**Combatting Islamophobia**

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The word Islamophobia is once again in the news around the world. To go into further details as to why and how this fresh debate on Islamophobia has stirred up, first there is a need to understand what Islamophobia is. According to the European Islamophobia Report (EIR), an annual report first presented in 2015, Islamophobia is defined as a dominant group of people aiming at seizing, stabilising and widening their power by means of defining a scapegoat – real or invented – and excluding this scapegoat from the resources/rights/definition of a constructed “we.” Wikipedia defines it as fear of, hatred of, or prejudice against the religion of or Muslims in general especially when seen as a geopolitical force or a source of terrorism. Simply put, it is the non-acceptance of Muslims by others around the world. The form of Islamophobia varies from country to country. In the West, it is owing to misperceptions about Islam. In Israel, it is inspired by Zionism. In India, the driver behind Islamophobia is Hindu nationalism inspired by RSS. That post 9/11 era saw a spike in Islamophobia is an open secret. Hardly does a month pass that we do not hear about attacks on Muslims simply because of their faith. There is no need to dive deeper into history because, in recent years, a number of Islamophobic attacks took place in the West. Even sometimes mass-shootings have been the fate of Muslims. For instance, a 28-year-old Australian-born man Brenton Tarrant had live-streamed footage of himself going room-to-room shooting the wounded from a close range in a mosque in New Zealand.

A divided Muslim world can never effectively combat Islamophobia

That episode ended in the killing of over two dozen Muslims and had invited the world’s attention. Left with no other option, Jacinda Arden tried her level best to bring the apparent normalcy to the minds of Muslims living in her country. Likewise, last year, a man driving a pick-up truck slammed into and killed four members of a Muslim family in the south of Canada’s Ontario province. Police later said: “There is evidence that this was a planned, premeditated act, motivated by hate. It is believed that these victims were targeted because they were Muslim.” In India, according to Hindustan Times, 27 students were recently prevented from entering a government-run college for wearing hijabs in the coastal town of Kundapur in Karnataka’s Udupi district. This week, a video of a burqa-clad Muslim student Muskan Khan, who alone confronted Hindu far-right goons in India’s southern Karnataka state, has caused outrage around the globe, particularly in the Muslim world. In the video, she could be seen confronting the goons and chanting Allahu Akbar (Allah is the greatest). How many examples of hatred towards Muslims will one provide? Islamophobia is a global reality. What is worrying is that like many other issues, it too is subjected to global politics. On the other side, blaming alone the West for the no containment of rising Islamophobia makes little sense. The truth is that the Muslim world too can hardly be seen on one page when it comes to combating Islamophobia. A divided Muslim world can never effectively combat Islamophobia until Muslim countries set aside their differences and do not let this mushrooming problem be subject to their matters. A collective and unequivocal stance of the leaders of the Muslim world will only convince some leaders of the West who sow hatred in minds of their people for achieving short and long term political goals. To be fair, some leaders in the West have on different occasions spoken against Islamophobia. For example, Russian President Vladimir Putin, during his annual news conference in December last year, said that insulting Prophet Muhammad is not the expression of artistic freedom and termed these ilk acts as a “violation of religious freedom and the violation of the sacred feelings of people who profess Islam.” Mr Putin might have said this with a view to garnering the sympathy of the Muslim world one way or the other as a shift is taking place in global politics and new blocs are being formed. However, Prime Minister Imran Khan wasted no time appreciating his remarks. Similarly, to his credit, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau late last month tweeted: “Islamophobia is unacceptable. Full stop. We need to put an end to this hate and make our communities safer for Muslim Canadians. To help with that, we intend to appoint a Special Representative on combatting Islamophobia.’’ This also prompted Prime Minister Imran Khan to appreciate the step taken by Mr Justin Trudeau. But are only these statements adequate? Far sure, the answer is not in affirmative. Concrete yet concerted steps need to be taken by the Muslim world. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) must, in the true sense, wake up to the rising menace of Islamophobia and prove its mettle. To remove or reduce misperceptions about Islam found in people of the West largely created by the Western media, there is a dire need to launch a multi-lingual TV channel that could show the positive image of Islam to those who perceive Muslims as terrorists and unveil the evil faces of those who seek to advance their political interests by nurturing hatred towards Islam and its followers. On the sidelines of the 74th UNGA session, in a trilateral meeting, Prime Minister Imran Khan, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Malaysian PM Mahathir Mohamad had decided that the three countries would jointly start an English-language channel for the purpose but no one is in the know as if any headway has been made in that connection or the decision thrown into the bin. Two countries, Pakistan and Turkey, have been active in combating Islamophobia but the naked truth is that the onus is not alone on these two. Other leaders from the Muslim world should also show loyalty to the cause.

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