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**Ramadan: A Global Season of
Worship and Good Deeds**

S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

All these things have made Ramadan a global season and a time of grand celebration of worship, God-remembrance, recitation of the Quran, self-restraint, and piety in which Muslims—educated and uneducated, rich and poor, humble and privileged-participate like close friends and associates all over the world. Ramadan falls at the same time in every city and village in the world. Its arrival can be noticed equally in the palaces of the rich as well as huts of the poor. No one can dare do its rituals differently according to his personal understanding, nor is there any scope for a disagreement in determining the number of its days. The grandeur and beauty of Ramadan is, in fact, easily noticeable throughout the length and breadth of the Muslim world. It seems as if a canopy of effulgence and peace is raised all over the Muslim society. Even those who are slack in Fasting choose to fast in Ramadan for the fear of being alienated in the Muslim community. If for some reason they decide not to fast, they eat in the day hiding from others in shame. The sick and the traveller are, of course, lawfully exempted from Fasting. Fasting is thus observed collectively throughout the world in the same month. This creates a congenial and conducive atmosphere for the believers due to which Fasting becomes easy, hearts soften, and Muslims turn to deeds of worship and submission, sympathy and compassion with greater eagerness. ■

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Wisdom of Qur'an

Allah shan't Fail His Promise

They ask you to hasten the punishment. Allah shall most certainly not fail His promise; but a Day with your Lord is as a thousand years of your reckoning. How many towns did I respite at first though they were steeped in inequity, and then I seized them? To Me are all destined to return. Say (O Muhammad!): 'O people! I have been sent to you only as a warner (before the Doom strikes you).' So those who believe and act righteously shall be granted forgiveness and an honourable sustenance, whereas those who strive against Our Signs, (seeking to profane them), they are the friends of the Fire!"

(Al-Qur'an – 22:47-51)

This refers to the ludicrous statement repeatedly made by the Makkan unbelievers to the effect that if Muhammad (SWS) was indeed a Prophet sent by God then why had his detractors not been visited by the scourge that ought to afflict those who deny a true Prophet? Why did such a scourge not specifically visit them even though they had repeatedly been warned by their Prophet that were they to deny him they would be seized by a calamity?

It is preposterous to think that the consequences of obeying or disobeying God's injunctions can be observed instantly. It is also absurd for them to retort that they have taken that course for the last ten, or twenty years, and still no calamity has befallen them. For it often takes not days, months or years, but centuries for the consequences of a people's behaviour to become fully evident. ■

Pearls From the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH)

A Life of Contentment

Abu Moosa Asha'ri narrates: "Ayesha took and showed to us a sheet of cloth and a rough loincloth and stated that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be to him) died in these clothes." (Bukhari)

This hadith presents a glimpse of simple life that the Messenger of God Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be to him) used to lead even when he was the ruler of the State of Madinah. In eating and drinking, in dress and living, in short in every matter the Holy Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be to him) liked and practised simplicity and informality, and used to be content with whatever was available with him. And even in poor circumstances he used to be generous to others. Accordingly he never saved any wealth for himself. His food consisted of ordinary things, like bread of barley and dates, and sometimes even these ordinary things were not available, and he was required to go to bed empty bellied. His dress was simple and, according to the custom of the time, consisted only of a sheet of cloth and a loincloth (izar). Similarly his bed was also made of the fibre of palm tree.

At the time of leaving this mortal world, he did not leave behind any wealth or property. And what a good example of preferring the life of the Hereafter to the life of this mortal world! This hadith holds mirror to the power-hungry and materialistic world. ■

Editor's Note 

Existence of God

Often nonbelievers ask the question about the existence of God. They say that how we can convince ourselves without observing the physical presence of someone. Some worship man-made deities like statues made of stone of some imaginary figures, some bow before trees, rivers and even human beings. Prophet Mohammad's declaration of the unity of God and His existence people who worshiped idols asked the messenger of God about the characteristics of his creator. In reply to this question God revealed:

“Say (O Muhammad): He is Allah, (the) One, Allah, the Self-Sufficient Master (Whom all creatures need, He neither eats nor drinks). He begets not nor is He begotten. And there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him.”

He also says:

Indeed your Lord is Allah Who created the heavens and the earth in Six Days and then He Istawa (rose over) the Throne (really in a manner that suits His Majesty). He brings night as a cover over the day, seeking it rapidly, and (He created) the sun, the moon, the stars

subjected to His Command. Blessed be Allah, the Lord of all the worlds!”

He also says:

“Allah is He, Who raised the heaven without pillars that you can see. Then He Istawa (rose above) the Throne (really in a manner that suits His Majesty). He has subjected the sun and the moon (to continue going round)! Each running (its course) for a term appointed. He regulates all affairs, explaining the Aayaat (proofs, evidence, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) in detail, that you may believe with certainty in the meeting with your Lord. And it is He who spread out the earth, and placed therein firm mountains and rivers and of every kind of fruits. He made in pairs. He brings the night as a cover over the day ...” until He says: “Allah knows what every female bears and how much the womb falls short (of their time or number) or exceed. Everything with Him is in due proportion. All-Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Most Great, the Most-High.” ■

S.A.

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Islamic Culture

- S. Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi

The Prophets of Allah do not only call people to the religion of Islam by presenting tenets of the Islamic Faith and its codes of law: they also pioneer a new culture, a new civilization, and a new way of life. Such a culture can aptly be called "Ibrahimi Culture". This culture has certain fundamental principles and characteristics which distinguish it from other cultures based on ignorance. This distinction may be seen in its spirit and principles as well as in its outward manifestations and details.

The first distinctive characteristic of the Islamic culture is the authentic religious beliefs, social ethics, and moral values on which it is based. This factor is commonly shared by Muslims all over the world, irrespective of their nationality, language, and dressing style. Due to this common feature Muslims from different parts of the world look like members of a family, easily identifiable as representatives of the same culture. Thus, the Muslims of the world have a specific culture of their own which could be best called the "Ibrahimi Culture".

The Ibrahimi Culture and Its Pioneers

Prophet Ibrahim, may Allah's blessings and peace be on him, was the founder of that God-worshipping culture which was based on the noble principles of faith in the Oneness of Allah, God-remembrance, truth, piety, mercy and virtue. His moral integrity and distinctive lifestyle, which are described in the

following verses of the Quran, run into the veins of this culture.

*For Abraham was,
without doubt, forebearing
(offaults), compassionate,
and given to look
to God.*

[XI: 75]

*For Abraham was
most tender-hearted,
forebearing.*

[IX: 114]

Prophet Muhammad, who was from the progeny of Prophet Ibrahim and the last in the line of the Prophets, blessings and peace be on all of them, gave a new lease of life to this culture in his time. He brought it to completeness and perfection and promoted it to the position of an eternal and universal culture.

Three Features of the Ibrahimi Culture

The Ibrahimi Culture has three distinctive features: faith in the Being of Allah and its constant awareness, faith in the Oneness of Allah (as taught by the Prophets and laid down in the Quran), and belief in the nobility of mankind and their inherent right to equality and justice. To my best knowledge, these characteristics, which inspire the true spirit of the Ibrahimi Culture, are not found with such a clear projection in any other culture.

First Feature:

Faith in the Being of Allah

Faith in the Being of Allah with constant awareness of it (keeping it in view all the time and following it in practice) is a distinctive feature of the Muslim culture and is an integral part of it. If we consider different Muslim cultures and civilizations as dresses of different fashions (affected by diverse tastes of different people, local considerations, seasonal variations, and outside influences), we find all the dresses deeply drenched in one colour (Faith in Allah) which reaches every fibre and thread. The frequent remembrance and mention of the name of Allah flow in the veins of the Muslim culture like life-giving blood.

When a baby is born in a Muslim family, Adhan (Islamic prayer call) is called as first words in his ears, making thus the baby hear and learn the name of Allah even before his own name. When he is seven days old, his Aqeeqah (shaving off the head) is performed and an Islamic name is given to him. Such names are preferred which reflect man's bonds-man-ship to Allah and Allah's Oneness. Babies are sometimes also given the names of the Prophets, who were the greatest monotheists of their times. When the child begins his schooling, he is first of all taught the name of Allah and verses of the Quran. At the time of marriage a Muslim man and a woman are united as wife and husband in the name of Allah and are made responsible to honour the sanctity of Allah's name for the rest of their lives. In

the festival of Eid al-Fitr Muslims proclaim the name of Allah in the prescribed way and offer two Rak'ahs of Prayer of thankfulness. In Eid al-Adha animals are sacrificed in the name of Allah.

When a Muslim is in his death bed, he is encouraged by his relatives to utter the name of Allah as his last word in the world to ensure for him a noble death. When the news of the death of a Muslim reaches other Muslims, they automatically respond by saying: "To God we belong and to Him is our return" [II:156].

During the burial rites the name of Allah is very frequently mentioned from the beginning to the end. Muslims say prayers for the forgiveness of the deceased as well as for themselves, invoking Allah's help for living in faithfulness to Him and departing from the world with true faith in Him. Then the dead person is laid into the grave, all present uttering the name of Allah. In the grave his face is turned toward the K'aba, the direction he faced in prayers all his life. After his burial, whenever a Muslim passes by his grave, he says prayers for his forgiveness and invokes Allah's blessings on him. Thus, the name of Allah accompanies a Muslim in his life's journey at every step from birth to death.

