

# Al - Qalam

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LOCAL NEWS

# Choonara (17): 'I cherish the memory of praying in Antarctica'

By Azra Hoosen

Supplicating the Almighty on the frozen wasteland of Antarctica is what Aaminah Choonara will treasure most about her recent adventure to the polar ice shelf. The 17-year-old (Grade 11) student from Lenasia Muslim School, who won a trip to Antarctica, had recently returned from her adventure with great memories, which she shared with *Al-Qalam*.

"Reading salah on the snow was something that stuck with me. Being there as a traveller, knowing your du'as are accepted... just sitting and speaking to Allah," she said.

Ahead of her Antarctic expedition, there was a lot of preparation. Aaminah and four other selected students spent three days in Cape Town undergoing safety training, briefings and orientation sessions.

Yet nothing could prepare her for the moment of arrival in the frozen Antarctic wastelands. "As I disembarked the aircraft, the first sight was this bright white light. Standing there, feeling the snow for the first time, it finally kicked in, this is not a dream," Aaminah recalled.

Life in Antarctica quickly settled into a rhythm. Aaminah's days began before dawn. "Wake up, pray Fajr, catch a few minutes of sleep and then be up and ready," she said. Breakfast was shared in the canteen before lessons in an igloo; thereafter, daily adventures across the frozen landscape.

Aaminah describes the trip as well-balanced, as they had the educational part as well as the fun and extreme physical part. In just four days, the experiences were intense and varied. "Seeing the ice wall, a campout, hikes, watching



the plane take off, helping Allegra paint her mural, ice plunging and running half marathons," she said. Among the most demand-

ing moments was the half-marathon: "That truly challenged me physically and mentally. If the four didn't push me to believe in myself, I would never have completed it."

Climate change, too, became real in ways no textbook could convey. "One morning, I was sitting with Ms Governor as she explained climate change and how the smallest actions affect things on a massive scale. That was the moment of realisation," said Aaminah.

Surrounded by endless ice and untouched beauty, Aaminah often found herself reflecting deeply on creation itself. "You look at the landscapes and think, Allah says we are the best of His creation, like how? You see this massive land of ice and think about your Creator and His divine qualities. SubhanAllah. If Allah created this beau-

ty and yet we are still His best creation, imagine how much love He must have for us," she said.

As the only Muslim on the expedition, her faith was both personal and visible. Everyone had questions regarding Islam, and she was more than happy to speak about it. But one thought stayed with her constantly: "They say the ground upon which you take Allah's name will testify for you on the Day of Qiyaamah. Every chance I got, I made dhikr, so that the snow of Antarctica would testify."

Seeing the fragility of the polar environment deepened her understanding of the earth as an amanah. "If anything, it just deepened that feeling of responsibility. We have to preserve it, because Allah entrusted it to us."

Representing African and Muslim youth on a global

scientific expedition carried weight.

"I was extremely honoured. Being living proof that we can do great things. As Muslims, we have a responsibility placed on our shoulders and it's of utmost importance that we fulfil it," said Aaminah. Her environmental initiative, From Ice to Life, has since grown into a shared mission.

With a goal of ten water wells, three have already been reached and the project is now collective among the five Antarctic students. Reflecting on the journey, Aaminah's message is simple and sincere: "Start today. Don't wait. We think our actions are insignificant, yet we don't realise how far they go. Never think your dream is too big or that you are too small. If your intention is pure, then Bismillah! Make the first step."

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# Don't allow Ramadan to greet you as a stranger, prepare now



By Imam A. Rashied Omar

The blessed month of Ramadan is fast approaching. Whether we realise it or not, we are already on The Road to Ramadan. I would like to advise myself and you to begin preparing thoughtfully and intentionally for the arrival of the most auspicious time of the year, the blessed month of Ramadan. Our Islamic tradition teaches us something simple yet profoundly wise: what we receive and gain from Ra-

madan depends on how we prepare for it. Allah, the Lord of Wisdom, reminds us of this enduring principle in the Glorious Qur'an in Surah al-Baqarah (2:197):

Take provision (for your journey), for the greatest provision is taqwa; that is, hearts firmly anchored in mindfulness and awareness of Allah.

This verse teaches us that sacred journeys, whether the journey of Hajj or the journey toward Ramadan, are not meant to be entered unprepared. They require inner provision before outward exertion. And so, the verse invites each of us to pause and ask a simple yet searching question: what am I carrying with me as I continue on the road to the blessed month of Ramadan?

This Qur'anic wisdom was not merely recited by our pious predecessors; it was embodied and lived by them. Al-Salaf al-Salih our righteous ancestors, understood

that every sacred journey is shaped not only by where one is going, but by how well one is prepared. Sacred journeys do not begin at the destination. They begin long before the journey itself unfolds, in the quiet and often unseen work of preparation. The early spiritual scholar Abu Bakr al-Balkhi (d. 939 CE) captured this wisdom beautifully in words that have echoed through the centuries:

*Rajab is the month of planting. Sha'ban is the month of watering. And Ramadan is the month of harvest.*

If we desire a meaningful harvest in Ramadan, then the planting and watering cannot be delayed. It must begin now, while we are still on the road to Ramadan.

Preparing for Ramadan does not mean exhausting ourselves before the month even begins. It does not require sudden spiritual heroics, nor unrealistic resolutions that cannot be sus-

tained. The road to Ramadan is not meant to be rushed. It is meant to be walked with mizzen – balance, hikmah wisdom, and Rahmah, compassion, mercy and tenderness toward ourselves.

Our beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught us a principle that lies at the heart of all sound spiritual preparation: Allah values consistency over intensity, and faithfulness over dramatic bursts of effort.

As narrated by our mother `Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) narrated, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: *"The most beloved deeds to Allah are those that are consistent, even if they are small." (Bukhari and Muslim)."*

This hadith teaches us that the road to Ramadan is not paved with dramatic gestures, but with small, gentle, faithful steps, steps that can be sustained long after the

month has passed. With this in mind, allow me to suggest five small and manageable steps that prepare our hearts, steady our souls, and ease us gently into this blessed season.

**First:** Begin by performing your Salah with khushu', with your heart and mind fully present in your communion with Allah. Choose one Salah each day to slow down, to be fully present, even if only for a few minutes.

**Second:** Reconnect with the Qur'an, gently. Do not wait for Ramadan to open the Book of Allah. Even one page a day, or a few verses. When read with reflection, it softens the heart and prepares it for the month of revelation.

**Third:** If you are able, fast twice a week, especially Mondays and Thursday, this is not obligatory; it is preparation.

**Fourth:** Where possible,

take a step toward forgiveness, and reconciliation, within families, between neighbours and friends, or even within your own heart.

