

'For AMU, it's a battle of perceptions'

The minority character of the university has a sentimental and far-reaching significance for Muslims, who deserve this right, says VC

UNEASY lies the head that wears a crown. This could be even truer of the successive vice-chancellors of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), the historical institution located in Aligarh district in India's most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, who have struggled to eke out consensus on their methods of governance – on what is the best approach to serve the interest of the students/university. For **LT GENERAL ZAMEERUDDIN SHAH**, whose term as the vice-chancellor comes to an end tomorrow (May 16, 2017), his five years at the helm have been even more momentous. While there have been reports of his uneasy ties with the previous Union Minister for Human Resource Development, it was also during his tenure as the V-C that the university had to move court to argue its case for the preservation of its minority status. "This has been the most difficult job I have had to tackle," Lt Gen Shah told *Qatar Tribune's MEHRE ALAM*, in what could possibly be dubbed as his last interview while in office as the V-C.

The AMU, he pointed out in the online interview, is fighting a battle of perceptions, and, "if we can correct the wrong impressions people have about us, we would certainly be the leading university of the country."

As for the Muslim youth's educational advancement, the former deputy chief of Army staff, said the key lies in strengthening their educational foundation. Any "ghettoization" on religious grounds is a dangerous trend for students, he noted.

Excerpts of the edited interview:

QATAR Tribune: From the army to the vice-chancellor of a premier Central university, how has the journey been for you? Did you find the transition smooth?

Lt Gen Zameeruddin Shah: The vice-chancellor's role relates to laying down policy, public relations, garnering funds for the university and ensuring the rule of law prevails. This was a little more difficult than the Army where there is a chain of command and the rules and regulations are well framed.

In AMU, everything is vice-chancellor-centric. This leaves the vice-chancellor with very little time for contemplation or leisure. This has been the most difficult job I have had to tackle. It is unforgiving and



AMU Vice Chancellor Lt. General (Retd.) Zameeruddin Shah (2nd from left), with veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah (centre), during the Professor Zahida Zaidi Memorial lecture at Kennedy Auditorium in AMU on May 4, 2017. Naseer, who is the brother of the vice chancellor, was a student of AMU from 1966 to 1970 and lived in a room he shared with four other students at Sir Syed Hall (Osmania Hostel).

thankless. We worked hard because of the responsibility entrusted upon us and to safeguard the interests of this historical institution.

Q: Your term as the vice-chancellor comes to an end on May 16. Are you satisfied with what the university has achieved in these past five years of your stewardship?

A: I am only partially satisfied. Our aim was to make AMU the No. 1 University by 2017. We came very close but the unfortunate incident of arson in April 2016 took a heavy toll on the perceptions about the university. All I can say is, we have laid a strong foundation and my successor should be able to achieve the goal we had set for this great seat of learning.

The AMU has recently received a certificate of the 11th rank among the Indian Universities from the National Institutional Ranking Framework India Rankings (NIRF) associated with the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Could the university have done better?

AMU was ranked 11th among Central Universities – we scored very low marks in 'Perceptions'. If we can correct the wrong impressions people have about us and score high marks in 'perceptions', we would certainly be the leading university of the country.

What are the main challenges facing the university currently?

The main challenge lies in dealing with the criminal elements that enter the campus and attempt to control the students. They sponsor their elections and favours in return. Another challenge is the porous nature of the campus. We have had to close a large number of entry and exit gates. This has led to inconvenience but has ensured better curbs on the entry of criminal elements.

AMU has some of the renowned Centres for Advanced Learning,

like its History Department, for example. What are the future prospects?

The Centres of Advanced Learning, as in the Department of History, are the pride of AMU. They have done outstanding work in the field of research and academics.

You took over as the V-C when the UPA government was in power at the Centre. Your term saw the change of guard at the Centre with the BJP-led NDA government taking over the reins in 2014. There were reports of you having troubles with the previous Union HRD minister. Has it been smooth with the current Union HRD minister?

What are the key challenges facing the Muslim community of India in terms of education?

The present HRD Minister has always given me a patient hearing. We have full faith that he will be fair and just to the university, especially with regard to the terms of funding, which we expect to be equitable.

Your term as the V-C will also be remembered for the reason that the university has had to move court to fight for its minority status. Could you share your thoughts on the expected outcome? In case the university loses its minority status, what could the impact be on the institution?

The minority character of the university is dear to the hearts of all Aligs (alumni of the university). It has a sentimental and far-reaching significance. That's why we deserve the right to remain a minority institution.

In the past few years there has been a debate on the issue of tolerance with several writers, artists etc. having expressed their dismay over what they term as growing intolerance. Now, there are incidents of cow vigilantes attacking people and taking the law into their own hands. Do you think the society has grown more intolerant over the years?

