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daughter is handling the situation. To her, he said, the situation is a matter of right and wrong. She did not understand why she could not go outside because a plane hit a building somewhere else. He described the first time she went outside after the attacks.

"When my daughter came home, she said, 'We went to the mailbox, we came back and nobody did anything to us. There were people driving their cars, trying to go to their houses, but they didn't do anything to us, because we did not do anything to them.' To her, it was as simple as that. We hadn't done anything wrong, so they shouldn't do anything bad to us."

Sabir described an incident when he and Begum visited an area grocery store and noticed two children staring at them. Their mother grabbed them and apologized for her children's actions and explained that they are trying to learn about Muslims and that she was trying to teach them what Muslims are.

"Even though I talked with them and shook their hands, even though I did everything to make them comfortable, they were so very skeptical. I patted them and said, 'Look, she is my wife,' and she took them aside and showed them her face and said, 'Look, I am a human being.' They were just children and they could not comprehend. It was too big an impact on them," Sabir said.

In spite of the fear and lack of understanding in the community, the focus group members said that the majority of their interactions with non-Muslim students since the attacks have been positive. However, there are still common misunderstandings and misconceptions.

The group collectively said these might be caused by ignorance about who Muslims are and what they believe. They said the more educated people are, the more willing they are to see someone else's point of view.

Faisal Chaudhry, a computer information services staff member, said people need to become more familiar with each other and that it is interesting to hear what people think of Muslims.

"I won't be able to speak for other cultures, but within the Muslim community, or Middle East, there are a lot of misconceptions about what we practice, who we are," Chaudhry said. "That seems to come out at a time of crisis like this, and we are surprised to learn what others sometimes think of us."

Begum said she does not think A&M students understand her as a Muslim woman.

"I think that a lot of people look at me and think that this is imposed on me, Begum said. "And not only imposed, that is difficult to carry on with what I am wearing. If you are looking behind the veil, from where I am, my life differs very little from yours."

The group said a woman covers herself as part of her modesty and that this is often misunderstood by non-Muslims.

Another male said the dress is part of the religion and faith. Christian Nuns wear garb similar to Muslim women, he said, but it is accepted.

"You can find tribes in Africa that barely dress, and it is acceptable," he said. "It's about culture. You cannot go to them and tell them that they cannot dress like that ... The idea that [women] must be oppressed to do something like that is not correct at all and should be corrected in the media. It shouldn't even be brought up. It is part of the culture."

Chaudhry said Muslim men and women should dress modestly and should not wear tight or revealing clothing. The clothing should not attract attention, he said.

Other moral guidelines include avoiding certain types of language, not being alone with a woman who is not a member of his immediate family and avoiding touching.

Muslim men are expected to dress from the knee to the neck; some Muslim men wear a beard to imitate Muhammad, the Muslim prophet.

Misrepresentations in the media include a generalization that all Muslims hate Americans and that they support fighting. The word Muslim means "one who is submitting to the will of God." One participant said extremists are often people who do not understand their own religion; that this is not a situation unique to the Muslim religion. Islam, the group said, does not condone the acts of Sept. 11.

"The people, based on the little amount that they know about Islam, mostly out of context,

are doing things that are not in the teachings of Islam and is not unique to Islam," a male participant said. "We see this in Christianity and Judaism. We see people blowing up abortion clinics in the name of Jesus. I mean, I don't think any sane Christian would say that is Christianity, but they are still doing it in the name of Jesus. So, similar things happen to Muslims. They are not immune to that. I think it is partly due to lack of education."

Like Christianity, Islam permits fighting in self defense, in defense of religion or on the part of those who have been forcibly expelled from their homes. It has strict rules of combat, which includes prohibiting harming civilians and destroying crops, trees and livestock. War, therefore, is a last resort.

Sabir said people should be careful when labeling others as terrorists.

"In general, sometimes there are people of the Muslim people resisting occupation military and they are fighting because they are getting kicked out of their homes, or their children are being shot or their houses raided," Sabir said. "Their opponents are going to label them terrorists ... so, right now you must be careful as to where these labels are being placed and be critical in examining that kind of thing."

A male participant said he does not think most Middle Eastern people hate Americans, but have hatred toward the American government. He said they love American ideas like freedom and freedom of speech, but when the government helps tyrannical Middle Eastern governments stay in power, American values are contradicted.

"I think that the Middle Eastern people know a lot about the American culture," he said. "They know the values of the American people, but when they see the American policies, there is a contradiction between them."

He said that as Muslim Americans, they felt the wrath of Sept. 11.

"We all felt the destruction on Sept. 11, and the rest of the country did, too," he said. One male participant said Muslims believe that the land of Islam is a holy land and when Muslims around the world see the Palestinian people butchered by bullets with "Made in USA" written on them, they are going to have some resentment.

Chaudhry said that while there is hatred in the world, no one in the Muslim world uses this resentment to justify what happened Sept. 11.

"No Muslim could justify the acts of Sept. 11," Chaudhry said. "There is no authority for that in their religion or culture."

