

The Khatib and the Bosnian Muslims

I am writing this in response to the letter "Wrong messages" by Mohammad Zaman MD (December 28).

Dr. Zaman lectured the Khatib of Baitul Mukarram for his Khutba and asked: "does the Khatib know that, it is the American power that put an end to the sufferings of the Bosnian Muslims?"

I believe in freedom of expression that's why I do not have any problem with what Dr. Zaman feels about the Khutba. I respect Dr. Zaman's views, and at the same token I respect the Khatib's perspective too. But I do feel the need to correct the views of those glibly busy-bees, especially those who spread misinformation.

Looks like Dr. Zaman has a very little understanding of the world events. Let me take this opportunity to refresh our memories:

In each and every conflict, the major powers with the USA as the leader, do nothing if Muslims are the victims of ethnic cleansing other than helping the perpetrator in a clever way, until if all of a sudden the table turns, they rush to the rescue of their Christian brothers. The Bosnian War was a classic example. During the Bosnian war, the west imposed an arms embargo, so that Bosnian Muslims could not get weapons to defend themselves, whereas Serb Christians were using all the military power of Yugoslavia. When other Muslim countries started to send help, the west made a fantastic arrangement of working with Croatia, so that war ravaged Croatia could keep a lions share of every plane load coming from outside; also if by chance Muslims won by fluke, they would not be able to claim victory alone. When finally Muslims started to fight back with the help of foreign Mujahideen fighters, the west immediately ended the war and arranged to sign the Dayton Peace accord to save the Christian Serbs and to share the petrodollars with the Muslims to rebuild the Serb areas.

Now tell me Dr. Zaman why the 'Big Saviour' of the world didn't stop the Serbs before the massacre in United Nations 'safe haven' of Srebrenica where 8000 Muslim men and boys were killed in cold blood by the Serb Christians in July 1995? I remember the sensible journalists reported about the possible massacre and pleaded to the western powers for help long before the actual massacre took place.

Shukla Mirza, on e-mail

"The Khatib's sermon"

Thank you for publishing Mohammad Rahman's letter (December 28). He spoke on behalf of the majority of Bangladeshi-American Muslims opinion on the Khatib's sermon.

Mir Dost Mohammad Khan on e-mail

Khatib-- morally incorrect or politically incorrect?

I am amazed at the reaction of some 'progressive' people at the Eid khutba of the Baitul Mukarram mosque delivered by the Khatib Maulana Obaidul Haque.

What happened to the so-called big mouths proclaiming freedom of speech? And what happened to their self-dignity as a nation? Why all of a sudden there is so much hue and cry at an Eid khutba the content of which is very consistent with the expectation of the majority of the people of Bangladesh and all over the Muslim world?

First, the Khatib position is an honorary position that goes to persons who are well-reputed for their knowledge about Islam and the society through their academic and religious achievements. A man of his stature is expected to speak his conscience and verbalise the conscience of the nation at the hour of need. He is not supposed to act as a 'yes minister' man and be the sycophant of the ruling class. We have seen that a section of the Alem community in different countries did not hesitate to compromise their faith, principle and integrity for getting favour from the rulers or in fear of retribution. They have even

given 'fatwas' justifying the illegal and immoral activities of the rulers. We should feel proud that there is at least a man of honour in the country who does not serve as a 'pet' Alem of the government endorsing their views and positions.

Secondly, what the Khatib told at the congregation about the celebration of 'Pahela Baishakh' was very much in line with the thinking of the majority of the people of Bangladesh. He did not speak against 'Pahela Baishakh' as misquoted by some media outlets. He spoke about the way the day is celebrated by a section of urban people today, Bengali new-year is a part of the life of Bangladeshis for hundreds of years. But the celebration today has taken a very strange form, which is totally alien to our culture and values to say the least. Since wearing sindur and hosting costume parties and holding dance soirees eulogising gods and goddesses of certain religions became the part of 'Pahela Baishakh' celebration in our country?

