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LOCAL NEWS

Faith and the Muslim voter

By Fazlin Fransman Taliep

Before a voter puts a cross beside a name, there are questions a ballot paper cannot answer. What makes someone worthy of public trust? How should religious conviction inform political loyalty? And what does a citizen owe to people beyond their own community?

At the International Peace College South Africa (IPSA), eight students took up these questions through a seminar examining Muslim youth and political participation. Held on 3 October, the Contemporary Islamic Thought Seminar brought citizenship, Islamic scholarship and electoral choice into a single programme, with students presenting on subjects that reach well beyond their classrooms.

The theme, "Muslim Youth and Political Participation: Citizenship, Voting and a Just Future", gave the gathering an ambitious scope. Across two sessions, the presentations moved from the meaning of national belonging to the judgements involved in choosing whom to support.

For Muslim students, these questions sit at the intersection of religious education and everyday life. Political decisions shape access to education, livelihoods and the safety of neighbourhoods. They also raise questions about justice, the exercise of authority and responsibility for the welfare of others. Connecting those concerns requires both an understanding of faith and an ability to examine the world in which its principles must be applied.

The programme began with belonging.

Saleem Parker's presentation on love and loyalty to one's nation, considered from an Islamic perspective, sat alongside Rasheedah Khan's examination of the responsibilities of citizenship through fiqh al-muwatanah, the jurisprudence of citizenship.

Together, their subjects framed a question that extends beyond elections: how should Muslims understand their obligations within a shared society? Love of country is an expression of attachment. Citizenship gives that attachment practical consequences, bringing the rights and needs of fellow citizens into consideration.

The historical presentations widened the discussion. Nihad Moses addressed the political activities of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his Sahabah, while Fagmieyah Darries examined the history of Muslim political involvement in South Africa.

Their subjects placed contemporary participation within two important frames of reference: the early Muslim experience and the community's own history in this country. For students considering their place in public life, both offer starting points for enquiry into how Muslims have understood authority, responsibility and collective action.

The second session turned to the ballot itself.

Zainab Achmat's topic, "Is Voting Permissible? What the Scholars Say!", addressed the religious question underlying electoral participation. Nabeelah Esack followed with an examination of the criteria that should inform the choice of whom to vote for.



Students at the International Peace College South Africa (IPSA) after the Seminar
Photo credit: IPSA

The sequence mattered. Permission to participate does not, on its own, resolve the judgement required of a voter.

Choosing a representative demands an assessment of the people seeking power, the commitments they make and the grounds on which they can be trusted.

For a Muslim electorate, that is also a question about how ethical commitments become standards of public judgement. What weight should be given to integrity, competence and the treatment of vulnerable people? How should competing considerations be assessed? A discussion of criteria creates room to examine the reasoning behind a political preference.

Tasleemah Ellis brought an international perspective through her presentation on the impact of Muslim votes in the United Kingdom and United States. Fazlin Davids returned the discussion to South Africa, addressing the possible and certain benefits of voting.

Placed together, these topics connected the question of participation with the question of consequence: what influence can voters exercise, and what can they reasonably expect it to achieve?

Across the presentations ran a common question: what does responsible political participation require of a Muslim? Examining it meant bringing religious scholarship into conversation with history and the practical choices facing voters.

For young Muslims, these questions bear directly on how they understand their faith, their citizenship and their responsibilities towards others. The questions explored at the seminar extended beyond whether Muslims should vote to what should guide them when they do. Citizenship, scholarly interpretation and political experience each formed part of that enquiry. At its heart was the challenge of translating a commitment to justice into a choice on the ballot – and sustaining that commitment once the votes have been counted.

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‘Navi, you’ve inspired generations’

Millions of Palestine activists worldwide are rejoicing that Judge Navi Pillay has won the Nobel Peace Prize, reports. ***Ismail Suder***

When retired ICC Judge Navi Pillay was a guest of honour to mark the 40th anniversary of the Advice Desk in Durban, little did she know that she was going to be catapulted to become a bigger icon of the Palestinian struggle – by winning the Nobel Peace Prize.

Judge Pillay was on a solidarity visit to the Hague when she received a surprise call to say she had won the Nobel Peace Prize. This news sent the US President into a ranting rage because he wanted it so badly, but was overlooked by the Nobel Committee in Norway.

Navi Pillay, as the chair of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, has stated that Israeli authorities are responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including the crime against humanity of extermination, amid the conflict in Gaza. Meanwhile, Saydoon Nisa Sayed, a leader of the South African Palestine Movement in Durban (SAPM), paid tribute to her close friend and comrade.

“Our connection with Judge Navi Pillay goes back to our district and neighbourhood conversations in Overport. My school friends who lived in her street would often speak of her, her work and her commitment to justice. Even then, we recognised and supported the importance of human rights and the need to champion this cause.

She added: Judge “We have met with her Navi, worked with her, engaged with her and shared spaces in the pursuit of justice.

“Judge Navanethem “Navi” Pillay is not a distant figure in the struggle for human rights and justice. We have witnessed, first-hand, her unwavering commitment to human dignity, international law and accountability. Her journey – from standing against apartheid to becoming one of the world’s most respected voices on human rights and international justice has inspired generations.



Saydoon Nisa Sayed with Judge Navi Pillay at the recent Advice Desk event in Durban

“Her work and findings concerning Palestine and Gaza have further demonstrated the importance of speaking truth to power, documenting violations and insisting that international law cannot be selective. “For those of us who have worked with Judge Pillay, this moment carries a deeply personal meaning. We know the person behind the title: a South African woman whose life’s work has been rooted in courage, principle and an uncompromising commitment to justice.

“Her winning this recognition is therefore also a reminder of our own responsibility. It tells us that the work we do - organising, mobilising, documenting, educating, marching, picketing, standing in solidarity and demanding accountability - matters. “As SAPM, we are proud of the connections and shared work we have had with Judge Navi Pillay. We honour not only her achievements, but the values that have brought us together: justice, equality, human rights, dignity and freedom. “Judge Navi Pillay, we salute you. From the streets of South Africa to the halls of international justice, your journey reminds us that courage can change history and that the pursuit of justice must never stop.

From those of us who have walked alongside you: thank you for showing the world what principled leadership looks like.



FEATURE

Matric learners: 'Your results do not define your future'

By Neelam Rahim

With Matric finals approaching, learners are entering the final stretch of a demanding year, often carrying the weight of academic expectations, university applications and uncertainty about what comes next.

Speaking to *Al-Qalam*, career coach and strategist Farhana Hassam said many Matrics are already mentally and emotionally exhausted after months of prelims, extra classes, tuition and workshops.

