thejartapost.com)

OIC Centre Reaches 54m People on Social Media

The Sawt Al-HikmaCenter (Voice of Wisdom) at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has reached 54 million people around the world through social media, distributing messages in three different languages: Arabic, English and French. The centre is considered the intellectual branch of the OIC in its fight against extremist speech. It was established in 2016 at the OIC's headquarters to work on using media platforms to dismantle extremism, call for tolerance and co-existence and reflect the true spirit of Islam. Since its establishment, the centre has focused its efforts on cyberspace. The centre has launched 11 pages on social media, in three languages, publishing content prepared by specialists to deal with calls for extremism and violence in the name of religion and to challenge Islamophobia and those trying to distort Islam.

The centre added that it has also worked on combatting extremist ideologies on the ground through conferences in Saudi Arabia, Somalia and the UAE. The symposiums have focused on examining and fighting terrorism, promoting intellectual security and spreading the values of tolerance and acceptance. Now it has launched a new initiative: The "Samahet Din" (tolerance of religion) contest of short videos, to encourage young men and women to express themselves on camera.

(Extracted from arabnews.com)

Sudan PM Directs to Accommodate Non-Muslim Work Hours

The office of the Sudanese Prime Minister has instructed various public institutions to accommodate the work hours of non-Muslims to allow them to perform religious rites and ceremonies. The weekly holiday in Sudan is Friday and Saturday. Accommodating Christian requests for prayer breaks during the Sunday which is a work-day was at the discretion of the employers, under the former Islamist regime. Upon the request of the minister of religious affairs in a letter on 4 November, Sudanese prime minister has ordered on 11 November to ban holding examinations in the academic institutions and schools on 25 December or 7 January. The two dates are Christmas day for Catholic and Coptic Sudanese. The administrative circular also authorizes Christians to leave work at 10.00 am on Sunday to enable them to perform Sunday prayer in church.

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Indian Christian Gets UAE Award for Building Mosque

The United Arab Emirates has bestowed its 2019 UAE Pioneers Award to SajiCheriyam, a Christian businessman from Kerala who built a mosque for Muslim workers. The winner was recognised, among others things, for promoting the values of a tolerant society and cohesion in the UAE. UAE Prime Minister and Dubai Emir Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum personally handed over the prize to the Kerala businessman in a ceremony held recently.

In accepting it, MrCheriyam said: "I thank this country and its leaders profusely. I am so happy that I could do something in return for this country that gave me so much in my life." "This is something beyond my imagination. This is beyond what I could ever achieve," he told *Gulf News*. His wife Elsy, has been his inspiration and devoted companion. "This is definitely the proudest moment in our lives. When we did all this, we never expected anything in return," she explained. "God," she added, "has given this in return to us. God has blessed us so much and chose my husband for this great honour. We feel really blessed."

A father of two and an Orthodox Christian, SajiCheriyam hails from Kayamkulam, a city in



Kerala. He moved to the UAE in pursuit of business opportunities in 2003. In 2017 he began the construction of the mosque in the East Ville residential complex, near the Al Hayl industrial zone, in Fujairah. The building was completed in 2018 at a cost of 1.3 million dirhams. It has a capacity for 250 people inside and 700 in the outdoor courtyard.

Cheriyam named the mosque Maryam Umm Eisa ('Mary, Mother of Jesus').

For Anglican Christian priest Reverend Canon Andrew Thompson, winning the UAE Pioneers award as Cheriyam did, is an invitation for everyone to join the path of tolerance. "The award is a message that there is still hope in this world; hope that we can all live together despite

our differences," the senior pastor at St Andrew's Church in Abu Dhabi told said.

Rev Thompson, who has lived in the UAE for more than two decades, has authored a book *Celebrating Tolerance: Religious Diversity in the United Arab Emirates*, which was released in February 2019 to coincide with the UAE's Year of Tolerance. "The award has reinforced my love for the UAE. It is reminder that in the heart of the Islamic world, this country has opened its doors to people from all backgrounds", he remarked.

St Andrew's church receives about 15,000 worshippers from more than 80 congregations from across the world. It was built in 1984 on a land gifted by the UAE leaders.

Buddha Sculptures Returned To Afghanistan

Ten stolen Buddha sculptures were returned to Afghanistan after they were discovered stashed inside two broken fruit crates at London's Heathrow Airport. Customs officers seized a statue and nine Buddha heads in 2002 believing they might have been used to hide drugs but further investigations revealed they were stolen 1,500-year-old treasures. Police said the sculptures from the ancient region of Gandhara, in the Afghan-Pakistan border area, could not be immediately returned to Afghanistan because of the war that followed the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. Gandhara was a centre of Buddhism for Asia until Islam increased in significance.

Although the return of the items to the National Museum of Afghanistan was first



announced in July, they are now being sent back after going on display at London's British Museum.

The pieces, which are believed to have originated from Buddhist monasteries in the country, are thought to have been parts of bigger works of art damaged by the Taliban. "We presume that they were beheaded in the Taliban iconoclastic phase of 2001, when figural representations were prohibited, whether in modern media like television or from antiquity," St John

Simpson, senior curator at the Middle East department of the British Museum, was quoted as saying in July.

Detective Constable Sophie Hayes from the Metropolitan Police Art and Antiques unit, said: "This has been a very long and complex case but I am delighted that after 17 years, these ancient and precious items are finally being returned to Afghanistan."

(Extracted from thenational.ae)



Two Iranian Universities May Set Up Chair in Guru Nanak's Name



On the eve of the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, two Iran-based universities have desired to establish academic Chairs to conduct research on the life and teachings of the first Sikh Guru. Another proposal from their side was to initiate the Sikh religious study programme in collaboration with the Iran-based universities. University of Religion president SayyidAbulhasanNavab and a representative of Al-Mustafa International University recently held a discussion with Akal Takht officiating JathedarGianiHarpreet Singh to work on the modalities of installing the Chairs. GianiHarpreet Singh said to arrange literature and reference material, they had tied up with the Punjabi University, Patiala. "Besides this, the SGPC will be directed to assist the Iranian scholars in collecting the information on the life, philosophy and vision of Guru Nanak. It was an honour for the Sikh community that our Guru's message was being spread on a global platform by installing a

dedicated Chair," he added.

Syed AfrozNazvis, an Iranian delegate, said that besides setting up Chairs by the universities under the patronage of the Government of Iran, a detailed discussion was also done with Akal TakhtJathedar over a religious study programme proposed to understand the concept of Sikhism. "We proposed that there should be a Sikh religious study programme for Indian and Iranian intellectuals", he said

Meanwhile, Pervinder Singh Chandhok, a Sikh citizen of Iran, said though the Sikhs comprise a miniscule population of Iran, the Iranian government had accorded them all rights to observe the Gurpurbs and other religious ethics. "I can say that the 'shaan' (glory) of turban is there in Iran. There are around 60 Sikh families living in Iran. They visit two gurdwaras located in Tehran and Zahran. We are free to maintain the 'maryada' of Sikhism and the authorities never interfere in our religious occasions," he said.

(Extracted from sikhnet.com)

Many Saudi youth interested in volunteer work

The majority of Saudi youth would be more than willing to get involved in volunteer work, according to a survey.

The study found that 84 percent of the 1,126 young people questioned were "highly interested" in donating their time to take part in community programmes. Almost half of those quizzed from throughout the country (of which 64 percent were men and 36 percent women) said that finding a volunteer opportunity in the Saudi community was "easy," while 27 percent found it "difficult" and 11 percent claimed no openings were available. However, 14 percent noted that young Saudis did not receive enough information about volunteer opportunities. The results of the survey, conducted by the National Center for Public Opinion Polls at the King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue, in Riyadh, also showed that 70 percent of respondents had read or heard about the importance and advantages of volunteering, as opposed to 30 percent who were unaware. Of those questioned, 45 percent had already participated in volunteer work, and the expectations of 68 percent of them were met.

(Extracted from arabnews.com)

Defining Religion

BY AMIN VALLIANI

Religion has remained a living topic in almost all ages. Many have discussed religion in different ways; some have even made religion a topic of acrimonious debate. Karl Marx has declared religion to be the opium of the people. He mentioned this while writing a Critique on Hegel's Philosophy of Right, published in Paris in February 1844.

As a result of his writing, some Europeans developed misconceptions about religion while others confined it to special occasions such as childbirth, marriage, death etc. Marx's work also inspired the foundation of many communist regimes in the 20th century, where religious practices were discouraged officially until these regimes ended in the 1990s.

In the Western concept of modernity, religion has been marked as primitive, backward, obsolete and incompatible with the progressive style of modern life. The motto has been: no religion, no doctrine, no creed and no restricted way of life. History is replete with examples of people negating or rejecting religion, while others have manipulated religious teachings.

Religion is an inner state

In the past, wars have been fought, women degraded, children sacrificed and people enslaved, declared infidel, imprisoned, exiled or killed in the name of religion. Sometimes wrong and strange interpretations of religion have become the cause of fatalism, intolerance, fanaticism, superstition, internal bickering, isolation from society and even suicide.

A desire for political power and money has lured many to use religion as a tool of earning thus abusing, misusing and misinterpreting religious teachings. Many individuals have constructed religious



theories to suit their wishes. Sometimes religion is used by despotic rulers for authoritarian purposes, forcing people into undue submission.

At times, the so-called religious leaders and scholars empowered the states, rulers, warriors and politicians etc to carry on with their brutalities while the true leaders who abstained were treated badly.

Oppressive rulers have given their narratives and counter-narratives about religious teachings, forcing people to toe the state line in the name of religion. Many rulers have used religion to legitimise their acts of gaining power. Muslim kings and sultans claimed to govern people with divine sanction. They declared themselves *Zil Allah* (the shadow of Allah) on earth in order to pursue their self-interest.

In spite of all this, religion is a vital force that guides people's lives towards the truth. It is as

relevant today as ever before. The ultimate goal of every religion is to explain the purpose of human life to make it meaningful. Religion basically is an inner state which propels one to seek the meaning of life. Life's journey starts with birth and ends with death; it is not meaningless. True religion helps us to understand the meaning of life through reflection. It helps us build character, manage crises, confront malignant influences and change the course of life socially and spiritually. It inspires us towards goodness and equality of all human beings before the Ultimate Being. Without religion, a human is like an animal having no purpose or goal in life.

In its essence, religion is simple. Abraham Lincoln, the 16th US president said that "...when I do good, I feel good, when I do bad, I feel bad. That's my religion". It requires people to do good, create peace and harmony on earth and feel accountable before the Creator for all commissions and omissions. It is something spontaneous in human nature. Allah has created humankind as per His nature, which is based on pure religion (*deen al-khalis*). The Holy Quran warns: "O you who believe! Take not for friends and protectors those who take your religion for a mockery or sport..." (5:57).

(This is a modified version of an article taken from the Net)

Is The Quran Only For Muslims?



BY RAJAT MALHOTRA

One of the most erroneous beliefs about the Quran is that it is a book that is meant only for Muslims. Nothing could be farther from the truth, however. The Quran, which literally means, 'to be read', is in fact a book that is meant for the entire humankind. In its 114 chapters the Quran addresses all of humanity. In the Quran, God addresses us all all human beings, not just Muslims alone directly.

