

# Al - Qalam

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aid flotilla to set  
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'We need a credible  
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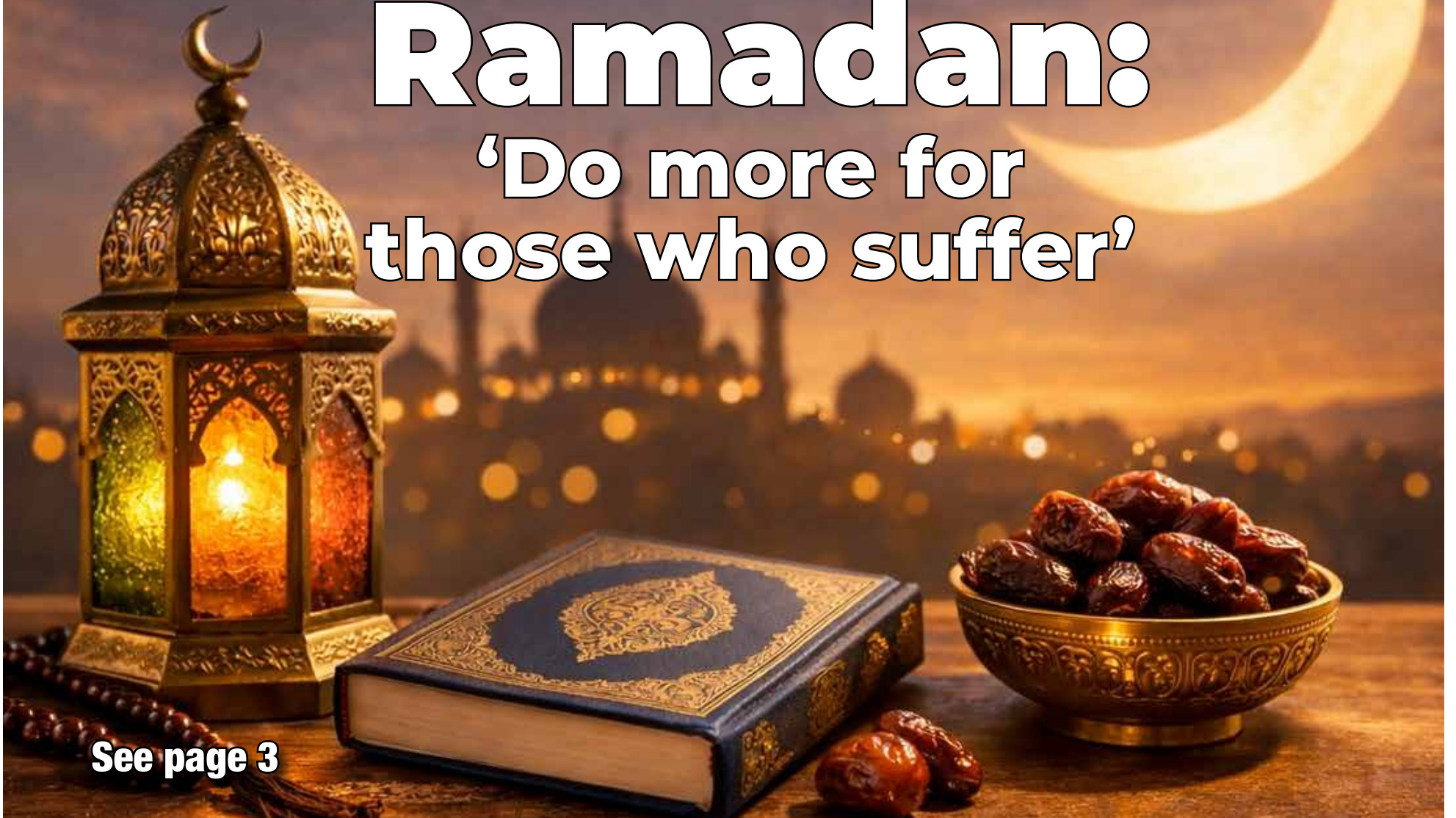
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LOCAL NEWS

# Activists announce new, bigger aid flotilla to set sail for Gaza in March

A Johannesburg meeting of the next Global Sumud Flotilla has decided to mobilise 100 boats and 1000 activists to break the siege of Gaza, writes **Stephen Quillen and News Agencies.**

Organisers of a Gaza-bound aid flotilla that Israel seized at sea last year say they are planning a new, larger mission next month. The Global Sumud Flotilla has announced that it will sail more than 100 boats carrying up to 1,000 activists, including medics and war crimes investigators, to Gaza in March.

Meeting at the foundation of late South African leader Nelson Mandela in Johannesburg, the campaigners described the undertaking as the largest-ever, civilian-led mobilisation against Israel's actions in Gaza.

"It is a cause ... for those that want to rise and stand for justice and dignity for all," said Mandela's grand-

son Mandla Mandela, who was among activists arrested by Israel during last year's voyage.

The flotilla will be supported by a land convoy across nearby Arab countries, expected to attract thousands more backers, Mandela added.

Last October, Israel's military intercepted some 40 boats from the Global Sumud Flotilla as they carried aid to blockaded Gaza, arresting more than 450 participants, including Mandela, Swedish campaigner Greta Thunberg and European Parliament member Rima Hassan. Several detainees alleged physical and psychological abuse while in Israeli custody.

Israeli officials had denounced that flotilla and earlier smaller-scale efforts to sail aid into Gaza as publicity stunts. Flotilla organisers said they were acting to break Israel's "illegal" siege of the enclave and accused Israel's seizure of their ves-

**‘It is a cause ... for those that want to rise and stand for justice and dignity for all,**



sels of violating international maritime law.

Israel has heavily restricted supplies of aid since it launched a genocidal war against Palestinians in Gaza, causing famine-like

conditions in the enclave, according to activists and humanitarians. Some aid has reached the enclave since a "ceasefire" started in October, but the UN says it falls far short of what is needed to meet urgent needs. While

the flotilla activists anticipate Israel will again try to stop their passage, they say international law is on their side, and their journey will bring attention to the plight of Palestinians in Gaza. "We may not have reached Gaza

physically [but] we have reached ... the people in Gaza," said one of the activists, Susan Abdallah. "They know that we care, that we will not stop at anything until we actually break the siege." - *Al Jazeera*

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**MORAL FOODS MANAGEMENT**

# 'In a world scarred by war and strife, let's keep the light of Ramadan burning'



Ramadan is a sacred invitation to transform sorrow into moral courage and spiritual resolve, writes Imam Dr Rashied Omar

Ramadan 2026 arrives within a deeply troubling global context. From the looming threat of an imperial war against Iran to the devastating civil war in Sudan, from the repeated violations of the fragile Gaza 'ceasefire' to the prospect of deepening suffering as the sacred month unfolds, the Muslim conscience is burdened with profound anguish and moral urgency.

Across continents, calls

for protest and solidarity rise like a restless chorus, reminding us that this Ramadan dawns amid acute human vulnerability and political turmoil. Such a precarious global moment threatens to defile the devotion, compassion, and serenity that are the hallmarks of this sacred month.

In the face of relentless images of destruction and grief, it would be easy to surrender to despair. Yet the spiritual wisdom of Ramadan calls us in the opposite direction. Notwithstanding the despondency that surrounds us, conscientious believers are summoned to resist fear, refuse hopelessness, and keep alive the lamp of hope within their communities.

Ramadan is not merely a retreat from the world's suffering; it is a sacred invitation to transform sorrow into moral courage and spiritual resolve.

Hunger and thirst are not ends in themselves; they are pathways toward empathy.

Through fasting, the spiritual seeker learns to feel, if only faintly, the vulnerability of the poor, the displaced, and the marginalized.

In a world scarred by war, occupation, and structural injustice, this cultivated empathy must move beyond sentiment into meaningful action. We are therefore called to adorn our fasts with benevolence.

Ramadan generosity cannot remain confined to ritual charity alone; it must blossom into sincere and active solidarity with those who suffer. Supporting humanitarian relief, amplifying truthful witness, and participating in nonviolent movements for justice are all expressions of a living fast.

Our hope for a more compassionate and just world must be embodied in courageous engagement: standing alongside civil society activists, joining campaigns that resist warmongering and injustice, and bearing moral witness in public spaces,



including peaceful protest where conscience demands it. As we enter Ramadan 2026, let us recommit ourselves to the sacred work of peace and justice. Let our masajid become sanctuaries of prayer and centres of compassionate action for justice. Let our charity grow deeper, our solidarity wider, and our hope more steadfast.

Let us teach our children that faith is not passive resignation but courageous trust in Allah, expressed through service to humanity.

Above all, let us keep the lamp of hope burning, within our hearts, our homes, and our communities. For Ramadan is, and has always been, a reminder that even in the

darkest nights, the light of divine mercy continues to shine.

May this blessed month renew our spirits, strengthen our resolve, and guide us toward becoming bearers of compassion, justice, and peace in a wounded world.

Allahumma Amin.



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LOCAL NEWS

# Sabra Desai earns her doctorate at 75 – ‘I still have work to do...’

By Azra Hoosen

When Sabra Desai – formerly of Port Shepstone – first enrolled for her PhD in 1989, she could not have imagined it would take 36 years to complete.

