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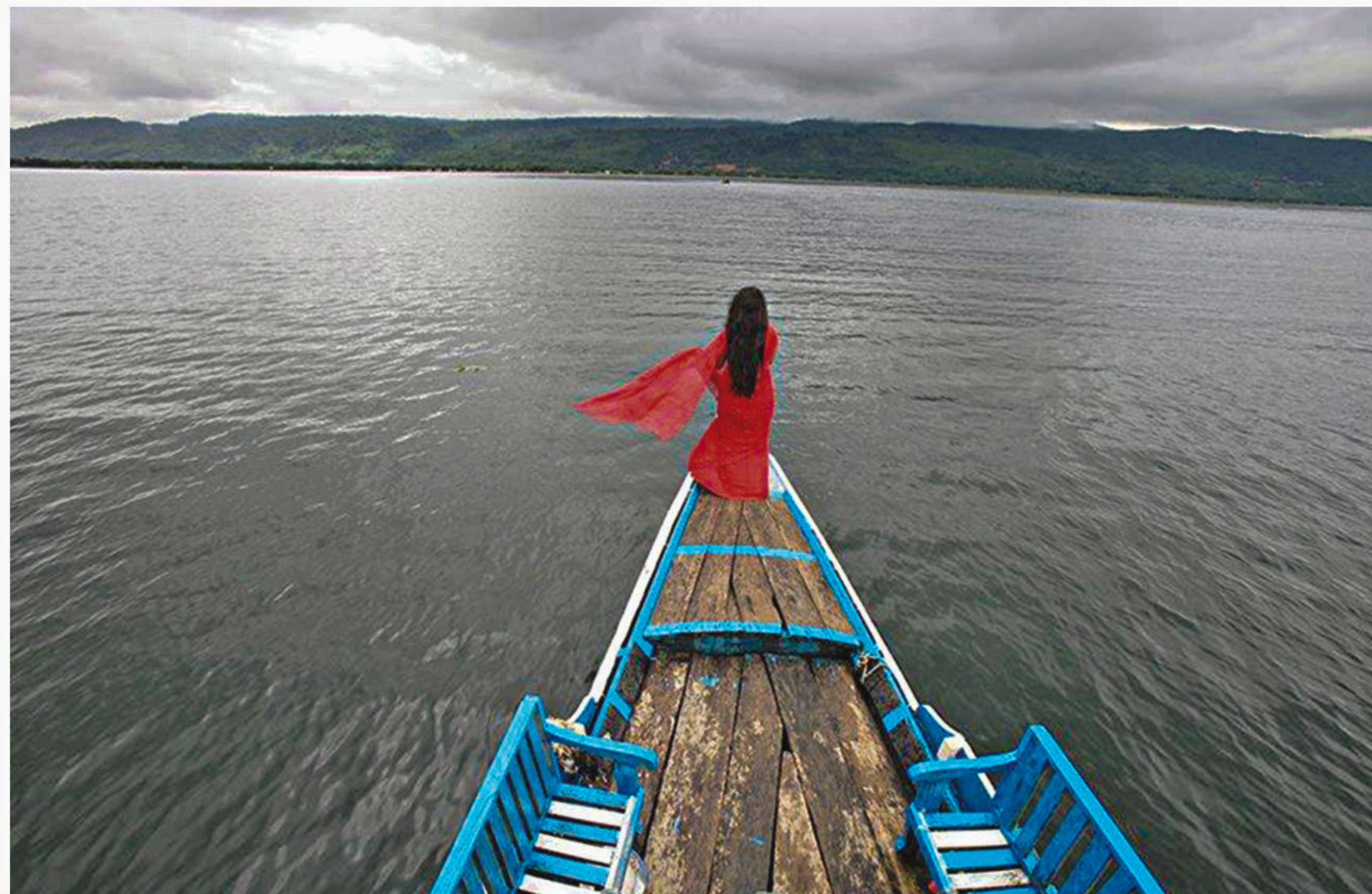


PHOTO: PRANABESH DAS

"In order to understand the world, one has to turn away from it on occasion." – Albert Camus, Author

SNAPSHOT

TRIBUTE

It has been one month since that black night of July 1st when a group of fanatic, deranged and desensitised young men attacked the Holy Artisan Bakery, focusing on killing "foreigners", supposedly as an act of taking revenge for persecution of Muslims worldwide. As per newspaper reports, most of the Bangladeshis were spared except for Faraaz Hossain, Saiful Chowkidar, and Ishrat Akhond. Along with them Tarishi an Indian national and Abinta Kabir a US citizen were also murdered.

From the numerous rumours about the attack, a story also surfaced about Abinta being killed because she confessed to being an American citizen. Even though there are no eye witnesses to attest that she actually said she was American, every report stated that among those killed were 9 Italians, 8 Japanese, 1 Indian, two Bangladeshi and one American- Abinta.