"Rest is not wasted time," she said, encouraging learners to prioritise sleep, healthy routines, manageable study sessions and short breaks rather than feeling they must study every waking hour.

She advised learners to break their workload into realistic goals and focus on what they can control: their preparation, effort and well-being. For those struggling with anxiety or fearing they may disappoint their parents, Hassam said such feelings do not mean they are incapable or unprepared.

"Learners should remember that their results are a reflection of their performance in a particular period, not a measurement of their worth, intelligence or potential," she said.

Hassam also urged parents to create a calm and supportive environment. Rather than repeatedly asking how much their children have studied or what marks they achieved, she suggested asking how they are feeling and how they can help.

"Avoid comparisons with siblings, friends or other learners," she said, adding that practical support, including ensuring children eat, rest, sleep properly and have a quiet place to study, can make a significant difference.

While Matric results can influence which opportunities are immediately available, Hassam cautioned against viewing them as a final verdict on a learner's future.

"There are many pathways into further study, employment and career development," she said. These include alternative programmes and institutions, qualifications, learnerships, skills-development opportunities and opportunities to redirect one's career later.

For learners uncertain about what comes after school, Hassam recommended making informed rather than panic-driven decisions.

She encouraged learners to consider their interests, strengths, values, subjects and the type of environment in which they would like to work, rather than choosing a career because it is popular or because their friends are pursuing it.

University, she noted, is only one pathway. Depending on individual circumstances, learners can also consider TVET colleges, learnerships, skills programmes, employment, entrepreneurship or taking time to explore their options.



Career coach Farhana Hassam engaging matriculants during a career guidance session

"Careers and life is not linear. There is also no single definition of success," she said.

Hassam, who has more than 12 years of experience in recruitment and talent-focused roles and over four years of full-time career coaching experience, supports high school learners with career guidance, subject choices and post-school planning.

Her message to Matrics facing the final exams is simple: "You are not running out of time, you have your whole world right in front of you."









FEATURE

Yvonne Ridley: 'God not an estate agent'

British journalist Yvonne Ridley toured SA recently along with George Galloway. Al-Qalam correspondent ***Fazlin Fransman-Taliep*** *caught up with her.*

God is not an estate agent," says celebrated journalist and author Yvonne Ridley.

Yvonne Ridley has a gift for the sentence that refuses to leave the room. In our interview, the British journalist moved from the story of a runaway donkey in Afghanistan to the moral responsibilities of Muslims towards Palestine, wielding humour and indignation with equal precision.

The remark came as she praised Jewish opponents of Zionism who reject religious justifications for territorial claims. She speaks with admiration of their dissent, and with fury at what is being done in their name beneath an Israeli flag that, in her words, "has now become a butcher's apron".

But before the political arguments came the donkey. In 2001, reporting for the Sunday Express, Ridley entered Afghanistan beneath a blue burqa. She likened its anonymity to "putting on Harry Potter's invisibility cloak". Her cover unravelled when the animal carrying her towards the Pakistani border bolted, exposing her camera to a Taliban soldier.

"I was done for by a rogue donkey."

Having surrendered her camera, she closed her eyes and waited to be shot. She might subsequently have escaped. Instead, seeing her local guides detained and surrounded by an angry crowd, she turned back.

"And I realised I couldn't leave them behind."

She imagined her guides would admire her return. Instead, she recalled, they looked as though she had made their predicament considerably worse. The Taliban now had a British journalist in their custody.

For the next 11 days, she expected to be killed. She describes herself as "the prisoner from hell", swearing, spitting and throwing things during interrogations.

"You don't kiss the hand that slaps you." Their restraint confounded her expectations. Recalling the brutality she had anticipated, she delivered an incredulous question:

"Why aren't you living up to the job description?" Her subsequent interviews with former Guantánamo Bay detainees sharpened that contrast. Hearing their accounts, she considered herself fortunate to have been held by the Taliban rather than the Americans. Her verdict was deliberately barbed,

"Thank God I was captured by the most evil, brutal regime in the world and not by the Americans."

By her account, the Taliban had treated her more humanely than the Americans had treated the Guantánamo detainees she interviewed.

"When I was released, I don't know who was happiest, them or me." A religious cleric had invited her to embrace Islam during captivity. Ridley declined to make such a decision as a prisoner, but promised to study Islam and read the Qur'an if released.

"If you give your word, your word is your bond."

She kept that promise without expecting it to change her faith. "I wasn't looking for a religion. I was a practising Christian."

A former Sunday school teacher, she found familiar figures in the Qur'an. What moved her was its account of women's spiritual equality and its demand for justice, including towards one's enemies.

"The theme of justice really swept me away," she tells *Al-Qalam*.

Her solidarity with Palestinians, however, preceded her conversion by decades.

At 13, she recalled, a Palestinian woman asked her to sign a petition. Ridley initially refused. Television coverage had taught her to associate Palestinians with hijacking and terrorism. The woman explained the history of dispossession.

Ridley imagined her own family being forced from their home, strangers wearing her clothes and eating their food. "And I was shocked that I hadn't understood this from the media."



British journalist Yvonne Ridley and British politician George Galloway, meeting with Al-Quds Foundation SA
Photo credit: Ahmed Meshtawy

Her conversion brought an additional responsibility – protecting Masjid Al-Aqsa. She urged religious scholars to prepare their communities spiritually for that obligation.

"We don't need weapons," she said, envisaging collective Muslim mobilisation. For Ridley, solidarity demands a response to suffering.

She described seeing images of children mourning their father, a journalist killed in an Israeli strike. "Children shouldn't have to see that sort of thing." The sentence carries none of her usual verbal fireworks. It needs none.

She urged people to stand with Palestinians through peaceful protest.

In Afghanistan, she had turned back rather than leave her guides to face danger alone. Now, she asks others to act on the same conviction: that we cannot walk away from people whose lives are at risk.

The question she imagines facing Muslims on the Day of Judgement is characteristically direct: "What did you do to protect Masjid Al-Aqsa?"



OPINION

SA Cricket silent on Imran Khan's detention

By Hassen Lorgat & Iqbal Jassat

Our national anti-apartheid sports movement, the South African Council on Sport (SACOS), working with SANROC, worked tirelessly to isolate South Africa culturally and, in particular, in the sports movement.

Organised under the banner "No Normal Sport in an Abnormal Society," the camp contributed towards our own democratic breakthrough in 1994. The time now, in the spirit of fair play and sportsmanship, is for us to raise our voices and our bats against the jailing of political prisoners in Pakistan, in particular Imran Khan. When South Africa was a global pariah, suffocating under the weight of apartheid, international sports solidarity was our lifeline. For decades, many parts of the global sporting community erected a wall of isolation against institutional racism, holding a mirror to our pariah state.