**Fifth and finally:** Make a clear intention for this coming Ramadan. Ask yourself: What do I hope will be different when this Ramadan ends?

More gentleness? More discipline? More generosity? More courage to stand for justice? Name it. Write that intention down. Return to it often.

Let us remember that Ramadan is not meant to overwhelm us. It is meant to heal us, to reorient our hearts, and to draw us closer to Allah, the Most High, and to one another.

If we take small steps now, Ramadan will meet us not as a stranger, demanding everything at once, but as a long-awaited guest, welcomed with readiness, tranquillity and ease.

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LOCAL NEWS

# Nurulhudah Okwayo: ‘Many women struggle to get access to justice’

By Neelam Rahim

Access to justice remains a pressing challenge for women and girls in South Africa. From economic exclusion and land insecurity to gender-based violence and systemic discrimination, many still face barriers that prevent them from fully exercising their rights and safeguarding their dignity. Across the country, activists and advocates are working tirelessly to ensure that justice is not only a legal principle on paper but a lived reality for all.

Among these voices is Nurulhudah Okwayo, an alumna of the Auwal Socio-Economic Research Institute (ASRI) and an advocate whose work spans grassroots activism and global policy spaces. Speaking to *Al-Qalam*, she shared how her commitment

to women’s rights has been shaped by both lived experience and the values instilled through her faith and leadership training.

“As I grew older, I realised that access to justice is bigger than individual cases,” Nurulhudah explains. “It is about the kind of justice a society chooses after harm, particularly for those who have historically been excluded.” In South Africa, many women and girls continue to live with the aftershocks of dispossession, economic insecurity, and systemic inequality. For her, justice is not simply a policy goal; it is the bridge between rights on paper and dignity in reality.

Her journey has been further strengthened through ASRI, which she describes as a space that nurtures ethical leadership and practical skills. “ASRI reminded me of the importance of ethics

and accountability in public life,” she says.

“It strengthened my confidence to navigate formal policy spaces while remaining guided by values of fairness, integrity, and service - principles at the heart of Islamic teaching.” Beyond technical skills, ASRI provided a network of peers and mentors, reinforcing the idea that leadership is about uplifting communities and holding systems accountable, not personal acclaim.

On 2 December, Nurulhudah took part in the CSW70 South Africa Intergenerational Dialogue, convening multigenerational voices to advance accessible, survivor-centred, and transformative justice for women and girls. She emphasised that justice must be inclusive and grounded in lived realities. “Many systems remain urban-centric, slow, and detached from

women’s daily lives,” she explained. “Access to justice must go beyond criminal cases to include land, inheritance, education, economic security, and reparative measures. Dignity and safety are intertwined, and they must be at the centre of all justice efforts.”

She was struck by the structural and systemic barriers women continue to face. Justice often feels out of reach because services are centralised, costly, and procedurally complex. Informal or customary avenues, while more accessible, can reinforce patriarchal norms, particularly in cases of gender-based violence or property disputes. “For too many women, access to justice doesn’t feel guaranteed; it feels like a struggle,” Nurulhudah notes.

She also highlighted the importance of intergenerational dialogue. “Older gen-



erations bring hard-earned lessons and institutional memory, while young women bring urgency, innovation, and new tools. These spaces should not end at conversation; they must lead to action that transforms systems.” Young women, she adds, are critical in shaping contemporary notions of justice, from economic inclusion and land security to protection against tech-facilitated harm and in holding institutions accountable and responsive.

Looking ahead, Nurulhudah stresses that commitments must translate into real-world action. One tangible outcome of the CSW70 dialogue is the Africa Intergenerational Declaration on Strengthening Access to Justice for All

Women and Girls, which sets out concrete actions and measurable priorities. Practical steps include decentralising justice services, strengthening survivor-centred pathways, and ensuring proper accountability through adequate resourcing, oversight, and consequences for failures.

“Access to justice must be broader than criminal law,” she tells *Al-Qalam*. “It must include land, education, economic security, and reparative justice, because dignity, safety, and opportunity are deeply connected.” For Nurulhudah, this work is both a professional mission and a moral imperative guided by Islamic principles: fairness, integrity, and the protection of human dignity.



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# Iran - moral clarity needed

Nor can freedom be indefinitely postponed by a regime that governs through repression and force', writes Dr. A. Rashied Omar

I denounce the Iranian regime's lethal repression on largely peaceful protestors and, with equal moral clarity, unequivocally reject imperial calls for bombing or foreign intervention, because history shows that violence, whether imposed by the state at home or by powerful outsiders from abroad, has never delivered peace with justice, protected human dignity, or brought genuine freedom.

It is this same ethical commitment to justice and human dignity that compels an unambiguous condemnation of the Iranian regime's violent crackdown on its own citizens. The killing, imprisonment, and intimidation of Iranians demanding dignity, accountability, and meaningful socio-political reform constitute grave violations of human rights and stand in direct contradiction to core Islamic principles of 'adl (justice), karamah (human dignity), and amanah (moral trust and responsibility). Any

state that claims Islamic legitimacy is therefore both religiously and morally obligated to uphold these values. Calls for radical and structural reform are not only understandable; they are necessary for Iran's social healing and long-term stability.

At the same time, any credible condemnation of state violence inside Iran requires the unequivocal rejection of violence imposed from outside. I categorically oppose threats by external powers to bomb Iran or to impose regime change through coercion and force. Such actions would constitute clear violations of international law, undermine the foundations of a rules-based global order, and risk deepening human suffering rather than alleviating it. These positions are not driven by genuine concern for the well-being or agency of the Iranian people, but by geopolitical agendas that have, time and again, devastated societies and undermined authentic struggles for justice. From a peace studies perspective, imperial interventions do not advance liberation or positive peace; they instrumentalise civilian populations and reproduce

cycles of structural and direct violence.

To oppose repression inside Iran while endorsing violence from outside is a moral contradiction. It is precisely the rejection of imperial coercion that allows the genuine, indigenous voices for justice and reform within Iran to be heard on their own terms. These voices have emerged organically from within Iran's own religious, intellectual, and political traditions. For decades, respected Iranian figures such as the late Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, Ebrahim Yazdi, and Mohsen Kadivar have publicly challenged coercive state policies, recognizing their deep incompatibility with justice, freedom of conscience, and the ethical spirit of Islam itself. Ironically, and tragically, many of these principled reformist voices have been subjected to harassment, marginalisation, and repression. Their treatment exposes the regime's profound intolerance of faith-grounded internal critique and its reliance on coercion rather than moral persuasion. Islamic ethics emphasize education, wisdom, and voluntary moral

commitment, not state violence, as the pathway to cultivating genuine belief and ethical practice.