I had always thought of the Quran as a book of rules and regulations, but surprisingly, when I read it, I found in it answers to my questions. It helped me understand why God created us, what the purpose of my life ought to be, and what comes after death.

Did you know that the Quran covers a variety of subjects,

such as brotherhood, peace, compassion and tolerance? Did you know that the Quran addresses questions like how we can grow mentally stronger, how we can face challenges and manage stress, how we can develop spiritually, and above, all how we can discover the Creator of us all?

Let me give you an example of Quranic teachings about social life. We often face the problem of enmity, both at the individual level and at the larger level, including between communities and countries. For this problem the Quran gives the following solution. It says: "Good and evil deeds are not equal. Repel evil with what is better; then you will see that one who was once your enemy has become your dearest friend (41:34).

From this we learn that a person who might seem to be a permanent enemy is not really so. Rather, he is actually potential friend. All we need to do is to transform this potentiality into actuality. When we return good behavior for bad behavior, it touches the conscience of the other and turns enmity into friendship. This principle holds true at every level between individuals, between communities, and between countries, too.

This Quranic teaching is based on a principle that may be called 'unilateral ethics'. That is to say, to do good to others and be good with them unilaterally, irrespective of whether they behave in the same way with you. Bilateral ethics is not a part of the scheme of the Quran. There is no doubt that in terms of results, unilateral ethics is far more effective than bilateral ethics.

If you are seeking answers in your spiritual quest, then read the Quran today. To get your free copy of the translation of the Quran in English and/or various other languages, visit www.cpsglobal.org or contact info@cpsglobal.org

May God help us and guide us.

(Dr. Rajat Malhotra is a member of the New Delhi-based Centre for Peace and Spirituality International and can be contacted on info@cpsglobal.org)

Countering Hate Speech

The secretary-general of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar, announced that the Center will allocate approximately €1.5 million (\$1.7 million) for initiatives aimed at combating hate speech through the centre's global programmes in 2020, in

partnership with UN and global organizations and through its five platforms in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Arab world.

This came during the joint press conference accompanying the international meeting, organized by KAICIID under the title "The role of religion, media and policies in combating hate speech".

The initiatives will include social media campaigns against hate speech and training for vulnerable groups such as women and people seeking



(KAICIID Secretary-General Faisal bin Abdulrahman bin Muaammar speaks during the press conference in Vienna)

refuge to counter the phenomenon, support for existing efforts and help in launching new national initiatives to counter hate speech and a tailored training program for media experts, journalists and social media influencers on the responsible use of their channels.

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When I Cried From Inside

BY SHABAN ALI NADVI

I was working in an office till recently. I would spend much of the day there. In the morning, a Muslim woman would come to clean the place. One day I asked someone about her, and I learnt that her husband was a habitual drinker. I felt she was in great pain and sorrow, and so I decided to visit her home, which was in a slum near our office.

The woman had a six-year-old daughter and two sons. I said to her that I'd be happy to teach her children, free of cost. She agreed. The next day, I came back to her house. She hurried about trying to neat up the place. She didn't know where I should sit to teach her children. She repeatedly said that she was sorry that she didn't have something to spread out on which I could sit.

I sat down on a mat and looked about. I was struck by the conditions of the house. There was only one bed and a single suitcase. Clothes were hanging from a rope.

At first the woman's daughter was scared of me. It was for the

first time in her life that she had opened an Arabic book. I wrapped a *dupatta* around her head and helped her pronounce some letters of the Arabic alphabet. She was an intelligent child. That day, my mind travelled back to my childhood, when I was beaten for my improper pronunciation. But this little child did so well!

The woman kindly asked me to have tea. I am not in the habit of drinking tea, but I accepted her offer. I was moved by how this family managed their life with so few material possessions. I had never experienced life in a slum before (except in stories and movies). Those moments in the slum helped me recognize how privileged many of us are compared to so many others. For the first time ever I had first-hand experience of the hardship of living in a slum. At the same time, one of the things that struck me was how happy the woman's children were. Perhaps they didn't know and think of the luxuries of the rich.

The woman told me that her family had come to the slum

around a year ago. Her husband worked as a mason. Sometimes, he drank and behaved roughly with his family. Even though the family was Muslim, the children didn't know what the Quran and *namaz* were. I asked whether she was offering *namaz*. For one year she had neither offered *namaz* nor recited a single verse of the Quran. She didn't have *musalla*, a prayer-mat, nor even a copy of the Quran. I asked her why she didn't have a copy of the Quran at home. She replied that it was because other people entered her house. I said to her, 'So what? It is good to interact with other people and live in peace with them.' The woman responded thus: "If they enter my house and the Quran is inside, our *kalima* will be removed from our forehead."

I was stunned at this absurd and erroneous belief. I told the woman that Islam teaches us that we must live peacefully with others and must share God's message with others, rather than keeping it away from them. I said to her that God's message is for all human beings.

Science Can Help One Become a Good Muslim

Our intellect and our other faculties are all limited, while God is Unlimited

BY MOHAMMAD ASLAM PARVAIZ

I have been writing on science-related topics for several decades now. One issue that I often deal with is the relationship between Islam and Science. There are different approaches to this relationship. I do not seek to compare Science and Islam, nor do I seek to use the claims of one to prove the other.

According to the teachings of the Quran, every single thing in the universe is a sign or, in Arabic, *ayat*, of God. Since everything has been created by God, they are all His signs, pointing to Him, their Creator. In numerous verses in the Quran, God exhorts us to reflect on His signs that are scattered in Nature—on the clouds, on the rain, on plants, on animals and so on. To reflect on and acquire knowledge of these signs of God in Nature is precisely what Science is all about. Science is, simply put, the acquisition of knowledge of something. And that is exactly what the Quran exhorts us to engage in while reflecting on the 'signs' of God, His creations, that Nature is suffused with.

Now, you could ask: Why does God want to draw our attention to His creations? The point is that God's Being is beyond our understanding. Our intellect and our other faculties are all limited, while God is Unlimited. And what is limited cannot grasp in its knowledge what is Unlimited. This being the case, how can we recognise God? How can I, from my heart, truly exclaim, "God is most great" (*Allahu Akbar!*). When I was a child, I was taught the phrase *Allahu Akbar*, but it was then little more than an emotional slogan which I didn't really understand. How can I truly know what this phrase signifies? How can I truly comprehend it? The answer is: when I reflect on the



“ God exhorts us to reflect on His signs that are scattered in Nature on the clouds, on the rain, on plants, on animals and so on. ”

amazing and diverse creations of God and am struck by the beauty and intricacy and balance of everything, from an invisible electron to the sun, I can grow in my understanding of God's Greatness, His Glory, His artistry, His Power! And then I can truly exclaim from my heart, '*Allahu Akbar!*'

This is what God wants us to do: to understand Him through understanding His creations. Seen in this way, then, Science, the acquisition of knowledge of things, is a means for understanding God or *marifat-e Ilahi*. This is the approach to the relationship between Islam and Science that I follow. In this way, Science can make one a good Muslim, a God conscious person someone who fully surrenders to His commands, as other creations do.

(The author can be reached at maparvaiz@gmail.com)

Managing Controversy

Whenever there is a controversial issue, do not allow it to become a large-scale conflict.

By Maulana Wahiduddin Khan

The Quran says, "Let them not dispute with you in the matter." This verse would mean, 'Do not give others a chance to dispute with you.' That is, 'You should not enter into disputes.'

The verse actually indicates, 'You should manage the dispute in the very beginning before it degenerates into a full-fledged controversy.' We need to solve a controversial issue only by way of peaceful management. In 628 AD, the Prophet and his companions left Madinah and travelled to Makkah to offer pilgrimage to the Kabah.

When they arrived at Hudaibiyah, some miles away from Makkah, the group was stopped by their Makkan opponents. The leader of the opponents refused to let the Prophet enter Makkah. The tradition was to fight a battle. On the contrary, the Prophet engaged in negotiations with the opposite side for about 15 days.

Finally, a peace pact was concluded that laid down that the Prophet would return to Madinah without performing pilgrimage.



The treaty of Hudaibiyah has been referred to in the Quran as a 'clear victory' (48:1). This means that in God's eyes, an issue should not be allowed to escalate into a dispute and controversy.

The Prophet and his companions accepted this condition and returned to Madinah.

The treaty of Hudaibiyah has been referred to in the Quran as a 'clear victory' (48:1). This means that in God's eyes, an issue should not be allowed to escalate into a dispute and controversy,

rather be resolved beforehand through wise management and non-controversial approach.

Muslims all over the world, including Indian Muslims, should follow this principle: whenever there is a controversial issue, do not allow it to become a large-scale conflict, rather defuse it and finish it off in its initial stages.

(This article appeared on economictimes.indiatimes.com/)

NEWS Calcutta HC prevents deportation of Rohingya couple, wins hearts

The Calcutta High Court on December 24 passed an order staying the deportation of a Rohingya couple to Myanmar. The order was given in response to a writ petition filed by the couple who have, as per their petition, already served their sentence in prison. The petitioners submitted that now that they have completed their sentence, the government is trying to deport them back to Myanmar. They also submitted that such deportation would be tantamount to a death sentence in view of their plight in Myanmar

which has the declared policy of an all-out onslaught on Rohingyas.

The Court restrained the government by an order of injunction 'from deporting the petitioners from India during pendency of the writ petition' and also directed the government to 'ensure that the petitioners are provided with the basic amenities, compatible with a life worthy of respect'.

The Court went a step ahead and even directed the government to allow the counsel of the petitioners

to visit them from time to time. Rohingyas are an ethnic group, majority of whom are Muslim. They have been denied citizenship in Myanmar since 1982 which has effectively rendered them stateless. They face extreme violence and persecution in Myanmar and hence have been compelled to flee to other neighbouring countries to find harbour. They are considered as the world's most persecuted minority.

(Extracted from sabrangindia.in)



Ibtihaj Muhammad is a woman on a mission, one which is greater than what drove her to be the first Muslim African-American to win a medal while wearing the *hijab* in the 2016 Olympics in Rio. She has now become an inspiration for many Muslim women who don the hijab but feel oppressed or ridiculed.

The decision Ibtihaj made at age six to don the Hijab back in New Jersey, USA, had yielded dividends but in a way she never imagined. The first in her family to do so and not being apologetic about it in the face of taunts and insults that followed her from school days right into the sports arena had finally paid off. She still remembers those moments. "To have someone refer to you in a Hijab as a curtain, towel or tablecloth...even saying those words out loud gives you chills in a way. These bullies and the words they said, you don't forget them because words have a lot of power and can hurt," she says. Ibtihaj says she got bullied a lot as a kid, but not always for wearing the hijab. Sometimes, it was for being the only child of 'colour'.

