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Editorial

Dr. Busharat Elahi Jamil
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Pakistanis had an awfully unique experience in 75 years history of the Country, on October 21, 2023, when a criminal and absconder Nawaz Sharif received a protocol of a prime minister and addressed the nation at 'Minar-i-Pakistan' the monument symbolising the solidarity of Pakistan. He didn't surrender in front any court of law or police but the state machinery capitulated portraying the dissolution of the system of the country.

This un-constitutional system verifies that it cannot deliver without corruption, hypocrisy, corrupt elements and conflicting the interests of certain authoritative stratus. Unfortunately, here and now democracy is being defined merely as the fruition of hegemonic classes' objectives.

In these circumstances, all four pillars of the state seem to relish miseries and agonies of the people for their own resolutions. Regrettably, JUSTICE is JUST-ICE and media (print and electronic) is for sale as they are not with RIGHT but only with POWERFUL. Media only highlighted the arrival of Nawaz Sharif as his victory over the system of Pakistan.

No doubt, native media is playing a role of a procurer, selling the rights and hopes of the public to the powerful clutches for their compulsions. In fact, the powerful stratus consider themselves super natural and superior than common citizens.

Since 1947, these ruling classes have been intentionally pushing the common people towards poverty, illiteracy, religious orthodoxy and lack of self-reliance to contain them in a specific cycle of life with limited rationales. Actually, this is a game plan to gain power and domination to rule over the power corridors. Since 1947, evidently, a typical class and certain institutions are ruling over the Country on the name of so-called democracy.

Recently, we can observe a slight but pleasant change in the minds and thinking of Pakistanis. On October 21, particularly Lahoris practised and supported a confident and positive transformation. In fact, they disallowed the status quo as people articulated their displeasure with the obsolete system in force for 75 years. After April 10, 2022 for the first-time, media, establishment and state machinery with their joint venture could not eliminate this current social and political transformation in public.

The whole credit does not go to Imran khan but also to that anarchic process of no-confidence motion giving awareness through unveiling the corrupt practices of discriminating political process and misapplication of the constitution in Pakistani corrupt political system.

The reception given to a criminal is un-exemplary and can trigger and fan the hatred against the system and authoritative classes. The retaliation against this corrupt system can lead the nation towards true democracy and pave it on the path of prosperous Pakistan.

The abolition of intolerable status quo particularly the role of the establishment needs to be redefined making the people of Pakistan solely the true source of power under the sovereignty of God.

BlinImpact of Israel-Saudi Arabia Normalization on Palestine

By: Aalia Naseer

The recent Hamas attack on Israel, launched on the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, is a stark reminder of the enduring tensions in the Middle East, fueled by the intricate and unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Amidst this protracted conflict, recent developments have further exacerbated tensions, with one notable occurrence being the normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel. This diplomatic milestone



signifies a significant shift in regional relations and shared interests but notably sidesteps the Palestinian issue, a pivotal concern in the Middle East. This article dissects the interplay between this normalization process and the recent Hamas attack, shedding light on its repercussions for the Palestinian cause, the worsening of existing grievances, and its contribution to heightened violence. By scrutinizing the complexities of this situation, this article aspires to unravel the nuanced aspects of the conflict and explore potential pathways toward peace and stability. The Abraham Accords, inked in 2020 during the Trump administration, marked a pivotal juncture in Middle Eastern diplomacy, with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) becoming the first Arab nation to normalize relations with Israel. This historic step paved the way for four other countries, Bahrain, Morocco, Sudan, and Kosovo, to follow suit, igniting discussions regarding the potential normalization of ties between Saudi Arabia and Israel.

Palestinians perceive their struggle as being suppressed, and the normalization accords as further isolating them.

These negotiations, bolstered by support from the Biden administration in the United States, promise economic and security benefits for both nations. For Saudi Arabia, normalized relations could yield access to advanced American-made weaponry, including the F-35 fighter jet, and potentially contentious civil nuclear capabilities, such as in-country uranium enrichment. For Israel, normalization with Saudi Arabia, the Arab world's most influential power and largest economy, would bolster its security posture and regional influence. Prime Minister Netanyahu articulated Israel's interest in Saudi-Israeli normalization during United Nations General Assembly side meetings, underscoring the potential for regional peace and reconciliation. However, the Palestinian issue remains a substantial stumbling block to normalization, as Saudi Arabia insists on the necessity of a just and lasting resolution before recognizing Israel. The Biden administration is eager to broker a Saudi-Israeli normalization deal, as it would represent a significant diplomatic achievement and enhance relations between the U.S. and Israel. Nevertheless, it faces pressure from human rights organizations and some members of Congress to avoid making concessions to Saudi Arabia, which has faced criticism for its human rights record, notably in the context of the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. However, the most pressing concern lies in the marginalization of Palestinians in these normalization agreements. The dwindling faith in the viability of a two-state solution compounds this issue, deepening despair among the Palestinian populace. The lack

of emphasis on the Palestinian predicament during the normalization talks, exemplified by statements from Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, is a matter of grave concern for Palestinians and their supporters. Domestic Israeli politics have also played a pivotal role in the recent escalation. The ascent of far-right ultranationalist parties has emboldened the Israeli government to pursue more aggressive and expansionist policies toward Palestinians, manifesting in increased settlement construction, restrictions on Palestinian movement and access to resources, and the use of excessive force against Palestinian civilians. These Israeli policies toward the West Bank, coupled with regional events, have garnered criticism from Palestinians and their supporters. They argue that these agreements effectively reward Israel for its occupation of Palestinian territory and violations of Palestinian rights, while simultaneously weakening the Palestinian cause and obstructing the prospect of a just and enduring peace. Palestinians perceive their struggle as being suppressed, and the normalization accords as further isolating them. An August 2023 Palestinian Public Opinion Poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Research overwhelmingly reveals that Palestinians believe these normalization deals will harm their cause and fail to lead to a just and lasting peace. These factors have engendered a pervasive sense of despair and hopelessness among Palestinians, further bolstering support for Hamas and its militant ideology. To many Palestinians, Hamas represents the only force willing to confront Israel and advocate for their rights. Reports by the International Crisis Group and the Brookings Institution align with this view, suggesting that the Abraham Accords have negatively impacted the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, emboldening Israel and neglecting to address the root causes of the Palestinian economic crisis. The recent escalation should serve as a wake-up call to the international community. The current status quo in the Middle East is untenable, and achieving a just and lasting peace necessitates addressing the fundamental grievances of the Palestinian people and ensuring their participation in determining their future.

Saudi embassy in Beirut: calls on Saudi citizens in Lebanon to leave immediately

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's embassy in Beirut on Wednesday called on its citizens in Lebanon to leave the country immediately. "The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the Republic of Lebanon is closely following the developments of the current events in the southern Lebanon region, calling on all citizens to adhere to the travel ban and to leave Lebanese territory immediately for those who are currently in Lebanon," the embassy posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. An Israeli air strike on Tuesday killed hundreds of Palestinians at a Gaza City hospital crammed with patients and displaced people. Gaza's Health Ministry said Wednesday that 3,478 Palestinians have been killed and more than 12,000 injured in the past 11 days. Hezbollah fighters exchanged fire at the Lebanese border with Israeli forces on Wednesday in violence fuelled by the war between Hamas and Israel.



<https://www.arabnews.com/node/2398956/saudi-arabia>

Analysis: Why is so much **anti-Palestinian disinformation** coming from India?

By: Marc Owen Jones



The cliché goes that the first casualty of war is truth.

With Israel's occupation of Palestine, disinformation often comes with a side of anti-Palestinianism and Islamophobia, turbocharged by social media amplification, especially under Elon Musk's leadership of X, formerly known as Twitter.

But an intriguing element of the disinformation that has flooded social media since Hamas's October 7 attack on southern Israel is that a lot of it has been produced or spread by right-leaning accounts based out of India. Some of these fake stories include Hamas kidnapping a Jewish baby and beheading a young boy on the back of a truck. Blue check accounts have pushed false reports into the stratosphere of virality. One extremely popular tweet shared by thousands of people even claimed the Hamas attack was a US-led psyop.

The rise of the Islamophobic 'disinfluencer'

BOOM, one of India's most reputed fact-checking services, found several verified Indian X users at the helm of a disinformation campaign. These "disinfluencers" – influencers who have routinely shared disinformation – have been "mostly targeting Palestine negatively, or being supportive of Israel", according to BOOM. They have peddled tropes that have sought to showcase Palestinians as fundamentally brutal. In one instance, an account began circulating a video that claimed to show dozens of young girls taken as sex slaves by a "Palestinian" fighter. However, the video was likely from a school trip to Jerusalem. While relatively low quality, if you look carefully, you can see girls happily chatting and using their phones.

Despite this, the video got thousands of retweets and racked up at least 6 million impressions. An analysis of the accounts sharing the video showed that most were based in India. It was even shared in the Telegram channel of Angry Saffron, an apparent open-source intel-

ligence or OSINT channel operating from India. This suggests either sloppy intelligence or disinformation aimed at exploiting the credibility that the description “OSINT” might imply. In another instance, a video circulated that falsely claimed to show Hamas kidnapping a Jewish baby. The video garnered more than a million views in one post alone. Seven of the top 10 most-shared tweets featuring the misleading video were profiles based in India or containing the Indian flag in their biography. These seven tweets alone received more than 3 million impressions on X. However, the video was from September and had nothing to do with kidnapping or indeed with Gaza.

Islamophobia, India and social media

Many of the accounts sharing these false videos also spend a lot of their time posting anti-Muslim comments on X. One account, Mr Sinha_, who shared the false video of a boy being beheaded by Hamas, included the hashtag #IslamIsTheProblem in the same post. Another account that shared the misleading video of Palestinians kidnapping sex slaves had previously written: “The only difference is when Muslim girls convert to Hinduism they live happily ever after. But when Hindu girls convert to Islam they end up in a suitcase or a fridge.” Others have been more explicit in their hatred of Palestine. One Indian account, purporting to belong to a retired Indian soldier, stated, “Israel must finish off Palestine from the planet.” It is no secret that India has an Islamophobia problem, one that has only increased since the rise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

A report by the Australia-based Islamic Council of Victoria found that the majority of all Islamophobic tweets can be traced back to India. The plight of Palestinians has drawn Islamophobes like moths to a light and this can be witnessed on social media. Part of this online hatred can be traced to what has been called the “BJP’s IT Cell”, who have fanned the flames of hatred. In her book, *I Am a Troll*, Swati Chaturvedi discusses the BJP’s online social media army. According to Sadhavi Khosla, one of Chaturvedi’s interviewees, “The BJP has a network of volunteers who take instructions from the social media cell, and two affiliated organisations, to troll critical voices.” Khosla said she left the “IT Cell” after tiring of the constant barrage of “misogyny, Islamophobia and hatred” she had to disseminate.

A perfect storm: Musk, BJP and #GazaUnderAttack

While the BJP’s IT Cell may have an Islamophobia problem, it also has a disinformation problem, and it is coming to the conflict in Gaza

Pratik Sinha, a co-founder and editor of the Indian non-profit fact-checking website Alt-News, tweeted: “With India now exporting its disinformation actors in the Indian mainstream media and on social media in support of Israel, hopefully the world will now realise how the Indian right-wing has made India the disinformation capital of the world”.

Elon Musk’s acquisition of X and his decision to scale back efforts to curb lies spread on the platform has potentially set a precedent that might be influencing other technology giants in their approach towards managing harmful content. Notably, companies like Meta and YouTube appear to be re-evaluating their existing commitments to mitigating hate speech, disinformation and other detrimental content on their platforms.

Last week, the European Union even sent a warning to Musk following the deluge of disinformation on X following the Hamas attack on Israel. Western support of Israel, Big Tech’s renewed indifference to content moderation and the digital reach of right-wing Islamophobic accounts from India are turning the Gaza crisis into a springboard of hate targeted at Palestinians and Muslims.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2023/10/16/analysis-why-is-so-much-anti-palestinian-disinformation-coming-from-india>

There is nothing surprising about Hamas's operation

By: Somdeep Sen



The Israeli authorities seem to have been caught off-guard by Hamas's Operation Al-Aqsa Flood on Saturday. Besides launching rocket fire, the Palestinian faction also sent its fighters from the Gaza Strip into southern Israel, where they attacked military targets, briefly took control of some Israeli settlements and took dozens of civilians and soldiers hostage. Some have called Hamas's attack a "colossal failure" of the Israeli military and intelligence apparatus. Others, mostly diplomats and political leaders from the West and beyond, have labelled it an "unprovoked" "terrorist" act while insisting that Israel has the "right to defend itself". But nothing about this operation is surprising or unprovoked. Neither is it just the result of gaps in Israeli security measures. It is a response that is to be expected from the Palestinian people, who have faced Israeli settler colonial rule and occupation for decades. International law prohibits states from "any military occupation, however temporary". United Nations General Assembly Resolution 37/43 also reaffirms that people struggling for independence and liberation from colonial rule have the right to do so using "all available means, including armed struggle". In other words, Operation Al-Aqsa Flood is part of the armed Palestinian struggle provoked by the Israeli occupation and colonialism.

