

The discourse on women's issues, as advocated by women's rights organisations around the world, often ends up portraying women as victims of their circumstances. What has been missing from the conversation though is positive stories – of leadership, fruitful journeys, and the power of women. And that is exactly what Women in Leadership (WIL) has been doing for the last four years.

With the understanding that it is crucial for women to play an active role in the economy if Bangladesh is to reach its goal of becoming a middle income country by 2021, WIL's objective is to help women reach their full potential.

example, maternity leave rules that they face in their workspace," says Andaleeb. Through this summit, the stories of positive journeys are shared by many women in leadership positions throughout the country. "These stories

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP FOR THE WOMEN, BY THE WOMEN

NAZIBA BASHER



PHOTO COURTESY: WIL

"I felt like empowerment through knowledge, education and financial independence is what's most important for women. And what better way to inspire women into professionalism than through professionals?" says Preema Nazia Andaleeb, Visual Artist, Preema's Atelier and President, WIL.

Every year, WIL organises a Women Leadership Summit, in which local and international speakers discuss different aspects of creating the right professional ecosystem, fostering equal participation of both men and women in leading positions.

"We needed to create a platform where women will come and openly discuss the sector-specific issues, for

make women think about their rights and roles in society." This year, some of the known speakers were political scientists; feminist leader and author of Bangladesh Rounaq Jahan; Indian columnist and novelist Shobhaa De; MP Waseka Ayesha Khan; prominent dance artiste Lubna Marium, and more.

The Inspiring Women Award aims to recognise aspiring and leading women in the corporate sector of Bangladesh, under different categories, and hence, identify role models for the women of today. It also gives acknowledgment to business organisations with the most female-friendly working conditions and policies.

The WIL Magazine is a quarterly

publication dedicated to gender-related issues. This magazine also includes various stories of women, by women. "For example, a woman working at the HR department of a corporation can write about the different HR policies boost their confidence before entering the professional world. Bangladesh Women Professional Network (BWPN) is designed to look at issues and challenges which female professionals face in their respective organisations or fields. From policy to work culture, many issues within an organisation make it difficult for female professionals to reach their potential. BWPN aims to work on these issues, particularly with the professionals and assist them in reaching senior leadership positions.

"There are so many inspiring stories. One such story is of a speaker, Nasreen Zamir. Nasreen Zamir has recently been sworn in as Luxembourg's first ever

Honorary Consul in Dhaka. Now, many people did ask her the inevitable question of having a lot of high-profile connections to be able to acquire the job to which she firmly said, 'No. I was just brave enough to apply for the post.' This is the kind of courage I want all the attendees to walk out with," adds Andaleeb.

WIL believes in the process of learning, understanding, and growing together. "It's a global problem – the issues that women face – and we must all be there for each other. Connecting these women is our ultimate goal. The only way us women can move forward is by holding each other's hands and lifting each other up."

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OSAMA RAHMAN

## MONETISING AMERICA'S RACISM AND MESSIAH COMPLEX

Donald Trump made the headlines once again, as he has every day since before election, by now banning all electronic devices from 10 Muslim majority countries including Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. The British followed suit with restrictions that cover passengers from Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey and Tunisia.

While the world contemplated what the new measures could mean, Bangladesh, as always, was ready to capitalise. "America did not make these measures for us. We are free to travel to America with as many electronics as we have, provided we have enough land to sell for the tickets and visa fees, with enough land left to prove our connection with our land and, thus, our intention to return," a beaming 24-year-old Bishesh Hassan, a Bangladeshi citizen said. Standing outside the American Embassy, Bishesh was ecstatic. "With less people being able to come from elsewhere, there's more opportunity for me. My parents always dreamed that one day I would go to America, the land where everyone is treated equally," Bishesh said with a twinkle in his eye, before being prodded with a cattle-stick by the guards hired by the American Embassy.

