



Editor:

Dr Saeed Shehabi
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Published by the
45 Crawford Place,
London W1H 4LP

Tel: 020 7724 3033

Email:

Abrarhouse
@hotmail.com

Website

www.abraronline.net
Charity no. 293802

We stand for:

- *Inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogue*
- *Respect for the human race and rights*
- *Cooperation for the good of people*
- *Moderation*
- *Modernity*
- *High standards of spirituality*

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Abrar

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Sex education infuriates religious communities

The recently publicised government's new educational policy to introduce sex education to primary school children has led to an uproar among the communities that oppose this policy. Many families across the cultural and religious divide resent the prospect of exposing their children to the sensitive world of sex. Many families are conservative and prefer not to deal with this topic openly, let alone in the presence of their children. Sex has always been a taboo to most human communities throughout the generations. It is only in the past century that liberal attitudes have flourished and imposed new narratives related to morality, sex, privacy and cultural specificity. One of the outcomes of the cultural shock of the sixties was the emergence of permissiveness that led to the sexual liberalism.

Although this has become the norm today, and may have mushroomed further in the digital age, new women groups fighting against the exploitation of their folks have openly opposed turning women into commodities or sexual objects. Never in the history of mankind has this occurred at this level. The digital explosion of the past three decades has expounded the moral and behavioural crisis. Grooming for sex has become a worrying phenomenon, not only among corrupt youth in Northern England but within the large corporations that have broken every limit of modesty and belittled the dignity of women. With increasingly harsh economic environment, young girls are pushed towards unethical behaviour in order to survive on one hand and to achieve "stardom" on the other. The government has a duty to protect the public morality and ethical values. While awareness of these sensitive matters is important, a line must be drawn between outright abolition of the borders that separate the private from the public matters. There is a need to cleanse the modern means of communication especially the internet and other social media. Children must be protected against exploitation and grooming. But they must also be protected against zealous approaches to these contentious matters that may lead them into more confusion and sense of loss of morality and identity. This are serious matters.

The decision by the government to introduce sex education to under-aged children has infuriated many, especially among the ethnic groups as well as the conservative families. Seminars, discussions and debates have been held in the past six months to highlight what is seen as "infringement" of the basic laws of privacy, self-dignity and cultural specificity. A consensus has thus formed to oppose the blanket imposition of the proposed policy. The parliament debated it as protesters blockaded Westminster as MPs were lobbied by members of their constituencies to urge them to oppose the policy. It now appears that this activism may have worked, for now at least. There is now an inclination to allow families to opt out of the sex education curriculum. This may be a short-term policy to bypass the wide opposition to the legislation. There is fear that those concessions may be overturned in the future. There is no guarantee to stop that eventuality. Here the government must respect those communities who have accepted its offer of opt-out for families. Any drastic change of that policy may endanger the mutual faith and lead to social unrest. Despite the trend towards more liberal approach to sexual matters, a large section of the British society remains conservative and considers sexual matters inappropriate for open scrutiny especially for children.

In light of the recent uproar against the proposed sex education at primary schools, the authorities must take note of the need to protect public interest and maintain proper social order. More consultations are needed to evaluate the public perception of the new policies which often break the traditional barriers and curtail the excesses of liberalism and "open-mindedness" that often cross the boundaries between modesty and outrage. This is much needed if the institution of marriage is to be preserved, encouraged and facilitated. The new approaches to liberalism must not be allowed to destroy traditions and public decency requirements. The ongoing debate must be encouraged and with it more consultations, scientific studies and religious indoctrination especially in the fields of morality, spirituality and decency.



Islamists experience in Educational systems



The Iraqi experience in education was the topic of discussion at Abrar's weekly meeting on 28th February. Abdul Muhsin AlMousawi, the Director of Baghdad's education Board delivered a critique of that experience drawing from his personal work over several years. He quoted Imam Ali on this: That who starts with himself (in education and good behaviour) is more respectable than that who starts with the others. He delved into wide area of ideological discourse on education citing Quranic verses and historical lessons to prove that man must not deviate from the natural path. He pointed out that the materialists based their doctrines on the natural laws and the human excellence. They did not aim to create the perfect humans but how to own them. The factory, the servant, the street and the pupil are all manifestations of ownership. Modern educational doctrines which are in line with the Islamic concepts says that the student must contributed in the educational process. Under the Iraqi Ba'this rule this did not happen. Education was a closed enterprise, the relations between the teacher and the students or among the students themselves were built on fear, not mutual respect. In the old days people were made to fear of others. But the Islamic education seeks to save the humans. Life was built on wars and fear. Then came Prophet Mohammad who told the people: Don't fear each other. Overnight this nomadic person became a leader who seeks to guide others out of love, and not out of the desire to conquer. Islam tells its followers: go about your material life in coordination with the Islamic way of thinking and be part of life and the universe. Islamic education seeks to build the human, not the businessman. It seeks to establish peace with the self and the other. To achieve internal victory is more important than the outside one. This leads to internal peace. In UK we live in accordance with Imam Ali's motto: People are of two kinds; a brother in religion or an equal in creation. The Quran seeks to establish real balance between the earthly and spiritual needs. Our experience in Iraq has been tough. We inherited heavy loads. Education was geared to worship the party and the president. Appointments of teachers were based on loyalty not qualifications. Fear was induced in the minds and souls of the students. Educa-

tion was devoid of meaning or content. The Teacher feared negative reports from his students to the party mechanisms. The relations between the teacher and student were built on mistrust, lack of respect and fear. To build an alternative educational system proper budgets were needed. This did not happen. Only 3 percent of the budget was allocated to education. The ideal class must have less than 30 students. I visited a district called "Seven palaces" in Iraq and found 120 students in the class. Most buildings are dilapidated, the curriculum is shaky. Then we took some action and asked students to attend only the classes related to their studies. In 2007 there were 12 percent student passes while in 2017 this rose to 90 percent.

