

# Al - Qalam

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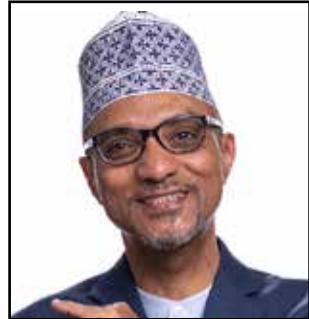


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## 'As year ends, embrace New Day resolutions'



*We must embrace 'Muḥāsabah' (take stock of our lives) and make meaningful changes as we enter the Gregorian Year 2026, says Dr. A. Rashid Omar.*

By the Divine Grace of Allah, the Giver and Taker of Life, we have arrived at the close of the Gregorian Year 2025. This moment offers us an invaluable opportunity to pause, reflect on our personal journeys over the past year, and resolve to make meaningful and positive changes as we enter 2026.

In truth, such reflective self-assessment, muḥāsabah, should not be an annual event alone. Our Islamic tradition teaches that the truly

conscientious believer is one who regularly examines their life and holds themselves accountable.

### Beyond New Year's Resolutions

Ideally, the spiritually alert Muslim strives to grow and improve every single day, not only at the dawn of a new year. Instead of limiting ourselves to "New Year's resolutions," we should cultivate New Day resolutions. With this mindset, every dawn becomes a renewed chance for spiritual rebirth and moral refinement.

This daily exercise need not be burdensome. Just a few minutes spent at day's end, reflecting on what benefitted us, what distracted us, and how well we upheld our intentions, can nurture a deep sense of purpose and accountability.

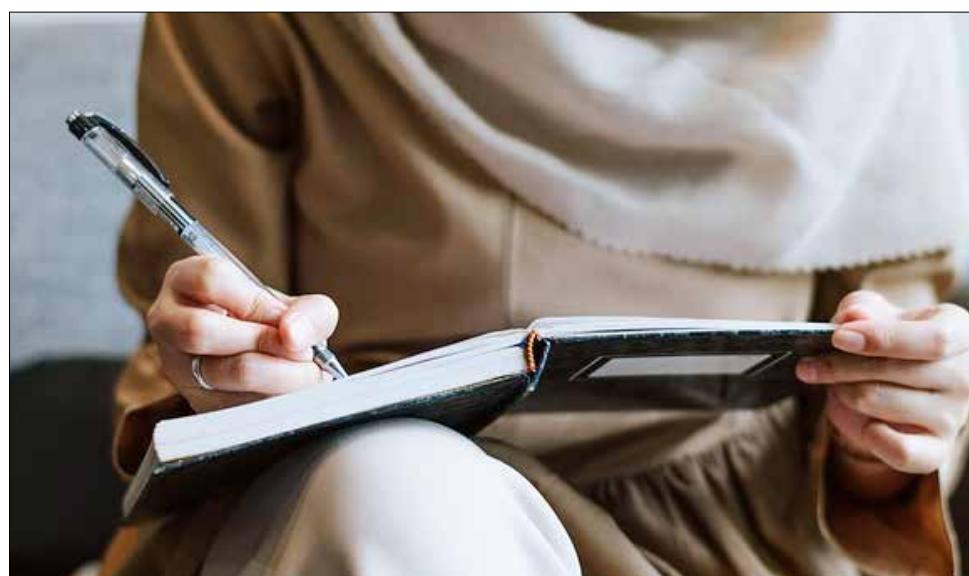
This spirit of continual renewal is echoed by the renowned tābiī, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728), who is reported to have said: "Every day when dawn breaks, two angels call out: O child of Adam! I am a new day, and

I witness your deeds. Seize the opportunity of this day to do good, for once I have passed, I shall not return until the Day of Judgment."

### The Value of Intentions

Some may feel discouraged by past failures to keep their resolutions and question the value of making them at all. It is true that as the year unfolds and daily pressures return, complacency can creep in. But Islam teaches us the immense value of good intentions, even when they are not fully realised.

In a sacred prophetic tradition (hadīth qudsī) recorded by al-Bukhārī and Muslim, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) narrates that Allah says: "Whoever intends a good deed but does not carry it out, Allah records it as a complete good deed. If he intends it and performs it, Allah records it as ten good deeds up to seven hundred times, or even more." This profound teaching assures us that resolutions are themselves meritorious acts. They reflect our moral aspiration and our longing to live with greater consciousness, com-



passion and integrity.

### Crafting a Balanced Set of Resolutions

I encourage each of us to make a modest, realistic, and balanced set of resolutions for the coming year. These should include: Spiritual goals such as praying more consistently on time or increasing sunnah fasting; Physical and health goals to strengthen the body entrusted to us by Allah; Intellectual commitments to pursue

learning and deepen our understanding; Social and relational goals to improve interactions with family, friends, and neighbours.

Importantly, our resolutions should also move us beyond the self-centred culture promoted by consumerism. Let us commit ourselves to greater generosity, giving more of our time, skills, and compassion to uplift those who are struggling. And let us resolve to contribute actively to efforts that bridge

the class divide that continues to fuel deep inequality in our society.

### A Closing Prayerful Hope

As we stand at the threshold of a new year, I pray that Allah inspires us to live with renewed purpose and moral clarity. May we each become more compassionate, more just, and more caring human beings, agents of mercy in our families, communities, and wider society, in shā' Allāh.

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## LOCAL NEWS

# SA's Aalimah 'heroines' honoured

By Azra Hoosen

For the first time, the remarkable work of Aalimahs was recently celebrated nationally through the Aalimah of the Year Award, launched by Radio Islam International to honour the unseen heroines of South Africa's Muslim communities.

Moulana Ibrahim Daya of Radio Islam told *Al-Qalam* that while Aalimahs have been doing a fantastic job in their communities, their efforts often went unrecognised. "This initiative was created to honour their contributions and inspire the next generation," he said.

