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A deeper lesson behind celebrating

Women's History Month

Every year, the month of March marks the celebration of Women's History Month. Many institutions join in commemorating and encouraging the study, observance and celebration of the vital role of women in history. Economic, political and social achievements of women are celebrated globally throughout this month. Many countries around the world celebrate the holiday with demonstrations, educational initiatives and customs such as presenting women with gifts and flowers. So as the world celebrated the achievements of women over the past month, let's assess whether in recent times, are women really receiving the rights owed to them? Women's History Month has been sponsored by the United Nations since 1975. The UN General Assembly described that the reason behind observing this month was "To recognize the fact that securing peace and social progress and the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms require the active participation, equality and development of women; and to acknowledge the contribution of women to the strengthening of international peace and security." Undoubtedly, women are progressively demonstrating their abilities to contribute to society and are now more than ever an instrumental force in shaping the fundamentals of society. The past year, however, has had damaging effects on the success of women not only in the workplace, but also in their homes. The Head of UN Women called the Covid-19 pandemic "the most discriminatory crisis" that women and girls have ever experienced, pointing to women losing jobs far more often than men, a "shadow pandemic" of domestic violence, and 47 million more women being pushed into living on less than \$1.90 a day this year. The executive director of the UN Women's Agency, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, observed that the world also faces more orphans and child-headed homes emerging from the pandemic, along with an increase in child marriage. Research shows that 59 percent of women are having to spend more time on domestic work since the inception of Covid-19, widening the digital gender gap leaving many women unprepared for the future. (Time Magazine) According to the World Health Organization's latest reports, the highest rates of intimate partner violence in the past 12 months — 16% — was against young women aged 15 to 24. Secretary-General said "looking across the world, we see that women voices remain missing from the highest levels of leadership." Female heads of state only exist in 22 countries, with Europe topping the list. The slow recovery of certain countries is a plight that stems from pretentious male politicians, whereas the leaders who have dealt most effectively with the poised threats of coronavirus have been their female counterparts, leading the road to recovery for their nations. This only emphasises the urgent need to support women especially in vocations that play an integral role in shaping the fundamentals of society, by granting them equal rights and protection, in order to achieve the peace and social progress that the world is craving for, which was the original reason behind the observance of Women's History Month.

Challenging Roadmap to Peace

By: Maleeha Lodhi



THE Biden administration has launched its first diplomatic initiative to accelerate the Afghan peace process even as it continues its review of Afghan policy. This is reflected in a leaked letter from Secretary of State Antony Blinken to President Ashraf Ghani that sets out its proposed plan. It is also evident from the discussion draft of a peace agreement shared by the US with Afghan parties and the regional diplomacy now underway by special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad. These moves signal three things — a renewal of US commitment to withdraw from Afghanistan, its desire to do so after securing a peace settlement among the warring Afghan parties and the willingness to use pressure to quickly achieve this. This raises several questions. Is the Biden administration overreaching with an ambitious plan that it wants to accomplish in a limited timeframe? In deciding to mount pressure on the parties does the US have the leverage to get them to agree? Is the proposed ‘new, inclusive’ interim government an achievable goal as bitter foes will have to share power? With Washington having drafted a peace agreement, albeit for discussion, will Afghan parties take ownership of this?

The Biden team is vigorously engaging Kabul, the Taliban and other Afghan leaders in discussions over the peace plan and the May 1 deadline for US withdrawal with the proviso that final decisions will emerge once the review concludes. President Joe Biden has said that meeting the May 1 deadline will be tough but it won’t be extended by “a lot longer”. Meanwhile, the Taliban have warned against any delay in this deadline and of an unspecified “reaction” if this happens. The US diplomatic initiative — according to the leaked letter — has four elements. One, a meeting to be convened by the UN of representatives of Russia, the US, Pakistan, Iran and India to forge regional consensus to support the peace plan. Two, a draft peace agreement to expedite negotiations on a settlement and ceasefire. A key

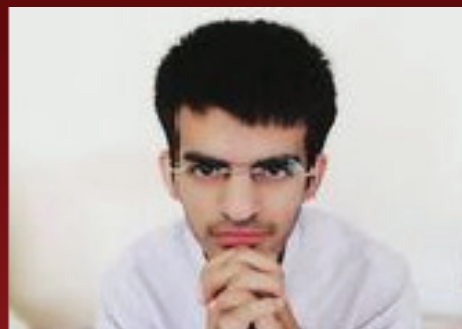
proposal is to set up a transitional government once agreement is reached. Three, Turkey to host a meeting between the two sides to seal a peace deal. And four, a 90-day reduction in violence to avert a spring offensive by the Taliban. This plan is punctuated by the US warning that it is considering full withdrawal of forces by May 1 but not ruling out other options. By clearly communicating that a political settlement is a priority — not just the military withdrawal, as it was for president Trump — a prudent path seems to have been outlined especially as diplomatic parleys underway will shape the conclusions of the US review. Regional consensus to back a peace deal is clearly necessary. This is also a way for Washington to ensure that Iran is included in the diplomatic process. No timeframe has been set for this. But the UN will have to deftly play the role expected of it. Moscow, while welcoming the transitional government idea, has not said anything on the US plan and is embarked on its own regional diplomacy including a peace conference hosted last week on Afghanistan. The Pakistan-India dynamic also has to be kept in view; Islamabad has already conveyed its misgivings over India’s inclusion in the proposed conference to US officials. With two new processes now envisaged in addition to that in Doha it would be important not to allow the intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha to be diluted or complicated by the proposed new ones. They should facilitate the Doha process and not replace it. The principal diplomatic effort should remain in the Doha talks. Washington is clearly in a hurry. Trying to force the pace of the peace process reflects US frustration with the stalled intra-Afghan talks. It also shows impatience with President Ghani’s obstructive tactics, evident from the tough tone of Blinken’s letter. The tight timeframe in which the US wants a settlement done and dusted aims to compel the two sides to negotiate seriously. Even so the expectation for negotiations to yield an expedi-

tious outcome runs up against an ineluctable reality that the tough compromises needed for an agreement are unlikely to emerge quickly just because Washington has set a deadline. The US can intensify pressure on both sides but that doesn't mean it has enough leverage over them to reach a speedy settlement. A senior Afghan official recently told PBS that the US has adopted a "fast food" approach, forcing everybody to consume something that is "too quick to succeed". There is also the question of whether in order to expedite the process Washington has overprescribed the elements of an agreement — drafting one itself rather than letting it emerge from negotiations. This lays it open to being viewed as an 'imposed' solution. While the US says it is not seeking to dictate terms and its peace agreement is a discussion draft it is yet to be determined whether Afghan parties see it the same way. The idea of a transitional government, vehemently opposed by Ghani, makes sense before a more permanent government can be installed following adoption of a new constitution and elections. But can the two sides and other Afghan leaders show the accommodation needed for a workable power-sharing arrangement? In an initial response a Taliban spokesman asserted that interim governments have proven ineffective in the past but the Taliban have yet to take a firm position. Pakistan's interest lies in the success of intra-Afghan talks that can produce a negotiated end to the war and a lasting settlement before the full withdrawal of US forces. That is what Islamabad means by its repeated calls for a "responsible withdrawal". It does not want its neighbour to descend into political chaos or a civil war, and sees an inclusive post-settlement government in Kabul as the best way to ensure peace and stability. It seeks assurances that Afghan territory will not be used against Pakistan. US officials have also been told that Islamabad stands ready to do what it can to help the peace process. It is however up to the Afghan parties to seize the moment as the US plan starts to unfold and faces critical tests in the months ahead.

The writer is a former ambassador to the US, UK & UN.

Published in Dawn, March 22nd, 2021

Pakistani student given Young Student Award by US organization



A student of Comsats University Umair Masood has received the 'Young Scientist Award 2021' from the American Lab-Root organisation at a conference in which students from 121 countries from around the world participated. Umair Masood, 21, the student of Abbottabad campus of Comsats University Islamabad, achieved this milestone for his outstanding contribution to the field of Molecular Diagnostics Techniques at the 7th annual conference held in Australia earlier this month. He had presented two dissertations at the conference. "Thanks to Allah the Almighty and my parents that I could secure this high prestigious award for my contribution to the biotechnology field," he said. The young scientist said the annual conference of biotechnology of SB12 under the Lab-Root organisation was about genetics and molecules. Masood, who belongs to Havalian in Abbottabad district, said that the young scientists from as many as 121 countries participated in the conference and he stood first with a total of 336 voters. He said that young scientists from Israel and Germany could secure 264 and 164 voters respectively and became second and third, respectively.

<https://www.24newshd.tv/07-Mar-2021/pakistani-student-gets-young-scientist-award-from-us-organisation>

Pakistan's Acquisition of an Advanced Missile Technology

By: Syed Qamar Afzal Rizvi



India's acquisition of missile technology (transferred to it by the Western countries) and other high-profile defence equipment is well beyond her legitimate defence requirements. It poses a valid and active threat to Pakistan's security. To counterpoise India's cold start doctrine and to prevent the Indian nuclear threat/foreign aggression, Islamabad has adopted an astute security trajectory via revitalizing its missile technology, which, under a professional command of the SPD is being systematically developed and upgraded in two forms of our missile technology advancement: one is the short-range missile program while the other is the long-range missile program. In the modern defence concept, the missile system is the most essential element. In fact, it is now the core of any viable defence structure and the cutting edge of an adequate defence capability of any nation. It cannot therefore be ignored by the defence planners. Missile-based threats are becoming an ever-increasing element of the strategic landscape in South Asia. Pakistan has diversified but integrated missile command and authority system. It has vast spectrum of both ballistic and cruise missiles for nuclear weapon delivery. The significance of Pakistan's missile technology, resulting in the test-firing of its cruise and ballistic missile system—now seems to be a sheet-anchor of our national defence system. Pakistan is likely to remain focused on developing and improving short-range ballistic missiles and cruise missiles to deter India's conventional military superiority despite the second successful test of India's long-range, nuclear-capable Agni-5 missile, experts said in recent interviews. Pakistan recently declared that it had successfully test-fired a medium-range ballistic missile into the Arabian Sea, aimed at "revalidating" the weapon's

operational and technical parameters.

On Feb 11, Pakistan conducted a successful training launch of a surface-to-surface cruise missile which can strike targets up to 450 kilometres, the Army said, the country's third missile test in three weeks. The Babar missile 'is capable of engaging targets at land and sea with high precision,' the Army said in a statement, adding that the missile was launched from a state-of-the-art multi-tube launch vehicle. On February 3, Pakistan Army successfully test-fired a nuclear-capable surface-to-surface ballistic missile which can strike targets up to 290 kilometres. The launch of Ghaznavi missile was 'culmination of Annual Field Training Exercise of Army Strategic Forces Command. The Shaheen III surface-to-surface missile, which the country first fired in 2015, can carry nuclear and conventional warheads up to 2,750 kilometers. The range, analysts said, enables the solid-fueled, multistage rocket to reach targets anywhere neighboring India, Pakistan's archrival, and in parts of the Middle East. The range, analysts said, enables the solid-fueled, multistage rocket to reach targets anywhere in neighboring India, Pakistan's archrival, and in parts of the Middle East. Seen in its historical perspective, it goes without saying that the testing of Hatf V (Ghauri) missile is the result of the dedication, hard work and single-minded devotion to a cause displayed by our scientists and engineers working on the research and development of missile technology. Initially Hatf I was developed with a range of 80 kilometers and a payload of 500 kgs. Efforts continued to improve its performance, resulting in Hatf II with an enhanced range of 250 kms and the same payload of 500 kgs. Both were free flight missiles with inertial guidance systems following a ballistic trajectory. Hatf II was produced

پاکستان کا ایسا نیوکلیر میزائل ہے جو امریکہ کے پاس بھی نہیں



پاکستان کے میزائل جن کے نام سے ہی دشمن تھر تھر کانپے

in 1989 and displayed in the Pakistan Day parade on March 23, 1990 and 1991.

Despite the fact that both India and Pakistan are nuclear powers, which should have introduced a degree of deterrent certainty, the ground reality has not changed much. The malicious introduction of the Cold Start Doctrine, i.e. a limited war under a nuclear overhang, by the Indian Army, has had the effect of negatively escalating the fragile balance between the two nuclear-armed states. Ironically, this strategy has gained a fair degree of currency in academic circles, bordering on the possibility of strategy's applicability. In April 2011, Pakistan declared that it had tested a short-range battlefield nuclear missile, the Nasr.¹ Since then, prominent purveyors of Pakistani nuclear doctrine, including Lieutenant General (Retd) Khalid Kidwai have portrayed the Nasr missile as a counter to India's "Cold Start" war doctrine. Today, Pakistan has vast spectrum of both ballistic and cruise missiles for nuclear weapon delivery. Its nuclear-capable ballistic missiles include the Hatf-1 (range 100 km); the Hatf-2 (the Abdali, range 200 km); the Ghaznavi (Hatf-3, range 290 km); the Shaheen-I (Hatf-4, range 750 km); the Ghauri (Hatf-5, range 1,500 km); the Shaheen-II (Hatf-6, range 2,000 km); the Shaheen-III (an upgraded Hatf-4, range 2,750 km); and the Nasr (Hatf-9, range 60 km), a short-range missile with the stated capability to "add deterrence value at shorter ranges.

The testing of Hatf III in July last year was a major breakthrough in missile development in

Pakistan. It has a range of 600 kms with a payload of 500 kgs and a proper terminal guidance system giving it an accuracy of 0.1 per cent, as the circular error probability (CEP) at 600 kms, similar to the Indian Prithvi surface to surface ballistic missile at 250 kms. This meant that Hatf III was to be controlled by an on-board computer for accuracy and was not to follow a purely ballistic trajectory.

