

# I.I.S.I.C. Bulletin

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## EDITORIAL

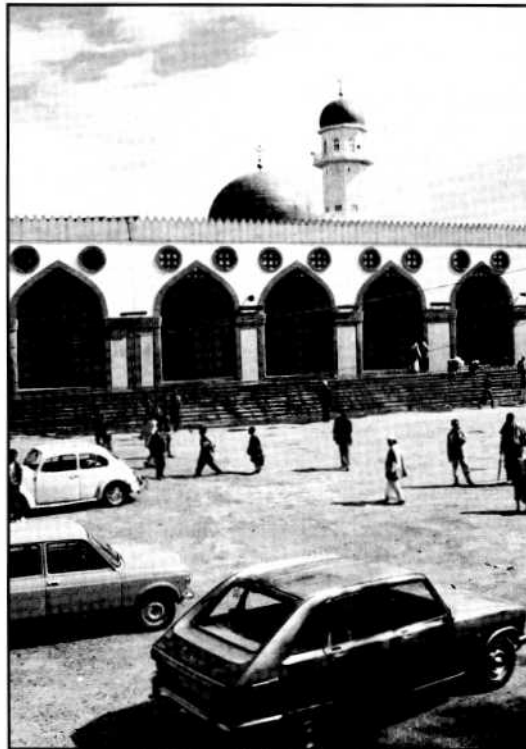
It is rare for the issues with which *IISIC Bulletin* is concerned to hit the headlines in the western media. But this has been so in the case of Salamat Masih, the 14-year old Pakistani Christian boy, sentenced to death for blasphemy against Muhammad. While we all rejoice at his subsequent acquittal, it is sobering indeed to consider that this young country lad, described by his mother as "a simple, quiet child", has had to leave his village and his country, probably for ever, to live in the West, without even any certainty of his security there.

The virulence of the Islamic extremists in Pakistan is almost incredible, the courage of the High Court judges who acquitted Salamat and his uncle Rehmat correspondingly impressive. "Kill whoever protects or defends the blasphemers", "Benazir Bhutto-bitch" and "The judges must also hang" are a sample of the slogans shouted by thousands of extremists outraged at the acquittal. To quote Bernard Levin in *The Times*, "Is Islam so fragile a religion that it must kill children for imaginary slurs?"

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is not the only moderate Muslim ruler to be facing increasing problems from Islamic militants. Shortly before the death sentence on Salamat Masih and his uncle was announced, NATO secretary-general Willy Claes had warned that he considers radical Islam to be "at least as dangerous as communism was". It is certainly evolving and developing in such a way as to become an increasingly effective power in the world. While in the past many who joined the ranks of the Islamists came from situations of desperate poverty, and were attracted by the social welfare programmes of the Islamists, more and more are now coming from the well-educated middle or upper classes. Many indeed have been educated in the West. The significant new force in

Afghanistan, the Taliban, is an army of Islamic theology students.

## *Echoes from history*



*Al Anwar Mosque, Addis Ababa, scene of violent clashes on 21 February, see page 9*

Christianity was brought to the African kingdom of Baganda (part of modern Uganda) by Victorian missionaries from Europe. A number of the brightest young boys who served King Mutesa as pages became Christians. When Mutesa died he was succeeded by his son Mwanga, who was a Muslim and immediately forbade his subjects to follow Christianity on pain of death. Many of the young pages refused to obey. They were wrapped in grass matting, tied into bundles and burnt alive at Natete (near Kampala). As they were being led to the place of execution, they sang the hymn "Bulijno tutendereza mu kibuga kyafe" ("Daily, daily, sing the praises").

The echoes of the Baganda martyrs' experience are all around us in the world today. Young Salamat Masih escaped death by hanging in Pakistan but remains

in danger of assassination by zealous Islamists in Europe. His parents report that soon after Salamat and his uncles

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were accused of blasphemy, 100 Muslims came with torches and tried to burn their house down. "They said that if we wanted to save Salamat and the others, we all had to convert to Islam. We would rather die." Reports from Upper Egypt speak of a new development in Islamist violence - rather than simply burning down church buildings, the extremists are now said to be attempting to burn them down with the Christians inside. And in Uganda itself, where King Mwanga's page boys were martyred, 110 children have been abducted and sold as slaves to aid a "semi-Christian" group in league with the Islamic Khartoum government over the last few months.

## **ALGERIA, HER NEIGHBOURS AND EUROPE**

### *The war*

As the conflict in Algeria enters its fourth year, the weekly death toll has risen to well over 500, say diplomatic sources. It is now estimated that at least 30,000 people have died since the violence began between Islamists and the military government after the abrupt cancellation of elections which the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) looked sure to win.

The war is being conducted with increasing cruelty by both sides. Many are killed by having their throats slit or their heads cut off. The first suicide car-bombing occurred on 30 January 1995 outside the police headquarters in Amrouche Street, Algiers - 42 people were killed and 256 were injured, many of the injured losing limbs. It is claimed that the bomber in this, the single most deadly attack in the conflict so far, was sixteen years old. In February a taxi-driver was buried alive by Islamic militants. The Islamists target intellectuals, artists, journalists and unveiled women. They will board buses in Algiers and demand to see the passengers' identity papers; anyone carrying documents showing them to be government officials, doctors or journalists are taken off the bus and murdered. The security forces target young men who look like terrorists, and shoot, imprison or torture them with little concern to establish their guilt or innocence.

Each side has infiltrated the other. It is difficult to know whether claims of responsibility for violent incidents are genuine or faked. The police set up checkpoints. The Islamists set up false checkpoints. The talk in downtown Algiers is that the bearded men are all undercover policemen, while the clean-shaven men in suits and ties are members of the Islamist groups in disguise. The security forces seem to be killing each other as well as suspected terrorists.

The Islamic Salvation Army (AIS), the armed wing of the FIS, ordered its supporters to step up their killings during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan (which this year more or

less coincided with February). Recalling that the number of killings during Ramadan 1994 was three times greater than in the average month, it threatened to kill 5,000 people this Ramadan. Tracts being circulated urged: "Carry on, you mujahedin [warriors], and remember God's goodness, fight the apostates and their henchmen. Have no fear and ... don't be troubled if the tyrant overwhelms you because he has promised that you will go to paradise." The Armed Islamic Group (GIA), the most extreme militants in Algeria, also pledged to increase attacks on intellectuals, "to fight words by the sword".

