

# Dr Maneh Al-Johani 1942-2002

## Scholar and youth leader

More than 30 years ago as a student at the College of Arts, Riyadh University, Maneh ibn Hammad al-Johani was involved in Islamic activity helping and guiding the youth that developed into a lifelong passion. Though he chose teaching English as his career – was professor at King Saud University, Riyadh (1975-95) – his vocation in life was *da'wah*, which made him a familiar figure worldwide. When he died in a fatal car accident on 4 August he was on his way to meet Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in the capacity of the secretary general of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY).

Born in 1942 in Makkah, Al-Johani obtained his first degree in Riyadh before doing MA and PhD in English in the US. Besides being fluent in Arabic, English and French he also knew several other languages.

The unfamiliar surroundings of his student days in the US rekindled his desire to help and guide fellow Muslim and Saudi students. He was an active member of the Muslim Students Association of the United States and Canada, and of the Islamic Centre of Bloomington City. He founded The Muslim Arab Youth Association (MAYA) and as its secretary general, he busied himself in fostering unity among Muslims and cooperating with other Islamic organisations.

While doing PhD in 1982, he became chairman of Muslim Students Federation as well as of the Islamic Society of North America's (ISNA) education committee and member of its Fiqh committee. At Indiana University Al-Johani turned his attention to inviting non-Muslims to Islam through the process of disseminating knowledge and understanding of Islam, and formed a committee to publish relevant material. On his return to Saudi Arabia, he passed on this cherished project to Dar Al-Iftaa.

Dr Maneh Al-Johani's organising skill, unflagging devotion and enthusiasm, not to mention his intellect and academic ability, drove his twin projects: Islamic humanitarian work through the Saudi-based but independent international organisation WAMY, and *da'wah*. In 1983 he became assistant secretary general of WAMY and secretary general in 1987.

Twenty years of his dedicated service saw WAMY's annual budget rise from



SR6 million to SR100 million, and burst of activities that included three international conferences and many publications in Arabic, English and other languages. He pushed himself hard working 10-12 hours daily. He was generous with his help, advice and patronage.

According to Hussain Zulqarnain, director of the London-based International Council for Islamic Information (ICII), Dr Al-Johani launched WAMY's website on the Internet, in Arabic and English, to espouse the cause of Islam, and wanted to set up an Islamic satellite channel.

Ever so keen to help, he worked either as executive committee member, chairman, or in an advisory capacity in such organisations as The Institute of Islamic Information and Education, Chicago, (a special institute for *da'wah* among non-Muslims); Islamic Da'wah at Universities in US and the UK; The Muslim Converts Association, Singapore; Regional Islamic Da'wah Council of South East Asia & Pacific; and Islamic Da'wah Movement of South

Africa. He founded the International Council for Islamic Information (ICII) to remove western misconceptions of Islam, and was its trustee since 1996.

Dr Johani was a prolific writer and translator. Among his works were a series of 15 introductory pamphlets on Islam in English, aimed at non-Muslims, which were later translated into 50 languages. His booklet, *The Truth about Jesus*, was invaluable in leading many a Christian to Islam.

According to the assistant secretary general of WAMY, Saleh Al-Wohaibi, *The Meanings of the Qur'an*, which he and Dr William Daud Peachy translated into English, was superb because of its lucidity; though he rates the *Encyclopaedia of Muslim Minorities* as Dr Johani's great work. An English translation of it will be published posthumously. As an academic Dr Johani produced many research papers as well.

Despite his wearing more than one hat, Maneh Al-Johani made time to contribute articles to Islamic publications and translated books such as *The Muslim Belief* by Shaikh Muhammad bin Salih Al-Uthaimen and *Problems faced by the Dawah* Professor Fathi Yakan. His was a familiar face on the television, in his favourite role of explaining Islam in English to non-Muslims.

The cause of Islam and Muslims was very dear to him. As head of the sub committee on Islamic affairs in the Shoura Council of Saudi Arabia he took a keen interest in Islamic and Muslim causes, including the freedom movements in Palestine, Kashmir and Chechnya.

Dr Maneh Al-Johani accomplished more than most people. He will be sorely missed. WAMY will feel his absence particularly at its 9th international conference on 'Muslim Youth and Globalisation' on 22 October.

**Anwar H Chowdhury**

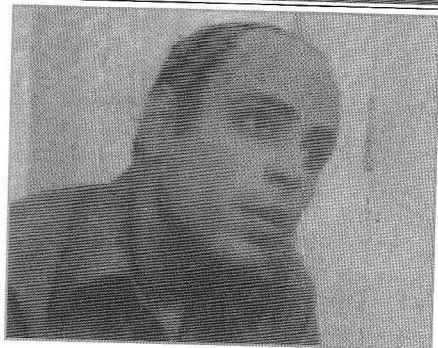
## Mohammad Jibril

### PFLP-GC operations coordinator

Mohammad Jibril, son of Ahmad Jibril, leader of the PFLP-GC (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command), died on 20 May 2000 in Beirut when his car which appears to have been wired with explosives blew up. 'Israel had no connection to it,' said an Israeli defence ministry official. The PFLP-GC leader had, however, little doubt about Israeli culpability in the

assassination of his son.

