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April 2024 Bengaluru Pages 24 Rs. 40

Ramadan / Shawwal - 1445 H

BENGALURU: In a significant policy shift, the Karnataka Congress government has amended regulations regarding minority educational institutions, alleviating the burden of

Karnataka Government Eases Rules for Minority Educational Institutions

mandatory student enrollment quotas based on religious affiliation. The new directive emphasizes the composition of the institution's management committee, prioritizing representation from under represented communities.

The decision aims to alleviate challenges faced by around 3,000 aided and private religious and linguistic minority schools in the state. The Department of Minority Welfare issued the order on March 16, following the Cabinet's approval on March 12.

Citing data from the 2011 Census, the government highlighted the



Photo AFP

difficulty in meeting enrollment quotas due to the relatively low population of minority groups such as Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, and Parsis. Consequently, the

requirement for schools to allocate a specific percentage of seats based on religious affiliation has been removed.

The decision aligns with guidelines from the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions, which prioritize the composition of trustees and the institution's stated mission over student demographics. This adjustment applies to both existing and newly-established institutions, excluding medical colleges.

Naseer Ahmed, MLC and Chief Minister's political secretary, played a pivotal role in advocating for these changes, emphasizing the need to relax criteria for declaring educational institutions as religious minority institutions. ■

Stem Cell Pioneer Henry Klassen Embraces Islam



Renowned stem cell scientist, Henry Klassen, has converted to Islam, as captured in a viral video showing him reciting the Shahada, the Islamic declaration of faith. His conversion during Ramadan, the holy Islamic month, has been celebrated by Muslims on social media. Klassen, known for his groundbreaking work in stem cell research, joins a growing list of notable figures embracing Islam, including activist Shaun King. This conversion highlights the diversity of individuals finding resonance in Islam. ■

Historic Gathering in Makkah:

King Salman Hosts Conference to Unify Islamic Sects

MAKKAH: In a momentous occasion near the Sacred House of Allah, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia convened the Global Conference for Building Bridges between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects. This unprecedented event, held during the Holy Month of Ramadan, signifies a groundbreaking effort to unite diverse Islamic sects under the 'Charter of Cooperation and Brotherhood.'



Photo: By RNS Press Release Distribution Service

Under the auspices of His Eminence Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary-General of the Muslim World

League, the conference brought together approximately 300 Islamic scholars and dignitaries from across the globe, representing Shia, Sunni, and Sufi sects. Addressing critical issues such as extremism and exclusion, the gathering aimed to foster unity, celebrate Islamic diversity, and promote a shared Islamic identity.

In his opening address, Sheikh

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**Abdul Bari
Masoud**

“Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas,” a mantra often echoed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, rings hollow in light of the treatment of minorities since his assumption of office in May 2014. Institutions dedicated to their welfare have not been spared from the repercussions of this discriminatory policy. The Maulana Azad Education Foundation (MAEF), a stalwart in supporting minority communities for 35 years, finds itself as the latest casualty of this systemic bias. Abruptly, the Modi administration declared its shutdown without offering any cogent explanation. However, an immediate challenge to this decision was mounted in the Delhi High Court, which issued an interim order to halt any actions until further hearings.

Modi Government's Argument

In response to the petition contesting the closure order directed at MAEF, the Modi administration argued that the foundation predates the establishment of the Ministry of Minority Affairs. They asserted that allowing a monopoly over minority development, especially after the dissolution of the foundation as per legal protocols, is untenable. Additional Solicitor General Chetan Sharma emphasized the presence of a specialized ministry adequately staffed to address minority needs comprehensively, rendering the foundation's continued operation redundant. He claimed that the foundation's projects had been assimilated into similar ministry initiatives, emphasizing that the petitioners lacked authority to dictate policy matters to the executive.

Unjust Dismantling: The Plight of Maulana Azad Education Foundation



Photo:thequint.com

Moreover, the government cited incomplete projects initiated by MAEF and asserted that the decision to dissolve it adhered strictly to legal procedures, with a majority of the governing body members consenting to the dissolution.

Petitioners' Case

Represented by Senior Counsel Anand Grover, petitioners argued that the decision to dismantle MAEF was unlawful. They highlighted that the abrupt closure denied deserving students, particularly girls, access to MAEF programs. They deemed the decision arbitrary, without jurisdiction, and an abuse of state authority. The petition underscored MAEF's significant contributions to minority education in India and stressed the need for transparency and adherence to the law in such decisions.

Delhi High Court's Intervention

The Division Bench of the Delhi High Court ordered the Ministry to clarify its position and explain steps to ensure the continuation of MAEF's welfare programs. The Court also placed a stay on the government order pending further deliberations.

Foundation Activities and Community Reactions

Established in 1989, MAEF provided scholarships and grants to support minority education,

although some programs were discontinued by the government

in 2022. Community leaders criticized the lack of transparency in the closure process and questioned the legality of transferring assets to the Central Waqf Council. Former Minority Affairs Minister K Rahman Khan expressed grave concern, labeling the decision as a deliberate attempt to mislead ahead of elections. Former Member of Parliament Muhammad Adeb condemned the government's reasoning and criticized the VCs of Aligarh Muslim University and

Jamia Millia Islamia for supporting MAEF's closure.

The Future

While NCP MP Dr. Fauzia Khan urged reconsideration of MAEF's closure, the case remains pending in the Delhi High Court, offering hope for its future.

In summary, the dismantling of MAEF reflects a concerning trend of discrimination against minority institutions, underscoring the urgent need for transparency, accountability, and equitable treatment in governance. ■



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Staff Writer

HYDERABAD: Telangana Chief Minister, A Revanth Reddy, reassured Muslims in the state that the 4 percent reservation granted to them by the previous Congress government in undivided Andhra Pradesh would be safeguarded under his administration. Speaking at the state government's "Dawat-e-Iftar" event in Hyderabad on March 16, Reddy countered recent suggestions by Union Home Minister Amit Shah that the BJP might overturn the reservation, citing actions taken in neighbouring Karnataka during

Telangana Chief Minister Assures Protection of Muslim Reservation



BJPrule.

Reddy affirmed his commitment, stating firmly that neither Prime Minister Modi nor Amit Shah would dare to eliminate the 4 percent reservation. He credited the Congress party for allocating

resources towards appointing capable attorneys to defend the reservation in the Supreme Court and asserted the government's responsibility to protect it. Highlighting his government's efforts towards minority

representation, Reddy emphasized providing Muslims with key appointments in government positions and ensuring their fair share in welfare schemes' implementation. He reiterated the government's secular stance, likening Muslims and Hindus to two eyes and stressing that Muslim development was never compromised during Congress's tenure. Reddy pledged to appoint a minimum of one Muslim as vice-chancellor of a university and highlighted Muslim

representation in the Telangana State Public Service Commission and government advisory roles. AIMIM president and Hyderabad MP, Asaduddin Owaisi, expressed hope for reinforcing Telangana's "Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb" during the event. He extended his party's cooperation to the chief minister's efforts, urging the strengthening and beautification of Telangana. Owaisi also addressed concerns regarding BJP's divisive rhetoric and actions, suggesting that Telangana must stand firm against those inciting hatred and demolishing Muslim homes, reaffirming the need for unity and solidarity. ■

BJP's Advantage in UP Elections Due to Split Muslim Votes

LUCKNOW: With the 18th Lok Sabha election campaign in full swing, attention turns to the Muslim vote in Uttar Pradesh. Being the most populous province in India with a significant Muslim population, Uttar Pradesh holds sway over the outcome of parliamentary elections. Muslims influence nearly all 80 parliamentary seats in the state, with over two dozen seats being pivotal.

Historically, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has gained from a division among Muslim voters. In the 1980 Lok Sabha election, eighteen Muslim candidates were elected from Uttar Pradesh. However, in the 2014 Lok Sabha election, not a single Muslim candidate was elected due to the fragmentation of their votes among various parties.

Comprising 19% of Uttar Pradesh's population, Muslims influence 20-50% of the state's population, potentially determining the outcome of about 24 Lok Sabha seats.

While the Samajwadi Party-Congress alliance hopes to consolidate Muslim support in constituencies with a majority of Muslims, the ruling BJP seeks to sway Muslim voters through its "pasmnada" (loyalty) pitch. However, the BJP's past targeting of Muslims may limit its success in this endeavor.

As elections near, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) are poised to split the Muslim vote. The BSP has strategically fielded five



Photo: muslimmirror.com

unofficially announced Muslim candidates, including Aqil Ahmed Patta from Kannauj and Irfan Saifi from Moradabad.

Additionally, the AIMIM plans to field candidates in approximately twenty seats with a significant Muslim majority. While their primary goal may not be to win seats directly, their actions could inadvertently benefit the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

The BJP's attempts to sway

Muslim voters with promises of welfare schemes and the triple talaq ban face skepticism. Muslims may not fall into the BJP's trap, but divisions among them could occur in the name of "Biradariwad" (brotherhood), as seen in past elections.

The 2014 general election serves as a lesson for Muslims in the state, highlighting the consequences of failing to unite and send representatives to Parliament. ■

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Allahabad High Court Declares UP Madrasa Board Act Unconstitutional



A file photo of the Allahabad high court. Photo: AFP

LUCKNOW: The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court has ruled the UP Board of Madrasa Education Act 2004 as 'unconstitutional.' The division bench, consisting of Justice Vivek Chaudhary and Justice Subhash Vidyarthi, deemed the law ultra vires and directed the Uttar Pradesh government to devise a scheme to integrate madrasa students into the formal education system.

The decision stemmed from a writ petition filed by Anshuman Singh Rathore, challenging the legality

of the UP-Madrasa Board and its management by the minority welfare department, both at the Union and state levels. The petition also raised concerns regarding the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Act, 2012. With approximately 25,000 madrasas in Uttar Pradesh, over 16,500 are recognized by the UP Board of Madrasa Education. Earlier in March, a special investigation team identified 13,000 illegal madrasas along the UP-Nepal border, recommending

their closure to the government. The court's verdict has left madrasa students in the state

uncertain about their future. Asif Riyaz, a secondary level student in Lucknow, expressed concerns

about the challenges of transitioning to a new school and adapting to a different educational system, urging for a transition period of at least two to three years. (IANS) ■

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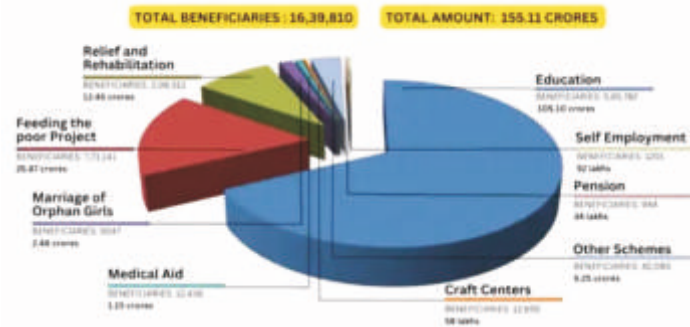
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instills hope and possibility in those in need. Babukhan's pioneering Zakat collection has redirected funds toward educating less privileged children, resulting in a substantial impact.