On 22 February a prison revolt in the notorious Serkadji prison, in Algiers, was crushed by the security forces. In the process, at least 95 prisoners were killed, most of them Islamists, and four guards had their throats slit. Among the dead inmates were Lembarek Boumaarafi, imprisoned in Serkadji for the assassination of President Boudiaf in 1992 and various Islamist leaders. Islamists claim that the event was engineered by the authorities.

### *Peace?*

Last year Algerian President Liamine Zeroual attempted to open a dialogue with two FIS leaders. But the talks foundered over issues such as the future role of the army, the nature of a transitional regime, and the status of an estimated 10,000 political prisoners.

In January 1995 the Community of Sant'Egidio, an influential Roman Catholic peace group, brought together Algeria's eight main opposition groups (Islamic and secular, outlawed and legal), including the FIS, for talks in Rome. These groups represented more than 80% of the Algerian electorate in the December 1991. A joint declaration was published on 13 January, demanding a speedy restoration of democracy and a national peace conference to pave the way for multi-party elections. It also pledged respect for freedom for all religions. However, the Algerian government rejected the agreement, even before it was announced, and condemned the whole initiative as "outside interference". Shortly afterwards the GIA and the AIS also dissociated themselves from the agreement.

On 3 February, French President Francois Mitterand proposed that the European Union should follow up the Rome peace proposal by hosting a conference on Algeria. The Algerian government responded by summoning the French Ambassador to complain about interference in Algeria's domestic affairs. Mitterand's suggestion was not developed further.

The Algerian government is proposing to hold presidential elections in late 1995, but most of the opposition groups have already announced their refusal to participate. The second highest official of the FIS, Ali Belhadj, has warned from prison that the holding of presidential elections will lead to an even more violent confrontation between the Islamic militants and the security forces.



## *Algeria's neighbours*

Tunisia and Morocco, Algeria's immediate neighbours to east and west, are determined to prevent the Algerian conflict spreading across the borders to them. The tourist industry is an important source of foreign currency for both Tunisia and Morocco. They are anxious that it should not decline in the way that Egypt's tourist industry has done as a result of Egyptian Islamist threats and attacks on foreigners. Last year two Spanish tourists were shot dead in a Marrakesh hotel, apparently by Algerian Islamists, and Moroccan tourism has subsequently dropped by about 20%. Tunisia has managed to hush up the mysterious death of a tourist at the resort of Hammamet around Christmas.

Both Tunisia and Morocco are now requiring would-be Algerian visitors to obtain a visa. Indeed, Tunisia is deporting almost all foreign workers (especially Algerians) as security risks. It has banned the Islamic Party an-Nahda and is reported to have imprisoned up to 8,000 of its members and supporters.

Tunisian Islamists claim that hundreds of their followers are crossing the Algerian border to join the Algerian Islamists. The ultimate aim, according to one Tunisian Islamist, is for them to train and then return to Tunisia to carry on the Islamist fight there.

On 11 February, six Tunisian national guardsmen at a border post near Sendes in the south of the country had their throats cut by Algerian Islamists, as did the Algerian civilian whom the Tunisians had invited to join them for the evening meal as they broke their day's fast.

This, the first attack by Algerian militants on Tunisian soil, was followed a day later by an attack in the Ain Drahem region in the north of Tunisia.

Although these could have been random attacks by militants seeking to equip themselves with more weapons and ammunition, Tunisian Islamists claim that these attacks are part of a new strategy aimed at deliberately involving Tunisia because of its support for the Algerian government. Rashid Ghannouchi, the exiled Tunisian Islamist leader now living in London, claimed that the Tunisian government has "intervened" in the Algerian conflict by providing the Algerian government with "anti-terrorism specialists". This assertion is backed up by rumours circulating amongst Algerian officials that after a shoot-out between Islamic militants and Algerian security forces, the militants discovered Tunisian identity papers in the pockets of one of the apparently Algerian soldiers they had killed.

## *Europe*

The escalation of brutality in Algeria has direct repercussions not only for its next door neighbours, but also for Europe.

The French Interior Minister, Charles Pasqua, has warned of

a wave of Islamist violence on the streets of France, which has a large North African community. In Britain, David Atkinson, MP for Bournemouth, predicts victory for Islamic extremists in Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt by the end of 1995, followed by a huge influx of refugees to southern Europe. He also predicts that European governments will respond by clamping down on their known Islamic extremists, which will lead to "riots in the cities of Europe, with much bloodshed".

The Islamic militants are increasingly aggressive to European and other western countries. The GIA warned more than a year ago that all foreigners would be killed unless they left the country. The AIS says that war against France (Algeria's colonial ruler for 132 years) has become "a legitimate duty", although the war will not be taken to targets on French soil.

In January this year British, German and American diplomats were informed that unless they closed their embassies by 7 January they and other foreigners in Algeria would be killed. This warning was given in a letter signed by several Islamist groups.

In March the GIA threatened Brussels with reprisals for breaking up an Islamist network in Belgium.

## *The impact on Christians*

Christians are a particular target of the Islamist violence in Algeria. It is reported that the aims of the FIS include "purifying" Algeria of non-Muslims, including Christians, Jews and Communists. The GIA has declared a campaign of "annihilation and physical liquidation of Christian crusaders".

Several expatriate Christians have been killed, and the indigenous Algerian church is feeling increasingly vulnerable. A number of Christians have received individual threats. It is reported a "death sentence" on one Algerian Christian leader was announced at a certain mosque. Algiers is considered particularly dangerous for Christians at the moment. The only Christian bookshop in Algeria, which had been situated in Algiers, closed down in March 1994 after its staff were told they would "disappear" unless they closed. Some Christians are thought to have fled the country, but others are resolved to stay.

