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and its heart for Sikh
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My UNFORGETTABLE JOURNEY TO ROME — JOHN KEATS



Not far from our hotel was the tourist attraction - Spanish Steps. The Spanish Steps are a set of steps in Rome, climbing a steep slope between the Piazza di Spagna at the base and Piazza Trinità dei Monti, dominated by the Trinità dei Monti church at the top. It's a great place to just sit down and enjoy the atmosphere and views of the Eternal City. The steps built in 1723 are a wide irregular gathering place consisted of 138 steps placed in a mix of curves, straight flights, vistas and terraces. When I was there one could sit on the steps and eat ice cream, but now it has been banned for tourists to sit down on the steps. Any violations can result in 300 Euro fine.

At the lower end of the stairs you can find an early baroque fountain called Fontana della Barcaccia, or "Fountain of the Old Boat". The fountain has the form of a sinking ship and it is said to be based upon a folk legend. Day and night this plaza is crowded with tourists from the around the world. Two streets down was the Indian restaurant where we enjoyed our delicious biyani with kebab.



At the corner on the right as one begins to climb the steps, is the house where English poet John Keats lived and died in 1821 at just age 25; it is now a museum dedicated to his memory, full of memorabilia of the English Romantic

generation. On the outside wall the sign reads: The Keats-Shelley Memorial House.

When Keats arrived in Rome, desperately ill with tuberculosis in November 1820, it was his doctor who found him a room in this house. His bed is still intact

in which he breathed his last. Most of his clothes were burnt, but some were saved. With help from Kings of England and Italy, and US President in 1909 the house was opened to the public as a museum and library commemorating Keats, Shelley and the other



Romantic poets who had spent time in Italy.

To this day Keat's bedroom is preserved as a shrine to his tragic story and extraordinary talent. The collection of books, manuscripts and other treasures grew steadily over the past century and museum is now visited by thousands of tourists,

scholars and admirers of Romantic literature. There are stacks of old books neatly stored in wooden book shelves. There is an old painting showing only face of Keats. There are also two terraces with stunning views, a book and gift shop and an introductory film. There was a lady checking the admission tickets while absorbed in reading her book. She asked me to sign the guest book.

I took photographs of letters and manuscripts - one hand written letter dated 12 March 1844, Putney. A book cover said: Walt Whitman's Manuscript Notes - Review of Keats' Hyperion'. One chart read FRAGMENTS FROM THE LIFE OF LORD BYRON. One neat hand written letter reads like this: Max Gate Dorchester - 27th June 1924 Dear Sir Rennell Rodd . Next one said: Letter of Thomas Hardy to Sir Rennell Rodd , June 1924. There was a letter of Mary Shelley to Douglas W. Jerrold with stamp from the post office dated 9 Aug 1834.



Kartarpur Corridor

A step closer to a more tolerant Pakistan



By Sitara Brooj Akbar

“You are free; you are free to go to your temples; free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in the State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or cast or creed that has Nothing to do with the business of the state” – father of the nation of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah in his address to the first constituent assembly of Pakistan, 11th August 1947.

On 12th of November 2019, a couple of weeks

forefathers, our leaders have turned and twisted the image of the nation so much that it is barely recognizable as the pure land it was. Politics and gatekeeping have prevented that dream of our Quid-e-Azam from coming true, instead over the years our constitution has changed to include and justify religious intolerance and prosecution of minorities based on the interest of a few extremist groups in the country. In a



after the initial agreement signing on the 24th of October, negotiations were settled and the Kartarpur corridor finally opened to Sikh pilgrims allowing them to visit one of their holiest sites without a visa for the first time after the bloody 1947 partitions. The 4-kilometer-long corridor now connects Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, the resting site of Baba Guru Nanak Dev Ji (1469-1539), the founder of Sikhism, with Dera Baba Nanak Sahib, another holy site in across the border.

Pakistan as a country was built on the foundation of religious tolerance and peace for all but ignoring the wishes and guidance of our

nation that is shadowed by its past filled with injustice and state-sanctioned hate crimes, the Kartarpur corridor is finally a step in the right direction. Pakistani finally reached across the dividing line to hold the hands of our Punjabi family in India in a move that expresses trust and will alter history thanks to the dedication and effort of the new government and Prime Minister Imran Khan put into it. Taking into the account the current tensions, threat of war and the always present fear of terror attacks, this agreement is nothing short of a miracle of diplomacy and strategy that goes to PM Khan's credit.

The Kartarpur channel will not only be a physical one, but a bridge of trust built across hostile nations and with that comes unbelievable responsibility as well. Terrorists and extremists try their best to cause strife and grief among us and make the path towards peace impossible. As much as this place needs to be celebrated, it also needs to be protected from those who would seek to destroy it so it can be a permanent foundation we can build upon.

On top of its social, geo-political and diplomatic implications this development might also help boost our economy and might lead to future help in science and research. A country struggling with debt could find an unexpected source of income from religious tourism, generating an estimated Rs5.55 billion per annum. If this turns out to a success there is no reason why what is at Kartarpur is not extended to other important sites in the country. We as a nation come particularly blessed with a rich and vibrant history as a legacy of the Indus Valley Civilization in the form of Harappa, Mohenjodaro and Taxila, something we have not explored as much as we should and this history is also shared with India with their cities of Lothal, Dholavira and Rakhigarhi. Perhaps in the future a shared venture to study said history could be set up, with specific visas for students and researchers that can build our understanding and boost Pakistan as a global destination for learning.

Such an event will hopefully have a domino effect, with our society opening arms towards not only our brothers and sisters from abroad but also their fellow Pakistani's that live within, let us not forget that we have much to work on in terms of society. In the 21st century, democracy demands equal rights for all citizens regardless

of their cast, creed, race or gender but why would we need to hear these things again when we were taught the exact same principles 14 centuries ago as Muslims. We claim to be the Islamic Republic, the pure land that our ancestors fought and died for then let us act like it as well, be a state that does not accept prejudice in any case and provides equal opportunities for every Pakistani.



I'll leave you with the words of Qaid that resound over time and history, may his dream for the nation in the past guide us in the future. "Now if we want to make this great state of Pakistan happy and prosperous we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people, and especially of the masses and the poor ... If you change your past and work together in a spirit that every one of you, no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his colour, caste or creed, is first, second and last a citizen of this state with equal rights, privileges and obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make."

Pakistan opened its border and its heart for Sikh community at Kartarpur

By Naveed Siddiqui

NAROWAL:



Prime Minister Imran Khan inaugurated the historic Kartarpur Corridor on Saturday, for the followers of Guru Nanak, allowing them to visit the revered Sikh Guru's final resting place without a visa.

The three-kilometre corridor provides visa-free access to Sikh pilgrims, allowing them to travel to Gurudwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur, where Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, spent the final years of his life.

The prime minister welcomed the Sikh community to Kartarpur at the start of his address. "First of all, I congratulate the Sikh community on the 550th birth anniversary of Baba Guru Nanak and welcome you all."

"A leader will always bring people together and will not divide them. A leader does not spread hatred and canvasses votes on the basis religion," said the prime minister in a veiled reference to India PM Modi.

Referring to the issue of Kashmir, the prime minister said he had suggested to Modi to resolve the issue. "What we are witnessing in Kashmir today, it is not an international issue anymore. It has escalated to a humanitarian crisis."

"Unfortunately things have gotten even worse for the people of Kashmir." He further said the Sub-Continent will only progress when the issue of Kashmir is resolved. "And, God willing, that day is not far." The prime minister, who arrived earlier

using the shuttle service being used by the Sikh pilgrims, greeted the Indian delegation shortly after his arrival at the venue.

'We welcome you with open hearts and arms'

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi opened the ceremony and welcomed all those who had come to attend the historic occasion. FM Qureshi congratulated the global Sikh community and said the inauguration was a "historic occasion and the credit goes to Prime Minister Imran Khan for his efforts to make the corridor a reality".

Sidhu lauds PM Imran's Kartarpur initiative



Cricketer turned politician Navjot Singh Sidhu lauded PM Imran's Kartarpur initiative and paid rich tribute to the premier. "This is the first prime minister, a lion, who did not care about benefit or loss and made the Kartarpur dream a reality for the millions of Sikhs around the world." "My friend Imran turned our dream into reality in just 10 months." "You have won hearts."

Hope bilateral relations improve: Manmohan Singh
Former Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh led a delegation of Sikh pilgrims as they crossed the international border. He was also accompanied by Indian Punjab's Chief Minister Amarinder Singh.



Former Indian premier Manmohan Singh arrives for Kartarpur ceremony. Photo: EXPRESS

“I hope India and Pakistan relations improve as a result of this beginning,” said the former Indian prime minister while talking to state broadcaster PTV. The chief minister of India’s Punjab said the entire Sikh community was very happy as it was their wish to visit the religious site for 70 years. “I hope this is the beginning and many more gurdwaras are going to be allowed,” he said.

PM Imran, in his message earlier, noted the significance of the event for the Sikh community could be well understood by the Muslims who have visited the holy place. “Today we are not only opening the border but also our hearts for the Sikh community,” said the premier.

