

Sri Lanka Muslims Anguish over Coronavirus deaths

News:

The forced cremation of two COVID-19 infected Muslims in Sri Lanka has sent shockwaves among the minority community, which accused the authorities of violating Islamic burial rites. Bishrul Hafi Mohammed Joonus, a 73-year-old man from the capital Colombo who died of COVID-19, was the second Muslim to have been cremated in the Indian Ocean island nation, which has registered 151 cases so far. (Source: [Al Jazeera](#))

Comment:

The Coronavirus pandemic (COVID19) that is known to have been confirmed in Wuhan, Hubei province, in China on 07 Jan 2020, has reached 209 countries as of 05 Apr 2020, WHO reports with total number of infections over 1.133 million people and 62,784 confirmed deaths. Sri Lanka had one of the lowest infection/deaths ratio in the South Asia region. It was 1/0 by end of 31 Jan 2020, 1/0 by 29 Feb 2020, 11/0 by 15 Mar 2020 and 120/1 by 31 Mar 2020. It moved from Imported Case scenario to Local Transmission after 29 Feb 2020. As of 5 April 2020, Sri Lanka had 151 infections and 4 deaths.

To date, 2 of the 4 dead are Muslims and the forced actions of the government officials to cremate the bodies without handing them over for Janaza and burial has caused tremendous anguish to the Muslim in Sri Lanka and the world. Despite WHO guidelines that allows burial and followed in many countries in Europe and Asia, it is not followed in Sri Lanka. In the first Muslim case, the 64-year-old father was admitted to a private hospital on 30 Mar 2020 for mild cough and fever. Hospital officials straightaway suspected it as a coronavirus case and moved him to ICU. The family was advised to leave the hospital premises immediately. Within a short time, the family received calls from different government bodies including the Police, most likely on a tip-off from the hospital authorities. Few hours later, the family was informed that the father was on his final moments and transferred to Government hospital where he soon passed away. The final report indicated that it was a positive coronavirus case, though there were no earlier reports. The family was promised by hospital officials that the body will be handed over for burial formalities. However, late at night without notification nor consent government officials cremated the body whilst the family was waiting for the body for burial.

The unexpected turn of events got many organizations and parties representing the Muslims to amend the Sri Lanka COVID-19 gazette to allow burial. Despite the amendment, the government officials acted with disregard and disdain in cremating the second case on 01 Apr 2020. There is no doubt that the government and its subordinates moved with malicious intent to hurt the sentiments of Muslims, who comprise 10% of Sri Lanka population of over 21 million, and rather to appease the Ultra Nationalist Buddhist majority. This has been the trend since 2009, after the decades long civil war ended.

Indeed, burying the dead is among the earliest sunnah taught by Allah (swt) to humankind in the story of the son of Adam (as). In Surah al-Maidah, Allah (swt) says **فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ غُرَابًا يَبْحَثُ فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُرِيَهُ كَيْفَ** **يُؤَارِي سَوْءَةَ أَخِيهِ قَالَ يَا وَيْلَتَا أَعَجَزْتُ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِثْلَ هَذَا الْغُرَابِ فَأُوَارِيَ سَوْءَةَ أَخِي فَأَصْبَحَ مِنَ النَّادِمِينَ** **«Then Allah sent a crow who scratched the ground to show him to hide the dead body of his brother. He (the murderer) said: "Woe to me! Am I not even able to be as this crow and to hide the dead body of my brother?" Then he became one of those who regretted.»** [TMQ 5:31]

Burying after praying Salat-ul Janazah is from the Sunnah of the Prophet (saw). The performance of Salat ul-Janazah (the funeral prayer) is considered Fard (obligatory) Kifayah. If someone is buried without it being performed, the whole community is held responsible, but as long as some gather and perform it, the obligation is removed from the community as a whole. The Prophet (saw) said, **«مَا مِنْ مُسْلِمٍ يَمُوتُ فَيُصَلِّي عَلَيْهِ ثَلَاثَةٌ صُفُوفٍ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ إِلَّا أُوجِبَ»** **«Any Muslim who dies and three rows of Muslims make salah for him, but he will be guaranteed (Paradise)»** (reported by Abu Dawud).

Burying the dead is from the first generation of humankind, which Muslims continue following the Sunnah of Prophet (saw). Truly any other forms of disposing the dead other than burial is considered invalid or abrogated.

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