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INSIDE



Activists break
bread at Iftaar
evening

Page 4



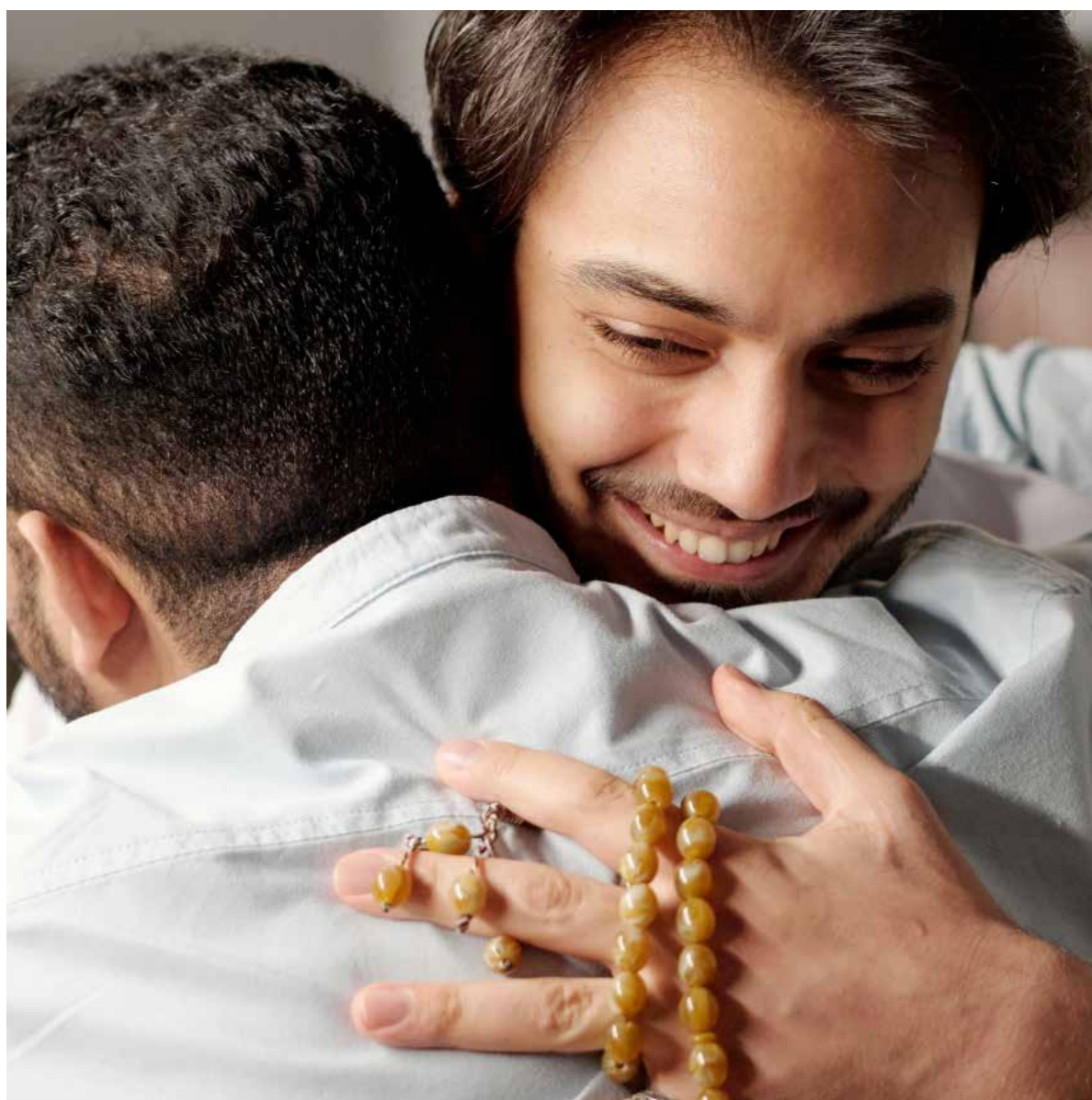
'KZN pharmacist
returns from Gaza with
newfound purpose

Page 7



Al-Aqsa cries
in the last
10 nights

Page 25



'May this Eid be a turning point'

See page 3



EID MUBARAK

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Eid al-Fitr 1447: courage to refuse empire



By Imam Dr
Rashied Omar

As we gather to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, we do so in a world trembling under the weight of war, dispossession, and deepening injustice. Ramadan has trained our souls in restraint, discipline, and compassion. Eid now asks: What have we learned? And how will we live what we have learned?

Across our globe, we witness powerful states arrogating to themselves the right to decide which governments may stand and which must fall. The

language is often dressed in the garments of “security,” “stability,” or even “liberation.” But history teaches us a sobering truth: regime change imposed through military force violates international law. It rarely brings freedom. Instead, it advances imperial ambitions, strengthens authoritarian narratives, entrenches cycles of violence, and multiplies human suffering. In the process, it suffocates indigenous, justice-centered movements struggling for authentic emancipation.

As Muslims shaped by the ethical discipline of Ramadan, we must resist the seduction of simplistic narratives. The Qur’an commands us: “Believers!, stand firmly for justice, as witnesses for God, even against yourselves...” (Qur’an 4:135)

Justice is not selective. It is not partisan. It does not excuse external aggression because we oppose a particular regime, nor does it romanticize authoritarian rulers simply because

they resist foreign powers. Our moral compass must be steadied by principle, not by geopolitical convenience or sectarian prejudices.

Ramadan has reminded us that transformation begins within. Fasting is not only abstention from food and drink; it is an act of moral reorientation. It teaches us sabr (steadfast perseverance), taqwa (God-consciousness), and rahma (compassion and mercy). These are not private virtues alone. They are public ethics. Eid, therefore, is not an escape from the world’s pain. It is a recommitment to healing it.

In the past decades, we have seen the catastrophic consequences of wars waged in the name of “liberation.” Entire societies have been fractured. Sectarian divisions have deepened. Millions have been displaced. The architecture of international law has been eroded by double standards and selective enforcement. As conscientious believers, we must

reject both the violence of empire and the violence of tyranny. Our beloved exemplar Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) stood against oppression in all its forms. He taught that the best jihad is a word of truth spoken before a tyrannical ruler (Sunan al-Nasa’i; also reported in Sunan Abu Dawud, and Jamial-Tirmidhi). In our time, that includes speaking against unlawful wars, economic strangulation through unjust sanctions, and collective punishment of civilian populations. It also includes challenging corruption, repression, and abuses of power within our own societies.

Eid al-Fitr is a festival of gratitude. We thank God for the gift of life, for the strength to fast, for the bonds of family and community. But gratitude must also deepen into social responsibility. What might this responsibility look like?

First, we must cultivate moral clarity. We refuse the false choice between

empire and despotism. We affirm instead the dignity of peoples to determine their own futures without external coercion.

Second, we must nurture compassionate solidarity. The Qur’an describes the believers as a single body: when one part suffers, the whole body feels the pain. Let our zakat, our advocacy, our scholarship, and our civic engagement reflect this global moral consciousness.

Third, we must invest in justice-centred peacebuilding. Sustainable peace cannot be built through bombs and occupation. It grows from within societies, through accountable institutions, inclusive governance, economic fairness, and respect for human rights. External actors who truly wish to help must support these indigenous processes rather than impose their own geopolitical designs.

Finally, we must guard our hearts. Anger at injustice must not curdle into hatred.

Opposition to aggression must not become dehumanisation. Ramadan has softened our hearts through fasting, night vigil prayers, Qur’an recitation, and alms giving. Eid invites us to carry that tenderness into the public square.

The takbir of Eid—Allahu Akbar (God is Greater Than) is not a slogan of triumphalism. It is a proclamation that no empire, no army, no ruler is ultimate. God alone is the Greatest. All power is accountable. No oppression will escape its reckoning.

As we embrace one another and say Eid Mubarak, let us also renew our covenant with the Lord of Compassionate and Mercy to stand for justice without fear, to speak truth without rancour, and to work for a world in which freedom is not delivered by missiles but cultivated through compassion, the rule of law, and human dignity.

May this Eid be a turning point, for our hearts, and for our world. Eid Mubarak

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Prosperity To Your Home.

Eid Mubarak

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Activists break bread at Iftaar evening

By Ismail Suder

The South Africa Palestine Movement (SAPM) recently held an Iftaar evening of “unity, reflection and solidarity” at the Suleman Lockhat Auditorium in Overport, Durban, with one main conviction – to pursue justice for the Palestinian people.

Al-Qalam attended the event along with dozens of activists from across religious denominations and Palestinian groups.

The Iftaar evening also marked a milestone for the South Africa Palestine Movement whose members street protested for 105 Fridays in bitterly cold wintry weather to blistering hot summer days.

“This milestone is not simply a celebration – it is a renewal of intention. Until the siege ends. Until occupation falls. Until children wake up without fear. Until olive trees grow without being uprooted. Two years

later, the message remains clear: we will not normalise oppression. We will not silence the truth. We will not stop showing up, no matter what the weather, Yeshelen Govender, the group’s media spokesman.

One of those who attended the Iftaar was 95-year-old Coral Vinsen of Durban who is probably the oldest human rights activist in South Africa to protest each week against the genocide in Gaza – come hail, rain or shine.

Also at the Iftaar evening was activist Elham Mouafak Hatfield, a French-Moroccan (now South African citizen) who is part of the Global South African Samud flotilla Organisation team.

She told *Al-Qalam* that people are preparing to set sail for Gaza within weeks, adding that the Flotilla will sail from Tunisia. She also called on South Africans to register to join the flotilla as soon as possible.

“We aim to leave for Gaza on the 12th April 2026 with



Palestinian activist Coral Vinsen (95) enjoying tasty treats at the Iftaar evening with her son

100 boats. Over a thousand people from around the world will join the Samud flotilla. We also have the humanitarian convoy mission at the same time.

“We will focus once again to sail peacefully to attempt once again to open a humanitarian corridor and break the siege of Gaza. Participants will include

teachers, healthcare workers, war crime investigators, eco-builders and others to help build essential infrastructure in the Gaza Strip that was destroyed by the

Zionist regime,” she added.

