

## A year of Tonu murder

*We demand proper and expeditious investigation*

WE find it unacceptable that even a year after the murder of Sohagi Jahan Tonu the investigators are clueless as to under what circumstances this bright young woman had to meet such a tragic end, and who the murderers are. We find it befuddling that this has happened despite DNA test results and a change of the investigation officer of the case more than twice. As though it were not enough, Tonu's mother has recently told a Bangla daily that the concerned official has instructed her not to talk to the media about her daughter's murder. This behaviour is deplorable to say the least and it smacks of a wilful attempt to protect the perpetrators of this horrible crime.

Tonu's murder has stirred the nation for many reasons. While it had cut short a life at its prime, the place in which her murder occurred was supposed to be one of the most well-protected areas in the country. If such a fate can befall a girl within the boundary of a cantonment, we wonder how dangerous can it be for a woman to live in other places? Also, if a much-highlighted case such as Tonu's runs the risk of going cold, we shudder to contemplate the fate of the less publicised rapes and murders.

It is high time that the authorities understood that failure to bring to justice the perpetrators of this heinous crime will corrode the justice dispensation system, rendering irreversible damage to the notion of rule of law. We demand a proper and expeditious investigation into the case. We want to believe that Tonu will get justice, and that the law is not biased towards the rich and powerful. Please do not prove us wrong.

## UNSC statement on Rohingyas blocked!

*We are surprised*

A statement expressing concern at the violence on the Rohingyas by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) failed to find consensus among its members. We are surprised that the proposed statement, that would have expressed concern over the situation in Myanmar's Rakhine State, where Rohingya Muslims have been subjected to unmitigated violence by the Myanmar's state agencies, was blocked by Russia and China.

The government of Bangladesh has been urging its counterpart in Myanmar to come to a settlement on the Rohingya crisis. Unfortunately, nothing much has happened on that front. We believe that for the spate of violence in the Rakhine State to cease, from where 75,000 Rohingyas have fled in to Bangladesh since military operations began there last October, there is need for the international community to bring concerted pressure on the government of Myanmar. And a statement from the Security Council would have sent the right signals to the Myanmar government about the feeling of the international community on the matter and pave the way for an international effort to stop the humanitarian disaster unfolding across our border.

Needless to say, the quashing of the proposed UNSC resolution will send entirely the wrong message to government in Naypyidaw. Instead of looking into the cases of premeditated murder, arson and rape, the message that has been given is that the world body is not on board on the issue of human rights violation on such a grand scale. We are surprised at the lack of consensus on a humanitarian issue, one that we look towards our friends to help resolve.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Confirm DUCSU polls as soon as possible

Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) has provided momentous contributions from the time of its establishment - in the Language Movement of 1952, the Education Movement of 1962, the mass rising of 1969, the Liberation War of 1971 and in the struggle against autocracy in 1990. These events stimulated the democratic process and created a participatory and democratic environment in student politics. It is a matter of sorrow that the DUCSU polls have been stopped for the past 26 years. The High Court has asked the authorities to explain this inactivity. We hope the concerned authority will provide a response as soon as possible, and hold a poll to ensure participation and democracy in student politics.

Md. Tarek Aziz Bappi  
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### Clarity of prescription writing

Physicians are still using clumsy, illegible handwriting in prescriptions even after the high court order against the practice. Patients have to revisit doctors to clarify the name or dosage of their medication at the cost of their time and added expense. A medicine, if wrongly taken, can be poisonous. Patients and even attendants cannot be expected to have accurate knowledge of medical terms and product names.

Hefty fines should be imposed on doctors who do not provide clearly legible prescriptions. It is the responsibility of the concerned health authorities to decide on the appropriate penalties for doctors who disregard these rules continuously. Meanwhile, the media should generate more public awareness regarding this matter immediately.

Zubair Khaled Huq  
Dhaka

# Someone else's babies

**KNOT SO TRUE**



RUBANA HUQ

THERE was a time when the film industry in the subcontinent used Indo-Pak plots to create pre-film-release-tension-teasers to attract more audience. After all, a movie wreathed with political controversy and laced with a love story was bound to sell more. Then, with time, as nations started to become more and more war-prone, on-ground confrontations turned more real than the films. Fuelled by communal tensions, people got out of homes and fought for religion, religiosity and nationalistic boundaries. Somehow most of our hearts have shrunk in fear of being invaded by the "others."