Life intervened and the PhD was put on hold, however, in 2025 – at the ripe age of 75 – she returned to that unfinished chapter and completed her doctorate.

Desai who permanently settled in Canada, has worked at the intersection of social justice, education and community healing long before the title “Dr” preceded her name.

“It’s never too late. Believe in yourself, have faith and take that first step – you never know where it might lead,” she advised.

For over 30 years, Desai has served as a social worker, psychotherapist, educator and advocate – working with vulnerable youth, supporting survivors of family violence

and pushing institutions to be more just and humane.

Born in Port Shepstone, KwaZulu-Natal, Desai grew up during apartheid in what she describes as a “loving, values-driven home.” Her parents, Ahmed M.K. Desai and Ayesha Rawat, though not wealthy, made sure their children never felt deprived. “My parents were resilient, resourceful and deeply committed to education. They ensured we never experienced ourselves as poor, teaching us dignity, hard work and trust in Allah’s provision,” she said.

She said her family in KZN is proud of her achievements, and if Allah wills, she would possibly return to South Africa.

“I am from a family of six children, four brothers and two sisters. Currently, with our eldest brother Marhoom Mohammed Iqbal deceased in 1994, we are three brothers, Yousuf, a surgeon; Suleman a businessman, Moosa a physician, and our youngest sister Fathima, also

a business woman.”

Her parents modelled a simple, compassionate Islam, rooted in the five pillars, lived as a way of life, never as a burden. As a young girl, Desai was exposed to stories about Nelson Mandela, Fatima Meer and Ahmed Kathrada. “This shaped my interest in psychology and sociology, grounding it in an enduring curiosity about human behaviour, resilience and the social conditions that shape our lives,” she said.

Desai left South Africa in 1970, believing freedom could only be realised elsewhere. Having settled in Canada, however, she discovered a different landscape of injustice. “Experiencing systemic racism in both contexts sharpened my commitment to social justice education and shaped my scholarly path,” she said.

Her career unfolded across universities and community spaces. While she completed her comprehensive doctoral exams in psychology, Desai postponed her disser-

tation for many years, earning the designation ABD. During that time, she built a long-standing career as a social worker, psychotherapist and educator.

She taught at York University, Toronto Metropolitan University and Humber Polytechnic, focusing on equity, human rights and access to postsecondary education, particularly for “marginalised and disengaged youth.” She was also involved in developing institutional initiatives related to human rights, Indigenous engagement and mental health capacity building.

A published author and poet, Desai has consistently worked to connect theory with practice. She seeks to “bridge academic inquiry with real-world impact,” emphasising empowerment, dignity and community healing.

In 2025, Desai completed her PhD in Social Justice Education at the University of Toronto. She described this achievement as “clarifying



her purpose.”

“My understanding of success and achievement has shifted from earning the degree itself to the impact I can now work toward. My definitions of success, achievement, and purpose continue to evolve as I begin this next phase,” she said.

Her academic journey was not without struggle, facing moments of doubt, exhaustion and delay. “My faith was a quiet but constant source of strength. There were times when circumstances were beyond my control, and others when my own choices led to thoughts of giving up,” she said.

Turning to Allah through

surrender, istikhara and prayer sustained her. Desai drew inspiration from Surah Al’Alaq and the reminder that “Allah raises those who have faith and knowledge in rank” (58:11).

“While I could not always change my situation, I could choose how to live through it,” she added.

Looking back, she describes the PhD as “both a test of the nafs and a deeply fulfilling experience.” While based in Canada, Desai remains committed to improving life outcomes for children and youth. She hopes her research will contribute to reforms grounded in dignity, belonging and empowerment.



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# IMASA launches Health Hub operated by volunteer doctors in Gauteng

By Al-Qalam Reporter

The Islamic Medical Association of South Africa (IMASA) has launched an innovative medical service in Parktown, Johannesburg, where patients can be assessed by volunteer doctors who will provide treatment options – including for those who do not have the means.

The Hub – as it is called – is not a fully operational hospital or free walk-in medical centre. Instead, it is a facility that operates on a referral basis by doctors and is designed to complement existing healthcare services rather than replace them.

According to the IMASA Executive team, the focus is on areas where patients experience the greatest delays, particularly specialist consultations, diagnostic investigations and continuity of treatment for chronic conditions.

Dr Ahmed Vachiat, Health Hub Coordinator, told *Al-Qalam* that the initiative grew out of patterns doctors

were already seeing in their practices. “Many patients don’t necessarily need hospital admission, but they do need timely assessment, specialist input and coordinated support. The Hub is about bridging those gaps,” he said.

How does it work? Patients are referred by doctors to the Health Hub facility for specific assessments or investigations. Referrals may come from community clinics, NGOs, healthcare professionals, faith-based organisations or through a structured self-referral process.

The healthcare team examines eligibility. Once deemed eligible, assessments and certain services are provided on-site. However, the Hub does not assume long-term responsibility for patient care. After services are rendered, patients are referred back to their primary healthcare providers for ongoing management.

With regards to services offered, the property for the Hub has only recently been secured and facilities are still

being developed. In its early phase, radiology and chemical pathology services are being planned. Specialist assessments and allied healthcare services, such as dietetics and psychology, will also be available.

For example, a cancer patient may require radiological staging, cardiology clearance before chemotherapy, or support from allied healthcare professionals during treatment. While these services exist in the public healthcare system, access can be significantly delayed. The Hub aims to provide these services to eligible patients in a timely manner.

However, IMASA stresses that the Hub is not primarily responsible for diagnosing or treating complex diseases. Its role is to complement and support care already being provided elsewhere. Services at the Hub are offered at reduced cost through volunteer healthcare practitioners. For patients who cannot afford treatment, subsidised or charitable care will be provided based on clear crite-

ria, including financial need, medical urgency and lack of reasonable access to alternative services.

Funding for subsidised care comes from donations to the Hub, which also supports structural and administrative costs. Dr Shoyab Wadee, IMASA Gauteng Treasurer, told *Al-Qalam* that sustainability has been a central consideration from the outset. IMASA has indicated that patient dignity, fairness and transparency guide the allocation of charitable funding, with structured assessment processes and governance oversight in place.

One of the future goals of the Hub is to introduce weekly dialysis sessions for a limited number of patients who are unable to access public-sector dialysis. Patient eligibility will be stringently assessed by a medical team led by nephrologists. Because dialysis is a costly and resource-intensive treatment, this service will be introduced gradually, with limited capacity expanding over time as funding allows.



Subsidies will be available and patients unable to afford treatment will be supported based on financial assessment and medical need. IMASA emphasises that the Health Hub is not intended to compete with public healthcare services, but rather to support patients in navigating them more effectively. The initiative is built on volunteerism and professional collaboration. Several specialists are contributing their services within defined scopes of practice.

Dr Vachiat reiterated that continuity of care remains clear. “Patients are never discharged into a vacuum. On-

going responsibility remains with their primary healthcare providers,” he said. While still in development, the Parktown Health Hub represents IMASA’s attempt to respond to growing healthcare strain with a structured, referral-based model focused on specialist access, diagnostics and continuity of care.

Its long-term impact will depend on sustainable funding, practitioner capacity and the evolving needs of the communities it aims to serve. While IMASA is a faith-based organisation, the Hub is open to all patients regardless of faith, ethnicity or background.

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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.

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**A response to the misdiagnosis of the Iranian crisis**

**D**r. Rashied Omar's recent critique of the Islamic Republic of Iran, while framed through "peace studies," suffers from a disqualifying omission: The systematic, illegal economic warfare waged against the Iranian people. To demand "structural reform" without acknowledging the structural asphyxiation caused by Western sanctions is a clinical misdiagnosis that only serves those seeking Iran's total collapse.

**The Invisible Violence**

While critics condemn "lethal repression," they remain silent on the "silent killing" occurring in Iranian hospitals. Comprehensive sanctions targeting the financial and oil sectors have created a blockade preventing the

import of life-saving medicines for cancer and rare diseases. The skyrocketing prices of basic goods and currency volatility are intended outcomes of a "Maximum Pressure" campaign designed to immiserate 90 million citizens. To demand "irreversible reforms" while a state's lifeblood is drained by a global financial blockade is not a call for justice, it is a call for total surrender.

**The Instrumentalization of Dissent**

In a sanctioned environment, every internal grievance becomes a vector for foreign exploitation. The Iranian government is in a perpetual "full-scale war" against cyber-sabotage, information operations, and the arming of fringe elements by foreign ad-

versaries. Labelling the maintenance of order as "repression" while ignoring coordinated attacks by foreign-backed provocateurs betrays the principle of 'adl (justice). Justice requires viewing Iran as a sovereign nation under siege, preserving its independence against an order that treats its resistance as a crime.

**The Reality of Security and Civil Society**

Internal security policies are defensive responses to state subversion. They are anchored in Amanah, the sacred obligation to protect citizens from foreign-engineered fragmentation. When protests escalate to the killing of security personnel and the burning of buildings, they become a paramilitary threat. State responses, in-



cluding internet restrictions, are calculated "securitization" measures to break the command structures of external agitators.

