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**In this issue**

<b>Local Events</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Muslim Affairs</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Jaffar Al Tayar; the man with two wings</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Cals to close down Guantanamo Bay prison</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>What the targeting of Muslim women means</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Story: The Khoja teaches a lesson</b>	<b>8</b>

# Abrar

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## **The power of invocation: God's omnipresence**

Among the wishes expressed by people at the inception of the New Year is for peace and security of the world. The aspiration to achieve this has always been entrenched in the human mind. This reflects the lingering feeling of insecurity in a world that gradually moves towards self-destruction. Despite the repeated warnings by scientists of possible "space accidents" such as an asteroid colliding with the earth, the real threat is linked to self-destruction. The humans are their own enemy. The enemy within is perhaps more dangerous than the enemy without. This long-held worry is an indication of the extent of the ignorance dominating the successive generations of the human inhabitants of this planet. This has naturally led to fear, anxiety and psychological and mental turbulence. With the onset of Covid-19 these negative feelings became more entrenched in the human society and are causing stress and unease among many.

The positive wishes thus underline the real feelings of the people. Aspiring for peace is a noble feeling. But aspirations are not enough to secure it. Mankind needs to develop its own road map to reduce the chances of conflict, poverty, warmongering and exploitation. These destructive phenomena contribute to the feeling of insecurity among the vast majority of the world population. Peace is a beautiful world, but the human behaviour is not conducive to the conditions that help achieve it. The human material needs are of paramount importance to lead to peace of mind. On the contrary hunger is a destructive power that can easily turn the tide and cause political and moral mayhem. The holy Quran classifies hunger and fear as the two most destructive conditions of mankind. They are the inevitable consequences of diverting from the divine path as prescribed by the divine messages. Corruption, which includes deviation from God's path leads to hunger. The dynamics of the process of material degeneration is known only by God Almighty who linked the two.

The other consequence is fear. This is a reflection of insecurity, the moral weakness of mankind and the lack of re-assurances needed to create inner peace. For example under dictatorial regimes people live in fear for their personal lives. Only those who were forced to hide from the secret police of dictators can appreciate what it means to live in fear. But there is also the fear linked to uncertainty, lack of hope and the fear of the unknown. These feelings exist in most societies with varying degrees. Even in democracies fear does not totally disappear. There is the fear of war, the fear of illness as a result of the environmental pollution, the fear of lack of commodities. There are other forms of fears linked to the man-made financial systems that virtually enslave people through accumulation of debts. Many people take away their lives when they default on their debts either to the banks, credit cards companies of mortgage lenders. These are signs of ultimate desperation that ravaging the modern human societies which have been enslaved by the usurpers, money launderers and exploiters. How can a human being attain peace when he/she loses the battle with debts?

How can this vicious circle of despair be broken? How can modern man be freed from the chains around his neck? The fear of the unknown is a killer. This is what many psychologists say. This also explains why many normal doctors and physicians suddenly decide to change their specialization to become psychiatrists. The inception of the pandemic has contributed to this state, but the other calamities have created the huge demand for dealing with the mental health issues created by the modern political, social and economic order. What underlines all these is the lack of faith. The holy Quran clearly says that: Hearts will be at peace when it remembers God. This is the ultimate source of peace. So how can faith be brought into the public domain? In the present material culture, there is one exit: to link up with the power of unseen;



## Martyrdom of Sayeda Fatima

The martyrdom anniversary of Fatima Al Zahra, daughter of Prophet Mohammad and wife of Ali, was marked by Abrar in its weekly meeting on Thursday 6th January. Mrs Nidaa Al Shamari chaired the first half of the meeting which was addressed by Mrs Zahra Al Shakarchi. This was followed by a lamentation session by Sheikh Hussain Al Hilli.

Mrs Al Shammari talked about Fatima presenting some verses from the holy Quran that show her elevated status in Islam. She recited the verse of Al Kawthar and said it confirmed that status and refuted the claim by Mohammad's enemies that he was unable to have children. The verse says that the accuser is the one who cannot have children. The word "kawthar" has several meanings including "much water" and the name of a river in paradise. But the verse links it to Fatima, ie, she is the source of water. Her father, Mohammad granted her special respect and love. He would always stand for her when she enters the room. Fatima provided physical example of responsible woman and how she can shoulder great responsibilities. But she said that in order to have a woman like Fatima we must also have a husband like Ali. She shouldered the message at the hardest of times. She also looked after her father until she was called; the mother of her father. She did not confine her activism within the walls of the house. When the situation demanded outside activism she left home and faced those who challenged the legacy of her father. She did not remain silent in the face of wrongdoing by others. At her father's mosque she delivered an eloquent speech that shook the hearts of those in attendance..

Zahra Al Shakarchi posed the question: How do we emulate Fatima? She said that this needs re-formulation of the educational systems in order to make use of those experiences. We need to employ specialists and skilful people to do this. These must be urged to communicate with other religious groups and urge them to study Islam as well. They also need to challenge those targeting Islam. The second point is to rephrase the religious narrative to include both man and woman. This will go some way to alleviate the suspicions created by the anti-religion tendencies that women are inferior to



men in Islam. The myths of the orientalist and the "modernists" must be quashed in order to maintain the faith of our youth. The third point is that there is a need to present an action plan to launch pro-woman narrative in accordance with the high status offered by Islam.