Those willing to volunteer may sign up here: <https://registration.globalsumud-flotilla.org/>



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Gaza to SA: Israa Selmi keeps Palestinian culture alive

By Neelam Rahim

For many across the world, Gaza is often known only through news reports of conflict and devastation. But for Palestinian artist and educator Israa Selmi, Gaza is first and foremost home – a place rich in culture, faith, and resilience.

Now living in South Africa, Selmi carries the stories, traditions and spirit of her homeland into the work she does every day, ensuring that Palestinian culture continues to be shared and preserved far beyond its borders.

Born and raised in Gaza, Selmi's childhood unfolded against the backdrop of repeated conflict. She lived through multiple wars and countless military aggressions that have shaped the lives of generations of Palestinians.

One of the most defining moments of her early life was the loss of her father who was martyred during

the ongoing struggle faced by the Palestinian people. In the face of unimaginable hardship, Selmi says it was her mother who became the pillar of strength for the family, raising her children under extremely difficult conditions while instilling in them values of patience, faith and perseverance.

Those lessons have remained central to Selmi's journey.

While she initially pursued studies in Medical Laboratory Sciences in Gaza, her passion for education and cultural expression continued to grow. Today, she is in her third year studying education, working towards her dream of becoming a teacher who inspires students to believe in themselves and in the power of knowledge.

Her commitment to education extends beyond the classroom. Through her online initiative, Arabic with Israa, Selmi teaches Arabic to students around the world, sharing not only the language but also the

cultural richness that it carries. For Selmi, language is more than a means of communication – it is a living connection to identity, history and belonging. Her journey eventually brought her to South Africa, a move she describes as both daunting and deeply meaningful. Leaving Gaza and starting a new life thousands of kilometres away from family and familiarity was not easy. Yet within South Africa she found a community that stood in solidarity with the Palestinian cause.

That support has played an important role in shaping the work she continues to do today. Living far from home has strengthened Selmi's commitment to preserving and sharing Palestinian culture. In diaspora, she told *Al-Qalam*, the importance of holding on to one's roots becomes even more profound.

This commitment led to the creation of ZaytoonZA, a cultural initiative Selmi co-founded with her close friend, Manar Shanqiti. What began as a small ef-

fort to support Selmi's family in Gaza during difficult circumstances gradually evolved into a growing platform that connects South Africans with authentic Palestinian cultural products.

The initiative also maintains a direct link to Gaza through Selmi's sister, Iman, who assists with preparing and promoting items from there. In this way, ZaytoonZA serves not only as a small business but also as a bridge between Gaza and South Africa.

Today, the online store offers more than 200 Palestinian products, including traditional embroidered items, scarves, bags, accessories and other pieces inspired by Palestinian heritage. Through art, craftsmanship and cultural storytelling, Selmi believes these traditions can continue to flourish even far from their place of origin.

Art, she told *Al-Qalam*, is a universal language capable of communicating the stories of a people across



cultures and borders. Each embroidered design, each pattern and each handmade piece reflects a narrative of heritage, resilience and pride.

Despite living far from Gaza, Selmi remains deeply connected to her homeland. Through constant communication with her family and through initiatives that provide support to them, she continues to play an active role in their lives. She hopes that people in South Africa and around the world come to understand that Gaza is more than the images of de-

struction often seen on television screens. It is a place where families raise children, where communities celebrate culture and where people continue to dream of a better future. Through her work as an educator, artist and cultural advocate, Selmi is determined to keep those stories alive.

In doing so, she reminds us that even in the most difficult circumstances, hope can take root – much like the enduring olive tree that has long symbolised the strength of the Palestinian people.

عید مبارک

Eid Mubarak

تقبل الله منا ومنكم

May Allah accept from us and from you.

From our family to yours, we pray that this blessed day brings peace, joy and barakah into your home.

May Allah reward you for your compassion and continued support in serving those in need.



FEATURE

Ottoman art makes meaningful Eid gifts

By Sana Ebrahim

As Eid al-Fitr approaches, families begin preparing for one of the most joyful days on the Islamic calendar. Alongside the traditional sweets, new clothing and perfumes exchanged during the celebration, many people are also seeking gifts that carry deeper meaning. Ottoman-inspired Islamic art offers one such option, blending spirituality, heritage and craftsmanship into pieces that can be treasured for years.

Occupational therapist and Ottoman art practitioner Nazeemah Soomar believes that traditional Islamic art holds a special place in celebrating occasions such as Eid.

Traditional Turkish art dates back many centuries and reached a peak during the Ottoman era. Artists used natural pigments derived from minerals and plants, along with delicate applications of gold leaf. These meticulous tech-

niques helped many historic works survive for generations and remain preserved in museums today. Ottoman illumination and calligraphy formed part of the wider tradition of Ottoman book arts. These techniques were used to decorate Qur'anic manuscripts, official documents and artistic panels, often featuring intricate patterns and elegant floral motifs.

For Nazeemah, Ottoman art carries meaning far beyond decoration.

"Ottoman art is a labour of love," she explains. "It reflects love for Allah's words and for the beauty Allah created in nature."

Calligraphers carefully write sacred texts or meaningful phrases, while illumination artists frame the words with balanced designs and stylised florals. The result is a composition that reflects harmony, a central principle within Islamic artistic tradition.

Historically, Islamic art appeared in several forms, including architecture, func-

tional objects such as tiles or vessels, and decorative artworks. Across these forms, beauty was regarded as an essential element of life.

"Islam encourages balance, harmony and goodness," Nazeemah says. "Beauty reflects Allah's nature and helps create peaceful spaces."

Nazeemah's love for art began early, although opportunities to explore it were limited during her school years.

"In the early 1990s there was very little exposure to the arts in our communities," she recalls. "Art was often seen as something low on the ladder in terms of career choices."

Despite this, her passion endured. Over time, her appreciation for art deepened alongside her spiritual journey.

"Art became a way of recognising Allah's beauty," she told *Al-Qalam*. "It also reflects one of Allah's attributes, Ya Khaliq, the Creator."



For Nazeemah, gifting Islamic art during this time offers an opportunity to reconnect with cultural and spiritual heritage.

"In many places we do not live in societies where Islamic culture is dominant," she says. "For centuries we have often looked to the West for artistic inspiration. Reviving traditional Islamic

arts helps us rediscover our own heritage."

Calligraphy holds a particularly important place within Islamic tradition. The Qur'an itself references the pen, highlighting the significance of knowledge and writing.

Receiving a handmade artwork can therefore carry

both spiritual and emotional meaning, she added.

"A piece of art created by hand builds a connection. It brings harmony into the home and the heart of the person receiving it."

"Art has lasting value," Nazeemah says. "It is like a bouquet of flowers that never fades."

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EID
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As we celebrate Eid, we celebrate more than just a day — we celebrate gratitude, generosity, and unity.

KZN pharmacist returns from Gaza with newfound purpose

Mahomed Zahir Haniff, the first South African pharmacist to enter Gaza since the start of the genocide, shares his experience working inside Nasser Hospital, writes Azra Hoosen.

The first time Mahomed Zahir Haniff heard a bomb fall in Gaza, he was standing in Fajr Salah.

Just hours earlier, the Newcastle pharmacist had arrived at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis on January 20th as part of a two-week medical volunteer rotation.

Then the ground shook.

Haniff told *Al-Qalam* how terrifying it was: "Every bone in my body just vibrated. I didn't know whether I should turn and run, whether to read my Kalimah or finish my Salah. I had no idea what to do."

Yet no one moved.

The Imam continued re-

citing, while everyone remained steady. "That's when I realised how normal this had become for them. I couldn't understand how anyone could get used to the sound of bombs," Haniff said.

Yet within two weeks, he did. But what he never got used to was what came next. "Half an hour to 45 minutes later, you get an influx of patients. Those are the ones who survived and were able to make it to the hospital. The rest go straight to the morgue," he recalled.

That is when his healthcare experience and knowledge kicked in – he put his heart and soul into saving lives in a war zone, working closely with medical teams at the hospital. "I conducted clinical ward rounds in the ICU with doctors, consulted patients in the fast-track unit similar to South Africa's primary healthcare clinics, managed chronic medication in the medical wards and assisted in the ER (emergency room)," he said.

Haniff's journey to Gaza began almost by accident. Last September, he saw a call on social media for medical volunteers and submitted an application without much expectation. He applied for the voluntary service through a US-based NGO, Gift of Disability Alleviation (GODA). Months passed. Then, in December, an email arrived asking if he could deploy in January.

Zero hesitation – he said yes. However, entry into Gaza was not guaranteed. Haniff explained that volunteers had to travel to Jordan and wait for final clearance from authorities. Approval came only the night before crossing the border. "If your name isn't approved, you simply go home," he said.

Nasser Hospital

The scale of the humanitarian crisis was impossible to ignore. "Burns over 45 percent of the body, bullet wounds, broken bones, you name it, we were seeing it. From two-year-olds to the

elderly," he explained.

Many patients arrived after the bomb blasts. Others came in with sniper wounds. But the cases involving children left the deepest scars. "You see the videos online – fathers running into the emergency room carrying their child and screaming for help, but when you're the one standing there and that child is handed to you, it's completely different," he said.

In one case, a young boy arrived paralysed after shrapnel severed his spinal cord. His home had been destroyed and eleven members of his family had been killed in the same strike. "How are you supposed to deal with something like that?" Haniff questioned.

Despite shortages of medicine, failing equipment and overcrowded wards, with tents erected outside for additional patients, he says the hospital staff continued working with remarkable ingenuity and faith.



For him, the experience revealed something deeper than the devastation of war.

Despite everything, life simply continues: "People are not sitting there feeling sorry for themselves. Every single day, they are rebuilding, helping others. The children are playing. Madrasas are continuing in tents. Their level of Tawakkul and resilience is something we have a lot to learn from."

Haniff was amazed that the Fajr jamaat in a tent was just as full as Jumu'ah. "Everywhere you look, people are reading Quran. Even the children playing outside are reciting," he said.

Haniff said the people of Gaza showed extraordinary generosity: "They never al-

lowed us to do anything for ourselves. Not even make a cup of tea."

He returned to South Africa around 5th February with a completely different outlook on life.

Despite the trauma he witnessed during his just over two weeks of service, Haniff said that the experience has only deepened his commitment to humanitarian work.