It is also not surprising that the Palestinian armed factions rely on asymmetric tactics and stealth. That is because they are up against one of the most sophisticated and well-funded armed forces in the world. That the operation was launched from Gaza is also not surprising. The late Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said once called Gaza the "essential core" of the Palestinian struggle. It is an impoverished, congested place inhabited largely by Palestinian refugees expelled from their homes during the Nakba of 1948. It previously gave birth to the first Intifada and has been hosting the bulk of the Palestinian armed resistance over the past few decades. Gaza has also been under debilitating siege for 16 years, which has taken a heavy toll on its people but has failed to destroy their will to resist. The blockade was imposed after Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council elections in 2006, but its Palestinian rival, Fatah, along with Israel and its backers conspired to prevent it from taking

power. After several months of fighting, Hamas was able to take full control of Gaza in June 2007, for which Israel and its partners decided to collectively punish the Palestinians living there. For more than 16 years, the residents of Gaza have had no freedom of movement. They can leave through the Israeli-controlled checkpoints if they have an Israeli work permit or in rare cases if they have been given special permissions by Israel to receive medical treatment in the occupied West Bank for life-threatening conditions. To leave for any other part of the world, they must have a valid visa, which is difficult to obtain by stateless people, and then navigate the Egyptian authorities' arbitrary decisions to close the Rafah border crossing and deny entry to Palestinians.

The blockade has brought the economy of Gaza nearly to a standstill. Today close to half the population is unemployed. Among the young, the unemployment rate is more than 60 per cent. The food supply is also limited by the siege. From 2007 to 2010, Israeli authorities kept a calorie count of Palestinians' nutritional needs to narrowly avoid malnutrition while restricting access to food for the people in Gaza. Today, according to the World Food Programme, a significant portion of the population is food insecure. In 2022, 1.84 million people across Palestine – one-third of the population – did not have enough food to eat. Among these people, 1.1 million were considered “severely food insecure”, 90 percent of whom lived in Gaza. The strip also suffers from an energy crisis. The Israeli ban on the entry of fuel into Gaza means that electricity production is severely limited. In 2023, Gaza has had only 13 hours of electricity a day. In 2017 and 2018, this was down to seven hours a day. This has in turn caused severe problems with water provision and sanitation. The constant blackouts have prevented water treatment plants from functioning properly. As a result, untreated sewage simply flows into the Mediterranean Sea.

Gaza's aquifers, the main source of its water, are also nearly depleted and contaminated by sea- and wastewater. A significant portion of all reported diseases in Gaza is caused by poor access to safe water. The blockade has also taken a toll on the strip's medical facilities. Hospitals lack basic supplies, equipment and infrastructure and are unable to handle severe cases or provide proper care for the chronically ill. Then there are the routine Israeli military campaigns. Israel justifies its onslaughts on the enclave by claiming they are in pursuit of Palestinian fighters. Yet it systematically targets civilians and non-military civilian infrastructure like residential buildings, hospitals, schools, water treatment plants, etc, making life in Gaza all the more unbearable.

The psychological impact of all of this cannot be understated, especially among the young, who feel a heightened sense of hopelessness and mental distress. As a Palestinian youth in Gaza told me during an interview in 2013: “Every day here is a struggle to stop yourself from losing your mind. You will notice that the youth in Gaza often go to university and then on the side they do internships, volunteer or set up organizations. All this is done to remain occupied mentally and delay the inevitable point when you lose it.” But all these years of tragedy and suffering have not killed the Palestinian spirit of resistance.

The formal justification for the operation Hamas gave was the desecration by Israelis of Al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam's third holiest site, and increased settler violence against the Palestinians. But considering how well-planned it looks, it is likely that Operation Al-Aqsa Flood has been in the works from before the recent events in Jerusalem and the West Bank. In fact, what appears to be the largest military response by Palestinians in decades was an inevitable development, an act of resistance and a reaction to the suffering of the people of Gaza under a brutal blockade and occupation. It is part of the Palestinian struggle for freedom, and it solidifies Gaza's place at the heart of it.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/opinions/2023/10/8/there-is-nothing-surprising-about-hamass-operationvhhv>

Vatican summit tackles women's ordination with a nod from Pope Francis

By: Claire Giangravé

VATICAN CITY (RNS) — Discussions about women's ordination to the priesthood have become livelier in the waning days of the synod on synodality, Pope Francis' month-long summit to discuss pressing issues facing the church. While there's a consensus that women's roles need to be promoted, participants remain divided on how to achieve that goal. The Vatican's synod, which started on Oct. 4 and goes until Oct. 29, is the result of a two-year-long process engaging Catholics at every level, from faithful at the local parish to continental leaders. Now, the 364 lay and religious participants present at the synod are poised to address questions ranging from sexual abuse to LGBTQ welcoming to hierarchal structures. Few topics have captured the attention of attendants more than the question of women's roles in the church.

Participants were encouraged to maintain the confidentiality of the small working group discussions taking place at the synod. But speaking to Religion News Service, attendants said the question of the ordination of women remains fairly evenly split, with some bishops leaning against and religious sisters leading the charge in favor. In many ways, this synod has seen many firsts for women. For the first time a woman, Sr. Nathalie Becquart, is undersecretary of the synod office at the Vatican. Sister Maria de los Dolores Valencia Gomez, a sister of St. Joseph of Lyon, is the first woman to preside over a synod. In the months leading up to the summit, the resources of the Women's Ordination Worldwide advocacy group were made available for the first time on the synod website.

A record 54 women are participating, and voting, during the synod. In the past, synod events were exclusively attended by bishops and a few priests who acted as secretaries and writers. Synod discussions so far have addressed the topics of women's ordination to the priesthood, the female diaconate and the creation of alternative ministries that would allow women to have an equal representation in the traditionally male dominated institution. Whereas the pope has shut the door to the female priesthood in the past, Francis recently opened an unprecedented opportunity for debate on the topic. Answering a series of questions, or dubia, sent by conservative prelates regarding the synodal discussions, Francis said there is no "clear and authoritative doctrine" on the question of ordination, and it can be "a



subject of study." Pope Francis created two commissions to study the possibility of the female diaconate, which would allow women to preach at Mass and perform marriages and baptisms but not celebrate the Eucharist or hear confessions. Opponents fear allowing women to the diaconate would open the door to women being ordained as priests.

Some participants at the synod, and Catholics looking in from the outside, have voiced the possibility of finding alternative roles and ministries for women in the church. They argue that if the church is going to defeat clericalism, a term used to describe the special status held by Catholic clergy, then the solution is not to ordain more people. While synod officers, and the pope, have encouraged synod participants to be creative in the search for solutions to the church's woes, there have so far been few inspired solutions to the much-needed promotion of women's roles. For some synod participants, the solution is already there: allowing women to become priests or deacons. A significant push toward this solution came from the religious sisters within the synod. A "cohort" of nuns favoring female ordination, and especially women deacons, has formed at the synod, said participants.

The women, mainly from Latin America and some from Europe, are said to have initially bonded because they could all speak Spanish. Nuns from Italy to India have come forward in recent years to denounce unfair treatment by male clergy who, they claim, often regard them as nothing more than free labor. Cases of nuns being sexually abused by priests or bishops have also emerged in recent books and reports. Liberal-minded nuns at the synod have embraced the cause for a women's diaconate with gusto, participants said, with some pushing the envelope further by asking for the elimination of titles reserved for clergy, such as "your eminence" or "your excellency," which promote clericalism.

But to some, the idea of women being allowed to become priests remains beyond the pale. One synod participant said he felt "violated" by the idea of women priests, while another Eastern Orthodox attendant voiced surprise at the Western "obsession" with female clergy. The argument that the ordination of women would fill the emptying seminaries of Europe was shot down by representatives from Africa and Asia who take pride in their growing number of priests. At the tail end of the synod, the question of whether female ordination will make it in the final document remains uncertain, participants said. The goal of this synod is not to come up with solutions, after all, but to pose questions and foster a feeling of communion. Attendants will likely vote on an amorphous or scaled-down version of the vibrant debates on women's ordinations that have filled the Vatican halls this month.

For advocates for female ordination who have looked at this event with hope, the result of this first consultation might be disappointing. For conservatives, the final document might be the latest sign of how this pontificate has exposed the church to an unbridled liberal shift. Debates are likely to evolve ahead of the second part of the synod, when participants will meet again in October of 2024. In the end, it will be Pope Francis who will make the final decision on the matter when he publishes the apostolic exhortation born from the synodal discussions. Francis has so far avoided tackling the complexities of dogma directly, opting for his signature pastoral approach instead.

If gestures speak louder than words under Francis, then his meeting with Sr. Jeannine Gramick on Oct. 17 at the Vatican made a clear statement. The Philadelphia-born nun has called for women to become cardinals and is the founder of New Ways Ministries, a Catholic network promoting the welcome and inclusion of LGBTQ Catholics. In 1999, she was banned from pastoral work by the Vatican's doctrinal office. The meeting signaled that the pope is welcoming "not just LGBT people but those who have been shunned by society and the church," Gramick said in an interview with National Catholic Reporter shortly after the audience. "I think Pope Francis is trying to get us to move forward, to open our eyes and look to the future and to the changes in the world," she added.

<https://religionnews.com/2023/10/23/vatican-summit-tackles-womens-ordination-with-a-nod-from-pope-francis/>

The myth of Israel's 'most moral army'



By: Neve Gordon

As Israel ordered 1.1 million Palestinians – many of whom are the children and grandchildren of refugees – to leave their homes in northern Gaza ahead of its ground offensive, I asked myself how much more killing and destruction will be necessary to satisfy this death drive. Israel is clearly seeking retribution in the wake of Hamas's horrific attack. In the Israeli imagination, October 7 will be forever remembered as the day Hamas massacred more than 1,300 citizens. Hamas fighters entered Israeli settlements and towns, killing hundreds of children, men and women.



An attack on a music festival in the desert left more than 250 Israelis dead. Legally speaking, these attacks constitute a series of blatant and egregious war crimes and thus it is only natural that leaders around the world have denounced them as heinous acts of violence. Yet, Israel attacking civilian buildings and infrastructure and killing more than 2,300 Palestinian children, men, and women have been met with silence from Western leaders. Moreover, Israel's decision to cut off electricity, limit the water supply and flatten large parts of the Gaza Strip has barely engendered any criticism from the West even though these actions also constitute flagrant war crimes. In order to understand why the death of Palestinian civilians fails to generate moral indignation among the Western elite as well as what likely lies ahead for Palestinians in Gaza as Israeli troops cross the border, we need to take a look at dominant Israeli narratives of past assaults. In 2014, for example, during Israel's invasion of Gaza, more than 2,200 Palestinians were killed, 556 of whom were children; this is compared to 64 Israelis who were killed in that round of violence. So how is it, then, that even after Israel unleashed such disproportional and lethal violence in 2014, the West overwhelmingly continues to believe that the Israeli army is "the most moral in the world", while Palestinians have been relentlessly cast as "violent aggressors"? Why is it that Western leaders never publicly denounce Israel for war crimes? The answer is complex, as there are a number of factors at play. But one of them is Israel's incredibly savvy manipulation of the laws of war that has successfully helped to frame Israeli violence as ethical. Israel's legal manipulations draw on a series of ambiguities and exceptions that constitute international law, revealing that the laws of war favour states over non-state actors and the strong over the weak and consequently might not be the best tool to shield civilians in Gaza. Let us take some concrete examples. The standing orders given to the soldiers entering the Gaza Strip in 2014 were clear: Palestinians who did not heed Israel's warnings to evacuate their homes and flee south became legitimate military targets. One soldier explained to the Israeli organisation Breaking the Silence that: "There weren't really any rules of engagement ... They told us: 'There aren't supposed to be any civilians there. If you spot someone, shoot'. Whether the person posed a threat or not wasn't even a question; and that makes sense to me. If you shoot someone in Gaza it's cool, no big deal. First of all because it's Gaza, and second because that's warfare. That, too, was made clear to us – they told us, 'Don't be afraid to shoot', and they made it clear that there are no uninvolved civilians." One might think that a

military order permitting indiscriminate firing at civilians would be deemed illegal under international law, particularly given the principle of distinction (the bedrock of the laws of war calling on warring parties to distinguish at all times between civilians and combatants, and prohibiting the intentional attacking of civilians) – and given the fact that over half of the 2.3 million Palestinians currently living in the Gaza Strip are children. The irony is that Israel actually uses the laws of war to portray itself as the moral actor. As it has done earlier this week, in 2014, the Israeli army instructed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to leave their homes and travel to the south knowing full well that among those living in the area are thousands of elderly and sick people and that the time it gave them to vacate the area was not sufficient. But Israel also knows that warning the Palestinian civilians and instructing them to leave will allow it to deny the very existence of civilians within northern Gaza. That is precisely the meaning of the phrase “there are no uninvolved civilians”, since it brands all those who have remained in the area – even if civilians are still the majority and are unable to leave, as the United Nations has averred about the current situation – as “participants in hostilities” or as “voluntary human shields”. Such terms render these civilians “killable”, according to some interpretations of the laws of war. And since the claim to morality is based on compliance with the laws of war, the lethal violence that Israeli soldiers use against civilians who remain in their homes is then constructed as morally justifiable and even ethical. Alongside this legal discourse, Israel also circulates a colonial narrative that presents the Palestinians as “human animals” that do not understand the laws of war. By combining these colonial tropes and “legalese”, it frames Palestinians as immoral barbarians who “deserve to die”. This rhetorical move, in turn, construes Israeli soldiers as the opposite, namely, the “civilised” and moral “fighters”. Furthermore, the linking of international law with colonial tropes – or what we might call colonial legal discourse – helps justify the execution of massive violence. About a month ago, CBS News’s 60 Minutes programme interviewed Shira Etting, an Israeli pilot who had been active in the protests against attempts by the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to overhaul Israel’s legislature. “If you want pilots to be able to fly and shoot bombs and missiles into houses knowing they might be killing children,” she said, “they must have the strongest confidence in the [politicians] making those decisions.” Etting nowhere admits to any intention of killing children. Yet she does acknowledge that when she and her fellow pilots set off on a mission over the Gaza skies, they understand that the missiles they fire may very well – and often do – end up killing civilians. In other words, Israeli pilots, like Etting, know that they kill children when dropping massive bombs on city centres, but since they did not “intend” to kill them, international law as well as media outlets like CBS News and Western leaders consider their actions to be morally sound. This is despite the bombardment these pilots carry out resulting in the death of exponentially more civilians, including children, than in a Hamas attack. Western media outlets portray them as heroes who did not intend to kill non-combatants – euphemistically called “collateral damage”. Note, however, that within this colonial legal discourse, it is not only the perpetrators of violence who are framed as morally distinct, but the victims of this violence as well. Israeli victims have names and life stories, which have been tragically cut short. These victims, in other words, are presented as people worthy of being grieved. Palestinian victims, by contrast, remain nameless; and they tend to be presented as mere numbers rather than flesh and blood human beings whose lives also deserve to be grieved. This, too, helps to perpetuate the myth of the Israeli military as moral. Ultimately, then, it is not only that those who deploy the weapons of the strong are considered more ethical because they kill innocent people from a distance, but also because the colonial legal discourse constructs the people they kill as “human animals”, “collateral damage”, or as a statistic. So long as the dead are dehumanised in this way and, consequently, presented as unworthy of being grieved, the death drive will continue unabated. This, I fear, is a recipe for genocidal retribution.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/10/16/the-myth-of-israels-most-moral>

Could a warning by the ICC deter war crimes in Israel-Gaza conflict?