The lamentation session was presented by Sheikh Hussain Al Hilli who was visiting UK from Denmark. He went over the life and character of Fatima. He said she was young when she passed away, only few weeks or few months after the demise of her father, Prophet Mohammad. She was great worshipper of God. Once her son, Hassan asked her: You pray for others more than for yourself, why? She said: I start with the neighbour first. He highlighted several other stories from the life of Fatima to show how dedicated she had been to Islam, her family, the people and the truth.



## Muslims of India: history and present welfare

The suffering of Muslims in India was the subject of discussion of the weekly meeting of Abrar Islamic Foundation on Thursday 13th January. The speaker was Sayed Ali Baqir Abidi, a Shia Muslim scholar, who is the President of Ahlul Bait Educational Organisation in the city of Bangalore. He delivered a comprehensive speech about the past and present of the Muslims in India. He also talked about the elections and their impact on communal relations.

The elections scheduled for next month will be crucial to the Muslims of India. The prime minister, Narendra Modi is preparing for another win and has taken steps to strengthen his stand. These include lavish treatment of Hindus. Recently he sent jute shoes to those working at a temple to enable them to walk on its cold marble floors. The Muslims feel under constant threat from Hindu extremists and cannot forget the destruction of the Ayodia Mosque in 1995. Their memory is still vivid with the killings that claimed the lives of over 2000 Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. They are aware of the dangers facing any minority but the increasingly hostile establishment makes them even more worried. The change of India's foreign policy in the past thirty years is contributing to their worries. The newly-developed links with Israel is a serious development in a country that was once ruled by Muslims under the Mughals, the

Ghaznavids and the Turco-Persians. Yet Muslims enjoy the overt democratic culture in their country which led at some stages to improvement of their situation. The last president, Abdull Kalam (2002-2007), was a Muslim. This did not last long though. With continuous hostility with neighboring Pakistan and the ongoing complex political landscape in Kashmir and Afghanistan, the Indian Muslims continue to face uncertainty and unease. They feel safer when the liberal politicians win such elections. Under the rule of the Congress Party, Muslims enjoy relative safety but the challenges never disappear. India's Muslims constitute one of the largest concentration of Muslims in any country. Despite their 175 million population, they remain a minority in a country with a population in excess of 1.2 billion people. The economic prosperity of India leads to less hostilities as the standard of living improves marginally. Yet poverty never ceased. The economic polarization, corruption and the rise of elitist culture does not help fair distribution of wealth.

The speaker said that Islam spread in India not by sword but through voluntary acceptance by the people. Early Muslim merchants carried the message with their trade and, through their high moral stands and noble behaviour Indians embraced the religion. In the Kirala region there is a place known as Abu Ayyub Al Ansari, one of the early companions of Mohammad. Then came the British colonialists to control the Indian sub-continent until Ghandi led the revolt against them. After independence came the split of Pakistan from India in 1948 that undermined the Muslim influence in India and gave rise to the notion that India is for Hindus. The speaker blamed the Arab countries for their lack of support of the Indian Muslims. He presented aspects of the Muslim grievances under the present Hindu leadership. These grievances have been compounded by the enhancement of the links with Israel. The attacks on Muslims by Hindu extremists are on the rise while the police has not been able to provide them with protection. He also talked about the religious activities within the Shia Muslim community, especially the religious seminaries, schools and other Islamic institutions. It was a comprehensive review of the Muslim situation.



## Nearly 8,000 detained in Kazakhstan amid unrest



The authorities in Kazakhstan said Monday that nearly 8,000 people were detained by police during protests that descended into violence last week and marked the worst unrest the former Soviet nation has faced since gaining independence 30 years ago.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on Monday described the events of last week as a "terrorist aggression" against the country and dismissed reports of the authorities fighting peaceful demonstrators as "disinformation."

Kazakhstan's Interior Ministry reported that a total of 7,939 people have been detained across the country. The National Security Committee, Kazakhstan's counterintelligence and anti-terrorism agency, said Monday that the situation in the country has "stabilized and is under control." The demonstrations began on Jan. 2 over a near-doubling of prices for a type of vehicle fuel and quickly spread across the country, apparently reflecting wider discontent with the authoritarian government.

In a concession, the government announced a 180-day price cap on vehicle fuel and a moratorium on utility rate increases. As the unrest mounted, the ministerial cabinet resigned and President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev replaced Nursultan Nazarbayev, former longtime leader of Kazakhstan, as head of the National Security Council.

One of the main slogans of the past week's protests, "Old man out," was a reference to Nazarbayev, who served as president from Kazakhstan's independence until he resigned in 2019 and anointed Tokayev as his successor. Nazarbayev had retained substantial power at the helm of the National Security Council.

## AI urges Spanish clubs to take a stand in Saudi Arabia

Amnesty International is calling on the four clubs involved in the Spanish Super Cup in Saudi Arabia this week to take a stand over women's rights and equality issues. Real Madrid, Barcelona, Atletico Madrid and Athletic Bilbao will compete in the revamped Super Cup in the Saudi capital Riyadh from Jan. 12-16 after the

Spanish FA agreed a contract with the Saudis until 2029 that will earn the governing body 30 million euros (\$34 million) a year.