Among the giants who stood firmly on the right side of that history was Pakistan's World Cup-winning captain, Imran Khan. In his 1983 autobiography, Khan stated unequivocally that he had no qualms about declining lucrative offers to play in a country where a man was considered inferior because of the colour of his skin. He chose moral principle over personal profit. He stood for us when it mattered.

Today, that same icon languishes in a raw Pakistani prison cell. At 73 years old, he faces solitary confinement, systemic legal weaponisation, and medical neglect so severe that international appeals report he faces severe vision loss in his right eye.

Yet, while global cricketing legends rally to demand his basic human rights, Cricket South Africa (CSA) and our modern Proteas are completely missing in action. Our sporting establishment's silence is thus questionable.

We learn that the current humanitarian campaign to secure Khan's welfare began as a noble peer-to-peer petition. Initiated by Australia's Greg Chappell, the movement has submitted letters to Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed by over 21 global titans, including Sunil Gavaskar, Clive Lloyd, Sir Alastair Cook, Ian Chappell, and David Gower. The signatories are demanding fundamental humanitarian considerations: urgent completion of independent medical assessments, unhindered family visits, and immediate medical treatment.

But this campaign cannot remain an exclusive club for 1980s contemporaries. Because South Africa was isolated and banned from international cricket during Khan's playing prime, our local administrators and legends probably do not share locker-room memories with him. If it is true that behind closed doors, this lack of "shared history" has been used as a convenient shield for inaction, it is a cowardly excuse.

Surely you do not need to have faced Imran Khan on a pitch to recognise the blatant injustice of his detention. By treating his imprisonment as a private matter for his ageing rivals, the broader cricket world—and South Africa in particular—is failing a critical moral test.

South African cricket exists in its current, prosperous form because the world weaponised sports to fight tyranny. Our unity era navigated a path back to legitimacy only because global actors forced accountability on our behalf. For Cricket South Africa (CSA) to sit on its hands and treat Khan's imprisonment as a "foreign political issue" is utterly unacceptable. We are calling for the release of a man who in his later years served as the 19th Prime Minister of Pakistan from 2018 to 2022. He was removed from office on 10 April 2022, after growing tensions with the military. Since August 2023, Khan has remained incarcerated, amidst mounting political protests led by his party demanding his release. Even Amnesty International in 2024, called for his release, noting: Amnesty International has found several fair trial violations under international human rights standards which have resulted in his arbitrary detention, denying his right to liberty.

CSA is quick to champion progressive causes, domestic transformation, and social justice when it aligns with corporate branding and low-stakes public relations. But true institutional courage means speaking out when the stakes are high and diplomacy is uncomfortable. Our modern, multi-millionaire players – who wield immense global leverage through social media and player associations—must also look in the mirror. Staying quiet to protect corporate relationships or lucrative T20 league contracts while a foundational figure



of the global game is broken in a cell is a damning indictment of the modern player's conscience. When players claim that "sports and politics shouldn't mix," they mock the very legacy that allows them to wear the Proteas badge on the world stage today.

We are not asking South African cricket to adjudicate the complex, hyper-partisan labyrinth of Pakistani domestic politics. But we are demanding that they stand against the subversion of justice, the violation of a Supreme Court medical directive, and the cruel treatment of an elderly sportsman. The campaign must transition from an elite, back-channel appeal into a mass-based movement. At a minimum, we expect CSA leadership to officially endorse the international humanitarian call for Khan's fair medical treatment. In addition, we call on democratic-era Proteas legends – the beneficiaries of our return to sport – to publicly sign their names alongside Chappell and Gavaskar. Indeed, we remind the South African public to look at the green and gold cap and remember that the privilege to wear it was bought with the currency of global solidarity.

Imran Khan didn't stay silent when South Africans were being oppressed.

Our continued silence in the face of his persecution is nothing short of a betrayal of our own liberation legacy. It is time for South African cricket to stand up for the man who stood up for us.



OPINION

Al Awaisi: 'Failure by Muslim states to protect Gaza a shame on ummah'

By Fazlin Fransman Taliep

Visiting Palestinian scholar Dr Khalid Al-Awaisi has asked an uncomfortable question: "How could the ummah that professes such conviction in its faith witness a genocide in Gaza and remain so powerless to stop it?"

In an interview during his visit to Cape Town, Al-Awaisi asked a more uncomfortable question of the Muslim ummah: how could a community that professes such conviction in its faith witness such suffering and remain so powerless to stop it?

"Our iman is theoretical," he said.

Throughout the interview, Al-Awaisi returned to the demands of solidarity: what Muslims were prepared to sacrifice, and how consistently they were willing to act. Al-Awaisi questioned the comfort of believing that prayer, a donation and a boycott had exhausted every available responsibility. He recalled warning his aunt against returning to northern Gaza. She laughed and told him they were waiting their turn for martyrdom. Her response made him question the distance between her trust in Allah under bombardment and the faith professed by Muslims living in safety.

Faith and Palestine had been intertwined in his own life since childhood. Growing up in Al-Khalil, also known as Hebron, he accompanied his father to Al-Aqsa, where the elder Al-Awaisi taught university students. His father preferred to hold classes inside the masjid rather than in the lecture halls beneath it. Long before Al-Awaisi studied the Holy Land, he knew it through those visits with his father.

During the first intifada, Al-Awaisi recalled soldiers firing at his primary school while children played during break time. Curfews restricted daily life, and Palestinians confronted the occupying army with stones. His memories place October 7, 2023, within a much longer history of occupation - one he had experienced as a child.

His father was later expelled to southern Lebanon alongside hundreds of academics and activists, he said. The family was subsequently forced out of Palestine. Al-Awaisi has never returned to Al-Khalil. A later visit to Al-Aqsa was possible with a foreign passport.

That experience informs his scholarship in Bayt al-Maqdis studies, which examines the Holy Land through its history, religious traditions and significance for Muslims. It also informs his impatience with language that makes Palestinians solely responsible for defending it.

"Al-Aqsa is not a Palestinian masjid," he said.

Al-Awaisi argued that anyone witnessing Palestinian suffering has a responsibility to help. For Muslims, that duty is also rooted in faith: Al-Aqsa is sacred to the entire ummah, yet Palestinians have been left to bear the cost of defending it. He questioned how Muslims elsewhere could claim a bond with the masjid while leaving Palestinians to face such suffering alone.

To illustrate that shared responsibility, he asks Muslims to imagine soldiers entering the sanctuary in Makkah and attacking worshippers around the Ka'bah.