While the Ramadan rhetoric of the AIS, which urged the killing of "apostates and their henchmen", was an insulting reference to Algeria's (Muslim) elite, virtually all Algerian Christians are literally apostates from Islam. According to Islamic law, which the Islamist groups would like to see enforced, all adult male apostates from Islam should be killed.

Some expatriate Christians in Morocco predict that the persecution of Christians in Morocco is likely to increase as the Moroccan government seeks to appease Islamist sentiments in its country and thus prevent a violent Algeria-style confrontation. Certainly Moroccan legislation



would lead to the severe harassment of Christians (who are effectively all converts from Islam) if enforced rigorously.

Even North African Christians in France who have converted from Islam are growing increasingly fearful.

1 Many Christians across the world will be praying for Tunisia on 1 April. Join with them in prayer for the tiny, beleaguered Tunisian Church.

2 The Tunisian government is strenuously promoting the image of Tunisia as a safe and stable country in order to protect its tourist industry. A major means of achieving this image is by strict government control of the foreign press and by expelling foreign correspondents who produce critical reports. Pray that the government may find effective means to create genuine and permanent peace, stability and freedom and that Islamist violence would not take root in this country.

3 The armed conflict in Algeria continues to escalate. Extremists on both sides seem to have an insatiable appetite for cruelty and killing. While the Islamists have warned of more violence if the government presses ahead with its plans for presidential elections, army hardliners (known as "eradicators") seem to have a definite preference for war rather than peace. Pray that God would change these leaders' attitudes and give them a desire for peace.

4 A number of peace initiatives seeking to bring an end to the Algerian conflict have all foundered. Pray that a way may be found **soon** to stop the brutality and bloodshed.

5 Pray for the growing Algerian Church (numbering several thousand), which is very much a target of the Islamists' violence. Pray that Christians may have courage and confidence in such troubled times. Pray also for the tiny Jewish minority (about 100) who are similarly a target of the Islamists.

6 It appears that the Moroccan authorities may step up the persecution of Christians as part of their anti-Islamist strategy. Pray for the protection of Moroccan Christians and expatriate Christians in Morocco. Pray that their faith may not fail.

## AFGHANISTAN: THE TALIBAN

The nine mujahedin rebel factions in Afghanistan, who have been feuding amongst themselves since the overthrow of the communist regime in April 1992, are "falling like ninepins" before the advance of a militia of Islamic theological students. The students are known as the Taliban (literally

"religious students" or "seekers of truth").

The Taliban are Pashtuns (also called Pathans), recruited mainly from Afghan refugee camps along the Pakistan border, where various Muslim countries have funded Qur'anic schools. As they have advanced across Afghanistan their ranks have been swollen by many guerrillas from the rebel factions. Estimates of their current numbers vary from 4,000 to 25,000. They are reported to have between 100 and 200 tanks and armoured vehicles, plus helicopters and jet fighters.

The leader of the Taliban is Maulana Mohammad Omar, a reformist cleric from Kandahar, 280 miles south-west of Kabul. A *shura* (council) in Kandahar has authority over the Taliban. Although the Taliban assert that they have no foreign backing, it is believed that they have links with radical Islamic groups in Pakistan, and possibly with other countries. There are also allegations that the Pakistani government has supplied them with funds and arms, but this is denied by officials in Islamabad.

The Taliban are keeping clear of the ethnic and political rivalry in which the nine mujahedin factions are embroiled. They have denounced all nine factions as "criminals" who have "betrayed" the Afghans' trust, and are demanding that all the mujahedin lay down their arms. Their aim is to establish a neutral peace-keeping force in Kabul and then to hold elections.

The Taliban first emerged as a military organization in late October 1994, when they numbered just 800. By the middle of February they had gained control of the southern third of the country. It appears that because of the religious mystique of the Taliban, many rebel fighters have been reluctant to attack them, and have simply retreated, surrendered or joined them.

One of their most dramatic successes was to drive out Hizbe Islami, the main rebel group, from its stronghold at Charasyab, eighteen miles south of Kabul. Led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Hizbe Islami had been shelling Kabul daily, while the capital's defenders, under President Burhanuddin Rabbani, had been unable to repel them, despite air raids and offensives. Remarkably, Hekmatyar fled after a few artillery blasts from the advancing Taliban.

However, it is worth noting that the nine provinces (out of a total of 30 in Afghanistan) which the Taliban control are exclusively Pashtun. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar is also a Pashtun. In contrast, Kabul is held by Tajik forces and beyond that are Uzbeks, so further progress may not be so easy. At the time of going to press, the Taliban have just suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Tajik forces in Kabul.

The Taliban are popular with the war-weary Afghan population. Roads previously controlled by warlords and bandits have been opened up by the Taliban to allow supplies of food and fuel to reach the starving inhabitants of Kabul. They have not plundered or mindlessly slaughtered



as they have advanced, and they have not taken hostages. Like mullahs of old, the Taliban commanders have gone from house to house asking for alms. Very unusually in a country where revenge and honour are inextricably linked,

are an element of peace since they put pressure on the parties and they make them in a rather embarrassing situation, not just politically but militarily. So this may accelerate the process of peace, some day but not very

soon." The Taliban are already bringing some law and order to the nine provinces they control. On the other hand, Mahmoud Mestiri also asserted that the rebel groups are using the presence of the Taliban as an excuse to delay implementation of the UN peace plan.

8 Prior to the fall of the communist regime in 1992, there were known to be a number of Afghan Christians in Kabul. Some have been killed, some are in prison, and some have fled to Pakistan. Whether a stable Islamic regime emerges, or whether the present anarchy continues, they are in danger. Pray for their safety and protection.

9 The conflict in Afghanistan has been a training ground for many Islamic terrorists now active in other parts of the world. Pray that God may step in and make this country a source of blessing to the world, not a source of violence and destruction.



the Taliban have refrained from killing captured enemy soldiers. Nor have they preached against other ethnic groups. In the areas they control, they have stopped highway robberies.

The rapid appearance of the Taliban on the Afghan scene has considerably complicated the United Nations peace plan, according to which President Rabbani was to have handed over power to an interim council on 20 February. The Taliban's regional commander, Mullah Boorjan, has insisted that all members of the interim council must be good Muslims and that any future government must be Islamic.