It is this long-standing tradition of internal moral critique, combined with the courage, discipline, and agency of ordinary Iranians, that makes the current protest movement one of the most significant challenges to authoritarian rule in decades. Genuine democratic change must therefore emerge and grow from within, rooted in the aspirations, strategies, and leadership of Iranians themselves, not imposed, engineered, or hijacked from outside. Historical experience and comparative scholarship consistently show that foreign military strikes do not advance internal movements for freedom. In the Iranian context, threats of attack or external military pressure, whether framed as limited strikes or as "assistance" to protestors, are already being used by the regime to delegitimise the uprising by portraying it as foreign-orchestrated. Rather than weakening authoritarian rule, military escalation predictably strengthens regime narratives and measurably



undermines nonviolent, indigenous movements for political change.

The path forward must therefore be shaped by Iranians themselves. I call on the legitimate leaders emerging from these grassroots, non-violent protests, not Western proxies or agent provocateurs, to seize this moment with wisdom, restraint, and courage. This is an opportunity to apply sustained, principled, and nonviolent civic pressure on the Iranian authorities to commit to deep and irreversible reforms: an end to lethal repression, the release of political prisoners, meaningful protections for women and minorities, and the opening of genuine civic and political space.

Justice will not come from bombs dropped on Iran by external powers, nor can freedom be indefinitely postponed by a regime that governs through repression and force.

Meaningful and enduring change can only emerge through moral clarity, sustained nonviolent action, and reforms grounded in the lived realities and aspirations of the Iranian people themselves.

\*Dr. A. Rashied Omar is an Imam of the Claremont Main Road Masjid; Associate Teaching Professor of Islamic Studies & Peace Studies; Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame

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**EDITORIAL**



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# SAJFP says Trump 'peace plan' smokescreen for ongoing genocide

**S**outh African Jews for a Free Palestine (SAJFP) rejects, in the strongest terms, the Trump Plan for Gaza and the mythical 'second phase of the ceasefire'.

The Trump Plan does little more than provide a distracting smokescreen for ongoing genocide with its newly announced 'Board of Peace', accelerating the pace of the entrenchment of a concentration camp in Gaza on the rubble of what is increasingly being referred to as a Zionist holocaust. This plan, like others before it, is designed to normalise and perpetuate oppression, not to deliver justice or peace. We take our lead from the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement and echo its call for a global wave of resistance to US empire, which must begin with ending Israel's genocide.

We are deeply outraged that the chief engineer of

the genocide, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – against whom the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for war crimes – has accepted an invitation to join the laughably named 'Board of Peace'. But even before the announcement of his inclusion, the Board represented naked racist imperialism. It is led by an executive stacked with fascistic, hyper racial capitalist, pro-Israel war mongers and includes not a single Palestinian member.

Among those appointed to the executive are:  
- Ultra right wing US Secretary of State Marco Rubio;  
- US Special Envoy and longtime friend of Trump, Steve Witkoff who has no foreign policy experience;  
- Trump's son-in-law, real estate developer Jared Kushner who has championed the total expropriation and settlement of Gaza for the development of 'waterfront property';

- Former UK Prime Minister responsible for the massacre of over a million Iraqis, Tony Blair;  
- Billionaire investor and funder of pro-Israel propaganda, Marc Rowan;  
- World Bank President and former Chief Executive of Mastercard, Ajay Banga and;  
- Trump's national security advisor and loyal aide Robert Gabriel.

Trump has also invited States to buy a permanent seat on the 'Board of Peace' for the sum of 1 billion USD. The 'Board of Peace' accompanies a technocratic committee to govern Gaza, installed and overseen by the colonial administration.

In the words of Palestinian South African scholar Haidar Eid, the Trump Plan 'is nothing but the antithesis of the Palestinian right to self-determination for which thousands of men, women, and children have sacrificed their lives'. Since

the announcement of the first 'ceasefire' phase on 10 October 2025, Israel has continued its massacres, killing at least 451 Palestinians from Gaza and injuring 1,223. Between 10 October 2025 and 15 January 2026, Israel violated the ceasefire agreement at least 1,244 times. This is a systematic decimation of international law in service of Israel's settler-colonial expansion.

In the course of the 'ceasefire' Israel has also banned 37 aid organisations, and is continuing its attempt to settle and strangulate Gaza via starvation.

This is a direct violation of the International Court of Justice Order in South Africa v. Israel, which, on 28 March 2024 held that, '[t]he State of Israel shall take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to address the adverse conditions of

life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.' This is not a ceasefire; it is a continuation of genocide by other means. As the BDS movement asserts, U.S. imperial power is the primary sponsor of this genocide. By rebranding genocidal belligerence as 'diplomacy', Israel and the U.S. are gaslighting the world, providing Western media an excuse to look away and fostering a false sense that justice is being served.

Our Jewish conscience, our shared humanity, and the lessons of the South African anti-apartheid struggle compel us to action. We heed the BDS call for a global escalation of pressure to dismantle the structures of empire and apartheid. There can be no peace without justice.

**We therefore call for:**

- Sustained and escalated global grassroots pressure, in support of BDS, to hold Israel accountable and end

all complicity in its genocide.

- Immediate, full, and unconditional opening of all crossings for humanitarian aid and commercial goods.  
- The opening of the Rafah Crossing to allow the wounded and critically ill to access medical treatment.  
- A commitment to working ferociously towards a free Palestine, from the river to the sea, where all its people live in dignity, justice, and equality.

The struggle for the liberation of Palestine must be led by Palestinians. Only they can lead the way towards peace and justice, rather than having their future dictated to them by a committee of warmongers and imperialists seeking to profit from their suffering. We therefore reaffirm our commitment to the BDS movement, and will continue working towards a free Palestine in our lifetime, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

# Israel angered as Trump's 'Board of Peace' internationalises Gaza issue

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has accepted an invitation to be on the Board of Peace, but is unhappy to the inclusion of Turkey and Qatar, writes Sean Mathews

President Donald Trump wants his new peace board to make a big splash at the Davos Economic Forum, but his test case for this new Trump stamp of diplomacy, the de facto internationalisation of Gaza, is ranking Israel.

At the time of going to press, Trump was set to unveil his "Board of Peace" at the Davos Forum in Switzerland.

The board includes key Trump allies such as US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and envoy Steve Witkoff. American billionaire Marc Rowan is a member, and King Mohammed VI of Morocco has become the first world leader to confirm his participation.

Gaza is not mentioned

in the board's charter, but Marwa Maziad, a Middle East and security expert at the University of Maryland, told Middle East Eye that Trump clearly envisions the destroyed enclave being one of the board's first "franchises".