"These awards are not just tributes, it's a celebration of the light these women bring to our Ummah," he said."

The initiative drew an overwhelming response, with nominations pouring in from across South Africa and beyond.

Three winners were selected in different categories: Muallimah Jamila was hon-

oured for 30 years of dedicated service at Madrassah Mueinul Islam, in Zakariyya Park, Muallimah Fatimah Khoele Mokaba was honoured for her tireless community upliftment, and Ustadha Zaahira Karrim was honoured for her profound impact through teaching and guidance.

Muallimah Fatimah told *Al-Qalam* that her journey into Islamic scholarship began with a deep love for Deen nurtured from a young age. "The desire to seek knowledge was not only for personal growth, but to serve others, to uplift and guide, especially women and children," she said.

For her, Leadership as an Aalimah means serving her community with sincerity and compassion. "It's about listening to people's struggles and helping them reconnect with Deen in a way that brings peace and purpose."

As a female scholar in South Africa's diverse landscape, she acknowledges that balancing tradition with modern realities isn't always easy, yet she views these

challenges as spaces for growth and inclusion. "Being an Aalimah means not only teaching, but serving, inspiring and leading with humility," she said.

Her projects – from Ramadan hampers and Iftaar distributions to baby-shower initiatives for mothers in need embody that spirit. "It's not just about material assistance. It's about restoring hope and reminding people they belong to a caring Ummah," said Muallimah Fatimah.

For Ustadha Zaahira Karrim, founder of Ummah Heart, the calling came early. "When I was in Standard 2, my Aapa wrote on my report card. 'May Allah accept your dream of becoming an Aalimah.' I never forgot that," she said.

Her most moving moments come outside the classroom: "When a student says, 'You helped me through a dark time,' I know it's not me; it is the Deen that healed them. That's what knowledge does; it heals hearts."

Both Aalimahs believe in



empowering women to lead. Muallimah Fatimah mentor young women to take charge of community programmes. "When you create spaces where women and youth feel valued, they discover purpose," she said.

Ustadha Zaahira shares a similar vision through Ummah Heart: "I wanted an Ummah with a heart – a place where women learn and love for the sake of Allah. Women come to study Qur'an and Hadith, but they

leave with friendship, comfort and belonging." She believes women's voices are vital in shaping the Ummah:

"There's nothing more valuable than women speaking to women. We understand each other, our emotions, our challenges. When women create spaces of remembrance and learning, the Ummah comes alive."

For Ustadha Zaahira, "There is nothing that fills your soul like giving for the sake of Allah. Behind every

woman who serves is someone who quietly makes it possible, a husband, a family, a community that believes in her."

"If we want our Deen to thrive, we must support our ulama not just symbolically, but with tangible respect and care. Our scholars carry the community's spiritual weight, often while struggling to survive. When they are supported with dignity, they can serve with focus, sincerity and heart."

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## Al-Qalam Exclusive

# At 94, Vinsen vows to stand for Palestine

By Ismail Suder

**C**oral Vinsen (94) is probably the oldest human rights activist in South Africa to publicly protest each week against the genocide in Gaza – come hail, rain or shine.

Her activism was bolstered by her lifetime friend, Judge Navi Pillay, the former UN High Commissioner. Last week, coral invited Judge Navi Pillay to her home in Durban North for dinner where the two women reminisced about the dark days of Apartheid. Recently, just before retiring from the Human Rights body, Judge Pillay declared that Israel had committed a “Genocide” in Gaza.

While many people are content to support Palestine in their social media group chats, – Coral serves in the trenches. You could find her protesting with a placard in drenching rain, bitter cold or

in burning sun at strategic points in the city.

In an exclusive interview with *Al-Qalam*, Coral said she was unfazed by criticism from some of her friends who frown at her support for the Palestine cause. Sharp-witted, sprightly and blessed with excellent health, Coral and Saysoon Nisa Sayed, a well-known Palestinian rights activist of Durban, could be seen across the city with placards calling for the end to the Zionist Genocide.

“Navi had declared during an UN inquiry that what the Israelis were doing was classified as a Genocide, but for decades before that, the Israelis were oppressing the Palestinians; – they were encroaching on their land, they were cutting down their olive trees – they were facing cruel injustices at every turn.

The Occupied land originally belonged to the Palestinian people and the British and others in the West decided to split it, and illegal-

ly gave the Jewish people a homeland,” she added. In the 1950’s Coral was the first virologist in Durban and she played a leading role in treating hundreds of people during a polio outbreak.

Her anti-apartheid activism and campaigns for social justice was first awakened in her 20’s when she heard gossip from her first fiancé’s family that she might not have pure European blood. Needless to say, she was horrified and severed all ties with them.

With a new outlook on life, she became a founding member of the Active Citizens Movement (ACM), and also signed up to join many social justice groups, including the Black Sash – a resistance organization for Liberal white women. She was also instrumental in founding a chapter of Amnesty International (SA) in Durban after the fall of apartheid.

Despite her senior years, Coral continues to give back

to the community by hosting gardening workshops at her home. “I think if people are hungry, that’s very dangerous, we must be sure that people have food,” Coral pointed out.

Meanwhile, her longtime activist friend, Saysoon Nisa Sayed, who continues to hold pickets for Gaza each Friday, told *Al-Qalam* that she first met Coral during the “Defiance Campaign” of the 1990s where she was in the forefront of anti-apartheid activism.

“During my time with the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa (MYM) where we were involved in planning various protest events, we would invite Coral to address our gatherings. Over the years, she has been part of many national Palestine solidarity marches, and even spoke to hundreds of people from the steps of the Durban City Hall.

“Because of our involvement with Amnesty Interna-



tional (Durban chapter) the human rights organization acknowledged both Coral and I – and other women – for our dedicated work within the organisation.

