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Why India is becoming an intolerant country?



Zakaria Virk, Editor

India used to be a tolerant country but not anymore. Why? It all started with the rise to power of BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party – People's Party). BJP rose to prominence by agitating the demolition of a mosque in the city of Ayodha, so that a temple could be built for Ram. The destruction of the mosque in 1992 followed by deadly riots propelled the party to ascent. Also when Modi was chief minister of Gujrat massacre of Muslims took place in 2002 which made him a Hindu hero in the eyes of nationalists.

By creating divisions over religion and politics and national identity the Hindu nationalists get energized. This also distracts people's attention from economy which has been struggling since BJP election victory. There is constant insinuation that Muslims are the cause for every problem in the country that they are always scheming to bring Hinduism down and sell the country to Pakistan. The new Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 is another cause for concern.

Supreme Court of India recently ruled that a Hindu temple could be built at the site of demolished mosque in Ayodha. Property worth millions has been destroyed by Yogi and Amit Shah; lives have been lost on the false pretext of beef. Yogi is destroying Muslim constituencies by seizing their properties.

PM is tarnishing the memory of Mohandas Ghandi, a preacher of non-violence. Many Muslims have been lynched or beaten to death for supposed disrespect to the Hindu religion like loving a Hindu woman or killing a cow. From time to time stoking such fears leads to massacres of Muslims like the one in Gujrat in which one thousands Muslims died.

While all this mayhem is going on, Indian media is scared. Demonetization of currency increased corruption so as BJP supporters can easily transfer funds. The government wants to convince the world that this is an internal matter; the fact is it affects millions of Muslims.

Lawmakers from US, UK, and European countries have raised their concerns and have conveyed them to the government. Secular & liberal minded Indians like Javed Akhtar, veteran actor S. Sinha, & Mahesh Bhatt are battling to have Indian democracy and secularism restored.

Mr. Bhatt says: "The Muslims of my country and all other minorities have never felt more insecure; if people choose to turn their face away from this naked truth, it's their privilege but they do India a lot of harm when people are frightened to speak. There's palpable anxiety in the air." I don't think the average Indian is so frightened of a Muslim. This fear has been crafted and structured. The media is working around the clock to create 'the other' to stay in power. To hate the Muslims is the lifeline of the BJP, let's not mince our words."

Regarding Bollywood's deadly silence in this matter & being "Team Modi", celebrated poet and author Javed Akhtar said: "No, I won't say that but the fact is this is the proof that society is scared. Do all these people agree with him, his philosophy, his ideology or what his party is doing? Do they think lynching is wonderful? No. And if they don't think that, then why are they not saying it? It's fear, it's purely fear." India must remain a beacon of democracy, secularism but not nationalism. Muslim have lived here for more than a millennia, they cannot be deported.



UN Chief thanks Pakistan for giving full access to UNMOGIP in Kashmir

United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa at the General Headquarters (GHQ) on Monday, the military's media wing said in a statement.

During the meeting, matters of mutual interests, the overall regional security situation including the issues of Afghan refugees, Afghan reconciliation process and Kashmir dispute were discussed.

Guterres during his conversation with Gen Bajwa "thanked Pakistan for full access given to United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) in Kashmir", the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) press release said.

It added that the UN chief also said that there is a need to implement UN resolutions on the

Kashmir issue.

Guterres once again acknowledged Pakistan's contribution to UN peacekeeping missions and "extraordinary achievements in counter-terrorism".

According to the statement, he commended the improved security situation in Pakistan and the country's efforts towards regional peace and stability. Gen Bajwa during the meeting remarked that Pakistan is committed to achieving "a stable, peaceful and normalised Pakistan".

Guterres on Monday also held a meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan in Islamabad, Radio Pakistan reported. Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi was also present on the occasion.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1535048>



In Pictures:

Erdogan visit to his second home Pakistan



DAWN.COM

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday completed his two-day trip to Pakistan

— his fourth visit to the country — aimed at strengthening bilateral strategic partnership and economic ties.

After being welcomed and personally driven from the Nur Khan Airbase by Prime Minister

joined on the trip by First Lady Emine Erdogan, later held a meeting with President Arif Alvi at the Aiwan-i-Sadr.



Prime Minister Imran Khan receives Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on his arrival in Islamabad, February 13. — Reuters

Imran Khan on Thursday, the Turkish leader was presented a guard of honour at Prime Minister House. President Erdogan, who was



Turkish President Erdogan (top L) addresses the joint session of Parliament in Islamabad on February 14. — AFP

His schedule for Friday was packed. In the morning Erdogan addressed a joint session of Parliament for a record fourth time and spoke at the Pakistan-Turkey Business and Investment Forum. He later held a one-on-one meeting with Prime Minister Imran and co-chaired a meeting of the Pakistan-Turkey High Level Strategic Cooperation Council.

The visit saw the signing of 13 memorandums of understanding (MoUs) for cooperation in various areas. Erdogan, who referred to Pakistan as "our second home" at a joint presser with Prime Minister Imran, departed from Islamabad on Friday evening.



Ghost Mathematicians

By Dr. Pervez Hoodbhoy

SCAMS and scandals shock no one in Pakistan. Why should they? The corrupt are never punished except if they cross swords with those behind the scenes. With this dismal truth before me, I pen here an unusual story that would grab headlines in another country. To be named below are several persons who would have ended up behind bars in any country where there is rule of law. Several others — whether complicit or negligent — would be shamed, reviled and removed from their current official positions. Knowing that nothing will happen here in Pakistan, this is still a story I must tell.

Briefly: between 2003 and 2013 dozens of European mathematics professors were flown into Pakistan at government expense. They came under the Higher Education Commission's so-called Foreign Faculty Hiring Programme (FFHP). A big budgetary chunk went to the Abdus Salam School of Mathematical Sciences (AS-SMS), an affiliate of Government College-University in Lahore. SMS received Rs638 million from HEC for salaries and airfare.

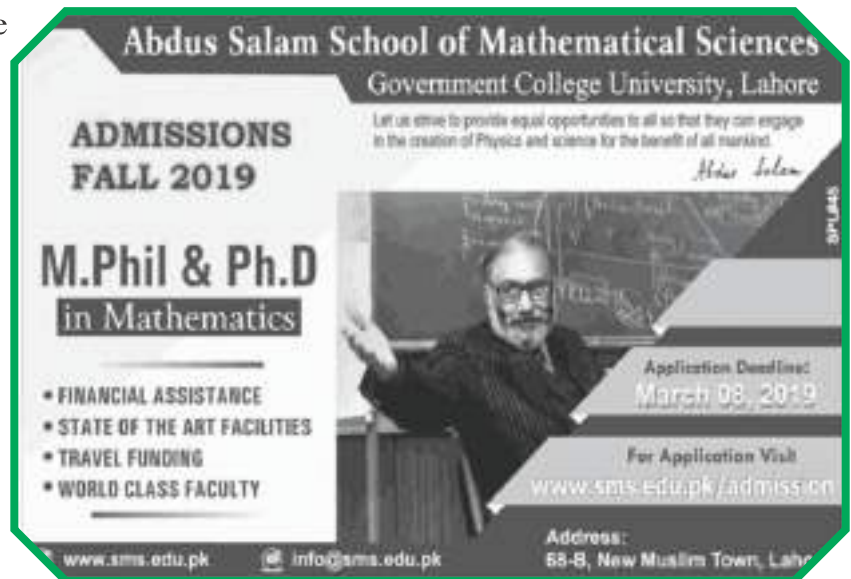
The imported professors were listed as full-time SMS faculty with Western-level salaries convertible to euros and dollars. Some were paid for as long as eight years. They were supposed to teach students all year round, supervise their research, and add to overall national prestige by publishing high-level mathematics research using their Pakistani institutional address, ie that of SMS.

This did not happen. Some foreign professors visited Lahore for just four to five months of the year, others for half this time, and still others for

most four to six weeks. Still, apart from those on short-term appointments, year after year all were paid a full 12-month salary. When later asked, some said Lahore was too hot while others said it was too dangerous.

Research publications of the foreign professors did not carry SMS's name although they were formally full time SMS employees. Clearly several were making brief junkets to Pakistan while actually employed elsewhere. How the ghost professors managed to supervise one hundred PhD theses at SMS is a mystery. The quality of these graduates is for the reader to guess.

An investigative report can be found on the SMS website. Such detailed investigations are unknown in Pakistan's academic history. Spread over 456 pages (including email correspondence with relevant foreign professors) it was patiently put together over two years by an officially constituted committee of three individuals presently employed at SMS: Prof Amer Iqbal (convener), Prof Fiazud-in-Zaman, and Muhammad Imran Khan (administrative and finance officer). They deserve our highest respect for the risk they took.



Bullet points gleaned from this report follow:

FFHP was launched by HEC in 2003. On the HEC side the officials responsible for this programme and disbursement of funds to SMS were: Dr Atta-ur-Rahman (then HEC chairman), Dr Sohail Naqvi (then HEC executive director), and Wasim Hashmi Syed (then FFHP project director). Presently Dr Rahman heads another major government education initiative in the PTI government. Shall we hope that another disaster will be averted?

From 2003 to 2013 the SMS officials directly responsible for the disbursement of funds received from HEC under FFHP were Dr A.D.R. Choudary (director general, 2003-2014) and Ejaz Malik (director of finance & administration, 2003-2014). The committee repeatedly sought to contact both but received no replies. They are said to have left Pakistan.

Fifty-eight foreign professors were hired at SMS under the FFHP programme with durations ranging from a few months up to almost eight years. These professors were paid monthly salaries which were deposited into their accounts opened in a local bank with the help of SMS staff. It is not certain whether the professors themselves withdrew the money or someone else pocketed it.

When the committee wrote to 38 foreign professors formerly at SMS asking them to verify their salary payments, just 13 replied. Official records show each receiving payments between \$150,000 to \$300,000. The reader, by browsing through the email correspondence, can sense that some professors were genuinely confused and had forgotten details from many years earlier. Several said that they received far less than the alleged amount. Others recall being asked to sign blank sheets of paper by the SMS staff.

The committee also inspected the research publications of foreign professors employed by SMS between 2003 and 2013 and found that

these individuals showed their affiliation only to foreign institutions and not to SMS. It noted that “this [is] rather odd since if someone was employed at SMS for five or six years it is natural to expect that they will show SMS as their affiliation in their research papers”. Stated differently: why on earth was Pakistan paying them?

