

Hijab: A pro-feminist action

I am writing in response to Ziaul Huda's "Women should be in Purdah." Mr. Huda, what you want is a return to the "good of days" as opposed to true Islam. Since when has a sari been considered an Islamic dress? Half your belly sticks out and the skin-tight-I-can-hardly-breathe blouse is certainly far from modest. Mr. Huda, you can't live in the past. And to cover your hair without the faith behind it is utterly useless. These "Muslim" women that practised the purdah during your time weren't covering their hair because they were burning with religious zeal. They did it because it was the social norm: you were considered a "bad" girl if you didn't. And this practising of purdah to "save you from public shame" is absolutely repulsive because it is done for selfish, non-virtuous reasons. In my opinion, those women were better off prancing around naked rather than wearing *hijab* and making a mockery out of God.

Now don't get me wrong; I am in no way opposed to *hijab*. In fact, I actually cover my hair. But not for the selfish reasons of "pleasing my parents" or so that I can present myself as a "good, respectable little girl." I cover my hair because I believe in the virtuous, moral principles behind it, which I will explain later.

In response to MA's "Women in Purdah," *hijab* in no way "violates ones liberty." In fact *hijab* bolsters a woman's liberty and freedom. We live in a superficial world where women are measured by their beauty.

But this is only one result of the superficiality of society towards women. We see other effects in the mad race for cosmetic surgery, age-defying gimmicks, and in the prevalence of eating disorders. These women grow up believing that to remain young, beautiful, and desirable to men is everything. But *hijab* teaches women how wrong that viewpoint is. When a woman covers her hair and gives up that bit of her beauty for God, she realises the unimportance of vanity. She begins to understand that women do not have to be slaves to society's stereotypes, that women do not have to be sex objects to be accepted. *Hijab* teaches them to disregard the superficiality and vanity in our society and to respect themselves for who they are *inside*. And because these women respect themselves, society in turn respects them.

So if you look at it logically, *hijab* is actually a pro-feminist action and certainly is not an encroachment on a woman's liberty, wouldn't you agree, MA?

Farah Islam
Grade 11, Dhaka

This is in reply to Mr. Ziaul Huda's riposte to my letter.

I must thank him for drawing my attention to Ayats 31 and 59. Without debating what the Quran does or does not say, I do disagree that, "All believers of Islam must follow these".

Which strictures of Islam anyone chooses to follow is his/her own decision. But following particular strictures does not a true believer make. I should also add that sexual desire is a normal and natural part of human beings. Whether a woman wants to be modest or not is her choice and hers alone (although I'm voting for immodesty).

MA, on e-mail

Razakar: A true story

Has Awami League got the ability to conclude the Razakar issue? Definitely not. I personally don't think that AL alone is keeping the Razakar issue alive. The whole nation does not know whether this issue is dead or not. I know that we should not live only in the past and should not ignore the present problems of the nation but I can't accept the suggestions of some people that we will have to forget the past to deal with the problems of the present.

Pintu's arrest

The news of the arrest of MP Nasir Uddin Ahmed Pintu belonging to the ruling party came as a pleasant surprise. Sceptics and political pundits may have much defamation and find the hidden agendas behind this action. But for us the general public we welcome such initiative by the government and congratulate the Prime Minister for taking this bold step. We hope this firm action against criminals and terrorists would continue and all those who are responsible in creating havoc in our day to day life brought to justice and given the highest punishment possible under the law.

The fact that law and order situation has declined is a fact which everyone is aware of.

We welcomed the fact that the honourable Prime Minister took curbing "law and order" decline as one of her priorities in the 100-days agenda. We wish her government God Speed in attaining that commitment because it is in the interest of the nation and the people have the right to go with our work and live in "peace of mind."

It is hoped for the interest of the nation all would join hands in

their intent or desire.

To them, an extremist ideology and a radical strain of wahabi/deobandi school of thought borrowed from Pakistan means much more than our own culture and religious practices that are infinitely richer than what Pakistan would ever have to offer.

That we are poor, and that we are unable to preserve or enhance our dying culture in the larger struggle of staying alive as a human being and keeping afloat as a nation, is another matter.