Mohammad Jibril headed the PFLP-GC in Southern Lebanon and was responsible for coordinating military operations inside the occupied territories. He is believed to have master-minded the 1987 daring guerrilla raid on the Israeli settlement town of Kiryat Shimona. Last May, he had also claimed responsibility for arranging a shipment of arms for the Intifada. The Israelis had, however, seized the ship in the Mediterranean.



## Abu Nidal 1937-2002

*Gun, only the gun*

Dreaded and celebrated alike, Abu Nidal ('father of struggle') died by the gun in Baghdad, 16 August 2002. He was born, May 1937, into a wealthy Palestinian family in Jaffa. Named **Sabri al-Banna**, he was the 12th child from his father's second wife, a Nusayri from Northern Syria. His lost his father, **Khalil al-Banna**, in 1945 and lost his country in 1948. The blight changed the course of his life, as it did the course of history itself.

Sabri spent his early years in Nablus, where he was introduced to the Ba'ath ideology. In 1958, King Husain (d.1999) cracked down on the Ba'ath; so he moved to Riyadh, where he worked as painter and electrician and founded the Palestine Secret Organisation. He joined Al-Fatah set up by **Yasir Arafat** in Kuwait in 1958-59 and became the PLO representative in Baghdad and Khartoum.

With Palestinian diaspora in search of an appropriate liberation methodology, the debacle in June 1967 jolted everyone from their armchairs. By occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the Israelis had bitten more than they could normally chew. They needed time to build settlements and consolidate the occupation. However, instead of challenging the occupation on the ground, the Palestinian guerrilla groups chose to externalise their fight over other people's lands or skies. The idea was to win attention and move western conscience to, hopefully, force Israelis to vacate their occupation. No conscience seemed to move and the Israelis went on building settlements after settlements and bolster their occupation.

'The gun, only the gun,' declared Abu Nidal. He seemed to be the angriest child of the debacle. As the mainstream PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) 'terrorists' ran out of ideas and came down to force Israel to the negotiating table – on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 242 – it was Abu Nidal who took it upon himself to weed out the 'weaklings' in their

struggle. He denounced Arafat as traitor and established his own 'legitimate' Al-Fatah, with the suffix, 'Revolutionary Command'.

The 'Revolutionary Command' killed several PLO representatives in Kuwait, Paris, Brussels, London and in the Portuguese resort of Albufeira, the most notable being **Said Hammami** and **Isam Sartawi**. Abu Nidal said Sartawi was 'a cheap servant of the CIA, Mossad and British Intelligence'. Sartawi suspected Abu Nidal of 'working for Mossad'.

If the PLO had wanted to pin down Israelis around 242, they ended up in an internal war of their own. The killing of each secret negotiators also meant whatever 'commitment' he might have obtained from Israel, the next one had to begin from the very beginning. And when something happened which no one was prepared to own, it was 'credited' to Abu Nidal and like all brave 'fidayin', he would say, 'Thank you, yes we have done it.'

One such 'revolutionary action' which sent all 'peacemaking' to square one, driving away the PLO and its leadership from Lebanon to Tunis, was the shooting (3 June 1982) of **Shlomo Argov**, Israeli ambassador in London. The British police took little time to round up the suspects, including Abu Nidal's nephew, **Marwan al Banna**. The Israeli intelligence chief wanted to brief the cabinet on Abu Nidal, but **Menahem Begin** (d.1992) dismissed him saying, 'They are all PLO.' For **Ariel Sharon** the shooting was 'merely the match that ignited the fuse'. The cabinet decided to invade Lebanon and Sharon went marching up to Beirut.

Contrary to 'received wisdom', it is doubtful that for once Abu Nidal was involved in the Argov affair. Very simply he would not have put his own nephew on the job whom he had sent to study in Britain; even if he had, he would have made sure that he was out of the country in no time. However, the fact is that his 'struggle' happened to serve the interests of his 'enemy', not his own people. It is a moot point then whether or not, like the many self-appointed 'mujahideen' of today, he was an agent of this or that power. He scored his own goal.

Abu Nidal has been accused of working at various times for one or another Arab country, and even the

circumstances of his death remain obscure. The Iraqis say he committed suicide when he was accused of working for Kuwaitis. The British newspaper *Daily Telegraph* claims he was executed because he had refused to train Al-Qaeda 'terrorists' for Iraq – as if the Iraqis were unskilled in these things). One of his aides now says his boss had told him that his organisation had blown up the Pan-Am Flight 103 in 1988 at the behest of **Col Qadhafi**. Whatever the truth, his 'reputation' will live on.

Abu Nidal married a Nablus girl, **Hayam al-Bitar**, who bore him one son and two daughters.

## Zeid Bin Shaker 1934-2002

*Said go slow with Israel*

**King Husain's** (d.1999) distant cousin who came from an old loyalist family that fought against the Ottomans, Field Marshal Zeid Bin Shaker, died of a heart attack, 30 August 2002. He was born on 4 September 1934.

Zeid Bin Shaker had served variously as chief of the royal court (1988, 1989 and 1993), commander of the armed forces (1976-78) and prime minister (1989, 1991-93 and 1995-96). Towards the end, though, he resigned as prime minister because he felt the king had been going too fast in normalising relations with Israel. He also believed Jordan should continue to support Iraq. Husain accepted his resignation and appointed him an 'emir' which barred him from taking part in politics. Zeid Bin Shaker is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

