



**Witness Statement of Mehdi Nozar**

**Name:** Mehdi Nozar  
**Place of Birth:** Tehran, Iran  
**Date of Birth:** 18 January 1977  
**Occupation:** Legal Expert

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**Interviewing Organization:** Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (IHRDC)

**Date of Interview:** 13 October 2012

**Interviewer:** Morad Mokhtari (IHRDC researcher)

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This statement was prepared pursuant to an interview with Mehdi Nozar. It was approved by Mehdi Nozar on October 15, 2013. There are 41 paragraphs in the statement.

The views and opinions of the witness expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center.

## Statement

### Background

1. I am Mehdi Nozar, born on January 18, 1977 in Tehran. Before leaving Iran, I was a legal adviser for the Cultural Heritage Organization. Because of my political activities during the 2009 presidential elections I was fired in May 2010 and on August 9 of the same year I was summoned and detained at Evin Prison. After imprisonment for a year in Evin's sections 240, 209 and 350, I was released on August 6, 2011. I resumed my activities and when the Intelligence Ministry summoned me once again, I left Iran in November of 2011.
2. I basically wasn't a political person. Like any other young person, I always tried to seek work and build my life. I was a graduate student in the field of criminal law and criminology. I worked as a legal adviser for the Cultural Heritage Organization for seven years under Mr. [Seyyed Hossein] Marashi<sup>1</sup>, until the arrival of Mr. Rahim Mashaie.<sup>2</sup>

### Cultural Heritage Organization

3. If I start talking about all the wrong things and mismanagement that took place during this time in my field of cultural heritage, there would be a lot to say. During Mr. Mashaie's management, he was practically never there and was always traveling. Especially during the first four years [of Mr. Ahmadinejad's presidency], he was always on trips to the provinces. The Cultural Heritage Organization was run by a gang that included: [Hamidreza] Baghaie<sup>3</sup>, [Seyyed Hassan] Mousavi<sup>4</sup> and Dr. [Mohammad Sharif] Malekzadeh<sup>5</sup> In fact they were all employees who had been expelled from Radio Tehran.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For more information see (in Persian): <http://shakhsiatnegar.com/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%B9%D8%B4%DB%8C>

<sup>2</sup> “*Miras-i Farhangi-i Iran va Karnameh Esfandyar Rahim Mashaei*”, [Cultural Heritage of Iran and Esfandyar Rahim Mashaei], Official website of Abdollah Shahbazi (Iranian Historian), June 2, 2009, available at (in Persian): [http://www.shahbazi.org/pages/Mashai\\_Chicago\\_Affair.htm](http://www.shahbazi.org/pages/Mashai_Chicago_Affair.htm); see also (in Persian):

<http://shakhsiatnegar.com/%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%81%D9%86%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D8%AD%DB%8C%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C>

<sup>3</sup> “*Hamid Baghaei Kist?*” [Who is Hamid Baghaei?], Rasekhoun website”, available at (in Persian):

<http://www.rasekhoun.net/news/show-73262.aspx>; see also (in Persian): <http://shakhsiatnegar.com/%D8%AD%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%B6%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D9%82%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C>

<sup>4</sup> “*Seyyed Hassan Mousavi Reis-i Sazeman-i Miras-i Farhangi Shod*” [Seyyed Hassan Mousavi was appointed as head of the Cultural Heritage Organization], Asriran, January 4, 2012, available at (in Persian):

<http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/195887/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%88%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A6%DB%8C%D8%B3-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%87%D9%86%DA%AF%DB%8C-%D8%B4%D8%AF>

<sup>5</sup> “*Malekzadeh moaven-i Ahmadinejad va Reis-i Sazeman-i Miras-i Farhangi Shod*”, [Malekzadeh was appointed as Ahmadinejad deputy and head of the Cultural Heritage Organization], Hamshahri Online, December 1, 2011, available at (in Persian):

