

Why I do not support the killing of 'rapists' by 'Hercules'

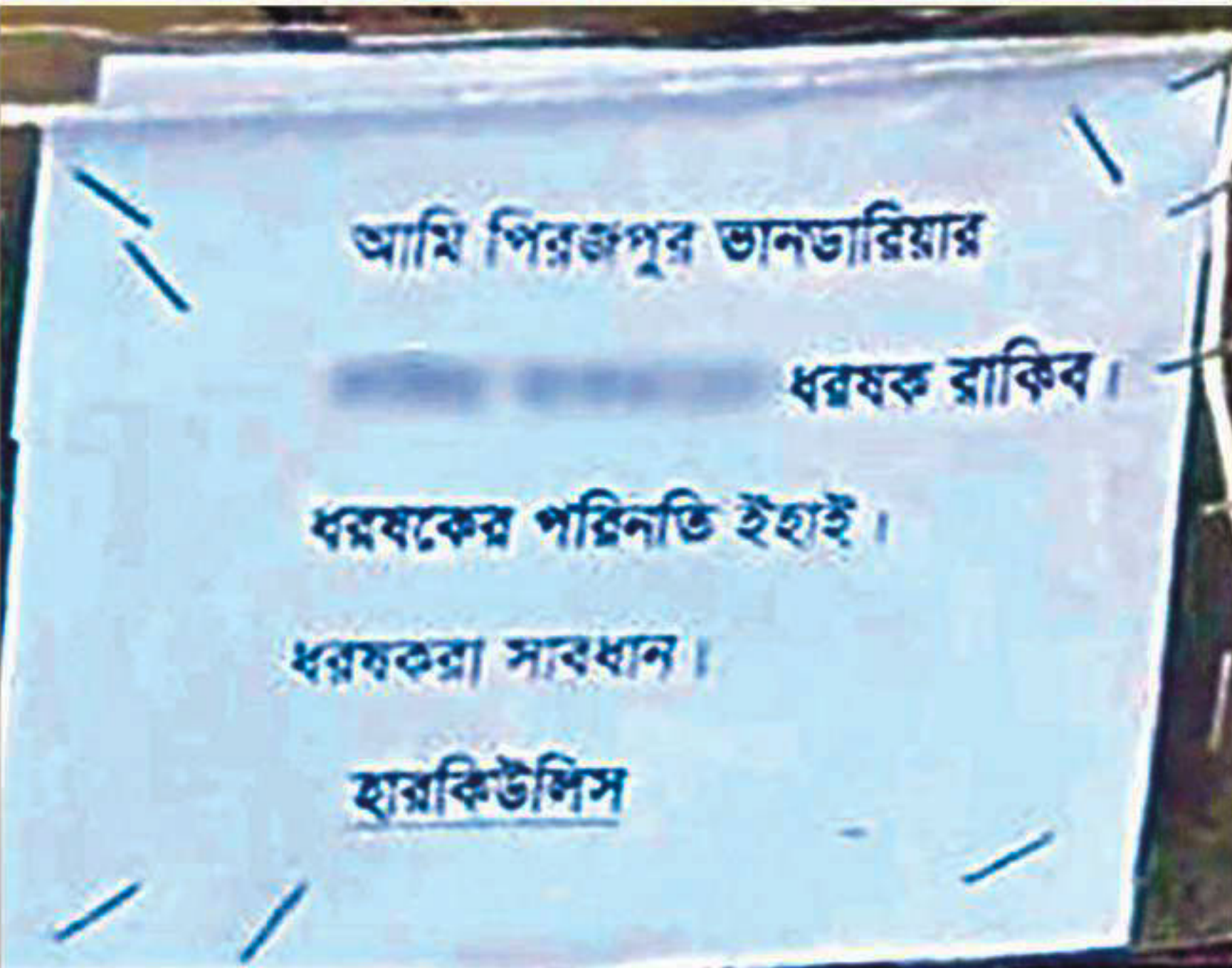


TAQBIR HUDA

RECENTLY, the bodies of three "rapists" have been found shot to death with culpatory notes hanging around their necks. On January 17, the first body was found by the police in Savar, whereby Ripon, who was the key suspect in a gang rape and murder case of a female garment worker, was found dead with a note that read "I am the prime accused in a rape case." On January 24, the second body was recovered by the police in Jhalakathi, with a note that read "I am Sajal. I am a rapist and this is my fate." On February 1, the third body was found, also in Jhalakathi, but this time the note read "I am Rakib, I am the rapist of a madrasa girl of Bhandharia and this is my fate. Beware rapists - Hercules". Sajal and Rakib were the two accused in a gang rape case of a madrasa student that took place on January 14. These killings are being attributed to "Hercules" since the note on the last body was signed by this pseudonym. This spate of killings has been overwhelmingly well received by the public, with people extending their deepest "respect", "salute", "love" and admiration to Hercules on social media.

impunity for their gross crimes. For instance, a 2013 UN multi-country study on male violence (which surveyed perpetrators of rape) found that in Bangladesh 95 percent of urban respondents and 88 percent of rural respondents reported facing no legal consequences for raping a woman or girl. Furthermore, a recent study by Prothom Alo found that out of the 5,000 rape cases lodged in Nari-O-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Tribunals in Dhaka district between 2002 and 2016, punishment was given in only three percent of the disposed cases. Thus it is perfectly understandable why many citizens may have lost hope in the law enforcement and judiciary as upholders of justice. However, is cheer-leading an onslaught of extrajudicial killings by an unidentified vigilante (however noble their intention maybe) the path to a safer country? It is important to note that while all three men were accused of rape, a formal investigation followed by trial was still pending. Thus, on what ground are we allowing someone the licence to kill at will and a free pass to breach the very foundation of our criminal justice system: innocent until proven guilty? Are we as a society then saying anyone and everyone has the permission to shoot on sight whoever they deem to be a criminal?

