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We stand for:

- *Inter-faith and inter-civilisational dialogue*
- *Respect for the human race and rights*
- *Cooperation for the good of people*
- *Moderation*
- *Modernity*
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In this issue

Local Events 2

Muslim Affairs 3

Pope's message to Muslims on Ramadan 4

UN experts slam UK report for repackaging 'racist tropes' 5

England's Black Muslim Female Rugby player 6

Story: Fasting for the first time 8

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Ramadan is the Spring of the Quran

The holy month of Ramadan has two commonly known features; fasting and Quran recitation. Every Muslim is aware of fasting during this holy month. Much material and psychological preparations are made in the days before the holy month begins. Muslims develop different feelings as Ramadan approaches. These are a mixture of deeper faith, stronger desire for worship and more serious approach to the Islamic identity. It is this devotion that has made Ramadan a month of significance to the Muslim Ummah. World's leaders often issue respectful and conciliatory messages to the Muslims. Religious leaders of other faiths issue statements and send messages of recognition and respect of Muslims. The Pope is at the forefront of reconciliatory approach to the Muslims. His message this year has been received well by Muslim leaders who often reciprocate with messages to the Christians in their festive seasons.

But the other aspect of Ramadan is the holy Quran. It is widely believed that the holy script had been revealed on Prophet Mohammad in Ramadan. A specific night called "Lailat Al Qadr" is considered a blessed one as it signifies the revelation of the Holy Quran to Prophet Mohammad. The holy script is considered the main miracle of Islam. Since it was received it has remained a source of pride to the followers of Islam. For 14 centuries it has defied any human being to produce a similar script that is capable of facing every challenge posed by its enemies. Its language has remained original, continuous, alive and easily understood. People who know Arabic today can easily comprehend the holy script that had been revealed to Prophet Mohammad 1500 years ago. The text is the original one, unchanged, modified or "modernised". It has remained a challenge to everyone in terms of structure, context and viability. It has also remained a source of peace to the hearts and souls of people. It is considered the strongest living miracle of all times.

How to form a relation with the holy Quran?

For a Muslim it remains the main source of guidance. "No doubts surround that book which is a guide to the pious". This guidance is evident in its perfectly-structured text with abundance of lessons from history, nature, science and jurisprudence. The mission of Islam has many facets, one of which is to create piety in men and women. This is part of the indoctrination to free humans from servitude to fellow humans. This is achieved by adopting the holy Quran as the main guide in life, as stated by the second verse of the second chapter of the Quran (Al Baqarah, the Cow). Thus to be a true Muslim one must be attached to the holy script. Since people are often distracted by materialistic concerns, there is tendency to deviate away from the divine path and abandon the Quran. Indeed one of its verses quotes the Messenger complaining to God that his people had abandoned Quran. "The Messenger said: O Lord, my people have abandoned this Quran".

The holy month of Ramadan provides the opportunity to mend the relation between the fasting Muslim and the Quran. It is widely seen in the Muslim world that the month is overshadowed by the holy script. Whether in mosques, the media or in homes, Muslims are attracted to the Quran, reciting it individually and collectively, teaching it to the young generation and organising competitions on Quran recitation and other sciences. Yet this has remained largely symbolic and confined to Ramadan. What is required is to create the Quranic Muslim who models his/her life along the teachings of the Quran which are spiritual, humane, moral and practical. But this needs real attachment to the holy script. Ramadan provides the beginning of real bond- age between man and Quran. But this can be achieved if the fasting soul develops a taste for deeper insight into the verses of the holy text, readiness to embrace them and pledges to become partner of Quran. The road to perfection will then begin. Fasting is the climate for this personal and societal transformation.



Ramadan seminar

The annual Ramadan online seminar jointly organized by The Open Discussion and The Gulf Cultural Club was held on Tuesday 20th April. It was chaired by Shabbir Razvi and addressed by four people.

Sara Russell, a photographer, said: When we reflect on what goes on we turn to God to seek refuge. We acknowledge the fear and what destroys us from life. There are things that we may have overlooked or neighbours in need whom we did not communicate with. To stand still for a moment is necessary. In Ramadan we have the space to stand with ourselves. Sometimes we speak when silence is necessary. We become followers of mass hysteria at times. One year has passed with total stagnation, no travel, no socializing. When we trust in God we become more humble and observing. All of us have been in a state of reflecting and face our demons. Nothing more positive than to recognize where we are with our faith. Faith is pivotal to our life and mental well-being, strengthening our community although we are not congregating. We communicate with our Lord in seclusion. We came to this world to worship. All of us have a faith and we have to connect to it.

You can ask Him for guidance. Verse 112 of TaHa chapter says: But he who works deeds of righteousness, and has faith, will have no fear of harm nor of any curtailment (of what is his due).