<http://www.hamshahronline.ir/details/192950>; see also (in Persian): <http://shakhsiatnegar.com/%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%D8%B4%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%81-%D9%85%D9%84%DA%A9%E2%80%8C-%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%87>

<sup>6</sup> “*Az Mashaei ta Malekzadeh/ Hameye Havashi-i Roasai-i Sazeman-i Miras-i Farhangi va Gardeshgari dar Dowlathayeh Nohom va Dahom*”, [From Mashaei till Malekzadeh/ All margins of the Cultural Heritage Organization heads in ninth and tenth governments], Khabar Online, December 2, 2012, available at (in Persian): <http://khabaronline.ir/detail/261173/>

4. At the Cultural Heritage Organization we used to receive confidential reports that, for instance, some ancient objects had been found in some region. We would quickly send a letter to the security or protection office of that province to carry out the job. They would answer back that the matter was out of their hands because a group under direct orders from the organization had come there and were doing the investigation. Only God knows what objects were taken. These kinds of things happened a lot.
5. Regarding the way employees dressed at the Cultural Heritage Organization, I should say that Mr. Mashaie really didn't care. Women would wear makeup and if their hair was showing a little bit, he would not interfere. As for financial matters, he also took care of his employees. He did not care about Iranian history but he did look after his staff. But Baghaie was a very radical person and acted like a Taliban member.
6. As an Iranian, when I saw what is happening to our cultural heritage I would get truly upset. However I could not do anything about it. For example excavations at Sivand Dam, while Mr. Mashaie knew Cyrus [the Great's] tomb would be destroyed and all experts at the Cultural Heritage Organization had advised against it, he nonetheless ordered the dam take water.<sup>7</sup>
7. For all these reasons, I decided to join Mr. Mousavi's presidential campaign in 2009. After all, Mr. Mousavi was in favor of reforms and that's what I believed also. During Mr. Khatami's [presidency] I had worked with Mr. [Seyyed Hossein] Marashi. I had clearly seen the difference between Khatami's government and Ahmadinejad's government. Therefore, like most Iranian people I opposed Mr. Ahmadinejad. I joined Mr. Mousavi's campaign and I began helping in my own field of law and anything else [they needed me for].
8. The *herasat*,<sup>8</sup> or security office at the Cultural Heritage Organization was a big supporter of Ahmadinejad and they knew I was active in Mousavi's campaign. They asked me a number of times to leave Mousavi's campaign and join Ahmadinejad's campaign. Mr. Emadi worked at the Cultural Heritage Organization's *herasat* office but he was actually an agent of the Intelligence Ministry. He called me in a few times and told me, "We received reports that you are working with the opposition. You are getting your paycheck from this government and helping the other side." I told him, "Mr. Emadi, I'm standing beside my people. I have at least seen the damage done to the country's cultural heritage."
9. Mr. Emadi was about 45-46 years old. He wore glasses, had tanned skin, salt and pepper hair, and short facial hair. The head of the *herasat* office and his deputy at government organizations must be official agents of the Intelligence Ministry. In either case I did not listen to their requests [to join Ahmadinejad's campaign]. In the last meeting that I had with Mr. [Afzal] Alizadeh, the general manager of the *herasat* office at the Cultural Heritage Organization<sup>9</sup> and Mr. Emadi who was an

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<sup>7</sup> "Abgiri-i Sadd-i Sivand belamaneh Ast", [Taking water the Sivand Dam in permitted], Fars News Agency, April 10, 2007, available at (in Persian): <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8601210318>; also "Aya Pasargad Ghargh Mishavad?", [Does Pasargadae sink?], BBC Persian, September 2, 2005, available at (in Persian): [http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2005/09/050902\\_ra-jb-iran-pasargad.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2005/09/050902_ra-jb-iran-pasargad.shtml)

<sup>8</sup> The "Herasat" is a force of guards and morals police embedded in governmental organizations in Iran.

<sup>9</sup> See: <http://www.azadisportcomplex.com/dpic.asp?id=10269>

intelligence ministry agent, I was threatened that if I didn't stop my activities with Mousavi's campaign, I would lose my job.

