



ILLUSTRATION: ANWAR SOHEL

Almost 43 percent of the men surveyed did not want women to be working outside of home.

How empowered are women in Bangladesh?



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Bangladesh is often praised for making remarkable progress towards women's empowerment, in areas such as education, labour force participation and political representation. But what are the attitudes of citizens about women's empowerment?

The Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), in partnership with The Asia Foundation, recently conducted and published a national survey of over 10,000 respondents who were questioned on a range of topics, such as their views of women in leadership roles, their economic participation, agency, and not least of all, women's property rights. The data provides some useful insights on this.

A staggering majority (83 percent) in the survey were in support of women's participation in economic activities, both in urban and rural areas of the country. Though more women and people of higher education levels were in support of women's work compared to men and people with no formal education, the overall support was high.

Having said that, a somewhat smaller segment of respondents (69 percent) supported women working outside of their homes. Though a majority expressed their support for women's outside work, it seems that for a large number of people, women's work is deemed fine as long as it is limited within the boundaries of their households. Almost 43 percent of male respondents said they did not want women to be working outside of home, and 22 percent of women also shared this sentiment.

It was not in the scope of the survey to further explore why this is the case, but it definitely raises questions that make one ponder. The response is even grimmer to the question of whether men should be prioritised over women in the case of employment. Two-thirds of the men agreed that they should be given priority in employment over women. What is more remarkable, though, is that 56 percent of women also agreed with the statement. You might think that this was a more common opinion among rural communities, but our data suggests no rural-urban difference.

However, there is a difference in the education groups. The responses were evenly divided among the highest educated group, while 70 percent of people with no formal education believed that men should be prioritised over women in case of employment. All these statistics indicate the traditional gender and social norms underlying the Bangladeshi society. It is also worth noting that there is a possibility of an inherent "desirability bias" in response to these types of questions. So, the real attitudes may be even less optimistic.

Apart from questions about women working, the same respondents were also asked about their opinions on women's property rights and how they should dress. Just over half the men (57 percent) agreed that both men and women should have an equal share of their father's property, while 22 percent of women did not think they should have equal rights as men over their fathers' property. On the one hand, it is commendable to see more men advocate for women's equal share of property, while on the other, one may wonder why a fifth of the women are not advocating for equal share of property.

If, overall, the answer to the question of property rights gives a more optimistic view of women's empowerment, then the following question on women's clothing promptly diminishes the optimism. Almost 70 percent of men in the survey did not think women should be allowed to dress as they please. Shockingly still, 51 percent of women also don't think they should dress as they please.

This again raises many questions: what about women's clothing in Bangladesh is so outlandish that it is subject to such strong opinions by both men and women? Are women judging themselves more because they are being subjected to judgement from society? Or do women feel coerced to be "modest" about their choice of clothing? Is society taking away women's agency not only by making judgements about their choices in attire and work, but also by making them turn against their own?

The data presented may seem contradictory and confusing at first glance, but it goes to show that the opinions about women's choices in their employment and agency are layered and nuanced. On the surface, it seems that society is moving in the "right direction," as most support women working. Yet, a deeper analysis shows that there are preconditions attached to women's work, and when it comes to making a choice, most still

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believe that men should be prioritised for work. What stands out particularly is that over half the women surveyed thought men should be given priority over themselves.

This makes one wonder: do men and women in Bangladesh want to maintain the status quo of gender roles in society, or are they simply bound by the patriarchal norms? Are women's sentiments towards work persist due to a lack of confidence, or is it because the conditions of working outside their homes are not conducive to women at large? Is it our education system that has failed women, or the labour market? Or is it simply patriarchy that holds expectations of women to continue their domestic responsibilities without challenging power relations in the household?

Are we supposed to celebrate the fact that a majority were in support of women earning their own and having equal property rights; or should we be concerned about the controlling views on women's clothing and the conditions within which they can work? You can choose to be on either side of the sentiment, or even both. The notion of women's empowerment is a complex one, and while there is no clear right or wrong stance, one thing is for certain: there is still a lot more left to be done before we can truly call our women empowered.

Easy, Tiger! Hold your horses



BLOWN' IN
THE WIND

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SHAMSAAD MORTUZA

The youngest member of Team Tigers, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, has been on an emotional roller coaster ever since his impressive performance in the Asia Cup Super Four match on September 15. The debutant pacer dismissed Indian Captain Rohit Sharma in his fourth international delivery and then scalped the wicket of the other opener, Tilak Varma. Young Tanzim gave the mighty Indian team a wake-up call when they appeared overconfident due to the fact that Bangladesh had only beaten them once in their 14 Asia Cup meetings, and that was in 2012 on home turf.

Tanzim's performance catapulted him to stardom's centre stage, where the spotlight shines rather harshly on those basking in its glow. Even before Tanzim could relish in his success, he came under public scrutiny for comments he made a year ago. His Facebook remarks exhibit blatant sexism veiled in religious dogmatism. In the past, as an ordinary citizen, his views might have stirred some murmurs among his social media friends, and they

storm he hadn't anticipated. To his rescue, the officials of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) issued a public statement, assuring everyone that the young pacer would refrain from making any such public comments in the future. However, the defence they forwarded, quoting Tanzim, did not assist the cause either. The young man reportedly said that his mother is a woman, so how could he not respect women.