And now Ibtihaj has helped turned bullying experiences into new children's book that she has

Olympic Winner On a Mission

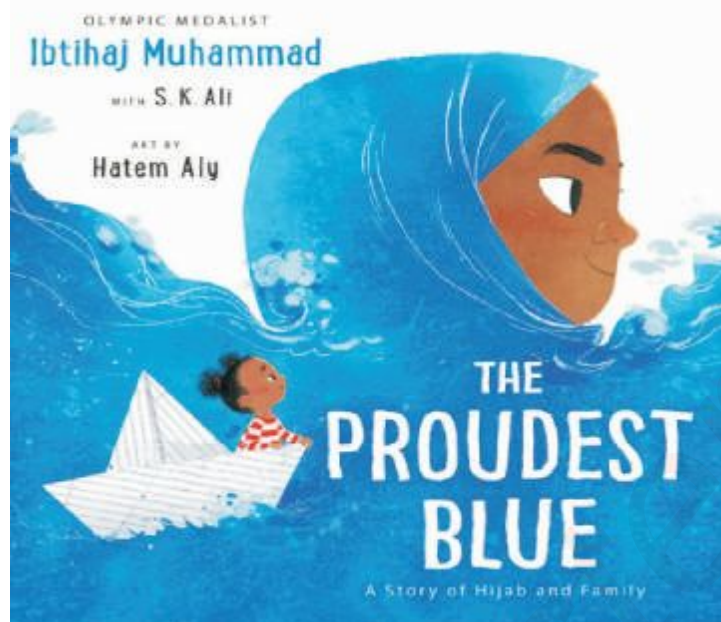
co-authored. The book "The Proudest Blue: A Story of Hijab and Family" looks at a common childhood experience — the first day of school. For sisters Faizah and Asiya, the first day is extra special because older sister Asiya will be wearing a beautiful blue hijab to school for the first time. The head covering, worn in public by some Muslim women, is a way

Olympics wearing a hijab, and the first to win a medal at the games. Since then, she's been viewed as a role model for young Muslim women, something she says is still surreal.

As a child growing in the suburbs of New York City, Ibtihaj says her parents and siblings were one of the only Muslim families in town, yet

book provided her with an outlet to show other little girls wearing hijabs to school that

it's okay "I hope that they see themselves in this work," she says while teaching other children to "celebrate one another despite our differences."



to honour Islam. But as Faizah and Asiya navigate a new school year, the two siblings encounter questions as well as teasing and bullying for wearing a hijab. It's an experience that co-author Ibtihaj knows all too well. She made headlines in 2016 when she became the first Muslim American woman to represent the United States in the

sporting a hijab was "commonplace" within her family. In elementary school, she had to explain what a hijab was to classmates, something she describes as "quite a heavy load to carry" at such a young age. "At that age, you want to fit in," she says. She says writing "The Proudest Blue" was cathartic. The children's

Muslim Women Share Their Startup Stories

Over 100 Muslim women gathered in Bangalore recently to break stereotypes and share their entrepreneurial journeys at the launch of the Association of Women Entrepreneurs (AWE). Formed to support and connect Muslim women entrepreneurs, the AWE is a wing of the Muslim Industrialists Association.

38-year-old NousheenTaj has turned the stereotypical role of a woman in the kitchen into a successful business that delivers homemade food to corporate offices. "It's on the lines of Mumbai's dabbawallahs although I use Dunzo to deliver it for now," she says about her six-month-old startup called Areha Foods. The unique selling point of her service is the

promise of the menu not being repeated for an entire month.

Nousheen, who has an MSc degree, worked as an administrator at a Hyderabad hospital until 2017. Away from her family in the city, she says she craved for home food every single day back then. "I know that pain and that's why I wanted to make fresh food for people who are away from home," she says. Her startup runs on a subscription basis for 26 days a month. It is based in Dairy Circle and caters to surrounding areas. "My sisters help me cook and I have two helpers for other things," she says.

Among the women was Ishana, who convinced her family to invest her wedding savings into

her business. Hestartup manufactures cloth sanitary pads and provides employment to 25 women.

Like Nousheen and Ishana, nearly 10 entrepreneurs spoke about their ventures at the launch of AWE. Shabana Begum of Sacred Oven, a baking company and Akhila of Alfa Creations, that specialises in designer hijabs (headscarves) and jilbabs, turned some heads with their unique designs at the event.

Salma Moosa, founder of city-based Startups Club, said: "If I can do this, even you all can. As women, we need to be seen and heard."

(Extracted from timesofindia.indiatimes.com)

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Karkala, Karnataka

Contact for Reg: Mohd Yakub Bashu: 9343352744
Mohd Mubeen 9606620070

2. DYS WORKSHOP IN HYDERABAD

FOR TEACHING STAFF

DATES: 21,22,& 23 January 2020

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Organized by: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE CELL (IQAC)
Osmania University College for Women

Contact for details:

Dr. Aliya9440886451, 7893547611, 9849170130,
Email: aliyads@yahoo.com | gvjlakshmi@gmail.com
Website: <http://www.oucwkoti.ac.in>

3. DYS WORKSHOP IN HYDERABAD

DATES: 25 & 26 January 2020

Venue: Islamic Public School International
Tolichowk, Hyderabad

For Details Contact:

Mohd Majid: 8008227262

mail: majiddba@gmail.com

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DATES: Jan 31, 1 & 2 January 2020

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These New York Sikhs are fundraising for a mosque in India

Darshan Singh learnt from a Muslim man living in Nadala, in Punjab (where Singh was visiting his family recently) how the village's growing Muslim population had to pray in shifts in order to fit in the small room they had repurposed as a prayer space. Now, Darshan Singh and his son, who are both Sikhs, are running a crowdfunding campaign to purchase land for Muslims in Nadala, a Sikh-majority village, Punjab, to build their first mosque.

Why? It's an interfaith act of Punjabi solidarity, explained his son, 28-year-old New York City community organizer Jagpreet Singh. It also serves as a way for him to live out the Sikh concept of *sarbat da bhal*, a Punjabi term used in Sikh prayer meaning "welfare of all mankind," he said. "All of our prayers end with this idea of doing work for the betterment of

all of mankind and not just ourselves," he said, adding that he has helped host a Sikh-Muslim unity iftar in New York for the past three years to mark the breaking of the fast during the Islamic month of Ramzan.

More than 35 donors have contributed to his GoFundMe fundraiser, launched on November 15.

Locals estimate that several dozen Muslim families now reside in Nadala, most of whom are working-class families. The village has no mosque or formal Islamic prayer space. Just a handful of Sufi shrines remain in



(Jagpreet Singh, left, his father Darshan Singh, his younger brother and his mother)

the area. Currently, Nadala's Muslims hold daily congregational prayers in a small room in the back of a shop that fits about two dozen people. They pray in several rounds on Fridays when they hold congregational Jummah prayer services.

(Extracted from religionnews.com/)

Sikhs stand for equality, include Muslims in CAA: Akal Takht Jathedar

Claiming that the new citizenship law has led to the alienation of Muslims, Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Harpreet Singh said that the community should have been included in the amended law. The Jathedar, meanwhile, welcomed the inclusion of the Sikh community in the Act. "There were many Sikhs and Hindus, who were living as refugees in India and the CAA has provided them relief. It is a good development and a welcome step. The CAA will be of big relief for the Sikhs who were facing religious persecution. There are Afghan Sikhs who have been attacked and forced to leave their birth place. They will benefit from this Act," the Jathedar said while talking to *The Indian Express*. But he maintained that Muslims should not be kept outside of the purview of the Act. "According to principles of Sikhism, we Sikhs cannot differentiate against anyone on the basis of religion and caste. In the same way, the Constitution also does not differentiate on the basis of religion and caste. So, there was no need to keep the Muslims out," the Jathedar added. Asked whether Muslims needed to be included in the Act when they



Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Harpreet Singh.

were in majority in several Islamic countries, the Jathedar said, "It is true that Muslims are in majority in those countries, but it is also a fact that Muslims are a minority in India. Excluding them from the CAA

has led alienation of Muslims." "Religious persecution in any country, whether it is Pakistan, Afghanistan or Bangladesh, should be condemned. Respective countries should take measures that all minorities living there can follow their religion," he added.

Many Sikh bodies have come in support of activists protesting against the CAA.

(Extracted from indianexpress.com)

Citizenship Amendment Act: Archbishop Pakiam expresses concern

Thiruvananthapuram: Archbishop Soosa Pakiam M. of the Latin Archdiocese of Thiruvananthapuram has come out against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, terming it discriminatory. Discrimination against anyone in a democratic and secular country like India was unacceptable, the Archbishop said at a press conference here on Dec 18. The act is against the secular values and the church will express its



views over the act at the apt time, he said. "Discrimination against some people in the country is worrisome. Church doesn't support it. The amendment is anti-constitutional and against the secular values. There is a concern whether the amendment conceals a declaration that anything can be done in the name of majority," he added.

(Extracted from mattersindia.com)

Hindus Join Mass Marriage of Muslim Girls In Odisha

SAMBALPUR: In a noble gesture, city-based social organisation Alla Hazarat Welfare Committee solemnised the marriage of four Hindu and 13 Muslim girls at Sunapali. All the girls belong to economically weaker sections and their parents were unable to marry them off due to financial constraints.

Alla Hazarat Welfare Committee has been organising mass marriage of poor Muslim girls for the last three years. Secretary of the committee Atif Alam said the objective of the organisation is to help poor girls, irrespective of their religion, who find it difficult to tie the knot due to monetary problems. Needy families select grooms for their daughters and apply with the committee for help to organise their marriages. The committee members then visit the houses of the applicants. If they find that families are poor, the necessary steps are taken to arrange the marriages. All expenses of the marriages are

borne by the committee by collecting money from its members, Alam said.

While the marriages of Muslim brides were performed as per Islamic rituals, the Hindu girls exchanged garlands and rings with their grooms during the mass wedding ceremony on the day.

The committee gifted household articles, including refrigerator, washing machine, air-cooler, grinder, steel almirah, furniture, utensils and clothes to the newlywed couples. A community feast was also organised after the mass marriage at the venue.

Manasi Pradhan, a Hindu girl whose marriage was solemnised at the event, said her family had applied for help to the committee. "I am thankful to the organisation for arranging my marriage," she said. While Manasi's father is bed-ridden, her mother is a domestic help.

(Taken from

https://www.newindianexpress.com/)

Muslim Woman Elected Chairperson of Urban Local Body

The Makrana Nagar Parishad in Nagaur district of Rajasthan elected one of its youngest members – 26-year-old Samrin of Congress party – as its chairperson. She is a graduate and daughter of district Congress president Zakir Hussain Gaisawat. She was elected as Chairperson unopposed.

In the 55-member urban local body, Congress has 35 members and BJP 3 besides 17 Independents. The elections for the Parishad were held recently.



In all, there are 40 Muslim councillors in the house, most of them from Congress.

(Taken from caravandaily.com)

US Urges India To Protect Rights Of Religious Minorities

The US has urged India to protect the rights of its religious minorities in keeping with its Constitution and democratic values as it continues to monitor the developments in various Indian states related to the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. "We are closely following developments regarding the Citizenship Amendment Bill. Respect for

religious freedom and equal treatment under the law are fundamental principles of our two democracies," a State Department spokesperson said. "The US urges India to protect the rights of its religious minorities in keeping with India's Constitution and democratic values," the spokesperson said.

(Extracted from indianexpress.com)

BY VALEA

The other day, I was chatting with an acquaintance about this and that when he said something really remarkable: his wife and he were homeschooling their three children two sons and a daughter! Given the horrendous time I had at school (such a waste of many precious years, almost half a century ago), this news came as a very pleasant surprise!