Hiring foreign professors to teach in Pakistan once seemed an excellent idea. In 2003 when Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman asked me to create and head a FFHP committee for hiring physicists from abroad, I gladly accepted. Subsequently I requested Prof Riazuddin (died 2013), who was Pakistan’s finest physicist after Abdus Salam, as well as Prof Asghar Qadir, a distinguished physicist, to join the committee.

Dr Riazuddin, Dr Qadir and I spent many hours in many meetings poring over faculty applications and making recommendations for appointing the best applicants. We were hopeful that infusing foreign expertise would put new life into otherwise intellectually barren institutions across Pakistan. But after a full year’s work we found ourselves sidelined. Decisions were made and appointments were made against the committee’s advice — and often without its knowledge. Thereafter we sent in our collective resignation to Dr Rahman. Other factors seemed to be at work and we did not want our reputations sullied.

Pakistan already has the distinction of having thousands of ghost schools in its rural areas. Now it has set a world record by having hosted a ghost faculty programme for a full 10 years — and that too in high-level mathematics at one of its oldest institutions. One hears of other scams in higher education but none as brazen. Either no one knew about this one or, more likely, many knew but none spoke up. All this happened right under the HEC’s nose. One does not feel optimistic.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1515765>



Pakistani woman architect

Yasmeen Lari wins prestigious Jane Drew Prize

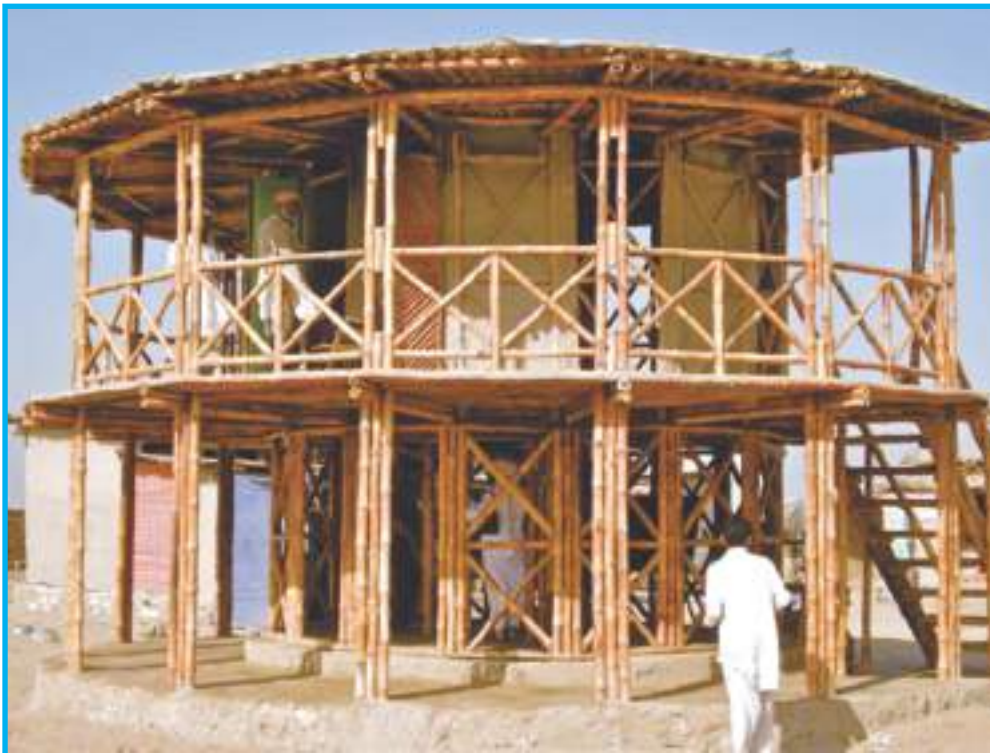
Islamabad: Pakistan's first female architect, Yasmeen Lari has been awarded the prestigious Jane Drew Prize 2020. The award recognises the contributions of women architects.

"I am honoured and grateful to have been chosen for this award," Lari told Gulf News. "This award not only recognises my efforts but the contribution of Pakistan in the field of architecture," she added. The prize would also be a source of inspiration for Pakistani women working in different fields, she said. The award is named after Jane Drew, an advocate for

Karachi city, the country's commercial hub. Using simple indigenous materials such as earth, lime and bamboo, we built thousands of flood and earthquake resistant houses that are both cost-effective and eco-friendly.

In recent years, however, she combined her architectural knowledge with traditional skills to design zero-carbon structures for the underprivileged. In Pakistan, she is considered as one of the most successful providers of disaster relief shelters in the world.

Low-cost, zero-carbon, zero-waste housing



Architect Yasmeen Lari has built over 50,000 flood- and earthquake-resistant houses using traditional building materials in Pakistan.

The 2005 earthquake, which killed nearly 80,000 people and left 400,000 families displaced, changed Lari's life forever. It was then that the architect behind some of the country's landmark buildings devoted all her energies to providing homes to the marginalised.

She developed a low cost, carbon-free structure technique, using renewable materials and based on

women in a male-dominated profession.

Previous winners include Grafton Architects founders Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara, Kathryn Findlay of Ushida Findlay, Zaha Hadid, Amanda Levete and Odile Decq. Lari, 79, made her mark by designing some of the most iconic buildings in

traditional heritage, to help rehabilitate the earthquake victims.

<https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/pakistani-woman-architect-yasmeen-lari-wins-prestigious-jane-drew-prize-1.69329499>





Why Pakistanis get radicalized in the UK

By Khalid Ahmad

Pakistanis get radicalized after migrating to the UK. Their children get radicalized growing up in labor-class communities where Islam is practiced in more intense forms. One such “transformed” person was Al-Muhajiroun’s founder, Anjum Chaudhry, of Pakistani origin, who is now in jail.

On November 29, 2019, five people were stabbed on the London Bridge. The attacker, Usman Khan, had been released from prison in 2018 “on licence”. A known extremist boasting ISIS and Al-Muhajiroun flags at the age of 15 didn’t alarm the authorities enough then. Khan’s hatred was British-born, though, and unrelated to Pakistan.

It is said that Khan was affected by the bullying he got from his schoolmates. He was ultimately shot dead after the London Bridge stabbings but not before a section of the Indian media linked him to Pakistan, where religious extremism is rampant. The British media, however, knew better: Muslim extremism grows out of the melting pot of extremist Islam

in Britain.

In 2010, too, three terrorists had stabbed to death seven innocent people on London Bridge. One of the terrorists turned out to be of Pakistani origin, Khurram Shahzad Butt: A typically radicalized boy in his 20s, maladjusted in his East London milieu, Butt was reported when he told a neighbor, “I’m ready to do whatever I need to do in the name of Allah. I am ready in the name of Allah to do what needs to be done, including killing my own mother”. He had reportedly also entered a local mosque and demanded obedience while parroting Chaudhry’s line that Muslims refuse to vote as democracy was an enemy of Islam.

It appears that religious radicalism didn’t go from Pakistan to the UK, but actually came to Pakistan from London. Al-Muhajiroun had come to Pakistan along with its British-based sister terrorist organisation, Hizb ut-Tahrir, in the mid-2000s, and recruited a number of people inside the Pakistan army till the Musharraf government banned them. Brigadier

Ali Khan was arrested for his alleged ties with Hizbut and, before that, Colonel Shahid Bashir, commanding officer of the Shamsi air force base, was apprehended by the military police in May 2009 for keeping links with this banned pan-Islamic political outfit.

French scholar Gilles Kepel has studied the “reverse” phenomenon in his books on expat Islam. In the UK, Islamisation of the immigrant

“separating” the community on such questions as halal and girls’ education, and the Labour Party was the popular party for the Muslims.

Next came the Rushdie affair in 1988: The protest that was organised against Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* united the fragmented Muslim community in the UK — toppling its less educated leaders in favour of the anglophone radical ones.



Muslim community was an early postcolonial trend stemming from the British experience in India. “Communalisation” rather than “integration” suited the UK because it could then farm out the menial jobs to a community formed especially for them.

Workers’ mosques came up in the 1950s in the industrial areas of the UK. In the 1950s and 1960s, the mosques were divided against each other on the basis of Barelvi-Deobandi religions. There were even Pathan and Punjabi, Mirpuri, Bengali and Gujarati mosques. Then came the individual charismatic figures like Barelvi Pir Maroof Shah who built a number of mosques for his followers in Bradford, founding the World Islamic Mission in 1973. Sufi Abdullah built himself a similar Barelvi empire in the area in the early 1980s. The Bradford Council of Mosques in the 1980s was already

The Islamic Foundation of Leicester sent out the call against Rushdie’s blasphemy, but the man who finally ran away with the collective Muslim response was ex-journalist, Kalim Siddiqui, of Jamaat Islami background, who set up his Muslim Parliament and issued what was termed the Muslim Manifesto in 1990, actually challenging the British system. This caused Labour politician Roy Jenkins, who had described the British policy of integration as equal opportunities with cultural diversity in 1965, to say in 1989 that the policy had failed to effect any integration of the Muslim culture and religion within the British society.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-radical-expat-islamic-state-pakistan-terrorism-london-bridge-attack-6256654/>



Pakistani woman becomes 'youngest ever Muslim' lawmaker in UK parliament



Zarah Sultana

A total of 11 female Muslim MPs of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Kurdish origin made it to Westminster in the December's general election, setting a new record. December's general election results in the U.K. set a new record for female Muslim lawmakers, in what international media outlets have heralded as the most diverse parliament ever in the country's history in terms of gender and ethnicity.

The British Parliament now welcomes more female Muslim MPs than male Muslim representatives for the first time in its history.

A record-breaking 220 women (34 percent) -- regardless of race, religion or ethnicity--, out of 650 in total, were elected in December, 12 more than the previous number of 208 in the 2017 general election.

In the previous parliament, a total of 16 MPs of Muslim faith won seats in the election— of

which eight were women.

After the last general election, the number of Muslim parliamentarians has reached a new record of 21. Of those, 11 are women: six of Pakistani or Kashmiri origin, four from Bangladesh, and one Kurdish.

The six female MPs of Pakistani background who made it to Westminster are Zarah Sultana, Shabana Mahmood, Yasmeen Qureshi, Nusrat Ghani, Naz Shah and Rosena Allin-Khan.

The 27-year-old Kashmiri origin MP, Zarah Sultana, set a new record of becoming the youngest Pakistani and Muslim ever to be elected as an MP.

<https://www.yenisafak.com/en/news/pakistani-woman-becomes-youngest-ever-muslim-lawmaker-in-uk-parliament-3510139>



UK: Islamic faith marriages **not valid** in English law, **appeal court** rules



Islamic faith marriages are not valid under English law, the court of appeal has ruled, in a blow to thousands of Muslim women who have no rights when it comes to divorce.