**A Moral Contradiction**

Sanctions destroy the middle class, the foundation of

stable civic space, forcing a population into survival mode where "moral clarity" is a luxury.

Freedom for Iran is not being "postponed" by a regime, it is being stolen by an international order refusing to allow Iran to exist on

its own terms. Meaningful change can only emerge once the external knee is removed from the throat of the Iranian economy, allowing the people to determine their own destiny free from the weight of a global blockade.

M. Murshid Obaray

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# Corruption crisis erodes democracy

*Below is an extract from a new book, Promises and Peril- the South African Crisis by Al-Qalam editor, Imraan Buccus*

**M**any countries followed a similar trajectory after independence from colonialism, and we should have been prepared for the risks that corruption could become an overwhelming structural crisis. After all, while in exile many leaders in the ANC had witnessed how corruption had corroded social hopes in other African countries. Corruption is not an African pathology. It is a global and often structural problem, deeply connected to the global crisis of democracy and the rise of neoliberalism. In countries as different as Brazil, India, and the United States, we see similar patterns: state capture by elites, the monetisation of political access, and the subordination of the public good to

private gain.

Yet what is particularly shocking and painful about the crisis of corruption in South Africa is the depth of the betrayal. A struggle waged in the name of justice and equality has given rise to a political order that reproduces the very inequalities it sought to undo and often protects them with violence.

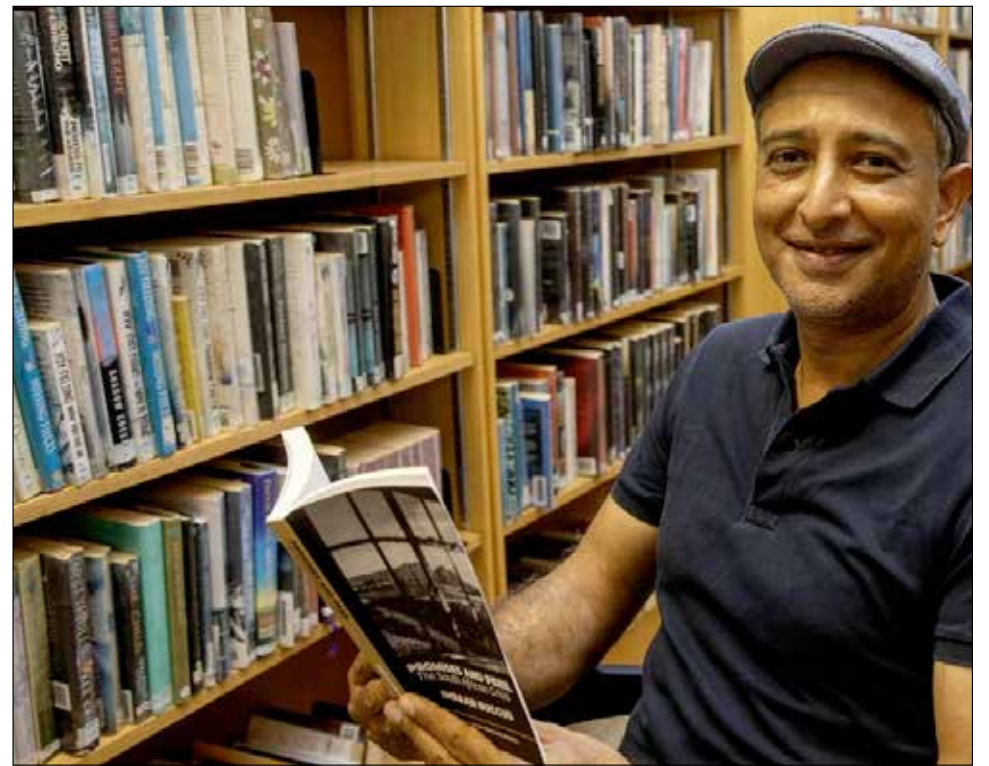
The democratic institutions established after 1994 have not been dismantled, but they have been politicised, weakened, and often penetrated or even captured by criminal networks. As the Zondo Commission into state capture revealed in painstaking detail, this process of degradation was not incidental. It was planned, coordinated, and executed at the highest levels.

The growing convergence between political corruption and violent crime is

particularly alarming. In parts of the country, with KwaZulu-Natal being the most notorious, the political system has become entangled with networks involved in the construction mafias, political assassinations, and protection rackets.

The state is no longer simply corrupt; in places, it is criminal. Tenderpreneurship — the use of political connections to secure state contracts — has flourished in this environment. Figures such as Shauwn Mkhize, whose wealth derives from lucrative municipal contracts, illustrate how blurred the lines have become between business, politics, celebrity, and gangsterism. Assassinations of rivals in the construction industry and the use of intimidation to secure contracts are often quietly tolerated or ignored.

The cumulative result is a system in which public



resources are militarised.

The awarding of a contract can trigger a killing. A councilor appointment can incite a gang war. A protest can provoke a police assassination. Violence

becomes the means through which political and economic power is maintained. This is not merely state failure.

It is the emergence of a new kind of state — one

that kills not in the name of ideology, but in defence of extraction, and in which the line between governance and gangsterism is no longer clear.

*Continued on page 8*

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## BOOK REVIEW

Continued from page 7

Corruption has become one of the dominant lenses through which South African political life is understood. Yet this discourse is often shaped by a narrow set of voices - NGOs, think tanks, and donor-funded institutions. But too often their framing of corruption has been technocratic and depoliticised, focused on transparency and accountability in the abstract while avoiding deeper questions of inequality, power, and political economy. The systemic dimensions of corruption; including the role of neoliberalism, outsourcing, and elite patronage networks, are sidelined in favour of compliance frameworks and superficial metrics.

Moreover, some of the leading figures in this network speak and write in ways that show a tin ear when it comes to race. This has limited the capacity of anti-corruption discourse to resonate widely. Many of the NGOs operating in this space are themselves reliant on international donors whose agendas are

shaped by geopolitical priorities rather than grassroots realities. The result is a language of moral condemnation which is often racialized, rather than popular and progressive political mobilisation.

It struggles to confront the structural conditions in which corruption thrives and rarely accounts for the complicity of elite private actors, from multinational corporations to domestic capital, in sustaining systems of extraction and inequality. Nor does it engage seriously with how anti-corruption rhetoric can be weaponised to delegitimise state-led transformation or protect the status quo.

If South Africa is to build an effective and enduring response to corruption, it cannot rely solely on elite NGOs or donor-driven campaigns. What is required is a genuinely popular and democratic project that confronts the social and economic roots of corruption and reimagines the state as a vehicle for collective freedom.

Corruption is inseparable

from a broader crisis of legitimacy. When citizens see politicians enriching themselves while services collapse, faith is lost not only in political parties but in the idea of democratic politics itself.

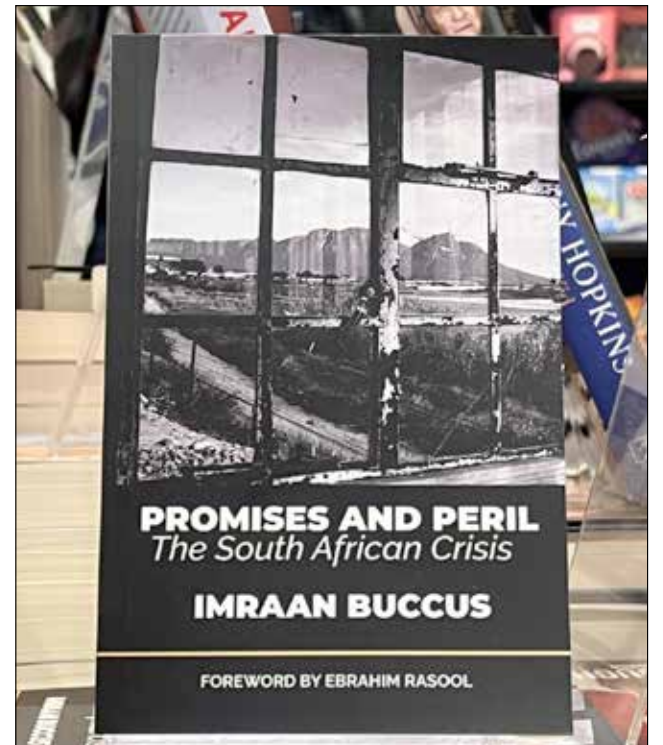
This vacuum is dangerous. It creates space for authoritarianism and for demagogues who promise to clean up corruption while entrenching their own patronage networks. Cynicism, disillusionment, and despair deepen, particularly among the youth. The fact that the majority of South Africans no longer bother to vote is a devastating indictment of the conduct of the political class over the past three decades.

At the same time, corruption is embedded in the everyday functioning of the state. Honest officials work in systems where it is often impossible to complete even basic tasks without navigating demands for bribes or favours. Tenders are manipulated to benefit the connected rather than the competent. The looting of public resources is not

marginal; it has become a defining feature of the political economy.