The HZCT's efforts extend beyond education to feeding the poor, women's empowerment, and community development. Through initiatives like the Foundation for Economic and Educational Development (FEED), Babukhan ensures that critical needs are addressed, fostering hope and empowerment. In the words of Babukhan, "Education shields children from life's trials, imbuing them with virtues for a meaningful life." Through Zakat-funded education, beneficiaries are not only uplifted but also encouraged to give back, creating a cycle of generosity and empowerment.

Together, the HZCT and FEED are shaping a better tomorrow for generations to come. As Babukhan exemplifies, true wealth lies in lifting others, a sentiment that resonates deeply with his commitment to philanthropy.

In Hyderabad, Ghiasuddin Babukhan's philanthropic endeavors are illuminating the paths of underprivileged youth through education. His recent acts of kindness, including providing a laptop to Anas Khan and supporting Shakira Kausar's education, showcase the transformative power of generosity.

Anas Khan, the son of an ambulance driver, received a life-changing gift a brand new laptop upon his admission to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). Shakira Kausar, despite facing personal loss, is pursuing a B Tech degree in Guntur, thanks to timely assistance from Babukhan and his

wife, Shujath Babukhan.

These acts of kindness stem from Babukhan's belief in the transformative potential of education. Through the Hyderabad Zakat and Charitable Trust (HZCT), founded in 1992, he has been a beacon of hope for the underprivileged. The HZCT's mission to make quality education accessible has touched countless lives, empowering poor and orphaned youth to create promising futures.

Over three decades, the HZCT has disbursed a remarkable Rs 155 crore in Zakat, benefiting 16.40 lakh individuals. By focusing on education, the Trust not only provides material support but also

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shaping the nation's future.

The campaign, held both online and offline, unfolded a spectrum of engaging programs at AMU City Girls' High School, fostering awareness and dialogue on democratic participation. Among the highlights were:

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Confronting Islamophobia: A Call for Global Solidarity



Illustration: A campaign on stopping Islamophobia in Bandung, Indonesia, in 2019. ANTARA FOTO/Raisan Al Farisi (ANTARA FOTO/RAISAN AL FARISI)

JAKARTA (ANTARA): An international conference titled “Embracing Diversity: Tackling Islamophobia in 2024” took place in Baku, Azerbaijan, coinciding with the eve of Ramadan and the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. This conference holds deep significance as Azerbaijan reaffirms its commitment to combating Islamophobia on the modern front. Last year, Baku hosted another conference in partnership with the G20 Interfaith Dialogue Forum, focusing on “Islamophobia as a Specific Form of Racism and Discrimination: New Global and Transnational Challenges.” While last year’s conference aimed to contribute to efforts against Islamophobia, this year’s objective extends to developing concrete solutions and fostering global solidarity to address its root causes. Islamophobia, a term combining Islam and phobia, signifies the fear of Islam, which has historical roots tracing back to Europe since the 7th century. The fear

intensified with the arrival of immigrants from Muslim countries in the 14th century and was exacerbated by events like the European Crusades and the expulsion of Muslims from Andalusia. This prejudice finds its roots in colonialism, Orientalism, and the East-West dichotomy. Western societies have long associated Islam with negative stereotypes, propagated by cultural, academic, and imperial works portraying Eastern cultures as inferior. The escalation of Islamophobia spiked after significant events such as Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa in 1989 and the 9/11 attacks. The term itself gained prominence in the 1980s amid controversies surrounding Salman Rushdie’s book “The Satanic Verses” and later efforts to counter harmful actions and rhetoric against Islam and Muslims in the West. Today, Islamophobia is on the rise globally, with instances of discrimination, intolerance, and violence against Muslims becoming increasingly prevalent. Western countries, despite

espousing democratic values, have integrated Islamophobia into their state policies, with France notably promoting it through legislative acts and discriminatory practices. France’s recent actions, including banning religious clothing in public spaces and targeting Muslim students, highlight the institutionalization of Islamophobia. Similar injustices are perpetrated by governments in Israel, India, and China against Muslim populations, perpetuating discrimination and violating human rights. Azerbaijan, too, has experienced Islamophobia, evident in the deliberate destruction of its Islamic heritage during Armenia’s occupation of its lands. President Aliyev emphasizes the need to combat Islamophobia, xenophobia, and racism, asserting that associating terrorism with any civilization or ethnic group only fuels division and conflict. In the 21st century, there is no place for such prejudices. It is imperative for global communities to stand in solidarity against Islamophobia, safeguarding humanism and universal values for a more harmonious world.

Mohammad Anthoni



International Day to Combat Islamophobia: UN Takes Action, Calls for Unity



NEW YORK/ NEW DELHI: On March 15, the United Nations General Assembly marked the second anniversary of the International Day to Combat Islamophobia with a resounding call to action. In a historic move, a majority of 115 votes supported a follow-up resolution at the UN headquarters in New York, reaffirming the commitment to human rights and religious plurality. The resolution urged for an international dialogue to foster tolerance and peace, along with the appointment of a Special Envoy on Islamophobia by the UN Secretary-General. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres emphasized the importance of collective effort in upholding shared values of inclusion, tolerance, and mutual understanding, which are central to all major faiths and the UN Charter. He condemned anti-Muslim hatred and underscored Islam’s message of peace, compassion, and grace that has inspired people worldwide for centuries.

Kofi Annan, Guterres’s predecessor, lamented Islamophobia as a troubling modern phenomenon, while the General Assembly President highlighted its roots in xenophobia, leading to discriminatory practices and hate speech. The approval of the follow-up resolution was met with applause from delegates, with Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), welcoming it as a crucial step in the global fight against Islamophobia. Taha emphasized the need for international collaboration and highlighted the commemorative event organized by the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, chairing

the OIC Group Countries in New York. In addition to the UN headquarters in New York, the OIC and the United Nations Office in Geneva co-organized an event at the Palais des Nations to commemorate the International Day to Combat Islamophobia. Panelists discussed various aspects of religious intolerance, violence, and bigotry, offering recommendations for effective countermeasures. Renowned figures from different fields also weighed in on Islamophobia. Professor Gordan Conway described it as a baseless terror resulting in exclusion and discrimination, while journalist Stephen Schwartz defined it as the condemnation of Islam in its entirety. President Biden reaffirmed the United States’ stance against Islamophobia, emphasizing the country’s foundation on freedom of worship and immigrant contributions. Maria Zakharova, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, expressed Russia’s commitment to combating discrimination against Muslims and ensuring religious freedoms. Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr highlighted Islamophobia as not just fear but also hatred. In a positive development, “The March 15th Forum” was launched to combat Islamophobia, aiming to build research and investigative resources while rallying support for the eradication of Islamophobia. The second International Day to Combat Islamophobia serves as a reminder of the importance of unity, tolerance, and concerted global action to combat prejudice and promote peace and understanding among all communities.

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NGO Hamaari Sada Trust Doing Yeoman Work in Slum Areas of Delhi



DELHI: In the bustling streets of New Delhi, where diverse communities coexist, Hamaari Sada Trust stands as a beacon of hope. Founded by Mohd. Irshad Alam, the Trust is dedicated to uplifting the educational prospects of underprivileged children residing in the slum localities of Okhla and its environs in South Delhi, predominantly inhabited by Muslims.

Alam emphasized the Trust's unwavering commitment to fostering a love for learning among students from marginalized backgrounds, primarily hailing from families of petty traders and daily wage earners. With a mission to bridge educational disparities, the Trust extends beyond conventional tuition classes, offering Remedial Classes tailored to students who have had to prematurely abandon formal education due to financial constraints.

"Approximately 80 percent of dropouts cite financial hurdles as the primary reason for

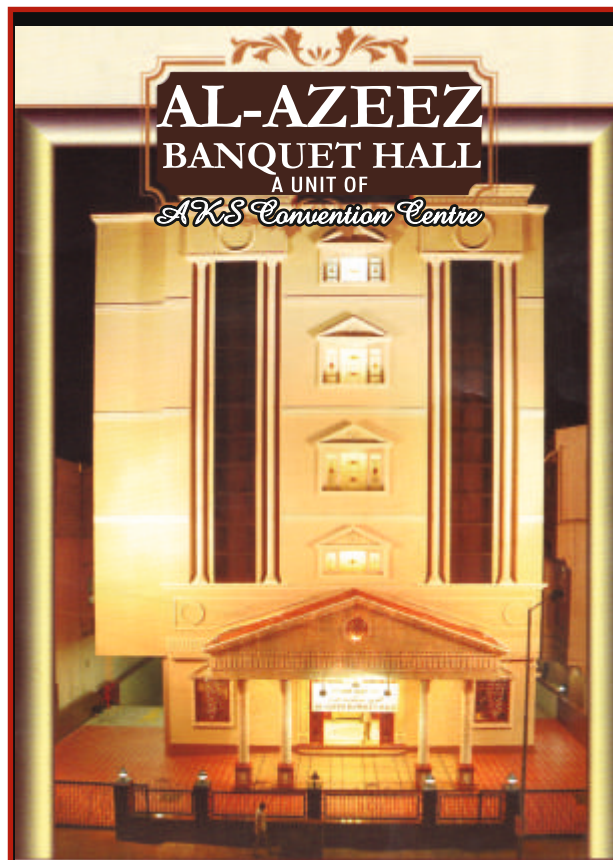
discontinuing their studies. It's imperative for all socio-religious communities and organizations to join hands in preventing these dropout rates," Alam asserted.

Established in 2016, the Trust not only aims to mitigate educational inequities but also endeavors to provide holistic support to deserving yet disadvantaged students, facilitating their academic journey towards excellence.

To address educational gaps effectively, the Trust inaugurated the "Auj-e-Falak Shiksha Center" in Madanpur Khadar JJ Colony on October 2, 2022, a pivotal step towards empowering the community through education.

Beyond educational initiatives, the Trust collaborates with the Indian Institute of Natural Resources Management for community mobilization endeavors. Its multifaceted approach encompasses a wide array of social causes, including the promotion of self-sustaining

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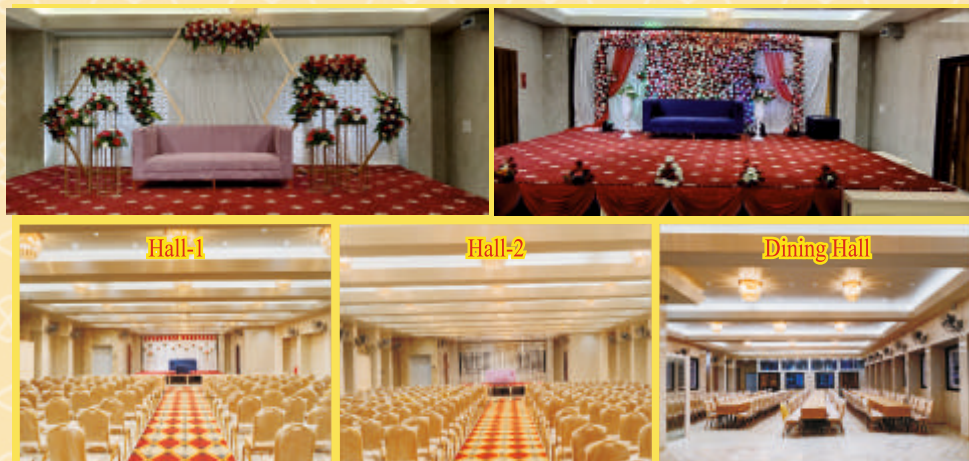
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In Riyadh, the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) and the UN came together to honor International Women's Day on March 8th with a special event titled "In Her Shoes: Inspirational Stories of Women Shaping the Future." This event served as a platform to showcase the remarkable journeys of women leaders in digital, economic, and diplomatic sectors.