The Tanzim episode provides us with an opportunity to examine the double-edged sword of fame, where privileges and responsibilities collide. The repercussions of Tanzim's misogynistic remarks extend well beyond the headlines. It reminds us of the complicated world of sudden stardom and the blurred lines between personal opinions and public responsibility. This is also true for jobseekers who do not realise that their digital footprints have the potential to hurt their future careers. I think that while Tanzim's past regressive remarks about women from a religious perspective are troubling, we should

productive dialogue about cultural sensitivity, religious tolerance, and the importance of education and awareness.

At the same time, while his talent should be celebrated and nurtured, his personal beliefs should be the subject of the same respectful discourse extended to other members of society. We also need to

We must keep in mind that Tanzim is the product of his upbringing and cultural context. His regressive remarks about women stem from the patriarchal system's deeply held beliefs. His case is not unique. Just last week, we heard a top administrator of a university making similar sexist comments. Condemning Tanzim without addressing the underlying causes of his viewpoints does little to promote understanding or change.



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PHOTO: AFP

would have been easily forgotten in the ever-changing digital cacophony. But as a rising sports icon, Tanzim discovers that his words have far-reaching consequences.

Both social media and international media are aflame with anger. Women's advocacy organisations and offended supporters are slamming Tanzim for his sexist remarks. A section of the syndicated press, many of them from India, cites a self-exiled Bangladeshi women's rights activist who reminded the youngest tiger that the jersey he wore to gain fame was sewn by women. So it is evident that Tanzim's argument that women lose their charm, chastity, integrity, and social role when exposed to the outside world lacks merit. He found himself at the epicentre of a

focus on nurturing his sports talent while addressing issues of cultural sensitivity, without unjustly singling him out for problems related to patriarchy and religious dogmatism.

It is essential to acknowledge that individuals grow and evolve over time. We must keep in mind that Tanzim is the product of his upbringing and cultural context. His regressive remarks about women stem from the patriarchal system's deeply held beliefs. His case is not unique. Just last week, we heard a top administrator of a university making similar sexist comments. Condemning Tanzim without addressing the underlying causes of his viewpoints does little to promote understanding or change. Instead, Tanzim's late realisation and public admission can be used to initiate a

remember that his past remarks about women from a religious perspective are a reflection of a pervasive cultural insensitivity and religious dogmatism in our society. Instead of singling out and vilifying a young cricketer, we should seize this opportunity for constructive dialogue and development. This may require an overhauling of our education system, including our attitudes towards morality and ethics. Right now, we should foster Tanzim's ability as a sportsman while addressing the underlying issues with empathy, education, and sensitivity. In doing so, we can aspire to create a more inclusive and tolerant world, one in which rising sports stars can flourish while maturing into responsible and culturally aware individuals.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

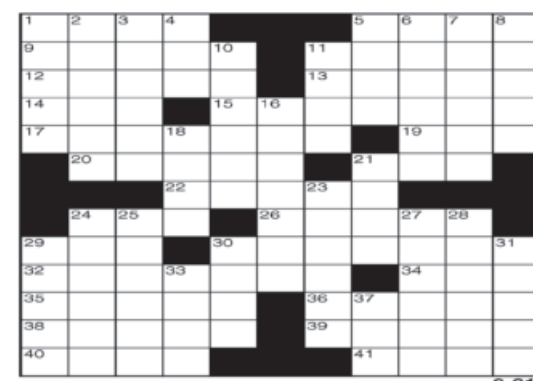
- 1 Tater
- 5 Baseball's Ty
- 9 Singer Tucker
- 11 Fable ending
- 12 Big name in auto racing
- 13 Tennis star
- 14 Naomi
- 14 Convened
- 15 Coagulated
- 17 Was a schemer
- 19 Vein yield
- 20 Parslay unit
- 21 Use a crowbar
- 22 Lab liquids
- 24 Music category
- 26 Domineering
- 29 Ump's call
- 30 On the schedule

- 32 Soaked up, in a way
- 34 Surgeon eggs
- 35 Honolulu hello
- 36 Kitchen come-on
- 38 Back biter
- 39 Long sofa
- 40 Over again
- 41 Corrals

DOWN

- 1 Lumberjack's leftover
- 2 Comic strip makeup
- 3 Clear, as a drain
- 4 Color
- 5 Tag info

- 6 Speech maker
- 7 Pie producer
- 8 Ice skate part
- 10 Very cold
- 11 State of mind
- 16 Like good handwriting
- 18 Snare
- 21 "You there!"
- 23 Thingamabob
- 24 Like some sweaters
- 25 Peter of "Troy"
- 27 Tried hard
- 28 Navy clerk
- 29 Bush's successor
- 30 Rating unit
- 31 College heads
- 33 Turn to slush
- 37 Tear



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



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