Yet this is not the whole story. Across the country, honest public servants continue to do their jobs under extremely difficult conditions. Investigative journalists, whistleblowers, judges, and prosecutors have resisted intimidation. Above all, courageous grassroots activists have stood firm in the face of threats, violence, and assassination. Movements that expose corruption in housing allocation, land deals, or procurement have paid a heavy price. This violence is not random. It follows the fault lines of contestation: over land, housing, resources, and political office. It punishes exposure and rewards silence. It is not the residue of a violent past. It is the architecture of the present.

South Africa's crisis of corruption must therefore be understood not as a moral failure of individuals, but as a structural crisis of the post-apartheid order. It is rooted in a political settlement that



protected elite interests, embraced neoliberal orthodoxy, and hollowed out the idea of public service. Without confronting these foundations, anti-corruption efforts will remain shallow and easily co-opted. The choice is stark: either corruption continues to corrode democracy from within, or a genuinely democratic and popular politics emerges,

capable of reclaiming the state from extraction and violence, and re-anchoring it in the needs and dignity of the many.

*Dr Imraan Buccus is senior research associate at ASRI and research fellow at University of Johannesburg. The book is available at Exclusive Books and is published by African Perspectives*



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# We need a credible debate on international issues



By Imraan Buccus

Watching the debate in South Africa on international issues is like watching the same movie over and over in a relentless loop. One faction, mostly white and generally self-identified as liberal, roundly condemns states that are in conflict with the United States and demands that South Africa has no contact at all with these states. Sometimes it collapses into conspiracy and makes assertions for which it has no evidence, such as the claim that Iran bribed the ANC to take Israel to the International Court of Justice.

Another faction, more ra-

cially diverse and generally identified as nationalist or left-wing, condemns the US and other Western states with equal passion while staying silent on the failings of the regimes opposed to the West. On occasion it also collapses into conspiracy theory denouncing all opposition to these regimes as a Western plot.

Both sides are often simply propagandists and this endlessly tiresome and pointless exercise that takes us exactly nowhere. The uncritical cheerleaders for the West cannot be taken seriously until they acknowledge that the West supports and collaborates with authoritarian regimes such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt. They also need to acknowledge that the West has repeatedly engaged in unlawful and wantonly destructive bombings, wars and coups against many countries, and that it has backed Israel's assault in Gaza which has resulted in the mass killing of civilians.

Those who uncritically support all the regimes opposed by the West need to acknowledge, for instance, that labour conditions in Chinese factories are atrocious, that Russia locks up its dissidents, that Zanu-PF runs a rapacious regime in Zimbabwe and that the last election in Venezuela was clearly stolen.

Getting past this sorry state of affairs requires, as a first step, that the empirical facts of each situation need to be taken seriously. We must acknowledge that powerful states in and outside of the West use 'fake news', or just plain lies, as part of their political strategy. This is as true of the US and Israel as it is of Russia or Zimbabwe.

If we use Venezuela as an example the widely documented facts are that the fentanyl that has done such damage to US society is made in Mexico with chemicals imported from China and not Venezuela. It is also clearly true that Cartel de



los Soles (Cartel of the Suns) - the alleged cartel US prosecutors previously claimed Maduro led - does not exist. There is also no doubt that the US violated international law

when it kidnapped Maduro and his wife. However, it is also true that Maduro stole the last election, ran a corrupt government, locked up

some political dissidents and presided over a police force that regularly kills darker skinned and poor young men.

*Continued on page 11*



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Continued from page 10

Any political position that does not acknowledge all these clearly confirmed facts is not credible. Similarly it must be acknowledged that the West is waging a proxy war against Russia in Ukraine that followed a Western backed coup and that the Russian state has violated international law and committed war crimes.

It must also be acknowledged that China has done extraordinarily well to end absolute poverty and that it runs a massively exploitative labour regime and represses dissent. At home we must be clear that the ANC has been complicit with authoritarianism and corruption in Zimbabwe and that it took a principled position on Palestine and in support of international law when it approached the ICJ.

Both the left and the liberals must, if they are to be taken seriously, deal with the factions in their midst that just line up behind one side or the other in the new Cold War.

Liberalism has many

currents, some of which hold consistent positions, but figures such as Greg Mills on its right-wing happily support the West at all costs and under all circumstances. This must be addressed.

The left also has many democratic currents but the inheritors of the old Stalinist tradition, happily support any authoritarian regime that opposes the West. They are known pejoratively as 'tankies' after the Stalinists who supported the crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 by Soviet tanks. In South Africa the SACP invariably takes the 'tankie' position. The radical nationalists in the EFF and MKP do the same.

There is a 'tankie' current in the trade union movement, with its origins in the SACP, but the most principled positions on international politics in our public life are taken by the democratic components of the trade union movement with their origins in 'worker democracy'. Zwelinzima Vavi is one of the few public figures who has both noted that Maduro was an authoritar-

**Even though our politics has few voices that do not just uncritically line up behind one side on geopolitical issues our commentariat have no excuses for continuing with crude forms of comment and analysis.**



ian leader and that his kidnapping by the US is unlawful and an outrageous violation of sovereignty.

Liberalism in South Africa has been dragged firmly to the right in recent years and while there are left liberals who hold states on all sides of the geopolitical divides to the same standards there is no organised expression of this kind of liberalism. It

does not have a party or its own NGOs or media.

In party politics Songezo Zibi of Rise Mzansi is the only significant figure willing to be critical of both the US and Israel and its enemies.

However his party has only one seat in parliament and while his voice on international affairs is welcome it has limited

numbers behind it. It is only the democratic currents in the independent trade unions that offer a principled position on international affairs backed with numerical support.

But even though our politics has few voices that do not just uncritically line up behind one side on geopolitical issues our commentariat have no excuses for continuing with

crude forms of comment and analysis. We should all be opposed to all human rights violations and all forms of authoritarianism, not to mention illegal state actions and mass killing of civilians, whoever the perpetrators may be.

*Dr Buccus is director of a study abroad program, research fellow at UJ and editor of Al-Qalam*

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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

# How a live video call from a Syrian mother moved SA donor to tears

By Azra Hoosen

As many South African families begin stocking their freezers in anticipation of Ramadan, a small female delegation travelled to Lebanon and Syria with a different kind of preparation in mind... to witness, first-hand, how displaced families are preparing for the sacred month.

Among them was Nabila Cassim, Africa Muslims Agency (AMA) Lenasia office manager and delegation member, who described the journey as far more than a humanitarian assessment.

She told *Al-Qalam* that the purpose of these trips was to allow people to experience the needs on the ground. There is a difference between watching suffering on a screen and sitting inside it. "When you see how people live, it motivates you to come back and advocate for them, to raise awareness about their situations and fundraise to help them," she said. The

delegation was composed entirely of women. This was intentional. Many of the families AMA works with are widows, abused women, or mothers raising children alone. "They find it difficult to speak to men, to allow them into their spaces. When other women come, they are more comfortable. They feel they are not forgotten," explained Cassim. She noted that women can sometimes empathise better with their situation.

In Syria, the group visited a refugee tent with plastic sheeting stretched over concrete and a straw mat, the only barrier against the winter cold. No sense of comfort or certainty. They walked through neighbourhoods reduced to rubble. A mother cradled her baby, who had no proper warm clothing or socks. She shared that she had been abandoned and did not know what steps to take next.

"It was a stark reminder of how fragile life can become and how much strength it takes to simply endure,"

Cassim said. In Lebanon, they walked through camps where families who have fled war now live in a different kind of waiting. Some had recently returned to their homes in Syria, except that the homes were no longer there. "They are going back to absolutely nothing. They are restarting their lives completely," said Cassim.

One encounter in a Palestinian camp has stayed with her.

The group asked a family what their wish for Ramadan was. The mother responded quietly: her young son's greatest wish was simply to have a burger for iftar. "A burger is something that is not normal for them," Cassim said. The mother explained how she tries to recreate one by placing two pieces of flatbread together with whatever filling she can find, telling her son, "This is your burger."

For a delegation of women who, in their own homes, would go to great lengths to prepare special meals for

their children in Ramadan, the moment was sobering.

"We are so focused on stocking up our freezers and preparing the best foods, then you meet these communities who have almost nothing to eat. We know from the time we are kids that part of the reason for fasting is to experience what those in need feel, but when you see it yourself, it changes how you feel during your fast," said Cassim.

There was a moment during the trip when the team arranged a video call between a donor and a Syrian beneficiary family. Both women. Both mothers. On one side of the screen, gratitude. On the other, tears. "Seeing their faces light up with smiles and tears, the recipient making heartfelt duas and expressing deep gratitude, while the donor's eyes overflowed with tears, witnessing that exchange of humanity and compassion was truly heartwarming," she explained.

For Cassim, Ramadan in



these regions carries a different weight. Many refugees wait for leftovers from neighbours or rely on food parcels to get through a few days. Yet amid the hardship, she encountered remarkable yaqeen. The message they carry is that 'Allah is always with us.'

"They have yaqeen that Allah will help them no matter their condition. But their message is also: don't forget us," she said.

