

"Then they came for me"

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

In his bestselling book, *The Black Swan* (2007), Nassim Nicholas Taleb developed an interesting theory. According to Taleb, in the Old World people were convinced that all swans were white. The unexpected sighting of a black swan in Australia exposed the fragility of conventional knowledge. Taleb thus defines the "Black Swan" as a highly improbable event with three main characteristics. First, it is an outlier. Second, it creates a tremendous impact. Third, after the fact we often rationalise the event with the benefit of hindsight. The metaphorical concept can be applied to anything with low predictability and high impact – e.g. political occurrences like the collapse of the Soviet Union or scientific revolutions like the spread of the internet culture. Last week, the world witnessed a Black Swan scenario when President Trump issued an executive order that temporarily bars the entry of refugees into the United States and bans citizens of Iraq, Iran, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, and Yemen under any visa category. Despite Trump's campaign rhetoric about a Muslim ban, many believed rationality and humanity would prevail in a country that boasts of "equality and justice for all!" But contrary to expectations, the Black Swan appeared! President Trump and his team continue to claim that the ban on travellers from selected countries is a

national security measure to protect the "American people" against terrorism. Yet, facts confirm that not a single terrorist attack was carried out on American soil by an immigrant from the seven listed countries. Also, "unsurprisingly", the two nations whose citizens were involved in the 9/11 attacks - Saudi Arabia and Egypt - have been excluded. The travel ban, which singles out Muslims, was issued without adequate legal consultation and administrative preparedness. Hence it resulted in utter chaos at border entry points, exposing travellers to the whimsical and discretionary interpretations by immigration staff. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) moved with alacrity and filed a suit on behalf of two men detained at Kennedy airport, citing the immigration ban as unconstitutional and illegal. Consequently, a federal judge in New York, Ann Donnelly, issued a stay order temporarily blocking the ban and extradition of legal visitors and immigrants from the seven countries. While it's difficult to predict whether the Supreme Court will uphold the temporary court ruling, it has caused a surge of optimism in the country reassuring citizens that the justice system acts as a bulwark against government abuse of power. The final verdict notwithstanding, the travel ban has already triggered considerable angst and uncertainty. At a personal level, I was shaken to the core by the heart-wrenching stories of stranded men, women and children. The elderly couple making the long journey to meet their daughter, the mother with two small children waiting to be united with



A protester holding a poignant sign outside Manchester Town Hall.

PHOTO: MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS

her husband, the "pre-screened" refugee families fleeing violence and terror, were all huddled in the corner of an airport, their hopes of a better future dashed by an unconscionable abandonment of basic humanity. But when I saw Facebook video posts of the thousands of Americans who thronged the airports to protest against the ban, my heart and confidence soared. As I shed a tear for our fractured and divided world, I also celebrated the intense efforts of

the common people of the United States to protect the vulnerable. A hand-written placard held by a woman simply said: "Let my friends in." People of all religions, races and colours fused together to brave the cold, knowing that they could be arrested. Lawyers volunteered their time to fight for the detainees. Government officials joined the rallies calling the order "unconstitutional" and "antithetical" to American values. Some Republican

senators articulated their support for Muslims: "Our most important allies in the fight against ISIL are the vast majority of Muslims who reject its apocalyptic ideology of hatred." Many business leaders condemned the ban, demanding "free borders" to ensure a more connected and inclusive world. Yes, there may yet be a ray of light at the end of the tunnel. My optimism is based on the strength of the US Constitution, the moral

decency of ordinary Americans and the power of protesting voices the world over. Already, Trump and his cohorts have backpedalled – exempting US green card holders from the ban. However, I must confess that I was disappointed at the lukewarm response from Islamic nations. Except for Iran, no Muslim majority country has expressed its concern or displeasure. Neither have they offered a safe haven to the refugees. On the contrary, many Muslim leaders are lining up to visit the US, Jordan's King Abdullah being in the forefront. My appeal to Muslims who are critical of "America" and "Americans" is that it may be time for you to pause and reflect on the fact that the much "maligned Americans" are the ones standing up for you. People whom you may have wilfully ignored or censured – gays, transgender, Jews, blacks, whites are all fighting for your rights. It is time for you to respect their rights and speak out against all forms of discrimination. Please recall what Martin Niemoller said nearly a century ago: *First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a Socialist.... Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out— Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.* Don't wait until you have no one left to speak for you! The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank.

The stubborn tentacles of dowry culture



SARAH ANJUM BARI

A research paper on domestic violence in Bangladesh published by Shahjalal University of Science and Technology recounts many instances of cruelty against women by their husbands or in-laws. One of the women, who had eloped with a married man, started facing abuse and demands for dowry once they got married. Cut off from her parents and "forced into a divorce", she was eventually made to separate from the man, although she had wanted to stay back despite the repeated abuse. Which of the many alarming aspects of this story do we even begin to address? The frighteningly regular reports of dowry-related violence, often resulting in the death of women, demonstrates how persistent and overpowering the culture of dowry is in this country. The amended Dowry Prohibition Act 2017 approved by the Cabinet on January 30, 2017 is a noteworthy step in reiterating the illegality of this practice. But in order to wipe it out effectively we must truly delve into the dynamics that still keep the dowry custom alive. The original Dowry Prohibition Act, effective since 1980, made it illegal to exchange any form of property or valuable security in the name of dowry. Any person directly or indirectly demanding dowry from his/her spouse and spouse's family would be punishable with a fine, an imprisonment of up to five years, or both. And yet, in just the 12 months of 2016, 108 women were physically tortured and 126 were tortured to death over dowry, according to Ain O Salish Kendra. Ten of these victims were aged 13 to 18. In the worst of cases covered by news reports, wives were dragged across streets by their hair, beaten up to the point of broken limbs, and even burned to death. This only accounts for the cases that were reported, unlike the numerous others who suffer in silence in fear of facing judicial costs, social

stigma, harassment in court, further violence at home or worse, inaction. As the Dowry Prohibition Act 2017 indicates, many are even pushed to the brink of committing suicide. These incidents, in addition to the findings of several research papers on domestic abuse published in the 'Asian Social Work and Policy Review' journal, reflect the deep-seated patriarchy pervading our societies. Villagers and poor families in cities still believe that a husband and his family are superior to the bride, have the right to make unhealthy demands, and resort to violence when they aren't met. The paper titled "Causes and Contexts of

