

A trumped up charge



BETWEEN THE LINES
KULDIP NAYAR

THE Central Bureau of Investigation's raid on the owners of NDTV for an alleged concealment of share transaction from the SEBI that has caused a loss of Rs 48 crore to a private bank has

been termed by the channel as a witch-hunt based on a "same old" false accusation. I tend to agree with the channel. Radhika Roy, the co-owner, and I have worked together at *The Indian Express* and I cannot imagine that she could have indulged in such activities that she has been accused of.

I think it is a trumped up charge. Radhika and her husband, Prannoy Roy, may have committed some technical errors but the CBI has registered a case against RRPR Holdings Private Limited, the Rroys and unidentified officials of ICICI Bank of criminal conspiracy, cheating and corruption.

According to the charges, the RRPR Holdings had allegedly taken a loan of Rs 500 crore from India Bulls Private Limited to purchase 20 percent shares of NDTV from the public. The CBI has alleged that RRPR Holdings took a loan of Rs 375 crore at the rate of 19 percent per annum from ICICI Bank to repay the loan from India Bulls. The promoters of NDTV pledged their entire shareholding in NDTV as collateral to ICICI for this loan, it is alleged.

According to the investigating agency, this pledging of shares was not reported to the SEBI, stock exchanges and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Such concealment was allegedly done as a creation of more than 61 percent voting capital, which was in violation of Section 19 (2) of the Banking Regulation Act. It should not be more than 30 percent, the agency claimed. An interest waiver of 10

percent was also given by ICICI. The network has said that the loans have been repaid and it even produced a document that appeared to confirm its claim. "NDTV and its promoters have never defaulted on any loan to ICICI or any other bank," read a statement posted on NDTV's website. "We adhere to the highest levels of integrity and independence. It is clearly the independence and fearlessness of NDTV's team that the ruling party's

channel in the Supreme Court when it was ordered off the air for broadcasting sensitive details of a terror attack on the air force base in Pathankot in January 2016.

In November 2016, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting had ordered an unprecedented 24-hour blackout against the network, stating that its coverage on terrorist attacks at Pathankot had revealed "strategically-sensitive information." NDTV argued

condemned by journalists and editors with all press councils drawing parallels to the Emergency of the 1970s when basic constitutional rights, including the freedom of the press, were blatantly violated. At the last minute, the government lifted the ban.

The Editors Guild of India then said that the one-day ban by the government was unprecedented and that the centre appeared to have given itself the power "to intervene in the functioning of the

Naidu has said: "If somebody does something wrong, simply because they belong to media, you cannot expect the government to keep quiet." He said that the law was taking its course.

I am not against the law taking its own course. But I, like other journalists, would want to know what the channel has done to invite the wrath of the government or, for that matter, Prime Minister Modi. It is obvious that this action could not have been taken without consent from the top. The Information and Broadcasting Minister is only the 'hatchet' person. After all, he would have to carry out the orders coming from above.

The government has been using sedition laws to silence dissenting voices. And there are over 51 freedom of information activists who have been found murdered since the law came to force in 2005. NDTV's news coverage has riled up members of Modi's Hindu nationalist BJP, many of whom accuse the network of being anti-BJP. Days before the raid, an NDTV news anchor had sparred with BJP's national spokesman Sambit Patra on air and asked him to leave her show after he accused NDTV of having an "agenda".

On the one hand, Modi talks of strengthening democracy. But on the other hand, he, or at least his party, is doing everything to weaken it. In his All India Radio show *Mann Ki Baat*, Modi had claimed that for a lively democracy, healthy criticisms are immensely important. However, every action emanating from his government, particularly the attacks on the media, smacks of authoritarianism. The magic he casts on the people is gradually vanishing. The sooner he realises this, the better it would be for him and his supporters.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.



SOURCE: NEWSJUNKIE POST

politicians cannot stomach and the CBI raid is merely another attempt at silencing the media."

The Narendra Modi government has seemingly been after NDTV for quite some time because it is one of the very few channels which have not surrendered to the whims of the government. And this is not the first time the channel has been targeted by the incumbent government. Last year, NDTV had to challenge the government's one-day ban of its Hindi

that its coverage was based on official news briefings and that other broadcasters that had made the same revelations were not being penalised.

Subsequently, the representatives of NDTV met with the Information and Broadcasting Minister, arguing that the channel had not been given a fair chance to offer evidence that it did not share any information that was different from what other channels and newspapers presented at the same time. Understandably, the ban was widely

media and take arbitrary punitive action as and when it does not agree with the coverage." Defending the ban, the Information and Broadcasting Minister Venkaiah Naidu said that it was "in the interest of the country's security", and that the barrage of criticism confronted by the government appeared to be "politically inspired."