The judgment, delivered in February 2020, overturned an earlier high court ruling that an Islamic marriage, known as a nikah, fell within the scope of English matrimonial law.

The appeal court has confirmed that nikah marriages are legally “non-marriages”, meaning spouses have no redress to the courts for a division of matrimonial assets such as the family home and spouse’s pension if a marriage breaks down.

Many couples who undergo nikah ceremonies believe they are lawfully married. But their marriages are only legal if they additionally go through a civil ceremony.

A survey in 2017 found nearly all married Muslim women in the UK had had a nikah and almost two-thirds had not had a separate civil ceremony.

Responding to the appeal court judgment, Charles Hale QC, of the family law firm 4PB, said: “This means that many have absolutely no

rights at the end of what they believe to be their ‘marriage’. No rights to assets in the husband’s sole name, and no rights to maintenance.”

The appeal court had “upheld the existing concepts of what constitutes a lawful marriage ... The law in these cases are not keeping up with society. These vulnerable women need better protection than the law currently provides.”

The 2018 high court case concerned a couple, Nasreen Akhter and Mohammed Shabaz Khan, who had undergone a nikah marriage conducted by an imam in front of 150 guests at a restaurant in Southall, west London, in 1998.

The relationship had broken down, and Akhter petitioned for divorce. But Khan blocked the move, arguing the couple were not married under English law, only under sharia or Islamic law.

Akhter said she had seen Khan as her husband, and he had “always introduced me as his wife”. The high court heard the couple had intended to follow their nikah ceremony with a civil ceremony, but that Khan refused to go through with a legal process despite frequent efforts by Akhter to persuade him.

Mr Justice Williams, who heard the case in the family division of the high court in London, concluded the marriage fell within the scope of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973.

The state did not have a human rights obligation to recognise religious marriage, the judgment said. Daniel Jones, of the law firm BLM, said the appeal court judgment was “a real blow for all concerned”.

The law on marriage was “no longer fit for purpose in a modern, multicultural and less religious society”, she added. Pragna Patel of Southall Black Sisters, an organization that has campaigned on the issue of nikah marriages, said: “Today’s judgment will force Muslim and other women to turn to sharia ‘courts’, which already cause significant harm to women and children, for remedies because they are now locked out of the civil justice system.

“What we are seeing is the outsourcing of justice on family matters to unaccountable and fundamentalist-inspired community-based systems of religious arbitration. This is not about recognizing religious marriages; it is about the state guaranteeing equality to all before the law.” The state guaranteeing equality to all before the law.”

In 2018, an independent review of sharia councils recommended that Muslim couples should undergo a civil marriage as well as a religious ceremony to give women protection under the law.

The review, instigated by Theresa May in 2016 when she was home secretary, found that a significant number of Muslim couples did not register their marriages under civil law, and “some Muslim women have no option of obtaining a civil divorce”.

Raghad Altikriti, president of the Muslim Association of Britain, said many Islamic centres in the UK had made civil registration a condition of nikah marriage. The appeal court ruling provided an “opportunity to continue the discussion to ensure that everyone’s rights are

protected by facilitating a comprehensive system that incorporates the needs of all”, she added.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/14/islamic-faith-marriages-not-valid-in-english-law-appeal-court-rules>

Bill Gates daughter engaged to an Egyptian Muslim

Jennifer Gates, the daughter of Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, is engaged.

Jennifer announced the news via Instagram late Wednesday, sharing a photo of her and her now-fiancé Nayel Nassar, an Egyptian show jumper. The 23-year-old Stanford graduate addressed the photo’s caption to Nassar.

You are one of a kind. Absolutely swept me off my feet this past weekend, surprising me in the most meaningful location over one of our many shared passions," she wrote with a ring emoji. "I can't wait to spend the rest of our lives learning, growing, laughing and loving together. Yes a million times over. AHHH!!!"

Though it is unclear what "shared passions" she is referring to in the post, one thing the couple have in common is their love of equestrian sport. Jennifer is also an equestrian athlete and posts frequently about her competitions.

The couple have been together for years, with social media posts together dating back to 2017.

In a similar post to his In a similar post to his Instagram, Nassar shared the happy news: "SHE SAID YES!!!"

"I'm feeling like the luckiest (and happiest) man in the world right about now. Jenn, you are everything I could have possibly imagined..and so much more," he continued. "I can't wait to keep growing together through this journey called life, and I simply can't imagine mine without you anymore. Love you more than you can possibly imagine, and thank you for making every single day feel like a dream to me. Here's to forever!"

Jennifer took to the comment section to share her emotion.

"Yep crying again it's fine life is perfect (right now) you're everything to me," she wrote with a heart and ring emoji.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/celebrities/2020/01/30/bill-gates-daughter-jennifer-gates-engaged-nayel-nassar/4618476002/>

The man teaching 300 million people a new language

By Will Smale Business reporter, BBC News

The BBC's weekly The Boss series profiles different business leaders from around the world. This week we speak to Luis von Ahn, co-founder and chief executive of language learning app Duolingo.

If anyone ever doubts the positive impact of immigration tell them about Luis von Ahn.

A 41-year-old from the Central American nation

known as the "genius grant", because you are said to have to be one to get it.

Luis then became a multimillionaire by his early 30s, after selling not one but two businesses to Google. The technology he sold to the search engine giant is still used by all of us, as will be explained later.

Fast forward to today, and Luis is the co-founder



The company's headquarters is in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

of Guatemala, he went to the US in 1996, aged 18, to do a maths degree at Duke University in North Carolina. After that he studied computer science at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

Luis went on to become a computer science professor, specialising in "human-based computation", which in very simple terms is how humans and computers can best work together to solve complicated tasks.

For his pioneering work in that field he was awarded the US's prestigious MacArthur Fellows Program award. This is colloquially

and boss of Pittsburgh-based Duolingo, the world's most popular language-learning app, which has more than 300 million users around the globe.

Soft-spoken and bespectacled, Luis modestly says that the much of his success is down to the fact that he was lucky enough to be taught English as a child. A native Spanish speaker, he says that his doctor mother insisted that he learned English from a very young age.

His middle class family then had enough money to send him to a private English language school in the capital Guatemala City.

Luis says this obviously put him in a very privileged position compared to most Guatemalans - almost half of the country's population live in poverty, according to the World Bank, with 9% in extreme poverty. Many have limited access to education.

The inspiration behind Duolingo was to create a language learning app that was free for people to use - be it in Guatemala, or around the world - so that they could gain the economic advantages that often come with being at least partially bilingual.

"I wanted to do something that would give equal access to education to everyone," says Luis. "And then I focused on languages because growing up in Guatemala I saw that everyone wants to learn English.

"And knowledge of English in a non-English speaking country can usually mean that your income potential is doubled. I mean, you literally make twice as much money if you know English. So that's kind of where the idea came from to have a free way to learn languages, and that was Duolingo."

Luis and co-founder Severin Hacker started work on the app in 2009. At the time Luis was a professor at Carnegie Mellon, and Severin was one of his students. Bringing on board linguistics and language retention experts, Duolingo launched in 2012, initially offering a handful of languages, including English, French and Spanish.

"When we launched I was lucky enough to be able to give a TED Talk that was watched by two million people, so that gave Duolingo a good initial base of users," says Luis. "But from then until 2019 our growth was solely due to positive word of mouth, we didn't do any advertising or marketing at all."

Today Duolingo offers more than 100 courses across 28 different languages. While the most popular languages are English, Spanish and French, you can study everything from Arabic to Ukrainian. Duolingo also has a special focus on

promoting minority languages, with courses in Welsh, Navajo, Gaelic and Hawaiian.

Dr Sylvia Warnecke, a senior lecturer in languages at The Open University in Scotland, says that she was very pleased to see Duolingo work with leading Gaelic speakers to launch that course last year.

"Duolingo gets criticism from some that you cannot learn enough to become proficient in a language... but it is a wonderful way of getting people started," she says.

"For lots of people learning a language is a slog, and they don't have the time to sign up for formal classes on a weekly basis. Apps like Duolingo are a valuable alternative."

Duolingo now has annual revenues of \$90m (£69m). Some \$15m of this comes from the adverts included on the free, standard app, while \$75m is from the 2% of users who pay for the advertisement-free premium version.

"If you use Duolingo heavily and you are relatively wealthy then you should pay us, that is my sense," says Luis. "But if you are in a developing country and don't have very much money, then the free version is for you. That's how I feel about it."

Now with 200 employees, Luis hopes that Duolingo can float on the stock market in 2021. He is said to have a substantial, but minority stake in the business, which already has some outside investors.

Going back in time, the two businesses Luis sold to Google were the ESP Game and Recaptcha.

ESP, which stands for Extra Sensory Perception, was an online game in which two people, who could not communicate with each other, had to pick words to describe a photograph. When they used the same word they each got a point, and were presented with another photo. Since 2006 Google has used this technology to improve its image search software.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-51208154>



Canada is developing into a Western hub for Islamic investment

By Arno Maierbrugger



Although currently not quite in the very centre of attention of the global Islamic finance industry, the Canadian Islamic finance scene in the recent past has experienced growing interest from domestic and international investors, as it developed a rising number of Shariah-compliant investment and financing offerings.

The reason is that more Muslims are seeking halal banking and finance products and – in general – an open-minded and progressive society is looking for alternative and socially conscious ways of investing.

Canada is home to an estimated 1.5mn people following the Islamic faith, or around 4% of the population, which makes Muslims the second largest religion in the country, while it is also the fastest-growing.

Most of them are immigrants, but there is also a growing percentage of Muslims born in Canada and a smaller, but increasing number converting from other religions to Islam.

Most of them live in the Greater Toronto and Greater Montreal area and are generally middle-class and well educated with considerable grades of financial literacy.

Overall, it is estimated that the number of Canadian Muslims will double in the coming decade. Besides, the Muslim community in Canada is quite young, so there is definitely a large potential for mortgage, car, house and

personal insurance, credit cards and consumer loans. Multiple-language offerings, personalized services and modern technology-based banking and investment products further create demand in Islamic banking.

These facts, paired with Canada's global competitiveness and ease of doing business, its AAA credit rating, its well-supervised financial market with strong risk management mechanisms, a sound banking system and a financial regulatory regime which has shown to be compatible with many Islamic finance instruments make a solid background for a thriving Islamic banking and finance landscape.

This situation, together with open-minded non-Muslims on the outlook for ethical and sustainable investment, has raised particular demand for halal mortgages and sukuk and Islamic mutual funds, Islamic insurance, or takaful, as well as commodity- and infrastructure-backed investment.