When asked if he would return to a war-torn region again, he told *Al-Qalam* that he had finally found his calling.

Haniff is already planning his next deployment: "I'm hoping to return to Gaza. If that doesn't work out, I want to head into Sudan."

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OBITUARY

Remembering Suliman Mohamed Ghoor

29 September 1932 – 25 February 2026



By Ebrahim Moosa

On 25 February 2026 – 7 Ramaḍān 1447 – South Africa lost one of its most consequential and visionary Muslim figures. Suliman Mohamed Ghoor, fondly known to all as “uncle Solly” of Vryburg, who passed away in Johannesburg at the ripe age of 93.

Businessman, philanthropist, and a tireless patron of Islamic education at home and abroad, he left behind a legacy that few could match and almost none would have kept so quietly.

He was born on 29 September 1932 in Ranavav, a village set in the Khatiavar Peninsula of Gujarat, India. Ranavav is today a small town of some 160,000 souls situated roughly 15km from Porbandar – the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi, who himself had spent formative years in South Africa as a lawyer. This geography of coincidence is fitting. The region’s people are also known as Memons, a community with a distinct Gujarati dialect and culture that today constitutes an impressive and influential global diaspora. From such roots grew the Ghoor family’s story in South Africa.

The family ancestor, Cassim Abdulla Ghoor, was a farmer in Ranavav. He had two sons: Dada Cassim (DC) Ghoor and Mohamed Cassim (MC) Ghoor, whose mother died when the latter was just two months old. It was DC Ghoor who first made the crossing from India, arriving in South Africa at the tender age of ten in 1888, where he worked for a merchant. His younger brother MC Ghoor followed, also arriving at age ten, spending a few months in Dundee, then Pretoria, before joining his brother in Vryburg in 1898. MC Ghoor was

Suliman Ghoor’s father.

Their destination, Vryburg, was itself a place of layered histories. Once the capital of the short-lived Boer Republic of Stellaland (1882–1885), and then the capital of the British Crown Colony of British Bechuanaland (1885–1895), Vryburg was later annexed to the Cape Colony and is now part of the North West Province. Its population in the 19th century numbered 18,082 residents. Into this remote but historically charged town, DC and MC Ghoor were drawn by a network of Memon families also from Ranavav. The brothers alternated their stays between South Africa and India for several decades: while one kept the family hearth in Ranavav, the other worked in South Africa. In 1903 they formalized their presence, opening a general dealer partnership trading as DC Ghoor in the downtown area next to Vryburg’s Grand Hotel.

MC Ghoor continued his crossings. In 1933, he brought his wife and five children to Vryburg, the youngest of whom was Suliman, who was then barely a year old. Suliman began his schooling in the town but could not advance beyond the primary stage: apartheid’s brutal logic barred him from the only white high school, and no high school existed for non-whites. Circumstances thus pressed him into the family business. DC Ghoor and his brother MC dissolved their partnership in 1935. MC Ghoor then renamed the departmental store MC Ghoor & Sons but died five years later at the age of 52. Suliman Ghoor was only eight years old, and his older siblings assumed responsibility.

Eventually Suliman joined them and later took charge, specializing over the decades in clothing, curtaining, fabrics, flooring, appliances and furniture. In the 1970s the Group Areas Act forced the business out of the downtown area toward the edge of what is today’s central business district. There it continues to flourish, serving a Vryburg which has now grown to 90,000 residents and functioning as

a regional hub for a vast farming and mining hinterland.

Through the success of his business and the force of a sterling character, Suliman Ghoor gained recognition far beyond the Memon circles of South Africa. From seven to 10 Muslim families in the 1880s, Vryburg had grown to over a thousand Muslims, hosting a mosque whose committee Suliman Ghoor chaired at the time of his death. Yet modesty and self-effacement were his most distinguished marks. He would never disclose the extent of his own generosity. The most he would ever say – and I witnessed this firsthand – was “our family helped out a bit,” words offered as encouragement for others to give. What he withheld was that his contribution was almost always the lion’s share of any project he took to heart. He was among those who spent his wealth according to the Qurānic teaching, “secretly,” fully reassured that his reward is with his Lord (Q 2:274). This, too, is the teaching of an authentic ḥadīth: giving with the right hand such that the left hand does not know what the right hand gives.

His public engagement with Islamic life was no less devoted. In the 1970s he became active in the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa, which hosted important international figures and made a vital contribution to Islamic awareness in the country. He was especially moved by the Pakistani Islamic scholar and preacher Mawlānā Fazlur Rahman Ansārī (d. 1974) and by the Lebanese-American biochemist and Islamic preacher Dr. Ahmed Sakr (d. 2015), who advanced the cause of halal certification in the United States. Suliman Ghoor was also a regular member and contributor to the Quranic Study Circle in Vryburg. And he was deeply engaged with the South African National Zakah Fund (SANZAF), a premier Muslim faith-based socio-economic welfare and development organization.

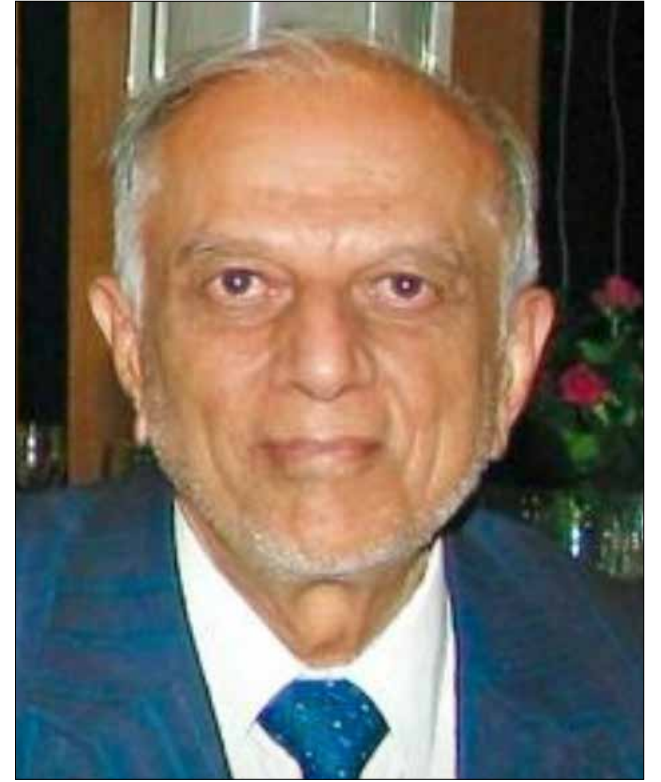
His legacy is most indelibly marked by two

major projects. He had a close personal relationship with the physician Dr. Imtiaz Suliman, the founder of the globally reputed NGO Gift of the Givers (GOTG). It was Suliman Ghoor, together with Dr Haroon Tayob and an established network of friends, who urged Dr. Imtiaz Suliman to commit himself fully to relief work. GOTG is today known as the unofficial “fourth arm of the state” in South Africa: a hyper-efficient, non-governmental disaster relief organization that routinely arrives at crisis zones faster than the government itself, both at home and abroad.

The second project was the founding of the Islamic Academy of South Africa. In 1989, Suliman Ghoor and his network of donor friends formed the Academy and endowed, in perpetuity, two academic positions at the University of Cape Town (UCT): a junior lectureship and a full lectureship. The Academy also supported smaller ventures at other South African universities. It was an act of institutional vision, executed with the quiet determination that characterized everything he did.

After a national search, the inaugural hires for these two positions were Professor Abdulkader Tayob, a graduate of Temple University, USA, appointed as lecturer, and me as the junior lecturer. In his tribute, Tayob – now emeritus professor of Islamic Studies at UCT – noted “Uncle Solly’s” unique, quiet and understated manner: a businessman with a deep social commitment. Tayob, who knew him through family networks and later worked closely with him, added: “Uncle Solly represented a long line of visionaries in South Africa that committed themselves to its current crop of vibrant institutions, be it mosques, schools, or colleges. May that line not disappear. We need people like him, more than ever in our world.”

Without that endowment of the Islamic Academy embodying Suliman Ghoor’s vision, I often wonder what alternate trajectory my career



would have taken, were it not for the opportunity he and his committed group of friends created for two South African scholars. Whatever contribution we make will always be indebted to his act of social benevolence and to the contributions of his colleagues in the Islamic Academy. We will never know for certain, but I carry an informed hunch that when additional fundraising for these positions slowed, Uncle Solly and his network of friends quietly covered whatever remained – asking nothing, saying less. The Muslim tradition is very explicit in the teaching of the Prophet, (SAW) who said: “Whoever inaugurates a good practice shall obtain its reward – as well as the reward of those who act upon it after the one who started it, without diminishing their reward.”

Suliman Ghoor was also deeply drawn to Islamic Sufism and the tradition of self-purification. In the 1990s he and his brothers sponsored the translation into English of the works of Shaykh Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (470–561 AH / 1077–1166 CE), the world-renowned Persian scholar, preacher, and founder of the Qādiriyya Sufi order. Through his patronage, several volumes were translated by Muhtar Holland and published, bringing this treasure of Islamic spiritual writings to new generations of readers. Shaykh Saʿūdullah Khan, the Chief Executive Officer of Islamia College in

Cape Town, also a native of Vryburg, but never a permanent resident after his childhood, recalled “Uncle Solly as a kind and pleasant man with a heart of gold.” Endearing in his soft-spoken nature, Khan recalls conversations with Suliman Ghoor about translations of significant Islamic literature. It is during these “sittings at his home,” Khan said, “that I realized the remarkable insight of this quiet, unassuming man from a small town who had this incredible passionate interest in enlightening people the world over.”

All Suliman Ghoor’s siblings had predeceased him. He is survived by two children – Bashyr and Asima – five grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. A middle son, Samir, died in a tragic accident in 1990. With the passing of this great South African figure, all communities are the poorer. Yet none more so than South Africa’s Muslim community, for which he was a pillar, but whose height was largely invisible to those who stood under its shelter.

His munificence has infected time itself, making it generous, though time, were it not for him, would be a miser.

