

# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA InFOCUS

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**Muslim Woman Runs the LA Marathon**  
...Page 6



**Mandera: On the Brink of Collapse**  
...Page 17



**Teaching Arabic with a Passion**  
...Page 19



**Malaysia: Hidden Jewel**  
...Page 27



**Army Ads: Your Response**  
...Page 30

## INDEX

LOCAL	3
NO. CALIFORNIA	8
NATIONAL	10
INTERNATIONAL	12
MASJID FEATURE	15
FEATURE	16
PROFILE	19
KIDS CORNER	20
HEALTH	21
FOOD REVIEW	22
ARTS/BOOKS	23
MONEY/LEGAL	24
ISLAM	25
TRAVEL	27
COMMENTARY	28
EDITORIAL/LETTERS	30

## More than 500,000 March for Immigration Rights in L.A.



By Perter Prengaman  
Associated Press

Immigration rights advocates marched in Downtown Los Angeles on March 25, demanding that Congress abandon attempts to make illegal immigration a felony and to build more walls along the border.

More than 500,000 participated in the massive demonstration, by far the biggest of several around the nation in recent days, came as President Bush prodded Republican congressional leaders to give some illegal immigrants a chance

SEE IMMIGRATION MARCH  
PAGE 6

## MUSLIMS WELCOME JOURNALIST'S RELEASE

By Nedda

Muslims across the United States were elated at the news of journalist Jill Carroll's release on March 30 after nearly three months of captivity in Iraq. She appeared to be in good health and reported that she was not mistreated while being held.

When Hussam Ayloush, Executive Director at the Southern California chapter of Council



on American-Islamic Relations

(CAIR), received the news he said was "thrilled" and immediately said a prayer to thank God.

"She did not deserve to be treated like that," he said. "She is a friend of the Iraqi people, a voice of courage and truth."

Ayloush's organization, CAIR, had sent a delegation to Iraq

SEE JILL CARROLL \* PAGE 11

## ISLAMIC CENTER OF HAWTHORNE: The Power of True Faith! p. 15



## Presbyterians Reaching Out and Promoting Justice

By Munira Syeda

A group of Saint Mark Presbyterian Church parishioners have been actively seeking more knowledge on Islam. For about four weeks, as many as 70 children and adults at the Newport Beach-based church have listened to talks and participated in discussions sponsored by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

During the last several weeks in March, members visited the Islamic Center of Irvine and met with Shaikh Sadullah Khan, who shared with them the basics of Islam and what it feels to be a Muslim in a post-September 11 America.

"There is a tremendous lack of understanding



From left to right: Carol Franzen, Tyler Franzen, and Mark Franzen who attend St. Mark

among people in general. We see the world through white eyes, and that's very problematic," Khan said.

He also likened the atmosphere in the country to an atmosphere that prevailed in South Africa, where he grew up, before the fall of Apartheid. Khan further talked

SEE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
PAGE 18

## Muslim Students Go Abroad to Study Arabic

By Amel S. Abdullah

When Najeeb Ashraf Kamil decided to study Arabic abroad with his wife Bhawana, he did so with the intention of learning how to read both classical and contemporary texts in Arabic and being

able to convey the knowledge in English. While it's a given that most scholarly material about Islam has been written in Arabic over the centuries, Najeeb, a resident of Santa Clara who

SEE ARABIC ABROAD \* PAGE 16



Raana Smith, a resident of Irvine, finishes her homework in Amman, Jordan, where she and husband have gone to study Arabic.

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## ARABIC ABROAD

FROM PAGE 1

works for an Islamic non-profit organization and plans to obtain an MA in social work, points out that contemporary books on issues facing the Muslim world are also in Arabic. "Therefore," says Najeeb, 28, "Arabic becomes essential if one wants to read these books and apply the ideas to our context."

For Muslims everywhere, learning to read, speak and understand Arabic is undoubtedly the key to gaining more meaningful knowledge about Islam. Not only was the Qur'an revealed in Arabic, but Arabic is also the language of prayer and a lingua franca that binds the *ummah* (Muslim community) together. Today's Muslims (of which only about 12% are Arabs) risk losing this knowledge if they do not know the language.

