

## Assault on the Chief Justice

Enough is enough

THE Chief Justice is far more than an individual. He is an institution, and of the three pillars of the state, he represents one of the most important columns. His office is the last resort for those who seek justice. His office is also the interpreter of the Constitution and is crucial in establishing a society based on justice and rule of law. We are, therefore, aghast at the blatantly hostile and direct assault on the Chief Justice that has been going on for the last few days. Not only have his credentials been questioned, motives have also been imputed to him.

This we see nothing but an expression of no confidence on the Chief Justice and, by implication, on the highest echelon of the judiciary itself. And such vitriolic comments are bound to make the country's highest court of law controversial. If judgments are not passed following legal procedures, only the rule of jungle prevails. This cannot augur well for the government of the day. In this context, it is indeed unnerving that two senior ministers have chosen to attack the Chief Justice. Even the Attorney General has not been spared of their wrath.

Nobody is above the law. If there has been any breach of law by any quarter, the Constitution provides avenues to seek redress of that situation. But nothing should be uttered that might impinge on the work of the judiciary or question its independence.

We want an immediate stop to this unwarranted attack on the Chief Justice, because enough has been said that has slighted the judiciary and denigrated its importance and stature. Enough is enough. It must stop.

## International women's day

Much remains to be achieved

THE world has been celebrating International Women's Day since 1910 when it was launched at the International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen. The idea was to observe a day globally to press for the demands of better wages, working conditions and other facilities. And although March 8 has been celebrated by the United Nations since 1975, women in our society have a long way to go before their rights are fully protected or even recognised. Yes, there have been some notable achievements. We have seen women climb to the top of public office, there has been an increase in women's participation in the field of entrepreneurship and the administrative cadres and women, in general, have become a cornerstone of our labour force in the readymade garments industry.

And yet, women continue to face discrimination in the workplace where their contribution is seldom recognised. Violence against women, which has often led to deaths, points to a society that remains aloof to their rights as human beings. Women remain subject to fatwa and shalish verdicts imposed by ignorant preachers and humiliated in public. Hence when we talk about observing this day, we should take a look at the laws of the land which need to be implemented to give women the rights that they are entitled to. Perhaps then, this day would have true and proper meaning in Bangladesh where nearly half the population continues to toil in an insecure environment, where their contribution to nation building remains unrecognised and where they remain marginalised and vulnerable.

### LETTERS

#### TO THE EDITOR

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#### No covert attempts will be tolerated in Bangladesh

Bangladesh won independence following a bloody war in which millions of people were brutally murdered, tortured, raped and displaced. The sad but inspiring story of the emergence of the sovereign nation of Bangladesh from the clutch of West Pakistan, and her march towards a secular and progressive democracy breaking the shackles of erstwhile East Pakistan is a global example of how people's resistance can change the geography and political history of a nation. Bangladesh has earned the world's respect for making significant progress in multiple socio-economic indicators.

For the past few years, certain officials in the Pakistan government have allegedly been involved in espionage as well as supporting insurgent groups within Bangladesh. It is highly condemnable that it has been providing logistic support to criminals, insurgent groups with radical ideologies, spreading counterfeit currency and intervening and officially commenting on the state of affairs of this sovereign nation. The government of Bangladesh has taken the right steps in diplomatically challenging Pakistan to stop these activities on foreign soil. No such covert attempts and activities will be tolerated by the proud and freedom loving people of Bangladesh.

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# How far have we truly come?



HAMEEDA HOSSAIN

MARCHES, rallies and celebratory speeches will mark March 8 in Bangladesh and around the world. There is indeed much to celebrate since 1857 when women garment workers in New York picketed their factories or since 1910 when Clara Zetkin and other socialists declared it as the international women's day. The movements that voiced the demands of women garment workers extended to voting rights of women and other social and political rights. The women's struggle for justice and social transformation continues even as we face new challenges.

The theme in 2016 is Planet 50 – 50. Recent MDG appraisals of Bangladesh have indicated improvements in life expectancy, maternal mortality, parity in education and rising employment. While these advances are important in themselves, we need to ask if they have freed women from the shackles of forced marriages, dowry demands, domestic subservience and marital violence, or exploitation at the work place and sexual violence in their public lives?

Will these indicators bring us the justice that we seek - individually and collectively? We may reach equality in numbers but will this be a formula for freedom for women as also for other genders? Can we envision a society where women can choose their life options freely, live without fear, speak without constraints?

Yes, on March 8 we will acknowledge the state's contribution to material progress, increased resource allocation and development opportunities, but beyond such piecemeal changes we had expected state interventions to make for a gender just transformation in relations within the family, in community values and in recognition of women as citizens. This is why the demand for legal reform has remained an essential element of the women's movements – as a means towards affecting their public and private lives.