Alaa Abdulaal, Chief of Digital Economy Foresight at the DCO, expressed her admiration for the challenges overcome by fellow women leaders, emphasizing the need to break barriers in traditionally male-dominated fields. Esteemed figures such as Sweden's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Petra Menander, and CEO of Circular Economy Co., Dr. Hajjar El-Haddaoui, contributed to the panel discussion, shedding light on both progress and challenges faced by women in various

Empowering Women: Riyadh Event Spotlights Inspirational Stories and Future Opportunities



The Digital Cooperation Organization, in collaboration with the UN, hosted an event in Riyadh celebrating inspirational women's stories for International Women's Day on March 8. (AN photos/Loai El-kellawy)

sectors. Abdulaal expressed hope for a future where International Women's Day would become obsolete, signifying true equality for women. She stressed the

importance of celebrating women's achievements while striving for a more inclusive society.

Held at the UN Building in the Diplomatic Quarter, the event

brought together a diverse audience to celebrate women's accomplishments. Abdulaal highlighted the necessity for initiatives aimed at empowering women in the digital economy, reaffirming the DCO's dedication to providing equitable opportunities.

In an interview, Abdulaal elaborated on the DCO's initiatives, including a framework for women in ICT designed to enable and empower women in the digital sphere. She emphasized the crucial role of collaboration among governments, the private sector, and international organizations in supporting women's advancement in the digital economy.

Abdulaal underscored the collective responsibility of both men and women in empowering women within the ICT sector,

stressing the importance of skill development, access to financial resources, and mentorship opportunities for women in leadership roles.

Deemah Al-Yahya, Secretary-General of the DCO, highlighted the transformative power of assisting women in transitioning to online platforms and providing them with essential resources for success. She shared a compelling story of a dentist in Rwanda whose professional reach expanded significantly through online platforms and innovative solutions.

The event concluded with an engaging Q&A session, where women shared personal experiences and discussed strategies for overcoming obstacles in their careers and personal lives. Overall, the event served as a vital platform for showcasing women's achievements and discussing avenues for further empowerment in the digital age. ■

The Global Conference for Building Bridges between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects, convened in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, has ignited a transformative discourse on inter-sectarian dialogue within the Islamic world. Under the guidance of the Muslim World League and Sheikh Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, this historic event has profound implications for Europe's Muslim communities, which find themselves at a pivotal moment in shaping their collective destiny.

Europe's Muslim populace embodies a tapestry of diversity, encompassing individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and Islamic traditions. While this diversity enriches their communities, it also presents

Forging Unity: Charting the Future of Islam in Europe Post-Makkah Summit



challenges in fostering a unified identity amidst sectarian divisions, compounded by

geopolitical tensions from their countries of origin.

The 'Charter of Cooperation and

Brotherhood' forged at the Makkah summit emerges as a crucial instrument in addressing these challenges. Emphasizing common Islamic values transcending sectarian boundaries, the charter advocates for a cohesive approach to Islamic practice and community cohesion. Its principles offer a blueprint for European Muslims to harness their diversity constructively.

Implementing the summit's ideals in Europe necessitates strategic action and sustained engagement. Local initiatives must operationalize the charter's principles, fostering intra-community understanding and challenging stereotypes through

education and dialogue. Yet, entrenched sectarian biases and external threats such as rising Islamophobia pose formidable obstacles.

The Makkah summit serves as a catalyst for an Islamic renaissance in Europe, envisioning a future where diversity is celebrated, dialogue prevails, and shared values underpin societal engagement. Achieving this vision requires a collective commitment from all stakeholders, transcending cultural and sectarian divides.

As Europe's Muslims embark on this journey towards unity and inclusivity, the broader societal and political environment plays a pivotal role. Inclusive policies that promote diversity and intercultural dialogue can bolster community efforts, while exclusionary measures hinder progress.

In conclusion, the Makkah summit holds profound implications for Europe's Muslims, offering a renewed vision of unity and cooperation. By embracing its principles and navigating challenges with resilience, Europe's Muslim communities can contribute to a more cohesive and vibrant society, guided by the principles of tolerance, cooperation, and mutual respect. ■

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The story of Islam in Russia stretches back through the centuries, with its roots intertwining deeply with the nation's history. From the earliest encounters between Islam and Russia in the Middle Ages, when Muslim traders and ambassadors introduced the faith to its lands, to its widespread presence today, Islam has left an indelible mark on Russian society. The journey began in the Eastern Caucasus (Azerbaijan) in the 7th century AD, as Islam found fertile ground for expansion and growth.

Fast forward to the present day, and Islam stands as the second-largest religion in Russia, with an estimated 26 million adherents, constituting around 15% of the population. Projections indicate that by 2050, Muslims may comprise one-third of Russia's

Islam in Russia: A Rich Tapestry of History and Modernity



populace. The heartlands of Russia's Muslim population lie in the North Caucasus republics, alongside Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and the capital city, Moscow. Here, Muslims enjoy the freedom to observe their religious practices openly, with designated spaces for communal

activities during Ramadan and other important occasions. Moscow, once a modest 12th-century settlement, has blossomed into a global metropolis over the centuries, now boasting a Muslim population of up to 2.5 million amidst its 10.5 million inhabitants. The city's skyline is adorned with both historical and contemporary mosques, serving as symbols of the vibrant Islamic presence in Russia. These architectural marvels stand as testaments to the cultural and religious diversity that enriches the country's landscape.

The month of Ramadan brings forth a flurry of activity across Russia, with cities bedecked in vibrant decorations and special events organized to mark the

occasion. The Russian Muftiate takes a proactive role in fostering community spirit during Ramadan, extending assistance to those in need through various charitable initiatives.

One of the most iconic Ramadan traditions in Moscow is the "Ramadan Tent," an annual event held since 2006 at the Poklonnaya Gora Memorial Mosque. This tent serves as a focal point for over 45,000 visitors during Ramadan, offering free

Iftar meals and hosting cultural events aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding in an atmosphere of tolerance and goodwill.

As Islam continues to flourish in Russia, its integration into the fabric of society underscores the nation's commitment to diversity and inclusivity. The journey of Islam in Russia is one of resilience, adaptation, and coexistence, reflecting the enduring bond between tradition and modernity in this dynamic Eurasian nation. (WAM) ■

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NGO Hamaari Sada Trust Doing Yeoman Work in Slum Areas of Delhi

employment opportunities for women and youth, advocacy for women and children's welfare and empowerment, and fostering communal harmony.

Alam articulated the Trust's vision for a society where healthcare and educational resources are

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Minister of Endowments Engages with Islamic World's Muftis and Scholars



DOHA: HE Minister of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, Ghanem bin Shaheen Al Ghanem, convened a gathering in March 2024 with distinguished muftis and scholars, along with their accompanying delegations, representing various Islamic countries. They were hosted by the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs in the State of Qatar for Ramadan 1445 AH, participating in the Ramadan talk program "Amenhum men Khawf" and other scientific and advocacy programs organized by the Ministry during the holy month. In his address, HE the Minister of Endowments extended a warm welcome to the scholars and

muftis in the State of Qatar. He emphasized their crucial role in serving society, guiding individuals towards righteousness and piety in accordance with the teachings of the Quran and Sunnah and promoting frameworks of tolerance and peaceful coexistence among all segments of society. The meeting provided an opportunity for the exchange of perspectives and discussions on contemporary religious issues affecting the Islamic world at large. Key topics included fatwas and legal rulings in light of prevailing challenges and the religious and social advancements across Islamic nations. (QNA)

Haramain High Speed Railway Expands Services for Ramadan



RIYADH: In preparation for heightened travel demand during Ramadan, the Haramain High Speed Railway announces plans to significantly increase its operations, with over 2,700 trips scheduled and seating for more than 1.3 million passengers. The railway, known for its top-speed capabilities of up to 300 kph, will enhance its operational capacity to cover the 449 km distance between Makkah and Madinah in just two hours and 20 minutes. This expansion aims to streamline transportation for pilgrims and visitors while alleviating congestion on routes between Makkah, Madinah, and Jeddah. Established in 2018, the railway boasts advanced signaling systems and five stations, including terminals in Makkah, Madinah, and Jeddah's King Abdulaziz Airport. With 35 electric trains offering amenities such as business-class compartments and a cafeteria, the railway ensures comfort and efficiency for passengers during the holy month.

Thailand's Culinary Journey: Embracing Halal Cuisine to Welcome Muslim Tourists



Visitors check the menu of a halal food stall at Jodd Fairs Night Market in Bangkok, Thailand, Feb. 21, 2024. (AN Photo)

BANGKOK: Thailand has long been renowned for its aromatic and spicy cuisine, drawing in visitors from around the globe. Now, the country is making strides to cater to Muslim tourists by offering halal versions of its popular dishes. Since re-establishing diplomatic ties with Saudi Arabia in 2022, Thailand has placed a greater emphasis on attracting visitors from Muslim-majority countries. A recent government initiative aims to position Thailand as the "halal kitchen of the world" and Southeast Asia's "halal hub" through a 2024-2028 tourism promotion plan. The Halal Science Center at

Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok plays a crucial role in ensuring adherence to halal food regulations. Their Halal Assurance, Liability-Quality System (HAL-Q) standardization system is utilized by numerous food factories and restaurants across the country, enabling them to market their products as halal. Dr. Winai Dahlan, the center's founding director, emphasizes the importance of introducing halal Thai cuisine as a form of soft power for Thailand. With over 900 halal restaurants in Bangkok alone, Dahlan believes the country is well-equipped to welcome Muslim

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- Bihar School Examination Board: Since 1993 to 2023, (109) Orphan girls and (83) Non-orphan girls passed the Matric Examination Bihar Board.
- Qur'an Memorization: 12 Students passed the Matric Examination with Hifz, Matric with Hifz
- Annual Expenditure: Above forty lakh (40 Lakh) rupees.
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NOTE: See the documentary film NAZR-E-ENAYETH on the Internet "YOUTUBE" in which there is a brief history of Girls' and Boys' orphanages

Vatican Decision on Same-Sex Blessings Strains Catholic-Coptic Relations



The Vatican's recent authorization of the blessing of same-sex couples has ignited tensions within the Catholic Church and strained relations with the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt. The controversial move has prompted the suspension of theological dialogue between the two Christian denominations, laying bare deep-seated divisions over matters of faith and doctrine. Released on December 18 under the title "Fiducia Supplicans," the Vatican's declaration has drawn criticism and apprehension from clergy and religious leaders, particularly in regions with significant Orthodox and Islamic influences. Critics argue that the decision, perceived as hasty and inadequately managed, has alienated traditional Orthodox communities and undermined interfaith relations.