"I find it sad that we read Qur'an every day, pray five times a day, and say amen to other people's dua (supplications) that we don't understand," remarked Aneesa Adam, a 23-year-old native of New Zealand who studies Arabic at the Qortoba Institute for Arabic Studies with her husband in Cairo, Egypt.

### An Open Classroom

Like Najeeb and Bhawana, Aneesa and her husband are part of a highly determined culture of young couples and individual Muslims from around the world who travel abroad to learn Arabic in the Middle East. They spend both time and money in pursuit of knowledge, sometimes putting careers on hold, missing years of school, and enduring separation from friends and family. But when they return to their home countries, they often bring new energy to their communities and use their experiences living overseas to make a difference in other people's lives. Explaining her goals, Aneesa said that she hopes to read books in Arabic and transfer her knowledge to her children and community back home, perhaps even starting classes in Arabic for Muslims in New Zealand.

"There aren't any affordable domestic programs that can teach Arabic in an intensive manner on a full-time basis in the US," said Raana Smith, 31, a resident of Irvine who went to Amman, Jordan with her husband in 2004 to study Arabic at the Qasid Institute. "Living in an Arabic-speaking country provides an open classroom to practice what we learn."

Raana, who works as a technical writer says that living in Jordan helps the couple concentrate on their goal of learning Arabic without the distractions of daily life back home. "It is too hard with work and family commitments to be in a program that you can really benefit from," explained Raana, whose mother is Pakistani and whose father is an American revert to Islam. "We realized that if we are serious about learning

the language of Islam, we needed a more intensive effort."

"There is definitely a *tarbiyah* (educational or developmental) aspect in studying abroad," added Jamaal Diwan, a resident of San Diego who studies Arabic with his wife Muslema at the Al-Diwan Center in Cairo. "One is forced to adapt to a new environment and go through things that they would not have experienced at home. If approached with an open mind, it can change one's mindset completely." Quick to mention there is no connection between his name and that of the center he studies at, Jamaal, who is 22 and of mixed Pakistani and Canadian heritage, hopes to raise any future children speaking classical Arabic so they can understand the Qur'an.

### The Importance of Goals

According to Najeeb, a Bay Area native with a Pakistani background, it is important for po-



Ibrahim Wang in Cairo, Egypt

tential students to evaluate the reasons why they wish to study abroad. "Spending so much money and leaving home is tough and therefore should only be done if someone has clear goals in terms of studying Arabic or Islamic studies. If those clear goals aren't there, then a person will end up wasting all those resources. It must be made clear that studying in a foreign country isn't the only way to learn Arabic," he emphasized. "If someone wants to study Arabic in a foreign country just for the sake of going to a foreign country, then it's better to just go there to visit."

Najeeb and Bhawana studied at both Al-Diwan Center and the Higher Institute for Islamic Studies in Cairo, where they spent nearly three years solidifying their knowledge of Arabic. "Going abroad was very beneficial in terms of learning as much as possible in a short period of time," he commented. "Being immersed in an Arabic and Islamic environment helped in reinforcing Arabic for us while at the same time opening our eyes to the reality outside of the US."

### Making the Choice

For many, the choice to study Arabic abroad is only made after careful consideration, consultation with other students, in-depth planning, and lots of prayer. After taking a preliminary trip to Jordan in August to check out Amman and the Qasid Institute, which had been recommended by friends, and where they already

knew one of the instructors, Raana and her husband felt comfortable with their decision. "When we arrived, we knew that this was the right place," she said. After praying *Istikhara* (a prayer that guides one to make the better of two choices) and wrapping up loose ends in the US, the pair was back in Amman by December.