Notably, Canada's wealth in natural resources, which ranges from mining to hydrocarbons, combined with its ambitious infrastructure development agenda provide countless investment opportunities for investors looking for Shariah compliance in accordance with the asset-backed product requirements of Islamic finance.

There are already a number of Islamic finance

players, with the most established being United Muslim Financial, Habib Canadian Bank, Al-Ittihad Investment, Al Yusr, Manzil Bank, Ijara Community Development Corp, Islamic Co-Operative Housing Corp, Ansar Co-operative Housing Corp, Qurtuba Housing Co-op, An-Nur Housing Cooperative, Amana Auto Finance Canada, Assiniboine Credit Union, newer

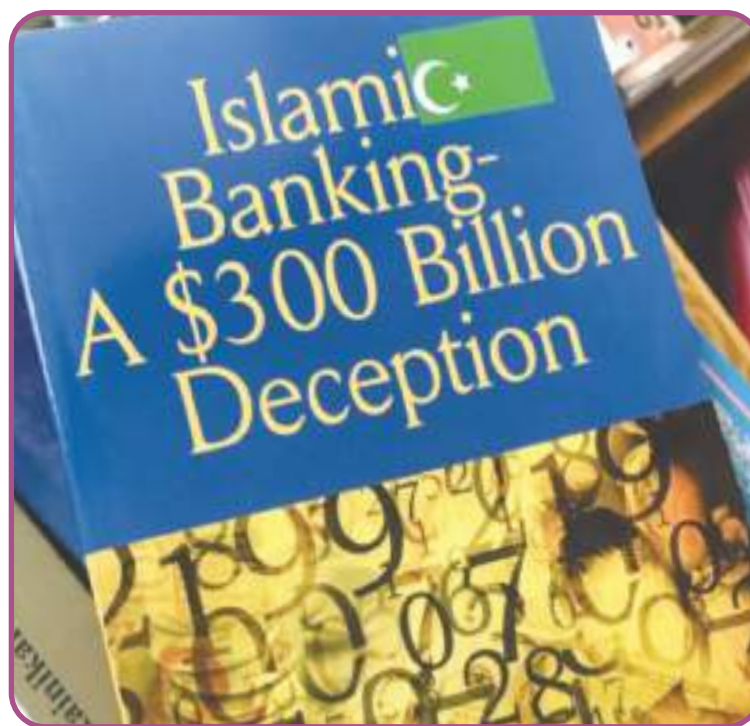
players such as Iana Financial, Wealthsimple Halal, ShariaPortfolio Canada, Global Iman Fund, as well as a number of other medium-sized and smaller player and mortgage cooperatives. Besides, there are a growing number conventional banks and financial institutions opening Islamic windows or planning to do so, among them Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce or the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp.

The opposing view

Shariah banking and Islamic finance did not exist for most of Islam's 1,400-year history. The origin of Islamic banking has its roots in the rise of Islamism or the use of Islam as a political ideology beginning in the 1920s.

However, in practical terms Shariah Islamic banking did not start until the late 1970s and owes much of its foundation to the Islamist doctrine of two people — Abul Ala Maudoodi of the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan and Hassan al-Banna of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

These 'products' and terminology were put into practice by the jihadi Pakistani military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq who established Shariah banking law in Pakistan.



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The fact is Islam prohibits usury, not interest. Every English-language translation of the Quran has translated the Arabic word 'riba' as usury, not 'interest'. Yet, Islamists have deliberately portrayed bank interest as usury and labeled the current banking system as un-Islamic.

Two authors, both senior Muslim bankers, have written scathing critiques of Shariah banking, one labeling the practice as nothing more than "deception," with the other suggesting the entire exercise was "a convenient pretext for advancing broad Islamic objectives and for lining the pockets of religious officials."

In his book, 'Islamic Banking — A \$300 Billion Deception,' Muhammad Saleem, former president and CEO of Park Avenue Bank in New York, not only dismisses the founding premise of Shariah and Islamic banking, he writes: "Islamic banks do not practice what they preach: they all charge interest, but disguised in Islamic garb. Thus, they engage in deceptive and dishonest banking practises." (Tarek Fatah in Toronto Sun)

<https://m.gulf-times.com/story/655595/Islamic-finance-making-strides-in-Canada>



Stress Really Does Make Hair Go Gray Faster

By Knavul Sheikh, NYTimes

The same nerves involved in the fight-or-flight response can cause permanent damage to the cells responsible for producing hair color in mice, scientists have found.

here is some truth to the longstanding anecdote that your locks can lose color when you're stressed.

A team of researchers has found that in mice, stressful events damage the stem cells that are responsible for producing pigment in hair. These stem cells, found near the base of each hair follicle, differentiate to form more specialized cells called melanocytes, which generate the brown, black, red and yellow hues in hair and skin. Stress makes the stem cells differentiate faster, exhausting their number and resulting in strands that are more likely to be transparent — gray.

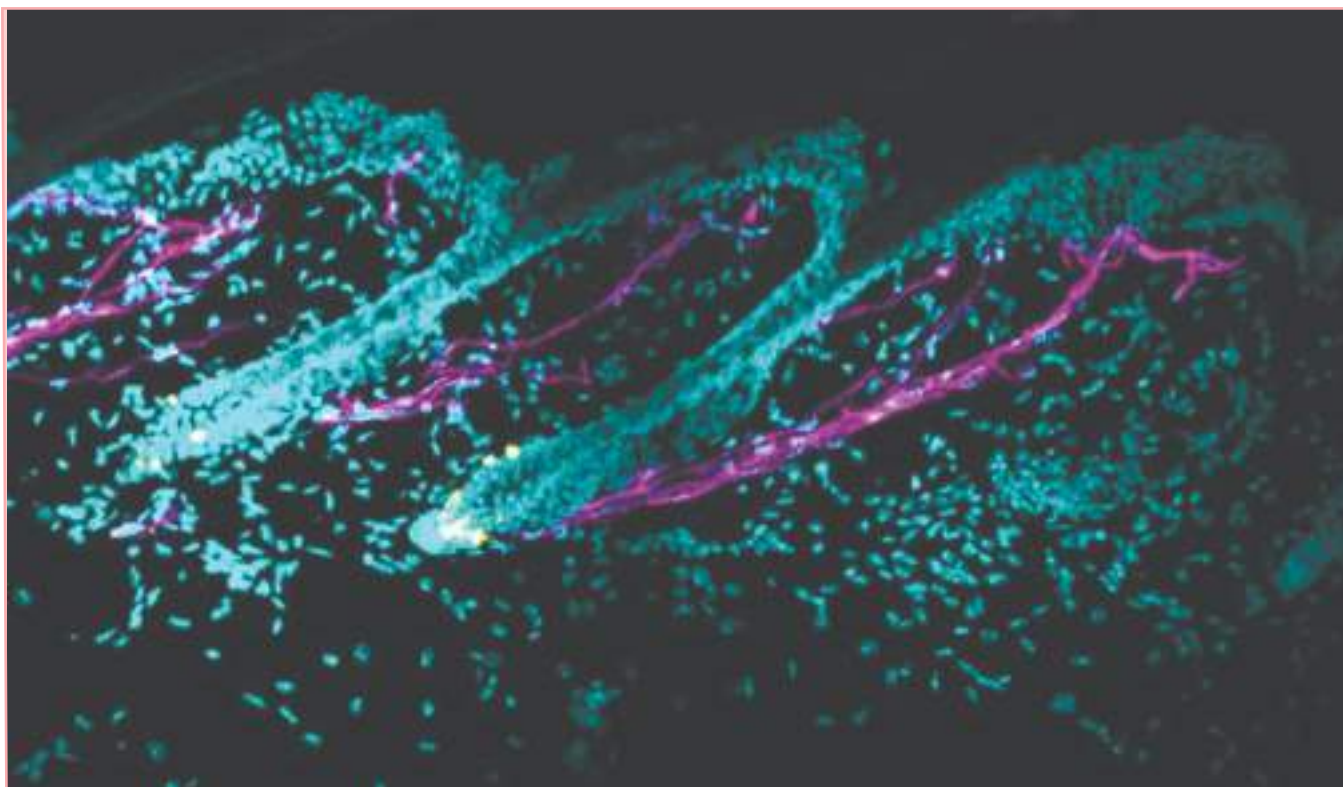
The study, published Wednesday in Nature, also found that the sympathetic nervous system,



which prepares the body to respond to threats, plays an important role in the graying process.

“Normally, the sympathetic nervous system is an emergency system for fight or flight, and it is supposed to be very beneficial or, at the very least, its effects are supposed to be transient and reversible,” said Ya-Chieh Hsu, a stem cell biologist at Harvard University who led the study.

The sympathetic nervous system helps mobilize many biological responses, including increasing the flow of blood to muscles and sharpening mental focus. But the researchers



A microscope image shows the sympathetic nerves (magenta) surrounding melanocyte stem cells (yellow).Credit...Bing Zhang and Ya-Chieh Hsu

found that in some cases the same system of nerves permanently depleted the stem cell population in hair follicles.

The findings provide the first scientific link between stress and hair graying, Dr. Hsu said.

At first, the team hypothesized that stress might cause an immune attack on melanocyte stem cells.

They exposed mice to acute stress by injecting the animals with an analogue of capsaicin, the chemical in chili peppers that causes irritation. But even mice that lacked immune cells ended up with gray hair.

Next, the scientists looked at the effects of the stress hormone cortisol. Mice that had their adrenal glands removed so they couldn't produce cortisol still had hair that turned gray under stress.

The system responsible for the appearance of silvery strands turns out to be the sympathetic nerves that branch out into each hair follicle in the skin.

The researchers found that the sympathetic nerve cells released a neurotransmitter called noradrenaline that was taken up by nearby melanocyte stem cells. Then a series of events unfolded in quick succession:

The melanocyte stem cells proliferated and turned into specialized pigment-producing cells, which abandoned their niche near the base of the follicle and left the hair without a source of pigmentation.

In Dr. Hsu's study, acute stress depleted the entire melanocyte stem cell population in mice in just five days.

The researchers also found that, in petri dishes, noradrenaline prompted human melanocyte stem cells to proliferate, suggesting that the same acceleration of hair graying occurs in people, too.

"I was amazed by how dramatic this change is," said Mayumi Ito, a biologist at the New York University School of Medicine who was not

involved in the study. In her own research on aging mice, the graying process was gradual: The depletion of melanocyte stem cells led first to a few salt and pepper strands and then to gray or white fur, much as humans begin to see more white hair as they get older.

Dr. Hsu's team also found that the graying process in mice could be halted with drugs known as CDK inhibitors, which stop the proliferation of stem cells, or by blocking the release of noradrenaline.

The findings underscore the consequences of triggering a survival mechanism when the situation isn't life-threatening.

"Stress is a normal part of life, but there are situations where stress is helpful and situations where it is detrimental," said Subroto Chatterjee, a biologist at Johns Hopkins University who studies the effects of stress on the cells in blood vessels.

Other studies have shown that stress is just one factor affecting how quickly hair goes gray, Dr. Chatterjee said. Genes and diet play a big role as well.

In a 2018 study, Dr. Chatterjee and his colleagues found that mice placed on the equivalent of a Western diet — high in fat and cholesterol — not only developed inflamed arteries, they also started going gray and experiencing hair loss.

(The team also found a way to halt the process.)

But the new study is an important step toward understanding the role of stress on various tissues.

"If we can know more about how our tissues and stem cells change under stress, we can eventually create treatments that can halt or reverse its detrimental impact," Dr. Hsu said.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/22/science/gray-hair-stress.html>



US:
Saleha Jabeen
commissioned
as first
Muslim woman
chaplain



U.S. Air force chaplain candidate saleha jabeen, right, is commissioned by U.S. air force chief of chaplains (maj. gen.) steven schaick, dec. 18, 2019, at the catholic theological union in chicago. (U.S. air force photo/ tech. sgt. armando a. schwer-morales)

(RNS) — The U.S. Air Force commissioned its first Muslim woman chaplain candidate last month, marking the first time the U.S. military will have a female chaplain of the Islamic faith.

Saleha Jabeen became a second lieutenant in a December ceremony at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

“The fact is America is a place where the Constitution guarantees your freedom to embrace or abstain from religious ideals, and the Chaplain Corps, which Jabeen just entered, exists to ensure every Airman has a religious freedom advocate. This is a big day not just for Muslims, but for persons of all faiths,” said Maj. Gen. Steven Schaick, Air Force chief of chaplains, in a statement published on the Air Force’s website on Friday (Jan. 10).

“I could not be more proud of our Air Force for being willing to commission and embrace the first female Imam in the Department of Defense.”

Jabeen’s path to the chaplaincy has included graduating from North Park University, an evangelical Christian school in Chicago, in 2009, and the Catholic theological school, where she was the first Muslim woman chosen by fellow students as valedictorian for their 2014 class,

according to a bio she provided to Religion News Service.

She served in the U.S. Army Reserve from 2016 to 2018, acting as a lay representative for the Islamic faith when a Muslim chaplain was not available.

“Serving as a female Muslim Chaplain would give me the opportunity to serve the female service members and families of male service members of the Islamic faith and otherwise as well,” Jabeen told RNS via email. “Having a female chaplain is crucial to honor the gender-specific needs of all the female service members in general. It is specifically important for female Muslim service members to have a female Chaplain to accompany and to fulfill their needs, in the very practical aspects of religious and cultural sensitivities, as they seek help in moments of vulnerability.”

Jabeen, who was born and raised in India, said she expects to take officer training this summer at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama.

<https://religionnews.com/2020/01/13/first-woman-muslim-chaplain-commissioned-in-the-u-s-military/>



A Barber, a Cobbler and a Chhabri-wala

By Bilal A. SHAMIM

The small town where the days of my childhood, adolescence, youth and middle age were cast is no doubt dear to me. Whenever I look back into the period of my childhood days, some figures appear prominently in my mind's eye. Their contours of face, their simple and rustic attire, their innocent and down to earth dedication to their small but honourable means of livelihood, and their way of dealing with customers remained etched in my not-so-feeble memory till to-day.

To begin with, I reverse the order of the title of this piece.

Chhabriwallahs were a common sight in those days as are rehriwallahs (hawkers selling on push-carts) today. A 'Chhabri' is a flat wicker basket.

At a corner of the road from where I passed daily, an old man in his sixties, slightly bent, with wrinkled face and sunken eyes, clad in white dhoti and kurta and with a small turban on his head and a white towel over his shoulders, sat on his haunches putting before him his twin chhabris that displayed his merchandise meant for children in particular.

In one of his chhabris, he put yet even smaller baskets containing puffed rice flakes (phulliyan...as they are called in Punjab or murmure or murhi in some other Indian languages), 'daal'—skinless and split grams roasted with a pinch of salt and turmeric—, roasted whole grams, meethi saunf (sugar coated fennel), and some assortment of toffees and sweet tablets of orange and mango flavour, while in the other chhabri, he put small bags or sacks containing the bulk of his merchandise from which he refilled the smaller baskets.

This old man, whose name we didn't know, but we used to call him 'babaji'—a respectful epithet for old people—came in the morning carrying his chhabris in a 'wehangi'—a country device in which the chhabris are tied in a triangular shape to the each end of a flat bamboo shaft with ropes—and sat in his fixed place. Then, slowly and neatly, he put his items in the smaller baskets. I never heard him calling out to customers to attract their attention.

From morning till sunset he conducted his business. When shadows started lengthening, babaji would carry his wehengi on his shoulders and wended his way homewards. He was very punctual in his arrivals at and departures from his business site. In those days, our pocket money was just a five or ten paisa coin but not daily, only once or twice a week. I and Ibrahim—my friend and neighbour—would rush to him in the evenings or in the mornings during holidays and shell out our treasure of ten paisa coin to buy puffed rice flakes and daal. The babaji would put the items in a paper and give to us. We used to mix both the items and relished them munching and talking a great deal of nothing.

The combination of daal and phulliyan gave such a wonderful taste that even today my mouth waters just by imagining those things. We were his regular customers till we reached 5th standard. Thereafter, babaji's visits slowly petered out and a day came after which he was no longer to be seen. Age might have prevailed over him. May his soul rest in peace!

Those were the days when cobblers or shoemenders or repairers were ubiquitous. At every nook or corner of a street, one could see a man

squatting on a 'taat' (mat made of jute) or 'boriya'____(old gunny or jute bag) and mending shoes. People would not discard their shoes until they attained beyond-repair status. I too followed the same rule --courtesy our feeble financial condition.

A single pair of Hawai chappals were the sole possession of our feet. It was repaired and mended umpteen times. Whenever the strap of the chappals got snapped, I went to the cobbler dragging my feet along wearing the same torn slippers . When the straps could no longer bear the pain of the awl, a new strap was brought and the slippers again bore a new look . Thus mending and changing the strap a number of times , finally a day would come when the soles of the slippers became unequal to the exertions of friction on the roads, and they would be discarded for good.

The cobbler I often visited for minor or major operations of my chappals, sat on the side of a street close to the Chhabriwalla about whom I have mentioned above. There was another cobbler sitting just a few yards away from him. Some said they were real brothers , others said they were cousins . Anyway, by face, it seemed they were closely related . Both were in their late sixties or early seventies. One of them was known as Gharibu mochi. They came from a nearby village . As they couldn't carry their tools and other paraphernalia daily from home to work place and then back home, they would keep their tools and other things in a shop lying close to their workplace .

The permanent shopkeepers were kind enough to oblige them without levying any charges on them for the service they rendered. These two cobblers dressed in traditional rural dhoti and kurta would come there at seven in the morning during summers and at nine during winters. They would take their bags from their respective patrons, clean the place with a broom, spread an old gunny bag , take out and arrange their tools which included a cobbler's anvil or tripod, an awl, a gourd, a skewer, pliers,

scissors, a knife, a hammer, thread and needle, nails, leather hole punch etc.

By their side in a bag they kept some old and new strips of leather, old shoes and chappals. Both were experts in their trade and consequently there existed a strong professional rivalry between them . They would keep an eye on the customers whether they came first to him or the other. People used to visit the one who was not very busy to get their work done at the earliest. These two cobblers would behave coldly with a customer who approached the other one first . Professional rivalry made them indulge in backbiting sometimes as they disclosed the faulty skills of each other to the customers.....that the other one uses a thread of low quality , he does not sew the broken part properly, he makes stitches with wide gaps etc. I used to get my chappals mended by Gharibu . He spoke with a nasal sound. He would examine the patient chappal, and then after thinking for a while , tell the cost of repair .

If the customer agreed , he would proceed with the repair work. The charges depended upon the disease and illness of the patient. Normally, for a single repair without using a piece of leather for a patch ranged between 10 to 25 paise . In that too people bargained with him to cut down the cost. And sometimes he did relent to waive off 5 paise. He also used to shine the shoes . For that he kept with him a variety of creams , polish and some black powder to give extra shine and gloss to the shoes. Indeed, shoes polished by him lent a mirror shine to them . He would say ' tusi apna munh waikh sakde ho .iddan di palsh kiti ae main'.....You can look your face in the shoes. I have shined them such.

As years passed by, I saw less of these two tradesmen. Gharibu was the first to have stopped coming to the spot. And a few months later, the other cobbler was also no longer to be seen . All their toil and trouble was to oil the machine of life. Now they might be feeling in heaven that someone is writing about them. Rest in peace !

And last but not the least is an itinerant barber who roamed our streets to catch his customers. Tall and lanky, immaculately clean shaven, dressed in white dhoti and kurta, with his tool box tucked in his armpit, walking with a graceful gait as if ascending a hill, Bhagta Nai, as he was popularly called trod the streets of our town especially on Fridays and Sundays. His clean shaven face was a manifest proof of his professional skills. He was in his late fifties. He was very innocent, simple and rustic, and perhaps not initiated into the world of trickery. He spoke with a shaky voice. People used to make fun of his naivety.

It is the way of the world to ridicule anybody who is innocent, suave or looks gullible. His charges in those days for a haircut were 30 paise. For shaving, he took 25 paise. He also offered a discount of 5 paise if one opted for both a hair cut and a shave. For making a 'tind'-- tonsuring the head completely--he took 25 paise. Because of his low charges, parents insisted that their children should have a hair cut by him.

In his tool box he kept, a couple of scissors, combs, manual trimmer, a straight razor, a packet of blades, a small mirror, shaving brush and cream, a piece alum, a slab of whetstone, a pair of towels, a powder tin and a brush for dusting pieces of hair.

Bhagta ji was so innocent that he didn't even know that Odisha is in India. Once when someone taunted him that his tools had become worn out and old, he retorted, "Ae wekh ustra ..made in Odisha'...(see this razor, it is made in Odisha) and displaying the razor in his hand he asked him to feel the sharp edge of it.

People took him home for benefitting from his services. Specially, elderly men liked him. Barbers are blessed with the gift of the gab. They are naturally very talkative and garrulous. During the haircut, one could listen to the entire happenings of the town or village from politics to love affairs. Bhagta was no exception to this.