“The inauguration of Kartarpur Corridor is a manifestation of the fact that our hearts are always open for the followers of different religions as enjoined by our great religion and envisioned by our Father of the Nation,” added the prime minister.

The premier further said Pakistan believes that interfaith harmony and peaceful coexistence would

provide an opportunity to work for larger interests of the people of the Sub-continent.

Modi thanks PM Imran

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked the prime minister and said: “I also thank Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan for understanding India’s wishes and turning Kartarpur into reality”.

The first batch of Sikh pilgrims arrived at Gurdwara Darbar Sahib after undergoing the immigration process at the border terminal earlier today. As a gesture of goodwill, PM Imran also waived the passport requirement for Sikh pilgrims entering the country on this auspicious occasion. Around 10,000 pilgrims are set to perform their rituals within the compound of the Gurdwara after seven decades.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2096425/1-prime-minister-imran-inaugurate-kartarpur-corridor-today/>



ICC Documents 43 Cases of Persecution Against Pakistani Christians in Three Months



By ICC's Pakistan Correspondent

International Christian Concern) – On September 27, Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, made lofty claims about protecting religious minorities as he addressed the General

widespread discrimination facing non-Muslims in Pakistan's education institutions. According to that report, 60% of non-Muslim students experienced discrimination and disrespect because of their faith. The report went on to say that 70% of non-Muslim teachers faced



Assembly of the United Nations. Back home, however, as these claims were being made, Pakistan's Christian community was protesting against the Prime Minister's government after it announced its intention to nationalize Edward's College in Peshawar, a century-old Christian education institution.

In the midst of these protests, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and the Institute of Development Research and Corresponding Capabilities released a report highlighting the

discrimination and 72% of parents reported that their children experienced discrimination based on their faith.

While this report and the protests paint a grim picture for religious minorities in Pakistan, the suffering endured by the country's Christian community continued. Between July and September, International Christian Concern (ICC) documented 43 cases of persecution. These cases included kidnappings, rapes, forced conversions to Islam, discrimination,

and several religiously motivated murders.

In early September, police tortured to death Amir Masih, a 28-year-old Christian gardener in Lahore. Sunny Masih, Amir's brother, told ICC, "Amir was a father of two kids, one of them just born when Amir was tortured to death by police in custody."

Amir was arrested by police on August 28 after he was falsely accused of stealing over 3,500,000 PKR (\$22,200 USD) from the house of Rana Hanif, a Muslim resident in PAF Colony of Lahore. According to Amir's family, the police then tortured Amir for the next four days, seeking to extract a false confession.

On September 2, police contacted Amir's family and told them that Amir was not well. The police then instructed the family to take Amir to the hospital. Covered in the marks of extreme torture, including bruises and burns from electric shocks, Amir died at the Services Hospital only a couple of hours after he was taken there by his family.

"My son was kidnapped by police and they tortured him to death. We approached the police officers to recover Amir, however, they did not extend any support to us and only handed over Amir when he was almost dead," Iqbal Masih, Amir's father explained to ICC.

"One of the policemen reportedly abused Amir stating, 'These Chooras [an insulting term used against Christians in Pakistan] should not be trusted. I know how to deal with these infidels,'" Sunny told ICC.

"Amir told me that he had not done anything wrong and had not stolen money. He said that the police had tortured him awfully," Sunny told ICC.

The authorities registered First Information Report (FIR) # 1720/19 against the policemen involved in torturing Amir and have also arrested the Station House Officer who oversees the police station. However, three other officers involved are still at large.

In another case documented by ICC, Faiza Mukhtar, a Christian teenager and a student at the government girls' primary school in

Khanqah Dogran, located in Sheikhpura district, was kidnapped and fraudulently converted to Islam by her school's principal.

On September 4, Faiza was forcefully taken from her school and brought to an Islamic seminary. The principal claimed, "The Christian girl has learned to read and write the Arabic language; therefore, she is no more a Christian and must live the rest of her life as a Muslim."

In a video posted to Facebook, Faiza's mother claimed, "On that day, my two daughters went to school, but only one returned home. When we went to the school in search of Faiza, the principal revealed that Faiza had converted to Islam and therefore, we had no right to meet her. It was heartbreaking for me."

"Instead of returning our daughter, the principal asked all of us to convert to Islam," Faiza's mother continued. "She offered us a luxurious life and that she will bear the entire expenses of the family and we will have access to Faiza if we converted."

Faiza's mother claimed that the police did not cooperate with her family and refused to register a case against the principal for kidnapping and fraudulently converting their daughter.

Including these two cases, ICC documented 43 cases of persecution against Pakistani Christians between July and September. This included the abductions and forced conversions of seven Christians girls, another seven cases where Christian women were targeted for sexual assault, five cases where Christians were denied their religious freedom rights, seven cases of Christians being physically tortured, six religiously motivated murders, and 11 cases of discrimination.

For Pakistan's Christians, discrimination and persecution are quickly becoming the norm. Instead of making lofty claims to international bodies, Pakistan must take real action at home to curb instances of persecution and secure the rights of the religious minority communities that call Pakistan home.

persecution.org/2019/10/25/icc-documents-43-cases-persecution-pakistani-christians-three-months

Agricultural problems of Pothohar region in Pakistan

By Sundus Tanveer , M. Phil student, Pir Mehar Ali Shah
Agriculture University, Rawalpindi



Pothohar plateau covers about %7 of all the cultivated land of Pakistan and most of it is very fertile. But this region does not have any proper irrigational system except rain water. Inappropriate construction, maintenance and management of dams are among one of the major problems encountered by Pothohar region in the agricultural scenario. Despite its huge potential the Pothohar region has always been sidelined at agricultural fronts. Nestled in between the gigantic Salt range and the Hazara hills, Pothohar region is a land of unparalleled charm and glory. A huge portion of population in this region is directly or indirectly related to agriculture and depends on it to earn their living. Despite its enormous importance for this piece of land, agriculture has not yet received enough attention from the prime leaders at any stage of time. There are a number of problems that hinder the progress in agriculture sector. First and the foremost comes the problem of irrigation. Almost all of the land in this region is barani and dependent upon rainwater for irrigation. From a total of 1.8million hectares of land only 0.7million hectares is cultivable. And even out of this only %4 is irrigated while all the remaining land is rainwater-dependent. Multiple dams and other water storage structures have been built time to time but almost one of the has proved to be fruitful. Hindrances have occurred at the primary stages just after the land has been acquired, say the locals. Even in those cases where work was started and to some extent completed, it was not up to the mark. Secondly the general level of farming of agriculture is very low as compared to the rest of Pakistan and subsequently to the world. Farmers are generally illiterate and do not have even the basic knowledge of modern techniques that are required to cope up with the modern day requirements. They cannot work to control the agricultural diseases, moreover they are not confident enough to use modern methods of agriculture. Another reason of substandard agriculture is poverty of farmers they do not have enough resources to buy expensive modern machinery, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. Thirdly the laws of inheritance which are generally in practice keep on dividing the land into smaller and

smaller pieces and eventually it becomes impossible for a farmer to buy machinery such as tractors and ploughs for such a small piece of land and that too when they are expecting a very meager output.

Even with the farmers who produce a good yield there lays the problem of communication gap. Road networks and railway networks are not in a status as to encourage or help farmers transport their processed goods. Another big problem in this same regard is that there are a large number of members in producer-consumer chain. These 3rd party members gain a huge profit margin consequently leaving a very small profit for farmers which is again not very encouraging for the farmers and they do not feel a need to work to such an extent which is possible.

This uncertain situation neither creates incentive for hard work nor attracts capital investments. Solutions to all of the aforementioned problems are possible. Though time taking and effort demanding, revolutionary changes can be brought in agriculture of Pothohar region. First and foremost, the issue of water resources needsto be addressed as there is a dire need of building new dams in the area of which can store water so as to provide water exactly what a plant or crop requires. There is a need to not only construct but also check the quality and standard of water storage structures, which can provide benefit to the people. Water needs to be used wisely, when we know that there is a shortage of water then the traditional floor irrigation method should not be used instead there should be new methods of irrigation introduced such as drip farming, sprinkle farming tunnel farming etc. So that a maximum output is obtained through a minimal use of water supplies,

Farmers should be given basic knowledge of moern day techniques and equipment, they should be able to use new and improved types of machinery, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides and insecticides. There needs to be scientifically directed research oriented work in this field. A number of institutions are needed in this regard. Barani Agriculture Institute Chakwal is a very good institute playing its part in this regard but there is a need for more institutes. Recently ithas been found out that the Pothohar region especially Chakwal and its surroundings are very suitable for olive farming.

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Forced Conversions of Hindu Girls in Sindh



Forced conversions' of young girls is an emotive issue within the Hindu community of Sindh. Those accused claim that 'young love' is being misrepresented by the community, the media and activists. But those who know the whole truth are often not speaking...