As soon as we let individual members of society decide what does and does not constitute a "crime" and allow them to execute punishments for it, rather than a properly appointed judge, we go down a very slippery slope. We move towards a reality where each of us lives at the mercy of someone else's (subjective) sense of public morality. This would be



The note found on February 1 with the third body in Jhalakathi reading "I am Rakib, I am the rapist of a madrasa girl of Bhandharia and this is my fate. Beware rapists - Hercules".

punishment in the form of Hercules killings as a victory for women's safety. Even if the three men who were killed were actually rapists, who is to say that tomorrow someone will not kill their opponent (political or otherwise) and hang a note describing them as a rapist? That is the main trouble with allowing any random citizen to execute punishments without any formal investigation process: someone need not actually have committed the crime, but merely accused of doing so by someone else.

Undoubtedly, the legal system is flawed and the Hercules killings should most certainly invoke deeper introspection on part of the law enforcement agencies as to why so many citizens would rather entrust a vigilante than a police officer or a judge. However, the inefficiency of the justice system should only ever be used to help contextualise the vigilantism but never to support or justify its existence. Those who really want to make the country a safer place for women must take the more strenuous route to lobby for and implement law and policy reforms from the very grassroots level instead of giving in to our baser instincts and letting our country succumb to disorder and mayhem. We should, therefore, be careful to not let our thirst for speedy punishment obliterate the very bedrock of our justice system and create a state of lawlessness, the ultimate victims of which will almost certainly be the very women we set out to "protect".

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It is deeply alarming to see the blind hero-fication of this Hercules by many otherwise educated individuals as some sort of feminist crusader against social injustice. Undoubtedly, any conscientious citizen ought to be frustrated with the state of justice in our country, whereby rapists enjoy virtual

particularly problematic for women since in a deeply misogynistic country such as ours, women are especially susceptible to moral policing by society. For instance, certain members of society think it is a "crime" for women to even step out of the house to work and defy other forms of androcentric cultural norms. What kind of power would this new system of "justice" be giving to them?