Those mentioned above are clearly important stages in life, but even in ordinary engagements of the daily life a Muslim remembers his Lord and mentions His name so frequently. He begins eating with the name of Allah and ends with words of thankfulness to Him. Those eager to follow the Sunnah (practices of the

Prophet of Allah) eat and drink, put off and put on dress, enter and come out of the lavatory, in fact, do everything with the name of Allah on their tongues and His remembrance in their minds and hearts. When a Muslim sneezes, for example, he is instructed to say Allah's praise; the Muslim who hears him sneezing is required to invoke a prayer for him. Other parts of a Muslim's time are also full of Allah's remembrance. Expressions such as MashaAllah ("May Allah increase it"), InshaAllah ("If Allah wills so") and La hawla wala quwwata illa billah ("There is no power or strength except that which comes from Allah"), which are words taught by the Prophet to Muslims to remember Allah, have now become an essential part of the languages spoken by Muslims throughout the world. These are Muslims' characteristic ways to remember Allah and to remind others of Him. The culture, language, literature, and lifestyle of no other people are so profoundly influenced by faith in Allah's Being and constant awareness of it as are the culture, language, literature and lifestyle of Muslims. This is the first universal feature of the Islamic culture.

Second Feature:

Faith in the Oneness of Allah

The second universal feature of the Islamic culture is Muslims' faith in the Oneness of Allah which is so strongly reflected in their lives, ranging from faith to practice, from worship to celebration. It is proclaimed five times from the minarets of their mosques that there is none

deserving worship except Allah, It is required that their houses too remain free from decorations bearing polytheistic signs and symbols. Pictures, statues, and idols are forbidden in their religion to the extent that these have to be avoided even in the toys played by Muslim children. Whether it is a religious ceremony or a national festival, a birthday celebration of a religious or it is political leader or an occasion of national flag hoistation – It is forbidden for Muslims to bow in front of idols and statues, stand in front of them in reverence with folded hands, and put flower wreaths around them. All such acts are contrary to their monotheistic culture. Wherever Muslims are adhering to the Islamic culture, they discard all such polytheistic practices. Any act defying Allah's Oneness in any form—in giving name to a baby, in taking an oath, in revering pious persons and saints, or the like—is against the teaching of Islam.

Third Feature:

Belief in the Nobility of Man

The third universal feature of the Islamic culture is belief in the nobility of man and in the fact that all human beings are essentially equal on humanitarian terms. This teaching is so strongly emphasized in Islam that a belief in it becomes a second nature of a Muslim and fully controls his mind and heart. Consequently, the practice of observing discrimination in the name of cast and the tradition of un-touch ability are totally alien to Muslims. A Muslim would take meals with any other Muslim, nay any human

being, without hesitation. Persons, several in number and different in background, eat together from one plate, eat each other's left-over food and drink left-over water. The king and the slave stand together shoulder to shoulder with each other in prayers. A person with lesser social status but greater knowledge is entitled to lead the prayers, the most important responsibility in Islam, while the rich and the elite have to follow him by standing behind him.

Professions Neither Humble Nor Unchangeable in Islam

In the Islamic culture professions are not permanent in the sense that people cannot change them. Professions do not serve as a basis for dividing people into high and low categories in status. Muslims adopt a profession according to their need and convenience. Sometimes a profession is taken by only one person in a family, but in other instances a whole family may adopt a profession and continue with it for generations. This, however, has no religious significance in Islam. Whenever needed, a Muslim can quit his present profession and take a new one, to which there is no religious or social restriction.

Also, no profession is looked down upon in an Islamic society. In the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah in Saudi Arabia and in other Arab countries some very distinguished and respectable Muslim scholars and persons enjoying high social status use with their names titles signifying professions that their predecessors adopted, but which they themselves do not practice. They do not feel ashamed of

such titles nor do others consider them as persons coming from humble social background.

Widow Marriage

In Islam a widow's second marriage is not considered a base and objectionable act. Islamic teachings and traditions extend full legal and moral support to it. This was a practice of the Prophet of Islam, blessings and peace be on him, and subsequently in every age and time distinguished Muslim scholars, revered spiritual leaders, and prestigious emperors took widows as their wives without hesitation and gave their widow sisters and daughters in marriage to others. This practice is widely observed by Muslims everywhere in the world and is considered a natural response to a practical situation in life.

Tradition of Greeting

Muslims exchange greetings at the time of meeting and departing for which they use same words everywhere in the world, irrespective of their national, cultural, and linguistic differences. The first person extends greetings by saying, Assalamo 'alaikum ("Peace be on you"), to which the other replies, Wa 'alaikumus salam ("Peace be on you, too").

Importance of Knowledge

The first revelation that came to Prophet Muhammad, blessings and peace be on him, in the Cave of Hira near Makkah in Saudi Arabia has thus been recorded in the Quran:

Read!
in the name of thy
Lord and Cherisher,
Who created –
created man, out of
a (mere) clot of
congealed blood:
*Read! and thy
Lord is Most Bountiful, —
He Who taught (the use of)
the Pen, — taught man
that which he knew
not.*

[XCVI: 1-5]

The Creator of the universe mentions this fact in this first revelation that the fate of knowledge is tied up with the pen. The Prophet who received this revelation in the seclusion of the Cave of Hira was unlettered and did not know how to use a pen. This is an unprecedented incident in the history of the world that the first revelation which comes down to an unlettered Prophet living among an unlettered people in a country where even knowledge of alphabets was not common begins with the word Iqra (“Read”). The unlettered Prophet is asked in this revelation “to read” which clearly signifies that his followers would not merely be receivers of knowledge; they would also advance knowledge and spread it. The age of this Prophet, thus, was not going to be an age of ignorance and antagonism to knowledge; it was to be an age of knowledge, reason, wisdom, and true advancement.

There was a serious flaw in the thinking of the people at that time: the inherent relationship between knowledge and the Creator was lost as a result of which knowledge had digressed from its correct course. This lost relationship was re-established by this revelation by emphasizing in it that knowledge, which was granted such a high position in the above verse, must begin with the name of Allah (“Read! in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher”). As knowledge was a gift of Allah to mankind, it could advance in a balanced way only under His guidance. This was a most revolutionary call given to the world which could not have been imagined by people at that time. If the intellectuals and literary masters of the world were invited to make a guess how the first revelation of Islam would begin, none who knew the nature and intellectual background of the unlettered nation destined to be its first recipient would have thought that it would begin with the word Iqra (“Read”). By mentioning “pen” in the first revelation of Islam, Allah the Almighty granted an exceedingly honourable position to knowledge although a pen was perhaps a truly rare thing to be found in a house of Makkah then.

It was, indeed, a revolutionary call proclaimed in the first revelation in Islam that the journey of knowledge should be undertaken and covered in the light of the injunctions of Allah, the Wise, the All-Knowing, because this journey was very long, very arduous, very risky. This was a journey, symbolically speaking, in which caravans were plundered in broad daylight,

the path ran through dangerous valleys and deep seas, and the travellers encountered harmful snakes and scorpions at each step. In this journey one surely needed not knowledge, but Allah as guide. If knowledge was allowed to drift away from its purposeful course set by Allah, man would get involved and take pride in petty things such as creating ornate designs or amusing pastimes, or in harmful acts such as forcing two nations into armed clash, or in selfish pursuits such as finding ways to fill the ever-hungry stomach.

The first revelation in Islam quoted above also presents the eternal fact that there is no limit to knowledge (“[the Lord] taught man that which he knew not.”). The present advancement of knowledge is a clear exposition of this truth. The scientific and technological knowledge which has enabled the modern man to land on the moon, fly in the space, and reduce the distance are achievements which could be best understood by pondering on the above verse.

Attitude Towards Fine Arts

Another feature of the Islamic culture is that it maintains a moderate, realistic, and careful attitude towards fine arts. It is fully appreciative of beauty, delicacy, tenderness and fineness, but it does reject some branches currently associated with fine arts in the West, such as dancing, painting of living beings, and carving of statues. In other areas, such as singing, it holds a moderate and careful position and allows them under necessary restrictions. In any case, excessive involvement in fine

arts is against the purposeful lifestyle of a Muslim as it would tend to deprive him of piety, concern for the hereafter, and morality-qualities which he is expected to nourish in himself.

Religion as Guardian of Life

Time is a proportionate and balanced mixture of stability and change, stagnation and movement. If it loses either of these characteristics, it will lose its relevance. Islam as a religion accepts this fact and is ready to make necessary accommodations, but it holds the position that as religion it has to guide life, not simply follow it. Religion, as Islam pleads, does not have to passively approve all changes. It is not lifeless like the needle of a barometer which moves up or down mechanically to measure the pressure of the atmosphere, or a weather-cock fixed on the top of a building which moves to show the direction of the wind. The function of religion is not simply to acknowledge and show the changes which are occurring at a time. Its obligation is to check whether a change is healthy or unhealthy, constructive or destructive. It has to evaluate the effect of a change on mankind at large and on its promoters in particular. It judges all pros and cons of a change before it approves it. It, therefore, will discourage a change if it is destructive. It may even oppose the latter kind.

At this point we can see a clear difference between religion and morality. Religion feels obliged to oppose wrong inclinations, morality simply identifies them. ■

Short Weighing

- S. Bilal Abdul Hai Hasani Nadwi*

One of the main reasons of embezzlement and dishonesty is short weighing in commercial dealings. This is such a fatal curse that Hazrat Shuaib (AS) was sent for its reformation. And when his adherents did not pay heed to his words, they were destroyed. Today, this menace has gained momentum like common epidemic. Even pious persons are involved in it. Allah says, "Woe to those that deal in fraud,- those who, when they have to receive by measure from men, exact full measure, but when they have to give by measure or weight to men, give less than due. Do they think that they will be raised up? - on Mighty Day, a Day when all mankind will stand before the Lord of the Worlds? Nay! Surely the record of the wicked is preserved in Sijjin." (S.83.A.1-7). It further said, "To the Madyan people We sent Shuaib, one of their own brethren: he said: "O my people! worship Allah; ye have no other god but Him. Now hath come unto you a clear sign from your Lord! give just measure and weight." (S.7, A.85) And again "And O my people! give just measure and weight, nor withhold from the people the things that are their

due: commit not with intent to do (S. 11, A.85).