Muslims in Britain

On Tuesday 5th March a seminar was jointly organised by The Open Discussion and the Gulf Cultural Club to debate the issue of "The Muslims in UK". Three speakers participated in the discussion and the session was chaired by Shabbir Razvi. Ifath Nawaz (Chair, Legal Affairs Committee, MCB) focussed on Muslim engagement in UK since 1997 when the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) and Muslim Lawyers were established. They started engaging with the police, NGOs and others. Now after over 20 years the general perception is terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. The Axis of evil are Muslim countries. Muslims in Europe are haunted by Brexit, moral collapse and environmental catastrophe. There is clear absence of women. We are in danger of another Bosnia-like situation although we are part and parcel of European heritage. Religious values are under attacks. Muslims of Europe are undergoing transformation, from being foreigners to be indigenous. In UK, we have 15 MPs including 8 women. But the tribal issues have continued. I saw Muslim councillors on the backdrop of tribalism, with no regard to wider community. Participation in civil society is necessary to go forward. Muslims are under-represented in civil service. I worked with MINAB. I found that there is lack of willingness to tackle old-fashioned culture. MCB is trying to lead the way. Visit my mosque was started with 10 mosques this time it attracted

more than 200. MCB tries to change things with upskill in power, leadership training of women, workshop with Met police and attempts to reach out to wider society There is a lot of work being done but we have long way to go. Across Europe we need to share experiences

Julian Bond (Grants Team Leader, The Methodist Church) said that the British society and Muslims is a fact Remembering history means facing up to it. The biggest problem is religion. Our society rejects others, There is denial of ignorance. There are many who do not know that Muslims have affection to Jesus

We are faced with people not knowing and not trying to know. It creates extremism amongst some non-Muslims. Media outrage is manufactured. Three years ago Imam Suliman Gani was accused of supporting ISIS while in fact he was supporter of the Conservative party. When Muslims integrate they are accused of islamification. When they don't they are accused of stealth jihad. 30 years after the Rushdi affair anti-Muslim feelings have not gone. There are good initiatives like Visit my Mosque and the Big Iftar.

The book: ninety nine names of God, a sufi book, illustrates the names of God and is open to other faiths.

Zaki Badawi whose response to Rushdie was to write a better book stands as a good example. Cameron hosted Eid parties at Downing Street. Our response together must be to challenge negativity. We need to challenge threats.

Abdool Karim Vakil (Lecturer at King's College) had four things to say: First: not long ago any discussion on Muslims citizenship focussed on Muslim segregation and lack of engagement etc. From the notion about removal of obstacles to pro-active action to enable access and build capacity there has been a good progress.

The second point: Muslims as citizens face same problems as others; Brexit, economy, increasing the gap between the haves and have nots. Muslims have other challenges; they face specific challenges that span from centrality of Islam in the world. The most direct result is: the curtailment of citizen rights of Muslims, Islamophobia and the curtailment of the freedom of expression.

Continued on Page 3



14 tory MPs suspended over alleged Islamophobia

Britain's Conservative Party has suspended 14 members over alleged Islamophobia, it emerged on Tuesday, amid calls for an independent inquiry into widespread "bigotry" within the ruling party. The members were reportedly suspended after numerous abusive posts were uncovered on social media, collected online by the @matesjacob Twitter account.

One individual claimed they would like to "turf all Muslims out of public office," and another wanted to "get rid of all mosques," The Guardian reported.

A third wrote they could not vote for Home Secretary Sajid Javid because that would amount to a vote for "Islam to lead this country," according to reports.

The members were reportedly suspended for Islamophobic posts in a Facebook group called the "Jacob Rees-Mogg Supporters Group."

"However we have identified some people who are party members and they have been immediately suspended, pending further investigation," he added. "When we find evidence of members making offensive or inappropriate comments, we consistently take decisive action. Discrimination or abuse of any kind is wrong and will not be tolerated."

Muslims to make up 30% of Russia's population by 2034

Muslims will make up 30 percent of Russia's population by 2034, the country's grand mufti said Monday.

Speaking at a conference in Moscow, Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin said the number of Muslims in Russia has been growing with every passing day.

"According to the predictions of experts,

Muslims in the West

Continued from Page 2

But there is also the transformation from being Muslims in Britain to British Muslims; nationalisation of Islam

The third point is about our collective memories. We have two central elements: Muslim engagement has improved starting from the Rushdie affair. The second is that we have matured and would not do what they had done during the affair. Rushdie was critical moment in the emergence of Muslims. It was important for the learning code for Muslims and how to engage public opinion, discourse and government. Other issues also emerged: Issues of halal food, schooling, Sunday schools, school meals, dress and law. The fourth point is poverty of imagination. What it is proper for Muslims to campaign on. There is also the Muslim citizenship.