Homeschooling is becoming an increasingly popular option for parents, not just in the West but in countries like India too. Many people are becoming disenchanted with 'mainstream' schooling or various reasons, including skyrocketing school fees, aggressive competition, rote-learning, culturally alienating curricula and last, but certainly not the least, lack of sufficient focus on ethics, spiritual values and character-building.

Homeschooling can have several advantages that are making it an increasingly attractive choice for many. For families where one of the spouses (often, the wife) feels compelled to seek employment outside the home simply in order to supplement the primary bread-earner's income and help meet children's astronomically high school fees, homeschooling can come as a great blessing. If their children are being homeschooled, the spouse need not feel forced to take up paid work outside and face the

A Different Sort of Schooling

Homeschooling is becoming an increasingly popular option for parents, not just in the West but in countries like India too. Many people are becoming disenchanted with 'mainstream' schooling for various reasons, including lack of sufficient focus on ethics, spiritual values and character-building.

drudgery it may involve. Instead, he/she can remain at home and spend quality time with the children, helping them with their studies. Not only can this relieve these parents of the burden of having to slog at a job simply in order to foot their children's school bills, teaching their children (instead of having a school teacher to handle this responsibility) can help foster closer and more nourishing parent-children relationships. Homeschooling can enable parents to become more closely involved in their children's lives, instead of expecting school-teachers to bear a major share of the responsibility for how their children turn out to be.

For families unable or unwilling to cough up huge sums of money for fees (and other charges) levied by supposedly 'good' schools, homeschooling can be a great relief. Homeschooling can be immensely cheaper than 'mainstream' schooling, a great money saver. Homeschooling can be a great bonus for children, too. It can be potentially more conducive to the child's inner growth than the 'mainstream' schools that are often characterised by aggressive

Homeschooling can be a great bonus for children, too. It can be potentially more conducive to the child's inner growth than the 'mainstream' schools that are often characterised by aggressive competition, authoritarianism, control, hierarchy and lack of adequate concern for morals.

competition, authoritarianism, control, hierarchy and lack of adequate concern for morals and spiritual values. Children who are homeschooling may be in a much better position to follow their dreams. They may be able to choose from a greater variety of

subjects to study, instead of being confined to a relatively narrow range of subjects offered in many 'mainstream' schools. A child who is homeschooling might be able to choose to study supposedly completely unrelated subjects such as Home Science, Biology, Accountancy, Painting and Sociology, a combination that is impossible to have in most regular schools. Studying at home, learning can also be much more flexible in terms of time. The pace of learning can be calibrated by parents along with their children instead of being dictated by schools. Learning can thus become a more relaxed process, instead of something to be rushed through. If parents who choose to home school their children are innovative and creative, they can help them cover the prescribed curriculum in a much more enjoyable way than is often the case in 'regular' schools, where fear of teachers' reprimands or of failure in exams can sometimes create havoc with children's lives.

That said, the proportion of parents who choose to homeschool their children still remains small which is why when my acquaintance

mentioned to me that his children were homeschooling I was surprised (although pleasantly, of course!). One reason for this could be that institutionalised 'mainstream' schooling has now become so pervasive that many people have come to believe that it is as normal and necessary as, say, marrying or even eating or breathing! (To realise how misplaced this assumption is we need only to remember that starting with the advent of human beings on this planet till say just half a dozen or so generations ago, possibly the overwhelming majority of the world's population had never stepped into a school or had even heard of the concept!) Some people may appreciate how much better homeschooling can potentially be for their children than institutionalised 'regular' school but yet be unwilling to homeschool their children for fear that not going to conventional schools, they may turn out to be misfits. This is a concern proponents of homeschooling need to address. The best way to do so is to get parents who are homeschooling their children and their children themselves to share with others their experiences of it.

In India, the National Institute of Open Schooling is a good resource for parents who wish to homeschool their children. For details, see their website: www.nios.ac.in

Many Arabs Now Reject Religious Extremism

The popularity of Muslim religious extremist groups will decline over the next 10 years in the Arab world. That is what a substantial number of respondents predict for their home country in a YouGov poll on "Mosque and state: How Arabs see the future," conducted across 18 countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

As part of its partnership with the Arab Strategy Forum, Arab News commissioned the survey of the views and concerns of Arabs today, and their projections for the future of the region. A total of 3,079 Arabic speakers aged 18 or above were interviewed. One of the strongest messages conveyed by the study was that the Arab world has had enough of extremist Islamist groups and political organizations based on religion, with substantial combined averages believing

their home country would see less of these groups over the next 10 years.

"Without a doubt, the region is falling behind because of persistent violence and conflict," said Dr. Albadr Al-Shateri, politics professor at the National Defense College in Abu Dhabi. "That the people are sick and tired of extremism is obvious enough. The region is facing a real crisis in terms of development and governance. Revisiting old issues repeatedly will not solve the problems."

His sentiments were echoed by Dr. Abdul Khaleq Abdulla, former chairman of the Arab Council for Social Sciences, who says the Middle East has had enough of extremism, with Arabs having realized that political parties, groups and organizations based on religion were "taking them nowhere." "Indeed, we have seen the ugly face of it during the four to five

years of Daesh's control of large areas, both in Syria and Iraq," he said. "So it is very natural to see there is a decline in the popularity of these parties. But much more important are the predictions that support for religious parties, whether moderate or extremist, is in sharp decline." Abdulla said: "People are becoming aware that there has been some kind of abuse and overuse of people's emotions for political gains by these religious movements," he said.

After the failure of extremist governments or parties across the region, Michael Singh, managing director at the Washington Institute, says it is little surprise that public opinion has soured. "Nevertheless, violent extremist groups continue to grow across the region, as do incidents of terrorism," he told Arab News. "These survey results suggest

that governments will have the public on their side if they wish to defeat extremism, but doing so will require addressing some of its underlying causes, such as the lack of political space for dissent, abuse by security forces, or a sense of economic unfairness and corruption. "Too

often, governments in the region have cynically brandished extremist groups to discredit all political opposition, a practice which only contributed to radicalization."

(Extracted from arabnews.com)

◀ Page 1

Mega Job Fair in Bangalore

More than 70 corporates and HR consultants across various industries participated in this fair, with a turnout of more than 1590 Candidates. At the end of the day, 390+ candidates were given on-the-spot offers by the recruiters while 680+ were shortlisted for the next round of selection.

Mr. Mohammed Sanaullah, Retd. IAS Officer and Ex-Principal Secretary, Govt. of Karnataka, who inaugurated the job fair, said "Having worked in the Government in different capacities and specially Minorities Welfare Department, it was our intention to propagate education and employment assistance for the underprivileged strata of the society so

that the youth can fulfil their family and the society's needs. I'm happy to note that Association of Muslim Professionals is taking that vision further by organising job fairs and helping our youth get gainful employment and thus helping in nation-building."

Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) is a platform for Muslim professionals and volunteers to share their knowledge, intellect, experience and skills for the overall development of not just the Muslim community but also the society at large, and further empowering Muslims in the educational, social, political and economic front of life.

Spiritual Upliftment in Melbourne & Sydney!

The Discover Yourself workshop was hosted by Mercy Mission Madinah in Melbourne on the 23 & 24th November, 2019 and in Sydney, it was hosted by the Islamic Forum for Australian Muslims (IFAM) on 30 & 1 December 2019.

Melbourne



Some of the Participants share their Experiences:

- It was a great experience and it helped me a lot.
- It was a life-changing experience and I gained absolutely valuable techniques to deal with life.
- It opened my mind. It was a great experience and I think a lot of it was very interesting.
- The workshop made a great difference in my thinking and I discovered my weaknesses.
- Thanks, that was a great experience and very useful. Now, I know how to connect to Allah.
- It helped in improving my internal state of mind and helped me become a better Muslim.
- It was beneficial as it helped fix issues in our daily lives.
- It was fun and helpful, and it was informative. I am giving up blaming and proving others wrong.
- An Academic approach based on theology (a good blend of both).
- This workshop helped me look at the world and real-life situations from different perspectives. Interesting with a lot of new information.
- The presentation from an Islamic perspective helped me deal with my conflict. It was interactive and practical.
- Gives a good insight of who am I? I will see everyone as a human being.
- The best workshop I have ever attended. Spiritual upliftment to connect to live by purpose and be a blessing to humanity.
- Excellent. It made me aware of

the reality, acceptance and to forgive.

- Everyone was feeling excited to change her or his behavior. Very motivational. Must have a separate workshop for teenagers.
- It is very useful for life and very empowering to live life.

•Self-realization. This workshop is 'Allah's Blessing' and I am blessed to know Dr. Sadath Khan.

•The most important thing was realizing the Whisperer and getting away from it. It motivated me to see things differently.... that is from Haq & Batil perspective. It is enlightening, liberating and helpful.

•I feel light after letting go of the baggage. It is liberating from the past.

- Before the workshop, I had some things being applied in my life before, and more are added and explained now through practical and logical experiences.
- It is outstanding and life changing.
- I have learnt the importance of forgiveness. Second day was most relevant to make a change.

IMRAN: It helped me with a better understanding of myself. I got the ability to deal with life in a much peaceful and successful way. I am trying to purify my heart and actions to please Allah. Many times, it happens through facing my weaknesses. In this workshop, I learned that (submission) helps me even to reduce my fighting with myself. I learned to bring the mind back to the right place. I am grateful for your sincere efforts to give us the ability and light, to go to Allah with a peaceful heart and a better human being.

Melbourne



URWAH: My life has changed after the workshop as I look at the world differently now. It was a very meaningful experience as I got a variety of information that I could apply in my practical life. I now look at the situations presented to me by my family members from a perspective that I did not, before. This workshop benefitted me as it allowed me to

between denial and submission (Allah's way) I got it, and feel free. Indeed, it is a life-changing course, provided we keep an open mind. Accept people as they are and then find solutions – is my take-home message. I think you are doing a great job; may Allah give you good health and peace-Ameen!

SALEH: My life before the workshop was full of excuses and denial. After the workshop, I unlearned a lot about the mind and resisting, using reason and logic. I took things and advice that struck out to me and will apply it practically. Anyone can learn something if they find the essence of the workshop. I would have missed out on something very

was always judgmental, but now I realize the situation presented to me in life 'IS' the situation- I must accept and not judge. An eye-opener!

WASEEM: This workshop has transformed not only me, but also our family. It is a life changing workshop. Please continue transforming lives.

BUSHRA: It is very beneficial. I have noticed courage, energy and kindness for all human beings and will follow it for the rest of my life, Inshallah. May Allah make it easier for all of us and help us to achieve love of Allah. An excellent effort (may Allah accept and give Barakat). Please try to have the workshop in school holidays.

Sydney



take control of my mind, body, and heart.

FATIMA: Before the workshop, I would be quick to judge and create opinions about others and I would be living in my own world. This workshop has helped me to accept situations and learn to find solutions rather than reasons and answers. I learned how to live a happier life in peace and love with each other rather than living in our own realities which is not the Absolute reality.

SABINA: I realized that I was putting on veils in front of my eyes unknowingly and these veils were anchoring me down. So, the minute I learned the distinction

valuable.

