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The COVID-19 Pandemic:
Its Impact on Economy &
Everyday Life

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Religion under attack by virus



Zakaria Virk, Editor

What on earth is going on with the corona virus? Why is it wreaking havoc on holy sites, mosques, churches, synagogues, and shuttering temples keeping believers away from praying together? Mecca and Medina are deserted, Vatican is deserted, Jerusalem is deserted, mosques are closed, Friday congregational prayers are suspended, Nazareth's imposing Basilica of the Annunciation - is also bereft of all but the most hardy faithful. Priests filling plastic bags with white candles and holy water on Sunday were asking worshippers to pray from home.

No one had imagined that this virus will have such drastic and lasting effects on religion. Rabbis and Imams are asking people to pray at home or online or worshippers over seventy must not come to mosques or prayer houses. Those who go to mosque for prayers are keeping safely at distance from one another, even though it is against the dictates of the religion.

From Malaysia, Indonesia to Iran faith groups and pilgrims have emerged as hazards, transmitting the virus in ways that is proving difficult to trace and contain. In Malaysia attendees of an Islamic gathering of 16,000 people have taken cases of the virus to Singapore and Brunei. In Pakistan Shiite pilgrims who returned from Iran have tested positive in large numbers. The city of Qom in Iran lies at the center of Iran's outbreak, one of the worst in the world. Shiite pilgrimage sites in Qom and Mashhad are closed but those who are there are kissing steel doors and barriers daring to die.

Religion is supposed to be a source of comfort in times of crisis and suffering. Religion provides psychological and emotional support in times like this. But these days wherever you look around

religious services, prayers, communal gatherings, & funeral services and weddings are being suspended indefinitely. Believers have been told to watch offerings of Sunday Mass broadcast or Friday sermons on local TV or online. In an unprecedented move, Saudi Arabia suspended pilgrimages to the holy sites of Islam. The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem was closed after a coronavirus case was confirmed in the area. Let it be clear it is not a divine punishment.

No one should be disputing the limit on ritual gatherings, we all must comply with strict regulations. We must keep in mind Holy water is not a sanitizer, and prayer is not a vaccine. We need science to come up with an effective vaccine to fight this scourge, which it recently has. As Muslim we must pray that God help those unbelievers who are working tirelessly to find a vaccine. We should not pray for their destruction or victory over them. We need scientists right now.

This virus makes no distinction between a disbeliever and a believer. Prayer alone cannot help only washing hands with soap, using sanitizers, social distancing will help. When it is all said and done many things would have changed dramatically- on-line worshiping, consulting doctors online, online teaching, online shopping, online socializing will be the norm.

Corona virus has changed religious precepts which no man would have dared to. Ramadan is starting in April, in what shape or form would we be observing it remains to be seen. Remember love spread faster than virus. Do everything to protect yourself and loved ones.





The COVID-19 Pandemic: Its Impact on Economy & Everyday Life



By Sitara Brooj Akbar

The fight against COVID-19 has turned into a full-fledged war on all fronts. China seems to have won its first and hardest battle, with the country reporting no new domestically transmitted cases today for the first time since the pandemic began last year, marking a major milestone in the international battle to contain the virus. Similarly, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Japan have also chalked up visible successes in mitigating the outbreak but unfortunately, the global infection rates continue to accelerate, with over 120 countries across multiple continents now contending with rapidly-expanding outbreaks. At the time this article has been written, the virus has infected more than two hundred thousand people and is approaching nine thousand deaths and the west just seems to be awakening from its illusions of invulnerability.

Several countries including Italy, France and the Philippines have enacted policies similar to those seen in China, placing millions under full or partial lockdowns while others such as the UAE, Australia and New Zealand are no longer allowing entry to the country for other nationalities.

Panic is rising and people are attempting to gather as much food and water as they can while preparing to lock themselves up if the time comes to do so and in some cases doing so is piling on to the completely unnecessary shortage and strain on the supply chain due to hoarding of essentials.

Authorities in many nations have closed all educational institutions, offices, airports, banks and major tourist attractions and temporarily put a stop to any exams as well as all other events that require gatherings and instead thankfully in this day and age we have the technology to help us out to an extent. For those living away from loved ones, it has been helping to check up on their condition remotely and stay up to date with the latest information and guidelines. Many businesses have also suspended face-to-face activities and instead

moved to work remotely which is helping to limit the spread of the disease to an extent but due to all these measures being in place, besides the devastating effects it has had in terms of human suffering, COVID-19 is also wreaking havoc upon the economy and while it could take some-time yet to completely see the fallout in data, the results have already started to be felt.

The hardest-hit country besides China so far is Italy, where the death toll surpassed that of China today and with the health system overwhelmed with trying to deal with the crisis the government took drastic measures, shutting down the retail economy and quarantining the entire population. All business except pharmacies and grocery stores have remained closed for over four weeks now. All residents have been instructed to stay at home and may enter public places only for necessary shopping or commuting to work and many public and private debt obligations (e.g. housing rents and interest payments) have been deferred as the nation attempts to slow down the fiscal clock until the pandemic quiets down.

With Italy falling deeper into the crisis each day, the country's prime minister Giuseppe Conte is urging the European Union to use "the full firepower" of its €500bn rescue fund to support its members, insisting that it was time for the European Stability Mechanism to offer emergency credit lines to countries reeling from the pandemic to help them fight the consequences.

Across the pond, the American president declared a national state of emergency and congress has approved an \$8.3bn (£6.7bn) emergency programme to fund efforts to contain the epidemic while even larger sums are awaiting passage through the Senate. The US central bank and the Bank of England have both slashed interest rates in response to mounting concerns and airlines appear as if they face a horrific year. Global stock markets overall just exhibit major swings fuelled by fear triggered by the escalating

"The belief that the world is getting worse, that we can't solve extreme poverty and disease, isn't just mistaken. It is harmful."

- Bill Gates -

pandemic and display a volatile picture. An agreement between OPEC and Russia caused the gravest one-day crash in crude prices in approximately 30 years and FTSE, Dow Jones Industrial Average and the Nikkei have all seen sharp falls since the outbreak began, the Dow recording its biggest one day decline since 1987. It has also been predicted that European production could also suffer considerably as the continent is more dependent on trade than the US and is linked even more extensively to China through a web of supply chains. While Germany narrowly escaped recession last year, it may not be so lucky this year, especially if it fails to undertake some economic expansion. As for the UK, Brexit may finally have its long-feared economic consequences and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has warned that the world's economy could grow at its slowest rate since 2009.

It seems as if a severe recession can no longer be avoided, and some experts are already demanding that governments announce measures to shore up aggregate demand to tackle the unprecedented supply shock. However, in such a situation, such a demand stimulus might end up merely boosting inflation potentially leading to weak or falling GDP growth alongside rising prices, as happened during the 1970s oil crisis, when another important production input was in short supply and the same argument could be applied to liquidity support.

In this crisis what is needed are better economic measures to save businesses from bankruptcy, so that they can recover quickly once the pandemic is over. Policymakers in many countries are considering various forms of tax relief and public guarantees to help firms borrow if necessary, as well short-time work allowance and that should be implemented worldwide, hopefully helping us all so life can once more turn towards normalcy

From a more personal perspective beyond the economy and government decisions, we all must play our part in addressing the issue as well. While it is quite easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information that is being bombarded to us from all directions, take a step back and look at it matter-of-factly, considering the whole picture and fact-checking any information before sharing it instead of losing our calm with jump scares inflicting the same upon others. I am by no means saying that we should not take this as a serious risk, indeed we must follow all the guidelines that are being provided by health care professionals and the government because they are to our advantage. I have seen people being careless as they are young

and the being proud of the fact that the “virus does not affect us” perhaps it won't but you have a responsibility to everyone around you. If you as a carrier become the cause behind an elderly or immunocompromised individual getting a potentially life-threatening disease is that not immoral and irresponsible? Tourists at holiday destinations are refusing to listen to local authorities despite repeated requests to adhere to the social distancing guidelines and even in such a crisis, certain people are mass gathering to hold riots. Taking all that into account it is easy to see why certain authorities are overwhelmed by the lack of seriousness around the issue and that is where the community must step up.

On the other hand, the completely apocalyptic view a certain faction has taken is equally absurd and baffling. From the doomsday-like updates spread like bushfires across social media to the conspiracy theories that run rampant, all adding hysteria to an already sky-high pile of problems. If there is one lesson that I shall take away from this crisis is that people show their true faces and priorities in times of crisis. One look at any platform and you can see the eco-fascists and eugenicists out in hoards, harping their beliefs without any qualms of the sheer absurdity of what they preach. Humanity is not a disease that the earth is taking a break from as some suggest with their infinite wisdom, rather the damage we see reversing during this time is originally a result of the over-exploitation of our planet's resources through a flawed economic model and horrible governing. Beyond that, the virus is not a way to “weed out the weak” no human life is worth any less than the other wither a person is young or old, sick or well and suggesting otherwise does not paint you as a strong icon as you might hope, rather points to your terrible upbringing and lack of character.

At the end of the day, this too shall pass. All we can do is hold for the time being then move but before it ends it is sure to take away more loved ones from people and leave lasting problems for others. Please remember to be compassionate and take a minute to think about those around you and how you might be able to help them. Even a little good deed such as buying the elderly their grocery would go a long way in perhaps making a life a little easier for those struggling more than us, it is time we look beyond ourselves to people who might not have anyone to turn to and we must do so now as you cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late. Caring for one another is the most powerful, least costly and most underrated agent of human change.



Sir Zafrulla Khan: Legendary Judge & giant Statesman

By Dr Basharat Jamil

On 6 February 1893 in Daska (near Sialkot), Ch. Nasrullah Khan and Husain Bibi were blessed with a child, Ch. Muhammad Zafrulla Khan. The child had a promising future of a distinguished jurist, lawyer, diplomat and a key person to determine the fortune of 'nations' by conferring and practicing his worthwhile competences. After completing his formal studies in Government College Lahore, he passed his LLB from King's College London and started his law practice in Sialkot during 1915-1916. He later moved his office to Lahore during 1916-1935. Moreover, he also served in Law College Lahore as a lecturer during 1919-1924.

Ch. Zafrulla Khan commenced his political responsibilities in 1926 when he befitted as a member of Punjab Legislative Council. He was quite close to Sir Fazl-e-Husain of Unionist Party of Punjab. He joined All India Muslims

League (AIML) and presided the AIML's meeting in 1931 at Delhi in which he highlighted the cause of Muslims. In 1931-1932, as President of AIML, he had the opportunity to stay close to Mr Jinnah. Sir Zafarulla Khan was honoured to represent the League in Round Table Conferences in London through 1930-1932. Under the direct supervision of Mr Jinnah, he defended and presented the image and demands of Indian Muslims. It was undoubtedly a critical time demanding a new constitution for India. Therefore, distinct legal souls like Sir Zafrulla Khan were the essential need of the time to deliberate the Indian Muslims' constitutional issues in RTCs

In 1935, he became a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council for two years as Railway Minister. After completing the tenure, he received the titles of 'Sir' and 'KCCI' according to the traditions. In the Central Assembly of



United India, he also remained the 'Leader of the House'. Ch. Anwar Ahmad Kahlon, PS of Sir Zafrulla Khan in a TV interview, shared that as Minister in United India he visited Europe for successful trade agreements and stayed there for six to seven months. Even Mr Jinnah admired the agreement as "agreement is tons better than the earlier agreement". Even before the partition, Viceroy of India had admired him and proposed foreign delegations to conferences and meetings under Sir Zafrulla Khan's leadership.