And what is so inconsistent for the Khatib to caution the nation about the negative implications of those newly imported rituals on 'Pahela Baishakh' that some people should feel offended? Interestingly, these are the same people who also prefer to celebrate the English New Year with a lot of noise and immoral activities notwithstanding their claim to be the Bengali cultural stalwarts. Any independent minded person with some thinking would find logic in the Khatib's remarks about

"What makes Shahriar tick?" - Protest by Faezul Haque

My attention has been drawn to a letter purported to have been written by one Mr. Shawkat Hossain, wherein he refers to me as an anti-liberation element.

I don't know if it is his personal view or hearsay, but I take serious objection to his comments and if he doesn't apologise through the same columns within 7 (seven) days, then I shall be constrained to take appropriate legal action, for which (costs and consequences) he shall be solely responsible.

Although this is not the first time that such unkind remarks have been made against me, yet I had always thought that the so-called gentlemen would definitely get to know the truth and would refrain from using indecorous and uncouth language as they often tend to use.

As for me, I think I don't need certificates and testimonials after 30 years of independence to prove my role in 1971.

I was not only a victim of circumstances then (at an age of 24 years) but also suffered irreparable damage and consequently had to incur a financial loss which neither the subsequent governments of Bangladesh nor any generous gentlemen like Mr. Shawkat Hosain, reimbursed. (We had to sell a property worth 60/70 lakhs for 23.00 lakhs only in 1972).

However, just for your information:

a) The Pakistan Army arrested me on 01.04.1971 and restricted my movement within Dhaka City till further orders.

b) They froze all my and my families' bank accounts from 26.3.1971 till Bangladesh saw the dawn of independence.

c) They kept me and my wife Rukhsana in custody (house arrest) in Lyallpur for 2 1/2 months from end July to September 1971. My wife was pregnant at that time and our son, Faisal, born on 21-9-1971 still bears scars of mental torture.

d) I was never a member of any pro-Pakistan government committee or delegation.

e) British MPs James Kilfedder and James Tinn who visited Dhaka in June 1971, wrote to Sheikh Mujib in June, 1972 regarding me when I was kept under protective custody and later released. They expressed surprise at my detention since they had met me in 1971 and knew what I was doing.

f) No case could be proved against me since I had not issued any statement under my signature at any time during the occupation period.

Sir, do I need to say any more?

AK Faezul Huq
K.M. Das Lane, Dhaka

is sent across these saboteurs.

Ahmed Kamal
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Get a life

I enjoyed reading Mr. Sajjad Hussain's response to my letter for what it was worth: comic relief (his clever turn of phrase, forthrightness and articulation notwithstanding).

Firstly, I did not condone the Indian security force's role in Kashmir in my previous letter. The Kashmir situation is complex and messy

thriving democracy, a consultative process where dissenting voices are accepted and a powerful middle class. Through this strength we can handle our own problems, which are doubtless, several. We in India are happy with the way we are, warts and all. As Channel V (extremely popular in the neighbouring countries too) once famously said about Indians: 'We are like this only'.

It is unhealthy for our neighbours to be so obsessed with India. Maybe the likes of Mr. Husain should go get a life beyond India, while they wist-

made the vital mistake when they failed to join the media bandwagon. You can feed people anything and everything you want and frankly we are getting hammered for some rogue elements within the Islamic world.

The sad fact is, the good people, the good Christians/Muslims/Jews can't do anything about the radical elements in their own religions. The good gets sidelined by those who bear arms and those with the loudest voice. Because decent people also tend to be quiet and non-confrontational.

As for the Indian media, they would do anything (i.e. make up stories or add flavour to real ones) to make us look bad. Why, Bangladesh is so harmless that it's funny to read how we try to hurt India all the time. It's a known fact that India is the reigning big brother in our region and has completely taken over the markets within Nepal and Bangladesh. Now, with the help of the US, they will get gas from us and we are the 'bad guys'. At least Jamaat doesn't get full majority (selling religion) like the BJP did in India. In fact, Jamaat doesn't even come close.

Tehsin, on e-mail

"Band banned"

I've just read Pir Saheb's thoughtful reflection "Band banned" (26.12.01) on modernisation of Tagore songs. Thanks to him for the admirable writing. I would like to add some words to his comments.