Someone talked about "these

way for Talibans to take control of Afghanistan. The Northern Alliance proved to be so ineffective against Talibans that they couldn't harm Talibans in five years of their war against them and it took a super-power's ruthless bombing to recapture Kabul again.

Now another government is installed in Afghanistan by foreign powers including the one, which tried to colonise it twice in 19th century and another which betrayed them barely 10 years ago. Let us all pray for a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan.

He had the foresight to realise the importance of a strong navy for our country, and he took appropriate steps to enhance the capabilities of the Bangladesh Navy.

As a young admirer and promoter of the Bangladesh Navy, I grew up admiring this kind and warm-hearted gentleman and he was one of my heroes. I cannot help but note that Bangladesh would be missing a lot due to his passing away. It would be a fitting tribute to the late Admiral if the Bangladesh Navy commissions its next naval vessel in his name.

few Raazakars like Faizul Huq, Mosarrar Hossain. Interestingly Gathak Dalal Nirmul Committee did not campaign against these AL candidates.

I also wonder why Shahriar Kabir remained silent about BSF killing. Every now and then we come across news of BSF killing Bangladeshi people. Are these poor people not human beings?

Why did Shahriar Kabir remain silent when the garments workers died en masse due to negligence of the authorities concerned? Why did he remain silent when slums were bulldozed and hapless people were evicted? Where were Shahriar when four people were shot dead by the cadres from MP Iqbal's procession? I really doubt the genuineness of Shahriar's advocacy for humanity.

I vehemently express my objection regarding the role of the print media regarding Shahriar's arrest. He is receiving undue favour just because he is a journalist. Can't a journalist be arrested or interrogated if he is suspected of some offence?

Shawkat Hossain
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Unprofessionalism

Recently I was going through *The Daily Star* Internet edition and came across a news about the International Trade Fair which I believe is going to take place in Chittagong on the 27th of December 2001, which will continue for 25 days. The article also gave a link to the website where people will get to know about the fair and related matters, i.e. the participants and venue etc. I tried to find out the same story in other newspaper but failed to do so.

Probably it's my browsing skill, which is not good enough. But one matter is clear that even though *The Daily Star* has given the link to CITF2001, the website is not updated yet. It is still showing our Former Prime Minister as our present Prime Minister and former Opposition Leader as the present Opposition Leader. The only way to learn about Bangladesh is via the Internet as it is not possible for

nationalism what so ever. This lack of proficiency is what deprives Bangladesh of its true potential. These are very simple errors but significant enough to weaken ones image.

For your kind attention I have included the web links:
<http://www.cccibd.com/citf2001>
<http://www.dailystarnews.com/200112/26/n1122605.htm#BODY1>

I hope you all will take these unnecessary mistakes under strong consideration.

Mohammed A Mahmood
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"India's woes"

This refers to Mr. M. K. Barua's letter (December 24), from India. Mr. Barua, you want to obliterate Pakistan from the world map through a nuclear war— according to you the last war with Pakistan. I have the conviction that your country has the capability to do so, as your nuclear arsenals are much more rich and superior to that of Pakistan's. It won't be possible to mop out Pakistan with a conventional war. To that purpose you will have to drop nuclear bombs.

But Mr. Barua, what about the nuclear fall-outs of that possible bombings on Pakistan? Barbed wire fencing won't do to save at least half of India's cities and villages including the Hindi belt, the heartland of India, from those fall-outs. You are ready to sacrifice one or two cities of India to obliterate Pakistan from the world map, but are you ready to sacrifice half of your people for that purpose? If you are ready, will not that price be too high? After that bombing there will be no Pakistanis on the earth, you may cherish that situation, but your people will suffer for generations from nuclear aftermath, what about that fact?

Having fought hundreds of wars including two World Wars the European nations have now learned to live in harmony and peace. Two hundred years' long British subjugation did not allow the South Asian nations to learn that lesson. But can't we learn from the history of

country or take any other punitive measure against it.

Let the UNO decide and save people of the subcontinent from nuclear holocaust. The South Asian countries must honour each other's existence and must not allow their territories to be used by the terrorists to conduct attacks in neighbouring countries and anywhere in the world.

