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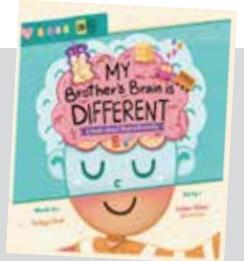
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LOCAL NEWS

Farewell to Iqraa Trust's Dr Baker

By Sana Ebrahim

Egyptian national Dr Mahmoud Youssef Baker, founder and former chief executive officer of Iqraa Trust, was honoured at a heartfelt farewell ceremony in Durban last weekend after more than three decades of humanitarian work in South Africa.

The event, held at the Iqraa Trust Knowledge Centre in Glenwood, was attended by academics, community leaders, business figures, and colleagues who gathered to celebrate his legacy as he prepares to return to his native Egypt. It was not simply a farewell, but a reflection of a life dedicated to education, empowerment, and service to humanity.

Dr Baker's journey with South Africa began more than 30 years ago while he was working in London for the late Sheikh Saleh Kamel, founder of the Saudi Albaraka Group. Sheikh Kamel requested that he travel to South Africa to assist in establishing Albaraka Bank, which went on to become one of the country's pioneering Islamic financial institutions. At the time, Dr Baker

was a respected economic adviser, working across some 30 countries. Yet his experiences in South Africa inspired a deeper calling. After two decades of global work, he chose to settle here permanently, dedicating his life to humanitarian causes. That decision led to the birth of Iqraa Trust, a non-profit organisation rooted in Islamic values of compassion, education, and justice.

Since its inception, Iqraa Trust has grown into one of the country's most respected charitable institutions. Under Dr Baker's leadership, the Trust supported more than 1600 organisations and thousands of students through bursaries, training initiatives, and development programmes.

"I was eager not only to provide financial support but also to guide, motivate, and personally mentor students with the potential to excel," Dr Baker said in his farewell address. Among those he mentored, two students have gone on to study at Harvard University.

In 2020, he established the Iqraa Trust Knowledge Centre at Hunt Road Secondary

School in Glenwood. The Centre provides free classes in mathematics, science, coding, and robotics, helping learners gain essential academic and technical skills.

Governance workshops and training sessions run by partner organisations are hosted by the Centre, extending Iqraa Trust's mission of building knowledge and ethical leadership.

Saturday's 1 November farewell drew a cross-section of leaders from education, business, and faith-based organisations.

Among them were MS Paruk; Ebrahim Vawda; Prof Salim Abdool Karim; Dr Bassiouni and Qari Basheer of Al Tawheed WAQF NPC; Shabir Chohan, CEO of Albaraka Bank and Trustee of Iqraa Trust; Adv Mohammed Vahed of the Young Leaders Academy; Shaikh Mohamed Elhaddad of An Nur Islamic Centre in Cape Town; attorney Aslam Mayat; Prof Mohamed Mostafa from UKZN's School of Engineering; PB Mkhize, principal of Hunt Road Secondary; Prof Jairam Reddy from the Dennis Hurley Centre; and Zama Sishi from Mangosuthu Uni-



versity of Technology.

Speakers recalled Dr Baker's humility, compassion, and unrelenting pursuit of education as a vehicle for transformation. Prof Karim described him as "a man of vision whose work continues to empower generations."

Shabir Chohan noted that his "integrity and moral clarity have guided not only the Trust but everyone privileged to work alongside him."

Many speakers remarked that while Dr Baker will leave South Africa, his influence will remain woven

into the fabric of the organisations, schools, and lives he helped shape.

Dr Baker thanked his staff at the end of the function for their support, hard work and commitment. He then introduced his successor, Ismail Mahomed, known as Milo.

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Heartbreak as Muslims addicted to online gambling destroy families

Online gambling addiction in the SA Muslim community is raising alarm and requires urgent government and community actions, writes Ismail Suder

The scourge of online gambling addiction has reached "epidemic proportions" in the Muslim community leading to many families being torn apart, said prominent Durban social scientist, Dr Suhaima Hoosen.

In an interview, she urged Muslim leaders and Islamic scholars to take urgent proactive measures to address this scourge that is tearing the fabric of the South African Muslim society.

Meanwhile, in a press statement, the President of the Minara Chamber of Commerce, Ebrahim Patel, has urged the Government and regulatory bodies to implement immediate and robust measures to address the escalating social and economic risks associated with gambling, including the trend of online gambling. However, speaking about

how it was affecting many in the Muslim community, Hoosen told *Al-Qalam* that it was time that Islamic scholars took urgent steps to address this scourge in mosques and at community meetings. "If this scourge is not stopped now, we could see a further disintegration of the family unit down the line," she warned.

She told *Al-Qalam* that she was witnessing an uptick in cases where Muslim women were complaining about their husbands' online addictions which were directly impacting on their wives and children. It often leads to marital discord, and even divorce.

She said the women she counselled had complained about their husbands' violent verbal outbursts or physical abuses, especially when their husband's online gambling was not going well. She said families were facing serious financial ruin to such an extent that they were battling to even put food on the table. "Sadly, I have heard several cases where husbands are selling off anything of value

in the home, from jewelry, furniture, and even chicken packs from the freezer, to satisfy their online gambling addiction," she said.

Hoosen said many Muslim men, unwittingly trapped in the web of false hope, are ordinary people – and many come from reputable family backgrounds. What attracts many Muslim men towards online gambling is the privacy and secrecy that it affords an individual. For gamblers, betting online takes away the "shame factor" of being spotted at a casino, so gambling on the internet while lying on their beds until the early parts of the morning, was considered a safer option.

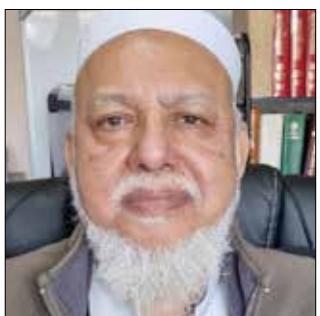
In her counselling sessions, Hoosen said many women pour out their hearts about the impact their husband's gambling is having on their families. The women all said their husbands' demeanor changed once they were caught in the web of online gambling addiction. "It transforms them into aloof, depressed and moody individuals, that in the end, can lead to financial ruin, sui-



Dr Suhaima Hoosen



Ebrahim Patel



Sheikh Rafeek Hassen

cidal tendencies, and not to mention the breakdown of relations with their wives and children. "It brings out the monster in the man", she added.

"A typical scenario would be when the husband comes home from his work; he immediately gets stuck with his phone or laptop and starts his online gambling. If he loses, he may vent his frustration on the poor wife, for example, complaining about the lack of salt in his food, or starts shouting at the children for no reason which ultimately leads to a tense environment in the house." In the Minara Chamber statement, Patel said the surge in gambling, particularly via

online channels, places considerable strain on household incomes. He pointed out that households already experiencing financial hardship are especially susceptible, "with evidence suggesting that up to 40% of vulnerable household income is directed towards gambling.

Sheikh Rafeek Hassen, Director and founder of the Islamic Interfaith Research Institute (iiFRI), said intoxicants and gambling are "Satan's handiwork" (Quran: Al Maida, Ayah 90).