“At the age of 94, Coral has been supportive of the protest actions for a free Palestine, and most recently, addressed protest gatherings on the Durban beachfront to highlight the genocide in Gaza.

“She continues to stand

shoulder to shoulder with us in our Palestine campaigns, she supports our workshops on Palestine and is a real power and strength for women everywhere. Coral has been family to me and I’m truly blessed to have her as a friend for all these years, Saysoon Nisa said.

Turning to Coral, *Al-Qalam* asked for how long would she continue fighting for the Palestinian cause, she replied without hesitation – “Till my last breath”

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## LOCAL NEWS

# Prof Muaaz Bhamjee: '... let faith guide the journey'

By Neelam Rahim

From a young boy curious about how household gadgets worked to a physicist contributing to one of the world's most ambitious scientific projects, Professor Muaaz Bhamjee has always been guided by curiosity and faith.

Today, as an Associate Professor at the University of Pretoria and South Africa's institutional representative for CERN's ATLAS experiment, he has helped a global team earn the prestigious Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics. Yet speaking to *Al-Qalam*, Prof Bhamjee emphasizes that the greatest reward is not recognition, but the pursuit of knowledge that serves humanity and uplifts communities.

His fascination with science began early. "I was always intrigued by how things worked - technology, natural systems, even simple household objects,"

he recalls. This curiosity guided him into the world of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) - first in school and later through formal study, including a degree in mechanical engineering, a PhD, and an Honours degree in applied mathematics.

One pivotal project involved simulating how dry nitrogen flows through a critical safety system in CERN's Inner Tracker. That early technical challenge became his gateway into the ATLAS collaboration, one of the largest scientific enterprises in the world, where global teamwork and innovation intersect.

Working in such a diverse international environment has taught him that science is never a solitary pursuit. "Impactful research depends on the collective effort of scientists from many disciplines, cultures, and backgrounds," he tells *Al-Qalam*. "Advancing our understanding of the universe is a shared endeavour that requires humility, openness,

and collaboration. Meaningful discovery is always a joint pursuit, not an individual one." He notes that the friendships and mentorships formed across borders are as valuable as the scientific breakthroughs themselves.

For Prof Bhamjee, science and Islamic faith are deeply intertwined. "My Islamic values play a grounding role in my work," he explains. "Islam encourages seeking knowledge, reflecting on creation, and using that knowledge to benefit humanity. These principles naturally align with scientific inquiry and ethical responsibility."

Each equation he works with, each model he develops, becomes a reminder of the beauty, order, and complexity of creation - a source of both intellectual challenge and spiritual reflection. He believes that understanding creation through science can enhance gratitude, mindfulness, and ethical awareness, core tenets of Islam. This perspective

also informs how he hopes to inspire young Muslim scientists.

"Parents, educators, and community leaders should avoid framing science as separate from faith," he advises. "Muslim researchers can be role models, showing that integrity, humility, and service in STEM are expressions of Islamic values. When young people see this, they feel supported and confident in pursuing scientific careers while staying true to their faith." He encourages initiatives that introduce students to research early, fostering both curiosity and moral grounding.

Looking to the future, Prof Bhamjee's excitement is captured by the potential of quantum computing. "It can tackle problems beyond classical computing and spark curiosity across multiple scientific fields," he says. "South Africa has the talent to contribute meaningfully in this space, and our Muslim communities can encourage youth to ex-

plore these frontiers. With vision and support, we can help position the country as a contributor to the next wave of global innovation." While awards and international recognition are impressive, Prof Bhamjee measures his success by the principles he lives by: curiosity, ethical responsibility, and service to humanity. "Science is not only about discovery," he tells *Al-Qalam*. "It is also about how knowledge can benefit communities and uplift people. This is where faith and science meet - in humility, reflection, and a sense of purpose." From the child captivated by simple mechanisms to a Breakthrough Prize-winning physicist, Professor Muaaz Bhamjee embodies the power of curiosity guided by faith. His story demonstrates that science is not a departure from Islamic identity, but a way to engage with creation, serve humanity, and nurture both mind and soul. For young South African Muslims looking toward STEM careers, his message is clear: pursue knowledge boldly, stay rooted in your values, and let faith guide the journey.



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# MYM takes gender-based violence awareness to Welbedacht East

By Azra Hoosen

When women from Welbedacht East asked the Muslim Youth Movement (MYM) to bring empowerment workshops to their area, MYM listened.

This year, the organisation brought its 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence programme to the Welbedacht Islamic Humanitarian Centre, where nearly 50 women gathered for a morning of learning, sharing and open conversations on gender-based violence.

The programme was hosted by the MYM Gender Desk, Chatsworth branch, which was launched last year in response to requests for more empowerment and upliftment initiatives. Since then, a small team of volunteers from across Chatsworth has been working to bring practical support to women facing the daily realities of GBV, unemployment and social instability.

Programme Director and

MC, Aisha Metadad Ally, from the MYM Gender Desk told *Al-Qalam* that the aim was to create a space where women felt a sense of solidarity and unity to foster Ubuntu, because we are all in this fight together.

"I wanted them to feel safe, validated and empowered by the knowledge they would receive. Many women don't know their rights or where to get help. We wanted them to leave here with clarity, confidence and the courage to ask questions without feeling judged," she said.

The morning brought together three key institutions that women often struggle to access: the local clinic, the Department of Justice and Metro Police.

Sister Thandeka Shabangu from Gateway Clinic opened the panel with a practical breakdown of what victims should do when reporting GBV, rape or abuse at a clinic. She explained the importance of preserving evidence, the medical steps women can expect, and the support services available

through the health system. Her session was followed by Sihle Sodo from the Department of Justice, who explained the constitutional rights of survivors and the legal avenues available to them. Highlighting organisations in and around Chatsworth that assist women who feel unsafe, unsupported or uncertain of how to proceed.

