

“My journey hasn’t been easy, but it’s shaped who I am today.”  
- Surma Zahid

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From New York

# NEW YORK NEWS

The Voice of People

## Trump Era Sparks Arab American Political Rise

Hamid Abdullah

Arab Americans are increasingly engaging in U.S. politics, a shift largely driven by the political landscape under President-elect Donald Trump. This rising involvement is exemplified by figures like Michael Boulos, the Lebanese billionaire’s son and husband of Tiffany Trump, as well as notable Arab American appointments like Janette Nesheiwat and Marty Makary. Despite Trump’s controversial policies, including travel bans targeting Muslim-majority countries, some Arab Americans find themselves supporting him. Discontent with the Democratic Party, which many feel alienates them, has prompted a shift toward Republican politics. Arab Americans like Yahya Basha and Casey Askar are now seeking influence within the Republican Party, viewing it as a platform to have a say in policy and to push for meaningful change. This complex political shift signals an evolving dynamic for Arab Americans in the U.S.

# Muslim World League Hosts Pivotal Conference on Girls’ Education

## Afghan Taliban Declines to Attend Historic Conference

Jamil bin Nahyan

The Muslim World League’s international conference on girls’ education, held in January 2025 in Pakistan, has set a new benchmark in the fight for educational equality in Muslim communities. The event, which gathered world leaders, activists, and scholars, became a rallying point for advocating girls’ education in regions where access is limited. A key moment of the conference was the signing of the Islamabad Declaration, a pivotal document that reaffirms the fundamental right to education for all Muslim girls. The declaration calls on governments, organizations, and communities to prioritize the educational needs of girls, ensuring their equal opportunities for learning and growth. Among the notable attendees was Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, whose personal experience as an advocate for girls’



Image Source : aa.com.tr

education in Pakistan added weight to the summit. Yousafzai’s call for an increased focus on empowering girls through education resonated strongly with attendees, emphasizing the transformative power of knowledge. However, the conference was not without controversy.

### HIGHLIGHT

- Malala Yousafzai advocates for global action on girls’ education.
- Global solidarity despite challenges in Afghanistan’s education system.
- Islamabad Declaration highlights

The Afghan Taliban government, which has consistently restricted girls’ access to education, notably declined to participate in the summit. This absence underscored ongoing tensions regarding education rights in Afghanistan, where girls’ schooling remains severely

restricted under Taliban rule. Despite this setback, the Islamabad Declaration has made clear the global commitment to the rights of Muslim girls, sending a strong message that education is not a privilege, but a right to be upheld universally.

## The SHORT

Elhaam Academy Unveils 'I Am The Future': A Grand Celebration of Young Aspirations

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# CAIR Ordered to Disclose Donors in Defamation Lawsuit

Farhana Azmi

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has been ordered by a U.S. magistrate judge to disclose its funding sources following a legal setback in a defamation lawsuit. Judge David Schultz issued the ruling as part of a case filed by former CAIR employee Lori Saroya, who alleges the organization defamed her after public disputes. Saroya sued CAIR after it accused her of leading efforts to spread claims that the organization



Image Source : New York Post

### HIGHLIGHT

- Defamation lawsuit filed by former employee Lori Saroya, alleging damage to her reputation.

receives funds from foreign governments and terrorist groups. The court now requires CAIR to provide

documentation of its financial sources, including donor lists and any foreign contributions, to clarify its fundraising practices and donor management. The ruling places CAIR’s financial transparency under scrutiny. While the organization has been a prominent advocate for Muslim Americans, the order raises questions about its funding structure and accountability. CAIR has not yet publicly responded on whether it will comply or challenge the decision, which could set a legal

precedent. For Saroya, the ruling is a step toward clearing her name after what she calls damaging accusations. Originally a defamation lawsuit, the case has evolved into a broader discussion on transparency and financial oversight within advocacy organizations. As the case progresses, CAIR’s financial disclosures could have significant implications, potentially affecting its reputation, operations, and relationships with both supporters and critics across the political spectrum.

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Young Scholars Illuminate Quranic Teachings

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# Community

today



### Book Launch

Elhaam Academy Unveils 'I Am The Future': A Grand Celebration of Young Aspirations

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### Quran Night

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### Annual Banquet

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### Leadership

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### Defamation Lawsuit

CAIR Ordered to Disclose Donors in Defamation Lawsuit

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### New Series

"Muslim Matchmaker" Premieres on Hulu with Fresh Take on Dating

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## Date of 39th FOBANA Conference Announced, Preparations Finalized

NYN DESK

The Federation of Bangladeshi Organizations in North America (FOBANA), an organization of Bangladeshis living in North America, has finalized preparations for its 39th conference. The conference will be held on August 29, 30 and 31 at a hotel ballroom in downtown Montreal, Canada. Atiqur Rahman Atiq, Chairman of FOBANA, presented the details of the conference at the Meet the Press event held in New York on February 9. He said that in continuation of FOBANA's 38-year tradition,

### HIGHLIGHT

conference will be held on August 29, 30 and 31 at a hotel ballroom in downtown Montreal, Canada

this time too, the rich image of Bangladesh's culture and heritage will be presented abroad.