"Would Muslims regard that as a matter for Saudis alone?" An attack on the Ka'bah would concern the entire ummah, he argued. Defending Al-Aqsa should carry the same sense of collective responsibility.

Al-Awaisi reserved some of his sharpest criticism for Muslim governments, describing their failure to protect the people of Gaza as a source of shame for the entire ummah.

For South Africans, there was a particular connection. Al-Awaisi recalled learning the power of boycotts through refusing South African goods while living in Britain during apartheid.



Dr Khalid Al-Awaisi at Al Azhar High School. Photo credit: Fazlin Fransman-Taliep

He praised South Africa's pursuit of accountability through international courts and the Muslim community's longstanding attachment to Al-Aqsa.

His praise was also a call to deepen that commitment. He urged people to give beyond the spare change in their pockets, sustain their boycotts and keep organising after the immediate outrage had faded.

Individuals should develop projects of their own, he said, while organisations should set aside rivalries and work together for Palestine.

"You need to turn this emotion into action," he said. His challenge to the ummah was ultimately a question of accountability. Al-Awaisi imagined having to face the people of Gaza, and ultimately Allah, with an explanation of what he had done while their suffering unfolded.

"How will I answer to Allah?" he asked.

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OPINION

‘The One-State Solution for Palestine Was Never a Solution’



By Shabnam Palesa Mohamed

We are asked to imagine a future where the architects and beneficiaries of that genocide simply become neighbours. This is not some Hollywood-written, Zionist-funded, award-winning American propaganda film. Our commitment to wage peace must be rooted in authentic, rigorous reality”.

I argued for the two-state solution, then the one-state solution, for many years. I was wrong. A colleague at Wage Peace put it best. Expecting Palestinians to live alongside Israelis in one state is like expecting a rape victim to live with the rapist who stole her house and holds the keys. The strongest case for one-state says two state is already dead. It says land theft has expanded so far that a viable Palestinian state no longer exists, and that the only choices left are permanent apartheid or a single democratic state with equal rights. Most Israelis reject both ‘solutions’ with contempt.

But one state fails for the same reason the two-state solution fails. A single state would begin from more than 100 years of dispossession, with power still in the hands of the coloniser. Equal rights on paper, inside a structure built to deny them, is not liberation. It is apartheid with a shiny new flag.

Pillay vs Trump

Navi Pillay’s Nobel Peace Prize made the world notice what Israel spent years trying to bury. As chair of the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Pillay found Israel responsible for “four genocidal acts” in Gaza, committed with the specific intent to destroy Palestinians as a group: killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm, inflicting conditions of life calculated to destroy the group, and preventing births within it. She named the Israeli President, Prime Minister and former Defence Minister as having incited genocide. She described Gaza as “the most ruthless, prolonged and widespread attack against the Palestinian people in history.” Israel called the report “scandalous” and “fake.” Trump said he had “never heard of” her and called the award an “indelible stain” on Norway. He also reshared an irrational, unsubstantiated post calling her an “unabashed hater of America and Israel.”

Trump’s answer was a “Board of Peace”, ratified in Davos. Yvonne Ridley calls it a “Board of Piss.” War profiteer Jared Kushner unveiled tourism zones and high-rise waterfronts, calling it “New Gaza” and “New Rafah”. The board’s charter gives Trump final authority, allows permanent membership for countries that pay $1 billion, and makes no mention of Palestine. A real estate project built on graves.

The rainbow myth

South Africa is not a model to pedestal. We live in the shadow of a settlement called a miracle. Thirty years later, we have one of the highest Gini coefficients in the world, land is still predominantly in corporate hands, townships are still gaping wounds of humanity, and structural violence remains. I do not want Palestinians to inherit our disappointment while we wonder, what if Chris Hani led us.

For Palestine, this is not a political disagreement. This is not two peoples with competing claims to land redistribution. This is a colonial project built on ethnic cleansing, maintained by apartheid and occupation, and culminating in genocide - live-streamed, documented, and ludicrously denied.

We are asked to imagine a future where the architects and beneficiaries of that genocide simply become neighbours. This is not some Hollywood-written, Zionist-funded, award-winning American propaganda film. Our commitment to wage peace must be rooted in authentic, rigourous reality.

Who can stay?

Prof. Patrick Bond asked whether my position meant throwing Israelis into the sea. I said I believe that the only Israelis eligible to stay are those who recognise genocide. Not those who say “both sides” or who call themselves “pro-peace” while remaining silent on horrendous crimes against humanity.

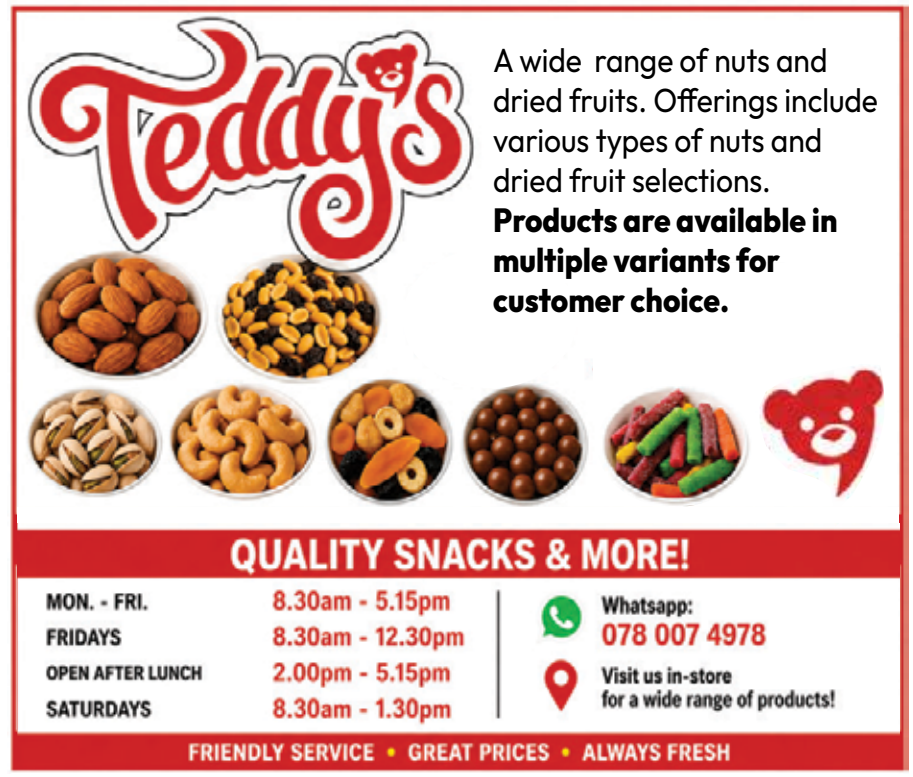
The ones who could stay are the tiniest minority - who protest, refuse to serve in the war machine, denounce Zionism, boycott, lobby, who say “not in my name” and mean it. And, the ones prepared to leave. The rest chose colonisation. They cannot inherit land they ethnically cleanse. And let me be clear, I will never recognise Israel as a state. This is a position we must not be afraid to stand on. Only Palestinians must decide Ultimately, Palestinians are the only ones who determine who stays. Not even South Africa, still selling coal to ‘Israel’, and not prosecuting South Africans complicit in the genocide of Palestine.