By: Mat Nashed

Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan of the International Criminal Court (ICC) must send a message that he is monitoring developments and must warn against carrying out potential war crimes as heavy bombardment of Gaza continues, human rights groups and legal experts say. Khan broke his silence last week on the Israel-Gaza war, which began with an October 7 attack by the armed wing of the Palestinian group Hamas on Israel, in an interview with Reuters, saying the ICC has jurisdiction over



possible war crimes carried out in the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel. However, analysts and rights groups said Khan should have explicitly warned Hamas and Israel against committing crimes by making it clear that they would be subject to investigation. They added that Khan's voice may have the power to deter some war crimes and to send a message to both Palestinian and Israeli victims of this conflict that they will not be abandoned by the court. "What I did not hear, and what I would have liked to hear, is a stronger statement [from Khan] that the office of the prosecutor is collecting evidence and is monitoring the situation," said Adil Haque, a law professor at Rutgers University in the United States. Khan's office has already been investigating war crime allegations in the occupied Palestinian territory since 2021 – mainly from the Israeli war on Gaza in 2014. However, no formal statement about the ongoing war has been issued despite the office doing so in conflicts such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the atrocities carried out this year in Sudan's western province Darfur. Since October 7, at least 3,361 Palestinians and at least 1,400 people in Israel have been killed.

Accusations of wrongdoing on both sides

Human Rights Watch (HRW) verified four videos from the Hamas attack where fighters killed people who appeared to be civilians and said these incidents "should be investigated as war crimes" while Amnesty International examined video evidence that also shows deliberate "shooting at civilians and taking civilians as hostages". Israel has responded to Hamas's surprise attack by cutting off the supply of food, water, fuel and electricity into Gaza, which "will undoubtedly cost civilian lives and constitutes collective punishment", according to the United Nations. Israel has also launched relentless air attacks on the Gaza Strip, killing entire families and destroying neighbourhoods. An HRW report also found that Israel has used white phosphorus, an incendiary weapon that can burn flesh down to the bone and set fire to all nearby structures. Its use magnifies the dangers for civilians in Gaza – one of the most densely populated regions in the world, said the report. On October 17, an explosion struck the al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City – where thousands of Palestinians were seeking medical care and shelter from the ongoing bombardment – killing at least 500

people, according to Gaza's health ministry. While Israel denies responsibility for the hospital attack, its actions in Gaza may already amount to war crimes under international humanitarian law, legal experts told Al Jazeera. Balkees Jarrah, the associate director for HRW's International Justice Program, said a public statement is critical: "It is important [Khan] signals his willingness to expand his investigation into new crimes that are being committed right now."

Statements a deterrent

In the past, former ICC Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda issued warnings that deterred Israel from committing war crimes, said Ahmed Abofoul, a legal researcher and advocacy officer at Al-Haq, a Palestinian human rights organisation based in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. In 2018, Bensouda warned Israel not to forcefully evict a Palestinian community from Khan al-Ahmar, a village in the occupied West Bank sandwiched between illegal Israeli settlements, saying such action could constitute a war crime. In a statement, Bensouda said that she would continue to keep "a close eye on the developments on the ground and will not hesitate to take any appropriate action". Israeli officials delayed the eviction out of fear that it could invite an ICC probe. "This [example] unequivocally shows that such preventative statements [from the ICC chief prosecutor] can provide sufficient deterrence [to war crimes]," Abofoul told Al Jazeera. When asked last week by the BBC if Israel's ongoing aerial offensive on Gaza was excessive and violated the boundaries of international humanitarian law, Khan responded that he could not make an assessment about fighting that was just "a few days old". But Haque told Al Jazeera that there is more than enough evidence to start an investigation against the Israeli army for its actions in Gaza. "There are strong indications that the Israeli army has intentionally directed attacks against civilians, including medics, and civilian objects such as entire apartment buildings, and the war crime of launching attacks knowing that they will cause excessive or disproportionate harm to civilians," he said. "Depending on the duration of the Israeli siege [on Gaza], and the effects on civilians, the war crime of starvation may be implicated as well," Haque added.

Palestinian victims need to know 'justice will be provided'

Khan was quite vocal after Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Four days after the invasion, he announced that his office would open investigations into possible war crimes committed on Ukrainian territory. Abofoul, whose family is among the two million



people trapped in Gaza, said Palestinians want the ICC to express an equal commitment to probing war crimes that Israel may be committing. “Palestinian victims in Gaza need to know that these crimes [against them] won’t go unnoticed and that justice will be provided to them. They need to feel seen by the court, or they will feel abandoned,” he said, speaking from his home in the Netherlands. Mark Kersten, an assistant professor in criminology and criminal justice at the University of the Fraser Valley in Canada, agreed. “I think, for many people who have experienced atrocities in Israel-Palestine or elsewhere, it’s really powerful when a court reminds the world that it is on their side,” he said. “I think that is an extremely powerful symbolic gesture.”

Foreign interests

However, political pressure could compromise any impartial investigation, even if Khan does launch a probe, analysts said. Khan’s approach to investigations in Afghanistan – where his office decided to “deprioritise” crimes committed by US personnel to focus on the Taliban’s abuses – established a worrying precedent, the analysts pointed out. Khan’s decision followed years of US pressure against the court to drop a probe against its soldiers. Former US President Donald Trump even sanctioned Bensouda and other ICC officials in 2020. Powerful Western countries that finance a number of the ICC’s proceedings could use that influence to pressure the court into not investigating Israel, said Srinivas Burra, an assistant professor in legal studies at South Asian University in New Delhi, India. “[Western] political considerations may play a role in the ICC’s whole process, which was evident in the context of Afghanistan,” he said. Further complications may arise from Israel’s legal relationship with the ICC. Because Israel is not a party to the Rome Statute – the treaty that established the ICC in 2002 – Burra suggested it had no legal obligation to cooperate with its proceedings. “It will be difficult to say conclusively that there will be fair cooperation [with the court] from Israel’s side,” he told Al Jazeera.

‘The least the court could do’

Going forward, Khan’s words and actions on Israel and Palestine have the power to restore – or damage – the court’s credibility worldwide, according to some observers. “It’s ultimately up to ICC officials to guard their own independence,” said Jarrah of HRW. “But ICC member countries can and should help to create the space for that independence by being firm and consistent in their support for impartial justice across the court’s docket.” Haque believes Khan has leverage. According to the Rutgers professor, Western states have specifically designated funds to facilitate an ICC probe of Russia’s crimes in Ukraine. He suggested that Khan could “simply reverse” this arrangement and insist that any funding goes to supporting the court as a whole, not particular investigations. “That would create a dilemma for the West because if states withdraw funding to investigate Israel, then they would also be withdrawing money to investigate Russia,” Haque told Al Jazeera. During Khan’s interview with Reuters, he called for more funding for the court as a whole, including for the ongoing investigation in the occupied Palestinian territory. “Palestine – like every other situation that we have – is underfunded and under-resourced and it is a challenge to state parties and the international community whether they wish to give us the tools to do the job,” Khan told Reuters. Khan’s press office declined to speak to Al Jazeera and would not comment on whether a probe would be launched into any possible war crimes committed during the current conflict. For now, Palestinians like Abofoul want the court to acknowledge the abuses in Gaza, where more than 1,000 children have been killed by Israel’s offensive since October 7, and try to mitigate the extent of war crimes by telling the warring parties they are being monitored. “How can Palestinians trust and expect justice from a court that doesn’t try to prevent perpetrators by words?” Abofoul asked.

“That’s the least the court could do.”

<https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/10/18/could-a-warning-by-the-icc-chief-prosecutor-deter-war-crimes-in-gaza>

Families of Possible Japanese Abductees Call For Truth to be Uncovered, **Swift Rescue of Missing Persons**

By: Yomiuri Shimbun

About 600 people, including the families of about 470 Japanese nationals who may have been abducted by North Korea, called at a recent gathering in Tokyo for all the relevant facts to be uncovered and the missing persons rescued soon. In addition to 17 people officially recognized by the Japanese government as having been abducted by North Korea, there are about 470 missing persons for whom the possibility cannot be ruled out,



according to the Investigation Commission on Missing Japanese Probably Related to North Korea (COMJAN), a private organization that investigates the 470 cases. Thirty-nine families, including those of the 17 abductees, were among the participants in the Saturday meeting. It was the first large-scale gathering to be held by COMJAN in 13 years. COMJAN has designated 77 out of the 470 as people who “were highly likely kidnapped by North Korea.” Seventy families of the 470 participated in the previous COMJAN gathering in 2010, but the number of the attending families has decreased due to aging and other factors.

At the Saturday meeting, family members held up photos of the missing persons and shared their hopes and thoughts before a microphone. “My family’s only wish is to have my younger sister back home,” said Tamaji Takeshita, 79, a sister of Noriko Furukawa, who went missing when she was 18 after she left her home in Chiba Prefecture in 1973. “My parents died without seeing my younger brother again. Please let me see him while I am still alive,” said Kazuo Inoue, 76, a brother of Katsuyoshi Inoue, who went missing in Kawaguchi, Saitama Prefecture, in 1971 when he was 21. Prior to the meeting, COMJAN announced that it had added five people to its list of “people who are certain to have been abducted by North Korea.” Among them are Takeshi Terakoshi, 74, who was 13 when he was abducted with his two uncles while fishing off the Noto Peninsula in 1963. The uncles have also been added to the list. Terakoshi was later confirmed to be alive in North Korea.

Married, he now lives in that country. Although the possibility that Terakoshi was abducted by North Korea cannot be ruled out, the family of Terakoshi in Japan has denied he was abducted out of consideration for his safety. The remaining two are Kenzo Kosumi from Hokkaido, who went missing at the age of 27, and Kimiko Fukutome from Kochi Prefecture, who went missing at 24 years old. Kosumi’s family register was found to have been manipulated to make it represent a North Korean agent. Fukutome is believed to have married a suspect in the 1970 hijacking of a Japan Airlines jetliner to Pyongyang by the now-defunct Japanese Red Army terrorist group. “We encourage the Japanese government to clarify and solve the cases,” said Kazuhiro Araki, who represents the COMJAN.

<https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/society/general-news/20231023-145008/>

MBS, the Arab world and Israel

By: Dr. Muhammad Ali Ehsan



Muhammad Bin Salman (MBS), the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia for last so many years, seems a man on a mission. Given his young age he is considered as the future 50 years King of Saudi Arabia. Leading a country of 36 million people, 65% of which are under 30, he is determined to set his country on the biggest transformation project ever. His success can easily be attributed to his reliance on the sentiments of the young Saudi generation which considers him a reform-minded ruler that they have been waiting for, a ruler who could give them the opportunity to live real lives rather than living them virtually by watching videos on Netflix and following other cultures through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. MBS's message to his countrymen and the world so far was simple — he was not trying to modernise Islam but all he was doing was restoring it to its more modest roots. Through the American corridor he was reaching out to the Israelis and was committed to joining the other Arab nations in signing the Abraham Accord with them. But that was not to be, as Hamas's attack on Israel happened. MBS's modernisation dreams and his Vision 2030 have come crashing down almost with the same speed as the physical infrastructure and buildings in Gaza are crashing down under the Israeli airstrikes.

The problem with the MBS solution for Saudi Arabia is that he can modernise the physical infrastructure of the country but how he will modernise it politically and socially as it remains a deeply conservative country. Even outlawing slavery in Saudi Arabia took a while and was only done in 1962, and some say under pressure from then American President JF Kennedy. It is the same conservatism and the old Bedouin from the nomadic Arab tribes that now stand in total disbelief as the Israelis execute their shock and awe military campaign against the Palestinians. The big question that all of them are asking is: were we being friends with this country?

The American President and the British Prime Minister visited Israel. For these major powers it was not enough to demonstrate that they were standing with Israel but standing in Israel; and demonstrating that they were with the people of Israel was more important. The civilised world that these powers represent had already caged the uncivilised people but

now the civilised world was bombing them to death. The Israeli PM while holding a joint press conference with the British PM mentioned who all wanted Israel to win this war and together with the entire civilised world which includes the US and the UK, he also named the 'modern Arab countries'. I was just wondering what would be going through the minds of the people of Saudi Arabia. If the cost of being modern is being on the Israeli side, what would they think about it?

