



In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

..... **The HOPE Bulletin**

Health, Ongoing Projects, Education



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AAIIL Worldwide Edition

Editor: Akbar Abdullah

A CALIFORNIA JAMA'AT PROJECT: APPROVED BY THE CENTRAL ANJUMAN, LAHORE

INTRODUCTION

In view of the convention in Sydney, Australia during the Easter weekend, we would like to share with our readers some background information on the Muslim population in that country.

In Australia census is taken every five years. From the 2001 census we learn that Australia had a population of 18,769,249, of which 281,578 were Muslims.

Muslims in Australia are found in every state and territory and in most cities. More than two-thirds of them live in Sydney and Melbourne. While 36.4 percent of Muslims resident in Australia were born there, 63.6 percent migrated from more than 60 countries, with most coming from Lebanon (10.4 percent) and Turkey (8.3 percent). From the last census we see a shift in migration from Egypt, Lebanon, and Turkey to Central and South Asia as the main sources of migrants.

Muslims now constitute 1.5 percent of Australia's population and, as such, are more numerous than Australians who identify themselves as Baptists, Churches of Christ, Pentecostals, Lutherans or Jews. Baptists and Pentecostals are just over one percent each. The largest religious groups in Australia are Catholics at 27 percent and Anglicans at 21 percent. Our *Jama'at's* presence in Australia resulted mainly from migrants from Fiji and to a lesser extent from Pakistan. (Source – Monash University, Melbourne)

I will be away for a about month to participate in the convention in Australia, and my departure is scheduled for next week. A shortened edition of the April issue of *The HOPE Bulletin* is being circulated ahead of time to maintain continuity. *Inshaa Allah*, in the May 2007 edition we will present a detailed report of deliberations held during the convention.

HEALTH & PRAYER NEWS

Prayers for Mian Farooq Ahmad Sheikh and Prof Aziz Ahmad

We humbly request members of our global “Prayer Circle” to join Hazrat Ameer and the members of Central Anjuman in their intense prayers for Mian Farooq Ahmad Sheikh, who is undergoing treatment in the UK, and Professor Aziz Ahmad, General Secretary of Central Anjuman, who will soon be undergoing major

surgery in Lahore. May Allah (*swt*) with His bountiful mercy and cherished blessings grant *shifa* and speedy recovery to our dear brothers.

We also pray that Allah will have mercy on all our other brothers and sisters throughout the *Jama'at* who are afflicted with ailments.*

Condolence Message

Br Shaukat A Ali, Regional Coordinator, Pacific Region, copied the following message to us:

“Dear brother Umar Farooq Sahib,
Assalamu Alaikum wa Rahmatullahe wa Barakatuh.

We are very deeply distressed and saddened to note the death of your brother, Mian Rashid Sahib. *Inna Lillahe wa Inna Ilaihi Rajioon.*

May Allah (*swt*) grant the departed soul eternal peace and abode in *Jannatul Firdaus* – *aameen*. I had the pleasure of

meeting him in London some years ago. His departure is an irreparable loss not only to his family but also to our society.

Please convey our heartfelt sympathy and condolences to his family as well as to the other members of the extended family and the *Jamaat*. May Compassionate and Merciful Allah grant strength and comfort to you all in this hour of anguish – *aameen*.

Allah Hafiz, Shaukat A. Ali, (Bangkok)”

BOOK REVIEW

Muhammad – A Prophet for Our Time is the title of the latest biography of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), written by Karen Armstrong, and published by Harper Collins of New York in their “Eminent Lives” series. Masud Akthar Choudry, Secretary, AAAIL, California, has reviewed this book for the *Bulletin*. – Editor.

Karen Armstrong, author of many bestsellers on the subject of religion and spiritual issue, is an internationally renowned expert and acknowledged authority when it comes to writing on these subjects. In 1991 she had

published a biography of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

In the introduction to this present biography she recounts the reason for writing the 1991 book in these words:

“I was disturbed by the way some of Rushdie’s (Salman Rushdie) supporters segued from a denunciation of the *fatwa* (against Rushdie) to an out-and-out condemnation of Islam itself that bore no

relations to the facts. It seemed wrong to defend a liberal principle by reviving a medieval prejudice.”