"Regardless of age, gender, race or religion, a large percentage of the population are entrapped in this snare. A few decades ago, we were wor-

ried about cigarettes, then the next decade we worried about dagga, then we worried about smart phones and pornography and now online gambling."

Hassen, a well-known face on Hilaal TV, and who often addresses sociological issues, asked: "So why is the government allowing these evils? We all know the answer – collusion and kickbacks to Government officials. Money before moral values and community. But in the end where is the community? Why are we not exercising our democratic right to object, to oppose and shut down this cancer that is destroying our youth and families."

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BALAAK NATIONAL INDEPENDENT HAJJ & UMRAH

LOCAL NEWS

Qurtuba girls crowned national debate champions

By Neelam Rahim

In a moment that will be remembered for years to come, three young learners from Qurtuba Islamic Academy have made history – bringing home the title of National Debate Champions in their very first year of competing.

The trio, Grade 7 learners Humayra Bey, Layyana Essop and Imaan Adamjee, represented Qurtuba at the National Debate Finals competing against some of South Africa's top public and private schools. Their final motion, "Navigation apps should warn users of dangerous areas, and recommend routes avoiding them," saw them take the stage as the proposition – and walk away as champions.

But behind the victory was more than just skill - it was faith, unity, and tawakkul.

"We hope our win shows other young Muslims that with passion, hard work and full trust in Allah, any-

thing is possible," the girls told *Al-Qalam*. "We began our debating journey completely new to the sport, yet we stepped forward with confidence and belief in ourselves. Our message to others is simple: place your reliance on Allah first, do your absolute best, and success will find you. Representing our Ummah with excellence makes every effort worthwhile."

For first-time debaters, the journey came with its challenges. "Debating for the very first time was mentally demanding - thinking quickly, crafting strong arguments and speaking boldly under pressure. There were moments where we felt unsure or had differences of opinion, but we always reminded ourselves that we are a team," they told *Al-Qalam*. "By relying on each other's strengths and staying united, every challenge became manageable. Teamwork gave us courage."

Even amidst the intensity of the two-day finals, the girls made sure their prior-



ities remained intact. "We constantly made dua and remembered that success is only granted by Allah," they shared. "Even during the National Debate Finals, we made sure to take time out

to read our Salaah, because our connection with Allah comes before anything else. We aimed to remain humble, respectful and patient throughout. Knowing that Allah rewards effort gave us the confidence to keep going."

Their coach, Apa Sumaiya Cotwal, who led the team alongside Muallimah Farzana Khan, described the girls as a rare blend of intelligence, sincerity and teamwork. "Most of the national debates were impromptu," she explained. "The girls had to prepare without knowing which side they would argue for – that uncertainty pushed them to think deeply and stay flexible. Our strongest strategy was teamwork. They built on one another's ideas and knew each other's speeches so well that their flow was seamless." For Principal Moulana Muhammad Aslam Rajah, the achievement is not only an academic milestone but a reflection of Qurtuba's

greater mission – nurturing intellect with imaan. "Debating requires intellect, discipline, respect and the ability to reason – qualities deeply rooted in our Islamic tradition. The Qur'an reminds us in Surah An-Nahl (16:125): 'Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best.' This verse beautifully encapsulates what we aim to instill in the ability to articulate ideas with wisdom, respect and purpose," he told *Al-Qalam*

This was Qurtuba's first-ever participation in the National Debate League – and to emerge as national champions is nothing short of extraordinary. Competing against institutions with decades of experience, the young team stood firm, representing the Muslim community with grace and excellence.

"As the only Muslim school at both provincial and national levels, we felt a

deep sense of responsibility to represent our Ummah," said Moulana Rajah. "This victory has shown our students - and, we hope, other Muslim schools - that with dedication, mentorship and tawakkul, anything is possible."

For the girls, the experience has been life-changing. "This showed us how powerful our voices can be," they told *Al-Qalam*. "It's encouraged us to pursue careers where communication and leadership matter – whether in law, journalism or community service. We want to use our voices to uplift others and represent Islam proudly."

With humility, the trio added, "We are deeply grateful to our coach, our parents and our school for believing in us. Above all, we thank Allah Ta'ala for every moment of courage, every good idea and every blessing that led us to this victory. He is the One who grants success."

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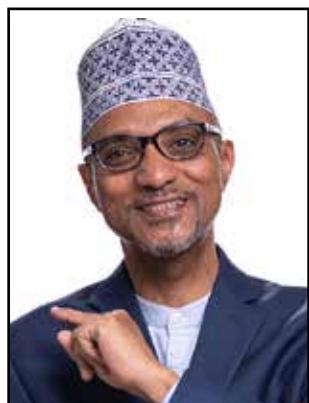
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Ibn Umar (r.a.) narrates the Nabi (SAW) said: "The place of prayer (salah) in religion is like the place of the head in the body."

Tabarani

From Kampala to Cape Town and NY: Lessons from Mamdani's journey



An African Childhood with Modest but Lasting Influence

Born in Kampala, Uganda, in 1991, Zohran spent a brief but formative part of his early childhood in Kampala, Durban and later in Cape Town, where his father, Professor Mahmood Mamdani, held academic positions, first at the University of Kampala, a brief visiting professorship at the University of Durban-Westville (now University of KwaZulu-Natal) and later at the University of Cape Town (UCT), where he served as the AC Jordan Chair in African Studies from 1996 to 1999.

During the Mamdani family's brief stay in Durban, the young toddler Zohran would be taken on walks at Mitchells Park. It was, however, when the family moved to Cape Town (1996–1999), that Zohran began his schooling. While

enrolled full time at St. George's Grammar School in Mowbray for his primary education – Zohran on weekends attended the Saturday Islamic madrasa at the Claremont Main Road Masjid (CMRM), where his father once delivered a memorable pre-kutbah talk. These years, though few, situated him in an environment where learning, faith, and justice were deeply intertwined.

During a visit to Cape Town by Zohran's grandparents, Maulana Sayyid Aftab Haidar, Director of the Ahlul Bait Islamic Centre in Ottery, he recalled how the young Zohran joined them at religious and educational programmes. His grandparents' quiet spirituality and compassionate faith clearly left a lasting moral imprint. In a recent interview with Rev. Andrew Wilkes of the Double Love Experience Church in Brooklyn, Zohran reflected: "The thing that

my grandmother taught me is that to be a good Muslim is to be a good person. It is to help those in need and to harm no one. The lesson I have from my faith that informs my politics is the importance of serving others, and doing so without asking who they are or where they are from."

Although Zohran's South African sojourn lasted only from the ages of five to eight, it left what can best be described as a modest yet enduring imprint on his moral and political consciousness.

Immersed in the progressive ethos of post-apartheid South Africa, the Mamdani household offered him early glimpses of a faith rooted in justice, a scholarship attuned to human dignity, and a social world that linked compassion with civic engagement.

It is heartening for us, as

South Africans, to know that this environment, however small its contribution, helped nurture the ethical sensibilities of a future leader whose politics are animated by compassion, equity, and solidarity.