I am reminded of MBS's modernisation plans. He is building a new city in Saudi Arabia named Neom; in fact he doesn't call it a city he calls it a new kingdom. He considers it a pioneer which will lead all sectors in future. One of them is the commercial air travel that the Crown Prince wants to bring to the city. This is a project on which the Crown Prince wants to spend \$500 billion and the exuberant cost is reflective of ideas such as NASA partnering Saudi Arabia in developing there an artificial moon that would be the biggest in the world. Neom has a vision statement that reads, "the land of future where the greatest minds and the best talents are empowered to embody pioneering ideas that exceed boundaries in a world inspired by imagination." But unfortunately, the world of the Middle East is inspired by ideological hatred and conflict and in the troubling politics of the Middle East hardly any state is anymore sovereign. The UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman are already Muslim states that have embraced modernism but for almost all of them the US acts as the arbiter and none of them can do anything without America's nod or approval.

MBS is the leader of the Arab world and his Vision 2030 should have been more Arab than his country centred. Geoeconomics guided his Vision 2030 but there was so much wrong with the geopolitics and the Arab politics that warranted Saudi Arabia's and the Muslim world's attention and there is so much wrong that had happened in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen. So many people in these countries that suffered and there is this unending suffering of the Palestinian people. The lesson for MBS is that no economic vision alone can create an environment of security and stability. The very powers that guarantee Saudi security stand unhinged with Israel today. How can Saudi Arabia, the leader of the Arab world, stand up against them when it is dependent upon these big powers for its own security?

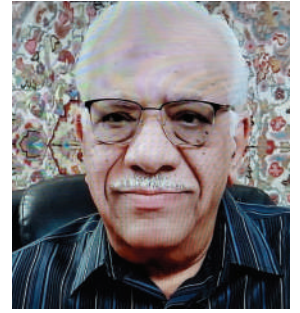
The Crown Prince says he read The Prince and that Machiavelli is his model. What MBS was doing through his Vision 2030 was creating a Saudi fortress in an Arab island where many other countries and their people suffered. Machiavelli says, "the best fortress is to be found in the love of the people, for although you may have fortresses, they will not save you if you are hated by the people." Hamas and the people of Palestine had nothing to lose except their lives. Those were already being lost under the state terrorism being executed by the Israelis for the past so many years. So, the death ground strategy of Hamas had one big achievable objective — bring the plight of the Palestinian back on the global stage.

Under the current circumstances, life is not easy for both the US and its strategic partner Saudi Arabia. The US was pivoting Asia-Pacific and was moving away from the Middle East. But now it faces not two but three front problems in three different theatres. In Eastern Europe there is the problem of Ukraine. In Western Pacific there is the problem of China with Taiwan and now it is being pulled back in the Middle East. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia was blindsided by the suffering of its brotherly Arab countries and was running away with its Saudi-centred modernisation plans. What has happened to the big plans of both these countries is best described by a dialogue in the famous movie Godfather: "Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!" Both the global and the regional hegemons have some very difficult decisions to make as the world sits and waits.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2442270/mbs-the-arab-world-and-israel>

Gen Asim Muneer Caught in His Own Death Trap: Playing All Sides, Going Nowhere

By: Shaheen Sehbai



WASHINGTON: An undecided mind, Himalayan ambitions, conflicting messages, confusing statements, untenable and unjustifiable positions, fits of anger and vulgar outbursts before his juniors, plus much more, have landed Pakistan's army chief General Asim Muneer in a fast twirling quicksand of filth and gutter. These words may seem harsh but the reality is that in his nearly 10 months in office, Gen Asim Muneer has transformed very slowly from a deeply guilty, undeserving candidate for the most powerful post of the chief. The fact is that he maneuvered his way with the help of his political sponsors, to a man with a thousand ambitions and now sees past military dictators as his role models. But this General, who hit a jackpot just hours before he would have retired and gone into oblivion, missed a basic point devising his strategy. The previous autocrats grabbed power when the people of Pakistan were vigorously protesting against corrupt civilian governments and the

army was welcomed. Gen Asim has come in at a time when the majority of the people are protesting against the leadership of the army for removing a popular elected government of Imran Khan. Obviously the regime change was done with the support of legally tried and convicted corrupt politicians who colluded with the army. Some ran away from the country to enjoy their looted wealth in western countries while leaving a weak and dumb third tier leadership to provide a political face to the junta.

FIRST MISTAKE: Instead of thinking large and looking forward, making friends with Khan, to hold fresh elections, Asim Muneer exposed himself as an inexperienced and visionless leader by seeking revenge. He launched an unprecedented crackdown on Khan's party that included assassination attempts on Khan. He was dragged from one civilian court to another in about 200 fake cases dumped at him. He also practically banned Khan's party and rounded up all key leaders, including even innocent flag bearers. Women, children, old and young were hounded, hunted, arrested and in many cases kidnapped without trace. The media was silenced by brute force and such harsh measures as kidnapping, beating and sodomizing senior leaders and journalists. The most prominent critic, TV anchor Arshad Sharif, was mysteriously murdered in Kenya. Others like Imran Riaz Khan, just disappeared and remain untraceable for months, even now. Some went into self exile but are being pursued through Transnational Repression, a non-starter. The mistake he committed was to do all this under the see-through garb of an unpopular civilian government of political cronies and nobodies. He could not declare Martial Law under international and economic pressures, but his heavy boot trampled upon all civilian institutions, including the superior courts, the Election Commission, a toothless and dummy parliament and an always loyal slave bureaucracy.

SECOND MISTAKE: In his confusing hypocritical policy the General kept on promising free and fair national elections while in practice he even thwarted constitutionally mandated elections in 70 percent of Pakistan, the big provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He put in hand-picked nobodies in charge in these provinces and forgot all constitutional

requirements. Promises of elections made by him and his cronies dissipated into thin air like words and sounds in a National Farting Olympiad. **THIRD MISTAKE:** The most surprising miscalculation by Gen Asim Muneer was about the fate of Imran Khan's political party PTI and Khan's steadfastness. He treated Khan as a personal enemy, using words like 'bast...' in several gatherings of his troops and businessmen. PTI was forced to disintegrate with weak-hearted leaders. Anyone important was shamelessly pushed and kicked to dissociate from Khan. A lot of them could not face the pressure and crossed over, sacrificing their careers. But despite the harshest measures, a bulk of young and honest PTI leaders and workers stayed loyal, though they were chased, harassed, beaten and forced to hide in seclusion or go into exile. Families of those who fled were subjected to brutalities with women humiliated and manhandled, children thrown into trauma with one who died while his father was being tortured. Numerous atrocities were committed. Gatherings by the PTI were physically uprooted but the people defied every brutality and whenever they got a chance they came out in hundreds of thousands to show support for Khan.

Two such expressions of support stand out. The funeral of Anchor Arshad Sharif pulled such a huge crowd in Islamabad it became the largest gathering at the famous and large Faisal Mosque after General Ziaul Haq's funeral in 1988. Months later, last week, the funeral of a 5-year old Ammar, whose father, a PTI worker, was tortured, drew such huge crowds that everyone was shocked. Prayers in absentia were also offered in many other cities. Yet the biggest proof that PTI had not suffered any big blow to its support continued to come in elections won at every level, local bodies, provincial or national. This has frustrated Gen Asim Muneer so much he is shying away from national and provincial polls on one side and has deployed army troops and his secret agencies to manage all elections in support of Khan opponents. So far he has failed and thus no date for elections has been set.

NEXT MISTAKE: Caught between his promises and a sinking economy which kept all friends and rich international donors from giving Pakistan desperately needed dollars, Gen Asim Muneer decided to jump directly in managing the economy, financial matters and even agriculture and minerals. So the message he sent to all donors and friends was that he will be directly handling civilian matters, besides his defense responsibilities, which have suffered a lot with terrorist attacks increasing manifold. Thus Gen Asim Muneer is acting directly against what he has been saying about holding elections and handing over power to those elected. He cannot be right on both counts. Either he stays to handle the economy or he lets the representatives of the people do it. Everyone is confused.

NEXT MISTAKE: General Asim Muneer's crackdown on Imran Khan and his party created a huge wave of concern and sympathy for Khan within the ranks of the army, more so at the mid level of officers and largely in the lower ranks. Gen Asim has just ignored this and he thinks the discipline within the army will not be broken to threaten him. But the measures against retired senior officers and reports of large scale resignations and even trials in military courts, suggest there was serious concern about the reaction of ranks against Gen Muneer. With the people at large already hating the anti-democratic role of the few top generals, a disgruntled rank and file can be a potential ticking bomb. Come crunch time, the troops could pop a big surprise.

NEXT MISTAKE: While the lower courts were properly "managed" by the army to get decisions, some absolutely biased and even ridiculous, against Imran Khan and for the army, the higher courts have started showing some resistance but the new Chief Justice, Qazi Faez Issa, can be a huge wild card. Justice Issa has a long history of being anti-establishment. In the last 12 months of his judicial career, he would hardly be interested in leaving the bench considered as a crony of the Army. This can create a lot of obstacles in the aspirations and ambitions of Gen Asim Muneer. The first public and live hearing chaired by the Chief Justice was an indicator that he would be more a judge of his wishes and not serve as a limping

attack dog. **BIGGEST PROBLEM:** While the Supreme Court is yet to show its style and operative strategy, Gen Asim Muneer has a lot more on his plate to manage. He wants Imran Khan out, by hook or by crook. So far it has been a one sided tirade but his allies against Khan are also not dependable or subservient. Mian Nawaz Sharif feels he had been unjustifiably ousted and wants the army to help him get back to power, to compensate him. The problem with Mr Sharif is that once he gets into power, he wants to become a Sultan or an Arab King, more aptly Amir ul Momineen.

As General Asim Muneer is also shaping himself as the next Amir ul Momineen, there cannot be two powerful men sharing the same crown. The NAB amendments law that gave amnesty to mega thieves but was thrown out by the Supreme Court, (obviously not to the liking of Nawaz Sharif) General Asim Muneer may grab the opportunity to keep the old law in place which will give him a handle on Nawaz Sharif, Asif Zardari and all other crooks to keep them in line. This could, nevertheless, soon become a sub-surface but deep cause of tension between Nawaz, Zardari and Gen Muneer. The problem for Gen Muneer will be that all others on key positions, be they Nawaz, Zardari, Imran or Justice Issa, have always been anti-army and have been publicly saying so loudly. With so many haters in power politics, including now the people plus quite a big chunk of his own forces, the General may likely be an isolated soul in the next few weeks or months. This house of cards cannot battle the winds for long. The trouble is that the big number of his appointees, well dressed and heavily funded cronies sitting on top positions, cannot change public opinion or the minds of corrupt leaders by any number of farts in an Olympiad. They will disappear with the first whiff of fresh air.

The writer is a senior journalist from Pakistan living in Washington DC (Pictures from Google)

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Pakistan's ex-PM Nawaz Sharif back from self-exile ahead of elections

Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan's thrice-elected former prime minister, has returned home after four years of self-exile in the United Kingdom to stand in next year's elections against his biggest rival, former premier Imran Khan. The 73-year-old veteran politician arrived by chartered flight to Pakistan's capital Islamabad on Saturday, after which he is expected to lead a rally in his hometown, Lahore, where supporters deco-



rated the city with green and yellow party banners, posters and flags. "We are completely ready for elections," Sharif told reporters before his flight took off from Dubai. "Our country which should have been at the heights of prosperity has really gone backwards," he said. "How did we get here? Why did it come to this?" The South Asian nation is facing overlapping security, economic and political crises ahead of polls already pushed back to January 2024, with Khan languishing in jail on corruption charges which he denies, after he was removed in a no-confidence vote in April 2022. Sharif had not set foot in Pakistan since leaving for London in 2019 to receive medical treatment while serving a 14-year prison sentence for corruption. His convictions remain in force, but a court on Thursday barred authorities from arresting him until Tuesday when he is to appear in court. While he cannot run for or hold public office because of his convictions, his legal team says he plans to appeal and his party says he aims to become prime minister for a fourth time. Sharif's biggest challenge will be to wrestle back his support base from Khan, who despite being in jail, remains popular following his removal. Khan, too, is disqualified from the election because of his August corruption conviction, which he has appealed. "Sharif's key challenge is first to establish himself and his party as viable options to replace Imran Khan, who is already popular, and secondly to turn around the economy," political analyst Ayesha Siddiqi told AFP. Sharif has said he was removed from government at the behest of the powerful military after he fell out with top generals, who play an outsized role in Pakistani politics. He says the military then backed Khan in the 2018 general election. Khan and the military deny this. The military and Khan fell out in 2022, and over the last few months, they have been involved in a bruising showdown, which has afforded Sharif some political space. The military denies that it interferes in politics. "An evergreen rule about Pakistani politics is that your chances of taking power are always greater when you're in the good books of the army," Michael Kugelman, director of the South Asia Institute at the Wilson Center, told Reuters news agency. "Over his long political career, Sharif's relationship with the military brass has blown hot and cold. It's now in a relatively cordial phase, and he stands to benefit politically." Pakistan is currently being led by a caretaker government in the run-up to January's election.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/21/pakistan-ex-pm-nawaz-sharif-back-from-exile-ahead-of-elections>

Eyes wide open

By: Muna Khan



WHILE at college in the early 1990s, I had the pleasure of attending a guest lecture by Edward Said. As a teenager whose schooling was through a Western lens with little exposure to scholars from the Global South, I was thrilled to hear him. He spoke about how he wrote *Orientalism* because he didn't find realistic representations of the East in the media. He said he wrote *Covering Islam* in response to how Palestine was seen in the media as terrorists wanting to kill Jews and how little is done to a) counter that or b) report on what Israel's role is in the displacement of millions of Palestinians. The media's focus is just on violence and terrorism in that region and if that is all the audience sees, it equates people from there as extremist, threatening, etc. I wonder how Mr Said would have reacted to the news last week of the backlash to a letter written by 34 student organisations at Harvard, holding Israel "entirely responsible for all unfolding violence" in Gaza. The reaction to the letter has been furious — from alums to former US officials condemning the statement. CEOs have reportedly asked for the signatories to be identified so they can be 'blacklisted' for jobs. On Wednesday, NBC reported the law firm Davis Polk has rescinded job offers for three law students at Harvard and Columbia "who signed on to organisational statements about Israel".