On why she chose to write a second biography of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), she says:

“From the very start, writing about the Prophet Muhammad was never a wholly antiquarian pursuit. The process continues today. Some Muslim fundamentalists have based their militant ideology on the life of Muhammad. Muslim extremists believe that he would have condoned and admired their atrocities. Other Muslims are appalled by these claims and point to the extraordinary pluralism of the Qur’an, which condemns aggression and sees all rightly guided religions as deriving from the One God. We have a long history of Islam phobia in Western culture that dates back to the time of the Crusades. In the twelfth century Christian monks in Europe insisted that Islam was a violent religion of the sword, and that Muhammad was a charlatan who imposed his religion on a reluctant world by force of arms; they called him a lecher and a sexual pervert. This distorted version of the Prophet’s life became one of the received ideas of the West, and Western people have always found it difficult to see Muhammad in a more objective light. Since the destruction of the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001, members of the Christian Right in the United States and some sectors of the Western media have continued this tradition of hostility, claiming that Muhammad was irredeemably addicted to war. Some have gone so far as to claim that he was a terrorist and a paedophile. We can no longer afford to indulge this type of bigotry because it is a gift to extremists who can use such statements to ‘prove’ that the Western world is indeed engaged on a new Crusade against the Islamic world. Muhammad was not a man of violence. We must approach his

life in a balanced way, in order to appreciate his considerable achievements.”

Karen Armstrong is of the opinion that the behaviour of both parties in the present conflict is tantamount to *Jahilliah*. She further writes:

“Strangely, events that took place in seventh century Arabia have much to teach us about the events of our time and their underlying significance, far more, in fact, than the facile sound bites of politicians. Muhammad was not trying to impose religious orthodoxy – he was not much interested in metaphysics – but to change people’s hearts and minds. He called the prevailing spirit of his time *Jahilliah*. Muslims usually understand this to mean the ‘time of ignorance,’ that is, the pre-Islamic period in Arabia. But as recent research shows, Muhammad used the term *Jahillyya* to refer not to an historic era but to a state of mind that caused violence and terror in seventh century Arabia. *Jahilliah*, I would argue, is also much in evidence in the West today as well as in the Muslim world.”

Karen Armstrong sums up her introductory chapter in these words:

“We cannot understand his (Muhammad’s) achievements unless we appreciate what he was up against.”

Then in the next chapter, entitled “Mecca”, Ms Armstrong traces the socio-economic conditions prevalent in the city of Mecca and those prevalent in and around Arabia. It gives the reader an insight into an important aspect of the background not only of the country, but more importantly, of the city in which Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was born. In this chapter, on pages 37-38, she gives a brief but beautiful account of young Muhammad, who was well liked in Mecca and who possessed admirable physical as well as behavioural characteristics; of how he adored his wife Khadija and their children, and how he was devoted to Zayed ibn

Harith (a freed slave who was adopted as a son by him), and Ali ibn Abu Talib (a cousin of his), who were brought up as members of his household.

After narrating an account of the first revelation received by the Holy Prophet (pbuh) and about the first and early acceptors of that Divine message, the author writes on page 56 about this revelation:

“Under the inspiration of Allah, Muhammad was feeling his way towards an entirely new solution, convinced that he was not speaking in his own name, but was simply reporting the revealed words of God. It was a painful, difficult process. He once said, ‘Never once did I receive a revelation without thinking that my soul has been torn away from me.’ Sometimes the message was clear; he could almost see and hear Gabriel distinctly. The words seemed to ‘come down’ to him like a shower of life-giving rain. But often the Divine voice was muffled and obscure. ‘Sometimes it comes to me like the reverberations of a bell, and that is the hardest upon me; the reverberations abate when I am aware of their message.’ ... In the Qur’an God instructed Muhammad to listen intently to each revelation as it emerged; he must be careful not to impose a meaning on a verse prematurely, before its full significance had become entirely clear.”