The human rights organisation has sent the clubs and the Spanish soccer federation purple armbands and asked the team captains to wear them during the tournament as a show of solidarity.

"We are asking your organisation to honour its commitments and responsibilities to human rights," Amnesty urged the clubs in a letter sent last week and seen by Reuters. "Your club has an opportunity to take advantage of the tournament to make human rights concerns visible in Saudi Arabia. We invite your captain to wear the armband either during matches, or at events around the tournament such as press conferences, training sessions and other public exhibition spaces, including social media."

## Saudi Arabia bans women from pilgrimage to Prophet's shrine

The Government of Saudi Arabia has issued new order banning women from pilgrimage to the holy shrine of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) one of the most popular sites to pilgrims visiting Medina. Women may request special permission to visit "Al Rawda", the courtyard of the Prophet's Mosque located between the pulpit and the shrine where Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) met with his relatives. This is while the report of the Ministry of Pilgrimages does not state the reasons for this ban.

It only indicated that the mobile application with which pilgrimages to the holy places of Mecca and Medina are managed will no longer allow women to book a visit to the burial site of the Prophet, according to the newspaper, Specimen, which usually presents official government information.

With this application, which began to be used with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic almost two years ago, pilgrims can reserve tickets to the Great Mosque of Mecca and the Mosque of the Prophet, where his shrine is located, in the city of Medina, and obtain a code that is scanned in the accesses.

## UK Johnson's future uncertain after lockdown party apology

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's premiership was in the balance on Thursday as he faced calls from within his Conservative Party to resign after he admitted attending a party at his official residence during a coronavirus lockdown.



Johnson issued "heartfelt apologies" for attending the gathering at Downing Street in May 2020, telling parliament he understood the public's rage at the revelations. [read more](#)

Senior ministers rallied around to offer support to their leader, who won a landslide election victory in 2019, although media said the backing of finance minister Rishi Sunak, regarded as a potential successor to Johnson, appeared lukewarm.

Others were more direct. The Conservatives' leader in Scotland, along with a handful of other prominent lawmakers, called for Johnson to resign, saying his position was untenable.

"The mood isn't great," Conservative member of parliament Jake Berry told BBC radio.

"There is a lot of concern amongst my colleagues about the damage that these revelations are doing to the Conservative Party. But I think yesterday there was a bit of a turning point of opinion."

## WHO: Omicron caused COVID-19 surge in Mideast in January

A "shocking" surge in COVID-19 cases across the World Health Organization's Eastern Mediterranean region is probably due to the Omicron variant, a WHO official said, warning that some countries in the group still have very low vaccination rates.

Reported cases in the region rose 89% in the first week of January from a week earlier but deaths fell by 13%, WHO regional director Ahmed Al-Mandhari said. Out of 22 mostly Middle Eastern countries in the region, 15 have officially reported cases of the highly infectious Omicron variant. "While Omicron appears to cause less severe disease compared to (the previous variant) Delta, especially in those vaccinated, this certainly does not mean it should be underestimated, as it continues to lead to hospitalization and deaths," he said.

Mandhari said six countries in the region - Afghanistan, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen - have vaccinated less than 10% of their populations despite having enough vaccines available to protect up to 40%. Just 36 countries worldwide have similarly low vaccination rates, according to the WHO. He said vaccination campaigns had been hampered by problems including lack of political commitment, insecurity and logistical challenges.



## Ja'far Al-Tayyar, The refugee who brought Islam to Africa

When the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S) began to preach religion of Islam in Mecca, those who did not believe in him and his message, opposed and troubled him. They called him a lunatic and a sorcerer. They offered bribes to persuade him to stop preaching the religion. When all these ways failed, they used harsh threats against the Prophet and the new Muslim converts. During all these years, the Holy Prophet enjoyed the protection of his uncle Abu Talib. He always stood by his nephew and did not let anyone harm him. The sons of Abu Talib, one by one, accepted Islam. Imam Ali (a) was right, from his childhood, under the care of the Prophet and was the first one to declare his true faith, Islam, when the Prophet proclaimed his Prophethood. He always stood by the Prophet firmly and faithfully both in good and difficult times. Among the other sons of Abu Talib (a), Ja'far also accepted Islam and so did Aqeel, the other son of Abu Talib.

The torture and oppression which the Holy Prophet and the small group of his followers had been subjected to, had increased so much that life became unbearable. The Holy Prophet decided on an action which not only saved the lives of his followers but also spread the message of Islam to other countries. He therefore, decided to send some of his followers to Abyssinia, which was just across the Red Sea, to the south of Mecca.

The Holy Prophet had great faith in Ja'far the son of Abu Talib (a) and brother of Imam Ali (a). A handful of Muslim refugees including men and women under the leadership of Ja'far crossed the Red Sea. This is known to be the first migration in the history of Islam, which occurred in the fifth year after the Prophet had proclaimed Islam in 615 A.D. They were joined by more immigrants who had become the victims of the enemies of Islam. The number of the refugees rose to eighty-two men and eighteen women.