Those who are not allowed to stay must go back to where they came from, such as the US and Europe. If they do not, they will target another land to steal. They are colonising Argentina. They are trying to colonise South Africa. There is an openly stated agenda to separate the Western Cape from our country. We should be vigilant about who funds it. Watch that video clip with Phil Craig and Afriforum.

There can be no just peace built on greed, depravity and impunity. It’s time we commit fully to Palestinian liberation. Our freedom is indivisible. None of us are free until all of us are free.

**Shabnam Palesa Mohamed is an activist, journalist, lawyer and strategist. She is the founder of Wage Peace International, a grassroots movement focused on multi-pronged strategies to achieve peace.*







OPINION

War by other means – the era of deception



By Ebrahim Rasool (Former Ambassador to the USA)

Recently I shared a platform with Prof Sayed Muhammad Marandi, hosted by the Foreign Policy Community of Indonesia. Prof Marandi is a compelling voice for Iran as it remains under attack from the United States and Israel.

While indeed bombs and missiles, fighter planes and bombers, aircraft carriers and frigates, are all the conductors of physical and human destruction, the age we are in – the era of deception – means that war and conflict are pre-emptively conducted through Disinformation, Mass Manipulation, and the Distortion of Truth.

Our era, I argued, has a strategy to distort reality as a prelude and accompaniment to war and conflict: lying, distorting, and manipulating are intentional as truth is subverted, facts distorted, and people manipulated through the dehumanisation of the 'other' to be attacked and towards whom, fears are engendered.

Such means of narrative war are meant to bypass both human sympathy and logic, and to blind people to the obvious truths about who are the victims and aggressors – most often through inverting the two.

This is most obvious, I demonstrated, in the 2 most prominent conflicts: firstly, in presenting the start of history in the occupation and genocide of the Palestinian people by Israel as October 7, 2023, and not earlier, so as to find a moment of both post-facto justification for a history of oppression, as well as a priori consent to finish the job of eliminating Palestine and its peoples. Secondly, the extravagant lies in prosecuting the war on Iran – from nuclear weapons to regime change, from obliteration of such weapons to the 40 imminent defeats of Iran - are so palpably deceptive, but illustrate that we need to look for the armies and weapons of war beyond the armed personnel and the exploding weaponry.

The era of deception has an army of influencers ranging from opinion-makers who peddle fears, warnings and scenarios about imminent danger and the virtues of immediate war against the source of fear, to intermediaries in news channels, whose principles of objectivity mean finding necessarily the midpoint between the obvious truth and the blatant lie, often ending up with false reasons with real war narratives that sell news while appeasing the liars.

The era of deception also has an arsenal of weapons deployed: the guilt-trip (we owe Israel a free pass because we allowed the European holocaust); the gas-lighting (don't believe your eyes about Israel's genocide); playing the victim (the aggressors – USA and Israel – are actually the victims of Iran and Hamas, despite the sheer disproportionately in fire-power and deaths); projection (Iran has nuclear ambitions while Israel maintains silence on its nuclear stockpile); and then the famous double-down (either by flooding the zone with lies or repeating the lie often enough to make people immune to their own sensibility).

These armies and arsenals become especially effective as journalism declines (mostly by suicide) and the digital era spawns the good and the bad: citizen journalists communicating a genocide from their devices; while deep fake employs generative AI to create an alternative 'truth' through fake content, face-swapping and voice cloning.

The outcome of such campaigns of Disinformation and Mass Manipulation is that institutional legitimacy declines and social polarisation intensifies, and any middle ground is eroded. For the time being, it will be a battle of numbers – whose 'truth' will be believed by more people.



The tide that gave us Trump, Netanyahu and Orban; that threatened with Le Pen, AFD in Germany and Wilders in the Netherlands; and that produces local populists across the world, that tide ebbs and flows.

But we do have some hope that the era of deception is capable of being pierced. In the USA, Pew tells us that 60% of Americans have a negative view of Israel and Gallup show far greater sympathy for the Palestinians. The University of Maryland's Institute for Global Affairs shows that over 60% of Americans disapprove of the war on Iran while even Fox News reports the 71% believe the war to be without plan or strategy.

These signs should encourage us to contest the space, utilize the technology, and remain tenaciously committed to truth.



FOOD

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Ingredients

- 400g Udon noodles
- 1 can Gorima's tomatoes
- 2 onions
- Soy sauce
- 240g mince
- 227g Shitake Mashrooms
- 2 carrots
- Coriander
- Chilli flakes

Method

1. Cook the udon noodles and rinse them in cold water.
2. Cut the onions into strips and slice the carrots lengthwise into thin sticks.
3. Sauté the onions in oil over high heat until they become translucent.
4. Saute the mushrooms then, add the carrots, followed by the mince and tomatoes. Salt and mix well.
5. Allow the mixture to cook for a few minutes, then add the noodles.
6. Add chilli flakes and soy sauce according to your preference. You can add hot water to make a juice.
7. Continue cooking for a few minutes and finish with a few pieces of cilantro.

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FEATURE

Kashmir Black Day – 27 October: A call for justice, human rights and self-determination

By Muhammad Zakria

Every year, 27 October is observed as Kashmir Black Day by Pakistan and Kashmiris around the world to remember the events of 1947 and highlight the unresolved Jammu and Kashmir dispute. For Kashmiris, the day symbolises decades of political uncertainty, human suffering and the continuing struggle for dignity, fundamental rights and the opportunity to determine their own future.

On 27 October 1947, Indian troops landed in Srinagar following the signing of the Instrument of Accession by Maharaja Hari Singh. While India maintains that the accession was legally valid, Pakistan and many Kashmiri representatives dispute its legitimacy and argue that the wishes of the Kashmiri people were not adequately considered. The dispute subsequently became a major source of tension between India and Pakistan.

