

# Veil ban: The unveiling of France's bigotry

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MONDAY, April 11, 2011, will be marked as a black day for the land of the so-called free. Two veiled Muslim ladies were arrested based on a draconian law banning such veils in public places in France.

With the passing into law of banning the use of face veils in French territory, France has desecrated its own fundamentals, Liberty Equality, Fraternity. By passing this absurd and racist law, the brave French government, headed by the equally brave Mr. President, has ganged up on something less than 1,900 poor defenseless Muslim ladies who are only following the dictates of their own belief. So guess who is the latest bully on the block?

Where is their much touted freedom of dress, freedom of religion, all men and women are equal, etc? Virtues which the West always takes pride in?

You are encroaching on the fundamental rights of individuals, only because it's a Muslim thing. If this is not bigotry, what would you call it? Racism, discrimination, male chauvinism? If there are any freedom loving spirits left in France I urge them to take Mr. Sarkozy and his smug government to the International Court of Justice for passing laws infringing on civil liberties.

It is hilarious the way the arguments have been posed in favour of the ban. "Demonising women kind," "walking prison," "security risk." Islam advocates utmost respect for ladies; wives, mothers and sisters are treated with honour and dignity. We don't make women sex symbols (now that is demonising).

Just to put the facts before the discerning public, the command of veiling came through the verses of the Quran just like other orders -- such as banning of intoxicants, not taking usury/interest, forbidding eating of pork, forbidding slander, adultery, sodomy, promiscuity, illegal abortion, stealing, lying. Need I go on? Everyone will agree that these prohibitions are for the



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good of society as a whole.

Also, ladies who do put on the veil, do it on their own free will. "There is no compulsion in religion, truth is distinct from error" -- Al Quran.

It is said that in Madinah, the night the announcement was made for donning of the veil, not a single lady was found in the streets, without the veil the following morning. Those who say that wearing a veil is not an Islamic dictate should do some more reading on Islam, please.

Islam emphasises purity of heart, sincerity of action, chastity, modesty, humility, words which I am afraid have become strange and have lost their meaning.

The Quran states: On chastity: "... and those who guard their chastity ..." (al Maarij 29) "... men and women who guard their chastity ..." (al Ahzab 35): "... Mariam (Mary, mother of Jesus) the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity ..." (al Tahrim 12), "Chaste, not lustful, nor taking paramour ..." (al Nisaa 25).

On modesty and those with

whom ladies can mix freely: "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest ..." (al Nur 30), "O Prophet tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their wrap over their bosoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their husbands, or fathers, or husbands' fathers, or their sons or their husbands' sons, or their brothers or their brothers' sons, or sisters' sons, or their women, their slaves or male attendants who lack vigour, or children who no naught of women's nakedness ..." (al Nur 31).

The verse of Hijaab: "And when you ask of them (Prophet's wives) anything, ask it of them from behind a screen, that is purer for your hearts and their hearts as well" (al Nur 30).

"O you wives of the Prophet, you are not like ordinary women, if you keep your duty to God, then be not soft of speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease aspire towards you, rather utter customary

speech..." (al Ahzab 32)

The Burqa/Chador verse: "O Prophet, tell your wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when going out). That is most convenient that they should be known and not molested ..." (al Ahzab 59).

Isn't it strange that women who want to follow their religion for the sake of modesty and purity are being prevented from doing so in the land of social justice. It's illiberal, unconstitutional.

In the streets of Paris women can be seen in different types of dresses that some may find offensive because of their revealing nature, and Mr. Sarkozy sees nothing wrong with that, although such scenes are an affront to people of different sensibilities.

Now that Mr. Sarkozy is dictating what not to wear, what will prevent him from dictating what to wear, when to wear, how to wear, where to wear, etc.? No telling when he will order Muslim ladies to dress like their French counterparts. Such apartheid attitude and illogical intolerance, may well force Muslim immigrants in France and other parts of Europe to go for mass exodus, back to their original homelands. Not a pleasing alternative for Europe because these are the people who do the odd jobs and menial work, which the Europeans don't have the stomach for. This will only add to their economic woes.