The main features of Hatf III missile are its two-stage rocket ability for war-head separation, a terminal guidance system and five different types of warheads. The most difficult part of the missile was the guidance system which was developed entirely by Pakistani engineers and scientists. By successfully test-firing Hatf V (Ghauri) missile overland within Pakistan territory, our engineers and scientists have amply demonstrated their own technical skills and accuracy of the missile. India on the other hand tests her missiles from the missile range at Chandipur-on-Sea on the Orissa coast, and these are fired into the Bay of Bengal. Veritably, in the given South Asian strategic landscape, both India and Pakistan induct missiles into military units and push the performance envelope of missile capabilities, it is important to assess ways to limit the threats posed by these missiles. Regional stability with respect to missiles has both political and technical components. From a deterrence standpoint, striving to maintain some parity in capabilities could be a politically stabilizing factor in reducing the likelihood of conflict. The Introduction of missiles might serve to correct imbalances in nuclear or conventional capabilities. In order to achieve its strategic balance, Pakistan's missile program under the supervision, of the Strategic Plans Division (SPD) is rapidly evolving, achieving greater accuracy, payload capacity, and range.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/735557/pakistans-acquisition-of-an-advanced-missile-technology/>

Pakistan could not fool FATF with its half measures and last ditch efforts to come out of Grey List

Despite all its diplomacy and last minute face saving exercises, Pakistan could not come out of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) 'Grey List'. The financial watchdog, after the end of its 4 day plenary decided to keep Pakistan in its 'Grey List' implying that financial transactions of Pakistan will be closely monitored. The FATF has given Pakistan time till June to fully implement all the 27 recommendations till FATF's June meeting in which Pakistan's fate will be decided. The FATF said Pakistan

Sayed last year to 35 years imprisonment. But that was also an eyewash to hoodwink FATF because its parent body Jamat ud Dawah has always enjoyed patronage of the Punjab government. In 2013, Shahbaz Sharif led Punjab government allocated JuD Rs 61 million. It also issued a tender for construction and repair work in JuD complex in Muridke. New Age Islam had published a detailed report on it in 2013. Another designated terrorist Masood Azhar of Jaish-e-Mohammad



had completely implemented 24 recommendations and had partly implemented 3. FATF has put Pakistan in 'Grey List' since 2018 for its inability and lack of will to prevent money laundering and terror funding. The FATF had asked Pakistan to take action against designated terror organizations and terrorists of Pakistan but Pakistan failed to comply. It was only in January 2021, that it took some half measures against terrorists and terrorist organizations keeping in view the plenary of FATF to be held from February 22, 2021. Pakistan arrested Zakiur Rahman Lakhvi in January. A Pakistani court had sentenced Lashkar-e-Taiba leader and designated terrorist Hafiz

named by FATF was not arrested though Pakistan had acknowledged his presence in Pakistan. A Pakistan court issued an arrest warrant against Masood Azhar in January but the police did not arrest him. FATF could see through Pakistan's unwillingness to arrest him. Another factors that went against Pakistan was the recent acquittal of Omar Shaikh, the prime accused in American journalist Daniel Pearl's murder and Pakistan's diplomatic tussle with France, a powerful member of FATF in the aftermath of Emmanuel Macron's 'Islam in crisis' remark last year. Pakistan had denounced his remark in its National Assembly and passed a resolution to recall its ambas-

sador from France. It had also called France's ambassador in Pakistan and registered its unhappiness over the remark with him. The fact is that Pakistan has used terrorism as a state policy and therefore, it has sponsored terrorism against India and Afghanistan. The statistics given by Pakistan itself speak of the enormity and severity of the problem of terrorism in Pakistan. The statistics released by Pakistan army says that 1,850 incidents of terrorism occurred in Pakistan from 2017 to 2021. The Army said that it conducted 375,000 operations during the last four years to reduce urban terrorism under its special operation 'Raddul Fasad'. Despite all its big talk, the Pak Army could not arrest Masood Azhar. It arrested Lakhvi only in January. Pakistan officially banned Lashkar-e-Taiba in 2002 but in practice, Lashkar-e-Taiba leader Hafiz Sayeed moved freely in Pakistan, even participating in a seminar in the office of a widely circulated Urdu daily of Pakistan after the ban. During the plenary of FATF in Paris, human rights activists, journalists, Pashtun and Uyghur activists protested outside the FATF office in Paris demanding that Pakistan be put in the Black list for promoting terrorism. Adil Qasim, the exiled Uyghur dissident, Fazal Rahman, Pashtun Rights activist and other activists said that Pakistan and China have economic friendship and use terrorism to kill Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other ethnic minorities in their respective countries. They said that even if Pakistan promulgates laws to curb terrorism, it will not implement them. They also observed that the judiciary in Pakistan was working on the dictates of Pakistan Army which sponsors terrorism. Pakistan will have to take action against terrorists and terrorist organizations active on its soil and wipe out terrorism completely and it is possible only when it gives up using terrorism as a tool of strategic depth.

<https://www.newageislam.com/islam-and-politics/new-age-islam-special-correspondent/pakistan-could-not-fool-fatf-with-its-half-measures-and-last-ditch-efforts-to-come-out-of-grey-list/d/124412>

Medical waste is washing up on Seaview beach and Shaniera Akram has proof



If you've been to Clifton beach in Karachi, you know it's not the cleanest place around. People litter, waste washes up on the shore and there's even a discharge of untreated sewage into the sea from a drain near a restaurant. Shaniera Akram has taken to social media to declare the beach in a state of emergency. "There is kilometers of medical waste, including open syringes, vials of blood, broken glass medical containers, that has come in from the ocean spread out over kilometers across the beach. Our beach is a bio-hazard zone and needs to be shut down immediately. I am so sorry to the people including myself who use and love our beach but this is beyond safe."

She called for the media to take notice: Akram also warned people to let professionals take care of the mess as cleaning it up ourselves could be dangerous:

She suggested the beach be shut down until it's safe for the public: She had also previously shared a picture of all the plastic waste on the beach: Good on her for pointing this out and also shutting down this troll in the process:

<https://images.dawn.com/news/1183611/medical-waste-is-washing-up-on-seaview-beach-and-shaniera-akram-has-proof>

Blood Money and Tribal Disputes behind Child Marriages in Pakistan

By: S. Khan

Activists in Pakistan have called on Islamabad to raise the minimum age of marriage to 18. The age requirement for marriage is currently 16 in all parts of the country except in the southern province of Sindh, where it is 18. Pakistan ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990, pledging commitment to protect the rights of children, as well as the elimination of child marriage. But underage marriage is still a problem in several parts of Pakistan. Citing data from the Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey (PDHS) 2017-18, Qamar Naseem, a rights activist from the city of Peshawar, says 3.3% of girls are married off under the age of 15 while 18.3% of girls married off are under the age of 18. Across the country, about 4.7% of boys are married off under the age of 18, he added. Naseem said child marriage is notably higher in Pakistan's newly merged tribal areas, where around 35% of all child marriages in the country take place. Women's rights activist Mukhtaran Mai says most girls in rural parts of the Punjab province are married off at a young age due to local customs and traditions. "Exchange marriage - or Watta Satta - is quite common. Young girls are also married off to settle blood money, tribal disputes and property feuds. They are given away like animals," Mai said. Politician's Marriage To 14-Year-Old Triggers Uproar. The recent marriage between a lawmaker and an underage girl in Pakistan sparked outrage across the country and prompted rights activists to urge the government to take stronger action against child marriage. Maulana Salahuddin Ayubi, a 64-year-old lawmaker of Jamiat-Ulema-Islam Fazl (JUI-F), married a 14-year-old girl, according to various local media reports in late February. The reports shocked the country and went viral on various social media platforms. In response, Federal Minister for Science and Technology Fawad Chaudhry called the report-



ed marriage "absurd" and "very disturbing news." He demanded that the JUI-F come out with an explanation, and called for the lawmaker's resignation. Various civil society activists from around the country slammed the marriage not only as a deprivation of a child's fundamental rights, but also as a serious health risk. Poverty As A Driving Factor Qaisar Khan, a political activist from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, believes poverty is the biggest driver of child marriage in Pakistan. The activist slammed so-called unions as the outright selling of young impoverished girls. "In newly merged tribal districts and Malakund district, people take 500,000 rupees (€2,660, \$3,180) to 2,000,000 rupees from men wanting to marry their underage girls. Most of these men are wealthy and already married," Khan explained. Religious leaders, tribal lords and state administration are all involved in the process, he added. "If they have to do it for religious purposes, then why can they not have an older woman as their bride?" Islamabad-based child rights activist Habiba Salman says marrying off minors is common in the town of Chitral. Here, young girls can be sold off for 2.5 million Pakistani rupees, she told DW. Another activist from the city of Quetta, who wished to remain anonymous, told DW that in the province of Balochistan, wealthy men are known to purchase underage Afghan girls or local girls from the Pashtun ethnic group "in the name of marriage."

According to the activist, men in Qila Abdullah, Pishin, Zhob and Quetta typically pay between one million to four million Pakistani rupees for young brides. Salman blames the Pakistani government for not taking effective action against child marriage. She says the police, child protection bureaus and other relevant departments fail to respond to reports of underage marriages and take concrete action. Role of religious leaders and the patriarchy Lahore-based women's rights activist Shazia Khan says Pakistan's clergy play the biggest role in underage marriages, citing past opposition to legislation seeking to prohibit underage marriages from religious party members. When such a law was enacted in the state of Sindh some years ago, it was fiercely resisted by religious clerics. A federal bill seeking to punish those responsible for underage marriages was also censured by clerics in 2014.

"They have always opposed bills seeking to ban underage marriages. The entire scientific community confirms that it is detrimental to women's health but they misinterpret Islam, justifying the marriages of underage girls on religious grounds," said Shazia Khan.

Nasreen Jalil, a Pakistani politician and former chairperson of the Senate committee on human rights, says that the country's feudal customs and patriarchy are to blame for child marriages. "I believe the marriage age should be 18 across the country and those who violate this should be dealt with," she said. Underage Brides At Risk Of Health Destruction-Tipu Sultan, a Pakistan-based doctor, warned about health complications that could arise during early marriages and pregnancies. He says anemia, hormonal disorders and vaginal fistula are just some of the problems young brides are at risk of facing. "It also causes malnutrition because when underage girls get pregnant, their babies need nutrition which they receive from mothers' bodies. But since mothers themselves go through a phase of growth, how can they provide nutrition to their babies and keep themselves healthy at the same time?" he said.

<https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-how-poverty-and-exploitation-drive-child-marriages/a-56841723>

Egypt expects increase in COVID-19 cases during Ramadan

CAIRO: Egypt says it expects to witness an increase in its daily number of coronavirus infections during Ramadan, which is set to begin next month, national daily the Egypt Independent reported. The country's presidential health advisor said the numbers are expected to increase due to large family gatherings for the evening Iftar meals, when Muslims break their daily fast at sunset. "We are going through a phase of



fluctuations in the number of coronavirus infections, and familial infections have become more common recently," said Mohamed Awad Tageldin, during a televised interview. "We are dealing with a new pandemic, about which we do not know much information, and adherence to precautionary measures is the only way to prevent the spread of the virus," he stressed. Last year, Egypt kept a night-time curfew during Ramadan to combat the coronavirus spread. The curfew allowed families to gather at home for the meal and began shortly afterwards. Communal activities and mass prayers have been banned.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1825786/middle-east>

Pakistan: Jab of a Vaccine to Activate My Patriotism

By: F.S. Aijazuddin



I NEVER thought I would need the jab of a vaccine to activate my patriotism. Since news of the availability of anti-Covid-19 vaccines has been regurgitated by the press, I have suffered anxiety about whether or not I should allow myself to be vaccinated. Which one, though? AstraZeneca? The Pfizer-BioNTech? Moderna? Or the single dose Johnson & Johnson? Why not the Russian Sputnik V, even though it might be a cousin to the secret weapon developed by Vladimir Putin to disable defectors? What pushed me over the edge was not my vulnerability. Everyone in contact with Pakistan accepts that while life is in the hands of God, death can come from the unwashed infected hands of fellow man. What precipitated me into action was the advice by a young Brit-Pak doctor who has spent the last year treating Covid-19 patients at a London hospital, where incidentally Boris Johnson was also a patient. According to that medic: "The vaccine will not prevent you from catching the virus; it will however reduce the chances of it degenerating into something lethal." Government announcements have urged elderly Pakistanis over the age of 65 to register on an official number 1166. I did, and then waited

for the call. It took some weeks and an unsubtle prompt for 1166 to respond. It informed me that I should present myself with my CNIC at the Expo Centre in Lahore's Johar Town. I did, last Sunday. It is the same cavernous complex that has been the venue for commercial exhibitions, annual book fairs, and most recently (after an almost overnight conversion) into an emergency hospital for Covid-19 patients. Those in my family over the age of 65 accompanied me on the off-chance that, even though none of us had an appointment, we might secure a jab. I steeled myself for the institutionalised in hospitality one endures at government managed dis-organisations. That sunny spring afternoon was different. Lahore's geriatric and ageing residents debouched onto the tarmac of the Expo's parking lot. An ants-line of wheelchairs ferried the incapacitated to the receiving area. The crowd massed there defied every injunction about safe social distancing. But then, the promised protection lay on the other side of the massive steel doors. We filled out a form each, and were ushered into an inner waiting area. There, after no more than three minutes on chairs spaced for safety, we were invited row by row into the vaccination hall.



The remnants of its previous modification as a Covid-19 emergency centre were still visible — rows of hospital beds, two per cubicle, each fitted with electrical outlets for equipment. A relay of nurses examined patients, noting their temperature, pulse, and blood pressure. At the next station, a

few yards away, doctors sat, each dipping into a cooler containing cartons of the dose. A lady doctor gave me a jab, noted the time '2:57' and passed me to an orderly who invited me to spend the next 15 minutes on a chair or bed (my choice) just in case I might suffer an allergic reaction. After the observation time was over, a doctor obligingly initialled my form and I was ushered out, with a reminder that I should have my next vaccination after 21 days. It had taken all of 30 painless minutes, including the post-jab wait. No industrial assembly line could have operated with smoother efficiency. I felt the dead virus vaccine and an invigorated patriotism course through my being. To whom should one give credit for this conveyor belt of social thoughtfulness? The federal government, the Punjab government, the nurses, the doctors, the welcoming staff, the attentive orderlies, the police who shepherded the aged with soft-pawed courtesy? My compliments to all of them and to everyone else responsible for this seamless exercise. Such humanity does not need a political mannequin upon which to hang a medal. Expo Centre may not be a place of worship, but emerging from it — punctured but otherwise unscathed — verses from the Holy Bible came to my mind. In the Book of Isaiah, Hezekiah pleads: "My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. / I am being threatened; Lord, come to my aid!" God hears Hezekiah and grants him an extension of life — 15 more years. In gratitude, Hezekiah vows: "I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul." A momentous occasion deserves a memento. I took away a small empty carton of the vaccine. It was the SARs-Cv2 (Inactivated), manufactured on Dec 29, 2020 and distributed by the Beijing Institute of Biological Products Co. Ltd. All the other information about the vaccine was in Chinese. Could someone translate it for me — preferably someone not from Wuhan?