Sir Zafrulla had also been the member of Viceroy's Executive Council during 1935-1941 during which he represented India in the League of Nations in 1939, becoming the only Indian to represent India both in 'League of Nations' and 'United Nations'. In 1936, he represented British India in the coronation ceremony of George V. He was the Chairman of 'Supply Department' during World War II. Furthermore, he was the author of famous 'Lahore Resolution' (Pakistan Resolution) of 1940. Historically, this resolution is known as Lahore Resolution. The word 'Pakistan' was not used. Hindu press satirically named it the 'Pakistan Resolution'.

From 1941 to 1947, until partition, he served as a judge of Federal Court of India. On Mr Jinnah's request, Sir Zafrulla prepared Punjab's case admirably in the Boundary Commission in 1947. He passionately planned and primed this case for the benefits of Pakistan. In his autobiography 'Tahdis-i-Nemat' (Urdu) and 'The Servant of God' (English), he had a comprehensive discussion unveiling various controversies by British manipulations regarding the partition plan of Punjab.

In provincial elections of 1946, AIML secured heavy mandate in Punjab Assembly. Nevertheless, E. Jenkins, the Governor of Punjab invited Sir Khizar Hayat Tiwana of Unionist Party to form a government in Punjab with the coalition of Akali Dal and Congress. In response, AIML launched agitation throughout

Punjab. Violence was at its peak in Punjab, particularly during February-March 1947. Muslim League was demanding resignation from Mr Tiwana to form League's ministry. Sir Zafrulla visited from Delhi to Lahore to convince Mr Tiwana for resignation to contain the situations and stop the horrifying bloodshed.

Sir Zafrulla had good relations with Unionist leadership. It was his political will and rationale that he convinced Khizer to resign on 2 March 1947.

Moreover, when Pakistan became the member of the UN on 30 September 1947, Sir Zafrulla led the first Pakistani delegation in September 1947 in the UN. Mr Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, gave him due respect and honoured him as the first Foreign Minister of Pakistan. Sir Zafrulla was also designated as the constitutional advisor to the ruler of Bhopal (from June to December 1947) on Mr Jinnah's wish.

In reference to Kashmir issue, Sir Zafrulla significantly presented Pakistan's case at the UN. Even Indian diplomats in the UN acknowledged Sir Zafrulla Khan's presentation of the Kashmir case. In his speech at the UN in 1949, Sir Zafrulla urged for the demilitarisation of the state of Kashmir to hold a free plebiscite. He stressed, "it would be the duty of the plebiscite administrator to establish the conditions which would ensure and grantee that the plebiscite is in every respect free and impartial".

In 1949, he focused on the traditional behaviour of the Indian government and said, "...Indian press to persuade the Govt. of India to resile from this position" but India did not intend to resile from Jammu and Kashmir.

Sir Zafrulla served as a judge from 1954 to 1961, vice president during 1958-1961 and president during 1970-1973 of the International Court of Justice. He remained the President of the General Assembly during 1962-1963. Moreover, he remained Pakistan's permanent

representative in UN during 1961-1964.

His services for the Muslim world are the revolutionary for the Islamic communities. He highlighted the issues of Palestine and advocated the voices of freedom in Morocco, Eritrea, Libya, Sudan among others on the international forums.

Even in 1948, he opposed the foundation of Israel to British Foreign Minister. In 1958, Sir Zafrulla was honoured to perform Umrah, during which he visited Saudi Shah who praised him for his services towards Arab nations, particularly for Palestine. In 1967, he performed Hajj as the special guest of the Saudi Shah Faisal.

Religiously, Ch. Zafrulla Khan belonged to Ahmadiyya Muslim community and was a proud Pakistani. His faith always remained controversial among radicalised religious classes, deceptively propagating against him as an anti-Pakistan element and unfaithful soul. Contrarily, the facts are opposite as he was the person chosen and recognised by Mr Jinnah and international community admired his legal and diplomatic services.

In 1953, Khatm-i-Nabuwat Majlis-e-Ihrar along with other orthodox religious classes launched anti-Ahmadiyya movement. Their primary demand was the removal of Sir Zafrulla from Foreign Minister-ship of Pakistan.

Punjab, particularly Lahore, became the centre of the agitation and riots. To contain the situation, the government imposed martial law under General Azam. In response, Sir Zafrulla Khan resigned and went to self-exile in 1954.

Sir Zafrulla was also criticised for not offering the funeral prayer of Mr Jinnah, but he was present in the funeral procession. In fact, it was a religious issue, which had no concern with his abilities, services, patriotism and worth.

The funeral prayer was led by Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, who belonged to a school of thought that had declared Sir Zafrulla Khan 'Kafir'

(non-believer). How can he say funeral prayer behind him? On the other hand, even if he would have said the funeral prayer, he must be criticised by Mullahs and public considering him as non-Muslim.

Maulana Maududi, the founder of Jamat-i-Islami, also did not offer Mr Jinnah's funeral prayer but was never criticised and labelled a traitor. Therefore, the criticism on this issue befits nothing but a useless attempt to jeopardise his services for his nation.

He was a highly literate person and the author of about 50 books and writings in Urdu as well as in English, including an explanatory translation of the Holy Quran in English in 1970.

The Excellent Exemplar Muhammad: The Messenger of Allah, The Message of Islam, Victory of Prayer over Prejudice, Islam and Human Rights, Wisdom of the Holy Prophet, My Mother, Agony of Pakistan,

Tahdis-i-Nemat, Servant of God are among the list of his literary endeavours. He came back to Pakistan in 1983 and lived in Lahore. During his last illness, the Shah of Jordan sent his ambassador and offered for his proper treatment in Jordan if his disease was not curable in Pakistan, but he refused.

He passed away on September 1, 1985, and was buried in Rabwah (Chenab Nagar), presently in District Chiniot.

The behaviour of the Pakistani nation towards its hero is abundant to determine why Pakistan is still a regressive state.

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<https://dailytimes.com.pk/207358/sir-muhammad-Zafrulla-khan-man/amp/>



Was Pakistan always destined to become an Islamic republic? – Part 1

This article is the first in a two part series which looks at pre-partition and post partition events that led up to Pakistan being declared an Islamic republic. ~

Saturday, 29 February 2020, will mark the 64th anniversary of the day when Pakistan was formally declared an Islamic republic. However, was Pakistan always destined to be a Muslim state? This was one of the critical questions faced by Pakistan's founders and the subsequent leadership soon after the country's independence in 1947. The question, however, was not new. Ever since the Muslim League's Lahore Resolution of 1940 and Jinnah's enunciation of the two nation theory, both opponents and supporters of the League had wondered as to what kind of state Pakistan was going to be.

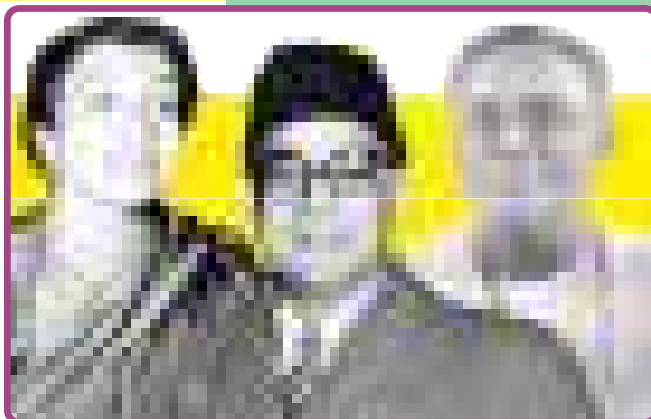
Naturally, eyes turned towards the founder of the nation and his speeches for guidance. Jinnah had three answers on record to the aforementioned question. Firstly, he had stated that Pakistan would not be governed by "priests on a divine mission." Secondly, he had also said that the constitution of the country would be determined by the representatives people and finally, that Pakistan's constitution would not be in conflict with Shariat.

While secularists and Islamists offer their own explanations to reconcile these three seemingly contradictory statements, to Jinnah and his lieutenant, Liaquat Ali Khan, there was no contradiction to begin with. This is best described by Khan in his speech before the constituent assembly when he moved the Objectives Resolution on 7 March, 1949,

"...all authority should be exercised in accordance with the standards laid down in Islam so that it may not be misused."

He also added,

"...in accordance with the spirit of Islam, the preamble fully recognizes the truth that authority has been delegated to the people, and to none



else. This naturally eliminates any danger of the establishment of a theocracy."

To Khan, simply mentioning the name of Islam in a preamble to the constitution was not theocratic. To him, the state became a theocracy when power went into the hands of the undemocratic, hand-picked orthodox ulema, to which Jinnah had alluded to as "priests on a divine mission."

Khan further stated that the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance, and social justice needed to be "observed in the constitution as they have been enunciated by Islam", adding that it was necessary to qualify these terms further in order to give them a well-understood meaning. This was not unheard of, seeing as how in every country, free speech is qualified to exclude hate speech and therefore, tolerance does not extend to hate groups. The only difference was that Khan wanted the qualifications to come through Islam.

He went on to say that,

"the state is not to play the part of a neutral observer, wherein the Muslims may be merely free to profess and practice their religion, because such an attitude on the part of the state would be the very negation of the ideals which prompted the demand of Pakistan, and it is these ideals which should be the corner-stone of the state which we want to build."

This is in line with what Jinnah said during his address to the Karachi Bar Association on January 25, 1948,

“No doubt, there are people who do not quite appreciate when we talk of Islam...Islam is not only a set of rituals, traditions and spiritual doctrines. Islam is a code for every Muslim which regulates his life and his conduct in even politics and economics and the like.”

Adding,

“Why this feeling of nervousness that the future constitution of Pakistan is going to be in conflict with Shariat Laws? Islamic principles today are as applicable to life as they were 1,300 years ago. I could not understand a section of people who deliberately wanted to create mischief and made a propaganda that the constitution of Pakistan would not be made on the basis of Shariat.”

We must also highlight Jinnah’s speech to the constituent assembly on August 11, 1947 in which he cemented religious freedom and equal citizenship as state policies. There is no contradiction between the two speeches once we realise that what Jinnah meant when he talked about Islam and Shariat was in fact a modernist version of Islam, espoused by the likes of Allama Iqbal and Muhammad Asad, and not the orthodox version of Islam propagated by Maududi and Shabbir Ahmad Usmani. Khan was also of the same view and this shall become clear once we see how the 1956 constitution was framed seven years after the Objectives Resolution was moved in the Constituent Assembly.

On March 7, 1949, Khan’s motion was opposed by non-Muslim members of the Assembly, Prem Hari Barma and Sris Chandra Chattopadhyaya. Over the next few days, they along with the other non-Muslim members such as BK Datta and Professor Chakravarty moved a large number of amendments, focusing on parts where phrases like “sovereignty belonging to God” and “state principles being enunciated by Islam” were mentioned.

The amendments, however, were rejected 21 to 10 as Professor IH Qureishi, Sardar Abdur Rab Nishtar, Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah, the leftist Mian Iftikharuddin and others voted against them noting that non-Muslim members also believed in God and should have no objection to His sovereignty, and that the resolution was in line with demand of Pakistan based on particular

ideology and pledges, while reassuring them that they believed that power is delegated to the people which includes both Muslims and non-Muslims. Winding up the debates, Liaquat Ali Khan said,

“We are guaranteeing you [non-Muslims] your religious freedom, advancement of your culture, sanctity of your personal laws, and equal opportunities, as well as equality in the eye of the law.”

The Objectives Resolution however did not pacify some of the Islamists either. One of the key figures of the era, the head of Jamat-i-Islami, Maulana Maududi, is reported to have said that the Resolution was “such a rain which was neither preceded by a gathering of clouds nor was it followed by vegetation.”

After partition, he and other Islamists such as Majlis-i-Ahrar and Shabbir Ahmad Usmani’s Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) began demanding the Islamic state that they believed Jinnah and Muslim League had promised the Muslims. Let us examine whether there was any truth to this claim.

