

Bengali monthly newspaper "Ohio Sangbad", Ohio, published my article below on March 15, 2024: "My connection with Gaza, Palestine" on my promotional work on STEM education and research in Gaza since 2015



Prof. Sultana N. Nahar
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Since October 7, 2023, as Israeli started genocide in Gaza it has been a painful and stressed time for 5 months with daily new loss of hundreds of lives and brutal persecutions of Palestinian civilians both in Gaza and West Bank. I keep praying for it to stop. My connection with Gaza has been promotion of STEM education and research programs for about 9 years since early 2015. The genocide has shattered my effort with a big blow. Israel has killed thousands of

My connection with Gaza, Palestine

students, hundreds of professors in Gaza where over 97% of population is literate. I don't know how many were part of my program. I made considerable effort to get the focus to progress when the environment is insecure and anger from killed family losses has to be suppressed. Being the single Muslim of the Astronomy Department at the Ohio State University (OSU), I am affected the most by the incidents in Gaza. But there is no scope for vocal expression. Since OSU President's warning after the start of the conflict that no anti-Semitism would be tolerated, OSU has remained silence. Diversity and Inclusion Club (DJIC) of Astronomy shows extreme support and care for the sensitivity for various diverse groups, however it does not include religious diversity, and hence no

word has been said on the condition at Gaza at DIC session. I posted some pictures of suffering in Gaza from news media on the wall outside my office and after consultation with a faculty member of DIC committee, wrote a statement of my involvement in Gaza, and impact on my work in Astronomy email listserv. To my surprise quite a number of Astronomy members responded expressing solidarity with the Palestinians.

I have been quite involved with STEM education and research (ER) in Gaza with significant effort. It is difficult to access and collaborate with any program in Gaza. Israeli controls its activities and has kept it separated from rest of the World. My student Zher Samak in Gaza told me their belief that the world does not care for them to do

anything. In June 2023, I had a meeting with two Engineering faculty members, Casey Harwood and Deema Totah, of University of Iowa, regarding access to Gaza. They along with some faculty members from USA, UK, and Australia had started a program to conduct STEM workshops for Palestinian undergraduate students. They were able to hold it in West Bank but could not get permission for Gaza from Israel. They were aware of my connection with Gaza from my article on Gaza published in American Physical Society (APS) newsletter.

I started work with Gaza since 2015 when I met my student Zher Samak from Gaza pursuing her Ph.D. in Physics in Cairo University. Her funding was money saved from her teaching at schools and saving

of her parents who were also teachers. Zher enrolled to my course on atomic astrophysics and spectroscopy with computational workshops on R-matrix and SUPERSTRUCTURE codes at Cairo University at which I hold an Adjunct professor position. Zher was very confident, focused to her objectives, beautiful but very quiet with little smiles. She was the only student who would come to lectures and computational workshops with a heavy old laptop which would not connect to wifi. She performed very well even with her fever and I awarded her with some cash for a computer.

She resisted the money stating prayer for her was enough but accepted it as award. With years of persecution and instability news in Palestine, I was unaware of any

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education beyond primary schools in Gaza. From Zher I came to know that education and research (ER) being developed in Palestine. Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) was the only institution which offered research scope and higher education beyond bachelor degree by offering Masters degree in several STEM areas. Zher did her Master's at IUG. Higher quality research and higher degrees have been growing at IUG and other universities in Gaza.

Zher connected me to IUG in 2015 and I became part of Gaza ER since then. I provided \$43,000 of my saving to IUG and Al-Aqsa University for promotion of STEM programs in Gaza, and planned to add more. It took time and considerable effort to build up the programs. There is an IUG youtube video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoQLNGmFN2U> of an IUG ceremony on recognition in 2019 that I founded. Impact can be seen in the video where three young students are describing how much inspiration they felt achieving knowledge and looking forward to working harder and gaining more. This video includes me for my virtual participation. I have been in Gaza newspapers number of times.

Figure 1. L: President Awadalla (2nd from right) and vice presidents with the STEM Recognition poster that I founded in 2015. M) Winners in STEM is being recognized. 2017. Winner with printed headscarf is Prof. Hala El-Khozondar. 3) Winners in STEM in 2019. As the Israeli bombing pounded on IUG, an unusual target for an attack, I wrote to IUG on October 10, 2023, three days after the bombing started on Gaza. Only four IUG members responded. Prof.

Rami Mojan of Chemistry Department Wrote "Dear Sultana
Thanks for your email and your kind feeling and wishes.

What is going in Gaza is a real massacre, it is genocide, we lose our beloved every single min and they demolished thousands of homes. Even my home. University has been attacked twice today and their attack caused a huge damage.