This narrative has pained her family and surprised those who knew Abinta well. According to them, she was no more an American than you or I. Yes, she had a US passport, but so do many people in our country. A person may take on a foreign nationality for practical reasons, it does not necessarily mean they have renounced the country of their origin and birth

Why is then Abinta being denied her right of Bangladeshi citizenship? Only recently some newspapers have started to refer to her as an American of Bangladeshi origin. The truth is, she was born in Bangladesh, went to live in the US when she was two and returned at the age of 10. She has been living in Dhaka since then, graduated from the American International School in 2015, and left for Canada to study at Emory College as an undergraduate student

But who was Abinta? I did not know Abinta personally, but since her death, I couldn't help but visit her family over and over again in my meager attempt to share in their grief. I have learned that she was a beautiful 19 year old, stunning and intelligent, 5 feet 8 inches tall and a pro basket ball player. She was the only beloved child of her parents. Her grandmother, Nilu Murshed says Abinta could not wait to come home and would jump on a flight the day her exams ended. She loved deshi food, her relatives, friends, her home. She did not mind the chaos, dirt and traffic jams, for her this was home, with all its fault, this is where she belonged and always wanted to be. This is where she dreamt of returning someday and making a difference in the lives of people not as fortunate as her.

At this young age, she had a deep sense of responsibility towards Bangladesh and the people. Her dorm room in college was adorned with a big flag of Bangladesh. In one of her class assignment she writes:

"I am acutely sensitive to the tremendous hardships faced by ordinary people in Bangladesh and also understand that these hardships are a result of many centuries of

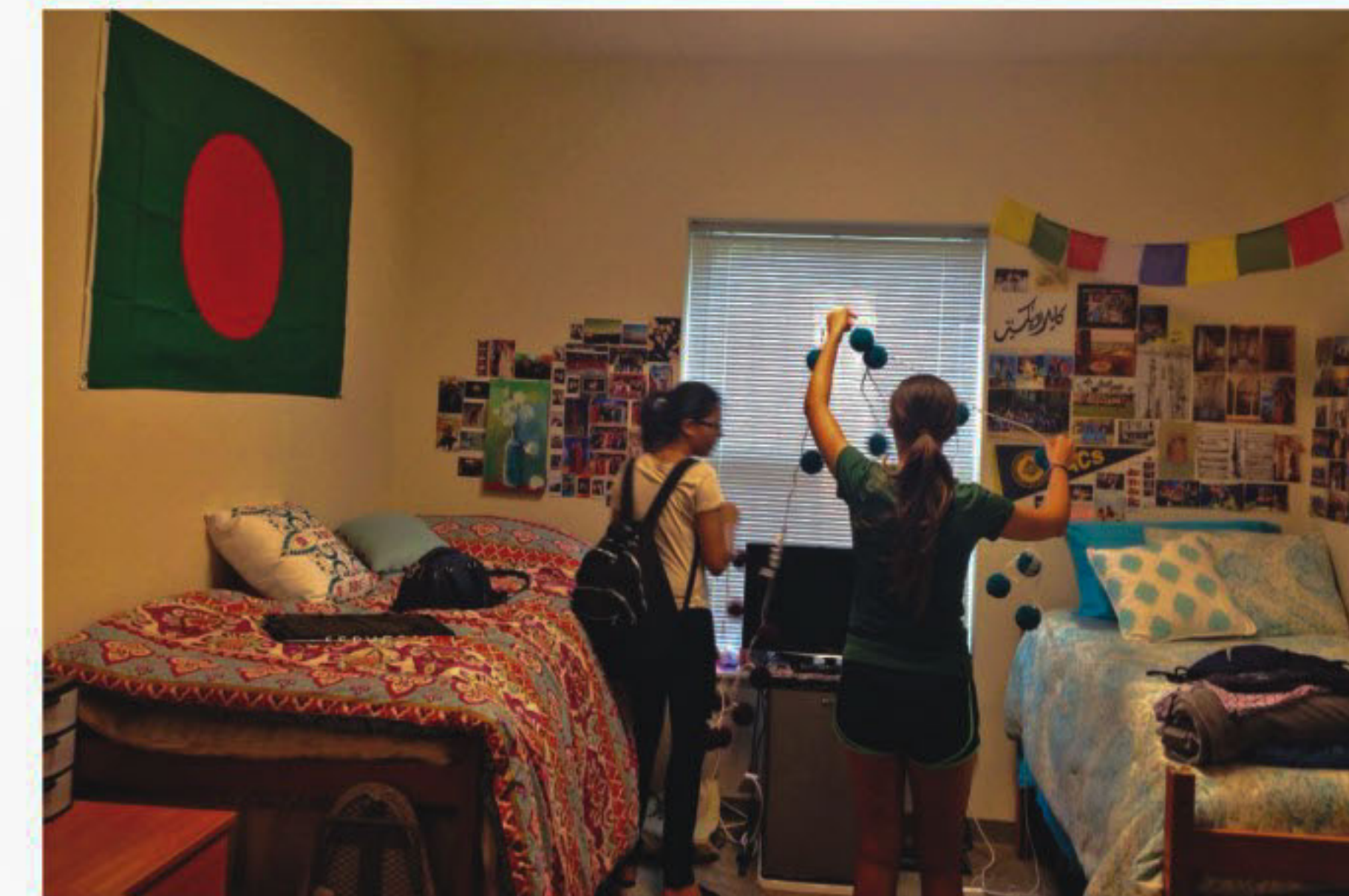


Abinta Kabir (L) with her mother.