Even on the recent raids by CBI,

Naidu's reaction is, more or less, the same. Denying that there was any political interference on the raids,

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Harming the hands that help us



SARAH ANJUM BARI

ON May 5, 2017, an employer poured boiling water over an eight-year-old domestic help – a child – for breaking a glass by mistake. She is currently suffering from burns across

her head, her hands and her abdominal areas at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. On May 20, a 20-year-old domestic help in Chittagong was raped by her employers' neighbour. And on May 27, a fourteen-year-old domestic help in Chittagong, wrongfully accused of stealing money, was tied to a window grille and beaten with pieces of wood by her employer and her sister. The employers threatened to kill the girl and dump her body in a septic tank if her parents didn't give the money back.

The housemaid who was raped, according to media reports, had been asked by her employers' neighbour to come over and help him with some work at home. The man attacked her in the absence of his family members, and threatened to harm her further if she decided to report the incident. As much as this absolves her employers of any direct crime, it still raises the issue of how safe domestic workers are in the houses they work in.

We're well aware of how often we ask our maid or our cook to go over to a neighbour or a relative's house to help out with household chores. The workers are expected to follow these instructions with no questions asked. But along with the 'right' to ask for such service comes the duty to protect the workers in our care. In a country where sexual assault victims from privileged backgrounds struggle to get justice, one can only

wonder how near-impossible it must be for the hired help to voice their concerns of safety.

Most domestic workers tend to come from villages with little or no idea of their surroundings in the city, and without the power to stand up for themselves. Their employers are therefore responsible for their safety not only at home, but also (and especially) when they step out of the house. It's on them to make sure that the workers can talk to them openly when they feel threatened. But this also raises the most challenging question – if a worker does inform her employers of having been attacked or mistreated, would the employers support her? Would they take actions on her behalf?

The two other incidents, meanwhile, point towards an even more alarming trend that has shamefully become a part of daily life in many households. How easily we hurl verbal abuse and push, shove, or even slap a housemaid for forgetting to do the laundry, for accidentally breaking a dish, or for standing up for herself when she is tormented. God forbid that the person who works around the clock to keep our homes spotless should feel anger, frustration, or exhaustion. God forbid that she act like an actual human being.

The extent to which domestic workers' sufferings have always been taken for granted was proved by their complete exclusion from the Labour Act until 2016, which prompted the Domestic Workers' Protection and Welfare Policy to be formulated. The policy sets the minimum age of domestic workers at 12 years and, among other basic provisions relating to working conditions and terms of payment, requires that employers pay for their workers' medical bills and

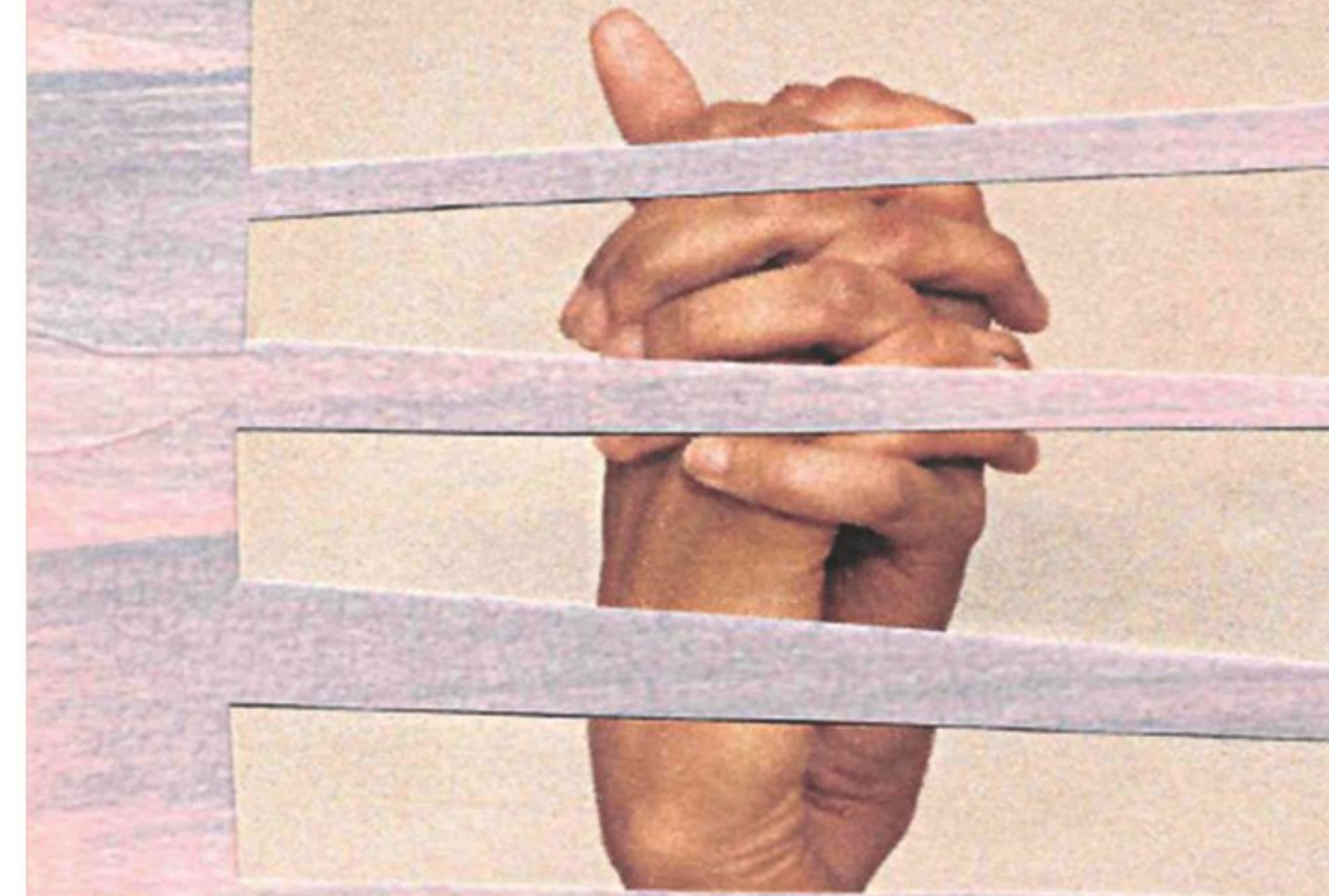
other compensation if the accident or illness occurs because of the work they're doing. It also mentions that the Ministry of Labour and Employment will file cases with the police on behalf of workers who are abused by their employers. (*Dhaka Tribune*, February 2, 2017). But we have yet to see this policy be translated into law and implemented.