"He wants to take this board concept to Gaza, then Venezuela and Ukraine. He is going to go around to different countries and tell them to join the board or face war and conflict," Maziad said.

Some figures, like Rowan, Witkoff, and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, sit on Trump's Board of Peace and an executive board established to govern Gaza.

But Aaron David Miller, a former State Department negotiator, told MEE that, aside from Trump's fondness for bringing corporate titles to diplomacy, the peace board is a distraction from the painstaking work of shoring up a fragile ceasefire in Gaza.

"This is a misplaced solu-

tion to a problem we don't have," Miller told MEE. "The Board of Peace is not going to move Gaza from Phase 1 to Phase 2."

"In Gaza, you need Trump to exercise his leverage over Israel and the Qataris, Turks and Egyptians to exercise their influence over Hamas," he added. Miller said that Trump's penchant to bring new international players into Gaza would mark a defeat for Netanyahu.

"If you could internationalise Gaza, why not internationalise the occupied West Bank?" he said. "That's the last thing Netanyahu wants."

Maziad said Trump has "spread the wealth" in his Gaza board.

In addition to Rowan, Yakir Gabay, a Cypriot-Israeli tycoon close to Kushner, was given a seat, as was a senior official from the UAE, the Arab state closest to Israel.

However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is pushing back against

the inclusion of two senior officials from Turkey and Qatar on the board: Qatari diplomat Ali al-Thawadi and Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan.

"We have a certain disagreement with our friends in the United States regarding the composition of the advisory council," Netanyahu's office said on Monday. "The Prime Minister has instructed the foreign affairs minister to contact the US secretary of state on this matter."

Qatar hosts Hamas's leadership at the request of the US, and Erdogan has praised Hamas members as "freedom fighters". Across the wider region, both Fidan and Thawadi have been on the frontlines frustrating some of Netanyahu's key power plays.

Fidan is a suave former Turkish spymaster who has been instrumental in rehabilitating Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, where Netanyahu is angling for influence. Thawadi is a steely



Qatari diplomat who helped broker the Gaza ceasefire. He was photographed discreetly sitting in the White House when Netanyahu was forced to call the emir of Qatar in September to apologise for an attack on Hamas negotiators in Doha. Maziad told MEE the inclusion of Turkey and Qatar on the board is worrying for Israel because it could

foreshadow the deployment of Turkish and Qatari troops as part of an "International Stabilisation Force" in the future.

The force received a United Nations mandate in November but has yet to deploy, as Arab and Muslim countries balk at demands from Israel that they confront Hamas, which has yet to disarm.



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OPINION

# Can Ramaphosa Block US Ambassador-Designate?



By Ebrahim Rassol  
(Former Ambassador to the USA)

The fact that the United States Ambassador-designate to South Africa, Lee Brent Bozell III, was sworn in, in the USA, may indicate that his appointment to, and acceptance by, South Africa as the US Ambassador is now a foregone conclusion. Would he have taken the oath of office if there was no prior agreement by South Africa?

Has South Africa decided to ignore his odious positions in the past on South Africa's liberation struggle outrightly labeling it as terrorism? Maybe he changed.

Did South Africa decide to ignore his remarks in the Senate when interviewed for the job. He doubled down on all the positions espoused by President Trump and his administration: BEE is racist; a white genocide is taking place; South Africa must be punished for charging Israel with genocide; and trying to prescribe South Africa's foreign relationships, etc.

In weighing up Bozell's historical position on South Africa's struggle, and what he purports his mission in South Africa to be, President Ramaphosa may well find himself in a bind.

Can he afford to reject Bozell's credentials and endanger further the relationship with the Trump administration? Should he accept Bozell's ambassadorship, and hope Bozell can be bracketed from overreach? Or does he hope that reality in South Africa, such as no evidence of a white genocide, will result in honest and sober reports that will change Washington's stance and reverse the punitive measures?

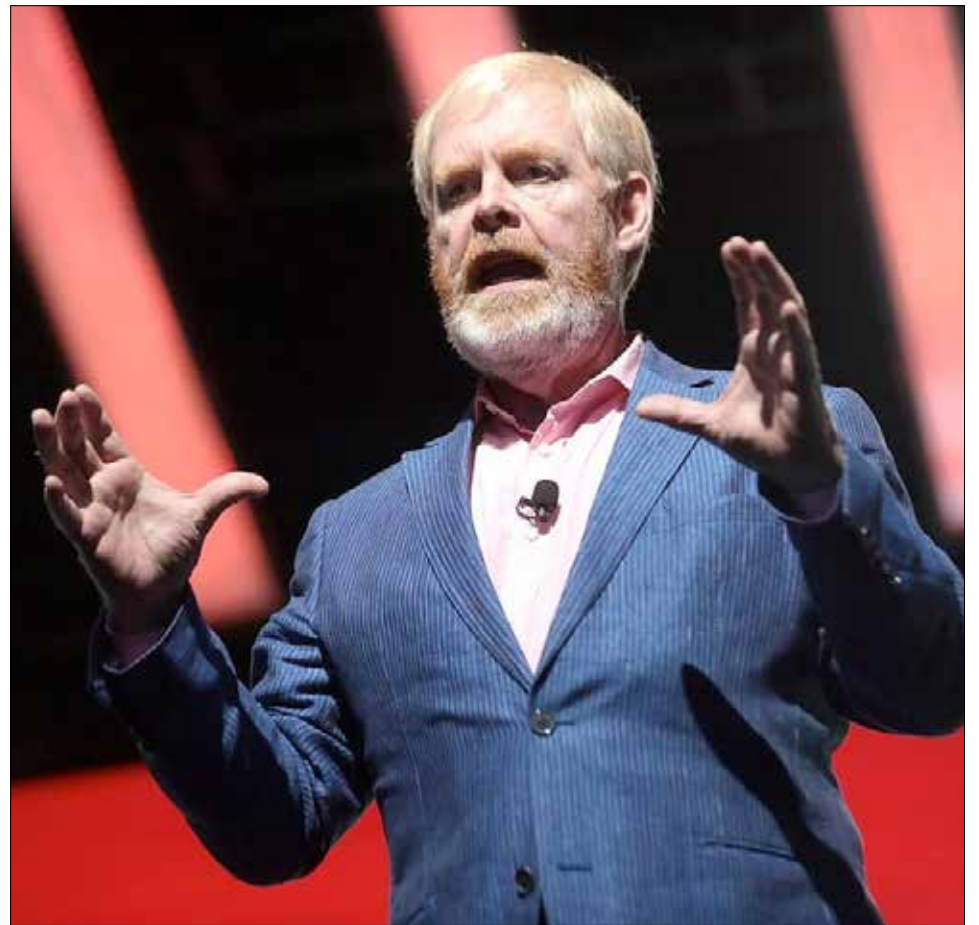
There is indeed a school of orthodox diplomacy in

South Africa that believes better diplomacy will produce better results. If this is so, then the recipe should be shared with those who may fear the Madura treatment to avert, in their countries, the regime change formula evident in Venezuela.