RABIA: Before the workshop, I was a bit irritable but after the workshop, I have seemed to be able to calm myself and understand the right way to respond in a situation. I found it useful because it taught me some essential skills. It was a good experience because it enlightened me on certain topics. I think I may have missed valuable information such as differentiating between reality and opinions. I am willing to give up the veils covering my eyes

TERRANCE .Y: The workshop allowed me to look at life and situations without "Glasses" on. I

FAIZ: It was very beneficial. I learned many interesting things; techniques and I feel very light. I am very lucky to attend this workshop and God helped me. I am thankful to the coach, an amazing person and a great teacher.

SAAD: It was a great experience. I got to know happiness is an inside job. Got to distinguish between Absolute reality and personal reality. Understanding a new paradigm, came across new perspectives, understanding the consequences and justification based life, Understood how to perceive and how to respond and the application of triple test.

What We Came Here For

By Firdos Tarannum

We came here for a journey of ten days
To see our inner self incredibly raised.
We here are of different professions,
But we all are here for a spiritual session.
First, we saw different people and of different types
But differences cleared out after looking into each other's eyes.
We came looked into each other's worlds
And tried to reproduce each other's words.

We later came to know that the problem is
The whispers that are from mind or Satan.
Somebody judged you, and you became low
Which made your life extremely slow.
We become depressed at others' opinions
Ignoring reality and dying in interpretations.
You are the one who's losing yourself
Thank you for helping us meet our inner self.
I hope that what we all are here for
May Allah help us to attain that all!

(Firdos Tarannum is a student and a teacher in Raichur and participated in the Discover Yourself Train-the-Trainers workshop in Bangalore in December 2019)

Vatican committee asks UN for World Day of Human Fraternity

Members of a Vatican special committee met with the Secretary General of the United Nations on December 4 to deliver a petition on human fraternity co-authored by Pope Francis and the Sunni Islamic Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb. The committee was formed under the auspices of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The message from the two religious leaders requested that February 4 be declared the "World Day of Human Fraternity," and asked the United Nations, along with the Vatican and the Al-Azhar Mosque, to create a "World Summit On Human Fraternity." The Al-Azhar Mosque is located in Cairo, Egypt, and the Grand Imam of that mosque is considered to be one of the highest positions in Sunni Islam.

According to a statement released by the Pontifical Council, Dr. Antonio Guterres, the secretary general of the United Nations, "expressed his appreciation and availability for the initiative," and said that he believed it was important to work "at the service of all humanity." Guterres appointed Adama Dieng, who is presently the United Nations Secretary General's Special Adviser for Hate Speech and the Prevention



of Genocide, to work along with a Vatican special committee on the proposed summit and World Day of Human Fraternity.

The Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue formed the committee to work towards the goals for advancing world peace and coexistence laid out in the Document on Human Fraternity. That document was released when Pope Francis made a journey to the United Arab Emirates. The committee, which is led by Cardinal Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, contains members belonging to Christian, Muslim, and Jewish faiths. Ayuso Guixot also heads the Pontifical Council.

Ayuso Guixot, in an interview with Vatican News Aug. 26, called

the creation of the committee a "significant act" with a "noble" objective, and stated that he believes "fear is the number one enemy of interreligious dialogue." "The Catholic Church recalls the value of its own identity, of the courage of otherness and the sincerity of intentions," he said. "It is not a matter of making a 'melting pot' in which all religions are considered equal, but that all believers, those who seek God and all people of good will without a religious affiliation, have equal dignity." "I think the Abu Dhabi declaration is a global appeal to the 'civilization of love' which contrasts with those who want a clash of civilizations!" the archbishop said.

About three weeks after the superior committee was formed, the Catholic and Muslim members met in the Holy See on Sept. 11 to pray for the victims of the 9/11 attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, as well as for the victims of every act of terrorism.

According to the Holy See Press Office, the committee chose to meet Sept. 11 as "a sign of the will to build life and fraternity where others sowed death and destruction."

(Extracted from catholicnewsagency.com)

UK Muslim Woman Defends Jewish Family

Recently, a brave Muslim woman, 36 year-old hijab-wearing Asthma Shuweikh, rushed to the defence of a Jewish family who was being harassed by an anti-Semitic man while traveling on the London Underground. Ms. Shuweikh acted, she later explained, because "I thought it is my duty as a mother, as a practicing Muslim, as a citizen of this country, to have to say something." The footage, posted by British author and filmmaker Chris Atkins, showed a Jewish man wearing a kippah comforting two young kippah-wearing children as another man preached loudly at them about how they were part of the "Synagogue of Satan." The preacher, using obscenities, also threatened to "smack" another person on the train who got too close to him. Ms. Shuweikh then told him off about his language, ignoring the preacher's criticisms of her. The video of the incident has over one million views.

In a statement released by the UK's Campaign Against Antisemitism, the father of the

family said he was "extremely grateful" to Shuweikh for stepping in. "We are certain that without her intervention and distraction, he would have continued his abuse which could have escalated to physical violence," he said.

Speaking to London's Jewish News, Shuweikh described her

meeting with the Jewish family's father as "lovely." "He came and gave me beautiful flowers and we sat down and had a coffee and we were talking about our experiences and our backgrounds," she said. Shuweikh added that she had previously faced Islamophobic abuse.

Muslims Hand Out Roses In London

London is one of the world's most cosmopolitan and culturally diverse cities. Nonetheless, sometimes Muslims can feel marginalized and misunderstood there. Recently, volunteers handed out roses in London's Trafalgar Square and offered passersby information about Islam. The organizers of the *Roses For Peace* initiative say this is vital at a time when misinformation is rife. The organizers hope to bring people of different faiths together but also strengthen the bond between

different Islamic sects. The roses were tagged with quotes from the Prophet and also similar quotes from the Bible. The purpose of this was to demonstrate the closeness of the two faiths. Hundreds of roses were handed out. Some people rushed passed but others stopped to ask questions and listened closely to what the volunteers had to say. A few hours into the event Trafalgar square and the streets surrounding it were dotted with roses and their little messages of peace and goodwill.

Tragedies Deepen Jewish-Muslim Bonds

Muslim groups helped raise hundreds of thousands of dollars to help Pittsburgh's Tree of Life synagogue recover after a gunman killed 11 people there, around one year ago. The Jewish congregation mounted its own fundraiser for New Zealand's Muslims after a white supremacist shooter killed 51 people at two mosques there in March. Such outreach between Jews and Muslims often draws widespread attention only in the immediate wake of tragedy. But as both faiths grapple with a rise in reported hate crimes and fears within their communities of being attacked for their beliefs, Jews and Muslims are forging bonds that rely on shared personal values to help combat anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

For Sheryl Olitzky, 63, the moment that inspired her focus on Jewish-Muslim connections came almost a decade ago on a trip to Poland, when she asked a guide why she saw no locals in the head-covering garb of devout members of either faith. Olitzky recalled being stunned by the exclusionary response she heard and telling herself that "I could not change history, but I could rewrite it by changing the future" and working to prevent further episodes of discrimination against Jews and Muslims.

When the grandmother of seven returned home to New Jersey, USA, however, it took several months for her to realize that, despite living in an area with a fairly substantial number of Muslims and Jews, she had no Muslim friends. "I said, 'I believe ignorance is a primary driver of hate, and it's time, if I want to make change that I get to know Muslim women,'" Olitzky said.

When Olitzky was introduced to Atiya Aftab, a Muslim attorney and adjunct professor at Rutgers University, their partnership took off as the non-profit Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. What began as a meeting of six Muslim and six Jewish women at Aftab's home now counts more than 170 chapters in 32 states of the USA and Canada.

The Sisterhood devotes much of its attention to education and shared experiences that can deepen ties between its members, with its fourth annual

trip this year taking dozens of Muslim and Jewish women and teenage girls to Germany and Poland. But a vow to fight hate crimes that target their respective communities is also woven into the group's foundation, with a "rise and respond" primer for speaking out against anti-Semitism and Islamophobia released this year.

Other members of the two faiths have created formal alliances as well. The Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council (MJAC) was established by the American Jewish Committee and the Islamic Society of North America in the first days after President Donald Trump's 2016 election following a campaign where Trump repeatedly stoked public fears of Muslims. MJAC is co-chaired by two business executives, one Jewish and one Muslim. The group opened regional affiliates after a 2017 spike in reported hate crimes that included the death of Heather Heyer, killed while demonstrating against a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

AJC Director of U.S. Muslim-Jewish Relations Ari Gordon said that some themes common in episodes of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are "definitely linked." The same man who allegedly attacked a synagogue in Poway, Calif., this spring was also linked to a fire set at a nearby California mosque, Gordon pointed out.

Hate crimes in the USA reported to the FBI have risen for three years running, according to official statistics, with Jews and Muslims ranking as the top two targets of religiously motivated incidents. MJAC has championed bipartisan legislation in Congress designed to improve the tracking of hate crimes but its work has stayed in that domestic policy lane, steering clear of U.S. policy toward the Israel-Palestine conflict that has been a longtime divider of Jews and Muslims. "We don't put that issue on the side because it's not important; quite the opposite," Gordon said, adding that MJAC aims to demonstrate that the two faiths "can work together for mutual benefit and build trust despite this disagreement."

Interfaith Conference Brings College Students Together

Muslim and 'Evangelical' Christian students convened at a conference at Wheaton College, in the USA, recently to explore what they could do to ameliorate relations between their two religious groups, a situation the event's organizers called "the greatest interreligious challenge of our time." The conference was arranged by Neighborly Faith, an organization that bills itself as "a nationwide movement bringing Christians and Muslims together."

The people at Neighborly Faith are right to think that there is room for improvement in 'evangelical' Christian-Muslim relations. According to the results of a survey from the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and PSB Research released in 2019, most 'evangelical' Christians do not harbour much interest in "building bridges" with Muslims. The survey (which used results from equal numbers of Evangelicals and Muslims), found that only 22 percent of 'evangelical' participants said they had regular interactions

with Muslims. A similarly small number believed "that such interaction helps the groups to understand each other better". By contrast, 53 percent of Muslim respondents said they interact with Christians frequently. Further, the survey indicated that 61 percent of 'evangelical' Christians supported the so-called "Muslim ban" that the Trump administration implemented between 2017 and 2018, as opposed to only 20 percent of Muslims. More than 20 speakers attended the event, which was designed for 'evangelical' and Muslim students.

The conference's keynote speaker was Shadi Hamid, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institute and author. In his remarks, Hamid talked about his friendship with 'evangelicals', and how one of them, theologian Matthew Kaemingk, introduced to him the idea of "Christian pluralism." After learning about this, Hamid wondered if there was a similar ideal commitment to pluralism in his own Islamic tradition. He found that there was. "If you know who you are,

then this allows for a mutual respect and generosity of spirit that wouldn't otherwise be possible," he said. "Friendship with those who are different can only be possible if we liberate ourselves from the fear of difference."

A survey conducted after the conference seemed to support previous findings that "frequent interaction lead to more perceived similarities" between members of the two faiths. Organizers highlighted 'evangelicals' improved perceptions of Muslims in particular. "Among conservative evangelical students, an anonymous post-conference survey showed that while 49% had neutral or somewhat negative attitudes toward Muslims coming into the conference, only 6% remained neutral while 0% maintained a negative attitude – 94% left the conference with either somewhat positive or very positive attitudes toward Muslims," Neighborly Faith reported. "Similarly, 44% of conservative evangelical students were either neutral or

disinterested in building friendships with Muslims before the conference. Afterwards, only 4% remained neutral, while 0% remained disinterested."