On arrival at the capital of Abyssinia, Ja'far and his companions paid a visit to the Emperor Negus. The Emperor was very much impressed with the knowledge, behaviour and the politeness of Ja'far and he received him with much honour and entertained him as a respected guest.

When the non-believers of Quraish in Mecca came to know of this, Abdulla Bin Rabih and Amr Bin 'Aas together with some other people took some expensive gifts and ar-

rived at the court of the Emperor Negus. On entering the court, they prostrated (bowed in sajda before the Emperor and presented him with the gifts. Then they said, "Someone in our country has invented a new religion and some people have joined him. We tried to stop this, but some of his followers have taken refuge in your country. Now, we appeal to you to throw them out and hand them over to us." The Emperor replied that he had already given protection to them and would not throw them out of the country, but he would ask them to come there before them. So saying, the Emperor called in the Muslim refugees.

Hazrat Ja'far took with him some close companions and arrived at the court. But he did not prostrate (bow in sajda) before Negus. People in the court criticised him for this and asked him why he had not bowed down before the Emperor as was customary. Hazrat Ja'far promptly retorted, "We do not bow down before anybody except God. The Emperor knew that this was the true and basic teaching of divine religions. He called Ja'far and gave a respectful place near him. He then informed Ja'far that some people from his country of origin had come there with a complaint that he had deserted his old religion and started a new one which rejected the original idol-worship. Hazrat Ja'far in very impressive language, replied:

"O King! We were in deep ignorance and barbarism: we adored idols, we lived in unchastity; we ate dead animals, we disregarded the duties of hospitality and neighbourhood; At that time, God raised among us a man, who is pure, truthful and honest. He called us to believe in One God and taught us not to associate anything with Him. He forbade us to worship idols, enjoined us to speak the truth, to be faithful to our trusts, to be merciful and to regard the rights of neighbours. He forbade us to speak evil of women. He ordered us to keep away from vices, to offer prayers, to pay alms and to observe the fast."

Negus told Ja'far to recite some words from the Holy Qur'an. Ja'far commenced with Bismillah and proceeded to recite a few lines from Surah Maryam with such sincerity and sweet voice that the Emperor and his people were very much moved and began to weep. When the Emperor heard the verse concerning Prophet Isa (Jesus), he was very touched and said that the words resembled those which were bestowed upon Prophet Musa (Moses) and Prophet Isa (Jesus).

The Emperor rejected the appeal of the Quraish and ordered Amr bin 'Aas to take away the gifts he had brought. Amr bin 'Aas went away but having thought of something, he returned to the court the next day. He made a cunning move by suggesting to the Emperor to ask the

Muslims as to what their belief was concerning Prophet Isa? Hazrat Ja'far was called to the court again and was given a very respectful welcome. The Emperor then asked: "What does your Prophet (Muhammad) say about Prophet Isa (Jesus)?"

The Muslims became worried but Hazrat Ja'far, with great peace of mind, replied: "O King! Our Prophet is guided by God in what he says." Saying this, he proceeded to show an Ayat from the Holy Qur'an and requested Negus to read it: "The messiah (Isa), son of Maryam is only a messenger of Allah and His word and His spirit which He sent to Maryam."

Negus was extremely pleased to learn this and said: "This actually is also there in our book of Injil." He then expelled Amr bin 'Aas and the infidels of Quraish from Abyssinia. From then onwards, Negus had high regard for and faith in Islam.

Thus Ja'far had done a great service to Islam. He preached the true message of Islam in Abyssinia and stayed there for fifteen years before returning to Madina.



## Jerusalem church leader says Israeli extremists threaten Christians

The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem has accused radical Israeli groups of threatening the presence of Christians in the holy city, in remarks that Israeli officials rejected as baseless.

In a column in the Times of London on Saturday, His Beatitude, Theophilos III, said he believed the aim was to drive the Christian community from Jerusalem's Old City, which has sites sacred to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Israel captured East Jerusalem, including the Old City, along with the West Bank and Gaza Strip in a 1967 war. It annexed East Jerusalem after the war in a move that has not won international recognition.

"Our presence in Jerusalem is under threat," the patriarch wrote in the article, published a day after the Greek Orthodox celebration of Christmas.

"Our churches are threatened by Israeli radical fringe groups. At the hands of these Zionist extremists the Christian community in Jerusalem is suffering greatly, he said. "Our brothers and sisters are the victims of hate crimes. Our churches are regularly desecrated and vandalised. Our clergy are subject to frequent intimidation."

By singling out extremists as Israeli, Theophilos's criticism was more personal and trenchant than that of a collective statement issued by the heads of other churches in Jerusalem before Christmas. Their statement spoke of "frequent and sustained attacks by fringe radical groups" but stopped short of identifying them as Israeli.

A U.S. State Department report published last year on religious freedom around the world said Christian clergy and pilgrims continued to report instances of ultra-Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem harassing or spitting on them.

Church groups have for some time reported attacks of vandalism at religious sites in the city. Theophilos did not accuse any radical groups by name or cite specific incidents. He did not provide evidence that they were Israeli, or that their goal was to drive Christians from the city.