In 1937, during the by-elections, the Muslim League’s nexus with a faction of the Deobandi orthodox ulema began. One of the most prominent members of the ulema was Ashraf Ali Thanvi whose fatwa endorsing a League candidate in Sahranpur was plastered all over the constituency. He sent a questionnaire to the League which was responded to by none other than Nawab Ismail Khan assuring him of the Islamic credentials of the Muslim League. In 1939, Thanvi’s fatwa endorsing the entire Muslim League called “Tanzim-al-Muslimeen” was read out at AIML Patna Session by Zafar Ahmad Usmani. During the same session Jinnah met with a delegation of Deobandi Ulema where he announced that Islam was a complete code of life and cannot be separated from politics.

This was plastered on the front page of his newspaper by Maulvi Mazharuddin, the editor of Al-Aman, Delhi who ultimately gave Jinnah the title ‘Quaid-e-Azam’. This was repeated by Jinnah to Gandhi in 1944 during their famous talks as the basis of the Two-Nation theory.

<https://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/94243/was-pakistan-always-destined-to-become-an-islamic-republic-part-1/>



Promising engineer from Karachi makes a splash by setting fastest underwater robot fish in motion



Muhammad Saad Shahid Anwel and his team has smashed a world record by making with his team the fastest underwater robot fish which is a replica of a fish that is able to zip through oceans, opening doors to new modes of research and climate action.

It was a long time back that Muhammad Saad Shahid Anwel, then a student of Beacon house School System in Karachi, and his team were awarded a gold medal for creating a robotic car fit to roll on Mars' rocky surface. The moment was exhilarating and one of the earliest memories that Anwel has of his accomplishment. But that was just the beginning.

Moving forward many years, at the age of 20, Anwel has smashed a world record, yet again stealing the show by making with his team the fastest underwater robot — a replica of a fish that is able to zip through oceans, opening doors to new modes of research and climate action.

The eldest of his siblings, Anwel had taken a liking to technology since early childhood. In fact, it was his love for everything that had to do with computers and machines which led to him winning a robot competition while he was still in school.

In the years to come, still in his teens, he would design a curriculum based on the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics education system — commonly called STEM — for A' Level students at his school. The curriculum was designed so that the many students to whom it was taught, following in Anwel's footsteps, went into the field of robotics and were widely appreciated for their work by the industry experts.

Anwel, however, had bigger dreams.

On the basis of his impressive academic record, he was offered a scholarship at the University of Hong Kong, from where he graduated with a degree in computer engineering. This is where his journey to breaking a world record began.

Setting a record

At the university, Anwel was enamoured of biomimicry creations — robots that ape living organisms characteristics and features. He actively participated in

several such projects and got an opportunity to join a team, working on creating a robot fish named Vayu, as a computer engineer.

Previously, teams from different batches preceding that of Anwel's had worked on the project but it was Anwel and his team that upgraded it so that they broke a Guinness World Record on January 23, 2020, held by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The robot fish was now the fastest underwater bot.

Vayu moves using mechanical fins, which work differently than propellers, preventing it from getting entangled in underwater plants. Operating on a lithium-ion battery and able to stay underwater for eight to 12 hours, it can swim 50 metres in just 26.79 seconds. But speed is not its only merit. According to Anwel, it is one of the best means for underwater surveillance and environmental study.

"It can be used for studying the effects of environmental pollution, conducting research on marine life and underwater surveillance," he said, adding that the robot could also be used for identifying problems in dysfunctional vessels, helping with their repair and eventually benefitting the shipping industry.

However, Anwel aims to further improve the functionality of the robot fish. He believes that installing sensors can increase its efficiency. The way forward

He also looks forward to doing a PhD in computer science, with a focus on swarm robotics — an approach to designing multiple robots that work in a coordinated and decentralised way, using artificial intelligence and with the least possible human interference.

After gaining experience of working at various renowned companies in the field, he then wants to put his experience, skills and learning to the benefit of Pakistan, promoting technology in the country. He believes that technology can be used to combat marine pollution and climate change in Pakistan, besides using robots to make advancements in the fields of agriculture, manufacturing, logistics and healthcare. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2162840/1-promising-engineer-karachi-makes-splash-setting-fastest-fish-motion/>



Peshawar's historic Sunehri Mosque opens doors to women after 23 years

Peshawar's historic Sunehri Masjid on Friday opened its doors to female worshippers for the first time since 1996, a move warmly welcomed by women of the neighbourhood. Nearly 15-20 women offered Friday prayers after the administration of the mosque, located on main Saddar road in Cantonment area, announced the move.

A banner put up outside the mosque stated that arrangements have been made for women to offer

Friday prayers in the hall located on the upper floor of the mosque. Mosque officials said women will also be allowed during Eid prayers.

The mosque's naib imam, Muhammad Ismail, said the decision — which comes days ahead of International Women's Day observed on March 8 — was taken to facilitate women living in Saddar and other areas.

"Before 1996, women were allowed to attend Friday prayer congregations in the upper portion of the mosque," he recalled, adding that in 1996, females were barred from praying in the mosque due to growing militancy.

"Now we have opened the upper portion again so that women can offer Friday prayers alongside males in a separate section and listen to Friday khutba (sermon)," Ismail said. A woman steps out of Sunehri Masjid. — Photo by author

He revealed that the mosque's khateeb also threw light on women's issues and their rights in Islam during Friday's sermon.

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He revealed that the mosque's khateeb also threw light on women's issues and their rights in Islam during Friday's sermon. A police personnel stands outside the mosque. — Photo by author

Kousar Shah, 45, a resident of Saddar, was one of the women who attended the prayers at the mosque today along with her daughters. "I am really happy, and this is a really good decision," she told DawnNewsTV.

She said the facility should be available to women for daily prayers as well. "We are hopeful that the mosque administration will allow women regularly also," she added. Anila Sajid, 22, appreciated the mosque's imam for the decision.

Strict security measures were taken during the Friday prayers and police personnel were deployed around the mosque.

The construction of Sunehri Masjid started in 1946 and it was completed after 30 years, according to naib imam Ismail.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1538890>



Peshawar: Ms Wazir is a lady on a mission – to make Cantonment encroachment free

By Ali Sheikh

PESHAWAR: Ms Qurratul Ain Wazir, the first female magistrate of Cantonment Board Peshawar, has said that she had collected over Rs30million in terms of property tax in three months (from April to June 2018) and has already collected Rs10million only in September.

Talking to The Frontier Post, Ms Wazir said that removing encroachments from the Peshawar cantonment was the biggest challenge for her but with the support of people and media she was successfully leading the anti-encroachment drive. “Anti-encroachment drive in Shafi Market, Peshawar Sadar, was a challenge and we had to face stiff resistance from the shopkeepers but we remove the encroachments,” Ms Wazir said while adding that she had received a number of complaints from the women regarding difficulties in shopping from the Shafi Market in the presence of the encroachments.

Ms Wazir said she personally supervised the 10 hour long drive in Shafi market where encroachments from around 400 shops were removed. “We have also passed Cantonment Board Resolution according to which the encroachers would be fined Rs25,000 for the first time which the same will be doubled if they involved in encroachment again. Similarly, they will have to pay Rs one lac for the third time offence and their shops will be sealed and the items will be confiscated until they pay the fine. “Previously they had to pay a meager amount of fine but now with the huge amount of fine the people are thinking twice before doing the encroachment,” Qurratul Ain added.

Speaking about the hygienic conditions of food items including the slaughter houses she said that she along with her team visited a number of slaughterhouse in the Peshawar Cantonment and found out that the conditions were not suitable. “The animals were being sold without the stamp of the Cantonment Board Peshawar slaughter house which is a crime,” Qurratul Ain said.

She also informed that some of the workers in the

slaughterhouses were found putting Cantonment Board stamps by themselves after bringing the animals from outside the Cantonment area which again was a crime. She said that she personally inspects the hygienic

conditions at the restaurants and with the number of raids increasing each passing day the restaurant owners and workers and doing their best to keep the conditions as per the standards.

Replying to another question, she said that people hesitate in paying the property tax but now after successful raids and recoveries people are more willing to pay the tax than facing the action. In response to a query, she said allotment of parking was not under her control but her team was still having an eye on illegal parking. “For any illegal parking Rs3000 fine will be imposed and for motorcycle parking Rs1000 fine will be imposed. When asked about her fame especially on social media, she said that she was just doing her work for the betterment of the people and not for the fame.

Qurratul Ain Wazir belongs to Wana in South Waziristan and has taken her early education from Bannu. She has done LLB and MA Political Science before passing the provincial Public Service Commission examination. Before joining Cantonment Board Peshawar she has worked at the Planning and Development, Establishment and Monitoring and Evaluation departments.

<https://thefrontierpost.com/ms-wazir-is-a-lady-on-a-mission-to-make-peshawar-cantonment-encroachment-free/>



body calls for inquiry into ruling party



The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) said Thursday it has renewed its call for the U.K.'s human rights watchdog to investigate the ruling Conservative Party over allegations of Islamophobia.

The Muslim advocacy group provided the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) with a dossier implicating 300 people in or associated with the party with Islamophobia.

This is the second time the MCB has reported the ruling party to the EHRC, the first being in May 2019. The rights watchdog has neither investigated the Conservatives nor responded to the MCB, they said in a statement.

"Having furnished the Equality and Human Rights Commission with evidence of over 100 incidents of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party ten months ago, we find it extraordinary that the Commission has failed to give any response, let alone inform us and British Muslims as to whether action will be taken," said MCB Secretary General Harun Khan.

"Two years ago, we estimated that there were cases of Islamophobia being identified in the Party on a weekly basis. Now, with over 300

documented incidents, it appears our estimation was too low."

In its updated dossier compiling allegations of Islamophobia, the MCB singled out the prime minister's controversial special advisor Dominic Cummings, who presided over the publication of a picture of the Prophet Muhammad with a bomb in his turban while he was responsible for the right-wing Spectator magazine.

They also highlighted the hiring, and subsequent firing, of No 10 aide Andrew Sabisky, who had previously made controversial comments on eugenics, women and welfare claimants and expressed harsh views on what he saw as the threat of Britain's growing population.

The statement said that Thor Halland, the chairman of a local conservative association, called for Muslims to be banned, and two other Conservative party members called for Muslims to be thrown off bridges and sterilized.

These were just a sample of the 300 plus incidents the MCB compiled. Some of the allegations dated back to prospective parliamentary candidates who have since been elected.

MP Anthony Browne responded to a question about Muslim leaders' opposition to the Iraq War by questioning British Muslims' loyalty to the U.K.

Another MP, Karl McCartney, retweeted posts by far-right leader Tommy Robinson. McCartney has since apologized.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has previously said his party has a "zero tolerance approach" and pledged to hold an internal investigation into allegations of Islamophobia.

The MCB said in its statement that the Conservatives have "failed to take meaningful action on its problem of Islamophobia."

The Conservatives reneged on a pledge to hold a dedicated, internal investigation into Islamophobia within the party, instead promising one into all forms of discrimination, a move seen as watering-down their promise in the eyes of critics.

The MCB also highlighted the concerns of several prominent Conservative Muslims, "including Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, former co-chair of the Party, Lord Sheikh, founder of the Conservative Muslim Forum, and Sajjad Karim, former Conservative MEP for the West Midlands, who spoke about a senior serving minister having made Islamophobic comments

about him."

Khan said: "There is no doubt that the Conservative Party has an Islamophobia crisis: it is institutional, systemic and widespread.

The Party's response has been one of denial, dismissal and deceit. This results in clear discrimination against Muslims because of their religion.

Islamophobia is never acceptable, yet this dossier cites hundreds of individuals – including many in significant positions of power and influence – who have made horribly offensive comments about Muslims that would not be tolerated for any other section in our society.