It doesn't end there.

The British perfumer Jo Malone's son, Josh Wilcox, has been reported as being an organiser of the letter, a claim he denied, saying he hasn't even been on campus this semester. But because Wilcox has written strong editorials in the school paper about "the brutal oppression of Palestinians" by "an apartheid regime" and criticised Harvard for giving a fellowship to an ex-Israeli army officer Amos Yadlin, his role remains unclear, says the media. I chose to write about a white, rich man to illustrate how the silencing, doxxing, attacks spare no one. The conservative non-profit, Accuracy in Media, organised a van to drive through Harvard featuring the names and faces of some of the signatories and labelled them as anti-Semites. "No one who supports terrorist groups like Hamas should be able to hide in the shadows," AIM said. Some students have withdrawn their names from the letter following the backlash while others have expressed fear for their safety and insist none of them are siding with terrorists by signing that letter. Harvard isn't the only university in the US feeling the heat for not "condemning anti-Semitism" on their campuses, a reference ostensibly to students' protests denouncing Israel's attack on Gaza. Columbia University — where Mr Said taught from 1963 to 2003 — shut its doors to the public on Oct 12 as pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian student groups clashed. Students of colour said they were spat on by classmates. My own alma mater, SOAS, where I learned what solidarity for Palestine should look like, temporarily suspended some students on Oct 9 "for their conduct at a pro-Gaza rally". It appears videos of students chanting "resistance is justified when people are colonised" and "there is only one solution, Intifada revolution" goes against "venue protocols". These are just a few examples of the silencing taking place on campuses in the West which is supposedly a bastion of freedom of speech. My disappointment remains in the media coverage of these as 'anti-Semitic' or 'pro-Hamas' rallies. Student demonstrations have led to larger civil rights movements like the demonstrations at segregated lunch counters in the US in the 1960s. Benazir Bhutto wrote about attending anti-Vietnam war protests when she was at Harvard. Students in South Africa organised anti-apartheid protests and were joined by students around the world. Students in China led protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Students in Thailand led protests demanding reforms in the monarchy in 2020. Our students also protest across cam-

pushes but their issues do not interest the media. Students have proven they hold the power to drive change. Pro-Palestine demonstrators are showing up on campuses across the world, despite the consequences. Any media that participates in silencing their voices to make space for the oppressors' will soon have no audience left. People recognise who gets killed and who is reported dead in headlines. They're trying to outwit shadowbanning attempts, too. People will look back at this moment and ask who stood by the side of the oppressed and who shilled for their employers' corporate or military interests. Profit-driven media are failing the public's right to know. We need public media to tell stories fairly and accurately if we want journalism to stay relevant. Al Jazeera may provide many answers to how it can be done right.

Degree in magic to be offered at University of Exeter

A degree in magic being offered in 2024 will be one of the first in the UK, the University of Exeter has said. The "innovative" MA in Magic and Occult Science has been created following a "recent surge in interest in magic", the course leader said. It would offering an opportunity to study the history and impact of witchcraft and magic around the world on society and science, bosses said. The



one-year programme starts in September 2024. Academics with expertise in history, literature, philosophy, archaeology, sociology, psychology, drama, and religion will show the role of magic on the West and the East. The university said it was one of the only postgraduate courses of its kind in the UK to combine the study of the history of magic with such a wide range of other subjects.

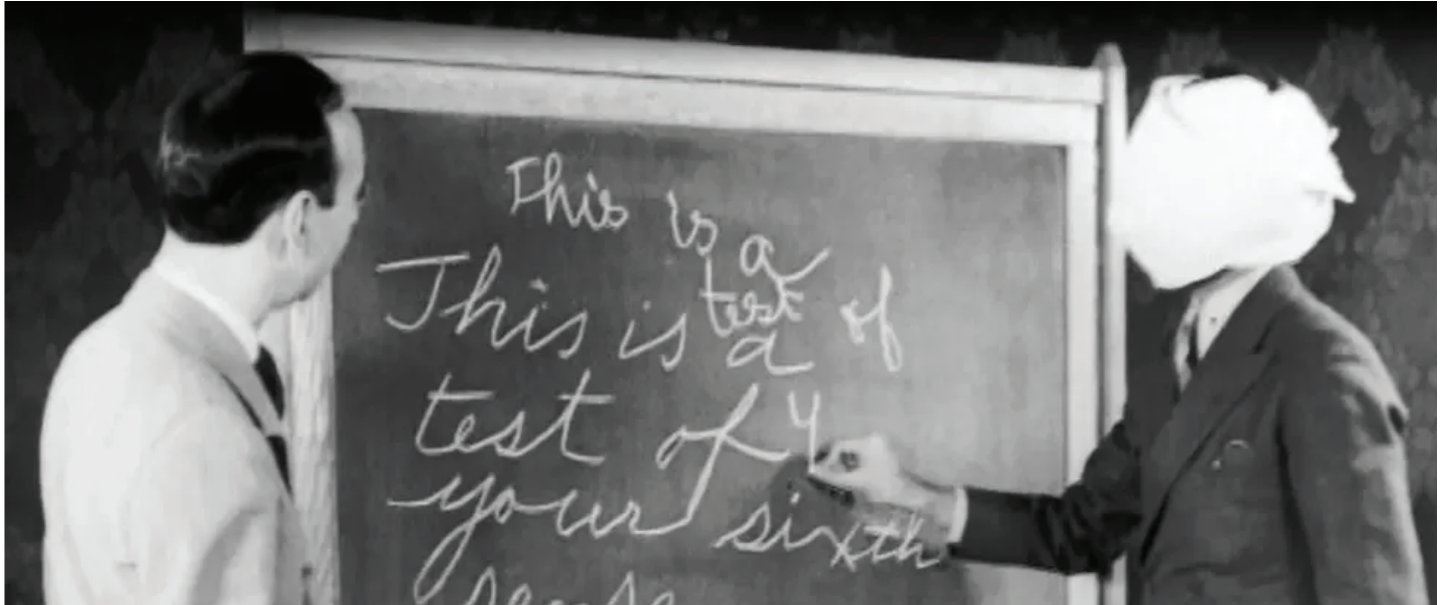
'Place of magic'

Prof Emily Selove, course leader, said: "A recent surge in interest in magic and the occult inside and outside of academia lies at the heart of the most urgent questions of our society. "Decolonisation, the exploration of alternative epistemologies, feminism and anti-racism are at the core of this programme." The course will be offered in the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies. Prof Selove said: "This MA will allow people to re-examine the assumption that the West is the place of rationalism and science, while the rest of the world is a place of magic and superstition." The university said the course could prepare students for careers in teaching, counselling, mentoring, heritage and museum work, work in libraries, tourism, arts organisations or the publishing industry, among other areas of work. A choice of modules includes dragons in western literature and art, the legend of King Arthur, palaeography, Islamic thought, archaeological theory and practice and the depiction of women in the Middle Ages.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-devon-66981924>

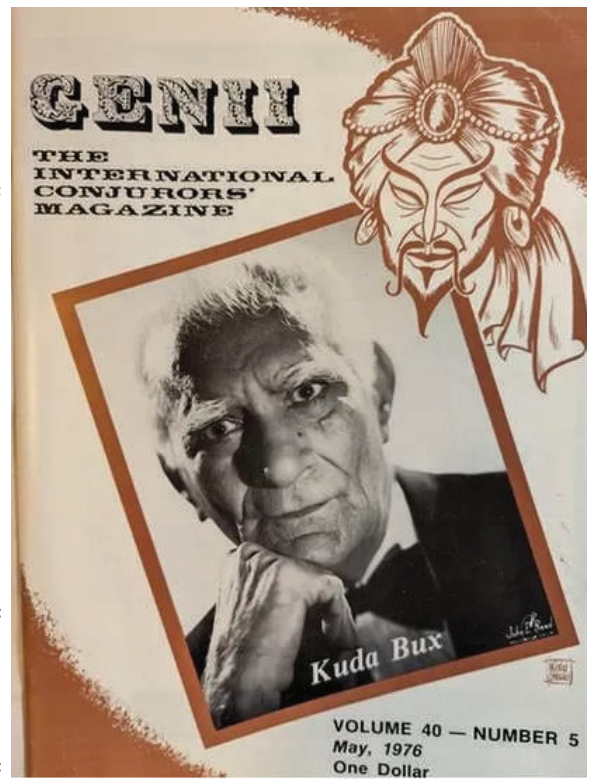
Kuda Bux: The Indian magician who charmed the West with his 'X-ray eyes'

By: Cherylann Mollan



There's nothing spectacular about a man riding a bicycle through a crowded street. But what if his eyes were covered with lumps of dough, thick swabs of cotton and several layers of gauze - and he had multiple layers of bandages wound tightly around his head in such a way that only his nostrils were left exposed? Kuda Bux, who was born in Kashmir in 1905, was famous for performing this cycling feat on streets of England and Europe in the 1930s and 40s - something he claimed he was able to do because he could "see without eyes". He headlined his magic shows "the man with X-ray eyes" and would appear to perform a mind-boggling range of activities - including reading passages from books and threading a needle - while covering his eyes in his signature style. Bux has fascinated generations with his seemingly superhuman ability. He reportedly inspired Roald Dahl's 1977 short tale, *The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar*, which has now been adapted into an eponymously-titled film by Wes Anderson. Bux, whose original name was Khudah Bukhsh, was born in a wealthy family. In a 1952 interview with Dahl for *Argosy Magazine*, he spoke about being fascinated by magic after a performance by an Indian conjurer who went by the name of Professor Moor. Two days later, he ran away from home and followed Moor to Lahore to work as his assistant at the age of 13. In the following years, he would travel through Burma (Myanmar), Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Bombay (Mumbai), learning tricks and skills from traveling magicians, yogis and theatre artists. He also changed his name to Professor KB Duke and then to Kuda Bux, author John Zubrzycki writes in his book *Empire of Enchantment: The Story of Indian Magic*. In May 1935, he sailed to England, where there was an appetite for magicians from the Eastern world. "India was seen as 'the land of magic,' a perception that grew out of the writings of travellers, missionaries, merchants and historians, who visited India and wrote about their fascinating, but often embellished, encounters with street or court magicians," Mr Zubrzycki tells the BBC. Many Indian magicians capitalised on the West's fascination with magical acts from overseas, and Bux was one of them. Even though he dressed like an Englishman, he would link his magical abilities to Eastern mysticism. Writing about Bux in the magic magazine *The Linking Ring*, historian John Booth describes him as "that mysterious man from the Indian subcontinent who rode bicycles blindfolded in Paris" who had the "air of a mystic". In England, Bux quickly rose to fame with what he called his X-ray vision act, attracting the attention of sceptics who subjected him to "tests" to check the authentic-

ity of his abilities. In July 1935, Harry Price - Britain's famous "ghost hunter" - and a team of doctors tested Bux's X-ray vision claims. "Price came prepared with surgical bandages, adhesive tape, pads of cotton wool and a special tie-on mask composed of two thicknesses of heavy black cotton between which was a layer of cotton wool," Mr Zubrzycki notes in his book. After Bux successfully read from a book with the bandaging on, a doctor redid his blindfold. Bux was still able to read a handwritten note that was placed on a table behind his back. In September 1935, Bux was put to another test, again by Price, and this ended up propelling him to fame in England and much of Europe. In the Surrey countryside, Bux performed his fire-walking feat - the first time it was ever performed in England - in the presence of doctors, psychologists and journalists. The observers were charged with testing every aspect of the act, including Bux's feet before and after the walk, to spot any kind of trickery that might be at play. A pit was dug and filled with logs of wood, charcoal, paraffin and newspapers that were set on fire. A couple of



hours later, Bux walked across the glowing fire-pit not once, but four times. "There was not a suspicion of a blister" on his feet, Price noted in his book, *Confessions of a Ghost-hunter*. Nine days later, and in the presence of more observers, Bux walked twice across a fire-pit hot enough to melt steel. But this time too Bux's feet remained unscathed, leading Price to hypothesise that "there was some obscure relationship between physical and mental forces that helps to make him immune from injury", Mr Zubrzycki writes. In the interview with Dahl, Bux would claim that he survived fire-walks by "concentrating to such a degree that I see nothing but the fire, and the fire being cold". He claimed that this "inner sense of sight" also helped him perform his "X-ray vision" feats and that he honed this sense by "concentrating the conscious mind" through exercises a yogi taught him when he was a teenager. These involved staring at the black spot of a candle flame until "everything around him disappeared" and he could fully visualise the face of the person he loved the most - his brother. After practising the candle exercise every night for years, Bux realised at the age of 24 that if he shut his eyes and concentrated fiercely on something, "I can see vaguely, dimly, the outline of the object I am looking at". By the time he was 28, he could read a book blindfolded, he claimed. Bux's claims didn't go unchallenged. Some who studied his so-called X-ray act concluded that he was peeking down the sides of his nose, says Caitlyn Renee Miller, who has written a paper on Bux. But that didn't interfere with his popularity. Thousands flocked to watch his shows, while the press labelled him "the wonder of the century" and the "eighth wonder of the world", magician Bill Larsen notes in an article in magic magazine *Genii*. Bux appeared on the first televised episode of *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* and even had his own TV show: *Kuda Bux, Hindu Mystic*. So convincing was Bux's act that it made people believe that he could really "see without sight". Booth wrote about how one of Bux's claims, which was widely repeated by the press, led to trepidation among three female performers who were set to perform at one of Bux's shows. Bux claimed that he had been practising to look through brick walls, which led to the women demanding dressing rooms far away from Bux. "There is only one brick wall between us and Kuda Bux," they complained. He eventually left London and moved to the US, where he would continue performing, including at the famous Magic Castle, a club in Hollywood. Bux died in 1981 in Los Angeles, California. He spent his last days playing cards at the Magic Castle with magicians who - Booth notes - claimed they could beat Bux only if he didn't put on his blindfold.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-67166439>