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Let us co-operate with the PM

Prime Minister, in her first address to the nation, has assigned some programmes for 100 days to be implemented by her government. Rather than last time, a good start as this is an expression of her intention of hard work for the development of the country.

Hope the BNP leadership will keep in mind the failures of their last tenure and the consequences of mistakes of the AL rule. Hope she will be able to overcome the influence of traditional sycophants, who always ruin the image of the leader.

Her proponents and opponents will eagerly wait to see what she achieves in her 100-day programme.

It is for national interest everyone should help her.

In recent days we have been observing some conspiracies of vested quarters, who are trying to create chaos in the country and pull the country backward.

Prime Minister underscored the need for concerted efforts and hard labour to make Bangladesh a happy, self-reliant and a prosperous country, for that we need also a good strong Sangsad.

However, I think there are necessities of getting some more competent politicians in the JS through the ensuing bye-election of the left out seats.

In the Sanghsad we need some talented wider vision political leaders who can guide the nation towards prosperity.

That's why by the next bye-election instead of giving nomination BNP their own party members, they should try to bring veteran politician and experienced people like Dr. Kamal Hussain, Dr. Yunus, Barrister Istiaq, Dr. Wazed (Husband of Sheikh Hasina) in the JS.

Bangladesh can no longer afford street politics and hartal culture. How long will the people suffer at the hands of these so-called politicians who are out to play politics just to make their own fortune at the cost of others sufferings?

Democracy, in fact, starts with dialogues and ends in harmonious understanding, give and take between the party in power and the party in opposition.

At present, we need sincerity and co-operation between the public and the representatives of people in the Parliament.

Bangladeshis are really intelligent, ambitious and hardworking. But for lack of proper guidance and facilities they are the worst sufferers.

Do we see how our neighbouring countries are marching forward while we are still at the same place where we had begun.

I am 50 years old. Can I hope that I will see a prosperous Bangladesh?

Shahid Dhaka



stopping the criminals and make our streets and home a safer place.

Akku Chowdhury
Banani, Dhaka

Through your esteemed daily, I'd like to convey my appreciation to the PM in particular and the law enforcing authorities in general as they really have reflected the new government's firm determination in improving the quality of governance which is evident from the arrest of the lawmaker, Nasiruddin

Ahmed Pintu. It was overdue.

This will go a long way in establishing the rule of law in the country.

Let there be no fear or favour in establishing good govern-ance.

Sobhan Abdus
Atlanta, USA

May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Tashdique Mannan
Department of International Relations, DU

"What makes Shahriar tick?"

I appreciate the letter by Mr Ekimur Raza (December 26) and support him wholeheartedly. Shahriar Kabir went to Feni to campaign for Joyal Hazari during the 2001 election.

Jamil Ahmed
Atlanta, USA

Tribute to late Rear Admiral Sultan Ahmed

I was shocked to learn about the sad demise of the former Chief of Naval Staff of the Bangladesh Navy, Rear Admiral Sultan Ahmed. He breathed his last at the age of 70 on December 16.

His passing away was undoubt-

poor victims" being slandered as Razakars because they support Pakistan instead of England in an England-Pakistan match. Sorry sir, but we are talking of that section of Dhaka Stadium, which cheers Pakistani Cricket team in a Pakistan-Bangladesh match.

Let's keep our eyes open. The history repeats itself to those who don't learn from it.

Ahmad Jamali
CA, USA

Crusade against Taliban!

Mr. Mahmood Elahi has started a crusade against Taliban and Osama bin Laden in his letters to this newspaper.

In his zeal he comfortably forgot that it was the USA who brought OBL and his army of foreign warriors to Afghanistan. They were fed, trained, and pampered by the CIA to not to help the Afghans but to take revenge against the Soviet Union for the US defeat in Vietnam. These foreign mercenaries were lovingly called Mujahideen by the US government and media.

OBL was projected as a brave warrior against the Evil Empire. When the war was over, USA just packed up and dumped the war devastated countries in the region to care for themselves. The heroes of yesterday were now the terrorists of today.