We could have happy moments. I had happy moments photographing weddings. You can see sacred moments of union. It is important sometimes to leave our homes and go to some woodland to confront certain issues.

We come home to address our weaknesses, environmental, spiritual etc.

Father Nadim Nassar said: It is time for fasting for our Orthodox Christians. Our Easter was on Sunday two weeks ago. Ramadan and Easter of Orthodox Church are overlapping this year. The Greeks separated between body and soul. The body is the shell and the soul is in the body. Both form the human being. Upon death the body disintegrates.

When Christ came, the Hellenistic philosophy was part of the thinking of the people at that time. Jesus was a revolutionary. He did not agree with the Greek philosophy. His approach was holistic. He did not believe in separation between body and soul.

When he was facing death he felt the fragility of humanity. He did not feel the pain in the body only but the suffering of the whole humanity. The Christian faith says that Christ was risen in body, soul and heart. When we talk about cleansing, how to clean our body or soul, how do we clean our heart as a symbol of humanity. It is not that I clean my body, or give money to the poor, this is only the surface of the process of cleansing. When we open the tap we have unclean water and we put filter. The water comes out clean. Where do we put the filter in order to cleanse the human being? We attach filter to the heart. Whether we are Christians, Muslims, Jews the question is: What kind of filter do I need? Cleansing of the tongue, the hand, the thought, the mind.

The filter is actually my relationship with God, not the scales or shallow ideas like stop eating meat or anything from animal, or for Muslims not eating from sunrise to sunset. It is more than that. Fasting is about reflecting on what kind of filter.

Mahera Ruby: After covid hit there was rescheduling. I found myself in need to support families in crisis. This conscious awareness comes from relations with others; family, neighbours. How do we connect with each other and with God. Last Ramadan I realized that many things were beyond my control. But I had the sense to rely on God's plan, tawakkul. His plan is greater than mine. God will do as He sees fit. According to human nature we have four main parts to ourselves: the physical, the intellectual, the emotional and the spiritual. I was trying to connect those with this sense of self purification. How can we transcend our character and our behaviour from the mundane to the sublime. The process of fasting takes into consideration the four aspects. When we are fasting we still restrain ourselves from extravagance. Real struggle is with ourselves. The intellect, 'aql and the

fitrah (innateness), wanting to be connected. We are born in state of purity, connected to God, the truth. From Allah and back to Him. This fitrah is what brings us back. Then the intellect, intuition, refined by the strength of our connection to God.

When we are in trouble we are able to use this. How strong and connected I am influences my feeling of who I am. When we are in trouble we have to draw into our fitrah and it will become easy to reign ourselves in, realign with it. In Ramadan we are training to taste, feel good things. Our hearts will be at the right place.

Sheikh Mustafa Jaffar: Solitude is an opportunity from God. We are confined within our homes. Zoom kept contact with each other. We have an opportunity to spend more time to worship and undertake acts of charity and understanding the plight of Muslims elsewhere. There is the danger of being tainted by publicity or show. But when you are in solitude in your home, then your acts are between you and God. The idea of honeymoon is to be alone in order to make the bond stronger, physical and emotional. When we are in lockdown in Ramadan, where God's mercy is encompassing us, every breath you take is tasbeeh, glorifying God. When you sleep it is an act of worship. When you put down the prayers mat, what can we do beyond that? Prophet Jacob said: I grieve to what is happening but I complain to Allah only. People came to him to express grief, Jacob did not jump to cry on their shoulders, but said that my grief is poured to God, I talk to Him alone. With Him he has the power to change things for me.

When Yousuf's brothers repented and came to their father and asked him to seek forgiveness from God, he did not do it immediately. He said: I will seek forgiveness when I am alone with God. We do these acts in the time of solitude with God. What better time better than the lockdown.

* The weekly meeting of Abrar on Thursday 22nd April was addressed by Sheikh Za'im AlKhairallah who talked about the Abundance of knowledge in Ramadan. He

talked about three levels of fasting; the basic where eating and drinking are stopped, the indoctrinal fasting and that which protects Islam and its values. It was a fascinating lecture.



Chad President Idriss Deby killed on frontline

Chad's President Idriss Deby, who ruled his country for more than 30 years and was an important Western ally in the fight against Islamist militants in Africa, has been killed on the frontline against rebels in the north.

Deby's son, Mahamat Kaka, was named interim president by a transitional council of military officers, spokesman Azem Bermendao Agouna said in a broadcast on state television.

Deby, 68, came to power in a rebellion in 1990 and was one of Africa's longest-ruling leaders, surviving numerous coup attempts and rebellions.

His death was announced the day after he was declared the winner of a presidential election that would have given him a sixth term in office. Most of the opposition, which had long complained of his repressive rule, boycotted the vote.

