



ILLUSTRATION: BIPOB CHAKROBORTY

COX’S BAZAR ATTACKS

A sickness far from being cured



NO STRINGS ATTACHED

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One of the most remarkable features of the student-led mass uprising was how easily women protesters could blend in with the crowd, reportedly without facing harassment from fellow protesters. Side by side with their male counterparts, we saw women and girls in all kinds of attire walking towards Shahbag and other areas to celebrate a people’s victory. Throughout the movement, female students took an active role in chanting slogans and supporting their brothers.

Which is why the attacks on women in Dhaka and Cox’s Bazar only a few weeks later and the way the attackers have shared their “crusade against immorality” on social media are all the more jarring. It also indicates a newfound boldness in moral policing, giving some credence to the idea that the end of the previous regime has further emboldened ultra-right groups. But it would also be disingenuous to suggest that such self-appointed defenders of propriety were not there before August 5.

For cons, women’s conduct, what they should or should not wear, and which spaces they may or may not occupy have been the preoccupation of many self-righteous groups who justify violence against women as a way to “cleanse” society. By giving their opinions a religious tag, these groups or individuals have managed to get away with vicious assaults on women, both physical and verbal. The recent attacks remind us of the 2022 incident where both men and women assaulted a young woman at a railway station in Narsingdi for wearing “indecent clothes.” The victim barely saved herself from the mob after managing to escape to the station master’s room to take shelter.

In the recent incidents in

Cox’s Bazar, a young man named Mohammad Farukul Islam decided to take it upon himself to chastise women for being out alone on the beach or for wearing clothes he did not approve of. In one of the videos that went viral, Farukul, who falsely claimed to be a student coordinator, is seen holding a stick while his chums verbally abuse a woman and force her to do sit-ups while holding her ears. In another video, the same group approaches another woman sitting by herself on the beach and asks her what she was doing there so late at night, and then chases her away, after she said she was a tourist.

There are also clips of the same man repeatedly hitting a woman with a stick, and chasing women after dragging them down from a rickshaw. Another clip shows a terrified woman at a police box with Farukul where she is crying and telling the police that the attacker had taken her mobile phone. What is most frightening is the enthusiasm of the onlookers who are seen egging on the perpetrator. It was only after Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan was informed of the incident by a female journalist, and after one of the victims found the courage to file a case against Farukul and six other men, that police arrested him. Before these incidents came to light, another man with the same intention of “cleaning the streets” of Dhaka posted a video of him chasing a sex worker and beating her with a pipe.

Disturbingly, both this man and Farukul were proud of their heinous actions. They announced what they were about to do on Facebook and later uploaded and shared videos of their deeds on social media themselves. In an opinion piece in Prothom Alo,

Qurratul-Ain-Tahmina describes how brutally some sex workers have been beaten in various areas of Dhaka by men armed with sticks. They also robbed them and threatened them so they wouldn’t report these incidents. the pictures she took of the victims show the severity of their injuries. One of the victims was eight months pregnant.

This raises the question: who gave these men the right to humiliate and assault these women? Why were they so confident that in some cases they publicised their acts, thinking them to be “good deeds?” Clearly, these men committed heinous crimes. But in a society in which misogyny in the name of religious piety has become entrenched, how likely is it that they will be punished?

Members of the “moral police”—both men and, unfortunately, women—feel entitled to humiliate and even physically assault women who they think are not conforming to their idea of how a “good girl” should carry herself. Social media is the most popular place for this hatred for women to be displayed. The vulgar and abusive remarks in the comments section of posts or videos in which women are featured or talked about give an idea about the perverted obsession with females and their bodies among certain groups of people.

This year alone, around 250 women were raped between January and June, according to Ain O Salish Kendra. Fourteen victims were killed, and three died by suicide after rape.

On August 5, there were among the revellers thousands of women and girls who thought the country was finally free from all kinds of repression. Perhaps they forgot for a few moments that freedom is selectively distributed, and seldom are women part of the deal. We still live in a society that is far from being free from the regressive notions of the past. A 70-year-old woman being gang-raped near Dhaka University, a 19-year-old being raped on a moving bus in Chattogram, and women being beaten and humiliated on the city streets and the sea beach—these incidents just weeks after August 5 don’t give us any reason to believe otherwise.