Domestic workers are treated with contempt because their employers take pride in being their sole financial providers. It gives them the misguided idea that paying someone a salary allows them to buy their workers' never-ending gratitude, their dignity, and their tolerance of all forms of cruelty. They forget that they're in fact paying for a professional service without which their own homes would be uninhabitable. What's worse is that most domestic workers agree with this wrong and derogatory concept. Even if the Domestic Workers' Protection and Welfare Policy were properly implemented, the government's hardest, and most important, job would be to encourage and empower domestic workers to stand up for themselves and make use of the law.

The three incidents of torture in the past month form a mere fraction of the countless cases of domestic help abuse occurring all over the country on a near-daily basis. Last year, a total of 64 workers faced various forms of sexual, physical and psychological abuse, among whom 14 were younger than 12 years, according to Ain O Salish Kendra. Forty workers died from such violence. But the most alarming part is that these gruesome crimes against little children and vulnerable adults aren't committed by violent criminals or struggling

delinquents who don't know any better. They're done by regular people like you and I – people who can be presumed to belong to civilised society if they can afford to hire help; people who are parents to their own children. The woman who beat up her maid in Chittagong last week, for instance, was a

shouldn't have to be told that it is illegal to inflict pain on a child, or a person who doesn't have the strength to fight back. We shouldn't have to be explained why it is wrong to work a six-year-old to the bone, while a more fortunate child of the same age is showered with luxury in the very next



medical officer of the Chittagong General Hospital. This is a woman who tries to earn a living from treating sick patients, but feels no qualms in torturing a child for a paltry amount of Tk 2,500 that the child denies to have stolen.

No amount of laws or social awareness campaigns will ever be enough if people aren't instilled with a basic sense of humanity. We

room. Instead of always blaming the authorities for failing to ensure justice, how about we ask ourselves why we hardly bat an eyelid anymore when we hear the screams of a cook, a cleaner, or a maid being tortured next door?

The writer is a member of the Editorial Department of *The Daily Star*.

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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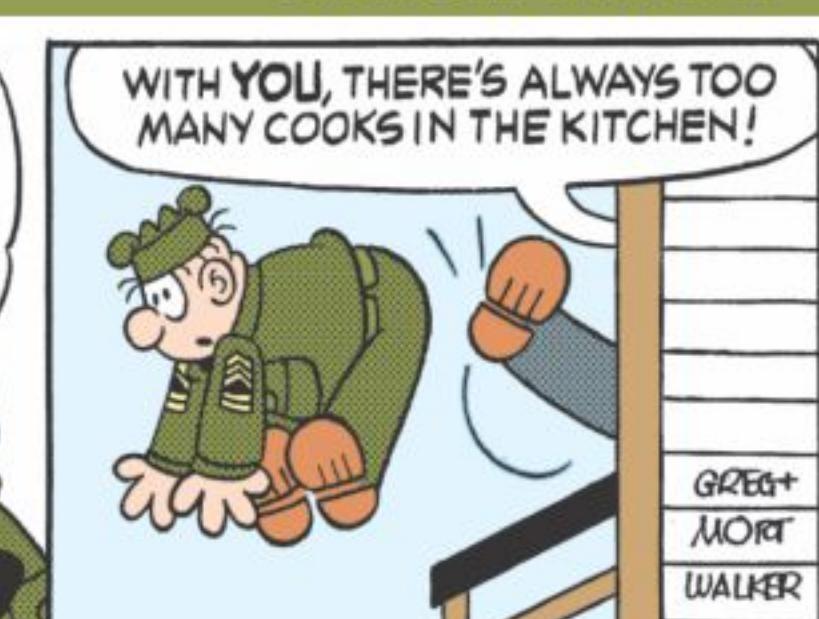
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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER



BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER