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1613169/new-lease-of-life>

Samia Suluhu Tanzania's First Female Head of State

Tanzania's Vice President Samia Suluhu Hassan was sworn in as president on Friday, becoming the first female head of state in the east African country following the death of President John Magufuli. Hassan, 61, was sworn in at State House in the country's commercial capital Dar es Salaam. She assumes the presidency following Wednesday's announcement of the death of Magufuli, after a more than a two-week absence from public life that drew speculation about his health. In a statement, the presidency said Hassan would address the nation after being sworn in and would also hold a cabinet meeting. The absence of Magufuli, Africa's most vehement COVID-19 skeptic, since Feb. 27 had fuelled speculation about his health and sparked rumors he had contracted the disease,



although officials had denied he was ill. Hassan said he had died of heart disease. Described as a soft-spoken consensus-builder, Hassan will also be the country's first president born in Zanzibar, the archipelago that forms part of the union of the Republic of Tanzania. Her leadership style is seen as a potential contrast from Magufuli, a brash populist who earned the nickname 'Bulldozer' for muscling through policies and who drew criticism for his intolerance of dissent, which his government denied.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2021/03/19/Tanzania-swears-in-Samia-Suluhu-as-president-country-s-first-head-of-state>

Happy Families Come in All Shapes and Forms

By: Asma Abdul Malik



A few days ago, I came across a local campaign that encourages families to read more to their children. The campaign, developed and advertised through a local entity, depicted a mother, a father and their two beautiful children cuddling on their couch while holding a colorful book. I felt an instant gush of sadness. I stared at the image and thought, “this does not speak to me and this does not represent me.” As a single mother of a three-year-old boy, the image spoke of a reality that we can no longer relate to. To us, story time is when my son and I cuddle in bed and read his favorite dinosaur book for the 100th time. That is our normal. National and local campaigns continue to depict scenes that are real for only a fraction of people. They insist that family units still all comprise the mommy, the daddy and their two beautiful children. Reality, however, is far from that. Divorce rates in the UAE, and the Gulf region as a whole, have been on the rise for years. The UAE’s divorce rate is actually one of the highest in the region. According to the government, one in four marriages in the past decade has ended in divorce, with one in three marriages ending within the first year. This is a worldwide trend and it does not seem to be receding. In other words, high divorce rates are here to stay. In acknowledging that, our efforts and attention can move slightly from trying to push back on the growing wave to accepting it as part of our social evolution. Marriage has long formed the bedrock of traditional Arab and Muslim society. And while I do understand that there is an underlying message in that we want to promote and encourage a more wholesome and traditional family unit — and encourage families to foster stronger relationships with each other and their children — the truth of the matter is that there is a new normal we all have to accept: That of the nontraditional family unit. Family life is changing; two-parent house-

holds are on the decline as divorce is on the rise, and families are getting smaller. Because of these changes, there is no longer one dominant family form and parents are raising their children against a backdrop of increasingly diverse and evolving family units. Families now come in all shapes, sizes and forms. The number of one-parent families has increased over the last decade — and most of them are now headed by women.

Despite that, the traditional model of family structure is the single most over-represented and over-catered-for group when it comes to advertising, marketing and services. Campaigns and brands are excluding a massive demographic in not portraying the lone-parent unit. To disregard and alienate almost 30 percent of society is to pretend they do not exist. And, in doing so, you end up with generations of groups that continue to feel unaccepted and isolated. Over the years, most effort has been channeled toward increasing marriage rates and reducing divorce rates, including the promotion of mass weddings, workshops to reduce wedding costs, and campaigns to help couples stay together. While that is still important, policies, programs, brands and campaigns must also take into account the multiple facets of families. They should create campaigns specifically catered to parents raising children in separate homes or workshops that educate parents on how to deal with divorce when children are involved, including how to create a nurturing and safe environment for them. It would be great to see messages on television or social media that address the many situations where you can see one parent raising their child to become a successful adult. In doing so, you are not applauding divorce or encouraging it, but helping the bedrock of your society grow into healthy and stable individuals.

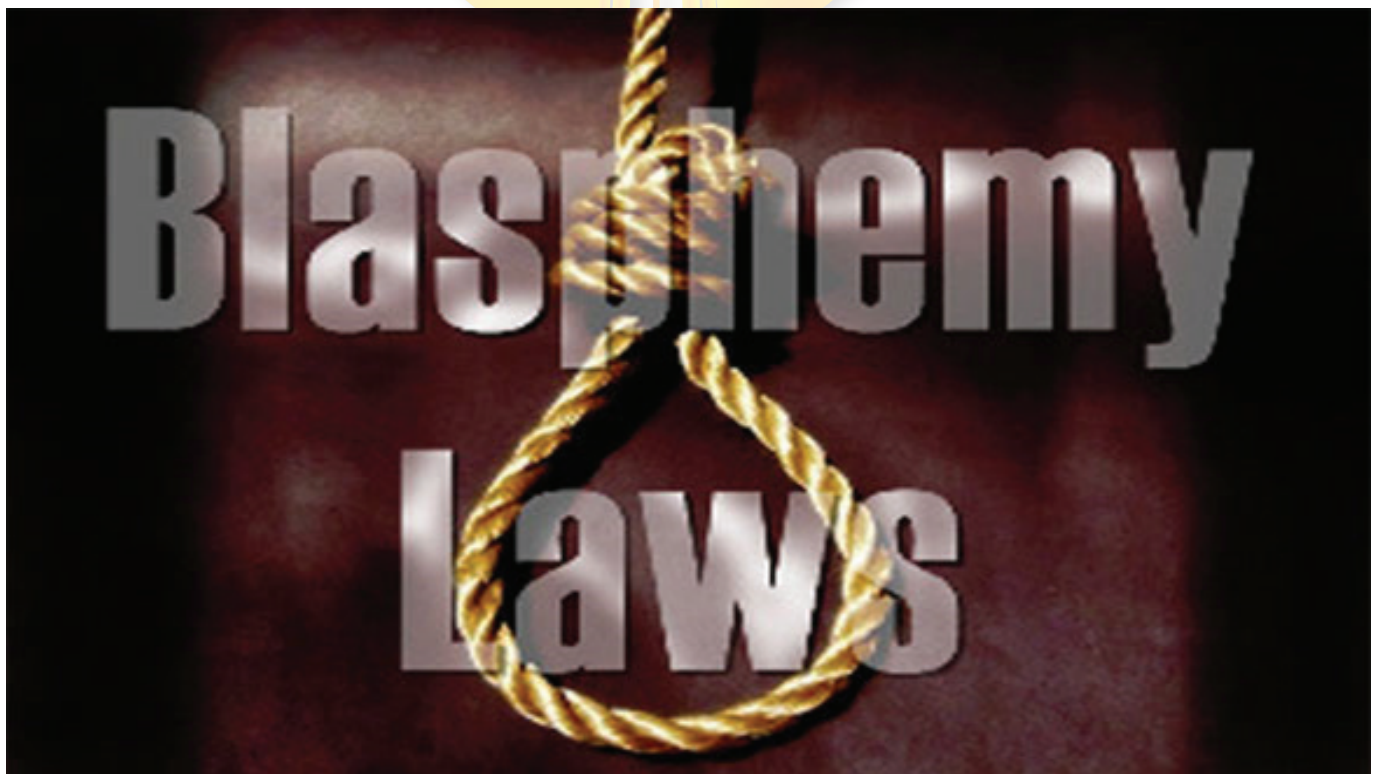
<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1827201>

Pakistan's Islamist Double Standard on Blasphemy

By: Kunwar Khuldune Shahid

Renowned Pakistani televangelist, Islamic scholar, and member of the National Assembly Aamir Liaquat Husain last week took a jab against Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Vice President Maryam Sharif by mocking a Hindu deity on Twitter. The National Assembly member from the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) used a doctored image of a Hindu goddess in a bid to degrade the PML-N leader, intrinsically attributing derogatory characteristics to the deity. While Husain has since deleted the tweet, and issued an apology, the incident is the latest reminder of the Islamist double standard of Pakistan's stance on blasphemy and the correlated blood-thirsty laws. In Pakistan, lives have been derailed, individuals burned alive, and entire colonies torched over false allegations of blasphemy against Islam. Unlike Husain, who didn't even have to face any criminal inquiry for open sacrilege against Hinduism, those accused of blaspheming against Islam aren't afforded the privilege of a retraction or apology. At least 75 have been extrajudicially killed, and hundreds imprisoned, over the intangible

and victimless "crime" of sacrilege against Islam in Pakistan. The Islamist mob violence in the country is encouraged by gory blasphemy laws, which establish the capital punishment for outraging Islam alone, inherently relegating other religions and ideologies to the periphery of judicial egalitarianism and pushing non-Muslim minorities outside democratic bounds. Over the past six months, Islamabad has been embroiled in an embarrassing diplomatic brawl with Paris, over the republication of Charlie Hebdo's caricatures on Islam and the anti-separatism bill, culminating last week in the French foreign ministry issuing a reminder to Pakistan that all of France's laws, past and present, are equally applicable to all religions. Pakistan's diplomacy currently appears to be orchestrated by radical Islamist groups like the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), which in November had convinced the government to "boycott French products" and "expel the French ambassador" owing to blasphemous caricatures against Islam. The TLP's policymaking positions include, but aren't limited to, issuing death threats to makers of



award winning Pakistani films, rallying for the genocide of the Ahmadiyya community and calling for the nuclear bomb to be dropped on France — all under the pretext of responding to blasphemy against Islam. An especially damning exposé on Islamabad's duplicitous blasphemy stance came on September 25 last year when Prime Minister Imran Khan was hypocritically lecturing the United Nations on Islamophobia, the same day a Pakistani man launched a terror attack on Charlie Hebdo's former office and Hindu beliefs were openly mocked on national TV. Proponents of a global blasphemy law designed to shield Islam often argue that Muslims never engage in sacrilege against the messengers of Christianity or Judaism, and hence other religions should similarly reciprocate with regards to Prophet Muhammad. This line of argument often fails to take into account Islam's endorsement of Jesus and Moses as prophets of Allah, which intrinsically establishes their respect in synchrony with Islamic beliefs. Such courtesy is often discarded for non-Abrahamic religions, with Pakistan's Hinduphobia being a prominent case in point. In 2019, Punjab government spokesperson Fayyaz-ul-Hassan Chohan was sacked for anti-Hindu bigotry and mocking Hinduism, but he was reinstated in the same position months later. Last year, an official banner affiliated with the PTI, carrying Imran Khan's image, read "Hindu baat se nahi, laot se maanta hai" ("A Hindu doesn't understand words, only kicks"). A couple of days after Aamir Liaquat Husain's mocking of Hinduism, Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) chief Siraj-ul-Haq reiterated that "Muslim money" can't be used to build a Hindu place of worship. The JI chief's statement has reignited the controversy that has stalled the construction of Shri Krishna Mandir in Islamabad since last year.

The resistance against the construction of Islamabad's first ever Hindu temple is rooted in the institutionalized anti-Hindu bigotry in the country, which continues to be preached through school curricula and mosque sermons. The latter, coupled with the ubiquitous glorification of temple vandalizers in Pakistani histo-

ry, folklore, and literature, often rile up mobs to desecrate Hindu places of worship. Over 95 percent of pre-Partition Hindu temples in Pakistan no longer exist. Underage Hindu girls are also the primary victims of the annual 1,000 forced conversions to Islam in Pakistan. These forced conversions, just like blasphemy lynchings, are rooted in the Islamist supremacy upheld by the Pakistani Constitution. The large-scale disregard in Pakistan for religious matters outside of those mandated by orthodox Islam can also be witnessed in anti-Christian bigotry, which makes it hard to preach Christianity, or the widespread anti-Semitism, underscoring how Islamist tolerance for "people of the book" also has its prejudicial limits. Elsewhere, dissenting or divergent Muslim beliefs — or lack thereof — also trigger the blasphemy law for many, as exhibited by Pakistan's acquiescence to anti-Shia politics, outlawing of Ahmadiyya Islam, or the upholding of death for apostasy and atheism. The country has even witnessed blasphemy cases for the assertion that "all religions are equal." Indeed, should a global blasphemy law be implemented, Pakistan would be among the worst culprits of sacrilege against all beliefs contradicting orthodox Islam, along with its existing status as a chief denier of religious freedom. Of course, any law censoring critique of religion curbs the fundamentals of free speech. However, when a country upholds religious supremacism, elevates one religion over others, and shields it with the death penalty, the first step is to establish the equality of all faiths — and lack thereof — before law. For Pakistan, establishing the legal equality of Islam and Hinduism would right many of the country's wrongs of the past seven decades. It would also help overcome the communal hatred that became the *raison d'être* of Pakistan's creation and pave the way for a pluralistic and prosperous future.

<https://thedi diplomat.com/2021/03/pakistan-blasphemy-law-clearly-doesnt-protect-hinduism/>

Syria's proxy war widens gulf between Sunnis and Shias

By: Muhammad Luqman Majoka



After a period of relative calm, the conflict in Syria is reigniting the tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims in Pakistan: groups from both sects are involved in the clashes in Syria. The authorities fear a new wave of sectarian violence. Background by Mohammad Luqman.

Few people outside the borders of Pakistan are familiar with the country's small ethnic minority of Hazaras. In neighbouring Afghanistan, the Hazaras form the third largest ethnic group, but they only moved into the territory that forms modern-day Pakistan at the end of the 19th century. The reason behind the move

was a rigorous persecution of the Hazaras by the Afghan Emir, Abdur Rahman Khan. Many Hazaras sought protection in what was then British India, and since that time they have made up a considerable proportion of the population in the Pakistani city of Quetta. Their membership of the Shia Twelver sect and their visibly central Asian facial features make them stand out clearly in the overwhelmingly Sunni, Pashtun north of the province of Balochistan. This makes them an easy target for attacks by Sunni terrorist groups. Since 2012, there has been an increase in attacks on Hazaras by terrorist organisations such as Lashkar-e-Jhangvi ("Jhangvi army").

Hazaras caught in the crossfire of Sunni terrorists According to an estimate by the British Home Office in 2019, more than 2000 Hazaras have been killed in terrorist attacks in Pakistan since 1999. The most recent attack was carried out at the start of 2021, when eleven Hazara miners were executed by terrorists. The Hazara community blocked a main road for several days in protest, and refused to bury their dead until Pakistan's prime minister Imran Khan made them a personal guarantee of increased safety. The prime minister was heavily criticised throughout the country for his initially insensitive response to the protesters. In the end, Khan met with the representatives of the victims a week later and promised them state support and more security. Time will tell whether these are empty promises, as has been the case with previous governments, or whether things will actually change. The persecution of the Hazaras is in part a consequence of the policies pursued by the military ruler Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988). After the Soviet



The Islamisation of Pakistan: the devout General Mohamed Zia-ul-Haq came to power in a coup d'état in 1977 by overthrowing the civilian government and abrogating the constitution. The military ruler instrumentalised Islam for his goals. To further consolidate his power, he promoted radical Sunni schools of thought. These were intended to push back the growing influence of Iranian revolutionary ideas on Pakistan's Shias

occupation of Afghanistan, he encouraged a so-called "Islamisation" of Pakistan, with the help of his radical Sunni ideology. This was intended to suppress the growing influence of Iranian revolutionary ideas on Pakistan's Shia Muslims, who at the time made up more than 20 percent of the population.

Pakistan caught up in Saudi-Iranian rivalry
This policy led to the formation of anti-Shia groups such as Sipah Sahaba ("Guardians of the Prophet's companions") and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, whose declared aim is to combat Shias and other "apostates". From the mid-1980s, Pakistan began to experience the worst sectarian violence in its history, in the wake of which some militant groups were also formed by the country's Shia Muslims. They are said to have close connections with Iran. Pakistan was caught up in the conflicts between the Saudis and the Iranians. Assaults and attacks saw hundreds killed on both sides. It was only in the mid-1990s that the violence began to ebb a little. After 2001, the military ruler Pervez Musharraf, who remained in power until 2008, started to take targeted action against radical groups in the country for the first time. Since then, both the Sunni Sipah Sahaba and several militant Shia organisations, such as Sipah-e Muhammad and Ansarul Hussain, have been banned.

Syrian conflict fuels sectarian split

Following a period of relative calm, anti-Shia groups seem to have become increasingly active again in recent times. The primary reason for this is the conflict in Syria. Since 2013, there has been evidence that groups of Pakistani Shias as well as radical Sunnis have been involved in clashes in Syria. In 2015, they were organised separately into the so-called Liwa Zaynebioun or Zaynebioun Brigade. Following initial basic military training, they are now being deployed on various front lines in Syria by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.

The anti-Shia mass demonstrations held in September 2020 in Karachi and Islamabad may have come as a surprise to many Pakistanis, but they were an expression of this smouldering conflict. Among the demonstrators were members of the banned Sipah Sahaba and other militant Sunni organisations, who sympathise with Sunni terrorist groups in Syria. The authorities are very worried that Karachi could once again be visited by a wave of inter-denominational violence. The security forces are increasingly taking action against militant groups in this major city. At the end of 2020, several members of the Zaynebioun Brigade were arrested during one of these operations. Of course, long-term success in combat-

ting radicalisation can only succeed if an atmosphere of tolerance is also promoted right across society. But for Pakistan, that is still a long way off



<https://en.qantara.de/content/sectarian-strife-in-pakistan-syrias-proxy-war-widens-gulf-between-sunnis-and-shias>

Journalists Association of Pakistan (JAP)

Annual Election for 2021

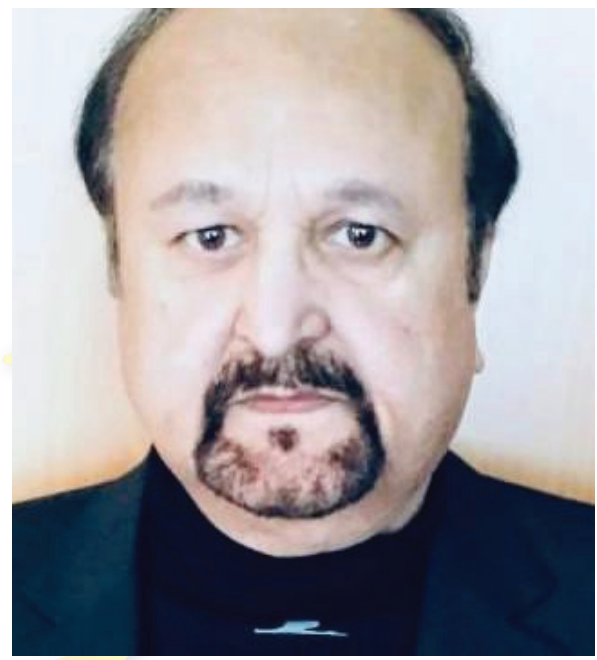
By: Mohiuddin Abbasi
Senior Vice President of Journalists
Association of Pakistan

Our manifesto is to promote positive media, to bring all journalists together on a common platform for the exercise of journalistic rights and to highlight Pakistan's positive image globally. S. A. Sehba Insurance Policy for Sustaining the Poor Families of Martyrs of Journalism Is part of the Manifesto and Mission of the Lancaster Association of Pakistan

representative body of Pakistani journalists at the international level, was carried out in consultation with each other. According to Chairman S. A. Sehba, Patron General Dr. Shahid Masood, Chief Organizer Mubashir Luqman, President Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Shami, Senior Vice President Babar Rind, Mohi-ud-Din Abbasi, Dr. Mian Azhar Amin, Vice President



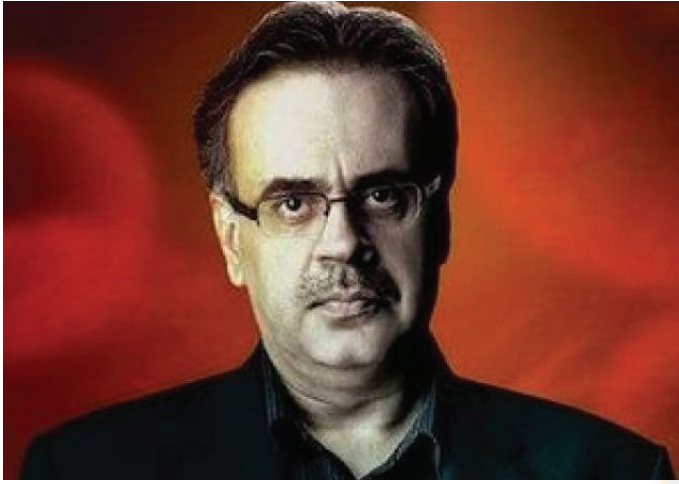
S. A. Sehba -- Chairman



Mohiuddin Abbasi -- Senior Vice President

Chairman JAP Journalists Association of Pakistan (Registered) Annual Election for 22-2021 Central Officials Election Process Completed Patron General Dr. Shahid Masood, Chairman S. A. Sehba, Chief Organizer Mubashir Luqman, President Mujeeb-ur-Rehman Shami, Secretary General Qasim Munir and Broadcasting Secretary Dr. B. A. Khurram selected All other key officials, directors and members of the working committee were elected through mutual consultation. Congratulations from the President of Pakistan Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Imran Khan, Ministers and Opposition Leaders ISLAMABAD (SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE): The election of the Central Officers, Directors and Members of the Working Committee of the Journalists Association of Pakistan (Registered) Annual Election for 2021, a

Pir Syed Zia Gilani, Shujah Hussain Pirzada, Arshad Malik, Amjad Bobby. Secretary General Qasim Munir, Secretary Finance Miss Farah Naz, Secretary Information and Broadcasting Dr. B. A. Khurram, Broadcasting Secretary Rashid Niaz, Additional Secretary Mir Zulfiqar Abro, Office Secretary Fida Hussain Khawar were elected. For the Boards of Directors, Mian Amir Ali has been appointed Director Foreign Affairs, Saghir Alam Rame Director Overseas, Aqeel Tareen Director Current Affairs, Sudhir Kayani Director Media Affairs, Sardar Zaheer Director Diplomatic Affairs, Dr Malik Muhammad Afzal Awan Director Health Safety Affairs, Sultan. Ghulam Nabi Kashmiri was elected Director Kashmir Affairs, Alhaj Abul Barakat Director Literary Affairs, Amjad Khan Director Sports, Riaz Bazmi Director Education and Amjad



Dr. Shahid Masood - Patron General

Saeed Khan Director Social Affairs. Sardar Kamran Agha, Shams Tabrizi, Miss Kabra Bibi, Madam Bandia Ishaq, Sardar Ghulam Mustafa, Riaz Chishti, Zia Sham, Sohail Anjum, Rana Zulfiqar Ijaz, Shaheen Malik, Asad Ali Shah, for the members of the Working Committee of Journalists Association of Pakistan. Amir Azam, Jan Mohammad Ramzan, Jamil Malik and Khawar Nadeem Zahid were selected. Chairman of the Journalists Association of Pakistan S. A. Sehbaei congratulated the newly elected officials, directors and members of the working committee and hoped that all the officials and members of the Journalists Association of Pakistan would continue to play their full role in promoting positive media. We will continue to use all our energies through the media platform to highlight Pakistan's positive image globally. The media will continue to work for alternative employment opportunities for working journalists to address the global economic crisis. The fight for the rights of journalists and the establishment of schools, universities, housing schemes, life insurance and hospitals for the children of the refugees are part of our manifesto. Mohammad Naeem Shah, the soul of the Journalists Association of Pakistan, has termed the Journalist Daughter Funds for sponsoring the families of the martyred journalists and for the marriage of daughters as part of the Manifesto and Mission of the Journalists Association of Pakistan. All prominent political, social, religious and journalistic personalities have extended heartfelt congratulations to the newly elected officials and members.

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UK foreign policy review highlights growing role of technology

By Alstair Burt

The review of the UK's foreign, defense, development and security policy was published this week after a year of consideration. It was the most apt time to do so. The combination of a fresh administration after the election of 2019, the UK's exit from the EU and coping with a pandemic is surely a unique collection of circumstances in which to consider where a state may be going internationally. The review is certainly bold and, to a degree, unconventional. If readers are searching for an index, in which to look up chapters devoted to familiar regions and geopolitical issues, they will look in vain. The whole point of integration is to engage both the population of the UK and those friendly and less friendly to us overseas in awareness that old boundaries are breaking down and that the speed of technological and scientific change has consequences for the old order. Friends, as in those in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), need to absorb all the messages to appreciate that the UK will still be reaching out to them in old and new ways. Conventional issues are covered, but not in endless pages. The UK government says that it "will build on existing partnerships across the MENA region, strengthening them and taking them to new places through deeper engagement on science, technology, health, climate and biodiversity." Do not miss the personal intent behind these examples. As at the UN Security Council during the UK's presidency last month, Prime Minister Boris Johnson clearly sees his legacy as depending on engaging multilateral efforts to combat climate change and the threat to biodiversity loss, which he describes as the UK's "No. 1 international priority." This is some claim. He has led the review and it was he, not the foreign secretary, who launched it in Parliament. This is important to note. These examples matter deeply to him, and the country. The review is alive to regular policy mes-



sages, mentioning the need to work with partners in relation to Iran, the importance of the UK's historic partners in the Gulf on maritime security, threats to Europe and the need for NATO, and combating terror. I think the overall message should be reassuring. Despite the recognition of the growing importance of the East and the "tilt to the Indo-Pacific," in which, of course, the UK is far from alone, familiar alliances get a boost. A US back in the international arena, the E3 of the UK,

Despite the recognition of the growing importance of the East and the 'tilt to the Indo-Pacific,' familiar alliances get a boost.

Alastair Burt

France and Germany, and the UK's many friends in the MENA region remain as foundations of global security but, as part of this new collective relationship, that security is increasingly to be built around smart technology and science. The hub of the paper and policy is in four overarching principles. The first of these is not, as would have been expected a generation ago, the UK's commitment to NATO and increased defense spending, but rather "sus-

taining strategic advantage through science and technology.” The second is to ensure that “open societies and open economies can flourish.” Importantly, these key objectives are not focused on any triumphal “Make Britain Great Again” claim of world-leading exceptionalism. Instead they are rooted in a paragraph recognizing that the UK cannot achieve its objectives alone — it must rely on collective action and co-creation with others, leading by example where it can but identifying “where we are better placed to support others.” It is a big country that recognizes the need to work with others. If the policy is influenced by a fast-changing technological world, where there are many threats from those who would make use of cyber and advanced scientific innovation for illicit purposes, it is also influenced by the recognition that security abroad is now intimately linked to domestic security. The targeting of states in cyberattacks are not victimless crimes because the perpetrators are truly aiming at our citizens accessing services or being protected by their critical infrastructure, from Abu Dhabi to Aberdeen. Just as in a pandemic, no one is safe unless all are safe. There will be challenges, and questions to be asked. Modernizing a nuclear arsenal is one thing, but increasing the number of warheads while maintaining the mutual disarmament element of the Non-Proliferation Treaty will take some explaining. And the effort to square the circle on the UK’s exceptional development contribution in recent years by being reassuring about a return to the high standard of 0.7 percent of gross national income “when the fiscal situation allows,” while currently reducing it to 0.5 percent because of the pandemic, will not convince all in Parliament. However, no set of foreign policy principles will be universally accepted, least of all in a free society that is open to questions. I doubt if this one will gather much dust, as it is set to be a topic of discussion in many capitals for quite some time.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1827221>

UK: History made as first Muslim nominated for lead actor Oscar



LONDON: British actor Riz Ahmed has made history by becoming the first Muslim to be nominated best lead actor for the film industry’s most prestigious award: The Oscar. Ahmed, 38, was nominated for his role in “Sound of Metal,” which tells the story of Ruben, a rock-and-roll drummer and recovering addict whose life is sent into a tailspin when he loses his hearing. Ahmed told The Times that he had immersed himself in the character of Ruben by attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, and learning drumming and sign language. “When you learn things that take you away from yourself and your comfort zone — and I mean truly learn them — what it does is bring you home, back to yourself,” he said. “As an actor, you start off at this place of separation, and by the end, it’s crazy, but you want to grab someone and tell them, ‘This is me!’” he added. “Ruben’s journey in ‘Sound of Metal’ became my journey too. And it absolutely changed my life.” Muslims have seen Oscar success in the past, but this is the first time one has been nominated for the coveted lead actor award. American-Muslim Mahershala Ali has taken home two Oscars for supporting actor for his roles in “Moonlight” in 2017 and “Green Book” in 2019, but nomination for lead roles has eluded him. Ahmed will compete against six-time nominee and one-time winner Anthony Hopkins, one-time winner Gary Oldman, the late Chadwick Boseman and Steven Yeun. The Oscars will take place on April 25.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1825956/art-culture>

EXCLUSIVE: Grim-faced Prince William emerges hours after Meghan Markle's friend revealed his 'unproductive phone call with Harry': Gayle King tells US viewers couple told her they want royals to speak out against 'racist press' and claim they can prove everything

- Prince Harry spoke to brother William and father Charles over the weekend, Gayle King reveals on CBS
- But presenter, who attended Meghan's baby shower in 2019, claims conversation were 'not productive'
- She says Sussexes want 'royals to intervene' over 'false stories' in British Press which have 'a racial slant'
- Ms King gives no examples of stories - and it comes after Mail complains to CBS for doctoring headlines

Prince William was photographed looking glum while driving in London today after Meghan Markle's friend Gayle King revealed Prince Harry had spoken to him and their father Charles for the first time following the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's interview with Oprah Winfrey. The CBS presenter, who attended Meghan's \$500,000 baby shower in 2019, said she spoke to the Sussexes who told her that Harry had talked to the Duke of Cambridge and Prince of Wales over the weekend. But she said the conversations were 'not productive' and the Sussexes were keen for the 'royals to intervene and tell the Press to stop with the unfair, inaccurate, false stories that definitely have a racial slant'. Ms King, 66, who is also close friends with Oprah, failed to give any examples of the stories she was referring to, but added that Meghan has 'documents to back up everything that she said on Oprah's interview'. If Ms King is correct about the details of the chat, William and Charles are likely to be appalled at it being leaked to a US media personality - with royal experts pointing out that senior royals are unlikely to want to talk to the Sussexes if they just pass on information to a friend who then reveals it in the American media. She told CBS This Morning: 'Well I'm not trying to break news, but I did actually call them to see how they were feeling, and it's true, Harry has talked to his brother and he has talked to his father too. The word I was given was that those conversations were not productive. But they are glad that they have at least started a conversation. 'And I think what is still

upsetting to them is the palace keep saying they want to work it out privately, but yet, they believe these false stories are coming out that are very disparaging against Meghan, still. No one in the Royal Family has talked to Meghan yet, at this particular time. And I think it's frustrating for them to see that it's a racial conversation about the Royal Family when all they wanted all along was for the royals to intervene and tell the Press to stop with the unfair, inaccurate, false stories that definitely have a racial slant. 'And until you can acknowledge that, I think it's going to be hard to move forward. But they both want to move forward with this and they both want healing in this family. At the end of the day, that is Harry's family.'