Former Chairman of FOBANA, Zakaria Chowdhury, said, The success of our generation in the entire North America makes us proud. We should inspire them to move forward and encourage them to practice and preserve Bengali culture. Ziaul Haque Zia, president of this year's organizing organization Canada-Bangladesh Solidarity and convener of the FOBANA conference, and member-secretary Iqbal Kabir discussed various aspects of the conference.

## Ekushey Book Fair will be held in New York on February 21-23



NYN DESK

Unbanged has been practicing art and literature in New York for the past 11 years with the slogan of intensive practice of pure art in mind. On January 26, it was decided at the 47th literary meeting of

Unbanged that this year, Unbanged will organize the Amar Ekushey Book Fair-2025. The fair will be held at the Ilham Academy Auditorium in Jamaica on February 21, 22 and 23. To organize this book fair for the first time with the

slogan of Bengalis all over the world, Bengalis' world, an 83-member convening committee and a 13-member advisory committee were formed with community activist and former general secretary of Bangladesh Society Fakhru Alam as the convener and recitation artist

and community board member Ahsan Habib as the member secretary. Poet Kazi Zahirul Islam, a visionary of New Bengal, said, "My vision is for a writer's book fair in New York, where writers, not publishers, will have stalls, and there will be a direct connection between writers and readers."

### Prayer Time IN New York

FAJR	DHUHR	ASR	MAGHREB	ISHA
05:32	12:10	03:06	05:32	06:48
05:31	12:10	03:07	05:33	06:49
05:28	12:10	03:08	05:35	06:50
05:27	12:10	03:09	05:36	06:51
05:26	12:10	03:10	05:37	06:52
05:25	12:09	03:11	05:38	06:53
05:24	12:09	03:12	05:39	06:54

## Number 20

### Bangladesh Society decided to celebrate Mother Language Day

The event will run from 4 pm to 12 midnight on February 20

NYN DESK

Bangladesh Society, an umbrella organization of Bangladeshi people living in the United States, has taken the initiative to celebrate International Mother Language Day in a grand manner. It is reported that more than a hundred organizations from several states including New York



will participate in it. The event will run from 4 pm to 12 midnight on February 20. On this occasion, the organizers are expecting the presence of several thousand people at the Tibetan Community Center located at 57-12, 32nd Avenue in Woodside, New York. There will be discussions, songs, paintings, poetry recitations and many more throughout the program. The media partners of the program are Time Television, ITV USA and IBTV USA. The organizers have called on everyone in the community to participate in this event of Bangladesh Society to highlight the mother language and culture of the country to the outside world. The prime mission of Bangladesh Society is to lead our community to a parallel way alongside the mainstream of USA through mutual cooperation and amity. The other mission of the society is to assimilate our new generation with our own culture, tradition, social and religious values so that they themselves preserve and practice these in their daily life. According to its constitution Bangladesh Society has an Executive Committee consists .

# Entertainment

## Young Scholars Illuminate Quranic Teachings

A Night of Spiritual Reflection and Community Engagement

### Samira Umama

On February 14, 2025, Al-Mamoor School in Fresh Meadows, NY, hosted a spiritually uplifting event, Youth Quran & Welcome Ramadan 2025 Night, organized by the school's Dawah Club. The gathering brought together prominent Islamic scholars, young Quraa, and community members for an evening of Quranic recitations, reflections, and preparations for the holy month of Ramadan. The event featured renowned scholars and Qaris, including Sheikh Usama Kawkab, Sheikh Nuh Kawkab, Qari Adeen Shehzad, Qari Fahad Miage, and Imam Shamsi Ali, who shared insights on the significance of Ramadan and the transformative power of the Quran. Their presence enriched the night, providing attendees with profound



spiritual guidance. A special highlight of the event was the participation of young Quraa, such as Qari Umair Siddiqui, Sheikh Sajjad Abdin, Hafiz Zeeshan Ahmed, Hafiz Ajyan Ahmed, and Hafiz Safer Maruf, who

### HIGHLIGHT

•Renowned scholars and young Quraa participated in the event.

captivated the audience with their heartfelt recitations of the Quran. Their contributions underscored the importance of youth engagement in Islamic learning and the preservation of Quranic teachings.

Adding to the evening's significance, Al-Mamoor alumni, including Sheikh Mustafa Abdelrehem, Sheikh Rayin Ahsan, and Brother Ahmad Kamal, returned to share their experiences and reflections. Their presence demonstrated

the school's enduring influence in shaping future leaders committed to faith and service. Throughout the night, speakers emphasized the values of spiritual discipline, self-reflection, and community unity as Ramadan approaches. Attendees were reminded of the importance of deepening their connection with the Quran, fostering a strong community bond, and preparing their hearts and minds for the blessed month. The Youth Quran & Welcome Ramadan 2025 Night was not just an event—it was a testament to Al-Mamoor School's commitment to nurturing faith, leadership, and community engagement. The overwhelming response and participation reaffirmed the school's role as a beacon of Islamic education and spiritual growth.