Saad Hazari, a Muslim student at Benedictine University, was one of the conference's attendees. He told *Newsweek* that some of his dearest friends are 'evangelicals' and most of his interactions with people from that religious group have been pleasant in the past. Hazari said he thinks that the Neighborly Faith conference

and other events designed to spark dialogue between people of different religious backgrounds was important because it forces people to peek out of the "bubble" they might otherwise put themselves in.

Hazari said that the spirit behind the conference reminded him of a certain quote from the prophet Muhammad that he likes to keep close to his heart: "None of you have truly believed until you wish for your brother what you wish for yourself."

NEW ARRIVAL

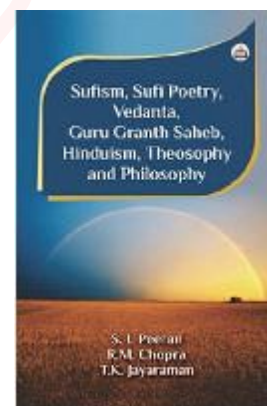
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Authors Press, New Delhi, 2019

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Peeran reflects on a number of well as spiritual poetry.

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Sehgal provides a brief introduction to Rumi's life and poetry. From her we learn that Rumi wasn't just a Sufi and a poet: he was also an Islamic scholar, theologian and jurist.

More than 200 Christian leaders from across India have condemned the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019, and "brutal repression" of protests by youth and civil society against the legislation.

"We express our solidarity with the students and others who have been grievously injured and pray for their speedy recovery," said the statement signed among others by Father George Pattery, head of the Jesuits in India, former theology professor T K John, human rights activist John Dayal, and Evangelical Fellowship of India general secretary Reverend Vijayesh Lal.

The statement noted several controversial legislations passed by the Parliament since the new government came to power in May. They have led to the collapse of the democratic institutions of India built "carefully and painstakingly" by "enlightened leaders" over the last seven decades, the Christian leaders bemoaned.

The new law, they say, is deeply divisive, discriminatory and violative of human rights. In particular, this legislation discriminates against Muslim communities in India, who constitute over 14 per cent of the population of India, and therefore, it is totally unacceptable in a secular democratic republic of India.

"The letter and spirit the Constitution, framed by men and women who had participated in the

Christian leaders condemn repression of youth protests

freedom struggle, cannot be thrown out at the whims of a particular ideology. We are deeply saddened at the haste in which the President of India gave his assent," the statement added.

The following is the text of the statement released to the Media on December 20.

Concerned Christian Citizens' Statement on Citizen's Amendment Act 2019

We, the citizens of India belonging to various Christian denominations, express our solidarity with the enlightened youth and people of India in their struggle to preserve the rich heritage of the values of the Constitution of India by peacefully expressing their dissent and protest against the recently enacted Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019.

We condemn the brutal repression by the police and paramilitary forces on peaceful democratic protests by youth and students of various cities and Universities in India, especially Jamia Millia Islamia University and Aligarh Muslim University. Innocent lives have been lost, and many young persons injured. We express our solidarity with the students and others who have been grievously injured and pray for their speedy recovery.

We note that ever since the new Government was elected in May 2019, there have been several controversial legislations passed by the Parliament that lead to the collapse of the democratic institutions of India which have been carefully and painstakingly built by enlightened leaders over the last seven decades.

We are also concerned that the misplaced priorities of the Government are leading to a serious economic crisis causing a lot of suffering for the poor and marginalized sections of society.

The CAA 2019 mitigates against the very Preamble of the Constitution of India. The President, Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India, members of Parliament and the Council of Ministers are sworn to defend the Constitution. The new law is deeply divisive, discriminatory and violative of the human rights. In particular, this legislation discriminates against Muslim communities in India, who constitute over 14 per cent of the population of India, and therefore, it is totally unacceptable in a secular democratic republic of India.

We are appalled that a majority of members in both Houses of Parliament rushed through in voting the highly contentious CAA 2019

without paying sufficient attention to the concerns of the people of India. We are even more appalled that several political parties have had no qualms about passing a law that goes against the spirit of the Constitution of India and the good of the people who elected them just over 6 months ago.

The letter and spirit the Constitution, framed by men and women who had participated in the freedom struggle, cannot be thrown out at the whims of a particular ideology. We are deeply saddened at the haste in which the President of India gave his assent to the controversial piece of legislation.

The people at large have been denied an opportunity for citizens to convey him their serious concerns over the CAA 2019. At all stages, there patently has been a serious lack in application of mind to the ramifications of enacting such a law. A law can be just only when it preserves the common good. A law that discriminates against a particular section of people abdicates its moral legitimacy.

The CAA 2019 cannot be seen in isolation. It has to be seen in the light of the National Register of Citizenship (NRC), an attempt to

target minority communities under the guise of identifying illegal immigrants. All these are aimed at polarising communities in the name of religion, excluding the minorities and making a majoritarian, theocratic hegemony.

The failed and futile exercise undertaken in Assam is being planned to be undertaken across the country at enormous cost. Rather than identifying illegal immigrants, the exercise has stripped genuine Indian citizens of their citizenship and torn families apart due to their inability to produce documents of ancestry or even due to spelling mistakes in their identity cards.

It is extremely shameful for a patriotic citizen of India that even a brave decorated former Indian soldier and Kargil war hero, Mr. Mohammad Sanaullah, has been declared an illegal immigrant by the flawed NRC process and incarcerated in detention camps.

We join the citizens of India, who are vehemently opposing, resisting and protesting against CAA 2019, NRC and the construction of detention camps. We humbly appeal to all political parties and members of Parliament to hear the cries of the citizens of India who have elected them and repeal the CAA 2019, scrap the pan India NRC and stop the construction of detention/concentration camps at the earliest.

(Taken from <http://mattersindia.com/>)

No harm in backtracking on citizenship law: Cardinal Gracias

Mumbai: There is no harm in backtracking if the government thinks it has erred in amending citizenship laws, says Cardinal Oswald Gracias, head of the Catholic Church in India. "Religion should never be made a dividing factor," asserted the cardinal when asked about the political turmoil in India over the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 (CAA) and the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC). However, the prelate disapproved people indulging in violence to get their voices heard. "Violence is not right. A continuous discussion must take place," the Bombay archbishop told friends and well-wishers who on December 24 greeted him on his 75th birthday.

Cardinal Gracias, president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India and an adviser of Pope Francis, says he is "very keen" on inter-religious dialogue between



Cardinal Gracias

people of different faiths. "This will knock off any prejudices and eventually help to understand and appreciate each other. I want the Catholic community to be at the forefront of this... to build bridges," he added.

The Indian Church leader termed the love for the nation as an important trait of citizens. "If we truly feel strongly about India, then we must work for the country, to the point of being ready to sacrifice for it," the cardinal asserted.

To foster patriotism, the cardinal suggests people engage in reflection and exchange of ideas. "Reading and knowing the thoughts of others helps one's own thoughts to mature and conceptualize a better India, in which everyone is like one big family. This is what should be our priority," Cardinal Gracias explained. He urged students protesting against the CAA to come forward and discuss their difficulties with the authorities.

Cardinal Gracias stressed the importance of having an inter-religious dialogue, and the responsibilities that come with being "men of service." "I have held multiple offices (he is also the president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of India) and I have realized that it is important to be men of service and have faith in God, no matter which religion you belong to," he said.

(Extracted from mattersindia.com)

51 BHU teachers write to govt condemning new citizenship law, police action

Fifty-one teachers at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) have written an open letter to the Centre, condemning the new citizenship law and NRC. It also condemned police action against students of universities like BHU, Jamia. The letter states, "We, the teachers of BHU, IIT BHU and affiliated colleges are deeply pained and aghast with the recent CAA passed by Parliament of

India and the declared follow up by implementation of National Citizenship Register. This is completely against the spirit of freedom struggle and the idea of a pluralist democracy. This is not acceptable in the land of Gandhi and Tagore. This is clearly an attempt to divide society on communal lines..."

(Extracted from indianexpress.com)

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Record of Accounts

The account given here of these blessings includes some aspects of material comfort.

"He who is given his record in his right hand will say, 'Come you all! Read this my record, I certainly knew that one day I would have to face my account.' He will be in a happy state of life, in a lofty garden, with its fruits within easy reach. 'Eat and drink to your heart's content as a reward for what you have done in days gone by.'"

Al-Haqqah (The Inevitable Truth) Sura 69: Verses 19-24

Taking one's record with one's right or left hand, or behind one's back may be a statement expressing a material fact, or it may be an idiomatic expression following standard rules of Arabic as it refers to the good direction as the right and the evil one as the left or the back. Whichever may be the case, the meaning remains the same. What we see here is a person who is given his record and realizes that he has won. The

hardship of the day is gone, and he moves along, overjoyed, among the great multitude. In his overwhelming delight, he says that he never thought that he would be spared. He expected to have to account for his deeds, and that means suffering. The details of blessings made ready for such people are then announced for all. The account given here of these blessings includes some aspects of

material comfort. This suited the state of those addressed by the Quran at the time. They were still newcomers to Islam; it had not yet given its distinctive hue to their feelings, nor had they had the chance to appreciate luxuries higher than any material comfort. Yet this type of blessing can satisfy the needs of many people across many generations. (Compiled From: "In The Shade of The Quran")

On the Rights of Parents in Islam

When we are asked about the people who took care of us and nurtured us the most, we instantly think of our parents. They are the ones who helped us when we were weak and patiently taught us everything. Needless to say, without them, we wouldn't be who we are today. So what are the rights of parents in Islam?

Rights of Parents in Islam

Islam has given parents a high status. Honouring your parents is very important in Islam. Allah makes it necessary upon Muslims to treat their parents in the best way possible. Your parents are your first teachers. Treating them with love and respect could be the reason for your success in the *Dunya* and *Aakhirah*.

Ayah 14 of Surah Luqman says:

And We have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness and hardship, and his weaning is in two years. So give thanks to Me and to your parents, and unto Me is the final destination.

"Parents" in themselves are Allah's Blessing to us. Allah says in Ayah 23 of Surah al-Isra:

And be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honour.

In fact, it is only by respecting

our parents that we can expect to succeed in our lives. Humility is a basic tenet of Islam. When our parents get old, it is our duty to be patient in helping them, much like they were patient when we used to make mistakes in our childhood. Obeying and respecting one's parents is counted among the most praiseworthy actions in Islam.

As per Ayah 36 of Surah an-Nisa:

Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbour, the neighbour farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your

right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful.

Our parents have done so much for us that it is simply not possible for us to repay them ever. They went through a lot and sacrificed their own wishes and desires, but never once compromised on our wishes. May Allah grant them the highest level in Jannah. We pray to Allah SWT to bless our parents and guide us all to be respectful and obedient towards them. Our prayers should be for the well-being of our parents, as stated in Ayah 24 of Surah al-Isra:

My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they brought me up when I was small.

Time is Slipping Away

The exact moment He alone knows,
When we'll depart from this Earthly realm.

