

MWL holds Media and Palestinian Rights forum

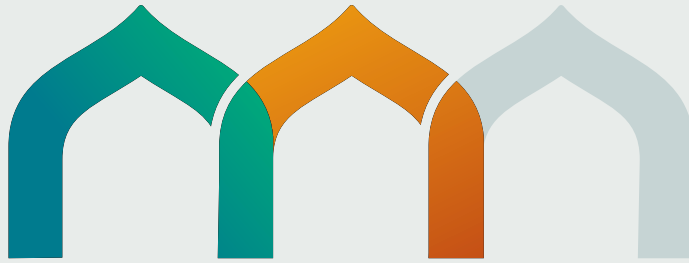
Al-Issa discusses Charter of Makkah at Woolf Institute

More than two million people arrive in Makkah for Hajj

Online fraud on the rise worldwide



MWL IN MALAYSIA
'Let us join efforts against
extremist ideologies'



المؤتمر الدولي
بناء الجسور بين
المذاهب الإسلامية

The Global Conference For Building Bridges
Between Islamic Schools of Thought and Sects

THE MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE JOURNAL

"All of the people are the children of Adam, and Adam was created from dust."

*Prophet Muhammad
Sunan al-Tirmidhī 3955*



VOLUME 54 | ISSUE 2
APR - JUN 2024

P.O. Box 537 - Makkah, Saudi Arabia
Email: mwljournal@themwl.org

ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL
FOR CORPORATE COMMUNICATION
Abdulwahab Alshehri

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
Naif Alturki

GENERAL MANAGER OF CONTENT
Yasser Alghamdi

PUBLICATION MANAGER
Abdullah Ba Musa



IN THIS ISSUE

HAJJ

22

*The spiritual, cultural, and
existential significance of Islam's
holiest event*

FEATURE

26

*Why we need to keep
celebrating the gift of language*

SOCIETY

28

*Tackling misinformation
and fake news in the digital age*

CYBERCRIME

31

*Interpol warns: Online
financial fraud rising*

FEATURE

32

*The great Mosque of Kano:
Landmark of Islamic
heritage in West Africa*

HISTORY

42

*The ancient history of
Islam in Japan*

ENVIRONMENT

44

*The Baltic Sea is becoming
increasingly saline*

HEALTH

48

*Over a billion people
worldwide are overweight*



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَدْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ
وَجَدِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَرُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ
ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿١٢٥﴾
سُورَةُ النَّازِعَاتِ

In the name of Allah, most Gracious and most Merciful

Invite 'all' to the Way of your Lord with wisdom
and kind advice, and only debate with them in the best manner.
Surely your Lord 'alone' knows best who has strayed
from His Way and who is 'rightly' guided.

Surah Nahel - vers.125

Ethical perspective is a must in communication

Guided by Taqua, ethics has the task of regulating the delivery of information, directing us to work with responsibility and avoid breaching others' rights, thereby promoting mutual trust. In this issue, we address several topics from an ethical perspective, ranging from the MWL's conference that called for the international media to assume their responsibility regarding events in the Gaza Strip, to the way people consume news in this age, as indicated by polls, and how online financial fraud is on the rise according to the Interpol.

Ethics facilitate a free and open dialogue between different cultures in an attitude of mutual respect, in a quest for shared values, and with consideration for a community's diverse nature, such as in Malaysia, where the MWL inaugurated a conference on the role of religion in promoting peaceful coexistence and justice.

Each of us needs to have "the opportunity to understand and choose" – where there is compulsion, there is no morally acceptable

option. This is also true in the field of information, even more so today when it reaches millions of people every day with fast-evolving methods and technologies, like social media, which often trades in imagination, emotions, and fantasy, which in turn requires reflection, deep consideration and reasoning, and a non-superficial cultural background.

Having clear and solid values to refer to enables us to make informed and focused choices. Values must be our truths; the beliefs that help us understand and guide our behaviors.

Ultimately, we should all work together to develop a model of dialogue that fosters better social coexistence while respecting diverse cultures and faiths. In this challenging historical moment that humanity is experiencing, institutions, diplomacy, academies, local authorities, and the media are all called upon to participate in building a great bridge between peoples that all can cross to achieve peace in the world. ■

CONFERENCE



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS 2024

المؤتمر الدولي لزعماء الأديان

PERSIDANGAN PEMIMPIN AGAMA ANTARABANGSA 2024

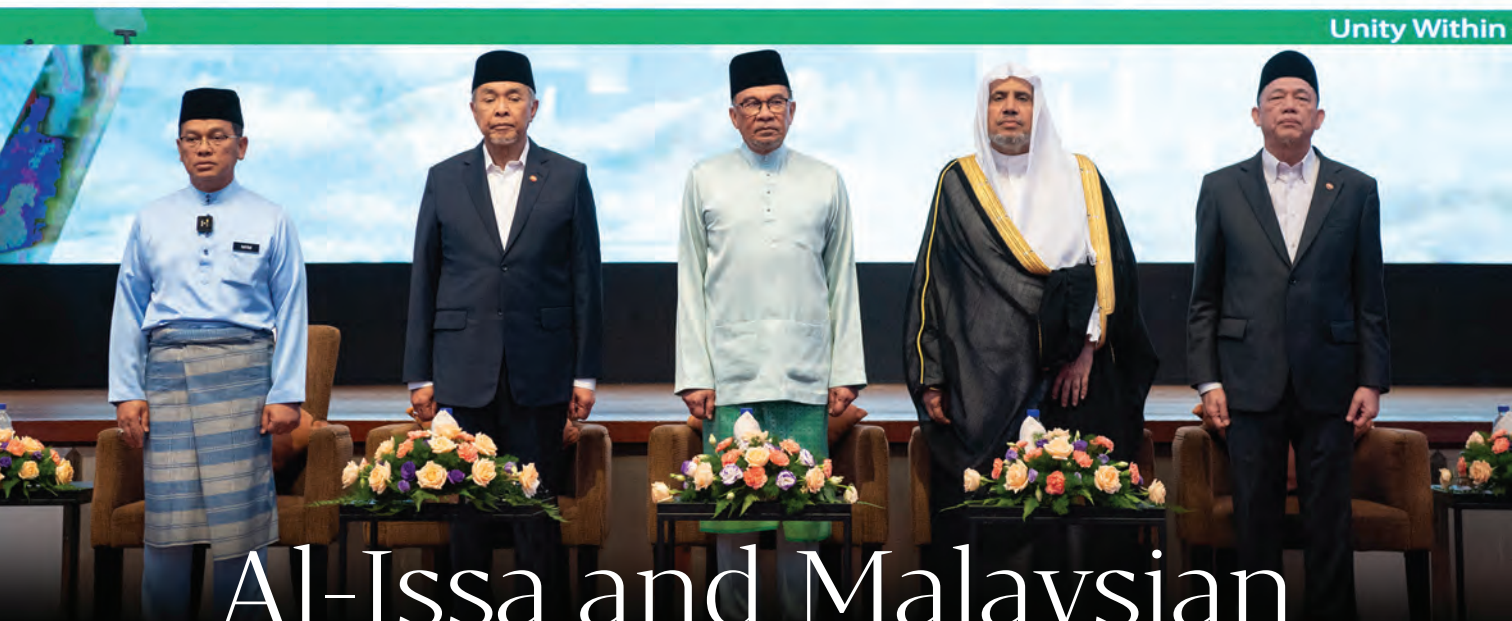
OFFICIATED BY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE DATO' SERI ANWAR BIN IBRAHIM
PRIME MINISTER OF MALAYSIA

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
Tuesday, 7th May 2024



Unity Within



Al-Issa and Malaysian PM Anwar Inaugurate Conference in KL



The International Conference of Religious Leaders launched in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in the presence of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and Secretary General of the Muslim League Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa and 2000 religious scholars and intellectuals from 57 countries.

By
MWL



An international conference organized by the Muslim World League (MWL) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, has called for collaboration and solidarity against extremist ideologies and sought to facilitate dialogue and peace initiatives. Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and MWL Secretary General Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa inaugurated the International Confer-



Dr. Al-Issa and his accompanying delegation received at the KL International Airport.



Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar, King of Malaysia, greets Dr. Muhammad Al-Issa as the latter arrives at the King's office. The two discussed the outcomes of the International Conference of Religious Leaders and the meeting of the Council of ASEAN Scholars.

“

Several recommendations were issued at the conclusion of the event, including urging major religious institutions worldwide to cooperate and coordinate in serving humanitarian causes.

”

ence of Religious Leaders, where more than 2000 religious leaders

and scholars from 57 countries gathered to discuss the role of

religion in promoting peace and justice.

In his speech, Dr. Al-Issa said that thanks to the efforts of scholars, “activities are being carried out on multiple fronts to counter extremism in all parts of the world.” This part of the world “is an ideal region for harmony and peaceful coexistence for Muslims and non-Muslims to prosper,” he said. “The great participation seen at this conference is a testament to Malaysia, demonstrating the enthusiasm of people and religious scholars in working for



King Sultan Ibrahim and Dr. Al-Issa in a friendly discussion.

peace, harmony and coexistence.” Dr. Al-Issa said, stressing that the gathering “seeks to have a tangible impact” in promoting peace and harmony during this sensitive time that is burdened with troubles and dangers. He also pointed to the decline in values and international resolve that the world is witnessing. The war in Gaza is the clearest evidence of the failure of the international community to stop the genocide there, he said, expressing appreciation for the “great and continuous efforts made by the Arab

“

Religious leaders should take an active, effective and courageous role in promoting peace and justice. It is the duty of religious leaders to ensure that governance is guided by strong moral and ethical values.

”

and Islamic countries led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.”

Prime Minister Anwar highlighted the current challenges facing



Dr. Al-Issa and King Sultan Ibrahim pose for a photo following their meeting.

Muslims, including internal disputes, provocations and Islamophobia. He said the MWL chose multi-ethnic Malaysia because it is well known for its harmonious life. While about two-thirds of Malaysia's population of more than 33 million are Muslims, there are also large Buddhist, Hindu and Christian minorities in the country. "This religious conference will be an annual feature in Malaysia since it has proved successful in building an understanding and affinity among religions in the world, as well as in Malaysia," Anwar said. "In a conference like this, we can observe the things that need to be done and need

“

The great participation seen at this conference is a testament to Malaysia, demonstrating the enthusiasm of people and religious scholars in working for peace, harmony and coexistence.