# Election

## Zohran Mamdani's Vision for New York



**My name is Zohran Mamdani.** I am the assembly member for Astoria in Long Island City and I am the first ever Muslim elected official to run for mayor of New York City. You know first I want to thank Ibn Relief for all of the work that this incredible organization does. I have seen it firsthand. I have stood alongside brothers in this very audience handing out backpacks, school supplies, halal turkeys, whatever it is that Muslims across the five boroughs need, I have seen Ibn Relief step up and deliver those very things. So I just want to say thank you first and foremost for the incredible work of this organization.

You know I have a question for everyone who is here this evening.

If you will bear with me, can you please raise your hand if you were born outside of this country? Many, most. I was born in Uganda in East Africa.

I came to New York City at the age of seven and I know that those of you in this room are like New Yorkers across the five boroughs coming to this state, coming to that city with the dream of what life would be like. It's a dream that kept you going through the difficulty of that journey, but it is hard to remember that dream today. When you spend most of your day worrying about how you're gonna make your rent, how are you gonna make your mortgage payment, how are you gonna pay for your gas, your metro card, your childcare, your groceries, the cost of living in New York City.

And New York State is suffocating to the point where you cannot even remember that first dream you had. And I remember the words of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ who instructed us to make things easier. Do not make them more difficult. Spread glad tidings. And



I am running for mayor to do exactly that. I'm running for mayor to make life in New York City more affordable, to make life easier, to make life like the one that you imagined when you first came. Now we launched this campaign about four months ago and I stood on stage and I spoke about this campaign and this platform and this dream. And a friend of mine, his name was Assad, he took a photo and he shared it on social media. He said he was so excited to see a Muslim elected official running for mayor.

And a member of the

New York Post editorial board wrote back. He said is it true they didn't allow pagers into the event? Now what he was referring to was the Israeli war crime, blowing up thousands of pagers across Lebanon, killing scores of Lebanese civilians including a nine-year-old girl named Fatima who picked up her father's pager in an act of love and lost her life for it. And he said this because in this country people think they can say anything about a Muslim in public life. If you dare to speak up you will be called a terrorist. But he also said this because I am an elected official who has a politics of consistency. I believe that what a working person in New York City deserves is the same as what a working person deserves anyway. And in my time in the assembly I have refused to turn my back on Palestinian human rights. I have refused to make an exception to the beliefs of humanity and justice and safety when it comes to Palestinians. I have said that Palestinians deserve everything that every other people deserve. And I have said that as I have led a hunger strike outside of the White House calling for a ceasefire. I have said that as I have been arrested outside of Senator Chuck Schumer's home. I have said that as I have introduced legislation that would make it illegal for New York State charities to fund Israeli war crimes. I have said it again and again and again. And I know that part of those things that I've said is why that member of the

board spoke up. Now we know that as Muslims we want what every other community wants. Respect. Equality. And Alhamdulillah in New York City there are a million Muslims. About 200,000 of us are registered as Democrats. In the last

incredible work that it does but also to ask each and every one of you for your help. Because in order for us to win this race, I need everyone in this room to tell any Muslim they know in New York City that there is a Democratic primary on June 24th. And their chance to prove that Muslims don't just belong in New York City but also belong in City Hall is on that day. Now we have been building a campaign that will win. We have been described by the New York Times as the campaign with the most momentum of any in the race. We raised in the last filing period three million dollars. We raised it for more people than every other campaign combined. But I always remember the first time I knocked on doors in



election do you know how many Muslims voted? About 7%. Now I will not blame anyone in our community for not voting because often it feels like there is nothing to vote for. But in this country if we want to win equality, respect, then we know we have to show that for the power of this community. Because politicians do not care about morals, principles. Politicians care about power. And the power I think that we can show is at that ballot box. So I'm here not only to thank IgnorElief for the

New York City was for a progressive Pakistani candidate named Ali Nadji. In 2015, I knocked on doors, 169th Street, Southeast Queens. And Ali lost that election. And the next day he went to Dunkin Donuts and he met an uncle there who said, Ali Jaan, I'm so excited to vote for you. He said, Uncle, election took all time. I want to make sure that everyone knows the election is on June 24th. Early voting starts today. **Zohran Mamdani's speech in ICNA Relief's Annual Banquet**

## MAYORAL CANDIDATE INTERVIEW

MONDAY, FEB 17TH 6:30-9PM

6:30-8PM: ZOHHRAN MAMDANI    8-9PM: MICHAEL BLAKE

📍 **Elhaam Academy**  
 87-41, 165th st. Jamaica, NY 11432

**Zohran Mamdani**

**Michael Blake**

# Philanthropy

## ICNA Relief's Annual Banquet: A Night of Giving and Impact

Raising funds for those in need through compassion and generosity.