William was seen driving outside Kensington Palace in West London today, while Charles and Camilla were also out in the north of the city, visiting a Covid-19 vaccination pop-up centre at Finsbury Park Mosque. Kensington Palace declined to comment to MailOnline about the information given by Ms King today. Last Thursday, William appeared furious as he defended the Royal Family, saying it was 'very much not a racist family' while on a trip to a school in London, and said ominously of Harry: 'I haven't spoken to him yet but I will do.' Meanwhile Buckingham Palace has instructed an external law firm to assist with its investigation into bullying allegations made against Harry and Meghan, with lawyers for the couple denying any wrongdoing. Ms King's comments came on the same day that Harry's grandfather Prince Philip, 99, was



The Duke and Duchess of Sussex in conversation with Oprah Winfrey in an interview first aired on CBS on March 7

reunited with the Queen at Windsor Castle after leaving King Edward VII's Hospital in London following a 28 day-stay for treatment. During the brothers' discussion over the weekend, once-inseparable William and Harry could have discussed the unveiling of a statue for their mother Princess Diana which is scheduled for Kensington Palace in July. The brothers are set to meet face-to-face at the event in London for the first time since the Commonwealth Day service at Westminster Abbey last March, which was Harry and Meghan's last event as senior royals. CBS has been at the centre of the Oprah interview, after This Morning showed a number of preview clips before the chat itself went out on the channel on March 7 and was then broadcast in Britain on ITV the following night. The Queen's former press secretary Dickie Arbiter said today: 'Seems like the narrative is being driven by Gayle King of CBS. I don't think a continual play on American TV is quite what the Queen had in mind. Time for a cooling off period - best for everyone to put up and shut up.' Royal biographer Robert Jobson, whose new book *Prince Philip's Century* is out next month, told MailOnline: 'The Royal Family do not like providing a running commentary on the their personal lives and personal relationships. 'So it's clearly not very helpful that every time there has been a development, in this case William talking to his brother, that it is immediately broadcast on Harry and Meghan's adopted pet US network CBS via the host, Meghan's

friend Gayle King. 'I really cannot see how there will be any progress in building bridges and rebuilding broken relationships if when Prince William, or the Queen or Prince Charles telephones, the conversations they have with Harry are passed on to CBS and then broadcast to the world. That's not how the Royal Family works. There has to be trust and discretion.' Ms King also said today: 'The bullying thing was raised in 2018 and now there's an ongoing investigation about bullying from Meghan Markle, when anyone who has worked with her will tell you exactly who she is. 'You know, she's really a very sweet, caring person. And as I say, Meghan has documents to back up everything that she said on Oprah's interview. Everything.' Ms King also said: 'The family has to acknowledge that there are issues. Right now, no one has acknowledged, you know, Houston we have a problem here. That's really all they want. They want a conversation, they both want a conversation. MailOnline's owner Associated Newspapers has complained to CBS for doctoring headlines and taking them out of context during a section of the Oprah interview designed to illustrate racist coverage of Meghan by the Press. Reacting to the comments by Ms King, royal biographer Angela Levin added: 'That's why it's not a good idea to pass on any information to them including details about alleged bullying because it will be passed on to a friend and reach social media in the blink of an eye. Their sense of entitlement is extraordinary. They can't bear to be out of the spotlight.' She continued: 'The fact that Harry and Meghan say the talk with William was 'unproductive' makes me believe that Harry and Meghan aren't interested in compromising or working hard to mend the rift. Otherwise they wouldn't use such a negative, unpleasant word.' ITV royal correspondent Chris Ship added: 'Clearly, Gayle King would not have shared these comments with millions of viewers without Meghan's permission, so this marks a significant new approach.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9367669/Prince-William-Prince-Harry-speak-time-Oprah-interview.html>

House of One: Muslims, Jews and Christians to Worship under Single Roof in Berlin

Under the 2.3 million red bricks arching over a new building in Berlin it is hoped that the seeds of peace can grow between the three Abrahamic religions. When the cornerstone is laid at the House of One building this spring it will mark an increasingly global desire for togetherness among Muslims, Jews and Christians. A decade in the making, the project puts all three religions under a single roof, a concept growing around the world with the Abrahamic House reaching completion in Abu Dhabi next year and similar projects in Central African Republic and Georgia in eastern Europe. In interviews with The National, an imam, rabbi and priest have argued that the House of One could mark greater understanding between the monotheist beliefs. "The Muslim community is tired of hate, violence and terror being spread to the world in the name of Islam," said Imam Kadir Sanci. "Now they see that Muslims - together Jews and Christians - are finally working effectively for peace. Many Muslims are happy that the House of One can be the voice of peace that can drown out the voice of violence."

His words were echoed by Rabbi Andreas Nachama. "The idea to have Jews, Muslims and Christians under one roof is attractive to people because it's a step towards peace between the religions." For more than 50 years a parking lot in what was East Berlin has stood largely empty, with memories of the great church of St Peter demolished by the communists, largely forgotten in the Petriplatz area. But in 2009, at the height of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, a group of religious thinkers decided that a route out of violence would be greater understanding by building a church, a synagogue and a mosque all housed within a central building. "The Protestant community decided that we wanted not to rebuild a church but a sacred building to mirror

the religious situation in our city," said Protestant theologian Roland Stolte, one of the founders. "We wanted to step back and give room for other religions, that was the main premise, for Jews and Muslims to join us in one sacred building." The Protestant theologian said the concept accepted there was "no exclusivity of truth in other religions" but that the idea of House of One was to "look for hints of truth in other religions or in other world-views". The idea found global appeal. Donations totalling almost 9million Euros (\$10.7m) have poured in from 60 different countries, including Egypt, Jordan and UAE as well as 30million Euros from the German government. Respect for each religion's individual services and practices will remain strictly observed within the 46 metre high building separated into four distinct parts. It will contain three religious structures, each accommodating about 100 worshippers and then a central hall to which everyone is welcome, from atheists to tourists and others religions. The project has also had close ties with the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi that will be completed next year. "We discussed it with people from the UAE embassy in Berlin and they have the same ideas, system and structure," said Roland Stolte. "The same hope too for more harmony between religions." From a theological perspective, each theology accepts there should be no objection to the concept. "It is in the tradition of our honourable Prophet," said Imam Kadir Sanci and was inspired by examples from Islamic history. "For us, every step we take must be in accordance with the Quran and the Sunnah. Father Gregor Hohberg, 53, a Lutheran pastor, said the philosophy was contained within the teaching of Jesus. "This goes hand in hand with the sharing and relinquishing of historically grown power, influence and privileges - entirely in

the spirit of Jesus.,” he said. “There are theological challenges and questions but no religion can come into the House of One with a final theology or an absolute claim of truth.” Worshippers had been attracted to his congregation because of the project. “We are not trying to create a mixed religion, but rather to live and celebrate diversity and the richness of differences.” It was also accepted by Imam Sanci that there would be some concerns or “headwinds” within the Muslim community who do “not know their own religion and its history sufficiently”. The idea of “sharing an umbrella” with Christians and Muslims came in the knowledge “that Abraham is our common father in belief and that we have the same God...is progress,” said Rabbi Nachama. Indeed, this symbolism of unity, forgiveness and understanding has greater meaning among the Jews in Germany where its people were the victims of the Holocaust. Today their number is just 200,000 where once there were an estimated 318,000 Jews and many more from a Jewish background before the Nazis came to power. But Rabbi Nachama, whose father survived the Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen concentration camps and whose mother was sheltered by a non-Jew Germany family, believes the House can go some way to resolving conflict. “We can have greater understanding that while each has his own tradition we share the earth and we share the one God.” Imam Sanci is hopeful that the more people from different religions learn about each other the greater the chances of peace. “From the first minute of my involvement in the House of One, I was convinced that we are making an important contribution - albeit a modest one - to world peace. When people have conversations at eye level they are more likely to find reasons to be friendly with each other,” he said. “People who refuse to get to know their counterparts are more prone to hostility and violence.”

<https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/muslims-jews-and-christians-to-worship-under-single-roof-in-berlin-1.1184796>

Switzerland: Voters support ban on face coverings in public

Switzerland has narrowly voted in favour of banning face coverings in public, including the burka or niqab worn by Muslim women. Official results showed the measure had passed by 51.2% to 48.8% in Sunday's referendum. The proposal was put forward by the right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) which campaigned with slogans such as "Stop extremism". A leading Swiss Islamic group said it was "a dark day" for Muslims. "Today's decision opens old wounds, further expands the principle of legal inequality, and sends a clear signal of exclusion to the Muslim minority," the Central Council of Muslims said in a statement, adding that it would challenge the decision in court. The Swiss government had argued against the ban saying it was not up to the state to dictate what women wear. According to research by the University of Lucerne (in German), almost no-one in Switzerland wears a burka and only around 30 women wear the niqab. About 5% of Switzerland's population of 8.6 million people is Muslim, most originating from Turkey, Bosnia and Kosovo. Swiss people are given a direct say in their own affairs under the country's system of direct democracy. They are regularly invited to vote on various issues in national or regional referendums. It is not the first time Islam has figured in a Swiss referendum. In 2009 citizens went against government advice and voted to ban the building of minarets - a proposal also put forward by the SVP which said minarets were a sign of Islamisation. The proposal in Sunday's referendum did not mention Islam directly and was also aimed at stopping violent street protesters from wearing masks. However, the vote was widely referred to as "the burka ban".

The latest proposal predated the coronavirus pandemic, which has meant all Swiss adults having to wear masks in many settings.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-56314173>

France, Islam and the Muslim Response

By: Arshad Alam

In a debate on the place of Islam in France, the centrist French interior minister accused the far right leader Marine Le Pen of being 'too soft' on Islamism. Not only was Le Pen shocked and started fumbling, the left leaning daily Le Monde described this exchange as 'unprecedented' and called it an 'unexpected gift' for Pen to have been 'portrayed as a moderate by a minister without having to change her policies'. This political encounter not just highlights the confusion over how to deal with Islam but also how far the centre in France has traversed to the right. Islamism and its associated political violence is not new to France. The country has been facing this problem for more than a decade now. The current debate within France is in the backdrop of the killing of Samuel Patty, a teacher who had discussed the issue of Charlie Hebdo with his students as an example of free speech. There is some evidence to suggest that parents who got upset over the content of this kind of teaching, had called for him to be punished. His beheading by an immigrant Muslim sparked a fresh round of talk about the place of Islam and Muslims in France. It must be recalled that the French president Macron had publically stated that Islam is going through a major crisis and that there was a need to curb foreign influences on this religion. He had talked about bringing in a new law to tackle this problem. That law is currently being debated in the French parliament and there are good chances that at the end of this debate, we will see a much stricter law than was envisioned by the president himself. Certainly the law will have the support of the right but not without making it more specific to Islam. The proposed law has very nearly divided the French society. Those opposing the law are largely from the left who have been arguing that the attempt of the French state should be the integration of Muslims rather treating every one of them as potential terrorist, which this law intends to do. The left has been highlighting issues like racism and discrimination against Muslims,

which they argue, leads to alienation, violence and terrorism. The problem of 'Muslim separatism', according to them, can be solved by putting policies in place which integrate more and more Muslims within the opportunity structure. This solution is extremely ill informed of the complexities of Islamism. Research suggests that Islamism does not occur because of lack of opportunities but because it subscribes to a certain ideology. That ideology is one of establishing Islamic supremacy all over the world and making a particular interpretation of Islam as the master narrative. Certainly there is no racism and discrimination against Muslim in the Islamic world and yet we see some of these countries in the grip of Islamism and terrorism. Granted that Muslims in Europe are at the margins but this precariousness of their material situation must not be seen as the sole reason for the growth of Islamism. Moreover, the left, and not just in Europe, has been making the mistake of defending Muslim regressive practices like sexual segregation as a matter of communitarian choice. A community policing its women and children is not a matter of choice but simply a matter of political subjugation. The left, in turning a blind eye to a whole host of anti-libertarian practices within the Muslim community, is simply not being true to its own political philosophy. That said, the law should not be open to misuse and an entire community should not be held guilty for the folly of a few. The law might create the impression that Islam is incompatible with France which might further stigmatise Muslims. One aspect of the proposed law is an increased surveillance on mosques in a bid to control radicalism. While not discounting the fact that one particular mosque was related to the killing of Samuel Patty, most radicalism now happens online and through international networks. One is not quite sure how an increased surveillance over mosques would be potent in controlling radicalism and terrorism. Moreover, the government should be seen to be just and fair when it

comes to Muslim groups. While it has banned the “Collective Against Islamophobia”, which fights against discrimination of Muslims, the government hasn’t dealt with the far right Generation Identitaire in a similar fashion. Such double standards create the impression that the current French government is simply interested in stigmatizing Muslims rather than having an earnest interest in fighting Islamism. At the same time, there are aspects of the law which should have been addressed by Muslims themselves. The law seeks to curb home schooling and allow it only in exceptional circumstances like medical condition. Part of the reason why some Muslims are objecting to this provision is because they believe that the French schooling system promotes values which are antithetical to Islam and hence they want educate their children at homes. Parts of the legislation also seeks to crack down on any behaviour that violates the dignity of people, especially women. The provisions of the proposed law seek to ban ‘virginity tests’ and put stricter measures against forced marriages and polygamy. There is no justification today for schooling children at home simply because parents want to inculcate certain religious values in them. Fundamentally, this goes against the right of children. Similarly, the advocacy of sexual segregation in schools by certain Muslim groups should necessarily be seen as an attempt to control women’s sexuality and not celebrated as the choice of a community. In the first place, Muslims themselves should have come forward and put a stop to these practices. In not addressing issues such as forced marriages and segregation, they themselves have left the space wide open for intervention by the state. It is heartening to note that despite the brouhaha to the contrary, many Muslims in fact are welcoming such reforms. The voices of these Muslims need to be amplified for they sure tell us that there is nothing inherently antagonistic between Islam and the French state; that there is a meeting ground between the demands of the state and the reformist impulses of Muslims.