These verses vividly describe some people's destruction and dub some as sinful and debouched ones. Obviously, the hell would be the real place for such people. It is reiterated that believers must show justice and honesty in weighing and measuring. The Holy Qur'an says, "Give full measure when ye measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight: That is better and fairer in the final determination." (S.17.A.35)

It is clear from the last part of the verse that short weight may seem profitable in the beginning but its result would not prove good in this world as well as in the Hereafter.

In short, Islam always motivates and urges its followers to lead pious and righteous life in which there should be no embezzlement, no dishonesty, no illegal right for other property. And such essence brings about when the sense of accountability may always be in the mind and this is the basis of righteousness in real sense. ■

*(English Rendering:
Obaidur Rahman Nadwi)*

* Rector Nadwatul Ulama, Lucknow.

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Liberative Elements in Maulana Azad's Theology

- Asghar Ali Engineer

Maulana Azad was one of the most significant Islamic thinkers of modern India. There are several dimensions of his theological thought, and looked at from any of these dimensions, he emerges as a distinguished thinker, both creative and innovative. In this paper I wish to deal with the liberative aspects of his theology. The fundamental question therefore is: what is meant by liberative thought or what is currently called Liberation Theology?

Liberation Theology developed in the Christian world of Latin America. It dealt, in the words of William K. Tabb, 'less with the communities of the Judeo-Christian tradition and more with the task of reconnecting with these earlier understanding in a different historical context, a context of suffering and oppression in the third world. Out of this situation has come a new way of doing theology, from the vantage point of the poor, the sufferers'.

Thus the viewpoint of the poor and the exploited is fundamental in Liberation Theology. This is nothing new of course. All major religions of the world concerned themselves with the sufferings and exploitation of the poor. Buddhism's central emphasis was on

removal of dukkha (suffering). But when the religion was co-opted by the status quoists, its physical dimension was lost and dukkha was transformed into an abstract, metaphysical and spiritual suffering. A Buddhist monk Kuliypitiye Prananda describes the Indian situation before the emergence of Buddhism in the following words:

Indian society of the day was divided into the two extremes of wealth and poverty. At one extreme there were those who possessed and enjoyed an abundance of the highest forms . . . and there were others who suffered extreme forms of poverty and depravity. The ideological reflection of this reality was that there are two extremes in the concept of liberation and the path to achieve it. One was to give maximum satisfaction and pleasure to the senses while the other was the complete suppression of the sensual desire. But the Buddha's finding was that neither of these would liberate human-kind since both extremes accept the situation as it is, and brings about no change and that liberation lies in rejection of both these extremes. In order to change the existing situation, he presented the Middle Path

....

The Buddha, it is interesting to

note, projected an ideal system which is not substantially different from the communist utopia of a classless society. He visualised:

A society of prosperity and abundance, highly populated and with a plentiful supply of food. There would be eighty-four thousand cities in such a society. The earth would be freed from punishments, liberated from armaments, and become a righteous world. The Buddha named this kingdom the Kethumathi.

The case of Christianity is no different. It appeared on the scene as a champion of the oppressed serfs of the Palestinian society. As Robert McAfee Brown points out:

This is a God who intervenes to overcome bondage, to ensure that the oppressive power of the Egyptian Pharaoh can no longer be exercised, a God who liberates those who have been victims, seeing to it that they got a fresh start. This is a God, in other words, whose activity embodies a preferential option for the poor, thereby providing the reason why those who in such a God must do likewise.

Interestingly enough, the Quran provides a similar perspective for the mustadafin, i.e., the oppressed, declaring in unequivocal words: 'And we desired to bestow a favour upon those who were deemed weak in the land, and

to make them the leaders, and to make them the heirs'. In this way, the weak and the oppressed shall inherit and lead this earth, not the haves and the ruling elites. Notice that this verse, which is also in the context of the liberation of the Israelites who were oppressed under the Pharaohs, comes close to the intent of the Old Testament. Also, it is worth recording that Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers in Iran made much use of the same verse to intensify their struggle against the Shah of Iran and against American imperialism.

I

With this background one can appreciate and critically evaluate the liberative elements in Maulana Azad's theology. The focus is on 'Masala-e Zakat', an essay with insights and clarity of thought. None of Azad's recent biographers', including Ian Henderson Douglas and V.N. Datta, have taken notice of this essay.

At the outset, the Maulana points out that there was no deed in the world which had not preached helping and serving the poor and the needy and had not made it a necessary part of prayer and supplication (ibadat). Islam, however, was the only religion to levy an annual tax (zakat) on every Muslim who had the resources to pay it after calculating the total earnings.

Azad described zakat as a

compulsory levy, a tax, and not merely a charity or voluntary disbursement for the poor and needy. He used the word tax for zakat repeatedly to make his intention clear. He further gave it (i.e., zakat) so much importance that in the *aamal* (obligatory acts) it was placed next to prayer, i.e., *namaz*. Putting these two together, the Quran made clear that the identity of the life of any community depends on *salat* and *zakat*. It was for this reason that the Companions of the Prophet of Islam maintained that they would fight those who refused to pay *zakat*. Abu Bakr, the first Khalifa, said that he would fight all those who made a distinction between *salat* and *zakat*.

In this respect Azad insisted on drawing a line between Christianity and Islam. While Jesus Christ exhorted his followers to give away everything, he did not establish a system, such as *zakat*. In this way, his preaching became merely a high point of piety and renunciation the world. Except during the early years of Christianity when the foundation of the Church was laid on mutual and brotherhood and communism, there was no other period in the history of that religion when the ideas of Jesus were put in practice.

Explaining the principle of *zakat* Azad pointed out that the rationale behind *zakat* and other *sadaqat* (charities) was that the wealth should neither be concentrated nor circulated

among the rich alone. In support, he quoted the Quranic verse: 'So that the wealth does not circulate among the rich themselves' (159:7). In an explanatory note to this verse, he added that *zakat* was prescribed so that the material resources get distributed among all and not become the monopoly (*thekedari*) of a group. He then went on to cite the Quranic verse: 'Those who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in Allah's way-announce to them a painful chastisement,' and the Hadith that the wealth be taken away from the rich of the community and be distributed among its poor and needy. Azad concludes that the spirit of the Quran was against hoarding (*ihhtikaar*) of wealth as well as its remaining in the hands of specific groups (*ikhtisaas*), i.e., the Quran insisted that the material resources of a society/community be and fairly distributed among the largest number of people. It is for this reason that the Law of Inheritance stipulated the distribution of property/assets among the heirs.

In his essay, Azad referred to the prohibition of usury in the Quran, quoting the verse: 'Allah will blot out usury, and He causes charity to prosper' (2:276), and commented that Allah wanted to do away with usury and encourage charity. No individual would be poverty-stricken in a community which encouraged charity. Discussing the banning of usury

and the hoarding of wealth, Azad observed that the Quran wanted to establish a society with a 'collective system' wherein there will be no millionaires (karorpati), no deprived and poverty-stricken people. Those who earned more would need to spend more in accordance with the Islamic spirit. In this equitable distribution of wealth, Azad envisaged an affluent Muslim community, the key to the solution of the Indian Muslim problems, and a more egalitarian society.

Azad compared zakat with income tax and felt that it could not be spent arbitrarily. Just as tax was collected by the officers of the government, the realization of zakat was a task assigned to those specifically appointed for the purpose. For this reason the Quran provided a part of zakat for the remuneration of collectors. Further-more, Azad insisted that zakat must be paid, irrespective of the character of the government or the state. A government guilty of misuse zakat funds does not forfeit the right to collect the obligatory tax. It is incumbent upon the faithful to perform his duty — enshrined in the Quran - and, at the same time, prevent the misuse of the zakat funds. During the Umayyad period, for example, appeals were made not to offer zakat to a government which was oppressive and guilty of violating the injunctions of the Quran. But the consensus amongst the ulama and

the fuqaha of the day was against this position. In fact, if anything, Azad was sympathetic to the idea that Muslims should elect an Amir and organise the system of zakat through him. If Muslims, according to Azad, have not given up the Friday prayer in the absence of an Islamic ruler, why then should zakat not be realized under the leadership of an elected Amir?

Maulana Azad goes on to make another point which is important from the point of view of liberation theology. According to him, charitable funds have never ever removed economic disparities and social injustice. Had this been the case, Europe and America would not have experienced long years of economic depression, social dislocation and unemployment. Muslim societies, confronted with social deprivation and acute economic disparities, could remove the malaise by adhering to the principles enunciated in the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet of Islam. One such principle, with important social consequences, was in the form of zakat. It is noticeable that the Quran called upon the ruling power to levy zakat and to spend it on the social and economic upliftment of the weaker sections of society. Azad, as always, quoted a Hadith in support of his contention - 'Take from the rich and among the poor and the needy'.

Another liberative aspect of the

Maulana's theology is that he did not consider it to spend one's income only on one's own relatives, neighbours and co-religionists but also on the welfare of humanity at large. For this, he quotes the Quranic verse: 'And serve Allah, and associate naught with Him, and good to the parents and to die near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the neighbours of (your) kin and the alien neighbours and the companion in a journey and the wayfarer and those whom your right hands possess' (4:36). The word *wa jar al-junubi* (the alien neighbour) can be taken to mean the entire mankind of those neighbours not related or those neighbours who did not belong to the same religion. Thus the scope of *infaaq*, i.e. spending, was not to be restricted to relatives or co-religionists only.