Deby - who often joined soldiers on the battlefield in his military fatigues - visited troops on the frontline on Monday after rebels based across the northern frontier in Libya advanced hundreds of km (miles) south toward the capital N'Djamena. L1N2MC20E

"Marshal Idriss Deby Itno, as he did each time that the institutions of the republic were gravely threatened, took control of operations during the heroic combat led against the terrorist from Libya. He was wounded during the fighting and died once repatriated to N'Djamena," Bermendao said.

Malaysia's FM urges proper dealing with Rohingya issue

Malaysian Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein said the issue of Rohingya has to be dealt with properly under the current situation in Myanmar to avoid a further influx of refugees into Malaysia and neighboring countries.

"In Malaysia, we have 200,000 Rohingyas ... can you imagine if the situation in Myanmar worsens and we have influx of more Rohingyas into our shores," Hishammuddin said, pointing out that his ASEAN counterparts have been working out ways on how to resolve the situation unfolding in the troubled nation since the Feb 1 coup that ousted the civilian government.

"Rohingyas comprise only one percent of the overall 80 percent refugees around the world who are Muslims," the prem-

ier said in his opening remarks during the meet and greet session with heads of mission from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states here on Monday.



UNSC: foreign forces, mercenaries must leave Libya

The United Nations Security Council has unanimously passed a resolution that calls for all foreign forces and mercenaries to leave Libya and gives the green light for a UN team to monitor last October's historic ceasefire agreement.

In a second vote announced in New York on Friday, the Council members also passed a resolution unanimously, renewing measures relating to the illicit export of petroleum, through 30 July 2022.

The UN-brokered agreement last year was signed by military representatives of the internationally recognized Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), and rival administration of the so-called Libyan National Army (LNA), based in eastern Libya. The resolution gives approval to the Secretary-General's ceasefire monitoring plan, and notes the need for constitutional and legislative backing for Libya's new electoral process to be in place by 1 July, ahead of parliamentary and presidential elections planned for 24 December 2021.

The resolution underlines that the Joint Military Commission (JMC) of the GNA and LNA, needs to develop a broader plan specifying how the ceasefire mechanism will be implemented, and how UN-SMIL monitors can be deployed.

The monitoring mechanism resolution 2570, also "strongly urges" States to support the October ceasefire agreement, including the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya, "without delay".

Briefing journalists just before the results of the voting were disclosed in the Council, Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said that the UN was committed to "helping the political leaders of Libya", noting that "what we want to see, is all foreign fighters leave Libya."

UK parliament declares genocide in China's Xinjiang

Britain's parliament called on Wednesday for the government to take action to end what lawmakers described as genocide in China's Xinjiang region, stepping up pressure on ministers to go further in their criticism of Beijing.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government again steered clear of declaring

genocide over what it says are "Industrial-scale" human rights abuses against the mainly Muslim Uighur community in Xinjiang.

Lawmakers backed a motion brought by Conservative MP Nusrat Ghani stating Uighurs in Xinjiang were suffering crimes against humanity and genocide, and calling on government to use international law to bring it to an end.

"The unwarranted accusation by a handful of British MPs that there is 'genocide' in Xinjiang is the most preposterous lie of the century, an outrageous insult and affront to the Chinese people, and a gross breach of international law and the basic norms governing international relations," the embassy said in a statement dated Friday.

Britain's minister for Asia, Nigel Adams, again set out to parliament the government's position that any decision on describing the human rights abuses in Xinjiang as genocide would have to be taken by "Competent" courts.

Inmates, families protest conditions in Bahraini jails

Activists said prisoners protesting conditions in a Bahraini jail were beaten in a security operation last weekend that authorities had described as a response to disobedience following repeated warnings.

Tensions had been rising in the country's main Jau prison since an outbreak of COVID-19 last month, which authorities said had been contained. Outside the prison, detainees' families have been holding small protests demanding the release of political prisoners and better conditions.

Dissolved opposition group al-Wefaq, SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights, and the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD) said security forces used excessive force during Saturday's operation.

BIRD's Sayed Ahmed Alwadaci, a Bahraini activist living in exile, said one prisoner told him that inmates had formed human chains in a sit-in that security forces tried to break up. "They surrounded (one prisoner) and we could see the batons rise and fall on his body until they took him out," the inmate could be heard saying in a recorded phone conversation shared by Alwad



Pope's message to Muslims on Ramadan

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL
FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE
Christians and Muslims: Witnesses of Hope
MESSAGE FOR THE MONTH OF
RAMADAN AND 'ID AL-FITR
1442 H. / 2021 A.D.

Vatican City

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters,
We at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue are glad to offer you our fraternal good wishes for a month rich in divine blessings and spiritual advancement.

Fasting, along with prayer, almsgiving and other pious practices, brings us closer to God our Creator and to all those with whom we live and work, and helps us to continue walking together on the path of fraternity.

