

## Chaplain Sees Greater Understanding of Islam in US Military

by Joanne L Nix writes from Washington

It has been just over a year since Captain Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad was commissioned a chaplain in the US Army. Today, the young religious leader is still optimistic about the future of Islam in the West.

His commission, he said, is a direct result of a growing understanding of Islam by the American military establishment. And he promised that his appointment in December, 1993, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, was "only a beginning" in his campaign to foster awareness of Islam throughout the US armed forces.

In a recent interview with USA, Muhammad emphasized that his chief aim this year is to "become a good chaplain." Despite the fact the Islamic world is glorifying my (appointment) as the first Muslim chaplain," he said, "the reality is that I am here to be an Army family chaplain. The majority of the people aren't Muslims. My prime responsibility is to every man, woman and child in my unit."

May 12-25 marked the high point of Capt. Muhammad's first year as chaplain. He performed the Hajj, "I wish I could tell you all of it," he said in an attempt to explain what the trip had meant to him. "It was the most fantastic experience of my life. I had the opportunity to pray at the holy Ka'ba (in Mecca) and the Prophet's Mosque (in Medina) and saw people (from) all over the world. Spiritually it was very fulfilling."

During his trip, Muhammad was invited by the Muslim World League to a banquet in Mina where he met King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, the Presidents of Cameroon and Ghana, and other dignitaries. He also toured important holy sites in Mina, Mecca, and Medina.

The appointment of a Muslim military chaplain marks the first time a non-Judeo-Christian faith group has been represented in the US Army. In the Navy, Legalman First Class Malik Noel is set to become its first Islamic chaplain after finishing his current course of training this year, and American Buddhists are currently searching for a candidate to serve as their first chaplain.

According to the Armed Forces Chaplain Board, the total number of Muslims in the military is hard to determine because enlistees are not required to list their religious

preference. But the American Muslim Council, which endorsed the candidacy of Chaplain Muhammad, estimates that there are more than 10,000.

Muhammad noted that the presence of Muslims in the US armed forces increased following the Gulf War after US service members stationed in the Middle East worked alongside Egyptian, Saudi, and other Muslim coalition forces. And, he said, many Americans, himself included, became Muslims after they were inspired by the teachings of Malcolm X, the American Muslim leader of the early 1960's and by the 1992 biographical film, "Malcolm X," directed by Spike Lee.

Muhammad expressed hope that now an Islamic chaplain is part of the military system. "Hopefully more Muslims will come forward and openly acknowledge their faith." In order to reach out to both committed Muslims and service members who have a desire to learn the religion, Muhammad contacted Islamic religious groups in the US, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia to obtain copies of the Koran as well as pamphlets and books in English about Islam.

He also formed links with Muslims stationed in remote areas. Those contact people provide information to local Muslim and non-Muslim residents, distribute Islamic literature, and inform him on the needs of Muslim service members. "What we have to do is make sure that every strategic location where the army has troops, such as Korea, has a contact person," Muhammad said.

The chaplain admitted that although he has made real progress, there is still much that needs to be done. Some of the concerns he still must address are matters of dietary regulations, prayers and religious observances.

Concerning dietary laws, Muhammad was pleased to report that the Department of Defense agreed to provide vegetarian MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) for Muslim troops in Haiti. He said that following its research on Multi-faith rations, "the military is now providing multi-faith vegetarian products and vendors from private industry are also considering the distribution of 'halal' meals for observant Muslim service members worldwide."

Asked about Muslim women in the Armed Forces who wish to follow the traditional female Islamic dress code including the "hejab," Muhammad replied, "The American Muslim Council is working on that issue. I have referred that matter to them (and) it will have to go up through the Department of Defense. Wearing the 'hejab' is not mandatory," he explained, "but it is a symbol of Muslim identity and sends a unified message (to non-Muslims) in the armed services. As long as it is does not (impede work, women) can wear it."

One of Capt. Muhammad's most ambitious goals is to establish suitable sites for worship by Muslims on US army installations. He explained that although the armed forces do not build individual religious structures in order to preserve religious equality, "the American Muslim Council has (agreed to) using the (post) chapel as a multi-faith facility. As long as the chapel can be used for prayers in the form they are performed (by Muslims), it will be acceptable."

The Imam had been invited to discuss Ramadan, Islam's holiest month, at an in-service training session at Fort Bragg in January. He also plans to train chaplain's assistants to set up various services including the Jumaah prayer and the

two Eid services.

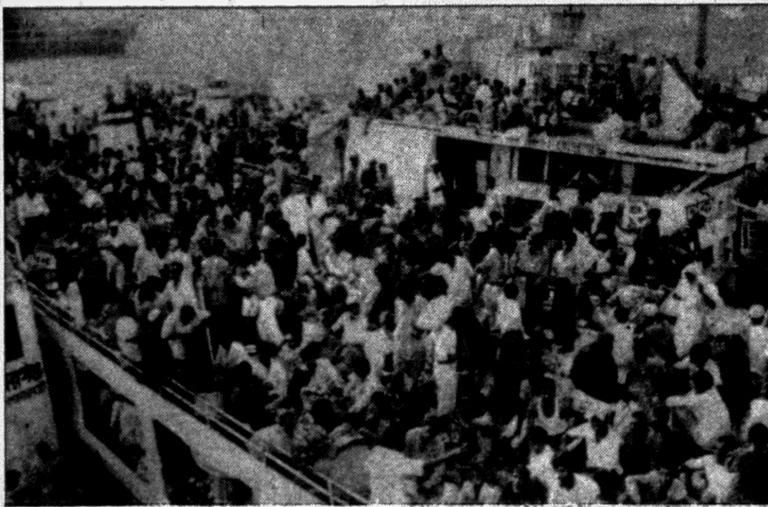
In addition, Captain Muhammad reported that he is occasionally invited to explain how Islam is perceived. His chief topics, he says, are "the stereotyping that continues (in) the western press (and) raising awareness among service members of the plight of Muslims throughout the world, particularly in Bosnia and Somalia."