### Abdul Nassr

ICNA Relief successfully hosted its much-anticipated Annual Banquet on Saturday, February 15, at the Long Island Marriott in East Garden City, NY. Themed "Seeds of Change, Harvest of Goodness," the event gathered community leaders, philanthropists, and supporters to celebrate and contribute to ICNA Relief's humanitarian mission. The evening featured renowned activist Shaun King and Dr. Ayman Hammous, who delivered powerful speeches on the importance of giving, social responsibility, and uplifting marginalized communities. Their words resonated deeply with the audience, reinforcing the critical

role of philanthropy in creating lasting change. ICNA Relief has long been at the forefront of disaster relief, refugee support, food assistance, and social services across the United States. The banquet served as both a fundraiser and a platform to showcase the organization's achievements, highlighting the countless lives touched through its initiatives. The event provided a unique opportunity for attendees to directly contribute to various ICNA Relief programs, including homeless shelters, free medical clinics, food pantries, and educational support for underserved communities. Many guests generously sponsored tables, with some committing



next generation. The overwhelming support and generosity displayed at the banquet will help ICNA Relief expand its reach, providing essential aid to struggling families, disaster victims, and vulnerable individuals across the country. As the organization continues to grow, events like these serve as a reminder of the power of collective action in transforming lives. ICNA Relief expressed heartfelt gratitude to its donors, volunteers, and attendees, reaffirming its commitment to serving those in need. The evening ended on a hopeful note, with a renewed dedication to fostering change, one act of kindness at a time. For more information or to contribute, visit [icnarelief.com/banquets](http://icnarelief.com/banquets)

### HIGHLIGHT

- The event focused on philanthropy.
- Attendees contributed to humanitarian aid and community service programs.
- The fundraiser offered sponsorship opportunities, raising significant donations.

to ongoing donations to sustain these life-changing efforts. Beyond fundraising, the banquet fostered a strong sense of unity and purpose. Attendees from diverse backgrounds came together to support a shared mission of kindness, justice, and service. The presence of influential figures like Shaun King

added to the event's significance, inspiring many to take action in their own communities. A dedicated children's activity room provided entertainment for young attendees, ensuring an inclusive experience for families. The event organizers emphasized the importance of instilling the values of generosity and community service in the



# Education

## Elhaam Academy Unveils 'I Am The Future': A Grand Celebration of Young Aspirations

A Book That Captures the Future in Children's Words

**Fazlul Hoque**

In a momentous event that underscored the power of dreams and creativity, Elhaam Academy officially launched *I Am The Future*, a student-written book that captures the aspirations and artistic expressions of children from kindergarten to 6th grade. The grand ceremony, held at the academy's auditorium, was graced by esteemed community leaders, educators, and families, all gathered to celebrate the young authors whose voices are now immortalized in print.

The book launch was not just an ordinary event—it was a statement about the importance of nurturing creativity and ambition from an early age. *I Am The Future* serves as a unique platform where students have shared their dreams, career aspirations, and personal reflections in their own words and illustrations. From aspiring astronauts and doctors to poets and architects, the book encapsulates the diverse ambitions of young learners and the unwavering support they receive from their educational community. The event opened with a warm welcome from Elhaam Academy's Principal, Shahana Olid, who set the stage for an inspiring evening. "Tonight, we celebrate not just a book, but the boundless potential of our students," she said. "This project is a testament to what young minds can achieve when given the right encouragement and resources." Among the distinguished guests was Queens Borough President



Richard Donovan, who commended Elhaam Academy for spearheading such an impactful initiative. "What we see here today is the future—these children, their dreams, and their passion," Donovan said. "This book is not just for them; it's for all of us, reminding us of the potential we must nurture in every child." New York State Senator John Liu also addressed the audience, emphasizing the far-reaching impact of the initiative. "Publications like *I Am The Future* transcend individual communities," Liu remarked. "They inspire children across the globe to believe in their dreams and take steps toward achieving them." The event also saw the presence of NYC Perth Crime Prevention Unit Head Cristin Noel, Commissioner at NYC Commission on Racial Equity Imam Ahmed Ali, and NYC Mayor's Office

### HIGHLIGHT

- The event was attended by prominent community leaders, educators, and families.
- Queens Borough President Richard Donovan and New York State Senator John Liu praised the initiative.
- The book was developed under the guidance of S.T.E.A.M. Creative Director Dina Uddin.

Muslim Liaison Mehedi Hassan. Each of these leaders reinforced the importance of education, self-expression, and community support in shaping the next generation. The making of *I Am The Future* was an extensive journey involving months of student participation, creative workshops, and hands-on mentorship. Leading this effort was S.T.E.A.M. Creative Director Dina

Uddin, who played an instrumental role in designing the book's cover art, formatting its thematic layout, and guiding students through the storytelling and artistic process.

"This book was built on passion and the belief that every child's dream matters," Uddin explained. "From the first sketches to the final printed pages, the students poured their hearts into this project, making it a true labor of love."

The academy's commitment to fostering creativity was evident in the students' contributions. The book preserves their original handwriting and artwork, capturing authenticity and individuality in each page. With a strong emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (S.T.E.A.M.), Elhaam Academy ensured that students engaged in meaningful activities

that enhanced their critical thinking and self-expression.

For many parents and teachers, the event was an emotional and proud moment. Seeing their children's names and work published in a professionally crafted book was a milestone that reaffirmed the importance of nurturing ambition from an early age.

"It is overwhelming to see my daughter's name in this book," said one parent, holding back tears. "This project has given our children confidence, and that is the most valuable gift any educator can provide."

Teachers who worked closely with the students echoed this sentiment. "When we encourage creativity in the classroom, we empower students to think beyond the conventional," said one teacher. "This book is proof that their voices matter."