Last year Hari Lal's house in Daharki, a city in Ghotki district, was echoing with the sound of laughter and the cranky fights of his daughters Reena and Raveena on the eve of Diwali. Diyas illuminated the small courtyard where the sisters had drawn intricate rangoli patterns, after carefully choosing each colour. But this year, Diwali at the Lal home is devoid of colour. In March, Lal maintains, his daughters were kidnapped during the festival of Holi.

"Today our day started with crying," Lal tells Eos. The 50-year-old cannot help but remember Reena and Raveena on every special occasion.

Lal had made headlines earlier this year when a video of him — helplessly slapping himself while crying outside the Ghotki police station,

asking the police to do something to recover his daughters — went viral online. Lal was not alone. Reportedly over 2,000 Hindu men and women from nearby villages and towns had joined him in demanding justice for Reena and Raveena, blocking the highway for three consecutive days.

The incident became a flashpoint about the issue of forced conversion of Hindu girls. Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal-Bhutto Zardari met with Lal and his son Shaman Das, and assured them that all efforts would be made for the recovery of the girls. Prime Minister Imran Khan took notice of the incident. Even Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj directed the Indian high commissioner in Islamabad to send her a report about the incident.



"In the past 200 years, not a single Hindu has been converted to Islam forcibly," Mian Mithu claims. "All those men, women, girls and boys, whether they belong to the Hindu community or any other community, come to us to change

their religion out of their own choice,” he says. But it was all for nothing. In April, the Islamabad High Court found that the sisters from Ghotki were not forcibly converted to Islam. A medical test showed that Lal’s claims that Reena and Raveena were minors were also incorrect. Some now use the ruling as an example of how the issue of forced conversions of Hindu girls in Sindh is blown out of proportion.

But Lal refuses to accept that his daughters married the two Muslim men, Safdar Ali and Barkat Ali — both of whom were already married with kids — out of their free will. His son, Shaman Das, alleges that the strings of what happened to his sisters were being pulled by the pir of the shrine Bharchundi Sharif, Mian Abdul Haq, more commonly known as Mian Mithu.

Mian Mithu, a former PPP member of the National Assembly, is infamous for his involvement in cases of alleged forced conversions. In 2015, when Imran Khan asked Mian Mithu to join Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), the PTI chairman faced so much backlash from the Hindu community that he had to distance himself from the pir. The PPP had earlier denied Mian Mithu a ticket when he first came under the spotlight in 2012 because of accusations of forcefully converting a Hindu girl, Rinkle Kumari. The conversion, Mian Mithu had claimed, was not forced.

The religious leader found himself in the news yet again in September this year. He made headlines when he reportedly led a large number of people who took to the streets in protest to an alleged incident of blasphemy. In a rare move, Mian Mithu recently called a press conference in Karachi, clearly in an attempt to clear his name.

THE MIAN MITHU SHOW



The Karachi Press Club is bustling with energy on a Tuesday. Reporters chatter away before the man of the hour, Mian Mithu, takes his seat facing the audience. He looks calm. He is wearing his signature cone-shaped white cap and a grey kameez. His white beard and calm demeanour give the impression of someone who is very sure of himself. Joining Mian Mithu is his 30-something son, Abdul Malik, and another associate.

“I have nothing to do with the Ghotki violence. In fact, my sons and nephews tried to control the mob, which was charged over an incident of blasphemy committed by a Hindu school principal,” Mian Mithu says.

He and his followers had nothing to do with the vandalism of the Sacho Satram Das temple, he maintains. Instead, he insists, some organisations are trying to defame him. But Mian Mithu is not just here to talk about the recent riots in Ghotki. He wants to address another accusation against him that keeps resurfacing: forced conversions of Hindu girls.

“In the past 200 years, not a single Hindu has been converted to Islam forcibly,” he claims. “All those men, women, girls and boys, whether they belong to the Hindu community or any other community, come to us to change their religion out of their own choice,” he claims. “They are not forced to convert.” Going back to the case of Rinkle Kumari, he proudly shares that Faryal Bibi (the Muslim name of Rinkle Kumari) has recently completed reading the Quran and has returned to Pakistan after performing Umrah.



Faryal Bibi, born Rinkle Kumari, addresses a press conference in 2012 | Online photo

She currently teaches the Quran to children at the madressah, he says.

Mian Mithu clearly wants to position himself as a saviour of love. He says that he supports newly converted Muslims, even Hindu women who are entering the religion after falling in love with a Muslim man. This is something Mian Mithu has apparently been doing for years.

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), in 2018, more than 13 Hindu girls were abducted and married off to Muslims without the consent of their families. But members of the Hindu community say the number is higher.

Back in 2013, when he was a local member of the national assembly, he had invited the press to his residence on the outskirts of Daharki. Reporters and photographers had travelled from Karachi to see Kiran Kumari, another young woman who had supposedly fallen in love and eloped with a Muslim boy.

Kiran had narrated her and Shabbir Ahmed's love story in great detail. She told the captivated audience of journalists that she and Ahmed had come to Mian Mithu's residence a day before Eidul Fitr, where she embraced Islam and married the love of her life. Mian Mithu had told the media that he gives shelter to eloping couples because it is his "duty" to provide them

security.

Six years later, Mian Mithu repeats the same lines at the Karachi Press Club. "There is no force in religion, but there is also no bar on helping those in need," he declares.

"Once non-Muslim converts, the first thing that they need is shelter and a source of livelihood," he says. "Yes, I support those who are in need, but they convert out of their own free will," he says, at the crowded news conference at the press club.

Away from the cameras and prying journalists, 18-year-old Radha* walks on a narrow pathway passing through green fields. She is waving a small stick in her hands. She looks like any other young woman in her village in Umerkot district. Radha is wearing a colourful choli and gharara and her arms are full of white bangles. Suddenly, she stops and points to the fields where her life changed forever. "There," she says, pointing the stick in her hand to the exact spot where she was playing when she was kidnapped by a man named Ali Nawaz, when she was 16.

"He kidnapped me from the fields in the evening and took me to some house," she says. It was at this house that the teenage girl was raped multiple times.

Radha's father Vinesh* petitioned the Sindh High Court against the kidnapping of his daughter. He had found out that his daughter was being kept in a village near the Sarhandi shrine, in Mirpurkhas division. Soon the court-ordered Nawaz and four of his accomplices to produce the girl in court.

The men did their best to intimidate Radha.

"They said that I have to tell the judge that I have changed my religion and married Ali Nawaz out of my own free will," she recalls. They also warned her that they would kill her parents if she did not comply.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1515863/the-strange-case-of-the-silent-women>

Mahira Khan appointed UNHCR National Goodwill Ambassador in Pakistan.

Mahira Khan has shared the touching moment her parents received a congratulatory letter from the United Nations High Commissioner



for Refugees (UNHCR), after their daughter was named the first ever UNHCR National Goodwill Ambassador in Pakistan.

Khan posted the letter on Instagram, and revealed how she felt when her parents read it. “I

received the sweetest letter from UNHCR for my parents,” she wrote, “Needless to say it made me extremely emotional.”

Khan added that her mother began to cry and her father was “smiling his biggest smile”. “Sometimes I forget that I have been chosen to be put in the position that I am in, given the platform I have been given and the kind of love that I receive. I hope and pray that I can always uphold the responsibility.” She signed off her message as the daughter of “Mr. and Mrs. Hafeez R. Khan”.

Khan after her appointment said she felt strongly about speaking up for refugees around the world. “This is something I want to talk about,” she said in a video message released by the UNHCR.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/552653-mahira-khan-gets-extremely-emotional-after-reading-un-letter>

Pakistan's new tallest bowler who stands 7 feet 4 inch high



Pakistan Super League (PSL) team Lahore Qalandars have roped in a certain Muhammad Mudassar under their players development program.

Pakistan's Mohammad Irfan with a height of 7 feet 1 inch is currently the known tallest cricketer in the

world. But, it seems like he has a competition waiting for him in his own country.

Pakistan Super League team Lahore Qalandars have roped in a certain Muhammad Mudassar who stands 7 feet 4 inches high. The 21-year-old off-spinner joined

the Qalandar's player development program and will be training at their high-performance centre for one year.

Hailing from Lahore, Mudassar joined the Lahore Qalandars' players development program on November 6 and will be honing his bowling skills for the next year.

Speaking about his height, Mudassar said he intends to represent Pakistan after playing in the PSL. The spinner said that he finds picking up shoes the most difficult part of his daily routine, and hopes fitness issues due to his height won't affect his career.

Irfan, the tallest international cricketer, was snapped up by Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) in IPL 2011, and has become a mainstay in the Pakistan side.

<https://www.thestatesman.com/sports/meet-pakistans-new-tallest-bowler-who-stands-7-feet-4-inch-high-1502819075.html>

PM Boris Johnson visits Mosque in election campaign



Boris Johnson visited the Islamic Cultural Centre, Regents Park Mosque for the first time as Prime Minister and praised the role nearly three million British Muslims play in Britain. Boris Johnson had visited the same mosque as Mayor of London in 2012, in which he had invited all the London mosques and imams for an open discussion.

The latest visit was one of his first+ visits at the start of the Conservative Party General Election campaign. Prime Minister Johnson was met by representatives of the Mosque as well the newly appointed peer British-Pakistani businessman Lord Zameer Choudrey.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who has

community in our capital and particular to the work of this mosque.”