Perhaps some indication of the way a Taliban-backed government would function is given by reports that they have executed drug dealers and burned thousands of acres of opium poppies in the area they control. It is also reported that they forbid women to work or to go outdoors unless veiled and accompanied by a male relative. They have smashed TV sets, banned chess and other board games and various sporting events, and ordered on-the-spot trims for men with unkempt hair.

7 Pray for peace in this war-ravaged country. According to the United Nations' special envoy to Afghanistan, Mahmoud Mestiri, "The Taliban

## TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan is being targeted by Muslim radicals in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran as the first step in an Islamic conquest of Central Asia. Such, at least, is the view of the United States, Russia and Tajikistan's neighbour, Uzbekistan.

The extremist Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), which functioned for more than a decade as an underground movement in Soviet Central Asia, became a legal political party after Tajikistan gained independence from Moscow in 1991, and called publicly for an Islamic state. A civil war the following year (which left tens of thousands dead and more than half a million refugees out of a total population of five million) ended with Dushanbe under the control of certain clans of former communists, while the IRP fled to Afghanistan. Islamic parties are now banned, press freedoms restricted, and dissidents either in jail or in exile. Although elections were held before and after the civil war, it is not surprising that the inhabitants of Dushanbe equate democracy with chaos!



While all this has been going on, Tajiks have been enjoying an Islamic revival. Thousands of mosques are believed to have been built, many with funding from Saudi Arabia or Iran.

The IRP are waging a guerrilla war under the instruction of Afghan mujahedin. Some observers believe that Ahmed Shah Massoud, an Afghan warlord and an ethnic Tajik, must be pressurizing the IRP to adopt a more radical agenda embracing the whole of Central Asia. Others consider that the IRP is growing less extreme rather than more extreme. A Tajik journalist believes the IRP has moderated its position in the last two years: "We Tajiks have come to learn that unity should be our main purpose. Once the stolen fruit of religion was sweet, but now it is poison."

Nevertheless Uzbekistan fears the spread of radical political Islam from Tajikistan into Uzbekistan, where ethnic Tajiks live in the Islamic holy cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. It is therefore supporting the Russian-backed hardline regime in Tajikistan, under President Rakhmonov.

**10** Although Tajik religious leaders play down the notion of a grand Islamic plan to work out from Tajikistan and conquer the whole of Central Asia, many observers are fearful that this is indeed the case. Pray that God will intervene and halt the spread of radical Islam in this region.

**11** Pray in particular for Kazakhstan, which has a Muslim majority, but a constitution which guarantees secularism. The government has consistently disavowed Islamic extremism. Interest in Christianity is growing rapidly amongst the Russian community, especially amongst young people. In the past twelve years the number of Russian Orthodox churches has grown from 40 to 200, and eight more are planned. There is a great demand for bibles. The Bible Society in Kazakhstan, which was established last year, also undertakes work in the neighbouring republic of Kyrgyzstan.

## PAKISTAN

Two Pakistani Christians, Salamat Masih (14), and his uncle, Rehmat Masih, were found guilty of blasphemy against Muhammad (Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code) and sentenced to death on 9 February 1995. On 15, 16 and 20 February their appeal went to the High Court and they were acquitted on 23 February. Because of threats from Islamic extremists they have now left Pakistan for refuge in Europe.

The alleged incident of blasphemy took place on 9 May 1993 at the village of Ratta Dhotran, near Gujranwala. Salamat was reported to have written anti-Muslim slogans on the wall of the village mosque and thrown into the mosque pieces of paper inscribed with derogatory remarks about Muhammad. He is said to have done this at the

instigation of his two uncles, Rehmat Masih and Manzoor Masih.

In the climate of Islamist fervour which has developed in Pakistan, someone accused of blasphemy will never be safe again. Any zealous radical may decide to "take the law into his own hands" and kill the alleged blasphemer, whether or not their guilt has been proved. Salamat Masih's second uncle, Manzoor Masih, who was arrested with Salamat and Rehmat in May 1993, was shot and killed by extremists when he left the Lahore High Court on 5 April 1994, after having been granted bail. Salamat, Rehmat and a supporter of theirs were all injured in this attack.

Others accused of blasphemy, both Muslims and non-Muslims, have also been murdered before the due processes of law had been completed. There are more than 300 cases of blasphemy pending in various courts across Pakistan, some 30 of which involve Christians.

Most if not all complainants who have registered cases under the blasphemy law in recent years appear to have had a personal grudge against the accused. This seems to have been true in the case of the two uncles and their nephew.

On 6 May 1994, the Federal Law minister announced two amendments to the Blasphemy Law designed to discourage false accusations and prevent the exploitation of suspects by the police. However, this announcement aroused so much opposition from the Islamic political parties that the amendments were dropped. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto says that discussions on the issue are still continuing, with a view to amending the procedures of the Blasphemy Law, but she will not consider repealing the law itself.

**12** Praise God for the acquittal of Salamat and Rehmat Masih, and pray for their safety in Europe. Pray for their relatives and other Christians from their village who have suffered such severe harassment from Muslims in the village that almost all have moved elsewhere. Salamat's father, Alladitaa Masih, sold his four cows to pay for his son's legal expenses, and is now seeking part-time work in the town of Gujranwala.

**13** Pray for Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto that she may be successful in introducing amendments to the Blasphemy Law to prevent its malicious misuse. Pray that she may even change her mind and be willing to consider abolishing the law itself.

**14** Pray for the Pakistani judiciary that they will refuse to be intimidated by Islamic extremists who often pack their courtrooms in cases of blasphemy etc. Pray for their protection and for the protection of all who have been falsely accused of blasphemy. Pray that the tide of Islamist fervour in Pakistan may turn. Pray that the Christian community in Pakistan may continue to show restraint and self-control.



## SAUDI ARABIA

### *Economics and stability*

The stability of Saudi Arabia is under threat from a combination of economic, political and religious factors, many of which are repercussions from the 1990-1991 Gulf war.