On Sunday, an Israeli official said the reality on the ground for Christians was completely different from that described by the patriarch, citing a Foreign Ministry statement on Dec 22 that rebutted the earlier church leaders' claims.

"Since the day it was established, the State of Israel has been committed to freedom of religion and worship for all religions, as well to ensuring the freedom of access to holy sites," the ministry statement said.

"The statement by Church leaders in Jerusalem is particularly infuriating



given their silence on the plight of many Christian communities in the Middle East suffering from discrimination and persecution."

In his column, Theophilos said the radicals that he criticised "are not representative of the state of Israel or the Jewish people," and called on Jerusalem to remain a diverse "mosaic community" of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

## UN experts: Washington close Guantanamo prison

A number of UN experts have referred to the two decade operation of Guantanamo prison as "an ugly chapter of unrelenting human rights violations" calling on the United States to fulfill its promise regarding shutting down the notorious prison in Cuba. The demand came in a statement released by more than a dozen independent UN human rights experts on Monday.

The undersigned voiced outrage that the military prison was still in operation two decades after being set up under Washington's self-proclaimed "war on terror" campaign. "Twenty years of practicing arbitrary detention without trial accompanied by torture or ill-treatment is simply unacceptable for any government, particularly a government which has a stated claim to protecting human rights," the UN experts said.

The experts called on the US Government to close the site, return detainees home or to safe third countries while respecting the principle of non-refoulement, provide remedy and reparation for those egregiously tortured and arbitrarily detained by their agents, and hold those that authorized and engaged in torture accountable as required under international law.

The experts condemned the lack of adequate medical assistance and torture rehabilitation to rehabilitate torture victims both at Guantanamo and after transfer—both of which are plainly required under international law.

The experts said Guantanamo Bay was also a profound symbol of the systematic lack of accountability for and censorship of the practice of state-sponsored torture and ill treatment and the unacceptable impunity granted to those responsible.

"When a State fails to hold accountable those who have authorized and practiced torture and other cruel inhuman or degrading treatment it sends a signal of complacency and acquiescence to the world," they said.

There are 39 prisoners left at the facility, down from nearly 680 that it used to hold at its peak in 2003. Most have been languishing there without charge and proceedings for their release have been delayed at the pretrial state for years.

In the past 20 years, the ill-famed prison has come to be known as the symbol of US human rights abuses. Many detainees – mostly Muslim men – were tortured or held for years without charges.

The experts pointed out that between 2002 and 2021, nine detainees died in custody--seven of whom reportedly from suicide. None had been charged with a crime, they said.

Obama had made the closing of Guantanamo one of his top priorities and issued an executive order to do so soon after taking office in 2009. However, he failed to achieve that goal by the end of his second term in face of stiff opposition in Congress. His successor, Donald Trump, rescinded the order to close it.

Human rights advocates have also expressed increasing frustration with US President Joe Biden for failing to deliver on a pledge to close Guantanamo Bay, leaving inmates languishing in the notorious offshore prison with no end in sight. "President Biden has stated his intention to close Guantanamo as a matter of policy but has not taken substantial steps toward closure," Wells Dixon, an attorney with the Center for Constitutional Rights, told the Associated Press.

The New York-based organization has a track record of challenging indefinite detentions without charge at the offshore prison. The prison's continued existence, critics say, is a reminder to the world of torture methods by the United States that President Obama once said left a "stain on our broader record."

The critics grew to include Michael Lehnert, a now-retired Marine Corps major general who was tasked with opening the offshore prison but came to view it as antithetical to American values and interests. "To me, the existence of Guantanamo is anathema to everything that we represent, and it needs to be closed for that reason," Lehnert said.



## What the targeting of Muslim women really means

**Saira Shah Halim**, New Delhi  
Let's just say it's not the best time to be a Muslim in India. Particularly a vocal, politically active Muslim woman.

In the run-up to year 2022, Indian Muslims witnessed calls for genocide of the community. No action. Then Muslim women are being auctioned online for the second time in the past one year in a new avatar of Bulli Bai. No action as yet.

It is said that morning shows the day. 2022 should have been a year of peace and amity, yet calls for genocides for minorities are happening right under the nose of the establishment.

There leaves no shadow of doubt in anyone's mind that a sinister holocaust is brewing in India; you feel it in the bones. The whole generalisation during the abolition of 'Triple Talaq' about Muslim women being weak and hapless is a warped perspective of Muslim women.

Can anyone forget the resistance at 'Shaheen Bagh'? The sight of Muslim women camping for months in biting cold fighting to safeguard their homes, territories and their nationality that was under threat of being snatched away was truly inspirational as the world watched.

In 2019, the United Nations official, Adama Dieng, spoke on the dangers of hate speech and intolerance. We all have to remember that hate crimes are preceded by hate speech, he emphasised.

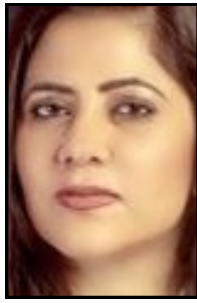
Today, what we are witnessing around the world, with the rise of extremists, when we see the growing number of neo-Nazi groups, neo-fascist groups, when we see the way migrants and refugees are being vilified, we need, therefore, to make every effort to address this hate speech.