Who says Tagore songs have never been changed or modified? At the very beginning, when there was no sophisticated recording instrument, people used to sing very loud so that the microphone could get the desired waveform.

Now the classical singers are enjoying the opportunity of natural singing in digital studios. Is it what we call spoiling the culture? No one

realise the creation and inspire artists who are trying to get out of these backwardness?

Tarun
Tejkunipara, Tejgaon, Dhaka

100 percent vs 100 days!

Would someone be kind enough inform us when the teachers of private schools and colleges will get their promised monthly salary?

It is an irony that though pledges were made several times before the October 1, election by the present PM on this issue and it was projected as one of the foremost action to be undertaken, so far we have not heard of anything regarding this matter.

If teachers are truly the future nation builders, then surely the time has come to demonstrate it and set an example. Within the 100 days of the new government the 100 per cent monthly salary should be transformed into a reality.

Moreover, any teacher must not be deprived or made a 'scapegoat' on the plea that he is a third class holder in his educational career, keeping in mind the fact that efficiency is more important than the certificates one holds. Let the teachers be respected and honoured as teachers.

Mujibul Haque
Sobhanbag, Dhaka

Why only Dhaka in Daily Star?

I admire the excellence of *The Daily Star*. It carries reply to many queries and unknown facts of our country but to mostly who are the elite.

The first page of the daily, mostly from Dhaka; remains full of news of smuggling, corruption, murder and other mischief. It reflects that all these mischief are happening in Dhaka. There is only one column in the National Page to state what happens to other five divisions of our country.

Moreover, there is one special page named Metropolitan, which states news from Dhaka mostly. I urge our newspaper editor to carry news, reflecting economic and political condition, from other five divisions also.

Dr. Lailun Nahar
Dhaka

Mastaans and act of terror

It was indeed refreshing news to hear that the PM will in no way compromise with terrorism and will root out such heinous act from society. But in reality we mostly see the PM ordering the Home Minister, the Home minister ordering the IG of Police and so on. But real actions to arrest the situation remains far from happening. Are these all-mock shows, or is it that our mastaans and terrorists are smarter than our law

a huge need for energy but no supply. According to 'experts' reports, Bangladesh will loose money rather than earning. I would ask our government representative to give detailed reports on future possibilities of finding gas reserves.

Bangladesh is our country, and it is our duty to resolve our problems. I would request all to fight against gas treaty.

Sarfraz Khan
Denver, Colorado, USA

Hats off to the Finance Minister

I am very much pleased to know the reaction of the Finance and Planning Minister M. Saifur Rahman regarding the present economic misbehaviour of our big neighbour India.

I strongly support what he said. "... they (India) wants to get access to our local market without opening their own." This is the truth but the fact is that he said it very loudly and strongly. Hats off to Mr. Saifur Rahman.

Ms. Sharifal Mahmood
Mohammadpur, Dhaka

Timely steps needed

There are so many frustrated voices in our media. We hear about the decline of our RMG sector all the time but we can't understand why the export lobby didn't look for markets elsewhere.

Now the factories are closing and the workers are losing their jobs. Why didn't they look for other export markets?

Imtiaz Ahmed
Dhaka

Politics and religion

Politics, religion and the Afghan dropouts are posing formidable puzzles to the Pakistani administration and policy makers during the beginning of the new century. Ikram Sehgal's commentary from Karachi (DS, Dec 21) was well analysed from a particular viewpoint. Some supplementary observations might be in order, to access conditions in other parts of the Muslim world.

Economic affluence through industrial development in the Temperate Zone produced dropouts, which are now known as the Third World, mostly located in the tropical zone (the effect of climate on economics?). The winner is supposed to be the macro-economic theories, which gave a thrust to capitalism and consumerism; with late warnings that the environment is in danger. The latter (consumerism) is now hitting back, after the terrorist attack in New York (and the Pentagon).

Another factor, which propped up modern politics in the west, is secularism. This might be one of the reasons, which encouraged religious fundamentalism which propped up during the latter part of the previous century.

