

Domestic violence: When society is an abettor

NAZMIN TITHI

THINGS are not changing for women in this country when it comes to gender-based violence. Some recent studies and research findings have brought to light the fact that despite many preventive measures taken by the government and non-government organisations, violence against women in Bangladesh is far from decreasing.

Globally, one in every three women and girls experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, most frequently by an intimate partner, according to the UN.

Although there are fewer reports on domestic violence compared to the reports of sexual harassment, rape, gang-rape and murder of women and children in our media, this does not mean that domestic violence has at all



SOURCE: WWW.BLONCAMPUS.COM

How much has changed in the country since the incident of Rumana Manzoor? Not much, it seems.

decreased. Rather, it is the most prevalent form of violence against women across the country, according to a recent research by ActionAid and Jatiya Nari Nirjatan Protirodh Forum (JNNPF). Their research found that two-thirds of all violence against women occur inside victims' own homes.

And not only in Bangladesh, the

situation seems to be pretty much the same across the world, as a recent UN study has found the home to be the "most dangerous place" for women. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, an average of 137 women across the world are killed by a partner or family member every day. The UN calculated that of a total of 87,000 female homicide cases worldwide in 2017, some 50,000—or 58 percent—were committed by the victims' intimate partners or family members. Therefore, the extent of violence women across the world face inside their own home is far more severe than many of us might have imagined.

In Bangladesh, women face all types of violence including marital rape, dowry related murder, acid attacks, and many forms of physical and mental torture by close family members or intimate partners. According to Ain O Shalish Kendra, as many as 191 women have been murdered by their

husbands in 2016 alone.

However, while all these forms of violence perpetrated against women are considered to be crimes, marital rape is still not considered a crime by society. And since child marriage is still prevalent in our society, marital rape is all too common here.

But unfortunately, the issues relating to domestic violence are not discussed much in public and there is hardly any awareness among the victims with regard to how and where to seek remedies for this. Needless to say, the "socially accepting attitude" towards this kind of violence prevent victims from reporting these incidents. Other factors behind the low reporting rate include fear, social stigma associated with these incidents and also considering domestic violence a "private" matter.

A Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) survey found that 72.7 percent women, who experienced violence by their partners, never reported the

incidents; only 2.1 percent women reported them to local leaders, and only 1.1 percent sought police help.

Therefore, our fight against domestic violence must address all the factors that have contributed to this horrific situation. There is no alternative to raising awareness among people against this social malaise. All forms of domestic violence—physical or mental—must be recognised as crimes. The patriarchal attitude as well as the social perception that domestic violence is a "trivial" and "private" matter has to change.

If that can be done, it will encourage more women to report such cases. But where would they go to report or lodge complaints, especially without facing any repercussions for taking such action? In this regard, appropriate information should be disseminated among women to make them aware of the resources and channels to safely file legal complaints and grievances.

In 2012, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs established a helpline centre to help women and children victims, their families and other stakeholders with relevant information and various advice, services and support. Anyone can call 109, a toll-free number, to get assistance. Information regarding this helpline must be made available to all.

Needless to say, the media has a crucial role to play here. That 75 percent of the media reports on VAW are about rape and gang rape, as found in the ActionAid research, is a clear indication that the media has not given domestic violence due importance. The media should raise awareness about domestic violence, report more on this and put pressure on all the parties concerned to take concrete steps to fight such violence.

Domestic violence is something that affects women irrespective of their

social class and economic status. And while dealing with such incidents, both physical and mental harassment must be taken into account.

Only two years ago, Akter Jahan Joly, an associate professor of mass communication and journalism at Rajshahi University committed suicide for what she said in her suicide note was mental and physical stress. But there were allegations by her colleagues and close relatives that her ex-husband had provoked Joly into committing suicide ("RU teacher's suicide: Colleague withdrawn from academic activities", *The Daily Star*, September 22, 2016). There are many such cases that occur behind closed doors.

Remember Rumana Manzoor, an assistant professor of International Relations at Dhaka University, who was blinded and maimed in an attack by her husband more than seven years ago? Her silence regarding the torture she had suffered at the hands of her husband had almost cost her life.

How much has changed in the country since the incident of Rumana Manzoor? Not much, it seems. And it will not, until social attitude towards such violence change and society comes forward to support the victims.