"This is actually a tremendous opportunity for us. Our national carrier, which maybe forgot to take some passengers from Nepal and maybe has three flights grounded the world over, can perhaps fill the vacuum left by those Muslim non-secular airlines," Baiman Raihan, the Head of PR of Bangladesh's national airlines, said. By making additional flights to and from America, the airlines hopes to get out of the red, a task deemed impossible by industry insiders.

A Travel Warning issued on March 6 to American citizens coming to Bangladesh may prove to be problematic. However, the Bangladesh government hopes to target American tourists using a wide variety of innovative methods. "Yes, they have been cautioned about coming to Bangladesh. But while we have had certain terrorist incidents, we have fewer 'lone-wolf' and 'mentally unstable people' shooting up churches and schools and along with that we are making better travel packages," Baiman continued. "The difference between our terrorists and their mentally unstable people is only skin colour and while we totally understand the reason for the

An imposing text on the top read "Every tragedy needs a Messiah." This poster would be part of brand new measures to woo more American tourists with "developmental tourism." "Eco-tourism is overrated. Regular tourism is the way to go. We are giving Americans an opportunity to spend some money and go home feeling like they helped a lot. You can put a price on development but you can't put a price on that feeling," he said. Americans will now be offered the opportunity to buy an air ticket from the national carrier and do a number of tied-in perks. These will include adopting a Bangladeshi kid (6 months trail basis period included), killing a terrorist which the cops will be more than willing to pull out of their a-1 mean-hats, arming the "moderates" to fight the "dictator", releasing the frustration on local Bangladeshi cops



CARTOON: E. R. RONNY

distinction and the travel warning, there is no reason why we shouldn't use this as an opportunity as well," he concluded.

"American tourists have money and the Messiah complex. They just need a reason to spend it, one where these two can be married to produce fantastic 360 tourist experiences. We are now repackaging Bangladesh in a positive more marketable light," Parjatek Pavel, the head of the Tourism Board, Bangladesh explained. He then presented a poster depicting a tin-house surrounded by flood water with a lone baby with a puffed belly standing outside his door in ankle-deep water surrounded by mosquitoes.

because you can't do that in America, Police escort wherever they go, feeding a Bangladeshi some rice, buying 10 things with \$10, buying wooden rickshaws and other exotic stuff and getting guaranteed 500 likes from Bangladeshis for your post about how Bangladesh's poverty yet tenacity has totally won you over.

If these don't interest the American tourists, they can go for more policy-level stuff like help Bangladesh design better false flag attacks, interfere in politics by promising bridges or not allowing budget for bridges, help fight capitalists by giving us more money, plan boycott campaigns for 'Made in Bangladesh' clothes without actually

stopping buying the clothes we make, teach kids from impoverished areas the English language and computer skills and other life skills they will never need in the near future and cry us a river, because lord knows we need rivers. One can also choose to get malaria, diarrhea, dengue or other diseases to write sob stories about. They can also go to Exotic Museums where you can feel free to experience all the stereotypes associated with Bangladesh and fetishise the poverty till you feel satisfied enough.

In the end Bangladesh is vowing to make one man's misery another man's joy and they are going to do so in style. Donald Trump's racist rhetoric is a reflection of the people who elected him, regardless of completely unfounded allegations of Russian

interference. While the Democrats now plan to go back to the grass roots, something they could have done by not rigging the primaries against Bernie Sanders, the republicans continue to rule and it is the ruling class that Bangladesh hopes to target. Since all Bangladeshis are generally measured by the same yardstick in displays of harmless humour, Bangladeshis are now choosing to do the same for Americans. Except, we intend to make a lot more money and spend less on wars. ■

**ABOUT TOWN**

**SHREYA GHOSHAL MELODY NIGHT**  
Organiser: Octopi  
March 31, 4-11 pm, International Convention City, Bashundhara

**FLOWER IDENTIFICATION AND PAINTING COMPETITION FOR KIDS**  
Organiser: Bangladesh Flower Fest  
March 31, 10-11.59 am, Bangla Academy

**SHADHINOTAR KOTHA**  
Organiser: EMK Centre  
April 1, 5-9 pm, EMK Center, Road 16, Dhanmondi