The fine is €150 for wearing a veil in public and €30,000 for enforcing the wearing of veil. Brides, you can forget about your wedding veils, trick or treaters, come Halloween time, better keep your 150 bucks handy. What if another flu scare comes along, or a nuclear reactor meltdown? No face masks please. If people do put them on they will be slapped with €150 fine.

So Mr. Sarkozy and his supporters would be well advised to leave those poor defenseless ladies alone and withdraw such barbaric laws.

The writer is an Islamic Scholar.

SHOBUJ UDDIN

AMERICAN president Abraham Lincoln said the immortal words: "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time."

The words are as fresh and relevant today as ever before, especially to Bangladesh.

When one hears politicians -- including the prime minister and opposition leader -- talking in a jingoistic fashion and in conde-

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scending tones, one feels revolted. The people are not as ignorant as they once were, or do the political leaders not realise this?

Prof. Musa Bapery struck the nail on the head in an English-language newspaper recently when he observed that it really doesn't matter to the ordinary people in Bangladesh which political party is in power because they and their cronies are the real beneficiaries.

To prove it to yourself, do the math. To become an MP in Bangladesh in some cases can cost as much as \$1 million. Now consider the pittance in salary they receive each month, multiply this

by 12 (for the year) and multiply that by 5 for the five-year period in power and it doesn't add up or make any sense whatsoever. It actually costs him/her crores in taka to serve the people, so to speak. They're either all saints or sinners, but definitely not very good in business management.

Once they gain power, they want their \$1 million back with a healthy profit on top! Although this is far from being in the better interests of the nation, it does make good business sense for the individual. And when we all realise that a government is a "business" that controls all businesses and not some kind of de-facto parenthood watching over and protecting us, the better. They're all out to get what they can for themselves -- first! If we happen to benefit from the crumbs, that's either our good luck or they've made a serious mistake!

A politician once told me: "Politics is no place for an honest person," and this I believe.

When I read about noble, patriotic Bangladeshis like our Nobel laureate Professor Yunus (his mistreatment is our shame) and well-wishing foreigners like Sir Frank Peters voicing their opinion in the better interest of the nation, I feel sorry for them, especially Sir Frank who has yet to learn the raw truth about Bangladesh politics.

If you want to do business now, you pay bakshesh to the power that be or wait another couple of years and pay it to whoever is in power then. To the people it doesn't matter, they're not beneficiaries and trust too much in whatever government is in power to do what is right and proper and what Allah would wish.

Maybe Abraham Lincoln was wrong. Maybe you can fool all of the people all of the time. No doubt the major political parties are actively researching this.

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# Remembering the Chernobyl nuclear accident

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THE accident could have served as a wake-up call to the whole of humanity. On April 26, 1986, disaster struck at the fourth reactor of the Chernobyl nuclear complex in Ukraine in the former Soviet Union.

During the test the automatic emergency system was shut down, undermining reactor safety. Fuel elements burst, setting off a chain of events, which in no time resulted in two powerful explosions. Soon, the reactor melted down, and a huge radioactive cloud spread its contaminating effects over a vast area of the Soviet Union and beyond.

Until last month's accident at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, Chernobyl was considered to be the worst disaster ever at a nuclear production facility. Even today the Chernobyl disaster is far from over. Hence, a retrospective is surely appropriate. The more so since the Japanese authorities have rated the Fukushima accident at the same level as the Chernobyl catastrophe.

The radioactive fall-out from the Soviet granite-moderated reactor was unprecedentedly large. Officially, the fall-out is stated to have been 50 million Curies of radioactivity. But it probably was at least several times this figure.

When storage tanks for high-radioactive waste in 1957 exploded in a nuclear-military reprocessing factory in

Cheliabinsk, in a remote corner of the Ural mountains, tens of millions Curies of radioactivity leaked out. Both the fall-out from Chernobyl and that from Chernobyl by far exceeded the radioactive fall-out from the atom bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945.