Mr. Elahi's love for the Northern Alliance is probably the result of his lack of knowledge of this band of diverse groups. It was the leaders of the Northern Alliance who were appointed the leaders of Afghanistan after Soviet Union's withdrawal and who so profoundly destroyed the remaining Afghanistan that fifty thousand civilians lost their lives just in Kabul due to the infighting among the Alliance members.

It was this destruction caused by Northern Alliance, which paved the

Increase in fuel price

The government has decided to increase prices of all the major energy prices. The most visible impact seems to be on the gasoline prices. I would like to take this opportunity to ask the government and the relevant agencies "will this price increase also reflect an increase in quality of petrol and octane?"

It is unfortunate that even paying much higher prices than motorist of some other countries we don't see any improvement in the quality of fuel.

Usually when I buy octane for my newly overhauled VW I also buy kerosene! Yes it's true. My car's old carburettor often leaks liquid substances, which sells and fells like kerosene. If some one wants I can provide the sample also. I am sure my car's carburettor does not convert octane/petrol to kerosene, if it did I would have only purchased crude oil!

So will the authorities concerned do something to ensure the quality of fuel. Anybody who has a little mechanical intuition



would tell you how bad kerosene is for your vehicle.

Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association can also take steps as the un-burnt kerosene is sprayed in the air with the exhaust causing air pollution.

Fahad Saleh, on e-mail

What a wonderful (!) headline "Gas, fuel and power prices to soar from New Year's Day".

It's as if the New BNP government is wishing a Very Happy New Year to the democracy and freedom loving people of Bangladesh! Isn't it exactly what we have voted for?

This is the democratic right of BNP and they have the freedom to raise the price of anything they want!

A Distressed Observer
Chittagong

edly a loss to our nation in general and to our Navy in particular, for it was during his tenure as the Chief of Navy (1984-1990), that some of the important foundations of our modern navy were laid. Specific mention may be made about the Bangladesh Naval Academy in Chittagong, which was established during his tenure in 1988, as well as many other important naval establishments and commissioned warships.

How can a man of conscience support Hazari? As a journalist did Shahriar ever protest the illegal and inhuman acts of Hazari?

In 2001 election, Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee actively campaigned against 40 candidates who were collaborators of 1971. Among them 32 were from Jamat-e-Islami, 6 from Isalmi Oikya Jote and 2 from BNP.

Awami League also nominated a

outsiders to verify every news by visiting Bangladesh itself.

When I was in Bangladesh last time the only topic that took my interest sky high is the drive to study and implement the so-called "IT"-Information Technology. This event of observing a website, lacking simple updating and usage of wrong information saddens me. I am sure well qualified professionals maintain these sites but I see no profes-

other regions? The United Nations Organisation is there to help resolve the disputes that arise among the nations.

India accuses Pakistan of being behind the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament and Pakistan denies that allegation. In spite of brandishing muscles these two countries must go to the UNO. If the UNO finds Pakistan guilty, it may impose economic embargo on that

Wrong messages

Celebration of 'Pahela Baishakh' just affirms our national and cultural heredity, just as the Eid celebration affirms our religious affiliation. There is no conflict in this apparent dichotomy. I am particularly saddened by the fact that this kind of remarks (by the likes of the Khatib) tacitly encourages the kind of violence that rocked the whole national psyche on the last 'Pahela Baishakh'. By the way, does the Khatib know that an Islamic State like Iran still celebrates "Nawrooz"—the Persian version of 'Pahela Baishakh'?

People of inadequate understanding of current geo-political situation are walking their own jaywalking, trashing countries like the United States. Despite my understanding of the concept of 'Blow Back' (Blow Back is a word used by CIA which refers to the unintended consequences of its actions.) to explain some of the international events, I see no rationale to kill thousands of innocent civilians as it happened in New York on September 11. The vitriol as uttered by the Khatib (for destruction of cities in the United States) in the name of religion, is one of the reasons of our current predicament as Muslims. These kinds of rhetoric also incite the young to go extreme. By the way, does the Khatib knows that, it is the American power, that put an end to the sufferings of the Bosnian Muslims?