Lessons for South African Social Justice Activists

In today's South Africa, where political disillusionment and fatigue often threaten to paralyze civic life, Zohran Mamdani's victory offers powerful lessons.

His model of politics, grounded in empathy, proximity, and creative grassroots organising, reminds us that transformative change is still possible when citizens are treated as partners, not merely as voters.

We too can learn to blend the best of community-based grassroots mobilisation with the imaginative energy of digital activism, crafting

movements that resonate with younger generations while remaining rooted in the lived realities of our people. His story invites South African activists to reimagine political engagement in an age of cynicism, and to rebuild trust across divides of race, class, and faith with authenticity and moral clarity.

A Shared Ethos of Justice and Hope

As we at the Claremont Main Road Masjid celebrate Zohran's achievement, we receive his story as a gentle reminder: that the seeds we plant, through teaching, organizing, or nurturing the moral imagination of the young, may one day grow into movements of justice beyond our imagining. We pray that his leadership continue to embody the values of compassion, justice, and service that lie at the heart of our shared faith and humanity.

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EDITORIAL



✉ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NB. All letters MUST be accompanied by the writer's correct name and contact details, or it will not be published. A nom-de-plume will be accepted only for publication purposes.

NB. All views reflected in this column are the opinion of the writer and do NOT necessarily reflect the views of the Editor.

We would like to thank all our respected readers for sending in your comments, views and opinions to our 'Letters to the Editor' column. We value your thoughts on the various aspects affecting the Muslim community. Keep them rolling in.

'Bloodshed in Delhi and Islamabad utterly reprehensible'

Icategorically condemn the heinous bloodshed in Delhi (1011) and Islamabad (1211) as utterly reprehensible.

The loss of innocent lives and assaults on democracy are inherently malevolent, regardless of who bears responsibility or what underlying causes precipitated the outrage.

Perhaps, if a just cause is pleaded, international conventions analogous to the law of war should be strengthened to oblige perpetrators to issue warning notices of their intentions, affording authorities sufficient time to safeguard in-

nocent lives by evacuating civilians from harm's way.

Label me as naive or with whatever pejoratives you are inclined to, but sparing innocent civilians, who are going about their daily lives, from stress and fear, in the interest of their wellbeing and dignity, is paramount in a civilisational context.

Gandhi and Jinnah, the revered fathers of their countries, are weeping for the evil and abomination of late, which must not rouse the monsters lurking about with evil intentions and agitate the dogs of war, engulfing both countries and filling

them with terrible resolve.

If, the 20th century, in the opinion of Mahmood Mamdani, the erudite and eloquent father of NYC mayor-elect Zohran Mamdani, rightly ascribed, as the most violent 'than any other in recorded history' it is time that we begin to reflect and give peace and tolerance a chance, and it begins with you and I questioning those who whisper revenge and retribution where innocence get exterminated with impunity.

Saber Ahmed Jazbhay
Castlehill
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Aman School Finetown – establishing a legacy in South Africa

By AMA Media

It's 10am on a Monday morning, and the school courtyard waits, colourful and quiet, anticipating the sound of the bell that will bring life pouring in from all directions.

On cue, it sounds, and a sea of blue uniforms flood into the space, high pitched voices shouting and chattering, school shoes pounding the ground and bags bouncing on backs barely big enough to carry them.

This is the Aman School of Excellence, located in Finetown, south of Johannesburg. Without knowing its story, it's a school like any other in South Africa. But there is so much more to Aman...

Just 2 years ago, this space at the Al-Furqaan Islamic Centre was serving its community, but had not yet realised its full potential. Through a labour of love and a commitment to bring the very best to Finetown, the AMA team worked hard to establish a school which brings a private standard of education to a very needy community. While government schools exist in the surrounding areas, the question of quality of education is a pertinent one in South Africa.

UNICEF has noted that in SA, "the quality of early learning and development programmes remain a challenge. An underqualified work-

force combined with the poor implementation of appropriate early learning approaches impact early learning outcomes, especially in poor communities."

It was for this very reason that the Aman School was established – a school which offers qualified and excellent teachers, a safe learning environment and a robust extracurricular programme which includes coding and robotics and physical education activities.

A library and computer room were essential when establishing the school, something rare for many South African government schools situated in similar communities.

In addition, Gauteng MEC Matome Chiloane, has noted that Gauteng needs 200 more schools to meet the needs of learners in the public school system, and is leaning heavily on the private sector to assist with the establishment of these schools.

A school like Aman, which provides the highest quality of education to children who would otherwise be caught up in a cycle of poverty, is exactly the type of school that the country needs. There is no substitute for a solid foundation phase education, which is what Aman can offer.

The children at Aman school are sponsored through private donors of AMA, and in addition to their tuition, receive

uniforms, bags, stationery, food and books.

The school provides more than basic education – the Al-Furqaan Centre where it is based is a community hub, where school families gather to participate in other outreach programmes led by AMA, from winter warmth distributions, to Ramadaan feedings, Qurbani and the establishment of skills projects.

For school Principal, Madame Zohra Adam, the real success of the school lies in the changes she has witnessed in the children who attend the school. Their personal growth is her proudest achievement, and she shares stories of children who were previously too shy to speak, or who struggled with a subject, but through the commitment and care from Aman teachers, have blossomed and overcome their personal challenges.

The word "Aman" means safety, and the name was chosen for AMA's schools because every child deserves the safety that a sound education can give them. The safety of a nurturing school environment and the safety of a better future.

As we look ahead to Aman's third year in 2026, we invite you to sponsor a child or any amount towards the school and become a part of our journey to educate, empower and inspire South Africa.

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Youth pen their love for Nabi (SAW) in Seerah Competition

By Neelam Rahim

In an age where distractions often drown the call of faith, young hearts across South Africa turned their pens toward the greatest story ever told – the life of Rasulullah (SAW). Through words dipped in love and longing, students rediscovered the mercy, patience, and forgiveness that defined the final Prophet (SAW).

Hosted by Radio Islam International in partnership with TIKA Pretoria, the National Seerah Competition invited learners to write about moments from the blessed life of Nabi (SAW) that moved their hearts most. Submissions poured in from across the country – stories of love, loss, and mercy that left the judges in awe.

Moulana Sulaimaan Ravat, who presented the winners on Radio Islam, said: "Every student who wrote about Nabi (SAW) is already a winner. The true success lies in falling in love with the

Seerah, in connecting with his mercy and character."

The top three winners – Fatima Zahraa bint Farhan Patel from Middelburg, Shiza Sheikh from Johannesburg, and Yahya Khan from Benoni – each revealed, in their own words, the timeless relevance of the Prophet's (SAW) compassion and strength.

First Place: Fatima Zahraa bint Farhan Patel, Qurtuba Online

Fatima Zahra's essay was a masterful reflection on how the Prophet's (SAW) mercy touched every corner of creation. Her writing was rich in imagery and sincerity: "His Seerah is not merely a record of events, but a living guide for humanity - revealing how mercy can heal even the deepest wounds of the world."

She wrote that Rasulullah (SAW) mercy "knew no bounds, it touched his companions, his adversaries, even the animals and the

earth beneath his feet."