The Conservative Party have been actively campaigning within the Pakistani community and has welcomed the news that Pakistani heritage Saqib Bhatti was last week selected as the parliamentary candidate for Meriden.

Replacing the former cabinet member and secretary of state Dame Caroline Spelman, the party predicts Saqib will be re-elected in this safe Conservative seat adding to three previous Pakistani heritage MPs including the first Pakistani heritage Chancellor, Sajid Javid.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/555144-pm-boris-johnson-visits-mosque-in-election-campaign>



UK: My halal student debt- How Muslims navigate Sharia financing when interest is Haram - Necessity Legalizes the Prohibited

By Faima Bakar



“I didn’t take out a loan for my masters because it’s haram so I planned to save up my salary to pay it off,” explains Muslim writer Rabbil. ‘It didn’t go well because of rent and bills. I was just struggling already. My family had to step in which I was embarrassed by.’ Like Rabbil, many Muslims hoping to get an education face a dilemma – to take out or not to take out a student loan. You might not be aware but for Muslims, interest is haram (forbidden). Any loans that require

can stop students from pursuing university altogether.

Those who still choose to study via halal means, such as borrowing money from their loved ones, can end up in large amounts of debt. How do Islamic banks make money then if they don't charge interest? You might wonder how Islamic banks ever make many profits. To ‘earn’ its profits, banks offer a service, providing accounts that offer profit/loss. The bank, in turn, purchases assets with your money, helping it to generate money (for mortgages, for example, the bank buys the property and then leases it back to you). The concept of halal banking is similar to ethical banking and runs on the grounds of equitable distribution and



repayment with interest added on are not permissible. This is because in Islam money has no intrinsic value – it’s just a medium of exchange.

That means Muslims have to work for money to attach its value. Simply lending and borrowing money doesn’t count as ‘work’. So taking out a loan and incurring interest on it is considered impermissible – because the bank (or person lending) hasn’t ‘worked’ to earn extra payment. The limitations put on borrowing

trading.

For teacher Faiza, despite knowing the difficulties of self-funding her degree, going against Islamic principles was not an option. ‘I knew from early on that I didn’t want to take a loan,’ she tells Metro.co.uk. ‘When the £9,000 fees were announced during my second year of the sixth form, I thought “That’s it. University isn’t for me”. ‘I believe that interest is haram and I wasn’t willing to listen to anything else.

That didn’t go well with my parents who

were adamant that I had the higher education they never had.' As a necessity, Faiza applied for a student loan to cover her first-year fees and also got a maintenance grant which did not need to be paid back. She didn't apply for the maintenance loan, however, as it needs to be paid back with interest. 'In second year, I basically saved every penny of the grant (plus I was entitled to a university grant too),' she explains. 'I worked as a private tutor, and luckily had some financial help from the Danish government (since I'm a citizen and they pay for you to go university).'

'I managed to make up almost all of the fees for second and third year this way but I'm still in debt.' Having to worry about paying these fees without relying on a loans company negatively affected her quality of life. 'It was really difficult but I realize I'm in a lot less debt than many of my peers,' Faiza tells us.

'Also, I was constantly broke as a student and never, ever did anything remotely fun. 'I was always felt too guilty if I spent any money on myself.' While she doesn't have to pay back the Danish government, Faiza is still indebted to the Student Loans Company for her first year. How do Muslims manage to pay for university? With rising tuition fees, the options are limited for Muslims who don't want to use the Student Loans Company.

'I tried but ultimately failed,' she tells Metro.co.uk. 'I took a gap year [to raise money] but I got so comfortable in working I didn't return. 'However, I do have hopes and plans to go one day. I now work at a school and I do speech and language however to progress further I need that degree so the plan is to go back.' She's not sure how she's going to afford university when the time comes but doesn't plan on taking out a non-Sharia-compliant loan. She's hoping that some help will be available to her.

When I Rent: Carys and Jamie, £487.50 each a month for a one-bedroom flat in Hove Martial arts teacher drops four dress sizes because she was too big to do her own moves Widow takes pictures of herself in her wedding dress every year to honour late husband Dog who's learning to talk using custom keyboard already knows 29 words Without Sharia-compliant loans, Muslim students often have to plan meticulously, stashing away their time and

money for years to afford an education.

Technological officer Imdad tells us: 'I did some calculations and modeled it on Excel. I researched and estimated what my income would be based on receiving a maintenance grant, a yearly grant from King's College and working part-time. I also estimated my outgoings which were inevitably less due to the choice to live at home and stay in London to study. 'Those were my initial calculations which allowed me to break even. 'Beyond that point, I knew having a part-time job along and hopefully securing one or two internships would provide me with the extra income that I could use for my outgoings outside of the core fees.' He adds that it was stressful having to live scrupulously and scrape up enough to pay each installment in time.

Despite the pressure, he is unmoving in his position on accepting loans. 'My cultural upbringing along with religious teachings strongly recommended the avoidance of debt,' says Imdad. Some Muslims end up taking out a loan as paying £27k upfront isn't feasible (Picture: Ella Byworth for Metro.co.uk) While some believe that student loans are impermissible, others say that 'necessity legalises the prohibited'. In other words, it's unlikely that a person will be able to afford extortionate tuition fees for an education that is required for many jobs. Others also argue that the student loan is unlike any other and doesn't go against riba (or usury – lending money at unreasonably high rates of interest).

The conditions of a student loan – that it's written off after 30 years, cancelled in case of debt and disability and paid only after earning £21,000 a year – make it different to others, say some. All these things may indicate that such loans are not a standard loan, which is shunned by Islamic jurists and therefore may be allowed.

While the conversation is happening, many Muslims will agree that a government-led system would make the decision a lot easier to make. Otherwise many bright followers of the Islamic faith will be prevented from accomplishing their educational goals. MORE: British Muslims launch first ever pride festival <https://metro.co.uk/2019/11/03/my-halal-student-debt-how-muslims-navigate-sharia-financing-when-interest-is-haram-11004118/?ito=cbshare>

DEADLY SILENCE

AN INSIDE LOOK AT KASHMIR



Laura Hoflinger - Der Spiegel

Kashmir has been largely cut off from the outside world for months and the internet remains cut off. Residents share stories of state violence and terror.



The first thing that comes as a surprise to a visitor is just how quiet it is. You can see people on the streets, but shops and offices are all closed. Officially, the schools are open, but the classrooms are largely empty because many boys and girls stay home out of fear. Someone has painted the message "We exist to resist" on the shutter of a shop front.

The Indian government insists that the situation in Kashmir is returning to normal. Or at least what could be considered normal in a region where roads are blocked with sandbags and barbed wire, where passerby are monitored by soldiers in bunkers and where more than 400 people lost their lives last year due to terrorism and state violence.

Three months have now passed since India revoked the special status granted to its part of Kashmir. Earlier this month, the government of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the further step of dividing the once semi-autonomous state into two federal territories and placing them under the control of New Delhi.

Hundreds of politicians were arrested and remain behind bars. India had offered them freedom, but only if they agreed to refrain from speaking about the revocation of Kashmir's

autonomy for an entire year. Foreigners and Indian opposition leaders have been banned from traveling to Kashmir. The first foreigners allowed to enter the region recently were 23 members of the European Parliament, who visited in late October. Most were members of right-wing populist parties, including from the Alternative for Germany party.

The Kashmir conflict has generated less attention in Europe than the protests in Hong Kong, yet it is the far more dangerous of the two crises. India, Pakistan and China all lay claim to a part of Kashmir, meaning three nuclear powers are playing tug-o'-war over the region. Pakistan has already warned about potential consequences, while the Indian defense minister has said that India would stick to the No First Use doctrine when it comes to using nuclear weapons, but what happens in the future would depend on circumstances.

Very little, however, has been heard from the people of Jammu and Kashmir themselves. After a weeks-long blackout imposed by New Delhi, landline and mobile telephones now work in the region once again. But the internet is still shut down.

DER SPIEGEL has met with more than a dozen people in Kashmir, and their reports are shocking and sometimes contradictory. Some fear the Indian state. Others are hoping for protection. All, however, are afraid of what may be on the horizon. One says: "We are experiencing the calm before the storm."

'I'm Cold, Even When the Sun is Shining'

There's a village full of broken windowpanes in southern Kashmir. Residents say soldiers throw stones through the windows

at night, and claim fearful residents switch off their lights after sundown and barricade themselves in the darkness of their homes. Almost nobody in the town is willing to speak openly with journalists. There is a strong atmosphere of paranoia, with many apparently wondering if the foreigner really is who she says she is -- and not a spy.

The woman who finally does invite us into her home declines to provide her real name. She is 44 years old, wears a headscarf and asks to be identified as Sakina. When talking about her son, she breaks down repeatedly. She shows a photo of a young man of around 20 with long black hair and a beard.

"It was the night of August 7. We could hear noise from outside, but we were too afraid to see what was going on. Instead, we went to bed, my daughter and I slept in the kitchen and my father and my son in a room at the front of the house. It must have been around three in the morning when five or 10 soldiers began hammering on our door.