Mohammad Zaman M.D.
Cary, North Carolina, USA

"Freedom of speech"

In Mr. Oli Md. Abdullah Chowdhury's letter (December 26), he seems to imply that Bangladesh has the similar type of protection of free speech as provided by the 1st Amendment to the US Constitution.

I'm no expert but I don't think that's completely accurate or if so, that it has been tested and is now supported by the weight of precedence. Such a provision for example would automatically proscribe the issuance of certain Fatwas.

Secondly, I'm under the impression that the Khatib is actually government appointed and that most mosque clergy in this country are government appointed or vetted.

In this context the government (and hence the people) has every right to establish parameters of acceptable conduct for its office-bearers while acting in official capacity. Had the Khatib been speaking to friends in his living room or even publicly on a street corner no one would have objected. But that was not the case.

Rasheed Khan, on e-mail

US Embassy and "Misguided Khatib"

I am very surprised at the term used "Misguided Khatib" by some one at the US Embassy published in "Prothom Alo" (December 25). How does this foreign national have the audacity to question the educational status of the Chief Imam of our country? Who gave him the right?

We know that this embassy personnel represents a very powerful country but that does not give him the right to question the integrity of our respected Khatib. The government of Bangladesh should have protested this instantly. It is just like calling the Reverend Pope or the Hon'ble Archbishop of Canterbury misguided persons. The government should declare this concerned Embassy personnel as persona non grata and deport him to his country for hurting the religious sentiments of the Muslims of this country.

We might be poor but we are not begging advice from any one. In our country, every person has the right to freedom of speech. The Americans should remember that we as Muslims respect our Khatib Maulana Obaidul Haque irrespective of our political differences. Probably the Americans would like to have a say as to who should be our Khatib. These Americans have murdered many innocent men, women and infants in Muslim countries like Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo and are now killing innocent Muslims in Afghanistan. As predicted earlier, this probably is the beginning of the war of civilisations between the west and Islam.

A red line has to be drawn somewhere soon otherwise the day is not very far away when the Yankees will start annihilating the Muslim population of the world in a planned and calculated manner.

Mohammad Sohail, on e-mail

Try the Khatib for anti-state comments!

The Foreign Ministry has distanced the government from the remarks made by the Khatib of Baitul Mukarram. His remarks have already hurt Bangladesh and may lead to actions by the US government who have already expressed their position regarding the

Khatib's remark. Whatever be one's beliefs, one hopes that the political leaders including the President who went to the US to plead for more garments quota will realise that you can't have a follower of Laden leading what is the official prayer and demand more export facilities.

The khatib should be tried for anti-state activities especially for damaging critical export sectors like the RMG industry. Let's try Shahriar Kabir and the Khatib together for doing the same thing.

Nizam Mollah
Kalabagan, Dhaka

The Khatib's remarks and show cause

The uproar regarding the remarks of Moulana Obaidul Huq, the Khatib of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at the Eid congregation is grossly opportunistic. His views on the issue is not unique. Many Islamic scholars and religious leaders in the world share his views. By virtue of its tradition Islam has a political side. And traditionally, "Khubbas" has always been political in nature in Islamic history and often it went against the rulers.

Whatever Moulana Obaidul Huq has said is based on his own judgement and conscience. Moulana Obaidul Huq has just exercised his constitutional rights of the freedom of speech. The "show cause" notice served on him is only an example of "state intervention" in religion. According to the Constitution, Islam is the State Religion of Bangladesh. As a corollary to this status, Islamic leaders should be allowed to express their views: right or wrong, consistent with the views of state leadership or not. Or, do we want a Khatib who would be "eyes man" to every issue that our political leaders think right.

The spreading of the US embassy's views through local press (UNB) and terming Moulana Obaidul Huq as "misguided" is devoid of any diplomatic decorum. If his comments really irritates United States, they should lodge a protest to our foreign office, not leak their feeling to the press.

I personally don't subscribe the views expressed by Khatib Moulana Obaidul Huq. But I think, this incident is thought provoking and educational in nature. In a global scale it emphasises the need for a secular state, the need for the separation of state and religion.

Since Islam is the State Religion of Bangladesh, my question would be which brand of Islam: the one preached by Moulana



Obaidul Huq or the one prescribed by the Religious Affairs Ministry?

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