Since the Chernobyl complex was located close to densely populated parts of the Ukraine and Europe, the radioactive fall-out was bound to be very consequential, and fifty thousand people had to be evacuated. Half of the territories of 15 countries of Europe were contaminated by the radioactive cloud. As happened in the wake of the recent Fukushima-Daiichi disaster, public authorities everywhere were forced to put restrictions on the sale and import of food.

Initially, the effects of the Chernobyl catastrophe and the widespread anger it aroused put a brake on plans to expand production of nuclear energy, in particular in Europe and the US. Yet, as Chernobyl started receding from public memory, proponents of nuclear energy once again went on the offensive, claiming that the disaster had cost very few lives. The renowned British thinker James Lovelock surprisingly stated a few years ago that claims regarding a huge death toll from Chernobyl were "a powerful lie."

The only admission institutions representing nuclear interests, such as the IAEA, are willing to make is that the disaster caused an increase in thyroid cancers in children. This, they say, may result



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in just a few thousand mortalities. Not even the fact that tens of thousands of young and healthy men, who participated in clean-up activities in Chernobyl, faced an early death is admitted from this side.

In a more critical report brought out in 2006, Greenpeace revealed that the figure for victims of cancer cases due to Chernobyl could top a quarter million. In a study brought out by the New York Academy of Sciences in 2009,

Russian scientists compared data from severely contaminated, and from less contaminated parts of the former Soviet Union. They concluded that the death toll until end 2004 may be nine to ten times Greenpeace's figure.

In some areas of the former Soviet Union, less than 20% of children are healthy. Numerous babies have been born with deformities or with disturbances of their nervous systems. Genetic disorders were found in every

animal species studied by the Russian scientists.

However, it would be wrong to think that the after-effects of Chernobyl were limited to the direct consequences of the 1986 fall-out. It is also necessary to look at the outcome of the clean-up operation undertaken subsequently. 5,000 tons of materials were dropped from helicopters to re-cover the damaged reactor, at the price of the lives of the pilots. Then, some 600,000 people, baptised the "liquidators," were recruited to rapidly build a sarcophagus of concrete and metal.

This operation, carried out over a period of six months, was extremely hazardous and probably resulted in the largest number of radiation-induced illnesses and deaths from the catastrophe. Besides, the new outer shell for Chernobyl's melted reactor never functioned as an effective barrier to radiation leakages. It reportedly has been in danger of collapse for years!

Thus, since the nineties, discussions have been underway over the building of a new arch. It would have to be erected in proximity of the former reactor, and will need to be glided towards its destination over rails in order to reduce risks for humans. Also, the existing sarcophagus and the destroyed reactor will have to be dismantled with the aid of robots. As of 2011, a major chunk of the funds required to finance this new operation still has not been collected. Clearly, the mess from the Chernobyl disaster is long-lasting. And although Japan's technologi-

cal capacity today obviously exceeds that of the Soviet Union 25 years back, the clean-up work in Japan is sure to extend over very many decades to come.

What fundamental lessons can be drawn from Chernobyl, for Japan and for the world at large? The experience gathered since the meltdown 25 years ago appears to validate the views nuclear critics expressed at the time. The disaster fuelled immediate and worldwide resistance -- not just against expansion, but against any reliance on nuclear energy.

One of the central arguments critics cite is that nuclear technology is so hazardous, so destructive, that humanity would do well to renounce it entirely. Yet, since the late nineties, strenuous efforts have been made by proponents of nuclear energy to stage a "renaissance" and resume the trend of nuclear expansion worldwide. It is very unfortunate that a section of writers and intellectuals who are vocal against climate change are voicing the same arguments being used by representatives of the nuclear lobby to defend a nuclear come-back.

As a retrospective on the Chernobyl catastrophe easily brings out: one cannot trade one catastrophe against another; one can't exchange a climate catastrophe for a nuclear catastrophe. Today, we need a sacred pledge in favour of reliance on technologies that are productive, and sustain all forms of life on planet earth.

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