10. After the election I, like everyone else, went to the streets and protested. In May 2010, I was fired for having worked in Mousavi's campaign in 2009. [The official reason stated](#) was that my supervisor was dissatisfied with me and that my work had been unsatisfactory in 2009. However, in 2009 I had received three awards for my work as a legal expert on three important cases. One case was the robbery case at Ostad Farshchian's museum in Sadabad Palace. The other was the case of Jahan Nama Tower in Isfahan. Because of modification to the tower<sup>10</sup>, Naghsh-e Jahan Square was not removed from UNESCO's World's Heritage Sites.
11. Some 27 or 28 other people were also fired. They were all people who had been active in Mousavi's campaign. We were planning on having a protest when the *herasat* office became aware of it. At that time, Mr. Hamid Baghaei was the head of the Cultural Heritage Organization. He contacted me and said that my dismissal had been a mistake and the *herasat* office had made an error. [He said] that they were trying to get me back to work. He asked me to just wait at home and not do anything until they get back to me. On August 7, 2010 at 4 p.m., Mr. Emadi from the Cultural Heritage Organization's *herasat* office called me and told me to go to work the next day. He said they wanted to talk to me. I got excited because I thought I was going back to work; I thought that Mr. Baghaei's promise had been sincere.
12. The next morning I got all dressed up and went to Mr. Emadi's office. As soon as I sat down he said, "Mr. Nozar you have become an important person! They have summoned you to go to Evin [prison]." As soon as he said this, I understood what was going on. I said, "Mr. Emadi what have you done?" He said, "I don't know what it's about. I got worried for you. Here take it. When are you going [to Evin]?" I said, "I still have time. I'm going in 2-3 days." Then he said, "Let me know before when you will be there so I can tell them to take care of you." I said, "OK. Thank you." The reason why the Intelligence Ministry began investigating was because of Mr. Emadi himself.

### Arrest

13. On the morning of August 9, 2010, I went to Evin prison. One of my colleagues came with me and brought a deed. He was going to wait outside. The plan was that I would go inside and if the situation got bad I would call him so he could come and give the deed as a security deposit [so I could be released]. Emadi called me when we were standing in front of Evin prison. He literally had someone watching me. He said, "I heard you are in front of Evin." I said, "Yes. I was in the neighborhood and thought I should go see what's going on." He said, "Go inside. I have talked to them. They are waiting for you." I entered the lobby of Evin's courtroom.
14. I saw a man walking toward me. He was about 36 or 37 years old, wearing a suit. He was a bit chubby and had pale skin. He asked, "Are you Mr. Nozar?" I said, "Yes." He grabbed my wrist and took me to the prayer room. He introduced himself as Hosseini and said, "Right now it's lunch and

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<sup>10</sup> "Jahan-Nama Pas az 15 sal Tadil shod", [Jahan-Nama tower was moderated after 15 years], Cultural Heritage News Agency, April 28, 2010, available at (in Persian): <http://www.chn.ir/NSite/FullStory/News/?Id=68697&Serv=3&SGr=22>

pray time. People have left for lunch. I've brought you here so we can talk man to man." Then he put a folder that was about 500 pages thick on the table and told me that it is my folder. He asked me to confess to everything right there so he would let me go. He told me that if I confess I won't be interrogated. I said, "Mr. Hosseini is this a legal procedure? This is my field. I have worked in courtrooms for 7 to 8 years. What do you mean? Are you saying if I confess you are going to let me go? What should I confess to?" He said, "Confess to the protests that you took part in and for calling people to join you." I said, "I haven't done anything. Mr. Mousavi's candidacy had been approved. I, like others, just worked for his campaign. Let's say I have dropped his campaign brochures at people's doors. That is not a crime."

15. Then he took me to the investigator at branch 5 of Evin's court. He took me to investigator Asadi. [Asadi] was from Isfahan. He said, "You think you know it all? You think because you are a legal specialist you can get away with it?" He began questioning me. I told him that I had not been in any protests and just denied everything. [Asadi] pointed his finger and with that, two people handcuffed me from behind and put a blindfold on my eyes. They grabbed me from the shoulders and threw me outside the room.