30 percent of Russia's population will consist of Muslims after 15 years," Gainutdin said. He recalled that during last year's Eid al-Adha religious festival, more than 320,000 Muslims came to

mosques in Moscow to perform their prayers, saying this was a "record."

Noting that the number of those performing prayers during the Islamic festivals has been increasing compared to previous years, Gainutdin said it was an indicator of the rising numbers of Muslims in the country. He also said there was a need for dozens of new mosques in Russia's big cities.

Last year, Gainutdin revealed that the Muslim community in Russia was 25 million strong and continues to grow, according to Anadolu Agency.

The reason for the increase is mainly due to two factors: the high birth rate among Muslim families and through the arrival of people from Central Asia, he added.

Most Muslims in the country live in Moscow and other major metropolitan areas such as St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, according to Gainutdin.

US senators to push Trump on Saudis, journalist's death

Republican and Democratic U.S. senators said on Monday they were frustrated with the Trump administration's failure to provide more information about the murder of Saudi Arabian journalist Jamal Khashoggi and vowed to push for a stronger response.

State and Treasury Department officials briefed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee behind closed doors on Monday evening. Lawmakers said they had learned nothing new.

"It was a complete waste of time. I knew more than they did," Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, a close ally of President Donald Trump on many issues, told reporters.

Graham said it was time for more action, but did not elaborate.

Republican Senator Mitt Romney said: "It was not very helpful. And it was frustrating for a number of us to have made so little progress."

Bob Menendez, the committee's ranking Democrat, said new sanctions

should be levied, possibly via legislation he co-sponsored with Graham.

"I think the Senate's going to have to act unless it is willing to accept the death of a U.S. resident journalist as an acceptable action because of a broader relationship. I don't accept that," Menendez said.

The Trump administration missed a February deadline to report to Congress on who was responsible for Khashoggi's death. In Saudi Arabia, 11 suspects have been indicted in the murder, and officials have rejected accusations that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman ordered the killing.

The report was required after lawmakers last year triggered a provision of the 2016 Global Magnitsky human rights act requiring that a Trump administration investigation.

"The Senate needs to act. Otherwise, Global Magnitsky will have no consequence and any administration, this one or another, can just ignore it," Menendez said.

Yemen accuses Saudis of violating truce 966 times

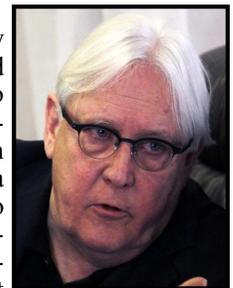
Yemeni Armed Forces spokesman has accused the Saudi-led coalition of repeatedly breaching ceasefire agreement in Al Hudaydah, Yemen, saying that it has breached the truce 966 times in 4 days. According to the Yemeni media 'Al-Masirah', Brigadier General Yahya Saree said the Saudi coalition has targeted different areas in Al Hudaydah with 55 missiles and 532 mortar shells.

Meanwhile, Saudi jet fighters bombarded Saada, Taiz, Sanaa and Hajjah 64 times.

The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2451 to support the Stockholm Agreement on deployment of a team in order to facilitate monitoring and implementing the Agreement and establishing truce in important Yemeni ports.

The resolution mainly focuses on sending essential commodities to the Yemeni people, supporting the Stockholm Agreement, assigning the Secretary-General of the United Nations to implement it and observing the ceasefire.

The fourth round of Yemen peace talks kicked off in Stockholm, Sweden on December 6 with the attendance of the UN special envoy Martin Griffith and the government representatives. It agreed to establish truce in Yemeni ports of al-Hudaydah, al-Salif and Ayn Issa.



Fatima al-Fihri: Founder of World's Very First University

Sumara Khan

The name Fatima Al-Fihri crowns the annals of history with the distinction of having established the world's very first university. Yes, it was a Muslim woman who pioneered a model of higher learning coupled with the issuance of degrees of various levels.

Fatima Al-Fihri migrated with her family in the early ninth century from Qayrawan in present-day Tunisia to the city of Fez in Morocco. This was during the rule of Idrees II, an extraordinary ruler and devout Muslim. Fez at that time was a bustling metropolis of the "Muslim West" (known as al-Maghrib), and held the promise in the people's imaginations of fortune and felicity. Having become one of the most influential Muslim cities, Fez boasted a rich combination of religion and culture, both traditional and cosmopolitan. This was the city, on the left bank of the River Fez, where Fatima's family settled and she eventually married.

After much toil and struggle in humble beginnings, the family of Fatima was eventually blessed with prosperity. Her father, Mohammad bin Abdullah Al-Fihri, had become a hugely successful businessman. After the deaths of Fatima's husband, father, and brother in short succession, Fatima and her only other sibling, Mariam, received a sizable inheritance which assured their financial independence. It was in this latter period of their lives that they distinguished themselves. Having received a good education, the sisters in turn hastened to dedicate all of their wealth to benefiting their community. Observing that the local mosques in Fez could not accommodate the growing population of worshippers, many of whom were refugees from Islamic Spain, Mariam built the breathtaking and grand Andalusian Mosque in 245AH/859CE.

In AD859, al-Fihri decided that a place of higher learning was much needed in the city and founded the al-Qarawiyyin Mosque and University, naming it after her hometown. She oversaw construction of the building – 30 metres long with a courtyard, prayer hall, library and schoolrooms. It is considered by many historians as the oldest, continually operating, degree-

granting university in the world. Historical references note that she directly oversaw and guided the construction process in great detail, certainly a testament to her great dedication as she had no expertise in the field!