Life is short, so do please prepare
For that meeting with Him from Whom you came.
Like grains of sand, we slip through life's watch glass,
Silently, without realising it, our time ticks away,
Moving rapidly towards the Hereafter.

Each day opens a new page,
Of an unknown tale,
Engraved in the rock of Time,
Indecipherable script of Life.

Let not the sand slip away
With no time left for forgiving, asking for pardon
and saying goodbyes.

Pray before being preyed upon by Time,
Turn to God before returning to Him.



HADITH ILLUMINATES THE PATH

Good Behaviour

"Be conscious (Taqwa) of Allah wherever you are. And follow up a bad deed with a good deed and it will wipe it out. And behave towards the people with a good behaviour."
[Tirmidhi]

Ibn Rajab states in his commentary of this hadith: "Having good character is a characteristic of *taqwa*. *Taqwa* cannot be complete without it. It was mentioned here by itself due to the need for explicitly explaining that point. Many people think that *taqwa* implies fulfilling the "rights of Allah" without fulfilling the rights of humans. Therefore, the Prophet (peace be upon him) explicitly stated that he must deal with people in a kind manner. Many of those who take advantage of fulfilling the rights of Allah, and are attached to love for Him, fear of Him and obedience to Him, neglect the rights on the humans, either completely or partially. There are very few people who combine together the fulfilling of the rights of Allah and of His servants. The only ones who have the strength to do that are those who are complete in their *taqwa* from among the prophets and the sincere ones." [Jaami, vol 1, p. 454]

In this hadith, the Prophet advised the person to have a certain behaviour. This demonstrates that a person can change and determine his behaviour. He can do those acts that are of good behaviour and character to the point that he grows accustomed to them. He can grow so accustomed to them that they do

The Messenger of Allah said, **"There is nothing heavier in the scales than good character."**

[Ahmad, Abu Dawud]

become his nature and character. Hence, a person can change his character, and, if he is of bad character, then, following this advice of the Prophet, he must work to change his character.

When talking about the purpose for which he had been sent, the Messenger of Allah stated, "I have been sent for the purpose of perfecting good morals." [Al-Hakim] That is, he was to show the manners and behaviour consistent with the belief in Allah.

In another hadith, the Messenger of Allah said, "I am a guarantor of a house in the highest part of Paradise for the one who makes his behaviour good." [Abu Dawud]

In yet another hadith, the Prophet described piety itself as being good character. Hence, it is an essential part of being pious. The Prophet said, "Piety and righteousness is being of good character." [Muslim]

How pleasing good character is to Allah can be seen by the weight that Allah will give it on the scales on the Day of Judgment. The Messenger of Allah said, "There is nothing heavier in the scales than good character." [Ahmad, Abu Dawud]. In another hadith that gives a similar impression, the Prophet said, "A believer reaches, due to his good character, the level of the one who fasts and performs the night prayer." [Abu Dawud]

The way to improve one's character is to look at the example of the Prophet (peace be upon him). One should try to emulate his behaviour in as many different circumstances as possible. If a person does that, then he will be moving toward the noblest character.

Compiled From: "Commentary on the Forty Hadith of al-Nawawi" - Jamaal al-Din M. Zarabozo, pp. 720-723

Key verses from the Qur'an (Sura Al-Hujurat) underline the universal nature of Islam: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other..." and "if any one slew a person...it would be as if he slew the whole people; and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people" (Sura Al-Ma'idah).

This is followed by a Prophetic saying that "None of you has faith until he loves for his brother/sister what he loves for himself/herself" (An-Nawawi).

Thus at the core of Islam is an inner spirituality encompassing the principle of human solidarity and equality. So what has gone wrong? And what can we do to encourage a shift towards cultivating spiritual harmony?

We first need to establish a common understanding of the term "spiritual harmony" as this can mean different things for many people. In this context, spiritual harmony can be described as being reflected in our diverse capacities to express solidarity, empathy, and sympathy with those who belong to different faith or non-faith groups. This space to express these elements of

Can There Be Peace Without, If There Is No Peace Within?

By Mohamed
Safiullah Munsoor and
Mohammed Abu-Nimer

solidarity and understanding constitute our shared sacred physical and mental space.

All religions share a universal set of values. Therefore the first step is to adapt diverse religious narratives to reflect this. If done systematically and sensitively, this approach will enrich and transform mind-sets for the better and foster communal harmony. This is best achieved through interreligious dialogue, which has its own approach, methodology, tools and framework aimed at establishing pathways for deeper dialogue.

Second, there is a bigger and often neglected consideration: Can there be peace without, if there is no peace within, oneself?

Given that religions have tended to become institutionalised and formalistic, there is a need to concurrently focus on the outer and inner aspects of observance and spirituality. That is to say, while adhering to the outer rituals, which gives 'form', there is also a need to focus on the inner dimension or the 'spirit', which forms the brain-heart nexus.

To enhance spirituality, religions have a plethora of contemplative practices including meditation (vipassana introspection and anapanasathi mindful breathing) in Buddhism, to the multifaceted yogic system in Hinduism, the centring prayers in Christianity, and dhikr (remembrance) in Islam, which is composed of silent prayers, recitation and mindful awareness (maraqaba).

There is increasing neuroscientific evidence that these contemplative practices result in positive benefits neuro physiologically, as well as psychologically, and, if properly executed, impact on one's attitude and behaviour, lending the person deep, sustained internal meaning.

So, if reminding ourselves of the need to strengthen our inner spirituality is a vital step, then universal spiritual education (values, tools and rituals that facilitate deeper understanding of all religions) is an important enabler for this.

We should not be afraid to teach

our children about the positive values that every faith group brings. In today's context this is a must in our troubled world. Within the religious space, the approach, methods and tools are available and need to be used by the religious scholars and the general public in a more serious and systematic manner since this has implications both at an individual and societal level. Religious leaders are expected to model peace building by reaching out to those who are affiliated with other faith groups.

A huge contribution to security and a key defence against violent extremism is established when religious leaders genuinely assume the role of peacemakers inside and outside their community circles. However, for this to take place, our policymakers and security institutions have to reach out to such religious leaders and seek their input and support through positive engagement and not through political manipulation and/or intimidation: "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that (Martin Luther Jr., 1963).

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Mohammed Abu-Nimer is a Senior Adviser at the International Dialogue Centre (KAICIID) and a Professor at the School of International Service of the American University (AU), Washington DC. He also served as Director of the Peacebuilding and Development Institute at AU. He is the founder of Salam Institute for Peace and Justice. He has conducted interreligious dialogue and conflict resolution workshops worldwide including in Sri Lanka. In addition to his numerous publications, he is the co-founder of the *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*.

(Extracted from an article hosted on kaiciid.org)

Luis Lopez battled nerves as he walked to the front of the crowded prayer hall in Union City with his son. Together, they repeated word-for-word in Arabic the Shahadah, the profession of faith required to convert to Islam. "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah," they declared at the mosque, located in a columned brick building that once housed a Cuban community centre.

For Lopez, the conversion and embrace by the congregation four months ago brought a feeling of peace and a recognition of how far he'd come in a life that nearly ended 22 years ago in gang violence.

"They told me, 'Come to the mosque. You're going to feel welcomed,'" said Lopez, 41, a truck driver and former professional boxer from North Bergen.

With their religious journey, Lopez and his 21-year-old son joined a growing segment of the Latino population who are leaving Christianity for Islam. About 8% of all Muslim

In USA, These Latinos Find Purpose in Islam

Americans adults are Latino, according to a 2017 report from the Pew Research Center, increasing by about a third from 2011.

In interviews, Latino converts said they are drawn to Islam because of the intense devotion to God, a simplicity in faith and a focus on community that they failed to find in their former faith. But their conversion often is not easy, as they break ties with family and their Christian upbringing. They are also choosing the faith at a time when Latinos and Muslims alike feel targeted by President Donald Trump's rhetoric and his increasingly restrictive immigration policies for both groups. Reports of hate crimes are on the rise, while Muslims bristle against their depiction in the media. Yet for some, the shared experience of living as a minority in the U.S. is a powerful attraction.

'No Reason to Fear'

Lopez, who moved to the U.S. from Puerto Rico as a child, sparred alongside Muslims while boxing and became close friends with them. Two events prompted him to change his life: a gang-related stabbing in 1997 and the birth of his son a year later. At his friends' urging, he visited a mosque and started reading about the faith. But it was his son's desire to convert years later that prompted him finally to make the leap. Lopez's son, a college student also named Luis, was baptized and confirmed in the Catholic Church. While he and family members drifted away from their faith, the younger Lopez still felt a pull towards spiritual life. Islam appealed to him because it focused on prayers to God alone and not to Jesus or saints, he said.

About 94 percent of Latino Muslims cited the desire for a more direct, personal experience

of God as a reason for converting, in a survey of 560 converts reported in "Latino Muslims in the United States," a 2017 report in the *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Religion*.

"From that first day, when people stayed to see us become Muslims, that was it. They find joy in it. They are genuinely happy for people who converted," the younger Lopez said.

They are choosing Islam at a time when bias, discrimination and hate crimes are a concern. Both father and son said they didn't believe stereotypes that painted Muslims broadly as extremists or terrorists. "They can say what they want. There is no reason to fear, because you are doing the right thing," the son said.

A Break with Tradition

But for other converts, the embrace of Islam created rifts. Khadijah Noor Tanju, who came to the U.S. from Colombia when she was 9, clashed with family

members who felt she was rejecting her culture and Catholic faith. A former choir singer, Tanju, whose birth name is Carol, sang in a church choir and performed the Catholic sacrament of confirmation. Tensions surfaced when she married a Turkish-American man and relatives made comments about Muslims as terrorists, she said. Sensing her struggles, her husband told her he would never hurt her. He was not very religious when they first met, and it dawned on her, she said, that she knew little about his faith. Privately, she began researching Islam and watching a series on YouTube about it. One night, while listening to a sermon at home, she felt inspired and vowed to change her life for God. In 2015, she converted. At first, her family didn't say much, but that changed when she began wearing the Hijab, or Islamic head covering. "My family didn't know the implications [of my conversion], that it was a lifestyle. It was more when I started to practice Islam that they were like 'Whoa, quépasaaquí?'" she said, using Spanish for "what's happening here?"

(Extracted from newageislam.com)

Masjid Jamaths Launch Awareness Campaign Against Drug Addiction

Mangaluru: Taking note of the growing incidents of drugs abuse and increase in the number of youth falling prey to drug menace in Dakshina Kannada District, local socio-religious leaders of Mangaluru and Dakshina Kannada on December 14 called a press meet and announced the launch of the campaign by Masjid Jamaths across the district against the menace. Addressing the mediapersons Syed Mohammed Beary, Chairman, Bearys Group, said, "In Dakshina Kannada District especially in Mangaluru the drug menace has been rising rapidly and to curb the drug menace educational institutions, as well as the NGOs, are working along with the police department." Syed Beary further said, "The most tragic part of the story is that the curse of drug abuse has already found inroads into our rural areas wherein school going students are being exposed to the addiction. Students of sixth and seventh grades including girls are falling prey to addiction. The situation is turning worse with each passing day. Some of the youth take it as a means of easy money and indulge in drug peddling. Some take it as business and the business addiction always results in the swift increase in crime rate. This has a direct impact on the safety and security

of the people in the region".