A Metro Police representative concluded the panel with an explanation of what happens after a case is reported from investigations, to bail, to the scope of protection orders. For many attendees, it was the first time they were able to interact with these departments and ask questions directly to the authorities.

According to programme director Zubeda Ayoob, the engagement was filled with eagerness, attentiveness and anticipation. "This programme brought hope. It showed them that help does exist and that they have the right to it," she said.

Zubeda noted that working

with women in Chatsworth was an amazing experience.

"Their positive mindset to make the world a better place, as well as their activism to report gender-based violence, is inspiring. The aim now is for this group to form a women's group that can support each other, report GBV and initiate self-help programmes to promote self-reliance," she said.

The second half of the programme shifted the focus to the women themselves. Participants broke into groups to identify the challenges they face and the support they hope to see going forward.

Aisha said this was one of the most impactful parts of the day: "There were a lot of older ladies at the event. Now they have the information and knowledge of what to do and what not to do if an issue arises." Unemployment came up repeatedly, with many asking for sewing, baking and knitting classes that could help them earn an income. Others em-



phasised the need for youth programmes, especially in a community affected by drug and alcohol abuse.

One of the outcomes of the programme was the establishment of a local gender group that will work with the MYM Gender Desk to continue raising awareness and driving community-led solutions.

"The knowledge they've

gained must go back into their homes and communities. Empower yourself. Access help when you need it. Do not let the system discourage you. Your voice is powerful. Your safety matters," advised Aisha.

With the community's guidance, the MYM Gender Desk plans to expand its programmes, skills workshops and support initiatives in 2026.

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## EDITORIAL



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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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.

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# One Palestine: 'Why the Two-State framework has failed'

**F**or more than a century, Palestine has been treated not as a nation but as a negotiation. The land that once nurtured Muslims, Christians, and Jews in a tradition of co-existence has been carved, colonized, and debated as though its people were an inconvenience rather than their own homeland's custodians.

From the Ottoman era and long before, Palestine upheld a civic pluralism that protected the dignity of all who lived there.

That legacy was shattered in 1948, when a state built through dispossession and imposed without consent was declared on Palestinian soil.

The two-state formula, celebrated by diplomats as a pragmatic compromise, asks Palestinians to legitimize this rupture.

It reduces a century of expulsion and occupation into a cartographic puzzle, two states living "side by side", while ignoring that one state was created through force and the other is de-

nied sovereignty. To accept this framework is to accept inequality as destiny. The two state solution rests on assumptions that have never reflected reality: equal partners, contiguous territories, and a fair international community. Decades of settlement expansion have fractured Palestinian land into disconnected enclaves.

Calls for Hamas to relinquish authority reveal a deeper hypocrisy: democracy is defended only when it produces leaders the West approves of. Palestinians alone have the right to

choose their government, free from coercion or veto. Even Gaza's reconstruction is being shaped by figures like Tony Blair, a man whose decisions helped devastate Iraq, now repackaged as a neutral advisor for Palestinian futures.

This is not justice; it is colonial management. A single, democratic Palestinian state is not a rejection of Jewish life.

It is a rejection of Zionist exclusivism and a return to the region's historical norm: coexistence under a

civic order that protects everyone equally. Such a state must guarantee full rights to Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others.

It must also uphold accountability: the right of return for Palestinian refugees, the removal of settlers implanted through colonial expansion, and legal consequences for those who orchestrated or carried out atrocities.

To stand for Palestine is to stand for universal principles: dignity, equality, and unambiguous justice. Any

solution that legitimizes occupation or erases historical truth perpetuates the very harm it claims to solve.

The two-state framework has failed because it was never designed to confront the core injustice.

A single democratic Palestine, unified, accountable, and rooted in equality, is the only moral and sustainable alternative.

**Salim Mohamed Badat**  
Durban writer, exploring the intersections of faith, politics

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# Gorima's – Adding flavour to South Africa since 1980

From a product (Magi Masala) developed in Durban by Khatija Mall in 1980, Gorima's has grown into a proudly South African success story with 29 retail stores nationwide – 25 in KwaZulu-Natal and 4 in Gauteng. For over four decades, Gorima's has been more than just a retailer.

"We are creators, innovators, and community builders. Our shelves are lined with fresh, high-quality, and affordable food ingredients sourced from across the globe – and from our own backyard. From authentic spices and herbs to wholesome snacks, teas, and speciality savouries, we bring a world of flavour to every customer who walks through our doors," says company CEO, Arshad Moola.

What sets Gorima's apart is their commitment to local production. They proudly manufacture most of their products and partner with over 60 home industries, creating sustainable opportunities for small businesses and artisans. "Our Snack 'n Go(rima's) counters have become a customer favourite, serving freshly prepared savouries – including our famous samosas – and aromatic speciality Chais, offering a taste of tradition with every bite. "Our MRS M Foundation is a cornerstone of our social responsibility, providing daily essentials, creating jobs, and uplifting communities," Arshad adds. With over 420 employees, Gorima's continues to grow while staying true to their founding values:



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"We are food people in business, not business people selling food. With a proud heritage, a strong sense of purpose, and a

passion for innovation, Gorima's is not just a store – we are a part of South Africa's cultural and culinary fabric," Arshad emphasises.

Gorima's is currently running a competition. Details are as follows:

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- To qualify for entry, customers will be required to spend R200 or more in-store, purchase one or more Patels products, swipe their MyRewards card and they will be entered automatically into the competition.

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las, every meal is freshly prepared to order. Guests can choose from a range of spice levels — from Lemon & Herb to Dynamite — ensuring there's something for every palate. The restaurants' lively décor, warm lighting, and energetic staff create an atmosphere that's both welcoming and exciting, making every visit a memorable dining experience.

## A Brand to Be Proud Of

Director Philip Karafilakis highlights vast opportunities for national expansion as demand continues to soar into 2026. Backed by membership with SANHA and FASA, Mochachos remains committed to excellence, flavour, and service.