It was the first degree-granting educational institute in the world (as recognised by UNESCO and Guinness World Records). Students from all over the world travelled to study a wide range of subjects, ranging from natural sciences to languages to astronomy, and Fatima herself studied there too. During the medieval times, the University was considered a major intellectual centre.

Fatima had grand aspirations, and early on began buying property adjacent to the initial land, thereby significantly increasing the size of the mosque. She diligently spent all that was required of time and money to see the project to completion. She was also extremely pious and devout in worship and made a religious vow to fast daily from the first day of construction in Ramadan 245 AH/859 CE until the project was completed some two years later, whereupon she offered prayers of gratitude in the very mosque she had so tirelessly worked to build.

Masjid Al-Qarawiyyin, one of the largest mosques in North Africa, housed the university which was to become a major center of advanced learning in medieval times in the Mediterranean. Al-Qarawiyyin University is credited with producing many distinguished Muslim thinkers including Abul-Abbas, the jurist Muhammad al-Fasi, and Leo Africanus, the famous author and traveler. Other prominent names associated with the institution include the Maliki jurist Ibn al-Arabi (d. 543AH/1148CE), the historian Ibn Khaldun (d. 808AH/1406CE), and the astronomer al-Bitruji (Alpetragius) (d. 1204CE).

Non-Muslims were welcome to matriculate. In fact, the University's outstanding caliber attracted Gerber of Auvergne who

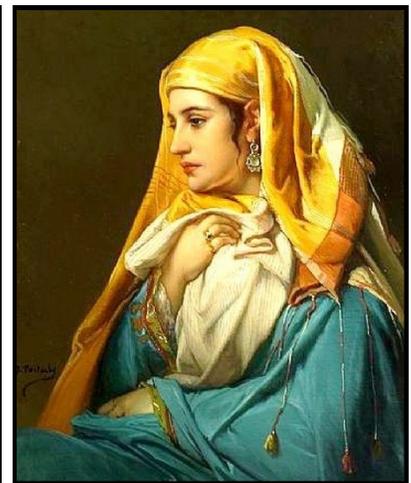
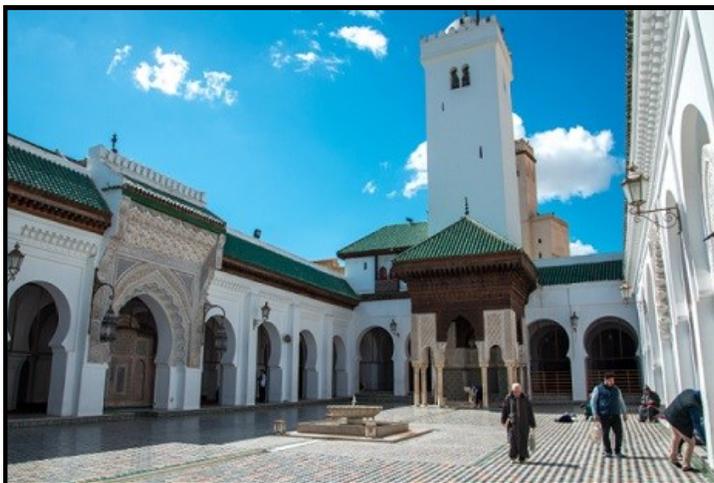
later became Pope Sylvester II and went on to introduce Arabic numerals and the concept of zero to medieval Europe. One of the university's most famous students was a Jewish physician and philosopher, Maimonides.

He was born in Andalusia in 1138 while it was flourishing as an intellectual and cultural hub under Muslim rule. His family moved to Fez, Morocco in 1160 where he was heavily influenced by Islamic thought. A distinguished theologian, he was the first to introduce articles of faith to Judaism; he considered it mandatory for every Jew to believe in the absolute unity of God, in His exclusive right to be worshipped, in revelation through prophets, resurrection, and Divine punishment and reward.

By the 14th century, the university housed the Al-Qarawiyyin Library which remains one of the oldest in the world, preserving some of Islam's most valuable manuscripts. These include volumes from the Muwatta of Imam Malik inscribed on gazelle parchment, the Seerah of Ibn Ishaq, the premier transcript of Ibn Khaldun's Al-'Ibar, and a copy of the Qur'an gifted to the institution in 1602 by Sultan Ahmed al-Mansur.

Fatima Al-Fihri's Legacy

Almost 1200 years have passed since the founding of the University of Al-Qarawiyyin in 859, and it continues to this day to graduate students in the various religious and physical sciences. This esteemed institution, which already had 8,000 students by the 14th century, is central to the legacy of Fatima Al-Fihri. Her story is one of timeless dedication to the Islamic tradition of learning and academic study, as well as personal devotion to pleasing Allah SWT by serving as a genuine benefactor to humanity. The world is richer as a result.



UN report: Accountability needed to end Israeli excessive force on Gaza protesters

The international community must take immediate and decisive action to ensure that Israel ceases its violations of international law when responding to the ongoing demonstrations at the Gaza fence, a UN human rights expert said.

The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk, welcomed the findings and recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into the deadly 2018 Palestinian protests in Gaza. He noted that the Commission, which was mandated to investigate violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws, presented its findings on 28 February 2019.