During these long months of suffering, anguish and sorrow, especially during the lockdown periods, we sensed our need for divine assistance, but also for expressions and gestures of fraternal solidarity: a telephone call, a message of support and comfort, a prayer, help in buying medicines or food, advice, and, to put it simply, the security of knowing that someone is always there for us in times of necessity.

The divine assistance that we need and seek, especially in circumstances like those of the current pandemic, is manifold: God's mercy, pardon, providence and other spiritual and material gifts. Yet, what we need most in these times, is hope. At this time, then, we think it fitting to share with you some reflections on this virtue.

As we are aware, hope, while certainly including optimism, goes beyond it. While optimism is a human attitude, hope has its basis in something religious: God loves us, and therefore cares for us through his providence. He does this in his own mysterious ways, which are not always comprehensible to us. In these situations, we are like children who are certain of the loving care of their parents, but are not yet able to comprehend its full extent.

Hope arises from our belief that all our problems and trials have a meaning, a value and a purpose, however difficult or impossible it may be for us to understand the reason for them or to find a way out of them.



Hope also carries with it belief in the goodness present in the heart of every person. Many times, in situations of difficulty and despair, help, and the hope it brings, can come from those whom we least expect. Human fraternity, in its numerous manifestations, thus becomes a source of hope for all, especially for those in any kind of need. Thanks be to God our Creator, and to our fellow men and women, for the quick response and generous solidarity shown by believers and also persons of good will with no religious affiliation in times of disaster,

whether natural or man-made, like conflicts and wars. All these persons and their goodness remind us believers that the spirit of fraternity is universal, and that it transcends all boundaries: ethnic, religious, social and economic. In adopting this spirit, we imitate God, who looks benevolently upon the humanity he created, upon all other creatures and upon the entire universe. This is why the growing care and concern for the planet, our "common home", is, according to Pope Francis, yet another sign of hope.

We are also aware that hope has its enemies: lack of faith in God's love and care; loss of trust in our brothers and sisters; pessimism; despair and its opposite, unfounded presumption; unfair generalizations based on one's own negative experiences, and so forth. These harmful thoughts, attitudes and reactions must be effectively countered, so as to strengthen hope in God and trust in all our brothers and sisters.

In his recent Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis speaks frequently of hope. There he tells us: "I invite everyone to renewed hope, 'for hope speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfilment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile' (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 1). Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope" (No. 55). We, Christians and Muslims, are called to be bearers of hope, for the present life and for the life to come, and to be witnesses, restorers and builders of this hope, especially for those experiencing difficulties and despair.

As a sign of our spiritual fraternity, we assure you of our prayer, and we send best wishes for a peaceful and fruitful Ramadan, and for a joyful 'Id al-Fitr. From the Vatican, 29 March 2021 Miguel Ángel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ President
Msgr. Indunil Kodithuwakku Janakarathne Kankanamalage
Secretary

British non-Muslims launch campaign to experience a day of fasting

A group of non-Muslim charity volunteers in Britain's Lancashire have decided to join a campaign which demands a day of fasting to have a better understanding of Islam.



A group of non-Muslim charity volunteers, firefighters and workers in Lancashire will participate in a campaign which demands them to fast for one day during Ramadan, reported Taqrib News Agency (TNA).

The campaign titled "I'm not a Muslim but I will fast for one day" is reportedly in its seventh anniversary and is held to call on non-Muslims support Muslims. Marc Hoville, a manager at Lancashire fire station stated that his reason to participate in is to reach a better understanding of Ramadan and support his Muslim colleagues.

Amy Sheehan noted that her motivation for joining the campaign is to make use of the opportunity and experience situations even in smaller scale and also gain more compassion for the issues her Muslim colleagues might face during the fasting month of Ramadan.

"This is how I can be a better employer and create an ambiance supportive and secure for Muslim employees" she said.



Sarah Roxby from Pleckgate High school said, "I chose to fast because I think it is important that I experience what my Muslim students feel during Ramadan."

UN experts slam UK report for repackaging 'racist tropes'

A body of experts that advises the United Nations on human rights concerns has slammed a widely criticized British government-backed report that concluded there was no systemic racism in the country.

The U.N. Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent said Monday that it found it "stunning" that the report "repackages racist tropes and stereotypes into fact" and urged the British government to reject its findings.

"The report cites dubious evidence to make claims that rationalize white supremacy by using the familiar arguments that have always justified racial hierarchy," the Geneva-based working group said.

"This attempt to normalize white supremacy despite considerable research and evidence of institutional racism is an unfortunate sidestepping of the op-

portunity to acknowledge the atrocities of the past and the contributions of all in order to move forward," it added.

The Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, which was set up by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson after last year's Black Lives Matter protests, published its report into racism last month. Its conclusions that Britain is not "institutionally racist" or "rigged" against minorities have been widely vilified, with some critics even arguing that the report downplayed the country's historic role in slavery.

Citing strides to close gaps between ethnic groups in educational and economic achievement, the report said race was becoming "less important" as a factor in creating disparities that are also fueled by class and family backgrounds.

Many academics, lawmakers unions and anti-racism activists were skeptical of the findings in the 258-page report, with some claiming the commission ignored barriers to equality, while others said it downplayed the ongoing legacy of Britain's colonial past as well as its role in slavery.

Johnson's spokesman, Max Blain, said the U.N. working group's statement "misrepresents the findings" of the U.K. racism report.

"This report in no way condones racist behavior, and in

fact it highlights that racism and inequality are still problems for our country," he said.

The commission, which was made up of 11 members from a broad cross section of ethnic backgrounds, has also previously defended itself against the charges, arguing that some of the criticism has "tipped into misrepresentation" and that it never argued that racism does not exist in society or in institutions.

The U.N. working group also poured scorn on what it described as the report's "mythical representation of enslavement," saying it was "an attempt to sanitize the history of the trade in enslaved Africans."

This, it went on, is "a reprehensible, although not unfamiliar tactic, employed by many whose wealth came directly from the enslavement of others, ever since slavery was outlawed."

One of the main clarion calls in last year's Black Lives Matter protests across the U.K. was for the government and institutions to face up to the legacy of the British Empire and the country's extensive profits from the slave trade.

The toppling of a statue of 17th-century slave trader Edward Colston in the city of Bristol in June prompted a pointed debate about how to deal with Britain's past. Many felt such statues extol racism and are an affront to Black Britons. Others, including the prime minister, argued that removing them was erasing a piece of history.



Pakistan to launch global campaign against blasphemy

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan on Monday said he is going to launch a campaign, seeking Muslim countries' support to raise the simmering issues of blasphemy and Islamophobia at international forums, including the UN and the EU.

"When we begin a campaign by bringing together all Muslim countries [against Islamophobia and blasphemy], it will make a difference and change will come in the West," Khan said at a televised ceremony in the capital Islamabad.

The campaign, he said, will help find a "permanent" solution to these issues.

Otherwise, he added, protests and violence will make no difference to the Western world.

He was referring to the ongoing protests across the country by a far-right religious group – Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) – demanding expulsion of the French ambassador over republication of blasphemous caricatures in France last year.

"There will come a time when people

in the Western countries will think twice before disrespecting the Holy Prophet (PBUH)," Khan went on to say.

Last week, Khan urged the Western countries to outlaw blasphemy of Prophet Muhammad on the lines of the Holocaust.

Expressing concern over a rising wave of Islamophobia, particularly in the West, Khan, in a series of tweets, had said: "I call on Western governments who have outlawed any negative comment on the holocaust to use the same standards to penalize those deliberately spreading their message of hate against Muslims by abusing our Prophet (PBUH)."

Pakistan, last week, banned the TLP, however, the group is continuing the protests, mainly in north-eastern Lahore city.

According to local media, at least seven people, including policemen, were

killed and hundreds others injured in pitched battles between the security forces and the TLP supporters across Pakistan in recent days, according to local media.

Protests had broken out in several Muslim countries over France's response to the murder in October last year of a teacher who showed cartoons of Prophet Muhammad in class.

French President Emmanuel Macron said at the time that France would "not give up our cartoons" while accusing French Muslims of "separatism" and describing Islam as "a religion in crisis."



Will Zainab Alema be England's first Black Muslim female Rugby player?

By Alex Roberts

"I didn't feel like I belonged just because I didn't see anyone that looked like me."

On last week's episode of House of Rugby on JOE, Zainab Alema revealed her ambition to become England's first black, Muslim female rugby player.

Alema is a neonatal nurse in the NHS and a mother of three. She also plays for Barnes RFC in south-west London.

She joined House of Rugby panel Lee McKenzie, Jonathan Davies and Séan O'Brien to discuss her route into the game, future aspirations and how she is managing playing and training throughout the month of Ramadan.

"I was 14 when I first got my hands on a rugby ball and I fell in love."

Alema briefly played for a club side in Ealing before moving to university; where she first took rugby seriously.

She admitted she was the only non-white Muslim player that didn't drink alcohol.

"That was a culture shock, if I'm honest," Alema said.

"I was the only black person in my team, the only Muslim person in my team and I was the only one that didn't drink on my team. There was a lot going on and I really felt out of place."

Looking through the laws of rugby persuaded her to stay in the sport.

"It said there in black and white under the clothing section that you can wear a headscarf to play.

"And for me, it was such a relief because up until that time, I didn't feel like I belonged just because I didn't see anyone that looked like me."