In an interview with the Vancouver Sun in 2014, Rumana Manzoor said: "...I know that many people in my country...are suffering from domestic violence and they think it's a shame for themselves to talk about it or share it with anyone and sometimes they are just scared...my ex-husband was only caught when my students at the University of Dhaka and my colleagues...put pressure on the police force...Until that support comes from society, I don't think that change can be possible."

Nazmin Tithi is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Mark Zuckerberg has lost control of Facebook



GUY VERHOFSTADT

WHEN Mark Zuckerberg, the chairman, CEO, and co-founder of Facebook, appeared before the European Parliament in May, I suggested

to him that he had lost control of his company. As one of the few politicians ever to have confronted Zuckerberg in person, I was happy for the opportunity. But, much to my frustration, I did not receive a direct verbal response to any of my questions.

I am not alone. Politicians around the world have grown tired of

Facebook's constant attempts to avoid accountability in the name of profits.

With Facebook, the myth of "self-regulation," long trotted out by high-paid lobbyists, has been laid to rest once and for all. It has been months since Zuckerberg appeared before the US Congress and the European Parliament, and the most urgent questions about Facebook's business practices remain unanswered.

With respect to the Cambridge Analytica scandal, it is still unclear what Facebook knew, and when it knew it. Equally unclear is the extent to which foreign interference through Facebook contributed to the election of US President Donald Trump, and to the outcome of the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum.

Does the seamless dissemination of targeted propaganda on Facebook still pose a risk to democratic elections? No one knows, owing largely to Facebook's

own dissembling. Facebook claims to have improved its privacy protections. But, given that it has failed to conduct a comprehensive internal audit of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, as requested by the European Parliament, there is every reason to fear that the upcoming European Parliament election in May will be subject to still more foreign manipulation.

Though Facebook and many other digital giants have signed on to a European Commission "code of conduct" on policing hate speech and disinformation, much more needs to be done. The code of conduct is too weak and does not include a timeline for when companies need to meet their commitments. In addition, far more resources are needed to enforce the EU's new General Data Protection Regulation, so that tech companies can no longer treat penalties for the misuse of personal data as mere costs of doing business.

Europe also lacks a zealous prosecutorial/investigative body that can hold tech companies to account. In the United States, Robert Mueller, the special counsel investigating Russian interference in the 2016 election, has handed down dozens of indictments, secured multiple convictions, and demonstrated the need for empowered prosecutors in cases involving social media. It is time for Europe to catch up, first by establishing its own special prosecutor to investigate attacks on recent elections, but also by tackling other crimes that arise from the abuse of data.

Moreover, the EU urgently needs to develop a robust mechanism for tracking and analysing Russian

disinformation campaigns across all member states and in every language. Only then will prosecutors and other law-enforcement authorities have what they need to compel testimony and provide an effective check against such attacks. With the right strategy in place, we can prevent social-media platforms from serving as accelerants of disinformation, by identifying and stopping propaganda campaigns as soon as they emerge.

At the EU level, the East StratCom Task Force that the European Council established in 2015 should be expanded and made independent from the EU diplomatic service. Its sole task should be to identify, analyse, expose, and debunk disinformation.

In the long term, though, there is only one sure-fire way to address the threat that Facebook and other platforms pose to Western democracy: regulation. Just as self-regulation by banks failed to prevent the 2008 financial crisis, so self-regulation in the tech sector has failed to make Facebook a responsible actor.

Regulating the tech giants should start with updated competition rules to address the monopoly control of personal data. And we need new regulations to ensure accountability and transparency in the algorithmic processing of data by any actor, private or public. But, ultimately, we should not rule out a break-up of Facebook and some of the other tech giants.

After all, what I told Zuckerberg in May still applies: he does not appear to have control of his creation. But even if he did, we should all be worried about the "more open and connected" world that he has in mind. Just imagine tens

of thousands of low-paid Facebook "employees" in India and elsewhere scrutinising our every word to decide what constitutes fake news and hate speech, and what does not.

As *The New York Times* recently revealed, Facebook is so desperate to protect its business model that it hired a shadowy PR firm to spread anti-Semitic misinformation about one of

There can be little doubt that monopoly control over millions of people's personal data and the flow of news and information online poses a clear and present threat to democracy. Facebook's management has shown time and again that it cannot be trusted to behave responsibly. There is no reason why we, the people, should put store in any of the company's promises



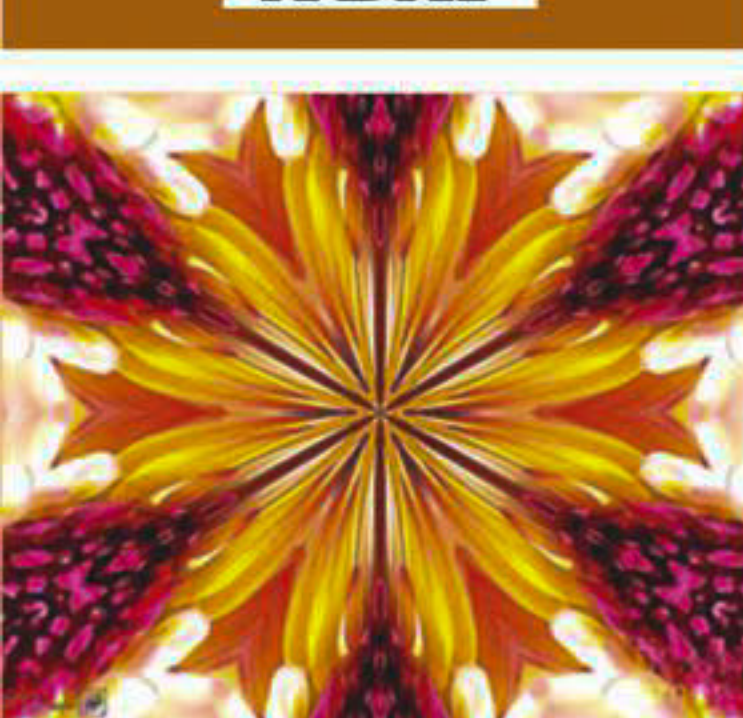
Mark Zuckerberg taking a water break during his testimony to the US Congress.

its leading critics, the financier and philanthropist George Soros. Such outrageous behaviour suggests that Facebook has much to hide. And, as it happens, a UK parliamentary committee has just seized internal Facebook emails showing that the company may have known about malicious Russian activity on its platform as far back as 2014.

to manage our data or clean up its act. Self-regulation has failed spectacularly. It's time for the real thing.

Guy Verhofstadt, a former Belgian prime minister, is President of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE) in the European Parliament.
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A WORD A DAY

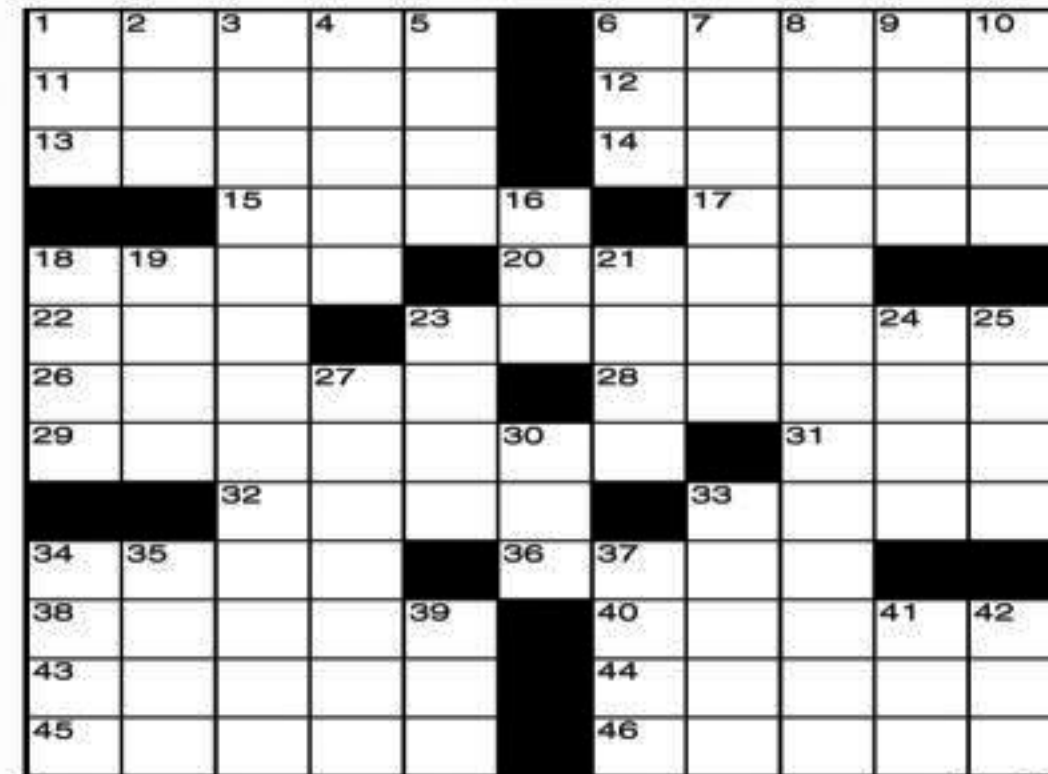


EURHYTHMIC
ADJECTIVE

In or relating to harmonious proportion (especially of architecture or art)

