



The Aga Khan, left, his wife, the Begum Aga Khan, and Norm Cafik, MP for Ontario riding dine at Harbour Castle Convention Centre last night

Metro's Moslems greet Aga Khan

By Stef Donev Toronto Star

Just as there is only one pope, there is only one Aga Khan. He is "Imam" — spiritual leader — to the world's 15 million Ismaili Moslems. And he is in Toronto.

Last night, about 600 of his 10,000 followers in Metro, and 250 or so "invited guests" — translate that to mean dignitaries and the media — gathered for a sumptuous banquet at the Harbour Castle Hilton Hotel to honor him and Canada.

If you're a Catholic, imagine seeing the Pope; if British, the Queen.

And if you're one of the world's 465 million Moslems — let alone one of his 15 million followers — imagine meeting a direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed.

When Mohammed died in 632 AD, his son-in-law, Ali, became the first Imam. Karim Aga Khan is the 49th Imam — each one a direct male descendant.

The banquet included consommé, lobster, steak, sherbet, fruit, pastries and a choice between fruit punch or wine.

Ismailis are not supposed to drink, but they don't force their beliefs on their guests — the banquet cost the 600 paying guests \$125 each.

There are now about 20,000 Ismaili Moslems in Canada. Before 1972, there

were hardly any. But in 1972, Idi Amin forced them out of Uganda, and the Aga Khan flew to Ottawa to ask Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to accept some.

He accepted 6,000. Since then, more have come, primarily from Kenya and Tanzania.

Last night, after Lieutenant-Governor Pauline McGibbon, federal Multiculturalism Minister Norman Cafik and other federal, provincial and municipal leaders congratulated the Ismaili on their adaptation to Canadian life, the Aga Khan thanked Canada for accepting the "stateless and destitute Ismaili refugees from Uganda, many of whom arrived with only the clothes they were wearing."

The assembled Ismaili politely applauded the dignitaries, but it was obvious it was Imam they were there to see and honor.

He will meet Premier William Davis today and then leave for his home in Paris, ending his 10-day tour of Canada. Most of that time was spent with his followers, conducting religious ceremonies.

"He is more than our spiritual leader," one Ismaili explained. "He guides us in the secular world as well. He has always stressed the need for education and for committing ourselves to the countries we

live in. That is why many of us are in business and the professions, and why we have taken out Canadian citizenship. We are Ismailis, but we are also Canadians."

And while they are Canadians and the Aga Khan is, by birth, Swiss, and by residence, French, they are all Ismailis, and he is Imam.

Unlike a queen or pope, the Aga Khan rules no country, wears no robes or jewels, badges, or rings of office.

"He needs no symbols," an Ismaili said. "He is Imam."

"REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF THE TORONTO STAR"

Mowlana Hazar Imam's TV Interview on "Canada A.M."

The following is the text of the interview with Mowlana Hazar Imam, conducted by Norm Perry, of the CTV network in Ottawa, on Monday, November 13, 1978, and nationally televised on the CTV Canada A.M. program on Tuesday, November 14, 1978.

Norm Perry: A spiritual leader of 20 million Ismailis, the Aga Khan is the direct descendant of Mohamed. As a political and social leader, he is a man of enormous wealth and responsibility. The Aga Khan is a friend of the Shah of Iran. Many of his followers live there. I asked him in Ottawa yesterday, what someone in his situation might do when a country such as Iran is thrown into the turmoil and crisis it is now in.

Mowlana Hazar Imam: I think the first thing one would ask oneself is the reasons for it, how the reasons fit or don't fit together. Then ask yourself what the outcome could be. The outcome can be so complex, it can destabilize a whole area, and in destabilizing that area, it can destabilize a substantial part of the western world and western economies. So I consider the crisis very serious. The number of Ismaili Shia, rather than Imashri Shia in Iran is very small, so it's not that the Ismailis will have any impact on the outcome there.

Norm Perry: One of the main causes we hear of the strife in Iran, is that the Shah wants progress. He wants to turn Iran into a modern industrialized state. Many of the religious leaders in Iran are opposed to that. They think the conservative approach is best. You yourself are a modern man, Harvard-educated, very much of a western-oriented man, in education and in learning. Doesn't that sort of put you, and in that sense your people, against what seems to be a majority of feeling in Iran? That is what I am trying to get at, basically . . .

Mowlana Hazar Imam: It might do. It might do. I think the main issue really is, how the Mullians, or like myself, the Imam, view the compatibility or incompatibility of Islam with the modern world. And as far as my family is concerned, my community is concerned, we don't run away from that. We are not prepared to say that there is a basic conflict between the modern world and our practice of Islam. I am not sure that this conflict is seen by all Imashri Shia Muslims in Iran. I don't think it is.

Norm Perry: The Middle East generally, an area of terrible conflict — has been for centuries, I suppose. Many of your people, the Ismailis, live in the Middle East, of course, and I suppose a lot of them in Lebanon. Are you involved in any direct way in that country?

Mowlana Hazar Imam: No, we were more involved, and we are more involved in Syria than in Lebanon. Lebanon is a country where there has been for many, many years a tremendous mix of communities: Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims, Druzes, Maronite Christians, Greek Orthodox Christians. It's a very complex situation, and we are much more concerned in fact, with Syria than we are with Lebanon.