For others, the choice is made somewhat randomly. Aneesa, for example, first studied at the Abu Nour Foundation for eight months in Damascus, Syria before going to Egypt in 2005, and admits she knew very little about what to expect there. "I chose my first program of study with no background knowledge of the Arabic language industry," she told InFocus. After searching the Internet and writing to numerous schools, Aneesa enrolled at the only one that replied to her e-mails. "I didn't realize at the time that there were so many Yahoo and MSN groups where I could ask for advice from those who had already studied."

### Building on the Advice of Others

Indeed, for those with no contacts or experience abroad, it is essential to research the many programs available to foreigners wishing to learn Arabic – or risk disappointment. Darren Ibrahim Wang, a law student of Chinese descent who was born in Los Angeles and now lives in Davis, began studying Arabic in 1999, when he enrolled in Arabic classes at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) at the age of 18. Three years later, his next destination was Middlebury College in Middlebury, Vermont, an immersion program famous for the "language pledge" required of its students, which entails promising to speak Arabic only during the ten-week course. After that, Darren was off to Cairo, where he first studied with a private teacher at Al-Diwan and later at the Sibawayh Center for



Students reading the *Ajrumiyya* outside of the Qasid Institute

Arabic, where he continued to improve his skills.

Eager to live in a Muslim country and benefit from the individual attention of Arabic experts not generally available in the US, Darren chose Egypt at the advice of his brother who had himself studied in Syria and was able to provide Darren with detailed information about the various programs available in Cairo. "At each stage of decision making, I gathered information about different programs including curricula used, effectiveness of instruction, cost of tuition, and

cost of living," explained Darren.

Experienced students agree that these and other factors such as class size, employment opportunities, living conditions, and access to healthcare should all be taken into consideration before choosing a school. Aneesa points out that class size can vary quite a bit. In Syria, for example, each class had up to forty students, while her classes in Cairo have had an average of only four. According to Jamaal, the competition between the many centers in Cairo is good for students, giving them more choices, and forcing centers to stay "on their toes."

### Where to Go

Choosing a country is a personal decision, and there are no right answers. For some, the rural environments of countries like Yemen and Mauritania (destinations that Aneesa's husband is keen to try out next) may prove too strenuous, while others may be turned off by the hustle and bustle of Cairo's crowded city life. "Jordan is not as crowded as Egypt," said Raana, "And does not have the political problems of Syria. The lifestyle is easier and is closer to what we were used to in the States."

Nicole Bovey, an American of European heritage, began her Arabic-learning experience at the University of California at Berkeley (UC Berkeley), where she enrolled in a three-month intensive summer session in Classical Arabic in preparation for a trip to Egypt, where she planned to take more courses in Arabic in order to complete a Master's degree in Middle Eastern studies at the American University in Cairo (AUC). Fourteen years later, at age 36, the former resident of Anaheim has now made Jordan her home, and she continues to study Arabic with a private tutor.

"Looking back," said Nicole, "I would say the program at UC Berkeley was the most organized and the best. I learned the most in the shortest amount of time. It was really a strict program and needed a lot of homework. We had separate teachers for grammar, speech and vocabulary. We also had a language lab."

Surveys indicate that the number of Americans studying Arabic has more than doubled since 9/11. Nicole, who embraced Islam in 1995, a year after her return from Egypt, says there were about thirty students in her class at UC Berkeley in 1992 – now there are more than a hundred in the same program, while others wait to get in.

"Different stages and circumstances warrant different choices," explained Darren. "If you are living in the States, as far as I know, nothing is better than studying at a university. The *masjids* (mosques) and imams, may Allah preserve them, generally do not have a consistent (or) organized program for students just starting to learn Arabic. If



Al-Diwan Center in Cairo, Egypt, is one of the most popular institutes for studying Arabic.

you can afford it, and if you can get it - it's become extremely competitive as of late - Middlebury is best for beginning and intermediate levels and the most effective use of a summer. For improving your spoken *FusHa* (Classical Arabic), Middlebury is generally better than going abroad to Cairo."