He was also fully loaded with all such stuff and

would pour out this treasure of gossip on to his customers. Listening to his stories was like music for his customers as it would make their sitting comfortable and cosy, for the otherwise boring procedure of a haircut. Although my parents never hired him for my hair cut, yet I watched him closely serving others and even talked to him a couple of times. Some years later, he was no longer seen in our area.

Maybe he had shifted to some other town. But one day I learnt that he passed into eternity. With his sharp edged razor, he ran his boat of life through the hard waters of the world.

In fact, he tried to earn a softer living in a hard world.



Twilight

One day I woke up early,
And opened my window slowly,
The sky was still dark
With a little of sun's spark.

He was crossing the horizon

With a mission to enlighten

The world with its shine and power.

And now he was near the tower,
Changing the colour of the sky,
And to the dark saying good bye!

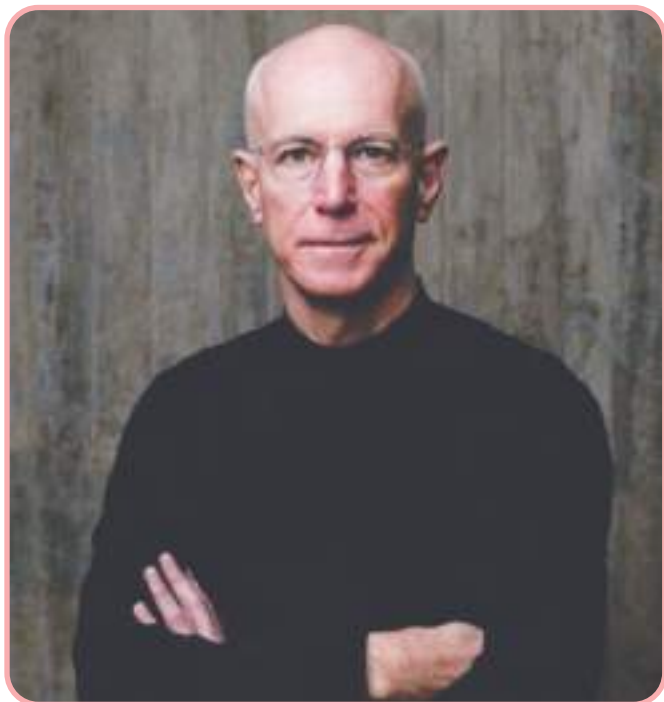
It was an astonishing sight!!

It was really a beautiful twilight!!

By Farzana Bilal



Monk saving timbuktu Islamic manuscripts



HOW Father Columba Stewart '79, a Benedictine monk from Minnesota, came to be hiding in a Timbuktu hotel during a jihadist attack last summer is a story that begins in the fifth century.

But the short answer is: he had flown to the medieval center of learning (and site of a United Nations peacekeeping mission since 2013), to start a new archival project—digitizing tens of thousands of documents in the Imam Ben Essayouti Library. The collection holds “everything from commentaries on the Qur’an to letters, scraps of poetry, land deeds, just the whole written culture,” says Stewart, executive director of the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML) at Saint John’s University, about 80 miles northwest of the Twin Cities.

Christian monks have helped safeguard cultural patrimony for more than a millennium. As followers of Benedict of Nursia (c. 480-540), Stewart says, Benedictines ultimately became “leaders in the copying and transmission of texts.” In the last 15 years, he has taken that tradition to some of the world’s most volatile regions—Syria, Iraq, Israel, and parts of the Balkans—as well as India, Ukraine, and Russia,

to help conserve documents threatened not only by religious wars and geopolitics, but also by poverty, natural disasters, and climate change.

“We’ve already done a lot of the Christian material,” says Stewart, who holds an Oxford doctorate in theology. “If we want to grow...and we think the preservation of general culture is valuable, then the growing edge of that for us are Islamic materials, not to mention East Asian stuff. Heritage is heritage. And the intellectual argument is, ‘Why not get all the material, of all the sides?’”

HMML is currently digitizing more than 250,000 ancient Islamic manuscripts, books, and literary treasures smuggled out of Timbuktu, in central Mali, in 2012 and 2013. That effort, the library’s largest project to date, is centered at a 12-camera studio in Mali’s capital, Bamako.

Catalogued materials are accessible through HMML’s “virtual reading room,” developed and launched during Stewart’s tenure, where more than 25,000 complete manuscripts from libraries across Europe, the Middle East, South India, and parts of the Balkans are already online. HMML also holds thousands of rare books and Bibles, maps, and artwork reflecting Christian culture and theology. More recently, the library has been collecting early printed books (physical counterparts to the virtual, digitized manuscripts online) in Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, and Syriac, including important Qur’ans.

For his August trip to Mali, Stewart had lined up Swedish and British support and seats on a UN plane to Timbuktu. Within hours of landing, while eating lunch in the hotel courtyard, he heard gunfire. Ushered into an interior room, he and two colleagues learned by way of phone texts that terrorists had raided the UN

headquarters, but that help would arrive.

Hours of waiting wore on. “We heard helicopters overhead, then sporadic shooting”—some of which seemed to come from the hotel garden—“then eerie quiet,” Stewart recalls. “I don’t like just sitting there, not knowing what’s happening, not being able to control anything. We did pray, since all of us are Catholic...and, good news, there was a bottle of scotch in the room, and the hotel people brought us food.” Around 9 p.m. Swedish soldiers arrived and took the group to a command post, where Stewart

these really smart guys, hanging out together and doing serious things, but also having fun, and their being willing to accept me. I think for men the sort of team/group thing is important...there was something about being embraced by the group that was very meaningful at that point in my human development.” The rich academic setting enabled Stewart to pursue scholarship and teach, and not worry about being re-assigned elsewhere. Benedictines’ vows are to their monasteries, not to the order, and each



spent two days getting the digitizing project under way before returning to the bucolic campus on Lake Sagatagan and Saint John’s Abbey, where he’s lived for 37 years.

The fall after graduation, having spent the summer taking a Harvard Latin course, where he met his “first Benedictine,” Stewart began a doctoral degree in religious studies at Yale. There, he became friends with second Benedictine, on leave from Saint John’s Abbey to study medieval history. Intrigued by the place, Stewart stayed there the following summer, learned some German, and joined the luminaries and theologians then on campus to celebrate the sesquimillennial of Saint Benedict’s birth.

“I loved the community,” he says. “I liked all

community, relative to parishes, operates with autonomy, setting its own liturgical and other practices in line with the Rule.

Stewart returned to finish a third semester at Yale, earning a “consolation-prize master’s degree,” and moved to the abbey in early 1981. By July, he’d entered the novitiate (he was ordained in 1990), received his robe, and taken the name Columba. Latin for “dove”—evoking peace and the Holy Spirit, he says—it honors his ancestry: Saint Columba, the evangelist from Northern Scotland, not only left “the first recorded sighting of the Loch Ness Monster,” he’s also known as a man who loved books.

<https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2018/01/columba-stewart-hmml>



From an Afghan Refugee to Rhodes Scholar in Oxford

By Boer Deng BBC News, Washington

From her home - a single bedroom in a house shared by four families - she could hear the sound of drones landing not far from Peshawar, in northwest Pakistan, where her family had

boy. Summia was six, but she remembers it clearly. She vowed then that she would take learning seriously.

It would be hard to dispute that she has. In



Growing up as an Afghan refugee in Pakistan, bloodshed was never far from Summia Tora's life.

fled in the 1990s to escape the Taliban's rise.

"I was just living in this violence, but it was a given, so I couldn't do anything about it," Summia says. Sometimes there were bombings once or twice a week. "At some point, people stopped talking about it. It would happen, and everyone would move on."

But life there was a privilege compared to Afghanistan, she tells the BBC. At least she got to go to school.

On a visit to Kabul in 2002, just after the US invasion, a girl not much older described only being able to attend school by pretending to be a

October, Summia, now 22, will become the first Rhodes Scholar to hail from Afghanistan, one of 102 students to earn a place in the 2020 class of the world's oldest postgraduate scholarship.

Now finishing her last term at Earlham College, a liberal arts university in the US state of Indiana, her outlook is bright and she laughs with ease, the fluent torrent of her words belying the traumas of the journey that has taken her from refugee to Rhodes Scholar.

'Anything can happen at any time'

To be called an educated Afghan woman is in itself a rarity. Female literacy in Afghanistan today stands at 17%, according to Unesco.

Though figures in neighbouring Pakistan are still poor - around 45% of women can read - access to schooling is possible. In contrast, in her home country "even the people who could afford to go to school were not able to go... because there weren't any", Summia says.

So it was her unlikely fortune to grow up in Pakistan, she says - an irony given the region's privations and dangers. Thousands of US drone operations have flown over Northwest Pakistan since 2004, as part of the so-called war on terror. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the province containing Peshawar, has been a major theatre for the decades-long Pakistani fight against insurgency. The year Summia left Peshawar, 2014, a militant bombing killed 139 pupils in one of the world's worst ever school massacres. "There's this sort of tension you have, a pressure," she says. "There's always this feeling of being unsafe, because anything can happen at any time."

Learning was an escape. But as refugees, her family had limited rights. Her father could not get a driving licence and her access to schooling was tenuous, so she had to look elsewhere. A fortuitous online search led her to find a high school, the United World Colleges (UWC), which places international students in its network of campuses across the world. Even the experience of winning a place to the school, in New Mexico, was mired in violence. A day after taking her entrance exam in Kabul in March 2014, the hotel where it had been held was shot up by Taliban militants.

The Persian New Year terror attack on the Serena Hotel left nine dead, including the head of UWC's selection committee, Roshan Thomas. The Canadian doctor had been in the city to help give the exam. Summia recalls how Dr Thomas had urged the student hopefuls to take the opportunity and one day "come back to Afghanistan and do something to change the situation, because that's the real purpose".

"She was the main reason I applied. Because she risked her life. Because she believed that students like me, from countries like

Afghanistan, or refugees from Pakistan, should have the opportunity to get an education."

The burden of a vexed legacy

It is a view that contradicts a legacy of imperialism linked to the Rhodes, one of the world's best-known and most competitive scholarships. Endowed by Cecil Rhodes through his will in 1902, it was initially intended to encourage closer ties between the US and Britain through funding postgraduate study at Oxford. For most of its history, it was only open to men from the US, Germany and the Commonwealth.

"He was an imperialist who believed in white supremacy and did not want people of colour or women to be part of the Rhodes Scholarship," Summia says. Initially, she did not want to apply.