Domestic Violence: Tales of Help-Seeking Married Women in Sylhet, Bangladesh", published in the *Asian Social Work and Policy Review*, interviewed victims of domestic abuse. Many of them shared that a little bit of beating up by husbands was tolerable; only when their lives were threatened did they decide to seek help. They were also advised by relatives to prioritise their marriage over their own safety and well-being. The few women who did scour up the courage to speak out were threatened with financial and social abandonment by their husbands, who emphasised on how the society would shun a divorced woman and she would have no

source of income for herself or her children. Poverty and patriarchy also contribute to the epidemic of child marriage in Bangladesh, which in turn increases dowry related violence. 52 percent of girls younger than 18 and 18 percent of girls younger than 15 were married off in 2016, according to girlsnotbrides.org. The website also explains that, "Where poverty is acute, families and sometimes girls themselves believe that marriage will be a solution to secure their future." Brides who are younger even have to pay smaller amounts in dowry, which further encourages child marriage. These young brides (read: children) passing into hostile marital environments often face domination and abuse in their formative years, both through personal experience and by witnessing the torture of women in their households, including mothers, sisters and female in-laws. They are essentially being instilled with the idea that husbands and in-laws have every right to treat them brutally and make constant demands for money. What chance do these girls ever have of learning to fight for themselves? It is despicable that such norms have become an inherent part of rural and disadvantaged communities, so much so that they no longer shock us. What's alarming, though, is the occasional appearance of dowry demands even among the urban societies. It is baffling as to how this prevails among those who cannot hide behind the sham excuse of lack of wealth, education or awareness. These are the fetid areas that the government needs to target in its fight against dowry and domestic abuse. The weapons at our disposal include education, social awareness, and the reach of the law, among others. Parents must be shown how wrong and destructive it is to push their daughters into slavery in the name of marriage, and that marriage itself is not the prime objective of their daughters' existence. More importantly, they must be taught how to raise respectful sons. Women must be shown the way of solidarity – mothers, sisters, and mothers and sisters-in-law need to channel their strengths

into supporting the females around them. The government, social service organisations, and the media must ensure that these notions are effectively communicated using the right and relevant means. For instance, local lectures, and television and radio broadcasts are more likely to reach those living in the villages, whereas print and digital media can be used for city dwellers. Education regarding gender equality must be included as a core part of academic curricula. Students, especially in disadvantaged societies, must be provided with the intellectual and cultural exposure that will enable them to realise for themselves the absurdity of the dowry culture and cruelty, and stand up against their elders and neighbours in prevention of these practices. They must be engaged in discussions in and out of the classroom through social awareness platforms regarding these issues. Most importantly, schools and colleges, NGOs, the government and the media must inform and educate the masses about the existence of laws that are in place to protect them. Meanwhile, the law enforcement and local leaders in rural areas need to be sensitised so that they are genuinely invested in providing support and protection to victims of dowry and violence. Psychiatric and counselling facilities ought to be provided for the tortured and traumatised, particularly in the rural areas. These services will help the vulnerable and the victimised to gain confidence in the government and law enforcement agencies. We hope that in addition to ensuring that the new laws in place are implemented with efficiency and rigour, the government will focus on these aspects in their efforts to crack down on domestic violence, much of which can be traced to dowry demands. It needs no explanation as to why tackling an epidemic from the root is a far more crucial and rational approach than attempting to harness it after it has already gained strength. The writer is a student of English and Economics at North South University, and a member of the Editorial team, The Daily Star.



SOURCE: SHAYARI7

QUOTABLE Quote

BOB MARLEY
JAMAICAN SINGER-SONGWRITER, MUSICIAN AND GUITARIST

Don't gain the world and lose your soul, wisdom is better than silver and gold.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Soap residue
- 5 Namely
- 10 Stun gun
- 12 Give an address
- 13 Last letter
- 14 Rome raiders
- 15 Roulette bet
- 16 Spying org.
- 18 Canine command
- 19 Farm cat
- 21 Theater award
- 22 Orbiting debris
- 24 Pin place
- 25 Paunch, slangily
- 29 Pencil part
- 30 Poplar trees
- 32 Reduce drastically
- 33 Car in a 1964 song
- 34 Pac.'s counterpart
- 35 Throb
- 37 Gymnast Comaneci
- 39 Styling site
- 40 Drink rudely
- 41 Delight

DOWN

- 1 Tempest
- 2 Carved gem
- 3 Exhausted
- 4 Ryan of movies
- 5 Forum wear
- 6 Spanish gold
- 7 Helper of Holmes
- 8 Opinion opener
- 9 Snappish
- 11 Indy auto
- 17 Words of emphasis
- 20 Light lunch
- 21 Colorful flower
- 23 Astro's family
- 25 Like some harassment
- 26 Saffron-flavored dish
- 27 Study
- 28 Complete
- 29 Slip
- 31 Strikes, in a way
- 33 Heredity unit
- 36 Toper
- 38 Imitating

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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