“It found reasonable grounds to believe that, in all but two of the 189 fatalities investigated, the use of live ammunition by Israeli security forces against demonstrators was unlawful,” Lynk said. “Accordingly, I support the Commission’s call for accountability with respect to those who used lethal fire unlawfully, and for those who drafted and approved the rules of engagement which permitted this illegal use of lethal fire.”

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One such incident saw the killing with live ammunition of two boys (aged 14 and 17) on 8 February 2019, and following the protest, the death on 12 February 2019 of a 16-year-old Palestinian boy who was hit by a tear gas canister in the head. According to human rights organizations, the three boys posed no threat to Israeli forces. More recently, on 22 February 2019, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy was killed by live ammunition during a protest east of Gaza city.

Lynk reiterated that international human rights instruments pertaining to law enforcement provide that firearms may only be used against persons if there is an imminent threat to life or risk of serious injury. He added that, in the context of an occupation, the killings at the Gaza fence resulting from the unlawful use of force might well constitute willful killings of the protected population, which constitute a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and potentially a war crime under the Rome Statute.

“We must ensure legal accountability and end impunity for the excessive use of force against largely peaceful Pales-

tinian demonstrators, and the resulting arbitrary deprivation of life,” said the special rapporteur. “This is a grave violation of their right to life and it abrogates their guaranteed freedoms of expression, peaceful assembly, and association.”

Lynk welcomed the attention given by the Commission of Inquiry to the dire living conditions in Gaza, which have fueled the large demonstrations over the past year. He endorsed the Commission’s call for an immediate lifting of the Israeli



blockade of Gaza, which has repeatedly been described by recent UN Secretaries General as a prohibited form of collective punishment of the people of Gaza. In particular, he noted the dire impact of the blockade on the Gazan health system, which has significantly contributed to the deteriorating quality of health in the Strip. As the one-year anniversary of the “Great March of Return” on 30 March 2019 draws closer, and in view of the ever-deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza, the special rapporteur expressed concern over possible rising levels of violence if no firm action was taken to pursue accountability and justice.

“Continuing to suffocate Gaza is a blot on the world’s conscience and a recipe for more bloodshed,” Lynk said, adding: “Restoring Gaza and ensuring justice and accountability would give the region hope that a better Middle East is possible.”

Pakistan seizes religious schools to stop militants

Pakistan intensified its crackdown against Islamist militants on Thursday, with the government announcing it had taken control of 182 religious schools and detained more than 100 people as part of its push against banned groups.

The move represents Pakistan’s biggest move against banned organisations in years and appears to be targeting Islamic welfare organisations that the United States says are a front for militant activities Pakistan is facing pressure from global powers to act against groups carrying out attacks in India, including Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), which claimed responsibility for the Feb. 14 attack that killed 40 Indian paramilitary police.

The escalating tension in the wake of the bombing led to a major confrontation between the nuclear-armed rivals, with both countries carrying out aerial bombing missions and even engaging in a brief dogfight that prompted fears of a war. Pakistani officials say the crackdown is part of a long-planned drive and not a response to Indian anger over what New Delhi calls Islamabad’s failure to rein in militant groups operating on Pakistani soil.

Previous large-scale crackdowns against anti-India militants have broadly been cosmetic, with the proscribed groups able to survive and continue operations.

The interior ministry said law enforcement agencies had placed 121 people in “preventive detention” as part of the crackdown that began this week.

“Provincial governments have taken in their control management and administration of 182 seminaries (madaris)”, the ministry said in a

statement, referring to religious schools.

What to do with madrasas is a thorny issue in Pakistan, a deeply conservative Muslim nation where religious schools are often blamed for radicalisation of youngsters but are the only education available to millions of poor children.

The interior ministry said other institutions from different groups had been taken over, including 34 schools or colleges, 163 dispensaries, 184 ambulances, five hospitals and eight offices of banned organisations.

Many banned groups such as JeM run seminaries, which counter-terrorism officials say are used as recruiting grounds for militant outfits.

Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), which operates hospitals and a fleet of ambulances, is estimated to run about 300 madrasas across the country. Pakistan’s government banned the group recently. JuD calls itself a humanitarian charity but the U.S. State Department has designated it a “foreign terrorist organisation” and calls it a front for Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET), a Pakistan-based group accused of orchestrating attacks in India, including the 2008 Mumbai attack that killed 166 people.



Decathlon's athletic hijab for Muslim women won't go on sale in France

Augusta Pownall

French sports retailer Decathlon has abandoned plans to sell a hijab for female runners in France, following a surge of complaints.

The company had planned to sell the athletic hijab – which covers the wearer's head and neck – in stores in both France and Morocco.

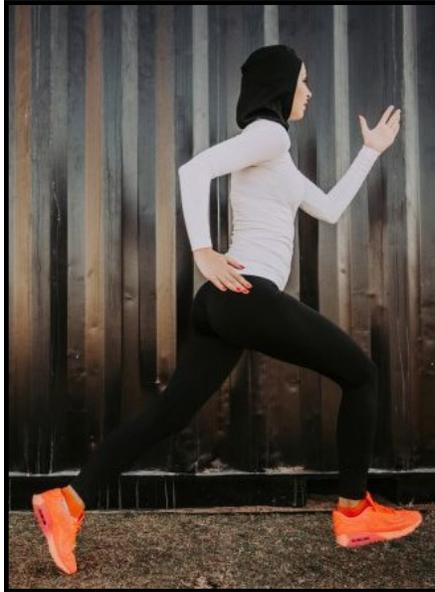
But it has now cancelled plans to sell the item in France following an outcry on social media and a barrage of calls and emails.