— Abū al-Tayyib al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/965)

**Ebrahim Moosa is the Mirza Family professor of Islamic Thought and Muslim Societies at the University of Notre Dame in the USA.*

Eid

Mubarak

May The Almighty fill your heart and home with blessings of peace and joy this Eid and always.



OPINION

The History of Political Islam in Iran



By Ayesha Omar

On 28 February 2026, the United States and Israel entered an illegal, immoral and reckless war against the Islamic Republic of Iran. The decision was not compelled by necessity but by hubris: the claim to universal political legitimacy and the belief that non-compliant regimes could be dismantled by force. Even in Western criticism of the latter, the former persists, as a subtle colonial reflex, they read the present dangerous war with Iran as a deviation from modernity, from rationality, from some imagined norm of political progress. What is especially lost in this mode of analysis is a proper engagement with the

theoretical underpinnings of Iranian revolutionary political thought, that which binds the intellectual architecture of its political order and sustains its durability. The Islamic Republic is a political formation with its own history, its own internal logic, and an intellectual genealogy that runs deeper than most Western commentary has cared to trace. Understanding what political Islam in Iran actually is, genealogically, conceptually, and historically, matters precisely because it is a system far more embedded than that which can be dissolved by any single intervention.

The revolution that overthrew Mohammad Reza Shah in 1979 was the culmination of decades of opposition to a regime synonymous with corruption, repression, and dependence on Western power. The Pahlavi state had been restored by the CIA and MI6-orchestrated coup of 1953, which removed the elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh. It governed through the SAVAK secret police and systematically eliminated political opposition across the ideological spectrum.

By the 1970s, nationalists, communists, Islamists, and liberal constitutionalists had converged not around a shared vision of what should replace the Shah, but around a shared conviction that his rule was illegitimate. The revolution was broad precisely because that illegitimacy was felt across class and ideology. It was also, as the scholar Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi has argued in *Revolutions and its Discontents* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), the product of an ideologically plural intellectual formation, drawing on clerical jurisprudence, Marxist sociology, Third Worldist anti-colonialism, Shia theology, and Persian literary culture.

To reduce it to a single ideology, whether called fundamentalism or theocracy, is to misread the intellectual history on which its institutions were built. Once the Shah fell, the question of which current would define the new order was settled, rapidly, by force. Two figures above all had shaped the intellectual terms of that contest: Ruhollah Khomeini, whose juristic reconception of clerical authority provid-



ed the revolution's institutional architecture, and Ali Shariati, whose synthesis of Islamic theology and Third Worldist anti-colonialism gave it its most powerful popular idiom.

Ruhollah Khomeini's central theoretical contribution was velayat-e faqih, the guardianship of the Islamic jurist. This was not a return to tradition but a decisive rupture within it.

Traditional Twelver Shia political theology had coun-
 sold quietism: during the occultation of the Hidden Twelfth Imam, the faqih might exercise limited delegated authority in judicial and social matters, but direct governance was another question entirely.

Khomeini and the juristic tradition

Traditional Twelver Shia political theology had coun-

continued on page 11

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continued from page 10

Khomeini's lectures at Najaf in early 1970, later published as *Islamic Government (Hukumat-i Islami)*, made a radical claim: that in the Imam's absence, the most learned jurist must not merely advise but rule, and that this was not an innovation but a recovery of Islam's original political logic. However, no Shia thinker before him had explicitly argued that only senior clergy had the authority to govern the state nor the corollary that previous monarchies were illegitimate.

Khomeini's intellectual formation was itself deeply layered. Trained in both jurisprudence and mysticism, he engaged philosophical traditions stretching back through centuries of Shia thought. The broader currents of twentieth-century Sunni political Islam also shaped the Iranian revolutionary milieu. A young Ali Khamenei, later to become Supreme Leader, translated the Egyptian thinker Sayyid Qutb's work into Persian in 1967. Qutb's arguments for Islamic sovereignty and against both Western liberalism and Soviet communism were arguably absorbed and reworked within a specifically Shia and specifically

Iranian framework.

What emerged was a peculiar and novel political architecture: juristic authority embedded over elected institutions, while retaining republican forms, elections, parliament, and presidency, that gave the system its claim to popular legitimacy. The 1979 constitution was not the codification of a pre-existing consensus but the political victory of one current within a plural revolutionary moment.

Shariati and the intellectual left of Islam

Ali Shariati represents a different strand of the revolution's intellectual genealogy, no less important for having been partially absorbed and partially suppressed after 1979. A sociologist trained in Paris in the 1960s, Shariati worked at the intersection of anti-colonial theory, Marxist sociology, and Shia theology. He was the principal theorist of Islamic Third Worldism: the argument that Islam, properly understood, was a liberation ideology capable of articulating the struggle of the mostazafin, the oppressed, against imperialism, capitalism, and colonial modernity. The Quranic term *mostazafin* became his rendering of Frantz Fanon's *les damnés de la terre*, the



downtrodden, a concept he wove throughout his lectures and writings.

Those lectures, delivered at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad in Tehran and later transcribed into some fifty pamphlets and booklets, captivated the educated youth of the 1960s and 1970s precisely because they refused the choice between secular modernism and clerical conservatism. His speech "Red Shiism/Black Shiism," delivered in 1971, distinguished between

the true Shiism of Ali, characterised by martyrdom, resistance, and agency, and the Safavid institutionalisation of religion as mourning ritual, a quietism that served entrenched power. He was openly anticlerical, deeply suspicious of the clerical establishment as guardians of an inherited Shiism that had evacuated its own emancipatory content. Shariati died in 1977, before the revolution he helped generate. His intellectual legacy was consequently available to

be selectively appropriated. With Khomeini incorporated some of the political language of the *mostazafin* into populist addresses.

The entrenched structure of political Islam

What these two genealogies together illuminate is that political Islam in Iran is not a surface ideology imposed on an otherwise secular society, nor a medieval residue awaiting displacement by modernity. It is a form of modern political thought emerging from the region's own reformation with unique intellectual contours. It is also a form of political organisation that has had close to five decades to embed itself in institutions, educational systems, military structures, and patterns of social life. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is not merely a military organisation; it is the organisational embodiment of the doctrine that the revolution must be protected from within. The seminaries of Qom are sites where the political theology of the state is continuously reproduced, debated, and contested.

The ongoing intellectual debates within the Islamic Republic, about the scope of clerical authority, about the relationship between divine

and popular sovereignty, about the role of religion in governance, are themselves evidence of how the system functions. None of this is to foreclose questions about the system's past Islamic legitimacy or future survival. It is rather to insist that those questions can only be correctly purveyed on the basis of a serious account of what the system actually is. Political Islam in Iran is not an interruption of Iranian history but a chapter within it, one produced by specific intellectual formations, shaped by transnational currents of thought, and institutionalised across decades. It will not wither away through the logic of modernity, nor dissolve under the pressure of any single moment of conjuncture. Understanding it requires taking seriously what its architects actually thought and engagement with Iran can only proceed by recognising that only the Iranians get to choose who they want to be.

Dr Ayesha Omar is a British Academy International Fellow at SOAS, University of London and a Senior Lecturer in Political Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand. She is the author of The Pluralistic Frameworks of Ibn Rushd and Abdullahi An-Na'im (Cambridge University Press, 2025).

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NB. All letters MUST be accompanied by the writer's correct name and contact details, or it will not be published. A nom-de-plume will be accepted only for publication purposes.
NB. All views reflected in this column are the opinion of the writer and do NOT necessarily reflect the views of the Editor.

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

Counter Islamophobia & promote dawah by inviting media for Iftar and Eidgah

We are all well aware about the rising Islamophobia in South Africa. Fuelled by a combination of deliberate media negative framing of Islam and Muslims, Zionist linked communities are actively promoting Islamophobia in pursuance of a political agenda.

Wherever you turn, you will see negative images of Islam and Muslims being portrayed in the mainstream media, social media, in novels and in movies etc. These negative images of Islam and Muslims are being driven mainly by Zionists and Christian Zionists. One of the ways to counter this negative stereotyping and imagery, and as a form of soft dawah, is to invite the media to your local

masjid or musalla to witness Iftar and maghrib salaah. Let them witness the universal brotherhood, unity and spirit of Iftar and Ramadan, and our salaah, where people across all races and social classes break fast together and pray next to each other – shoulder to shoulder. Invite all media but particularly the local community newspapers, the local community radio stations, podcasts hosts and influencers, in addition to the usual mainstream media.

In addition, you could also consider inviting the local religious leaders, head of the local police station, principals of local schools where children from the community attend, community leaders and local councillors. Let one or two musalees be appointed to chaperone the guests

and guide them along, doing soft dawah. No amount of preaching can substitute the visual effects of seeing people of all races and social classes share Iftar together and perform Salah shoulder to shoulder.

SAMNET encourages everyone to try their best to Google your local reporters, your local newspapers, radio stations etc in each of your areas no matter how small or how large your Masjid or your Musallah is, and invite them to the beauty of Islam. Keep it apolitical; just focus on 'breaking bread together' – consider the same for Eid salah whether at Eidgah or masjid.

South African Muslim Network (SAMNET)
Durban

Revolution cannot be imposed from above; it must be cultivated from below'

Across South Africa, the most urgent struggles – land occupations, housing crises, collapsing social services, and the fight against gender-based violence – are not being led by political parties or unions. They are being driven by the subaltern: the marginalised and excluded who live daily with the violence of capitalism. These movements, from shack dwellers to community advice centres, are not the product of party programmes.

They are born of necessity, of lived experience, and of survival. Yet when traditional left parties intervene, they often fall into what can be called a triple entrapment: economism, statism, and partyism. They cling to outdated vanguardist models, assuming revolution is a mechanical outcome of economic contradictions, led by professional cadres under the auspices of a vanguard party. In doing so, they risk suffocating the grassroots energy that keeps resistance alive. What is needed is a politics that listens. Instead of treating communities

as raw material for party agendas, the left must recognise that the subaltern are not passive victims of history but active makers of it. The struggles for land, water, food, and dignity are not simply economic demands – they are acts of reclaiming humanity.

Examples abound. Gauteng Housing Crisis Committee land occupations and grassroots-based socioeconomic development initiatives, the popular education and advocacy work of Zabalaza Pathway Institute, and ILRIG's counter-hegemonic research show us what grassroots socialism looks like in practice: survival treated as a collective right, not a commodity. These initiatives embody cooperative economics, mutual aid, and participatory democracy.