Father Rafic Greiche, a prominent Catholic priest in Egypt, expressed disappointment over the Vatican's handling of the issue, noting the declaration's apparent disregard for the sensitivities of the Islamic world. The decision has been interpreted as a concession to Western churches, exacerbating tensions with Orthodox counterparts who uphold conservative teachings on marriage and morality.

In response to the Vatican's declaration, the governing Holy Synod of Egypt's Coptic Orthodox Church, led by Pope Tawadros II, suspended theological dialogue with Catholics. The synod reaffirmed its staunch opposition to all forms of homosexual relationships, citing biblical teachings and the divine order of creation as fundamental principles.

While the suspension of dialogue offers a glimmer of hope for potential reconciliation, tensions persist as both sides grapple with the implications of the Vatican's decision. Father Romany Shenouda, a Catholic priest from Upper Egypt, lamented the adverse impact of the declaration on interchurch and interfaith relations, cautioning against further division within the Christian community. The decision by the Coptic Orthodox Church to suspend dialogue underscores broader concerns within Eastern Christian traditions regarding the compatibility of the Vatican's stance with traditional teachings. The synod's emphasis on reassessing dialogue and setting new standards underscores the gravity of the situation and the imperative for a deliberate reevaluation of the relationship between the two churches. Despite calls for dialogue and reconciliation, the controversy surrounding the Vatican's decision continues to reverberate within Catholic and Orthodox circles. As both sides navigate theological disparities and cultural sensitivities, the future of Catholic-Coptic relations remains uncertain, with hopes for a return to dialogue tempered by entrenched divisions and apprehensions.

«Page 12

Thailand's Culinary Journey: Embracing Halal Cuisine to Welcome Muslim Tourists

tourists.

One such venue is Sook Siam at ICONSIAM Mall, where the Kan Tang stand serves halal versions of iconic Thai dishes like tom yum soup and pad thai. While some halal food markets may be lesser-known among Muslim travelers, locations like Jodd Fairs Night Market and Pratunam Market offer a variety of halal options, albeit requiring some exploration to find. For Muslim visitors like Nani Rohayu from neighboring Malaysia, navigating Bangkok's

culinary scene is made easier with the help of social media recommendations. Rohayu finds joy in discovering new halal eateries throughout the city, showcasing the wealth of options available to Muslim travelers.

As Thailand continues to promote itself as a halal-friendly destination, initiatives like these highlight the country's commitment to catering to the diverse needs of its visitors, fostering inclusivity and culinary exploration for all.

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M A Siraj

The Delhi video of a cop kicking a Muslim worshipper is quite disturbing. This is reflective of the plight of Muslims in India as of now. Their weightlessness in national life is so evident. They are being kicked around, finding no solution, no saviour. Some action may have followed, and the erring cop is reportedly under suspension. But what happens in uncelebrated, nay unreported cases is quite well known.

That is of course the case of an individual or a few individuals found praying on a public thoroughfare.

We are witness to the genocide in Gaza for the last few months. 30,000 lives have been lost, two-thirds of the 22 lakh Gazans living in the world's largest open prison have been displaced within that narrow strip of land, all because Hamas hotheads miscalculated the consequences of their adventure or misadventure on October 7, 2023. This continuing mayhem in the heart of the Middle East is reflective of our weightlessness on the global level. Let us remember, it was South Africa, not the filthy rich Saudis or Emiratis, who mounted the legal challenge against Israel in the International Court of Justice. Mass graves are being dug every day in Gaza. Children and women are dying of hunger, starvation, and bombardment. Yet we hear that the Saudis are the second largest buyer of arms in the world which are of no worth to them. If there are no brains, their wealth is of no consequence. Great manpower but without education, without the power of reasoning, without character and discipline, without enlightened leadership, is of no use. It renders them into a burden. This is what is happening to the Ummah. Money and arms are invalid if knowledge is missing. Knowledge is a superpower in the current world. Jews are just about 15 million around the world but equipped with knowledge, skill and all the accessories of knowledge. They have think-tanks of all hues. They call the shots in all the

Points to Ponder: Muslims' Weightlessness Plumbing New Depths



Photo: newwaveglobal.net

leading nations of the world. They run major MNCs. They have dominated in the fields of science and technology, research and development, diplomacy and policy studies, world of languages and letters, produce the best books, invented the most used appliances, and produced the most enlightened intellectuals ranging from Karl Marx and Einstein to Kissinger to Noam Chomsky. They have never boasted of their manpower. They do not indulge in excessive ritualism as we do. The world's best books come from them. They occupy high seats in all bodies promoting various ideas and ideologies.

Look at our own plight. We have been an emotional lot. We dismembered ourselves into three nations in the subcontinent. We failed to recognize that sheer manpower and religion does not empower any community. Look at our western neighbour. It is in dire financial straits. It is almost a failed state with all institutions crumbling. It is virtually run by the army which has developed deep stakes in economy, business, trade bodies and is eating into the vitals of the body of that unfortunate nation. The grave of the only Nobel laureate of the nation has been defiled several times. 37 Percent of its citizens have expressed their desire to migrate out of its boundaries.

The nation on our eastern flank has though done better on economics, is another failing state under elected dictatorship. It faces climatic disaster. Rise of

sea level by a metre would inundate 19 percent of its land, the only Nobel laureate of the nation was jailed and is under the threat of more of it.

In between the two we have continually been in the smoldering cauldron of religious emotions. Shah Bano case demands to ban books by Rushdie, Taslima Nasreen, holiday for Eid Milad, constructions of Hajj Bhavans, three talaqs, Babri Masjid, obsessed us for nearly four decades. We were never bothered about raising socio-economic infrastructure in childcare homes, old age homes, media institutions, banks, publishing houses, think-tanks, centres for abandoned women, libraries, palliative care centres, endowments for promoting knowledge. There has been a terrible decline in the quality of our leadership during the last one century. We were trying to rescue the decayed Khilafath of Turkey which Mustafa Kemal Pasha upturned to raise the modern Turkiye. We were overwhelmed with Jinnah's disastrous two-nation theory. Not learning a lesson from the Partition, Kasim Rizvi brought about another disaster in the heart of Deccan in 1948. Two lakh lives were lost.

If in 1947, religion was the cause célèbres of our separation, in 1971, it was language. India survives between the twain intact with multiple castes, faiths and languages. Do we learn any lessons from this? Mustafa Kemal Pasha's modern, secular Turkiye is the most developed Muslim nation. But our Khilafat

movement was directed at retention of the decadent Khilafat of Ottomans. Is not there a lesson for us?

A multi-ethnic Malaysia has carried on its nationhood with great aplomb all through its 60 years of history. Isn't there a lesson for us to learn? Should religion be the be-all and end-all of our existence?

And what kind of religion are we following? It is mere ritualism, bereft of any spirit of humanity, kindness, camaraderie, love, compassion and sense of fraternity.



In Ramazan look how many million Muslims will be heading for umrah, how many billions will be squandered over this holy tourism? Is it what Islam desires from us? Is Islam a sawab-accumulation industry?

Hundreds of pilgrims will be defrauded of their money by unscrupulous umrah tour operators, hundreds will be left without accommodation and food in the holy place by these cheats. Can't we think of diverting these resources to more purposeful avenues of educating children, sheltering abandoned women, setting up skill centres, textbook banks, research institutes et al. But such is our obsession with ritualism that we cannot think of any community empowering institutions. Nothing more can be expected from our least educated clerics who have driven us into the dark tunnels of ignorance and their petty vested interest in squeezing zakat, fitra, sadaqa and *charm e qurbani* out of the Muslim masses and operation of Hajj and Umrah tour companies.

Let us conclude: the indignity we suffer in this world is of our own making. We refuse to learn lessons from our past and successes of other nations. We are immersed in ritualism in the belief that God will be pleased with this. We need to come out of this morass. We need to introspect on our situation and adopt pragmatism.

(The writer is a Bengaluru-based journalist. He is associate editor at News Trail, English daily, published simultaneously from Bangalore and Doha, Qatar.) ■

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Sana Rubiyana

Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse where a person or group makes someone question their sanity, perception of reality, or memories. People experiencing gaslighting often feel confused, anxious, and unable to trust themselves.

In other words, Gaslighting is an insidious form of manipulation and psychological control. Victims of gaslighting are deliberately and systematically fed false information that leads them to question what they know to be true, often about themselves. They may end up doubting their memory, their perception, and even their sanity. Over time, a gaslighter's manipulations can grow more complex and potent, making it increasingly difficult for the victim to see the truth.

Gaslighting can occur in personal or professional relationships, and victims are targeted at the core of their being: their sense of identity and self-worth. Manipulative people who engage in gaslighting do so to attain power over their victims, either because they simply derive warped enjoyment from the act or because they wish



Photo: NAMIBuck

to emotionally, physically or financially control their victim.

What is a gaslighter's technique?

A gaslighter will initially lie about simple things, but the volume of misinformation soon grows, and the gaslighter may accuse the victim of lying if he or she

questions the narrative. They typically deploy occasional positive reinforcement to confuse the victim, but at the same time, they may attempt to turn others against the victim, even their own friends and family, by telling them that the victim is lying or is delusional.

Let's talk about Gaslighting!

Is gaslighting ever unintentional?

It is possible for an individual to manipulate someone without realizing they are doing so. Importantly, though, the gaslighter still enjoys wielding control over the mind and behaviour of the victim, even if they cannot articulate or acknowledge this fact. Some

people engage in manipulative behaviour because they witnessed it frequently as a child, most often in their parents. Regardless of a gaslighter's level of self-awareness, the behaviour is never acceptable, and ignorance of the phenomenon should not be accepted as an excuse for manipulative actions.

(The writer is a Psychologist, Rational Emotive Cognitive Behavioral Therapist, sanarubiana@gmail.com)

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- Having Constructed the rooms or halls in the name of ancestors. ● Having co-operated i.e., the institution in possible form to get the compensation from Allah.

REMEMBER: 1 Donate the Bank Interest which is illegal for the Muslims, to orphan fund to eradicate illiteracy of the poor and orphan boys and to spread education. 2 A quality education in peaceful environment open space, Islamic dress and Islamic Uniform based on the syllabus of Bihar School Examination Board. 3 All facilities with food and lodging are provided free to the orphan boys just like a son whose father has died. 4 Hostel facility is also available for the external students at their own expenses. 5 Here audit is performed every year. Come and see yourself in the Institution, the great example of uniformity how the orphan and non orphan students live together. 6 Enayeth (I.T.I.) allows the admission of the orphan students of the orphanage is completely free with food and lodging. No any expenditure is taken.