”

to be improved among Muslims, Christians, Buddhists or Hindus. We want to listen to your advice,

criticisms and suggestions." "Religious leaders should take an active, effective and courageous role



The International Conference of Religious Leaders, the largest religious assembly in Asia, called for establishing a committee to achieve its objectives.

“

The conference was attended by international, religious, political, intellectual, academic and media leaders, and is considered the first nucleus of a breakthrough that includes several future initiatives and programs around the world.

”

in promoting peace and justice. It is the duty of religious leaders to ensure that governance is guided

by strong moral and ethical values,” Anwar said.

The conference was attended by

international, religious, political, intellectual, academic and media leaders, and is considered the first nucleus of a breakthrough that includes several future initiatives and programs around the world, aiming to enhance friendship and cooperation between nations and peoples.

Several recommendations were issued at the conclusion of the event, including urging major religious institutions worldwide to cooperate and coordinate in serving humanitarian causes while respecting religious and cultural specificities, encouraging moderate discourse that highlights the



Dr. Al-Issa inaugurates the Council of Southeast Asian Scholars, under the patronage of Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, and in the presence of Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and senior religious scholars of the ASEAN countries.

tolerance of religion, strengthening solidarity among societies, and rejecting extremist discourse that incites hatred and exploits religion to create crises and fuel conflicts.

The participants also called for forming a high-level committee for the conference, comprising religious leaders, experts, and intellectuals, under the chairmanship of the Cabinet of Malaysia and the General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The committee would form spe-

“
Al-Issa inaugurated the Council of Southeast Asian Scholars under the patronage of Prime Minister Anwar, marking the inception of the first comprehensive Islamic council in the region.
”

cialized task forces to work on achieving its objectives, including

an end to wars and conflicts, and address governments and inter-



Dr. Al-Issa receives the honorary doctorate in political sciences from the University of Malaysia (UM) in recognition of his outstanding efforts in Islamic diplomacy.

national organizations for an immediate and urgent intervention to stop the war in Gaza, end the suffering of the Palestinian people, and ensure that they gain their legitimate rights.

Council of ASEAN Scholars

During his visit to Malaysia, Dr. Al-Issa inaugurated the Council of Southeast Asian Scholars under the patronage of Prime Minister Anwar, marking the inception of the first comprehensive Islamic council in the region, comprising senior muftis and scholars from

Southeast Asian countries. The establishment of the council follows the recommendations of the Southeast Asian Scholars Conference convened in Kuala Lumpur on June 30, 2022.

Honorary Doctorate

The University of Malaysia (UM) has awarded Dr. Al-Issa an honorary doctorate in political science, in recognition of his outstanding efforts in Islamic diplomacy.

Prime Minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim attended the awarding ceremony.

UM Pro-Chancellor Dr. Aishah Ong said that the university was proud to grant the honorary degree to Al-Issa, a “prominent figure with solid religious influence who enjoys great respect and trust in the Islamic world”. Al-Issa said he was honored to receive the degree “from such a distinguished university”, adding that this honor extends to MWL, which seeks to spread Islam’s tolerant principles and build bridges of dialogue and cooperation with all. ■

الإعلام والحق الفلسطيني



MWL and OIC organize joint forum on Media and Palestinian Rights

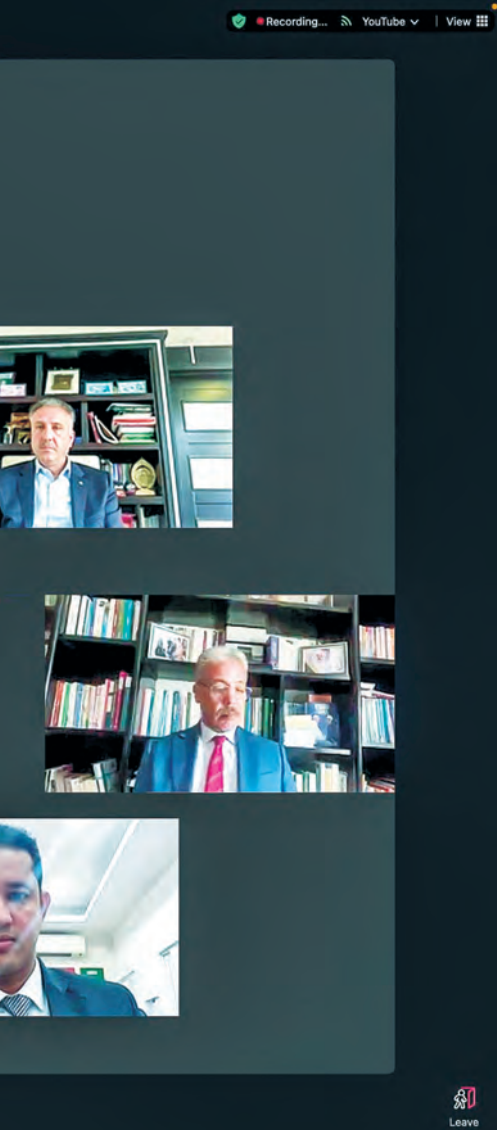
By
MWL



The Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL) Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa and the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha launched the international forum on “Media and Palestinian Rights,” which focused on practical steps to advance initiatives for the recognition of Palestine. Several Islamic and international news agencies, international me-

dia unions, diplomats and intellectuals participated in the event, which was conducted on June 9th via video conference in partnership between the MWL’s Assistant Secretariat for Corporate Communication and the OIC’s Union of News Agencies (UNA.)

The Forum issued several concluding recommendations aimed at bolstering Islamic and international media support to defend the rights of the Palestinian people.



They include establishing an interactive media platform dedicated to monitoring and documenting the international and popular movements concerning compliance with international resolutions on the Palestinian issue, and regularly publishing documented reports on their progress.

It has also called for intensifying media coverage of world nations' initiatives and declarations on the recognition of a Palestinian State, and portraying them in a positive light, in addition to launching a blog for media terminology on the Palestinian cause and people, aiming to rectify misleading terms commonly used in media narratives, and provide guidelines on

“

The Forum issued several concluding recommendations aimed at bolstering Islamic and international media support to defend the rights of the Palestinian people.

”

specific terminology based on international references.

The conference witnessed the launch of the “Reporters for Peace” initiative, engaging with international experts and activists to develop a comprehensive media strategy to advance the pursuit of peace and a just solution to the Palestinian cause.

It called for strengthening cooperation between the media arms of international organizations concerned with the Palestinian cause, such as the United Nations, the OIC, and the MWL, in terms of raising media awareness of the issue, organizing programs and activities designed for this purpose, and intensifying media monitoring of statements made by Israeli officials and far-right politicians that are offensive to the Palestinian people and violate international human rights conventions.

Opening the forum, Dr. Al-Issa stressed that professional, objective media coverage of the events in Gaza has helped revive the international debate on the urgent need to resolve the Palestinian issue.

Dr. Al-Issa highlighted the modern media's pivotal role in steering our world towards its righteous course, noting that professional journalists

have been invaluable in exposing the Israeli army's crimes in the Gaza Strip, with truthful reporting on human rights violations.

He stressed that these positive steps and media initiatives coincided with intensive Arab-Islamic movements, led by the ministerial committee assigned by the Joint Arab-Islamic Summit, chaired by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The committee has worked to mobilize international support for an immediate end to the war in Gaza and to discuss concrete steps to implement the two-state solution.

On behalf of the Muslim World League and its members, Dr. Al-Issa praised Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, and his Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Prince Mohammed bin Salman, for supporting the Palestinian cause and condemning war crimes in Gaza. Historic summits hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have aimed at coalescing global support for a permanent solution to the Palestinian issue, activating Arab initiatives and reviving the peace process.

OIC Secretary General Mr. Hissein Taha emphasized the importance of such a forum to bolster cooperation for the cause of Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Jerusalem).

He touched on the media's crucial role in documenting Israel's violations of international and humanitarian law, and noted the importance of internationalizing the issue and acting through international institutions to obtain official recognition of a Palestinian state, with the ultimate goal being a two-state solution as per United Nations resolutions.

Mr. Taha called for meaningful intervention to end the Israeli occupation and close the curtain on the colonial era, emphasizing the importance of speaking out on events in occupied Palestine and initiating steps to establish peace.

Minister Ahmed Assaf, General Supervisor of Official Media in the State of Palestine, said the recent wave of recognitions of a Palestinian state, particularly by Spain, Ireland,

Norway, and Slovenia, along with the International Court of Justice and International Criminal Court rulings, signal the international community's growing intolerance towards unchecked Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Israel can no longer act with impunity, said the minister, and the policy of double standards is no longer acceptable.

Assaf said, "What is happening in Palestine now is a new Nakba. Otherwise, what can we call the total destruction of the Gaza Strip? The war of genocide has caused the martyrdom of nearly forty thousand people and the injury of one hundred thousand wounded, including tens of thousands who have become permanently disabled."

The Palestinian minister stressed

the media's crucial role in portraying the conflict, amid the challenges of a complex situation involving multiple cultures and ambitions.

For his part, Mr. Mohammed bin Abd Rabbo Al-Yami, Director General of the UNA, urged capitalizing on international initiatives to recognize Palestine, supported by strong media discourse, to help end the conflict and establish peace.

During several sessions, media experts and international media union leaders discussed "practical steps in media cooperation to support initiatives to recognize the State of Palestine," "media terminology and support for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people," "peace journalism" and "strengthening the role of the media in resolving international crises." ■



By
MWL



Secretary General Discusses Charter of Makkah at Woolf Institute

Dr. Muhammad Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL) and Chairman of the Organization of Muslim Scholars, was hosted by the Woolf Institute at the University of Cambridge for a Q&A session at the end of the two-day Encounter Workshop, jointly delivered by the institute and the MWL, on July 2nd.

The meeting and subsequent working dinner focused on discussing the provisions of the Charter of Makkah among several other significant international issues related to it, including global challenges such as migration, climate change, hate speech, women's empowerment in Islam, and raising awareness of Islamic teachings among Muslim youths and followers of other faiths.