The challenge now is to weave them together into a sustained, strategically informed challenge to capital. Organisations such as the South African Communist Party, Socialist Party of Azania and Zabalaza Anarchist Socialist Front must redefine their roles. Their

task is not to capture movements into party hierarchies but to act as shields, amplifiers, and allies. The ZACF can promote anarchist principles of horizontalism and mutual aid. SOPA can connect Black Consciousness and African communal traditions to modern Marxist Humanism. The SACP, with its nationwide reach, can defend grassroots movements from repression while re-anchoring its programme in local culture and cooperative initiatives.

If the left is to remain relevant, it must abandon the prophet model and embrace the pedagogy of listening. Revolution cannot be imposed from above; it must be cultivated from below, in kitchens, neighbourhoods, and community assemblies.

The focus should not only be on capturing the state but also on building communal, cooperative, and democratic forms of life. South Africa's grassroots movements are already showing us the way. The question is whether the left will learn to follow.

Mphutlane wa Bofelo

SAMNET to minister: 'Why are dodgy Israelis being fast-tracked into SA?'

Dear Minister

Subject: Inquiry Regarding Immigration, Residency, and Citizenship Applications from Israeli Nationals

I am writing to request clarification and transparency from the Department of Home Affairs concerning the growing influx of Israeli citizens entering South Africa, particularly in the Western Cape. This matter raises public concern, especially given ongoing reports of human rights violations committed by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and the possibility that individuals involved in or supportive of such actions may be seeking residency or citizenship in South Africa.

Given South Africa's strong constitutional commitment to human rights and its consistent stance in support of international humanitarian law, it is important that due diligence is applied in all immigration and citizenship applications involving individuals who may have served in, or been associated with, military or intelligence bodies accused of violations of international law.

To this end, I respectfully

request that the Department provide responses to the following questions:

1. How many Israeli citizens or people coming from Israel have applied for South African residency, work permits, permanent residence, or citizenship over the past five years?
2. How many of these applicants hold dual or multiple nationalities in addition to their Israeli passports?
3. What specific background checks does the Department conduct on such applicants to determine prior or current military service in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) or associated security/intelligence institutions?
4. How does the Department ensure compliance with South Africa's domestic laws and international obligations, particularly where applicants may have been involved in actions constituting human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law?
5. Are there any mechanisms to coordinate with the Department of International Relations and Cooperation or the National Prosecuting Authority in assessing applications that may raise hu-

man rights concerns?

It is common cause that all able bodied adults in Israel serve in one form or the other in the greater Israeli Defense Force and would have served and participated in the Occupation and enforcement of a host of UN declared illegal activities in the Occupied Territories of Palestine and Gaza., including, but not limited to, killing and injuring unarmed Palestinians, destruction and/or illegal seizure of Palestinian homes, crops and possessions, illegal arrest and torture of Palestinians.

These same people are, especially during the past two years, increasingly entering our country and being sped through the normal bureaucratic processes at DHA and hastily given work permits etc to speed up their presence in our country, notwithstanding the fact that they would have perpetrated human rights abuses in occupied Palestine.

Relevant Legal Framework: The following provisions of South African law provide a framework for this matter:

South African Citizenship Act 88 of 1995

Section 6(1)(b): Provides

that the Minister may refuse or revoke citizenship if the applicant has been convicted of an offence which, if committed in South Africa, would constitute a serious criminal offence.

Section 8(1)(a): Allows for deprivation of citizenship if the individual has conducted themselves in a manner seriously prejudicial to the interests of the Republic.

Immigration Act 13 of 2002

Section 29(1)(a): Declares any person who is or has been a member of an organization or group advocating the practice of racial hatred or social violence as a "prohibited person".

Section 29(1)(b): Excludes from entry any person who has committed, ordered, incited, assisted, or participated in the commission of crimes against humanity, war crimes, or genocide as defined in international law.

Section 30(1)(c): Identifies a person as "undesirable" if they have been convicted of serious offences or conduct inconsistent with South African values and law.

These sections clearly empower the Minister and the



Department to exercise discretion and ensure that individuals associated with violations of human rights, including those potentially arising from IDF service, do not obtain residency or citizenship status in South Africa.

South Africa's Constitution, under Section 7(2), further obliges the State to "respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights," including the rights to equality, dignity, and life. Granting residency or citi-

zenship to people implicated in human rights abuses could therefore contradict the spirit and obligations of our Constitution. Given the sensitivity and gravity of this issue, we respectfully request that your department furnish a written response addressing the above queries, including any relevant statistics or current policy frameworks guiding such applications.

Yours faithfully
Faisal Suliman
Chairperson SAMNET



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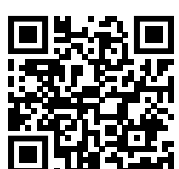
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OPINION

WAR ON IRAN - Holding Three Opposing ideas



By Ebrahim Rassol
(Former Ambassador to the USA)

Scott Fitzgerald held that one of the signs of a first-class mind was the ability to hold two opposing ideas in one head. The complexity of the current geo-political situation globally probably requires our minds to hold at least three contradictory and opposing ideas at the same time if we are to navigate and make sense of the world today, especially the Middle East as the theatre of conflict.

What We Know

What most citizens of the world increasingly know as true is that a genocide is being perpetrated against the Palestinian people, their lands occupied, and their prospects for a state diminishing. They know that Israel is the perpetrator, and the USA is the enabler with arms and permission. Furthermore, it is becoming quite clear that diplomatically South Africa and the Hague Group are holding them accountable in the ICJ, but also that Iran in the neighbour-

hood is the only country providing resistance and support militarily to the Palestinians through proxies.

We also know that much of the neighbourhood is tied to Israel and the USA through the Abraham Accord – signed or unsigned – and therefore, have tied their long-term future, economically, to the west. We also know that the USA has maintained hegemony over the world with a combination of hard power (military) and soft power (aid and trade), but that the supremacism of Trump has shifted to domination – cutting all aid, imposing tariffs, threatening allies and enemies alike, and effecting a regime change agenda.

Consequently, Trump is accelerating geo-political shifts from USA unilateralism (dictating the global agenda) to a cautious multi-polarity (the emergence of multiple poles of influence) that could eventually see a multi-lateralism (contesting poles of power). Following regime change in Venezuela, it was always going to be Iran's turn next.

At Israel's behest, and combining with the USA, they attacked Iran and assassinated its Supreme Leader expecting that this would achieve the primary objective of regime change beyond false pretexts like nuclear weapons, democracy for Iranians, and an imminent attack on the USA.



Managing the dilemma

Iran's response - its resilience, strategic choices, and operational capability - created confusion and a dilemma. Public opinion alternated between moments of clarity (it's wrong to attack without provocation and rules); moments of confusion (why is Iran attacking other Muslim countries); and moments of division (are they even Muslim). Such moments become moments of strategic, ethical, and theological dilemma.

A first-class mind must have the ability to weigh, sift, sequence, and prioritise multiple opposing

ideas and beliefs, using tools from ethical and strategic frameworks: discerning the lesser of two evils; distinguishing crime from sin, the domain of the human from the divine; permissibility as default while impermissibility needs proof; choosing the easier rather than the difficult; and avoiding undue suspicion. How does this play out currently?

Dilemma One – is this a cosmic battle between good and evil?

Iran is not the unadulterated force for good and its practices often dubious. It has been shaped by a combination of historical experience and ideolog-

ical zeal. Historically, when it went democratic under Mossadegh, a USA-led coup re-installed a brutally despotic Shah; when it won liberation in 1979, it was subjected to a western-inspired, regionally supported destructive war conducted by Saddam; ever since it has been sanctioned and isolated; and whenever it negotiated (the Nuclear Deal) the USA reneged.

History shaped Iran's zeal: ideology under siege reinforces victimhood, and victimhood engenders totalitarianism; totalitarianism controls freedoms and rights, difference and diversity; and thus, surveillance and security are the

antidotes to uprisings and regime change agendas.

The first-class mind can absorb this dilemma between historical injustice and totalitarian injustice.

But the first-class mind must also be capable of understanding that the architect of the historical injustice cannot own the right to be the custodian of what it has subverted in Iran (democracy, rights, and freedom), in the Arab Spring, what it by-passes in the neighbourhood of Iran, and how it perpetrates the genocide of the Palestinians.

Continued on page 15



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Continued from page 14

The first-class mind defends Iran's sovereignty and reduces its siege AND advances its people's claim to democracy, rights, and freedoms.

Dilemma Two – why attack the Arab Muslim lands?

The Arab States have a conundrum: they are no match for Israel militarily because the USA does not sell them weaponry superior to what Israel is provided, and for which Israel does not have an antidote; in a world accelerating to a post-fossil fuel energy regime, oil and gas may have a century to go, and will not sustain them unless they are fast-tracked into a post-oil world by the USA through its proxy, Israel. Therefore, the combination of military powerlessness and economic dependence has frog-marched them to the Abraham Accord with Israel.

This conundrum leads to a trade-off. The Abraham Accord carries the seeds of both realism and betrayal: realism recognises Israel as fact in the Middle East, but betrayal gives Israel silence amidst genocide. Realism sees the urgency of a post-oil economy, while betrayal allows the USA to have mil-

itary bases in Arab lands; and realism now means such bases are only realistically against Iran, but betrayal implicates the one housing the aggressor in war. Therefore, when Iran's military defence is founded on attacking both the direct aggressors (USA and Israel) and their bases in 'neutral' Arab lands -whether the military base itself, the fuel and other supply lines, or the accommodation housing evacuated soldiers, then Iran's strategic calculus says to the Arab lands: call off your masters otherwise we all go down together.

The first-class mind has sympathy for collateral damage of innocent citizens and infrastructure, and the consequent instability and choking of oil through the strait of Hormuz. It will have an impact on all of us. But these should have been in the calculus of the aggressor, not the responsibility of the defender facing an existential threat. The first-class mind can well comprehend that you cannot house the aggressor and expect someone you barely tolerated as Muslim to act in a spirit of Muslim solidarity.

Dilemma Three – are Iranians even Muslim?