"The EHRC has a duty to uphold the Equality Act, and this responsibility includes investigating where there are allegations of discrimination.

The absence of meaningful action by the Conservative Party despite the wealth of evidence makes it all the more important that the EHRC recognizes the impact of this level of Islamophobia in our governing party, and takes swift action."

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/uk-muslim-body-calls-for-inquiry-into-ruling-party/1756515>



Important Notice

We have been publishing monthly magazines namely... **Lahore International both in English and Urdu, and Aabgeene- a women's digest-** for the last many years through our own limited financial resources. We are grateful to our esteemed readers for their overwhelming response to the contents of the above magazines. The main objective of these periodicals is to create a better awareness and understanding among the different sections of the society through educative, informative and reformatory articles, essays and other write-ups. We also try to promote and foster Islamic culture and civilization through different articles. Apart from that we stand for true and unbiased journalism.

As our readers are well aware of the fact for publishing such magazines, the support of a organization or advertisements is needed. But unfortunately, we don't have any of these.

We, therefore, humbly request our valuable readers to lend their financial support to these magazines on monthly basis. Even a small amount will be of great help to us and it will be duly appreciated. All contributions may please be remitted to the following account:

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Hoping for an encouraging response
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May Allah be with you – Amen

MOHIUDDIN ABBASI
Editor-in-chief

UK Court: Dubai's Ruler abducted daughters and threatened wife

Abduction, forced return, torture and a campaign of intimidation. On Thursday the damning allegations made against the billionaire ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, by his former wife, Princess Haya Bint Al-Hussain, became established fact, published in a series of judgements by Britain's High Court.

Following a high-profile case that began eight months ago, the court has published a Fact Finding Judgement (FFJ) in favour of Princess Haya who fled Dubai last year, along with her two children, telling friends she was in fear of her life.

Sheikh Mohammed had tried, unsuccessfully, to keep the judgement out of the public domain but had his appeal rejected after it was ruled to be in the public interest. The ruler of Dubai was found to have "not been open and honest with the court".

In a statement issued after the judgments were published, Sheikh Mohammed said: "As a head of government, I was not able to participate in the court's fact-finding process. This has resulted in the release of a 'fact-finding' judgment which inevitably only tells one side of the story."

He insisted the case was a private matter. "I ask that the media respect the privacy of our children and do not intrude into their lives in the UK," he said.

'Young women deprived of liberty'

After hearing extensive witness statements over a period of time, the court found Sheikh Mohammed to have been responsible for the abduction and forced return of two of his daughters from another marriage.

► Sheikha Shamsa fled the family's UK estate in Surrey in 2000 but was later recaptured in Cambridgeshire by agents of the Sheikh, allegedly injected with a sedative and forcibly returned to Dubai where she remains in captivity. A request by Cambridgeshire Police to visit Dubai to investigate her abduction was refused.

► Sheikha Latifa made two unsuccessful attempts to flee her father's family, in 2002 and 2018. After the first she was imprisoned by her father in Dubai for over three years. In the second attempt she was recaptured at sea off the Indian coast and forcibly returned to Dubai, where she remains under house arrest. The judge found her allegations of serious physical abuse amounting to torture, made by Latifa in a public video, to be credible.

The judge found that Sheikh Mohammed "continues



to maintain a regime whereby both these two young women are deprived of their liberty".

Princess Haya of Jordan, 45, a daughter of the late King Hussain and a former Olympic equestrian, married Sheikh Mohammed of Dubai, 70, in 2004, becoming the sixth and youngest of his wives. They have two children, aged seven and 11.

Media caption What happened to Dubai's Sheikha Latifa?

Initially she believed his explanations of what had happened to the two princesses, namely that they had been "rescued" and were now safe with the family.

But by early 2019 Princess Haya had become suspicious and voiced her concerns. She had also begun an adulterous affair with her British bodyguard. A campaign of intimidation by Sheikh Mohammed's agents began and the court heard that a gun was twice placed on her pillow with the safety catch off. A helicopter landed outside her house with a threat to remove her to a remote desert prison.

The judge ruled that "the father has therefore acted in a manner from the end of 2018 which has been aimed at intimidating and frightening the mother, and that he has encouraged others to do so on his behalf".

'A huge embarrassment'

In April 2019 Princess Haya fled to Britain, taking her two children with her. The court heard how veiled threats from Sheikh Mohammed had left her terrified for her own safety, as well as fears that her children could be abducted and forcibly returned to Dubai.

In May 2019 she said he told her: "You and the children will never be safe in England". He published a poem entitled: "You lived, you died".

The court heard how the Sheikh had used his media contacts to generate a series of negative articles about Princess Haya, many of which were "wholly inaccurate".

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51756984>



Canada Mulling Over deportation of Afghan doctor conducting virginity tests



Canadian Immigration authorities are mulling deportation of a female doctor who conducted virginity tests on women in Afghanistan. According to local media reports, the authorities are arguing that the actions of the doctor are a crime against humanity.

The doctor, Saida Ahmadi reportedly conducted the virginity tests on women in a hospital in the North of Afghanistan. She made a refugee claim after arriving in Canada in 2017.

During her interviews with the Canadian Immigration officials, Ahmadi has admitted that she conducted virginity tests as part of her duties, they were not routine.

Meanwhile, the Immigration and Refugee Board has ruled that although the tests were “part of the systematic oppression of women in Afghanistan,” they were not a crime against humanity, according to Global News.

The IRB’s Immigration Appeal Division ruled that Ahmadi did not make a significant contribution to “the systems in Afghanistan which oppress women.” However, the Federal

Court of Canada overturned the IRB Appeal Division decision in February, sending the matter back to the refugee board for re-examination.

In August 2016, Ahmadi examined a woman named Soraya, who was accused of zina. Ahmadi said she signed a report stating her opinion that Soraya was not a virgin. Ahmadi testified in court, later saying that her testimony was limited to confirming her signature on the virginity test report. Soraya was sentenced to seven years imprisonment.

Ahmadi said she left Afghanistan after getting threatening calls from Soraya’s family. According to a Canadian immigration report, Ahmadi arrived to Canada from the U.S. in 2017. The Federal Court found the IRB made the decision through a process that “breached the principals of natural justice and procedural fairness.” <https://www.khaama.com/canada-mulling-deportation-of-female-afghan-doctor-who-conducted-virginity-tests-04504/>



Why CHRISTIANS ARE UNDER ATTACK in Modi's India?

It was a calm Friday evening in December, when about a dozen Christian villagers sat to pray in a house in Bilkua village in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal. A few minutes later, a group of Hindu men armed with wooden sticks barged into the house, disrupted the service and left.

When 34-year-old pastor Ramu Hala restarted the service, the armed men came back to stop him and asked him to leave right away. It's been more than a two months, but Hala — who is from a nearby village — hasn't returned to Bilkua.

Now, as the BJP prepares for a political test pivotal to expanding its base, mounting attacks on Christians are sparking worries that the RSS might be replacing the coyness of the past six years with a newfound aggression against the religion's followers.

West Bengal, with a population larger than Germany's, is one of a handful of states that the BJP has never ruled. But recent gains — it emerged as the second-largest party in the state behind the ruling Trinamool Congress in the 2019 national elections — have whetted its appetite for power there, where they anticipate



The country's Hindu right — led by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the parent organization with several arms, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling BJP — has for decades viewed Christianity and Islam as alien religions. But Modi's tenure since 2014 has seen the Hindu right largely target Muslims, with the government keen to avoid alienating the West.

more success in next year's state elections.

The RSS now holds 2,650 daily and weekly meetups — called shakhas — across the state, up from 2,000 in 2017, according to the organization. That increased footprint has coincided with a sharp rise in attacks against the Christian community, from 17 in 2017 and 2018 combined, to 26 in 2019 alone, according to Persecution Relief, a Christian nonprofit.

Last March, a group of Hindu men used knives to attack Anand Hari, 62, the pastor of Full Gospel Evangelical Church, about 150 miles from Bilkua. He was hospitalized for three days. Last month, police arrested three men for allegedly hurling bombs at a church. In many other cases, victims — including Hala, the pastor attacked in Bilkua — are too scared to report cases against their attackers. Returning to Bilkua, Hala says, is out of the question.

The founders of the RSS questioned the loyalty of Indian followers of Christianity and Islam because their holiest shrines lie outside of India. Their successors have long accused Christian missionaries of converting poor Hindus to Christianity through enticements.

In 1999, Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two sons were burned alive in their car by members of the Bajrang Dal, a paramilitary group that's a part of the RSS umbrella.

But following a series of attacks on churches soon after Modi came to power, the Hindu right has focused its attention on Muslims, driving a spike in hate crimes against the community. The controversial new citizenship law that discriminates against Muslim migrants treats Christians on par with Hindus.

That go-soft approach toward Christians now appears to be cracking, starting with West Bengal, where the BJP is trying to consolidate Hindu votes for next year's elections against the Trinamool Congress, which it has portrayed as pro-minority communities. How this new strategy plays out could determine the RSS approach to India's 28 million Christians nationally.

In July 2019, RSS volunteers in the Sundarbans region forced a Christian nongovernmental organization from Kolkata to change the design of the school building they had built for poor Hindu children in the locality. The building was originally shaped like a church.

Father Dominic Gomes, vicar general of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Calcutta, says,

"Christians are extremely anguished about these attacks, which have become a common phenomenon now."

West Bengal minorities commission vice chairman Michael Shane Calvert insists that the "stray" attacks on Christians have been handled well by the administration.

But Hari says he had to visit a police station 10 times before his complaint was registered. Ten months after he was stabbed, the police have yet to make an arrest.

And the reverberations of these attacks are beginning to be felt beyond the state's 658,000-strong Christian population. The Indian constitution allows religious minorities to run their own education institutions free from several government regulations. That, many fear, could be the next target.

"We fear that there will be an attempt to cripple the church by attacking the missionary educational institutions," says Father Rodney Borneo, principal of Loyola High School, Kolkata.

The government did not invite even one of India's 30,000-odd Christian educational institutions to offer suggestions while drafting a new education policy.

In January, a federal BJP minister, Giriraj Singh, said those who study at missionary schools lack "Indian culture."

The irony of these increased attacks coming amid the debate on the citizenship law — which will help migrant Christians become Indian nationals — isn't lost on Gomes. "If they cannot make Christians of this country feel safe," he asks,

"how can they keep Christians of other countries safe here?"

[ozy.com/the-new-and-the-next/is-the-hindu-right-targeting-churches-again/268729](https://www.ozy.com/the-new-and-the-next/is-the-hindu-right-targeting-churches-again/268729)



A Performance Hijab for the Olympics

By Allison Yates

When Melissa Scott went on a business trip to Central Asia and the Middle East in 2015, she didn't anticipate designing a makeshift hijab.

The 52-year-old Michigan native isn't Muslim, or the most obvious person to launch an active wear brand. But when it comes to sports, she knows her stuff. She served on the Japanese Olympic Committee in 1992, refereed for USA Cycling and USA Rowing, coached rowing Olympians in the early 2000s and later worked in marketing and sponsorships internationally.

When she embarked on this particular trip to scout locations for speed skating events, she took a hijab with her for cultural consideration. Scott was born deaf and wears hearing aids. She also wears glasses. The hijab she'd brought pushed against both of those, and the pressure caused migraines.

So one night in a hotel room in Kazakhstan she got creative. She took her existing hijab, cut out ear holes and sewed in a pocket with the basic hotel sewing kit. It did the trick, and she wore it for the rest of her trip. It proved effective while Scott was running or playing pickup soccer. While she was working, several female athletes noticed and kept asking if she'd make a hijab just like hers for their training.