Throughout the event,

special recognition was given to Imam Muhammad Shahidullah, the director of Elhaam Academy, whose vision and leadership played a pivotal role in bringing this project to life. His commitment to fostering a supportive educational environment was praised by both the speakers and the academy's faculty. "Education is about more than just academics—it's about empowering students to believe in themselves," said Imam Shahidullah. "This book represents hope, ambition, and the boundless possibilities that lie ahead for our young learners."

The event concluded with a moment of appreciation for the Executive Director, Dr. Jamiyah Johns, and Board of Directors Chairman Muhammad Shahidullah, who have continuously supported innovative educational initiatives at the academy.

The launch of *I Am The Future* extends beyond the walls of Elhaam Academy. With the support of local leaders and educational advocates, the initiative is expected to inspire similar projects in other schools and communities. The book serves as a model for how institutions can integrate creativity into the educational experience, encouraging students to see themselves as active contributors to the world. By celebrating student work in such a public and professional manner, Elhaam Academy is setting a precedent for other institutions to follow. The recognition from city officials further cements the importance

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# Education

of creative and career-driven education. The resounding success of I Am The Future has opened the door for future student-led projects at Elhaam Academy. Plans are already underway to expand the initiative, including interactive exhibitions, mentorship

programs, and potential collaborations with other educational institutions. "There is no limit to what our students can achieve," said Principal Olid. "This book is just the beginning, and we look forward to seeing where their creativity takes them next."

## HIGHLIGHT

- Imam Muhammad Shahidullah's leadership was instrumental in bringing the project to life.
- The project is expected to inspire similar educational initiatives in other communities.
- Plans for future student-led creative projects are already underway.

As the event came to a close, students beamed with pride, holding copies of I Am The Future in their hands. They had not only written a book but had also been part of something larger—a movement that celebrates dreams, ambition,

and the power of young voices. With the echoes of applause still lingering, attendees left the event feeling inspired and hopeful. Parents, teachers, and dignitaries alike recognized that this book launch was more than just a ceremony—it was a

defining moment in the lives of young dreamers. Through this initiative, Elhaam Academy has proven that the future truly belongs to those who dare to dream, and with continued support, these students are bound to achieve greatness.



# Leadership

## Empowering Future Leaders Through Education

Islamic leadership expert shares insights on education and digital growth.



### Faruk Hossain

Elhaam Academy had the honor of hosting Ayman Nassar, Founder & Board Trustee Member, and Chief of Academics & Digital Transformation at the Islamic Leadership Institute of America (ILIA). His visit provided an enriching platform for discussions on education, leadership,

and the role of digital transformation in Islamic learning. Nassar, a renowned figure in Islamic leadership and academic development, engaged with Elhaam Academy's faculty and students, emphasizing the importance of fostering strong leadership skills through faith-based education. He highlighted how

### HIGHLIGHT

- Ayman Nassar visited Elhaam Academy to discuss leadership and education.
- He emphasized the role of digital transformation in Islamic learning.
- Discussions focused on integrating leadership principles into education.

digital tools can revolutionize Islamic learning, making it more accessible and impactful for future generations. The discussions also explored strategies for integrating leadership principles within academic curricula, ensuring that students not only excel in their studies but also develop the character and resilience needed to

serve their communities. Elhaam Academy officials expressed their gratitude for Nassar's visit, emphasizing that such exchanges contribute to the institution's mission of nurturing future leaders through Islamic values and modern education. The event reinforced the importance of continuous learning and adaptation in

Islamic education, with digital transformation playing a key role in expanding opportunities for students worldwide. As Elhaam Academy continues to grow, collaborations with thought leaders like Ayman Nassar will remain crucial in shaping a generation of well-rounded, visionary leaders.



## Honoring Parents: A Path to Leadership

Dr. Hassan Akbar Delivers Inspiring Khutba on Leadership & Family Values

### Zishan Ahmed

On February 14, 2025, Elhaam Academy in Jamaica, NY, hosted a special Jumu'ah Khutba titled "Love Your Parents", led by esteemed speaker Dr. Hassan Akbar. The powerful sermon highlighted the importance of honoring parents, while also drawing connections between family values and leadership

principles. Dr. Akbar delivered a motivational lecture, urging attendees to recognize the sacrifices parents make and the critical role they play in shaping individuals and communities. He emphasized that true leadership begins at home, with the way one treats their family, particularly parents. "A good leader is first a good son or daughter," he stated, reinforcing

### HIGHLIGHT

- The sermon connected family values with strong leadership principles.
- Attendees reflected on the role of parents in shaping future generations.
- The event reinforced Elhaam Academy's commitment to education and community development.

the idea that respect, compassion, and gratitude are essential leadership qualities. The sermon also touched on Islamic teachings regarding parental respect, citing verses from the Quran and Hadith that stress kindness and obedience to one's parents. Dr. Akbar reminded the audience that successful leaders throughout history have been those who upheld

strong moral values and demonstrated humility towards their elders. Beyond spiritual reflection, the khutba encouraged practical steps to show appreciation for parents, including spending quality time with them, seeking their advice, and making du'a for their well-being. Many attendees expressed a renewed sense of gratitude and commitment to

strengthening their family relationships. The event reaffirmed Elhaam Academy's dedication to fostering not just academic excellence, but also strong moral character and leadership qualities within the community. The message of love, respect, and responsibility resonated deeply, leaving a lasting impact on all who attended.