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

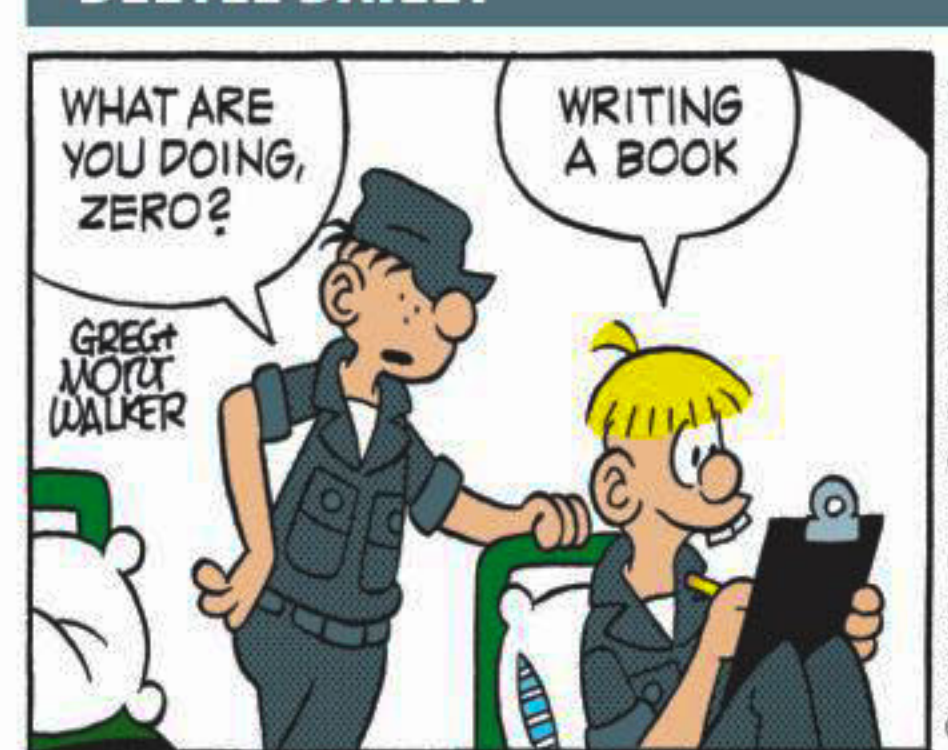
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| ACROSS | 32 Mystique | 8 Fat used in soaps |
| 1 Aspirations | 33 Club cost | 9 Kitchen fixture |
| 6 Esau's twin | 34 Peach parts | 10 Ice chunk |
| 11 Counting everything | 36 Cruise stop | 16 Bakery buy |
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| 13 Polynesian nation | 40 Bottled buy | 19 Pale tan |
| 14 Indy entrant | 43 Extended operatic solo | 21 Los Angeles team |
| 15 Scout's base | 44 Abrasive powder | 23 Gaze |
| 17 Drawn out | 45 Women's quarters | 24 Loyal |
| 18 Fruit tree | 46 Private's boss | 25 Some heirs |
| 20 Press | | 27 Invitee's guest |
| 22 "That's gross!" | DOWN | 30 Phone bug |
| 23 Low wages, figuratively | 1 Popular song | 33 O'Neill forte |
| 26 Pancake's kin | 2 Music's Yoko | 34 Swanky |
| 28 Paris subway | 3 Breakfast mix | 35 Cuzco native |
| 29 Rents from a renter | 4 "Enigma Variations" composer | 37 Is in the red |
| 31 Frank holder | 5 Bridge feat | 39 Grier of "Jackie Brown" |
| | 6 Mayo buy | 41 Work unit |
| | 7 Marine mollusk | 42 Reuben base |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

W E B S R A S C A L
O R A L E N C O R E
R I C E A G E N T S
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P I E T I N T U T U
A S P E C T S T A B

BEETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



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