Syed also said, "Normally almost every parent believes that their children are innocent and will not get addicted to drugs. Such an illusion prevents them from being vigilant. Mosques in Dakshina Kannada have already decided to run a campaign across the District to fight against the drug menace. Their focus is to educate the parents, the students and the youth on the issue and create awareness in every family under their jurisdiction. The 100-days campaign will include a series of awareness programs involving all the Masjid Jamaths and Committees across the region. The drive will run under the guidance and supervision of Twaqa Ahmed Musliyar and Bekal Ibrahim Musliyar, the two prominent Qazis of the region. The District and City Police have offered their full support to this campaign", he added.

"The District and Mangaluru City Police have initiated various campaigns and drives against drugs and have been on a constant state of alert. Several voluntary organization have also been doing their bit to curb the menace. Despite all the efforts, lack of awareness among the masses, the youth, and their parents have resulted in the situation going out of control", he stated.

Speaking at the press conference B M Mumtaz Ali, General Secretary Karnataka Muslim Jamath, Dakshina Kannada added that the Masjids alone cannot curb the drug menace in the District and called on religious leaders and places to play their part in order to make the District drug-free. There is an immediate need to educate people in the region about the power and networks of the drug Mafia, the cunning ways used by them to promote extremely dangerous addictive substances and the grave consequences of addiction. Temples, Mosques, Churches and all such places revered by the masses can play a great role in educating the masses and making the entire society vigilant against the devastating epidemic of addiction.

Syed Mohammed Beary also called for support from all sections of the society and anticipated the active participation of the leaders and representatives of all the communities, parties, educational institutions, NGOs, Social activists and various student and youth organizations in this campaign. He also called for support from the media and other organizations in the noble initiative.

(For details, see www.mangalorean.com)

NEWS

In Kerala church, choir sings Christmas carols wearing skullcaps, hijabs to protest CAA

Youngsters clad in Muslim attire, with girls wearing headscarves and boys in skull caps a video of around 14 youngsters singing Christmas carols in a Kerala church has taken social media by storm. At a time when protests against the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) are being held across the country, the youngsters wore the Muslim attire to express their solidarity with the anti-CAA movement in the country. The video is from Christmas celebrations at St Thomas Mar Thoma Church in Kozhencherry in Kerala's Pathanamthitta. In the video, the youngsters can be seen singing Christmas carols in the tune of 'Mappila pattu,' which are traditional songs sung by the Muslim community. The girls can be seen rhythmically clapping their



hands like the way it is done for Oppana, another traditional art form of the Muslim community. The video, which is being circulated with the caption 'Christmas: Celebration of Refugees,' has gone viral on social media.

Talking to TNM, Father Daniel T Philip, Assistant Vicar, tells why it was significant to express their solidarity to the agitations against CAA during the Christmas

celebration. "Jesus and his parents had to flee after his birth as refugees because of a king. What we are witnessing now can very well be related to it. People are being denied citizenship, their identities are getting lost, and they are being forced to run away as refugees. So for us, this year's Christmas celebration is in solidarity with those people who are being victimised," says Fr Daniel.

Fr Daniel also tells TNM that the true meaning of Christmas lies in spreading peace among people. "That is what we tried to do with this endeavour. There is no point in discriminating between communities or different persons; what we need is peace among all," he says.

(Extracted from thenewsminute.com)

Sikh family donates land for mosque

A Sikh family has donated 16 marlas (484 sq yards) of land for the building of a mosque in Machhike village in Punjab's Moga district. The village already has a nearly 200-year-old mosque situated right on the edge of the highway, but it is on the verge of being demolished for a highway widening project. The cost of the donated land is estimated at over Rs 8 lakh. Over a year ago, when the highway widening project was launched, Muslim families in Machhike village, under the banner of the Muslim Welfare Society, tried to urge the authorities to spare the mosque at the edge of the highway. However, after structures adjacent to the mosque or those situated almost on the edge of the highway started being demolished, they began to look for an alternative spot for a mosque and even approached

the village panchayat, but with no success.

We were worried for our place of worship. With only 14-15 Muslim families in the village, which has a population of over 7,000, we did not have the resources to purchase land and at the same time did not want to lose the only place of paying obeisance. It is at this point that the family of Darshan Singh came as angels and donated the land to construct a mosque and a dharamsala." Muslim Welfare Society president Roop Mohammad said.

(For more details, see <https://timesofindia.indiatime.com/>)



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Lakshmi Children's Health Centre, Bangalore

Through this initiative, the Sri Shankara Cancer Foundation hopes to reduce the barriers associated with the cure of paediatric cancers.



The Trustees of Sri Shankara Cancer Foundation launched a paediatric long stay facility - "Lakshmi Children's Health Centre, a unit of Sri Shankara Cancer Foundation" at Gandhinagar 8th December 2019. Deputy Chief Minister Dr. C N Ashwath Narayan, Sri. R V Deshpande (Former Revenue Minister and MLA), Sri. Dinesh Gundu Rao (KPCC President and MLA), Sri. PC Mohan (MP) and Smt. Latha Naveen Kumar Tejasvi (Corporator)

inaugurated the facility and praised the foundation for the work being done for cancer patients. On this occasion, the Trustees felicitated Smt. Meera S Naidu for benevolently providing the building to establish this facility.

Paediatric Cancers have one of the highest cure rates across the world. Unfortunately, many parents in India, especially from rural India, are unable to avail treatment services for their children with childhood cancers

as most paediatric cancer care units are located in metropolitan cities. When a child is diagnosed with cancer, the parents will have to worry about finding an affordable place to stay in the city, managing food and other

“ This facility has 30 fully furnished rooms spread across 3 floors. Each floor has a common area for dining and children's recreational activities. ”

expenses as well as taking care of any other children that they may have. The duration of treatment for childhood cancers may vary from 6 months to 1 year and for this period, the parents are under tremendous stress both emotionally and

financially. Many parents are left with no option, but to seek symptomatic relief from local hospitals and face the unfortunate death of their child that could have been avoided.

Recognising these issues, the Trustees of Sri Shankara Cancer Foundation were eager to open a long stay facility for children with cancer and their parents, and were looking for the ideal place to start this. As an answer to their prayers, Smt. Meera S Naidu, voluntarily came forward to provide the building for this facility in the heart of Bangalore which is now named Lakshmi Children's Health Centre - A unit of Sri Shankara Cancer Foundation, Smt. Meera S and R.S. Naidu Block.

This facility has 30 fully furnished rooms spread across 3 floors. Each floor has a common area for dining and children's recreational activities. Families will be given functional kitchenettes to cook food as per their comfort. Transportation to and from the hospital for the treatment will also be provided. This landmark initiative of Sri Shankara Cancer Foundation will provide the above mentioned services and additional services such as psychological support, nutritional counselling and a learning environment for the children completely free of cost!

Through this initiative, the Foundation hopes to reduce the barriers associated with the cure of paediatric cancers. The Foundation's efforts to provide state of the care to all and help build a society of healthy children and adults has been growing steadily, thanks to the many donors and well-wishers from near and far.



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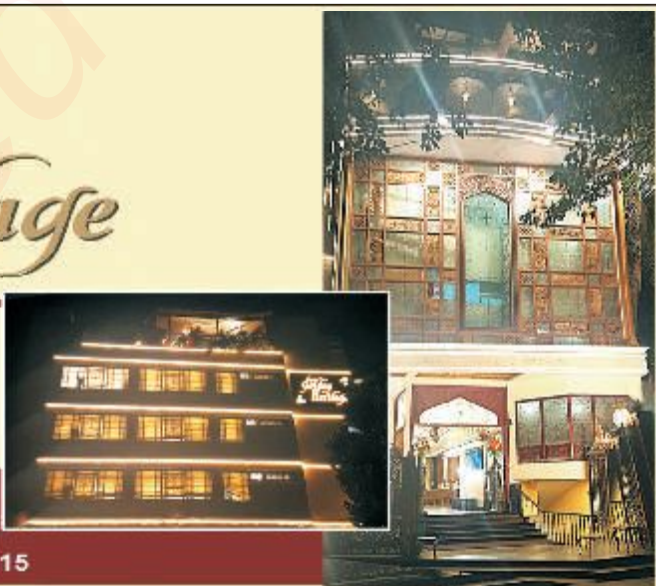
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BY NIGAR

I spotted Panther at a very green place, which is somewhat like a rainforest (let's call it the 'Jingle Jungle Lodge') when I was staying there for a while. He scampered so fast that in a matter of seconds I could catch only a fleeting glimpse of his velvety black-brownish colour and pretty brown stripes as he rushed away. He looked like a panther, and so I named him 'Panther'.

A very cute little cat, Panther is actually grown up, but malnourishment during his kitty days seems to have left him tiny-sized. Panther is a free wild cat that has sort of adopted the lodge for his occasional home. Once, I saw him dash into the big kitchen and only God knows how he managed to get any food there amidst the clutter and clatter of people, pots and pans. I've also seen him scampering up the steps

towards the office, looking all very serious, as if he was checking if people in the office were working or not!

One hilarious quality of Panther is that when many people arrive at the lodge for seminars or other sorts of meetings he vanishes and suddenly reappears after the crowd has gone. Climbing down a tree at breakneck speed, he may stop to give you a startled stare, as if to inform you that he had worked so hard to make the meeting a great success just like some human beings do especially at weddings and other such parties, rushing up and down because they want others to believe that they are really very 'busy'!

Fabulous Panther!

Panther, the frail and tiny cat, teaches us the fine art of resilience!



Panther's undernourished look worried me a lot. I would have loved to fetch some kitty food for him, but that would be breaking the lodge rules. One day, Panther's popping in and hopping out in the kitchen did not seem to go well with some of the lodge folks. So, Panther was caught in a

sack and left a distance away from the lodge. Knowing a bit about cat intelligence, I knew Panther would come back even if the so-called 'clever' humans thought they had got rid of him!

And lo and behold, a few days later Panther was back in action at the lodge, scampering up and down the trees, prancing on rooftops and courageously curling himself up on a chair in the dining hall, fast asleep!

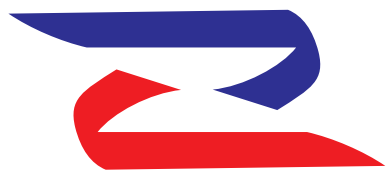
Looking at Panther, I learnt how much faith this tiny cat has in God. While humans tried to stifle his right to stay at the lodge, with God's grace he found his way back to his territory! God provides for

him, although he may not be getting food from humans. In the race for survival, Panther is a victor and a winner.

Life's challenges may put us in situations we may find difficult to handle, but like Panther, we only need to have faith in God, work hard, overcome fear and be firmly established in our values, without letting others disempower us!

Panther is undernourished and frail, but he has been blessed with abundant courage by God. He teaches us that if life ties us up in a tight sack which we humans call 'problems', like him, we should seek God's help, develop resilience to set ourselves free and climb the rooftops of success!

Today, Panther is the king of 'Jingle Jungle Lodge', although not many there even know he is around! Dashing in and out here and there, Panther does not need anybody's permission!!!!



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