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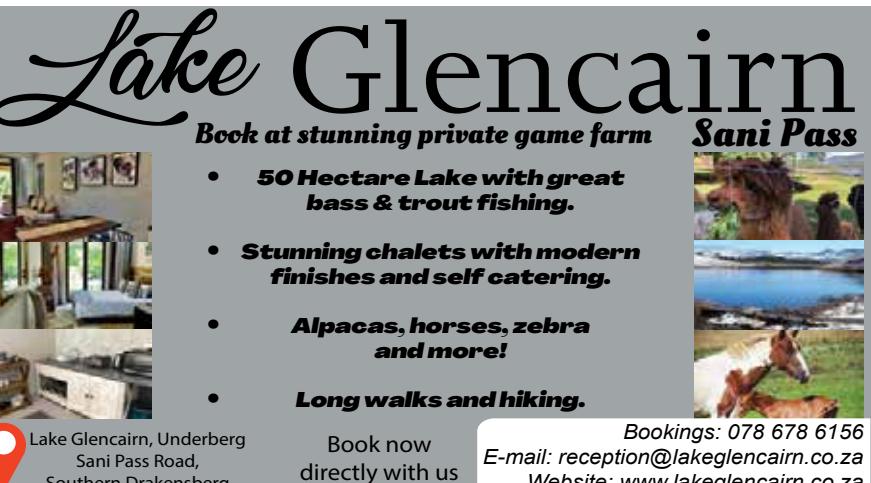
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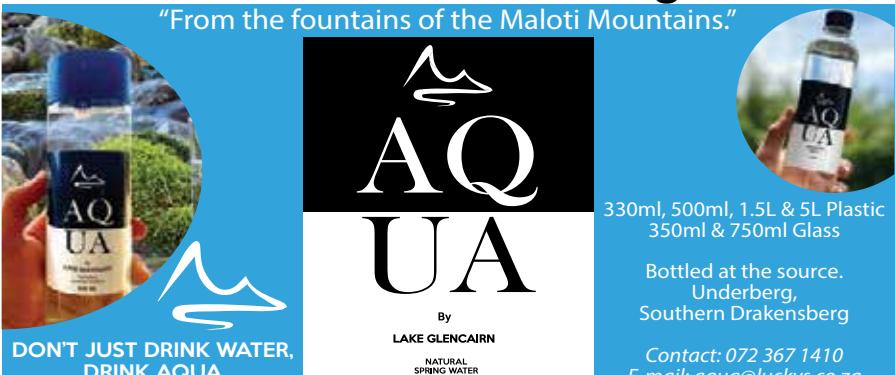
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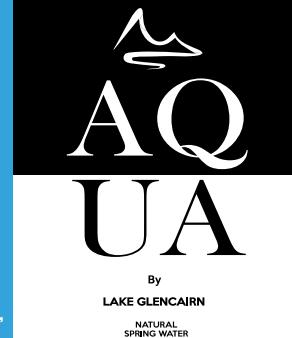
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# Islam, faith, and political awakening



By Imraan Buccus

*Politics and Peril, the South African Crisis*, a book by Al Qalam editor, Dr Imraan Buccus is being launched this week. Below is an extract from the introduction that links the personal to the political.

My journey into politics was intertwined with my search for meaning within Islam. I grew up in a religious Muslim home, and as a young boy I began to grapple with what my faith had to say about the world around me — a world marked by deprivation, racial division, and injustice. I wanted to understand whether religion had anything to tell a young person living through apartheid. I remember going to the local imam and asking him about the oppression of Black people and

what Islam's position on this injustice was. His response was stark and unsettling: he dismissed my question as "kufr politics".

That response lingered with me. It left me with the sense that something important was missing in how faith was being taught to us. My own father, who had only a primary school education, sensed my struggle. He introduced me to Fuad Hendricks, the then editor of *Al-Qalam*, a national Muslim newspaper whose political orientation was worlds apart from the conservative religious voices in my community. Hendricks presented a radically different image of Islam — one rooted in justice, struggle, and solidarity with the oppressed. He spoke of the Prophet (s) as someone who confronted injustice directly, who stood with the poor, and who challenged systems of exploitation. For the first time, I encountered a version of the faith that resonated with the world I lived in.

Hendricks encouraged me to attend the Muslim Youth Movement's Islamic Training Programme in December 1989. That weekend was transformative. It was the first time I encountered the

works of Ali Shariati, whose writings fused Islamic spirituality with radical social theory. Shariati captured something that had been forming within me for years: that the pursuit of justice is a religious act, and that the struggle against oppression is inseparable from spiritual devotion.

The programme also introduced me to two leading activists in the Muslim community, Na'eem Jeenah and Shamima Shaikh. Na'eem, in particular, shaped my political consciousness. In one discussion, he said something that has stayed with me throughout my life: "My spirituality is heightened when I am toyed-toying." It was a simple but profoundly clarifying statement. It made visible the connections I had always felt intuitively but could never articulate — that protest, solidarity, and collective struggle could themselves be forms of worship, expressions of faith in action.

One of the most powerful moments from that period came when I first met Ahmed Kathrada, who had recently been released after 26 years in prison. Kathrada attended a gathering hosted by the Muslim Youth

Movement. When he walked into the hall, young people erupted into song, forming a moving guard of honour as they toyed-toyed him into the room. I found myself standing next to him during Maghrib prayer. To be in prayer beside a man who had sacrificed so much — and who had emerged with his dignity, integrity, and humility intact — was electrifying. For many of us, it was a moment when political struggle, faith, and history converged in a single space.