December 9 was declared as the annual international day of commemoration and dignity of the victims of the crime of genocide and of the prevention of this crime in September 2015 by the United Nations.

The Sangh umbrella for long has been engineering this hate through its foot soldiers and getting away with it. For instance, if the criminals who launched the 'Sulli Deals' online were brought to task some time ago, we would not be witnessing the horrors of the "Bulli Bai" unfurling before our eyes today.

The holocaust was long pending in India when BJP won just two seats in Parliament in 1984 and began ideating a campaign of hate which saw the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 by the right-wing radicals in India.

As kids we quickly got accustomed to the term 'riots'; it was commonplace to have regular riots in the Hindi heartland like Meerut where my roots are. The



Army used to be called in those days for relief work when curfew used to be imposed upon the city. But these things were always kept in check as the ruling dispensation was accountable to the people.

At times when there is a surge of Covid cases amid the fear of an impending third wave, we haven't learnt our lessons from the first and second wave.

The priority of the ruling dispensation should have been a complete overhaul of the public healthcare system in preparation for the third wave. Instead, what appears as evident is that the government is least interested in that. Since its winning plank happens to be 'polarisation' and engineering a tsunami of hate for electoral benefits.

Recently, former Indian armed forces veterans wrote an open letter to PM Modi, criticising hate speech on minorities. This won't stop until the silent majority speaks up and condemns these gory incidents.

In December, a church was allegedly vandalised by unidentified miscreants in Karnataka's southern district Chikkaballapur. This attack comes on the heels of several other similar incidents, targeting the Christian community ahead of the controversial anti-conversion bill in the Karnataka Assembly. The Bishop made a statement to the effect that elected leaders are challenging the constitution, and the government is doing nothing to protect minorities.

Later, Bishops, Nuns and religious leaders of the Christian community were out on the roads in Bengaluru to protest the recent attacks and vandalism of churches.

Communalism was earlier relegated to the fringes; now it's become mainstream and it is not surprising anymore. The rot was setting in for some time.

Last year saw the auctioning of Muslim women online on an app called Sulli Deals. Even Najeeb's mother was not spared. This is just a reflection of India's broken justice system. Definitely, there must be some truth in stories when surveys say we are becoming one of the most unsafe countries for women.

Repeated complaints from women poli-

ticians made to IT minister Ashwini Vaishnav fell on deaf ears. Priyanka Chaturvedi from the Shiv Sena tweeted: "I have repeatedly asked Hon.IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav ji to take stern action against such rampant misogyny and communal targeting of women through Sulli deals like platforms. A shame that it continues to be ignored."

A few days ago, Yati Narasinghanand had called on Hindu youth to become Prabhakaran and Bhindranwale and provoked Hindus to pick up arms against the Muslims, promising to give them Rs one crore for it.

Yati Narasinghanand happens to be one of the organisers of the event. He faces criminal cases in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi as well.

Another speaker at the event, Sagar Sindhu Maharaj, whose name was added, had asked Hindus to have more children and spare Muslims only if they converted to Hinduism.

In a viral video of a similar event in Delhi on 19th December, right-wing Hindu groups could be seen taking the following oath: "We take an oath and make a resolution that till our last breath, we will fight, die for and if need be, kill, to make this country a Hindu Rashtra and keep this country a Hindu Rashtra."

On 30th December, Chhattisgarh police also booked religious leader Kalicharan for allegedly using derogatory language against Mahatma Gandhi at an event in Madhya Pradesh's Khajuraho.

It's not surprising that BJP leaders feign ignorance when asked about hate speeches in their states. Take for example Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami who completely feigned amnesia when asked about the Haridwar Hate Assembly after ten days had lapsed.

As India gets caught up in the intersection of hegemony, misogyny, bigotry, casteism, violence, impunity, there should be a collective action around the complete breakdown of a healthy, bustling, thriving democracy.

The punch in the gut fear of being Muslims in Modi-fied India is as real as it can be. Muslims have been a resilient lot since 2014. Many have chosen to be apolitical, many are keeping silent, many are watching the events unfold with dread and fear, but one thing is certain they will not get cowed down or bullied into becoming second-class citizens in their own country.

Would they like to be remembered as another fascist movement, a totalitarian regime that pushed its citizenry into civil war or a government that walked the talk of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikaas'? Honourable PM Narendra Modi Ji, the ball is in your court now.

*(Saira Shah Halim is an educator and a civil rights activist)*



## World Religions Today 7th edition

John Esposito, Darrell J. Fasching, Todd T. Lewis, and Peter Feldmeier

Revealing the significance of religion in contemporary life, *World Religions Today*, Seventh Edition, explores major religious traditions--Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, South Asian religions, East Asian religions, indigenous religions, and new religions--as dynamic, ongoing forces in the lives of individuals and in the collective experience of modern societies. This unique volume accomplishes two goals: it connects today's religions to their classical beliefs and practices and focuses on how these religions have both radically changed the modern world and been changed by it. The book is enhanced by numerous pedagogical aids--text boxes, timelines, maps, illustrations, discussion questions, a comprehensive glossary of key terms, and suggestions for further reading--and more than 200 photographs.