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May the blessed month of Ramadan bring to you and your family, good health, prosperity and closeness to the Almighty. May all your Dua's and efforts be accepted

**RAMADAN MUBARAK**



# Ramadaan Mubarak

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# Ramadan Messages



## 'Ramadan allows us to walk in the shoes of those who endure hunger & hardship'

Ramadan arrives as a divine opportunity — a sacred pause in our lives that invites us to realign our hearts, renew our faith, and reconnect with our purpose. It is a month that awakens the soul, strengthens spirituality, and revives within us compassion, care, and service to all of humanity, Insha Allah. Through fasting, we are taught discipline and self-restraint, learning to rise above unchecked desires, passions, and distractions. It is a training of the heart and soul that brings clarity, humility, and mindfulness into our daily lives.

This blessed month allows us to walk, even briefly, in the shoes of those who endure hunger and hardship throughout their lives. In doing so, we develop a deeper em-

pathy for the less fortunate and come to understand the true meanings of mercy, love, peace, and compassion.

Ramadan is also a time of deep reflection and sincere self-assessment. Families and friends gather more often, hearts draw closer, and our focus shifts from the self to the collective good. It is a season filled with increased prayer, remembrance, contemplation, and unity.

It is a month of forgiveness — forgiving others, seeking forgiveness for ourselves, and letting go of anger, resentment, and negativity. Through our words, actions, and conduct, we strive to embody the light of peace and goodness. This sacred gift comes from our Lord, who says: "I am

as My servant expects of Me." May this holy month bring immense benefit to our lives. May our hearts be filled with serenity, mercy, and compassion for all mankind. May our fasting and acts of worship be accepted, and may Allah bless us abundantly. May Ramadan be a truly transformative experience for us all, Insha Allah.

Ramadan Mubarak  
**Dr Ebrahim Dada**  
*National Executive Director*



## As-Salaam: 'lessons of Ramadan must guide us long after month has passed'

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. As the blessed month of Ramadan grace us once again, As-Salaam Educational Institute extends heartfelt Ramadan Mubarak to our learners, parents, staff, alumni and the wider community. Ramadan is a sacred month of reflection and return, a return to Allah, to the Qur'an, and to the purification of our hearts. Through fasting, salaah and charity, we are nurtured in taqwa and reminded that true success lies not only in knowledge attained, but in faith lived and character refined. During this blessed month, our school actively embraces the spirit of Ramadan through meaningful programmes and activities. These include collective Qur'an recitation, increased emphasis on salaah, Islamic talks and reminders, charity drives and outreach initiatives, as well as iftaar programmes that bring together learners, staff and

members of the community. Through these efforts, Ramadan becomes a living classroom, shaping hearts as much as minds. Ramadan also plays a vital role in nurturing the character of our young learners. Through fasting children learn patience, self-control, gratitude and empathy for those who go without. They are taught the importance of sincerity in worship, kindness in speech and action, and the value of giving and sharing with others. These lessons lay a strong foundation for moral development and lifelong Islamic character.

As we observe Ramadan, we remember in our du'a those facing hardship, hunger, oppression and displacement across the world. This sacred month calls us to compassion and generosity, reminding us to share our blessings, stand for justice, and uplift those in need wherever they may be.

Within our own community,

Ramadan strengthens unity, forgiveness and mutual care. It is a time to reinforce family values, support one another, and guide our children through positive examples and shared responsibility.

We make du'a that Allah accepts our fasting, our salaah, our charity and our sincere intentions. May He grant relief to those in distress, protect our learners, bless our community, and allow the lessons of Ramadan to guide us long after the month has passed.

Ramadan Mubarak  
**As-Salaam Educational Institute**



Ramadan invites us to look closely at how we care for others and what responsibility looks like when it is carried with sincerity. Compassion in this month is not only felt; it is acted upon through care that is patient, thoughtful, and effective.

This Ramadan, Humaniti, in partnership with the Islamic Medical Association South Africa (IMASA) and Federation of Islamic Medical Associations (FIMA), is focusing on maternal and child health, with particular attention to children born with congenital heart conditions. For families living with these conditions, survival and recovery depend on more than goodwill. They depend on skilled medical professionals, functioning health systems, and sustained access to care.

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# Humaniti

This Ramadan campaign is led by Humaniti in partnership with the Islamic Medical Association South Africa (IMASA) and Federation of Islamic Medical Associations (FIMA), supporting maternal and child health through professional medical care in South Africa.

# Ramadan Messages

## AMA: 'Reconnect with the people whose lives your generosity will touch'

In a world divided by crisis and detachment, Africa Muslims Agency invites you to join us on a journey of Reconnection this Ramadaan. As we enter this blessed month, we pause to reflect on its purpose. At a time when our lives are so filled with social media feeds, with watching war and suffering, with navigating AI and illusions of truth and progress, Ramadaan brings a deeply needed space in which we can step back from technology and reflect, reconnecting with humanity and our Creator. Ramadaan is a time when small acts carry immeasurable weight. A time when we embrace fasting, prayer and charity, re-uniting with the global Ummah.

AMA's Ramadaan campaign focuses on the provision of suhoor and iftar meals, as well as water, in needy communities across the world. Every meal shared and every drop of water given revives a life, uplifts a soul, and draws us closer to the mercy of Allah. And as we reconnect with our purpose, we also reconnect with the millions of families across the world whose lives are intertwined

with ours in ways we may never see. When a donor gives with sincerity, and a recipient receives with dignity, Allah places unseen barakah in between — transforming an act of giving into an act of worship. This reconnection is already unfolding across the world, in the remote locations reached by AMA, with your generous donations. It is seen when a mother prepares suhoor because you cared enough to give a grocery hamper, when a child drinks from a new water well and says 'Alhamdulillah,' and when families break their fast at a community iftaar sponsored through your generosity, knowing they were remembered by a stranger far away.

Through iftaar packs, grocery hampers, community iftaars, water wells and orphan sponsorships, your contribution becomes a bridge between hearts, a thread stitching communities back together with hope, dignity, and faith. We encourage you to give with generosity to countries far away, and also to join us across South Africa as we set iftaar tables in our own neighbourhoods, inviting you to reconnect with your

community, serving and sharing in beautiful acts of iba'dah.

A single plate of food, a drop of water, a simple intention — each becomes a means of mercy. This Ramadaan, we are asking you to feel the meaning behind each act of giving. Reconnect with compassion, Reconnect with purpose, Reconnect with the people whose lives your generosity will touch in ways you may never witness, but Allah surely does.

On behalf of AMA, our teams, volunteers, and the millions we serve, we invite you to join us this Ramadaan. Let us reconnect — with each other and with the Divine — as we strive to bring mercy, dignity, and hope to every home we can reach.

May Allah accept from you and from us.

AMA Media Team



## MYMSA: 'Giving up hope will strip us of our humanity'

The arrival of Ramadan comes at a time when the world is in turmoil. There is an ongoing genocide in Gaza, bloodshed and displacement in Sudan, occupation and repression in the illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, the threat of an imperialist war against Iran and the general rise to prominence of racism, xenophobia, the exploitation of women and children. This brings about a feeling of hopelessness and dependency.

However, Ramadan presents to us an opportunity to draw us closer to Allah and to draw strength from Allah's infinite power and mercy in order to enable us to face and defeat the ills that have engulfed the world.

We are not only called to deprive ourselves of the desires of the flesh, but we are also called to do the necessary internal work to increase our consciousness that will in turn prepare us for a comprehensive battle against ourselves and against those who cause disharmony in the world.

Let us utilise this Ramadan to rededicate ourselves to the cause of eliminating tyranny, hunger and hopelessness.

On each day of fasting, let us remember the people of Palestine, Sudan, Kashmir, the Democratic Republic of Congo and many other places in which the daily reality is that of death and destruction.

At a time when it seems easier to throw

our collective hands up in resignation and it looks appealing to simply focus on one's own welfare to the exclusion of all that is happening elsewhere, Ramadan comes to remind us of our connectedness. Giving up hope will strip us of our humanity and it will be a repudiation of our Muslimness.

The Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa wishes all Muslims in South Africa and around the world a blessed and mindful Ramadan.

Thandile Kona  
President of MYMSA



# Share the PERi-PERi

Ramadan Mubarak

# Children in Gaza forced to focus on work rather than school

By Donya Abu Sitta

**K**han Younis, Gaza Strip – It is 5:30 in the morning. The sun hasn't fully risen, but 15-year-old Mahmoud rubs the sleep from his eyes. He woke up this morning not in a warm bed, but on a thin mattress in a crowded tent – displaced, like hundreds of thousands of others in Gaza.

And Mahmoud did not reach for a schoolbag to get ready for school. Instead, he picked up a rough, frayed burlap sack. "The sack is empty now, but I feel its weight even before I fill it," Mahmoud said, as he looked at his palms, calloused and scarred from carrying the sack around Khan Younis's streets, planning to begin his day. "My back hurts before I even start walking." But Mahmoud insisted that he has to fill his sack – even if that comes at the expense of his childhood and his education. The young Palestinian

is forced by the economic situation in Gaza, brought on by Israel's genocidal war, to spend his days filling his sack with items that can be used as fuel for his family.