During the meeting, Dr. Al-Issa highlighted the MWL's dedication to these issues and its commitment to ongoing dialogue. He explained that the MWL is open to explaining the core values of Islam to all interested parties globally, maintaining an unbiased stance. "We do not exclude any aspect of dialogue for those eager to learn the truth," Dr. Al-Issa said, adding, "Anyone who reaches out to the MWL earnestly will find us responsive, as taught by the teachings of our noble Prophet, peace be upon him."



Dr. Al-Issa reiterated that the MWL steers clear of political involvements, focusing instead on clarifying the true message of Islam through its extensive network and the Charter of Makkah. The MWL is aiming to disseminate the charter's messages worldwide, especially to those having misconceptions or incomplete information about Islam.

He noted that the MWL strives, through its impactful initiatives and programs, to foster global peace and enhance harmony among national communities, steering clear of the conflicts and clashes typical of geopolitics

or competing civilizations. He emphasized that the MWL's stance is inherently apolitical, and any comments it makes regarding political matters stem directly from its fundamental religious values that advocate for justice and peace.

In his concluding remarks, His Excellency mentioned the MWL's initiative "Building Bridges of Understanding and Peace between East and West," welcomed by the United Nations Secretariat and launched at the UN headquarters in New York, with substantial global participation. ■

By
MWL



In the presence of more than 1600 ministers, officials, academics, professors, and students from Egyptian universities, the Secretary-General of the Muslim World League (MWL) and Chairman of the Organization of Muslim Scholars, Sheikh Dr. Muhammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, delivered a lecture at the Great Hall of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in the Arab Republic of Egypt, in which he spoke about the historical relationship between the East and West, in addition to several theories and theses within the context.

Following the lecture, a conference was launched to discuss the MWL's initiative on the Role of Universities in Building Bridges of Understanding and Peace between the East and West.

The conference, organized by the League of Islamic Universities in cooperation with Alexandria University and Al-Alamein International University, took place one year after the MWL launched the initiative at the UN headquarters, with the participation of the UN Secretary-General and senior leaders, and in the presence of high-level religious and international diplomats.

Dr. Al-Issa receives the key to Alexandria Governorate, city's highest decoration



Dr. Al-Issa delivers a lecture at the Great Hall of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt. The lecture discussed theories within the context of the relationship between the East and West.

Dr. Al-Issa also received the key to Alexandria Governorate, the city's highest decoration, in an official reception held by His Excellency the Governor of Alexandria, Major General Mohamed Al-Sharif, at the governorate headquarters, in appreciation of his international religious and humanitarian efforts.

The key to the governorate is given to dignitaries, including political and religious leaders, and those who have provided great services to their countries and the world. The key's unique design reflects the grandeur of the city of Alexandria and its historical and cultural significance. ■

Eid Al-Adha

The Muslim World League
wishes a happy Eid Al-Adha for
all Muslims around the world
Eid Mubarak





MWL hosts orphans for Umrah

By Syed
Abdulaziz



The Muslim World League (MWL) has recently organized an Umrah trip for orphans from Somalia. The young men and women's journey began in Madinah, where they had the opportunity to explore significant historical and religious sites, including the Prophet's Mosque and Mount Uhud. They toured numerous local landmarks during their visit, marking a meaningful and enriching

experience.

After their stay in Madinah, they traveled to Makkah to perform Umrah, before they visited the office of the Secretary General of the MWL, where they were welcomed by His Excellency, who honored them and presented them with gifts.

Following their time in Makkah, they traveled to Jeddah, where they met with staff



members of the MWL and were given a tour of the MWL's various offices, exploring its different departments and learning more about the organization's work.

Their visit to Jeddah also included recreational activities, including a trip to an amusement park and a visit to the Jeddah Corniche. Additionally, they had the opportunity to meet with the staff and their families at a vacation house, further enriching their experience. Ms. Eman Falemban, the MWL's Undersecretary for Relief, Welfare and Development, said: "Recreational activities and having fun

“

MWL's care for orphans and underprivileged children worldwide extends beyond merely providing basic needs. Its Orphan Sponsorship Program is a process designed to build and empower individuals

”

are part of a human being's well-being. They deserve it.”

She explained that the MWL's care for orphans and underprivileged children worldwide extends

beyond merely providing basic needs. Its Orphan Sponsorship Program is a process designed to build and empower individuals, she added. ■



The spiritual, cultural, and existential significance of Islam's holiest event

By
Alma
Tealeeb

As the Hajj season begins, more than 2 million Muslims from around the globe are gathering in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, for one of the most monumental events in Islam. This annual pilgrimage is a central component of the Islamic faith,

bringing together believers from all walks of life to fulfill a journey that represents a spiritual milestone.

Hajj is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, a core religious obligation. Every physically and



financially capable Muslim is required to undertake the pilgrimage at least once in their life. The rites of the Hajj have remained virtually unchanged for centuries. It's a deeply transformative experience that transcends nationality, ethnicity, and cultural differences, uniting Muslims in a collective expression of faith.

Makkah isn't just the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him; it is also the home of the

Kaaba, one of Islam's three most sacred sites. The Kaaba is a cube-shaped structure, believed to have been built by Abraham and his son Ishmael. It holds profound spiritual significance, especially since Makkah is where Prophet Muhammad received the first revelations of Islam in the early 7th century.

But even before Islam, Makkah was a pilgrimage site for the tribes of Northern and Central Arabia. Despite their polytheistic beliefs, these tribes visited the city annually to honor Allah. Over time, as the message of Islam spread, Makkah's status as a pilgrimage center solidified, making it not only a religious hub, but also a crucial economic one. The revelations received by The Prophet revitalized the ancient monotheistic faith of Abraham, linking Arab, African, and Asian communities to Makkah and restoring its position as the holiest city in Islam.

Ancient Rites and Timeless Practices

Hajj consists of a series of rites that take place in and around Makkah. The first of these is the tawaf, when pilgrims circle the Kaaba seven times. This practice, along with many others, is believed to have roots as far back as the time of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, himself, led the pilgrimage in 632, the year of his death. Today, over 3 million pilgrims from more than 70 countries participate in this spiritual journey each year.

Historically, Hajj wasn't easy. Pilgrims often traveled in large convoys, enduring long and perilous journeys. Many became ill or were robbed along the way. Yet, for Muslims, the risks were secondary to

the spiritual reward: The belief that those who die during Hajj are granted salvation.

The Quran specifies that Hajj should be performed during certain months culminating in the 12th month of the Islamic calendar. Although the primary rites of Hajj are performed over five to six days, pilgrims can begin consecrating (Ihram) for the pilgrimage as early as the 10th month. Because the Islamic calendar is lunar, the Hajj cycle shifts across seasons, rather than always occurring during the peak summer heat.

For many, Hajj is more than just a religious duty. The journey offers an opportunity for personal transformation, fostering virtues like patience, resilience, solidarity, and cooperation. These lessons often stay with pilgrims long after they have completed the journey, making Hajj a significant experience from religious, existential, cultural, and social perspectives.

The Role of Technology in Modern Hajj

In recent years, managing the logistics of Hajj has become a high-tech operation, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Artificial intelligence and robotics have been employed to streamline many aspects of the pilgrimage.

In 2022, the Saudi Tourism Authority launched the Nusuk platform to simplify the process of Hajj planning and booking. Robots have been used for the Grand Mosque's disinfection, sterilization, and distribution of Zamzam water. During the Hajj of 2023, AI-enabled robots communicated with pilgrims in 11 languages, guiding them through rites and providing assistance.

Key Rites of Hajj

- **Wearing Ihram:** Pilgrims exchange their regular clothes for two white, unstitched sheets of cloth to enter the state of Ihram.

- **Performing Tawaf:** The circumambulation of the Kaaba seven times in a counterclockwise direction.

- **Drinking from Zamzam Well:** This practice commemorates Hajira's (Hagar's) search for water and acknowledges pilgrims' dependence on Allah.

- **Safa and Marwah:** Pilgrims run between the hills of Safa and Marwah seven times, replicating Hajira's determination. It serves as a reminder of persistence and faith.

- **Mount Arafat:** Pilgrims spend a day at Mount Arafat, where Prophet Muhammad gave his final sermon. They pray here, seeking forgiveness for their sins.

- **Muzdalifa and Mina:** Pilgrims collect pebbles in Muzdalifa, which they later use in Mina to symbolically stone the Devil. The act commemorates Prophet Ibrahim's rejection of temptation.

- **Eid Al-Adha:** This festival, also known as the "Feast of Sacrifice," begins on the 10th day of Dhul-Hijja, during the Hajj. It celebrates Prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son in submission to God. Around the world, Muslims commemorate this event by sacrificing sheep or cattle and distributing some of the meat to the poor.



The Importance of Hajj

Muslims who complete the pilgrimage are honored with the title of Hajji, a sign of their devotion and fulfillment of a religious duty. Hajj promotes a sense of unity and equality among all who take part. The journey is a powerful experience of self-discipline and spiritual renewal. A

hadith suggests that a pilgrim who completes the Hajj returns home cleansed of their sins, as if they were "born anew" (Sahih al-Bukhari 26:596).

Hajj serves as a reminder of the strength of faith, the importance of community, and the personal growth that comes from overcoming challenges. ■

By
Franco
Minervi

Avoiding news: How people changed the way they consume information

The news has become disheartening, tedious, and relentless. This is what emerged from a recent investigation conducted by Oxford University's Reuters Institute, based on a survey of over 94,000 adults across 47 countries.

Adopting a comparative analysis approach, the survey found that news avoidance has soared since the Covid-19 pandemic. Almost four in ten, or 39% of the people surveyed globally, said they had consciously avoided the news, compared to 29% in 2017.

Getting to the roots of such averting behavior is not an easy task. Many reasons appear to be at the core of people's decision to turn away from the news, including global turmoil and conflicts in multiple world regions.

It would be incorrect to state that, generally speaking, people have lost interest in the news. According to the Reuters Institute experts, global events such as the pandemic and wars have spurred people to entrench themselves in a sort of "protective bubble" as a way to protect their mental health and psychological well-being and carry on with their ordinary lives without letting a load of demoralizing information about

world events overwhelms them.

In general, the majority of those surveyed share a feeling of vulnerability and powerlessness regarding the countless events that happen globally every day.

At the same time, politics appear to be contributing to the generalized sense of tiredness toward news, with those interviewed using the word "fatigue" when referring to political news. This is particularly evident among women and young people, who appear to be more likely to feel worn out by news of a political nature.