ABINTA: A PROUD BANGLADESHI – NOT JUST A US NATIONAL

SHAHEEN ANAM

PHOTOS: COURTESY



Abinta's room at her university dorm.

unplanned growth, strong prejudices and lack of education. I realise and understand that most problems have fairly complex solutions and require concerted planning, widespread education, class action, and substantial funding. I understand the importance of embracing my nation for what it is, and work in every way that I can to improve the quality of life of its people"

Her other passion was basketball. She was given the ball at age 3 and since then became a determined player. Abinta was a joy to watch when she played the game. Like everything else, she gave it her best. Again quoting from one of her writings *"When I emerged as the youngest player in the school's history to score the most points in a game, I truly understood what hard work could achieve. From a forward player, I began to be looked up to as someone who would lead on court. My teammates grew to rely on my judgment and my advice. From somebody who was initially intimidated by the skills and talents of the older players, I was now one of the core members. I had come the full circle, and it was only on the basis of my love and undying perseverance to pursue the sport."*

Abinta was brought up in an environment of love, care and respect for others. She was the life of the family and the center of their world. Her grief-stricken grandmother who lovingly called her "tuntun" says, *"Abinta lived for only 19 years but during this time she gave us a life time of happiness."* Her mother, her grief is not possible to describe in any language. Her entire world revolved around Abinta. She brought up Abinta, giving her unconditional love but also gave her values that made her into a strong, hard working, confident and socially conscious person.

How does one reconcile with such a loss? Her family asks, why her? There is no answer. No answer to the bigger question of "how did this happen in Bangladesh." As we commemorate a month of that fateful night we remember all those who lost their lives. We remember with deep gratitude the Japanese men who came to Bangladesh to build our Metro Rail, we remember the Italians who were here to promote business and change people's lives, we remember the pizza chef who is often overlooked in commemorative articles and statements, we remember our 2 brave policemen who gave their lives in an effort to save the hostages.

Finally, Faraaz, Tarishi and Ishrat, you all were precious gifts and could have contributed to society through your work but we failed to protect you. Dear Abinta, I have come to know you through your grandmother and your role model mother. You are like the star that shines and brightens up the sky but remains hidden most of the time. So you are up there but we cannot see you. You are indeed a Bangali, a Bangladeshi. Otherwise, what other 19 year would say "My birthright as a Bangali should be worn as a badge of pride."

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Turn the Pages, Be Your Heroes

Last night it was certainly Himu who came to my dream with the same old yellow coloured pocket-less panjabi, walking bare-foot with the iconic saint-like gesture. He sat on the chair in Misir Ali's room. They would have a face to face conversation on sharp logic and anti-logic. Meanwhile, Shuvro managed to wear his glasses after exerting great effort to find them. He glimpsed over his window down to the roadside tea stall where Baker Bhai was drinking a cup of tea. I saw them all last night. Waking up the next day, I had more strength as well as inspiration to go for the best. I remembered the article titled 'Turn the Pages, Be Your Heroes' that I had read before I slept last night. I appreciate Nilima Jahan's efforts as she succeeded to put me in a fine nostalgia after years. Synchronising the echoes from all the legends that were created by Humayun Ahmed, she has composed such a soothing melody in my head which I love to hear again and again.

Yusuf Bin Haque
Ajampur, Dhaka

Save The Flood Victims

Teesta River sits at the lap of Nilphamari and Lalmonirhat district. This river is of great importance to these two districts. But the erosion of Teesta is cause for panic and runs high during the rainy season. It destroys many shelters and damages numerous farm lands every year. According to recent news, this year many houses are submerged and multiple sites face river erosion because of heavy rain fall. Meanwhile, a large dam has already disappeared. The water flows above the danger line at the Teesta barrage of Daliya. Many people have taken shelter in safe areas. They are

spending their lives under bitter sufferings and an unhealthy environment. The sufficient donations and facilitations of the Government have not reached them yet. If these people remain helpless, their conditions will worsen. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief should come forward to save this miserable people immediately and the ministries of water resources has to take proper steps to stop river erosion. At the same time, pure water must be ensured to protect water borne diseases in these effected zones.

Bipul K Debnath
Dhaka



PTOTO: STAR FILE

House Of Equals

Whenever I think about working women, I feel pity for them. When I read the article titled 'House of Equals' published in the *Star Weekend* on July 29, 2016, I remembered a woman who was fed-up with her job as she was not exempted from her household works, even when she returned from night duty in a garments factory. I totally agree with Naziba Basher that an ideal father or an ideal husband can never accept the idea that helping his or her wife is emasculating. Rather, he always helps his wife cook, wash, and clean up, and even do the bed.

Enam Hasan
Bashundhara, Dhaka

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the *Star Weekend*.



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Earthquakes Don't Kill People. Buildings Do! Build Safe!



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