### **Section 240 of Evin Prison**

16. Then they took me to a small room and changed my clothes. I put on a prison uniform. Then they took pictures of me and took me to section 209's medical examiner for a checkup. Then they took me to section 240. For three months I was held in a solitary cell at section 240 of Evin.
17. I was held at solitary cell 88 at section 240 of Evin. The cell was about 1.5 by 2 meters. It had a western-style toilet that was made of steel. There was sink in [the room] also. The room had a window about 20 [centimeters] by 20 [centimeters]. The ceiling was high. The [room had a] carpet [which] was pretty dirty. It was very unfortunate that I was arrested during summer. It was hot and the toilet smelled. It would get really bad. Once a week they would give us a fruit. I wouldn't eat it. I would just cut it in half and put in the room so it would take some of the bad smell away.
18. In the first 24 days, I was not allowed to get fresh air at all. After that, once a week on Tuesdays for about 20 minutes, I was allowed to go to the backyard behind my cell. I usually wouldn't go or I went once every other week because going outside made me more depressed. The air in that backyard felt very heavy. The walls were very high. They usually took me out when it was getting dark so it would feel even gloomier. Just being in Evin, especially in a solitary cell, is difficult enough. Therefore I tried not to go outside under those depressing conditions.

### **Interrogations**

19. I was interrogated about 30 to 35 times. They usually took place at night. The interrogation room had no cameras. Section 240 feels like a vault.
20. My main interrogator was Mr. Hosseini. He would stand in front of me and wouldn't hit me a lot. He only slapped me three or four times. However there was a really strong man who would stand behind me. When he would walk me from my cell I felt like my height only reached his arm. He was very

tall. For example he would grab my head with one hand and squeeze. He was able to fit my entire head in his hand.

21. The first question that they asked during the interrogations was to confess to working with the Mojahedin or monarchists. I had no knowledge of these groups and had only heard of them. The year that I spent in Evin felt like I was being educated in a university. I learned about these political groups. I told my interrogator that he could check my email, my computer and my phone. I told him, "For three months you listened to my phone calls. You were reading my emails. You had me under complete surveillance. I've had no connection to these organizations. I took part in protests on June 15, on the day of Ashura, and other protests but I have had no connection to these groups."
22. The interrogator told me, "We have brought you here to kill you like a dog and no one would find out." They would beat me so much and there was no record of it. They would hit me with their bare hands and with a belt. Once I was seriously injured. They handcuffed me from behind to a chair. Then they knocked the chair and my left shoulder hit the ground. My left shoulder was dislocated. They took me to the clinic where they had to move my shoulder to the correct location. My shoulder was unfortunately still hurting. I could not put any pressure on it or lift anything heavy.
23. My family knew I had been arrested on the same day that I went to prison with my friend. However, no matter whom they reached out to they could not get any answers. During this period they went to the prosecutor's office, the Revolutionary Court and the security court every day. All they heard was that I was in the custody of the Intelligence Ministry. They were advised not to follow up on my case until the Intelligence Ministry was through with me.
24. Once after a very long interrogation during which they had beat me a lot, they told me, "Now that you have cooperated with us and have admitted that you took part in the protests on June 15, 2009, you can call your wife." They offered the phone call as a reward. I was only allowed to talk for two minutes. I could only say that I'm alive and well and I'm being held at Evin. I also asked [my family] not to try to get me out until I tell them. This is what they had told me to say. After two months they let me have a non-contact visitation (a visit from behind a secure glass) for 15-20 minutes.
25. I was held at cell 88 at section 240 of Evin. I was next to cell 90, which usually holds four to five people. At the end we had learned to knock on the wall between the two cells. The cells were right next to each other. When the guards were not there we would talk to each other for a few minutes from the opening beneath the door. That's how it was for three months.