Fatima Zahra described how his kindness radiated into every interaction: "He mended his own clothes, smiled at children, gave dignity to the poor, and reminded us that planting a tree is an act of charity. Long before the world spoke of compassion for creation, he exemplified it."

Her essay concluded with words that lingers in the hearts of all: "Mercy is not weakness. It is the truest form of strength. His forgiveness turned enemies into companions and despair into faith."

Second Place: Shiza Sheikh, Qurtuba Online

Shiza Sheikh's essay, "The Forgiveness and Mercy of Rasulullah (SAW)", earned second place for its eloquent reflection on the Prophet's patience and forgiveness.

She recalled the Prophet (SAW) journey to Ta'if: "He went there with hope, wanting to guide people to the

truth, but instead of listening, they threw stones at him until his shoes were filled with blood. Even in pain, the Prophet (SAW) thought of others before himself. That moment shows the purest kind of love, love that forgives even when it is hard."

She also highlighted his return to Makkah as a victorious leader, where he chose forgiveness over retribution: "The same people who once mocked him stood in front of him, scared of what he would do. But the Prophet (SAW) said, 'Go, for you are free.' Those words reached their hearts more than any fight or battle could." Shiza emphasized that his mercy extended to animals, children, and the environment, teaching that true strength lies in forgiveness, patience, and compassion.

Third Place: Yahya Khan, Benoni Muslim School

Yahya Khan's essay, "Beyond Tears: The Inner Strength of Muhammad (SAW)", explored the



Prophet (SAW) humanity and emotional depth, challenging the notion that strength requires stoicism. He reflected on moments of personal grief, including the loss of Hazrat Khadija, Abu Talib, and his young son Ibrahim, noting:

"These tears did not weaken him. They revealed the depth of his humanity. His example shows us the degree of his humility and mercy. Yahya also illustrated the Prophet (SAW) devotion to the Ummah: "Late at night, when Nabi (SAW) bowed in tahajjud prayer, he wept to

Allah, beseeching Him for the forgiveness for his Ummah. These tears were not weaknesses.

They were filled with a depth of emotion that is unparalleled in today's world." His essay offered a timeless lesson: courage rooted in mercy and compassion refines the heart and defines true manhood.

As one of the judges said: "If this is how our youth write about the Prophet (SAW), there is hope – because love for him will keep this Ummah alive."

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OPINION

Why is South Africa in the firing line of the USA and its president?



By Ebrahim Rassol
(Former Ambassador to the USA)

Just recently, I was invited to the TRT World Forum in Istanbul, Türkiye, focussing on the Global Reset, and the ideas inherent in the assumption of new realities emerging from an old order in eclipse.

My particular participation was to assess the way Donald Trump's America was shaping transformation both in the USA and globally, and how would the world be able to manage Trump's 'America First' foreign policy as the outflow of an ultra-national-

ist, populist agenda at home.

Of course, South Africa's centrality in Trump's imagination created great interest, and the fact that I was expelled as SA's ambassador by the Trump Administration for suggesting that he was driven by a supremacist instinct, created further curiosity. But there was a consensus that SA was being bullied because it was counter-hegemonic in many ways. The image of being bullied was tied to President Ramaphosa's disgraceful treatment in the White House and the proof of SA being punished was seen in the summary cutting of all development assistance, the de facto death of the African Growth and Opportunities Act, and the tariffs of 30% imposed on SA imports to the USA.

But there was sympathy for SA given the blatant and obvious lies about a 'white genocide', the 'confiscation of white property' in SA, and the general 'oppression of whites' at the hand of a

black (ANC) Government. The irony and the symmetry of these allegations against SA, and SA's charges against Israel, are not unnoticed.

Why is SA in the firing line of the USA and its President? Firstly, Trump's supremacism isn't simply a 'Make America Great Again' phenomenon. It's a supremacism that is being exported through campaigning for the UK's Nigel Farage, Germany's AFD, France's Le Pen, etc. It's a supremacism that intersects with other supremacisms: Zionist supremacism in Israel; and the residual White Afrikaner supremacism in, and originating from, SA. The special contribution of SA's residual supremacism is the 'proof' of white 'vulnerability' and 'victimhood' if black assertiveness is unchecked through access to power and the phenomenon of migration. To choreograph this, Trump has key South Africans in his inner circle, AfriForum and Solidarity on tap, and the DA playing a more nuanced role



in this performative politics.

But SA is, secondly, in the firing line for more substantial reasons: it has had the courage and the competence to put together an evidence-based case of genocide against Israel in the International Court of Justice, a case which turned the tide of global public opinion

against, and sympathy away, from Israel and its benefactors. Across the West, the campus turned on the Capitol, and the public square against the Parliament, with enormous pressure on arms and other exports to Israel.

Furthermore, SA hosted the BRICS Summit where the dreaded 'D' word was used

– 'De-Dollarisation' – in response to the weaponisation of the dollar and the US financial system. While this was not adopted, the demand remained that SA step away from China and BRICS lest it be collateral damage in Trump's trade war with China.

Continued on page 9

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Continued from page 8

Additionally, SA's loss of 18 soldiers in the East DRC was interpreted as SA's steadfastness in defending the integrity of Africa's critical minerals and rare earth elements, of which 30% of all supplies are in Africa, and which the USA is in desperate need of. When a USA mediator moved in he immediately concluded off-take agreements with the DRC to ensure peace and a curtailment of the black market smuggling of such resources from the DRC.

Minerals

Yet, while SA does occupy a special place in Donald Trump's imagination, it would be a mistake to believe that USA capriciousness is confined to SA. Donald Trump's agenda tramples on friend and foe alike in securing US interests (such as ensuring that the USA does not cede total domination to China in the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the supply lines and processing of critical minerals and rare earth elements) and resetting global priorities away from rules-based, rights-oriented, and shared governance inherent in the emerging multilateralism. Instead, he

is shifting away from a US unilateralism complemented with soft power, to unilateralism laced with threats, perniciousness, bullying, unpredictability, and malice.

Because SA is the 2025 President of the G20, and Trump has revived the 'white genocide' trope in motivating the USA boycott of the G20, the question from a roundtable of experts (security, geo-political, trade and investment, and global governance) was how SA would deal with the USA. I recalled the scenario exercise I did in my Exit Report to President Ramaphosa in April 2025, at his request.

In this report I outlined 5 scenarios available to SA – and the world – in managing a capricious superpower.

Scenario 1 – MUTUALITY – is the ideal scenario where all things are equal, in which we need each other, we sell each other what we mutually need, and we often understand the need to exchange the tangible (access to US markets for exports) for the intangible (increased prosperity in Africa means decreased migration and greater global security). In this scenario, we are each other's keepers.

Scenario 2 – SURRENDER – is the scenario demanded by Trump when for example, SA must drop its ICJ case, withdraw from BRICS, repeal BEE laws; while Brazil and France must withdraw charges against Trump allies, Bolsonaro and Marine le Pen; Venezuela must affect regime change IF they were to avoid the bombing of boats; and other countries too, must surrender to avoid tariffs and aid cuts.