They should also share it with Greenland, who never once called Trump a bad name, but is threatened with a takeover. They should also share it with the 8 countries who voice concern over Greenland - who, at worst, were obsequious in Trump's presence - and now have additional tariffs imposed.

Of course, the appointment or designation of Bozell coincides neatly with the passing of the African Growth and Opportunities Act, AGOA, by the U.S. House of Representatives.

This has obviously compromised President Ramaphosa's hand, because were he to voice the popular sentiment of rejecting Bozell, does he endanger South Africa in the further passage of AGOA to the senate, and then to Trump himself? This is a risk for South Africa. South



Africa could reject Bozell, and Trump could remove South Africa from AGOA. Or they could accept Bozell, and Trump could still remove South Africa from

AGOA. The problem is that trying to anticipate Trump is like trying to control the external environment to limit the damage of an abusive partner. You could look

nice, cook nice, talk nice, play nice. But the trigger is not in the external environment.

Continued on page 9

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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



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Continued from page 8

It's in the character of the bully. Changing the environment is like self blame. Taking responsibility for the behavior and abuse of the bully.

Our memories are short. Before any word of critique or criticism of Trump was uttered by any official of South Africa, South Africa was already under attack, and subjected to punishment, either collectively with the world, or individually as South Africa.

On Trump's first evening in power, we lost all the HIV funds, as well as those flowing through USAID, World Health Organization, etc. After Agri-Forum's visit in February, the remaining aid was lost, including those for the just energy transition, ostensibly because of "bad things happening in South Africa." By the so-called Trump Liberation Day, we had 30% tariffs imposed despite an SA strategy of appeasement with Trump that included the visit by President Cyril Ramaposa to the White House.

The appeasement from South Africa continued, despite the boycott of South

**‘On Trump’s first evening in power, we lost all the HIV funds, as well as those flowing through USAID, World Health Organization,’**

Africa's G20, that started early 2025 with Rubio and Bessent from G20 meetings. It culminated with Trump's boycott, and resulted in South Africa's disinvasion to the USA G20 in 2026.

By September, AGOA itself was in a tenuous situation because supply lines, employment levels, freight logistics, and order books required predictability long before the decision as to whether AGOA would be renewed. Hopefully, some



faith can be maintained as to whether AGOA's passage will be soon and successful. Does this need more appeasement?

For a moment in November 2025, the G20 saw President Ramaposa shift strategy from appeasement to what I call contingency. He took out insurance policies to mitigate the USA boycott.

South Africa raised finance from other sources for health and climate investments. It strengthened relations with its BRICS, Global South, and EU partners.

It used the US absence to push policies that may have been more cautiously put with the USA present, and it stung the US, especially Trump. He stated his anxiety

about de-dollarisation, threatened greater tariffs against BRICS, and is now acting recklessly with NATO and the EU.

So how does a strategy of contingency play out with the appointment of Lee Brent Bozell III, as ambassador to South Africa? I would suggest that President Ramaposa says to President

Trump: I will credential your ambassador if your credential mine. He should then put forward a name whether Mcebisi Jonas, Alastair Ruiters, or whoever. Put the ball in Trump's court, and let him jeopardize the appointment of his own ambassador-designate.

*Ebrahim Rasool is the former ambassador to the USA.*



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OPINION

# Trump says 'massive armada' will strike Iran with 'speed and violence'

US president says Tehran could meet same fate as Venezuela, writes MEE staff.

US President Donald Trump has warned that a "massive armada" is on its way to Iran and would attack with "speed and violence" unless Tehran cuts a deal.

Writing on his Truth Social platform, Trump drew comparisons with an operation that eventually led to the kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, but said the fleet deployed towards Iran was "larger" than the one sent to South America.

"Like with Venezuela, it is, ready, willing, and able to rapidly fulfill its mission, with speed and violence, if necessary," he wrote. "Hopefully Iran will quickly 'Come to the Table' and negotiate a fair and equitable deal - NO NUCLEAR WEAPONS - one that is good for all parties."

Trump warned that "time is running out" for the country, and referenced air strikes carried out against Iranian nuclear sites in June 2025.

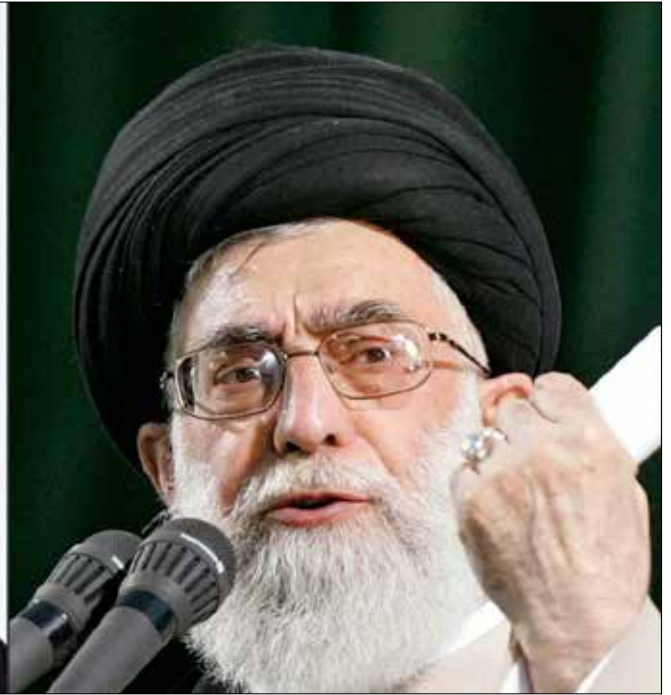
"As I told Iran once before, MAKE A DEAL! They didn't, and there was 'Operation Midnight Hammer,' a major destruction of Iran," he said.

"The next attack will be far worse! Don't make that happen again."

The US has been ramping up tensions with Iran in recent weeks.

Middle East Eye reported on Monday that Trump was considering precision strikes on "high-value" Iranian officials and commanders it deemed responsible for the deaths of protesters during anti-government demonstrations earlier this month.

Meanwhile, Israeli media have reported that Britain, along with Jordan and the United Arab Emirates,



would provide logistical and intelligence support to the US military in the event of an attack.

The UAE foreign ministry insisted on Monday that it will not let its airspace, territory or territorial waters

be used for military action against Iran. Tehran on Wednesday rejected negotiations with the US as long as its "threats" persisted.