Therefore, whichever leader flaunts his or her own boundaries and ownership of identities, the more he or she is set to lead the nation. Narrow nationalism sells better these days. The old days of Tagore dreaming of a united world, untarnished by "narrow domestic walls" are gone. Gone are the days where poets, leaders and philosophers were positioned above prejudices based on caste, creed, colour and religion.

Yet, at the United Nations, there are still popular voices like Angelina Jolie, warning people and powers against "a rising tide of nationalism masquerading as patriotism", ultimately leading to policies that evoke fear. For example, in the USA, apart from the fear and concern generated by the Potus Twitter torrent, there has been public pronouncement from representatives like Steve King of Iowa, who proudly shared an article on Twitter, offering support to the Dutch politician Geert Wilders who thrives on bashing Muslim immigrants. King added that culture and demographics were their destiny and how they could not "restore" civilisation through "someone else's babies."

In the world of populism, nationalism sits well with the voters. Voters look for extreme promises made for them in the voice of "genuine patriotism." Therefore, it is natural for leaders to be applauded for pursuing aggressive foreign policies, for going after the rich, and for handing out LPG connections to the rural poor. The nativism and the grandiosity of the leader's narrative is super critical. And the grand promises are also equally, if not more, important. That is the

reason why Irom Sharmila Chanu got only 90 votes in the Manipur elections. After 16 years of starvation, Shormila's political aspirations died a few days ago with her constituency voting for the sitting chief minister. After all, raging nationalism offers apparent euphoria and hope.

In general, there is a worldwide attempt to take people back to time, where voters buy the slogan of "Let's make . . . great again" with faith. For example, Putin wants Russia to look as it were 100 years after Lenin. Similarly,

In spite of all the realisation, the paranoia of intolerance across the world continues. In France, there's the far right anti-Muslim, anti-immigration candidate Marine Le Pen, the daughter of National Front founder Jean-Marie Le Pen. Day before yesterday, instead of handling her main challenge to appear credible on economic policy, she stressed security and immigration issues and declared, "I want to put an end to immigration - that's clear." Then right after, she talked about a rise of Islamic fundamentalism in France and said the

Better Hungary, or Jobbik, describes itself as a "principled, conservative and radically patriotic Christian party."

Even popular Abe in Japan has recently been tainted by accusations of having his wife having donated to a right-wing kindergarten, the land of which was secured by a murky land deal. The school incidentally boasts of a curriculum including pre-war style patriotic education, where three to five year olds are allegedly instilled with patriotism, and made to memorise the 1890 Imperial Rescript, and trained to "offer themselves courageously to state". Reviving this practice, which was



ILLUSTRATION: DANIEL BEREK

today Israel is investing in building temples again. This has become an age of reversals, promoting isolationism. And this is exactly how the first nations, thousands of years ago, lived by the Yellow River in China, divided into many different tribes, suffering from periodic droughts and floods, as each one of them had little control over the river. But it was only after the suffering that the small nations surfaced as the Chinese nation, bringing people together, building dams and canals, and regulating the river. So, we also need to realise that while the call to go back to the past authoritarian tendencies have worked well with elections and number of votes, it is the "Morning After" impact, after a long night of drinking, that is crucial for the survival of the globe.

security situation in France was "explosive." In Germany, there's Frauke Petry, chairperson of Alternative for Deutschland (AfD), who often meets in Bavarian taverns to plot policies. Petry's mistrust of Islam fuels her political passions, as she often cites Sharia and reports of sexual assaults committed by asylum seekers in Germany, and argues that Muslims are a threat to a free western society. According to Petry, Muslim immigrants go there "with attitudes that are so way out of our sort of common behaviour and European attitudes." She also openly says, "It's simply a lie by the government that these migrants will fit into our society." There's one in Hungary as well. The politician and historian David Kovacs' Movement for a

abolished after Japan's defeat in WWII, is once again, a rare reversal.

Nationalism can be a great brand sponsored by the state. It can also be an easy brand to appeal to the popular masses who have lost jobs to migrants to turn around and chant anti-immigration slogans. It may also be easy to speak the language of hatred to evoke the false sense of security. And it may also be the easiest to wage a war against "someone else's babies" next door. But it is also much, much more difficult to imagine a world without immigrants. Without immigrants, the melting pot of civilisation will cease to exist. Without immigrants, promotion of nationalism can only happen at a great cost to the audience.

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## No such place as home

**NO STRINGS ATTACHED**



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

THERE is an unfamiliar uneasiness the night before a woman gets married. As she tosses and turns on her bed, perhaps in excitement, perhaps with dread, she realises with a heavy heart that this is the last time she will ever be under the roof of her parents/family with the identity of being just a daughter, a sister, a granddaughter. What she

knew as home all her life will suddenly become a place to visit. She will refer to it as her parents' home (Maer bari/Babar bari) entering into the reality of being in a bizarre state of homelessness.

For it is either her in-laws' or husband's house that will now become her shelter - as long as they want her that is. She will be luckier, if by some miracle, she becomes the co-owner of the house through her own contributions or the generosity of her husband but that is hardly the norm in our society where often

rampant, passed a landmark Hindu marriage bill that allows Hindus to register their marriages for the first time since partition, file for divorce and remarry. The law aims to protect marriages, families, women and children and safeguard the rights and interests of Hindus.

If you are a Hindu woman in this country however, not only are you deprived of your parents' property, you also do not have the right to divorce since no legal provisions upholding such rights exist. Thus no matter how much we claim to be a country that endorses international conventions that seek gender equality when it comes to inheritance we tend to shy away with great reservations.

But imagine a different scenario where the groom is the one tossing and turning in his sleep. It is his last night as a single man in his own home. Tomorrow, after the marriage ceremony, he will be going to his wife's house. It may sound bizarre to the majority in this country but for the Garo community, it is the most natural thing. That's what Hira (last name withheld), a freelance physiotherapist, tells me. The Garo community is matrilineal which means the

Hira tells me that because females are so valued in the community and command a lot of respect, it is very unusual to hear about women being physically assaulted by their husbands. "What about the husbands?" I ask perversely, "Are they treated badly?" "Oh they are treated with a lot of respect and their in-laws are very good to them," she exclaims. I am doubly surprised - despite the power structure being tilted towards the woman, men are not oppressed or discriminated against.

The fact that Hira is financially independent does not seem to create a power imbalance between the husband and wife. Nor does it evoke resentment among her in-laws. Raising their daughter in the best possible way is what preoccupies the two, says Hira, who works from morning till evening six days a week, taking public transport to go to her patients. Sometimes her husband carries the heavy ultrasound machine for her when she needs to take it with her to work.

Education seems to play a big part in ensuring such harmony between the sexes. The younger generation of Garos especially is usually educated and progressive in their outlook. But it is the culture of giving such importance to the females that has ensured that girls and women are valued and treated with dignity and respect.

So what am I saying? That we should all become matrilineal societies? Let's not get carried away. For the majority of communities in this country, the idea of a woman inheriting more than a man is ludicrous, even equally is rarely accepted. But there have been instances where through legal channels brothers and sisters have shared their parents' wealth equally without any kind of acrimony. This has been possible because the men in the family have endorsed the idea that their sisters/daughters are just as entitled to the property as their brothers/sons.

Strangely, there are many women living in the patriarchal system who are the sole or main breadwinners of the household. They are either widowed or have been abandoned by their husband, raising the children by themselves. Yet most of these women are caught in a cycle of poverty that is enhanced by being cheated out of parental property if there was any. Thus even though they are the decision-makers, they seldom have enough funds to own a home or piece of land.

We live in a society, unfortunately, in which violence against women is routine. Often it is even acceptable. But the worst thing is that in most cases, women who are constantly abused by their husbands or in-laws just have nowhere to go and therefore have to bear with abuse all their lives. Even if parents are sympathetic, they may not have the means to support their daughters financially. This is why it is crucial that we build a society that will create opportunities and the mindset for women to be economically independent, that the wealth of their parents is equally distributed. So that she can say with confidence: This is my home and no one can throw me out of it.

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PHOTO: STAR

**In Bangladesh, not only are Hindu women deprived of their parents' property, but also do not have the right to divorce in the absence of family laws that adequately protect the rights of Hindu women.**

control of a woman comes in the form of keeping her economically dependent.

Inheritance is of course a very sensitive issue and heaven forbid you talk about equal inheritance laws - for that will trigger vehement opposition from so many quarters that you will be forced into silence. It is one of those things all religious leaders will become united against - as you know laws governing marriage, divorce and inheritance are in the realm of religious laws of respective communities.

Just this Sunday, Pakistan, a country where violation of the rights of religious minorities is

lineage is through the female children not the male children. So property is automatically owned by the daughters. What's more when a Garo woman marries, it is her husband who will go to her house and live with her. It may sound like the ultimate feminist fantasy but Hira tells me that is how it is. Which is why when she heard she was having a daughter, she was thrilled as was the rest of the family. That's how it is in the Garo family - the birth of a daughter is a celebration not a curse, not a burden for parents. Sounds strange, doesn't it - in the context of the majoritarian reality?