Alema's progress throughout the month of Ramadan has been hampered slightly by injury.

"I've got a hamstring injury at the moment so I can't run anyway," she admitted.

"So it's kind of timely."

Alema makes specific adjustments to her training surrounding Ramadan.

"The number one question people ask is, 'Not even water?' Like, everyone asks that.

"During the month of Ramadan we don't eat or drink and people are really surprised that we don't even have water.

"You have to be careful and know your body. I train close to sunset, so I can break my fast and then sometimes I train after I break my fast. I don't do anything silly like going for a run during the day because that's not really advisable."

Alema is clear and forthright in her ambitions.

"I want to be the first black Muslim woman to play for England. I actually only decided that during lockdown."

She hopes her story will inspire a new generation of black and minority ethnic players to lace up their boots, pop in their gumshield and take to the field, particularly within the women's game.

As the Sunday Times Grassroots Sportswoman of the Year, Alema is encouraging others from marginalised backgrounds to join their local rugby club. "I truly believe that if I get in that England shirt, I'm going to open up rugby to a new audience, people that I'm trying to reach out to to play rugby will then be thinking, 'Oh, look at Z, she's a black woman, she's wearing a hijab, she's playing rugby. Maybe I can give it a go.'"



CCMW's Statement on Bill 21 Decision

The Canadian Council of Muslim Women is disappointed by the Quebec Superior Court's decision to uphold much of An Act respecting the laicity of the State (Bill 21).

A judge ruled today that the province's secularism law is largely legal, even as he acknowledged it violates the rights of Muslim women and has cruel and dehumanizing consequences for those who wear religious symbols.

In his 242-page decision, Justice Marc-André Blanchard ruled that part of the law violates Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The judge struck down clauses pertaining to English-language school boards and a ban on members of the provincial legislature wearing face coverings but concluded that the law "does not violate the Canadian constitutional architecture."

An Act respecting the laicity of the State (Bill 21) bans the wearing of religious symbols for state workers deemed to be in a position of authority, like teachers, judges and police officers. The law unfairly persecutes minorities in Quebec, and especially harms Muslim women who wear hijab.

Today's decision gives a green light to continued religious discrimination and must be appealed.

While we are pleased that the Quebec Superior Court has struck key provisions of An Act respecting the laicity of the State (Bill 21), we must continue the legal battle to see this discriminatory law struck in its entirety.

On another front, The Canadian Council of Muslim Women welcomes the investments in women and gender equality announced in Budget 2021. Pledging unprecedented sums to reverse the impact of the pandemic on women, the investments were announced by Chrystia Freeland, who made history as the first woman Finance Minister to present a Budget.

The announcements include a national action plan on gender-based violence, increased support for gender-based violence services, investments toward women's economic well-being and ambitious new initiatives like a national child care program.

Women are among the groups most vulnerable to the worst impact of the pandemic and lockdowns, and the plan delivers much-needed good news as the pandemic's third wave sweeps across the country.

CCMW particularly welcomes the investment in women's and gender equality organizations, which have been struggling to provide essential support and programs to women, girls, gender-diverse people, and communities.

"The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequities faced by women and a budget that not only recognizes the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on women but also reflects on their differential experiences, including Muslim women the majority of whom are racialized, is truly historic," says Nuzhat Jafri, Executive Director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women. "The budget will help lay the framework for gender-responsive recovery. It is a big step forward for all Canadians and a milestone for women across the country."



The Prophet Muhammad: Islam and the Divine Message

By: Stephen Burge

Prophets serve as intermediaries between the human and divine worlds, granting them a special status in history across diverse religions and cultures. For Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad (570–632 CE) represents the culmination of the line of monotheistic proph-

ets, including Abraham, Moses and Jesus. In his own lifetime, Muhammad overcame opposition and brought reforms, firmly establishing a thriving community of believers which would become a major world civilisation. Today, the Prophet's life and actions continue to inspire the Muslims worldwide. The Prophet Muhammad presents an illuminating portrait of Muhammad in his capacity as God's messenger and an exemplary figure to Muslims. Revealing the challenges and triumphs of prophecy, Stephen Burge examines how prophets have inspired faith communities' relationship with the Divine, and one another. In doing so, this engaging account elucidates the enduring influence of prophecy and the profound legacy of the Prophet Muhammad.