In fact just a few years ago, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) and numerous rights activists fought long

and hard to have the High Court declare all forms of extrajudicial punishment to be unconstitutional after incidents of women and girls across the country being caned, lashed or otherwise publicly degraded by community elders for "offending public morality" came to light (63 DLR 1). One such incident was in 2010 whereby a woman in Cumilla was subjected to 39 lashes after a *shalish* took place on the disputed paternity of her child born out of wedlock. It is therefore deeply ironic that so many of us today are celebrating the extrajudicial

Plight of the little-known 'tiger widows' of the Sundarbans

MOHAMMED MAMUN RASHID

THE number of tigers in the world's forests has dwindled to only 4,000 from 1 lakh over the last 100 years. Three sub-species of tiger out of total eight have already become extinct. The tiger is categorised as a critically endangered species due to deforestation, piracy and poaching worldwide.

forest have to collect permission letters and pay government fees for entering the Sundarbans, but officials of the Forest Department (FD) often take an additional fixed amount as bribe from them, which is sometimes 10 to 20 times higher than the actual fee ("Political Commitments and Aspirations of Grassroots Coastal Communities: A Micro-Level Study in Bangladesh", *American Journal of Rural Development*, 2014, Vol. 2). Moreover, the majority of the Sundarbans' resource users have to pay a fixed amount of money regularly to *dacoits*; otherwise they are abducted or killed. They are also often the victims of *dadandar*

63 years, or an average of 22 human deaths per year. Local people suspect that this number is much higher than the number recorded. For instance, Nil Dumur of Shyamnagar upazila has been declared as a tiger-widow village—tiger widows (in Bengali: *bagh bidhoba*) are women whose husbands have been killed by tigers.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of Bangladesh adopted the Compensation Policy for Casualties Caused by Wildlife. The amount of that compensation is too little for one family to live on, in the absence of their sole male earning-member. There are no other initiatives set up by the government or humanitarian

Tiger-widows are deprived of all human dignity, are discriminated against by their family and community, struggle to survive due to a profound degree of poverty, and are forced to live a life with a multitude of post-traumatic scars and deprivations, abuse, and exploitations. It is a matter of uncertain speculation whether the cry of the tiger-widows of Sundarbans will be heard by our policymakers. The number of tiger widows has increased silently in the nearby villages of the Sundarbans. From

an eco-psychiatric perspective, this is a very serious concern that needs to be checked and balanced between two issues: conservation of biodiversity and the well-being of the forest-dependent population. The Sundarbans won't survive if the tigers don't survive. In parallel, we should protect both the tigers and human beings living in and around the Sundarbans.

Awareness should be created to eradicate social stigma against tiger widows. Rehabilitation initiatives like integrated farming, small-enterprise, interest-free loans and

grants should be arranged for existing tiger widows by the government and NGOs. Scope of alternative income should be facilitated through special national budget allocation and local resource mobilisation for people who are dependent on the forest for their livelihoods, so that no one can enter the sanctuary areas for collecting resources that may damage the Sundarbans.

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The 'tiger widows' of what is now known as Bidhoba Palli (Village of Widows) in Nalitabari upazila of Sherpur. PHOTO: STAR

(moneylenders). Additionally, a number of male members of families dependent on the forest are killed by tigers. Killings of human beings by tigers in the Sundarbans lead to negative attitudes and retribution killings by local communities, which in turn have a substantial impact on the number of tigers in existence. There is still a lack of reliable micro level information about how many humans have been killed by tigers in the Sundarbans. However, the available literature cataloguing official government records shows that 1,396 human deaths were recorded over a span of

agencies to rehabilitate tiger-widow families. Let's not forget that such people have constitutional rights. The right to social security through public assistance in case of poverty arising from death, illness or disablement, and other cases is mentioned in Section 15(d) under the "Provision of Basic Necessities" of Part II of the Constitution. The right to basic necessities for all citizens such as food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care and the right to work and employment, recreation and leisure are mentioned in Sections 15(a), 15(b) and 15(c) as well.