Norm Perry: But Syria is involved with Lebanon. Of course, I am asking you a political question. . . .

Mowlana Hazar Imam: These are political questions and I think one has to keep in mind that the Ismailis are a minority in Syria, like they are a minority in Iran, like they are a minority in Lebanon. Therefore, in the overall equation, they are very, very small

elements within these given countries. In other countries, they are much more substantially numbered.

Norm Perry: How about the unfortunate situation in the Mid-East, between the Arabs and the Jews? Here you have what could very well be a religious question. Are you involved with that issue?

Mowlana Hazar Imam: Not particularly, in the sense that I don't see it as a conflict of faith. I see it as a strictly territorial conflict. I am not prepared to say that a Jew and a Muslim cannot live side by side, in different circumstances, at peace with each other. In fact, the Qur'an and Islam, as a faith, accept Judaism as a monotheistic faith. In fact, they are referred to, like the Christians, as Ahl-al-Kitab, 'People of the Book'.

Norm Perry: In the West, I have been reading several of the stories that have been printed about you. Almost every story I have seen about you talks first about your wealth, how wealthy you are, and how your grandfather would be weighed against diamonds and pearls, and things to give him money; then it talks about your sister Yasmin's friendship with Margaret Trudeau, and about your father Ali Khan's marriage to Rila Hayworth. And then, later on you get the stuff that you are the Spiritual Leader and have a lot to do with the Ismailis. Does it bother you when you see stories like that, all that basically gossip stuff that comes at the top, in the West?

Mowlana Hazar Imam: No, I don't think that, living in the West, one can ignore the fact that the West has a tradition of a certain type of press which it has accepted, it lives with. I don't think it attaches much seriousness to that press. And as far as I am concerned, my work is what counts, and my people is what counts, and I am not prepared to discuss that sort of material really, with any of that media.

Norm Perry: You are a man with a background in the East, and you are educated in the West. You speak like a Westerner, and if you forgive me, you look like a Westerner. Is there not a contradiction between what you represent, who you are as a Spiritual Leader, and the lifestyle you live?

Mowlana Hazar Imam: No, I see no contradiction whatsoever. I think you have to be very careful not to apply to Islam, what I would call Western terminology. You are accustomed in the West to seeing "the man of the Church", so to speak, take a certain attitude to everyday life, dress in a certain manner. In fact, I think you are used to a certain dichotomy between 'men of the Church' so to speak, and men who are living everyday lives. In Islam, that isn't the case at all. The Prophet was married, was a businessman, had ongoing business activities, led armies, and yet, that did not stop the Prophet from being the Prophet, from leading the prayers, and I think that one has to really correct that image, or that understanding, because it is a misunderstanding in the West. In a sense what you are saying is that the modern world cannot live at peace with a faith.

Norm Perry: Many of your people came to Canada as a result of well, I suppose what many people consider, an atrocity of Uganda. How did you deal with that? When Idi Amin said "Out! We don't want you here." What did you do?

Mowlana Hazar Imam: Well, I think the history is really what is of some importance. When Britain gave

independence to Uganda, she offered to the non-indigenous communities a choice between British citizenship and Ugandan citizenship. Some of the immigrant communities opted for British citizenship. We opted for Ugandan citizenship. Therefore, we knew perfectly well, right at the time of independence, that if there was a crisis which affected the Ugandans, we would be involved in a completely different manner from those who had kept British citizenship. This is a decision that has been a part of the community's life for many years, not only in Uganda, but everywhere else. We seek to become citizens of the countries where we live. Therefore, it was known that it could be a difficult situation. Knowing that it could be a difficult situation, one had to make as best arrangements that one could, to help these people in the event of the sort of situation that arose in Uganda. Therefore, you think the problem out before it hits you in the face if you can, and a number of countries and a number of international agencies came to the assistance of the Asians and the Asian Ugandans. Britain came to the assistance of the Asian British, and Canada very substantially to the Asian Ugandans.

Norm Perry: Was there any problem in getting people of your sect into Canada?

Mowlana Hazar Imam: Well, you know the Canadian government extended a level of co-operation, understanding, help that was absolutely remarkable.

Norm Perry: How many Ismailis are there in Canada now?

Mowlana Hazar Imam: Do you know, I would not be able to give you a precise figure, but I would think something of the order of 20,000 today. . . something like that.

Norm Perry: And is your purpose in Canada now, basically to visit that community?

Mowlana Hazar Imam: To visit the community, to see how they have established themselves, to be with them, to complete a certain number of religious ceremonies that must be completed.

Norm Perry: That's part of your job as Spiritual Leader?

Mowlana Hazar Imam: That's part of my What have you learned so far about the people who came to Canada?

Mowlana Hazar Imam: Well, first, that they are a changed community psychologically, which is understandable, but very palpable, I would say, if I can use the word. There is a sense of peace and equanimity which is really very visible. There is a sense of challenge — it's a new country that they are getting to learn about, and that they are very attached to. They view Canada as a country with great prospects, completely different from what they have known up to now. So it's very exciting.

Norm Perry: Thank you very much, Your Highness.

REPRINTED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF "CANADA A.M."