The result was what she calls the "first-ever hijab for the digital era," an athletic performance hijab that includes an interior pocket and ear holes for cellphone or Bluetooth earbuds, or tools like stethoscopes, earpieces, glasses or hearing aids. It took off. Then the requests for more modest activewear kept coming. By 2016 Scott was selling as a private label, and she officially launched MODEFYwear in 2017.

The brand targets women who want to cover up for any reason, but specifically "modest women" — typically Muslim, Orthodox Jewish and

Pentecostal Christian.

Backed by investors including TV chef Cat Cora, True Religion founder Kym Gold and award-winning producer Nicole Ehrlich, the brand now sells swim dresses, surfwear, swim skirts, athletic skirts, arm sleeves, hijabs and kurtas, and soon it will debut an athletic snood. After that, the company will start designing kurtas and saris.

MODEFYwear sells to professional athletes and everyday women across the U.S., as well as the Iranian women's surfing team, Oman's track and

field athletes and the Israeli women's basketball team. Scott expects her threads to be represented by several athletes at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, and she's working on deals with entire teams. While the company is still small, Scott



estimates it's manufacturing around 1 million pieces a year and growing. She expects to double the company's \$3.9 million average revenue this year. MODEFYwear's eight employees design and manufacture all products in Los Angeles.

The company's target audience has historically experienced structural and logistical barriers to entering the athletic world. Scott says that there are many fabrics and designs of modest athletic wear that simply aren't "conducive to performance." A cotton or polyester hijab in the summer heat is not only going to be painful and feel like a wet rag, but "it will slow you down," says Scott. In a profession where every millisecond counts, the wrong uniform could be the difference between winning and losing. Not to mention, the lack of appropriate training gear kept many women away from sports.

Read More: <https://www.ozy.com/around-the-world/you-can-catch-her-sports-hijabs-at-the-olympics>



Mayor Zarifa Ghafari: Fighting for women's rights in Afghanistan

Mayor Zarifa Ghafari

Here, we talk to Mayor Zarifa Ghafari, a brave woman who argues for continued international presence in “Afghanistan’s international war” and how at both a local and international level we can all make a difference to create peace, equal opportunities and better societies.

Only 27 years old, Mayor Zarifa Ghafari has an MA in Economics from the University of Punjab and has overcome many challenges to create both success for herself and her people.

As well as carrying out her role as the first female mayor of Maidan Shahr, capital city of a province in Afghanistan, she is the founder of Peghla radio station and of NGO “APAW” Assistance and Promotion of Afghan Women. In this ideaXme interview, we talk of the daily challenges and threats that both she and her country face.

Awaiting her assassination

Mayor Zarifa Ghafari, told The New York

Times in October 2019 that she awaits her assassination. Threats to her security are centered on the work she carries out as a female mayor in a war-zone. She remains adamant: “I am in love with my job!”

Ghafari took up her position as the first female mayor of Maidan Shahr, capital of Maidan Wardak province Afghanistan, 10 months ago.

She explains to ideaXme why the Afghanistan war is an international war that requires a continued international presence in Afghanistan. She talks of her work to promote women’s rights and education, the numerous projects for which she has been responsible for in her 10 months so far as mayor. Ghafari also talks of her journey to becoming mayor and the hurdles she faced in taking up the position. Moreover, she explains why she urgently needs security assistance to continue the work she does.

Below, read the full interview transcript which



The current war in Afghanistan began with the United States invasion on 7 October 2001. It has cost the USA 1 trillion US dollars and the world, including Afghanistan, over 150,000 lives. The Washington Post’s ‘Afghanistan Papers’ is the latest contribution to a growing argument over whether the conflict, or any of the ‘forever wars’, was worth the cost.

includes details of who Mayor Zarifa would like to meet as well as who has helped her the most to carry out her work and further her career.

Fighting for women's rights, security, universal access to education and economic development in a war-zone

Andrea Macdonald, founder ideaXme [00:02:19] Hello. Who are you?

Zarifa Ghafari, Mayor of Maidan Shahr, Afghanistan [00:02:35] This is Zarifa Ghafari from Afghanistan, mayor of the Wardak Province.

Working in a war-zone

Andrea Macdonald, founder ideaXme [00:02:44] Your job is extremely dangerous. It is necessary as a woman, as anyone, to be very brave to do what you do. Could you talk about your job?

Zarifa Ghafari, Mayor of Maidan Shahr, Afghanistan [00:02:59] My job is full of problems for me but it's interesting, amazing and I love it because I am the first female mayor for my province of Wardak. It is still not safe. It is a war-zone province.

I am a female mayor of a province where women don't have rights. Most women are still deprived of education rights and humanitarian rights. Even walking outside is difficult.

Zarifa Ghafari, Mayor of Maidan Shahr, Afghanistan [00:03:40] I am the mayor of a province where people still don't believe women should take part in society. So, I'm really proud of my job but it's not safe. It is really dangerous and full of problems – social, political, cultural and security problems.

But I'm really proud of my job. I roam around the city and get involved with a big group of men who are not so pleased to have a female mayor. I'm in love with my job.

Andrea Macdonald, founder ideaXme [00:04:41] You were appointed in 2018, but you weren't allowed to take up the role immediately. Can you talk about that?

The right to do my job as Mayor of Maidan Shahr, Wardak

Zarifa Ghafari, Mayor of Maidan Shahr, Afghanistan [00:04:51] Yes, for nine months I wasn't allowed to join my office. It was really tough and full of problems. I went through a competitive process; I have a degree. But some groups of men, the land mafia and two people involved with the government were making problems for me because they didn't want to accept a female mayor. I never lost my hope. I just kept fighting for it and went through a long process of waiting. Finally, after nine months it was over, and I became a part of my office. It was great.

[00:07:15] I'm really appreciative of everything, especially the support that I received from local people and people on social media. When I wrote my first post on social media and I asked people to help me and support me, all around the country and all around the world, people were there to do just that. The President, Ashraf Ghani, was so nice to me and solved everything so I was announced to my office.

Andrea Macdonald, founder ideaXme [00:08:04] So tell us about some of your successes in this new position.

Zarifa Ghafari, Mayor of Maidan Shahr, Afghanistan [00:08:15] It's my 10th month working in my office and I have lots of things that I am very proud of. On my first day, the staff were not ready to work with me and when I entered, all of them came out and I was the only one inside the office.

[00:08:37] It took a lot of time to get these people to work with me. Eventually, I started doing the job that I'd been appointed for. We have completed around 13 projects of development – urban planning and urban development. In past years, there were only one or two projects developed. I am not the only woman entering the municipals.

There are 10 female officials working with the municipal office, coming into the office every day and going back home.

[00:10:06] It's great and I'm proud of it. We have achieved a 64 percent increase in revenue. It's amazing. Over the last year, we have become the wealthiest office. This is a great achievement and I am proud of it.

[00:10:39] Right now, we are working on an underground market with over 16 shops that will be for women. It caters to the provinces and cities where women are not allowed to come out and take part in society. Women will have a market where they can buy their essentials.

Andrea Macdonald, [00:11:05] You have been a very big champion of women in your role. You're very keen on promoting female education. Aside from supporting women, you're also leading campaigns on cleaning up the area through actions like litter control. Can you give some more examples of specific projects?

Zarifa Ghafari, Mayor of Maidan Shahr, Afghanistan [00:11:36] Actually, I have an NGO – APAW Organisation. Moreover, I have a radio station by the name of Peghla FM. Peghla is a Pashtu word which means young girl. At the radio station, we promote women's rights and awareness of issues affecting women. We promote educational awareness for women as well as legal awareness. At the same time, my NGO is working to support women regarding their work, education and economic development. As mayor, I am working to promote educational and economic rights for women. I don't know for how much of this I will be 'the champion' but it is amazing for me to be involved.

[00:12:29] I'm happy with what I'm doing because women all around the country will hopefully follow me. Maybe in 10, 15 or 20 years, we will have many Zarifas in the country who will fight for educational rights, economic rights and especially for women's rights.

Fighting for security

Andrea Macdonald, founder ideaXme [00:13:21] You've achieved some terrific things, but the context in which you operate in is so

dangerous. Recently, The Washington Post publicised the Afghanistan Papers (obtained The Afghanistan Papers, a set of internal documents from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction through a Freedom of Information Act). The Washington Post journalist Craig Whitlock writes of so many lies told around the 18-year war of Afghanistan. Most notable of which is that officials have known from the beginning that this was "an unwinnable war". Many Americans remain nervous, possibly more so now, about how many soldiers they've lost. Over 150,000 people have been lost in this war. Nonetheless, if or when the American troops withdraw, it leaves a situation where security in your country will be even more challenged.

[00:14:27] It's not an easy situation. Your country is made up of a lot of different ethnic groups and is built around tribalism. This makes the challenge of doing jobs like yours pretty extreme. In terms of your day to day work, could you talk about any threats to your security? You mentioned to The New York Times that rather terrifying, you await your assassination. God forbid that happens. Can you explain how threatened you feel now?

Zarifa Ghafari, Mayor of Maidan Shahr, Afghanistan [00:16:24] Let me start by answering the question regarding the American troops. Afghanistan is not just facing war with one group. There's international terrorism going on here and the international community should face it and help us in this part of this world. If Afghanistan is not safe, I think there will be problems for every country around the world.

<https://radioideaxme.com/2020/01/29/mayor-zarifa-ghafari-fighting-for-womens-rights-security-universal-access-to-education-and-economic-development-in-a-war-zone/>



USA: Jalila Haider among recipients of Women Courage Award

WASHINGTON: Jalila Haider, a human rights activist from Balochistan, will receive the International Women of Courage award from US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo on Wednesday, said an official announcement.

The US State Department's spokesperson's office identified Ms Haider as "the Iron Lady of Balochistan," who founded "We the Humans – Pakistan", a non-profit organisation to lift local communities by strengthening opportunities for vulnerable women and children.

She specializes in defending women's rights and provides free counselling and legal services to poverty-affected women. The first female attorney of her Hazara community, Ms Haider led a peaceful hunger strike to recognise the right to life for the Hazaras following a series of targeted attacks. She has taken up the cause of many other vulnerable communities.

As Balochistan's President of the Women Democratic Front and Balochistan's branch of the Aurat (Woman's) March, "she fought against violence against women in public spaces, at work, and at home," said her brief introduction released by the State Department.

Secretary Pompeo will host the annual International Women of Courage (IWOC) Awards at the Department of State on Wednesday to honour 12 extraordinary women from across the world.

The First Lady of the United States Melania Trump will deliver remarks to recognise the extraordinary accomplishments of these women.

Now in its 14th year, the Secretary of State's IWOC Award recognizes women around the globe who have demonstrated exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for peace,



justice, human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment, often at great personal risk and sacrifice.

Since the inception of this award in March 2007, the department has recognized 134 women from 73 countries. This year will bring the total to 146 awardees from 77 countries.

Following the IWOC ceremony, the 12 awardees will participate in an International Visitor Leadership Programme (IVLP) visiting various cities across the United States, before reconvening in Los Angeles for the conclusion of their programme on March 16.

Besides the Baloch Hazara woman, an Afghan woman Zarifa Ghafari, who became the mayor of Maidan Shar in the conservative Wardak province at the age of 26, will also receive the award. When she showed up to start work, a male mob appeared, and she was forced to flee. Despite facing death threats, Ms Ghafari returned, defying her conservative critics and their narrative that a woman is unfit to lead.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1538221>



She Shunned Islam and was Embraced by Trump World, Now she turned against them

Roger Sollenberger, BuzzFeed Contributor, Kathleen O'Neill, BuzzFeed Contributor
Rabia Kazan, a Turkish national who used to be a Trump fanatic, made a big donation to the president's campaign. But she's not a US citizen.