The main issue behind all the show is the present declining economic condition in one of the most influential country in modern world. Today, every change is loaded with positive or negative implications, and the DCs and the LDCs are not exempted in the so-called Global Village. The change of government in Kabul has made Pakistan and India worry of each other, apart from the Kashmir logo carried on both sides. Embryonic Saarc is pregnant with possibilities. Which way the tide will turn for the member nations is the name of the game.

Bangladesh should not rest its oars with theoretical studies only, weak as the nation is without political consensus in Dhaka metropolis. Political fragmentation in an underdeveloped country is a danger signal for future development. The country has developed little in three decades since independence. At this rate quick take-off is not possible, before foreign predators zoom in, whether gas is exported or not. The nation has to fall back on more solid sustenance, starting with better political communication and co-ordination.

Abul M Ahmad
Dhaka

Ban on polybags



I highly appreciate the new scheme the present government has taken regarding ban on polythene bags. Indeed it's a very good initiative from the present government.

Dhaka city was going nowhere with the hazardous polythene

bags, which was polluting the environment, and making it difficult for the city dwellers to carry on with normal life. Whenever there is a heavy rainfall, the whole city seems to have water clogging everywhere, and the drainage system eventually fails to activate. This initiative would also generate the jute products of the country, which would also symbolise our heritage and would definitely ensure a lot of employment throughout the whole country.

I am hoping for the day when there would be no longer the nuisance of the hazardous polythene bags loitering everywhere in the roads of Dhaka. I thank those who are involved in this scheme and I hope the scheme works effectively throughout the city.

Hopefully we all (the citizens of Bangladesh) will help the government in carrying on what is best for the country.

Arjumand Wohra
Dhaka

disagree that the Hijab is the way to go about it.

Article 1 of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserts that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights'. This contradicts the hijab and the reasoning behind it.

I also agree that women should not prance about naked or be surgically altered to look like Pamela Andersen. I think you'll agree that 'Beauty deprived of its proper foils and adjuncts ceases to be enjoyed as beauty, just as light deprived of all shadows ceases to be enjoyed as light.' - John Ruskin".

And finally I am all for the empowerment of women.

MA, on e-mail

Biman passengers' woes

I don't know how long will the Biman passengers suffer at the altar of the whims of the authorities. Now it was the turn of our consul general in Jeddah and the FM and his entourage. My God, which century are we living in? I can't understand how 16 reconfirmed passengers are off loaded to accommodate a bunch of people who don't deserve to be what they are.

Do these people realise for once that they are there because they are elected by us, they get paid from our taxes and this consul general (who had the audacity to threaten the Biman manager of loss of job)—is he aware that his salary is paid by the money renitted by these same wage earners whom he had asked to off load. To top it all this was done only a few days after clear instructions to the contrary were given by none other than the Prime Minister.

It is high time the Prime Minister took immediate measures so that the country is rid of such officials who forget that they are public servants (I mean servants of the public and not their masters).

I urge the Prime Minister to take stern actions so that the right signal

and I admit that India is responsible, among others, for the mess. If Mr. Hussain believes otherwise, he's kidding himself. Witness the spurt of recent editorials and comments in the Pakistani media asking their government to revise their Kashmir policy. And going by his pregnant silence on the terrorist attacks on India like the '93 Mumbai blasts in which several innocents were killed and thousands of lives disrupted (mine being one of them), I assume he not just condones such acts but revels in them.

fully wait for 'bombs to rain' on us.

Bhatnaturally, on e-mail

Bangladesh and the Bin Laden cult

"Bin Laden or not, terrorism is rampant in Bangladesh. The terrorism however is directed only at Bangladeshi citizens (Hindu/Muslim) by the political groups, their armed cadres and local goons." BBC online.

I did not read the BBC article but

IWT development



The recurring traffic rush on river journeys during the Eid holidays has been consistently pointing out the utter negligence of the IWT and marine sector by the government. The highways sector has made good progress, but, in this riverine and delta region, our shipping, shipyards, dockyards and marine industries are sick, and not attracting sufficient investment from local and

India's 'lust for approval' from the west is no different from his obsession to see everything through India's prism. He can amuse himself with his 'contempt' for India's 'odious' policies, but this holier than thou attitude is a comical, if not sad attempt to score brownie points over India. It must not have escaped Mr. Husain's notice that while berating India's policies, he is unwittingly aping India's 'condescending' attitude!