There is great resentment amongst Saudis towards the United States and Britain. Both are making multi-billion weapons sales to the Saudis, while simultaneously urging Saudi Arabia to prune its expenditure. A former diplomat said, "The United States is a dangerous lover. It will squeeze you dry." British and American leaders who visit Saudi Arabia are commonly described as "blackmailers" or "bloodsuckers", cynically selling inappropriate weaponry to a Saudi Arabia always desperate to improve its security, simply in order to help the British and American economies.

The kingdom's economic health has seriously deteriorated since the early 1980s when it held official reserves of \$150bn. The Iran-Iraq war cost the Saudi budget \$25bn in loans to Iraq which were not repaid. The Gulf war cost a further \$70bn. Oil prices have fallen. The GDP has not increased, whereas the population is growing at 3-4% per annum.

The recession of the last two years has meant that money spent on defence (30% of the official budget, perhaps much higher in reality) has to be found by cutting back in other areas, for example by simply not paying companies for work done. Nevertheless funding for Islamic extremists across the world has continued, both directly (through the government) and indirectly (by wealthy individuals).

Last year's budget was cut by 19%, and in January King Fahd announced a further 6% budget cut for the coming year. The middle classes are aggrieved. They have been accustomed to free healthcare, free education up to university level, and a free telephone service. Utilities have been heavily subsidized, fuel and basic food commodities have been available at a fraction of their true cost, and internal air travel has cost almost nothing. The government offers interest-free loans for new homes, and free farm land to anyone willing to cultivate it. All these benefits are under threat from the budget cuts.

A new five-year plan came into effect on 1 January 1995. This aims to balance revenues and expenditure and will substantially reduce subsidies. (Petrol prices have already doubled.) It also aims to make the economy more dependent on the private sector and to reduce dependence on oil as the main source of income.

Another economy measure concerns the 4.5 million expatriates. Contrary to government plans, the proportion of expatriates in the work force has been growing. In recent years the majority of expatriates have come from Asia,

having largely replaced westerners, who had required higher salaries. Now there is an influx of even cheaper labour, particularly Eritreans who are offered jobs on condition they embrace Islam. "Illegal" foreign workers were ordered to leave Saudi Arabia by 18 December 1994. Some observers see this as an attempt to put the blame for the country's economic woes and unemployment on the presence of these workers. Saudis are to be urged to take on the private-sector jobs now performed by expatriates. This process is given a helping hand by placing restrictions on the jobs which expatriates can do. For example, most drivers used to be Filipinos, but this is now a job reserved for Saudis.

Without the generous benefits which they have received until now, Saudi citizens may no longer accept the dictatorial rule of the King and the 5,000 princes of the House of Saud. Thus the supply of arms to Saudi Arabia, supposed to ensure the stability of the regime, may in fact have the reverse effect. A leading diplomat commented that if these benefits to the middle classes were to be withdrawn, the royal family would probably be displaced before the end of the century, by either a military or (more likely) an Islamist regime.

The personal financial difficulties which many people are beginning to experience are turning people towards radical Islam. They blame the banking system for their problems and refuse to pay up.

The national economic situation has grown so desperate that Saudi Arabia actually refused to pay the share requested by the USA in the cost of deploying western troops in Saudi Arabia when Iraq moved troops towards the border with Kuwait in October 1994.

OPEC, the world oil cartel, of which Saudi Arabia is a key member, has announced that it will not increase output. Since demand is expected to increase in the coming years, this will drive up world oil prices. Some observers predict a doubling of real crude prices in the next ten years. If this occurs it will be a serious setback to the now-growing economies in the USA, Europe and Asia.

### *The rise in Islamic extremism*

Islamists condemn the corruption of the royal family, the growing closeness of the relationship between Riyadh and Washington since the Gulf war, the growing gap between the rich and the rest, and the suppression of free speech.

Islamist clerics are continually calling for still more stringent measures. Women are being increasingly harassed. Unofficial private Christian worship continues to be closely monitored.

In September 1994, the Saudi authorities arrested 157 radical Islamic activists in Bureida, in the Islamist heartland of Nejd (north of Riyadh). The government has also reduced the subsidies it used to pay farmers in Bureida for



their wheat. Some see this as an attempt to punish the province for its opposition to the government.

The prominent Islamist dissident, Muhammad Al-Masari, fled to London a year ago. The British Home Office refused his application for asylum, but he took his case to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal which decided on 7 March to uphold his appeal. The government, highly embarrassed by this rebuff, can take the appeal further if it chooses, even to the House of Lords. Mr Al-Masari's organization, the Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights (CDLR), is conducting its campaign against the Saudi authorities by means of a stream of faxes and phonecalls from London to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Interior Minister, Prince Nayef Bin Abdul Aziz, a brother of King Fahd, has made plain his desire that Britain would take steps to halt this campaign.

Mr Al-Masari shrewdly speaks to westerners in terms of "human rights". Indeed, in the USA the CDLR is known as the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights. However, the Arabic word translated "legitimate" or "human" derives from the same root as *Shari'ah* (Islamic law). The rights which the CDLR is seeking to defend are therefore only those defined in the *Shari'ah*, which fall far short of a western understanding of human rights. According to *The Independent* (13 December 1994) "the effects of his Islamic programme on Saudi Arabia would be twofold at least. First would come the imposition of a fundamentalist agenda: even sterner restrictions upon women, a crackdown on the modest liberalization allowed to the middle classes and a retreat into xenophobia and righteous isolation. A second effect would be to break up the tribal structures which have bound the kingdom together since 1932 and, almost certainly, to hasten its dissolution. Strict Wahhabi fundamentalists abhor Shia Muslims who make up most of the population around Saudi Arabia's oilfields. A conflict would be almost inevitable, with the attendant risks of involving Shia Iran and disrupting the flow of oil from the Gulf. Western governments could then feel compelled to intervene."

If an Islamist regime does gain power, this would probably de-rail the Middle East peace process, which Saudi Arabia is currently nudging forward. It would also prevent any future deployment of American forces in Saudi Arabia, should any threat from Iraq or Iran make this expedient.