AMU teaches morality and large-

hearted tolerance. We are a modern, secular university and we abide by that philosophy. Vigilante action can never be tolerated and we are certain that the government will take action to protect all sections of people.

You have been quoted as saying that all governments at the Centre have been biased towards AMU and none of them have treated the institution well. Do you stick to those views?

I stick to the view that AMU has suffered inequity of funding from all governments. All central universities of equal size need to be funded adequately.

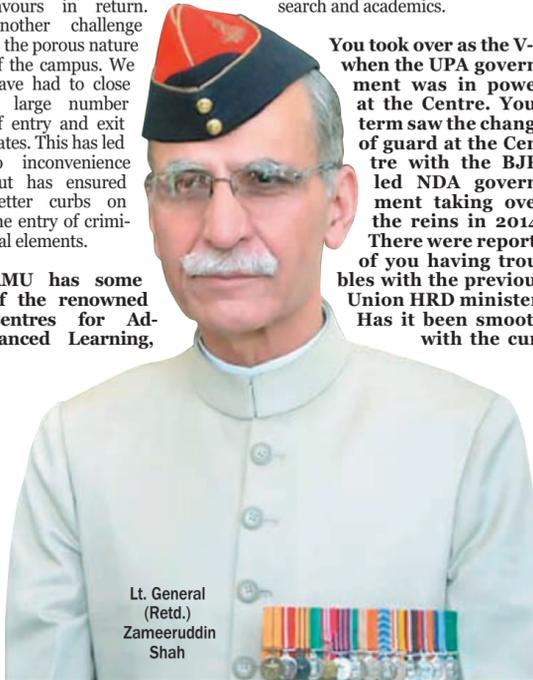
What, according to you, are the key challenges facing the Muslim community of India in terms of education?

The key challenge facing the Muslim community is lack of education at the school level. Because of financial constraints, Muslim children cannot go to good schools and thus, are ill prepared to face open, competitive examinations for institutions of higher learning. If we can establish a chain of schools where we can strengthen the educational foundation of our children, it would alleviate the educational problems of the Muslim community.

The separation and ghettoization of children on religious grounds in schools is a dangerous trend. Another problem is the decay of old Islamic educational institutions. They have been exploited by some families. Their revival is essential.

Your name is doing the rounds as a possible candidate for the post of the next Vice President of India.

As I am to complete my term as the V-C of AMU on 16th May, the Vice President's term is also getting over in a few months from now. It's okay that people might be expecting such a seat for me. But as of now I can assure you that I want to relax, play golf and do something related to establishing quality schools to carry forward the rejuvenated Aligarh movement. I shall never shy away if I am called for any service which is in the interest of the nation. I want to work until the last breath of my life. Every day is a new day. You live with the kind of responsibilities and the challenges of the day.



Lt. General (Retd.) Zameeruddin Shah

News in brief

'Malaria to be eliminated from 15 states by 2020'

THERE has been a progressive decline in the number of cases of malaria and deaths due to it and the disease is likely to be eliminated from at least 15 states in another three years. "By 2020 we will be able to eliminate malaria from 15 states," Dr AC Dhariwal, Director of the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme the health ministry, said. (PTI)

Monsoon rains reach Andaman ahead of schedule

MONSOON rains, which are vital for farm output and economic growth in India, reached the country's Andaman and Nicobar islands on Sunday, six days ahead of schedule, the domestic weather office said in a statement. Andaman and Nicobar, off India's eastern coast, are usually the first areas to receive the monsoon rains. (REUTERS)

Head injuries caused death of rape victim

MULTIPLE head injuries inflicted by a blunt weapon were the main cause of death of the 23-year-old woman from Sonapat in north Indian state of Haryana while sharp edged objects may have been inserted in her private parts, according to the post-mortem report. The chilling findings also suggest that woman may have been sedated before the crime was committed. (PTI)

India boycotts China's B&R meet over CPEC concerns

PTI BEIJING

INDIA on Sunday boycotted China's high-profile Belt and Road Forum (B&R), taking its protest over a controversial economic corridor traversing through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) to a new level despite Beijing's overtures to ensure New Delhi's participation.

Following India's boycott, Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, taking a veiled swipe at New Delhi's move, said the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was an economic project open to all the nations in the region and it

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"must not be politicised".

No Indian official of any level was present at the elaborate opening ceremony attended by 29 heads of state and government along with top officials of the world bodies like the UN, the World

Bank and the IMF. India skipped the meeting due to its sovereignty concerns over the \$50 billion CPEC, which passes through PoK.

Sharif, Sri Lankan Premier Ranil Wickramasinge, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan were among the world leaders who attended the meeting inaugurated by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The US sent a delegation led by Matt Pottinger, special assistant to the President and senior director for Asia at the National Security Council. China apparently saw India's boycott coming as no seat was allotted to it at the

high-tech Convention Centre during the opening ceremony telecast live.