In the same essay, Azad referred to socialism as a mean of ensuring social and economic justice. Socialism, according to his understanding, was in reaction to the concentration of wealth in the hands of just a few. For this reason, socialist ideas gained currency and paved the way for the rise of communism in countries like Russia. But, then, is the socialist/communist doctrine consistent with the principles of social justice enunciated in the Quran? The Maulana raised the question but did not attempt a detailed

answer. His is, at best, an ambivalent position. Social justice and economic inequalities, in Azad's judgement, could be effectively removed by preventing the concentration of wealth and ensuring its distribution among the weaker sections of society. In such a system the right to own property was to be restricted though not denied. Furthermore, Azad advocated the abolition of ownership rights altogether and favoured control over the means of production.

In highlighting the points of difference between socialism and the Quranic principles, Azad pointed out that while the former did not accept differences in the degree of income as natural the Quran does. According to the Quran, the Maulana pointed out, without such a degree of difference in the ability to earn, the competitive element, vital for the economic progress of a nation, would not come into play. He quoted the Quran in support, which emphasised the difference in ability and aptitude as both essential and natural.

Yet the Maulana, unlike other Muslim theologians of his day, did not adopt a hostile posture towards socialism or communism. He was prepared, at least implicitly, for a meaningful dialogue with the socialists and an appreciation of their ideas. This open-minded approach tends to bring Abul Kalam Azad's theology close to the liberative approach. ■

Rethinking UGC's New Equity Regulations

- Sameer Ahmad Khan* & Furqan Qamar**

Last month, the University Grants Commission (UGC) (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026, triggered protests by a section of general category students. On January 29, 2026, the Supreme Court stayed the implementation of the regulations.

These regulations are necessitated by an undeniable reality. Caste, gender, and religion-based discrimination in higher education is persistent and has been increasing in recent times. Grievance redressal mechanisms have been notoriously slow, often discretionary, and at times only symbolic, leaving students from marginalised communities to suffer the consequences in silence. Even the most ardent opponents of these new regulations cannot, therefore, deny the necessity of such an intervention. Why then are there protests?

A troubling combination

The opposition to the regulations stems from an apprehension that some members of historically disadvantaged and marginalised sections may exploit the structural flaws in the regulations — such as the vagueness of the definition of discrimination, the composition of the equity committee, and the procedure to be

followed to get grievances redressed — to victimise upper castes. This reflects distrust and fear that measures aimed at providing justice to one section could become unjust for others.

Introduced to tackle caste-based discrimination with unprecedented urgency, the regulations insist on swift redressal. They say complaints must be acknowledged immediately, committees convened fast, and inquiries concluded within rigid timelines. This design rests on the assumption that speed and fairness reinforce one another. Yet justice systems across the world suggest otherwise.

Quick timelines and central monitoring without clear procedural standards create fear. Institutions worry about regulatory penalties they cannot contest. Faculty and students worry about reputational damage from complaints processed rapidly and unfairly. The combination of speed and procedural vagueness is bound to lead to protests.

Thin process

The new regulations assume that the time taken in exercising due diligence and completing procedural formalities in grievance redressal is tantamount to institutional inertia. They seek to ensure rapid enforcement by threatening higher education institutions with dire consequences. The message is clear. Neutrality is no longer an option. Whether

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that shift commands legitimacy, however, will depend not on intent alone, but on the architecture of enforcement.

The experience of American universities during the 2010s is instructive. Faced with pressure to act swiftly on campus misconduct, institutions prioritised speed, only to encounter sustained judicial pushback over vague evidentiary standards, unclear rights of response, and reputational harm inflicted before findings were established. The backlash arose because the process was thin.

Clearly, justice that moves quickly but unclearly destroys trust. That risk is magnified by how the UGC regulations distribute authority. They do not specify offences or penalties. Investigation is delegated to internal equity committees, and punishment is imposed through existing institutional service or disciplinary rules. The UGC itself does not adjudicate individual guilt; it penalises institutions for non-compliance. This creates a powerful incentive structure. Faced with the threat of de-recognition or funding withdrawal, universities are encouraged to prioritise visible action over careful adjudication. In this system, ambiguity creates fear, which rarely fosters justice.

In a complaint-driven enforcement model, the consequences could be even more harmful. The ability to document harm, express it in institutional language, and navigate committees is unevenly distributed: while rural students and linguistic minorities often struggle to

translate daily discrimination into administratively legible complaints, those with greater cultural and institutional exposure are better positioned to mobilise the system. As a result, a regime designed to amplify marginal voices ends up privileging the institutionally fluent among them.

Compliance theatre

These pressures inevitably spill into classrooms and supervisory relationships. Universities operate through constant grading, feedback, and assessment, all of which are inherently subjective. When academic judgment is subjected to regulatory scrutiny without procedural clarity, risk aversion becomes the most logical course. Faculty respond by diluting feedback, avoiding difficult conversations, and sanitising evaluation.

Over time, institutions learn ways to bypass the complexities. Committees multiply, documentation thickens, and compliance becomes per formative. Governance scholars describe this as compliance theatre, a phenomenon where organisations learn to demonstrate reform without addressing underlying hierarchies. India's higher education system is uneven across regions and institutions and is vulnerable to this drift.

Justice in universities must not be a race to the first response. It should be a long, difficult conversation. One that demands urgency, yes, but also precision, and the humility to revise. ■

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The Day of Forgiveness and Mercy

- S.M. Rabey Hasani Nadwi

When Hazrat Sa'd bin U'badah, who was the commander of the Ansar regiment, passed by the vantage-point where Abu Sufyan was made to stand to watch the Islamic army, he caught sight of the infidels who had left no stone unturned in giving vent to their animosity towards Islam, those who had made the pious servants of Allah the target of their brutality and beastliness as a result of which they were compelled to relinquish their possessions and properties as well as their motherland and take refuge in Madinah. Today into that very central town of theirs, the self-safe hunted and hounded Muslims were making their entry hallowed with an aura of victory around them. It was in this context that Hazrat Sa'd had said then:

(Today is the day to make the massacre! Today no holds are barred in the Kaba! Today Allah has disgraced the Quoraish !)

When the Prophet (SAW), in the company of his regiment, passed by Abu Sufyan, the latter complained the same to the Prophet (SAW) saying: "O Allah's Prophet! Did you hear what did Sa'd say just now?!" The Prophet (SAW) enquired: 'What did he say?' Thereupon he repeated all that he had said.

Replacing the sentence uttered by Sa'd with one of his own that was full of affection and compassion, he (SAW) said:

(No! Today is the day of compassion and forgiveness! Today Allah has made the Quoraish honoured! It is when Allah would have the Ka'ba enhanced in its glory!)

Then, the Prophet (SAW) had Hazrat sa'd (RAA) sent for. In order to make the Makkans have a good impression, taking the flag of his contingent from his hand, he (SAW) had it transferred to his son, Quais (RAA). Obviously, he (SAW) did so by way of an expedient to avert the possibility of getting the tribal sensitivity of the Quoraish stoked by the sentence uttered by Hazrat Sa'd. For, this sentence was uttered by the Ameer of a tribe of Madinah and the Arabs were prone to get instantaneously tendentious and infuriated by any derogatory remark. And, that would usually lead to fresh tensions; whereas, these Quoraishi people had yet not fully imbibed the spirit of Islam. Otherwise, there would not have been such an apprehension. Nevertheless, having taken the flag from him, he (SAW) had it given to his son

and, thus, in a way, it still retained with him and he would not have felt at all that the flag was taken away from him.

Thus, by replacing just one letter (by putting the word al-marhama (meaning: compassion) in place of al-malhama (meaning: fierce fighting) and replacing just one hand with the another (one out of the two being the father's, and the other one of the son's), he (SAW) had managed, prudently or, rather, miraculously, to appease Abu Sufyan who was the representative and chief of the tribe of the Quoraish, the tribe held in high esteem throughout Arabia, (and who needed to be conciliated and familiarized), without hurting in the least, the feelings of Hazrat Sa'd bin U'badah (whose Faith-inspired and valiant achievements need no mention). The way he (SAW) did it is unsurpassable. Any better way than that is hard to even think of. He (SAW) had, thus, on the one hand, saved the Quoraish from getting a bad impression as a corollary of the bad impression of their up-till-then chief. And, on the other hand, he successfully avoided making Hazrat Sa'd bin U'badah aggrieved who had rendered great services to Islam. By handing over the flag to his son, after having taken it from him, it remained as if with him only. At the same time, he was also made to realize that it was the

treatment of compassion and tolerance that he liked to be meted out to even the enemies.