Highlights:

Connects today's religions to their classical beliefs and practices and highlights the tensions between historical religious traditions and their modern manifestations

Offers an up-to-date view of how religions have responded to and been transformed by the modern world and how they impact and are impacted by globalization and international relations

Highlights some of the most colorful, lively, and striking aspects of religion

today through a wide variety of thematic and special-topic boxes that explore particular ideas or practices in some depth: "Ritual and Rites" boxes examine rituals that have changed in practice or meaning over time; "Gender Focus" boxes highlight gender-specific customs within each faith; "Teachings of Religious Wisdom" boxes expose students to primary sources from various traditions; "Contrasting Religious Visions" boxes compare the beliefs of two significant adherents of a faith who each see the demands of their religion calling believers in very different directions in the modern age; "Tales of Spiritual Transformation" offer descriptions of religious experiences in the believers' own words. Incorporates helpful pedagogical aids, including timelines, maps, illustrations, discussion questions, a comprehensive glossary, suggestions for further reading, and more than 200 photographs. "Tales of Spiritual Transformation" offers descriptions of religious experiences in believers' own words. Some of these are classical voices and others contemporary.

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*Islam*, Second Edition (2011), *The Future of Islam* (2010), and *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (2002), and coauthor of *Islam and Democracy after the Arab Spring* (2015), all published by Oxford University Press.

**The late Darrell J. Fasching** was Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at the University of South Florida.

**Todd T. Lewis** is Professor of World Religions at the College of the Holy Cross.

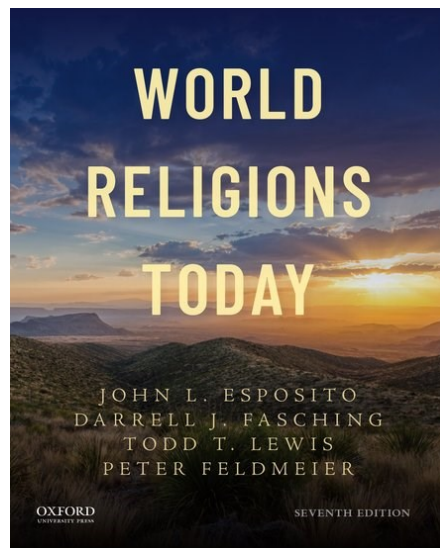
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## Revolutionary Life: The Everyday of the Arab Spring

By Asef Bayat

From a leading scholar of the Middle East and North Africa comes a new way of thinking about the Arab Spring and the meaning of revolution.

From the standpoint of revolutionary politics, the Arab Spring can seem like a wasted effort. In Tunisia, where the wave of protest began, as well as in Egypt and the Gulf, regime change never fully took hold. Yet if the Arab Spring failed to disrupt the structures of governments, the movement was transformative in farms, families, and factories, souks and schools.

Seamlessly blending field research, on-the-ground interviews, and social theory, Asef Bayat shows how the practice of everyday life in Egypt and Tunisia was fundamentally altered by revolutionary activity. Women, young adults, the very poor, and members of the underground queer community can credit the Arab Spring with steps toward equality and freedom. There is also potential for further progress, as

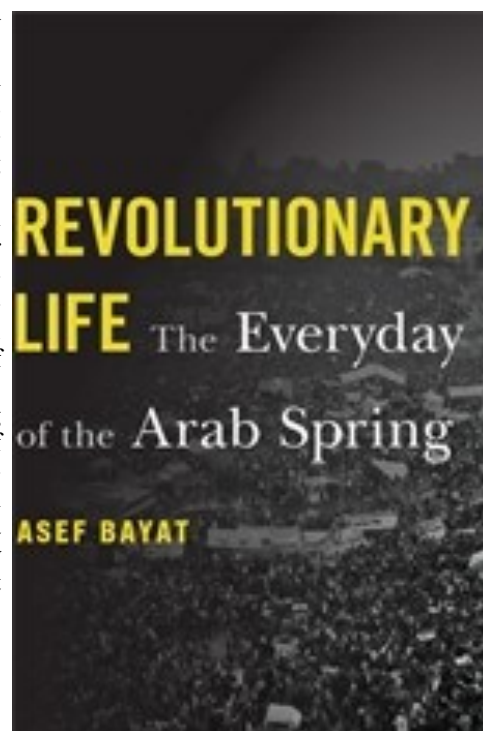
women's rights in particular now occupy a firm place in public discourse, preventing retrenchment and ensuring that marginalized voices remain louder than in prerevolutionary days. In addition, the Arab Spring empowered workers: in Egypt alone, more than 700,000 farmers unionized during the years of protest. Labor activism brought about material improvements for a wide range of ordinary people and fostered new cultural and political norms that the forces of reaction cannot simply wish away. In Bayat's telling, the Arab Spring emerges as a paradigmatic case of "refolution"—revolution that engenders reform rather than radical change. Both a detailed study and a moving appeal, *Revolutionary Life* identifies the social gains that were won through resistance.