Threats directed at Decathlon's workforce Decathlon issued a statement saying that they would not be selling the hijab in France "to ensure the safety of our workers", following more than 500 emails and calls.

"Our mission is to create, by athletes for athletes, technical products at the fairest prices anywhere in the world," the statement read.

"Faced with violent polemics and threats that far exceed our aim to meet the needs of our customers, our priority is to find a peaceful situation. In this context, we suspend our project of marketing this product in France."

Aurore Bergé, member of the French parliament and spokesperson for ruling party Republic on the Move, were among



those quick to condemn the move.

"My choice as a woman and as a citizen will be to no longer trust a brand that breaks with our values", she wrote on Twitter.

Responding to the matter on its own Twitter account, Decathlon had initially urged commenters to be calm and measured in their responses, pointing to a "wave of unprecedented insults and

threats". Many women wear "unsuitable" hijab for sport

The company claimed it intended to "democratise the practice of sport". It note that many women were already wearing the hijab to play sports, but suggested that these are often "unsuitable".

The Decathlon hijab is not the first head-covering intended for Muslim women to wear whilst engaging in sport to be sold in France.

Nike's Pro Hijab went on sale in France and elsewhere globally in March 2017. The piece of clothing was the result of a year-long collaboration between the global sportswear brand and a number of world-class Muslim athletes including figure skater Zahra Lari.

However this is not the first example of modest clothing for Muslim women causing a national outcry in France.

In 2016, a ban of the "burkini" – a full-length swimming suit for women – sparked protests, both in favour of and against the item.

Meanwhile, it has been illegal to wear a veil that covers the face since 2011 and the French government banned students from wearing any item that demonstrated any religious affiliation in 2004.

Quebec City Muslim women hold open forum to demystify the hijab

Representatives of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association say the decision to wear a headscarf is personal. Khulood Odeh, one of the event's organizers, says the decision to wear a hijab is personal, and she wants to help people understand it by answering their questions openly. (Spencer Van Dyk/CBC)

Some Muslim women in Quebec City are hoping to demystify the hijab by talking openly about their reasons for putting on the religious garment.

About a dozen people gathered Saturday in Quebec City to discuss the significance of the headscarf at an event hosted by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women's Association.

The open forum gave women who wear the hijab the opportunity to discuss what it means to them.

"It's for people to come and meet women from the Muslim community who wear the hijab and ask them directly the questions that are on their minds," said Khulood Odeh, one of the event's organizers.

Aspiring teacher may leave Quebec if CAQ follows through on

religious symbol ban. "We hear a lot of people talk about the hijab, claiming that it's oppressive or other things, and it's important for us to bring the voice of Muslim women forward and let them speak for themselves."

Most of the event's attendees were men, something that Odeh said did not surprise her.

Roger Cros attended the Quebec City event because he was interested in hearing the perspective of Muslim women

Khulood Odeh, one of the event's organizers, says the decision to wear a hijab is personal, and she wants to help people understand it by answering their questions openly. (Spencer Van Dyk/CBC)



firsthand.

He said for the most part, the narrative around the banning of public religious symbols in the province has been presented from a Christian point of view.

Not a 'symbol of oppression'

Early last month, Quebec's minister for the status of women Isabelle Charest faced criticism for saying the hijab is a symbol of oppression.

"When they are dictated by a religion on what they have to wear, for me, it's a lack of liberty, and it doesn't meet my values," Charest said.

Muslim head scarf a symbol of oppression, insists Quebec's minister for status of women

The Coalition Avenir Québec minister said the headscarf "is not something that women should be wearing," and later defended her position, but said she "respects the decision" of the women who choose to wear the hijab themselves.

The CAQ government is working on legislation banning public workers in positions of authority from wearing visible religious symbols, including the hijab.

The Crucible of Islam

G. W. Bowersock

Little is known about Arabia in the sixth century CE. Yet from this distant time and place emerged a faith and an empire that stretched from the Iberian peninsula to India. Today, Muslims account for nearly a quarter of the global population. G. W. Bowersock seeks to illuminate this most obscure and yet most dynamic period

in the history of Islam—from the mid-sixth to mid-seventh century—exploring why arid Arabia proved to be such fertile ground for Muhammad's prophetic message, and why that message spread so quickly to the wider world.

In Muhammad's time Arabia stood at the crossroads of great empires, a place where Christianity, Judaism, and local polytheistic traditions vied for adherents. Mecca, Muhammad's birthplace, belonged to the part of Arabia recently conquered by the Ethiopian Christian king Abraha. But Ethiopia lost western Arabia to Persia following Abraha's death, while the death of the Byzantine emperor in 602 further destabilized the region. Within this chaotic environment, where lands and populations were traded frequently among competing powers and belief systems, Muhammad began winning converts to his revelations.

In a troubled age, his followers coalesced into a powerful force, conquering Palestine, Syria, and Egypt and laying the groundwork of the Umayyad Caliphate.

The crucible of Islam remains an elusive vessel. Although we may never grasp it firmly, Bowersock offers the most detailed description of its contours and the most compelling explanation of how one of the world's great religions took shape.