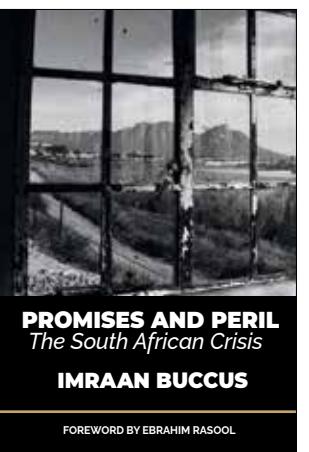
The weekend programme also exposed the fractures and tensions within the Muslim community itself. Alongside the inspiring ideas and radical teachings were equally stark reminders of the contradictions within the community: gender hierarchies, racial prejudices, and the struggle between progressive and conservative currents. These tensions were not peripheral; they revealed the complex social terrain that shaped South African Islam during the final years of apartheid. Yet, even with these challenges, the Muslim Youth Movement provided a rare space where young people like myself could imagine an Islam that was intellectually alive, po-

**PROMISES AND PERIL: THE SOUTH AFRICAN CRISIS** is a part memoir but mainly political analysis, weaving together personal experience with a critical account of the country's ongoing crisis. Drawing on influences from luminaries in South Africa and global thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Ali Shariati and others, Buccus examines how the promise of a better future has been betrayed by the forces of greed and repression. Ultimately, **PROMISES AND PERIL: THE SOUTH AFRICAN CRISIS** is a call to recover the moral clarity of the liberation struggle, to link local struggles with global justice, and to forge a politics that serves the many rather than the few.

*"A fascinating and frank exploration of South Africa's political crisis and the delicate hope that still survives within it."*  
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Imraan Buccus is an Associate Professor in International Relations at the US-based School for International Training and a Research Fellow at the Johannesburg Institute for Advanced Study at the University of Johannesburg. In addition to his work at the University, he is a Research Fellow at the Awele Socio-Economic Research Institute (ASRI) and Editor of *Al-Qalam*, a political magazine. A political theorist, political ethnographer and public intellectual, his research spans political governance and international relations in the Global South.





**PROMISES AND PERIL**  
*The South African Crisis*  
**IMRAAN BUCCUS**

FOREWORD BY EBRAHIM RASOOL

litanically engaged, and deeply rooted in justice.

Looking back, that period was decisive. It was the moment when my political identity found its anchor in my religious identity. Islam, for me, ceased to be a set of private rituals and became a framework through which to understand — and confront — the world. It offered both moral clarity and emotional discipline. It insisted that neutrality in the face of injustice was impossible. It taught me that spiritual life and political life were not competing spheres but complementary obligations. That insight shaped the path I would take from that moment forward. It informed my activism,

my academic work, and my commitment to the struggles of working-class people in South Africa. It framed my understanding of solidarity not simply as a political choice but as a moral imperative. And it grounded my belief that the pursuit of justice — in all its messy, imperfect, and often painful forms — is a form of worship, a lived expression of faith.

The book will be available at Exclusive Books, Baitul Hikmah, Ikes Book Store, through *Al-Qalam* and Asri, and online. Note, however, that it reaches Cape Town bookstores early next year.

Dr Buccus is editor of *Al-Qalam*

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# AMA wraps 'Year of Mercy', impact and milestones — 2025 in review

By AMA Media

**A**s 2025 draws to a close, Africa Muslims Agency (AMA) reflects on a year marked by extraordinary challenges — and extraordinary compassion. Across continents, crises, and communities, AMA's teams, volunteers and donors worked hand-in-hand to deliver mercy where it was needed most.

From life-saving emergency relief to long-term development and education, 2025 stands as a defining year for AMA's mission of restoring dignity and empowering communities.

This year's Ramadan campaign once again stretched across more than 20 nations, bringing mercy to families facing hardship across Africa, Gaza, Afghanistan, Syria and beyond. We reached 1.7 million people with 1.1 million hot meals, 61 000 food hampers, 550 000 loaves of bread and 151 000 Eid gifts. Qurbani 2025 further amplified this impact, with meat distributions reaching struggling households in remote and conflict-affected areas. Through the generosity of

donors, AMA ensured that the joy of Eid reached even the most forgotten communities. 2025 marked a landmark expansion in AMA's water-provision portfolio. For the first time ever, AMA drilled boreholes in Sri Lanka, Kenya, Nigeria and Syria, opening access to clean, safe water for thousands. These new boreholes stand alongside ongoing water projects in Malawi, Mozambique and Afghanistan, where the need remains urgent. With your generosity, we brought clean water to 1000 communities through wells and boreholes.

Gaza remained one of AMA's most urgent focus areas this year. With the humanitarian crisis worsening, we continued providing the two most critical needs throughout the year: food and water. In recent weeks, assistance expanded to include infant milk, bread and additional essentials.

Despite the extreme challenges of access, AMA remained committed to delivering aid consistently, and you showed your support for Gaza throughout the year, always donating and supporting our calls for assistance. As crises deepened

in Yemen and escalated in Sudan, AMA responded with emergency food aid, water tankers, and essential supplies for displaced families, and as Syria opens up, we are committed to rebuilding and restoring infrastructure and lives. AMA's Orphan Hope programme also reached new frontiers in 2025. We expanded into Gaza, Syria and Sri Lanka, offering vulnerable children stability, care and opportunity, and continue to serve as a critical safety net in Afghanistan and Lebanon, reaching almost a thousand children across the world with hope.

The Aman Schools continued to transform lives this year. In Lebanon, the school continues to provide quality education to refugee children, and those from poor economic backgrounds. In South Africa, the Aman School of Excellence in Finetown continued to grow, adding new grades, activities and opportunities. The community of SA showed up for us throughout the year, from cycling the Tour de Malawi to raise funds for water, to golfing for charity; from networking at women's events around the country to connecting at



dhikr nights — you gave your time and commitment to uplifting those in need

nearly four decades of on-the-ground experience.

where hope is almost lost, but so deeply needed.