## Popular places to study Arabic abroad include the following:

### In Egypt:

- Al-Diwan Center  
[www.aldiwancentre.com](http://www.aldiwancentre.com)
- Fajr Center  
[www.fajr.com](http://www.fajr.com)
- Qortoba Institute  
[www.qortoba.com](http://www.qortoba.com)

### In Jordan:

- Qasid Institute  
[www.qasidonline.com](http://www.qasidonline.com)

### In Syria:

- Abu Nour Foundation  
[www.abunour.net/english](http://www.abunour.net/english)
- IQRA Institute  
[www.iqrainstitute.com](http://www.iqrainstitute.com)

### In Yemen:

- Badr Language Institute  
[www.badr.org.uk](http://www.badr.org.uk)

### Free Download:

An excellent tool to help one compare between programs is available for download on-line at: [www.geocities.com/learnarabicincairo/APSv6.xls](http://www.geocities.com/learnarabicincairo/APSv6.xls). Prepared by Farhan Syed, an American who studied Arabic in Cairo, this worksheet enables one to plot a graph showing the strengths and weaknesses of each program and contains detailed information about popular schools in the Arab world.

### What it Costs

Costs for each program abroad vary from country to country as do rates for accommodations, food, and other expenses. Jamaal, who studied in Cairo, provided a high-end estimate of \$800 for a single person (including tuition) and two to three hundred extra for a spouse. Darren and his wife, who also studied in Egypt, lived in a two bedroom furnished apartment right next to their school and paid \$300 in rent (considered pricey), \$400 per month for private lessons (averaging \$5 per hour and 80 hours of instruction), and about \$5 per day on food. However, said Darren, "We ate

SEE ARABIC ABROAD \* PAGE 17

# On the Brink of Collapse: Drought-Affected Manderera

By Shamiq Hussain

"Our life is poor – in the house there is nothing to eat. I have eleven children to look after, but I can only take food for three."

- Abdul Qadir, a Kenyan dealing with the food crisis

In mid-February, I visited the Horn of Africa as part of Islamic Relief's delegation to assess the food crisis affecting that part of the continent. Our trip from Nairobi to



Mandera in Kenya began as many others do, with boarding a flight and loading luggage - except that the flight was a day late and the bags were loaded from the tarmac not into a luggage hold, but onto our laps.

The apprehension that I felt at that moment was heightened by the fact that I - like most Americans - had never heard of Manderera, and thus had no idea of what to expect.

After a bumpy ride on the twin engine Cessna, we arrived at the dusty military air strip that served as the airport for Manderera District.

The area was an immediate departure from the relatively mild climate of Nairobi. The naturally hot and dry conditions in Manderera have been exacerbated by a drought that has afflicted the region since 2003. As the Cessna made its approach, all we could see was desert; miles of burnt orange sand speckled with the husks of dry bushes. It was part beautiful and part frightening.

More than 30 million people across Africa are living in hunger, according to

the United Nations World Food Program. Just in the two countries that the Islamic Relief delegation visited, over 3.5 million people in Kenya and 4.9 million people in Malawi have been facing food shortages due to the current drought and depletion of food resources.

The local Islamic Relief staff informed us that during years with normal rain, the area produces abundant flora and fauna. Going from Los Angeles - where air-conditioners are considered a human right and SUVs a necessity - to a place with a desperate lack of water was deeply humbling.

From the very first moments of our trip we experienced the poverty of the local Manderans, the majority of whom are of Muslims of Somali ancestry. Manderera is small and quaint, in an African way. The district includes a local dirt soccer pitch where children often play; small businesses and shacks that sell everything from t-shirts to tea; as well as a Kenya Mail post office, which serves as a primary conduit to the outside world.

The majority of the district, however, is populated by small villages of pastoralists that herd sheep and goats. This livestock is the primary means of income and sustenance for the people of Manderera and the drought has hit these animals the hardest. The size of the livestock herds has dwindled dramatically as the water level has dropped.

Abdul Qadir, a local pastoralist, explained that as the local shallow well's depth dropped from 40 feet to past 80 feet, it became harder and harder to retrieve the water necessary to keep the goats surviving. The lack of rainfall has killed the shrubbery that he used to depend on to provide food for his goats.