For over 40 years, women have campaigned for reform of personal laws, and each time their demands have been subordinated to laws based on archaic religious precepts that deprive women of rights in marriage, divorce and in

inheritance and that differentiate between women of different religions. The demand for equal rights in marriage and divorce has not progressed beyond the Family Laws Ordinance 1961. The legacy of traditional religious norms stands in the way of change in personal laws, and underlines the need for reform.

Society's tolerance of unjust traditional norms is a contributory cause of gendered violence. Since 2000 several laws have been enacted, including the more recent Domestic Violence Act 2010, which aim to provide protection for the survivor and deterrent penalties to the

employers as a woman's issue or should it be rejected by them as a class issue? When a young Chakma or Marma girl is raped in Khagrachari or Bandarban -- in some cases by law enforcement personnel -- should we not be equally concerned as we are with the rape of a girl in Tangail?

The women's campaigns for women's representation in public decision-making forums have led to an increase in numbers in parliament and in local government. But why do women who enter political space engage vociferously in partisan party debates but remain silent on concerns that are central to women's security such as violence on the campus or the use of militant student cadres? Protests against sexual harassment of women on the campus

employers as a woman's issue or should it be rejected by them as a class issue? When a young Chakma or Marma girl is raped in Khagrachari or Bandarban -- in some cases by law enforcement personnel -- should we not be equally concerned as we are with the rape of a girl in Tangail?

Women's movements for equality, for non-discrimination, cannot be merely a means to earn privileges for a few or extract concessions from an unjust economic and political order. Rather, the struggle is to overcome traditional norms of oppression set by a patriarchal society, to curtail the power of political



PHOTO: AP

perpetrator. But patriarchal norms prevent women from seeking justice, and traditions and customs act as impediments. In some cases of rape and sexual violence, defective prosecution and investigation procedures have obstructed justice and increased women's vulnerability.

Women have challenged the social tolerance of violence instigated by fatwa or sexual violence and rape in public institutions by taking up these issues in the higher courts. The Supreme Court has declared illegal any penalty imposed by a fatwa. The High Court has also intervened to penalise sexual harassment

during new year celebrations were echoed across the country. But few voices were raised by our women representatives.

The divide amongst women on account of their class, religion, ethnicity or caste suggests that the women's movements need to look beyond standard, internationally developed indicators for equality to understand how different identities subject women to different forms of exploitation, and how the state and society reinforce these inequalities. Should not the exploitation of garment export workers or young domestic workers be taken up by women

hierarchies and to challenge the exploitation of unregulated market regimes. Our struggles should thus envision a recognition of diversity in women's life experiences, and work towards transformative social and economic justice and a meaningful representation in state structures. In challenging the present structures of power, the struggle cannot be deflected with marginal changes.

As we march together on March 8 and raise cheers for equality let us not forget the underlying causes of injustice in our society.

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## Misogyny: The spirit of terrorism



NAMIA AKHTAR

CONTEMPORARY terrorist groups like Daesh (ISIS), Boko Haram, Taliban and Al-Qaeda incorporate a political agenda with an ideological twist of Islam, with an interpretation that violates the moral values that Islam preaches. The ideology of these groups is embedded in rigid misogyny and sexism, violating women's rights, which is alien to the theology of Islam. When the dawn of Islam was brought to the Arabian Peninsula, it freed women from savage oppression and justice prevailed over injustice.

Bigotry is deeply embedded in the ideology of the groups that is buried in the current terrorist rhetoric, as academics and security experts term these groups as 'Islamist' organisations or *Jihadi* groups. These terminologies propagate the idea that any act of terror committed by a Muslim is not segregated from Islam, but Islam bears the responsibility for the act. The usage of these terms shed negative light on the religion, increasing the plight of ordinary innocent Muslims, particularly on those residing in the West, resulting in their alienation and segregation from the wider society.

The symbols of Muslim marginalisation are reflected in the recent western political discourses such as Donald Trump's hateful remarks to ban all Muslim travel to US, alongside Islam-sceptic debates that dominate in Europe, leading to public policies that further marginalise the Muslim community. These public discussions are a package of the greater Orientalist discourse, promoting the notion that Muslims are the 'less civilised' beings, whose presence contaminates European values. The terror lexicon in vogue weaves the myth of the *clash of civilisations*, that Islamic values are incompatible with liberal values and are a threat to modernity.

In the Indian subcontinent, the term *jihad* is used to define contemporary terrorism. By defining it as such, the highly regarded Islamic meaning of *jihad* has been severely denigrated. *Jihad* means to struggle, and to cling onto faith at the times of adversity, most importantly to stand against social injustice despite facing obstacles and difficulties. *Jihad* is not to be interpreted as a conflict, rather a fight of our inner struggles, to restrain our actions for the greater good of the society. Thus, using *jihad* or *jihadism* to entail "terrorism" is misleading. The stigmatisation of *Jihad* promotes the Western supremacist legacy.