A \$96 Million Hindu Temple Opens Amid Accusations of Forced Labor

By: Sarah Pulliam Bailey

Hindu pilgrims walked barefoot on the marble floors of the enormous temple, examining intricate stone carvings of deities etched into the ceilings and images of musical instruments and elephants along the white walls. As they approached a large gold shrine, many gasped in wonder, having arrived at the place where they believe God resides in the form of sacred images. The recent opening of Akshardham Mahamandir in Robbinsville, N.J., was a historic moment for Hindus in New Jersey and beyond. The temple, about 15 years in the making, is believed to be the largest in the Western Hemisphere and is expected to draw religious pilgrims and tourists from all over the world. It has also been clouded in controversy. Federal law enforcement agents raided the temple construction site in 2021 after workers accused the builders, a prominent Hindu sect with ties to Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India and his ruling party, of forced labor, low wages and poor working conditions. Their lawyers said workers who were Dalit, the lowest rung in India's caste system, were specifically targeted. A federal criminal investigation is ongoing, as is a wage claim lawsuit. A spokesman for the temple, Ronak Patel, said the workers came to the United States as volunteers, not as employees, and that volunteerism is a core part of their faith tradition. He said that temple officials were cooperating with the investigation. In the meantime, the temple, which sits on 180 acres and includes 10,000 statues and spires nearly 200 feet tall, is attracting visitors by the thousands, some there to view the elaborate architecture and design, others for a more spiritual experience. The Hindu sect Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, known as BAPS, dedicated the temple earlier this month and opened it fully to the public on Wednesday. Pilgrims visiting for the first time were asked to refrain from photography and remain silent, but many giddy devotees whispered to each other, pointed to intricate carvings and some snapped a quick photo. Dharmik Sheth, born in Vijayawada, India, and raised in Lawrenceville, N.J., visited on a recent afternoon to show his 2-year-old son the temple's intricately carved reliefs, which depict parables from the Hindu tradition. The new temple, he said, gives him a deeper connection to his roots. "I have a sense of pride here," Mr. Sheth said. "I've struggled to explain or identify our culture, but this place allows me to do that." Santosh Kumar Saini of Jaipur, India, traveled to Robbinsville for a private tour ahead of the opening. The temple, he said, contains the perfect blend of contemporary and traditional style. "We've been to temples in India, but this is one of the biggest we've seen," Mr. Kumar Saini said. "It depicts the real Hinduism." One of the first sights visitors see when they approach the temple is a 49-foot gold statue of the sect's chief deity, Nilkanth Varni, the child-yogi form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, balanced on one leg in a yogic posture. Though the temple is intended for Hindu worship, organizers wanted to make parts of the building more accessible to non-Hindus. That's why it includes representations of figures who would be familiar to Muslims, Sikhs and Jains. There are also quotes from Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln and Albert Einstein. For Hindus, the temple is the heart of religious life and where they believe God resides in sacred images of deities, said Yogi Trivedi, a scholar of religion at Columbia University, who served as a volunteer spokesman for the temple during its dedication weekend. Temples, he said, are used for rituals such as the waving of a sacred lamp, communicating with the divine, music and chanting, and the bathing of the sacred image of a deity. New Jersey has the highest concentration of Hindus of any state, at 3 percent, according to the Pew Research Center. Mr. Trivedi's research estimates that more than 400,000 Hindus live in New Jersey, and more than 400,000 reside in New York. BAPS initially hoped to build its temple in East Windsor, N.J. When plans there were rejected, the sect found land in Robbinsville. Construction began in 2015, and it cost about \$96 million to

build, Mr. Trivedi said. “For someone who studies and teaches Indian history and Hindu traditions, it’s like winning a World Series,” said Mr. Trivedi. Instead of traveling 8,000 miles away, he said, he can “show students faith, devotion and ritual right in our backyard.” In Robbinsville, a small community east of Trenton, officials expect the temple to become a major draw for tourists. Mayor David Fried said that a new hotel with about 200 beds will be built to accommodate visitors to the temple, which sits on a former plot of soy farmland. “When we saw this on paper, we knew it was going to be something,” Mr. Fried said. “Did we expect it to be this? Not in my wildest dreams.” Even as visitors are making their way to the Robbinsville temple, the treatment of some of the people who worked on its construction is still at issue. When the temple was raided in 2021, dozens of workers were taken from the construction site. Twenty-one temple workers filed a lawsuit that year, though this month, 12 of them pulled out of the suit. Their lawyer, Aaditya Soni, who is based in Jaipur, said in a text message that the workers believe the facts of the case are false and that they decided to pull out based on religious conviction. Patricia Kakalec, a lawyer for the workers, says she plans to continue fighting for nine of the laborers who are part of the complaint, but their civil claim is on hold pending a federal investigation. In addition to the wage issues at the temple, a 17-year-old boy who was volunteering on the construction fell to his death there in 2017. Federal inspectors determined it had been an accident. The conflict illustrates the complicated lines between U.S. labor laws and the religious concept of selfless volunteerism, which Hindus believe is a key part of their tradition. “If religious groups are subject to all of the restrictions that apply to other groups, it’ll restrict what they’re able to do,” said Charles Haynes, a senior fellow for religious liberty at the non-profit Freedom Forum. “But if there’s real exploitation here,” he added, “BAPS could be on the hook for government intervention.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/21/nyregion/nj-hindu-temple.html>



Chief Justice

Qazi Faez Isa And Islam



By: Yasser Latif Hamdani

Justice Qazi Faez Isa's tenure as the Chief Justice, while short, promises to herald new changes when it comes to fundamental rights of citizens especially the marginalized sections of society. Some of those positive changes are readily on display. Many courtrooms at the Supreme Court have female readers and court clerks, which is new even if there are two lady justices sitting on the bench today. Appointment of the first ever woman registrar by Justice Isa is yet another positive. Justice Isa had set the tone of gender inclusion from the get go by getting his wife to accompany him at the oath taking ceremony. Justice Isa is a sincerely religious man and that shows in his judicial pronouncements and obiter dicta, which are often peppered with religious wisdom. He is not a reactionary by any means. His is a progressive and modernist interpretation of the faith, which no doubt can be a legitimate basis for a just, egalitarian and inclusive society. Nevertheless for the more secular minded – self included- his frequent references to Islam and the scripture from the bench are jarring but not because one questions his intent or his interpretation of Islam but because religion has so often been subject to misinterpretation and misuse in our country. The road to hell as they say is paved with good intentions. First Constituent Assembly, which passed the Objectives Resolution in 1949, did not intend for Pakistan to become a theocracy or for religion to be misused in Pakistan. Men like Liaquat Ali Khan and Zafrulla Khan sincerely and earnestly believed that the egalitarian spirit of Islam could provide answers to some of the most serious problems confronting Pakistan. They thought that a truly Islamic state could only be an inclusive and democratic state, which would promise equality to believers and non-believers alike. Liaquat Ali Khan even promised that a state formed under the Objectives Resolution could have a Non-Muslim even as the head of administration. Justice A R Cornelius, Pakistan's only Christian Chief Justice, agreed. Like Justice Isa, Cornelius too embraced the idea of lawyer and judge led Islamisation of the legal system in Pakistan in which liberal lawyers and even Catholic jurists like him could "establish themselves as legitimate interpreters of Islamic law, and in the process thereby establish fundamental rights principles as principles essential to Islamic law as well." Cornelius had famously even described himself as a constitutional Muslim who was Christian by faith, something which sits uneasily with a state that actively decides who is a Muslim and who is not. Things have not panned out well for Cornelius's community or any better than they have for Zafrulla Khan's community, which was been forcibly excommunicated constitutionally. Blasphemy laws and other discriminatory legislation have all been brought about as a result of this constitutional and legal Islamisation and it has definitely not allowed liberal lawyers to become legitimate interpreters of Islamic law. History of Islam tells us that liberal and rationalist interpretations of the faith were always discarded in favour of the orthodoxy starting with the fall of Mutazilla very early on. Nonetheless if the honourable Chief Justice wants to double down on a progressive interpretation of Islam as the basis for an egalitarian society, there are a number of issues he can take up which need urgent attention. The clearest litmus test is the woeful treatment of the Ahmadi community in Pakistan. Declared Non-Muslims in 1974, since 1984 the very fundamental right of religious freedom under Article 20 has been denied to them completely. They are not free to profess, practise or propagate their religion. Nor do they have the right to freely develop their culture under Article 2-A. The Supreme Court of Pakistan in 1993 upheld a blatantly discriminatory and bigoted law against them as constitutional in what is by far the most damaging judgment to religious freedom in Pakistan i.e. Zaheeruddin v State 1993 SCMR 1718. As a consequence of the endorsement of religious bigotry by the apex court, today the Ahmadi community members are liable to be arrested for celebrating Eid,

eating or storing meat or even saying Salam. This is despite the fact that the founder of this country Quaid e Azam Mahomed Ali Jinnah, who the CJP is beholden to, had promised Ahmadis the right to be treated at par with any Muslim sect. This is despite the fact that the contributions of Zafrulla Khan, an Ahmadi and one of Jinnah's closest associates, to Pakistan are second to none. Today Ahmadi places of worship (which cannot be called mosques thanks to an ordinance promulgated by a brutal military dictator) are demolished and desecrated at will by the mob and Punjab police alike. These activities take place despite the judgment of the Honourable Supreme Court in the Tahir Naqqash case which refreshingly upholds Ahmadis' right to worship freely at least on their own communal and private properties. It is simply ignored and set aside by Pakistan's civilian administrators with impunity. So will the Chief Justice do right by the Ahmadis, now a constitutional minority, and restore their rights as citizens of this country, including their right to – at the very least- merely think of themselves as Muslims because surely the state cannot police thoughts and surely the progressive and egalitarian spirit of Islam does not mandate thought policing on part of the state. Will the Chief Justice restore to Ahmadis their right to profess, practise and propagate their faith under Article 20 of the Constitution by overturning the historic injustice and error by the Supreme Court in 1993? The most significant statement by the Chief Justice during his comments from the bench in the Supreme Court practice and procedure case was his criticism of the Federal Shariat Court – imposed on the country by a brutal military dictator. The very existence of a Federal Shariat Court, a parallel judicial system for all practical purposes, has turned our Islamic Republic into a full-blown theocracy. Far from allowing our superior judiciary i.e. the High Courts and the Supreme Court, to become legitimate interpreters of Islamic jurisprudence and what is or is not repugnant to Islam, it has created a super priestly council. That is the definition of a theocracy. All Pakistanis may not agree on the precise role of religion in their republic but there is a broad legislative consensus that Pakistan should not be a theocracy. The Federal Shariat Court struck down Pakistan's most progressive law, the Transgender Persons Act 2018 that aimed to provide some measure of justice to Pakistan's transgender community. That case is now before the Supreme Court. Will the Chief Justice let the will of the people, as expressed by the parliament which passed this law, prevail over an unelected, theocratic super priestly council or not? The blasphemy laws that have become an article of faith for Pakistan's unthinking Muslim majority are another area that require his Lordship's urgent attention, especially after what we have seen happen to Christian community in Jaranwala and elsewhere. For one thing, putting aside one's secular and human rights concerns about Section 295 B and C, the laws are not just unconstitutional but un-Islamic. Classical Islamic tradition has never had any conception of blasphemy laws which are of a recent origin given our penchant to codify everything. If anything 295 C militates against Hanafi Islamic jurisprudence in so much as it prescribes death penalty for Non Muslims, a position that Imam Abu Hanifa trenchantly opposed. Finally there is the question of women in our society. The father of the nation said that no nation could rise to heights of glory unless the women were side by side the men. Yet the gender gap in Pakistan is amongst the worst in the world. Gender discrimination is enshrined in Pakistan's laws. Pakistan's law of evidence i.e. Qanun e Shahadat Order by General Zia ul Haq, makes women half witnesses. In other words women in Pakistan can become Prime Ministers, Justices of the Supreme Court and fighter pilots but cannot witness a financial transaction as an equal of a man. Similarly the inheritance of a girl child under Pakistan's Islamic family laws is half that of a male child. All of this justified in the name of Islam, when these were time specific provisions and which if put through vigours of Ijtihad and Ijmah can no longer be sustained on any Islamic ground. By addressing it the Chief Justice can show the world that Islam stands for complete gender equality. The Chief Justice has a canvass to show to the world that Islam ontologically emptied and shorn of sectarian pretensions can become a vehicle for progress and change for all people in Pakistan. In doing so he can set Pakistan on the course of an Islamic reformation and age of enlightenment of the kind that transformed Europe 400 years ago. If he does so, his legacy will ensure that Pakistan fulfills some of those aspirations that we set out with all those years ago.