Please do whatever you can to drag the attention of the supporters of human rights to support my people and help to stop this crazy criems
Regards Rami"

He also gave accounts of Israel's daily bombing destruction of IUG during October 8-12.

Prof. Saeb Iwini of biology sent pictures of research lab shattered by bombing. He wrote

" Prof. Sultana N. Nahar,
Many thanks for your email and kind support. Yes, we are currently living under a severe attack from the occupation. Hundreds of people have been killed and the non-stop killing is on a large scale. The Islamic university has also been attacked and 3 buildings were destroyed. One major concern in my life is my lab, the tissue culture and cancer research lab, which was damaged as captured in the photos.

If we survive after these bad days, we hope to receive your support to resume our work.

Thank you once again for your kind support.

Yours Dr Saeb Aliwaini"
Prof. Rami Mojan wrote recently
"Dear Prof. Sultana

Thanks for your continuous kind pray and regular asking about us. We still a life and sort of OK. Just yesterday I have
(১৫-এর পূঃ দেবুনা)



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“টেস্ট অফ ওএসইউ” তে অংশগ্রহণ করলো বাংলাদেশ স্টুডেন্টস অ্যাসোসিয়েশন

এথিনা সাহা, ওএসইউ ক্যাম্পাস প্রতিনিধি, ওহাইও সংবাদ : টেস্ট অফ ওএসইউ শিরোনামে ৪০ টিরও বেশি আন্তর্জাতিক স্টুডেন্টস ক্লাব, তাদের সাংস্কৃতিক পরিবেশনা ও বিভিন্ন দেশের জনপ্রিয় খাবার পরিবেশনা করে। গত ১৬ ফেব্রুয়ারি (শুক্রবার) বিকাল ৫ থেকে ৮:৩০ পর্যন্ত অনুষ্ঠানটি বিনামূল্যে সকলের জন্য উন্মুক্ত ছিল। সন্ধ্যায় মেগে সাংস্কৃতিক পরিবেশনা করে বিভিন্ন ছাত্র সংগঠনগুলি। এছাড়া প্রদর্শনী ও খাবার পরিবেশন করে ক্যাম্পাসে ৪০ টিরও বেশি বিভিন্ন আন্তর্জাতিক ছাত্র সংগঠন। তবে খাবারে জন্য মূল্য ধার্য করা হয় ১ ডলার।

টেস্ট অফ ওএসইউ প্রাথমিক দুটি উদ্দেশ্য নিয়ে এই অনুষ্ঠানের আয়োজন করে। প্রথমটি হল বিশ্বজুড়ে জাতিগত খাবারের স্বাদ গ্রহণ ও অর্পিত হল শিক্ষামূলক প্রদর্শন এবং প্রাথমিকভাবে মাধ্যমে বিভিন্ন দেশের সংস্কৃতি পরিচয়গ্ৰহণে সক্ষমতা তুলে ধরা।

বাংলাদেশ স্টুডেন্টস অ্যাসোসিয়েশন গত ৪০ বছর ধরে পরিচালিত হয়ে আসছে ওহাইও স্টেট ইউনিভার্সিটি ক্যাম্পাসে। টেস্ট অফ ওএসইউ অনুষ্ঠানে বাংলাদেশ স্টুডেন্টস অ্যাসোসিয়েশন বাংলা পানের সাথে দলীয় নুতো অংশ গ্রহণ করে। এছাড়া বাংলাদেশী চিকেন শাখী রোস্ট, পোলাও পরিবেশন করে। বাংলাদেশ স্টুডেন্টস অ্যাসোসিয়েশনের সার্বিক দায়িত্বে ছিল সভাপতি এথিনা সাহা, সহ-সভাপতি মাহিন জামান, সম্পাদক মলি ইসলাম, কোষাধ্যক্ষ আয়মান মাহবুব, ইভেন্ট কো-অর্ডিনেটর মাহীন রহমান ও প্রীতি দাস, সোশ্যাল মিডিয়া কো-অর্ডিনেটর রিদ্দা রেজওয়ানা।

বাংলাদেশীদের জন্য বৃহত্তম কবরস্থানের ব্যবস্থা করছে নোয়াখালী সোসাইটি হাজারো প্রবাসীর মাথায় হাত