Against this background, a broader reflection of news sources may be appropriate. As is to be expected due to the rise of the internet and social media outlets, traditional news sources like TV and the printed press have experienced a sharp decline.

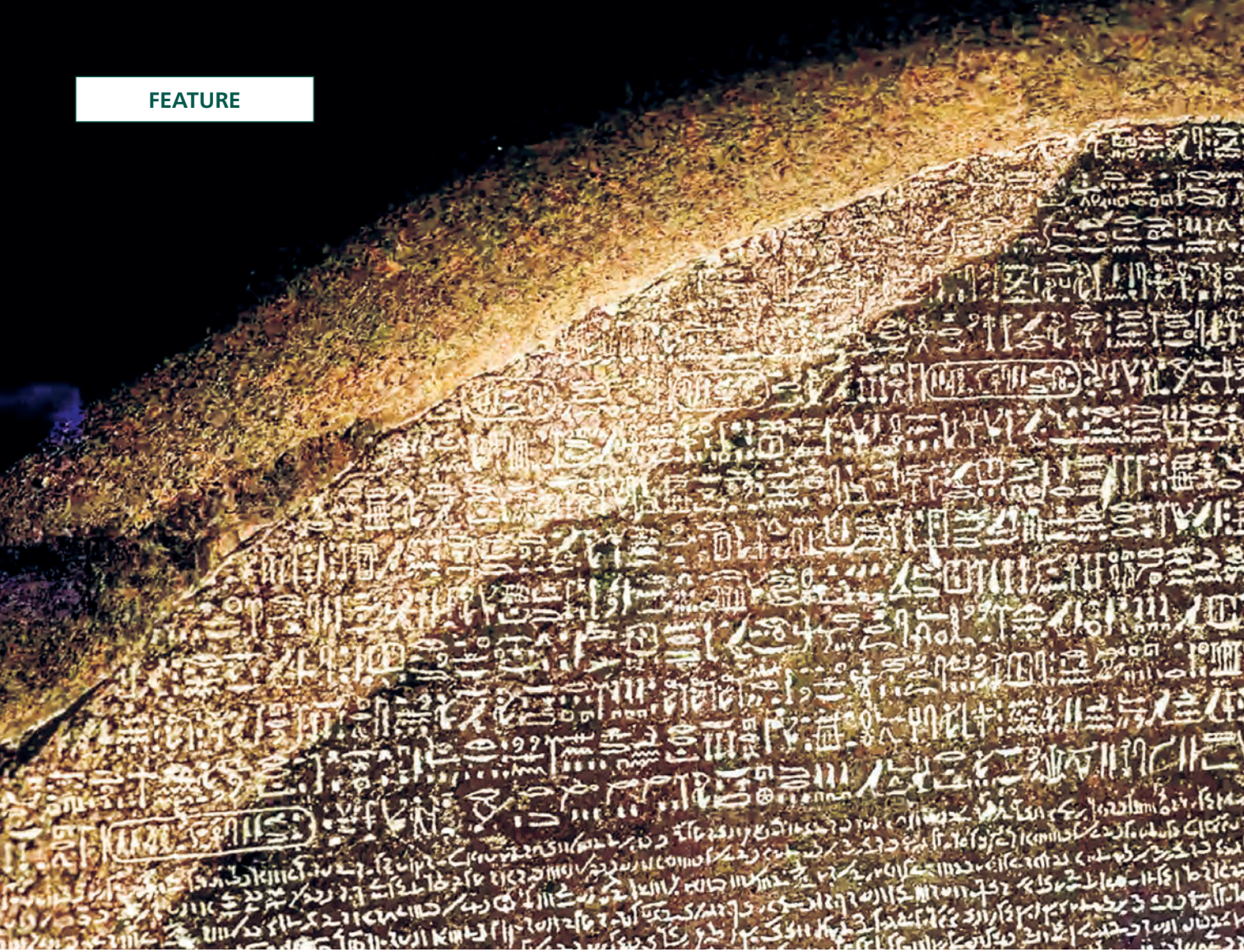
Many people are getting their information through social media platforms. This could be largely due to the fact that social media are faster than traditional news sources, accessible to anyone with an internet connection, and usable anywhere at any time.

Despite a gradual decline, Facebook still ranks among the most im-

portant social media platforms for news. YouTube and WhatsApp are also making their mark, while TikTok looks ready to overtake them all. Especially popular among very young people, TikTok has surpassed X (formerly Twitter) in terms of the number of those using the app for information purposes. With these new media comes a different way of approaching online news. Video sources are increasingly young people's preferred form of information.

Similarly, podcasting is experiencing a boom. Even though some experts consider podcasts a minority activity, audio files are increasingly attractive. Thanks to their ease of use in a variety of situations, including while enjoying breakfast or while stuck in rush-hour traffic, podcasts are likely to gain more and more popularity.

Within the discourse of new information technologies and social media, the relationship between journalism and the applications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is worth mentioning. Despite widespread public suspicion around the employment of AI in the field of reporting, this tool could prove useful in behind-the-scenes activities, including translation and transcription. This way, AI could be used to support rather than replace the work of journalists. ■



Why we need to keep celebrating the gift of language

By
**Nadia
Weeks**

The study of linguistics has a long history that spans centuries and civilizations. It is a testament to humanity's fascination with communication and how language shapes our world.

Thousands of years ago, people in places as distant from each other as Mesopotamia and China, India, and Egypt had already developed writing systems and language classifications.

Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle introduced the concepts of semantics, syntax, and phonetics as they pondered on the role of language in human cognition.

Latin grammar and the study of biblical languages dominated the medieval period, paving the way for linguists to focus on the diversity and relativity of languages during the Enlightenment.



It was in the 19th century, thanks to the work of scholars such as Ferdinand de Saussure, that modern linguistics emerged as a scientific discipline. Linguistic theories and methodologies proliferated in the 20th century as studies on structuralism, generative grammar, sociolinguistics, and language acquisition all contributed to a deeper understanding of language structure and use.

Today, computational linguistics can be added to the long list of subfields that explore the intricate workings of language and its role in human communication and cognition.

Yet, while our interest in how languages work remains strong, lan-

guages themselves are becoming extinct at an alarming rate. This is due to a combination of cultural, social, economic, and political factors that threaten smaller and minority languages.

An estimated 7,000 languages are spoken worldwide, but many are considered to be at risk of extinction. Globalization, urbanization, migration, and cultural assimilation are all factors contributing to their demise.

Globalization has accelerated the spread and dominance of major world languages such as English, Spanish, Mandarin, and Arabic. These languages are prevalent in international business, science, the media, and entertainment. The use of smaller languages tends to decrease as a result.

The internet and social media have greatly influenced language use. English, the predominant language of the internet, has become the lingua franca of many communities, which affects how other languages are used online.

Proficiency in dominant languages is vital to economic success and mobility in globalized economies. This can lead speakers of minority languages to shift toward using dominant languages, leaving their native languages at risk of extinction.

And while globalization promotes positive developments such as cultural exchange and integration, it can also lead to cultural homogenization. As dominant cultures and languages spread, local languages and cultural practices may be marginalized or lost.

Urbanization and migration result in speakers of multiple languages concentrating in urban centers where dominant languages are more widely used, weakening the transmission of minority languages.

Advanced translation software has made communication between speakers of different languages easier than ever. Ironically, this has reduced the motivation to learn different languages. Yet, it is only through learning foreign languages that other cultures can be fully understood.

When a language is lost, a unique cultural heritage and a whole way of viewing the world disappears with it. Recognizing the value of linguistic diversity and actively preserving endangered languages serves to promote a more inclusive and diverse global society.

Organizations, scholars, and communities worldwide are involved in language documentation, education programs, community projects, and advocacy with the goal of preserving and revitalizing endangered languages.

Community involvement promotes intergenerational language transmission – the most effective way to preserve endangered languages. Education systems have a role to play by creating programs that help to maintain and revitalize languages among younger generations.

Because languages are more than just a bunch of words, it is essential to integrate language revitalization efforts with cultural preservation initiatives – including storytelling, traditional arts, and celebrations.

As globalization advances, the value of linguistic diversity must not be lost. The benefits of multilingualism alone should engender support for language preservation initiatives within and beyond communities.

Every language represents a unique way of understanding the world. By keeping languages alive, we enrich the global tapestry of human expression and knowledge. ■



Tackling misinformation and fake news in the digital age

By
**Dr Fatima
Taneem**

In this age of digitalization, Information and Communication Technology is central to people's lives. The rise of the Internet, as a driver of communication, has drastically transformed the way information is produced and consumed. New digital technologies and social media platforms have led to the democratization of media, blurring the lines between content creators, mediators, standard-setters, and consumers of information. This has resulted in the disintermediation of traditional news and information sources and their frontline workers.

Throughout the world, the Internet and Electronic Media have enabled ordinary citizens to access all sorts of news and information at the click of a button; the media consumed shaping opinions on many topics, including politics, health care, and current events. Social media

platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Instagram are leading sources of news and information as well as major contributors of fake news and misinformation, with people readily sharing opinions, propaganda, and unverified information as enthusiastically as factual news. The onslaught of misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic, termed 'info-demic,' has shown how rapidly and widely false and misleading information can spread like wildfire. Hence, the misuse of these platforms for spreading fake news and misinformation can have detrimental economic, psychological, and political impacts, both online and offline, and lead to discrimination and violence.

Fake News and Misinformation

These terms are generally used to refer to a



range of ways in which sharing information causes harm, intentionally or unintentionally, usually in relation to the promotion of a particular moral, health-related, or political issue or point of view. They constitute false and misleading messages spread under the guise of information content, whether in the form of elite communication, online messages, advertising, or published articles. Technically, they are described as follows.

Fake News - Lies or fabricated news or information that is non-verifiable through facts, sources, or quotes.

Misinformation - False or mistaken information shared with no intention of

causing harm. When false information is shared intentionally to cause harm, it is referred to as Disinformation.

Misinformation and Disinformation are designed to trigger a reaction (emotional response) and to gain an action (shared content.) They are the key part of hate campaigns aimed at dividing and polarizing society. The World Economic Forum has recognized misinformation as one of the ten greatest perils confronting a society that sows seeds of hate, waters them, and harvests them.