Only when Iran responded by attacking USA bases in Arab lands, did we see the

mobilization of some of their clergy: they mobilized historical anti-Shia stereotypes (cursing of companions, how they pray, their belief system) and encouraged the idea of excommunication from Islam. This was for the consumption of the Muslim masses. At home they counted the costs of a strategic error of housing the USA military.

Hysteria for the masses, strategic recalculation for the leadership. Only when Iran attacked the Arab lands did we hear the fervent prayers for protection of Muslim lands, while no real fervour in praying for an end to genocide, for the deaths of 180+ girls at a school in Iran, or for an end to US-Israel aggression in the month of Ramadan.

A first-class mind can be bewildered or dismayed by aspects of Shia theology but be content to leave the final judgement to the Divine. It will wonder why there would be public pronouncements of the Shia being non-Muslim, but the same people issue Haj and Umrah visas for Shias, especially if the holy precincts are barred for non-Muslims. A first-class mind will compare the silence of the majority in the face of Palestinian genocide with the punishment of Iran and the emasculation of its



3-H proxies (Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis) and ask: who else is defending Palestine? Ultimately, a first-class mind can dismiss sectarian rhetoric to understand how the USA-Israel war is strategically reshaping the Muslim world into zones of domination and extraction.

Quo Vadis?

Indeed, a first-class mind must sift and weigh the dilemmas and conclude: firstly, rules must always apply, because its opposite – impunity – is what makes might right and the world a jungle; secondly, there is no neat delineation of good and evil, but rather the lesser of

two uncomfortable choices – who is the constant perpetrator and who the occasional? who is the historical victim? and who has the moral authority to advise regarding rights, freedom and democracy.

Thirdly, if Iran is destroyed, who else lies outside the hegemonic consensus that could inspire and assist resistance at the frontlines with Israel when the neighbourhood is tied into the Abraham Accord; fourthly, is this not the time for the Abraham Accord to argue that USA military bases and co-operation with Israel's defence is a fundamental compromise as well as a magnet for endangering the

Arab lands, and should end; and finally, if Iran's battle for survival means inviting the USA to engage, not merely from the air, but in a ground war of blood and mud, the world would experience another Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam, while unleashing the next generation of armed and trained militias. A first-class mind is rooted in values, has ultimate strategic objectives, and is tactically astute, sometimes prioritizing some objectives, delaying others, and co-existing uncomfortably with yet others.

Ebrahim Rasool is the former premier of the Western Cape and former Ambassador to the US

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SA join Muslim countries to condemn Israeli closure of Al-Aqsa

By Al-Qalam Reporter & Al Jazeera

The United Ulama Council of South Africa has condemned the recent closure of Masjid Al-Aqsa which it warned was aimed at consolidating “Israeli control over Islamic holy sites in Al-Quds”.

“Our eyes must remain unwaveringly fixed on Masjid al-Aqsa, with relentless focus and awareness, and we must urgently escalate both physical mobilisation and spiritual action, together with duā, during this sacred climax of Ramadan. This belligerent closure will not—and cannot—be tolerated.

“UUCSA commends South Africans who planned to travel to Al-Aqsa for salāh and itikāf—may Allah still facilitate your journey and accept your intention, and recompense you for any losses. May He swiftly reopen the Masjid, filling it without restrictions, and grant the Ummah the blessing of salāh in Al-Aqsa, free from occupation”.

Meanwhile, Qatar, Jordan, Indonesia, Turkiye, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have condemned Israel’s continued closure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan for the 12th consecutive day.

In a statement published on Wednesday, the foreign ministers of the eight Arab and Islamic countries said Israeli restrictions on Palestinian access to the old city of Jerusalem and its



places of worship constituted a “flagrant violation to international law, including international humanitarian law, the historical and legal status quo, and the principle of unrestricted access to places of worship”.

“The Ministers affirmed their absolute rejection and condemnation of this illegal and unjustified measure, as well as Israel’s contin-

ued provocative actions at Al-Aqsa Mosque / Al-Haram Al-Sharif and against worshippers. They stressed that Israel has no sovereignty over occupied Jerusalem or its Islamic and Christian holy sites,” the statement read.

The statement added that the entire area of Al-Aqsa Mosque was “exclusively for Muslims and that the

Jerusalem Endowments and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs department, affiliated with the Jordanian Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, is the “legal entity with exclusive jurisdiction”.

“The Ministers called on Israel, as the occupying Power, to immediately cease the closure of the gates of Al-Aqsa Mosque, remove access restrictions to the

Old City of Jerusalem, and refrain from obstructing Muslim worshippers’ access to the mosque,” the statement said, calling on the international community to compel Israel to stop its “ongoing violations”. Israeli forces have imposed strict restrictions on worshippers and access to the Old City, citing “security” measures as a result of the ongoing war against Iran. But the

Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday said the continued closure emphasised the policies were a “blatant violation of Palestinian rights”, the Palestinian news agency Wafa reported. Hamas has also condemned the continued closure and said on Tuesday that it sets a “dangerous historical precedent” and a “blatant violation” of the freedom of worship.

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O A S I S



LOCAL NEWS

MSA students host mass Iftar at UKZN

By Azra Hoosen

The UKZN Muslim Students Association (MSA) hosted a mass iftar at the Howard College Jamaat Khana recently which brought together over 130 students from across campus to break their fast in a setting that reflected the spirit and etiquette of Ramadan.

The event itself had long been part of the MSA's plans but had not been organised in recent years.

MSA UKZN Westville Chairperson, Hafidh Ebrahim Vaid, told *Al-Qalam* that a reminder from a recent Jumu'ah speaker about the virtues of hosting a mass iftar, and the importance of unity within the Muslim community, ultimately inspired organisers to prioritise it.

The intention behind the gathering was clear: to foster unity among students. "One of the foundational principles of Islam is the concept of brotherhood and belonging to one ummah," said Vaid.

While mass iftars on cam-

pus are sometimes criticised for becoming purely social events, the organisers were deliberate about maintaining an environment rooted in Islamic practice. MSA UKZN Westville Vice Chairperson, Abdullah Khan, said that the venue had separate entrances and facilities for brothers and sisters.

Khan explained that the evening was structured to keep the focus firmly on the spiritual significance of the month. With naseehat and talks delivered by Moulana Ismail Moosa and Moulana Junaid Kharsany, while students also marked the completion of a Qur'an khatam and participated in a collective dua before breaking their fast.

Maintaining modesty and boundaries was also a key priority for organisers. "Our Prophet (PBUH) said modesty is part of faith. As the hosts of this event, it was our responsibility to ensure that this article of faith was upheld. A few members stood guard and ensured no one lingered outside the gathering," explained Vaid.

He noted that students from

different cultures, backgrounds and age groups attended: "At a time when there are many challenges and disruptions taking place around the world, it is especially important for Muslims to strengthen their bonds with one another and stand together in unity."

For many students studying away from home, Ramadan can feel very different from the warmth of family iftars. One attendee said the gathering offered students a sense of comfort and belonging: "Being away from home is already a significant adjustment and during Ramadan, many students feel that distance even more strongly. Breaking fast with other Muslim students feels comforting. It becomes like a family away from our own families."

An attendee noted that the presence of over a hundred students shows that the Muslim community at UKZN is active, supportive and strongly connected: "It was really good to see a large number of Muslims together – a reminder of the strength of this ummah." The event also quietly opened the door



for dawah. Non-Muslim students were invited to attend and experience Ramadan alongside their Muslim peers.

"Ramadan is not only about fasting, but also about showing good character and hospitality. Some of the non-Muslim students even chose to fast with their

friends in solidarity or out of curiosity. They seemed to enjoy the experience and were comfortable. We hope to encourage more to attend in future," said Vaid.

The MSA team hopes they left with a better understanding of Ramadan and the welcoming spirit of the Muslim community.

Vaid noted that the evening was a reminder that many young Muslims are searching for spaces where they can remain connected to Islam while navigating university life.

The organisers now hope the mass iftar will become a regular Ramadan tradition at the university.



Eid Mubarak

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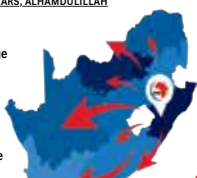


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Panic in Gaza as food shortages return

With Eid around the corner, thousands are scratching around to put something on the table. *Middle East Eye reports.*

As the US-Israel war on Iran began last week and Gaza's crossings were shut, panic has spread through the densely populated enclave, raising fears of a famine returning. Palestinians rushed to markets to stock up on essentials, as soaring prices and shortages of key items, particularly vegetables, signalled the impact of the closures.

Gaza depends almost entirely on border crossings for the entry of food and essential goods, meaning any sudden closure is quickly reflected in local markets and household budgets. For Ibrahim Madoukh, a father of eight from al-Sahaba neighbourhood in Gaza City, the price surge has already begun to affect his family's fragile livelihood.

Since the October ceasefire, Madoukh has been selling falafel from a small stall to support his family. Demand

had been steady, he said, largely because he kept his prices low. But rising ingredient costs have forced him to increase prices, while customers - many already struggling financially - are buying less.

"The economic situation in Gaza has been deteriorating since the war," Madoukh said. "Many people can no longer afford what is available in the market."

After hearing about the crossing closures, Madoukh rushed to buy supplies before they disappeared. Instead, he found markets crowded with residents trying to do the same.

The price increases were immediate and dramatic. A kilogram of onions that once cost three shekels (around \$1) now sells for 15 shekels (around \$5). Cooking oil has jumped from 5 shekels (around \$1.5) to 13 (around \$4), while the price of parsley has risen eightfold.

"Traders say prices are rising because the crossings are closed and supplies are running out," he said. Madoukh has already been forced to

raise the price of his falafel from two pieces for 1 shekel to one piece for 2 shekels.

Even so, many families still cannot afford it.

"Before the crossings closed, displaced children sometimes came to my stall asking for falafel because they were hungry and had no money," he said. "I used to give it to them, but now I can't. I'm already losing money."

Israel closed all crossings into Gaza last Saturday, halting the movement of people, aid and goods, shortly after the war with Iran began. The Karem Abu Salem crossing with Israel was partially reopened on Tuesday, allowing limited entry of fuel and humanitarian aid, while other crossings, such as the Rafah border with Egypt, remain shut.