Forced Marriage: A Violation of Human Rights

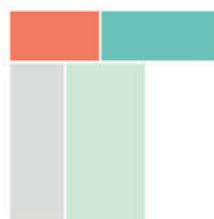
By **Munazza Abbasi M.A LL.B (Hons)**



Reforms and solutions to forced marriages

There is a need to facilitate internal cultural transformation in order to diminish coercion and enhance freedom of choice in marriage. The Forced Marriage Act can be viewed as a positive step in the right direction, and its success has been witnessed through the two cases discussed in previous editions. The Forced Marriage Unit suggests that there has been an increase in the number of reported forced marriage cases since the enactment of the FMA back in 2007. Although it has encouraged victims to come forward and report crimes, the impact of the Act as a piece of law may not prove to be significant in terms of securing convictions. Nonetheless, it is difficult to adjust to this mechanism of enhancing gender autonomy with the absence of the transformation of certain other grey areas. Accomplishment in combating the practice altogether, as a 'live and let live approach.' This shaded area is culture, which demands for a renovation in order for an effective to cultural difference may have the effect of undermining the rights of young women and girls (and the minority of men) in the context of forced marriages. The achievement of co-operative work within the communities. Although the change in key to cultural transformation as suggested by Abdullahi An-Na'im, is the law, although bringing about legal clarity, it needs to be addressed as a social, not merely a legal problem. This can be done by engaging women groups, opinion leaders and other human rights organisations, both in the UK and in the receiving country, in order to contextualize the issue and encourage culturally sensitive responses. This is one of the major effective methods, through which the problem and concerns of forced marriage can be dissolved, as parents are more reluctant to listen to the 'westernised intellectuals' who are not a part of their traditions and discourse, and who may be viewed as being sold out to the western community, and are more willing to listen to traditional figures, such as imams and community leaders who present the religious views on the matter. For example, views of an imam would often be more respected, as they quote the Holy Qur'an, Hadith and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet. Ayub Laher, the general secretary of the Council of Mosques in Bradford, a northern city which holds Britain's largest Muslim community of around 90,000, strongly disputes the notion that community leaders are sending families the wrong message about forced marriages, although he conceded that more remained to be done. However, Hannana Siddiqui, the joint co-ordinator of Southall Black Sister expresses that unless communities are held accountable for "honour" crimes, they will not stop. The view that forced marriage is not religiously excusable cannot be revolutionised until Muslim community leaders speak out against families who place honour above the good of their daughters, as "only when it starts to come from the leaders of their actually take notice" (Ann Cryer, former Labour MP). The state does have a duty to intervene and prohibit forced marriages from occurring, and to protect victims or potential victims. However, the question is until what point and Society rightly puts it when she stated that the "law's power to shape society would it be justifiable for the state to intervene? A Professor of Anthropology, Law embedded in everyday social practices, shaping the rules people carry in their heads," (Human Rights and Gender Violence, 2006) depends not on the rules depends not on punishment alone but on becoming. She contends that human rights law must be framed in local terms to be accepted and effective in altering existing social hierarchies. The Act is a specific mechanism used by the courts to put forward a tool that is indeed desirable and crucial in upholding the personal autonomy of women, thus enhancing the significant contri-

tribution they make to the dominant wider community, through respect of their personal identities. Though, in doing so, it is necessary to ensure that the traditions and cultures of other countries are respected. Many individuals, especially the perpetrators of such a crime, may view the introduction of the law to be an interference and objection to their traditions, rendering it disrespectful to those cultures. It should, however, be viewed as a strategy that emphasizes freedom of choice in marriage as enhancing, rather than diminishing their cultural values, as a matter of principle. Therefore, international laws need to be translated into local regulations bearing in mind their local justice. The law is however likely to succeed in practice, as the effect of the existence of the Act has already proved to be victorious, as soon as it surfaced into effect, as seen from the two cases so far that have used the protection orders to effectively shelter a victim from involuntarily being coerced into union. It is submitted that there is a need to negotiate culture, tradition and customary practices with increased independence, which are a consequence of increased requirement for a transformation in peoples' perspectives and their culture, not the educational potential and achievements and economic opportunities. There is a law. Only then will there be universalisation of ideas and values like forced marriage infringes an individual's fundamental human rights. Though this change in the culture that acknowledges forced marriages as acceptable is difficult, entailing many complex issues, it is however possible, as reformers and advocates of deep legal and cultural transformation have suggested. The Forced Marriage Act can be viewed as the launch of a transformative process that has the possibility of persuading a change as legal norms capture and reinforce deep cultural norms and community practices. They entrench ideas and help give them the sense of being natural, part of the inevitable order of things. Therefore, the custom of forced marriage which is seen as natural or inevitable is to be understood as possibly being socially assembled and thus open to change. Although the FMA 2007 can be regarded as only a possibility of resolving the practice, possibility produces change throughout social, economic and political life.



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Kazakhstan seeks role of religious leaders for maintaining Interfaith Harmony



- Kazakhstan has been a supporter of a peaceful, constructive foreign policy and an initiator of providing platforms for negotiations on the settlement of various international issues
- President Tokayev has assigned three spheres to religious leaders where they can assert their influence. Firstly, they can contribute to healing of wounds, using power of religion in societies which have endured long periods of conflicts
- This confirms the place of Kazakhstan as a global center of inter-civilizational, interreligious and interfaith dialogue
- Kazakhstan is home to 18 religious' denominations, making it one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world
- In recent years, Kazakhstan has emerged as a prominent peace loving nation in the world arena. Since the time of its independence, the country has been a supporter of a peaceful, constructive foreign policy and an initiator of providing platforms for negotiations on the settlement of various international issues.
- World order imposed by the United Nations to bring peace and stability in post WW II era is being challenged by the emergence of divisive blocks. These new blocks are undermining the authority of the UN. This may lead to disastrous consequences leading ultimately to the increase in arms race throughout the world. One way to avert this situation is to resort to diplomacy.

Diplomacy doesn't work in all situations. So an alternative way of maintaining global peace has to be devised. It's estimated that 85 percent people in the world identify themselves with a religion, making religion a potent force in world affairs.

Religious leaders, therefore, have an important role to play in maintaining global peace and harmony. Moreover, all the religions share some fundamental values, guaranteeing sanctity of human life, mutual support and rejection of destructive tendencies. These principles can be used as cornerstones of a new world order.

President Tokayev has assigned three spheres to religious leaders where they can assert their influence. Firstly, they can contribute to healing of wounds, using power of religion in societies which have endured long periods of conflicts.

Secondly, given the situations where individual acts of hatred may sabotage world peace, the targeted communication of religious leaders may not allow the situation from getting out of hands.

Thirdly, in view of the radical changes occurring in all spheres of human life as a result of new technologies, religious leaders can inculcate spiritual values and set moral standards to face challenges of digital reality.

Lately, the traditional religions, once excluded as pillars of modernity, have regained their influential status globally. To underscore the importance of religion in contemporary human life, Kazakhstan established the platform of Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana.

The Congress plays a vital role in shaping the country's international image. During its almost 20-year history, it has made a significant contribution to the global process of inter-faith dialogue.

In view of the far-reaching advantages that can be gained from the Congress, the convening of it on regular basis becomes important. It can play a positive role in bringing various religions closer together thus promoting peace and respect for others in society.

President Tokayev rightly noted during the opening of the last Congress, that the people of Kazakhstan have absorbed the traditions of different civilizations and religions, the spirit of tolerance and openness.

"Currently, representatives of more than 100 ethnic groups live in harmony in Kazakhstan, and about 4,000 religious associations representing 18 confessions operate freely. We believe this is an invaluable wealth and an inherent advantage of Kazakhstan. The Congress is an important part of Kazakhstan's policy to strengthen dialogue and cooperation in our country and worldwide," he further stated.

This confirms the place of Kazakhstan as a global center of inter-civilizational, interreligious and interfaith dialogue.

It is important to promote the ideas of the congress globally, attract foreign politicians, experts, and journalists to the dialogue, and call on leaders of the world and traditional religions and prominent political figures to achieve long-term stability.

<https://londonpost.news/kazakhstan-seeks-role-of-religious-leaders-for-maintaining-interfaith-harmony/?amp=1>

Afghanis are involved in economic terrorism against Pakistan

Monitoring Desk: Afghanis are involved in Economic Terrorism against Pakistan and they are supported by certain elements within the Taliban-led Interim Afghan government, reports Pakistani media. According to media reports from Pakistan as well as some reports from central Asian media, a new kind of terrorism has been launched by Afghanis and there are reasons to believe that this new kind of terrorism is actually an “Economic Terrorism” has been launched with the active support of certain elements sitting in Afghan Interim government. Moreover, Pakistani media is providing strong and logical justifications for sending Afghanis back from Pakistan to Afghanistan, and some of the justifications the Pakistani media mention are:



- Millions of legal and illegal Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan since 1979 Afghan Jihad and Pakistan invited three million refugees who now have multiplied in figure. Another grave issue is a constant increase in illegal/unregistered Afghanis. Some official reports claim that the number of legal/illegal Afghanis has crossed to over 12 million plus.
- The government of Pakistan has never taken any holistic action against registered Afghan refugees during the last 45 years and allowed them to stay in Pakistan several times in the past due to UNHCR requests.
- Afghanis have not integrated themselves with Pakistani society, culture, and even laws because they consider their customs more important than Pakistani laws and Pakistani customs.
- No foreigner can become a citizen of any country without going through an official integration process because integration with culture, history, norms, society, and customs is a prerequisite for converting any foreigner into a responsible citizen of any country because all such elements create a sense of nationalism and the concept of nationalism primary force behind nationhood. Nation, a complex structure of societies situated within a specific geographical location is based on more profound linkages such as language, oral history, and collective consciousness. These three fundamentals bind individuals into social groups and groups into nations which then transform into the concept of motherland.
- Afghanis are not interested in integrating into the culture of Pakistan and they have their reasons for not adopting Pakistani norms and culture.
- Afghanis share a nomadic/tribal culture with different sets of rules based on their own shared history and cultural values. The innate dislikeness towards the agrarian culture doesn't let them assimilate with Pakistan.
- Afghanis living in Pakistan are always abusing Pakistan as a transitory economic goal and the idea of them becoming Pakistani by soul is beyond their cognitive perception.
- Afghanis are deeply connected to their social belief system that any kind of social and cultural integration with Pakistan means leaving their own ways of life. The unwillingness to adapt and opt for the agrarian culture created Afghan ghettos across Pakistan, where

Afghani in sub-societies are living by their own norms and traditions resulting in Pakistan being just a land of opportunity to exploit.

- Pakistan has had enough of Afghani's exploitation and has decided to take some logical steps, already being practiced in the world such as border control, visas, and passports. Anywhere in the world foreigners are allowed to enter on the basis of their utility, like how much money they can bring, how much expertise they have, and above all are they even required for the country and so on.
- Afghanis were allowed to enter Pakistan without a valid visa/passport and they were never asked to pass a language test, and never expected to respect the history and culture of Pakistan.
- Afghanis make money from Pakistan and smuggle it in the form of US\$ to Afghanistan.
- It is understood that Afghanis do not consider Pakistan as their motherland, so just use Pakistan for their economic gains.
- The entire façade of Pak-Afghan brotherhood was standing on religion, but sociologists and anthropologists believe that religion is never a pre-requisite for a motherland and nationhood.
- The concept of motherland is based on emotional and symbolic significance which can have spiritual dimensions. The term is used for ancestral land and goes beyond mere physical and political boundaries. The ancestral roots of Pakistani culture and oral history are not aligned at any layer with Afghanis. The idea of them integrating into urban Pakistan was utopian which has brought drastic results.
- Afghanistan brings only bad news to Pakistan and Pak-Afghan borders bring nothing good except drugs, terrorism, radicalization, sectarian killings, poliovirus, and a dirty money market
- The Afghani currency is more stable than the Pakistani rupee because of the huge smuggling of US\$ from Pakistan to Afghanistan.
- Afghanis are brutally looting the resources of the host country, wreaking havoc on the latter's economy and weakening its currency to somehow consolidate their own economy in the isolated Afghanistan.
- An illegal parallel economy like Hawala and Hundi is solely operated by Afghanis sitting abroad from where they send money to Pakistan, encouraging Pakistanis living abroad not to use banking channels for the transfer of money thereby Pakistani remittances are nosediving.
- Dollar smuggling is 100 percent in the hands of Afghanis who are transferring US\$ from Pakistan to Afghanistan which is stabilizing the economy of Afghanistan and destabilizing Pakistan's economy.
- Afghanis are involved in Economic Terrorism against Pakistan.
- "keeping Afghanis in Pakistan is like as if we (Pakistan) are giving our blood to Afghans even when we are dying,"
- For the last 40 to 50 years, Afghans have looted the resources of Pakistan with great brutality and yet also hated their host country immensely.
- Afghans buy coal and other commodities in Afghani currency and sell them in Pakistani currency with some profit, later they convert Pakistani rupees into US dollars and send them to Afghanistan. This illegal outflow of US dollars from Pakistan has reduced foreign reserves in Pakistan and increased pressure on the rupee, with the domestic currency falling to record lows and the economy teetering on the brink of collapse.
- Afghanistan has again become a hub of terrorism and terrorist outfits like Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Daesh Khorasan, and other extremist groups are living there and operating against Pakistan and Central Asian countries from Afghanistan.
- Arms markets in Herat, Kabul, and Kandahar are selling US-left sophisticated weapons to citizens of Central Asia and Pakistan.

<https://londonpost.news/afghanis-are-involved-in-economic-terrorism-against-pakistan/>

Opinion:

Colleges Must Support Their Jewish Students Without Equivocation



The heinous terrorist attacks by Hamas on Israeli civilians have been devastating. We can't even begin to express the pain being felt across the Jewish community as we watch the endless and mounting stories of the more than 1,300 children, teenagers, parents, grandparents, and entire families who have been murdered, kidnapped, and held hostage simply for being Jewish. Depending on the moment, we feel simultaneously caught between anguish and anger, horror and despair.