# Interview

## “My journey hasn’t been easy, but it’s shaped who I am today.” - Surma Zahid

In an insightful Q&A, Surma Zahid, one of Bangladesh’s leading writers, discusses her journey as a writer, her deep connection to the Liberation War, and the importance of preserving the stories of the Birangonas—the women freedom fighters of 1971.

### Fahim Fuad

Q: Ma’am, can you tell us about your childhood? What was it like growing up? Surma Zahid

"Ah, my childhood! It was full of fun and mischief. I was born into a distinguished joint family, so I grew up surrounded by my cousins. It was a lively household, and we spent a lot of time together. I had a lot of energy back then, and I loved playing with my siblings and cousins. We would fly kites, fish, and even secretly swim in the monsoon waters. Climbing trees was one of our favorite activities. We had a guava tree just outside our bedroom window, and if we pulled a branch through the window, we could bring in a bunch of guavas along with the branch. There was also a big jujube tree in our yard, and we’d sit on its branches, eating guavas and jujubes, though we never ate any fruit that had fallen to the ground. Growing up, there was always something new to learn—whether it was a story or a lesson my parents wanted to teach us. I had the privilege of hearing about our family’s history, especially from my father, and those conversations left a lasting impression on me. It wasn’t all serious, though. I spent a lot of time with my siblings, and we had our fair share of playful moments, running around the house, arguing over silly things, and sometimes making up our own little games."

Q: How do you feel when you think back to those days?

Surma Zahid: "Even now, when I think back, those days feel like a dream. It was a time full of joy, laughter, and innocent mischief. There was always something exciting happening, and I wouldn’t trade those memories for anything."

Q: What inspired you to start writing seriously?

Surma Zahid: "My

interest in writing developed from a very young age, as I used to write a few lines of poetry. However, I didn’t keep a collection of those poems. My great-grandfather, who was very skilled at writing poetry and puthis (traditional verses) about current events, had a significant influence on me. I would often listen to these poems and puthis from my mother. My great-grandfather’s poems and puthis were quite long, and my mother could recite them fluently. Apparently, before marriage, my mother had memorized all of my great-grandfather’s poems. It was through my father’s writings and my mother reciting those poems and puthis that my interest in writing grew even stronger. While my childhood memories shaped my love for writing, it was the stories of the women freedom fighters—the Birangonas—that pushed me to write more seriously. Growing up, I heard numerous stories about Bangladesh’s creation, the struggles during the Liberation War, and the resilience of the people. But it was my encounter with the Birangonas that gave me the motivation to focus my writing on the war and these unsung heroines. Their stories of courage and survival resonated deeply with



me, and I felt compelled to write about them."

Q: Why have you focused so much on the Liberation War and

the stories of women freedom fighters?

Surma Zahid: "As I mentioned, my father’s storytelling brought the events of the Liberation War to life for me, but it was the women’s stories that often went untold. I vividly remember asking my father about the Birangonas, and he said, 'You’ll understand when you grow up.' When I met a Birangana for the first time, and she shared her painful story, I understood what my father meant. These women were silenced for far too long, and I knew it was my responsibility to give them a voice. The more I learned, the more determined I became to ensure their stories were remembered."

Q: What do you hope to achieve through your writing?

Surma Zahid: "Through my books, I hope to shed light on the history of the Liberation War, particularly the sacrifices made by women. I want the world to remember their courage, strength, and resilience. These women were often forgotten, but their stories deserve to be heard and honored. My goal is for future generations to understand and appreciate the sacrifices of those who fought for our independence."

Q: How do you conduct research, especially on such sensitive and personal topics?

Surma Zahid: "My research has taken me to remote areas, visiting 495 upazilas across 64 districts in Bangladesh. It wasn’t easy—many of the women were hesitant to speak due to social stigma. I spent years building trust, listening to their stories, and documenting their experiences. I’ve met countless freedom

fighters, local leaders, and community members who helped piece together these crucial narratives. It’s been a slow and emotional process, but it’s been worth every moment."

Q: What has been the most emotionally challenging part of your writing journey?

Surma Zahid: "The most challenging part has been listening to the stories of women who suffered unimaginable pain. When you meet someone who has lived through such torment, it’s hard not to feel overwhelmed. But it’s their bravery and strength that inspire me to keep writing. The stories of women like Kakon Bibi and Momtaz Begum, who endured severe abuse, are especially difficult to write. But they need to be told."

Q: How did you feel when you received your first major recognition?

Surma Zahid: I never wrote for recognition, but it does motivate me. I believe awards help increase the acceptance of a writer’s work and inspire them to continue. Recognition brings pride, but it also increases responsibility.