Reviews

"Thoroughly interesting. A novel, vivid approach, both learned and imaginative, The Prophet Muhammad explores faith and feeling through literature, myth and psychology as well as traditional scholarship and Muslim challenges to tradition, with the bonus of illustrations that take us on a world tour of lived Islam. All readers will be enriched by Burge's discussion of prophethood and surprised by its re-

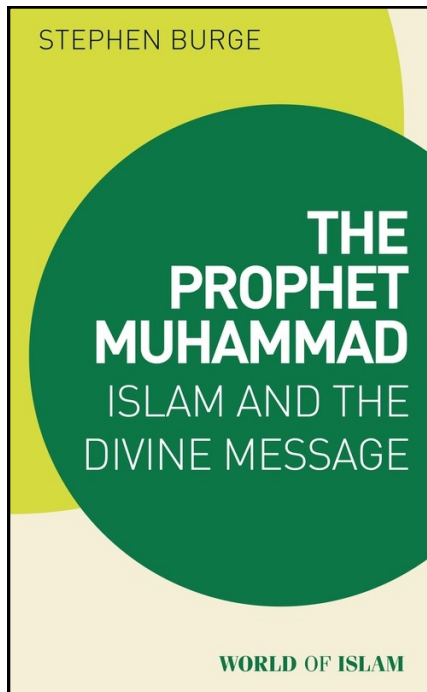
newed relevance today.'

" – Julia Bray, Laudian Professor of Arabic, University of Oxford, UK, "This book is one of the best introductions to the life of Muhammad as a religious figure. Wonderfully written, The Prophet Muhammad offers a measured and moving account of Muhammad's role as the prophet of Islam, bringing to life the latest scholarship on the topic. This unique and compelling read is a welcome addition to the array of literature on Muhammad and prophecy in Islam.'

" – Walid Saleh, Professor of Islamic Studies, University of Toronto, Canada, "This book explores who Muhammad was and why he remains a revered figure and model for imitation around the world today.

Burge subtly pinpoints Muhammad's distinctiveness within the Semitic prophetic tradition, looking at his teachings and the movement he started, showing precisely why the 7th-century Arabian prophet remains critically important for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.'

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The Prophet's Heir: The Life of Ali Ibn Abi Talib

By: Hassan Abbas

Ali ibn Abi Talib is arguably the single most important spiritual and intellectual authority in Islam after prophet Mohammad. Through his teachings and leadership as fourth caliph, Ali nourished Islam. But Muslims are divided on whether he was supposed to be Mohammad's political successor—and he continues to be a polarizing figure in Islamic history. Hassan Abbas provides a nuanced, compelling portrait of this towering yet divisive figure and the origins of sectarian division within Islam. Abbas reveals how, after Mohammad, Ali assumed the spiritual mantle of Islam to spearhead the movement that the prophet had led. While Ali's teachings about wisdom, justice, and selflessness continue to be cherished by both Shia and Sunni Muslims, his pluralist ideas have been buried under sectarian agendas and power politics. Today, Abbas argues, Ali's legacy and message stands against that of ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and Taliban.

"Ali was a hugely gifted thinker and

speaker, one of the earliest scribes and something of a poet. But it is hard to be objective about him. The evidence is often contradictory and he is shrouded by accretions, pious and otherwise. In The Prophet's Heir, Hassan Abbas - an enthusiast for his subject, and an objective enthusiast - pursues Ali on the ground. Fantastic."—Tim Mackintosh-Smith, author of Arabs

"An erudite and accessible biography of Ali, one that tells his life story, and discusses his teachings and values, and how his legacy continues to loom large over Muslim world."—Vali Nasr, author of The Shia Revival

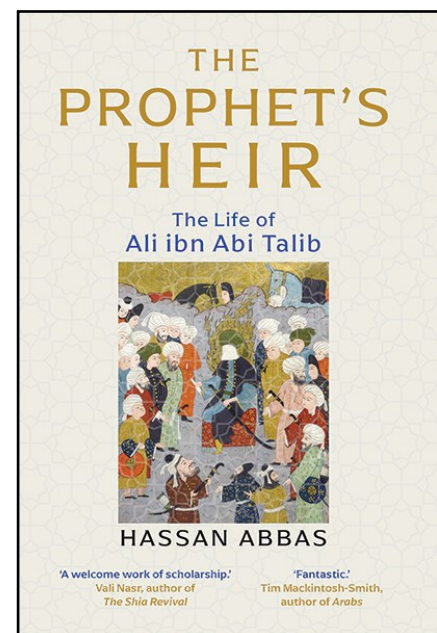
"This erudite but readable book shows why the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law Ali is central to Islam today, and should be both an inspiration and a figure for reconciliation."—John McHugo, author of A Concise History of Sunnis & Shi'is

About the author:

Hassan Abbas is distinguished professor of international relations at Near East South Asia Strategic Studies Centre at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C. He is the author

of The Taliban Revival and Pakistan's Drift into Extremism.