Ensuring decent and dignified work in Bangladesh



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On August 5, 2024, after ruling Bangladesh with an iron fist for over 15 years, Sheikh Hasina fled the country following month-long protests that turned deadly due to the brutal tactics employed by her government. The protests initially opposed the reservation of quotas in government jobs. However, the grievances of the young protesters, their disapproval of such quotas, and their aspirations for government employment stem from deeper issues—namely, the desire for decent jobs in a struggling economy.

In Bangladesh, government jobs symbolise dignity—which many of the nation’s youth crave. The central issue underlying

In 2015, Bangladesh signed onto the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with Goal 8 emphasising sustained, inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. However, even after a decade, Bangladesh has failed to meet these targets. And the absence of decent jobs has severely impacted the lives of young people and their families, whose earnings have not kept pace with the rising cost of living.

Bangladesh’s job crisis can be attributed to a lack of foreign direct investment (FDI) and the stagnant industrial and manufacturing sectors. For years, the business environment in Bangladesh has been

populations.

High-paying, formal private sector jobs sought by young people often require strong communication skills (in both native and English languages), computing, data management, and teamwork—skills that are largely absent from Bangladesh’s education curriculum.

Consequently, underprivileged youth, who lack access to alternative avenues for acquiring these skills, are left at a disadvantage. The prevalence of favouritism and nepotism in the job market, coupled with a mismatch between academia and industry, further compounds the challenges faced by youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Each year, many Bangladeshis migrate to Gulf countries as labourers, but most of them are unskilled or low-skilled workers. The treatment of these workers is often inhumane, with passports confiscated upon arrival and long, abusive work hours becoming a daily reality. Female domestic workers are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. Successive



The young protesters’ disapproval of government job quotas stems from the desire for decent jobs in a struggling economy.

FILE PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

their frustrations is massive unemployment. While the national unemployment rate is around three percent, youth unemployment is significantly higher, at about eight percent, reflecting a troubling trend of jobless growth.

Between 2013 and 2016-17,

inhospitable to new enterprises, due to burdensome administrative red tape and widespread extortion of business owners. As a result, new investments have not flowed into productive sectors of the economy. While there is much talk about encouraging self-employment and

governments in Bangladesh have turned a blind eye to these abuses, prioritising remittances over the well-being of our workers. While foreign exchange earnings are important, ensuring the safety and dignity of migrant workers must be the topmost priority.

Bangladesh should enhance its migrant workforce by sending more skilled labourers abroad, thereby increasing their earning potential. To this end, it is crucial to re-evaluate the role of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes. Unfortunately, social stigma still surrounds these institutions, which are seen as inferior to traditional education, despite the opportunities they offer. It is also essential to modernise TVET curricula and strengthen ties with industries. The emphasis should be on the quality of jobs rather than their quantity. Moreover, given how dependent Gulf countries are on our relatively cheap labour, Bangladeshi authorities should pressure these governments to ensure their agencies adhere to international labour standards.

The labour market in Bangladesh is exploitative. Youth are often forced to work for extremely low wages, with no adjustment for inflation, leaving them vulnerable to price shocks. Meanwhile, high-paying jobs frequently demand sacrifices in work-life balance, underscoring the inadequacy of labour laws.

As Bangladesh continues its journey towards economic restructuring, it is imperative to create jobs that provide dignity and security for its people. Engaging all relevant stakeholders in dialogue can help pave the way for incorporating safety nets and social protections into job creation strategies. Social cohesion and peace can only be achieved if no segment of society feels marginalised or ignored in the country’s development process. As such, providing decent jobs is one of the keys to addressing the long-ignored concerns of the youth.