The event, however, was attended by a few Indian scholars representing think tanks, which took part in the group discussions. Skirting any references to India's absence at the meeting, Xi, in his address after inaugurating the Summit, said all countries should respect sovereignty.

"All countries should respect each other's sovereignty, dignity and territorial integrity, each other's development paths and social systems, and each other's core interests and major concerns," the 63-year-old leader said.

Two militants killed in Kashmir gunfight with security forces

AFP SRINAGAR

TWO militants were killed in a shootout with security forces in Indian-administered Kashmir on Sunday, the army and police said.

Acting on a tip-off, government forces surrounded a thickly forested area near the northern town of Handwara, 70 kilometres (45 miles) from Srinagar, triggering the clash.

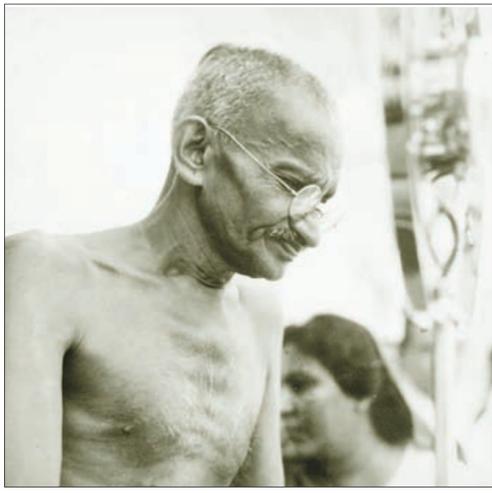
The bodies of the dead were recovered along with their weapons, army spokesman Rajesh Kalia said. On Saturday two civilians including a 13-year-old girl were killed in heavy cross-

border shelling which India blamed on Pakistan. Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the end of British colonial rule in 1947. Both claim the Himalayan territory in full. A revolt against Indian rule over its sector broke out in 1989 and tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians, have been killed since then.

Around 500,000 Indian soldiers are deployed in the region. Rebels have repeatedly attacked government forces and banks in recent weeks. Last week suspected insurgents abducted and killed a military officer who was home on leave for a wedding in Shopian district.

Gandhi-founded outfit HPS to mark 75th anniversary

PTI MUMBAI



The Hindustani Prachar Sabha, based in Mumbai, was established by Mahatma Gandhi in 1942 to develop a common language that could serve as the lingua franca of the country.

AN organisation founded by Mahatma Gandhi to promote Hindustani, a link language between Hindi and Urdu, plans to open libraries in jails and organise a series of essay writing competitions to mark 75 years of its existence.

The Hindustani Prachar Sabha (HPS), based in Mumbai, was established by the Father of the Nation in 1942 to develop a common language that could serve as the lingua franca of the country and bind the people together.

Gandhiji visualised Hindustani, a mix of Urdu and Hindi, as the common man's language. "We are in the 75th year of our existence and have undertaken various projects not only to acknowledge our glorious history but also to reach out to untouched strata of the society,"

Located in the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial building at Churni Road in South Mumbai, HPS has a rich collection of almost 46,000 books and many original manuscripts

HPS programme head Sanjiv Nigam said. The NGO has planned a series of programmes to mark the occasion. "We are opening libraries in the central jails of Maharashtra to reform the prisoners," he said.

"Besides, we are organising a series of essay writing competitions and an international conference on Hindi and Urdu languages in which delegates from South Africa and Mauritius are expected to take part," Nigam said. The HPS would also soon come up with a dictionary of verbs called 'Kriyakosh', he

said. Located in the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial building at Churni Road in South Mumbai, HPS has a rich collection of almost 46,000 books and many original manuscripts, including those scripted by legendary Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib.

Outlining the works of the organisation, its honorary secretary Feroze Patch said, "HPS conducts Hindi and Urdu teaching classes in its premises in Maharashtra and Gujarat for commoners and foreigners."

"We publish our quarterly journal in Hindi and Urdu and also a Braille edition for the visually-impaired people. We have also come up with a new quarterly magazine, 'Hindustani Zaban Yuva', for students," he said. Patch said HPS has been patronised by eminent personalities like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Morarji Desai, Dr Zakir Hussain and Kakasaheb Kalelkar, among others.

Abbas visits India ahead of Modi's Israel trip

NEW Delhi: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas landed in New Delhi late Sunday for a three-day visit looking to strengthen ties with India ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic trip to Israel.

Abbas arrived with a delegation for his third state visit to India, where he will hold key talks on bilateral, regional and international issues, including the peace process in the restive Middle East, according to India's foreign ministry. On Monday – day one of his visit – he will zip to an IT centre in Noida, a satellite city outside the Indian capital, aiming to forge greater cooperation in technology. He is also slated to make an address at New Delhi's India Islamic Cultural Centre in the evening. On day two, he will meet with Modi, his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee and Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj after a ceremonial welcome at the presidential palace. (AFP)