**Mehdi Nozar**  
**Visitation from behind the glass at Evin**  
**prison - 2010**

**Judge Moghiseh, Tehran's Revolutionary Court, Branch 28**

26. After 58 days, in October 2010, they transferred me from section 240 to section 209. In 209 I no longer had an interrogator. In November they took me to Judge Moghiseh at Tehran's Revolutionary Court, branch 28.
27. My family had contacted Mr. Alizadeh-Tabatabaei and he had agreed to represent me pro bono. On the day of my trial, Judge Moghiseh, the head of Tehran's Revolutionary Court branch 28, called me. He told me, "If Mr. Alizadeh comes and takes the seat next to you as your lawyer you will get 15 years. However if you are here by yourself [and without representation] I will take it easy on you. I feel bad for you. You are young." I came out of the courtroom and shared this with Mr. Alizadeh and he said, "If this is what [the judge] said he means it." I was worried because the investigator in my case had requested for me to be sent to exile. They had built a big case against me. However Mr. Alizadeh told me, "You know the law. You can defend yourself [well]."
28. Judge Moghiseh sentenced me to 3 years in prison and 80 lashes. The lashes were because I was convicted of insulting the president. The evidence they had was a few of my emails that were about the elections. They were humorous and somewhat related to the president. I was charged with attending gatherings and colluding against the state, acting against national security, insulting the Supreme Leader, insulting the presidency and disrupting public order; the same five or six national security crimes that they accuse everyone of. The evidence they provided was my political activities during the elections and the confessions I had made under torture. Legally, the judge should not base his ruling on a confession that is made under torture. However the exact opposite happened. In any case, they returned me to section 209.

**Evin: Section 350**

29. The day after I went to court they transferred me from section 209 to section 350 at Evin. Mr. Alizadeh, my lawyer, had objected to my sentence. He objected on the record that the judge had threatened that if my lawyer was present I would get a harsher sentence. Ultimately my case was transferred to the Court of Appeals, branch 36, which was headed by Mr. Zargar. My sentence was reduced to one year in prison, one year of probation, a one-million toman [approximately US \$ 910 in 2010] fine and 80 lashes. I received this sentence six or seven months after I had moved to section 350.
30. In section 350, I was held in room 2. The rooms held 20 people and there were 9 to 10 rooms. When the prison is overpopulated they hold 23-24 people in each room. Some of the political activists that were held in this section were: Mr. Ebrahim Madadi who is a member of the bus drivers' union, Mr. Hamzeh Karami, the political director general of President Khatami's office, and also many supporters of the Green Movement. There were also two Turkmens named Nour-Mohammad Ghavidel and Chari Moradof who were falsely accused of espionage. Chari Moradof was sentenced to 20 years in prison even though he was not an Iranian citizen.
31. There were others in section 350. For example Mr. Mohsen Mirdamadi, Mr. Arabsorkhi, Mr. Ghadyani, Mr. Emad Baghi and Mr. Aminzadeh. During this time I was also cellmates with Mr.



Hossein Marashi, whom at one point was the head of Cultural Heritage Organization. I said to him, "Isn't life strange." One day he was my superior and I was his employee and now we were cellmates.<sup>11</sup> The year that I spent in Evin prison really felt like being at a college or a university.

32. In section 350 there were also prisoners who were not well known, such as Houshang Rezaei. He had been sentenced to death. He was young, about 24-25 years old. In his own way he had fought against tyranny and the Islamic Republic. He was an athlete and a mountain climber. Usually people who climb have great energy. Until then he had never been active in opposing the government, however he was given a death sentence. He is a Lur from Damavand. He was my best friend until I left Evin. After he received a death sentence he was sent to prison in Rajae Shahr. It's been about five or six months since he has been in Rajae Shahr.
33. There was another man named Kamyar Tavana Manafi. He was 18 years old and instead of being in college he was in prison. He had been arrested in the protests that took place on the day of Ashura. He was never acknowledged as one of the people who had been arrested during the protests. Hossein Zarini was another Mousavi supporter. He had been a member of the group of disabled war veterans who supported Mousavi. Just because of his activities with Mousavi's campaign he had received a four-year sentence. His name is never mentioned and he is not recognized in media.<sup>12</sup>
34. Behzad Abbasi was a pilot during the [Iran-Iraq] war and fought for Iran for eight years. After he left the military he and his family moved to either Canada or Sweden and he was living there. After he returned to Iran to sell his properties he was accused of spying and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After the 2009 [protests] a lot of people were sacrificed unfairly. One of them was Mr. Abbasi. He lived abroad. His family was not in Iran and didn't have visitors. He had studied in the U.S. He was an F-16 pilot. He was from the same period as Abbas Doran<sup>13</sup> and other pilots. But now he is washing dishes for the prisoners in Evin so that he can make some money and manage his affairs. This is what the Islamic Republic does to people.
35. Dr. Kamran Ayazi was also in section 350. He is a dentist and was arrested for writing something satirical. He was accused of blasphemy and sentenced to nine years in prison. Another lesser-known person who was arrested is Mohammadreza Akhlaghi. You never hear his name. He was arrested for cyber crimes. He received a seven-year sentence. There were a lot more people. It would take a long time to name them all.
36. I spent my entire one-year sentence in Evin. I was even held for two additional days. I was in section 240 for 58 days, in 209 for a month and in 350 for nine months.

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<sup>11</sup> "Leading Iranian reformist Hossein Marashi jailed", BBC News, March 19, 2010, *available at*: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8576834.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8576834.stm)

<sup>12</sup> As of the date of publication of this testimony, Hossein Zarini has been released from prison. Along with more than a dozen political prisoners, Zarini was released in a high profile political prisoner release in September 2013. See: "Azadi-i Babaei, Velayati va Zarini ba Etmam-i Doran-i Mahkumiati-i Habs", [Babaei, Velayati, and Zarini were released at the end of serving their prison sentences], JARAS, September 18, 2013, *available at* (in Persian): <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/75748/>

<sup>13</sup> "Martyr Abbas Doran's last flight", Tehran Times, July 21, 2012, *available at*: <http://www.tehrantimes.com/highlights/99840-martyr-abbas-dorans-last-flight->



**Release**

37. According to a [printed document](#) they gave me in prison I had to be released on a Thursday and my name should have been removed from the list of prisoners. However they did not release me on that day. They told me that because it was Thursday there was no one there to lash me and I would have to wait until Saturday to receive my lashes and then be released. This was a blessing in disguise because it gave me an opportunity to spend two more days with my friends. Saturday at 8 a.m. they called me to go and receive my lashes.
38. They had six metal chairs next to each other. I took my clothes off and lay on the chair. They began lashing me with a belt. The man was standing at my feet and was lashing my back. I was released after the lashes.<sup>14</sup>
39. I was released on August 11, 2011, after a year in prison. I didn't get a single day off and I never had a contact visit. I also had a one-year probation so I still had to be careful.
40. After I was released, I was once again active. I would visit the families of political prisoners. After Eid Fitr<sup>15</sup> in 2011, when a number of political prisoners were released, we went and had a meeting with Mr. Khatami.
41. After that meeting I received a phone call from the Intelligence Ministry on December 1, 2011 and was summoned. I did not go because I was sure I would be arrested again. Two or three days later, they raided our house and I ran away. I hid for a few days until December 7, 2011, when I left Iran legally.

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<sup>14</sup> “*Sabzhay-i Gomnam/ Mehdi Nozar, Zendani-i Siasi ba do Rouz Takhir Azad Shod*”, [Unknown Green Movement activists/ Mehdi Nozar, political activist was released with two days delay], Kaleme website, June 8, 2011, *available at* (in Persian): <http://www.kaleme.com/1390/05/18/klm-68692/>

<sup>15</sup> “Eid Fitr” is a big feast held at the end of the month of fasting (Ramadan) for Muslims.