The misuse of the term "fundamentalist" and how it is loosely interchanged with the word extremist was identified as a problem by the focus group. One participant said fundamentalism in Islam is a very positive thing and should not be confused with extremism or terrorism. He said being a fundamentalist means closely following one's religion. In the case of Muslims, they fundamentally follow their values that include peace and goodwill.

"Being a fundamentalist is a good thing because you are sticking to the fundamentals of your religion," he said. "Being an extremist is a bad thing because you are going to an extreme. But unfortunately, in the media, the words are used interchangeably."

There has been tension between Muslim and non-Muslim faith and the focus group members said there are things in the A&M and surrounding communities that could be improved.

The MSA offers classes in varying locations every two weeks titled "Muslim 101" where people can hear a presentation regarding Islam and then the floor is open to discussion. Chaudhry said he thinks the group has not done all it can to reach out to the community, but will make more of an effort to do so.

"I would say we have not done the best job possible," Chaudhry said. "I mean, I think we have a long way to go ourselves in terms of going out and reaching out to people and I think we feel the urgency of that so much more after Sept. 11. I think we will be making more of an effort and I think we will be inviting others to join us, going out and meeting others and sitting with people."

## Prayer, devotion increase during Ramadan

By LINDSEY FIELDER  
THE BATTALION

Ramadan, a month of fasting and prayer for Muslim adults, began with the confirmation of the new moon on Nov. 16 at sunset. Ramadan is a time of purification, encouraging good, forbidding evil and striving for perfection.

Muslims are not allowed to eat, drink, smoke or have sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset. Iftar, the evening meal that breaks the fast, is a time of celebration and joy.

Kandoker Mahmudur Rahman, president of the Muslim Student Association and a graduate student in economics, said Ramadan is a time for self actualization and a devotion to achieving perfection.

"Religiously, Ramadan is a time to strive for perfection and nobody wants war during this time," Rahman said. "It is tough because our religion is not specific about this issue (fighting during Ramadan)."

Faisal Chaudhry, adviser to the Muslim Student Association, is from Pakistan and has worked as a systems analyst at Computing Information Systems for two and a half years. Muslims observe the month of Ramadan because it is a commandment from Allah, he said.

"Observing Ramadan is the duty of every believer," Chaudhry said.

Although most Muslim students are opposed to terrorist behavior, they also are opposed to the U.S. bombing Afghanistan, Chaudhry said.

"We don't think the U.S. bombing will help the situation, and it may increase hostility toward the U.S.," he said.

Muslim leaders are calling for a cease-fire during this time, of worship because they are concerned about the public opinion in their country, Chaudhry said. During Ramadan, Muslims pray for hardship in the world and it may agitate their feelings about the U.S. when they are praying for their Muslim brothers around the world, he said.

"Many Muslims see the actions of the U.S. as revenge, not as justice," Chaudhry said.

Mike Martin, a reborn Muslim, is retired from the United States Air Force. He was raised Catholic, but believes he was born Muslim and has returned to the faith.

Martin said the bombing of Afghanistan is futile. The Russians left Afghanistan in rubble and Chaudry said the U.S. is only making smaller rocks of what is left of the country.

"The bombing is disrupting the lives of innocent people who are not terrorists, and it makes their worship harder and it is affecting the most holy month for Muslims over there," Martin said.

The absence of media for Muslims in Afghanistan leads them to see the United States as the "bad guy" because they do not understand why they are suffering, he said.

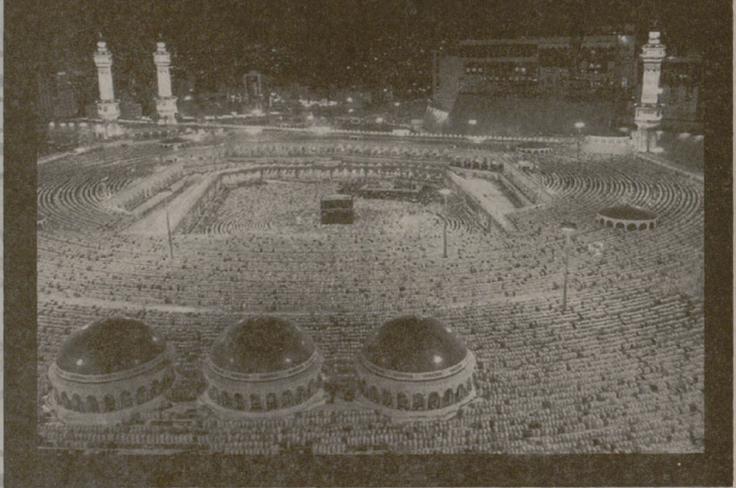
"All these people know is that they aren't terrorists and they don't know any terrorists, but they are being punished for the terrorists' actions," Martin said.

Chaudhry said Ramadan will have special meaning after the terrorist attacks.

"The feeling among Muslims is that there is more pain and suffering than before," Chaudhry said. "We are fearful that the volatility of the world is increasing Muslim hardships."

Prayers will be focused on the increased pain and suffering due to the war, he said.

"[The recent attacks have] given everyone, not just Muslims, a sense of how fragile peace and harmony can be," Chaudhry said.



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