This year was also a year of global presence for AMA. The organisation exhibited and presented at major international platforms, including AidEx, one of the world's largest humanitarian gatherings, the World Zakaat and Waqf Forum, the London Muslim Halal Festival and the Global Humanitarian Expo for Gaza. These platforms enabled AMA to build partnerships, strengthen collaboration, and share

None of this would be possible without the tireless dedication of our donors whose generosity fuels every project, our teams across the world, who work in some of the world's toughest environments and our volunteers, who mobilise awareness, run pop-ups, and drive fundraising efforts. To everyone who supported AMA this year — you have shared mercy. You have changed lives. You have helped us reach places

As we close the chapter on 2025, AMA looks ahead to new opportunities to serve, uplift and empower communities globally. With the same spirit of compassion, we step into 2026 ready to reach even more lives — and to continue sharing mercy wherever it is needed most.

Thank you for helping us in our mission to keep empowering, educating and inspiring.

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1–2 tbsp lime juice  
1–2 tbsp sugar or honey (optional)  
Ice cubes  
Lime slices or mint (optional garnish)

#### Method

Add watermelon, water, lime juice, and sugar/honey to a blender.  
Blend until smooth.  
Strain through a fine sieve if preferred.  
Pour into glasses filled with ice.  
Garnish with lime slices or mint.

#### Serving Suggestions

Serve ice-cold in tall glasses with extra watermelon cubes or balls.  
Add a few mint leaves for a refreshing aroma.  
Serve alongside light summer meals, picnics, or braais.  
For a fun twist, freeze some blended watermelon in ice cube trays and use as flavoured ice.



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# The West- guardian of the truth?



By Imraan Buccus

There is a lot of discussion about media and social media disinformation today. Much of this debate assumes that disinformation is produced only by the enemies of the West. This has long been the logic of Herman Wasserman, a South African academic working on media disinformation.

But the idea that only the enemies of the West engage in disinformation is simply not true. Two of the most consequential disinformation events in a generation came from the United States and Israel, and both were taken up uncritically by major Western newsrooms.

The first was the claim that Iraq possessed “weapons of mass destruction”. This lie, driven at the highest levels of the US government, was carried into the world by powerful Western media institutions such as the New York Times. It played a central role in legitimising a war that destroyed a country at the cost of more than a million lives and destabilised an entire region.

The second came in October 2023, when Israeli officials claimed that Hamas had “beheaded forty babies”. Again the New York Times and other outlets repeated the allegation without verification. By the time it was disproven the damage had been done and the stage was set for genocide.

Israel’s own propaganda and public diplomacy infrastructure, known as Hasbara, has been a major source of misinformation for decades. It operates through coordinated government messaging, media partnerships, influence networks and online campaigns that promote Israel’s political line and delegitimise criticism. During periods of intense violence it frequently circulates claims that later collapse under scrutiny.

Despite this history, Western governments and donors aligned to them have poured enormous resources into building the idea that only the enemies of the West engage in disinformation, while the West itself stands for reason, democracy, justice and freedom. This narrative has been

pushed through an ecosystem of initiatives including fact-checking outfits, academic programmes on disinformation, investigative journalism units, donor-funded media projects, training schemes and high-profile conferences. The aim is to entrench a worldview in which Western information is assumed to be neutral and trustworthy while critical voices in the Global South are treated with suspicion or dismissed as foreign-backed disinformation. South Africa is deeply embedded in these structures. A web of Western-backed organisations plays a major role in shaping what counts as independent journalism, which topics are prioritised and how disinformation is understood.

Journalists who toe the Western line are treated as respected professionals, while people making principled and independent criticism of the West and Israel are mocked, slandered and smeared as proxies for Russia, China, Iran or Hamas.

The extent of direct US involvement in South African media is well documented. Research into how the United States has penetrated our mediascape shows that organisations such as the US State Department, USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy have long funded journalism initiatives in this country. These funds support newsroom partnerships, training schemes, reporting fellowships and “capacity-building” programmes presented as neutral efforts to strengthen journalism. In practice they promote a liberal pro-Western frame as the standard of professional reporting. This influence shapes editorial assumptions and determines which voices are elevated as authoritative, narrowing the space for independent analysis. Over time these pressures shape newsroom identities. Western positions come to be treated as common sense.

One of the newer developments in this global donor ecosystem is the New Lines Institute, a Washington, D.C. based think tank that presents itself as an independent authority on disinformation, extremism and international security. It publishes New Lines Magazine, a high-profile platform that projects an image of rigour and neutrality. In reality its work sits firmly within the orbit of US foreign-policy priorities.

The institute emerged from the same networks that produced PropOrNot, the anonymous initiative that falsely branded a large number of independent and left publications as Russian propaganda during the 2016 US election cycle. While New Lines has adopted the for-



mal language of a policy institute, its reports consistently target governments and movements viewed as hostile to Western power, while never examining Western disinformation or the major failures of institutions such as the New York Times. As the critical media scholar Alan MacLeod has noted, New Lines “constantly attacks genuine alternative media who stray from Washington’s official foreign policy line, all while employing many spooks, spies and other figures at the heart of the national security state.” Yet its material circulates widely in donor-funded journalism trainings, fact-checking programmes and university courses across the Global South, giving it significant influence over how journalists are taught to understand disinformation. New Lines has also sought to intervene directly in the South African mediascape, and the liberal media here often treats it as if it were a neutral and credible project.

The National Endowment for Democracy is actively involved in trying to shape South African politics. In November 2023, it hosted the 12th Global Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy in Johannesburg, presenting the gathering as a neutral forum on democratic renewal. Instead, it sparked immediate controversy. Major civil-society organisations, including SAFTU and a number of social movements, criticised

the event as an attempt by a US-funded body with a long record of regime-change operations to place itself at the centre of South African political life.

Two South African institutions that had initially agreed to co-host—the Ronnie Mamoepa Foundation and the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA)—withdrew after public pressure.

These dynamics were also evident at the Global Investigative Journalism Conference held in Malaysia last month. The event was presented as a gathering to strengthen investigative reporting, but its political orientation was clear from the outset.