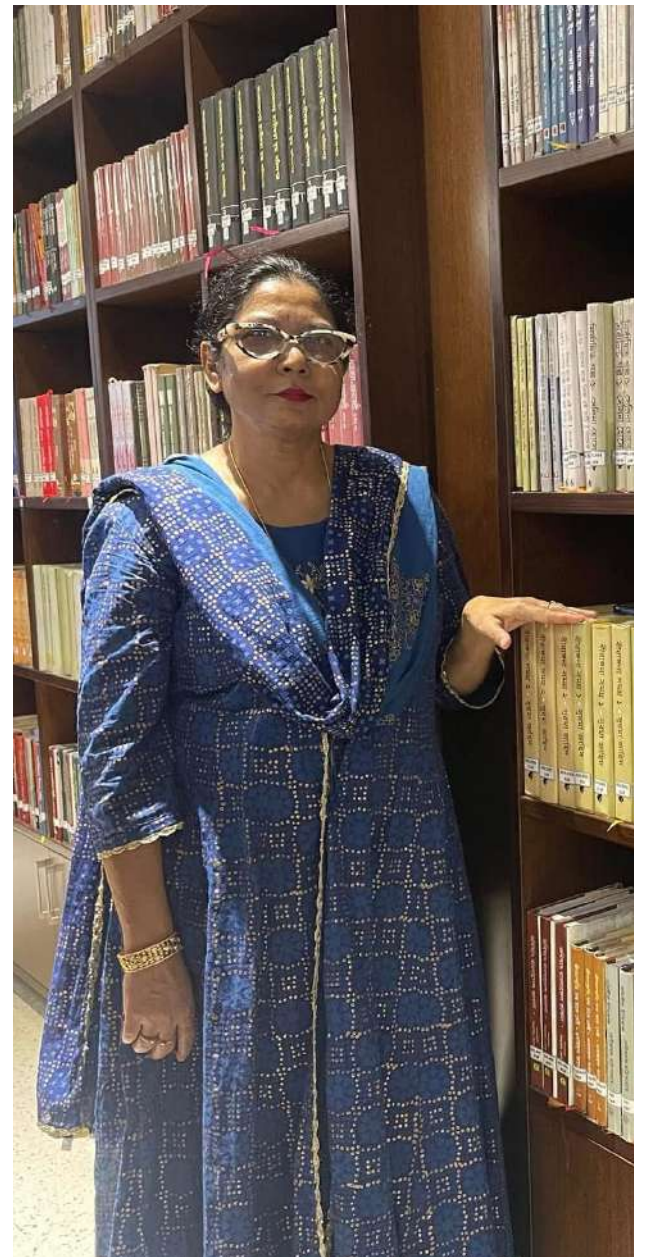
Q: Do you believe your work has had an international impact?

Surma Zahid: For international recognition, translating my books into multiple languages and gaining media coverage are crucial. I believe my work has already made an impact internationally, especially when it comes to the stories of Biranganas and their

role in Bangladesh’s Liberation War.

Q: How do you feel about the new generation’s awareness of the Liberation War?

Surma Zahid: "I’m encouraged by the growing interest in the Liberation War among young people. When I first started, many had



never heard the term ‘Birangana.’ But now, students contact me regularly, wanting to know more about these women and their role in

the war. It shows that the younger generation is becoming more aware and is eager to learn about our history. It’s heartening to see them engage with these stories."

Q: How do you see the evolution of literature in Bangladesh?

Surma Zahid: "Bangladeshi literature has come a long way. The modern era began during British rule, but true modernity came later, in the 1800s. Writers began focusing on social issues, human rights, and women’s struggles, reflecting the transformation of society. Over time, literature became more socially conscious, and writers began exploring real-life experiences and struggles. Today,

I believe literature continues to evolve, with a greater focus on realism and social issues."

Q: What is the importance of research-based writing in Bangladesh?

Surma Zahid: "Research is vital for any nation’s progress. It helps uncover truths, solve problems, and develop new ideas. In Bangladesh, research-based writing has played a crucial role in understanding our culture, history, and society. It’s through research that we uncover hidden stories and bring new perspectives to light. It’s also essential for preserving our past, especially when writing about events like the Liberation War."

Q: What is your philosophy on writing historical content?

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# Interview

Surma Zahid: "When writing history, it's essential to approach it with honesty and impartiality. A writer should ensure their sources are credible and must present history as accurately as possible. History is not just about kings and rulers; it's about society, culture, and the everyday people who shaped the events. My responsibility as a writer is to ensure that these stories are told in a way that reflects the true essence of what happened."

Q: What are your plans to share the true history of the Liberation War with the new generation?

Surma Zahid: "I'm working on creating documentaries, increasing coverage in both the media and schools, and ensuring that the true history of the Liberation War is included in educational curricula. It's important that we preserve these stories in libraries and research centers, so future generations can learn about the war and the brave women who fought for our independence."

Q: What is your personal motto or philosophy in life?

Surma Zahid: "I believe in being good and beautiful—both in my actions and in my surroundings. Life's purpose is

to adapt to changing circumstances and make life easier and more enjoyable.

Above all, I have faith in the Creator, as I believe that without this belief, life would lack meaning. I strive to work with sincerity and honesty, always remembering the Creator and fulfilling my duties."

Q: What advice would you give to aspiring writers?

Surma Zahid: "My advice would be to engage deeply with life. Don't just read books—experience the world. Travel, meet people, and learn from life's diverse moments. This is the key to becoming a good writer. And

remember, writing is about more than just words; it's about capturing the essence of human experiences."