While Iran indicated that a channel of communication had been opened with

Washington, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Wednesday that, in order to negotiate, the Americans would have to "cease the threats and excessive demands".

"Conducting diplomacy

while issuing military threats can be neither effective nor useful," he said.

Araghchi added that he had had "no contact" with US envoy Steve Witkoff and that Tehran had "not sought to negotiate".

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## 'Israel engages with SA entities without approval'

The Media Review Network (MRN) has condemned recent engagements by Israeli embassy officials and associated organisations with public hospitals, universities, and traditional authorities in the Eastern Cape.

According to Dr Ahmed Haroon Jazbhay Executive Member, of the Media Review Network, these interactions were conducted without authorization from South Africa's national executive, which holds exclusive constitutional authority, through the DIRCO to manage foreign diplomatic relations.

"Provincial governments, public institutions, and traditional leaders therefore acted outside their mandate by meeting with foreign

state representatives, constituting a breach of diplomatic protocol and undermining South Africa's sovereignty." He said MRN contends that portraying these visits as humanitarian healthcare cooperation is misleading, given Israel's historical role as a key ally of apartheid South Africa and withholding these services from occupied Palestinians.

"Israel provided the apartheid regime with military technology, arms, intelligence assistance, and economic support during its period of global isolation," he said.

MRN asserts that this assistance materially strengthened a system responsible for violence and oppression against black South Africans, and cannot be obscured by present-day public di-

plomacy efforts. "There are racialised or abusive practices in Israel's contemporary conduct.

These include the coercive administration of Depo Provera to Ethiopian Jewish women to sterilize them, as well as extensive destruction of medical infrastructure in Gaza, attacks on hospitals, killings of healthcare workers, and the detention or torture of medical personnel. "We bring to the public's attention that some Israeli physicians publicly endorsed the destruction of Gaza's hospitals in 2023." MRN concludes that Israel's engagements in the Eastern Cape serve a political, not humanitarian, objective and calls for their immediate cessation, accountability for facilitators, and the termination of Israel's diplomatic presence in South Africa.

## World Interfaith Harmony Week: Promoting Inter-religious dialogue

An interfaith approach fosters mutual respect, breaks down barriers and promotes harmony amongst diverse communities," says veteran politician Moulana Rafeek Shah. He said the faith sector plays a significant role in promoting and restoring peace in our democratic South Africa. Tashmica Sharma of the SA Hindu Maha Sabha (SAHMS) agreed with the sentiments of the growing collective movement of interfaith scholars and activists. The Faith Action Collective to End Gender-Based Violence, representing people of the eight major faiths in the country, has teamed up with the SAHMS to put strategy into action at a local level. This

movement is uniting around World Interfaith Harmony Week, an annual United Nations (UN) event observed during the first week of February.

Mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace, which is why the UN has established World Interfaith Harmony Week as a way to promote harmony between all people, regardless of their faith. "As the faith movement, individually and collectively, we honour this week to highlight shared values in our bleeding world of violence, fear, insecurity and anxiety," says Daniela Gennrich, coordinator of We Will Speak Out SA (WWSO-

SA), the secretariat of the Faith Action Collective.

The overall goals of Interfaith Week are:

- to celebrate religious diversity and shared values,
- to encourage cooperation and understanding between different faiths, and
- to build stronger, more integrated and neighbourly communities.

"Interfaith collaboration and action harnesses the energy of significant social and moral networks to uncover the structural and cultural drivers of gender-based violence. It is important to call out patriarchal narratives in our own communities and institutions," says Sharma.

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OPINION

# Israeli plans for Rafah ‘camp’ in Gaza slammed as continuation of genocide

*Facial recognition systems at Rafah crossing suggests the ceasefire is less about peace and more about cementing Israeli control, writes Mohammad Mansour and News Agencies*

While diplomatic circles welcome the recovery of the last Israeli captive's remains in Gaza and the imminent partial reopening of the enclave's Rafah border crossing with Egypt, a quieter, darker reality is taking shape on the ground.

According to comments by retired Israeli General Amir Avivi, who still advises the military, Israel has cleared land in Rafah, an area in the southern Gaza Strip that it had already flattened in more than two years of its genocidal war, to construct an enormous facility to entrench its military control and presence in Gaza for the long term.

Speaking to the Reuters

news agency on Tuesday, Avivi described the project as a “big, organised camp” capable of holding hundreds of thousands of people, stating it would be equipped with “ID checks, including facial recognition”, to track every Palestinian entering or leaving.

Corroborating Avivi's claims, exclusive analysis by Al Jazeera's Digital Investigations Team confirms that ground preparations for this project are already well under way.

Satellite imagery captured from December 2 through Monday reveals extensive clearing operations in western Rafah. The analysis identifies an area of about 1.3sq km (half a square mile) that has undergone systematic levelling.

According to the investigation, the operations went beyond mere debris removal and involved the flattening of land previously devastated by Israeli air strikes. The cleared zone is located

adjacent to two Israeli military posts, suggesting the new camp will be under direct and immediate military supervision. The satellite evidence aligns with reports that the facility is to act as a controlled “holding pen” rather than a humanitarian shelter.

To analysts in Gaza, no humanitarian intent is behind this projected high-tech infrastructure, which they say is in fact a trap for Palestinians. “What they are building is, in reality, a human-sorting mechanism reminiscent of Nazi-era selection points,” Wissam Afifa, a Gaza-based political analyst, told Al Jazeera. “It is a tool for racial filtering and a continuation of the genocide by other means.”

The reopening of the Rafah crossing, tentatively scheduled for Thursday, according to The Jerusalem Post, comes with strict Israeli conditions. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has insisted on full “security control”. For Palestinians hoping to

return to Gaza, this means submitting to what Afifa describes as “human sorting stations”.

“This mechanism is designed to deter return,” Afifa said. “Palestinians will face interrogation, humiliation and the risk of arrest at these Israeli-run checkpoints just to go home.”

By leveraging facial recognition technology confirmed by Avivi, Israel is creating a high-risk ordeal for returnees, he said. Afifa argued it will force many Palestinians to choose exile over the risk of the “sorting station”, serving Israel's longstanding goal of depopulating the Strip.

The Rafah camp is just one piece of a larger puzzle. Israel in effect occupies all of Gaza with a physical military presence in 58 percent of the Gaza Strip. Its forces directly occupy an area within the “yellow line”, a self-proclaimed Israeli military buffer zone established by an October ceasefire.



“We are witnessing the re-engineering of Gaza's geography and demography,” Afifa said. “About 70 percent of the Strip is now under direct Israeli military management.”