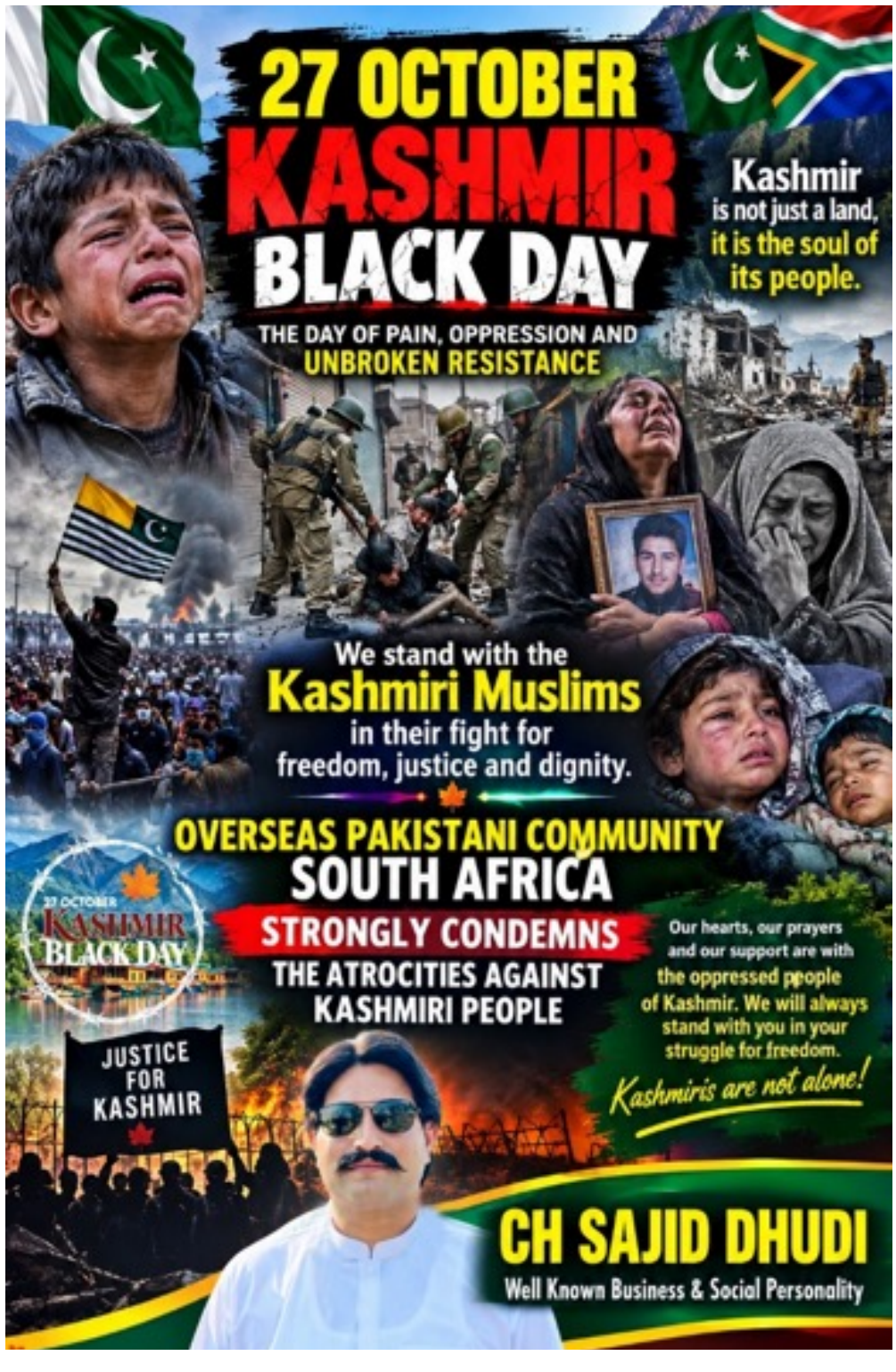
The Kashmir question was brought before the United Nations in 1948, and several UN Security Council resolutions addressed the conflict, including Resolution 47, which proposed measures involving a plebiscite under specified conditions. However, no plebiscite has taken place, and the dispute remains unresolved. For many Kashmiris, the right to participate meaningfully in determining their political future remains a central concern.

Over the decades, the region has experienced conflict, political unrest, security restrictions and allegations of human rights violations.

Reports by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2018 and 2019 raised concerns about alleged abuses, arbitrary detention, restrictions on freedom of expression and accountability. These concerns underline the need to protect civilians, uphold the rule of law and ensure impartial investigations into credible allegations of violations.



Kashmir Black Day is not merely a remembrance of historical events; it is also a call for renewed international attention, peaceful dialogue and a just resolution. India and Pakistan should pursue diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions, while the international community should encourage respect for human rights, accountability and meaningful consideration of the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. The people of Kashmir deserve a future defined by peace, dignity, security and respect for their fundamental rights. Lasting stability in South Asia requires constructive engagement, adherence to international law and a peaceful approach to long standing disputes. As 27 October is observed, the message remains clear: remembrance must lead to action, human rights must be protected, and the voices and aspirations of Kashmiris must remain central to the search for a lasting and peaceful settlement.





OPINION

The Yemen trap: Why Saudi Arabia should reject Israel's help

By Tamer Ajrami

If reports are true that Benjamin Netanyahu tried to offer Israeli involvement on Saudi Arabia's side in the war in Yemen, this should not be read as help. It should be read as a political and strategic trap.

Israel does not want to save Saudi Arabia from Yemeni missiles. It wants to insert itself into the heart of Gulf security, connect this role to normalization, and open a new door for political and military pressure. This is exactly what Saudi Arabia should reject.

The idea is simple. If Israel enters the Yemen war under the title of "helping Saudi Arabia", it does not give Riyadh extra strength. It gives Saudi Arabia's opponents a golden narrative: Saudi Arabia is no longer fighting alone; it is fighting as part of an American-Israeli front. This would damage Saudi Arabia's political legitimacy, strengthen the Houthi narrative, and open the door to wider escalation.

The problem is that Israel has not been able to protect itself from the Yemen front. When Yemeni missiles and drones targeted Israel, Tel Aviv did not stop them. It struck Hodeidah port, but the attacks continued, the Red Sea remained unstable, and Eilat port entered a deep crisis. If Israel cannot protect itself from this front, how can it claim that it can protect Saudi Arabia?

Saudi Arabia does not need Israeli aircraft to solve its problem with Yemen. It needs to close this file politically and security-wise. Continuing the war threatens the basic idea behind Saudi Arabia's new project: security, investment, energy, and stability.

The Gulf sells a clear image to the world: we are a safe and stable region, able to guarantee energy, attract investment, and build a post-oil economy. But this image cannot survive under missile fire. You cannot invite investors to Riyadh while airports and vital infrastructure are under threat. You cannot build Vision 2030 in the shadow of an open war. You cannot become a global center for tourism, energy, technology, and services while your capital itself may be targeted.