She had a change of heart when it struck her that it would be easy to say no, she says, "but it's harder to accept it, take the burden of the legacy of it, and actually do something to change it - that's a real responsibility." "I realised I shouldn't run away from admitting the colonial history," she adds. "It's people like us who need to change [the Rhodes legacy]."

Summia plans a post-graduate course on refugee and migrant movement, and after that, she says she will return to the country her family once fled.

The only Afghanistan she has known has been one of empty streets and bombed out buildings, but there is another in her mind - one she grew up hearing about from her father, before the wars that rent its streets to dust.

"I always imagined it to be a valley, with the mountains and rivers and beautiful houses - big, beautiful houses, with beautiful architecture," she says. "Dried fruits and nuts, fresh fruits on the streets... a very modern Afghanistan."

It is there for those like her to build. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51420370>



Why has the 21st century become so blatantly anti-Muslim?

Twenty-first century has just gone past its first fifth. By this time, the 20th century had been through a World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, not to mention the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. By contrast, the present century opened with 9/11 and the encounter with Islamist terrorism has shaped global politics ever since. There is a perpetual war in the Middle East, from Iraq and Syria reaching Iran and Afghanistan.

The Cold War ended last century. Now it seems all the Great Powers are engaged in a war against Muslims worldwide. Russia has its Chechnya, China its Uighurs. France has sustained multiple terrorist attacks this century on civilians. US President Donald Trump is hostile to Muslims worldwide and has just declared his displeasure against Iran. We could, though not very likely, yet end up with a world war in the second fifth of this century.

Why has this happened? Why has the 21st century become so blatantly anti-Muslim? Let's go back to 1920. The oldest Empire in Europe, the Ottoman Empire, fell and with it came the end of Islam's global domination after 1,200 years. The Western world was no longer threatened by Islam on its eastern front.

The remainder of the 20th century was spent sorting out the problems created by the collapse of Western European empires. The end of the Austrian empire unleashed nationalism, the Russian gave birth to Bolshevism. The German empire broke up to birth fascism. It took up to 1991 to sort out Bolshevism. In the meantime, maritime Western empires dissolved. The transfer of Hong Kong to China ended the British Empire.

But the one Empire whose problems were left



unresolved was the Ottoman. Its territory was carved up during the First World War by Britain and France in a secret treaty and territories were given names and governments – Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon etc. These remained informal colonies of Western powers. Turkey alone emerged a Republic.

After the Second World War, the Arab countries became nominally independent kingdoms. When Israel was created by a UN Resolution, these Arab kingdoms tried and failed to win a war against Israel in three attempts. By 1973, despair had set in. Pan-Arabism had lost its appeal as had Arab Socialism. The people turned to religion as a consolation. The oil-rich Saudis spread Wahhabism. Iran imploded and the Shah was replaced by the Ayatollahs. The Sunnis and Shias now had oil-rich States capable of encouraging orthodox Islam and each other. The Iran-Iraq war was one of the bloodiest.

Islamism is the political movement which was born as a response to the crisis, but it is Janus-faced. Islamist political movement has fought to disestablish Muslim governments across the Middle East. It was recruited by the Americans to expel the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, which gave birth to the Taliban and al-Qaeda. It is a moot point, but across the wars in the Middle East, Islamism has probably killed more Muslims than any other people. It is a tragedy with no end in sight.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/islamism-taliban-radical-islam-islamophobia-jihad-afghanistan-muslims-chechnya-world-war-muslim-century-6235459/>

FIFA Demands Iran Allow Women To Attend All Football Matches



In a new letter addressed to the Islamic Republic authorities the international soccer body FIFA says Iranian women have to be allowed to enter all football stadiums across the country to watch men's matches.

According to the local news websites, "House of Football" and "Mashreq News," in the letter FIFA has stressed that the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) should provide relevant facilities for women to attend three forthcoming major soccer events in the country.

During the past two years, a limited number of Iranian women were allowed to watch only three football matches in their country. The clergy-dominated government has banned women from watching men's sport since the 1979 Iranian revolution. FIFA's efforts to break the ban have been only partially successful recently.

Now, FIFA has officially demanded Iran to allow women to watch "all matches" and allocate more seats to them in stadiums.

From next June onwards, Iranian women should also be allowed to attend all local football league matches across the country, and watch their favorite teams in action, FIFA has affirmed in its new letter.

The death of 29-year-old Sahar Khodayari, nicknamed as the "Blue Girl" after the main color of her favorite team last March, reignited the debate over the ban barring Iranian women from attending men's sports matches.

Khodayari was arrested in March for attempting to enter a stadium to watch her favorite team play and was told by court officials she faced a six-month sentence behind bars. Desperate and devastated, she poured gasoline over her body and set it on fire, dying a few days later in hospital.

Many Iranian and non-Iranian social media users, as well as public figures, mourned her death and urged FIFA to act, pressing the Islamic Republic to allow Iranian women to attend soccer matches freely.

Under FIFA pressure and a month ahead of Iran hosting Cambodia in Tehran, the spokesman of President Hassan Rouhani's Administration, Ali Rabieie, said on September 11 that, generally the Islamic Republic government is in favor of letting Iranian women enter the sports arenas.

In the coming months, Iran will host national teams of Bahrain, Iraq, and Hong Kong in the preliminary round of the World Cup qualification matches.

Football-starved Iranian women hope to get clearance to attend the national side matches against Hong Kong on March 28, Bahrain June 5, and Iraq June 10.

Meanwhile, in the AFC Championship games two Tehran clubs, Esteghlal (Esteghlal) and Perspolis, are set to host their counterparts in the capital city of Iran. Another Iranian club still in the AFC competition, Shahr Khodro FC, represents the city of Mashhad ruled by ultraconservative clerics not likely to allow women to attend any matches.

Reuters reported two months ago that the Football Federation of the Islamic Republic had committed itself in writing to make it possible for women to enter stadiums and watch local league championship games.

The Islamic Republic authorities have not yet responded to FIFA's new letter

<https://en.radiofarda.com/a/fifa-demands-iran-to-allow-women-attend-all-football-matches/30441274.html>

Slovenia's first mosque opens after 50 years

LJUBLJANA: Slovenia's first mosque opened in the capital Ljubljana on Monday (Feb 3) after surmounting financial hurdles and right-wing opposition, 50 years after the initial request to build was made.

Opponents of the project - including those who criticised its Qatari financing - have repeatedly tried to halt it, and pig heads and blood have also been left on the site.

Islamic community head Mufti Nedžad Grabus said the mosque's opening was "a turning point in our lives". "Slovenia is the last former Yugoslav state to get a mosque, making Ljubljana a capital rather than a provincial town on the edge of the world," he told a press conference.

Muslims in the predominantly Catholic Alpine country first filed a request to build a mosque in the late 1960s while Slovenia was still part of the former Communist Yugoslavia. The community finally received permission 15 years ago, but ran into opposition from right-wing politicians and groups, as well as financial troubles.

Advertisement

Construction, which began in 2013, cost some €34 million (US\$39 million), out of which €28 million were Qatari donations, according to Grabus.

Situated in a semi-industrial area of Ljubljana, the mosque, which can hold up to 1,400 people, constitutes the core of the six-building Islamic

Cultural Centre.

The centre also comprises the community's offices; an education centre, which includes a library; a restaurant; a basketball court; housing for the Muslim clergy; and a 40-metre minaret.

All the buildings are made from white concrete combined with steel, glass and wood. A large blue textile-made dome dominates the mosque's interior, referring to heaven and reminiscent of famous mosques like Istanbul's Blue Mosque.

AIMING TO SHOW OPENNESS

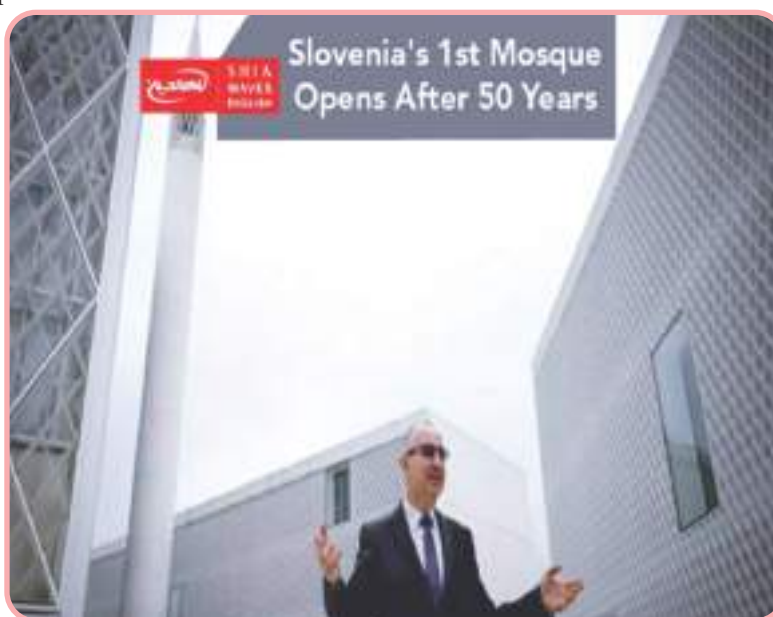
"We wanted to link traditional Islamic architecture values with contemporary architecture," architect Matej Bevk told AFP adding the centre's glass facades were meant to show its transparency and openness.

Until now, Muslims have been worshipping and holding ceremonies in

rented sports halls or buildings.

They make up 2.5 per cent of the country's two million people, constituting the second biggest religious group, according to the last 2002 census. Grabus estimated there were around 80,000 Muslims currently.

<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/slovenia-s-first-mosque-opens-after-50-years-12387444>



Catholic universities in Belgium to help train Muslim imams



LEUVEN, Belgium, February 7, 2020 (LifeSiteNews) – Two prestigious Catholic universities will offer programs for the first time in Belgium to help train imams who serve as prayer leaders and preachers in mosques.

Announced at the end of 2019, the programs of study grew out of the work of an official commission “launched after Islamist attacks in Brussels in 2016,” reported weekly newspaper *The Tablet*. The aim is to provide university-level education for prospective imams.

In Belgium, certain ministers of religion are paid by the government. Following the new programs supported by two Catholic universities, this also will be possible for imams, as the courses will be recognized by the state.

Flanders Today indicated that another goal of the new programs is “to persuade people with an Islamic vocation to study at home rather than abroad.”

“We are building a Belgian training program for ministers in the Islamic faith in order to reduce foreign influence,” explained Koen Geens, Belgium’s minister of justice and a member of the Christian Democrats. “It’s important that we know what they are studying.”