"Sometimes I walk for six hours just to find a few pieces of wood," Mahmoud said, describing his daily routine. "The dust from the rubble gets into my lungs. I cough all night. But I can't stop, there is no fire to bake bread." Mahmoud feels a deep sense of responsibility for his family. He explained that his father was killed in an Israeli air strike early last year, one of more than 70,000 Palestinians in Gaza to be killed by Israel since the war started in October 2023.

As his mother's eldest, and with Gaza mired in deep poverty with little help coming, Mahmoud knows that it is his job now to provide. Despite his age, he doesn't consider himself a child any more. "My mother is wait-

ing for me to come back with something to make a fire," he said. "If I collect any extra, I sell it at the market to buy bread."

Mahmoud knows that life could be different. He talks about his school days with nostalgia in his voice.

Israeli attacks – including air strikes, shelling and deliberate demolitions – have left much of Gaza decimated. According to the United Nations, more than 97 percent of schools in Gaza have either been damaged or destroyed, and most of the 658,000 children of school age in the enclave have had "limited access" to in-person learning for more than two academic years.

Even now, with a shaky ceasefire in place since October, many of the schools that remain standing are used as shelters for Gaza's legion of displaced people, preventing them from being used for education. While

there are no accurate statistics on the number of children forced to work in Gaza, Palestinians on the ground say that they have seen an increase as a result of the enclave's economic circumstances.

The weak economy, coupled with a lack of electrical power and the thousands of families whose breadwinners have been killed in the war, led to situations like Mahmoud's.

"What we are witnessing in Gaza is not merely child labour," said Yaqeen Jamal, an educational psychologist who has provided psychological support to children during the war. "It is the systematic destruction of an entire generation's future."

"These children lose their sense of security and their childhood, and they bear responsibilities that exceed their cognitive and physical capabilities," she added. Jamal said that would in-

evitably lead to dangers in the future. "The long-term effects will be catastrophic. We are facing a generation suffering from illiteracy and deteriorating mental health, which will create a societal gap that will be difficult to bridge."

"Rebuilding schools and resuming the educational process must be the top priority, because education is the last line of defence for [these] people's identity and future," she said. Reconstruction in Gaza is likely to take years, with Israel continuing to hinder the process, and uncertainty over whether Israel will attack Gaza again.

That means that children like 11-year-old Layla continue to be forced to work to help their families.

Her father suffers from a physical disability that limits his mobility, leaving him unable to work. The burden has instead fallen on Layla,

who goes out every day to the streets of Khan Younis to sell tea. She walks back and forth on al-Bahr Street – the main street in Khan Younis – calling out "hot tea, hot tea for one shekel".

Layla carried a tray containing eight cardboard cups, two-thirds full of tea, and covered each cup with aluminium foil to keep it hot.

Asked about her favourite colour, she replied that it was pink, and remembered her pink room, full of her toys. Then she remembered her favourite toy, a pink doll. Her doll currently lies under the rubble of the pink room, destroyed in Israel's war. "I wish that the colour pink would return to my life, that my room would return, that my family's happy life before the war would return," she said. Then she hurried away down the street, focused on selling more tea.

Al Jazeera



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# Majority of Arabs oppose normalisation with Israel, pan-Arab survey finds

More than a quarter of all Arabs believe Israel poses the greatest threat to their region, followed by the US and Iran, a pan-Arab poll conducted by the Arab Center Washington DC revealed on Tuesday.

Across 15 countries surveyed, 28 percent of Arabs said they consider Israel the foremost threat to their own nations.

The areas with the highest threat assessment for Israel were the Mashreq, otherwise known as the Levant (Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria), at 58 percent, and the Nile Valley (Egypt, Sudan) at 38 percent.

The Maghreb (Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia) and the Gulf (Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia) had the lowest threat assessments for Israel at nine percent in each region, but also had the highest number of respondents who said they do not know, or do not wish to answer the question,

at 47 percent and 42 percent, respectively.

In the Mashreq, the US and Iran polled equally at 16 percent as the second biggest threat to that region, while in the Gulf, Iran is considered the biggest security threat by 14 percent of respondents. Across the Maghreb, the Nile Valley, and the Gulf, fewer than eight percent of respondents saw the US as a major security threat.

Meanwhile, one-third of respondents in the Nile Valley said the second biggest threat after Israel is the Arab Gulf states. The 2025 Arab Opinion Index (AOI) was conducted between November 2024 and August 2025 in 15 Arab countries: Algeria; Egypt; Iraq; Jordan; Kuwait; Lebanon; Libya; Mauritania; Morocco; Palestine; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Sudan; Syria; and Tunisia. The survey consisted of face-to-face interviews with a sample of 40,130 respondents.

The AOI is the largest public opinion survey in the

Arab world, Laila Omar, a researcher with Arab Center DC and an anthropology professor at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, told the audience at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, on Tuesday, where the findings were unveiled. In some cases, the team of 1,000 researchers had to resort to phone interviews due to safety considerations on all sides - namely in Saudi Arabia and in Tunisia for this latest set of findings, Omar noted.

### Syria

A key element in the 35-page report stemming from the AOI is that it includes unprecedented independent insight into how Syrians perceive political life following the fall of the repressive government of Bashar al-Assad.

On Israel, 70 percent of Syrian respondents said they oppose a Syria-Israel agreement that does not include the return of the Golan Heights, which Israel annexed in 1967. Near-

ly three-quarters of Syrian respondents said Israel "is working to support certain groups in Syrian society in order to fuel separatist conflicts and threaten the unity of Syrian territory".

A whopping 88 percent said they believe Israel "is working to threaten security and stability in Syria". The survey also examined how Syrians assess their domestic challenges.

Some 60 percent of all Syrian respondents expressed feelings of "hope", "joy/happiness", "security", and "relief" at the fall of the Assad dynasty, while 22 percent or less expressed feelings like "anxiety" or "uncertainty" when prompted.

When asked what type of state they want to see, 42 percent of Syrian respondents said they support building a civil state, compared to 28 percent who said they want a religious state.

### Palestine

Eighty percent of the Arab



public, when asked, said they believe that the Palestinian cause is a collective Arab cause, the AOI showed.

Only 12 percent believe it is solely a Palestinian cause. In Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, and Kuwait, 90 percent or more of respondents said it is a collective Arab cause.

Saudi Arabia polled the lowest in this category, with 62 percent of respondents there saying the Palestinian struggle is a collective Arab cause.

But the caveat is that in this particular case, 30 percent of respondents said they did not know what to say, or declined to answer. When

it comes to normalisation with Israel, despite the 2020 Abraham Accords involving the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, the percentage of Arabs who support recognition of Israel dropped by two percentage points in the 2024-25 AOI compared to 2022-23, the report said.

An overwhelming majority of 87 percent of all respondents oppose recognition of Israel, while only six percent said they would accept it.

Of those who support their countries recognising Israel, half made such a move conditional on the formation of an independent Palestinian state, otherwise known as the two-state solution. - Middle East Eye

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OPINION

# Warren Goldstein– Chief Rabbi or Chief Representative?



By Ebrahim Rassol  
(Former Ambassador to the USA)

The declaration of Israel Chargé d’Affaires, Ariel Seidman, as Persona Non Grata has elicited yet another extraordinary diatribe from Warren Goldstein, Chief Rabbi of SA, in early February. His expulsion from South Africa indeed had an unmasking effect. But it did not, as Warren Goldstein asserts, unmask the South African President, the government he leads, or the ANC as captured by a

variety of forces who are anti-West, Islamist or Iranian. The unmasking was in forcing the real representative of Zionism and its political project, Israel, to step into the breach, directly and unfiltered, dispensing the onerous and inconvenient mask of “Chief Rabbi”.

Indeed, Warren Goldstein has been juggling these two personae, Chief Rabbi and Chief Representative, throughout his tenure to manage the moral tumult that Israel has been at the centre of, and that Zionism, as a political-colonial ideology has inspired. A political problem needs a politician, but a moral conundrum needs religious sophistry. But we’ve all been too polite to call him out, partly because it is imperative that we redeem – mostly for our own humanity – Judaism and Jews as a noble religion and indeed a peo-

ple who have been victims of a holocaust perpetrated by Western Europe.

In the demeanour of Chief Rabbi, Warren Goldstein the Chief Representative emerged. The only clue to his rabbinical role, in the nine-minute diatribe, was the reference to Genesis 12:3 that those who bless will be blessed and those who curse will be cursed. Although the reference is to Abraham, the appropriation is for Israel. He then anoints himself as God’s appointed blessing and curser and proceeds to curse President Ramaphosa, the Government and the ANC for the temerity to expel the Israeli diplomat, discovering belatedly that this is reserved for serious misdemeanours like bordering on espionage. Such cursing is the sound and fury of fundamentalist extremism, which would be irritating only, if it was not so severe in the




Middle East where such extremism has power and is not afraid to exercise it perniciously on the vulnerable.