The keynote speaker was Maria Ressa, a central figure in the Western-backed democracy-promotion world. Ressa has long been embedded in networks close to US foreign-policy circles, including serving as chair of the World Movement for Democracy, whose secretariat is housed in the National Endowment for Democracy.

Her leading role at the conference signalled the wider political frame in which the event operated: a view of disinformation that focuses on the conduct of non-Western states, domestic populists and critics of Western power, while treating Western information systems as inherently trustworthy. To understand why this matters

it is necessary to look at the NED itself. The NED was created in the early 1980s during the Reagan administration, when senior figures acknowledged that it would take over many of the political influence operations that had previously been carried out covertly by the CIA, but would now operate in public through a “democracy promotion” mandate.

Since then it has become one of the most influential funders of media initiatives, civil-society organisations, journalism training programmes and academic centres across the Global South. Its grant-making almost always aligns with the strategic interests of Washington. Through fellowships, conferences, investigative journalism hubs and fact-checking bodies, the NED helps to frame Western foreign policy as the standard of democratic virtue, while portraying independent or dissenting views as vulnerable to manipulation by foreign powers.

This is the political ecosystem in which the Malaysia conference was situated. It was not a neutral space. It belongs to a wider infrastructure through which Western donors and governments decide what counts as credible journalism and what is dismissed as disinformation. It is an architecture that avoids serious examination of Western disinformation. Much of our liberal media continues

to reproduce a worldview in which the West appears as the guardian of truth, the guarantor of democratic norms and the main victim of manipulation. The long history of Western disinformation, from Vietnam and Central America to Iraq and Gaza, is rarely brought to the centre of public debate.

If we are serious about confronting disinformation, we have to start by recognising that Western governments and media institutions have shaped global narratives for decades.

Their interventions do not only distort public understanding. They have repeatedly helped to create the conditions for large-scale violence. The genocide in Gaza and the misinformation that has surrounded it show how quickly Western states and their allies can construct a story that protects their interests and shields them from accountability.

South Africa needs a media culture with the confidence to question every source of power, including the West and the states it supports. This cannot happen while Western governments, Western media and Western-funded institutions are treated as if they stand outside the demands of scrutiny. A democratic media must serve the public. It must insist that all actors, without exception, are held to account.

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# Aaminah (17) wins expedition to Antarctica

By Azra Hoosen

**W**hen Aaminah Choonara (Grade 11) from Lenasia Muslim School first learned that she made the Top 20 in the Students in Antarctica (SIA) 2025 competition, she screamed, cried and told everyone she loved. But the weeks that followed, from 19th November to December 1st, were nerve-wracking. Between public voting and recording a video about why she should be chosen, the wait became a full emotional rollercoaster. "There were moments I wondered if someone from Lenasia could really stand out among entries from across Africa," said Aaminah.

This week, the wait ended with the best possible news: Aaminah was officially selected as one of the Top five winners, securing an all-expenses-paid scientific expedition to Antarctica, valued at

R1-million. The journey will span nine days, beginning with her departure to Cape Town on 8 December, followed by a polar-bound flight to Antarctica on 11 December and concluding with her return to Johannesburg after the expedition.

More than personal excitement, Aaminah told *Al-Qalam* that she felt a huge sense of responsibility. "We now carry the hopes of so many young African learners and I want to make everyone who believes in me proud," she said.

Founded by renowned explorer Riaan Manser, the Students in Antarctica programme invites Grade 11 pupils from across Africa to compete for a rare opportunity: an immersive expedition to the coldest, most environmentally unique continent on Earth. The competition aims to expose young Africans to

environmental science, climate literacy and the fragile ecosystems of the Antarctic region.

What makes Aaminah's story unique is not just her achievement, but the way she roots her environmental passion in Islamic teachings. "Caring for the environment isn't something extra we do when we have time, it's who we are meant to be," she said.

Aaminah references the well-known hadith: "If Qiyamah begins and one of you has a sapling in his hand, let him plant it." To her, this is not metaphorical, it is a call to action.

She said that Islamic teachings shaped her relationship with the planet: "The Qur'aan constantly calls us to reflect on creation – earth, sky, water and all living things. As Allah's deputies on earth, we're responsible not just for how

we treat people, but for caring for the environment He has entrusted to us."

In her submission, she emphasised the often-unheard voices of African youth and the trust Allah places on communities as custodians of the Earth. "We have this beautiful blend of faith that tells us the earth is an Amanah (trust) and the energy of youth that refuses to wait for permission. I see us leading by example: showing that protecting the planet isn't 'someone else's issue'; it's part of living our deen fully, and doing it with joy, creativity and inclusivity so that everyone feels invited to join," she said.

Aaminah told *Al-Qalam* that Antarctica feels almost mythical – remote, pristine and yet deeply connected to all of us through climate and rising seas. "It's a place that reminds you of nature's power and our duty to protect it and I'm cer-

tain I'll return with a stronger sense of purpose," she said.

Even before she knew she had won, Aaminah had already dreamt up what she hopes will become her long-term contribution: From Ice to Life – a campaign translating Antarctica's melting ice into relatable stories for South Africans.

The idea is to help especially vulnerable and coastal communities understand how climate change affects food security, storms, flooding and daily life. "I hope to turn this into workshops, school and madrassah talks and simple social-media explainers that make the science real and personal," said Aaminah.

The excitement is palpable as she now prepares for the ultimate student adventure – everything from travel, gear, training and accommodation is fully covered. The jour-



ney promises to be once-in-a-lifetime: part science lab, part survival lesson and part dream. Aaminah's selection is more than a personal win; it is a signal to young Muslims that they belong in global scientific spaces. As she journeys from Lenasia to Antarctica, she carries not only the aspirations of her family and school, but the values of her faith and perhaps opens a pathway for many more to follow.

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