According to *Flanders Today*, the programs are not only directed at educating imams but at preparing people “for other roles in the Islamic faith, such as counselors, pastors and theologians. The goal is to make sure that their religious knowledge is accompanied by an appreciation of Belgium’s laws and social values.”

The Catholic University of Leuven and the Catholic University of Louvain, which help to offer training for future imams, have the same history. In 1968, because of tensions between the Dutch-speaking and the French-speaking part, two separate universities were established.

The distinct universities are now located roughly 30 kilometers apart.

As Flanders Today reported, the program of study consists of two sections, the first scheduled to last at least two years. During that part of the program, which will take place in Leuven for those who speak Dutch and in Louvain for all French-speaking applicants, students will attend “courses on law, political science, religious psychology and sociology, Arabic philosophy, ethics and the history of the Middle East and North Africa.”

Even before the establishment of a program of study to prepare imams for their service, both Catholic universities had all of the courses available to their students, according to IslamiO.

In a second and longer step, Flanders Today continued, students will have to undergo theological formation in their religion, “including study of the Koran and some kind of internship.”

Responsible for the theological component of the program will be a new institute called AFOR, which was set up in conjunction with the government and the Executive of Belgian Muslims. Here, the Catholic universities no longer play a role.

Salah Echallaoui, president of AFOR, told Belgian news source 7sur7 that he was satisfied to see the project launched in 2016 come to a conclusion.

“This is part of our desire to implement an Islam of Belgium,” he said.

“Our wish is to no longer use imams from abroad. And if we still have to do so in the future, we will be able to demand an equivalence of diploma or even complementary training.”

Imam Franck Hensch was quoted by 7sur7 as saying, “It’s a bit of a dream come true. I have seen many young people interested in the course.”

Some of them, he said, were afraid “to have a

diploma that is not recognized in Belgium. Here, the academic side of the course is all the more important as it meets all the requirements of our universities.”

Flanders Today mentioned the Catholic University of Leuven was expecting around 30 students to start their six years of preparation for becoming an imam. Courses begin this month.

The Catholic University of Louvain, which is French-speaking, had suspended a professor for challenging his students on abortion in 2017.

As reported by LifeSiteNews at the time, Stéphane Mercier had distributed a paper during a lecture that “challenged the concept of a ‘right to choose’ and referenced abortion as murder.”

“The murder of an innocent person capable of defending himself is revolting, but to attack someone who does not have the strength or the resources to defend himself is even more dreadful,” Mercier wrote.

The leadership of the Catholic university issued a statement declaring its support for a woman’s “right to choose.” In the administration’s own words,

“The Catholic University of Louvain recalls that, in the spirit of the law decriminalizing abortion passed in 1990, it respects the autonomy of women to make this choice, in the circumstances specified by the legislator.”

<https://www.lifesitenews.com/mobile/news/catholic-universities-in-belgium-to-help-train-muslim-imams>



Sharjah all set for fifth edition of Arab Women Sports Tournament

The spotlight is on Sharjah which will transform into a mega-women sporting platform for 78 clubs from 18 Arab countries who will compete in nine sports at the fifth edition of the Arab Women Sports Tournament (AWST), organized by Sharjah Women's Sports (SWS) last month between Feb.2-12.

AWST 2020 will record the largest participation ever in the history of the event. The UAE tops the list with 15 participating clubs, followed by the Saudi Arabia with 12. Bahrain has eight clubs, Kuwait with six, Oman with three and Qatar with two teams, will round off the participation of GCC in the tournament.

The rest of the participating countries include Algeria with seven clubs; six clubs from Jordan; Egypt with four clubs; Libya and Syria with three clubs each; Sudan, Tunisia, and Palestine with two clubs each; and Lebanon, Iraq, Morocco and Comoro Islands with one club each. The UAE will compete in all nine sports: shooting, basketball, volleyball, table tennis, athletics, show jumping, fencing, archery and karate.

Nada Askar Al Naqbi, Deputy Head of AWST's Supreme Organising Committee, Head of its Executive Committee, and Director General of Sharjah Women's Sports, said: "Since its inception, AWST has celebrated women in sports.

The tournament has played a major role in nurturing strong relationships and cooperation between Arab countries and provided a platform for advancing the skills and capacities of sportswomen and served as a steppingstone to continental and international sporting events. "SWS's journey to empower Arab athletes and advance women's sports is based on the vision of His Highness Dr Sheikh Sultan Bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, and the directives of Her Highness Sheikha Jawaher Bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, wife of His Highness the Ruler of Sharjah and Chairperson of SWS, to create an ideal and nurturing sports environment for women because we believe in the value of sports as a vehicle for social development and progressive social change."

Several high-ranking sports officials will be in attendance including Prince Talal Bin Badr Bin Saud

Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, President of the Arabian Sports Council (ASC) and Chairman of the Union of Arab National Olympic Committees (UANOC); Prince Faisal Bin Al Hussein, President of the Jordan Olympic Committee and member of the International Olympic Committee; Dr Ashraf Sobhi, Minister of Youth and Sports in Egypt, and Lydia Nsekera, Member of the International Olympic Committee, President of Women's Sport at the International Olympic Committee; Algerian runner Hassiba Boulmerka, the first Arab athlete to win the gold medal in the 1,500m race, and the second Arab Olympic medallist in the 1993 Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona.

The Supreme Organising Committee (SOC) announced that the basketball, volleyball, archery, show jumping, and karate competitions will kick-off on Monday, Feb.3; followed by table tennis on Tuesday; shooting on Wednesday; athletics on Saturday; and fencing on Sunday.

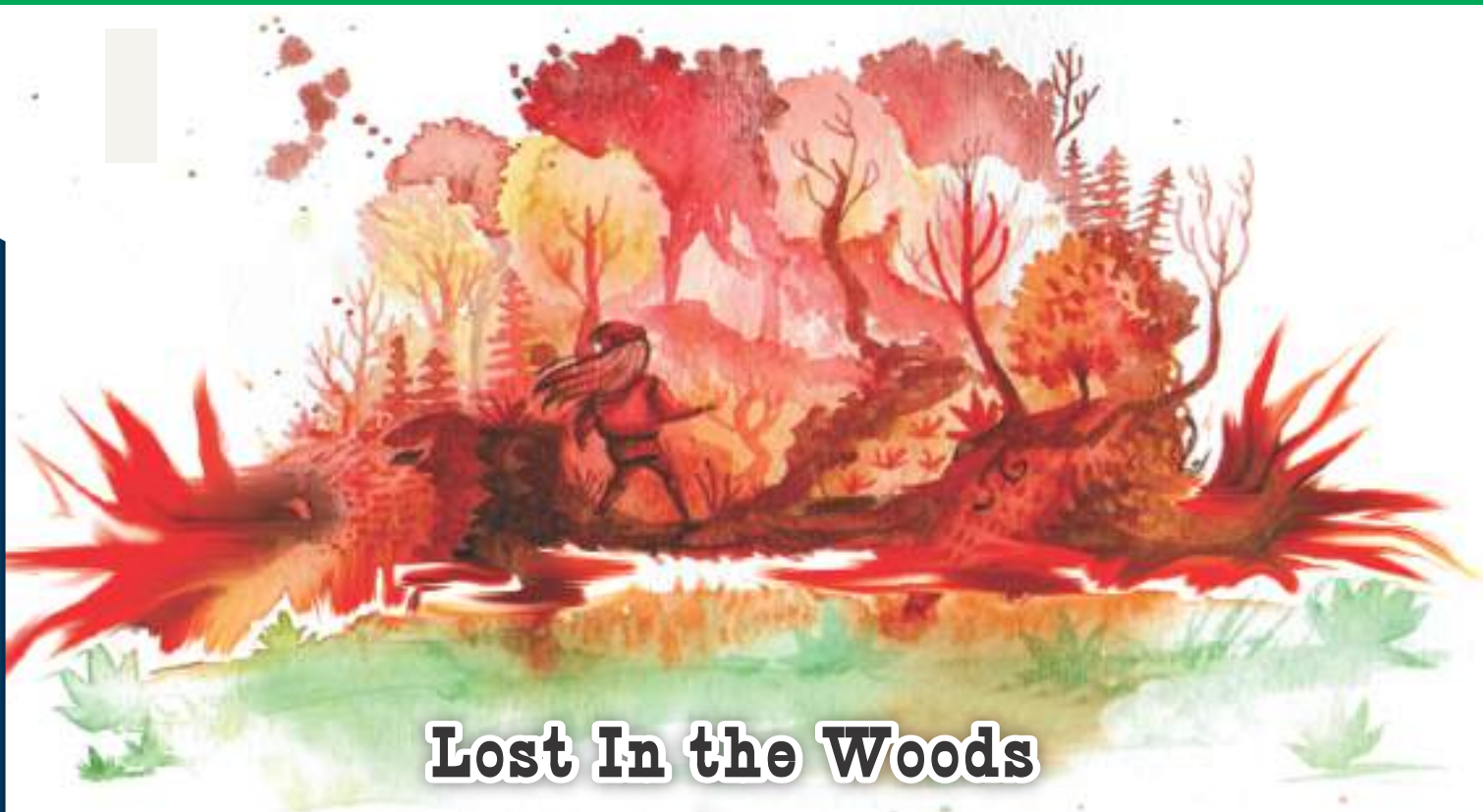
13 facilities are in place for AWST 2020, including six state-of-the-art sports venues across Sharjah for the competitions and seven sports halls that would be utilised for team training. The main sports hall and shooting hall at SWS will host team training sessions as well as the basketball, volleyball and shooting competitions (rifle and pistol 10m).

Basketball training and competitions will take place at the Samnan branch of the Sharjah Sports Club, while its Al Hazzanah branch will host the karate, table tennis and fencing competitions.

The training and competitions in pistol shooting 25m will be held at Al Dhaid Sports Club, while Al Thiqah Club for Handicapped will be the venue for the athletics and archery training and competitions. The Sharjah Equestrian and Racing Club will host the training and competitions for equestrian and show jumping.

<https://www.gulftoday.ae/sport/2020/01/28/sharjah-all-set-for-fifth-edition-of--arab-women-sports-tournament>





Lost In the Woods

By Farzana Bilal

I'm lost in the woods
Of your friendship,
Surrounded by love and care,
Away from every hardship.
We are like those two trees
Grown side by side,
I see them playing together
And enjoying the twilight.
I see them shedding leaves,
Together they cry
And gaining new ones again
Of laughter and joy.
I hear them whispering,
They plan to fight
The storm that's ahead,
And survive till the sun's bright
Their branches are interlinked
Now they cannot separate.
How satisfying it is to see
In nature, our friendship's potrait.