This assessment of a permanent foothold is reinforced by Netanyahu's own remarks to the Knesset on Monday. By declaring that “the next phase is demilitarisation”,

or disarming Hamas, rather than reconstruction, Netanyahu signalled that the military occupation has no end date.

“The talk of ‘reconstruction’ starting in Rafah under Israeli security specifications suggests they are building a permanent security infrastructure, not a sovereign Palestinian state,” Afifa added.



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# SA Coal Exports to Israel - Profit before Principle?



By Iqbal Jassat

**A** matter of huge concern for Palestinian solidarity movements in South Africa is the unresolved and extremely troublesome issue of coal exports to Israel.

For many, including trade unions and progressive forces, until a halt is placed on fuelling Israel's war on Palestinians, the elephant in the room will remain South Africa's economic lifeline to the Zionist regime. And the general consensus will be that South Africa's proclaimed opposition to Israeli apartheid and genocide, "collapses the moment profit is placed above principle".

The reality of the current status quo is in conflict with the fact that while the government correctly argues genocide at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), South African exports continue to feed the Israeli economy.

Coal, diamonds and strategic commodities flow uninterrupted, sustaining an occupation and war economy that Pretoria publicly con-

demns. This is not policy incoherence. It is deliberate political theatre masking economic collaboration.

Trade figures drawn from customs data, shipping records and international trade monitoring show that South Africa has quietly deepened its role as a strategic supplier to Israel since late 2024. When Colombia cut coal exports in protest against Israel's assault on Gaza, South African producers stepped in. By 2025, South Africa was supplying more than half of Israel's thermal coal needs, a lifeline for electricity generation during the regime's genocide in Gaza and ethnic-cleansing in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

This reality is absent from official speeches. It is reduced to footnotes in parliamentary replies. Instead, government officials invoke World Trade Organization technicalities to justify inaction, insulating private corporations, ports and logistics operators from accountability.

The message is clear. Moral outrage is acceptable so long as it does not interrupt revenue streams. Predictably, a biased counter narrative will come from Zionist aligned lobby groups and corporate apologists. Sanctions, they will argue, will cost South Africa revenue and jobs. This argument is neither new nor honest. Market analysts inform us South Africa has



already demonstrated that export markets are not fixed. They remind us that when faced with punitive tariffs under the Trump administration, exporters adapted by diversifying markets and re-routing supply chains. Coal, minerals and agricultural products found alternative buyers.

Did the economy collapse? No.

Surely the same mitigation logic applies here. Instead of aiding the Zionist regime's destructive war against Palestinians, alternative economic pursuits in line with

South Africa's principled position at the ICJ are not out of bounds. They do exist. Coal destined for Israel can be redirected to energy hungry markets across Asia, Africa and parts of Europe.

Indeed, diamonds already circulate through global hubs with ease, and agricultural exports are inherently flexible. The idea that Israel is an irreplaceable market is a manufactured myth designed to paralyse political will.

Investigative reports to establish who truly benefits from trade with Israel will

have no difficulty to identify mining companies, commodity traders, shipping intermediaries and port authorities.

Opponents of South Africa's genocide case such as the Democratic Alliance (DA) will obviously remain muted. To expect them to lift the lid on corporations profiting from Israel's energy insecurity, is foolish. Their moral outrage lacks principle. Selective silence cannot be condoned.

South Africa knows this script. Apartheid did not end because it was debated "po-

litenly" behind closed doors. It ended because sanctions made the system economically unsustainable. Capital withdrew. Trade routes closed. Labour movements applied pressure where governments hesitated. You cannot prosecute apartheid abroad while sustaining it through trade at home. Claims of unavoidable revenue loss are excuses, not analysis. Markets can be diversified. What cannot be mitigated is moral failure.

Indeed, to pretend otherwise makes a mockery of South Africa's groundbreaking legal case.

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## DELICIOUS RECIPES

# Masala Fish fry

By Bibi Ayesha Kadwa  
Credit: Sunnyside Classics (Facebook)



### Ingredients

- 4 to 5 cups whole dry red Chillie
- 1 cup peeled whole garlic
- 2 cups fresh coconut
- 2 cups Curry leaves
- 1 cup or more lemon juice
- 1 cup oil
- 2 tbsp sesame seeds
- 2 tbsp poppy seeds
- Quarter cup salt
- 3 tbsp tumeric
- 1 cup dhana jeeraa
- Grind well in blender
- Adjust salt accordingly

### Method

- Use fish of your choice.
- Wash fish slices properly making sure

there are no scales left on the skin.

- Clean out any blood or veins .
- Pat it dry.
- Marinate with Fish masala.
- Sprinkle cake flour on both sides just before frying the fish.
- Place oil in a pan or pot, enough to just almost cover the fish.
- Shallow fry, heat the oil well.
- Place the fish slices in the oil.
- Dont ever overcrowd the pan when frying fish.
- Allow the fish to fry nicely for a few minutes on one side.
- Then turn over and fry the other side
- If the fish slices are thick turn again once more.
- Dont over cook the fish as it will dry out. Remove fish and place on a rack for the oil to drain.

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# Voices of the Voiceless: Kashmir Solidarity Day

February 5th marks Kashmir Solidarity Day to protest against India's Occupation of Kashmir – and also to protest against the revocation of the autonomous status of the Muslim-majority region, writes **Muhammad Zakria**.

**J**ust like the dispute in Israeli-Occupied Palestine, the Indian-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK) dispute spans over seven decades – and in both these Muslim-majority regions, the occupation forces continue to inflict atrocities without meaningful intervention by the international community.

While the entire Muslim world is highly disturbed and indignant over what Israel is doing in Palestine, the situation is no different in Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJK).

We also see India forcibly changing the demography and geography of IOJK

through illegal actions like the revocation of Article 370 and 35a of the Indian Constitution, which gave a very limited autonomy to IOJK under the Indian occupation. Under these provisions, IOJK had a special status and no non-Kashmiri person, i.e. any Indian national, could have property or get jobs in the State. However, India shamelessly abolished it to invite Indian nationals to populate the IOJK region.

Their objective is to occupy its lands in order to change its demographic and geographic profile. This Indian move is completely illegal in the backdrop of UN Resolutions on Kashmir.

As India revoked Article 370 on 5 August 2019, the decision was internationally condemned and even challenged in Indian courts of law. However, on 11 December 2023, the Indian Supreme Court endorsed the Indian Government's decision of 5 August 2019 to revoke Article 370, making it convenient for the Indi-

an government to alter the Islamic profile of IOJK and gradually make it a Hindu majority area.

The decision of the Indian Court was not unexpected: the BJP, which is hell-bent on obliterating Muslim identity and history from India, notorious for using its judiciary to get IS anti-Muslim verdicts, such as in the case against the demolition of the historic Babri mosque, Hindu atrocities in Gujarat and many sensitive matters related to Islamic jurisprudence.