Then about the Qur’an she says:

“In the Qur’an, therefore, God spoke directly to the people of Mecca, using Muhammad as His mouthpiece, just as He spoke through Hebrew prophets in the Jewish Scripture. Hence the language of the Qur’an is sacred, because Muslims believe it records the words spoken in some way by God Himself. When Muhammad’s converts listened to the Divine voice, chanted first by the Prophet and later by the skilled Qur’an reciters, they felt that they had an immediate

encounter with Allah. Biblical Hebrew is experienced as a holy tongue in rather the same way. Christians do not have this concept of a sacred language, because there is nothing holy about New Testament Greek; their scriptures presented Jesus as the Word spoken by God to humanity. Like any Scripture the Qur’an thus provided an encounter with transcendence, bridging the immense gulf between our frail, mortal world and the Divine.”

The Holy Prophet’s marriages, the battles and the banishment of the Jewish tribes from Madina are the three matters which are often and repeatedly paraded by the Western Christian zealots in their attacks against the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Karen Armstrong has also dealt with all these matters in her book.

In dealing with the issue of the Prophet’s marriages, Ms Armstrong draws the reader’s attention to the verses of the Qur’an permitting polygamy and points out that these teachings, limiting the number of wives as seen in the background of sexual anarchy even in the case of married women having many husbands at a time, is a revolutionary step. She further draws attention to the rights being granted to women through the revelation of the Qur’an as great revolutionary steps towards feminine rights not known to the then world. In stating the events leading to each of the marriages of the Prophet (pbuh), she establishes that all the marriages were contracted either to help the respective lady on humanitarian grounds or out of political importance or concerns which would help the cause of establishing peace through creating bonds of marriage with the tribal chief’s or enemy’s daughters.

About the battles that were fought, Karen Armstrong first quotes the verses of the Qur’an which prohibit waging offensive wars and then narrates events leading to each battle. She shows that these battles were not the choice of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) but were of political necessity to defend believers against the offensive of the enemy, who was out to destroy

the peaceful revolutionaries who had heeded his call. Referring to the events of Hudaibyyah, Ms Armstrong shows the reader that Muhammad, who was a man of peace, was willing to accept even the unfavourable conditions of the treaty for the sake of peace, and that he did so even at the cost of his followers' displeasure.

Dealing with the matter of the banishment of some Jewish tribes from Madina, the author draws attention to the conduct of Jewish tribes who were openly against their treaty obligations with the Muslims of Madina, and for the sake of keeping peace in Madina, the banishment of such Jewish tribes who had secret contracts with those who wanted to destroy the Muslim community of Madina. This was a political necessity and such actions by the Prophet were not religiously motivated. He believed in pluralism and that is why he entered into treaties with Jewish and other tribes living in the vicinity of Madina. He had never forced Jews, Christians or even pagans to accept his teachings and religious beliefs. About the oft-trumpeted charge of killing of 700 men of the Jewish tribe of Madina, Karen Armstrong mentions the treacherous conduct of that tribe and holds that they were guilty of treason during a period of war and were killed for treason – a punishment which is even now upheld by the constitutions of many modern democratic countries of the world.

The only irritant for a Muslim, which many Muslims like I would feel, is mention of the story of the so-called "shaytanic verse." Truly speaking, blame for that story should be placed at the doors of Wazidi and Tabari, who had originally written that story. In any case, Ms Armstrong says that no such verse was revealed to Muhammad, and if he had said anything in praise of three deities namely, Lat, Manat and Lizza, then it might have been his own thought which may have resulted from his desire to establish a peaceful relationship with the Meccans, believers of these deities. Then she goes on to quote verses of the Qur'an which state that these deities are just useless and cannot do any good or harm to anybody, nor even defend themselves.