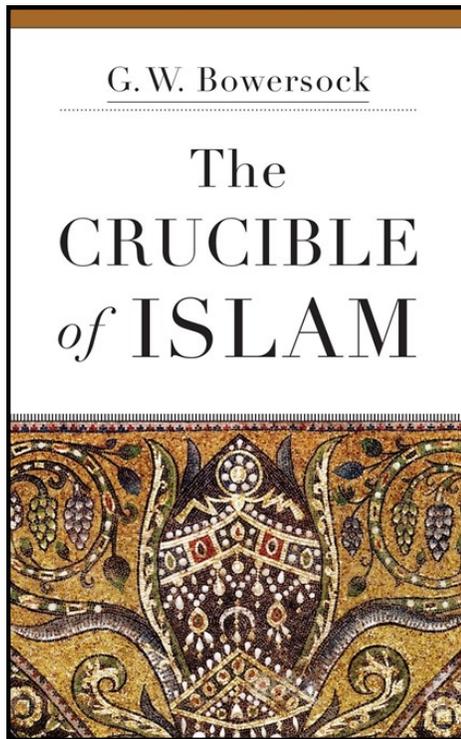
G. W. Bowersock is Professor Emeritus of Ancient History at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton.

"The Crucible of Islam is a remarkable work of scholarship." — Christopher Carroll, *The Wall Street Journal*
 "Erudite and lucid... Bowersock's fluency with specialist literature and his ability to transform scattered research into a coherent narrative are admirable."—Chase Robinson, *The Times Literary Supplement*.

"This work is highly recommended for those interested in the religious and political attitudes that gave rise to Islam."—Muhammed Hassanali, *Booklist*
 "Bowersock paints a concise portrait of Islam's early formation and consolidation, focusing on the political, social, economic, and religious conditions of 6th- and 7th-century Arabia... Bowersock clearly and succinctly describes the stage upon which Islam emerged, and also dispels certain rumors, myths, and half-histories that have come to dominate popular notions of the period (and even persist in scholarship)... Given the historical and current relationships and tensions among various groups of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, this brief and easily digestible introduction will interest and please a wide variety of readers."—*Publishers Weekly*

"This is an invaluable examination of the origins of a great religion."—G. M. Smith, *Choice*

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Saudi Arabia and Iran

Power and Rivalry in the Middle East

By: Simon Mabon

In the wake of the 1979 Iranian revolution, relations between states in the Middle East were reconfigured and reassessed overnight. Amongst the most-affected was the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The existence of a new regime in Tehran led to increasingly vitriolic confrontations between these two states, often manifesting themselves in the conflicts across the region, such as those in Lebanon and Iraq, and more recently in Bahrain and Syria.

In this new and revised second edition, Simon Mabon examines the different identity groups within Saudi Arabia and Iran (made up of various religions, ethnicities and tribal groupings), proposing that internal insecurity has an enormous impact on the wider ideological and geopolitical competition between the two. With analysis of this heated and often uneasy relationship and its impact on the

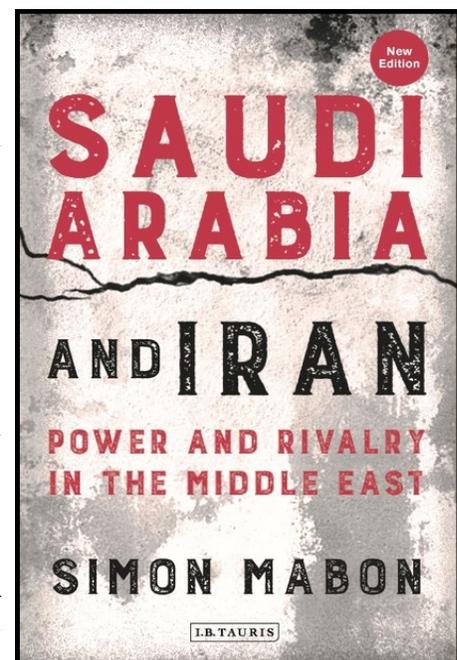
wider Middle East, this book is vital for those researching international relations and diplomacy in the region.

Review

"This book is essential reading for any informed understanding of a relationship whose scope and dynamic will likely shape the political and strategic landscape of the Middle East in the years ahead." — Clive Jones, Professor of Regional Security, Durham University,

"An impressive work that leaves the reader with a strong and nuanced understanding of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and how it affects the internal and foreign policies of both nations... As diplomacy continues between Iran and the P-5+1, diplomats would do themselves a service by picking up Mabon's book." — Stephen McGlinchey, *e-International Relations*

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The 1 O'clock Visitor

8. ALLAH DOTH KNOW WHAT EVERY FEMALE (WOMB) DOTH BEAR, BY HOW MUCH THE WOMBS FALL SHORT (OF THEIR TIME OR NUMBER) OR DO EXCEED. EVERY SINGLE THING IS BEFORE HIS SIGHT, IN (DUE) PROPORTION.

9. HE KNOWETH THE UNSEEN AND THAT WHICH IS OPEN; HE IS THE GREAT, THE MOST HIGH.

10. IT IS THE SAME (TO HIM) WHETHER ANY OF YOU CONCEAL HIS SPEECH OR DECLARE IT OPENLY; WHETHER HE LIE HID BY NIGHT OR WALK FORTH FREELY BY DAY.