They stormed into my son's room and pulled him out of bed. We wanted to know what he had done and where they were taking him. But we didn't get an answer. The soldiers locked us in and fired two shots. One of the shots hit the ground right here by the door, I can show you the spot. Since my son has been gone, I feel numb. I'm cold and I shiver, even when the sun is shining. The army forced its way into my home and took away my child."

Sakina's son wasn't the only one arrested by the soldiers. In the days both before and after Kashmir's autonomy was revoked, the army arrested men they considered potential troublemakers. According to reports, a total of more than 4,000 were taken into custody. Some were flown out of the region. Sakina's son is locked up in Agra, a city in northern India located around 700 kilometers (400 miles) away.

Two laws have essentially given security forces a free hand. According to the Public Safety Act, people in Kashmir can be held in

custody for up to two years without trial, while the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act gives



soldiers de facto immunity. There have been numerous, serious allegations made against the army, including rape, torture and murder. But according to the human rights organization Amnesty International, not a single member of the security forces has yet had to answer for them before a civilian court.

"You Just End Up Firing"

On 90 Feet Road, an upscale residential district in Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital, a man is dressed for battle. He is wearing a bulletproof vest and carrying an AK47-, a truncheon and a shield. He's a member of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), a paramilitary force under the command of the Interior Ministry in Delhi. Nearly half-a-million security forces are said to be currently stationed in Kashmir, making the region one of the most militarized areas in the entire world.

Kashmiris say they would rather dodge traffic on the side of the road than walk past the troops on the sidewalk. The guy from CRPF comes from a town near Delhi, and every time someone passes by, his shoulders tense up.

"When I heard that the region's autonomous status was to be revoked, I had a sense of dark foreboding. I have seen the worst of times in Kashmir, but I am surprised by how peaceful it has been. Kashmir is one of the most difficult postings of all. It takes no time for a crowd to collect here and before you know it, 250 people are running toward you. We can't trust the people here. Even the old ones and the young ones tend to be radicalized.

(read more)

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/deathly-silence-an-inside-look-at-kashmir-a1296450-.html#ref=nl-international>

Kenya emerging as big tech hub

Courtney Fingar

With two months still to go, 2019 is shaping up to be a blockbuster year for inward investment in Kenya.



So far this year, the country has attracted 54 projects totaling \$2.9 billion in announced investments, according to fDi Markets, a Financial Times data service that tracks greenfield cross-border investment.

This growth reflects a general rise across Africa in greenfield foreign direct investment (FDI) — new physical facilities of foreign companies.

Kenya is benefiting more than most of its neighbors because of its relative success in attracting IT investment, which has sparked the nickname “Silicon Savannah.”

The country is the second most innovative in sub-Saharan Africa, behind South Africa and ahead of Mauritius, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization’s Global Innovation Index 2019.

The arrival of fiber optics in 2009–10 set the wheels in motion for the first major

wave of information and communication technologies investment, which, if not massive in global terms, is significant for Kenya.

Some 63 foreign companies have made greenfield investments in the country in the software and IT sector since 2009, according to fDi Markets. Last spring Microsoft opened an Africa development center and Cisco, a supplier of networking equipment, set up an innovation hub. Both ventures are in Nairobi. Standard Chartered Bank also opened an innovation lab in its head office in the capital.

There are many strengths behind Kenya’s growing ICT cluster. Kenya ranked first overall in a benchmarking study of five East African countries for their attractiveness for a hypothetical informatics research and development center. And, though the country came in last for cost-effectiveness, its quality score was far ahead of the competition: 181.22, double that of Uganda, the second-ranked location.

The score is based on fDi Benchmark, an online tool that uses independent data points to measure investment attractiveness. Factors considered include the availability of labor and skills, the size of the existing industry clusters, infrastructure and accessibility, business environment and quality of living.

As a headquarters location for Pan-African business, Kenya faces tougher competition. When placed in a group that includes Ghana,

Ethiopia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, again using fDi Benchmark, Kenya ranked fourth in quality and sixth in cost-effectiveness.

Within its immediate region of East Africa,



however, it remained highly competitive.

Abbott Laboratories, a U.S. health care group, has opened an office at the Watermark business park in Nairobi that will act as the company's East African headquarters and is intended to support growth opportunities locally and in East Africa. This investment follows this summer's opening of an African headquarters of Cigna, a U.S. health service company, that will accommodate more than 80 employees.

The current boom in foreign investment will need to be sustained if Kenya is to climb the ranking of global investment destinations.

Despite the recent rise, Kenya's FDI levels are still low relative to gross domestic product and level of development. In the Greenfield FDI Performance index 2019, which measures how much foreign direct investment countries receive compared to the size of their economies, Kenya was 29th globally and fifth in Africa.

There are expectations that the development of public-private partnerships can boost FDI inflows, and the government has targeted a

number of reforms and legislative changes to improve the business environment. These are detailed in Kenya Vision 2030, the country's program of development designed to run from 2008 to 2030.

Kenya ranks 61st in the World Bank's Doing Business 2019 index, having jumped 19 places from the previous year.

With an overall score of 70.31, Kenya fares better than the regional average of 51.61, but lags far behind the likes of Rwanda (ranked at 29) and Mauritius (ranked at 20). On the individual metric of starting a business, Kenya is ranked an abysmal 126th globally.

"Kenya as an investment destination has huge potential," says Jonty van Zeller, director of Alamaya, a regional business coordinator for East Africa. But, in common with many other emerging markets, van Zeller says foreign investors considering investments in the country need to employ "local knowledge and local experience" to overcome barriers to doing business.

A recent review from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development highlighted Kenya's advantages for investors, which include its geographic position as a regional economic hub, its growing entrepreneurial middle-class and its expanding services sector.

"Nevertheless, numerous obstacles to investment persist, notably the country's poor-quality infrastructure, skills shortages, instability related to terrorist risk and political, social and ethnic divisions, ineffective rule of law and corruption," the report warns.

<https://www.ozy.com/fast-forward/welcome-to-silicon-savannah/229574/>

Al-Baghdadi death – the end of ruthless Caliphate

Irfan Husain



IN a world where news of fresh disasters is the norm, anything positive is worth cheering about. Especially when it comes from Trump's White House.

Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's departure from the world was widely welcomed, even though I have no doubt that some of his murderous acolytes who profited from his reign regret his death, and the manner of his demise. Even liberals have stifled their joy as the American success may enhance Trump's electoral chances next year.

As for me, I rejoice over the fact that there is one villain less to spread murder and mayhem. No doubt others will take

his place, but for now, at least, a monster has entered his well-earned place in the deepest, direst corner of hell.

They say we shouldn't speak ill of the dead. Me, I would happily dance on Baghdadi's grave except for the fact that his remains have been dumped into the sea. Just consider how many thousands he slaughtered in his mad quest to carve out a 'caliphate'. In addition, he and his sex-starved jihadists raped and enslaved tens of thousands of women and girls.

Just consider how many thousands Baghdadi slaughtered.

The Yazidis were easy targets for Baghdadi's bloodthirsty horde: peaceful

and largely unarmed, they were hunted down, and their women distributed and sold among soldiers of the militant Islamic State group. Had not the remnants of this ancient community been rescued by Western forces, Baghdadi would have succeeded in carrying out his genocidal plans.

But it was his so-called jihad against the treasures of antiquity the region is so rich in that infuriated all civilised people everywhere. The savage destruction of the reliefs and statues at the Mosul Cultural Museum, and dynamiting of the ancient desert city of Palmyra must count among the greatest crimes against our cultural heritage. Nineveh and Nimrud were also laid waste.

To be sure, Baghdadi did not have a monopoly on the hatred of all things representing another faith: Babri Masjid was reduced to rubble by Hindu fanatics; the giant carvings of the Buddha in Bamiyan were destroyed by the barbaric Taliban; Serbs went out of their way to demolish mosques and shrines in their bloodthirsty campaign against Bosnian Muslims; and allied bombers flattened hundreds of churches during the Second World War.

Nevertheless, Baghdadi's relentless war on culture and history still makes my blood boil when I think of it. The unravelling of his 'caliphate' became inevitable as soon as he took and held territory. This is the kind of hubris he shared with Prabhakaran, the leader of the Tamil Tigers, the dreaded terrorist group in Sri Lanka. He, too, sought to carve out his own territory, and like the IS, collected taxes and organised a rudimentary nation state.

But countries don't hand over land to separatists without a bitter fight. The American Civil War took hundreds of thousands of lives before the secessionist

southern states were finally defeated after several years of carnage. And the bloody civil war that led to the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 only succeeded because the two wings of the Pakistani state were separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory.

Ideologues like Baghdadi and Prabha-karan, intoxicated by early victories, forget that states are able to raise funds and armies, and buy arms at a level ragtag guerrilla forces simply can't. The Vietcong were helped by the Chinese and the Russians; the Afghan Taliban by Pakistan, the US and Saudi Arabia; and initially, the IS was allegedly armed by



an evil coalition of Western and Middle Eastern states. Once this assistance was withdrawn, the defeat of the IS was just a matter of time.