Here, at this end, the Muslims were making their entry victoriously and, at other end, some recalcitrant and crooked sort of People from the Quoraish were getting mobilized in the district of Khandamah of Makkah in an attempt to make a display of their vigour. When one of them, Hamas bin Quais, went home to get armed for this purpose, his wife said to him: 'Today no one can hold his ground against Mohammad (SAW)'. He said: 'But, I do hope that, having captured some of them, I would have them brought to you to be your servants.' Hence, on their taking up arms against Muslims, they were faced by the soldiers of Hazrat Khalid's regiment at the place called Khandamah. As a result of their temerity to combat some of them got killed and some others took to their heels after getting routed. Hamas was one of the latter bunch. Getting to his wife, he said anxiously: 'Have the doors shut immediately.' She said: 'And what about the tall claims that you were making, that you would do this and this and this?' Hamas said: 'All our mates took to their heels. The swords of the Muslims worked so fast as had the heads rolling.' ■

Madrasas - Cradles of Knowledge

- R. Pandya

The Western media, for obvious reasons, is highly prejudiced against 'other peoples and cultures' and has attained notoriety in spreading a diatribe against Madrasas as well. The terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in America drew attention of entire world to the then rulers of Afghanistan. The Western media created a fear that Osama bin Laden has formed a strong militant organisation of Taliban (the students) of Madrasas (schools imparting Islamic teachings). The Western media even succeeded in projecting the then Afghan government as 'Taliban Government'. Whenever Media used the word 'Taliban Government' it indirectly abused Madrasas and defamed Islam. This crooked propoganda has a drop of truth and an ocean of falsehood. It is also being publicized consistently that the Madrasas produce terrorists who are bigot to the bone. Whereas Osama is said to have his education in Europe and there is no evidence that he ever had the conventional learning in Madrasas.

The consistent propoganda of the Western media has had its effect on public and the government to Madrasas in countries where Muslims reside. The governments of these countries, including Islamic countries have thus been misled and started looking at Madrasas with suspicion.

Toeing the Western media's campaign in maligning the Madrasas most of the countries joined them. This led to wide acceptability of the theory of institutionalized involvement of Madrasas in terrorist activities. Majority of non-Muslims began to see a link between Madrasas and terrorism. This false notion prompted them to ask for the so-called modernisation of Madrasas and change in their syllabi and make Madrasas like general schools by introducing general subjects. A plea is being made for setting up Madrasas with financial assistance from the state. This is all to dissuade them from imparting the Islamic theology and force them to toe the line prescribed for them by the government. In short, an impression is being given that Madrasas are factories producing terrorists. Non-Muslims and those who are not aware of the true character and indispensability of the tradition of Madrasas in Islam find all this very logical and appealing.

There is need to understand the fact that Madrasas are meant to impart the basic tenets and manners of Islam to the children of its followers. They do not impart training in arms. An institution giving arms training can be anything but a Madrasa. Students go to Madrasas, but this does not mean that they are all terrorists. And if that is the case, then why this disinformation is being spread to pollute

people's minds? Even majority of the Muslims do not realize that this disinformation is also harming the community and may cause adverse effect on their pursuit of knowledge.

One must understand that the Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism are religions whose ideology is governed by their respective founders. Followers of these religions learn the rituals and religious practices naturally in the family and the society. But other religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is necessary to read their 'holy book', for which one has to be proficient in correct interpretation of the revealed tenets. This is genesis of Madrasa tradition.

The people inhabiting the vast tracks in West Asia, Middle East and northern parts of Africa from ancient times are known as 'Arab'. In this vast region there is a belief since antiquity that there is one God who sent Prophets from time to time for the reformation. It is due to belief in this ancient tradition that these areas first witnessed the advent of Judaism then Christianity and finally Islam.

In these three religions, the message of God was given to the respective prophets through 'holy books'. The Bible refers to the Jewish that predates it and the Jewish and Christianity find mention in the Holy Quran, which predated it. God enjoined upon faithfuls to give religious education to their children. The holy books of these three religions direct

their followers, to "liberate" and "civilise" others by making them co-religionists. Muslims and Christians follow this will of 'the God'. These religions also lay great emphasis on education and acquiring knowledge. It is believed that educated and knowledgeable people can better appreciate the existence and glory of the God and can approach Him in a better way. Religion also enables one to live the life in its totality.

Practice of the religions based on 'the holy book' is not possible without literacy. That is why these religions inspire their followers to set up schools of religious teachings. Madrasas are necessary to impart literacy, Islamic traditions and customs. The Madrasas also provide Quazis, Ulema, Muftis, Imams to guide the Muslim society and to help them in performing the religious rituals. Christians and Jewish also have a tradition of religious schools. Thus, these schools are integral part of these religions. This tradition started hundreds of years before the advent of modern education (around 18th century). It is also a historic fact that the religions based on 'holy book' contributed a great deal in the spread of literacy, education and knowledge throughout the world.

Here it is necessary to understand the basic objective of education. It makes the man intellectually and morally strong for the benefit of society and the mankind, besides the salvation after death. Modern

education sans religious teachings. In a way, it makes people secular (in a sense non-believer) by negating the existence of God. Therefore, it is imperative to make arrangements for religious teachings along the modern education to promote moral values and the sense of right and wrong in every civilised society. It enables one to follow the righteous path right from an early age and also helps in strengthening the institutions of family and society. It also keeps youths away from falling in immoral habits.

The holy Quran is in Arabic, a language which is not taught in most of the schools in the world. Most of the information contained in it and also in Hadiths (sayings of Prophet) can be appreciated and followed if one is proficient in Arabic. So apart from learning the language pupil learn philosophy, culture, logic and also history in Madrasas. This helps their mental development. Madrasas are imperative for poor Muslim children also who cannot afford to go to State run schools and also private institutions for financial constraints. Generally, religious and social workers have been running Madrasas for centuries with the cooperation of the State or with the financial help from the wealthy members of the community. Till 16th century there existed renowned Madrasas in Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva and Khohind in Central Asia on the line of Buddhist monasteries having disciples from all over the world.

Leaving aside some well-known and established centres of Islamic studies in India there are Maktabas (Primary schools) and Madrasas spread all over the country. They are run by local Muslims and cater the educational requirement of children living nearby. Most of them are established in thatched hutments or in a part of the mosque. They are open to public gaze and one can always see that students spend their time only in acquiring academic knowledge and do not aspire for any physical activity or body building. Same is the case with Darul Uloom (places of higher learning) where even students from foreign countries come to acquire knowledge. Local administration always remain in touch with Shahr Quazis, Muftis, Imams or their representatives and maintain cordial relation with them. This often helps in proper care and management of Madrasas. The government need not interfere much in religious affairs and restrict its role in overseeing the good conduct of students and providing security, if needed.

As for terrorism, strict action against terrorists and their outfits should be ensured. Anyone found in league with terrorists whosoever should be dealt with according to law. But it is not desirable to make a sweeping generalization about Madrasas and students. The demand to ban all Madrasas or to term them as a threat to the nation is wrong and foolish. This is not going to help put an end to terrorism. On the contrary some gullible

people get misled. One of the alleged terrorist involved in the attack on American Centre in Calcutta is said to be the product of Banaras Hindu University. The maligning of the traditions and meaningful institutions of a religion shows how people living together for about one thousand years have been misled by the misinformation being spread by the Western media. Terrorists and their accomplices of different communities have been arrested from different places spies and anti-nationals were found even in army, police and other institutions, then why single out Madrasas only?

Influenced by the West, the media of our country, at times, play up religious and social issues without going deep into them, in a manner that offends people and generates hatred and bad blood among different communities. This does not stop at this and at times even leads to riots. The issue of Madrasas is a glaring example of this. The Western media has directly linked terrorism to Islam. The traditional rivalry between orthodox Christianity and Islam seem to be playing an active role in this.

The war between Osama bin Laden and America is not a personal one. Not long before they were friends and unitedly fought with the Russian forces in the same Afghanistan. It is not yet clear why Laden has targeted America in this manner. There may be complex unknown reasons behind this development. Also there is a

competition to establish supremacy in the world. There is no love lost between the Jewish, the Christianity and the Muslims which were all born in the same land. The 'Crusades' during medieval period and the on-going struggle in Israel are examples of this. Jerusalem (Israel) has a common archaeological site of all these three religions, which has become a cause of friction amongst them.

We Indians should not turn this fight between Bin Laden and America into a Hindu-Muslim struggle in India. Lot of things are contributing to terrorism. People of cruel and criminal tendencies seek an opportunity to make a fast buck in the name of religion are also fuelling it. The Pak sponsored terrorism in India and the struggle between Bin Laden and America should not be viewed as the same thing despite possibility of cooperation between terrorists groups.

Others may see serious flaws and shortcomings in Islam and its followers. But it can be true for any religion or community. Things change in course of time, but religious and social changes come from within. Outsiders can never bring them by force or conspiracy. There is need to accept Madrasas as a religious traditions of Muslims, in the true spirit of Indian culture and civilization. There is also need to see through the motives and designs behind the constituent diatribes carried out by the Western media against 'others'. ■

The Relationship Between Ramadan And The Holy Qur'an

- Obaidur Rahman Nadwi

The Holy Qur'an describes Sawm (Fasting) at a great length. No other pillars of Islam were mentioned in the Qur'an in details as the Fasting.

It is worth mentioning that all Divine Books were sent down during the holy month of Ramadan. Accordingly, the Qur'an was first revealed from al-Lawh-al-Mahfooz (The preserved Tablet) to the first heaven on Laylatul Qadr (the night of Decree) all at once, then it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through Angel Jibrail intermittently over a period of 23 years. Similarly, the Suhuf (Scrolls) were sent down to Ibrahim (A.S) on first or third Ramazan. Hazrat Daud (A.S) received Zabur on 12th or 18th Ramazan, Hazrat Musa (A.S) received Tawrat on sixth Ramazan and Hazrat Isa (A.S) received Injil on 12th or 13th Ramadan. Obviously, the holy month of Ramadan has a special relationship with the all Divine Books.

As regards the Holy Qur'an, it is one of the greatest miracles of Allah. As the Holy Qur'an was revealed in the month Ramadan, therefore, it has a special relevance to the holy month of Ramadan. And that is why Ramadan is described as the month of the Qur'an.