Note: It is appealed from the respected persons of the community to have the attention to make orphan boys admitted in the institution. Lead them. I shall be grateful to you for this.

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● **NOTE:** See the documentary film NAZR-E-ENAYETH on the Internet "YOUTUBE" in which there is a brief history of both orphanages

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**Syed Tahsin
Ahmed**

The data released from the 2011 Census shows that Muslims constitute 25% of India's 3.7 lakh beggars. That means every fourth beggar in India is a Muslim. Out of the 3.7 lakh people categorized as beggars, 92,760 belong to the Muslim community. Contrast this with the community's population of 14.23% and it becomes apparent that the number of beggars is disproportionately high. Among Muslims, the percentage of female beggars (56.38%) is more than male beggars (43.61%). This is a sad commentary on the status of the community which gets placed at the bottom of most socio-economic indices. This data also highlights the economic disparities among Indians.

Beggary During Ramzan

The data also throws up another question. How could the Muslim community have such a huge number of beggars when Muslims are enjoined to spend 2.5% of their total wealth accumulated over the year as zakat? It is also considered a good deed for Muslims to spend liberally towards 'sadaqa' (optional charity). Quite often we hear the claims that if Muslims start using zakat amount honestly and judiciously, there will be no poor Muslim. Charity done during Ramzan is believed to fetch higher rewards. Therefore, Muslims are more generous during the month of Ramzan. Consequently, there will be swarming of beggars in Muslim areas during Ramzan. These 'seasonal' beggars aim at cornering easy money. Beggars migrate to the affluent cities in

India such as New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad. They are concentrated more in places where Muslims congregate like the mosques. I am told that there are also cases of international migration to oil rich countries for begging during Ramzan.

Beggary As a Profession

Extreme poverty, unemployment and sickness forces many persons to stretch out their hands for alms. Beggars belong to many categories like the old, the disabled and the destitute. But unfortunately, many beggars fake disabilities depriving the genuine ones of the generosity. They make up stories about hospitalization, need to undergo operation, treatment of a child, marriage of daughter and such other stories. Beggars station themselves at vantage points. The most favourite one is at the gates of a mosque, especially after Friday prayers. We also see them near function halls, shopping centres, bus stops, traffic signals, hospitals, Eidgahs, burial grounds etc. Many of the beggars do not suffer from physical disabilities, but they can turn themselves into a blind man, a paralytic, an epileptic and those with appalling wounds or swollen limbs. All this is done to arouse a feeling of pity and sympathy so that the kindhearted will liberally give some money. A disabled beggar will be often accompanied by an assistant and women beggars often carry an infant in their lap to generate sympathy. Beggars also obtain a letter from a mosque and the same is used to obtain similar letters from other mosques and madrasas testifying to their need and

Beggary and Muslims



poverty followed by a recommendation to give them charity.

Begging Mafia?

Begging is more of an excuse for the idle and lazy individuals who seek handsome earnings with little effort. Many cases of beggars in possession of sizeable amounts have been reported when they were rounded up by government agencies. A Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Field Action Project on Homelessness and Destitution, states that only a small number of beggars are part of organized rackets. The involvement of criminal syndicates or organized begging mafia as shown in Hindi films has not been established with proof of evidence. However, the manner in which beggars from other distant places are stationed at different vantage points in a city which is new and strange to them leads to suspicion that it is an organized racket. Huge groups of beggars who are noticed travelling to Bengaluru city in trains before Ramzan cannot be just a coincidence.

Beggars are Citizens Too

Activists for beggar's rights argue

that beggars are a victim of an unbalanced socioeconomic system. They are the poorest of the poor and the most disadvantageous and underprivileged section of the society who are not able to fulfil the basic needs of food, shelter, health and protection for their survival. These really poor beggars deserve our attention. Unfortunately, they have become indistinguishable from the professional beggars who have chosen this as an occupation since it does not involve much physical and mental effort.

Beggars face many health issues because of their unhygienic living conditions and bad habits. A majority of them eat and drink without washing their hands. Most of them suffer from asthma, respiratory diseases, and skin diseases. Studies have shown that beggars are not at all aware of the various poverty alleviation programmes of the government. How many Muslim NGOs are working for the upliftment of the beggars? Caring for the beggars is not just giving a ten rupee note to them. Rehabilitation of beggars with planned, systematic measures is necessary and not just doling out charity.

Anti-Begging Laws

There is no uniform anti-begging law in India. Twenty-two states and union territories in India have anti-begging laws. The Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959 serves as a model for most of these states' laws. These laws empower local authorities to detain and rehabilitate persons who are found begging in public places. These laws are intended to help and support beggars and not to

punish them since they need assistance. Beggars need to be given food, shelter, medical care apart from equipping them with some skills to enable them to eke out a livelihood. The beggary laws in India are generally considered punitive and not curative. The laws have provisions to punish and discourage begging by following a process of arrest, detention, and rehabilitation. It is difficult to assess as to what extent these laws have been successful in reducing the number of beggars. These laws can become effective only if they tackle the underlying factors of poverty, lack of shelter, health problems, abandoned women and children and so on.

Beggary and Islam

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has said: "the upper hand is better than the lower hand (i.e., he who gives in charity is better than him who takes it)". Islam encourages its followers to work for a living and discourages begging. The institution of zakat, if properly channelized, can remove poverty. There have been times in Islamic history when there were no poor people to receive zakat. Zakat should equip a person to eke out his livelihood without seeking help from others. The objective should be to give a fishing net to a hungry man, instead of giving him a fish. A part of the zakat should be institutionalized, and it should be pooled by Baitul Maals. Every mosque should have a Baitul Maal to cater to the needs of the poor and needy persons of the area. Baitul Maals should give priority for financing the education of poor and orphan students who will later become the breadwinners of a family.

(The author is a retired KAS officer and can be contacted at tahsin789@yahoo.com)

READERS RESPONSE

Readers Response

The major portion of the articles in *Islamic Voice*, March 2024 is devoted to Ramalan in depth. Even children also learn the Ramalan from A to Z in a brief time. The articles are superb by many experts in Al-Quran. Alhamdulillah.

A. Kaja Nazimudeen,
Tirunelveli district,
Tamil Nadu. ■

"It is Not a Sin to Be Rich"

Tahsin Ahmed's article "It is Not a Sin to Be Rich" is very well written. Islam is mis-interpreted by many to cover up their lethargic attitude and lack of urge to struggle for improving their standard of living. Common statements made are: "we don't have to run for worldly gains", "we shall not be greedy", "Islam teaches us contentedness". I wish the author had quoted the following Hadees too:

Narrated by Amir bin Sad bin Abi Waqqas that his father who was wealthy and had no inheritors except his daughter became seriously ill and asked Prophet Muhammad (saw) whether he should give two-thirds of his property in charity. The Prophet said 'No'. When asked whether half should be given as charity, the Prophet said 'No' and then added: "One-third, and even one-third is much. You would better leave your inheritors wealthy rather than leaving them poor, begging others." (Sahih Bukhari).

S.N.H Razvi, Bengaluru ■

Apropos Mr. Tahsin Ahmed's article "It is Not a Sin to Be Rich" in the March 2024 issue of IV. What an impactful and brilliantly written article. It's a distinctive and rational uptake on the long enduring societal stereotypes regarding wealth.

Sarah Fathima,
Bengaluru ■



This is regarding Tahsin Ahmed's article "It is Not a Sin to Be Rich" in the March 2024 issue of IV. A very tricky topic which has been dealt with wisely. Read the article twice. It's innovative interpretations and explanations fully support the revolutionary slogan:

"Islam is our strength, let us not make it our weakness". Congratulations to the author.

Ehtesham Ahmed, Mysore ■

I read with interest the article "It is Not a Sin to Be Rich" in the March 2024 issue of IV. A wonderful and a very engaging

article. The author has so beautifully articulated the existing misconceptions in our society, especially in the "Money and Essential needs" section.

Soha Fathima, Bengaluru ■

Tahsin Ahmed's article "It is Not a Sin to Be Rich" is really a good

eye opener. Moreover, this is the right time that the rich of the community should take up responsibility and try to lift the community economically. The rich should develop a sense of responsibility and should do their part.

Iqbal Ahmed, Bengaluru ■

"When Ramadan enters, the gates of Paradise are opened, the gates of Hellfire are closed, and the devils are chained".

— Al-Bukhari and Muslim

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Transformative Insights: A Journey from Struggle to Joy



Participants of the 'Discover Yourself' Workshop held in Gaya from February 24th to 26th, 2024, share their responses:

- The workshop is relevant and catering to the present needs and situation of society.
- The healthy atmosphere made the participants familiar to each other opening a new vista towards love, fraternity, and compassion to each other without any discrimination.
- It is incredibly valuable and essential. The coach's techniques and sense of humor are commendable.
- The workshop serves as a powerful tool for empowering humanity to embrace and experience love, peace, tranquility, happiness, and success.
- The workshop has been a life-changing experience, altering our perspectives and our very essence of being human.

QUASIB: The workshop has given me a profound connection with Allah and His perspective. Previously, I lived within the confines of my own distorted viewpoint, struggling for years to discover Allah but feeling

trapped within my self-imposed prison. Today, I am immensely grateful to have broken free from that cage and finally connected with Allah. My vision has changed and my view towards others have drastically changed.

JYOTI: Before attending the workshop, I was struggling in life, but now, I've found joy and fulfillment. The clarity I've gained here has been transformative. I've made the decision to let go of making others wrong.

MAAZ: Prior to attending the workshop, I lacked a deep understanding of the human existence from the perspective of Islam. However, after participating in the workshop, I am filled with a profound sense of enlightenment. This newfound understanding is truly empowering. Not only have I benefited, but my entire family has also gained valuable knowledge. My parents even

expressed that they feel reborn today, having had such an enriching experience.

IQBAL: At the age of 55, I have never before encountered nor participated in such a magnificent workshop. Words fail to adequately express the profound impact it has had on me. Through self-reflection, I've come to realize that I lacked a method of intellectual thinking. However, Alhamdulillah, I have now found a path to discern between truth and falsehood. I am committed to giving my utmost effort to follow this newfound understanding. Jazak Allah khair for facilitating such a beautiful and enlightening workshop.

TABASSUM: Before attending the workshop, my life was complex and challenging. However, since participating, I have experienced a significant transformation. My life has become simpler and more fulfilling. I am grateful for the positive changes that the workshop has brought into my life.

TAABIR: Prior to the workshop, my life lacked direction. However, since attending, I've experienced a complete transformation. I feel a profound change within myself. The coach is truly remarkable, with a unique personality and exceptional speaking skills. It is the need of the hour. ■

Transformative Insights: Reflections on a Life-Changing Workshop



The 'Discover Yourself' Workshop was held at the Iqra Hall, Hira Public School, for teachers from different schools in Patna on the 1st and 2nd of March 2024.

