

Commodities lost in clandestine marketplaces

Sex trafficking in Rohingya camps



WE are all commodities. Different parts of us are up for sale, as and when demand dictates, all the time. But it causes significant discomfort in me when vulnerable bodies are transformed into commodities.

Sex trafficking, by definition, is human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, including sexual slavery. Like all trade, it has two aspects i.e. demand and supply. According to the International Labour Organization, there are 20.9 million people subjected to forced labour, and 22 percent (4.5 million) who are victims of forced sexual exploitation. However, due to the secrecy of sex trafficking, obtaining reliable statistics is difficult.

Although there are no comprehensive empirical studies available on the subject, the threat of trafficking to refugees living in camps is evident and extensive. People attempting to escape their homes, or send family members out of conflict zones, are extremely vulnerable, and at much higher risk of trafficking. Most victims find themselves in coercive or abusive situations from which escape is both difficult and dangerous.

With the multiplication and intensification of regional conflicts around the world, an alarming increase in human trafficking has also become clear in these regions, both into and out of conflict zones. The ongoing crisis in Syria has produced thousands of refugees, many trying to escape to Europe. Political turmoil in Libya has caused trafficking for sexual and labour exploitation purposes as well. There have been occurrences in which traffickers fraudulently recruit individuals, confiscate their documents and use debt bondage to retain control of them. Others have simply been held for ransom until their families can pay to have them released. But these are examples perhaps not so relevant for us.

Let us look at a case that's closer to home. Myanmar is an interesting case of trafficking



Female fixer Noor lives in the same community as many of the sex workers and facilitates their client appointments over the phone in Kutupalong, Bangladesh.

PHOTO: STEFANIE GLINSKI/REUTERS

both within and out of a conflict zone. The country has been in a state of protracted conflict for more than fifty years that is still ongoing. Beginning with the fight for independence post-World War II, the military took control in 1962, and immediately began a crackdown on ethnic minorities within the country.

During the military rule, high rates of trafficking and other human rights abuses prevailed in the region rich in natural resources, and the site of pipelines moving natural gas and oil from the Andaman Sea, through Myanmar, to China. Men, women and children have been subject to forced labour. Women and girls were victims of sexual exploitation, by both the military and the ethnic militias. People have also been trafficked out of the country. Members of the

Kachin and Shan ethnic minorities, lacking citizenship or identity documents, have been especially vulnerable as they tried to leave the country. And now, in what is the world's fastest growing refugee crisis, so are the Rohingyas.

The current conflict in Rakhine State has led to thousands of Rohingyas fleeing repression in Myanmar who are often trafficked through Thailand to Malaysia. Some of these refugees find themselves trapped in jungle trafficking camps until either their families pay a ransom, or they are forced to work on Thai fishing boats. But what of the more than 600,000 Rohingyas who have fled across the border to southern Bangladesh? The question is usually met with an eerie silence.

Sexual predators and human traffickers are

herding to refugee camps on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border looking to exploit vulnerable Rohingya women and children, stated a Press TV report. Girls, as young as 12, are being sold off in neighbouring countries and forced to marry men more than a decade older than them. The religiously inclined are flocking to the camps to "save young girls by taking their hand in marriage," those sharing bus rides with the saviours tell me. A growing number of girls are becoming victims of human traffickers who sell Rohingya women and girls to men as brides, various reports have said.

Human traffickers know well who they can and cannot target. People in poverty, and without adequate community or family networks, are easily lured through schemes and promises of legitimate employment.

Refugees, asylum-seekers and displaced people are vulnerable and thus make perfect candidates.

Reuters reported from the biggest camp in Kutupalong, Cox's Bazar, where the sex industry is thriving. While many of the sex workers are longer term residents of the Bangladeshi camps, the influx of tens of thousands more vulnerable women and girls is expected to fuel the trade. The report cited sources saying that 500 sex workers live here. UN agencies have no public figures on the numbers of sex workers. The locals remain silent as well.

The silence is invoked partly by shame and partly by fear. In a conservative society, where sex in itself is stigmatised, trading sex is even more so. And not surprisingly, while economic theory insists that demand creates supply, when it comes to sex trade, it is only the suppliers we hold accountable. Shame, because the single most important attribute of a woman is her "purity". Fear, because these women are often faced with threats by those who buy sex. They fear for their dignity and they fear for their lives.

In survival sex, the victim is not necessarily controlled by another person but feels they have to perform sexual acts in order to obtain basic commodities to survive. Trade, however, is, or should be, conducted between equals.

When sex workers share common traits—poverty, abusive family members and lack of funds—they are vulnerable, less equal. In such a case, sex that is paid for becomes exploitative. It is no longer trade. It is pure, unadulterated exploitation. The morality of sex trade may be a grey area. But the morality of exploitation is quite black and white.