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185. RAMADHAN IS THE MONTH IN WHICH WAS SENT DOWN THE QUR'AN, AS A GUIDE TO MANKIND, ALSO CLEAR (SIGNS) FOR GUIDANCE AND JUDGMENT (BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG). SO EVERY ONE OF YOU WHO IS PRESENT (AT HIS HOME) DURING THAT MONTH SHOULD SPEND IT IN FASTING, BUT IF ANY ONE IS ILL, OR ON A JOURNEY, THE PRESCRIBED PERIOD (SHOULD BE MADE UP) BY DAYS LATER. ALLAH INTENDS EVERY FACILITY FOR YOU; HE DOES NOT WANT TO PUT TO DIFFICULTIES. (HE WANTS YOU) TO COMPLETE THE PRESCRIBED PERIOD, AND TO GLORIFY HIM IN THAT HE HAS GUIDED YOU; AND PERCHANCE YE SHALL BE GRATEFUL.

186. WHEN MY SERVANTS ASK THEE CONCERNING ME, I AM INDEED CLOSE (TO THEM): I LISTEN TO THE PRAYER OF EVERY SUPPLIANT WHEN HE CALLETH ON ME: LET THEM ALSO, WITH A WILL, LISTEN TO MY CALL, AND BELIEVE IN ME: THAT THEY MAY WALK IN THE RIGHT WAY.

(THE COW)

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Fasting for the first time: My experience of Ramadan

By Marius Bordat

Rabat – When I decided to try to fast during Ramadan this year, I didn't think that I was capable of lasting the entire month. I didn't even plan to complete the whole month of Ramadan, especially since I had never fasted before. My idea was to try fasting for the first few days and then stop. As a 16-year-old French-American, born in Morocco, I am going to talk about my experience of fasting for the first time.

I first decided to observe Ramadan in solidarity with my friends. I also wanted to live the experience of fasting.

The first day of Ramadan fell on a school day. Some of my friends presumed that I wasn't fasting. But when I explained my intention to try it, at first they didn't believe me, and then they were very surprised and proud of me.

What's more, on that first day I had sports. It felt a little difficult at the time to not drink but it wasn't impossible. For the breaking of the fast on my first day, I went to the Rabat medina to have a traditional Moroccan iftar.

The first few days were the most difficult for me. My body had to get used to not eating and drinking during the day until sunset – about 7:30 at night. They were also the hardest because, at the beginning of Ramadan, I only drank water instead of eating when I woke up at three in the morning for the last meal of "suhoor," before the sun rose. That made me a lot hungrier during the day. It was also harder for me during the first few days because I didn't have a complete iftar.

Since I was the only one in my family fasting, sometimes I waited until 8 pm to eat when my family had dinner, or I ordered food in advance. The problem was, it wasn't Moroccan food.

One week into Ramadan, my neighbors heard that I was fasting. They called me and told me to come to their house just before the iftar to come to try traditional harira soup. When I went to their house, the family gave me a tray of homemade Moroccan food with harira and some Moroccan sweet and savory pastries.

They told me to come every evening and get my tray of iftar. At first, I didn't want to because I thought it was impolite. But they said that I had to come each day or they would be mad at me. So each night I went to my neighbor's house and discovered something new on my tray.

They even included some extra cake for me to eat at three in the morning. That helped me a lot during the day, and I was less hungry.

After that, the whole neighborhood knew that I was fasting. Each time someone saw me, they told me that they were all proud of me.

Because of Ramadan, the school schedule changed and I got to get up a bit later. Even with Ramadan I didn't find school more dif-

ficult or feel more tired. I found it a little bit challenging at the end of the day, one hour before breaking the fast. So I usually took a nap or rested after coming back from school.

One thing that I noticed is that Moroccans go out a lot after the sun sets and nighttime is very lively. A couple of times during the month I went out to have dinner at 10 pm with my friends, I also went many times to play soccer with them until 1 am.

One night I went to my girlfriend's house to break the fast with a lot of delicious Moroccan food. I was very lucky to share the iftar with her and her family. Having an iftar with a Moroccan family was a very meaningful experience.

The next night was the Champions League Soccer Final, so I invited three of my friends to come over to watch the game and break the fast together. My friends brought some sweets and pastries to eat and my mother made us a lot of different Ramadan specialties.

Fasting for the whole month of Ramadan was a very good experience for me. I am proud of myself for having succeeded, and people were also very proud of me. I really appreciated the sense of sharing from the neighbors and the culture of generosity.

This experience also made me learn how lucky I am to eat every day when so many still go hungry. I didn't find it as difficult as I had expected, and I practiced self-control. I am happy that I've done it and look forward to next year.



Greed takes away wisdom from the hearts of knowledgeable men.

IMAM ALI (A.S)

Three habits destroy a man or a woman: greed, envy and pride.

IMAM EL-GHAZALI

The roots of evil are three: arrogance, envy and greed. Arrogance prevented Satan from bowing. Envy led Cane to kill Abel, and greed took Adam out of paradise.

AL-HASSAN AL-BASRI