Scenario 3 – RETALIATION – is a scenario for those who have sufficient leverage to withstand USA demands to surrender. China, to some extent, could retaliate to Trump's constant increasing of tariffs by initially retaliating with its own tariffs (with those on soybeans hurting US farmers) but then deciding to withhold rare earth elements (like gallium) which created constraints on US micro-chips and semi-conductors. This forced Trump to break the logjam in his Korea meeting in China. But too many countries are too integrated into the US market, financial system, and security apparatus to even contemplate retaliation.

Scenario 4 – APPEASEMENT – lies between surrender and mutuality and sees the need to flatter the bully and play to his vanity: nominating Trump for a Nobel Prize; gifting him an Air Force One jet; letting his children build Trump Towers; invest billions in the USA; or using white golfers and billionaires to get access to Trump. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

Scenario 5 – CONTINGENCY – is the scenario between retaliation and mutuality and is cognisant that a country does not possess sufficient leverages, but cannot surrender. Thus, the contingency is all about insurance policies, leveraging what you can, while changing the atmosphere. So insurance is about diversifying markets and sources of trade and investment; leveraging is about choosing how to sell, for example, critical minerals; and we need urgently to change the global atmosphere through a durable and robust multilateralism around existing formations (BRICS) and to gather those mutually aggrieved by the USA for a co-ordinated contingency plan.

None of these scenarios are neat and easy, but unless we think systematically about our response to a pernicious superpower, we will not find the resolve and strength firstly, to sit out the worst of this current onslaught, secondly, help the recoil among US citizens as the pain of Trump's policies take hold domestically to aid the 'Mandela backlash'; thirdly, fortify our nations to be resilient and increasingly self-reliant; and fourthly retain our own national dignity and sovereignty.

As a SA nation we must confront the question I was confronted with: what do we do about a community in SA whose lies to Trump have cost the country so much?

Can they be refugees in the USA and retain assets and citizenship in SA?

Can they cost the country billions in trade and aid and be free of charges of treason? Can SA be punished for land reform and still not do land reform?



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- 225 g sliced mushrooms
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 3 cups shredded or diced cooked chicken
- 1 cup medium or sharp cheddar cheese (shredded)

For the creamy sauce:

- 6 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup milk
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ teaspoon cracked black pepper

To finish:

- 1 egg, beaten (for egg-wash)

Method

- Preheat oven to 200 °C.
- Grease a round pie dish and line it with one sheet of puff pastry.

Make the creamy sauce:

- Melt butter in a saucepan over medium-high heat.
- Stir in flour and cook for about a minute.
- Gradually whisk in chicken broth and milk until smooth and thickened.
- Season with garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Remove from heat.

Prepare the filling:

- In a large pan, melt 2 tablespoons butter.
- Add mushrooms and garlic, sauté for 2–3 minutes until fragrant.
- Stir in macon and chicken, then pour in the creamy sauce.

Add the shredded cheese and mix

well until melted and combined.

Assemble the pie:

- Spoon filling into the prepared pastry dish.
- Cover with the second pastry sheet, seal edges, and trim excess pastry.
- Brush the top with beaten egg and lightly score for decoration if desired.
- Bake for 25–30 minutes, until the pastry is golden and crisp.
- Allow to cool slightly before slicing and serving.

Serving Suggestions

Serve warm with a green salad, roasted vegetables, or creamy mashed potatoes. Leftovers reheat beautifully for lunch the next day.

Recipe by: Tiffany Azure,
Le Crème de la Crumb

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'My Brother's Brain is Different' – Children's book addresses Neurodiversity

By Azra Hoosen

When Dr Sadiyya Sheik's nephew was diagnosed with autism a few years ago, she found herself facing a simple yet profound question from her two little girls – how do you explain that someone's brain works differently?

Sheik, a Public Health Medicine Specialist, told *Al-Qalam* that the answer began as a quiet conversation at home and later grew into the heart of her new children's book *My Brother's Brain is Different*.

Her children's book, written in rhyme from the perspective of a sibling, introduces the idea that brains can work in many different ways. "I think explaining the concept through the eyes of a sibling makes the content more accessible to children. Through the rhyme, we see examples of why the narrator thinks his brother's brain is different. This works better to convey information to children rather than just ex-

plaining the concept directly," said Sheik.

Neurodiversity, an umbrella term for the range of ways brains can function and process the world, has long been misunderstood. In many families, the words autism, ADHD or learning differences are whispered quietly, often followed by confusion, shame, or silence.

Sheik said that while stigma still exists, things are slowly changing. "I don't know that there is anything specifically different about how neurodiversity is perceived in Muslim communities compared to others. In general, while there is still stigma associated with neurodivergence, people are becoming more aware and starting to understand it better," she explained.

But awareness alone is not enough. The first challenge is that people often do not know how to start the conversation. "People may be afraid of saying the wrong things. Parents and educators play an important role in shaping perceptions. Ear-

ly exposure to neurodiversity and an appreciation for the differences in how our brains work is a great way to build a kinder and more inclusive world," she said.

For Sheik, that kindness is grounded in faith: "It was important to write a book that aligns with my beliefs and to tie the concept of neurodiversity to those beliefs."

Her story sits comfortably within a Muslim home, where compassion, patience and understanding are encouraged as acts of worship. "In that way, *My Brother's Brain is Different* becomes more than a story, it becomes a small act of da'wah through empathy," Sheik said.

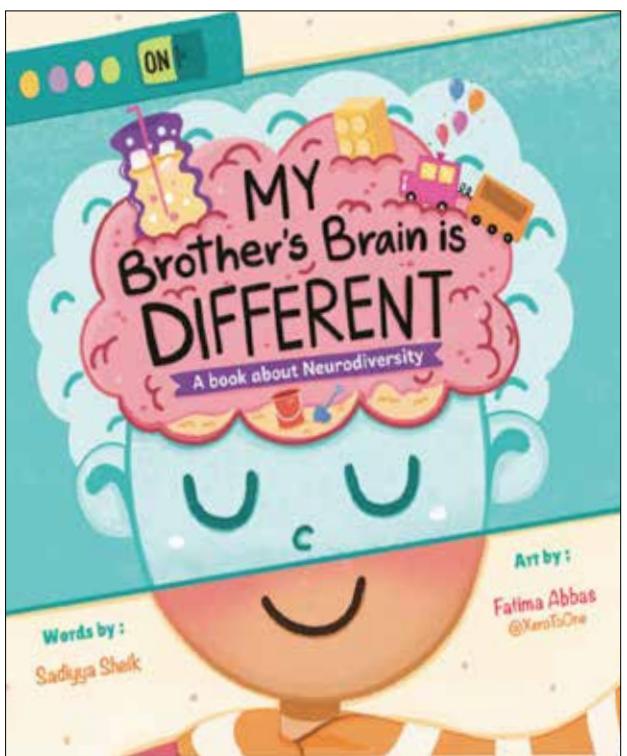
She noted that there is a growing community of Muslim writers approaching children's books from an Islamic lens. "I wanted to contribute something that reflects our everyday experiences while teaching children to see beauty in difference," she said. The word different runs through Sheik's story,

not as something to fear, but to understand. She hopes her book offers a starting point, a gentle opening that says it is okay to talk, to ask and to learn.