**15** Saudi liberals feel betrayed by the West who are so vociferous in condemnation of, for example, Libya's Col. Gaddafi, but seem determined to support and keep in power the equally dictatorial King Fahd. Yet the fall of the Saudi royal family would have immense repercussions throughout the region and, in terms of oil, probably throughout the whole world. Pray that Britain, the USA and other western powers would be wise in their dealings with Saudi Arabia and would not forget issues of justice and human rights.

Pray that God, to whom the nations are like a drop from a bucket or dust on the scales, would be in control (Isaiah 40:15).

**16** The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Abdel-Aziz bin Baz, issued a *fatwa* in December 1994 which sanctioned the possibility of the Palestinians making peace with Israel. This aroused controversy in Islamic circles, as it contradicted several earlier *fatwas* which had prohibited Muslims from dealing with Israel. It was considered to indicate a shift in Saudi Arabia's Middle East policy. Indeed, as a result of pressure from Gulf extremists, the *fatwa* was modified. (Two years ago, Sheikh bin Baz, who for the past 20 years has been head of the Saudi Authority for Scientific Research, *Da'wa* [propagation of Islam] and *Fatwa*, issued a *fatwa* that the earth is flat.) Pray that the December *fatwa* may prove to be a step towards peace in the Middle East.

**17** Pray for Christians in Saudi Arabia, who are officially banned from worshipping even in private. Pray that they may be protected as they meet together. Pray especially for Saudi Christians who are even more vulnerable than expatriates. Pray that western embassies in Saudi Arabia may offer support to the Christian community.

**18** Saudi television does not encourage a positive attitude towards non-Muslims. Two quotes from English-language programmes broadcast on 16 September 1994 are typical. "Aren't they (the Jews) the killers of the prophets? Didn't they try to kill Jesus Christ, may Allah's peace and blessing be upon him? Didn't they destroy the Scriptures and the Revelation of Allah? Aren't they trying to spread corruption on the earth?" "Give poor Christian relatives *zakat* [alms] not because they're close to you, only because you want them closer to Islam, so that they would say, 'Islam is a good religion. It does take care of people.'" Pray that, despite such input, Saudis may learn to tolerate other faiths.

**19** In a recent incident in Saudi Arabia, a group of western women out shopping were followed by a crowd of abusive Saudi men, angry because the women had not covered their heads. This crowd became in turn the focus of abuse from a second crowd formed of people who were indignant about the treatment of the women. Pray that the influence of liberal elements in Saudi society may be greater than the influence of extremists.

## THE FORGOTTEN HOLOCAUST

This year sees the eightieth anniversary of the Ottoman





massacre of the Armenian and Assyrian Christians of Turkey in 1915. In order to establish a single, ethnically pure, pan-Turkic state which included the Turkic peoples of Iran and Russian Central Asia, the Turkish authorities decided to remove the non-Turkic peoples who stood in the way. Thus, the order was given to deport virtually the entire Armenian and Assyrian Christian populations of eastern Asia Minor to Syria and Iraq, then part of the Ottoman Empire, and to massacre many of them. By the end of the year, 1,500,000 Armenians and 250,000 Assyrians had been exterminated. Many women were raped and children were kidnapped to be brought up as Muslims.

Although mainly racist in character, the genocide was also sectarian. Around 200,000 Armenians avoided deportation and massacre by converting to Islam. The Kurds, who were Muslim but non-Turkic, were not attacked, but rather were invited to assist in the genocide, which they did. Churches were destroyed or defiled by being turned into barns. A serious attempt was made to destroy every vestige of Christian identity in the region.

Turkey to this day refuses to admit that the genocide took place, despite the fact that the Kurds have both admitted their role in the massacres and officially apologized for it.

**20** Around the world the Armenian and Assyrian diasporas will be commemorating the genocide on 24 April. Hitler justified his policies on the grounds that the world did nothing when the Turks massacred the Armenians, so it would do nothing to stop his plans to eliminate the Jews. Let us pray that the memory of this genocide, the greatest martyrdom of our Christian brothers and sisters this century, may spur the international community to take a bold and firm stance against the attitudes which lead to such outrages.

## ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia, because of its strategic geographical position between Arab North Africa and the rest of Africa, continues to face pressure from Islamic powers, particularly Iran, Sudan and Saudi Arabia.

### *Peace talks*

A series of meetings between the Ethiopian government and four opposition political parties took place in Washington from 6 to 9 February 1995. The opposition parties represented were the Oromo Liberation Front, the Southern Ethiopia Peoples' Democratic Coalition, the All Amhara People's Organization and the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces.

According to the statement issued by Congressman Harry Johnston who headed the Congressional Task Force on Ethiopia under whose auspices the meetings were held, "the discussions were conducted in an open and serious manner and reflected the strong desire of all parties to resolve their

differences". Although little solid progress was made, further meetings are planned in Ethiopia in the near future.

The Ethiopian government is holding multiparty state and national assembly elections on 7 May, but opposition groups are planning to boycott the polls.

### *Violence at Al Anwar Mosque*

Violence flared up between two rival Muslim groups at Addis Ababa's largest mosque on 21 February. The two groups, representing moderates and extremists respectively, both claimed to represent Ethiopia's Islamic Affairs Supreme Council. According to official figures, sixteen people were killed, 120 wounded (including women, children and seven policemen) and 50 arrested. Other sources give higher figures. Some shops were burnt down, and police and other vehicles set on fire. The authorities responded by closing off the whole area, closing all the mosques in Addis Ababa, and strongly warning the rival groups to stop such behaviour.

**21** Pray that future discussions on the democratic process in Ethiopia may be more productive. The run-up to the elections on 7 May is bound to be a time of tension; pray that there will be no physical violence.

**22** Ethiopia is fraught by ethnic and religious tensions. All too often these result in physical violence. Pray for peace and harmony in this nation of more than 80 different ethnic groups, where Christians and Muslims are present in roughly equal numbers.

## SUDAN

The story of Sudan sounds to many like a litany of war, famine and peace talks that seem to go nowhere. The danger is that the world ... is learning to live with the scale of suffering in Sudan. We want to break that complacency - *Pierre Sane, Secretary-General of Amnesty International*

How do you expect us to introduce equality when inequality is the will of God? - *Lt.-Gen. Omar al-Bashir, President of Sudan*

The horrors of Sudan continue unabated, while the various players and onlookers subtly manoeuvre. A number of recent developments are significant.