But these pipe dreams prevent Muslims from doing the hard work needed to catch up with the rest of the world. Instead of focusing on education and economic growth, they indulge in fantasies and conspiracy theories. So when a Bin Laden or a Baghdadi arrives, they think he is Saladin reincarnated to lead Muslims to regain their lost empires.

Terrorism is no substitute for toil, just as fantasies cannot replace facts and figures. Both show how far behind we are.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1514397/straight-to-hell>



USA: He's lost his freedom for life, but he's won the religious freedom to grow his beard

A federal court in Tallahassee has ruled that a Martin County man doing time can grow his beard to the length his spiritual belief dictates, regardless of the limits of the Florida Department of Corrections.



Durrell Sims, who converted to Islam in 2007, can grow a fist-length beard. But the benefits of this decision could easily extend to those of other faiths.

"The decision sets an important precedent in Florida under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act," said K&L Gates attorney Olivia Kelman, who worked the case pro bono with fellow K&L attorneys Paul Hancock and Joshua Carpenter.

"Mr. Sims is a devout Muslim whose conduct in prison has been exemplary," U.S. District Judge Robert Hinkle wrote in the conclusion of his decision. "He wishes to grow a beard in accordance with his religion and doing so would pose no security, misconduct or flight risk.

The Department [of Corrections] has not shown that prohibiting him from growing a fist-length beard and trimming his moustache is the least restricted means of furthering a compelling government interest."

Sims began serving life for first-degree attempted murder in 2006. At the time, the Florida's DOC required all inmates who didn't have a medical reason for not shaving to be clean-shaven. After his conversion, Sims filed a grievance, but didn't file a lawsuit.

Meanwhile, in line with his conversion, Sims began keeping a prayer rug, praying five times a day, consuming Islamic reading material, changed his diet and observing Ramadan.

After a 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision said an inmate could grow his beard to half-inch length to comply with his religious beliefs. Florida's DOC changed its facial hair policy to give inmates two options — half-inch beard or clean-shaven. Sims grew a half-inch beard, but felt the DOC's rules inhibited his exercise of faith.

The DOC argued that it didn't "substantially" burden Sims in that regard and pointed to Sims acknowledgment that he can shave if necessary.

<https://www.miamiherald.com/news/state/florida/article235605662.html>

Holy Wars and the founding of Saudi Arabia



BY ERIC CZULEGER



Did he feel like a failure on the road to Diriyah, or question his decision to stone that woman to death? Perhaps being cast from his hometown for religious tyranny just made him dig deeper into his belief that Islam needed purification. Whatever the motive, giving up was never an option for Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

In the late 1700s he walked from his home in Uyaynah to Diriyah, near modern-day Riyadh, changing the Middle East forever. His philosophy, known as Wahhabism, is a puritanical version of Islam, and while most modern Sunni terrorists do not identify as Wahhabis, the austere tradition that this minority follows comes to us from the 18th century, when Ibn Abd al-Wahhab became one of the most radical reformers in the religion's history. Hilal Khashan, a politics professor at the American University of Beirut, points to the

oft-narrow view Westerners have of Islam. "To the Western eye, Muslims seem monolithic," he says, "but there has always been a great deal of discourse in Islam."

WHILE THE BRITISH EMPIRE FLEXED ITS MIGHT IN THE NEW WORLD, THE SAUD FAMILY WAGED WAR TO UNITE THE ARABIAN DESERT IN THE NAME OF ALLAH.

A gifted child from a long line of Arabic legal scholars, he could recite the holy Koran by the age of 10 and made his pilgrimage to Mecca as a young man. He was a voracious learner who undertook a religious trek to seek theological education in Basra and Medina, after which he returned home with followers and, even more valuable, political backing. He then began condemning the worship of ancestors, graves and even the celebration of birthdays. Anything that could be venerated, Ibn

Abd al-Wahhab destroyed, leaving Uyaynah's graves and shrines in rubble. When a woman in the village confessed to adultery, he had her stoned to death. Though the leader of Uyaynah originally supported the extremist holy man, al-Wahhab was making more enemies than friends. So he was given an ultimatum: Leave Uyaynah or die. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab packed his things and traveled to Diriyah, a desert oasis under the control of a man named Muhammad Ibn Saud, where the two would work together to forge a new state: Saudi Arabia.

Back then, Diriyah was a small oasis town in the Arabian Desert region of Najd, and Ibn Saud was just a mid-level merchant with little hope of gaining regional influence. He lacked both wealth and a recognizable tribal affiliation, so when Saud heard about Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's renown, he jumped at the chance to ally with the holy man. Not only would Ibn Abd al-Wahhab give Saud theological legitimacy, but his teachings emphasized rigid taxation of citizenry and adherence to a strict rule of law. Most importantly, both men wanted a united Arabian Desert. According to Madawi al-Rasheed's book *A History of Saudi Arabia*, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab declared his loyalty to Saud in 1744 by acknowledging him as the settlement's "chief and wise man." In doing so, he asked Saud "to grant me an oath that you will perform jihad against the unbelievers. In return you will be imam, leader of the Muslim community, and I will be leader in religious matters."



The Flag of Ikwhan (the Brethren)

Two years later, the killing began. Saud started waging jihad on the villages surrounding

Diriyah, forcing them to submit politically and theologically to the rule of the Saudi-Wahhabists. Though the Koran explicitly forbids war with other Muslims, Saud's new ally saw violence as a necessary tool for purifying Islam. The Uyaynah native also introduced the idea of takfir, the ability to declare other Muslims as infidels, which made the waging of war against Arabian tribesmen the holy duty of the Saud family. While the British Empire flexed its might in the New World, the Saud family waged war to unite the Arabian Desert in the name of Allah.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was often absent from the battlefield, but the House of Saud agreed to spread the teachings of Wahhabism through military force and form political allegiances through marriage. After Riyadh was conquered in 1773, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab retreated from public life and even gave up the title of imam. But the Saudi heirs continued their mission to unite the Arabian Desert — and by the time Ibn Abd al-Wahhab died in 1792, most of the Arabian Peninsula was under Saud family control. Though the modern state of Saudi Arabia would not be officially founded until 1932, the teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab form the framework for Saudi society and can be linked to Sunni extremism today.

While Wahhab is cited in jihadist propaganda, al-Qaida militants consider themselves Salafists, not Wahhabis, disassociating themselves with the Saudi regime. However, both historical Wahhabism and Salafism follow a similar puritanical form of Islam, embrace the cause of violent jihad and the concept of takfir as a justification for violence against fellow Muslims. Though the connection between these belief systems is hotly debated, both still consider themselves to be reformers of Islam in a modern world that has lost its spiritual center.

<https://www.ozy.com/flashback/holy-wars-and-the-founding-of-saudi-arabia/73825/>



Jhola Chhaap doctors or Quacks

B.A.SHAMIM

Jhola chhaap doctors or quacks, to be more specific, are itinerant physicians or part time medical practitioners in the rural areas of the subcontinent --India and Pakistan-- where people either don't have access to latest medical facilities or too poor to afford the fees of a genuine doctor. These quacks acquire some knowledge in medicine by working as an assistant at a medical store, a private hospital or with some another of their kind. They also succeed in obtaining some sort of certificate authorising them to practise medicine. In some cases, they use the degree of a genuine doctor to avoid any problem with the state health authorities. Armed with insufficient and inadequate knowledge, they go forth to find a village where there are no proper medical facilities. Our subcontinent is full of villages and full of illiterate people too. So, these quacks quickly find a suitable place to start their business by posing themselves as the direct descendants of Hippocrates. They are clever enough to befriend some influential persons of that particular village and gain their confidence and support through their sugary tongue. The quacks mainly treat common diseases like fever, cough and cold, loose motions, small injuries, common allergies, vomiting and other ailments that do not require much medical expertise. Summers and Rains are bonanza for quacks as during these days incidence of malaria, cholera, diarrhoea, viral fever, common cold etc is high.

Then they move on to treat some chronic diseases like arthritis, gall bladder stone, kidney stone, skin diseases, migraine, asthma etc. They claim to possess rare prescriptions of Hakeem Luqman for treating such ailments. Now the next step is to trap such people as have sexual problems. Normally people feel shy to discuss such ailments within the family. These quacks crack such people and offer definite cures for their problems. Aphrodisiac drugs are the mainstay of such quacks for eking out a fat 'dihari' (daily income).

In the villages, jhola chhaaps identify

such people as are having love affairs or extra marital affairs. Such people are sitting ducks for quacks. They extort huge sums of money from them by selling contraceptives.

Another strategy is to keep every kind of medicine..homeopathic, ayurvedic, Unani, and desi. For preparing doses of desi medicine for the treatment of chronic diseases, they demand hefty amounts.

Women are easily trapped by these quacks as they profess to possess potions for their private and personal problems.