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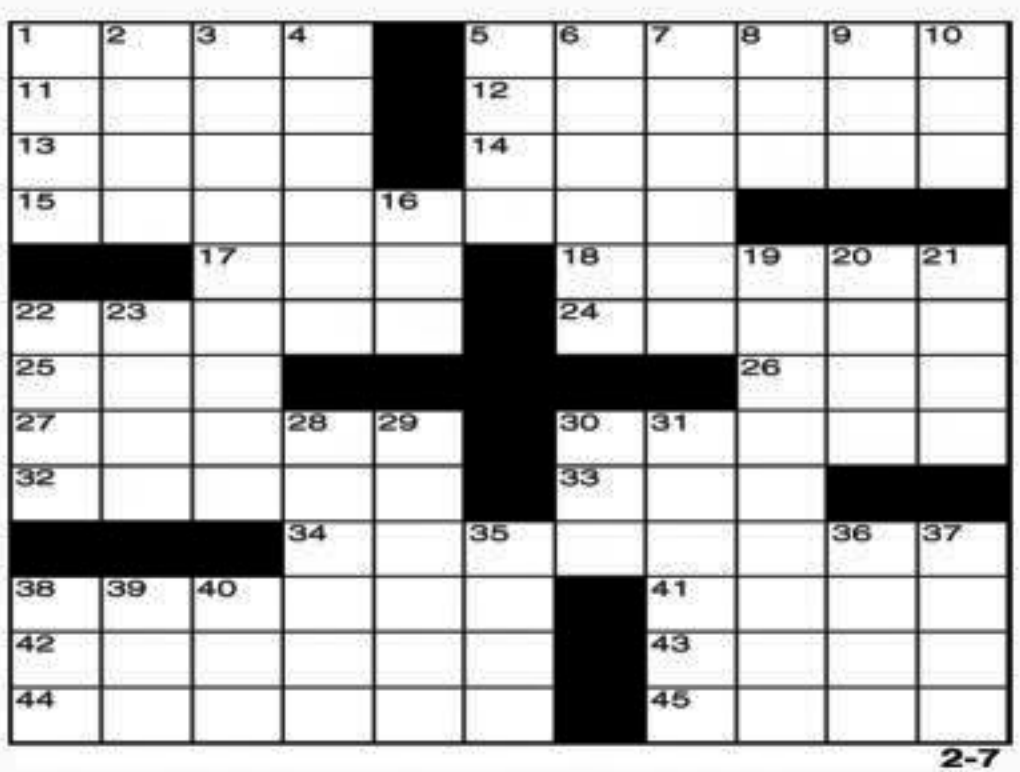
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 - 11 Andy's son
 - 12 Reunion attendee
 - 13 Tear
 - 14 Showy flowers
 - 15 Chess finishes
 - 17 Dramatist Jonson
 - 18 Amy Winehouse hit
 - 22 Linger
 - 24 Past its best
 - 25 Galena, e.g.
 - 26 Sign of approval
 - 27 Ice skate part
 - 30 Crosses creeks
 - 32 Sticks figure
 - 33 Subside
- DOWN**
- 1 Golf cry
 - 2 Ready for business
 - 3 Trees providing shelter
 - 4 Account book
 - 5 Con
 - 6 Tough puzzles
 - 7 Beginning
 - 8 Purpose
 - 9 Army address
 - 10 Print units
 - 16 Some amount of
 - 19 Bike stopper
 - 20 Balm ingredient
 - 21 Garden areas
 - 22 Man-shaped mug
 - 23 Woody's son
 - 28 Mock
 - 29 Late hour
 - 30 Fly catcher
 - 31 Old counter
 - 35 Car scar
 - 36 Kitchen need
 - 37 Egg holder
 - 38 The Matterhorn, e.g.
 - 39 Antique auto
 - 40 Nogoodnik



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