At the end of her book Ms Armstrong observes:

"Some Muslim thinkers regard the *jihad* against Mecca as the climax of Muhammad's career and fail to note that he eventually abjured warfare and adopted a non-violent policy. Western critics also persist in viewing the Prophet of Islam as a man of war, and fail to see that from the very first he was opposed to the *Jahili* arrogance and egotism that not only fuelled the aggression of his time but is much in evidence in some leaders, Western and Muslim alike, today. The Prophet, whose aim was peace and practical compassion, is becoming a symbol of division and strife – a development that is not only tragic but also dangerous to the stability on which the future of our species depends.

If we are to avoid catastrophe, the Muslim and Western worlds must learn not to merely tolerate but to appreciate one another. A good place to start is with the figure Muhammad: a complex man, who resists facile, ideologically-driven categorization, who sometimes did things that were difficult or impossible for us to accept, but who had profound genius and founded a religion and cultural tradition that was not based on the sword but whose name—*Islam*—signified peace and reconciliation."

On balance, this is one of the most beautiful biographies of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and not from the pen of an apologist for Islam but from the pen of a person who, in her early years, was brought up in a Roman Catholic Church Seminary, walked out of there in defiance of Church teachings and since then has avoided associating herself with any religious denomination which is run and managed by religious establishments and who, in pursuit of truth and knowledge, has read extensively the literature of all great religions of the world and has learnt to admire and write about the luminaries of the spiritual world. She is seeking a state of harmony in the votaries of various religions of the world and the present book is a gem in her writings. It makes a beautiful reading.

WHAT OUR READERS SAY

Membership addition in Holland

“I am receiving your *HOPE Bulletin* which I qualify as enrichment for every society, not only for Muslims. I request you to put a nephew of mine and my son on your mailing list. Their names are Sjoerd Hussain and Gilbert Nassier, both living in Holland, as I do myself.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation. *As-salaam-aleikum.*”

Jazak Allah, Br Nassier. We need more members in our *Jama‘at* with your enthusiasm. May Allah bless you and your family.

NEWS FROM THE JAMA ‘AT

Impressions of the *Hajj*

On Thursday 25 January 2007 the members of the Ladies Committee of the Suriname Islamic Association (SIV) organised a function at the SIV’s Cultural Centre to welcome back their President, Sis Sandra Ilaahibaks-Wazir, and her husband Br Imraan Ilaahibaks. Together with Sis Ghalida Badoellah and Br. Haroen Bechan they had recently returned home from performing the *Hajj* to Mecca.

After the opening *du‘a*, the SIV President, Br. Majidkhan Abdul, addressed the gathering and congratulated the *Hajjis* on their successful pilgrimage. Then the *Hajjis*, except Sis Ghalida who was ill, related some of their personal experiences. The following is an account of the journey to Mecca to perform the *Hajj* by Sandra Ilaahibaks-Wazir.

Ashadu an la ilaha illal’lahu-wah’dahu la sharikalahu-wa ashadu anna Muhammadan abduhu wa rasuluhu. In the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful.

Respected *Imaam*, members of the SIV Board, members of the Ladies Committee, Sisters and Brothers, *As’salaam o Alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatu.* Peace and blessings of Allah be with you.

As we all know, performing the *Hajj* is one of the five pillars of Islam and Allah, in His Infinite might and knowledge, has decreed the *Hajj* as the last one. Every Muslim who is financially capable and who enjoys good health should perform the *Hajj* at least once in his life.

“And accomplish the pilgrimage and the visit for Allah” (*Al Baqara*, v. 196);

“Certainly the first house appointed for men is the one at Bakka, blessed and a guidance for the nations. In it are clear signs: (It is) the Place of Abraham; and whoever enters it is safe; and pilgrimage to the House is a duty which men owe to Allah—whoever can find a way to it. And whoever disbelieves, surely Allah is above need of the worlds” (*Al Imraan*, v. 95 and 96).

Allah granted us the occasion to fulfil this duty and we have done our utmost to do it as best as we could.

It is in His hands to accept our *Hajj* or not. We will make an effort to be a good example to others and will bear the responsibilities as best as we can so that on the Day of Judgment we will be able to listen happily to the verdict of our Creator.

Today I would like to share our experiences with you all. Keep in mind that everyone experiences the *Hajj* in his own manner.

We took about one year to prepare for the *Hajj* but the reality surpassed all our expectations. When talking about the *Hajj* in Suriname people used to say that there isn't a great difference in performing the *Umrah* and performing the *Hajj*. They would say that the only things not done during *Umrah* are the sacrifice and the stoning of the devil. But after performing the *Hajj* I can tell you there is a big difference. The *Umrah* is a part of *Hajj* but *Hajj* is not *Umrah*. Our Holy Prophet (pbuh) said that *Hajj* is Arafat and you don't experience that during *Umrah*.

We left Suriname on 3 December for Holland where we had to present our passports and vaccination documents before 5 December to the Saudi Embassy to obtain our visas. When completing the visa form, to my surprise, we were not asked about which organization we belonged. I only had to mention who was my companion. Regardless of all the stories we had heard and our fear of not getting visas, *Insha Allah*, all went perfectly well and on 22 December we were able to fly from Amsterdam via Istanbul to Jeddah.

The ladies were in the state of *ihram* from Amsterdam but the gents took their *Ihraam* status in Istanbul. The *niyah* for the *Umrah* and the two *rakaats Sunnah namaaz* were performed at the Istanbul airport in a room reserved especially for *Hajjis*. There is also a mosque at the airport. While leaving Istanbul all of us were fully aware that the journey to perform the *Hajj* had indeed started. The atmosphere was cordial and everyone was helpful to one another. The only thing on our minds was the reciting of the *talbiyah*, "*Labbaika Allah-umma labbaika, la sharika la-ka labbaika; inn-al-hamda w-al-ni'mata la-ka- w-al-mulka la-ka la sharika la-ka.*" This would go on and on and others took over when some were tired. [Except when performing the *tawaf* or the *sa'y* or upon entering the Masjid al Haram, the *talbiyah* is recited during the whole *Hajj*. The meaning of

the *talbiyah* is, "Here am I, O Allah! here am I in Thy presence, there is no associate with Thee, here am I."]

About 10 hours after our departure from Holland we finally arrived in Jeddah. Our hearts were overjoyed to have reached our destination. We were transported by bus to the arrival halls where we had to wait patiently for our turn to check in. The Immigration Officer did not know where Suriname was. After a long time of us explaining he finally got the signal from his seniors and we were allowed to go and collect our luggage. [Please never lose sight of your luggage and on which trolley it was put otherwise you'll be in big trouble!] We all followed the trolley with our luggage to the bus stop thinking we could get going, but alas! the Saudis decide when the bus will leave, so again we had to wait patiently. We had been up since 5 that morning and after seeing the next sunrise at Jeddah airport, to our relief, we could finally get on the bus and be on our way to Mecca around noon!

Happy to continue our journey we cheerfully recited the *talbiyah*. We arrived after sunset in Mecca and were starving! I would like to mention that it was not our tour operator to be blamed but the bureaucracy in Mecca. In the hotel we got our room keys, freshened up, had some food and got ready to do the *tawaf al-qudum* (the *tawaf* of arrival) and the *sa'y* in Masjid Al Haram. As we were performing the *Hajj tamattu* this was also our *Umrah*.

A delightful feeling ran through me when I entered the square of the world's greatest mosque on earth! At once I forgot all the worldly things of this life and did not feel any weariness; only feelings of praise and thankfulness to Allah came in me. Very respectful and full of hope I entered the mosque with Imraan and the group, only concentrating on the moment I would see the *Ka'bah*. And when I finally set eyes on it, I froze. I could not move. "Imraan, look there," was all I could say. At that moment I felt so small and could only thank our Creator for allowing me to be present there.

After performing the *tawaf* and *sa'y* and cutting our hair our *Umrah* was completed and we returned to our hotel and take off the *ihraam*. Dressed in our normal clothes we awaited the start of the *Hajj*.

On Thursday, 28 December (8 Zhul-Hijjah) we again took the *ihraam* status and said the *niyat* for the *Hajj*. By bus we left for Mina where we stayed in tents and slept on the ground. Here we prepared ourselves for Arafat.

The next day (9 Zhul-Hijjah) we travelled to Arafat where we stayed all day in total devotion. After sunset we left for Muzdalifah where we spent the night in our sleeping-bags under the open skies along with thousands of other believers. After three *rakaats Maghrib* and two *rakaats Isha* prayer we went to find the stones we will need the following days. [We could have also looked for the stones the next morning.] We stayed in Muzdalifah till after *Fajr* and then returned to Mina. As this was the official *Eid-ul-Adha* (10 Zhul-Hijjah) our group left to throw the first seven stones at the *Jamrah 'Aqabah* and perform the sacrifice. [After the stoning ritual and the performing the sacrifice the hair is cut and one could quit the *Ihraam* state.]

On the 11th and 12th of Zhul-Hijjah all three *Jamrahs* were stoned and we left Mina and went to Mecca. Upon arrival in Mecca we took a full bath and proceeded to the Masjid Al-Haram for the *Tawaaf Ifaadah*.

When I stood before the *Ka'bah* I could not hold back the tears. I thanked the Almighty and talked to Him in our own language and praised Him saying that He was surely aware of the weakness of His creation to decree the *Hajj* for them only once in their lifetime.

After the *tawaf* and the *sa'y* I really could feel the thirst and despair of Hagar.

The next evening I performed my *tawaf al-wada'* (the *tawaf* of departure) in a wheelchair while the rest of the group performed theirs the following morning before our bus trip to Madina. With this the *Hajj* was officially completed.

The bus trip to Madina took a whole day. We spent four days in Madina and were very fortunate to perform the *Jumu'ah namaaz* in the mosque there. I will never forget the most beautiful moment when, after the *Jumu'ah*, the roof of the *masjid* was opened. It seemed to me as if Allah was indeed showering His blessings on us.

This is a very short report of my experiences. I did not want to elaborate on the sanitary facilities and the long hours of travelling for I think that any sane person could figure out what awaits him there. The Saudis are doing their utmost to modernise but a lot is in the hands of the visitors. Take my word for it, it is worse than you can imagine, but all these hardships are worth it to be present in the Masjid Al-Haram and the Masjid An-Nabawi. Remember that performing the *Hajj* is not a vacation. Practise *sabr* and try to sleep on the floor for in Mecca and Madina you can sleep in the most expensive hotels but the *Hajj* you have to experience like the beggar does, together, simply on the ground in the blowing sand.

I have tried to explain to you what *Hajj* is. In case there are people who plan to do the *Hajj* my husband and I are ready to offer our help. We have been there and have the experience and can help you to get on your way. One bit advice: try to perform the *Hajj* when you are still young and healthy, for then you can assist others and be an example to them.

I thank you all for listening so attentively and I thank the Ladies Committee and their friends for organising this event.

May Allah bless you all and my prayer to Allah is, "O Allah, *har musalman ko hajjee bana.*"
Wassalam.

Below are some photographs that were taken on the occasion and sent to us by Mary Ghafoerkhan. – *Editor.*

PHOTO GALLERY



SIV President, Hajji Madjid Abdul, addressing the audience.
Also on the photo from left to right: Mrs. Madjid Abdul, Mrs. Abdoelbasier,
Mrs. Sandra Ilahibaks-Wazir & Mrs. Roline Samsodien



Hajji Imraan Ilahibaks is sharing some of his experiences with the audience



Hajjin Sandra Ilahibaks-Wazir giving a detailed report about the group's experiences.
Her advice was to perform the *Hajj* when you are still young and healthy



Hajji Haroen Bechan also sharing some of his experiences



Audience listening attentively and enjoying the *Hajjis'* reports

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