The UN has called for more crossings to reopen to scale up humanitarian support, particularly as many NGOs in the Strip face restrictions.

Metres from Madoukh's falafel stall, Ahmed al-Shoubaki, 39, was stocking up on

supplies for his family. Carrying a large bag filled with tins, tahini, ghee, spices and olive oil, he carefully asked a vendor about the price of sugar.

"Since the crossings closed on Saturday, I've been going to the market every day to buy whatever I can and store it at home," Shoubaki told Middle East Eye.

"My wife and I agreed to keep the staples like flour, cooking oil, and canned goods untouched, buying only daily necessities from the market while they last."

Before the Israeli genocide in Gaza, Shoubaki worked as a painter, but shortages of materials forced him to switch careers. He opened a small food stall selling kebab and grilled chicken, which he had to close last month due to declining sales.

His story mirrors the experience of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza who have lost their livelihoods as entire sectors have ceased operating. "The economic situation in Gaza has collapsed. There is no work, so no one

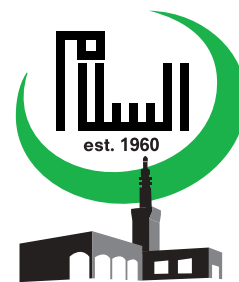


can cope with rising prices," he said. "When I heard about the (Iran) war, I spent more than \$1,000 - almost all my savings - buying supplies to last a month. I don't know how I'll manage later, but I had to do it. My children cried from hunger last Ramadan; I can't let that happen again." Shoubaki condemned the suffering imposed on Gaza, which he says has no role in the

Iran-Israel conflict. "Why must Gaza pay the price for wars it's not involved in? Our lives are already hell from siege, destruction, and hunger.

"Death would be more merciful than living through this continuous suffering. I fear the crossings will remain closed for a long time, and our suffering will only continue."

Eid Mubarak



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Eid Treats

Fruit Jelly Cups

INGREDIENTS:

- 3 cups milk
- 1 tsp china grass powder / falooda powder
- 1/2 tin condensed milk or to taste
- 1 big tin Nestle cream
- 2 cans fruit cocktail (Checkers brand) drained
- 1 can strawberries drained

METHOD:

- Place milk and china grass powder in a pot and bring to a boil, stirring all the time.
- Add condensed milk.
- Mix well and allow to cool.
- Place a spoonful of fruit salad and a few strawberries into mini glasses.
- Pour milk mixture over.
- Allow to set in the fridge.
- Top with sliced pista and half a strawberry.
- Serve well chilled



Recipe and image courtesy of recipes_by_ayasha, shared via the Facebook page "Friends Who Like Kitchen Queens" by Rashida Habib

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FEATURE

Does Bible grant Palestine only to Jews?

In a recent interview with media personality Tucker Carlson, the US ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee remarked that it would be 'fine' if Israel took over lands of the Middle East. Sheigh Rafeek Hassen examines the radical statement.

The US Ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee stated that God in Genesis 15 in the Bible gave the entire land from the Euphrates to the Nile to the Israelites only. Tucker then tells Huckabee that this includes the entire Middle East of today (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt etc) and Huckabee concludes by saying "it will be fine if they took it all."

In the past when people accused Israel and Zionism of having an expansionist dream of "Greater Israel" they shrugged it off as conspiracy theory. Today they are openly pursuing this expansionist agenda with violence and impunity defying all rules of international law.

So, does the bible grant Palestine to Jews only? Let the

Bible answer this question. God promised this land to Abraham [P] in Genesis 15-18 : "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates."

Abraham [P] had no children when this prophecy was made, neither were the Israelites in existence and the Prophecy states I will give this land "to your descendants .." plural not singular, not one chosen descendant but to all of your descendants.

The first child to be born to Abraham [P] was Ishmail [P] from his second wife, Hagar [P] from Egypt whom he married when Abraham [P] was 86 years old. Genesis 16-3 "So after Abraham had been living in Canaan for ten years, Sarah his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife."

Concerning the legitimacy of Ishmail [P] the Bible says in Genesis 21-13 "And also of the son of the bondwoman [Ishmail] will I make a nation, because he is thy seed." Which means

Ishmail [P] is the legitimate descendent of Abraham [P] his first born. The Bible also in Genesis 17-5 states "that Abraham shall be a father of many nations" and then in Gen 17-8 God states "And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." This Prophecy was made when Isaac [P] was not even born - the Israelites were not in existence. This land of Canaan, today's Palestine, which was promised to Abraham [P] and his seed. Gen 21-13 quoted above verifies that Ishmail [P] is the seed/descendant of Abraham.

Genesis 21-3 states that Isaac [P], the second son from his first wife Sarah [P] was born when Abraham [P] was 100 years old. So according to the above verses both Ishmail [P] and Isaac [P] are the seed and descendants of Abraham [P] and thus God promised this land to both of them and their descendants. In addition, in Genesis 17 God makes a covenant, a prerequisite to Abraham [P] that in lieu



of this all his male descendants shall be circumcised and that they should worship One God only and few other conditions.

However, the descendants of Isaac [P] the Israelites according to the Bible broke their covenant with God twice and were expelled by God from this land and their temple destroyed twice first by the Babylonians in 586 BC then by the Romans in

70 AD and were scattered into the diaspora for over a millennium as a punishment from God.

After the Muslim conquest of Palestine, Caliph Omar allowed the return of the Jews/Israelites as they understood that Jews, Muslims and Christians have a common bond to Abraham [P] as Genesis 17-5 predicted that 'Abraham [P] will be a father of many nations. They

all lived in harmony for the next 1000 years until the emergence of Jewish Zionism and Christian Zionism emerged claiming Palestine exclusively for the Jews by military force [in direct contradiction to the Bible] leading to unending conflict till today.

**Sheigh Rafeek Hassen is a Founder and Director iFRi (Islamic Interfaith Research Institute)*



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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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New book on ethical legacy of Prophet (s)

By Al-Qalam Reporter responsibility.

A significant new scholarly volume reflecting on the enduring ethical legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) will soon be available to readers across South Africa and beyond. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) at 1500: His Prophetic Legacy, Ethical Vision and Contemporary Resonance commemorates 1500 years since the birth of the Prophet (SAW) by exploring the continued relevance of his message in a world grappling with profound moral, social and environmental challenges.

The book brings together a diverse group of scholars, educators, religious leaders and public intellectuals who reflect on how the Prophetic tradition continues to speak meaningfully to contemporary life. Rather than offering a simple historical reflection, the chapters engage the legacy of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) as a living ethical inheritance that continues to guide reflection on justice, mercy, dignity, leadership, education and social

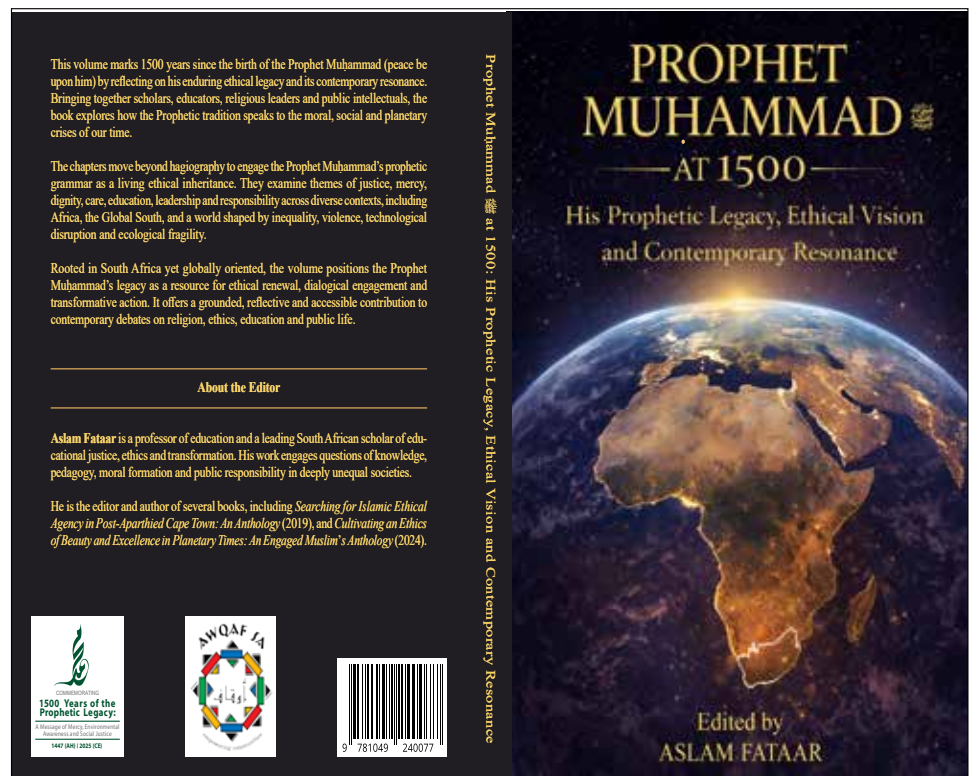
Central to the book is the idea of the Prophetic ethical grammar described by the contributors. This refers to the deeper moral framework embedded in the life and teachings of the Prophet (SAW), which continues to shape Muslim ethical reflection and practice. Through this lens, the chapters explore how Prophetic guidance can illuminate contemporary debates about inequality, violence, technological disruption, ecological vulnerability and the search for moral clarity in a rapidly changing world.

While the book is rooted in the South African intellectual and social context, its outlook is continental, global and planetary. The contributors place Muslim ethical thought within wider conversations about justice, public responsibility and the search for humane and sustainable futures. Through a range of perspectives, the volume demonstrates how the Prophetic example can inspire dialogue across communities while encouraging thoughtful engagement with the crises that define

our age. At a time when societies across the world face deepening divisions, war and genocide, political instability, environmental pressures and the disruptive effects of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, the book argues that the ethical vision of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) remains a vital resource for reflection and action. His teachings on compassion, justice, responsibility and care offer moral guidance for individuals and communities seeking principled responses to contemporary challenges.