This is why the war in Yemen is not only a military problem. It is a direct economic and political threat to Saudi Arabia's future.

Every additional day of war weakens the image of Saudi Arabia as a stable country. Every missile strike, even if it does not cause major military damage, creates a serious psychological and investment cost.

This is where Israel's game becomes clear. Israel lives on regional chaos. The more Arab states are busy with internal and regional wars, the more Israel advances: in Gaza, the West Bank, southern Lebanon, and Syria.

It wants to tell Arabs: your enemy is Iran, your enemy is the Houthis, your enemy is this group or that group. Then it uses this division to present itself as a security partner, as if it is not



the same power destroying Gaza, turning southern Lebanon into burned land, and pushing toward annexation and displacement in Palestine.

The first strategic question in any regional policy is this: who is the main threat?

If the answer is wrong, everything built on it will also be wrong.

If Saudi Arabia sees Yemen alone as its existential problem, it will enter a long war of exhaustion. If it sees Iran as the only enemy, it will remain trapped in a framework imposed for years by Washington and Tel Aviv. But if it sees the full picture, it will understand that the biggest danger is the fragmentation of the region itself and its transformation into permanent battlefields.

Continued on page 14



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INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Bangladesh seeks answers after Saudi Arabia executes two of its citizens

Dhaka said it was not informed by Saudi Arabia that it had executed the pair arrested in Mecca for 'indecent acts'

Bangladesh is seeking answers on why Saudi Arabia executed two Bangladeshi nationals in the holy city of Mecca without telling Dhaka.

Last week, Saudi Arabia executed a male and a female Bangladeshi national after they were convicted of committing "indecent acts" inside a mosque.

Riyadh did not provide further details on the acts the two Bangladeshi nationals allegedly committed or whether they had legal representation in the Gulf kingdom, according to local media reports. Reacting to the incident, Bangladesh's minister for foreign affairs, Humaiun Kobir, told reporters that he was "very disappointed" by the lack of communication and that Dhaka was seeking an explanation on why they were executed and not informed beforehand about the execution.

"We have sought an explanation from our friendly bilateral partner to look into the matter and know why the gap in information sharing and exchanges happened here. We are in discussions," he told reporters at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Monday.

Earlier, the Bangladeshi foreign ministry said that it was waiting for a copy of the full verdict and the circumstances that led to the execution. The official added that the two executed Bangladeshis were included in a list of prisoners that Saudi Arabia had shared with Bangladesh but did not indicate that they had planned to execute them.

Last week, Saudi Arabia's Supreme Court overturned the death sentence of a Sri Lankan national after he allegedly insulted Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Sri Lanka's Deputy Foreign Minister Arun Hemachandra confirmed that Riyadh had overturned the death sentence of Anojan Sivarasa. The 27-year-old remains imprisoned after he was sentenced to five years in prison and fined three million Saudi Riyals ($800,000). The court handed down the sentence amid intense criticism of Riyadh's legal system. Saudi Arabia relies on interpretations of Islamic law, alongside cybercrime and counterterror legislation,



to target online expression under the guise of protecting "public morals". This has resulted in a surge of decades-long prison terms for social media users and an increased use of capital punishment. At least 175 people have been executed so far this year, the majority of whom are foreign nationals.

Continued from page 13

This does not mean the Houthis are innocent. It does not mean Iran has no project, influence, or interference. And it does not mean Saudi Arabia should not worry about its security. Saudi Arabia has every right to protect its borders, cities, infrastructure, and people. But protecting security does not mean staying in an endless war. And it does not mean opening the door for Israel to enter the Yemen file in the name of "help". The solution is not to import Israel into the Gulf. The solution is to redefine Gulf security. Real Gulf security is not built on expensive Israeli defence systems, changing American promises, or turning Yemen into a permanent war of attrition. Real security begins with closing the Yemen front, opening serious negotiations, establishing a non-aggression arrangement, securing borders, protecting navigation, and stopping Yemen from being used as a card by regional and international powers. Oman can play a role here. Iran can also play a role in mediation if it has influence. Wider regional arrangements are possible, not based on humiliating anyone, but on stopping the bleeding. The alternative is clear: the longer the bombing continues, the more blood is spilled. And the more blood is spilled, the harder it becomes for anyone to step back.

Long wars do not create political courage. They create memories of revenge. That is why the most dangerous scenario today would be turning the Saudi-Yemeni war into a Saudi-Israeli war against Yemen. In that case, Saudi Arabia would not gain military support. It would lose its narrative, open a new door to escalation, and give Israel a place inside the Gulf security equation.

Netanyahu does not want peace in Yemen. He wants a longer war. He wants Saudi Arabia to remain in need of weapons and protection. He wants Yemen to remain a pressure card. He wants to appear before Washington and the world as part of the region's "security solution", while in reality he is part of the problem.

Saudi Arabia was right to reject this path. But rejection alone is not enough. What is needed now is a brave political initiative to close the Yemen file before it becomes a black hole swallowing security, investment, and regional standing.

The difficult path is not always the wrong path. Sometimes the hardest decision is the smartest one: stop the war, open negotiations, and prevent the Gulf from becoming another arena for Israel's wars.

Saudi Arabia does not need Israel to be safe. It needs a regional policy that reduces enemies, closes fronts, protects its home front, and prevents Netanyahu from dragging it into a war that serves only his project.

The Yemen war should never have started. Today, what matters most is that it should not continue. - *Middle East Monitor.*



Azerbaijan's hijab ban sparks outrage in Turkey

The exclusion of headscarf-wearing students and teachers from Azerbaijani schools has stirred a wave of solidarity in Turkey, writes ***Middle East Eye***

Azerbaijan's restrictions on Islamic headscarves in schools have sparked this week a wave of condemnation in neighbouring Turkey where scenes of girls being turned away from classrooms have revived painful memories of the country's own history of hijab bans.

Many Turkish social media users recalled their own experiences of discrimination during decades of restrictions on headscarves in Turkish universities and public institutions, following the military intervention of 28 February 1997, known as the "postmodern coup".

Thousands of women faced barriers to education and employment because of their religious clothing.

"What the Turkish public experienced decades ago is now being mandated on the Azerbaijani people," one commentator said in a video shared on Instagram. On 21 September, Azerbaijan amended school uniform regulations, prohibiting clothing deemed incompatible with school uniforms and the secular principles of education.

Although the regulations do not explicitly mention the hijab, the enforcement has seen headscarf-wearing students barred from classrooms, while some teachers have reportedly been told to remove their headscarves or risk losing their jobs.