We are living in a post-truth world wherein emotional and instinctive appeals are often invoked to influence public opinions against rational and reliable facts. And the proliferation of powerful new technological tools has made it easier for fake news and misinformation to thrive, masquerading as 'news' and 'informative content.' This has the potential to promote violent extremism and hate speech with dangerous consequences, as witnessed in many different parts of the world. Therefore, surviving in this digital era of the post-truth world is a genuine concern for all. And it is clear that interventions at different levels are needed to combat the proliferation of misinformation and fake news.

Combating Measures

In this digitally-fueled information world, it is essential for countries, communities, and individuals to take measures to tackle the spread of fake news and misinformation.

As the major arena of fake news and misinformation is Social Media Forms, they have a key role to play in stemming the flow of it, both by being more transparent in the algorithms being used and by adopting them to de-prioritize fake news and misinformation content. Regulatory reforms must seek to align the utility of social media plat-

forms with the welfare of citizens while safeguarding the right to free speech.

In many countries, government and international agencies, including the United Nations, have taken regulatory measures to combat fake news and misinformation proliferation. They have also taken many initiatives, such as projects and publications seeking to educate societies to be 'more-informed.' Many civic bodies and fact-checking organizations try to educate the masses about fake news, making their audiences savvy.

However, more needs to be done to overcome the recent unprecedented increase of polarization, hate speech, and extremism happening both off-line and online with the spread of misinformation and fake news.

Thus, the need of the hour is to equip people with high levels of education, emphasizing the 4 C's - Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity. One of the most effective antidotes to fake news and misinformation is the development of Media Information Literacy skills and Critical Thinking, which will enable Individuals to be 'well-in-formed,' responsible, and wiser.

Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

It is an umbrella concept used by UNESCO to stress the interrelatedness of competencies regarding information broadly and media in particular. This covers Human rights literacy, News literacy, Advertising literacy, Computer literacy, Intercultural literacy, etc. News literacy is the more specific ability to understand the language and convention of news as a genre and to recognize how these features can be exploited with malicious content. MIL is basically a tool to help understand news as a means to detect fake news and misinformation in obvious and sub-lime messages.

Importance

MIL helps to navigate a media-saturated world and develop the skills needed to analyze the information based on relevance, accuracy, bias, and reliability of content. It helps people understand journalism, recognizing that even authentic news is always constructed and consumed within wider narrative frameworks. It equips people with skills to detect flawed journalism as well as fraudulent news in various media. It is a strong tool to combat stereotyping and promote cross-cultural communication. It promotes the value of libraries and librarians. In a larger context, MIL also fosters the skills that help people work together in collaboration by encouraging respectful discourses.

MIL helps people foster critical thinking and become wiser consumers of media and responsible producers of their own media content.

Critical Thinking (CT)

Includes books, academic journals, reputed magazines, and independent and objective news sources. In addition, it can also be developed by following the works of famous journalists and opinion-makers without any hidden agendas and biases.

Thus, in this age of post-truth, fake news, and misinformation, people need to have a critical aptitude to identify, understand, and evaluate all information to make the right decisions, have sound opinions, and know the Truth.

Islamic Perspective Regarding Critical Thinking

The need to have an Islamic construction of critical thinking is because of the special worldview of Islam and its conception of Knowledge (Ilm,) which treats Revelation (al-wahy) as the primary source of belief and Knowledge.

The Noble Quran has plentiful examples of CT. It encourages its readers to

use their ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize what is read. The word 'reflection' and the command to use 'reason' are in several Quranic verses. The Noble Quran, in different verses, emphasizes Contemplation (al-faker,) Reflection (al-tadabbur,) Understanding (al-tafaquh), and Reasoning (al-taa-kul.) These concepts could be developed and elaborated in many ways and incorporated into a Muslim's way of life.

Epistemic Wellbeing

It refers to an individual's ability to know how to distinguish between what is true and what is a lie, to discard false truths, and to find true answers.

The information bombardment pounding upon us in recent years, both by traditional and social media, is exhausting and confusing. It undermines our endeavors to approach the Knowledge of Truth. Nevertheless, Knowledge is the key asset to differentiate between true and false information.

It generally refers to the ability to think in an organized and rational manner in order to understand connections between ideas and or facts, helping one to formulate an informed, independent opinion.

Developing CT is all the more relevant nowadays in this era of information overload, wherein people are vulnerable to manipulation by lies and misinformation. People need to develop CT skills to identify facts and opinions and make informed and intelligent choices, distinguish news from fake news, Truth from post-truth, and facts from alternative facts.

CT constitutes the analysis of an issue and the facts, data, or evidence related to it. ST skills involve Analysis, Evaluation, Self-regulation, Inference, and Explanation.

There are several ways to develop these skills. One of the most effective methods is to develop good reading habits

involving a variety of sources.

There are three components of epistemic wellbeing:

1. Access to Truth
2. Access to Trustworthy Sources of Information
3. Opportunities for Productive Dialogue Participation

Thus, in today's world of fake news and misinformation, people need to be driven by a pursuit of Truth, Trust, and Dialogue to be able to nourish themselves with accurate information and have a stable Epistemic wellbeing.

Islamic Perspective on Knowledge

Islam supports Knowledge as the way to know the Truth. It encourages and promotes the idea of learning, asking questions, and striving to better oneself through acquiring Knowledge. Knowledge has a central place in the Noble Quran. Islamic epistemological guidelines stress the methods of Certainty, discouraging guessing and conjecture while cautioning against unverifiable information and unreliable sources. The Noble Quran stresses Truth as a way of life, and Muslims are to uphold the Truth in all circumstances and reject falsehood in all forms.

In this chaotic information-over-loaded environment, powerful digital technologies have made manipulation and fabrication of content easy and simple. Social media networks amplify falsehoods peddled by vested interests. Therefore, people must make conscious efforts to understand media production and consumption while critically assessing all the information surrounding them. This will enable them to navigate the information fog and avoid the pitfalls of fake news and misinformation, thus allowing bridges to be built rather than expanding the gulf between communities, thereby broadening international understanding and striving for peace. ■

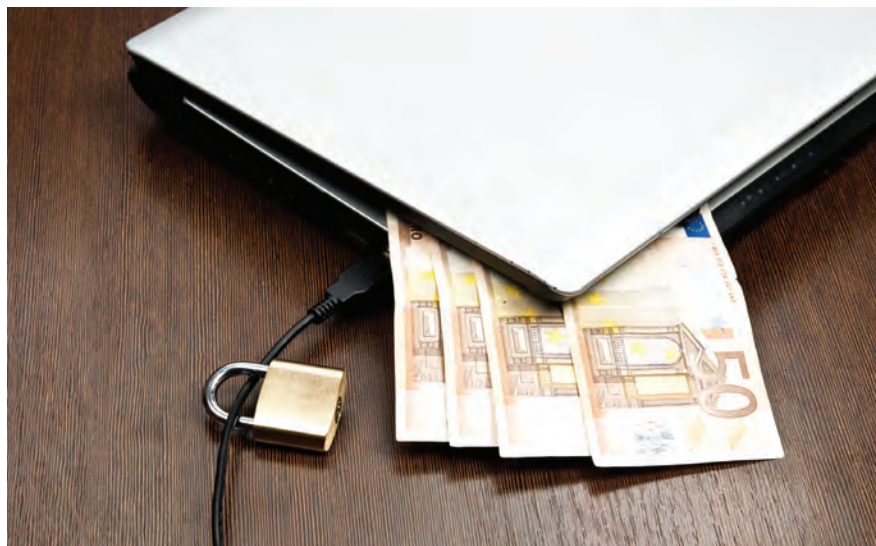
By
Emanuele
Occhipinti

Interpol warns: Online financial fraud rising

There is an alarming increase in online banking fraud across Europe and the world. In Denmark, for example, the cases of older women scammed into revealing their personal banking information online doubled between 2022 and 2023. These scams, called phishing, are carried out through fraudulent emails or messages, causing significant financial losses for individuals and banks alike.

The UK has also been grappling with an overwhelming wave of online fraud, with criminals defrauding the public of nearly half a billion pounds in 2022, primarily through authorized payment. This type of fraud occurs when victims unknowingly authorize transactions under false pretenses, with almost 80% of these cases originating from online sources. UK banks, which typically bear the responsibility of refunding victims, returned £300 million to those affected by authorized payment fraud in 2022 under a voluntary code. Starting in October 2024, refunds will become mandatory, further increasing the financial burden on banks.

In response to the rising phenomenon, UK banks are urging online platforms—especially social media and telecommunications giants—to share the responsibility of reimbursing victims for fraud facilitated through their websites. Ben



Donaldson, Managing Director for Economic Crime at UK Finance, emphasizes that while it is essential for victims to receive refunds, online platforms involved in these scams should also contribute financially.

Meanwhile, EU lawmakers are contemplating measures to hold tech and social media platforms accountable for fraud occurring through their services, although no formal proposals have been introduced yet. Interpol has raised alarms about the global escalation of financial fraud, warning that advancements in technology, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and cryptocurrencies, are enabling organized crime to execute sophisticated and low-cost phishing campaigns.

Interpol's General Secretary, Jürgen Stock, describes the situation as a "financial fraud pandemic targeting vulnerable individuals and businesses on a global scale.

Stock stresses the urgency of addressing this issue, advocating for enhanced international cooperation, improved information sharing, and increased investment in law enforcement training to combat these sophisticated fraud schemes. Without prompt and coordinated action, the rise of AI and cryptocurrencies is likely to exacerbate the global problem, victimizing more individuals, businesses, and even governments. Stock made these remarks during the Financial Fraud Summit in London on March 14, organized by the British government. ■



The Great Mosque of Kano: Landmark of Islamic heritage in West Africa

By
**Mohamed
Enab**

The Great Mosque of Kano in Nigeria is one of the most prominent architectural and religious landmarks in West Africa. It serves as an exceptional model of traditional Islamic architecture in the region, distinguished by its unique architectural style and exquisite artistic details that reflect the cultural identity of the Muslim Hausa tribes

and Africa's rich civilizational heritage. It has significantly contributed to strengthening Islamic and cultural identity in Nigeria, and plays a central role in the social and religious life of Kano's residents. Once the hub of Islam in Nigeria, the mosque has historically served as a center for worship and learning. Today, it remains a distinguished tourist destination



for many visitors and continues to be a focal point of religious and cultural life in the city of Kano.