A former rising star in MAGA world recently renounced the orbit of operatives who support President Donald Trump, calling them a "cult" and saying they broke campaign finance laws by requesting and taking her campaign donations.

Now, Rabia Kazan is talking to the FBI.

"I lost everything with these people," Kazan told BuzzFeed News from the lobby of the Connecticut hotel where she now spends most of her time.

Kazan's time in the MAGA world saw her make connections with top figures and lesser-known operatives. But she now believes she was "used" for her money — and for her identity as a former Muslim to help smooth over Trump's incendiary comments about Islam.

Kazan began her career as a journalist in Turkey in the 1990s, finding fame after scoring a jailhouse interview with Mehmet Ali Ağca — the Turkish ultranationalist who shot Pope John Paul II in 1981. She got into the prison by pretending she was engaged to Ağca — sparking rumors she became his fiancé while he was in lockup.

In 2007, she published a book, *Angels of Tehran*, based on her interviews with more than 200 women about abuses against them under extreme forms of Islam. She moved to the US in 2010 as a student and has been here ever since. She continued speaking publicly about women in the Muslim world, in particular targeting Sharia law and extremist ideology, and converted to Christianity. In 2015, she began supporting Trump because of his condemnation of radical



Islam, despite his blatantly racist fear mongering. "I was extremely worshipping of Trump," Kazan told BuzzFeed News. "I fight for women's rights in the Middle East and fight against ISIS, and I believed Trump was against radical Islam and tough on ISIS. I was thinking he really wanted to help us in the Middle East."

Kazan had a knack for publicity, and eventually gained the attention of Trump's election efforts. In April 2016, she joined the board of directors for the National Diversity Coalition for Trump, a group cofounded by several Trump surrogates and Michael Cohen, Trump's former lawyer who is currently serving out a prison sentence after pleading guilty to federal campaign finance violations.

For nearly four years, Kazan, 43, was a frequent speaker on the MAGA circuit, receiving awards from campaign surrogates and posing for photographs with a who's who of the president's inner circle: Rudy Giuliani, Donald Trump Jr., Ivanka Trump, Michael Flynn, Kellyanne Conway, and more — including Trump himself.

Her social media accounts from 2018 to 2019 were packed with glamorous selfies at various Trump hotels and events, often with many members of MAGA world's second string, such

as Trump campaign proxy Martha Boneta, Housing Secretary Ben Carson's son, and Rudy Giuliani's 20-year-old personal assistant, Christianné Allen, who once accompanied Kazan on a trip to Beverly Hills.

And she had money. Kazan said she received an inheritance after her mother's death in 2018. Her sister, Betul, married into one of Turkey's wealthiest families, which owns the Turkish plastics company, Plastmore.

In early March 2019, Boneta connected Kazan to RNC finance officials so she could purchase a \$5,600 VIP ticket for a Trump Victory fundraiser in Mar-a-Lago, featuring the president himself. The ticket, in an email, was described as "VIP reserved section (closest to stage), upgraded hors d'oeuvres, drink service."

Kazan considered Boneta a close friend — the two met in 2017 at the Trump International Hotel in Washington, DC — and said Boneta knew she wasn't a US citizen.

"I was just the introduction," said Boneta, a Trump campaign surrogate. "I didn't have anything to do with that."

"I know she provided all her documentation at the time; she provided her passport and everything," said Boneta. "Rabia never misrepresented her status."

FEC records show that Kazan made a \$2,800 to Trump Victory, which was transferred the same day to Donald Trump for President, Inc. The donation and transfer both list MEWC — the Middle Eastern Women's Coalition, a pro-Trump group Kazan formed — as her employer. Boneta also donated, and Kazan paid for the suite they shared at the nearby Breakers hotel.

"We only accept donations in accordance with federal election laws," an RNC official told BuzzFeed News. "If we see evidence that a donation was made by a foreign national, we follow the law's procedures and return the money." Read More @

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/rogersollenberger/she-shunned-islam-and-was-embraced-by-trump-world-now-shes>

UK: Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai finally meet at Oxford University



The teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg has met Malala Yousafzai at the University of Oxford where the Nobel peace prize winner is a student. Yousafzai, 22, posted a photo on Instagram of herself and Thunberg sitting on a bench with their arms around each other on Tuesday, with the caption: "Thank you, @gretathunberg" and a heart emoji.

Thunberg, 17, is in the UK to join a school strike in Bristol on Friday.

Both shot to worldwide fame after standing up for major global issues: the climate crisis and women's education.

Thunberg became a household name after striking from school in Sweden to protest against the climate emergency, while Yousafzai was shot in the head by the Taliban in Pakistan for campaigning for girls to be allowed to go to school.

In 2014, Yousafzai became the youngest recipient of the Nobel peace prize for her advocacy of education. She became a global symbol of the resilience of women in the face of oppression.

Thunberg was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in 2019 and 2020.

The pair met to discuss their activism at Lady Margaret Hall, Yousafzai's Oxford college. Thunberg also talked to some of the students about the climate crisis and protest.

The college's master, Alan Rusbridger, posted a photo of Thunberg on his own Instagram and Twitter, saying that he was honoured to host Thunberg and grateful that she found time to talk to the students.

Yousafzai also posted the photo on Twitter and commented: "She's the only friend I'd skip school for."

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/feb/25/greta-thunberg-and-malala-yousafzai-meet-at-oxford-university>

What the US has achieved in Afghanistan?

By Kevin Barrett



Many Americans are wondering just what we have accomplished in this war on Afghanistan, which lasted 18 years, and now the so-called peace deal in Doha claims to be putting an end to it. So what was the purpose? And what are the accomplishments?

Well, from the American point of view, this has been a complete disaster. The United States has spent trillions of dollars, lost many service members and tarnished its reputation around the world by leading this futile war on the country that has a well-earned reputation as the graveyard of empires, killing hundreds of thousands if not millions of people and rendering millions more homeless refugees.

So what was the point of it? We were told in 2001 that the purpose of the US invasion of Afghanistan was to get revenge for the Taliban supposedly having been sponsors of the supposed al-Qaeda terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. And of course, that was a lie. The war in Afghanistan was planned and set in stone in July of 2001. So, the September 11 false flag operation was simply an excuse for launching a pre-planned war.

Its purpose was twofold. First, and probably most importantly, Afghanistan is critically important geopolitical fulcrum for the Eurasian supercontinent. It's full of very valuable resources. And it's also a pipeline route or potential pipeline route for natural gas.

So, from a geostrategic perspective, and resource perspective, Afghanistan appeared to be a very valuable prize. Additionally Afghanistan was just like Iraq, right there on the border of Iran. And the United States has long been hostile to the Islamic Republic and dedicated to regime change there.

And the neoconservatives, who were responsible for the 9/11 false flag operation, wanted to put US bases in Afghanistan and Iraq, in large part to surround Iran as part of a regime change strategy that was revealed by General Wesley Clark, who said that the purpose of September 11 was to take out seven countries in five years, the seventh and most important country being Iran. And he heard this from a neoconservative Israel loyalist, and this was largely done in support of Zionist expansionism.

So has this been successful? Not at all. The Islamic Republic still stands. The vast wealth of Afghanistan is not being exploited. The minerals are not being mined. There's no pipeline. The only resource being exploited is heroin, opium production, which had been shut down by the Taliban was restored immediately by the US invaders who set free all the drug lords and told them to plant and sell to their heart's content.

So today, Afghanistan has resumed its position as the world's leading heroin producer. And that heroin is being flown to the United States, Europe, Central and South America and elsewhere on Global Hawk military vehicles.

It's grown in Afghanistan, refined in Pakistan and flown to the world on US military Global Hawks. And that's why the US has wanted to stay for all of these 18 years—because the people in charge are corrupt, drug-running mafia thugs, so those people may lose a little bit of their business. But if this proposed withdrawal does end up having an effect—and I do think that the pressure for American withdrawal has reached the point that they will have to leave, apparently—the American people will look back on this and say, what did we accomplish in 18 years, the longest war our country ever fought. Well, we protected the drug lords for two decades.

<https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2020/02/29/619812/What-the-US-has-achieved-in-Afghanistan>

Prevent: Muslim 'support' for 'toxic' anti-extremism scheme



Criminal justice think tank Crest Advisory says its research shows the "narrative" the scheme is a "toxic brand" is "fundamentally flawed".

UK Muslims would be more likely to tip off the scheme when someone was being radicalized than the wider public. But the Muslim Council of Britain said Prevent still needed to be overhauled.

The research was funded by a charitable trust with an interest in policing and crime reduction which for security reasons does not wish to be identified.

The survey showed that many of those questioned had not heard of Prevent before - amounting to 55% of Muslims and 68% of the general population.

But when offered "a neutral explanation" of Prevent, 80% of British Muslims and 85% of the wider public offered broad support for it, Crest Advisory says.

Some 67% of British Muslims surveyed said they would tip off the authorities about someone being radicalized, compared with 63% of the wider public.

"Our findings appear to fly in the face of a number of narratives commonly applied to British Muslims by some politicians, campaign groups and commentators about extremism and efforts to counter it," said report author and Crest Advisory director Jon Clements.

"British Muslims are, broadly speaking, no more 'in denial' about Islamist extremism and the threat it presents than the population as a whole." Equally it is evident that British Muslims appear to be just as willing to step up and report concerns about an individual at risk of being radicalised as everybody else."

Mention "Prevent" and the phrase that often comes to mind is "toxic brand". It's the label that is said to best fit what Muslims feel about the programme. It's unclear when it first became attached but it has stuck, leaving the impression that Prevent is tainted, poisonous and worthless.

The results of this research suggest the term is unhelpful and does not accurately reflect what British Muslims think. In fact, the finding that should cause most alarm among local authority safeguarding teams and counter-terrorism police is that most Muslims don't know what Prevent is - major work is clearly needed to raise its profile.

Officials will also have to address the concerns that a significant proportion of Muslims surveyed say they have about the overall purpose of the project.

That's a job that the independent review of the scheme, promised by the government last year, could help with - but the review has stalled after its chair, Lord Carlile, had to step down.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-51676923>



How Afghans Can Work Together to End the War

By Aref Dostyar, NYTimes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Momentum is building toward peace in Afghanistan.

On Saturday, the United States and the Taliban will sign an agreement that will pave the way for talks between the Taliban and a team of negotiators led by the Afghan government in March. There is hope, at last, of respite from the long war.

The Afghan government deserves credit for planting the seeds of peace two years ago by offering unconditional talks to the Taliban and announcing a unilateral cease-fire that blossomed into a three-day pause in hostilities in June 2018.

Kabul continued to reach out to the Taliban and sent some officials in July to an informal peace dialogue in Doha that brought together the warring sides for the first time. In February, the government of Afghanistan agreed to stop its operations against the Taliban for seven days to facilitate the first formal negotiations between Kabul and the insurgents. The Afghan government and the American forces abided by the agreement. There were reports of several attacks by the Taliban on the Afghan civilians and security forces, but violence certainly decreased during this period.

Negotiations between an inclusive Afghan government-led team with the Taliban offer us a historic opportunity to end the war. If these talks

are going to deliver peace, both the Afghan government and the Taliban urgently need to think more clearly about their coming talks and what they envision as the potential outcomes.

In October, President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan published a plan articulating his vision for peace. He laid out the steps for peace from talks with the United States and NATO about the withdrawal of their forces and a subsequent counterterrorism framework.

The plan includes the creation of an inclusive Afghan team to negotiate with the Taliban and talking to regional and global partners to ensure national security and

cooperation to develop the Afghan economy in “post-peace agreement” Afghanistan.

President Ghani also put forth the path to resolving long-term local grievances caused by feelings of exclusion from political processes or low levels of accessibility to law enforcement and justice. Furthermore, the plan aims to strengthen national public institutions to maintain order and deliver essential services to the people.