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12. MAN WE DID CREATE FROM A QUINTESSENCE (OF CLAY);  
 13. THEN WE PLACED HIM AS (A DROP OF) SPERM IN A PLACE OF REST, FIRMLY FIXED;  
 14. THEN WE MADE THE SPERM INTO A CLOT OF CONGEALED BLOOD; THEN OF THAT CLOT WE MADE A (FOETUS) LUMP; THEN WE MADE OUT OF THAT LUMP BONES AND CLOTHED THE BONES WITH FLESH; THEN WE DEVELOPED OUT OF IT ANOTHER CREATURE. SO BLESSED BE ALLAH, THE BEST TO CREATE!  
 15. AFTER THAT, AT LENGTH YE WILL DIE  
 16. AGAIN, ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT, WILL YE BE RAISED UP.  
 17. AND WE HAVE MADE, ABOVE YOU, SEVEN TRACTS; AND WE ARE NEVER UNMINDFUL OF (OUR) CREATION.  
 18. AND WE SEND DOWN WATER FROM THE SKY ACCORDING TO (DUE) MEASURE, AND WE CAUSE IT TO SOAK IN THE SOIL; AND WE CERTAINLY ARE ABLE TO DRAIN IT OFF (WITH EASE).  
**(THE BELIEVERS)**

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 Everyday  
 at 12.00

## The Khoja teaches a lesson

A story from Turkey

Khoja Nasiruddin is a household name in Turkey. Whether it is a tour guide in Istanbul or a taxi driver in Konya, he has a story to tell about the Khoja. These stories reflect the age old wisdom of a mature civilization. They are also uplifting and entertaining.

One day the Khoja was traveling on his donkey through a village when he noticed that a large group of agitated men was gathered around a well. Several women stood a short distance away, wailing inconsolably.

The Khoja got down from his donkey, tied it to a tree and approached the crowd.

"What is going on here?" asked the Khoja.

"A man fell down the well and we do not know how to get him out", someone in the crowd replied. "Bring me a rope and I will help you" said the Khoja.

A young man ran to a house and brought back a thick, long twisted rope. The Khoja carefully lowered the rope into the well and shouted to the man who had fallen in to tie the rope securely around his waist and firmly hold onto it with both hands. He then asked four strong men in the crowd to pull the rope.

When the hapless man was rescued, the villagers shouted "Allahu Akbar" with joy. The women stopped wailing, raised their hands up to the heavens and prayed for the Khoja.

Word got out about the exploits of the Khoja and his fame spread far and wide. People started to look upon him as a man of wisdom and sound judgment.

A few months later, as the Khoja rode his donkey through another village, he noticed that a house was on fire. A large crowd had gathered, shouting, pointing their fingers at the roof of the burning house. When they saw the Khoja, they pleaded with him.

"O wise Khoja. Please help us. The house is on fire and there is a man trapped on the roof. We do not know what to do."

"Do not worry", said the Khoja. "Bring me a rope".

A rope was brought. The Khoja threw it to the man trapped on the roof and asked him to tie it securely around his waist and hold on firmly to it. He then asked four young men to pull the rope.

The trapped man came crashing down to the ground and was dragged out of the fire. The villagers cheered the Khoja, praising him that he had rescued yet another man from a dire



predicament. They took a procession through the village with the Khoja on his donkey to celebrate.

When they returned to the burnt house, they noticed that the man who had been pulled from the roof was still lying on the ground, motionless as a rock. They checked his breath and found that he was dead.

They turned to the Khoja and asked him, "What have you done? The man is dead."

The Khoja thought for a moment and replied, "Ugh! It worked the last time."

The Khoja had taught an eternal lesson: The solutions of the past do not always work in the present. Each situation must be assessed in its context and new solutions must be evolved.

## The Woodcutter

Once upon a time a very strong woodcutter asked for a job in a timber merchant, and he got it. The pay was really good and so were the work conditions. For those reasons, the woodcutter was determined to do his best.

His boss gave him an axe and showed him the area where he was supposed to work. The first day, the woodcutter brought back 18 trees.

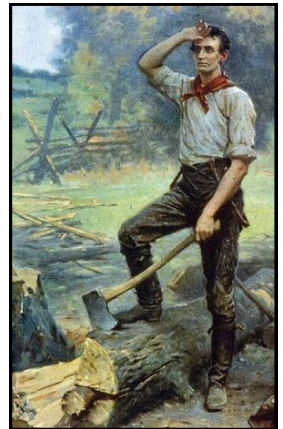
"Congratulations," the boss said. "Go on that way!"

Very motivated for the boss' words, the woodcutter would try harder the next day, but he only could bring 15 trees back. The third day, he tried even harder, but he only could bring 10 trees.

Day after day he was bringing less and less trees. "I must be losing my strength", the woodcutter thought. He went to the boss and apologized, saying that he could not understand what was going on.

"When was the last time you sharpened your axe?" the boss asked.

"Sharpen? I had no time to sharpen my axe. I have been very busy trying to cut trees." Our lives are like that. We sometimes get so busy that we don't take time to sharpen the axe. Our faith greatly depends on how much we sharpen it food that feeds the soul.



*The more you try to avoid suffering, the more you suffer, because smaller and more insignificant things begin to torture you, in proportion to your fear of being hurt. The one who does most to avoid suffering is, in the end, the one who suffers most.*

**THOMAS MERTON**