**In Bangladesh, government jobs symbolise dignity—which many of the nation’s youth crave. The central issue underlying their frustrations is massive unemployment. While the national unemployment rate is around three percent, youth unemployment is significantly higher, at about eight percent, reflecting a troubling trend of jobless growth.**

Bangladesh’s GDP grew at an average annual rate of 6.6 percent, yet employment grew by only 0.9 percent annually—less than one-eighth of the economic growth rate during that period. This suggests that the benefits of growth have been concentrated among a small elite, leaving the general population increasingly frustrated and angry, as evidenced by the protests.

Bangladesh is at a demographic crossroads, with youth (aged 15-29) comprising 36.7 percent of the total labour force (LFS 2022). Yet the country is missing out on the opportunity to capitalise on this “demographic dividend,” as 40.67 percent of youth are not in employment, education, or training (NEET). Alarmingly, 14.7 percent of the long-term unemployed (those jobless for over two years) have tertiary education. This has only deepened the frustrations of young people, whose investments in education have not yielded much tangible benefits. If the growing segment of the population neglected both by the education and job sectors is not addressed, the societal consequences—such as rising crime and unrest—could become much worse.

entrepreneurship among young people, significant structural barriers remain. These include limited access to credit, inadequate market access, and insufficient infrastructure. These political and economic challenges underpin the lack of investment in job-creating industries.

Other than the ready-made garment (RMG) sector, Bangladesh has failed to foster the growth of new industries, thereby limiting opportunities for economic expansion. The RMG industry has been a reliable source of employment, particularly for women, but it is rife with worker exploitation. Long hours and a lack of breaks take a heavy toll on workers’ health, and many women leave the industry as they age. Instances of sexual and verbal abuse in the workplace are also common. And the threat of automation poses additional risks, particularly for female workers. One potential solution is to develop the care industry, providing specialised training and capacity-building for women. This could create sustainable, decent employment opportunities abroad, especially in developed countries with ageing

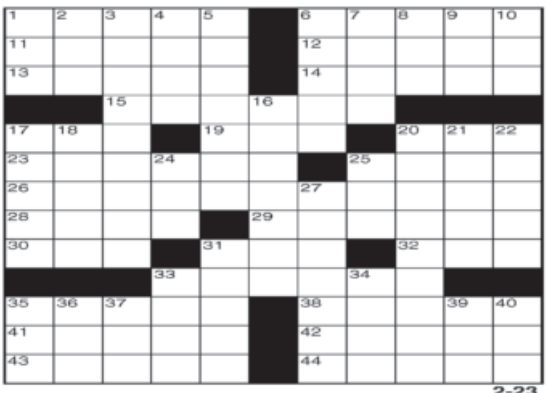
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Impressed greatly
- 6 Foxx of “Ray”
- 11 Cartoon genre
- 12 Undermine
- 13 Jeans material
- 14 Bar seat
- 15 Formal
- 17 Big D player
- 19 Pub pint
- 20 Kids’ card game
- 23 Galahad’s mother
- 25 Prudent
- 26 They help to develop breathing capacity
- 28 Preceding nights
- 29 Frozen expanse
- 30 — Moines
- 31 Martini base
- 32 Claire of “The Crown”
- 33 Second-largest nation
- 35 Yellow gem
- 38 Character found in kids’ books
- 41 Not dozing
- 42 Patriot Ethan
- 43 Single
- 44 Question type

DOWN

- 1 Gum mass
- 2 Low digit
- 3 Rooftop turners
- 4 Mideast ruler
- 5 Lowers
- 6 Track great Owens
- 7 Pretentious
- 8 Cattle call
- 9 Wedding words
- 10 Twisty fish
- 16 Didn’t get up early
- 17 Imitated a kitten
- 18 Full of energy
- 20 Sources of sudden wealth
- 21 The Jetsons’ dog
- 22 Utter over
- 24 Passport, license, etc.
- 25 Victory
- 27 Out of control
- 31 Peered
- 33 Soap unit
- 34 Secluded spot
- 35 Letter after sigma
- 36 Possess
- 37 Pussy foot
- 39 Bear abode
- 40 Lennon’s love



YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS



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