But the Taliban have shown profound and worrying lack of clarity, and their intentions remain inscrutable. They insist that they want the violence to stop, but they agreed to only a seven-day “reduction in violence” and refuse to accept a cease-fire until after official peace negotiations, the parameters of which remain undefined.

The Taliban have also been extremely vague about



their proposed policies on human rights, the relationship of the Afghan government to its people and the future of relationships between Kabul and the world.

The details are absolutely crucial. The Taliban have spoken about agreeing with human rights based on Islamic law. Will their interpretation be aligned with the positions of its founder Mullah Omar, or will it align with something that progressive scholars of Islam would approve? They are entirely silent about this.

The Taliban say that their proposed governance system is one that is “based on consensus among people.” But they have not clarified whether they agree that all men and women of age have the right to vote and whether they would accept peaceful transitions of power based on free elections through secret ballots.

The insurgents have not explained whether they would accept the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, which is informed by the core ideas of Islam and explicitly prohibits the promulgation of any laws contravening the tenets and provisions of Islam. The people of Afghanistan deserve to hear the Taliban’s positions clearly on these and many other questions.

These uncertainties and the absence of trust of the Taliban have created certain attitudes toward the peace talks among pro-government factions, particularly among some political parties who seek a share of power and a new generation of politicians who don’t want to lose their hard-fought gains.

The most common of these attitudes are the “compromise model” and the “defensive model.” The “compromise model” sees a degree of compromise with the Taliban as a prerequisite to successful peace negotiations, and it is implicitly and explicitly propagated by some international peace experts as well. But it is a shortsighted and problematic approach.

The opponents in negotiations, at best, compromise on superficial bargaining positions

rather than on their core interests. In the Afghan context, it focuses on a division of government positions among certain people or groups of people instead of building a sustainable system for political inclusion of all Afghans.

And it is difficult to understand what one can afford to compromise on. Development? Social and political freedoms? People’s right to food and education? Can one agree to halfway rights for women?

In Kabul, the “defensive model” plays out as a feeling of defensiveness, a compelling urge to guard against a dreadful past when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan. It stems from a sense that the ideals and achievements of the past two decades are under attack by the Taliban, and that fear is based on the regressive and ultra-Orthodox positions the Taliban demonstrated when they were in power in the 1990s.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/28/opinion/Afghanistan-talks.html>



A Few Glimpses of Faiz Sahib's Poetry

*At night thy faded memory played upon my heart's strings,
As spring noiselessly treads the wilderness,
As morning breeze does gently caress the desert sands,
As a sickly face glows with sudden cheerfulness.*

*When the bud of dawn blossom'd into morning light,
Radiance of thy cheeks filled the skies.
When the earth got wrapped up in night ,
Cascade of thy locks splashes o'er it, I surmise.*

*Why grieve over being dispossessed of pen and tablet ,
I have immersed my fingers in the blood of my heart,
What if my tongue has been restrained,
I have put a tongue in every link of chain.*

English translation by Bilal Ahmad Shamim

German Court blocks attempt to enshrine Sharia Law

By Soren Kern



A woman wears a burqa in Berlin. (AP/Miguel Villagran)

Germany's Federal Constitutional Court has ruled that the constitutionally guaranteed religious freedoms of Muslims can be curtailed if public displays of religiosity — in this case wearing Islamic headscarves in German courtrooms — endanger the ideological and religious neutrality of the state.

The court's landmark ruling effectively smashes a backdoor effort to enshrine Sharia law into the German legal system. Islamic head coverings have been a recurring issue in Germany, where the Muslim population has surpassed six million to become approximately 7.2% of the overall population of 83 million, according to calculations by Gatestone Institute.

On February 3, 2020, the Hamburg Higher Administrative Court (Oberverwaltungsgericht) ruled that a 16-year-old German-Egyptian student was allowed to wear a niqab, a garment that covers the face, at a vocational school in Hammerbrook.

Hamburg education officials had ordered the girl not wear the veil at school. In a statement,

the court explained that according to the Hamburg School Act as it is currently written: "Education officials cannot require the student to refrain from covering her face while at school. The student can claim the right to an unconditionally protected freedom of religion. Interferences with this fundamental right require a sufficiently defined legal basis."

Hamburg politicians from across the political spectrum have vowed to change the law to ensure that full-face veils are banned in classrooms. Hamburg's Senator for Education Ties Rabe, who belongs to the center-left Social Democrats, said:

The case involves a 38-year-old German-Moroccan law student who was born in Frankfurt and customarily wears a headscarf in public. In January 2017, she began legal training in the German state of Hesse, where the law bans any expression of religion in its courtrooms for judges, lawyers and legal trainees.

According to the law, legal trainees (Rechtsreferendar) are allowed to wear a headscarf — except when they are performing

certain official tasks in which they serve as representatives of the judiciary or the state. This means, for instance, that trainee lawyers are not allowed to wear a headscarf when presiding over a hearing, taking evidence or representing the public prosecution office.

The complainant filed a lawsuit claiming that the headscarf ban interfered with her right to freedom of religion. She argued that she was being forced to choose between performing the intended tasks or fulfilling a religious clothing requirement that she considers imperative.

The Higher Regional Court (Oberlandesgericht) ruled that, according to the law in Hesse, legal trainees have a duty to conduct themselves neutrally with respect to religion and that, when wearing a headscarf, the complainant was therefore barred from performing any tasks in the course of which she might be perceived as being a representative of the justice system or the state.

The complainant filed an appeal, which was rejected by the Hesse Higher Administrative Court (Verwaltungsgerichtshof). She then filed an appeal with the Federal Constitutional Court, which affirmed the lower court rulings. In a statement published on February 27, 2020, the high court explained:

“The principle of the state’s religious and ideological neutrality can be considered a constitutional interest that may justify an interference with freedom of religion in this case. The state’s duty to be neutral necessarily also entails a duty for public officials to be neutral since the state can only act through individuals. However, when public officials exercise their fundamental rights as private individuals in the performance of their duties, this cannot be attributed to the state in every case. Yet it can potentially be attributed to the state in cases where the state has specific influence on the visible character of an official act — as is the case in the justice system.

“Freedom of religion can be subject to a further

constitutional limitation inherent in the Basic Law (Grundgesetz): the proper functioning of the justice system in general, which is one of the essential elements underpinning the rule of law and is firmly rooted in the values enshrined in the Basic Law, given that every court decision ultimately serves to safeguard fundamental rights.

<http://thejewishvoice.com/2020/03/german-court-blocks-attempt-to-enshrine-sharia-law/>



RAIN DROPS

From the never ending expanse

These tiny tots,

Yes these rain drops,

They fall and reach the earth

Nourishing the fields,

Giving them some worth,

They kiss the grass

And get swallowed by the soil.

They cool the atmosphere

This seemed to boil.

Ah! These rains are so satisfying,

They even hide my tears

When I'm crying.

They help me in every aspect,

They make my poems

Even more perfect.

This is the reason , why in

Most of my poems

These rains reflect.

By FARZANA BILAL

World under lockdown: 1.7 bn people confine to their homes over virus

PARIS/RIYADH/MUMBAI/LONDON: several countries of the world have imposed mandatory lockdown measures, while others have issued stay-at-home recommendations to stem the spread of the virus. The coronavirus is affecting 195 countries and territories around the world. Total cases are 375,035, number of deaths reached 16,359 while 101,554 recovered from virus across the world on Monday.

Some 1.7 billion people have been asked to stay home in over 50 countries and territories around the world as governments battle the coronavirus pandemic sweeping the globe, according to an AFP tally Monday.

Lockdowns in parts of India alone have kept some 700 million people hemmed in, in the world's second most populated nation. At least 34 more countries and territories have also established mandatory lockdown measures ordering people to stay in their homes, accounting for some 659 million people.

France, Italy, Argentina, the US state of California, Iraq and Rwanda have also rolled out enforced lockdowns.

Greece is the most recent country to impose mandatory confinement measures, which came into effect on Monday morning.

Colombia will enforce an obligatory lockdown on Tuesday and New Zealand will follow suit Wednesday.

In most cases it is still possible for people to leave the house to go to work, buy essentials or seek medical care.

At least four countries with a collective population of more than 228 million people, including Iran, Germany and Britain, have urged their populations to stay indoors and limit contact with other people as much as possible. But the impact of these non-mandatory recommendations has been limited.

At least 10 countries and territories with a total population of 117 million people have issued curfews and barred overnight travel.

These measures are in place in Burkina Faso, Chile, the Philippines' capital Manila, Serbia and

Mauritania, while in Saudi Arabia a curfew will be imposed from Monday evening.

Elsewhere, some countries have imposed isolation measures in main cities, with measures barring people from entering or exiting. These measures have been seen in Almaty, Bulgaria, Nur-Sultan in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan's Baku.

Combined, these cities have an estimated 10 million inhabitants.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman has announced a nationwide dusk-to-dawn curfew from Monday in a bid to limit the spread of the new coronavirus, the latest in a series of restrictions.

The curfew -- from 7 pm until 6 am -- will be imposed for 21 days, the official Saudi Press Agency reported, citing a royal order.

The move comes after Saudi Arabia on Sunday said the number of Covid-19 cases had jumped to 511, the highest in the Gulf. The kingdom has reported no deaths so far. Health sector employees as well as security and military officials will be exempt from the curfew restrictions, the royal order said.

Saudi Arabia has also suspended prayers inside all its mosques except the holiest two sites in Islam in Makkah and Medina, a sensitive move in the deeply conservative Muslim kingdom.

Meanwhile, India will ground all domestic passenger flights from Wednesday to combat the spread of the coronavirus, the government said, as more states ordered lockdowns in the world's second most populous nation.

The move to halt domestic flights -- which ferried 144 million passengers across the vast country last year -- apart from cargo services came as other forms of transport were suspended.

The pandemic "is crippling the global economy and aviation, including India's once-booming aviation sector", said Devesh Agarwal, editor of the Bangalore Aviation website. "This is not a short-term pandemic and the outlook for Indian aviation looks tragic," he said.

Indian Railways -- one of the world's biggest networks which carries more than 20 million

passengers daily -- cancelled all services except suburban and goods trains. Other inter-state and metro services were also halted.

Despite the lockdowns -- including in the capital New Delhi where borders were sealed, shops and offices closed and local public transport stopped -- some residents still moved around.

In Delhi during the evening rush hour, a steady stream of vehicles plied some roads. The closures have hit poor, rural migrants who have lost their jobs amid the crisis and are trying to return to villages from cities where they were working.

Meanwhile, In Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) the authorities have ordered shutdown of all establishments except those providing essential services and commodities across Jammu and Kashmir till March 31.

Chief Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam in a letter to all 20 deputy commissioners of Jammu and Kashmir said, "The shutdown will come into effect from 8 pm on Sunday till 6 pm on March 31. He said the shutdown was necessary to prevent the spread of Covid-19 pandemic and break the transmission chain of the virus.

Meanwhile the latest move by the IOK authorities may take a sizeable bite off the indebted apple industry in Kashmir. According to owners of cold storages based at Lasipora and Aglar in South Kashmir 80 percent of the apple stock is still lying with them amid the lockdown imposed in the name of coronavirus.

Many traders in media interviews said they were apprehensive about the stored fruit. The restrictions are being intensified day by day and a large chunk of our fruit is lying in stores Imtiyaz Ahmad who has stored his apples at Lasipora cold storage in Pulwama district said.

Meanwhile, two more doctors have died after contracting the coronavirus in France, officials said on Monday, a day after the country reported the first death of a doctor treating Covid-19 patients.

One of the doctors, a 66-year-old gynaecologist in Mulhouse near the border with Switzerland and Germany, was infected by a patient during a consultation, according to his clinic. The other was a 60-year-old general practitioner at a hospital in Saint-Avold near Metz, further north along the German frontier, according to the town's mayor.