Hostility towards the National Islamic Front (NIF) government in Khartoum is increasing. The economy is weaker than ever, and food is desperately expensive for many, despite good rains and a good harvest. The biggest drain on the economy is the war in the South against rebels who oppose the government's Islamization and Arabization policies. There are some in the NIF who would be willing to give the South self-determination if it would ensure that they themselves remained in power in Khartoum. But the government does not trust its war-weary army and fears to



tell them that all the fighting to keep control of the South has been in vain.

The government is kept in power by two main factors: its security network, which crushes opposition in the North, and the lack of cohesion of the opposition. Security has been reorganized, apparently with help from Paris, and in line with the *Shari'ah* (Islamic law).

On 27 December 1994 a "Declaration of Political Agreement" was signed by various opposition leaders, including John Garang of SPLA-Mainstream, but the signatories do not seem keen to work together. The SPLA fragmented further in February and now consists of four groups.

Despite the disarray of its opposition, the government's position is weakening. A new armed Northern opposition force has emerged. Various factions of the SPLA as well as western officials are beginning to hint that peace with the NIF government will never be possible and a new government in Khartoum is necessary.

How such a change of government could be achieved is unclear. The NIF is planning to hold no-party elections, and political parties remain banned.

Militarily there is more or less a stalemate at the moment. The rebels, whose defeat was widely predicted not long ago, are now well supplied with arms. The donors of these, according to rumour, include the USA, Israel and various Arab nations. Government bombing of civilian targets has increased.

Meanwhile the sufferings of the Sudanese people continue, particularly of the non-Muslims. A report by Amnesty International published in January condemns both the government and the SPLA for widespread atrocities and human rights abuses. The war in the South whose carnage is multiplied by SPLA rivalries, the government's ruthless suppression of all opposition in the North, and the killings and abductions in the Nuba Mountains by both government and rebel forces combine to paint the grimmest picture yet of life in Sudan.

The Sudanese Embassy in London rejected the Amnesty report, chiefly on the grounds that they believed it to be motivated by hatred of Sudan's "Islamic orientation". Similarly, Khartoum accused Washington of being anti-Muslim when Washington accused Khartoum of direct involvement in the World Trade Centre bombing. But it is becoming more difficult for the Sudanese regime to use this argument. The governments of Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt, who are struggling against the Islamist movement, have made it acceptable for Islamism to be criticized in the Muslim world. This in turn makes it easier for non-Muslim nations to criticize Islamic extremists, such as the NIF.

In March the United Nations Human Rights Commission heard evidence from Bishop Macram Max Gassis, of Sudan's Catholic El Obeid Diocese that the Khartoum

government was engaging in "ethnic cleansing" and had "covered its hands with blood" while "making it seem abroad that it was seeking a dialogue between Islam and Christianity". Gaspar Biro, the UN Special Rapporteur, cited human rights abuses by both government and rebel forces. He mentioned the persecution of Christians and animist believers including forced conversions and destruction of their villages, with adults left to live in the desert and children interned in camps.

Sudanese government sources denied all the accusations, but opposed a proposal by Mr Biro (who is himself banned from entering Sudan) to station UN monitors in the country.

23 President al-Bashir's statement that inequality is the will of God is an accurate reflection of Islamic teaching. Non-Muslims and women are **not** considered to be equal to Muslim men. Pray for Christians and other non-Muslims in Sudan, who are suffering greatly under the government's Islamization and Arabization campaigns.

24 The starving people of Chot Bara, a remote village in South Sudan, walked up to Khartoum in February 1994 in response to a government offer of clean clothes and a supply of food to all who would present themselves in the North and sign a paper saying they were willing to convert to Islam and pray in Arabic five times a day. Two months later they walked home. (During the journey they were infected with kala-azar [leishmaniasis], which is usually fatal if untreated.) Pray for Christians and other non-Muslims in Sudan who are faced with a choice between Islam or starvation.

25 On 18 February 1995, junior Health Minister Abdel Halim announced that companies importing drugs containing alcohol (i.e. most liquid medicines) would be punished under *Shari'ah* (Islamic law). Pray that the government's trend towards increasing extremism may be reversed.

26 Pray that the world will not become complacent about the situation in Sudan, and that a way will be found to bring peace, justice and freedom.

### *Uganda and the LRA*

The Sudanese conflict is spilling over into Uganda. On 23 January Sudanese aircraft dropped two bombs near a Ugandan army barracks at Ngomoromo near Kitgum town in the north of Uganda. A Ugandan military spokesman commented that the Sudanese might have attacked in the "mistaken belief" that the 67th battallion stationed there was reinforcing SPLA-Mainstream. This attack came after a number of violations of Ugandan airspace by Sudanese military aircraft. Since then Uganda has declared itself "organized and prepared for any incursions from Sudan".



A rebel Ugandan group called the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) adds a further dimension. This group was formed, shortly after President Museveni took power in 1986, by a female religious leader who promised her followers immunity to bullets. It has a syncretistic ethos and forbids work on Sundays and Wednesdays. They have been waging a low-level guerrilla war in north-east Uganda with the aim of overthrowing the present government and establishing a government that would rule according to the precepts of the Ten Commandments. The current leader is Joseph Kony, a former Roman Catholic catechist.

The LRA is also active in Sudan. They have shot at convoys bringing food to refugees, and they are attacking SPLA-Mainstream. President Museveni has accused the Khartoum government of harbouring members of the LRA, and, according to Ugandan Defence Minister Amama Mbabazi, Sudan is helping the LRA to obtain landmines and anti-tank bombs. Further reports speak of the LRA abducting Ugandan children and selling them into slavery in Sudan in exchange for weapons.

27 The existence of the Lord's Resistance Army, with its somewhat Christian image and its totally brutal behaviour, could be used to undermine the case against the Khartoum government's Islamization policies. Pray that true Christians in Sudan and Uganda may demonstrate the reality of Christian love and Christ-like lives.