■ ওহাইও সংবাদ
বৃহত্তর নোয়াখালী সোসাইটি বাংলাদেশীদের জন্য একক সর্ববৃহৎ কবরস্থানের জমি ক্রয় করেছে। ১ লক্ষ কবরের স্থান হবে এ কবরস্থানে। নিউইয়র্কের আপস্টেটের মিডল টাউনে ১২৬ একর যায়গা কেনা হয়েছে। সিটি থেকে মিডল টাউনের দূরত্ব ৭০ মাইল। এ বছরের শেষ দিকেই প্রায় ৪০ হাজার কবরের স্থান তৈরি হয়ে যাবে। অবশিষ্ট ৬০ হাজার কবরের স্থান তৈরি হতে আরও বছর খানেক লাগতে পারে। প্রয়োজনে আরও সম্প্রসারণও করা যাবে কবরস্থান। জমির মূল্য ও উন্নয়ন পরচাহ এই সেমিটারের মূল্য প্রায় ৩ মিলিয়ন ডলারের কাছাকাছি। ইতোমধ্যে টাউন প্লানিং বোর্ডের অনুমোদন মিলেছে। এই সেমিটারি প্রোজেক্টের দায়িত্ব পালন করছেন নোয়াখালী সোসাইটির সাবেক সাধারণ সম্পাদক জাহিদ মিন্টু। তিনি সংবাদমাধ্যমকে জানিয়েছেন, প্রবাসী বাংলাদেশীদের একক কোন সেমিটারি নেই। আমাদের কেউ মারা গেলে কবরস্থান খুঁজতে কখনো আমরা বঙ্গ আইন্যাত, কখনো নিউজার্সিতে দৌড়াই। নোয়াখালী সোসাইটির উদ্যোগে এই সেমিটারি কেনা হলেও এটি হবে সকল বাংলাদেশীদের জন্য। নাম হবে ‘বাংলাদেশ সেমিটারি’। যেকোন জেলা কিংবা উপজেলা সংগঠন এখানে কবর ক্রিতে পারবে। (১১-এর পৃ: দেখুন)

■ ওহাইও সংবাদ
খুব সকালে একটি ফোনকলে ঘুম ভাঙে শাহাদাত ইমনের। হালো বলায় পর অপর প্রান্ত থেকে জানতে চাওয়া হয় এটা জিলানের নম্বর কীনা। রং নম্বর বলে কল কেটে দেন ইমন। পরদিন সকালে একইভাবে ফোনকল রিসিভ করেন করেন তিনি। দিনের বেলায় আরো দুইবার একই ফোন নম্বর থেকে কল রিসিভ করেন ইমন। এভাবে এক সপ্তাহে তিনটি নম্বর থেকে ১৩ বার ফোন পান তিনি। সাত দিনের মাথায় ইমনের সিটি অকার্যকর হয়ে যায়। ঘটনাস্থল থেকে ২ হাজার থেকে ২ হাজার ৭০০ ডলার নাই হয়ে যায়।

আরেকটি ঘটনা-মাহবুবুর রহমান একটি প্রাইভেট জব করেন। অফিসের প্রয়োজনে ফ্রিটারের কালি অর্ডার করেছিলেন অ্যামাজন ডটকমে। যেদিন অর্ডার দিলেন পরদিন তার ইমেইলে একটি ইমেইল আসে যে অ্যামাজনের অর্ডারটি কমপ্লিট হয়নি। ইমেইলে একটি ফোন নম্বর দিয়ে যোগাযোগের পরামর্শ দেওয়া হয়। নিজের সক্ষমতার অভাবে হোক, আর ভুল করেই হোক, ওই নম্বরে কল করে ফেসে যান মাহবুব। হ্যাঙ্কড হয়ে যায় তার ইমেইলটি। পরদিন ব্যাংকের অ্যাকাউন্ট লুণ্ঠান করে দেখতে পান, তার অ্যাকাউন্ট থেকে ৯৫০ ডলার উধাও। অভিযোগ দেওয়ার পর ডলার ফেরত পেয়েছেন। কিন্তু এ ঘটনার তদন্ত চাচ্ছে। আরো একটি ঘটনা-সিরাজুল ইসলাম পেশায় কাবি। চেজ ব্যাংকে তার একটি চেকিং ও বিজনেস অ্যাকাউন্ট আছে। হঠাৎ ঘুম থেকে উঠে নোটিফিকেশন পান যে তার বিজনেস অ্যাকাউন্ট ৫০ ডলারের একটি লেনদেন হয়েছে ক্যালিফোর্নিয়ায়। তিনি তে সোশালে যাননি। আর কোনো অর্থ বেহাত হয়েছে কীনা সন্দেহ (১১-এর পৃ: দেখুন)