The BJP government, which is the political face of the Hindu extremist organisation RSS, has been particularly uncomfortable with the Muslim majority IOJK, which has never accepted the Indian occupation and is continuously campaigning for the plebiscite to determine its political future as mandated by the UNO.

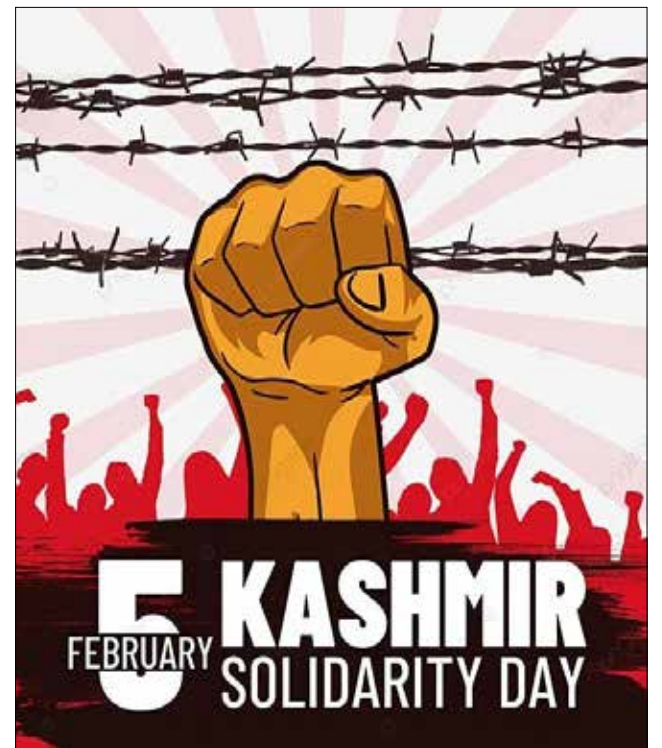
Therefore, now, by abrogating Article 370, India has started the disgusting process of altering the demo-

graphic profile of the State from a Muslim majority to a Hindu-dominated area with the Kashmiri lands stolen and jobs taken by the Hindus and non-Kashmiris from India.

This Indian strategy is similar to Israeli policies in occupied Palestine. India is taking advantage of the fact that today's world is almost completely inactive on the plight of Muslims, however India is living in a fool's paradise - the people of Kashmir and the world will never accept Kashmir as part of India.

The history of the Kashmir Freedom Movement tells us that no matter what, Kashmiris have never accepted the Indian occupation of their lands. History also indicates that Jammu and Kashmir were never and will never be a part of India.

Just like in Palestine, the Kashmir freedom movement is continuing and will continue with even stronger force until the complete end of the Indian occupation,



and all Kashmiris have the right to self-determination. All that is needed is a sustained campaign against the Indian and Israeli oppression of Muslims and international efforts to take collective measures against these rogue states.

The history of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa exemplifies that only international pressure can force both Israel and India to stop their atrocities and give the Palestin-

ians and the Kashmiris their due rights. South Africa has already taken the lead in taking legal action against Israel at the ICJ. A similar action IS needed in the case against India.

It is therefore important that as we express our support and solidarity with the struggling people of IOJK, we also ask our government to raise its voice in favour of Kashmiris and force India to implement UN Resolutions on Kashmir.



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**WE STAND WITH THE**  
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The people of Kashmir have endured decades of oppression, yet their spirit remains unbroken. Every voice silenced only strengthens the call for justice, every hardship faced only deepens the resolve for freedom. Oppression cannot extinguish dignity, nor can it erase the right to self-determination. Standing in solidarity means refusing to look away, amplifying their struggle, and demanding peace, equality, and justice for Kashmir.

**STAND UNITED AGAINST APARTHIED & INJUSTICE**

FEATURE

# Camping with Ramadan on my mind

*Al-Qalam senior journalist Ismail Suder went on a solo beach camping trip and felt the connection with the Almighty amidst the crashing waves.*

Isn't it marvelous what a little camping getaway can do for the soul? Desperate to shed off life's constant pressures, I took off in my little Suzuki Jimny for a one-night trip towards Salt Rock on the KZN North Coast.

As I drove off, leaving behind the smog-filled city of Durban, I could already feel the freshness of air as I sped past lush-green sugar fields.

With Ramadan less than a month away, I thought what better way to ease into the spiritual month with a bit of Zikr right in front of the ocean, at the Salt Rock Camping & Caravan Park, just 43km from Durban.

It was a warm balmy Sunday and I found the campground only half full as most of the holidaymakers who had descended on the Ballito area for the "Dezemba" holidays, had already left for home.

The tidal pool directly in front of my campsite was inviting and the roar of the sea was calming, especially to see gigantic waves crash onto the monstrous jagged rocks.

I deployed the Jimny's new 180 deg awning at my designated spot number 09, pulled up a chair and cast my eyes beyond the waves, marveling at Allah's magnanimity.

Salty air makes me hungry, so I heated up my little steak & mushroom pizza and listened to the sounds of the sea. With my tummy happy, it was time for some quiet Zikr. Have you ever tried making Zikr while listening to the rhythmic roar of the ocean? Believe me, the feeling is euphoric, like you can really feel the direct connection with your Lord.

As the sun began to set, it was time to supplicate to the Almighty for Maghrib and Esha. Fellow campers turned to look, some seemed confused while others stared out of curiosity. But I noticed one other thing – the loud banter and music at their camp spots were distinctly lowered, perhaps out



of respect, although I can't say for certain.

As the sun set over the horizon, the campsite's industrial beam lights came on and brightly lit up the waves in a blaze of silvery grey and white. It was pure delight to watch this magnificent sound and light show of the ocean. At around 10pm, when most of the campers

had snuck into their tents or caravans for an early night, I lit up my one-man braai and relished the three chops and two sausages that I brought along in my cooler bag.

This was washed down with a cup of steaming coffee and a moist carrot cake that I purchased at the last minute from Pastry Chef in North Beach. As the night wore

on, I could hear the sounds of night birds as it fluttered over the grainy shoreline.

Not long afterwards, and still dizzy from my delicious supper, I climbed the ladder to my rooftop tent to settle in for the night.

With the waves still crashing loudly nearby, I was almost immediately lulled

into sleep. I woke up at Fajr to the squalls of the seagulls, and another beautiful dawn.

On my drive home, I promised that I would do this often, if Allah wills. The tension on my shoulders had already eased and I was ready to feel the warm and comforting embrace of Ramadan. Marhaba ya Ramadan, Marhaba!

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