Here are the responses shared by the participants:

- The workshop provided me with the clarity to distinguish between truth and falsehood, between opinion and reality.
- The workshop has made a profound impact on my life, marking a clear distinction between before and after. This experience will stay with me for a lifetime.
- Prior to the workshop, my life was riddled with confusion and doubt. However, after attending, many of my doubts were clarified, enabling me to distinguish between truth and falsehood with greater confidence.
- The workshop was truly amazing, a turning point in my life. I am committed to making changes within myself so that I can fully enjoy every moment of my life. I am grateful for the positive response from my family.
- The DYS workshop has been transformative for me, allowing me to see others as fellow human beings and guiding me to listen to the voice of my heart. I've learned to embrace life and find joy in its every moment."

AAFREEN: Alhamdulillah, I am incredibly grateful to have attended this workshop. It has opened my eyes to a whole new world, allowing me to see myself, my religion, and the love of Allah in a different light. My family is

delighted to witness the positive change in my behavior.

AAMANA: Before attending this workshop, my life lacked guidance, direction, and a clear sense of purpose. However, after participating, my perspective on

the world, people, and life as a whole has shifted significantly. I now possess a clearer sense of control, consciousness, and connectivity, which has pleasantly surprised me. My awareness and mindfulness have also undergone a positive transformation, for which I am truly grateful, Alhamdulillah.

SANA: I am handicapped, but my parents have always nurtured me to be independent and guided me to follow the path of Allah. After attending this motivational workshop, I have gained the ability to distinguish between deen (religion) and duniya (worldly matters), between the mind and the heart, and the importance of forgiveness. Words cannot adequately express my gratitude and the profound impact this fruitful workshop has had on me.

RAZA: This workshop has imparted a profound lesson in

humanity to me. I have truly discovered myself through its teachings. I learned that by practicing gratitude and patience, we can embody the essence of humanity. The workshop emphasizes the importance of changing our perspectives, distinguishing between truth and falsehood. Such workshops are essential for our community and nation to witness tangible results,

ultimately fostering positive change for all mankind.

ALIYA: The workshop has illuminated my understanding of who I am. For years, I carried a burden that caused me immense pain, unsure of how to rid myself of it. Now, thanks to the workshop, I have found the path to freedom. I am finally able to free myself from this burden, and I feel a profound sense of lightness. ■

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I'tikaf is a Ten-Day Journey of Self-Discovery and Spiritual Rejuvenation

As Ramadan nears its end, Muslims worldwide immerse themselves in diverse forms of worship to seek Allah's blessings and forgiveness. Among the profound practices of these final ten days stands I'tikaf, a period of seclusion in mosques dedicated to acts of worship.

In the chaos of daily life, consumed by worldly pursuits like studies, work, and travel, it's easy to lose sight of our ultimate purpose – our connection with Allah. Yet, I'tikaf emerges as a vital sanctuary, rejuvenating our spiritual essence amidst the neglect of daily distractions.

Termed *"The spring of life in a world struck with the drought of negligence of Allah,"* I'tikaf provides a precious opportunity to rekindle our relationship with our Creator and ourselves. It's a reminder to spiritually realign before the inevitable separation of soul from body.

During I'tikaf, we pause, reflect,

I'tikaf is a ten-day journey of self-discovery and spiritual rejuvenation. We leave behind our homes to dwell in Allah's presence, nourishing our souls and surrounding ourselves with devoted servants.

and reconnect with our inner selves and the world around us. It's a time to transcend material worries and refocus on our soul's

divine origin. Through sincere repentance and immersion in Quranic verses, prayers, and supplications, we seek forgiveness and spiritual nourishment, reigniting our bond with Allah.

Far from a mere break from worldly duties, I'tikaf is a profound spiritual retreat, a deliberate departure from personal abodes to serve Allah in His house, the Masjid. It's an opportunity to recognize ourselves within His sanctuary, embracing both host and guest roles. I'tikaf demands active engagement, a commitment to self-improvement, and a genuine connection with the Divine and His creation.

Indeed, I'tikaf is a ten-day journey of self-discovery and spiritual rejuvenation. We leave behind our homes to dwell in Allah's presence, nourishing our souls and surrounding ourselves with devoted servants. ■

Zakat, an Essential Element of Islamic Charity



Moin Qazi

Charity holds a profound significance in Islam, epitomized by the obligation of zakat, especially during the holy month of Ramadan. Governed by the belief that all possessions belong to God, Muslims are entrusted to act as stewards of His blessings.

The Quran provides both spiritual principles and practical guidelines for the distribution of wealth, emphasizing frugality with oneself and generosity towards others (Q2:219). Zakat, obligatory for Muslims, requires the purification of wealth by contributing 2.5% of assets to the less fortunate.

Zakat, derived from five categories of property, is intended for the benefit of the poor, needy, debtors, and others in need of



conciliation. Embedded within zakat are principles of welfare, altruism, and justice, reflecting Islam's commitment to building a just and equitable society.

Islamic teachings advocate for a balance between extravagance and stinginess acknowledging humanity's dual impulses of compassion and attachment to wealth (Q17:29, 25:67). This balance encourages temperance

and prudence while promoting selflessness and generosity.

Anecdotes like that of the Persian Shah and the olive tree underscore the timeless wisdom of planting seeds for future generations. Ultimately, Islam teaches that love for humanity and God inspires acts of charity, embodying the universal truth that giving begets blessings for both giver and recipient alike. ■

Nurturing the Heart: Purification in Ramadan

In the embrace of Ramadan, Muslims around the world embark on a journey of spiritual rejuvenation, seeking to cleanse their hearts from the ailments that distance them from the Divine. Islam places profound importance on the purity of the heart, recognizing it as the true measure of one's character and worth.

A Hadith from the beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) illuminates this truth, reminding us that Allah does not judge by outward appearances or material wealth, but by the sincerity and purity of one's heart and deeds. Indeed, those with

sound hearts are deemed among the best of people, embodying the essence of faith and righteousness.

As we immerse ourselves in the sanctity of Ramadan, it becomes imperative to purge our hearts of maladies such as enmity, hatred, greed, and egotism. The Prophet (peace be upon him) taught us that true goodness lies in purity of heart and sincerity of speech, emphasizing the importance of cultivating virtuous qualities within ourselves.

Slander, born from malice and ill intent, corrodes the soul and undermines the essence of fasting.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) warned that one who does not abandon falsehood and similar vices cannot truly reap the benefits of fasting, as Allah is not in need of mere abstinence from food and drink.

In this blessed month, let us strive to emulate the purity of heart and sincerity exemplified by our Prophet (peace be upon him). Let us refrain from spreading rumors and falsehoods, and instead seek to verify information before sharing it. May our tongues be adorned with truthfulness and our hearts be free from the stains of hatred and animosity. ■

Nurturing Spiritual Growth: Insights from Imam Ghazali's Ihya ulumudeen for Ramadan



Sana Noorain

You might be wondering what relevance a scholar from centuries past could have to our modern lives. However, the enduring legacy of Imam Ghazali's teachings, particularly his revered work, the *Ihya ulumudeen*, continues to resonate today. In this article, I'll guide you through how each of the forty books within this magnum opus can help us prepare for the sacred month of Ramadan. The *Ihya ulumudeen* is divided into four parts, each containing ten books meticulously arranged to address various aspects of life. From abstract concepts to the essence of human existence, Imam Ghazali's teachings offer profound insights, presented in a manner that feels as though you're conversing directly with the scholar himself.

Ramadan, a month of spiritual significance, calls upon us to strive for excellence in both our worldly endeavors and our spiritual pursuits. Here, I'll summarize key lessons from the forty chapters of the *Ihya ulumudeen*, offering guidance on how to navigate Ramadan:

1. Knowledge: Begin by seeking or revisiting relevant Islamic knowledge pertaining to Ramadan. Understand its significance, delve into its history, and connect spiritually with your Creator. Purify your thoughts, words, and actions, and elevate your Salah (prayer) to strengthen your bond with Allah.

2. Norms of Daily Life: Focus on manners, particularly in eating habits, to maintain spiritual discipline during Ramadan. Ensure that the observance of this sacred month does not disrupt your familial or professional responsibilities. Foster brotherhood and engage in acts of goodness while avoiding excessive socialization.

3. Controlling Desires: Imam Ghazali delves into the intricacies of the human heart, emphasizing the importance of moderation and self-awareness. Guard against excessive indulgence, envy, and worldly attachments, striving instead for contentment and spiritual elevation.

4. Path to Salvation: Finally, prioritize repentance, patience, and gratitude as integral components of your spiritual journey. Embrace the fear and hope in your Creator, cultivate sincerity in your intentions, and constantly reflect on the transient nature of life.

Navigating life's journey requires steadfastness and spiritual alignment. In Ramadan, let us heed the wisdom of Imam Ghazali, drawing inspiration from his timeless teachings to enrich our spiritual practice not only during this blessed month but also in our ongoing journey toward closeness to Allah.

May our efforts in worship be accepted, and may Allah grant relief to the oppressed. Aameen. ■

Ramadan's Unique Calendar Alignment

The fifth day of this blessed Ramadan indeed aligns with the beginning of the next Ramadan.

The incredible insight of Akbar is exemplified in an intriguing point shared by Qazvini in his book, "Wonders of Creation". According to Imam Jafar Sadiq (may Allah have mercy on him), every Ramadan Mubarak, the fifth day of the month corresponds to the first day of the upcoming month of Wid Muzan. This observation, deemed as a law by the Imam, was purportedly confirmed through fifty years of consistent observation.

In today's world dominated by scientific inquiry, it's fascinating to consider the depth of knowledge possessed by individuals like the Shaikh. Many have experimented with this concept, affirming its accuracy. I encourage you to explore this phenomenon yourself; you may find that the fifth day of this blessed Ramadan indeed aligns with the beginning of the next Ramadan. ■

Ramadan: A Spiritual Retreat in Times of Hardship

Wendy Díaz

"Indeed, we need a Ramadan," a sentiment echoing from a minbar years ago, resonates more profoundly today amidst the turmoil engulfing the Muslim world. In the face of unprecedented oppression and strife, the desire to wholeheartedly connect with the Creator reaches its zenith. Ramadan, with its unique significance, offers solace and spiritual rejuvenation in troubled times.

Ramadan is more than abstaining from food, drink, and worldly pleasures. It's a time of recentering and resetting our faith, providing a much-needed boost after months of mundane routines. The physical and psychological sacrifice involved in fasting, coupled with refraining from evil deeds, gossip, and anger, fosters internal acts of worship and unifies the global Muslim community.

The fast of Ramadan serves as a cure and purification for the collective ailments afflicting the ummah. Like a body reacting to the pain of its limbs, Muslims worldwide experience a spiritual awakening during this blessed month. Despite recent hardships, the essence of Ramadan transcends mere enjoyment,

offering a spiritual retreat for healing and renewal.