That book is also for parents who might be navigating a new diagnosis or wondering if their child is "wired differently." For Sheik, that reflection became personal. "Around the time the book was being edited, we started considering a diagnosis of ADHD in my daughter. It was a challenging time, but I found myself coming back to the language of a brain that is different by design. All our brains are perfectly made because they were made by Allah SWT Himself," she shared.

Her next project, a chapter book for children about self-acceptance, continues that thread of gentle affirmation, reminding young readers that being different is not a flaw, it is a feature.

In a society where academic success and conformity often define worth, Sheik's



message challenges families to look deeper, to see children as they are, not as they are expected to be. "My hope is that children learn to recognise and celebrate all the wonderful ways their brains work. Also, families learn to see difference not as a label, but as part of the mercy and creativity in Allah's design," she said.

My Brother's Brain is Different is available at Baitul Hikmah, both in-store and online. Sheik hopes families will read it aloud and use it to start meaningful conversations at bedtime. "I want parents to trust that children can understand concepts that seem challenging. The book is meant to spark curiosity and compassion," she said.

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“For decades, Zionist Israel has pursued systematic methods to dispossess

By Iqbal Jassat

The drama that occurred at South Africa's OR Tambo airport involving Palestinians who landed there from the Occupied Gaza, has led to the indisputable conclusion that forced displacement orchestrated by Israel is behind it.

While expectedly it has not only generated widespread media coverage, but shamefully also attempts by Israel and its army of well-resourced propagandists to spin it as “voluntary exile”.

However it would be shortsighted to overlook the decades of campaigns conducted by the settler colonial regime to rid the country of Palestinians - by hook or crook.

For instance, a secret 1969 plan to encourage Gazans to migrate to Paraguay was revealed in 2020.

Back then it was negotiated by Israel's Mossad

intelligence agency with Paraguayan dictator and Nazi sympathizer Alfredo Stroessner. Though the plan called for 60,000 Palestinians to move to the South American nation, ultimately only 30 Palestinians did so,

In the current context it is crucial to take note of reports which reveal bitter divisions have emerged in Israel's war cabinet over the post-war destiny of Gaza's people.

Central to their debate is the policy of Ethnic-Cleansing, methods of implementation and deceitful cover of “voluntary migration”.

Unfortunately for them, the South African episode has backfired. And the reasons are clear.

Al Jazeera's Nour Odeh, reporting from Amman, Jordan, said it was unlikely the Palestinians who left did so without “Israeli coordination”. “Nobody can approach that imaginary yellow line [in Gaza] without being shot at. These people had to be bused through the

yellow line, through the 53 percent of Gaza that the Israeli army still controls and is operating in out of Gaza, through Israel to the Ramon airport,” she reported.

Further probes revealed that Israel has designated the Ramon airport as point of departure. It goes back to Donald Trump's controversial plot to empty Gaza of its population. According to reports in Israeli media, Defense Minister Katz had at a military briefing presented plans to move Palestinians out of Gaza.

Though the idea of relocating over 2 million residents of Gaza has been shot down by a number of countries, Israel has not backed off.

From the information obtained by various investigations particularly Al Jazeera and Haaretz, the Israeli army has been identified as being directly involved in the process along with the mysterious Al Majd entity, to depopulate Gaza. For the purpose of Ethnic-Cleans-

ing, IDF has established five land crossings from Gaza to Ramon would be used.

In coordination with Al Majd and the IDF, Palestinians would travel by bus from Gaza to Ramon Airport - 250 kilometres south, where it is based in the Red Sea's military zone Eilat. Contrary to the disgusting lies spewed by Israeli-apologists, Itamar Mann, a professor of law at the University of Haifa, finds it deplorable that Israel may be exploiting Gaza's dire situation by forcibly displacing vulnerable Palestinians.

“It does seem like they were being flushed out” of Gaza, was the reaction of SA President Cyril Ramaphosa, who has tasked relevant authorities to undertake a thorough investigation of the circumstances that led to the OR Tambo incident.

Indeed the clarity provided by SA's International Relations Minister Ronald Lamola when he said the flight was part of “a clear agenda



to cleanse Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank”, dismisses any notion of “voluntary migration”.

Oroub al-Abed in Middle East Monitor observed that for decades, Zionist Israel has pursued systematic methods to dispossess Palestinians.

“The open violence — bombardment, blockade, and home demolitions — is merely the most visible. Yet the subtler machinery of displacement has never ceased. It operates quietly, through psychological exhaustion, bureaucratic restriction, and

controlled mobility.”

The danger al-Abed highlights is that bureaucratically, Palestinians risk erasure of their legal identity, for without proof of exit, their rights of return dissolves.

Israel's current game plan is not any different from its history of deceit: “Politically, it signals a chilling shift from siege to disappearance — the continuation of ethnic cleansing by administrative means.”

**Iqbal Jassat is an Executive Member of the Media Review Network*

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Protest Modi's Visit: Extend SA's Moral Stand Beyond Palestine



By Imraan Buccus

South Africa's leadership on Palestine has set a global example. That same moral clarity must now confront Narendra Modi's repression in Kashmir — and the horrors in Sudan and the Congo.

South Africa's solidarity with the people of Palestine has restored moral purpose to our foreign policy and reminded the world that conscience still has a place in diplomacy. It has also renewed our collective sense of the moral centre of the national liberation struggle. Former Minister of International Relations Naledi Pandor, DIRCO Director-General Zane Dangor, and Dr Tlaleng Mofokeng, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, have each become internationally recognised for taking principled and courageous positions. Dr Pandor would have been a deserving recipient of the Nobel Prize.

We led the way with the case at the International Court of Justice and helped form The Hague Group. Most South Africans support this stance, which has affirmed our moral leadership on the global stage. This clarity and courage now need to be extended to other places where people face horrific violence and silence from the international community, including Kashmir, the Democratic Repub-

lic of the Congo and Sudan. Next week's G20 summit in Johannesburg will bring Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to our shores. His visit should not be welcomed. It should be met with peaceful protest and principled opposition. The same ethical conviction that drives us to support the Palestinian cause must compel us to denounce Modi's government for its repression in Kashmir and the steady rise of Hindu fascism in India.

The occupation of Kashmir mirrors the occupation of Palestine. Both are rooted in settler colonialism and ethno-nationalist ideologies that deny people their right to self-determination. India under Modi has flooded the valley with troops and surveillance, shut down the internet, detained thousands without trial, and promoted demographic change by resettling outsiders. Any dissent is branded terrorism. Since India revoked Article 370 in 2019, stripping Jammu and Kashmir of its limited autonomy, the region has become one of the most militarised in the world.

Reports describe torture, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Whole communities live under curfew. Journalists are jailed. The United Nations resolutions guaranteeing a plebiscite have been ignored for nearly eight decades. The moral principle at stake is the same as in Gaza: no people can be denied freedom indefinitely. Our solidarity cannot be selective. We cannot condemn Zionist apartheid while turning a blind eye to Hindu fascism.