<https://www.newageislam.com/islam-and-the-west/arshad-alam-new-age-islam/france-islam-and-the-muslim-response/d/124378>

Facebook freezes Maduro's page over Covid claim

Facebook has frozen Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's page after he claimed without evidence that a herbal remedy could cure Covid-19. He claimed in January that a thyme herb solution could cure the disease. He will be unable to post for 30 days. The company said the leader had repeatedly violated its policies on coronavirus disinformation. Mr Maduro is not the only world leader to face a pushback from social media companies over Covid. US President Donald Trump and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro have also faced action over Covid posts. A Facebook spokesperson told the BBC: "We removed a video posted to President Nicolas Maduro's page for violating our policies against misinformation about Covid-19 that is likely to put people at risk for harm. "We follow guidance from the WHO [World Health Organization] that says there is currently no medication to cure the virus. Due to repeated violations of our rules, we are also freezing the page for 30 days, during which it will be read-only." Last year, Facebook deleted a video from Brazil's President Bolsonaro over a claim that the drug hydroxychloroquine was totally effective in treating the virus. And previously a Twitter post by Mr Maduro about a different fake remedy was also deleted. In October, Facebook deleted a post in which Donald Trump claimed Covid-19 was "less lethal" than the flu. It removed another in August that included a video of him falsely asserting that children were "almost immune from Covid-19". Covid-19 disinformation on social media is a widespread problem. A dozen people are responsible for spreading thousands of anti-vaccine posts on Facebook and Twitter, according to analysis by the UK-based Center for Countering Digital Hate CCDH). Among them is Robert F Kennedy Jr, a nephew of the former US president, who leads an anti-vaccine group. Madagascar's President Andry Rajoelina last year promoted an unproven herbal concoction called Covid-Organics, prompting the WHO to say traditional remedies should have scientific evidence to back their use.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-56551350>

How a Canadian couple is demystifying Islam on social media

By: Mai Mazloun, OMNI



A Toronto couple is using their online platform to educate Canadians about Islam and the dangers of Islamophobia. Sana Saleh and her husband Will Saleh – a Canadian of European origin who converted to Islam – are a young Muslim couple from Toronto. Together they create educational videos for their more than two million followers across TikTok, YouTube and Instagram “Initially when we first started making videos on TikTok, it was just me and him making jokes about each other,” said Sana. “We would talk about our mixed culture. And then people started asking questions, like ‘what is that thing called on your head?’ A simple thing like ‘what is a hijab?’ And even sometimes people would ask, ‘can you go swimming with that?’ Or ‘who can see your hair?’ “As people started asking questions, we were like, ‘you know what, we should use this platform to educate people.” Several of the videos are about exactly that – demystifying Islam and correcting misconceptions about Muslims. Many are light-hearted and deal with various topics in a humorous way. “TikTok can be a great place for education,” said Will. “We wanted to be able to educate people about the religion of Islam and to humanize Muslims, to show the world we’re

not as bad as what you see on TV.” There are also videos about themselves: who they are, how they met, about their travels and their two young daughters. Then there’s the story of how Will was first introduced to Islam. “I was never really looking for religion,” he said. “And then when it came into my lap, I fell in love with it. Because it not only answers the basic things – like how do we eliminate racism or poverty – but it also gives me so much more sense of my place in the world.” “My only interaction with Islam was when 9/11 happened,” said Will. “And that’s literally the first time I had ever heard of Muslims. And then obviously from that point, it was in the news. But it was never in the news for good.” In the media, acts of violence committed by Muslims are covered disproportionately and differently, which ensures the image of the Muslim terrorist persists. In fact, according to the Canadian Incident Database, it is 107 times more likely to be killed for being a Muslim than by a Muslim in Canada.

<https://toronto.citynews.ca/2021/03/06/-from-hijabs-to-ramadan-how-a-canadian-couple-is-demystifying-islam-on-social-media/>

Swiss Vote for Burqa Ban and Its Reaction among Indian Muslims

By: Ghulam Rasool Dehlvi

Swiss voters on March 7 narrowly backed a ban on full face Burqa for Muslim women. An official referendum has shown that in Switzerland—a country which is actually one of the first modern-style democracies in the world—around 51.21 percent of voters and a majority of federal Switzerland's cantons are against the wearing of Burqa in public places. Some 1,426,992 voters backed the ban, while 1,359,621 were against, on a 50.8 percent turnout. According to reports, Switzerland will only allow women to wear it inside their respective places of worship and for “native customs”. It was, in fact, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) which launched the proposal of the Burqa ban in public places. It has earlier held some processions and put-up posters that featured a woman in a black Burqa/Niqab with captions like “end extremism” and “fight against radical Islam” etc. This writer has a brief experience of spending some time in certain parts of Switzerland. To my utter surprise, Burqa-clad women are hardly seen anywhere in Switzerland, except in some parts of Zurich, Lausanne and Saint Gallen where Muslims from Turkey, Pakistan, and several Arab countries are staying as migrants and refugees.

It is not surprising as only five percent of the total Swiss population, which would be around 86 lakh people, are Muslims and they mostly come from Turkey, Bosnia, Kosovo and former Yugoslavia which themselves hardly ever had a ‘Burqa culture’. According to research by the University of Lucerne, almost no Muslim woman in Switzerland wears a Burqa or any full-face veil. The University of Lucerne has found in its recent study that the Burqa, Niqab or full-face veil is hardly ever worn in Switzerland, not to speak of any one advocating it. Even in the religious places like the Turkish Sunni mosques in Zurich, Berne or Geneva, or the Shia places of worship in Schlieren and Saint Gallen, fewer women

wear burqa or full-face cover. Then what is the reason behind the sudden strong reactions of Muslim communities in Switzerland. They condemned the campaign against the Swiss ban on Burqa, describing the day it was discussed in the Swiss parliament as a “black day” for Muslims? Tellingly, the newly-founded Islamic Central Council of Switzerland and the Association of Islamic Organisations in Zurich (VIOZ), the largest cantonal Islamic umbrella organization in Switzerland have expressed great concern over the Swiss vote that, they say, has “proved an increase in Islamophobia in Switzerland since the ban on minarets in 2009.” It is worth mentioning that the Swiss citizens, both Christians, agnostics and atheists, had voted on the proposal to ban the building of minarets when the SVP claimed the building was a ‘sign of Islamisation’. In the wake of all this, a similar discourse on the whole issue has been renewed in India's Islamic circles. Dr. Zeenat Shaukat Ali, a Prof. of Islamic studies and Saira Shah Halim, social and women rights activist, Jawed Anand and the Indian Muslim Secular Democracy (IMSD) have all weighed in. They propound that the full-face veil is not mentioned in the Qur'an, and that only head covering is Islamic or Qur'anic, and not the covering of full face for women. Also, in the earliest period of Islam, that's is the Prophetic Age, called Ahd-e-Risalat, women were not clad in Burqa anywhere in the Arabian Peninsula.

Regardless of the actual reasons why many Swiss voters support the Burqa ban in their country, the fact remains that the Arabic-style Abaya or the post-1979 Islamic Revolution Iranian Hijab or Niqab, which later transformed into what we earlier called “Burqa” and now “Burkha” in the Indian subcontinent, are not actually 'Islamic'. All these have been imposed on Muslim women in different periods to pursue the pan-Islamic political ends.

Hence, they can be, at best, seen today as different regional or ‘cultural’ practices in Muslim societies, and not as part of religion or as an essential part of the Islamic code of conduct. More significantly, it cannot be justified or juxtaposed with religion as one’s ‘personal choice’ or ‘freedom of religion’ under the large ambit of human rights in the modern democratic countries, from France, Switzerland to India. In fact, some Muslim countries of higher Islamic authorities like Egypt, the cradle of Sunni Islam’s largest seminary Al-Azhar Sharif, Tunisia, which is a new regional epicenter of the evolving neo-Salafist theology, Azerbaijan, a progressive and modern Muslim nation in Central Asia, have either banned or introduced strict laws against the full face-coverings. Turkey, which had a little stricter law against the full-face veil, especially the Saudi-Arabic style, has only abrogated it now under the current regime of the aspiring global Islamist leader, Rajab Tayyab Erdogan. In Egypt, the full-face covering has been seen as part of the anti-regime political Islamist expression of resistance. The 1996 Fatwa issued by the then Grand Mufti of Egypt and Sheikh Al-Azhar, Sayyid Tantawi categorically stated that the full-face veil was not required in Islam, and has not been mandated by the Qur’anic verses related to Hijab or Jilbab. But ironically, in India, most traditionalist Islamic theologians and Muftis are less aware of these established Traditions and

Texts (Nusus) and are more abreast of the 18th century Fatwa documents like Fatawa e Alam-giriyya (compiled at the order of Aurangzeb), and Fatawa e Razawiyyah (of Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan). The reason is that the Mufti-making ‘ifta’ curriculum, which is around a 2 to 5-year course in the Sunni Madrasas has become what they themselves call ‘Sho’aba e Waqt Guzari’ (a department for ‘time pass’). But on the other hand, the established theologians of Islam around the world have debunked the untenable theological justifications around the full-face veil of all forms. Busting the myth of Burqa/Burkha ‘Abd al-Halīm Abū Shuqqah has elucidated in his well-researched Arabic book titled as, “Freedom of Women in the Prophetic Age” (تحرير المرأة) that there was actually no imposition of the full-face veil in times of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He has ample proof from the Qur’an and authentic Prophetic Traditions (Sahih Ahadith) to buttress this point. A rather radically new and thought-provoking narrative is that the un-Qur’anic patriarchy brutalizes the Muslim men more than their women, as it leads to the de-humanization of the whole community, especially the men as ‘guardians’ or ‘controllers’ (Qawwamun) of the Muslim society. All in all, an emerging moderate Muslim thinking is that the Burqa culture in the Indian setting is part of deep-rooted religious patriarchy which has its origins in the Constantinople Christianity, the Byzantine

theology or more conventionally and systematically in the Jewish Hassidic community, an ultra-orthodox sect which spread in the Europe with its birth in Israel.

The latest write-ups by Ghazala Wahhab, and excerpts from her book “Born a Muslim: Some Truths about Islam in India” as reproduced by New Age Islam have also sought some intellectual contestations on the related issues. Although there’s nothing new in Wahab’s book, it has



been placed among the books of the week, which reinforces a new narrative that the “progressive” Indian Muslims were Communists or Leftists though steeped in Islamic culture by way of mannerisms and attire, and thus she singles out an Islamic feministic outlook advocating for a complete gender equality in Islam. But then she takes the position of a traditionalist Muslim when it comes to commenting on the Prophet's first wife Hazrat Khadija. Wahab writes: “How appalling it is then that this astonishing and unparalleled story of a remarkable medieval woman has been relegated to the footnotes of Islamic history, and is remembered only for her piety and devotion to her husband”. In fact, what we need to address is the misplaced religiosity attached to the regional Arabic, Turkish or Iranian cultural and identity expressions disguised as 'Islamic' in the Indian subcontinent. Those who seek to revive the 'actual', 'authentic' or 'puritan' Islam in India--be they Salafis, Deobandis, Shias or some of the Bar-elwis—they all need to look at how Islam was best practised in India as an indigenous, vernacularized faith tradition which accentuated and enhanced the overall image and socio-economic status of Muslims in different periods. But the current state of 'purified' Indian Muslims, largely churned out from the ultra-orthodox Islamist ghettos, traditionalist madrasas and Maktabas from Kashmir to Kerala are indicative of their religious, cultural and socio-economic decay. We need to trace the syncretic Indian Islam's history from the 7th century Arabia to how it arrived in India through trade routes and a great deal of cultural interactions and inter-connections which evolved through the centuries to reach its present state—which we term today as ‘Indian Islam’.

<https://www.newageislam.com/islam-women-and-feminism/ghulam-rasool-dehlvi-new-age-islam/swiss-vote-for-burqa-ban-and-its-reaction-among-indian-muslims/d/124516>

Lebanese activist released after 10 months in jail for collaborating with Israel

BEIRUT: A Lebanese social media activist serving a three-year prison sentence for “collaborating” with Israel, was granted bail, her lawyer told Arab News. Kinda Al-Khatib, in her twenties, was arrested in June and charged with collaborating with “the enemy,” entering the occupied Palestinian territories and collaborating with Israeli spies. Lebanon is technically still at war with Israel and forbids its citizens from traveling there. Al-Khatib was sentenced to three years in prison in December. Her lawyer Jocelyne Al-Rai told Arab News that Al-Khatib was granted bail and released after she had appealed the primary ruling against her client. “The upcoming hearing will be held on April 8 before the Military Cassation Court. We have documents that prove my client’s innocence,” Al-Rai said. The lawyer said that as part of her defence argument she would seek to acquit her client before Chief Judge Tani Lattouff. Al-Khatib had pleaded innocent, said Al-Rai who expects the higher court to overturn the primary judgment and acquit her client of all charges. “The military appeals court on Tuesday decided to release the activist Kinda Al-Khatib in exchange for a bail of three million Lebanese pounds,” (\$1,990 officially, \$200 at the market rate), a judicial source told AFP. Since mass protests erupted in Lebanon in October 2019, several social media activists have been detained. Al-Khatib’s family and activists denounced her arrest at the time as “political” and a reaction to her tweets against those in power. Al-Khatib had used her Twitter account to criticize Hezbollah. Lebanese media and activists drew a parallel between Khatib’s case and that of actor Ziad Itani, who was also accused of “collaborating” with Israel in 2017. Itani was declared innocent and released several months later, and a high-ranking security officer was then charged with “fabricating” the case. <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1826681/middle-east>