Reflecting on the example of Imam Al-Ghazali, a 12th-century scholar who embarked on a spiritual quest amidst societal turmoil, we find inspiration to seek solace and closeness to Allah. His journey of self-discipline and reflection, spanning years of seclusion and worship, mirrors the heightened spiritual focus experienced during Ramadan.

1. Detachment from worldly life: Imam Al-Ghazali's renunciation of material possessions parallels the detachment encouraged during Ramadan. Distributing wealth and focusing on necessities align with fasting's emphasis on purification and charity.

2. Maintaining periods of seclusion: Al-Ghazali's solitude in mosques exemplifies the heightened worship experienced during Ramadan. Finding quiet spaces for reflection and prayer fosters spiritual growth and connection with Allah.

3. Observing periods of silence: Al-Ghazali's practice of silence for introspection resonates with Ramadan's call for self-reflection and repentance. Moments of silence aid in deepening faith and continuous God-consciousness.

4. Cleansing the heart: Al-Ghazali's pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina symbolizes seeking spiritual renewal and connection with Allah. Similarly, Ramadan offers an opportunity to embody the Prophet's teachings and abstain from falsehood and evil deeds.

5. Building discipline and determination: Al-Ghazali's resilience in overcoming obstacles mirrors the inner strength cultivated during Ramadan. Fasting instills discipline and self-control, enabling believers to navigate challenges and emerge spiritually rejuvenated.

In a world marred by strife and turmoil, Ramadan serves as a beacon of hope and renewal. By embracing its principles of fasting, prayer, and introspection, Muslims seek mindfulness, deepen their relationship with Allah, and reaffirm their purpose in life. Through the transformative power of discipline and resilience, Ramadan becomes a means of spiritual transformation and renewal.

As we embark on this sacred journey, may Ramadan bring forgiveness, blessings, and relief to all those earnestly seeking Allah's pleasure. Ameen. ■

Reviving Tradition: Dubai's Ramadan Iftar Cannon Embraces Modernity



Over the years, Dubai has increased the number of iftar cannons around the Emirate, which are operated by the police. (AN Photo)

In Dubai, the tradition of awaiting the Ramadan cannon for iftar holds deep significance, blending heritage with modernity.

For eight years, Lt. Col. Abdulla Tarish Al-Amimi has been synonymous with this tradition, announcing the iftar cannon with the iconic word "fire," a moment broadcast live on television.

Al-Amimi emphasizes the importance of this tradition, noting its resilience amid societal changes. Despite Dubai's evolution, the cannon remains a cherished symbol that resonates across generations.

This cultural practice draws both tourists and locals alike, symbolizing the unity of tradition and innovation. Visitors like Anastasiia Chetverikov from Russia find it a fascinating glimpse into Ramadan festivities, while for

American Elizabeth Ibrahim, it encapsulates the spirit of the holy month.

But why the cannon? This custom dates back to 10th-century Egypt under the Fatimid caliphate, where a cannon signaled iftar time.

In Dubai, the main cannon stationed at Expo City near Al-Wasl Plaza marks the second Hai Ramadan celebrations. This event features traditional Emirati decor and treats like luqaimat and Arabic coffee. Amidst performances and storytelling sessions, Hai Ramadan captures the essence of the holy month.

As Dubai continues to blend tradition with innovation, the Ramadan iftar cannon stands as a beacon of cultural pride, bridging the past with the present in a celebration that embraces both heritage and modernity. ■

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Rediscovering Traditions: Ramadan Festivities Illuminate Jeddah's Historic Al-Balad



At the Hazzazi area, located in Rubat Al-Khunji Al-Saghir, activities include making accessories, and learning about the history of the area through stories, solving riddles, playing traditional games, hunting for Ramadan treasure, and listening to poetry. (Supplied)



The Musaharati traditionally walks around neighborhoods beating a drum and chanting poetry to wake people for Sahoor. (Supplied)

Al-Balad also reverberates with the age-old traditions of Ramadan, including the melodic chants of the Musaharati, who awakens residents for sahoor, and the rhythmic dances of men clad in traditional costumes. Storytellers, known as Hakawati, transport listeners to bygone eras with tales of Islamic history and folklore.

For residents like Saeed Al-Ghamdi and Osman Abdullah, the festivities evoke fond memories of communal gatherings and spiritual enrichment during Ramadan nights of the past. Hadeel Alabbasi, co-founder of Al-Kuttab language institute, sees the event as an opportunity to impart cultural and linguistic knowledge while fostering a sense of community.

In the Hazzazi area, visitors engage in interactive activities, from calligraphy and poetry to traditional games and treasure hunts, immersing themselves in the rich history of the region. For Sarah Hassan, returning to Jeddah from Australia, experiencing Ramadan in Al-Balad is a cherished tradition that allows her to reconnect with her roots and share the joy of the holy month with her children.

The Ministry of Culture's efforts extend beyond entertainment, with exhibitions showcasing Jeddah's rich history and archaeological treasures, further enriching the cultural tapestry of Ramadan in Al-Balad. As the festivities continue to unfold, they serve as a testament to the enduring spirit of community, heritage, and celebration during this sacred time. ■

Jeddah's iconic Al-Balad district has been infused with light and joy, resonating with the spirit of Ramadan through a vibrant array of cultural and entertainment activities. Organized by the Saudi Ministry of Culture, these evening festivities are part of a larger program aimed at celebrating the holy month and showcasing Saudi heritage.

tent and a cinematic journey through the past captivate visitors, while live cooking shows and Qur'an recitation contests add to the festive atmosphere. A bustling market offers an array of products, from perfumes to homemade pickles, providing a glimpse into local craftsmanship and culinary traditions.



Visitors at the Bab Al-Balad entrance are greeted with traditional Saudi coffee, while in the Mirkaz area they can play games, try their hand at arts and crafts, or sample gourmet food. (Supplied)

Visitors entering through Bab Al-Balad are greeted with the aroma of traditional Saudi coffee, setting the tone for an immersive cultural experience. Throughout the district, specially designated zones offer a variety of attractions, including games, arts and crafts, gourmet food, and theatrical performances.

At the Sardek zone, a Ramadan

Dressed in Hijazi attire, participants like Sari Salem Hariri, co-founder of Al-Mugasap, embrace the opportunity to share their cultural heritage with visitors. For Badriya Suleimany, selling homemade pickles becomes a platform to connect with diverse audiences and celebrate the essence of Ramadan.

conference marked a significant milestone in bridging sectarian divides and promoting peace. Additionally, the establishment of a scholarly committee to disseminate the Charter reflects an unprecedented effort to unite Islamic sects under a common ideology.

The presence of esteemed scholars from various countries, including

Iran, Indonesia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, further underscored the global significance of the conference. Their participation reaffirmed Saudi Arabia's role as a spiritual hub for Muslims worldwide and highlighted the Kingdom's commitment to fostering unity and promoting peace within the Islamic community. ■

» Page 1

Historic Gathering in Makkah: King Salman Hosts Conference to Unify Islamic Sects

Abdulaziz Al-Asheikh, the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, emphasized Islam's inherent unity and denounced division and discord. The timing of the conference during Ramadan holds immense significance, symbolizing a transformative push for peace within the Muslim world.

With the formation of the 'Charter of Cooperation and Brotherhood,' the

Frankfurt Embraces Ramadan: Illuminating Togetherness on Grosse Bockenheimer Strasse



Frankfurt's Muslim community has welcomed the decision to put up lights for Ramadan. Image: Boris Roessler/dpa/picture alliance

In a symbolic gesture of peace and unity, the city of Frankfurt, Germany, is set to illuminate its main high street, Grosse Bockenheimer Strasse, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan for the first time ever. The initiative, which includes half-moons, stars, lanterns, and a prominent sign wishing "Happy Ramadan!" aims to foster a sense of togetherness and solidarity among residents, particularly during a time of reflection and fasting for Muslims.

The decision to adorn the bustling pedestrian thoroughfare, affectionately known as the "Fressgass" for its abundance of cafes and restaurants, with Ramadan decorations was met with enthusiasm from the local Muslim community. With Muslims comprising around 15% of Frankfurt's population, the initiative holds significant cultural and symbolic importance, emphasizing inclusivity and recognition of diverse religious traditions within the city.

City officials, including council chairwoman Hilime Arslaner and mayor Nargess Eskandari-

Grünberg, underscored the significance of promoting messages of peace and understanding, particularly amidst global conflicts and challenges. The illuminated decorations serve as a beacon of hope and solidarity, advocating against prejudice, discrimination, and anti-Muslim racism, while also promoting unity and tolerance among all residents. Mohamed Seddadi, chairman of Frankfurt's Muslim Community, hailed the initiative as a meaningful gesture that reinforces the city's commitment to inclusivity and belonging. By embracing elements of both Islamic and Christian traditions in public street lighting, Frankfurt sets an example of cultural harmony and mutual respect.

In essence, Frankfurt's decision to illuminate Grosse Bockenheimer Strasse during Ramadan reflects a commitment to diversity, tolerance, and unity. As residents come together to observe the holy month, the illuminated decorations serve as a powerful symbol of togetherness and solidarity, transcending cultural and religious divides. ■

Understanding the Virtue of Fasting in Shawwal

Alhamdulillah, another Ramadan has passed, and as we adapt to the "new normal," it's essential to maintain the spiritual practices we cultivated during Ramadan. Fasting six days in Shawwal is a highly recommended Sunnah for Muslims. Here are five key points to understand about this special practice:

- 1) Fasting in Shawwal Multiplies Rewards:** Fasting six days in Shawwal carries immense rewards. A Hadith narrated by Abu Ayyub indicates that fasting these days after Ramadan is akin to fasting the entire year, thanks to the multiplication of rewards by Allah.
- 2) Timing and Prohibitions:** While you can fast any six days in Shawwal except the first day, fasting on Eid day itself is forbidden in Islam. The rationale behind this prohibition is to distinguish Eid as a day of celebration and feasting.
- 3) Flexibility in Fasting:** Scholars offer differing opinions

on whether the six days should be observed consecutively or intermittently throughout Shawwal. Both approaches are acceptable, reflecting the flexibility within Islamic jurisprudence.

4) Combining Missed Fasts: Women who have missed fasts during Ramadan due to menstruation or other valid reasons can make them up during Shawwal. They can combine these makeup fasts with the six days of Shawwal to attain the rewards for both.

5) Health Benefits of Fasting: Beyond the spiritual rewards, fasting also offers numerous health benefits supported by science. It aids in weight management, enhances organ function, and promotes cellular regeneration and detoxification. As you observe these fasts, remember to stay hydrated during Sahoor and embrace the opportunity to purify both your soul and body. ■

The Evolving Role of Influencers in Ramadan: Commercialization vs. Cultural Change



Ramadan is for shopping? Surveys have found that 79% percent of UAE respondents spend more than originally planned during Ramadan Image: Giusepp

Ramadan, the month-long Muslim holiday, has seen a transformation in recent years, largely due to the influence of social media and the rise of influencers in the Middle East. While some argue that influencers are commercializing the holiday, others see them as agents of cultural change, reshaping traditions and bringing new perspectives to the observance of Ramadan.