Modi's government represents a fusion of religious nationalism, authoritarian power and crony capitalism. His Bharatiya Janata Par-

ty draws inspiration from the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a paramilitary movement founded in 1925 and influenced by European fascism. Its project is to transform India into a Hindu state. The result has been catastrophic for what was once the world's largest democracy.

Muslims are lynched in public. Christians, Sikhs and Dalits face persecution. Mosques are vandalised, homes demolished, and minorities turned into suspects in their own country. The state's Islamophobia is not an aberration but the central pillar of an ideology that seeks to erase centuries of pluralism.

The European Parliament has condemned the regime. MEP Pierre Larroutuou described monstrous violence in Manipur, where hundreds were killed and churches destroyed, and said that in Kashmir the situation is even worse, with torture, disappearances and arbitrary detentions.

Yet while Western governments rush to sanction others, they remain silent on Modi because India is a vast market and a convenient counterweight to China. South Africa should not follow that hypocrisy.

South Africa's response to Modi's visit will also test whether we can act with the same assurance we showed on Palestine. We have demonstrated that a small country can take an independent and principled stand in global affairs. That confidence should now guide us to express solidarity just as clearly with the people of Kashmir, the Congo and Sudan.

When Modi arrives for the



G20 summit, he will present himself as the leader of a thriving democracy. In truth, India under his rule has become one of the most repressive major states on earth. Civil society is crushed, universities purged, and journalists hounded. Kashmir is the laboratory of this authoritarianism. To welcome Modi without protest would be to betray our history. South Africa knows what it means to live under occupation and racial hierarchy. We know that peace without justice is an illusion. Our moral authority in world affairs comes precisely from the struggles we waged and the solidarities that sustained us. To remain silent when Modi arrives would be a failure of conscience.

Protests against Modi's visit should not be narrow or sectarian. They must bring together people of all faiths and backgrounds who believe in democracy, human rights and international law. They must affirm that South Africans will not normalise fascism, whether it comes

from Tel Aviv, Washington or New Delhi.

The same principle of universal solidarity must guide our response to crises beyond Kashmir and Palestine. In Sudan, the Rapid Support Forces have massacred civilians in El-Fasher and Bara, burning homes and starving communities.

In the Congo, millions have died in wars driven by foreign mining interests and regional power politics. These, too, are moral emergencies. South Africans have a special responsibility to speak out because our own freedom was won through international solidarity. Cuba, Tanzania and India once supported our struggle. Today we must honour that tradition by standing with those who continue to fight for dignity and justice.

Both India and Sudan show how violence and repression are used to hold together broken political orders. In Kashmir, the Indian state rules through occupation

and fear. In Sudan, power rests on militias backed by foreign arms and money. These are not local pathologies but global ones, tied to profit, resource extraction and militarisation.

India's economic rise has seduced many governments into silence, but the glitter of trade should not blind us to blood on the ground. South Africa cannot be complicit by omission. As we seek fairer global trade and reform of international institutions, we must also confront the militarised economies and political decay destroying lives in India and Sudan.

When Modi arrives in Johannesburg, South Africans should make it clear that he is not welcome as long as his government continues to occupy Kashmir, persecute minorities and insist that only Hindus are "true Indians." Our solidarity with Palestine has, aside from our failure to stop coal exports, been magnificent. We must now refuse to allow any form of fascism to pass unchallenged.

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Imams and Muallima get training to boost reading among children

By Al-Qalam Correspondent

Twenty-five Imams and Muallima from the Islamic Dawah Movement (IDM) across KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape have completed training as Reading Ambassadors under the "We Love Reading" (WLR) three-month pilot programme.

The training, conducted by Adv. Mahomed Vahed, Founder of the Young Leaders Academy (YLA) and a Department of Basic Education Literacy Ambassador, equips volunteers to promote a love for reading among children aged 4 to 10.

Each Ambassador received 20 age-appropriate books in isiZulu and English at no cost and will read aloud to children once a week for 20–30 minutes. The children will also borrow books to take home for a week – helping to build ear-

ly reading habits and family engagement. South Africa's literacy crisis remains alarming: 81% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning (PIRLS 2021); 78% of schools have no library; and 72% of households own no leisure books. Vahed warned that this "silent emergency" starts early, when children are not exposed to enjoyable, mother-tongue reading at home.

"Reading is the secret weapon to success," said Vahed. "It unlocks imagination, confidence, and comprehension – yet too many of our children are falling behind before they even reach high school."

The We Love Reading model, founded by Dr. Rana Dajani in Jordan and active in over 71 countries, has been recognised with the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize. Globally, more than 9 000 Reading Ambassadors have reached over 500 000 children through



community storytelling sessions.

Dr Ebrahim Dada, Managing Director of IDM, praised the initiative: "This project revives the spirit of

'Iqra' – Read! – and links faith with empowerment. It's about building a culture of literacy grounded in Islamic values." Vahed aims to train 100 ambassadors in the pilot programme reach-

ing 500-1 000 children and expand nationally in 2026.

"Books change lives," concluded Vahed. "Every story we read aloud plants a seed of hope for a brighter, more

literate South Africa."

For more information: please contact Adv. Mahomed Vahed@mahomed@youngleadersacademy.co.za

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Amazon, Project Nimbus, and Complicity with Genocide



By Imraan Buccus

Every year on Black Friday — which falls on 28 November this year — there is a global day of protest against Amazon. What began as a pushback against Amazon's brutal labour regime, its hostility to unions and the dangerous pace of work in its warehouses has taken on a broader political meaning. Today, the protests also confront Amazon's role in Project Nimbus and its deepening complicity in the Israeli state's assault on Gaza. Around the world, movements now understand that Amazon's power does not stop at the workplace gate. It reaches directly into the machinery of domination and mass violence.

Project Nimbus is a multi-billion-dollar agreement, signed in 2021, through which Amazon and Google supply the Israeli government with advanced cloud-computing services. These include high-capacity data storage, machine-learn-

ing tools and the processing power needed for real-time surveillance and analysis. This is not neutral technical assistance for ordinary administration. It is infrastructure that strengthens the very institutions tasked with enforcing occupation: the military, the intelligence services and the police.

Cloud infrastructure on this scale plays a strategic role in modern warfare. Israel's military relies on immense quantities of data, including biometric information, geographical mapping, communication records and the granular social data extracted from everyday life under occupation. Over decades, this information has been gathered through coercion, pervasive camera networks, monitoring stations and intelligence tools operating across the region. When fed into powerful machine-learning systems, this data becomes the basis for predictive policing, automated surveillance and algorithmic targeting. These systems have been widely reported during the assault on Gaza, with former Israeli intelligence personnel describing programmes that generate targeting lists at extraordinary speed. In this setup, the human operator becomes little more than the final approval in a process driven overwhelmingly by automated systems.

By providing the digital architecture that makes this

possible, Amazon is directly implicated in the violence. High-volume storage, AI environments and automated scaling may seem like technical features but in the context of mass killing and the destruction of civilian life they become tools of genocide. They make it possible for the Israeli state to carry out large-scale destruction against a population already trapped, besieged and deprived of the most basic protections.