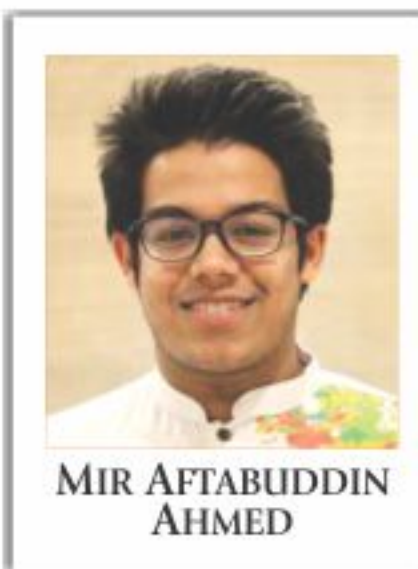
How often can we assert complete control over our bodies? And even if I could, and even if you could, can bodies that have been bruised and battered and used as battlegrounds afford the same luxury of control?

No. They cannot. They are turned into faceless, nameless, voiceless commodities that get lost in these clandestine marketplaces. Marketplaces we facilitate with our silence.

Shagufta Hossain is the founder of Leaping Boundaries and a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

Preserving integrity of the electoral process

The media in Bangladesh must fulfil its role of an independent observer



THE media in Bangladesh has traditionally played a pivotal role in all of our great national movements.

Whether it be the role of the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra during the liberation struggle in 1971, or the vociferous campaign undertaken by our national dailies during the anti-Ershad struggle of the 1980s, our media has pushed itself to take strong ideological stances against the values or policies detrimental to the country. As such, the media is yet again poised, and some may say challenged by the public, to portray the kind of progressive and independent voice that can contribute towards creating the elusive level playing field in the upcoming 2018 Parliamentary Elections.

The symbolic, political and constitutional significance of the upcoming elections cannot and should not be undermined. Given the rise of technology and social media, it is very easy to promote unverified and ill-motivated news regarding political actors, parties and organisations. If social media can raise individuals from the ground up to the status of heroes, it can surely do the opposite too. As such, it is imperative for our media outlets, in print, television and online channels,

to be leading advocates of the truth. The media as a collective is expected to educate voters on how to exercise their democratic rights, report on the development of electoral campaigns, provide platforms for political parties to communicate messages to the mass public, and scrutinise the electoral process in areas of fairness and efficiency.

Whilst the media is not the sole source of information in a globalised world, it is undoubtedly the most trusted platform as a source of news for the citizens. What a reputed newspaper says or the kind of talk show shows a well-respected TV channel hosts, is indicative of the mood of the country and, by definition, sways political opinion. Think about any random dinner table conversation and how someone brings up a recent talk show amongst political leaders, which subsequently sets the tone for the discussion. The media is what the public look up to as a source of empirical data and opinions, and as such, its performance in the next year will surely be taken into account.

Now, when it comes to objectivity, the media is expected to be as neutral as possible. In the 1990s, former Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia made a famous comment that no one in Bangladesh is neutral, barring "crazy" people or children. To a large extent, this may be true. But neutrality of personal opinion is not the same as neutrality of professionalism. One expects the various media outlets in the country

to have their own ideological stance, which, to a degree, is healthy for a country. But one also expects the media to play a professional and responsible role when it comes to objectivity of news when reporting the activities of our political parties and external institutions.

with. Stories about how leading news outlets such as CNN, *New York Times* and NBC, amongst others, failed to objectively point out Hillary Clinton's flaws and faults, both during her primary against Senator Bernie Sanders and later against Donald Trump, have seemingly resulted in

Ignorance is unfortunately still a major drawback in the democratic process in our society. The support for the kind of misogyny, sexism, racism and Islamophobia promoted by the current US president is baffling, but the role of the media is to point out these things from an observer's perspective, rather than exclusively supporting a candidate in elections. Bangladesh must be wary in this regard.

Whether a certain media outlet leans in favour of a political organisation must not be the sole precursor for presenting news. And to a large extent, our media outlets have tried to be the only platform for civilised and constructive dialogue within a socio-political framework. The talk shows hosted by our TV channels are followed by citizens with keen interest. Moderators, on most occasions, refrain from giving their personal opinions or judgements, and leave that to individuals divided by ideologies, professions and ideas, but united by the common quest to inform the public, albeit with their own political interests at play. This is healthy, and must continue.