The main purpose of the Holy Qur'an is to lead mankind from darkness towards the light. Every book has its subject matter. And the subject matter of the Qur'an is mankind. Allah vividly says, "A Book We have revealed unto thee, in order that thou mightiest lead mankind out of the depths of darkness into light-by the leave of their

Lord to the way of the Mighty the Innately praiseworthy ".(S.14.A.1)

"It is the Qur'an alone which enriches us. Let us present before you some gems gleaned from the treasure-house that is the Qur'an. Its wealth suffices for the whole of mankind. Only the Qur'an can enrich the super-rich, mighty rulers and flourishing business tycoons. It can change their fortunes. Rather, it can make them rich in the real and abiding sense of the term.

The Qur'an is capable of achieving such transformation. Those indifferent to it turn into utter losers. This is the constant divine law. If the Qur'an is not acted upon in the right spirit, its bearers are doomed for destruction. The laws enacted by Allah make no distinction. It is common knowledge that laws are to be respected and applied uniformly. The same holds true of the Qur'an and divine laws are to be respected and applied uniformly. Those failing to obtain guidance from the Qur'an are destroyed in accordance with divine laws" (Guidance from the Holy Qur'an, p, 5)

"The Holy Qur'an is the uncreated word of Allah. The Qur'an, final message to man, is exactly the same in its present version as it was at the time of the Prophet (PBUH). The Qur'an is the Book of Hidayah, the Guidance for man. Its authority is final. The Qur'an has come down to us complete. No changes have been ever made in it. Nothing of its is missing. No additions have been ever made to it. No part of it is forgotten. The Qur'an is protected by Allah

Himself from all corruption. It is the only Revealed Book in the world today, preserved in its original form. It is free from all from distortions. It is precisely in the wording in which it was sent down upon Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The text of the Qur'an has remained free from all alterations, additions or deletions. Since it was revealed, there is no other instance of any book, of whatever description, which has been preserved over such a length of time". (Studies in Islam)

It should be kept in mind that Allah is the Protector of His Book. As the Qur'an says, "We have, without doubt, sent down the message; and We will assure you it from corruption". (S.15.A.9) Similarly, He is also Protector of those who learn, read and follow its teachings and injunctions.

As regards Fasting, it is the fourth Pillar of Islam. The Holy Qur'an says, "O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may learn self-restraint. Fasting for a fixed number of days; but if any of you is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed number should be made up from days later. For those who can do it with hardship, is a ransom, the feeding of one that is indigent. But he that will give more, of his own free will, it is better for him. And ye fast, if ye only knew". (S.2.A.183- 184)

It is also a special gift of Allah. It strengthens and deepens our Iman (Faith)."It deeply affects the human heart both spiritually and physically. It brings us closer to Allah, making us more aware our actions and intentions.

Besides, it helps reduce anxiety, stress and depression, promoting a sense

of inner peace and contentment. It also helps purifying the heart by removing negative traits like greed, arrogance, and anger. It is the best opportunity for self-reflection, repentance and strengthening the connection with Allah."

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says, "When the month of Ramazan begins, the gates of Mercy are opened, the gates of hell are locked, the devils are shut" (Muslim). Every act of man is for him except fasting. It is done for My (Allah) sake, and I will give a reward for it. The breath of the faster is sweeter to Allah than the fragrance of musk". (Muslim)

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "There are three persons whose dua is not rejected, the fasting person until he opens his fast, the just leader and the supplication of the oppressed person" (Tirmidhi)

He also said, "whoever observes the Fast, believing and seeking reward of Allah, his past sins forgiven".

It is significant to note that the Holy Qur'an is one of the greatest blessings of Allah. It has a deep relationship with the month of Ramadan. It was revealed to last Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through the Angel Jibrail during the month of Ramadan. As the Holy Qur'an vividly says, "Ramadan is the month in which was sent down the Qur'an as a guide to mankind, also clear signs for guidance and judgment between right and wrong. So everyone of you who is present at his home during this month should spend it in fasting, but if anyone is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed period should be made up by days later. Allah intends every facility for you; He does not want to put you to difficulties. He wants you

to complete the prescribed period, and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance ye shall be grateful.” (S.2.A.185)

Muslims observe fast from dawn to sunset, engage in extra prayers, including the Tarawih prayer. They listen to the entire Holy Qur’an during this holy month. The believers strive to complete the recitation of the Holy Qur’an at least once during this blessed month.

No doubt, the Holy Qur’an is closely related to Ramadan. Even Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to recite the Holy Qur’an in every Ramadan and Hazrat Jibrail used to recite it to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Listening to the Holy Qur’an and reciting it is *Sinnah*. Generally it is followed in Tarawih prayer.

It should be noted that the trend of reciting the Holy Qur’an increases in the holy month of Ramadan and generally Muslims recite more during this holy month considering the relationship between the Qur’an and Ramadan.

It should also be noted that the Holy Qur’an was sent down on Laylatul Qadr during the month of Ramadan. The Qur’an speaks of Laylatul Qadr in two places. In Sura 97, it is mentioned thrice and in Surah 44, where it described as Laylatun Mubarakah, a blessed night; a night of grandeur and majesty. Allah says, “We have sent it down on the Night of Power. What will make you know what the Night of Power is? The Night of power is better than a thousand months” (S.97.A.1-3)

Several Traditions show that the believers should look for it as one of the

odd nights during the last ten nights of Ramadan: the twenty- first, the twenty- third, the twenty- fifth, the twenty- seventh or the twenty- ninth. Allah’s Messenger is reported to have said “Seek Laylatul Qadr among the odd nights during the last nights of Ramadan. “He also said,” A month has come to you in which there deprives himself of its blessings, is deprived of all blessings. And none is deprived of the blessings of the Night of Power except the most unfortunate”.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said, “He who passes the Laylatul Qadr in prayer, out of faith and seeking pleasure of Allah, will have his past sins forgiven!”

More importantly, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “Fasting and the Qur’an will intercede for the slave on the Day of Judgment. Fasting will say,” O my Lord! Prevented him from food and sexual desires, so accept my intercession for him”. Likewise, the Qur’an will intercede for its reciters on the Day of Resurrection”. This means that our good deeds and actions will be weighed against our bad ones on the Day of Judgment.

That is why Muslims spend this night in prayer and seeking Divine blessings.

In short, the Holy Qur’an and Sawm (Fasting) are both great blessings of Allah for believers and both can lead lifelong spiritual and physical benefits.

Hence, it is imperative for us to spend this holy month of Ramadan by reciting the Holy Qur’an as much as we can and attain *Taqwa* (piety) which is the sole purpose of the holy month of Ramadan. ■

Ramadan: One of The Five Main Pillars of The Islamic Faith

Ramadan is not only unique to the followers of Prophet Muhammad (saws). The Qur'an acknowledges this with its statement: "...as it was prescribed to those before you. "As always, as also in Ramadan, Allah (swt) desires ease and not hardship for His believers.

To be sure, the purpose of Ramadan is the attainment of ' Taqwa' or Self-Restraint: the state of heart that motivates virtuous conduct and prevents evil action. Taqwa is also the ability 'to guard against, preserve, shield and prevent.'

Thus, Fasting is not just about staying away from food and physical intimacy between husband and wife; it is that and much, much, more.

Sayings of the Prophet (saws) Regarding Fasting:

- "Fasting is a shield, as long as it is not destroyed by lies and backbiting."
- "One who does not give up lying and one who backbites and slanders— God has no need of his fasts. He gets nothing but hunger and fatigue."

What else about Ramadan?

- Ramadan is the name of the ninth month of the Islamic calendar in which refraining completely from food, drink and physical intimacy between husband and wife, between

dawn and dusk, is mandated.

- It is the month in which the Qur'an was revealed.
- The unique relationship between Fasting, the guidance of the Qur'an and Justice.
- As the Qur'an says about itself, it is "a Book in which there is no doubt, and a guidance for those who have Taqwa/Piety."
- Again, "Be Just: that is next to piety." (Qur'an 5:8)
- It is a month of heightened prayer, greater devotion and spiritual ascendancy.
- It is a month of compassion and caring.
- If practiced with sincerity and with adherence to its norms, fasting helps build the strength of character with which the believers can help establish a Just and Peaceful society.
- Only capable individuals can build a just society: one that guarantees survival of the human race and improves the quality of life — of man and woman, and irrespective of religion, race, language or ethnicity.
- Such earthly training also helps the individual attain eternal salvation: the ultimate goal! ■

(YMD)

Ja 'far bin Abu Talib (R.A.)

- Abdul Aziz Ash-Shanawi

His Full Name, Lineage, And Kunyah

He is Ja'far bin Abu Talib bin 'Abdul-Muttalib bin Hashim bin 'Abd-Manaf bin Qusay Al-Qurashi Al-Hashimi; he is the cousin of the Messenger of Allah (SWS). His Kunyah is Abu 'Abdullah, though the Messenger of Allah (SWS) used to call him 'Abul-Masakin,' literally meaning 'father of the poor,' for his generosity and kind, charitable acts.

His Description

Of the people, Ja'far bin Abu Talib (RA) most resembled the Messenger of Allah (SWS) both in physical appearance and in character.

His Acceptance Of Islam

Ja'far (RA) embraced Islam after 'Ali (RA) did. Once, when their father, Abu Talib, saw 'Ali (RA) praying alongside the Prophet (SWS), he said to Ja'far (RA), "Pray beside your cousin." And so Ja'far (RA) went and prayed to the left of the Prophet (SWS). It is reported that Ja'far (RA) was the thirty-second person to accept Islam.