How Khomeini's fundamentalist views drive Iranian incitement and malign behavior

CAIRO: On Oct. 6, 1981, Egypt's President Anwar Sadat was gunned down by Islamist militants during a military parade marking the anniversary of the 1979 Arab-Israeli War. The world condemned the attack. But in Tehran, the assassination was applauded. A hit squad composed of dissident army officers affiliated with the Egyptian Islamic Jihad launched the attack, hoping it would spark an Islamist uprising. A brief insurrection took hold in Asyut in Upper Egypt, but was soon put down. Although Iran had no direct hand in the plot to kill Sadat, Ayatollah Khomeini, architect of the 1979 Islamic Revolution that overthrew the Shah, certainly played a part in inciting the act of violence. Sadat, whose peace deal with Israel made him the target of hardline Islamists, had frequently lashed out at Iran's theocratic regime, branding Khomeini a "lunatic" who misrepresented Islam. Iran's new rulers, on their part, accused Egypt of "betraying" the Palestinian people and launched virulent diatribes against Sadat for granting asylum to the Shah and giving the deposed monarch a state funeral. "The Egyptian people must know that had they only rebelled just as the Iranian people did, they would have thwarted the conspiracies," Khomeini said after Sadat's deal with Israel. "The people of Egypt should not fear their government and not care about its laws. Just as our people broke the barrier of fear, they must fill the streets, banish the tails of arrogance, and not compromise for this despised authority." So grateful was Iran for the murder of Sadat that it glorified his assassin, Khalid Islambouli, even naming a street in Tehran after him. But then again, incitement, export and celebration of violent fundamentalism is written into the DNA of the 1979 revolution. Iran's interventionist policy, implemented through proxy warfare and malign behavior, is bound up in the same Khomeinist values that live on today through his succes-

sor, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. "When we say we must spread our revolution everywhere, it must not be misinterpreted to us wanting to expand our borders," Khomeini said in a sermon, soon after taking power. "We consider that all Islamic countries are a part of us. We respect each country. We wish to spread what happened in Iran and this awakening that led the people to steer away from the great powers." Iran's constitution even says the task of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is to spread the rule of God on earth and to build a unified global society based on the struggle to liberate the oppressed of the earth. It also says the task of Iran's foreign policy is to support "legitimate jihad." A headshot of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini taken in Tehran, 05 February 1979, during a meeting shortly after his return from 15 years of exile, as the insurrection against the Shah's regime spreads all over the country. Iran inspired the first extremist organization in Palestine, the Islamic Jihad Movement, in 1979, and supported Lebanon's Hezbollah and Iraq's Islamic Dawa Party throughout the 1980s. The IRGC and its Hezbollah underlings offered training to Al-Qaeda operatives in the 1990s and continue to fan the flames of "legitimate jihad" in Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen. Iranian incitement has contributed to the murder of prominent Lebanese intellectuals, of whom Husayn Muruwwa, Mahdi Amel and Lokman Slim are just three. The US State Department consistently brands Iran the world's number one sponsor of terrorism, highlighting its execution of dissidents at home and targeting of opponents abroad. Khomeini glorified the sacrifices of impressionable young men like Islambouli who fill the ranks of Iran's proxy armies, inciting others to fight and die in the cause of "jihad" and for achieving revolutionary aims. "For God is my witness, whenever I look at these

young people fighting on the front lines with passion and vigor, I feel ashamed of myself,” Khomeini said in one sermon. “Who are you? What are we? We have spent eighty something years in this world — I am speaking for myself — and we have not achieved what they have done in these few days. “We could not discipline ourselves. For me it is too late, but you, you should discipline yourselves, be careful not to trade this world for something else. We are all mortal, that we must approach God in order to make room for us in the other world.” Khomeini glorified the sacrifices of impressionable young men who fill the ranks of Iran’s proxy armies, inciting others to fight and die in the cause of “jihad” and for achieving revolutionary aims. Much of the ideology used to incite violence and motivate the regime’s foot soldiers today was formulated long before Khomeini and his acolytes took power. In his book, “Islamic Government,” based on a series of lectures he delivered in Iraq’s shrine city of Najaf in February 1970, Khomeini elaborated on the system of velayat-e faqih — or guardianship of the Islamic jurist — which prevails in Iran today. The book is a mishmash of inflammatory jurisprudence and radical Islamic principles, whose ultimate aim is to incite jihad to strengthen the foundations of the revolutionary state and weaken those of the “tyrants” and “polytheists” of non-Islamic regimes who deserve to be overthrown. “The persistence of these governments means the disruption of the system of Islam and its provisions,” Khomeini wrote. “There are many texts describing every non-Islamic regime as being polytheist, and its ruler or authority as being tyrant. We are responsible for eradicating the effects of polytheism from our Muslim society and shedding them away from our lives.” In essence, Khomeini peddled the baseless claim that a vast Jewish conspiracy was at work and that non-Islamist regimes, including the Gulf monarchies, were in league with Israel and Western powers. “We must expose this betrayal, and shout at the top of our lungs so that people understand that the Jews and their foreign

masters plot against Islam, and pave the way for Jews to prevail over this whole world,” he said. Khomeini also railed against what he viewed as the influence of secularism on regional governments. “All colonial institutions have inculcated in people’s mind that religion does not meet with politics, spirituality does not have to interfere in social affairs and jurists have no right to determine the destiny of the nation,” he claimed with no basis in fact. “It is very unfortunate that some of us believed in those falsehoods, thus achieving the greatest hope that the souls of the colonizers had dreamed of.” For Khomeini, the infiltration of these secular institutions by Islamists was an effective means of overthrowing them. “It is natural that Islam be allowed to infiltrate the organs of the oppressors if the real aim is to curb grievances, or to cause a coup against those who are in charge. In this case, infiltration is even obligatory, and no one can disagree,” he wrote. Indeed, he echoed the conclusions of Sayyid Qutb, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood who was convicted and hanged in 1966 for plotting the assassination of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. “We must fight the rule of the tyrant, because God almighty has ordered it and he has forbidden obedience to the tyrant,” Khomeini wrote. Decades later, on the eve of the Islamic revolution’s 40th anniversary, Khomeini’s pupil, Ali Khamenei, issued his “Fundamental Islamic-Iranian Blueprint for Progress.” The 56-point document, published on Oct. 14, 2018, set out the supreme leader’s vision for the next 50 years, including the “extension of the reasoning and the spirit of “jihad” in the Islamic world, supporting Islamic liberation movements and demanding the rights of the Palestinian people.” Half a century after Khomeini published “Islamic Government,” it is obvious that the same principles of interventionism and incitement are shaping the regime’s vision for the next 50 years.

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1826191/middle-east>

Clergy and Imams Preach faith to COVID vaccine doubters

During a recent Sunday service at the Gathering Place, an evangelical church in Orlando, Fla., the Rev. Gabriel Salguero focused his sermon on the Covid-19 vaccine, and the fear and suspicion that his largely Latino congregation clutches so tightly. He turned to the New Testament: the parable of the good Samaritan, about the importance of aiding the stranger.

“In getting yourself vaccinated, you are helping your neighbor,” he preached to about 300 masked and socially distanced worshipers. “God wants you to be whole so you can care for your community. So think of vaccines as part of God’s plan.” Dr. Uzma Syed cited a narration about the Prophet Muhammad in urging Muslims to be vaccinated. Credit... Laylah Amatullah Barrayn for The New York Times. Mr. Salguero is among thousands of clergy members from a cross-section of faiths — imams, rabbis, priests, swamis — who are trying to coax the hesitant to get vaccinated against Covid-19. By weaving scripture with science, they are employing the singular trust vested in them by their congregations to dispel myths and disinformation about the shots. Many are even offering their sanctuaries as vaccination sites, to make the experience more accessible and reassuring. Their mission is becoming increasingly vital. With vaccine supply expected to surge in the coming months, and the White House promising enough doses for every American adult by May, public health officials are shifting their attention to the still-substantial number of people who are skeptical about the vaccines. Winning them over is imperative if the country is to achieve widespread immunity from the virus and a semblance of normalcy. Some of the most potent reasons people cite in resisting vaccines are rooted in religious beliefs, and indeed one obstacle these clergy members face is the inveighing against the shots by their own peers. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops recently proclaimed that Catholics should avoid the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, calling it “morally compromised” because it

was developed with cell lines from a fetus aborted in 1985. A false rumor, taken up by some imams and rabbis, that Covid-19 vaccines contain pork byproducts pervades Muslim and Jewish communities. But clergy members who believe in the importance of vaccines are uniquely positioned to counter those claims. Pope Francis himself declared that coronavirus shots are “morally acceptable” because of the severity of the pandemic and the remoteness of the connection to the aborted fetus. With Ramadan approaching next month, imams have been holding Facebook Live chats with Muslim doctors, organized around questions like, “Is the Covid-19 Vaccine Halal?” Albert Mohler, the influential president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, announced that he would take the vaccine. In YouTube videos, WhatsApp messages and podcasts, some ultra-Orthodox rabbinical scholars in Israel and Brooklyn are endorsing the vaccine, citing religious texts. Evangelical clerical activism that promotes vaccination, led by ministers like Mr. Salguero, is gaining momentum. This month, a national network of Latino evangelical pastors hosted a webinar in Spanish about vaccines with government medical experts. In the Biden administration, the clergy has a new partner. The newly reinstated White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships has been holding a weekly call with thousands of faith leaders across the country on strategies for working with clinics to administer the shots. During the March 4 call, Jared Moskowitz, director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, who has connected with churches in Florida’s Cuban, Haitian and Vietnamese communities, said that faith leaders were crucial in getting vaccines to their communities. “There are major trust issues, there are major transportation issues, and there are digital divide issues,” Mr. Moskowitz said. “And what the church community has done is solve all of those issues.” Congregations, he said, “know the pastor, they trust the pastor,

and the pastor is better than anybody at getting people to come out.” Medicine and faith In January, Swayamprakash Swami, a former medical doctor based in India who is now a senior monk affiliated with BAPS, a mainstream Hindu denomination, gave his blessing to the Covid-19 shots. Now the ancient Hindu principle of ahimsa, an exhortation to do no harm and revere life, is being used to encourage Hindus in North America to embrace the vaccine, said Dr. Kashyap Patel, a cardiologist in Atlanta who is a medical adviser to BAPS. American Hindu temples such as the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Melville, N.Y., are providing pop-up vaccine clinics to their communities. Vaccine hesitance is more entrenched among American Muslims, who number nearly 3.5 million. About a quarter of them are African-Americans, who have their own historic reasons for mistrusting the shots. Hagar Aboubakr, who runs an Islamic school in Howard County, Md., said she saw no reason to get the Covid vaccine. But as she learned of teachers at her school being vaccinated, she thought: “I have a responsibility to lead by example. Am I being selfish by not getting it?” She offered a supplication prayer, asking Allah to lead her to a good decision. She listened to talks by Muslim physicians. She consulted her imam. He told her: “Muslim scholars advise you to take it. As Muslims, it is our responsibility to do what we need to do to relieve humanity of this pandemic.” Ms. Aboubakr recently got her first shot. Imams worldwide have been appearing in livestreamed conversations with doctors from the Islamic Medical Association of North America. In the talks, Dr. Uzma Syed, an infectious-disease physician, explains vaccine science but then turns to religious commentary. Medicine has long been a firmament of Islam, she says, citing a narration about the Prophet Muhammad, who was asked if taking medicine for disease was permitted: “Yes, O you servants of Allah, take medicine, as Allah has not created a disease without creating a cure, except for one.” “Which one?” they asked. He replied, ‘Old age.’”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/14/health/clergy-covid-vaccine.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

Large Asteroid to zip Past Earth

PARIS: The largest asteroid to pass by Earth this year is expected to swing closest on Monday, giving astronomers a rare chance for a good look at a space rock that formed at the dawn of our solar system.

While in astronomical terms this marks a close encounter with the asteroid -- called 2001 FO32 -- Nasa says there is no threat of a collision with “our planet now or for centuries to come”.

The nearest it will get will be two million kilometres away, according to the US space agency. That is roughly 5.25 times the



distance of the Earth from the Moon, but still close enough for 2001 FO32 to be classified as a “potentially hazardous asteroid”.

“We know the orbital path of 2001 FO32 around the Sun very accurately,” said Paul Chodas, director of the Center for Near Earth Object Studies. Nasa says 2001 FO32 would pass by at about 124,000 kilometres per hour, much faster than the speed at which most asteroids encounter Earth.

The asteroid is estimated to be about 900 metres in diameter and was discovered 20 years ago. Astronomers are hoping to get a better understanding of the asteroid’s size and a rough idea of its composition by studying light reflecting off its surface.

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<https://www.dawn.com/news/1613887/large-asteroid-to-zip-past-earth-today>

Father, Rabbi, Maulana and Brahmin: How Priests Became God

By: S. Arshad

Religious heads or priests assume an important place in all the major religions of the world. They are responsible for the smooth running of religious places --- mosques, churches, temples, synagogues etc – along with guiding the followers of their respective religions in religious matters. However, over time, this section of the community became powerful and assumed centre stage in their respective communities. They possess the theoretical and practical



knowledge of their respective religions and are considered an authority in religious matters. Therefore, Maulana in Muslim community, Father (or church father) in Christian community, Rabbi in Jewish community and Brahmin in Hindu religious community hold an important position in their respective religious societies. However, the concept of clergy in these societies (except in Hinduism) is not supported by their respective scriptures – the holy Quran, the holy Bible and the holy Torah. Only in Chhandogya Upanishad, the Brahmins have been granted a special status. The devotees are expected not to speak ill of the Brahmins. The most striking aspect of the titles Maulana, Rabbi, Father and Brahmin conferred on the religious heads is that they are in fact used by the Holy Scriptures for God and not for the religious heads or priests. The priests adopted these titles to suggest that they were next to God and so very important and revered persons. For example, the term Maulana which is used for religious heads or priests of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri

Lanka). A Maulana is a religious scholar having graduated from a madrasa and has authority on Shariah matters. But the literal meaning of the word Maulana is our God or our Lord. (Maulana). The word occurs in the Quran on two occasions (2:286 and 9:51). The word is not used in the Arab world and in Iran it is used only to mean the philosopher Rumi (Maulana Rum). In some African countries, the word means any scholar or secular public figure. How and when the word meaning God came to be used by Muslims in the Indian sub-continent for religious heads is a matter of research. The word Rabbi is used for religious heads or priests in Judaism. A Rabbi has the theoretical knowledge of Judaic religious texts like Talmud and is responsible for the services in a Synagogue. But the word Rabbi does not find a place in the Hebrew Bible. It was used for the Talmudic era religious teachers who would assemble to codify Judaism's written and oral laws. The word rabbi is derived from the Hebrew word rav meaning the great one or master. In later years, that is from the 1ST century CE, the

word has been used for religious heads of Jews. The word in Arabic means my God or my Lord. Therefore, the Rabbis adopted a word that literally meant my God. The Christian priests are called church father or generally, Father. In Trinitarian Christianity, God is called the Father. He is God the Father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit. In many verses in the New Testament, God describes himself as Father to the humankind. In the early era of Christianity, from the 1st century to the 8th century CE, influential Christian theologians and writers who established intellectual and doctrinal foundations of Christianity were called Church Fathers. But the church priests of the later era also used the term for themselves because it gave them a sense of superiority in their community. Thus, they used a word for themselves which God used for himself in the Bible. In Hinduism, the temple priests are called Brahmin but the word is pronounced a little differently from the same word meaning the formless attributeless God Brahmin. Brahmin meaning the priest is pronounced as Brahmin with a long "A". In the Vedas, Brahmin is the creative principle, or the Supreme Being which creates, destroys and sustains the universe. The Vedas and the Upanishads use the word Brahmin for the Supreme Being or the indwelling soul of the material world a number of times. However, as mentioned earlier, Chhandogya Upanishad has recognized the institution of Brahminhood and asks devotees to be respectful of Brahmins. The word Maulana among Muslims seems to be inspired by the Judaic and Christian traditions of adopting the word meant for God though Muslims, particularly in the Indian sub-continent talk ad nauseam of Jewish conspiracies to corrupt Muslim minds and their beliefs.