The proliferation of technology has revolutionized the way Ramadan is observed, with apps facilitating prayer timing and charitable donations. However, alongside these advancements, social media influencers have emerged as key players, leveraging their large followings to shape perceptions and behaviors during the holy month. In countries like the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, where online media use intensifies during Ramadan, influencers wield significant influence over consumer habits and social norms. From

promoting lavish iftar meals to collaborating with fashion brands on Ramadan collections, influencers play a prominent role in shaping the holiday experience for many.

However, concerns have been raised about the growing commercialization of Ramadan and the superficiality of its observance. Critics argue that influencers prioritize consumerism over religious devotion, turning Ramadan into a spectacle of luxury and excess. Moreover, against the backdrop of conflicts like the one in Gaza, extravagant displays of wealth during Ramadan can be seen as insensitive and out of touch with reality.

Despite these criticisms, there is evidence to suggest that influencers can also drive positive change during Ramadan. Initiatives promoting sustainability and mindfulness, led by influencers, have gained traction in recent years. From campaigns to reduce food waste to efforts to foster gender equality in

household responsibilities, influencers are using their platforms to advocate for social causes and reshape cultural norms.

Moreover, influencers are facilitating a more personal and relatable engagement with religious traditions, particularly among younger Muslims. Through storytelling and personal anecdotes, influencers are making religious practices more accessible and relevant to a new generation of digitally savvy Muslims.

In essence, while influencers may contribute to the commercialization of Ramadan, they also have the potential to catalyze cultural change and foster a more inclusive and meaningful observance of the holiday. As Ramadan continues to evolve in the digital age, influencers will likely play a pivotal role in shaping its future trajectory, balancing commercial interests with social responsibility and cultural authenticity. ■

Celebrating Saudi Heritage: Third Ramadan Nights Festival in Riyadh



The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts launched the third Ramadan Nights festival in Riyadh. (SPA)

The Saudi Arabian Society for Culture and Arts has launched the third Ramadan Nights Festival on March 20, 2024, in Riyadh, as reported by the Saudi Press

Agency. Coinciding with the Saudi Table Tennis Federation's third community tournament in the Al-Ma'athar neighborhood, this festival highlights the vibrant

culture of Saudi Arabia.

Embracing the warm Ramadan ambiance, the festival showcases customs synonymous with the holy month, aiming to create a lively atmosphere while spotlighting the aesthetics and essence of Saudi culture. The event emphasizes the Kingdom's rich past, identity, and heritage, evident in the costumes and cultural displays featured at the launch.

The festival provides a platform for amateur participants in fine arts to showcase their talents, alongside various captivating performances. With its focus on celebrating Saudi heritage, the Ramadan Nights Festival offers attendees a glimpse into the diverse and dynamic cultural tapestry of the Kingdom. ■

The Significance of Salah in Preparation for Death



Israrul Haque

In pondering the profound question of what death might entail, Israrul Haque underscores a thought-provoking analogy between the act of prayer (Salah) in Islam and the inevitability of death. Haque suggests that one's experience of death mirrors their relationship with Salah, serving as a poignant reflection of their spiritual readiness to meet Allah. Drawing parallels between the two, Haque emphasizes that Salah is essentially a meeting with Allah, just as death represents the ultimate encounter with the Divine. Thus, the disposition one holds towards Salah whether it be one of sweetness, eagerness, or burden foreshadows their perception of death.

If Salah is cherished and eagerly anticipated, indicating a deep connection with Allah, then death likewise holds a sense of readiness and sweetness. Conversely, if

Salah feels burdensome or disconnected, it suggests a need for spiritual refinement and a stronger bond with the Divine, preparing one for the journey into the afterlife.

Haque's analogy prompts a contemplation of the significance of Salah as a barometer for spiritual readiness. It serves as a reminder that continual improvement in one's relationship with Allah through Salah is essential in preparing for the ultimate meeting with the Creator. The concluding prayer for forgiveness and assistance in enhancing Salah underscores the importance of ongoing spiritual growth and striving for a profound connection with Allah. It encapsulates the aspiration to approach Salah, life, and ultimately death with sincerity, devotion, and a steadfast commitment to spiritual elevation. ■

King Mohammed VI Presides Over Second Ramadan Lecture

RABAT: Amidst the solemn observance of Ramadan, King Mohammed VI presided over the second religious Ramadan lecture on Monday, with renowned Indian scholar Bahaudheen Muhammed Nadwi leading the proceedings.

The event, hosted today at the Royal Palace in Rabat, was broadcasted live on radio and television starting at 4:15 PM local time.

Hailing from the state of Kerala, India, Bahaudheen Muhammed Nadwi currently serves as the Vice Chancellor of Darul Huda Islamic University.

Recognized globally as one of the most influential Muslim scholars, Nadwi has authored and translated numerous books on Islamic disciplines and delivered lectures worldwide.

His prominence extends to memberships in esteemed national and international organizations, including the



International Union of Muslim Scholars. Meanwhile, in line with the spirit of Ramadan, King Mohammed VI announced a substantial budget allocation of MAD 347 million (\$36.8

million) for "Operation Ramadan 1445."

Managed by the Mohammed V Foundation, this initiative aims to extend assistance to nearly 5 million individuals across Morocco. The campaign focuses on distributing essential food items such as flour, milk, rice, oil, and sugar to those in need, highlighting the monarchy's commitment to uplifting vulnerable communities during this holy month.

The royal leadership's commitment to philanthropy during the holy month highlights Morocco's dedication to supporting its citizens, particularly in times of spiritual significance. ■

Sustaining Ramadan Habits: Strategies for Long-Term Success

Forming habits takes time, with research suggesting it can range from 18 to 254 days for a new behavior to become ingrained. On average, it takes about 66 days for behaviors to become automatic. Last Ramadan provided Muslims with the opportunity to cultivate beneficial habits



even if it's just a few verses daily.

3) Perform Voluntary Salah: Maintain the habit of performing additional prayers (voluntary Salah) beyond the obligatory ones.

4) Consistent Charity:

Continue giving Sadaqah (charity) regularly, even if it's in small amounts, to uphold the spirit

of generosity instilled during Ramadan.

5) Maintain Duas: Keep making supplications (Duas) and seeking guidance from Allah in all aspects of life.

Regular Self-Evaluation:

Continuously assess your habits to ensure consistency. Whether it's through weekly or monthly evaluations, reflecting on your progress helps in staying accountable and identifying areas for improvement.

Ultimately, sustaining Ramadan habits requires dedication, intentionality, and a steadfast commitment to personal growth. While the fervor of Ramadan may diminish, the lasting impact of its habits can shape our lives throughout the year, Insha Allah. ■

like regular prayer, controlling anger, and practicing patience. While Ramadan serves as a catalyst for change, the challenge lies in maintaining these habits beyond the month.

The key question is: can we sustain these habits post-Ramadan? While the intensity of Ramadan may fade, it's possible to uphold these practices with commitment and perseverance.

Here are some strategies to help maintain the momentum of Ramadan habits:

1) Continue Voluntary Fasting: Keep up with voluntary fasts beyond Ramadan, such as fasting on Mondays and Thursdays.

2) Dedicate Time for Quran Recitation: Set aside regular time to recite and reflect on the Quran,

Zafar Agha (1954 - 2024)



The passing of Zafar Agha, a veteran journalist, has plunged the media community into mourning. Zafar's career, spanning over four decades, was characterized by his unwavering commitment to truth and integrity. Starting as an English journalist, he later transitioned seamlessly into Urdu journalism, leaving an indelible mark on both spheres.

Zafar Agha breathed his last on March 22, 2024, at Fortis Hospital in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi, after battling pneumonia and chest infection. His demise, attributed to cardiac arrest, marked the end of a storied career marked by resilience and dedication.

Born into a Shia family in Allahabad in 1954, Zafar pursued his education at Yadgar Hussaini College and Allahabad University, where his passion for English literature blossomed. Throughout his life, he remained committed to progressive ideals, evident in his active involvement in student movements and his steadfast support for democratic values.

Zafar's journalistic journey commenced in 1979 with "Link Magazine" in New Delhi, where he honed his skills as an English journalist. Over the years, he contributed significantly to

esteemed publications such as "India Today" and "Sunday Observer," establishing himself as a respected voice in the field.

In the face of political upheaval in the 1980s and 1990s, Zafar stood firm in his commitment to journalistic ethics. He was among the few Muslim journalists who rose to prominence during this tumultuous period, earning admiration for his principled approach to reporting.

Zafar's transition to Urdu journalism further cemented his legacy, with his columns in publications like "Siyast" and "Inqilab" garnering widespread acclaim. As the editor of the Urdu news portal "Qumi Awaz," he continued to uphold the highest standards of journalistic integrity until his final days.

Despite enduring personal challenges, including injuries sustained while reporting on riots

in Allahabad, Zafar remained resolute in his dedication to his craft. His impact on the journalistic landscape will be felt for generations to come, serving as a source of inspiration for aspiring journalists.

Zafar Agha leaves behind a profound legacy as a trailblazer in journalism, a champion of truth, and a beloved friend and colleague. While his physical presence may be gone, his spirit lives on in the countless lives he touched throughout his remarkable career. May his soul find eternal peace. ■

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Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders: The 'Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye' Campaign at Aligarh Muslim University

1. Essay Writing Competition:

Inviting participants to delve into the theme "Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye," the competition encouraged introspection and discourse on the significance of the first vote in a citizen's life.

2. Online Debate Competition:

Providing a platform for constructive dialogue, participants deliberated on the topic "Are reforms needed in the current voting system?" nurturing critical thinking and advocacy for electoral improvements.

3. Online Quiz Competition:

Exploring the theme "Democracy and Elections after 1947," participants tested their knowledge on historical and contemporary electoral dynamics, fostering a deeper understanding of democratic processes.

4. Slogan Writing and Poster Making Competition:

With the theme "Right to Vote," participants unleashed their creativity in advocating for the fundamental democratic right of every citizen, amplifying the message through

compelling slogans and visuals.

5. Digital Content Making:

Leveraging modern tools and platforms, participants showcased their interpretation of "Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye," disseminating the essence of electoral participation through various digital mediums.

Guided by esteemed teaching staff including Ms. Tehmina Ashraf, Ms. Samia Hamid, Ms. Rifa Nasir, and Ms. Kaneez Fatima, students were empowered to express their voices and contribute meaningfully to the democratic discourse.

Dr. Md. Alamgir, Principal of CGHS, lauded the students' endeavors and underscored the significance of such initiatives in nurturing responsible citizenship and fostering a vibrant democratic culture within society. The "Mera Pehla Vote Desh Ke Liye" campaign at AMU stands as a testament to the institution's commitment to shaping tomorrow's leaders and promoting civic engagement among the youth. ■

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