It's the same complex and debilitating swirl of emotions being felt by hundreds of thousands of Jewish students on college and university campuses across the country, and around the world. Students who for years have been marginalized and ostracized because they expressed their authentic connection to and love for Israel, even as antisemitism in the U.S. has risen to historic levels. Students who have, far too often, not received enough support and leadership from their campus administrations. Faced with the news that Hamas intentionally targeted civilians in such vile and brutal ways, committing numerous crimes against humanity, Jewish students need—and deserve—to have their university leaders and others on campus recognize the trauma that's been inflicted on them, and provide them with the space and support to process and to grieve for their Israeli families, friends, and loved ones. Instead, they have too often heard from those university leaders misplaced platitudes about cycles of violence and the need for unity and understanding, effectively gaslighting one of the most heinous acts of terrorism against civilians that the world has ever seen.

Let us be clear: There is no way to justify Hamas' war crimes and unconscionable atrocities. These Israeli civilians were not collateral damage caught in the crossfire. They were the direct target of a regime designated by the United States, the European Union, and dozens of other nations as an international terrorist organization. A regime whose charter calls for the annihilation of the Jewish state. We need you to unequivocally support our students and to take urgent action to eliminate and prevent the increasingly hostile environment for Jewish students on campuses today. To suggest otherwise insults the memories of those who were murdered, and the plight of 150 hostages whose lives continue to hang in the balance. Some campuses are getting this right. Emory President Gregory Fennes denounced

the war crimes committed by Hamas, and wrote, "The reality of Jews being senselessly murdered and taken as hostages will not soon leave my mind, and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms." President Ben Sasse at the University of Florida said, "I will not tiptoe around this simple fact: What Hamas did is evil and there is no defense for terrorism. This shouldn't be hard." And University of Miami President Julio Frenk noted the community's deep ties to Israel, and offered the full mental health support resources of the university to support all students experiencing anxiety or stress, including Jewish students. Condemning terrorist atrocities and showing compassion for Jewish students in a statement as these universities have done should be the lowest common denominator for supporting the Jewish community. First, they need to hear their campus leaders like you speak up and unequivocally condemn this heinous terrorist attack against Israeli civilians. Equivocating statements bemoaning the "cycle of violence" inherently blame the victims and fail both Jewish students and the wider campus community. This is too important a moment to fall back on platitudes and false moral equivalencies. Your Jewish students deserve better. Second, campus leaders like you need to show up for your students and be a visible presence at vigils and other solidarity events bringing together Jewish students and their allies on campus. Let Jewish students know they are not alone, that they are not being asked to hide who they are, and that they are not in danger when they express their connections to and support for Israel—the Jewish homeland and the largest Jewish community in the world. Third, campus leaders must take concrete steps to protect Jewish students and Jewish student organizations who are already being subjected to increasing incidents of harassment, intimidation, and vandalism.

At a time when other students and student groups on campuses across the country are actively demonizing and blaming Israel for the wanton violence that has been inflicted upon Israeli civilians and celebrating Hamas' violence as justified acts of "resistance," campuses have both a moral and a legal obligation to act. Universities need to work with Hillels and other Jewish student groups to ensure their safety in the face of these threats before an antisemitic incident or attack occurs on your campus. While the above steps are critical in this moment, they are not sufficient for the future. Administrations must also take steps consistent with the U.S. National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism to root out the underlying issues that contributed to the antisemitic rhetoric we are seeing on many campuses the past few days. That means developing clear and transparent non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies that protect against the harassment or exclusion of "Zionists"; promoting clear and transparent mechanisms for students to report hate incidents and acts of antisemitism to campus administrators; and ensuring clear and transparent communication from campus leadership regarding steps taken in response to reported incidents. It will also require the urgent creation of cross-disciplinary task forces or advisory councils, in consultation with Hillel and other Jewish campus partners, to review, address, and improve Jewish student life on campus. Participating in programs like Hillel International's Campus Climate Initiative, which works directly with university administrators to educate them on the history and modern manifestations of antisemitism, is critical. And it will require university leadership to remain nimble and proactive in responding to and preventing antisemitism, to keep open lines of communication with Jewish organizations on campus to respond to needs in real time, and to regularly evaluate whether additional proactive steps are needed to ensure a safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environment for all students, including Jewish students. We remain steadfast in our commitment to serve as a resource and partner to you in this critically important and urgent work. And we are watching for and counting on your leadership in this challenging moment. Adam Lehman, the President and CEO of Hillel International, the largest Jewish campus organization in the world. Jonathan Greenblatt, the CEO and National Director of ADL, the leading anti-hate organization in the world.

<https://www.newsweek.com/colleges-must-support-their-jewish-students-without-equivocation-opinion-1835150>

British Bangladeshi Mansoor Ahmad: Honoured with House of Lords Award for Community Cohesion and Integration

The recipient of many national recognitions and prestigious awards British Bangladeshi Mansoor Ahmad has been honoured with the House of Lords British Community Honours Award for outstanding contributing towards Cohesion and Integration of the Community.

Honourable Minister of State for the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, United Nations and the Commonwealth Lord Tariq Ahmad made inaugural speech as guest of honour on 20th October, 2023 at the House of Lords, the upper house of the Parliament of the United Kingdom.

Mansoor contributed greatly and his services in several ways to keep the British Community fed, connected and supported at this challenging stage of cost of living crises is highly appreciated. He worked for food bank and hub, distributed meals to those in need, coordinated deliveries, managed donations, inventory and storage and offered advice on civilian welfare entitlements, contributed towards the education of the students and schools development planning.



'It's an immense honour for me to receive this much coveted award and I am truly pleased that the House of Lords Community Awards recognised my contribution at this challenging phase of cost of living crises', said Mansoor Ahmad.

Mansoor has been honoured with a number of awards, achievements, and recognitions for his outstanding contributions, selfless efforts, and support to the British Community. Among these are the British Empire Medal, British Citizens Award, British Community Honours Award for education, Merton Mayor's Covid-19 Award, School Governor Award, and more.

He is a life devotee of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK, currently serving as Manager of Accounts & Finance with Al Shirkatul Islamiyyah, one of the largest Charities in the UK.

Ontario's power problem — too much gas and too few renewables

By: Star Editorial Board



Until the current Greenbelt fiasco, it was the phrase “gas plants” that stood as political shorthand for costly failures of leadership and oversight in Ontario. A decade ago, a scandal over gas plant location, and relocation, essentially brought the career of former Liberal premier Dalton McGuinty to an end in a miasma of allegation and acrimony. One would expect Premier Doug Ford to have taken note of the risks attached to that form of infrastructure. If so, a recent report by the Star’s Marco Chown Oved and Andrew Bailey should certainly have caught his attention. Their investigation found that while gas plants in Ontario were billed as so-called “peaker plants” – an insurance policy to operate only during peak electricity demand, estimated at maybe two per cent of the time — many were, in fact, operating 12 or more hours a day. Instead of serving as a bridge to a non-emitting world of power generation through a mix of nuclear, hydro and renewables, the gas plants, their reporting revealed, have become part of the provincial baseload, resulting in dirtier power that adds to local air pollution and makes climate change worse. The report’s deep dive into hour-by-hour generation data showed that Ontario’s 12 biggest gas plants operated nearly 12 hours a day, on average, every day this year. Critics and environmental advocates were shocked and alarmed at the report. Keith Brooks, programs director at Environmental Defence, said the disturbing state of affairs is not an accident. “It’s a result of choices that this government has made to turn its back on clean energy and to instead go whole hog into more fossil fuels, using these existing plants more, extending their contracts longer, and also seeking to build new plants to add even more gas to the grid,” he said. Shortly after taking office in 2018, the Ford government spent more than \$200 million to scrap more than 700 green energy projects, portraying them as “unnecessary and expensive.” But with the growing demand for electricity the province has announced three new gas plants and six upgrades across Ontario to ensure the reliability of the electricity grid. It is precisely in that chronology that the Ford administration demonstrated it has failed to learn a key lesson of the McGuinty experience. The previous Liberal government proposed to shut down coal-fired generating plants, which were significant contributors not only to climate change but to adverse health impacts on citizens, particularly children and the elderly. The new gas-fired plants the McGuinty government ordered were necessary to produce power to replace the coal-fired pol-

lution machines. The key, after all, was to keep the grid reliable while decarbonizing. And to do so required a period where Ontario had some redundancy. The problem now is that the Ford government is doing the opposite: it is building gas and not building renewables. What it should be doing is building as many renewable sources as possible and, eventually, it will have enough power from those sources that gas “peaker plants” won’t be needed any more. (Battery plants that can store power will replace them.) While 100 per cent wind and solar power is unrealistic, there is huge room to expand those sources. This summer, solar provided 68 per cent of peak electricity load in California and in the Midwest wind covered 49 per cent. In Ontario, renewable sources provided only eight per cent of peak demand in 2022. Simply put, the more renewables Ontario has, the less pressure on the system to turn on the gas. Every non-emitting megawatt is one that doesn’t need to be generated by burning gas. In his 2015 memoir, McGuinty expressed “deep regret” for the failings in his gas-plant trials, failings that did his government, his reputation and his successor Kathleen Wynne considerable harm. It’s a good bet that Doug Ford may come to feel the same way about his cavalier scrapping of the clean energy initiatives so vital to Ontario’s clean power future.

https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/ontario-s-power-problem-too-much-gas-and-too-few-renewables/article_f95484ee-745a-55b4-a8c3-570139efe84a.html

Elon Musk announces new ad-free, **low cost** subscription plans on X



Two new premium X (previously Twitter) subscription levels have been confirmed by Elon Musk, one of them will be less expensive than the current \$8/month X Premium subscription while the other will cost more and allow users to opt out of seeing ads on the social media platform. The billionaire has said that he hasn’t yet disclosed the costs of these two subscription plans. In a post on X confirming the new subscription plans, Musk wrote, “Two new tiers of X Premium subscriptions launching soon. One is lower cost with all features, but no reduction in ads, and the other is more expensive, but has no ads.” In an effort to “combat bots and spammers on X, while balancing platform accessibility with the small fee amount,” X has begun charging new users in New Zealand and the Philippines a \$1 annual subscription. For uploading content, leaving comments, liking or reposting other accounts’ posts, citing other accounts’ posts, or bookmarking posts, the “Not A Bot” programme levies a monthly subscription fee. An X support page about the new programme read, “This new test was developed to bolster our already significant efforts to reduce spam, manipulation of our platform and bot activity.” For both Android and iOS devices, a Twitter Blue subscription costs INR 900 per month in India. The cost for web is 650 per month. Additionally, customers can choose an annual subscription on the internet for \$6,800. X on iOS and Android has a yearly subscription price of 9,400 yen.

York University needs to shut down its antisemitic hate mills now

By: Daniel Koren

Last week, the York Federation of Students, York University Graduate Students' Association and Glendon College Student Union issued a horrific statement applauding the brutal Hamas genocide that left over 1,300 innocent civilians dead as "a strong act of resistance" against "so-called Israel."

Student clubs and unions at other universities such as the University of Toronto, Toronto Metropolitan University and Queen's University have issued similar statements. York administrators quickly denounced the statement and called on the unions to "clarify that they firmly reject any acts of violence or discrimination against Jewish students."



While I appreciate the sentiment (though it's bizarre York is asking them to "clarify" what was clearly stated, that they support acts of violence), this statement will likely fall on deaf ears.

As the founder of Allied Voices for Israel (AVI), an organization that unites college and university students against antisemitism and hatred, I can recount countless occasions where universities have issued statements against student clubs demonizing Israel and the Jewish People.

Ultimately, these statements and other equity, diversity and inclusion efforts, while appreciated, do little to change the attitude of radical anti-Israel students who espouse hatred on campus. Indeed, the time for words and statements has come and gone. It is now the time for bold, authoritative, action.

On Friday, Jill Dunlop, the Ontario minister of colleges and universities, decried the York student unions' post and called on the groups to "apologize and rescind their statement," otherwise she expects "York University to hold these groups accountable for their actions."

If history is any indicator, however, we will not see any accountability. Canadian academic institutions have been lenient for far too long when it comes to holding students responsible for promoting anti-Jewish hatred on campus.

Over the past few years, student groups and professors alike have invited members of Palestinian terrorist groups, as well as notorious antisemites and disseminators of propaganda, to campus. This has contributed to the toxic climate of antisemitism that exists for Jewish stu-

dents. Now more than ever, after the disgusting footage we saw last weekend depicting the slaughter of innocent unarmed civilians, including several Canadians, it is of the utmost importance that our academic institutions make it clear there is a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to glorifying, justifying or celebrating terrorism on campus.

Last week, McGill University set an important precedent when it demanded that its student union “revoke permission” for a student club that glorified Hamas terror attacks on social media and “take whatever other measures might be necessary to rectify the situation.”

It is time that York and others follow McGill’s example and severely reprimand the students whose actions are antithetical to the views we hold dear as Canadians.

We always hear about the need to protect students on campus. We hear this word “safe” very often in the academic space. After speaking with Jewish students on campuses across the country, I can confirm that they are feeling very unsafe right now. They need the support of universities, now more than ever.

Over the weekend, an anti-Israel club urging students to meet at York’s central square on Monday to learn about Palestinian “resistance,” which in my view, given the recent events, is an endorsement of the massacre of civilians.

I will ask York now — following the murder of George Floyd, would you have allowed the KKK to celebrate his murder on campus or would you have intervened?

Following the devastating anti-feminist massacre of female students at École Polytechnique, would you have allowed an anti-feminism rally on campus or would you have intervened?

York must act now and ensure it prevents a celebration of genocide and hatred on its campus. Make no mistake: this is not just a Jewish issue. As one Arab-Israeli human rights activist aptly observed last week, “To a terrorist invading Israel, all citizens are targets,” Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

This time is different. This time, the world has forever been scarred by the brutal, sadistic, and inhumane nature of Hamas. This time, words will not be enough.

<https://vancouver.sun.com/opinion/york-university-needs-to-shut-down-its-antisemitic-hate-mills-now/wcm/aab18c96-1080-419e-b126-6f96876c883d>

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