In addition, the water has become infected with malarial larvae and tape worms, which has made it unsafe for human consumption and has caused the animals to fall ill. Over the past couple of months, Ab-

dul Qadir's emaciated and sickly herd has dwindled to half its size, leaving him almost completely dependent on aid for survival.

"The children are suffering. Some of them are ill because of hunger. My youngest baby cried last night from hunger - she is one year and seven months old," Abdul Qadir said to us.

We found this story to be common among the villagers we spoke to in many areas throughout the district. However, despite the hardship they are suffering, I was personally affected by the stoic way in which the villagers took their predicament. We could see the weary sadness in their eyes after dealing with three years of severe drought, but they would always explain their situation calmly, albeit with a hint



of urgency.

The malnourished children I saw in Manderera emphasized the reason for that urgency in the voice of the elders. After three years of drought, Manderera, and in-

deed, much of the Horn of Africa, is on the brink of famine.

The carcasses of the animals that Manderans depend on for their survival lie baking in the sun. The once mighty river Duau that forms the border between Northeast Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia has been reduced to a stream. The pack animals of the townspeople are used to transport water over long distances, but they have also begun to die off and lie along

the route to the river. One by one, the pillars of Manderan subsistence and survival are breaking down. The UN World Food Program's country director for Kenya, Tesema Negash, has summarized the situation perfectly. Speaking of the food crisis, she said, "Many Kenyans - facing a fifth consecutive season of failed or poor rains - are already living on the edge, and unless donors respond immediately, we fear for the worst."

The week that we spent in Manderera passed quickly, yet the suffering and dignity of the people there has left a lasting impression on me. The day before we left Manderera, we witnessed six thousand people praying for rain at the main masjid. The sight was characteristic of my experience, with the desperation just barely showing under the patient appearance of the Manderans. As we waited on the dusty military strip for the plane that was to take us back to Nairobi, I could not help but admire their resilience and make a prayer of my own for their well-being.

## ARABIC ABROAD

FROM PAGE 16

out and splurged quite a lot."

Aneesa said they spent about \$700 per month in Syria, but without a strict budget. In Cairo, they spend significantly less: roughly \$200 for rent, \$200 for tuition (including private lessons), and \$125 for food and other expenses. In Yemen and Mauritania, says Aneesa, "you have a choice of living like the locals for really cheap prices or getting a more modern style place and paying more for it."

### Keeping Knowledge Alive

One of the challenges students face when returning home is retaining what they've learned overseas. "You always lose some of what you learn," said Darren, "But I think I have retained much of it. I read some Arabic here and there, (and) currently, I'm slowly reading a book by Shaykh Qaradawi - and, of course, whenever I read the Qur'an I use it."

"We (definitely) intend to stay in the Middle East for a few more years to really consolidate our knowledge of Arabic and Islam," said Aneesa, who used her Arabic-language skills when returning back to New Zealand for a visit to teach at a local mosque and found that she could also understand the conversations of the Arabs in her community.

"I have to say that I now live my Arabic," added Nicole. "I live in an Arab country, and it is necessary for me. I don't speak Classical Arabic in public, but the vocabulary has been useful, and I can use it to read."

### Worth the Sacrifice

While there is often sacrifice involved in studying abroad, few consider it a burden. To the contrary, the students we spoke to expressed gratitude to Allah for the chance to make such a profound journey. "There is nothing like living amongst a community of young Muslims from all over the world who are educated and intelligent and have

left their jobs, their family and the comfort of their country for the sake of Islam," said Aneesa.

Although each trip that Darren took to Egypt delayed his finishing law school by one year, he says he was not in any rush. "Insha'Allah (God willing) I have a lifetime to work and make money. So looking back, I do not have any problem with taking a couple years off to study Arabic," he said.

"Sacrifices are worth it because the seeker of knowledge is in the path of Allah until he returns, and all the creatures are making du'a (prayers) for his forgiveness. What more can we ask?" said Jamaal.

# SAVE THE DATE

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