Peace And Safety In Habashah

Ja'far (RA) and his wife, Asma' bint 'Umair (RA), were not exempt from the physical and mental torture inflicted by the Quraish upon the Muslims. They, like the other Muslims, remained patient and steadfast; but when matters worsened

and it became difficult for the weak to forbear so much punishment, the Prophet (SWS) gave his followers permission to migrate to Al-Habashah, which was ruled by a just king. Those who migrated did in fact find peace and stability in Al-Habashah, but they were few in number and longed for their homeland, so that, when news reached them that 'Umar bin Al-Khattab (RA) accepted Islam and that the Muslims prayed in peace at the Ka'bah, they returned to Makkah. But the news that reached them in Al-Habashah was not completely accurate, in that it did not mention the Quraish's reaction to the strengthening of Islam: they became harsher in their treatment of the Muslims, showing them more and more enmity. It was the responsibility of the leaders of each clan to inflict punishment on those fellow clansmen who had accepted Islam. Now that the situation became dire for Muslims who had no form of protection, Ja'far (RA), 'Uthman bin 'Affan (RA), and Mus'ab bin 'Umair (RA) went to the Prophet (SWS), asking his permission to migrate again to Al-Habashah. And again, he (SWS), granted them permission to go.

Many notable Companions made the journey: from the clan of Banu Hashim, Ja'far bin Abu Talib (RA) and Asma bint 'Umair (RA); from the clan of Banu Umayyah, 'Uthman bin 'Affan (RA) and his wife, Ruqayyah (RA), daughter of the Messenger of Allah (SWS) 'Amr bin Sa'id

bin Al'Âs (RA), his wife, Fatimah bint Safwan (RA), and his brother, Khalid bin Sa'id bin Al-'As (RA) as well as Khâlid's wife, Aminah bint Khalaf (RA); from the clan of Asad bin Khuzaimah, 'Abdullah bin Jahsh (RA), his brother 'Ubaid bin Jahsh (RA), and 'Ubaid's wife, Ramlah bint Abu Sufyân (RA) from the clan of Banu Asad bin 'Alul-'Uzzah, Az Z.ubair bin Al-'Awwam, Yazid bin Zam'ah, and 'Amr bin Umayyah (RA), from the clan of 'Abd-Shams, Abu Hudhaifah bin 'Utbah bin Rab'ih; and from the clan of Banu 'Abdud-Dar, Mus'ab bin 'Umair (RA) and Faris bin An-Nadr bin Al-Harith (RA). In total, 83 men made the migration.

What is interesting to note here is that many of those who migrated were the children of the Prophet's staunchest enemies at the time — such as Abu Sufyan bin Harb, An-Nadr bin Al-Harith, Al-'As bin Wa'il, Suhail bin 'Amr, and 'Utbah bin Rabi'ah. Even youth from the clan of Abu Jahl — Banu Makhzum - made the pilgrimage. Those pious Muslims left their homeland, their fathers, and their wealth — taking with them nothing save their religion.

As was the case in the first migration, the Muslims found peace and safety under the aegis of An-Najashi's rule (An-Najashi is the title that is conferred to the king of Habashah, and it is not the king's name, just as Caesar is the title that is conferred to the emperor of Rome, but is not a given emperor's name). Poems being the main means of spreading news,

praising people, or dispraising people - the Muslims in Habashah sent messages containing verses of poetry to the people of Quraish; some of the poems mentioned how Allah's earth is vast, and so Muslims did not need to remain oppressed and subjugated in Makkah, other poems disparaged the Quraish for their harsh treatment of their own people. 'Abdullah bin Al-Harith was known to have sent such poems.

Of course such poems did not have the effect of appeasing Quraish's chiefs; rather, they became even more infuriated. However, their main frustration was rooted in the fact that their own brothers, sons, and daughters had left their homeland; they had no qualms about torturing those very same relatives, but they could not bear the fact that they had left them. And so they sent two emissaries, 'Amr bin Al-'As and 'Abdullah bin Abu Rabi'ah, both laden with gifts for the king, to the land of Al-Habashah, in order to negotiate the extradition of the Muslims who had migrated from Makkah.

The Muslims in Al-Habashah knew that emissaries from Makkah had come, and so, also knowing that An-Najashi was going to summon them, they discussed how they should go about answering his questions. After a brief discussion, they headed towards An-Najashi's castle, and on the way, they met with Ja'far bin Abu Talib (RA), who said, "I will be your speaker today."

Upon reaching the gate, Ja'far (RA)

called out with his loudest voice: "Ja'far bin Abu Talib, along with the party of Allah, asks permission to enter."

"Yes, enter with the safety and protection of Allah," was An-Najashi's reply. The Prophet's Companions (RA) then entered, but unlike others who wanted to honor the king, they neither lowered their heads nor prostrated to him. Rather, they simply greeted him with the greetings of Islam.

'Amr bin Al-As, who was present in the king's court, found the opportunity to arouse An Najashi's anger against the Muslims. He said, "O king, do you not see how proud they are! They did not greet you as you should be greeted."

"What prevented you from prostrating to me and greeting me with the standard greeting that is given to me?" asked An-Najashi angrily.

"O king, we prostrate to none save Allah — the Possessor of might and majesty. As for our greeting, it is the greeting of peace, the greeting of Paradise's dwellers."

Pointing with his eyes at 'Amr bin Al-'As and 'Abdullah bin Abu Rabi'ah, Ja'far (RA) said, "O king, ask these two men whether we are slaves or free men. If we are slaves, then we have ran away (from our masters), and so you should then return us to them."

An-Najashi said nothing, but simply glared at 'Amr bin Al-'As as if to say, "Answer his question." "Rather, they are

noble, free men," said 'Amr.

"Did we unjustly shed blood (among our people), so that we are sought after for revenge?" asked Ja'far (RA).

"No, not even a drop," said 'Abdullah bin Abu Rabi'ah.

"Then did we wrongfully take other people's wealth, so that we are sought after to repay them?" asked Ja'far (RA).

"No, not even a Qirat (a measurement of wealth)," said 'Amr bin Al-'As.

"So what do you demand of them?" An-Najashi asked Quraish's two emissaries.

Both they and we upon one religion, the religion of our fathers, said 'Amr. "They then forsook that religion and followed another one."

"What was the religion that you were upon?" asked An-Najashi. "And what is the religion that you are now following? And be truthful with me."

"As for the religion that we were upon and that we have forsaken, it is the religion of Devil (Shaitan)," said Ja'far (RA).

"We used to disbelieve in Allah and worship stones. As for the religion that we have adopted, it is the religion of Islam (complete submission to Allah, the One True God). The Messenger of Allah came to us with it from Allah, and he came with a Book that is similar to the Book of Maryam's (Mary's) son (i.e., 'Isa (AS), one that is in agreement with it."

"You have spoken about a weighty matter indeed, so proceed slowly," said

An-Najashi. He then ordered for the bells to be sounded, so that he could meet with the priests and monks who served as his ministers. When they were gathered, he asked them, "I ask you by Allah, Who has revealed the Injil to Isa: do you know of a Prophet who is to be sent between the time of 'Isa and the Day of Resurrection?"

"... Yes," they all answered. "Isa gave us glad tidings about him, saying, 'Whoever believes in him has believed in me, and whoever disbelieves in him has disbelieved in me.'"

An-Najashi then turned his attention to Ja'far (RA) again: "What does this man say to you? What does he command you to do? And what does he forbid you from?"

"He recites to us Allah's Book," said Ja'far (RA). "He orders us to do what is good, and he forbids us from evil. He commands us to be kind to our neighbors, to join ties of relations, and to be dutiful to the orphan. And he commands us to worship Allah alone, without associating any partners with him."

"Do you have with you anything from that which he came with from Allah?" asked An-Najashi.

"Yes," replied Ja'far (RA).

"Then recite it to me," said An-Najashi. Ja'far (RA) then said, "In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful," after which he recited the following Verses:

"Alif-Lam-Mim. [These letters are

one of the miracles of the Qur'an, and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings] Do people think that they will be left alone because they say: "We believe," and will not be tested. And we indeed tested those who were before them. And Allah will certainly make (it) known (the truth of) those who are true, and will certainly make (it) known (the falsehood of) those who are liars (although Allah knows all that before putting them to test). Or those who do evil deeds think that they can —strip us (i.e., escape our punishment)? Evil is that which they judge! Whoever hopes for the "meeting with Allah, then Allah's Term is surely coming, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Knower. And whosoever strives, he strives only for himself. Verily, Allah is free of all wants from the 'Alamin (mankind, jinn, and all that exists). Those who believe [in the Oneness of Allah (Monotheism) and in Messenger Muhammad (SWS) and do not apostate because of the harm they receive from the polytheists], and do righteous good deeds, surely, We shall expiate from them their evil deeds and shall reward them according to the best of that which they used to do. And We have enjoined on man to be good and dutiful to his parents, but if they strive to make you join with Me (in worship) anything (as a partner) of which you have no knowledge, then obey them not. Unto Me is your return, and I shall tell you what you used to do. And for those who believe (in the Oneness of Allah and other items of Faith) and do righteous good deeds, surely, We shall make them enter in (the entrance of) the

righteous (i.e., in Paradise).”