<https://www.newageislam.com/interfaith-dialogue/s-arshad-new-age-islam/father-rabbi-maulana-and-brahmin-how-priests-became-god/d/124497>

Bitcoin witnesses boost as Tesla officially begins transactions

Tesla on Wednesday officially began accepting bitcoin as a currency to purchase electric autos, Chief Executive Elon Musk announced — a move that boosted the digital money. "You can now buy a Tesla with bitcoin," Musk said on Twitter, implementing a plan announced in February to accept the cryptocurrency as a form of payment. Near 1310 GMT, bitcoin was up 4.3% at \$56,802. As visitors to Tesla's US website click through the payment options, they can now opt to transact in bitcoin. But shoppers who choose this option may be prompted to "provide us with additional information to allow us to verify your identity," Tesla said in its "terms and conditions" section on the website. "All products are priced in US dollars," the website added. "If you choose to make a payment using bitcoin, you must pay an amount of bitcoin that is of equivalent value to the US dollar purchase price." Musk on Twitter said Tesla can accept bitcoin payments directly and that those sums "will be retained as bitcoin, not converted to fiat currency." Tesla in February first announced a plan to accept the cryptocurrency. The company also said it took a \$1.5 billion investment in digital money. The Tesla announcement, coupled with moves by Mastercard and other mainstream companies to accept the cryptocurrency, has helped to boost bitcoin to unprecedented levels in 2021. Bitcoin is currently a bit below its all-time high of \$61,742 earlier this month.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/809238-bitcoin-witnesses-boost-as-tesla-officially-begins-transactions>

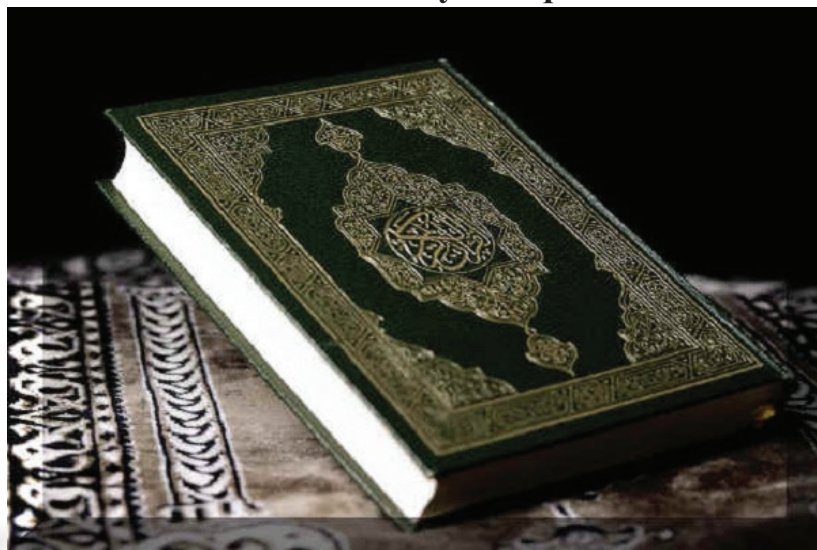
FORCED CONVERSION & ISLAM

“THERE SHOULD BE NO COMPULSION IN THE MATTERS OF RELIGION.” (HOLY QURAN, 2:257)



By: Laiq Ahmed Atif

Freedom is a great blessing. Freedom is the cornerstone of any free and prosperous society and underlines the idea of protecting the most important right of people – the right to believe, practice and preach what they want, without fear, coercion, persecution, punishment or discrimination. I recently read a report on the incidents of persecution of the Christian community living in Pakistan and there have been incidents of forced marriages and forced conversions.



Among them, there was a report about a Christian girl, Arzoo Raja, from Pakistan, who had been abducted and forced to marry and convert to Islam. The case of Arzoo Raja has raised many questions against forced marriages and forced religious conversion. According to Islamic teachings, coercion in matters of religion as well as in marriage is not allowed under any circumstances. Every person has the freedom to choose a partner in marriage and to believe in any religion of the person's choice. Islam believes in religious freedom and does not allow the use of force as an instrument for spreading its message. Islam clearly states:

“There should be no compulsion in the matters of religion.” (Holy Quran, 2: 257)

This categorically shows there is no need for any coercion. Leave it to an individual to determine where the truth belongs.

Moreover, addressing the Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, God told him not to use any force for the reformation of society. His status as a reformer is very clearly defined in the following verses:

Admonish, therefore, for thou art but an admonisher; thou hast no authority to

compel them. (88:22-23)

It is not thy responsibility to make them follow the right path; but Allah guides whomsoever He pleases. (2:273)

But if they turn away, We have not sent thee as a guardian over them. Thy duty is only to convey the Message. Leave it to God to make the Message effective. (42:49)

Furthermore, God Almighty makes it abundantly clear that if compulsion was to be made permissible in the matters of faith, then why God would have left it upon people, when He himself would have forced people to believe in religion? Allah says that introducing the element of compulsion in religion was never a part of His scheme, and He never allowed any linkage between religion and compulsion. God Almighty says in the Holy Quran:

And if thy Lord had enforced His will, surely, all who are on the earth would have believed together. Wilt thou, then, force men to become believers? (10:100)

These verses clearly show that Islam categorically states that religion is a personal matter and everyone is free to choose their religion.

Faith is a matter between man and his God and should not be interfered with in any way. Everyone has the right to live according to their faith and to perform their religious rituals. Therefore, when one interferes in this matter which is personal between man and God, and where the law interferes with this right, it is an act of great wickedness and persecution, and should be condemned.

In a nutshell, Islam firmly believes in freedom of religion. People often ask me that if Islam believes in religious freedom then why do we find religious persecution in certain countries where there are Muslims in the majority? Why do they want to impose their choice on others? Why not allow others to believe, practice, and preach the religion of their choice? Why are people of other faiths persecuted in Muslim countries?

These are very valid questions. I would say that it is a great misfortune that there are Muslims who do not practice Islamic teaching in its true sense. But we must also understand that, if a person does not follow any particular teaching properly while admitting to embracing that teaching, then it is the person who is wrong, and not the teaching that is wrong. The word 'Islam' actually means peace, love, and security. There can be no coercion when it comes to faith; it is a clear direction in the Holy Quran. From cover to cover, the Holy Quran conveys the message of love, affection, peace, reconciliation, and the spirit of sacrifice. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community follows the teachings of Islam in letter and spirit and works purely to please the Almighty God. If a church or other place of worship needs some form of protection and if Christians or people of other faith need it, they will find us side by side with them to help them. This is because we firmly believe in the Islamic teaching that, "There is no compulsion in religion" and in our revolutionary and peaceful motto which is, "Love for all, hatred for none."

Denmark Sending Syrian Refugees Back Home

The Scandinavian nation has stripped 94 Syrian refugees of their residency permits after it determined Damascus and the surrounding area as being safe. Migrants will be sent to deportation camps, but will not be forced to leave. But rights groups say the government is trying to give migrants no other option than to return to Syria on their own accord. Mattias Tesfaye, Denmark's immigration minister, said last month that the country had been 'open and honest from the start' with refugees coming from Syria.

'We have made it clear to the Syrian refugees that their residence permit is temporary. It can be withdrawn if protection is no longer needed,' he said, according to The Daily Telegraph. His comments came as Denmark extended the parts on Syria considered safe for people to return, to include the southern Rif Dimashq Governorate. 'We must give people protection for as long as it is needed. But when conditions in the home country improve, a former refugee should return home and re-establish a life there,' he said.

Denmark's ruling centre-Left Social Democratic Party has taken a fierce anti-immigration stance in an effort to fend off challenges from parties on the Right. Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has promised to target 'zero' asylum seekers applying for residence in the country.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9316633/Denmark-European-country-Syrian-migrants-country.html>

Dowry remains India's abiding shame

By: Namita Bhandare



Her name was Ayesha. She was 23, worked at a bank and was hoping to complete a master's degree when she chose to end her life in the Sabarmati river. The police have arrested her husband, Aarif Khan, who she married in 2018, and charged him with abetment to suicide. Rashika Jain was 25 and had married businessman Kushal Agarwal at a grand destination wedding in Jodhpur a year ago. On February 16, she was dead from a fall off the third floor terrace of her in-laws' home in Alipore, Kolkata. The police have filed a first information report against Agarwal. In both cases, the women's parents have alleged harassment over dowry. A consumerist, post-liberalisation economy now drives the marriage market — destination weddings, designer jewellery and, at the very least, a DJ-wale bhaiya even in small towns and villages. Much of this is paid for by the bride's family because it's "tradition". But even as gifts, how do you separate an outright demand from what was given under social pressure? Six decades after the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, the continuing prevalence of dowry remains India's national shame. The 2019 National Crime Records Bureau data tells us that a woman is subject to cruelty by her husband and in-laws every four minutes. Every 73 minutes, there is a dowry death — 23 bodies a day. Yet, when was the last time

you saw public outrage over these numbers? It is possible that these are now so routine, that we don't even react. In the 1980s, at the height of these "kitchen accidents", two mothers, Satyarani Chadha and Shahjahan Apa, turned a personal tragedy, the murder of their daughters, into a public crusade, leading to changes in the law. By 2014, public sympathy had waned and the Supreme Court called Section 498A, the cruelty section, among the "provisions that are used as weapons rather than shield by disgruntled wives". Notwithstanding the misogyny of "disgruntled wives", men rights activists are voluble when it comes to the "misuse" of this section, but inexplicably silent on dowry itself. Dowry is the issue that everyone, even government and social workers, has forgotten. Ayesha's death led to a welcome break in the silence as Hyderabad Member of Parliament Asaduddin Owaisi said: "Irrespective of which religion you belong to, I strongly urge everyone to end this greed of dowry." There's one good reason for bringing dowry back into the forefront of the gender agenda. A study found that states with the highest increase of dowry deaths also have the highest decline in sex ratio. In other words, in states such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh where dowry is rife, it does not make economic sense to have a girl child. In the run-up to International Women's Day, it's good to celebrate the undeniable gains on our road to gender equality. But it's also worth remembering just how far we have to go — and how little has changed. Namita Bhandare writes on gender.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/dowry-remains-india-s-abiding-shame-101614946497363.html>

Muslims, students protest Indian PM's visit to Bangladesh

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) - Muslims and student activists rallied in Bangladesh's capital Friday to denounce the upcoming visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to join the celebration of the country's 50th anniversary of independence. Modi is due to arrive in Dhaka on March 26, which Bangladesh celebrates as its independence day. It was the date in 1971 when Bangladesh declared itself independent from Pakistan. Aided by India, Bangladesh emerged as a new nation after nine months of bloody war. After Friday prayers, about 500 Muslims marched onto the streets outside the country's main Baitul Mokarram Mosque in downtown Dhaka amid tight security. The protesters carried no banners and did not declare if they have any allegiance to any political parties. They took their shoes in their hands to show disrespect to Modi. They chanted anti-India and anti-Modi slogans, asking him not to come to Dhaka.

Separately, about 200 left-leaning student activists marched through streets on Dhaka University campus where they called Modi as "the butcher of Gujarat." Some protesters carried posters reading "Go Back Modi, Go Back

India" and "Go Back Killer Modi." Modi was chief minister in the western state of Gujarat in 2002 when Hindu-Muslim riots left more than 1,000 people dead. Allegations that authorities allowed and even encouraged the bloodshed have long followed Modi, who has repeatedly denied having any role. India's Supreme Court has said it found no evidence to prosecute him. The protesters criticized Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for inviting Modi, saying the two countries had many disputed issues. The protesters said Modi and his Hindu-nationalist party oppressed Muslims in India. They also criticized the killings of Bangladeshis by Indian border guards. India says such casualties happen when Bangladeshis are involved in cross-border smuggling and attempt to cross the border illegally. "India's subordinate government of Hasina has invited Modi, we are here to protest against that," Hossain Mohammed Anwar said in front of the mosque. Modi's visit is the first foreign trip since the coronavirus pandemic began. He is scheduled to travel to a place outside Dhaka that is sacred to the Matua community of India's

West Bengal state. Matua is a Hindu religious sect that is expected to determine the winner of at least seven constituencies in the Indian state's assembly elections next month.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-9381055/Muslims-students-protest-Indian-PMs-visit-Bangladesh.html>



NATURE

A reflection of the teachings of The Holy Quran

By: Masood Ashraf USA

Modern science and technology has enabled us to make advancements and progressive discoveries that have driven change into the modern era. Evidently, there have been countless scientific discoveries and explorations that have stunned and pivoted progress towards growth. However, it is important to understand that even before all of these discoveries were credited with viability by world-class scientists, a certain ancient scripture that dates back to the time of desert nomads deserves far more credit and acknowledgment. Contrary to popular belief, science and scientific theories have always paralleled The Holy Quran in unfathomable ways. There is no act, law, or theory in any scientific branch that contradicts the Holy Quran, rather anything and everything that happens on this Earth is all a reflection of its teachings. One such example is that of dirt. Historically, dirt, mud, and clay have always been viewed as means of uncleanness, filth and contamination. The idea of soil being a substance we can use to increase personal hygiene could not be farther from our initial mindset and thoughts. However, like all theories that were once contradicted and ridiculed by many, ended up being proved truthful and evidence-based. Countless research has been done on the numerous qualities of soil, including its ability to indeed encourage cleanliness and aid in the fight against unwanted bacteria and microorganisms. Lynda Williams, a clay and mineral scientist at Arizona State University explained that there are in fact “two elements in clay [that] work in tandem to kill bacteria” (Burnham, 2016). By analyzing evidence-based information, we can establish the fact that this specific quality of soil can aid medical-centered research in new and progressive ways. Specific antimicrobial properties of certain soils can not only resist many harmful bacteria like E.coli and Staphylococcus Aureus, but can also encourage immunity to certain pathogens that may prove harmful to the human body (Indian Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences, 2008). Tying modern research regarding this subject with the timeless text of the Holy Quran, we can

advance the idea that both science and the Holy Quran parallel each other. Long before modern scientists discovered the numerous health-benefiting properties of soil, Allah the Almighty instructed his people to situationally “seek clean earth and wipe your faces and hands with it” (6:3). The term Tayammum was coined to represent this method that was to be used situationally. Fifteen hundred years ago, when Allah the Almighty revealed these verses, seldom did people have the opportunity to understand the complex scientific reasoning behind using dirt as an alternative to water for ablution. In fact, a very interesting experiment was conducted by Professor David Whitlock when in an attempt to prove that humans did not need water to keep clean, did not shower for twelve years. Instead, he developed his own soil-spray and used it as a substitute to soap and water for that time period. His results concluded that certain properties of soil and dirt have natural cleaning benefits and that the daily use of soap and water can actually remove healthy bacteria from the skin (Ghose, 2015). He got this idea after a friend asked him about horses rolling in dirt and he thought “the only way the horses could evolve this behavior was if they had substantial evolutionary benefits from it.” It must be noted that “dust has been chosen as substitute for water,” (77:21) because just as water reminds a person of his origin, thus creating in him a sense of humility, similarly dust calls to his mind that other humble substance from which he was created (30:21)” (Tafseer-e-Kabir). In today’s era where misconceptions about Islamic teachings and its viability in the modern world is questioned, one need not look further than the Holy Quran and its verses. Science and scientific theories have always puzzled the minds of men since the dawn of time and it will continue to do so as more innovations and technologies are discovered. However, in the end, due credit must be given to Quranic scriptures and texts which will always be a guiding light to researchers and scientists until the end of time.