Chaplain Muhammad holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Anthropology from New York State University, and two Master's Degrees — one in Counseling Education from San Diego State University, California, and one in Social Work from the University of Michigan.

In 1982 he enlisted in the Army as a chaplain's assistant and has also worked as a chaplain with Muslim populations in the New York State Department of Correctional Services.

After he completed his training at the Army's Chaplains School at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, Muhammad as stationed with his family at Fort Lee, Virginia. In his current military assignment, he counsels and conducts religious services for more than 100 Muslim soldiers. — USIS Feature

JOANNE L NIX is a USA Staff Writer



The mad rush of people going to their near and dear ones to celebrate Eid continues.

## Belief in God

by Kalimur Rahman

for your sake.

It is not the condition of justice that you do not obey Him.

Some critics of Islam say that God has been personified by saying that He begetteth not and He is not begotten. The question of personification of God does not arise at all in view of the fact that unlike living creatures of the world He has no physical body, no eyes and no ears and yet He sees, He hears and He knows everything evident as well as secret. It is said in the holy Quran that —

"God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The

parable of His Light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp enclosed in glass. The glass as it were a brilliant starlit from a blessed tree. An olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil is well nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it. Light upon Light God doth guide whom He will to his Light. God doth set forth parables for men; and God doth know all things."

Al Quran: Sura Nur

At different times, God sent His apostles to all peoples to preach them and guide them in the path of faith and righteousness.

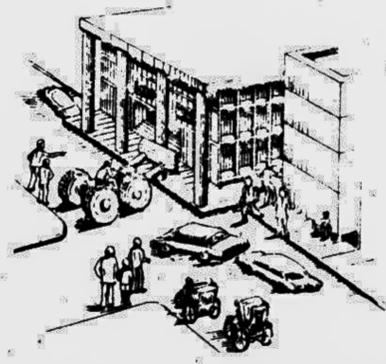
The people of prophet Noah rejected his message scornfully. Noah sought God's help in his mission when he felt himself overpowered by brute force. God gave him directions to build an ark against the impending flood which was to purify the populated world from sin and unrighteousness. Then the torrential rain from above combined with the gush of water from below caused terrible flood which inundated the populated world and the people of Noah were wiped out for transcending the limits in sin. God delivered prophet Noah and the believers who were with him in the ark.

They rejected him, but We delivered him and those with him in the ark and We made him inherit the earth while We overwhelmed in the flood the disbelievers. —

Continued on page 13

অপরূপা চট্টগ্রাম হোক  
আমাদের অনন্য বাসভূমি।

আর সেজন্যে চাই স্বাস্থ্যকর ও  
দুর্ঘটনামুক্ত পরিবেশ।



অপরিকল্পিত দালান, সড়ক অবরোধকারী বাণিজ্য বিতান ও যত্রতত্র গড়ে ওঠা দোকানপাটই অস্বাস্থ্যকর পরিবেশ, অসহনীয় যানজট এবং অন্তহীন দুর্ঘটনার অন্যতম কারণ।

আসুন, মহানগরী চট্টগ্রাম-এর সৌন্দর্য অক্ষুণ্ণ রাখার পবিত্র দায়িত্বে বেআইনী নির্মাণ কাজ থেকে বিরত থাকি এবং সম্মিলিত প্রচেষ্টায় সকল অসুবিধা দূর করে অপরূপা চট্টগ্রামকে পরিণত করি অনন্য বাসভূমি।



চট্টগ্রাম উন্নয়ন কর্তৃপক্ষ

চট্টগ্রাম বন্দরে মালামাল দ্রুত ও নিরাপদে উঠানামার

রেকর্ড সৃষ্টিতে সকলের সার্বিক সহযোগিতা

একান্তভাবে কাম্য



চট্টগ্রাম বন্দর কর্তৃপক্ষ

(জাতির সেবায় নিয়োজিত)

BSC IS THE NATIONAL FLAG CARRIER &  
THE NATIONAL LINES OF BANGLADESH

WE OPERATE THE FOLLOWING LINER SERVICES:  
BANGLADESH/UK-CONTINENTAL SERVICE  
BANGLADESH/FAREAST-JAPAN SERVICE  
BANGLADESH/KARACHI-WEST ASIA GULF SERVICE  
BANGLADESH/AFRICA SERVICE  
FEEDER SERVICE  
BANGLADESH/SINGAPORE/BANGLADESH



PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CALL US AT THE FOLLOWING PHONE NUMBERS

WE ARE ALWAYS AT YOUR SERVICE



বাংলাদেশ জিপিএস কর্পোরেশন  
Bangladesh Shipping Corporation

HEAD OFFICE CHITTAGONG  
BSC BHABAN,  
SALT GOA ROAD, CHITTAGONG  
Phone: 505062-8 PABX 501288  
502898, 505327, 503790  
Telex: 66277 66253 & 66359 BSC BJ  
Fax: 031-719506  
031-501288

DHAKA OFFICE  
28/1, TOYENBEE CIRCULAR ROAD,  
MOTIJHEEL C/A, DHAKA  
Phone: 250380, 250378  
251455, 251411  
Telex: 632204, 64223 BSC BJ  
Fax: 02-863950

KHULNA OFFICE  
K. D. A. BUILDING  
LOWER JESSORE ROAD  
Tel: 22326, 23702, 21142  
Telex: 633327 BSC BJ  
Fax: 22643