## UK

### ***Haven for Islamists***

There is a growing concern that the Algerian situation represents for Europeans a crossroads in terms of European security. France feels itself to be very much on the frontline with respect to Algeria, and is taking strong measures to prevent a terrorist war on its soil. In 1994 more than two dozen Algerians identified as militants were deported from France. The government has stepped up surveillance of Islamic groups, arrested radical leaders, and is working to strengthen the hand of moderate Muslims.

In Britain, on the other hand, many Islamists are finding a safe and convenient base from which to operate. This includes supporters of the main Algerian Islamist group, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), such as Mohammed Dnini, director of the FIS's weekly newspaper. Rashid Ghannouchi, the exiled leader of an-Nahda, a banned Islamic party in Tunisia, is now in London. The case of Muhammad Al-Masari, the Saudi extremist who has been granted asylum in Britain, has been discussed above in the article on Saudi Arabia. A Bahraini dissident, Sheikh Ali Salman, who was deported from Bahrain, arrived in Britain on 17 January. He is a Shi'ite cleric and is believed by the Bahrain government to be in the pay of Iran and dedicated to creating an Islamic government in Bahrain, which, although Sunni-ruled, has a Shi'ite majority. Supporters of

the radical Palestinian group, Hamas, also operate from Britain.

Another significant Muslim leader in Britain at the time of going to press (though not seeking asylum) is Zia Rahman Farouki, leader of a Pakistani organization called the Soldiers of God. This group is virulently anti-Shi'ite and is believed to have been behind many incidents in Pakistan in which Shi'ites have been killed. Although there is severe conflict between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims in a number of Muslim countries, this has never been an issue in Britain, where 15% of the Muslim population are Shi'ite. Mr Farouki's visit has sparked a flood of protests from the Muslim community to the Home Office.

### ***Radical Islam in British universities***

There is currently much debate about whether British universities are being used as recruiting grounds for Islamist activists. The Indian High Commissioner, Mr L.M. Singhvi, asserted last year that this was indeed the case, and that Muslim students were being recruited by various different Islamic terrorist organizations operating in India. The London School of Economics and London University's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) were alleged to be particularly fruitful colleges for such recruitment exercises. An Algerian university lecturer now seeking political asylum in France has commented: "It is a well-known fact that fundamentalists are welcome at British universities... Islamist students from North Africa are taken in hand by their opposite numbers from Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. They then return home and spread the word." Others deny any kind of "international conspiracy" centred on British universities. Dr Suha Taji-Farouki of the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies explains the predilection of overseas students from Muslim countries for British universities as follows: "The atmosphere in British universities is conducive to Muslim students. The colleges often have good prayer facilities and there are well-developed links between mosques and universities."

Whether or not students in Britain are recruited for Islamic terrorism overseas, the activities of Islamist students on British campuses are causing increasing alarm. Hizb ut-Tahrir, a group which calls for the killing of Jews and homosexuals, has been banned by several student unions (as indeed it is banned in most Middle Eastern countries). In October police had to be called to SOAS to deal with a confrontation between Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Jewish Society. In January, 20 were arrested in clashes between Hizb ut-Tahrir and Sikh students at West Thames College. In February, Hizb ut-Tahrir followers disrupted an anti-racist meeting at University College, London, when a Jewish student tried to speak.

Hizb ut-Tahrir is strongly implicated in the killing of a Nigerian student at Newham College of Further Education, East London, on 27 February. The Nigerian, Ayotunde Obanubi, was stabbed by a group of Asians at 1.05 p.m. in the college grounds. The incident took place four days after



Omar Bakri, the leader of Hizb ut-Tahrir had addressed a group of 200 students at the college to mark the end of Ramadan, and three days after another (non-fatal) knifing incident at the college. Fellow students believe that Obanubi may have insulted Ramadan.

Hizb ut-Tahrir followers have also been running Ramadan Radio, an FM station providing 20 hours a day of religious lectures and Middle East politics (but no music) for London Muslims.

### Islamic education in Britain

An Islamic university was inaugurated in Nuneaton, near Coventry on 4 September 1994. The Hijaz University was welcomed by Dr Kalim Siddiqui, leader of the self-styled Muslim Parliament: "There is no such thing as worldly and religious knowledge, the two are one-and-the-same and must be looked at as a seamless garment."

There are 22 Muslim secondary schools in Britain, all independent. Although private Muslim schools can now apply for grant-maintained status, the British Muslim community is greatly aggrieved that no Muslim schools have been granted voluntary-aided status, according to which they could receive state funding, as almost 44,000 Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Jewish schools do.

### Anti-Christian aggression at Hyde Park Corner

Christian speakers at Hyde Park Corner are regularly intimidated and threatened by Muslims in their audience. Some have even been physically attacked.

Bahrain's Crown Prince Hamad al-Khalifa

28

has criticized Britain for allowing itself to become "a haven for terrorists and saboteurs". The Foreign Office is also unhappy about the number of Islamic extremists who have found refuge in London, and the government has made some attempts to tighten restrictions. Pray for wisdom for the British government to act peaceably and fairly but so as to minimize the Islamist activities, which are so destructive of freedom and equality.

29 Exiled Islamist extremists in Britain often find it expedient to praise British institutions.

Dr al-Masari of Saudi Arabia says he always had full faith in Britain's judiciary. Shaikh Ali Salman of Bahrain says, "I am comfortable in Britain because this country believes in the rule of law." While they are happy to take advantage of the benefits and freedoms of western democracies, such Islamists are dedicated to setting up quite different systems in their own countries. Pray that these people will accept the challenge posed by such double standards, and will channel their energies away from creating Islamic states and towards genuine freedom and equality.

30 Shaikh Ali Salman, the Bahraini extremist exiled in Britain, has called for a fresh

dialogue between the Islamic movement and Christian leaders, including church leaders in Britain. This is an unlikely statement from an Islamic radical. Whatever the reasons for making this statement, pray that it may prove to be a stepping stone towards greater peace and freedom for religious minorities.

31 Pray for peace on British campuses. Pray that moderate Muslims, who reject the violence of extremist groups, may gain influence amongst Muslim students.

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