Balancing his personae, he froths moral outrage at how the expulsion of the diplomat has now cursed

the children of the Eastern Cape to a life of deprivation of potable water and sanitation – when Israel is the global leader in water management; to a life of compromised health care as a consequence; and endangered the country’s relationship with Presi-


dent Trump and the USA who will visit economic doom on us. Let’s examine whether Warren Goldstein’s “moral outrage” is that of a naïve Chief Rabbi or a calculated Chief Representative.

Continued on page 19




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Continued from page 18

Israel is the global leader in water management! Indeed. It is so good that Israel has perfected the art of ensuring 100% access to Israeli Citizens to water and sanitation – even in the northern Negev Desert – by intercepting the aquifers into Palestine from the mountains, by diverting water with pipes, tunnels, and channels from, among others, the Sea of Galilee, and restricting and limiting Palestinian water drilling for wells and development of water infrastructure.

The result is that Israelis receive about 137 litres per person per day – for household and agriculture – whilst Palestinians can barely manage agriculture on 76.4 litres/person/day! A stark example is in the establishment of a Jewish settlement in northeast Jerusalem, where, in addition to the appropriation of Palestinian land, the Palestinian villages lost access to its springs, wells and other water resources. Since October 2023, persisting right into the ‘ceasefire’ in 2026, the Israeli Defence Force has repeatedly bombed and shelled Gaza’s water infrastructure and prohibited access to water sources in Gaza and limited the entry of water and other humanitarian aid resulting in 96% of Gazans becoming water

compromised. No wonder UN experts declared: “Israel is using thirst as a weapon to kill Palestinians.” In South Africa, it appears, the Chief Representative is using thirst as a diplomatic weapon to mask a genocide.

The people in SA will suffer dire health consequence. Quite rich coming from the man who in February 2025 is quoted in The Times of Israel as saying “...we should welcome the Trump administration’s interventions...” later only admitting that Trump was mistaken to only allow white Afrikaners as refugees into the USA. It is not ironic that he feigns concern about our health but welcomes Trump’s cutting of Pefpar funds that combat HIV/AIDS – not only in SA, but Africa; cuts US-AID Programmes; defunds the WHO, and many others, that, in one night’s executive orders bequeathed death and disease. This is the cynicism of a Chief Representative, not the morality of a Chief Rabbi.

How do we take his warning about ‘endangering’ SA’s relationship with Trump, and jeopardising the African Growth and Opportunities (AGOA)? That boat has sailed. Before any word was said in anger, SA lost all its aid, had 30% tariffs imposed (together with the rest of the world), and AGOA’s

renewal was delayed.

All of this based on a lie about a white genocide! The Chief Rabbi could be moved to call out this lie, but the Chief Representative would revel in the delicious symmetry: SA charges Israel in the ICJ with Palestinian genocide and land occupation and, in retaliation, Trump accuses SA of white genocide and white land confiscation!

The only reason AGOA is still being considered for SA, is because our diplomacy has amplified the point that while, sadly, black workers’ livelihoods will be imperilled, the main victims will, ironically, be the white owners of the farms, mines, and factories that Trump purports to defend. Hopefully, unfair as it is, this will be enough for the morally dubious to defend and renew AGOA.

Chief Rabbi Goldstein in 2017 was included in the Algemeiner’s Top 100 in the religious category – for denouncing Jacob Zuma’s corruption. Some were exiled from the ANC and government for precipitating this at Polokwane in 2007 already. But the Chief Rabbi was absolutely and morally correct! This research was easy to find and would prove morally consistent with his fervour in his 9-minute ad-

dress charging the ANC with corruption. Yet the search for his moral outrage regarding the corruption charges against Benjamin Netanyahu is hard to find. I thought I would find scriptural admonition from Deuteronomy 31:29 with Moses predicting “utter corruption” for Israel: “evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands”.

But not much in the face of Netanyahu being indicted on breach of trust, accepting bribes, and fraud! Nothing about Case 1000 (taking gifts & presents), Case 2000 (conspiring against a competitor), Case 4000 (the telecommunications industry), .... Maybe the Chief Representative persuaded the Chief Rabbi that a corrupt and flawed leader who could bring wrath to the Palestinians must, perforce, get a free pass – just as support and admiration for a leader accused of paedophilia is okay!

The problem with interchanging a yarmulka and a political cap is that politics tends to undermine your professed morality and compromise your ethical judgement and connect you to causes and leaders for which there is no defence. Take the Chief Rab-



bi’s correct empathy for Iranian protestors’ deaths and compare that with the Chief Representative’s stoic denial and defence of a Palestinian genocide. The problem is that when you attach the name of your faith to a political project and thus legitimise it, you open your entire moral-ethical foundation to the vicissitudes of that project: when the Taliban prohibits women, when ISIS kills and maims, when Al Qaeda bombs civilians, etc. It takes a Muslim community decades to overcome the damage even, if there’s ambiguity about the original sin. Similarly, if a Chief

Rabbi endorses Israel as a “Jewish State”, then that Chief Rabbi has to be that State’s Chief Representative to defend or deny atrocity – even if there’s ambiguity about the original sin.

The Chief Rabbi can no longer dissemble whether an eye for an eye can interpreted to mean that 2400 eyes on October 7th justify 200 000 eyes ever since. The debate is mathematical, polemical, political, not moral, religious or ethical.

*Ebrahim Rasool is former ambassador to the United States*

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**RAMADAN KAREEM**

# Ramadan Treats

## CHICKEN TIKKA KEBABS

Bibi Ayesha Kadwa (Facebook: Sunnyside Classics)

### Ingredients

- 1 potato, boiled and mashed
- 500 g chicken mince
- 2 onions, grated and excess water squeezed out
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp ground green chillies
- 1 full tsp crushed garlic
- ½ tsp crushed red chilli
- A pinch of turmeric
- 1 tbsp crushed jeera (cumin)
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 handful fried onion (wagaar)
- Salt, to taste
- 1 tbsp ghee
- Chopped green dhania (coriander)
- 1 egg (add last)
- 1 tsp baking powder (add last)



### Method

- Place all ingredients except the egg and baking powder into a food processor and whisk until well combined.
- Add the egg and baking powder just before frying and mix through gently.
- Fry the kebabs in shallow oil until golden on both sides.
- Transfer to a casserole dish or tray, add small blobs of butter and a dash of lemon juice.
- Steam in the oven if needed, or freeze for later use.

### Serving Suggestions

- Fry thick potato slices and season as desired.
- Prepare puri and place the potato on the puri, followed by the kebabs.
- Serve with chutney, pepper cubes or cherry tomatoes, as preferred.



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# Ramadan Treats

## MINI CUP ROULADE

Bibi Ayesha Kadwa (Facebook: Sunnyside Classics)

### Ingredients

- Chicken Mixture
- 1 kg chicken mince
- 2 tsp salt or Aromat (to taste)
- 2 heaped tsp ground garlic
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp crushed jeera (cumin) seeds
- 1 tsp black pepper
- ½ tsp chicken spice
- Green chillies, finely chopped (to taste – approx. 2 tsp)
- 2 slices white bread, soaked in water and squeezed dry
- 1 onion, grated and excess water squeezed out
- 3 tbsp crushed fried onion
- Chopped greens (spring onion/ coriander)

### Additional

- 3 tbsp gram flour, braised in 2

- 1/2 tsp ghee
- Ghee, for drizzling
- Grated carrot and peppers (for mash)
- Cheese, grated

### To serve

- Salted grated potatoes, fried until crisp
- Chutney or sauce of choice
- Micro herbs, for garnish

### Method

- In a large bowl, combine all the chicken mixture ingredients.
- Add the braised gram flour and mix well. Process or mix until well combined.
- Lightly spray mini cupcake pans with cooking spray.
- Prepare a mash by combining the grated carrot and peppers.

- Season well, allow to cool, then mix in the grated cheese.
- Place a ball of the chicken mixture into each cupcake mould and flatten it to form a cup shape.
- Spoon the vegetable mash and cheese into the centre.
- Cover with more chicken mince, sealing well to ensure there are no gaps.
- Drizzle lightly with ghee and bake at 180°C for 10 minutes or until cooked through.
- Remove from the oven and allow to cool slightly.
- Fry the salted grated potatoes until golden and crisp.
- To serve, drizzle chutney or sauce of choice over the chicken cups, sprinkle with crispy potatoes, garnish with micro herbs and serve warm.



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OF EVERYTHING CHICKEN AND MORE

# Palestine, OIC, Arab Group condemn Israel's de facto annexation of West Bank

*UN envoys say Israeli security cabinet's decision violates international law, undermines two-state solution, writes Merve Aydogan*

Palestine's UN ambassador Riyad Mansour along with other UN envoys condemned recent Israeli measures aimed at expanding control over the West Bank, warning that it amounts to the de facto annexation of Palestinian land in the occupied territory.

"We are gathered here today in order to express our outrage and condemnation for what the Israeli cabinet decided yesterday with regard to what will amount to the annexation of the land of the Palestinian people, especially in the West Bank," Mansour told a news conference Tuesday at UN headquarters in New York.

Mansour said the Palestinian mission has initiated formal diplomatic steps at the UN to challenge the Israeli decision and press for its re-

versal through multilateral action.

He added that a letter outlining Palestine's position had already been circulated to the UN Security Council, the UN secretary-general and the president of the General Assembly.