My connection with
bured my sister and her husband and son as they have been killed by Israil. However, we will keep living in our land.
Best regards
Rami”
Prof. Hala El-Khozondar wrote:
” Dear Sultans,
The situation is very bad. We need international action to stop what is happening. The Israeli is committing a genocide attack on Gaza. We need your prayer ,
Thanks,
Hala”
Prof. Hala, a distinguished professor of Engineering at IUG, is the President of the ISMWS (International Society of Muslim Women in Science which I founded in 2010) chapter at IUG. She is a recipient of many national and international awards. Before she could inform her father about a prestigious international award she went to receive, he was killed by Israel.
Israel later camped at IUG and then destroyed it with more bombs before leaving. I had communications with two past IUG presidents, but don't know their whereabouts. I did not communicate with the current IUG president, Prof. Sufyan Tayeh, who did Ph.D. at Stanford University and was known as a top researcher within 2% in his field, was killed with his family by Israel on December 3, 2023.
IUG physics department participated in my global online course on atomic astrophysics and spectroscopy. I spent time with Prof. Mahar Ghossain of IUG Physics as he was working on to carry out independent research with his students, and created special account at the Ohio Supercomputer Center for his computations. He has not responded to my two emails. At my second email recently, only one IUG faculty responded. He is safe as he is living in Istanbul now.
I worked with Al-Aqsa University and met President Dr Kamal Al-Shrafi at the Dome of the Rock mosque when I went to Israel at the invitation from Weizmann Institute of Science in 2018. We discussed STEM programs. I also gave him couple of Astronomy books for Al Aqsa University.
I met Prof. Suleiman Baraka of Aqsa University in 2018. He did his Ph.D. in astrophysics in the USA but went back to Gaza to serve, but could not stay there due to oppressive life and returned to USA with a Fulbright fellowship to work at NASA. His family remained in Gaza. We remained connected for years while he in NASA and later in Canada. Within a year of his at NASA, he told me in a distressed discussion that his brother was shot dead by Israeli soldiers when he was standing 3 feet away. Suleiman worked on solar magnetic field at

NASA and published the results. He was very much interested in giving a seminar at Astronomy, OSU and built up his webpage for it. I asked the seminar committee for it, but faculty who is in dynamics of magnetic field in the Sun, has a Jewish wife, commented that Suleiman's research was not of interest to Astronomy Department here. So he was not invited. I have ISMWS members at Al Aqsa University with whom I communicate. I wrote to Suleiman and my other contacts at Al Aqsa University in October and recently. No one has responded.
Fig. 2 a) Meeting with Al Aqsa University President Dr Kamal Al-Shrafi on Dome of the Rock yard in Al Aqsa, b) Prof. Suleiman Baraka (on my right) of Al Aqsa University visiting me in Egypt.
I was part of the organizing committee of a Physics conference in Gaza and gave the ceremonial presentation virtually in 2017. The conference gave me the scope to see how passionate Palestinian researchers are and are carrying out useful research in whatever resources they could find. This was the subject of my 2017 APS newsletter "Science Research in Gaza in Palestine" (Vol 26, No 8, p.5, 2017) available at <https://www.aps.org/publications/apsnews/201708/gaza.cfm>
The news was highlighted at the APS website. Dr. Aaron Temkin of Goddard-NASA was a strong orthodox Jew, non-compromising to Palestinians, but treated me nicely whenever we met. After reading my APS article he told me "They (he meant Gaza) are all bad people. But these (he pointed to the article) are good people." Al-Azhar University was also involved in the organization of the conference, but while watching Palestine news, to my deep sad dismay I watched live Israel destroying it with bombs.
My latest on-going work was with Dr. Salem Abu Musleh (coordinator for science in high schools) and Dr. Raid M. Suleiman of the Ministry of Education of Gaza for promoting

STEM fields for high school students and teachers. My objective is not only promotion of STEM education and research, but also try to bring the anger of suffering of young minds to ER which can bring dignity, security from being attacked and happiness for them. Israel's night air strikes killing Gazan has been going on for years. Zher told me having brothers and sisters in Gaza is a positive thing and means that even if some of them get killed by night air strikes, surviving ones will be there for consolation of the parents.
About Zher, I did know her current status. At Cairo University, she used to miss her family very deeply. I suggested visiting them once. She did not dare doing it mentioning the hardship she went through to get permission from Israel to go to Cairo University to fulfill her dream of getting the Ph.D. degree. She had doubt of return if she went for a visit. She prepared for the Ph.D. degree by studying in combination of rationed electric light and candle light, living with rationed water, rationed internet with limited news of the outside world and bad sewage system around. However, after a year or so at Cairo University she did go back, and her advisor Prof. El-Sherbani told me that she did not return to complete her Ph.D. I was pleasantly surprised to hear from during recently. She did get her Ph.D. in Physics after a delay, got a job at Ministry of Education, but left to join the Physics Department of Al Aqsa University so she could continue research. A person who refused to take money from me in 2015, asked for it to buy a laptop. Israel has destroyed her house completely and killed some members. She is in a displaced camp in Deir al Balah.
I continue my effort to find the status of Palestinians I know and would like to go back to participate in rebuilding the STEM programs in Gaza. I pray all Palestinians survive, lead lives that others enjoy, engage in knowledge and contribute, and the generation of children going through the genocide do not suffer from lifelong trauma.