Both died on Sunday when officials announced the death of a 67-year-old doctor who was among the first to treat coronavirus cases in the northern Oise department, which has been badly hit by the outbreak.

Health experts warn that many French hospitals are already overflowing with coronavirus cases even as the government races to set up military field hospitals to help cope with a shortage of beds.

Meanwhile, Britain sent in the army to deliver protective equipment to hospitals on Monday and told people to stay at home and heed warnings over social distancing or the government would bring in more extreme measures to stop the coronavirus spread.

With some doctors saying they felt like "cannon fodder", the government said the military would help ship millions of items of personal protective equipment (PPE) including masks to healthcare workers who have complained of shortages.

So far, 281 Britons have died from coronavirus and, in the last few days, British authorities have rapidly stepped up action to try to limit the spread of the disease and prevent a repeat of the death toll seen in other countries where thousands have died.

However, there have been complaints from frontline medical staff about shortages of kit, saying they did not feel safe at work. In a letter pleading with Prime Minister Boris Johnson to increase PPE supplies, more than 6,000 frontline doctors said they were being asked to put their lives at risk with out-of-date masks, and low stocks of equipment.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock admitted

there had been issues but promised action was being taken. He said the army would drive trucks throughout the day and night to get supplies to medical staff. "It's like a war effort, it is a war against this virus and so the army have been incredibly helpful in getting those logistics so we can get the supplies to protect people on the front line," he told the BBC, saying the health service now had 12,000 ventilators, 7,000 more than at the start of the crisis.

But advice to stay at home and avoid social gatherings went unheeded by millions at the weekend who took advantage of sunny weather to flocked to parks and beauty spots over the weekend, ignoring instructions to stay 2 meters (6 feet) apart.

Emyr Williams, chief executive of the Snowdonia National Park Authority in Wales, said the past 24 hours had been unprecedented. "We have experienced the busiest visitor day in living memory. The area has been overwhelmed with visitors," he said.

The government warned that Britain would face a shutdown with curfews and travel restrictions if people continued to flout the advice.

Iran on Monday announced 127 new deaths from the novel coronavirus, raising the official toll to 1,812 in one of the worst hit countries along with Italy, Spain and China.

Health ministry spokesman Kianouche Jahanpour said 1,411 new cases had been recorded in Iran over the past 24 hours, bringing the total of those infected to 23,049.

Jahanpour, who was speaking during his daily news conference devoted to the pandemic, said he would no longer give a breakdown of cases by province. This was necessary, he said, to avoid sparking undue concern among residents of the most stricken areas and ensure that those in less affected zones remained cautious.

Meanwhile, thirty-one French nationals from the same tour group in Cambodia tested positive for the coronavirus over the weekend

and have been put under quarantine in a hotel.

The tourists, ranging in age from late 40s to 80, were part of a group of 36 that arrived on March 11 in Siem Reap, home to the famed Angkor Wat temple complex. The patients are currently receiving treatment in isolation in the southern coastal city of Sihanoukville.

Two local guides also tested positive for the virus, while the remaining five tourists tested negative, the health ministry said Sunday.

Including the tour group cluster, Cambodia has reported 87 COVID-19 cases, as the pandemic that has killed more than 15,000 sends the world into chaos.

Cambodian authorities have shuttered entertainment venues like karaoke bars, and schools were requested to close, but there has been no official order for people to stay home. Last week Cambodia issued a blanket ban on foreigners entering the country from France, the US, Italy, Spain, Germany and Iran.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/633702-world-under-lockdown-1-7-bn-people-confine-to-their-homes-over-virus>



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Coronavirus: Tokyo Olympics delayed to 2021, easing athletes' angst



The Games, to be convened by summer of 2021, would still be branded 'Tokyo 2020'.

Japan and the Olympics movement decided on Tuesday to delay this year's Tokyo Games into 2021 as the coronavirus crisis obliterated the world's last major imminent sporting event.

It was the first time in the Olympics' 124-year history that they had been postponed, though they were cancelled outright several times during the two 20th century World Wars.

After a call with International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said the July 24-Aug. 9 event would be rescheduled for the summer of 2021 at the latest as proof of victory over the coronavirus.

"We asked President Bach to consider postponement of about one year to make it possible for athletes to play in the best condition, and to make the event a safe and secure one for spectators," Abe said.

"President Bach said he is in agreement 100 percent."

There was no immediate word from the IOC, though its executives were due to meet later on Tuesday.

Athletes were sad but relieved after weeks of worrying and struggling to train as the world headed into virtual lockdown from the disease that has claimed more than 16,500 lives.

"I compete in a little bike race, which is nothing compared to what is going on in the world right now," American Olympic BMX champion Connor Fields said. "No sport is more important if it means more

people might potentially die from this."

Pressure on the IOC and its powerful president Bach had been accelerating fast in recent days, with Canada and Australia refusing to participate if the Games went ahead in the summer.

Athletes wholeheartedly endorsed the delay, given health risks and disruption to their training as gyms, stadia and swimming pools shut down around the world.

"To be honest, I'm left reeling and feeling a little lost. But the goal posts haven't disappeared - just shifted. It's time to recalibrate and fire up for the next challenge," said Australia's two-time Olympic champion swimmer, Cate Campbell.

The coronavirus outbreak has raged around the world since early this year, infecting nearly 380,000 people and wrecking sports events from the soccer Euros to Formula One.

Postponement is a massive logistical headache for hosts Japan, which has pumped in more than \$12 billion of investment.

But a poll showed about 70% of the Japanese agree with a delay.

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike told reporters the delayed Games would still be branded "Tokyo 2020"

<https://www.khaleejtimes.com/coronavirus-outbreak/coronavirus-japan-oic-agree-on-delaying-olympics>



Drive for 250,000-strong 'volunteer army' to boost the NHS

The news came as Mr Hancock held a press conference in Downing Street - although the questions were posed over video link as part of new government guidelines to stop spread.

Mr Hancock said his 'heart goes out' to families of those who had died, after it was announced that the UK's toll had jumped to 422 in the biggest daily rise yet.

The Cabinet minister said of the government's draconian new lockdown: 'They are not requests, they are rules... everyone has a responsibility to follow those rules and where possible stay at home.'

On another day of frantic twists and turns in the coronavirus crisis:

- Builders across the UK have said they feel 'angry and unprotected' as they continued working on busy construction sites
- Britain was placed under new draconian measures which to keep people indoors, including allowing outside exercise only once a day, social gatherings of more than two people banned, and non-essential travel prohibited, with police handed powers to slap offenders with fines;
- Londoners continued to cram into packed Tube carriages during this morning's rush-hour, with union chiefs calling on Sadiq Khan to get a grip of the capital's public transport;
- The Mayor of London came under fire for blaming commuters for flouting advice over non-essential travel;
- Former health secretary Jeremy Hunt demanded more NHS workers were tested for coronavirus, which has killed 335 and infected 6650 in the UK;
- Supermarket websites crashed and delivery slots were booked solid for weeks as lockdown begun;
- Sports Direct insisted it was providing an essential service and tried to open its stores, but was forced to U-turn under pressure from the government;
- The FTSE 100 opened up 4 per cent as investors seemingly took confidence in the PM's measures.

Unveiling the 'NHS Volunteers' drive, Mr Hancock said: 'We are seeking a quarter of a million volunteers, people in good health to help the NHS, for shopping, for the delivery of medicines and to support those who are shielding to protect their own health.'

He said 11,788 recently retired NHS staff had responded to the appeal from the government to return to the service.

They included 2,660 doctors, more than 2,500



Matt Hancock holding press conference

pharmacists and other staff and 6,147 nurses. 'I pay tribute to each and every one of those who is returning to the NHS at its hour of need,' Mr Hancock said.

Some 5,500 final-year medics and 18,700 final-year student nurses would 'move to the frontline' next week.

Eighty-three more patients died overnight in England, including 21 at the one NHS trust in London. Scotland also announced two fatalities, while Wales had one more death.

As of 1pm yesterday there had been 335 coronavirus deaths. Northern Ireland's update that one more patient had died last night was not included in yesterday's official toll.

Britain also saw a record spike in cases, with more than 8,000 patients now known to have the infection. But the true toll is likely to be closer to the 400,000 mark, scientists say.

It comes as police officers were today forced to break up barbecues being held in different parts of the UK as Brits flouted new draconian powers to disperse crowds of more than two to halt the spread of coronavirus.

Mr Hancock said the new makeshift hospital at the ExCel centre would be called the NHS Nightingale Hospital and would be open by next week.

He said it would have two wards and have a capacity for 4,000 people. It is understood it will be up and running by Saturday 4th April. He said: 'We will next week open a new hospital, a temporary hospital.'

With the help of the military and with NHS clinicians we will make sure we have the capacity we need so that everyone can get the support they need.

'But no matter how big we grow the NHS unless we slow the spread of this virus then as we have seen those numbers will continue to rise and that is why it is so important everyone follows the advice and stays at home.'

Mr Hancock also delivered a stinging rebuke to the London Mayor saying the underground system

should be running 'in full' so essential workers do not have to be close together.

The jibe came after another day of chaotic scenes in the capital where 'health hazard' carriages were rammed despite the unprecedented shutdown of British society.

But Mr Khan has blamed commuters for flouting a ban on 'all non-essential travel' and urged people to avoid rush hour 'to save lives' - claiming he does not have enough staff to return services to normal.

Mr Hancock went on the attack as he was asked at a Downing Street press conference this evening why NHS staff and other key workers were being forced to put themselves at risk on crowded transport.

He said: 'When it comes to the Tube, the first and the best answer is that Transport for London should have

the Tube running in full so that people travelling on the tube are spaced out and can be further apart - obeying the two-metre rule wherever possible.

'And there is no good reason in the information that I've seen that the current levels of tube provision should be as low as they are. We should have more tube trains running.'

In Scotland, Chief Constable Iain Livingstone yesterday refused to rule out forcing people to carry 'papers' as proof that they are moving around for legitimate reasons, such as being a 'key worker'.

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8148017/Drive-250-000-strong-volunteer-army-boost-NHS.html?ito=email-19819711&utm_source=overlay_newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cc_newsflash&utm_content=all



UK: First trailer for elephant film narrated

by Meghan Markle is released

- The Duchess of Sussex, 38, will be voicing a Disney documentary on elephants
- Meghan Markle's collaboration will benefit Elephants Without Borders charity
- Comes after Prince Harry was seen touting wife's voiceover skills to Disney boss

The Duchess of Sussex's first gig after quitting the royal family has been revealed - with Meghan voicing a Disney documentary on elephants.

Her fee for the project is going entirely to the Elephants Without Borders charity - an organization dedicated to conserving wildlife and helps protect the animals from poaching.

Meghan agreed to do the voiceover after a direct request from filmmakers, and it is understood that she recorded it in London this autumn after seeing footage of the documentary.

A trailer for Elephant failed to give fans a glimpse of Meghan's narration - but it did reveal that the story follows a 'family's extraordinary 1,000 mile journey across Africa on an adventure that will change their lives'.

It comes after the Duke of Sussex, 35, was filmed touting his wife's voiceover skills to Disney boss Bob Iger at the UK premier of Lion King in July.

The royal couple are currently in Canada with their 10-month-old son Archie and are self-isolating in their Vancouver Island waterfront mansion.

The Disneynature documentary will start streaming on April 3 on Disney+, three days after she and Harry quit as senior royals, the company revealed today.

It sees African elephant Shani and her spirited son Jomo as they are led by their great matriarch, Gaia, across the Kalahari Desert.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-8156613/Meghan-Markles-post-royal-exit-job-revealed-voices-Disney-documentary-elephants.html>