Mansour also said that he personally briefed the Security Council president on Monday afternoon, adding that Palestine expects the Council "to shoulder its responsibility to defend international law, including human rights law and humanitarian law."

Mansour said Palestinian diplomats would continue engaging with council members in the coming days, including meetings with the elected members, the permanent five, and the UN secretary-general, to push for action.

"There is a Prime Minister of an extreme government coming to Washington, DC, challenging everyone that

he is going to impose annexation and take the land of the Palestinian people," he said, stressing that "this is another test before all of these processes, whether (Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu will succeed against all of us, or whether we collectively succeed in defending what we agreed to."

Türkiye's UN envoy Ahmet Yildiz, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), also condemned Israel's actions, warning they would further destabilize the region.

"The OIC Group condemns in the strongest terms the illegal Israeli decisions and measures aimed at imposing unlawful Israeli sovereignty, entrenching settlement activity, and enforcing a new legal and administrative reality in the occupied West Bank," Yildiz said.

"They undermine the two-state solution, the ongoing peace efforts, and represent an assault on the inalienable



right of the Palestinian people to realize their independent and sovereign state on the 1967 lines, with occupied Jerusalem as its capital," he added. Syria's UN envoy Ibrahim Olabi, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, echoed the condemnation, describing Israel's measures as a flagrant breach of international law.

"The Arab Group condemns, in the strongest

terms, the illegal Israeli decision and measures aimed at imposing unlawful Israeli sovereignty," Olabi said, adding the move "accelerates attempts at its illegal annexation and the displacement of the Palestinian people."

The UN envoys' remarks came after Israel's security cabinet approved measures Sunday aimed at altering the legal and civil framework in

the occupied West Bank to strengthen Israeli control.

According to Israeli media, the decisions include repealing a law that barred the sale of land in the West Bank to private Israeli individuals, unsealing land ownership records, and shifting authority for building permits in a settlement bloc near Hebron from a Palestinian municipality to Israel's civil administration. - Anadolu



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# Israel's control of Rafah leaves patients, students in life-or-death limbo

*The partial reopening of Rafah is causing delays for Gazans who seek medical care, education, and family reunification. Alaa Helou reports from Gaza.*

The partial reopening of the Rafah crossing, under the second phase of the Gaza ceasefire agreement, has provided little relief to Gazans as it has been heavily restricted by stringent Israeli controls.

Preventing what could have been a major breakthrough after almost two years of closure, official data reveals the full scale of the crisis. Over 20,000 patients urgently need medical care abroad, while around 2,000 students are waiting to travel for university.

But only around 180 Palestinians have left the Gaza Strip since the limited reopening, according to officials in the territory.

Additionally, thousands of holders of Arab and foreign documents are stuck

in limbo, awaiting family reunification. With Israel's last-minute travel refusals and the implementation of a tightly controlled exit process — limiting departures to only hundreds daily — thousands remain stranded.

Against this backdrop, calls for a full and sustainable opening of the crossing have intensified. As the sole gateway for many Palestinians to essential services, the Rafah crossing is vital not only for saving lives but also for securing futures and alleviating the burdens of prolonged waiting.

Weighing the severity of the medical emergency, Gaza's Health Ministry reports that 6,000 injured people require immediate evacuation, including at least 500 patients who need daily transfers to prevent life-threatening consequences, but slow procedures and Israeli-imposed obstacles are exacerbating the crisis.

The most critical cases involve patients with emergency or life-threatening condi-

tions, including cancer, heart disease, and kidney failure, whose treatment options in Gaza have been exhausted due to the collapse of the health system and severe shortages of medicines and medical supplies.

For these patients, travel is not optional — it is a matter of life or death, and each additional day of waiting worsens their condition and increases the risk of irreversible complications.

Khaled Al-Sarhi has been waiting for three years to travel while battling cancer, as his condition deteriorates rapidly.

“When we heard about the partial reopening of Rafah, we felt a glimmer of hope, but that quickly gave way to worry and uncertainty, as the number of travellers is very small, and we don't know when it will be our turn,” the 48-year-old told The New Arab. “Waiting is not just about time; it's a matter of life or death. I fear the illness will overtake me before I can leave for treat-

ment. I hope there is genuine prioritisation for critical cases, and that our fate isn't left hanging on long lists with no end in sight.”

Other patients, like Nidal Al-Ayoubi, illustrate how official statistics translate into human suffering. Seriously injured by an Israeli strike, Nidal still requires urgent treatment abroad. “The number of travellers does not exceed 150 per day, including around 50 patients and 100 companions, while thousands of patients and wounded continue to suffer inside Gaza. This number offers no reassurance,” Nidal told The New Arab.

“Instead, it only increases our psychological pressure. I constantly wonder whether my name will be called today or if I'll still be waiting. This ongoing uncertainty affects every aspect of our lives. It's not just the illness, but the waiting itself that wears you down.” Alongside those seeking medical treatment, thousands of students face urgent challenges, with many already accepted



to universities abroad or awaiting confirmation, only to risk losing their academic futures due to rigid enrolment schedules and strict deadlines.

Mohamed Khalla, 21, who was accepted to a university in Turkey, described how the closure of the crossing disrupted his plans. “I was accepted months ago and should be attending lectures by now, but the closure of the crossing has turned my dream into an indefinite wait,” he told The New Arab. “The partial reopen-

ing initially offered hope, but it's unlikely that students will be prioritised over urgent medical cases.

The university has set a final enrollment deadline, and if I don't travel, I may lose both my seat and scholarship,” Mohamed added.

“What pains me most is that my future depends on a number on a long list. We don't seek privileges, only a fair chance to continue our education and build a better future for ourselves and our families.” - The New Arab.

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SPORT

# 'Archery is a form of Ibadah' - Abdullah Safodien

By Azra Hoosen

For Abdullah Safodien, a bow is more than a piece of sporting equipment. It is a bridge to history, to Islam and to a profound personal discipline. Now 50, Safodien took up archery at the age of 42.

Reflecting on his journey, Safodien told *Al-Qalam* that his path was shaped by a clear guiding force – a simple sunnah echoing down the centuries. He quoted Prophet Muhammed (SAW): 'Teach your children horse riding and archery.' "The wisdom of these words resonated deeply with me, and I knew that I had to embark on this journey," he said.

Living in Johannesburg, Safodien found himself drawn to traditional archery, but access to formal training was scarce. "Undeterred, I took it upon myself to craft my own bow and learn the art of shooting solo," he said. What followed was

countless hours of research, experimentation and practice as he was determined to not just learn but master the craft. "This self-taught journey, though challenging, instilled in me a sense of discipline and resilience," he added.

While archery came later, Safodien was no stranger to horse-riding. "I've been in the saddle for over 30 years," he shared.

That perseverance has carried him far, translating into tangible achievements: a second-place finish at the 2018 Grand African Tournament (Mounted archery), which earned him a spot on the South African Protea team for the World Championships in South Korea. That same year, he placed third in a mounted archery competition in Indonesia.

More recently, Safodien represented South Africa at the 2025 International Horseback Archery Alliance (IHAA) World Championships in Tennessee, United

States, where he was placed fifth in the Masters Division – a significant accomplishment on one of the sport's most competitive international stages.

"These achievements are a testament to the power of hard work, dedication and faith. They remind me that with determination and perseverance, anything is possible," he said.

Competing abroad brought with it physical setbacks, injuries and demanding conditions. But through it all, Islam has shaped his approach. When Safodien began competing, he realised that archery was not just about hitting a target. "It was about connecting with a rich history and culture that transcended borders and faiths and cultivates a sense of calmness and focus," he said.

Working with horses has further deepened that understanding. Mounted archery demands communication beyond words and an acute

awareness of one's inner state.

"The horse responds to your mental strength. If you're unsettled, it shows. As I ride and shoot, I am reminded of the interconnectedness of body, mind and spirit," he said. In an era defined by speed and constant stimulation, Safodien believes the preservation of traditional disciplines like archery and horse-riding is more important than ever: "These skills teach patience and awareness. They teach us to slow down and focus on the present moment. It is a reminder that there is beauty in the slow and deliberate pace of life."

For Safodien, archery is a holistic practice that has helped him find balance and harmony in all aspects of his life. "Archery has been a catalyst for growth, pushing me to confront my fears and limitations," he said.

That philosophy is central to the work of the Qurtuba Furuסיyyah Archery Club,



which Safodien is closely involved in. The club aims to make traditional archery accessible to the broader community, offering training for both children and adults.

He is particularly passionate about archery as a school extramural activity. Beyond physical coordination, he believes it teaches children focus, self-discipline and emotional regulation – skills that extend far beyond the range. "It teaches children how to manage pressure and develop patience and confidence – qualities they

carry into every part of their lives," he said.

For adults who believe it may be "too late" to start something new, Safodien offers simple reassurance: "Archery is a form of ibadah, a means of exercise and a path to spiritual growth. It is an activity that can be adapted to any age or ability, offering a sense of community and belonging. I encourage you to take the first step, to pick up a bow and arrow, and to experience the transformative power of archery for yourself."

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