



SHAGUFTA HOSSAIN

Shagufta Hossain, a development practitioner, is the founder and former executive director of Leaping Boundaries, and manager, youth engagement at Plan International, Canada.

It is the month of Ramadan. During this time, I find that our “Muslimness” peaks. Incidentally, this year, Ramadan coincides with Pahela Baishakh. During this time, I find that our “Bengaliness” also peaks. During Ramadan, those who haven’t prayed a single prayer the whole year are suddenly found touting religious sayings, spitting on sidewalks and judging anyone who isn’t fasting for whatever personal reasons. And as Pahela Baishakh approaches, we suddenly find those who regularly listen to “Tera Pyaar Hukkah Bar” immerse themselves in Rabindra Sangeet, eat panta bhaat in each meal, and crinkle their noses at anyone who isn’t speaking *shuddho* Bangla. As these two parts of our identities peak and collide, the age-old conflict of “Muslim first or Bengali first” emerges once again in the psyche of Bangladeshis who, for the past five decades, have failed miserably at grasping the concept of dual identities.

The recent incident where a policeman harassed and hurled abuse at a teacher of Tejgaon College after seeing her wearing a teep on her forehead while she was going to work, I suspect, is rooted in this age-old conflict. I have gone over the incident over and over again in my head, and tried to come up with some kind of reasoning for the man’s behaviour.

The conundrum is presented by a dot on the forehead. I suspect the man saw a woman with a teep on her forehead walking across the street, and thought it his moral duty to correct her behaviour. Naturally, he thought it was his moral duty—he is, after all, of the blessed male population. He wears a uniform with the purpose of protecting law and order. Of course, a tiny dot on someone’s head presents enough of a threat to the



ILLUSTRATION:
SUSHMITA S PREETHA

faithfulness and morality of the entire nation. After all, such blatant display of Hindu symbolism cannot be tolerated! So he took it upon himself to correct her behaviour.

Are teeps truly a Hindu religious symbol? In India, yes. Dating as far back as 1500-1200 BC, Vedic texts, which many Indians still follow today, indicate that the *bindi* is used to mark the Ajna Chakra, or more commonly known as the “third eye.” The Ajna Chakra is located in the middle of the forehead and considered a sacred place in the body. Vedic texts link this chakra to wisdom, spiritual insight, and an awakening of the mind.

But, while the origins of the coloured dot worn at the centre of one’s forehead may have been Hindu, it has since evolved in its role as an adornment across the subcontinent, with no necessary religious connotation attached to it. To continue to link it to its Vedic origins would be like linking the sacrifices we make during Eid-ul-Azha to pagan animal sacrifice rituals. Was ritualistic animal sacrifice

historically pagan? Sure. Is that the reason why we sacrifice animals during our Eid? No. So, then, why is wearing a dot on one’s forehead, something so decidedly personal, repeatedly used to mark women to be of a certain creed? More importantly, so what if it is? Why do I have to justify what I choose to wear or not wear? Why would I be abused for wearing something that is entirely harmless?

I suppose it must be done, yet again, to control the woman’s body.

In 2015, in London, UK, a British Muslim woman was assaulted by a group of women who ripped off her hijab in a racist attack as she went to collect her children from school. Last year in October, in Ottawa, Canada, a Muslim woman walking down the street in the middle of the afternoon was attacked by another woman who forcefully removed her hijab. In September 2021, a Muslim woman living in the Austrian capital Vienna was physically harmed as she was subjected to a racist attack for wearing

hijab. Countless such incidents have happened where a woman’s expression of identity has been attacked. These attacks are no different than the attack on the teep. And it begs to be noted that the assailants who attack a woman’s expression of identity aren’t necessarily male either.

In all honesty, I wasn’t there and I couldn’t know what this particular policeman was thinking. I have, however, noticed a pattern in people’s thinking in my own personal experiences of social interaction. Up until recently, my daily attire consisted of a saree, a hijab and a teep. As a result, I have been described as a walking, talking question mark. My faith has always been questioned. My understanding and practice of religion has always been questioned. My hijab has always been questioned. My Bengaliness has also always been questioned—as has my identifying myself as a feminist.

And often, this incessant questioning and unresolved confusion leads to oversimplified conclusions of “She’s a heretic,” “She’s a hypocrite” or, the kindest, “She’s confused.” After much deliberation, I have decided that what I wear, how I wear it, who I worship and how are entirely my business. So, I impolitely decline to answer any questions related to what I am wearing and how I worship.

But I have come to the difficult and amusing realisation that I will probably challenge the status quo with everything that I put on or remove from my body. Whether I wrap myself with more fabric or less, I will make a political statement. I think the same is true for every woman walking down the street who doesn’t fit into the pristine, well-defined boundaries and demarcations of proper, well behaved women set by society. And so, little things like what you are wearing moves beyond indulgence (or acts of faith) and becomes an act of political warfare. Every article of clothing, every accessory is a weapon in the warfare against patriarchy.

So, what are we to do? Accessorise, of course. Make the personal political. Exist. That, in itself, is enough.

Why fact-checking is essential

QADARUDDIN SHISHIR

Qadaruddin Shishir is a fact-checker based in Dhaka.

HAVING been working for some years to understand the trends and traits of misinformation in the Bangladeshi online sphere, I often encounter the question: “How can we fight the menace of misinformation?” This question is common as well as significant, but it has no concrete answer. Experts and policymakers across the globe have been in search of remedies for fake news that has proliferated over the years alongside the increase in internet penetration and the rise of social media platforms.

The concept of social media democratises the information ecosystem, but at the same time, it brings a burden of unverified information that is unprecedented in volume. Every citizen has now become a “journalist” and “publisher.” Traditionally, the media has always played the role of gatekeeper when it comes to the accuracy of information, but a social media user does not necessarily have any obligation or scope or even desire to verify everything he or she shares on his or her social media account(s). That’s where modern fact-checking—the process of verifying already-published claims—comes in.

