



The Muslim World Almanac: An Introduction

By the grace and compassion of Allah Almighty, this long-awaited work is now complete. We have, however, no hesitation in admitting that, like most human endeavours, it is neither a magnum opus of a luminary, nor can it claim any ascendancy in the fields of research, authorship or even documentations. It is, at the same time, an objective and “standard” beginning in the realm of self-assessment, periscopic reviewing and analytical projection of all available facts and figures, along with a number of incisive comments and observations, pertaining to the recent and contemporary Muslim history and existence.

Let us express the hope that it will soon be regarded as a fairly comprehensive statement about the essential details of demography, economy, health and education, major events, constitutional order, and prevailing social and political conditions in the Muslim-majority areas, particularly in the continents of Asia and Africa. Conversely, it is not intended to be an encyclopaedic compendium of our enormously diversified geo-political and socio-economic vicissitudes and many splendored (and shimmering) curls and churns since the very advent of Islam in the 7th century AD. In other words, it is a simple and straightforward informatory treatise produced to identify and describe in common parlance what can be construed as the inevitable questions from the point of an ordinary but inquisitive scholar, trader, banker, government official, or international traveller.

Now, the general content, basic data and overall plan of our Muslim World Almanac, together with the presentation and treatment of its various subjects and themes are, we do earnestly hope, bound to pave the way for several better designed and more descriptive reference books and certainly an improved version and edition of this and other such contributions toward building up a robust library on the legacy and potential of the followers of Islam. We have include a number of maps, charts and illustrations, some of them especially prepared for our Almanac, to help explain and elucidate the views and information contained herein. Finally, we must mention some of the important features that the Almanac can illafford to ignore. These features include: (1) A country-wise panorama, an unobstructed scene, or comprehensive portrayal, of different regions; (2) Human rights and social egalitarianism in Islam; (3) The significance of Jihad, or obligatory struggle, for a right cause; (4) The significance and role of Mosques in Muslim community life; (5) The dignity, status and security of women in Islam; (6) Terrorism, Extremism, Sectarianism, Nationalism, Secularism, Bonaprtism and other anti-Muslim cults and ideologies; and (7) the cardinal teachings of the Glorious Qur’an and the Traditions of the noble Prophet (peace be upon him).

Apropos, it is a great honor and both very appropriate and gratifying to incorporate Islamic ethos and ambience in the foundations and mosaic of this humble effort from the beginning to the end. As the second largest community in the world, the followers of Islam constitute about one-fifth of the human race. Today they are found everywhere, literally every where, but their majority is located in the center of the globe, stretching, from Morocco on the shores of the Atlantic to Indonesia in the Pacific. About one-third of the world Muslim population lives in territories



where non-Muslims constitute a majority, or an overwhelming majority. Their strength, culture, institutions, rate of progress and the part they are playing in varying degrees at political and economic levels will be exclusively discussed in the succeeding editions of the Almanac.

The fountainhead of the Muslim community is, of course, a proselytizing faith, which has brought about a stupendous and unparalleled change in human history and civilization. There is no doubt that, despite its present under-development, rampant disorganization and a fatal inertia and lack of unity and cohesiveness, the Muslim world can (give time and leadership) still galvanize itself into a force to be reckoned with. It has vast human and natural resources and is self-sufficient in food, fisheries, energy, minerals, cotton, wool, rubber, jute, tin, zinc, cobalt, fruits, etc, and can easily work out a system of economic, technical and information cooperation for unrestricted trade, commerce, communication, vocational training, mechanized farming, banking, shipping, administrative and educational facilities, medical, engineering and aeronautical development projects and regional alliance enterprises and the OIC-chartered nuclei and associations.

Almanacs are ready reckoners that give ample information about a country, the world as a whole, or a specific area, of its achievements, profiles, latest data and major developments, which take place every year. People, mainly from academia or media, even students, grab such ready reckoners as vital reference tools for daily use. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to have such almanacs on Muslim countries giving an account of the pace of developments there, bringing forth issues that put them in news, and making an assessment of their status in various fields, like economy, science and technology, which are otherwise not found in the form of any specific research-based work regarding the Muslim world.