**Surma Zahid's powerful words continue to resonate as she takes on the responsibility of preserving the untold stories of Bangladesh's Liberation War, particularly the women who played an essential role in shaping the country's history. Through her work, the legacy of the Birangonas and their sacrifices will never be forgotten. For the full interview, please visit our website : <https://nyn.press/>**





# END PAGE

## Violence and Discrimination Against Muslims Surge Amid Middle East Conflict

CAIR Reports Nearly 5,000 Complaints as Islamophobic Acts Surge

### Habiba Sultana

Islamophobic incidents in the United States have surged by an alarming 70% in the first half of 2024, amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict. According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), nearly 5,000 complaints related to anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian discrimination were reported, compared to just under 3,000 during the same period the previous year. This increase signals a troubling trend of heightened hostility toward Muslim and Palestinian communities in the U.S. The spike in incidents includes hate crimes, workplace discrimination, and bias in educational settings, particularly during pro-Palestinian protests at universities. These protests, which advocate for Palestinian rights amid the escalating violence in Gaza, have often resulted in backlash against students and faculty, including



Image Source : Reuters

verbal and physical assaults. This surge in discrimination highlights the interconnectedness between global conflicts and local social tensions, as the rhetoric surrounding the Israel-Hamas war has exacerbated existing

### HIGHLIGHT

- Islamophobic incidents in the U.S. increase by 70% during 2024.
- CAIR reports a dramatic rise in hate crimes and workplace bias.

prejudices. Among the most tragic and high-profile incidents was the murder of a six-year-old Palestinian-American boy in Illinois, which police are investigating as a hate crime. In Vermont, three men

of Palestinian descent were shot, further underscoring the deadly consequences of the rise in Islamophobic sentiments. These cases reflect a disturbing pattern of violence and harassment directed at individuals who are seen

as part of the broader Muslim and Palestinian community. The rise in Islamophobia is linked to a broader climate of political polarization and media rhetoric surrounding the Israel-Hamas conflict. As tensions flare in the Middle East, some media outlets and political figures have perpetuated harmful stereotypes about Muslims and Palestinians, further stoking fear and division. In this context, CAIR is urging the U.S. government to take stronger action to address hate crimes and ensure the safety of vulnerable communities. This surge in Islamophobic incidents underscores the need for systemic change, with a focus on both legislation and education to counteract prejudice and violence. As the situation continues to evolve, it remains crucial for communities and leaders to work together to foster greater understanding and solidarity in the face of growing hate.

## “Muslim Matchmaker” Premieres on Hulu with Fresh Take on Dating



Image Source : abc.com

### Jamshed Mozumder

Hulu’s latest reality series, “Muslim Matchmaker,” premiered on February 11, bringing a fresh perspective to dating for Muslim Americans. Created by the team behind “Indian Matchmaking,” the show follows hosts Hoda Abraham and Yasmin Elhady as they help singles find meaningful, faith-based connections. Unlike conventional dating

shows that emphasize quick matches and dramatic conflicts, “Muslim Matchmaker” takes a patient, values-driven approach to relationships. At the heart of the series is the belief that long-term compatibility is built on shared faith, lifestyle, and outlook on life. To guide singles in their search, Abraham and Elhady introduce the “three dates, three months, three hundred questions” rule. This

### HIGHLIGHT

- Hoda Abraham and Yasmin Elhady Guide Muslim Americans in Finding Love
- The series promotes emotional connections over superficial traits.

method encourages individuals to give relationships time to develop before making major decisions, prioritizing deep conversations about

goals, beliefs, and emotional compatibility over immediate attraction. A major focus of the show is addressing the challenges Muslim singles face while navigating love, family expectations, and religious values. Many participants struggle with balancing modern dating norms with their faith, often facing pressure to marry quickly while also wanting to ensure a strong, lasting bond.

The show sheds light on these complexities, giving a realistic portrayal of how young Muslims approach relationships today. Unlike mainstream portrayals that typically depict Muslim dating as overly restrictive or one-dimensional, “Muslim Matchmaker” presents a nuanced and authentic perspective. The participants come from diverse backgrounds, representing various levels of religious observance and cultural influences. Some seek a spouse who aligns strictly with their faith, while others are more flexible in their approach. The show allows these differences to be explored, creating a more inclusive and relatable narrative. The expertise of hosts Hoda Abraham and Yasmin Elhady adds depth to the matchmaking process. Abraham, with a background in relationship counseling, brings a structured and thoughtful approach to dating, while Elhady, a lawyer and comedian, provides cultural insights with a touch of humor. Their guidance helps participants navigate the often-overwhelming

world of relationships while staying true to their values. Beyond matchmaking, the series also aims to educate and inspire. By focusing on emotional depth and mutual respect, it challenges the notion that attraction alone is enough for a successful relationship. The show promotes the idea that love is built over time, through shared experiences and honest communication. This message resonates with audiences looking for a more intentional approach to dating, especially within the Muslim community. As discussions about faith-based dating grow, “Muslim Matchmaker” arrives at a pivotal time. Many young Muslim Americans struggle to find partners who align with their beliefs while also navigating cultural expectations. The show provides valuable insight into these challenges, offering a space for open conversations about love, faith, and commitment. By prioritizing substance over spectacle, “Muslim Matchmaker” stands out as a meaningful addition to the world of reality matchmaking shows.