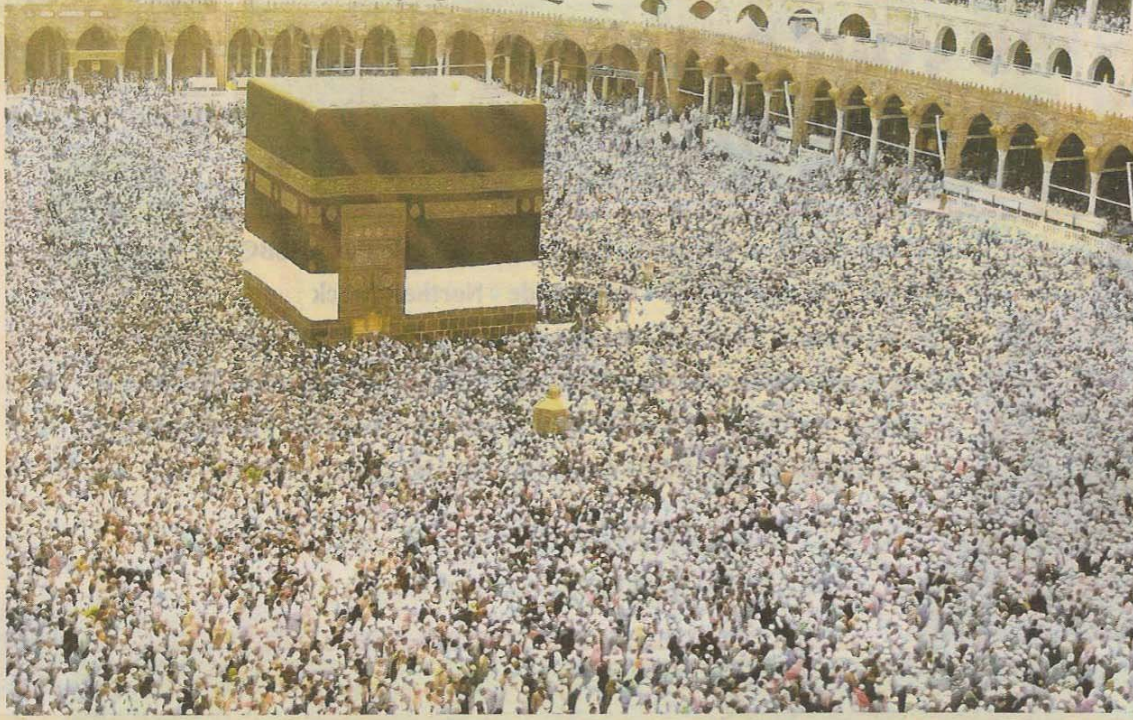


# One man's mission....



EVERY adult Muslim who is physically and financially able must take part in the Hajj - a three-week long festival at their faith's holiest sites.

That sees up to three million Muslims arrive in Saudi Arabia from every corner of the world annually.

Among them was community leader Anouar Kassim and his wife Maryam from Milton Keynes.

Last week at Woodhill Prison he talked of his experience - to invited guests and dignitaries and also to prisoners of all faiths and none.

He told them of the rites Muslims must observe at key sites following the footsteps of the Prophet Mohammed.

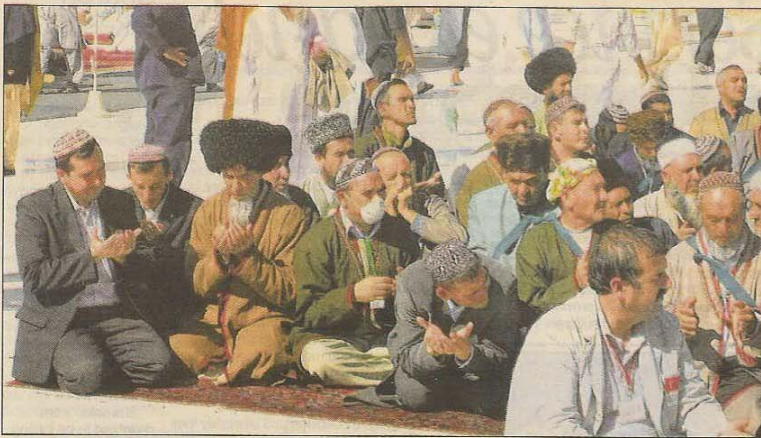
Among them is 'the standing' on the plain of Arafat, the casting of seven pebbles at white pillars representing Satan who tempted the Prophet, the sacrifice of a goat or sheep - with the meat sent to poor Muslims around the world, the symbolic shaving of men's heads and a lock of hair cut by women as a symbol of humility.

At Mecca pilgrims perform what is probably the devotion best known to non-Muslims the circling of the Ka'bah seven times by a vast host.

For Anouar the gathering of 200,000 followers to hear again Mohammed's Farewell Sermon at Arafat was most significant.

"He espoused a belief in one God, the equality of all Muslim believers, the sanctity of life, property and honour, women's rights and the notion of Community," said Anouar.

"As a result of this teaching for many Muslims Arafat IS Hajj.



"Nowadays we hear Preachers quoting verses from the Quran that are out of context and can only lead to misunderstanding, creating disharmony.

"The Hajj encourages co-existence and integration with wider communities," he said.

THE Mayor of Milton Keynes Cllr Brin Carstens and High Sheriff of Buckinghamshire Alexander Boswell were among guests at Woodhill Prison last week for a meeting of Inter-Faith MK at Woodhill Prison with Convenor Tim Clapton.

Faith leaders from the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Jewish communities gathered to hear the talk on the Hajj by Anouar Kassim.

Afterwards Mr Boswell said he found the talk fascinating and illuminating.

"In some ways it showed us how different we all are and yet we are all created in the same way and imbued with the same human spirit," he said.

Earlier Anouar had spoken to 80 prisoners of all faiths.



Anouar with a fellow muslim from the Chechen Republic