Yet another trickery of the quacks is



that they also exploit the gullible people's superstitious nature. So, they employ the 'jhad phoonk' therapy which is very effective in the sight of villagers. The patient is given some talisman as a protection against a particular disease. Commonly villagers are possessed by evil spirits very often. So these quacks also assume the form of an exorcist and recite various 'mantras' in an alien language to drive away the spirits. Sometimes they recite mantras on a bowl of water and administer it to the patients for which they have to loosen

their purse strings. Quacks also treat snake-bite or scorpion-bite cases by just chanting some mantras.

Quacks do not spare even the animals. They treat milch cattle, pet animals and even poultry. Sometimes animals take better of them.

Once a villager told me an amusing incident. A quack of his village was in the habit of chasing the stray dogs on his bike while coming into and going out of the village. He would produce eerie sounds from his mouth to chase away the canine family. On one occasion a stray dog took a sudden leap and thrust its teeth into the thigh of the quack. Now he could not hide the incident as in any case he had to visit a doctor for anti rabies injection. To hide his shame for having been bitten by a street dog, he floated a rumour that he was attacked by a German Shepherd kept by a retired Colonel. Actually everybody believed his version of the story until a resident of the village where the incident occurred spilled the beans. The friends of the quack pestered him so much that finally he admitted the truth. It seemed very strange to me that the quack glorified the incident attributing it to a German Shepherd and he considered it a shame being bitten by a stray dog.

What a mean thinking !

For the fear of being raided by the officials of the Health Department, quacks working in villages camouflage their clinics with general items like toffees, stationery items and undergarments and langerie.

In spite of all the risks posed by these quacks, there is one positive side also. They provide immediate and emergency medical assistance to the villagers. And no doubt, they might have saved many precious lives.

So the Govt. , instead of taking any action against them, should give them a chance to register themselves with the Department of Health and submit their credentials. Then a certificate may be issued to the eligible persons to carry out medical practice in villages. Those who do not fall in line, should be dealt according to the law of the land.

This way, these 'neem hakeems' may prove beneficial for the society and ease the burden of the government by providing basic medical care in the rural areas.

First female finance minister appointed in Kuwait

zain sheikh



For the first time in Kuwait's history, a woman, Maryam Aqeel, has been appointed finance minister.

Kuwait for the first time appointed female Finance Minister! According to Kuwaiti news agency Kokona, for the first time in the country's history, a woman is being handed over to the finance minister. Economic affairs expert Maryam al-Aqeel has been appointed as Finance Minister Naif al-Hajraf while the finance minister is the penman. Naif al-Hajarf has been nominated for the host of Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The first female finance minister of Kuwait is Maryamul Aqeel Economist, stay connected with the University of Kuwait, acting as the director of the financial control body in the Ministry of Finance and also responsible for the Minister of State for Economic Affairs in 2016 for her outstanding performance.

Was given It is essential to note that in Saudi Arabia, under the vision of Wali Eid Mohammed bin Salman, 2023, women are being allowed to show their skills in every field, after which, in the Arab countries too, women will be able to express their confidence in the abilities and assign important government responsibilities. The trend is growing.

<https://bloggersblogs.com/kuwait-for-the-first-time-appointed-female-finance-minister/>



The Iranian opposition fighters who mustn't think about sex

By Linda Pressly and Albana Kasapi

BBC News, Tirana

For six years, Albania has been home to one of Iran's main opposition groups, the Mujahideen-e-Khalq, or MEK. But hundreds of members have walked out - some complaining about the organisation's rigid rules enforcing celibacy, and control over contact with family. Now, dozens languish in the Albanian capital, Tirana, unable to return to Iran or get on with their lives.

"I didn't speak to my wife and son for over 37 years - they thought I'd died. But I told them, 'No, I'm alive, I'm living in Albania...' They cried."



That first contact by phone with his family after so many years was difficult for Gholam Mirzai, too. He is 60, and absconded two years ago from the MEK's military-style encampment outside Tirana.

Now he scrapes by in the city, full of regrets and accused by his former Mujahideen comrades of spying for their sworn enemy, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The MEK has a turbulent and bloody history. As Islamist-Marxist radicals, its members backed the 1979 Iranian revolution that toppled the Shah. But relations with a triumphant Ayatollah Khomeini soon soured. When the government cracked down hard, the Mujahideen had to run for their lives.

Neighbouring Iraq offered sanctuary, and from their desert citadel during the Iran/Iraq war (1988-1990), the MEK fought on the side of Saddam Hussein against their homeland.

Gholam Mirzai was serving in the Iranian military when he was captured by Saddam Hussein's forces at the start of that conflict. He spent eight years as a prisoner of war in Iraq. But in time,

Iranian prisoners like Mirzai were encouraged to join forces with their compatriots. And that is what he did.

Mirzai is now a "disassociate" - one of hundreds of former MEK members who have left the organisation since they moved to Albania. With the help of funds from family, some have paid people smugglers to take them elsewhere in Europe, and perhaps two have made it back to Iran. But dozens remain in Tirana, stateless and officially unable to work.

So how did the battle-hardened members of the MEK - formerly a proscribed terrorist organisation in the United States and Europe - find their way to this corner of Europe?

In 2003, the allied invasion of Iraq made life perilous for the MEK. The organisation's protector, Saddam Hussein, was suddenly gone, and the Mujahideen were repeatedly attacked - hundreds were killed and injured. Fearing an even worse humanitarian disaster, the Americans approached the Albanian government in 2013 and persuaded it to receive some 3,000 MEK members in Tirana.

"We offered them shelter from attacks and abuse, and the possibility to lead a normal life in a country where they are not harassed, attacked or brutalised," says Lulzim Basha, leader of the Democratic Party, which was in government at the time, and is now in opposition.

In Albania, politics are deeply polarised - everything is contested. But, almost uniquely, the presence of the MEK isn't - publicly, both governing and opposition parties support their Iranian guests.

For the MEK, Albania was a completely new environment. Gholam Mirzai was astonished that even children had mobile phones. And because some of the Mujahideen were initially accommodated in apartment buildings on the edge of the capital, the organisation's grip on its members was looser than it had been previously. In Iraq, it had controlled every aspect of their lives, but here, temporarily, there was a chance to exercise a degree of freedom.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/stories50339928->

Former Iraqi refugee is NSW Australian of the Year

Zia Ahmad



Arriving on a leaking boat and having been detained at Christmas Island, and now a pioneering orthopedic surgeon and human rights advocate, Professor Munjed Al Muderis has been announced as The 2020 NSW Australian of the Year by Premier Gladys Berejiklian.

The 2020 NSW Australians of the Year were announced at a ceremony at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney on Tuesday 5 November 2019.

Premier Gladys Berejiklian congratulated Professor Al Muderis, the 2020 NSW Australian of the Year, and NSW's three other recipients. "Each year our nation comes together to celebrate the achievements and contributions of Australia's amazing citizens through the Australian of the Year Awards," Ms Berejiklian said.

"This year is the sixtieth anniversary of the awards, providing us with a special opportunity to recognise those who make a real and lasting difference in NSW. Every year I'm inspired by the stories of the recipients, and this year is no exception," she said.

NSW's four recipients will join those from other states and territories for the national awards ceremony at the National Arboretum in Canberra on Saturday 25 January 2020. Professor Munjed Al Muderis, is a leading innovative orthopaedic surgeon and author,

who fled Iraq as he refused Saddam's regime orders to surgically remove the ears of soldiers who deserted.

His long journey to success includes being a fugitive from Iraq, as a refugee and while spending a long time in Christmas Island's Curtin Detention Centre and several Western Australian jails, then entering Australia and struggling through the elite medical profession eventually to become an orthopaedic surgeon with great contribution in advance research and clinical practice in Australia.

Professor Al Muderis has described his encounters with discrimination and racist attitudes as well as compassion and example of humanity during his journey and warned against hate on the basis of religious and cultural differences that could slide Australia away from the successful multicultural society it is today. Professor Al Muderis is known for his world-renowned surgical innovations and humanitarian work, funding his team to travel to Iraq to treat victims of conflict and educating other surgeons in complex limb reconstruction techniques.

A compassionate ambassador for multiple organisations, including the Red Cross, Professor Al Muderis is a powerful advocate for humanitarian work supporting people seeking asylum and refugees.

Funded out of his own pocket, Professor Al Muderis has taken a team to his former homeland of Iraq seven times, to help the victims of the conflict he fled and has educated other orthopaedic surgeons in the osseointegration technique and in complex limb reconstruction. His surgical innovations and breakthroughs are helping Australians and people throughout the world.

<https://www.amust.com.au/11/2019/former-iraqi-refugee-is-nsw-australian-of-the-year/>

Book Review: Journey from Guwahati to Machhiwara Punjab

By Rajiv Bakshi

Whenever you chance upon reading a new book, it adds to your knowledge and experience. While going through the book, you may experience a whole gamut of emotions, feelings and sentiments. Sometimes, it seems the writer has penned down the incidents of your own life. You begin to relate yourself with the contents of the book. From being impersonal in the beginning, you tend to become a part of the happenings contained in the book.