Amazon cannot claim ignorance. Human-rights organisations, including Israeli groups, have repeatedly raised the alarm. Palestinian organisations have been explicit. Scholars and legal experts have mapped the intersection of digital technology and military repression. Most strikingly, Amazon's own workers warned the company. They circulated petitions, asked serious questions and demanded an investigation into Nimbus. The response was predictable: the workers who raised concerns were fired. Amazon dealt with internal dissent in the same way it deals with warehouse organising by isolating and disciplining those who push back. The pattern is global and consistent.

The structure of Nimbus is designed to bind Israel to Amazon for years to come. The contract prevents government ministries from moving sensitive workloads

away from Amazon and Google, effectively locking the state into these platforms. As settlements expand, apartheid conditions deepen in the West Bank and Gaza suffers catastrophic destruction, Amazon's infrastructure becomes part of the long-term scaffolding that sustains this system.

To understand the deeper meaning of Amazon's role, it must be placed within the political economy of the tech sector. Companies like Amazon are no longer simply service providers. They have become part of the core architecture through which states police borders, run intelligence operations and wage war. Amazon markets itself as a supplier of digital public infrastructure but this infrastructure is governed by corporate interests, not democratic oversight. The power that comes with this position is immense and almost entirely unaccountable.

The idea that Amazon is merely fulfilling a contract collapses on inspection. Corporations choose who they work with. They have walked away from contracts before on ethical grounds. In this case, they pursued and secured a deal with a state engaged in occupation, apartheid and large-scale military violence. This is not neutrality. It is alignment.

Amazon's labour practices and its political partnerships are two faces of the same

system. In the warehouses, power is enforced through exhausting shifts, aggressive productivity targets and hostility to unions. In the realm of state contracts, power is consolidated through surveillance, military partnerships and the expansion of authoritarian capacity. Both rest on the same logic: profit secured through the disposability of workers and the disposability of entire populations.

For Palestinians, the consequences are devastating. Surveillance determines who may pass through a checkpoint, who is flagged as a threat, who is profiled and who is targeted. AI-driven targeting has shaped the scale and pace of military action, including the destruction of civilian neighbourhoods. The shattered homes, families, clinics and schools in Gaza are the material outcomes of a digital-military partnership in which Amazon plays a central role.

Nimbus makes Amazon a participant in a conflict defined by occupation, systematic discrimination and staggering levels of civilian killing. The company can choose to withdraw and establish ethical limits on military and policing contracts, or it can continue towards deeper entanglement in systems of coercion. That choice carries profound consequences, not only for Palestinians but for struggles everywhere against unac-

countable corporate power.

For activists, the task is to weave the threads together: the fight for safe workplaces and union rights inside Amazon, the fight against corporate participation in policing and warfare and the fight for Palestinian freedom. These are not separate issues. They confront the same political and economic forces. Amazon's role in Project Nimbus makes this connection painfully clear. As mobilisation for Black Friday builds in South Africa and around the world, there is an opportunity to link labour struggles with Palestine solidarity. These are not separate issues. They confront the same political and economic forces. Amazon's role in Project Nimbus makes this connection painfully clear. As mobilisation for Black Friday builds in South Africa and around the world, there is an opportunity to link labour struggles with Palestine solidarity.

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Dr Buccus is editor of *Al-Qalam*

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SPORT

'My five-day hike along the Wild Coast brought peace'

A 75-km five-day hike starting from the Wild Coast Sun, along the shoreline of the Pondoland Coast, was a dream come true for Ahmed Motala of Johannesburg. Here is his story.

Pristine expansive beaches, waves crashing onto black rocks, cows lazing on the beaches, tall hills covered in green vegetation rising from the beaches and smiling Amapondo people in tiny remote villages. These images are forever etched in my memory.

Over five days, I was part of a small group that hiked along the wild coast of the Eastern Cape from Mpande beach northward to Mbotyi. Each day we walked about 12km. Our group consisted of four men and four women, between the ages of 30 and 67. On arrival at Mpande, views of the ocean from the hill were exhilarating and whales frolicking in the deep waters welcomed us.

At the pre-hike briefing, Mthobisi and Sikhona, trained, knowledgeable local guides, explained our route and the terrain, and reminded us to have at least two litres of water, our hiking boots and poles. We carried only what we needed during the hike and our luggage was transported each day by road to the next accommodation.

As this was my first multi-day hike, I did not know what to expect but was eager to get going soon after an early breakfast the next morning. At the river mouth at the bottom of the steep hill, the low tide allowed us to walk across the shallow Sinangwana river. I found the steep climb through the coastal forest arduous. At the top of the hill, I looked back at the beach, bay and river valley far below with a sense of accomplishment.

From sea level we climbed steep grass-covered hills to more than a hundred meters, at times having only tufts of grass for footholds. The climb seemed precarious at

times. In the early afternoon, as we approached Mqaleleni village, I felt a sense of relief. A sumptuous lunch awaited us and the mesmerising view of the Mngazana estuary brought me a sense of soulful peace.

Early the next morning, a small motor boat ferried us across the estuary. As we walked along yet another pristine beach, we noticed the golden sands intermingled with black dust that sparkled in the sun, proof that the area was rich in titanium and other minerals.

Local communities are in contestation with the government and an Australian company over mining in the Xolobeni coastal area, which will permanently destroy this pristine area and the lifestyle of local communities. We noticed local women and children gathering mussels off the rocks during the spring tide. At the Umngazi river, we crossed by ferry and continued our hike until Sugarloaf rock where we stopped for lunch. In the



Ahmed Motala on a five-day hiking trail from Port Edward to Mbotyi, near Port St Johns. Photo credit: Susan De Bruin.

afternoon, we reached our destination in Port St Johns.

At 7.30 the next morning a river barge transported us to the Mzimvubu river mouth where we disembarked to begin our third day of hiking. I was delighted to hear the calls of the African fish eagles circling high above the river. Along almost every beach, no matter how remote, we were greeted by a herd of cows lazily chewing.

We arrived at Ntafufu for a lunch of lobsters and grilled vegetables. Without a mobile network, our digital detox began.

The next morning, we

crossed the Ntafufu river estuary in a canoe and walked between the forest and the ocean far below the cliffs.

At our stop for the day in Manteku, I found the view breath-taking over the expansive ocean, the river estuary and valley framed by tall hills covered in green vegetation. In the evening, I absorbed the sounds of the ocean, the insects and the night birds, and observed the illuminated night sky.

On our last day, we crossed the Manteku river in a canoe. We entered the forest and began the gradual climb to the top of the hill, and walked along secluded beaches

to our final destination in Mbotyi. We had walked in places that can be reached only on foot along narrow cattle tracks.

I learnt about the history and culture of the Amapondo nation, about the geography and ecology of the area. I also learnt about the fragility of the local ecosystem. Protecting the unspoilt wild coast and its valuable ecosystem is the responsibility of all South Africans.

*Ahmed booked with Single Track Adventures. The cost was R9800 per person, including shuttle from and to the Wild Coast Sun, accommodation and all meals.

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