Videos circulating online show students protesting in solidarity with affected classmates, as demonstrations spread across Azerbaijan.

On 12 October, Azerbaijani authorities announced that 37 people had been detained in connection with protests and incidents surrounding the enforcement of the new rules.

Azerbaijani officials have defended the restrictions as necessary to uphold secular education and preserve the country's cultural identity.

The controversy has brought wider questions of national and religious identity to the forefront, amid arguments that the hijab represents foreign religious influences rather than Azerbaijani cultural traditions.

It has raised questions as to what forms of religious expression are acceptable in public education in a country that upholds a secular identity.

Painful chapter

In the period following the Turkish military intervention of 28 February 1997, headscarf-wearing students were barred from universities, and women working in public institutions faced dismissal if they did not uncover their hair.

Women were forced to choose between pursuing their education and professional careers or following their religious beliefs. Some sought opportunities to study abroad after Turkish universities excluded them.

"What is happening in Azerbaijan right now reminds us of what Turkey has experienced in its near past," Turkish journalist Hatice Orhan said in a video shared on Instagram. "Women wearing headscarves in Turkey were subjected to various kinds of cruelty; there were a lot of women who could not go to school, perform their professions, or were forced to postpone their dreams."

The restrictions were gradually eased in subsequent years, with barriers to headscarf-wearing university students removed around 2010 and the ban on most female civil servants lifted in 2013.

But the issue remains deeply embedded in the country's political memory, continuing to shape discussions about secularism, religious freedom and discrimination, long after the formal restrictions were lifted.

The experiences of women excluded from education and public life during that period continue to resonate across generations, provoking strong reactions to developments in Azerbaijan.

"How is it possible in 2026 that in a Muslim country, a student is blocked from performing their religious duties?" Turkish content creator Gulben Tankus said in an Instagram video. "We in Turkey searched for the answer to this question for decades. How can we accept that such news is emerging from a country that we call our brothers and sisters?"

Solidarity has extended beyond social media, with demonstrators gathering outside Azerbaijan's consulate in Istanbul earlier this month to call for an end to the restrictions. The controversy exposed tensions between Turkey and Azerbaijan, two close allies that frequently describe their relationship as "one nation, two states".



Turkish presidential adviser Oktay Saral and lawmakers from the governing Justice and Development Party have criticised Azerbaijan's restrictions, prompting a strongly worded response from the country's ruling New Azerbaijan Party. In a statement issued on 13 October, the party accused Turkish political figures of interfering in Azerbaijan's internal affairs and disregarding the country's constitutional commitment to secularism.

It defended the country's education policies grounded in equality, secularism and the rule of law, arguing that secularism was also enshrined in Turkey's constitution.

The party accused Turkish officials of exploiting a sensitive issue for political purposes and rejected suggestions that the close relationship between the two countries gave Ankara the right to influence Azerbaijan's domestic policies.



SPORT

Islamic sporting spirit shines at AMS Cape Town national soccer tournament



By Azra Hoosen

Before the first whistle, there was the recitation of the Qur'an. Before the final score, there was a lesson in brotherhood. At the Association of Muslim Schools (AMS) National 7-A-Side Soccer Tournament, football brought together 83 teams from 30 schools across South Africa, with faith, sportsmanship and healthy competition at the heart of three days of action.

Held at Rooikrans Sports Ground in Cape Town under the theme "One Ummah, One Goal", the biennial tournament welcomed young players from KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape, uniting them in a competition where how they played mattered as much as the results.

Zain Muhammad, AMS Durban sports coordinator, told Al-Qalam that the tournament began many years ago to foster brotherhood among learners from AMS-affiliated schools across the country, while giving them a platform to showcase their footballing skills through friendly rivalry and healthy competition.

KwaZulu-Natal schools came to impress, claiming three of the five age-group titles, with Hartley Road Primary School winning the U9 division, Al-Falaah College taking the U11 title and Orient Islamic School securing the U17 championship. Al-Azhar Primary School won the U13 division, while Roshnee Islamic School claimed the U15 title.

For Al-Azhar, the victory was even more significant as the school became the first from the Western Cape to win the AMS national tournament. The U13 team completed an unbeaten campaign without conceding a goal and also received the Akhlaaq Award for its conduct and sportsmanship.

Al-Azhar expressed pride in its learners, who began every match by reciting Surah Al-Fatiha and remained committed to performing Salah even on the field. Reflecting on the achievement, principal Zainoedien Petersen said: "Winning is wonderful, but winning with good character and remaining steadfast in our faith is an even greater achievement."

The Akhlaaq Award was presented in each age category to the team that demonstrated the best behaviour. This year's recipients were Crescent Primary (U9), Jam 'Eyyatul Qurra (U11), Al-Azhar Institute (U13), Lenasia Muslim School (U15) and Ihsaan Boys (U17).

Muhammad noted that despite the intensity of the games, one of the most encouraging aspects of the tournament was the way players conducted themselves, shaking hands before matches and again after the final whistle.

KwaZulu-Natal's strong showing extended beyond the results. Shaheen Mohamed, head of sports at Al-Falaah College, told *Al-Qalam* that the camaraderie among the province's contingent stood out, with learners from different schools cheering one another on and offering support through victories and defeats. "The tournament helped learners build confidence and develop teamwork, discipline, resilience and respect," he said.

In the U9 division, Hartley Road Primary School defeated Al-Falaah College in an exciting all-Durban final. Hartley Road coach, Dawood Maither, praised his players for their determination, particularly given the mammoth task of travelling to another province. "The tournament came with lots of challenges, but shukar, the boys stayed focused and went all the way to bring joy to our school, sponsors, community, and province," he said.

At Orient Islamic School, the U17 title reflected the commitment of the players and coaching staff. The school's sports department, HOD Mr AR Hyder and head of football and winning coach Mr Demaine Ho Chong, told *Al-Qalam* that competing nationally exposed learners to different playing styles while strengthening their confidence, responsibility and school pride. They also expressed pride in all eight teams that represented the school.

"These tournaments allow coaches and educators to assess the progress of their players, identify areas for development and learn from different coaching approaches," said Hyder.

Despite a cold and windy start, participants enjoyed the hospitality of their Western Cape hosts. Organisers and coaches were grateful that the learners gained many valuable life lessons, built new friendships and created lasting memories, with the Islamic environment reinforcing the importance of coming together beyond the pursuit of victory.

Sponsored by Standard Bank, the tournament will return in two years, with the next venue yet to be confirmed. AMS hopes to make the next event bigger and better, with Gauteng or KwaZulu-Natal among the possible locations.