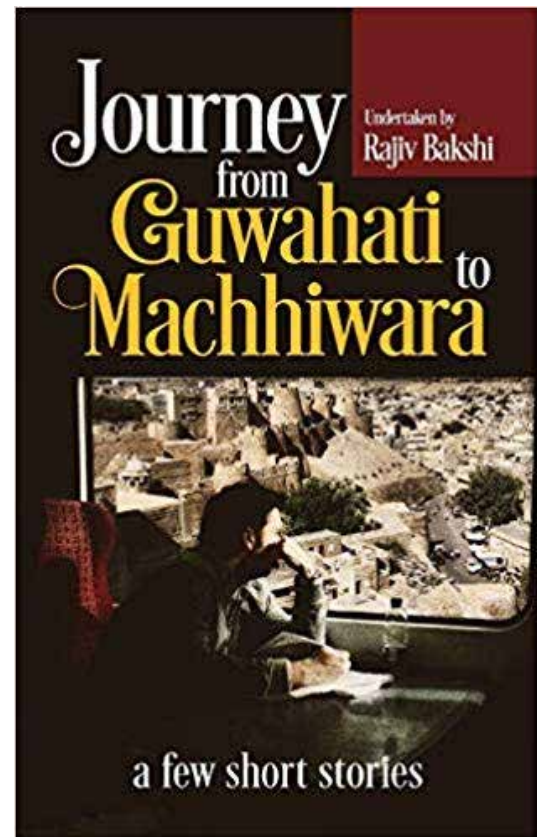
A few months ago, I saw a title of the book advertised on the Facebook. It was 'Journey from Guwahati to Machhiwara' by Rajiv Bakshi. I don't know why it caught my interest and therefore I ordered a copy of it. It is a collection of stories based on the real life incidents of the author Rajiv Bakshi, a retired Senior Manager, Punjab & Sind Bank. His stories reflect the day to day lives of his friends, relatives, colleagues and acquaintances.

The author portrays his stories in natural style that easily goes down the readers mind very smoothly. Language of the stories is simple, yet meaningful; no literary embellishments, yet caters to the taste buds of literature lovers. There is a beautiful flow of spontaneity in the narration which captivates the interest of the reader from the beginning to the end.

It is a short book of about 20 stories describing the sweet-sour experiences. The first story 'My first day in Guwahati', tells you how the writer felt going to Guwahati -the place of his first posting- 2200km away from Jalandhar, his native place, leaving his home, parents, relatives and friends; how he felt there away from home; and how he coped up with the changed environment.

The story "Encounter with wasps" offers a few moments of laughter to the reader. During a lunch in the open, the writer and his friends became hapless victims of wasps which were angered by the fire burning under a tree where Romali Rotis were being prepared.

'Samjhauta Express' is a very emotional story describing the meeting of a brother and sister --Razia and Imran-- each living on the other side of the Radcliffe Line. The sister goes to Pakistan to meet his brother but as soon as they



embrace each other, the brother succumbs to a massive heart attack

This sad climax leaves even a stone hearted person in tears.

Others stories are also very interesting enough to turn your leisure into a fruitful exercise. The reader will find these stories -- 'Me and my Mobile', 'Husbands - Beware do not Shop', 'Love and Hate Relationship', 'Sweet Temptations'--engrossing.

The last story of the book 'The Last Ride Together' describes the uncertainty of life. Bipin Jha and his wife who lived Guwahati had never travelled out the eastern states of India. Once they were invited by their son to Canada. Upon reaching there, the son and daughter-in-law served their parents very well. But unfortunately one day the son suffered a heart attack and left this mortal world. The magnitude and intensity of the grief of parents can't be described in words. It can only be felt.

On the whole, 'Journey from Guwahati to Machhiwara' provides a good treat for the readers. The book is available on Amazon and Flipkart also

Lahore: Pak Greens victorious in women's baseball



Pakistan Greens defeated Pakistan Blues 7-10 in Pakistan Federation Baseball-organised women's exhibition baseball match at Governor's House here. Mrs Parveen Sarwar, who is also the Vice Chair of the Sarwar Foundation, was the chief guest. She assured her full support for women baseball in Pakistan.

Syed Fakhr Ali Shah, President PFB, was also present on the occasion along with executive members of the federation Shah Manzar Farid, Executive Director Haseeb Muhammed, Chairperson Women Wing Sadia Alvi, Coach Pakistan Women Baseball Team Tariq Nadeem, Director Youth Baseball Development Dr. Shaheen Gulraiz and Legal Advisor Fakhar Amir Kazmi. After the national anthem, both teams were introduced to the chief guest.

Pakistan Greens beat Pakistan Blues by 10 runs to 7 in a thriller. For Pakistan Greens Najma Bibi, Anila, Aqsa and Manahal scored 2 runs each while Maham and Ghazala scored one run each. For Pakistan Blues Raheela and Bakhtawar scored two runs each while Rabia,

Tuba and Waheeda scored one run each. Speaking at the end of the match, chief guest Mrs Perveen Sarwar praised the performance of both teams.

She said that it is hoped that the Pakistani women players will showcase their successes in their international competitions in baseball as well as achievements for their homeland. She also praised the President of the Federation Syed Fakhar Ali Shah for his efforts towards promotion of women's baseball.

Speaking on the occasion, President PFB Syed Fakhar Ali Shah said that the Pakistan women's baseball team is going to China to feature in second Asian Women's Baseball Championship starting in China.

Teams from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Philippines, India and Pakistan are participating in the tournament. At the end of the match Syed Fakhr Ali Shah presented the souvenir on chief guest.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/-551067pak-greens-victorious-in-women-s-baseball>



Why Inter-racial marriages are booming in France

By Addison Nugent

Nearly seven years ago to the day, I married a French man. I was 24 years old, fresh out of college, and my student visa was going to expire in a matter of months. Of course, I loved my boyfriend at the time — I had left my life in America behind for him after a whirlwind romance of just two months — but our marriage, which has since ended, was equally about the fear of me having to leave. At our wedding, I wore a flower crown.

My dad flew over from the United States, and all of our friends showed up and threw rice at us as we left the courthouse. By all appearances, it was a wedding like any other, but both my new husband and I were unsure what it really meant to us. Was it just a way for me to stay? A way for us to keep dating? Or were we really making a lifelong commitment to one another?

Our situation was, apparently, not unique. In fact:

MARRIAGES BETWEEN FOREIGNERS AND FRENCH NATIONALS HAVE TRIPLED IN FRANCE SINCE THE 1970S.

As of 15, 2017 percent of marriages in France were between a foreigner and a French person, a number that rises when marriages involving a French person abroad are added to the total. According to recent data published by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, 33,385 of the 220,582 marriages celebrated in France in 2017 were between a French national and a foreigner. Compare that to 1974, when there were more than 394,000 marriages but fewer than 20,000 involved a foreign partner.

According to 2015 comparisons from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, France had a higher percentage of so-called mixed marriages than the U.S., Korea, Japan, Spain, Italy or Germany. France is now the country with the highest inflow of family migrants in Europe, with 105,000 in 2015 alone. This number represents a sharp increase from 2008 when that number stood at 85,000. Today, l'Hexagone — where 62 percent of migrants come for family reasons — has the fourth-highest inflow of family migrants among OECD countries.

The increase of mariages mixtes in France can be explained by migration patterns and globalization: 37 percent of the mixed marriages celebrated in France in 2015 united a French spouse with a person of North African nationality; 22 percent a French

national with another European; and 14 percent with a national of sub-Saharan Africa. These numbers are reflective of general immigration patterns in France.

Another factor is the civil solidarity pact, known as a PACS, which is a form of civil union introduced in 1999 to give same-sex couples who didn't have the right to marry at the time more rights. About 95 percent of couples who do this are straight, and it's increased about 800 percent since it became available. "The PACs overtook marriage for French citizens," explains Magali Mazuy, a researcher at the National Institute of Demographic Studies, "but marriage is the more attractive option for foreigners because it gives them more rights."

Periods of study and work in France also offer an opportunity for foreigners to meet French spouses, with France currently ranked as the fourth-most-popular country in the world to study abroad. "Marriage just made it so much easier for me to get a visa," says Caitlyn Bertin-Mahieux, an

American citizen who met her husband while working at the American University of Paris in 2017. "It took away a lot of the stress."

With increasingly fast and cost-effective forms of transportation, more people are traveling the globe than ever before, and in the process meeting partners from countries and cultures far different from their own. More than 2 million French citizens live abroad, marrying foreign spouses and creating culturally blended families.

Furthermore, more women are now migrating alone to study and work, accounting for 50 percent of foreigners residing in France. As a result, in nearly half of French mixed marriages in 2015, the woman was the foreigner — a marked increase from earlier decades, when nearly two-thirds of such unions involved a foreign man.

So, why France? It's certainly not the easiest country in the Schengen Area to immigrate to — it's rated as one of the hardest countries in the world for foreigners to settle in, according to the annual Expat Insider survey by InterNations. I found it very difficult to navigate French culture, make friends and generally feel at home even after receiving my marriage visa. Perhaps foreigners, like myself, are drawn by France's romantic reputation, and the promise of an archetypal French lover.

<https://www.ozy.com/acumen/international-marriages-are-booming-in-france/226799/>