It is true that the current Awami League regime has indeed provided increased licences for up-and-coming media outlets. Therefore, when one sees the kind of physical attacks on journalists while covering Begum Zia's recent trip to Chittagong, the nation feels disappointed. The violent nature of our politics, which one hopes will come to an end, is a reality for which there seems to be no short-term

solutions. The fairness of the upcoming elections will have to be ensured by the journalists of the country, as was the case during the 2014 general election. But even before the election itself, the media must continue to be confident, decisive and informative. The nation wants to see candidate profiles; the nation demands to know what policies our parties stand for; the nation expects constructive dialogue on national television; and the nation hopes that the truth is set free through the media as a whole.

In Bangladesh there has been a recent trend of misconstruing news and making online users believe in anything and everything. Pictures are tampered with. Contents of video and audio recordings fought over politically. Established truths challenged. All of this is detrimental for any society aiming to be a democracy. Given these realities, the collective media has the most crucial role as a stakeholder in the electoral process, to showcase all that is true and verified, and not spread rumours and alienate the public further.

As former US President Barack Obama said, everyone is entitled to their opinion, but not their own facts. The media must promote, protect and preserve the integrity of the electoral process and of the truth, by doing what they have always done—being bold, enlightening and a shining beacon for hope and democracy in the country.

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SOURCE: WWW.KRISIIS.FR

The majority of the American news media was biased towards Hillary Clinton in the 2016 US Elections, and, as such, played into the hands of President Donald Trump. The eccentric American president is waging an ongoing war against "fake news", which many Americans sympathise

much distrust towards the American media amongst Republicans, Democrats and independents alike.

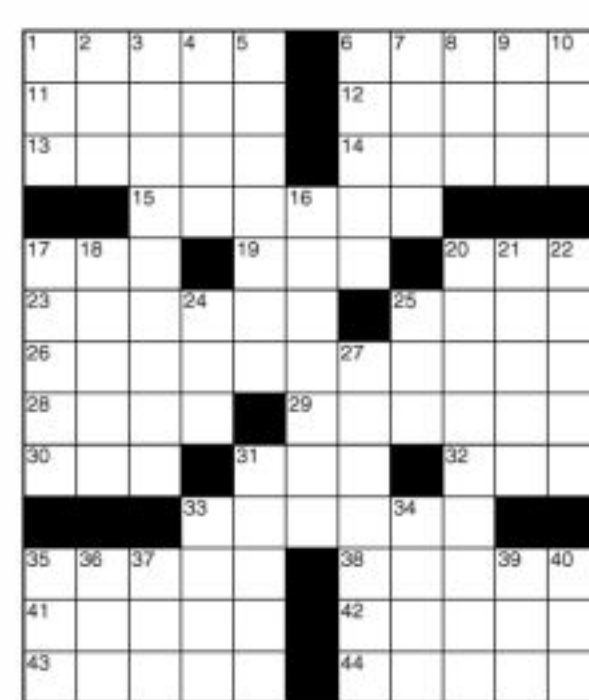
We cannot, and must not, let such a thing happen in Bangladesh. We must remember that we are the same country in which many people believed they saw a politician's face on the moon.

A WORD

A DAY

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| ACROSS | 32 Hosp. parts | 10 Hoop attachment |
| 1 Addict's program | 33 Metal ring | 16 Old autos |
| 6 Arafat's Nobel Prize sharer | 35 Wheel minder | 17 Computer shortcut |
| 11 Piano piece | 38 "— of Two Cities" | 18 Plant pest |
| 12 Ooze forth | 41 Martini garnish | 20 US/USSR competition |
| 13 Matt of movies | 42 Folded food | 21 Film prize |
| 14 Intolerant sort | 43 Pay | 22 Borscht base |
| 15 Tangent thoughts | 44 Dance units | 24 Mined find |
| 17 Game piece | | 25 Radius setting |
| 19 Salon stuff | DOWN | 27 They go with tails |
| 20 Blubber | 1 Valentine color | 31 Sweet treats |
| 23 Chefs' protectors | 2 H lookalike | 33 Surfer's ride |
| 25 Basilica part | 3 People everywhere | 34 Coup d'— |
| 26 "Ben-Hur" highlight | 4 Bustles | 35 Boar's mate |
| 28 Paddy crop | 5 "Life is Beautiful" star | 36 Copying |
| 29 Alley howler | 6 Defy authority | 37 Lively dance |
| 30 Exalted poem | 7 Line of symmetry | 39 Cut off |
| 31 Beat walker | 8 Programming error | 40 Twisty turn |
| | 9 Altar words | |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

DEBTS ROAM
IQUIT PAULO
SURLY HITIT
HART NODICE
ELI PUNEEL
DETAILED
DOIN TOAD
FOR NAG BAR
OPENUP LADE
RESET HONED
TRIDES ICING
SAND SHADE

BEEBLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



PEREGRINATION

NOUN

A journey, especially a long or meandering one.