Location: Kano is the capital city of Kano State in northern Nigeria, south of the Sahara Desert. It is one of Nigeria's most prominent and largest cities, ranking after the capital Abuja and Lagos, with the latter being Nigeria's largest city and its former capital. Renowned for its rich history and reputation as a major commercial hub in West Africa, Kano also holds significant importance as an Islamic center in the region. The city is home to numerous Islamic institutions dedicated to teaching Arabic and Quran memorization, as well as various Islamic institutes and historic mosques. Sur-

“

The mosque is situated in the heart of the old city, making it an integral part of Kano's urban center. It has played a pivotal role in shaping the city's layout and influencing the dominant architectural patterns.

”

rounded by ancient walls that reflect the grandeur of its history and civilization, the city is a testament to its enduring cultural legacy. The mosque is situated in the heart of the old city, making it an integral part of Kano's urban center. It has played a pivotal role in shaping the city's layout and influencing the dominant architectural patterns.

The history of Islam and its spread in the region

Nigeria is one of the African countries that experienced an early introduction to Islam. The religion entered the region through trans-Saharan trade routes to the Sahel zone, where Muslim merchants and scholars played a significant role in spreading Islam as early as the 7th century CE. The religion began to take root more effectively through the Hausa and Fulani tribes, who gradually embraced Islam starting in the 14th century CE.

Kano State was among the first areas to adopt Islam, primarily through the efforts of scholars from the Manding tribes residing in the Wangara region. It is said that Islam reached Kano during the reign of Yaji Dan Thamiya, the 11th ruler of Kano (750–790AH/1349–1388 CE.) Fol-

lowing this period, mosques were constructed, and the number of converts steadily increased. Over time, Islam became an integral part of the cultural and religious identity of northern Nigeria.

A number of scholars from Timbuktu traveled to these regions to provide judicial services and religious guidance. It is noted that the renowned scholar al-Suyuti moved to northern Nigeria and resided in Katsina for a period, where he taught the people before returning to Egypt in 876AH/1471CE. Kano emerged as one of the most significant centers of Islamic influence in West Africa, particularly gaining prominence after the decline of Timbuktu.

This period coincided with the reign of Muhammad Rumfa (1463–1499CE,) one of Kano's most notable rulers. His era was characterized by stability and strong support for scholars and religious leaders. He invited many to the region to promote the teachings of authentic Islam, jurisprudence, Islamic sciences, and the Arabic language. During his reign, numerous mosques and schools were constructed, contributing to the flourishing of Islamic learning and culture in Kano.



The history and development of the mosque

The Great Mosque of Kano underwent several stages of construction. The original mosque was built under the order of Sultan Muhammad Rumfa in the 15th century, with the initiative of the Egyptian Muslim preacher Abdul Rahman Al-Qusari, who hailed from Morocco. This original mosque is considered one of the most significant Islamic landmarks in the region. It was distinguished by its unique architectural style, which adopted the traditional Sudanese-Swahili architectural pattern prevalent in West Africa. This style is characterized by the use of local materials such as sun-dried mud, palm wood and thick walls supported by prominent wooden buttresses, enhancing both the mosque's durability and its distinctive aesthetic. The mosque was surrounded by a high wall and topped with pointed buttresses. It featured a large tower, standing 20 meters tall, which became a prominent feature of the mosque and a symbol of Islamic identity and the grandeur of traditional Islamic architecture in the region.

The mosque underwent numerous additions and renovations until the 13th century AH/19th century CE. The original mosque was demolished and relocated to a new site in 1582 CE by the ruler of Kano, Muhammad Zaki (990–1026AH/1582–1617CE,) who reigned from 1582 to 1617. It was rebuilt again in the mid-19th century by Sultan Abdullah Dan Dabo. However, it was destroyed in the 1950s.

The current mosque was constructed by the British government in 1963 as a tribute to Nigeria's role in World War II. It features a new architectural style that differs from its predecessors and has no equivalent in any of the indigenous Nigerian architecture.

Architectural description of the mosque

The current mosque has a capacity of approximately 100,000 worshippers. It is a large complex that includes a mosque, a Quranic school, a library, and a hospital. The building combines architectural styles from Persia, Sudan, and Egypt. The mosque's structure is rectangular, consisting of

“

The current mosque has a capacity of approximately 100,000 worshippers. It is a large complex that includes a mosque, a Quranic school, a library, and a hospital.

”

a main prayer hall covered by a large, prominent dome adorned with intricate botanical and geometric decorations. A large minaret stands at each corner of the courtyard, forming distinctive landmarks that help direct worshippers and make the mosque visible from distant locations. The mosque is surrounded by an elegant wall, enclosing a large courtyard that becomes crowded with worshippers during major religious events. The mosque and courtyard usually overflow with people, with large numbers of worshippers lining the adjacent streets and squares.

The civilizational and cultural role of the mosque

The Great Mosque of Kano has played a significant role in both religious and social functions. It is considered the main center for worship and education in the city of Kano, where Muslims gather for prayer and devotion. It has hosted religious lectures and classes to teach Islamic jurisprudence and Qur'anic interpretation, contributing to the enhancement of religious knowledge among the local population. ■

وَتَيْقُتُمُ كِتَابُ الْمَكْتَبَةِ

صَدَرَتْ عَنْ أَلْفٍ وَمِائَتَيْنِ وَنَبِيفٍ
مِنْ كِبَارِ مُفْتِيٍّ وَعُلَمَاءِ الْأُمَّةِ الْإِسْلَامِيَّةِ
عَنْ مُؤْتَمَرِهِمُ التَّارِيخِيِّ الْمُنْعَقِدِ بِجَوَارِ الْكَعْبَةِ الْمُشْرِفَةِ
تَحْتَ مَظَلَّةِ رَابِطَةِ الْعَالَمِ الْإِسْلَامِيِّ
خِلَالَ الْفَتْرَةِ ٢٢ - ٢٤ مِنْ شَهْرِ رَمَضَانَ الْمُبَارَكِ لِعَامِ ١٤٤٠ هـ
الْمُوَافِقِ ٢٧ - ٢٩ مِنْ شَهْرِ مَآيُو لِعَامِ ٢٠١٩ م



Water, a silent emergency: How Islamic NGOs are working for access to drinking water in Africa

By
**Abdoul Majid
Arsène
Ogougbe**

Water, also known as the “white gold,” is a fundamental resource for the life, well-being, and survival of the human race. A necessity for humanity as a whole—and, by extension, an inalienable fundamental right—water

remains a luxury for millions of Africans.

Although sub-Saharan Africa is home to some of the world’s most important water resources, many of its households still live without access to drinking water.



According to the joint WHO and UNICEF report (JMP 2023), more than 400 million people in sub-Saharan Africa live without access to a safely managed source of drinking water.

Faced with this crisis, Islamic NGOs are mobilizing to come to the aid of these millions of Africans.

A Persistent Drinking Water Crisis in Africa

In Africa, the shortage of drinking water is due to several inter-related factors. Climate change alters rainfall patterns, reduces river flows, dries up water tables,

and leads to recurrent droughts. Population growth, particularly in urban areas, causes a mismatch between the demand for drinking water and the deployment of appropriate infrastructure. Lack of proper infrastructure, due to insufficient investment and inadequate technology to collect, treat, store, and distribute water, especially in rural areas, conflicts, pollution, and overexploitation of resources further undermine equitable access to water.

The Role of NGOs: At the Heart of Humanitarian Action and Sustainable Development

For decades, both local and international NGOs have been working to mitigate the effects of this crisis through concrete and innovative actions, including the construction of deep wells and boreholes adapted to climate change; the installation of solar-powered pumping systems, which are more durable and cost-effective; the distribution of filtration kits in areas experiencing humanitarian emergencies; the installation of rainwater storage tanks in landlocked areas; the training of local populations in water resource management and maintenance, and the organization of awareness campaigns on hygiene and community governance.

Examples of Action

The Muslim World League (MWL) launched a water project in Malawi in August 2024. It serves six regions using solar-powered storage and pumping systems, providing clean water to more than 20,000 people, mainly children previously at risk of disease. Secours Islamique France has completed over 1,000 boreholes in countries like Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Kenya, and Madagascar. It also distributes home water treatment kits and integrates water access into its food security and health programs (SIF Report 2022–2023). In 2023, Human Appeal conducted over 90 water projects in 13 countries, including Chad, Niger, and Somalia—building wells, latrines, and irrigation basins. Muslim Hands, active in Mali and Zimbabwe, sets up family wells and community



Dr. Al-Issa inaugurates one of the MWL's water projects in Somalia.

purification systems. Al-Khair Foundation, through its “Sustainable Villages” program, combines water access, solar energy, and agricultural development. Some NGOs also collaborate with startups to introduce technological innovations: smart sensors, mobile payment systems for communities, or platforms for hygiene education. These efforts reflect a sustainable, inclusive, and community-based approach to one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges in Africa.

Challenges Facing NGOs

Despite their efforts, Islamic NGOs encounter several obstacles: A Lack of stable funding, as many projects rely on one-time donations. Without maintenance, infrastructures often degrade, leaving communities without solutions. Climate change effects—like droughts or salinization—make access even more difficult and call for more resilient strategies. To overcome these challenges, several solutions can be explored, such as the Networking of actors (govern-

ments, NGOs, private sector) to pool resources and avoid duplication of efforts; Active involvement of local communities in managing water points to ensure ownership and sustainability; Creation of coherent policy frameworks backed by targeted public and international funding to support NGOs in their humanitarian mission. It is, therefore, essential to consider water not merely as a humanitarian issue but as a fundamental lever for development and stability in Africa. ■



The roses of Arabia, a timeless fragrance

By
Aftab
Husain Kola

Several GCC countries have recognized the need for economic rejuvenation and turned to various non-oil sectors with agriculture emerging as a key area of focus. Once produced on a limited scale, cultivating vegetables, fruits, and certain cash crops has been significantly expanded in recent years. Notably, in at least two countries, namely, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman, the cultivation of roses and the production of rose oil and water are being actively promoted as part of broader initiatives to advance agriculture and horticulture. Farmers

and rural entrepreneurs are keen on tapping the potential of this economic sector.

Both countries have mountain ranges and uplands where roses bloom. The moderate temperature, abundance of water and excellent topsoil combine to make perfect growing conditions for roses.

Endowed with a climate that makes it an ideal retreat away from the scorching heat of nearby Jeddah and Makkah, the upland haven of Taif is known for its roses. It is moored above 2000 meters and has a favorable climate,

along with plentiful groundwater, a good irrigation network and fine topsoil; all combining to earn the region the name ‘Arabia’s Rose’ ever since roses began to be cultivated here first in the Ottoman era.

Come March-April, the entire area of Taif turns into a pink splendor with roses blooming at many pockets. Visitors are mesmerized by these home-grown roses that are sold by roadside vendors in the region. The Rose Village of Taif season festival attracts large hordes of locals and tourists. And so does Taif’s annual rose festival, the largest and longest-running flower show in the region.

The Taif rose strain is somewhat similar to the Bulgarian ‘Kazanlik’ strain, most probably because they were introduced from the Balkans by the Ottoman Turks, who settled in Taif area beginning of the mid-14th century, and the Hijaz from the 16th century.

The cultivation of Taif roses is a recent addition to UNESCO’s prestigious list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Saudi Arabia’s Culinary Arts Commission recently unveiled a pavilion dedicated to the newly recognized Taif roses at the 19th UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee meeting in Asunción, Paraguay.

Grown in the mountainous regions of Saudi Arabia’s uplands — spanning the Al-Hada mountains, Wadi Muharram, Wadi Ghazal, Wadi Qawah, Bilad Tuwairq, and Al-Shifa — Taif roses have long been revered not only for their beauty but as a profound symbol of the nation’s rich cultural and historical heritage. Taif’s renowned mountainous rose farms have evolved into a prominent hub for fragrance production, yielding



millions of blossoms each year and fueling a thriving economic sector.

Covering 270 hectares, approximately 910 rose farms cultivate around 1.14 million rose bushes across regions such as Al-Hada, Al Shifa, Wadi Muharram, Al-Wahat, and Al-Wahit.

The rose industry, from the meticulous harvesting to the distillation of rose oil and water, has become a thriving economic sector, generating substantial revenue. Today, it represents a considerable investment in the Saudi market, valued at over 64 million Saudi Riyals (approximately \$17 million). Production has surged in recent years, with farms across the Sarawat mountain range now yielding an impressive 550 million roses annually.

The nearly 1000 dedicated Taif rose farms throughout the region are supported by more than 70 factories and laboratories. These facilities produce an extensive range of over 80 distinct rose-derived products, each a testament to the region’s enduring expertise and craftsmanship.

At the heart of this industry lies the traditional distillation process of the Taif rose, a time-honored technique passed down through generations. Copper vessels are used in the process. The material is renowned for its exceptional heat conductivity, efficiency, and highest-quality output. The result is a trio of prized products: standard rosewater, concentrated rosewater (known in tradition as “bride’s water”), and the highly sought-after rose oil, celebrated globally for its rarity and exquisite fragrance.

Planting of the flowers begins towards the end of January, and harvesting starts by the end of March and goes on till the end of May. The flowers must be plucked before sunrise when they are dewy and most fragrant. After being sorted, the roses are put into a traditional cauldron with water. Securely covered over a simmering, burning fire, the water begins to boil and the fragrant steam passes through a tube surrounded by cold water; the steam then condenses and starts dripping into a special glass receptacle until a layer of rose oil appears on its surface. This is

then carefully skimmed off the surface and quickly bottled. The process usually takes between ten to fourteen hours daily.

Unlike Oud oil, which develops a better fragrance and hence gets more expensive as it ages, the rose essence should not be kept for a long time as that would affect its quality and devalue it, especially if exposed to light and heat.

Known for their strong, robust fragrance, Taif roses are a valuable commodity as boxes of Taif roses, bottles of rose essence and rose water are taken as mementos by visitors. Attar -- derived from the Arabic 'itr', meaning perfume or essence -- is the essential oil distilled from roses. Extracted from fresh blooms either by steam (when it is known commercially as Rose Otto) or by solvent extraction or supercritical carbon di-oxide extraction (Rose Absolute,) it has been single-distilled since the 9th century when Persia became one of the earli-

est producers. By the 13th century, it was widely produced in Syria.

Besides the rose oil, rose water is also quite popular. It is usually filled into large 20-liter glass bottles for a variety of uses, especially for the making of Arabic desserts, and can be added to drinking water.

There are two types of rose water: the normal one, and a more special type known as 'Al-Aroosa' (the bride,) which is distilled rose water resulting from the production of rose essence. People use it as a perfume at home and sprinkle it on guests, using traditional dainty rose-water pewter sprinklers.

Women have been applying rose water as part of their beauty regimen ever since its beneficial qualities, such as cleansing of the skin and tightening of the pores, were found.

Jabal Ak Akhdar's damask roses

Similar to Taif, Jabal Ak Akhdar, an upland area in the Sultanate of

Oman, is famous for its rose cultivation. In this highland plateau punctuated with breathtaking views, orchards of the famed damask roses provide an amazing landscape

During the harvest season, men and women rise early to pluck the blossoms just as they open and before the day's heat evaporates their fragrance and dew. The harvest is collected in a sheet of cloth, packed into a bundle and transported to one of the many traditional extraction units set up by the villagers. Rose petals are distilled in the traditional mud ovens called 'Al-duhjan'. The petals are then simmered gently for about four hours in a vessel called 'Al-burmah', which is covered by another vessel made of copper. As it boils, the water flows from the petals into the copper vessel. The old petals are then replaced with fresh ones using a traditional tool. After boiling, the rose water is poured into a traditional cauldron known as 'Al-karas', in which it remains for at least 30 days. ■





The ancient history of Islam in Japan

By
**Joseph
Villeroy**

The presence of the Islamic faith in Japan dates back to the 9th century and has strengthened in recent decades.

According to historical evidence, Islam first reached Japan in the 9th century via trade routes that connected the Middle East to East Asia. Arab traders ventured into Japan through the maritime routes, bringing with them their faith-based ethical code. These first

meetings laid the foundations for the gradual integration of Muslim culture into Japanese society.

One of the earliest interactions is documented in the city of Nagasaki, a crucial port for international trade during the Edo period. In the 17th century, during Japan's policy of isolation (*sakoku*), Nagasaki was one of the few gateways to foreigners. A small community of



Muslims from South-East Asia and the Indian subcontinent settled here.

The influence of Islam on Japanese culture is evident, in particular as a significant amount of medieval Japanese literature contains references to Muslim characters and Islamic teachings. However, it was only in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that

Islam experienced a revival in Japan.

The introduction of Islam to Japan is a fascinating story of cultural exchange and mutual respect. However, it is in contemporary times that Islam has gained greater visibility. The post-World War II period saw an increase in interactions between Japan and Muslim-majority countries. Students

“

The post-World War II period saw an increase in interactions between Japan and Muslim-majority countries

”

and professionals from Islamic nations arrived in Japan, fostering cultural exchange that fueled a fervent community life. Hence, there was a need to create cultural and recreational centers and mosques to offer the growing Muslim community spaces where they could practice their faith and share their traditions in compliance with the laws of the country.

According to a study by Waseda University in Tokyo, in 2021, there were 113 prayer halls and mosques in the country, compared with 15 in 1999. According to the same study, it is estimated that in 2023, Japan welcomed over 200,000 Muslims.

Although the Muslim population in Japan is small compared with other religious groups, the presence of Islam has enriched the nation's cultural tapestry. Today, mosques are symbols of unity and welcome both the Muslim community and those curious to learn about Islam. The presence of Islam is a testament to the nation's ability to embrace diversity and create connections between diverse cultures and faiths. ■



The Baltic Sea is becoming increasingly saline

By
**Sandro
Loria**

The volume of freshwater in the Baltic Sea has decreased by almost 24 km³ per year over the past two decades. This is equivalent to Lake Peipus, the fourth-largest lake in Europe, located on the border between Estonia and Russia.

The Baltic Sea has turned more saline in the south and more brackish in the north. Due to the different densities of saline and freshwater, saline water falls to the northern layers and freshwater, brought by the rivers, stays within the superficial layers,” says Urmas

Raudsepp, a professor at Tallinn University of Technology (TalTech) and co-author of a study published by news.err, the English-language portal of Estonian Public Broadcasting.

“The current stratification will increase, and oxygen will eventually stop reaching the deeper layers.” This could lead to the extension of so-called ‘dead zones,’ where oxygen is scarce for most organisms. The author adds that further research would show the magnitude of this saline increase.

These changes are not uniform across the

entire Baltic Sea. For example, in the Gulf of Bothnia, there is more freshwater, due to increased precipitation and water flow from rivers. Furthermore, the Gulf receives less salty water thanks to its position

At the same time, the seasonal variation of freshwater in the Bothnia Gulf and Finland is suppressed by a reduction in ice cover. “The marine areas that are important to Estonia, such as the Gulf of Finland and the Riga Gulf, are relatively stable in comparison with general changes occurring in the Baltic Sea,” states Professor Raudsepp.

In the south, the effect of saline water reaching the Baltic Sea through the Danish strait is evident. “We do not know why saline water from the Danish strait is spreading this way. A plausible hypothesis is that global warming, responsible for rising sea levels, may be increasing the volume of saline water. Overall, due to these changes, freshwater and the stratification are relocating to the north.

Still in the Baltic Sea, Estonia’s unique lake system is being drained due to shale gas extraction. Extraction activity by Eesti Energy in the Nerva cave will soon move to the south, and the northwestern area will be permanently closed. However, previous and future extraction activities will impact the Kurtna Lake system, Estonia’s largest and most environmentally important.

The lake closest to the cave was completely drained, ‘sacrificed’ for the Narva caves, according to Marko Vainu, geological scientist at Tallinn University. On the TV show ‘Osoon’, Vainu revealed that the magnificent Kurtna Lake system has been irreparably damaged by human activities. Kurtna – a few hundred meters west



of the Narva oil shale quarry – is the “most densely populated lake basin” in Estonia, with almost 40 lakes in an area of 30 km². Most of these lakes are incredibly valuable, and the entire area is under protection.