Our 'myriad intellectual and moral failures' have brought us the strength of a pluralistic society, a

foreign sources. There is hardly any news about the redesigning of launches, and modernising the dockyards and the shipyards (except when they are failing). The public hardly has any general knowledge or updated information of the private inland waterway shipyards catering to the river business (passengers and cargo, and tourism).

This informal sector is left to the mercy of the private exploiters, who are led by non-professionals without adequate technical and professional know-how. While the cottage industries have received some attention (especially from the NGOs), the mid-level industries in different sectors may be declared formal zones, and thrust areas.

The Bengalees have to live close to waters all their lives, but the floating life is not at all comfortable. Even during normal times, the overloading in the launches points out that there are not enough vehicles and ghats to prevent overcrowding. Traveling in Bangladesh is a hassle all around the year.

A Mawaz
Dhaka

can prove that the tunes and compositions we find today are unchanged. Tempos of maximum songs are much faster than Tagore defined. Songs are no more harmonium oriented; now our honorable Tagore singers are frequently using guitars and keyboards too.

Rabindranath himself even used to compose his songs on piano. Lalan Shah would compose in guitar if he had one. Culture whether western or eastern, what's the difference in those *sa re ga or do re mi*, I don't know. So why don't we

required radius - pointed out to me.

Now coming back to the Taj Mahal, is it really conceivable that the pilots on a Pakistani aircraft with a mission to bomb the famous monument will not have access to this modern locating technology when anyone in the world can buy it for less than US\$150? And what about the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, the Tomb of Humayun in Delhi or that of Akbar in Sikandra near Agra?

Will they be veiled too? I'm afraid the answer lies in a negotiated settlement and mature restraint if we are to protect ourselves, our heritage and our future from the evils of war and man's inhumanity to man.

Technology is already here for India and Pakistan to destroy themselves many times over or alternatively turn this region into a prosperous one as in the days when these glorious monuments were built-- the choice perhaps is not as hard as it might seem.

Shabbir A. Bashar, Ph.D
San Jose, California, USA

"Taj to take veil if war breaks out"

The above article published in your newspaper on December 29, caught my attention. While I watch with caution the brewing drum beats of war between two of our neighbouring countries and would very much regret an actual escalation of conflict or an outbreak of war based on the respective egos of the usual zealots on both sides, I write today about the practical consequences of veiling the Taj Mahal-- one of the seven wonders of the world.

In this day and age the idea of camouflaging a towering 200 feet high monument measuring some 186 feet x 187 feet built on a site which is nearly 590 yards x 315 yards to hide it from the prying eyes of an overflying enemy aircraft seems laughable.

Technology has come a long way since 1971 when the Archeological Survey of India last covered the Taj Mahal during the Indo-Pak War. With the advent of the US Department of Defence-controlled Global Positioning System (GPS) facilitated by a constellation of 28 low orbiting satellites, a network of ground tracking stations and a receiver one can easily determine one's position practically anywhere on the planet. This is achieved by measuring the time it takes for radio signals to travel directly between satellites and receivers, hand-held or in cars.

Positions can be determined with spatial resolution of 300 yards for civilian applications while for military applications, the accuracy can be an order of magnitude greater.

In fact a December 3, 2001 press release http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/releases/2001/release_2001_233.html from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California claims that researchers were able to accurately measure the surface level of Crater Lake to within 2 centimetres by using GPS based altimetry from a rocky observing platform half a kilometre above the lake.

Many US car rental companies and high-end automobile manufacturers (BMW, Mercedes-Benz, Acura etc.) offer this technology as standard for regular street navigational purposes. Anyone equipped with a laptop computer, a handheld unit (retailing at about US\$100) and an appropriate electronic map of the world (MS Streets & Trips 2002 retails at US\$40 for the North American Version) can also benefit.

Simply by typing in the street address of a friend and my current position (located by the GPS), I can drive myself to their door via a choice of routes, while having any number of petrol stations, hotels, restaurants, shopping malls, airports or other landmarks - within a