The volume is edited by Professor Aslam Fataar, a South African scholar known for his work on education, ethics and social transformation. Alongside his academic scholarship, he contributes to public intellectual debates and writes on Islamic ethics and social change. His work explores questions of knowledge, pedagogy, moral formation and public responsibility in deeply unequal societies.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) at 1500 offers an accessible and thoughtful contribution for readers



interested in Islamic ethics, intellectual history, education and the place of religion in contemporary public life. The book forms part of the 1500 Prophetic Legacy Project, developed in partnership with Awqaf South Africa. The first official launch is planned for early April 2026, with additional national and in-

ternational launches and a symposium on the book's themes also being organised. Readers are encouraged to watch media and social media platforms for announcements about the launches and related discussions.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) at 1500: His Pro-

phetic Legacy, Ethical Vision and Contemporary Resonance (Prophetic Legacy Commission, Cape Town) is edited by Prof Aslam Fataar and will soon be available through Exclusive Books, Takealot, Academia Library, Amazon and Loot, as well as through selected community venues and events.



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FEATURE

'What you post online could ruin your life'

Muslim leaders urged to educate youth on the real consequences of social media misuse, writes **Azra Hoosen**

As digital platforms continue to shape the social lives of young people, the rapid growth of social media has introduced serious risks, particularly for those who may not fully understand that what they post or share online could potentially ruin their own lives or those of others.

The South African Muslim Network (SAMNET) is urging Muslim organisations and community leaders to prioritise education around the moral, legal and social implications of social media misuse.

SAMNET member, Mohamed Kharwa, told *Al-Qalam* that across communities, concerns are growing around issues such as cyberbullying, digital harassment, grooming and the creation or sharing of manipulated content like deepfakes. While precise figures are difficult to determine, available research suggests the

problem is widespread and growing.

Legal experts have also warned that many young people do not realise how easily online actions can lead to serious consequences.

SAMNET pointed out that this was happening within the Muslim community, among, by and against Muslim youth.

Kharwa reflected on the teachings of digital law specialist Emma Sadleir, who has become a leading voice on the risks of online behaviour.

In her public talks, Sadleir frequently highlights that what young people consider jokes, pranks or private messages can easily cross into criminal territory. Sharing explicit images, participating in online harassment, or distributing manipulated content such as deepfakes can lead to serious legal repercussions. She emphasised that digital content leaves a permanent trail, something many teenagers fail to consider in the moment. For SAMNET, the

concern is that community discussions about social media often focus on condemnation rather than education.

"Many talks, Jumu'ah khutbahs and podcasts focus on saying social media is bad, that people should stay off it or delete the apps. It condemns the technology but doesn't teach how to use it or protect yourself," he said.

Kharwa said the youth need guidance to protect themselves from misuse among peers and their own actions. "The prevailing strategy of 'building walls' and trying to 'isolate ourselves' from the reality is not going to work," he said.

A major challenge, however, is that the digital world has evolved far more quickly than the ability of many parents and educators to keep up with it. "Until we educate and support parents, teachers and community leaders, how can we expect them to know what to do?" he asked.

Rather than addressing incidents only after they occur, SAMNET is urging proactive engagement to

equip both youth and adults with the knowledge needed to navigate the digital landscape responsibly.

To address the issue, the network has proposed a multi-layered initiative aimed at strengthening awareness and education.

The plan includes a programme to "educate the experts" by bringing together specialists in youth psychology, law and education to develop a unified messaging strategy. The initiative would also involve training community-based facilitators across different regions to deliver consistent guidance and support.

Another key component would involve workshops for parents and educators hosted through mosques and community organisations, helping adults better understand the platforms young people use and the challenges they encounter online. SAMNET also proposes a sustained social media awareness campaign across both digital and physical platforms to reinforce responsible online behaviour and highlight potential legal



Mohamed Kharwa

consequences. The organisation believes addressing the issue requires a coordinated approach involving legal experts, psychologists, educators, community organisations and youth leaders.

Importantly, the conversation should not be limited to schools or even to youth alone. "These problems exist in universities, workplaces and even between adults. The youth conversation is critical, but broader discussions about responsible digital behaviour must happen in parallel," Kharwa said.

SAMNET also believes addressing these challenges should extend beyond the Muslim community: "As

part of a diverse country, we have a responsibility to everyone. Just as we respond to hunger or physical hardship, we must also respond to social harm."

Kharwa noted that digital abuse affecting any woman or young person should be treated as a collective concern.

For SAMNET, the goal is clear: build awareness before harm occurs.

"This is about building an informed and prepared generation. We cannot ignore the realities young people face online. We must equip them to navigate it responsibly," said Kharwa.

Eid MUBARAK

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Al-Aqsa cries in the last 10 nights

Zionists have shut the doors to Masjid Al Aqsa over its war with Iran. Saadia Gani recalls her last three Ramadans spent at the holy mosque.

The green door would open quietly, and before us stood the Dome of the Rock, glowing beneath the Ramadan night. For the past three Ramadans I walked the courtyards of Al-Aqsa, feeling the sacredness of a place that has echoed with prayers for centuries. We would share iftar with hundreds of Palestinian families, pray Taraweeh, and remain inside the Al-Aqsa sanctuary through the night until 4 a.m., when the Israeli soldiers would reopen and we could return to the hotel for suhoor.

Then, after Fajr, something beautiful would happen. Elderly Palestinian women from the surrounding neighbourhoods would form Qur'an circles, reading and reciting the Qur'an and engaging in Quranic discussion. These circles became a form of resistance their

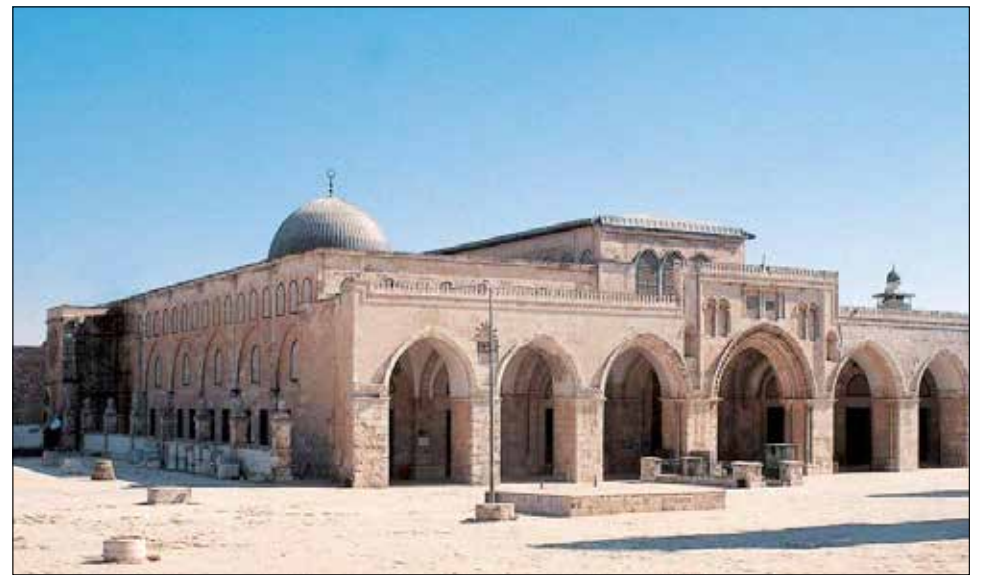
presence and prayers silently guarding Al-Aqsa, a testament that devotion could protect what force could not. Even in these moments, a quiet sorrow lingered. Deep down, I knew that every visit could be my last. Every year, the shadow of encroachment grew heavier; every year, the sanctity of Al-Aqsa felt more fragile. The presence of those who do not belong in Al-Aqsa became more apparent. I witnessed Jews entering the courtyards, permitted to remain and pray for hours at a time. Last year, this presence stretched for hours, a stark reminder of the shifting realities within our sacred space. And now, with the escalation of war in Iran and the ensuing closures, Al-Aqsa has been silenced during the holiest month of Ramadan, a time meant for worship, reflection, and closeness to Allah.

Al-Aqsa now cries, and her voice echoes through her empty courtyards. It is not a loud cry, but a subtle, heart-wrenching whisper felt in the hearts of those who have loved her for generations. Her tears fall in the last ten nights of Ramadan, when our hearts are meant to

be closest to Allah, when devotion is meant to illuminate every corner of our souls. Her cry is a lament for sanctity violated, for the silence of the Muslim Ummah, and for the interruption of a resistance long woven into her walls. She mourns the loss of leaders like Ismail Haniyeh and Yahya Sinwar, and the countless martyrs who dedicated their lives to protecting her. She grieves for the suffering of the people of Gaza and for those who endure life under occupation around her sacred walls.

But beyond grief, her cries are also a mirror. They reflect our own spiritual condition and the state of the Ummah fragmented, divided, and disempowered. For centuries, Muslims stood as guardians of this sacred space, striving for justice, sanctity, and freedom. Today, as the courtyards and surroundings of Al-Aqsa echo with absence rather than worship, we are called to reflect: have we lost touch with the essence of our responsibility?

The liberation of Al-Aqsa is not merely a political endeavour; it is a spiritual imperative. It is a call to up-



hold justice, protect sanctity, and act with courage. Yet this responsibility begins within. Each tear that falls from her sacred stones reminds us that our faith, our devotion, and our awareness are our first instruments of resistance.

As we enter the last ten nights of Ramadan, let us not only seek forgiveness and mercy for ourselves but also for Al-Aqsa, for her sanctity, her preservation, and for the countless faithful who have long awaited her liberation. Let her cries

awaken us, not to despair, but to devotion; not to resignation, but to resolve. May these nights inspire reflection on our purpose, our faith, and our duty. May we honour Al-Aqsa not only with words, but with hearts committed to justice, sanctity, and courage.

As the last ten nights descend, Al-Aqsa's cry is not merely a lament – it is a call. A call to awaken our faith, to renew our devotion, and to remember the trust that rests upon this Ummah. Her courtyards may stand

empty, but her light has not dimmed. It lives in the prayers of those who remember her, in the hearts that refuse to forget her sanctity, and in the souls that rise in the night seeking Allah's mercy. Al-Aqsa cries in these sacred nights and her tears ask only that we remember our duty, renew our faith, and answer her call with courage, devotion, and unwavering hope.

**Saadia Gani is an attorney with Honors in English and Masters in Multi-disciplinary Human Rights.*

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