Our readers will be well-advised to remember that Almanac is originally an Arabic word, which has been taken from almanakh, meaning the calendar. In modern sense too, an almanac, or almanack, is an annual calendar of events and developments, data and statistics of a country, a group of countries, or the world as a whole. However, bringing out an almanac is, by no means, to under-estimate the importance of other reference books, hand-books and periodicals, newspapers or magazines.

When we began work on this project, we visualized it to be a fairly comprehensive account of the actuality of the Muslim World, containing essential facts about demography, economy, health and education, constitutional pattern and prevalent social and political conditions in the Muslim-majority areas, particularly in the continents of Asia and Africa. Instead of serving as an encyclopaedic compendium of the historical events and political turmoil affecting our worldwide community, we sought mainly to present an objective, straightforward and informatory treatise that could satisfy all those people who are interested in finding answers to the many questions that they may have about Muslim and their distinct faith and way of life. We have refrained from entering into polemics or partisan and one-sided debates; our emphasis has been to present an unbiased, objective and impartial picture.



We all know too well the importance that information has come to occupy in our times. Although we are living in an age that is witnessing mind-boggling progress in information technology, especially during the last decades coupled with breath-taking advancements that have been made in science and technology preceding it in the last few centuries, vast segments of humanity are sadly, drifting apart instead of coming closer. The talk about 'clash of civilizations' and 'clash of religions' is getting louder. The power that science and technology has provided man in our times is a double-edged sword and by its judicious and wise use, he can build a peaceful, happier and more harmonious world wherein variety of civilizations will not simply co-exist, but will flourish and immensely enrich the others. The material resources and technical powers at the disposal of today's man have the potential to actualize the enormous possibilities that suddenly seem to be within his reach.

In an age characterized by the information explosion and globalization, prejudices, misconceptions and biases about Islam and Muslims have become widespread. The tragic events of 9/11 and some other subsequent developments have changed the world — and especially the world around us, the chasm between the Muslim world and the West has grown very wide and those who predict an imminent or inevitable clash of civilizations seem to be winning. We embarked on this project when 9/11 had just happened and its memories were quite fresh.

It is our observation that stereotyping rather than pursuit for truth and promotion of understanding and goodwill seems to have become a favourite pastime of people who control the print and electronic media. The old blinkers to which new blinkers are added from time to time ensure that we continue to live in a world of grim fantasy, a world filled with fear, suspicions, hatred and contempt. We also know it as a fact that ignorance leads to suspicion, suspicion in its turn, breeds hatred and hatred leads to violence, anarchy, terrorism, including state terrorism.

As Muslims' Faith and sets of beliefs are coming under closer scrutiny these days, we have tried to present an honest, objective and dispassionate image of Islam, as it in reality is and not as people with vested interests make it out. Misconceptions, surrounding such vital institutions as the mosque, its role and mission, madrasas and their rich contribution down the ages, waqf institutions and tradition of endowment, the much-maligned noble struggle that Jihad is and the position and role of the Muslim woman, terrorism and its utter rejection in the Islamic scheme of things, find a prominent place in the Almanac. This way we seek to set the record straight.

On the basis, the Research and Documentation Society, has embarked on a set of information projects aimed at reaching the people among non-Muslims and making them aware of the truth and reality of Islam and the real image of Muslims. In this publication, we have attempted, primarily, an objective, and factual portrayal of the Muslim people inhabiting 57 states where they are in a majority, supporting this factual analysis with plenty of charts, maps and tables. This special section promises to be very useful to a reader, whether he be from the academic or the media, in getting to know the diversity and actuality of the Muslim World.



At the end, we feel that it is our bounden duty to express our utmost gratitude to Allah Almighty for his benevolence and generosity, enabling us to undertake such an essential project in the interest of world peace and for the cause of self-awareness and correct portrayal of the conditions prevailing in the Muslim countries. We must also clearly state that any lapses and mistakes that might have crept into our manuscript are our own, and no other individual, or group or institution is responsible for them. However, we shall be grateful to our readers if they will kindly let us have their observations and suggestions regarding the contents of the Almanac to help us streamline its future editions, Insha-Allah. We pray for Allah's support and guidance in making this vital task easy for our team and for His mercy and blessings on the Noble Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) and his Ummah.