11. FOR EACH (SUCH PERSON) THERE ARE (ANGELS) IN SUCCESSION, BEFORE AND BEHIND HIM: THEY GUARD HIM BY COMMAND OF ALLAH. VERILY NEVER WILL ALLAH CHANGE THE CONDITION OF A PEOPLE UNTIL THEY CHANGE IT THEMSELVES (WITH THEIR OWN SOULS). BUT WHEN (ONCE) ALLAH WILLETH A PEOPLE'S PUNISHMENT, THERE CAN BE NO TURNING IT BACK, NOR WILL THEY FIND, BESIDES HIM, ANY TO PROTECT.

(THE THUNDER)

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This is our website. Have visited it: It will put you face-to-face with an alternative world, full of spirituality, morality coupled with modern outlooks and perspectives. We want to hear your views on its contents, layout and general quality.

Join us in our Noon and Afternoon prayers Everyday at 12.00

There was a poor family of three which consisted of a mother, a father and a young daughter who was in primary school. They didn't have much but they could just barely survive from day to day. Although they were not rich in terms of money, they were rich in terms of happiness and peace.

They were good practising Muslims, always praying their five daily prayers on time and always obeying Allah's rules and fearing His punishment. Their village back home had no available jobs and times were bleak. Therefore they had to migrate to this big, old town for a better life. School was also free for needy students there.

One day, the father of the family was tested with a huge test. He had to leave the country for many months for his job. His wife and daughter had no choice but to stay with the wife's dad's small apartment in the next town, until he got home. He left the family with a little amount of provision, just enough for them to survive those months without him.

A month passed and the daughter suddenly fell very ill. She had a terribly high fever and her right side was aching. The mother was very worried indeed. But she didn't have any money to send her daughter to the clinic. There was just not enough cash to spare. She wanted to call her husband but she did not want to worry him. Furthermore, they did not have a telephone in the house. She would have to go the payphone at the milk bar to call her husband. And that would cost money. Calling overseas was not cheap at all. Therefore, she decided not to tell her husband yet.

Then, suddenly, at 1 AM one night, they heard some loud knocks at the front door. The mother put on her Hijab quickly and went towards the door. The grandfather was awakened and rushed as well. They were both nervous and anxious to find out who it was but neither of them wanted to open the door. Until finally, they agreed to open the door together.

"Can I come in to check on your sick granddaughter?" said the man.

The man turned out to be a doctor! SubhanAllah. He did some medical procedures onto the little girl, one after the other and he finally came to a conclusion after about 20 minutes. The mother and grandfather just looked on anxiously. They could not believe what was happening. They didn't say anything but in their minds, they had so many questions. Who told this doctor to come? How did he know they needed help? Why did he come although all clinics are closed? When did he hear about them? The questions were endless.

"Your granddaughter's case is a little difficult. But I'll give you a prescription for some more medications that you can buy in the morning from the pharmacy. I have some extra painkillers and antibiotics right now with me. I'll leave that with you so you can give to her now, for the next several hours.

The mother and the grandfather smiled at each other. Thank you. Thank you so very much."

The doctor then walked to the front door and waited awkwardly next to it for several long seconds. The mother opened the door, intending to let him out. "Sorry, sister. This is hard,

but I have to ask you for the fee for this after-hours, in-home, private consultation," the doctor explained.

"Fee? The fee? Oh my. I'm sorry, doctor. We didn't know we had to pay," the mother shuddered.

"What do you mean, sister? You called my clinic and requested for a doctor's immediate visit to your home tonight. You said that you couldn't wait for the morning as the situation was quite urgent. I had to travel for a couple of hours out of the city to your faraway town. It was not an easy trip too, sister. I'm sorry but it is not right for you to pretend that you didn't know you had to pay for this private visit," the doctor barked.

"No, doctor. I swear, by the One who created me and you, we don't even have a phone in this house. We cannot afford it, doctor."

"What?? Aren't you so-and-so? Isn't this the apartment number so-and-so? Of So-and-so Street?" the doctor asked gruffly.

The doctor left at once to treat the neighbour's daughter and true enough, he came back soon after.

"I'm sorry, my dear sister and my beloved older brother. I have been a horrible man. I shouldn't have accused you without checking. I am at fault. I have made you anxious, upset and sad. Do forgive me. I was too tired and I had let my anger control me. If you don't mind me asking, can I know your story please? Please let me know of what has happened to you and your family," he earnestly requested.

"My husband is currently away on a difficult job overseas. He'll be away for several months. He can't find any other job, you see. But Alhamdulillah, we always have enough. Yes, we are poor but we never beg or ask for loans. We always work hard and Allah has always given us just enough. Alhamdulillah. Although my husband hasn't left us much. But it is supposed to be just enough. This is my father's house and I am staying with him until my husband returns. Every night, I pray 2 rak'ahs Sunnah and I make a sincere dua'a, asking Allah to help us in all matters but now, since my daughter is very sick, I make even more dua'a. All I can do besides making plenty of dua'a, praying and giving her a bit of medication is just putting two wet towels on her to keep her fever down," the mother disclosed between her sobs.

"It is Allah who sent me to you. Don't worry, alright? I will pay for all your child's treatment and medicines. I will also give you a monthly allowance until your husband comes back," the doctor calmly offered.

The mother and grandfather were shocked at the doctor's generosity and cried tears of happiness. The grandfather hugged the doctor so hard that the doctor had tears in his eyes too.