The Kurtna scenic reserve, located between several bituminous shale quarries, was established in 1987 and since 2018 has been part of the Alutaguse National Park. “It is also one of Estonia’s few iron-rich lakes. It contains both open (subterranean flow of water) and closed lakes.

Mining companies have sought to reduce the impact of their activities, and extractive work in the area is set to terminate. Even so, the most recent models of the subterranean water flow show that the water level in

the cave will not return to its previous levels. “This is because extraction continues in the south; otherwise, the miners would be submerged. The cave is 30 meters above sea level, but we are 40 meters above sea level. Therefore, the water level in the cave will be 10 meters lower than it could be in this lake,” Vaino explains.

“The shale has to be mined somewhere because it is vital to the economy. The same goes for other activities: subterranean water is drained here because drinking water is needed in the cities of Jõhvi and Kohtla-Järve. But we are trying to protect this ecosystem, because nowhere else in Estonia is there such a magnificent lake system with these distinct characteristics”, concludes the eco-geologist. ■



Qarawiyyin Library: An ancient urban complex in the modern world

By
**Claudia
Dell'Era**

Reflecting on the social role of libraries represents a small piece of a broad and important debate on how to create culture today.

An educated and refined Muslim woman of Tunisian origin, Fatima Al-Fihriya, tried to answer this question as early as 859 AD

when she founded the Qarawiyyin Library in Fez, Morocco.

The library, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is considered a global treasure, not only for its cultural value, but also for the multiplicity of its spaces and its architectural beauty. It is located inside an ancient



university of the same name, which has a fascinating history.

Its founder, Fatima Al-Fihriya, was ambitious and hopeful for knowledge and culture among women; it is to her that we owe the characteristics of this university as it is today – a beacon for both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds.

Al-Fihriya emigrated to Fez when the city was undergoing economic and cultural development – it was known as ‘the Muslim West’. Fatima built the Qarawiyyin library and mosque, which still among the largest in the world today, capable of accommodating over 10,000 people.

The university is considered among the oldest in the world. It has in its library an enormous cultural heritage

of 24,000 works, among them a collection of almost 4,000 ancient manuscripts, dating back 12 centuries, of Arabic grammar, theology, music and rhetoric, law, mathematics and chemistry, as well as an extraordinary copy of the Quran written in golden ink.

Recently, this historic place was featured in the American magazine ‘Time’, which rated it a prime global destination as a cradle of universal scientific and cultural heritage.

Al-Fihriya took care of every detail regarding the distribution of space in the complex that features a large internal courtyard, the mosque, classrooms and the very spacious library – she was personally involved in the construction.

Although it maintained its original structure, experts believe the complex was affected by the stylistic influences and dynasties of the last 1,000 years. Architectural renovations by the Moroccan Ministry of Culture have taken place in the past four years, with work entrusted to architect Aziza Chaouni.

While maintaining and respecting the original architecture, Chaouni expanded the reading spaces, restored a laboratory of ancient manuscripts, and opened another room dating back to the 12th century, which hosts an exhibition on Moroccan art. Architect Chaouni has thus returned to the academic and non-academic world one of its first and most magnificent libraries. ■



Over a billion people worldwide are overweight

By
**Dania
Ramadan**

Today, over a billion people are living with obesity, according to the global estimation published in The Lancet, the world's most influential medical journal.

We are talking about 880 million adults and 159 million children, according to 2022 data. The highest numbers are registered in Tonga and American Samoa for women and in Amer-

ican Samoa and Nauru for men, with around 70-80% of the adults affected by obesity.

The international team of scientists states that it is urgent to change the way we tackle obesity since its impacts include severe diseases such as cardiac problems, type 2 diabetes and some forms of cancer.

Professor of Global Environmental Health



Majid Ezzati, a research lead at Imperial College London, says: “For many of these island nations, the problem is the availability of healthy food in comparison to the availability of unhealthy food. In some cases, there have been big marketing campaigns promoting unhealthy foods, while, on the other hand, the costs and availability of healthy food may present problems.

The scholar, who has been studying global data for years, reveals his surprise at the rapid change in the global picture: many more countries are facing the obesity crisis today, while the number of countries where being un-

REGIONAL/COUNTRY DATA FOR ADULTS

- Countries with the highest prevalence of obesity in 2022 were the island nations of Tonga and American Samoa for women and American Samoa and Nauru for men in Polynesia and Micronesia, where more than 60% of the adult population were living with obesity.
- In the UK, the obesity rate increased from 13.8% in 1990 to 28.3% in 2022 for women and 10.7% to 26.9% in 2022 for men. The prevalence of obesity in the UK ranked 87th highest in the world for women and 55th highest in the world for men in 2022.
- In the USA, the obesity rate increased from 21.2% in 1990 to 43.8% in 2022 for women and 16.9% to 41.6% in 2022 for men. The prevalence of obesity in the USA ranked 36th highest in the world for women and 10th highest in the world for men in 2022.
- In China, the obesity rate increased from 2.0% in 1990 to 7.8% in 2022 for women and 0.8% to 8.9% in 2022 for men. The prevalence of obesity in China ranked 11th lowest (190th highest) in the world for women and 52nd lowest (149th highest) in the world for men in 2022.
- In India, the obesity rate increased from 1.2% in 1990 to 9.8% in 2022 for women and 0.5% to 5.4% in 2022 for men. The prevalence of obesity in India ranked 19th lowest (182nd highest) in the world for women and 21st lowest (180th highest) in the world for men in 2022.
- Countries with the highest prevalence of underweight in 2022 were Eritrea and Timor-Leste for women and Eritrea and Ethiopia for men, where more than 20% of the adult population were affected by underweight.
- In China, the underweight rate decreased from 11.2% in 1990 to 5.9% in 2022 for women and 9.5% to 2.9% in 2022 for men. The prevalence of underweight in China ranked 61st highest in the world for women and 97th highest in the world for men in 2022.
- In India, the underweight rate decreased from 41.7% in 1990 to 13.7% in 2022 for women and 39.8% to 12.5% in 2022 for men. The prevalence of underweight in India ranked 13th highest in the world for women and 26th highest in the world for men in 2022.

derweight is a problem has decreased.

At this speed, half of the planet may be overweight by 2035. The scientific report, which spans 1990 to 2022, finds that obesity levels have quadrupled among children and adolescents. As for adults, the number has more

than doubled for women and almost tripled for men.

In the meantime, the percentage of underweight adults has decreased by 50%; however, the researchers suggest that it is still an urgent matter, especially among the poorest communities.

REGIONAL/COUNTRY DATA FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

- Countries with the highest prevalence of obesity in 2022 were Niue and Cook Islands for both girls and boys, where more than 30% of the child and adolescent population were living with obesity.
- In the UK, the obesity rate increased from 4.7% in 1990 to 10.1% in 2022 for girls and 4.3% to 12.4% in 2022 for boys. The prevalence of obesity in the UK ranked 72nd highest in the world for girls and 91st highest in the world for boys in 2022.
- In the USA, the obesity rate increased from 11.6% in 1990 to 19.4% in 2022 for girls and 11.5% to 21.7% in 2022 for boys. The prevalence of obesity in the UK ranked 22nd highest in the world for girls and 26th highest in the world for boys in 2022.
- In China, the obesity rate increased from 0.6% in 1990 to 7.7% in 2022 for girls and 1.3% to 15.2% in 2022 for boys. The prevalence of obesity in China ranked 99th lowest (102nd highest) in the world for girls and 70th highest in the world for boys in 2022.
- In India, the obesity rate increased from 0.1% in 1990 to 3.1% in 2022 for girls and 0.1% to 3.9% in 2022 for boys. The prevalence of obesity in India ranked 27th lowest (174th highest) in the world for both girls and boys in 2022.
- Countries with the highest prevalence of underweight in 2022 were India and Sri Lanka for girls and Niger and India for boys, where more than 15% of the child and adolescent population were living with obesity.
- In China, the underweight rate decreased from 5.8% in 1990 to 3.3% in 2022 for girls and 6.8% to 4.0% in 2022 for boys. The prevalence of underweight in China ranked 93rd highest in the world for girls and 89th lowest (112th highest) in the world for boys in 2022.
- In India, the underweight rate decreased from 27.3% in 1990 to 20.3% in 2022 for girls and 45.1% to 21.7% in 2022 for boys. The prevalence of underweight in India ranked highest in the world for girls and 2nd highest in the world for boys in 2022.

The General Director of the World Health Organisation (WHS), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, says “This new study highlights the importance of preventing and managing obesity from early life to adulthood, through diet, physical activity, and adequate care, as needed,” and adds “Getting back on track to meet the global targets for curbing obesity will take the

work of governments and communities, supported by evidence-based policies from WHO and national public health agencies. Importantly, it requires the cooperation of the private sector, which must be accountable for the health impacts of its products.

Study co-author Dr. Guha Pradeepa, of the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation, states that there is a risk

of major global issues contributing to worsening malnourishment for both overweight and underweight individuals. “The impact of problems like climate change, the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine is contributing to the spike in the number of overweight and underweight people. At the same time, there is an increase in poverty and the prices of healthy food,” she states. “The knock-on effects of all this are the lack of food for some regions and families, and the switch to less healthy foods in other places.

The network of over 1,500 researchers, cooperating with the WHO, analyzed the height and weight of 220 million people, aged 5 years and above, using a measure called body mass index (BMI). Although BMI is an imperfect measure of body fat, and some countries have better measurement indices and data, it remains the most widely used parameter, enabling analysis to provide a clearer global picture.

According to the Italian media, obesity and undernutrition are the two sides of a single coin – that of mal-nourishment. Malnourishment involves under-nutrition in all its forms: from underweight conditions, with extremes such as growth arrest and starvation, to mineral and vitamin deficiency, overweight conditions, and obesity.

The countries with the highest scores for both obesity and underweight conditions in 2022 are the island nations of the Pacific, Caribbean, Middle East, and North Africa. At the 2022 World Health Assembly, the member states adopted a strategy to tackle obesity, aiming to sustain all national actions up until 2030. As of today, 31 governments are leading the way in the fight against the obesity epidemic through the implementation of those actions. ■



The Muslim World League

Congratulates Muslims across the world on
the advent of the new Hijri year
May Allah make it a year full of prosperity and
blessings for all

رَبطَةُ الْعَالَمِ الْإِسْلَامِيِّ

MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE



PEACE