Perhaps the term "sexlamism" best describes the dogma of these terror groups due to the presence of institutionalised sexism and/or sexual violence, along with the sexual motivation that plays a crucial role in their recruitment. The governance of Daesh is deeply sexualised. Men are given the provision of Daesh's lustrous heaven upon joining, with wives and slaves in ample supply, sins legitimised. Supposed martyrdom is encouraged with the distant mirage of making love to seventy-two *hoors* in paradise. They believe, however, that being killed by a woman will deprive them of their imaginative sensuous paradise, and they will perish in

hell. Thus, the hatred of women has proven to be largely beneficial for the Kurdish army, as the Women's Protection Units, an all women faction of the YPG which is estimated to be 10,000 troops strong, is fighting ISIS to re-take territory in north-eastern Syria. It has therefore helped them win victories.

Their ideology of "sexlamism" encompasses abuse against homosexuals, transsexual people or people of other orientations and religions. Not only is it prevalent in terror groups, but it's also legalised in some countries such as Saudi Arabia, where everyday sexism determines the political discourse. Some examples in Saudi Arabia include victims of rape being punished rather than the offenders. This notion also infers a racist doctrine that views the world in a binary - the Muslims vs. the Infidels. These "infidels" are perceived as being sexually immoral and looked down as being too liberal on women. The illusion of an Islamic Caliphate is also entwined in this seductive textual interpretation to unite the Muslim *ummah* into one nation.

Nonetheless, Sexlamists in their private lives are

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obsessed with pornography (in a February 17, 2015 article, *New York Post* reported that Navy SEALs who killed Osama bin Laden found a fairly extensive stash of modern pornography in his possession), they communicate through it (media sources reported that terrorist cells embedded secret coded messages into shared pornography and onto pedophile websites) and justify their own salacious carnal practices on religious grounds. Al-Qaeda leaders, such as Osama Bin Laden and Anwar Al-waki, had also indulged in notorious promiscuity. Adultery and fornication are strictly prohibited in Islam, but in terror groups abhorrent sexual practices reign supreme. Daesh, for instance, has issued fatwas justifying rapes of Yazidi women to make them Muslims. Rape is the mechanism of Daesh to achieve their strategic objectives, since it humiliates and shames respective communities.

Daesh also sells Yazidi women held as captives in the slave market, where they are exhibited naked and priced according to their physique. Women are publicly

gang raped and families and communities forced to comply with their code of conduct. Sexism dominates internal organisational structure of the Sexlamist groups where men occupy leadership positions; women on the contrary are placed in authority only over women to moralise their behaviour. The women in these groups serve patriarchal figures who protect the patriarchal misogynist structure within the organisation.

The issue of women's rights, victimisation of women in terror groups gets sullied in terrorist debates. Pornography is rarely discussed in counter terrorism narrative, even though evidence suggests that increased consumption of pornography might cause radicalisation, it is a rare issue in the security discourse. Preponderant abuses in terror groups get masked under the cloak of Islam, under the current terms of Islamism, *Islamist*, *jihad*, as these words highlight Islam as the root of evil. Terrorism committed in the name of Christianity, has inflicted violence in greater magnitude than the contemporary terror groups who proclaim to be Muslims. Christian terror groups have not been defined as "Christianist" or "Christianism," but are associated with terms like 'fundamentalism,' or 'fundamentalist'. The Christian 'crusade' does not echo a similar negative resonance as 'Jihad' in contemporary political dialogues. Hence it is a deployment of hypocrisy to use these contemporary terms i.e. "Islamism," "Islamist," "Jihadist," to impeach terrorism.

Women are largely absent from the domain of counter terrorism, as it is mostly men who make decisions on counter radicalisation. Women's scholarship and their expertise are undermined in the realm of international relations as they are viewed as "peacemakers," hence unfit for realist, rational decision making.

The absence of women in foreign policy decision making of Western countries explains the support of authoritarian regimes that has institutionalised misogyny for their political gains. The book *Sex and World Peace* by Valerie M. Hudson shows that countries violating women's rights have a higher propensity to indulge in conflict and terrorism. Thus, women's rights need to be enacted in the realm of international politics, as abuse of women rights is a significant factor causing terrorism.

Sexlamism dominates because of the perception of women's inferiority in these countries. To successfully fight terrorism, Western foreign policy, particularly the US foreign policy needs to terminate support for authoritarian regimes that has institutionalised bigotry. Moreover, the religion of Islam needs to be alienated from terrorism, as sexism, sexual violence on women in terror groups and the fantasy of the imaginative Caliphate are contrary to Islamic theology. At the same time, however, Islam needs reformation from renowned scholars to eliminate the existing fabrication of texts radical groups use for recruitment purposes. The terrorism prevailing in the modern world is prejudiced towards women, calling for an urgency to change the present lexicon and remove Muslim victimhood from our day-to-day discourse.

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