An-Najashi listened very attentively as Ja’far (RA) recited these Verses, and as soon as Ja’far (RA) completed the last Verse, An-Najashi said, “Give us more of this wonderful and good speech.” Ja’far (RA) said again, “In the Name Of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful,” after which he recited these Verses:

“Alif-Lam-Mim. [These letters are one of the miracles of the Qur’an, and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings]. The Romans have been defeated. In the nearer land (Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine), and they, after their defeat, will be victorious. Within three to nine years. The decision of the matter, before and after (these events) is only with Allah (before the defeat of Romans by the Persians, and after, i.e. the defeat of the Persians by the Romans). And on that Day, the believers (i.e., Muslims) will rejoice (at the victory given by Allah to the Romans against the Persians) — With the help of Allah, He helps whom He wills, and He is the All-Mighty, the Most Merciful. (It is) a Promise of Allah (i.e., Allah will give victory to the Romans against the Persians), and Allah fails not in His Promise, but most of men know not. They know only the outside appearance of the life of the world (i.e., the matters of their livelihood, like irrigating or sowing or reaping, etc.), and they are heedless of the Hereafter. Do they not think deeply (in their own selves) about themselves (how Allah created them from nothing, and similarly He will resurrect

them)? Allah has created not the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, except with truth and for an appointed term. And indeed many of mankind deny the Meeting with their Lord.”

Tears then flowed from An-Najashi’s eyes, as he said, “This and that which ‘Isa brought indeed issue forth from the same source.”

Knowing that matters weren’t proceeding as they had hoped, ‘Abdullah bin Abu Rabi’ah turned to ‘Amr bin Al’As and whispered into his ear, “Did you hear that?” ‘Amr answered, “By Al-Lat and Al-Uzzah, I will now say to him words that will uproot their present bliss.” ‘Abdullah answered, “Do not do so, for indeed, in spite of the fact that they have opposed us, they are still our relatives.” But ‘Amr was bent on succeeding, and so he stepped forward and said, “O mighty king, they indeed say terrible words about ‘Isa bin Maryam.”

An-Najashi’s expression immediately changed from one of peace and tranquility to one of anger and rage. “What do they say!” he demanded.

“They say that ‘Isa is a slave, and they curse his mother,” replied ‘Amr.

An-Najashi then turned his gaze towards Ja’far bin Abu Talib, Mus’ab bin ‘Umair, ‘Uthman bin ‘Affan, and Ibn Mas’ud (RA), and he said, “O Companions of Muhammad, what do you say concerning ‘Isa bin Maryam?”

“We say about him that which our Prophet came to us with (in terms of knowledge): that he is the slave of Allah and His Messenger and that he is His Word (“Be!”- and he was) which he bestowed on Maryam (AS) (Mary), who was chaste and dedicated to the worship of Allah.”

“In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.”

“And mention in the Book (the Qur’an, O Muhammad (SWS), the story of) Maryam (Mary), when she withdrew in seclusion from her family to a place facing east. She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them; then We sent to her Or Ruh [angel Jibril (Gabriel)], and he appeared before her in the form of a man in all respects. She said, “Verily! I seek refuge with the Most Gracious (Allah) from you, if you do fear Allah.” (The angel) said: “I am only a Messenger from your Lord, (to announce) to you the gift of a righteous son.” She said: “How can I have a son, when no man has touched me, nor am I unchaste?” He said: “So (it will be), your Lord said: ‘That is easy for Me (Allah): And (We wish) to appoint him as a sign to mankind and a mercy from Us (Allah) and it is a matter (already) decreed, (by Allah).’”

An-Najāshi then struck the earth with his hand; he then took a stick and said, “By Allah, ‘Isa bin Maryam did not surpass what you said even by the degree of this rod (i.e., what you just said is in perfect agreement with what he said).” He then said to the Prophet’s Companions

(RA), “By Allah, you are safe in my land. Whoever curses you will incur loss (penalty); whoever curses you will incur loss; whoever curses you will incur loss. Even if a mountain of gold were offered to me, I still would not hurt a single man from you.”

Turning to one of his servants and pointing to Quraish’s two emissaries, An-Najashi said, “Return their gifts to them, for I do not need them ...” Thus their gifts were returned to them and, having failed in their mission, they returned home in a state of humiliation.

The Islam of An-Najashi

As was the case for many who came before them and many who came after them, An-Najashi’s priests and ministers knew the truth, but refused to embrace it. Instead, they dissented, gathering around An-Najashi and challenging him with the words: “You have abandoned our religion.” They then gathered together all who were willing to rebel against the king.

While preparations for battle were taking place, between the rebels and the king’s followers, An-Najashi made other preparations: he prepared a ship and said to the Prophet’s Companions, “Board the ship, but remain there. Then, if I am defeated, depart and go whosoever you please. And if I am victorious, then remain.” He then wrote down the following on a scroll: I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that

Muhammad is His slave and Messenger, And I bear witness that 'Isa bin Maryam is Allah's slave, Messenger, Ruh (a spirit created by Him), and Word ("Be!"- and he was) which He bestowed on Maryam (Mary). And before heading out to meet the enemy, he placed this scroll in his outer garment, just below his right shoulder.

The battle soon commenced, and the Prophet's Companions (RA) anxiously watched the fighting; their hearts were trembling as they sincerely invoked the All-Powerful, the All-Mighty to grant victory to An-Najashi. And indeed, Allah — the Possessor of might and majesty - then granted victory to His believing slave, An-Najashi.

An-Najashi (RA) went out to the people and said, "O people of Habashah, do I not have more rights upon you than any other person?"

"Yes indeed," they answered.

"And how, in your view, have I conducted myself in life?" asked An-Najashi.

"You have conducted yourself well," said An-Najashi.

"Then what is the matter with you?" asked An-Najashi.

"You have forsaken our religion and claimed that 'Isa is a slave," they replied.

"Then what do you have to say about 'Isa?" asked An-Najashi.

"That he is the son of Allah," they said.

An-Najashi then placed his hand on the scroll that was hidden underneath his

garment, and he said that he bore witness that 'Isa, the son of Maryam ... and there he stopped, going no further. The people thought that he was bearing witness to what they said, but in his heart, An-Najashi was bearing witness to what was written on the scroll. Thus appeased, the citizens of Al-Habashah returned to their homes, and the conflict came to an end, Ja'far (RA) sent tidings of what happened to the Prophet (SWS), who was happy with the news that An-Najashi had embraced Islam.

The Lives Of Those Who Migrated To Al-Habashah

No sooner did An-Najashi regain a firm foothold over Al-Habashah than did the Muslims begin to feel the comfort of safety again. Feeling secure, they were free to practice their religion, without any fear of repercussions. But they were not content to live under the generosity of the king; rather, they worked, for the main part in business. They would travel to Yemen and then return to Al-Habashah with the goods they purchased in San'a and Najran. Their travels to Yemen in the winter served a twofold purpose; one was the obvious hope for profit, and the other was to meet with the businessman who came from Makkah to the main marketplaces of Yemen. From them they gained information about the welfare of the Prophet (SWS), and if there were Muslims among them, they would meet secretly with them in order to learn Verses of the Qur'an that had recently been revealed. ■

(To be Continued)

Around the World

Landslide Returns BNP to Power, Rahman to be PM

SIGNALLING THE start of a new chapter in the country's history, the centre-right Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman, returned to power Friday after nearly two decades, securing landslide victory in the first national elections since the August 2024 ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The Election Commission announced that the BNP had won 209 seats in the 300-seat Bangladesh parliament.

With a commanding two-thirds majority, the BNP will be able to form the government and 60-year-old Rahman, who is tipped to be the Prime Minister, will not need the support of smaller parties to push his agenda in the Jatiyo Shangsad, the country's parliament. ■

Indian Teacher Win \$1 m 'Global Teacher Prize'

An Indian teacher and activist known for creating hundreds of learning centers and painting educational murals across the walls of slums won the \$1 million Global Teacher Prize.

Rouble Nagi accepted the award at the World Governments Summit in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, an annual event that draws leaders from across the globe.

Her Rouble Nagi Art Foundation has established more than 800 learning centers across India. They aim to have children who never attended school begin to have structured learning. They also teach children already in school. The prize is awarded by the Varkey Foundation, whose founder, Sunny Varkey, established the for-profit GEMS Education company that runs dozens of schools in Egypt, Qatar and the UAE.

Militants attack 2 villages, kill at least 162 people

ARMED EXTREMISTS killed at least 162 people during attacks on two villages in western Nigeria, a lawmaker said, in one of the deadliest assaults in recent months. One rights group estimated the death toll could be higher. The attacks targeted the villages of Woro and Nuku, in the state

of Kwara, on Tuesday evening, Mohammad Omar Bio, a member of parliament representing the area, told The Associated Press.

Israel PM, Trump to meet as Iran tensions stay high

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday the top priority in his talks with U.S. President Donald Trump would be the on going negotiations with Iran, as he presses for a tougher U.S. approach to Tehran's ballistic missile programme.

So far, Iran has rejected expanding the scope of its talks with the U.S. beyond the issue of its nuclear programme, though Washington also wants Tehran's ballistic missile programme and its support for regional militant groups on the table.

The two leaders are to meet in Washington on Wednesday, their sixth such encounter in the United States since Mr. Trump returned to office a year ago.

They also met in Jerusalem in October when Mr. Trump announced a cease fire in Gaza.

Wednesday's meeting comes days after arch-foes Iran and the United States held talks in Oman, after which Mr. Trump said another round of negotiations would follow.

Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Trump will also meet amid growing international outrage over Israeli measures to tighten control of the occupied West Bank by allowing settlers to buy land directly from its Palestinian owners.

However, it remains unclear whether the issue will be raised in their talks, despite Mr. Trump's past opposition to any annexation of the West Bank.

"On this trip we will discuss a range of issues: Gaza, the region, but of course first and foremost the negotiations with Iran," Mr. Netanyahu said, in a video statement before his departure.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson warned on Tuesday that Mr. Netanyahu's visit would have a "destructive" influence on diplomacy that is "detrimental to the region". ■

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