There are different approaches, in different societies, to counter fake news that includes awareness campaigns, media and news literacy programmes, legal measures against those involved in coordinated misinformation drives, and alerting the public through fact-checking. Numerous studies confirm that fact-checking is an effective tool to counter misinformation. One such study, conducted by two researchers from George Washington University and The Ohio State University in the US, found that “experiments conducted simultaneously in Argentina, Nigeria, South Africa, and the United Kingdom reveal that fact-checks increase factual accuracy, decreasing belief in misinformation.”

Another research by a team of Paris-based researchers concluded similarly while assessing the efficacy of fact-checking. “Fact-checking can improve the accuracy of audiences’ factual knowledge,” the research says, but it does not necessarily change people’s minds.

In Bangladesh, we see that a section of the mainstream media often turns into a vehicle of misinformation; the same goes for the politicians, too. When their false claims are constantly challenged by fact-checkers, these important institutions of state face some form of accountability. By increasing the reputational risk of making false claims, fact-checking may help discourage politicians as well as media platforms from promoting misinformation.

Several experimental research

As a fact-checker who deals with Facebook’s third-party fact-checking programme in Bangladesh, I am a witness to how quickly media outlets here correct false or misleading pieces of information they inadvertently carry on their platforms to avoid restrictions imposed by the social media giant.

works have found promising impacts of fact-checking on politicians. A study by Chloe Lim, a PhD candidate at Stanford University, examined how checking published facts affected the repetition of claims in speeches made by presidential candidates in the 2012 and 2016 US presidential elections. She found that marking a politician’s claim as false decreases the likelihood of said politician repeating the same claim by 9.5 percentage points.

Similarly, studies show that fact-checking is a good means of holding journalists accountable for the accuracy of their reporting. As a fact-checker who deals with Facebook’s third-party fact-checking programme in Bangladesh, I am a witness to how quickly media outlets here correct false or misleading pieces of information they inadvertently carry on their platforms to avoid restrictions imposed by the social media giant. Not only the media, but the content creators who have embraced or are willing to embrace Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms as a source of revenue are also increasingly becoming careful about peddling fake news through their productions.

What’s interesting here is that, despite all these positive outcomes of the practice of fact-checking, there is yet no move by any Bangladeshi

mainstream media outlet to launch a fact-checking operation of its own, which could contribute to restoring the waning public trust on the media. In India, top media houses have their fact-checking teams and they regularly publish stories debunking different kinds of online hoaxes. Some outlets do fact-checks disproving claims made by politicians, including their prime minister. The same is true for the US, the UK and other countries where reputed media houses have dedicated fact-checkers to hunt down fake news and false claims made by public figures and institutions. Recognising the unfavourable journalistic atmosphere, especially for political fact-checking here in Bangladesh, our top media houses should still go for it. A team of dedicated fact-checkers can save these outlets from falling prey to misinformation campaigners.

Amid the wave of misinformation and disinformation surrounding the Russia-Ukraine war, the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), along with hundreds of fact-checking organisations across the world, observed the International Fact-Checking Day on April 2, 2022. At a time like this, a healthy information ecosystem requires everyone to do their part in elevating facts, where the media is expected to lead the way.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Play groups

6 Minimum amount

11 Boring

12 Mars neighbor

13 Game place

14 Mink’s cousin

15 Takes the wrong way?

17 Phone bill addition

18 Shoe shade

19 Free time

22 Slalom maneuver

23 Caravan critters

24 Bat around, kitten-style

25 Mountain

shrub

27 Green prefix

30 Advice

31 Right away

32 Galley need

33 Exactly correct

35 Physics bits

38 Similar

39 Movie ogre

40 Nomad

41 Visibly sad

42 Garden starters

DOWN

1 Pure

2 Big arteries

3 Glosses

4 Melt base

5 Compacts

6 Summer sign

7 “Dig in!”

8 Cunning

9 Takes the wheel

10 Low digit

16 Iodine source

20 “Lay it on me”

21 Ready to go

24 Groan inducer

25 Detest

26 Dawn goddess

27 Salad green

28 Used the kitchen

29 They have titles

30 Shore setting

34 Balm

ingredient

36 Body of eau

37 Sun setting

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12-11

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MOIST OPINER
ANKLE PIKER
TENON TONER
OTTO NODS
BOWS ANEW
OUT FREEMAN
OCHER TRYME
THEMETS ROW
SITE MIST
SECT DRAG
WROTE ATHOS
AIRES TETRA
BEERS ESSEX

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48270140, 5350

dd.procure@bari.gov.bd

yourusai.bari@gmail.com

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Memo no: 12.21.0000.032.02.711.22.5339 Date : 03 April 2022

e-GP: Tender Notice No.33(2021-2022)

e-Tender is invited in the e-GP system Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for the procurement of the following goods. Details are given below:

Sl No	Package no.	Tender ID & Ref No	Description of goods	Tender Documents Last selling (Date & Time)	Tender Closing date & Time	Tender Opening date & Time
1.	PN: GD-05	679994 & IRN: 711	Consumables 30 items	18.04.2022 17:00	19.04.2022 12:00	19.04.2022 12:00

The interested persons/firm may visit the website www.eprocure.gov.bd to get the details of the tender.

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the national e-GP portal and no offline/hard copy will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, Registration in the National e-GP system portal is required.

Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP system portal and e-GP Help Desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

Project Name : "Development and Expansion of bio-rational based integrated pest management technologies of vegetables, fruits and betel leaf" Project.

Md. Younus Ali

Deputy Director (In-Charge)

On behalf of Director General

GD-667