

Let our girls play

BEYOND THE DUGOUT

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RAIYAN BINTE RAFIQ

Earlier this week, a women's football match in Joypurhat was disgracefully disrupted by locals who masked their prejudice behind religious justifications. A football match, not a political protest, not a challenge to faith, but simply a game where young girls chase after a ball, just like boys have done for decades without a question. And yet, these girls had to face intimidation and threats for daring to play. It is infuriating that, even in 2025, we still have to defend a woman's right to play football. By now, this should not even be a conversation anymore.

I am often asked about women's football in Bangladesh, and what it was like growing up in a society where women's sports do not share the same space or coverage as men's. Recalling my childhood, the struggle was not

random incident—it is a reflection of a deep-rooted mindset that some still refuse to change. There are stories that make you feel as if there is no way forward; this is one such moment.

Over the past few years, we have seen remarkable growth in women's sports in general. Be it basketball, tennis, cricket or football—women's sports are among the fastest-growing industries in the world. With record-breaking crowds, groundbreaking sponsorships, and investments, the sector is becoming increasingly popular. Bangladesh has not lagged behind in this progress. Our cricket team has performed impressively on the international stage, while our women's football team has exceeded expectations—something their male counterparts have



Women football players in Bangladesh have delivered beyond what's been asked of them, on several occasions; so have the women cricketers.

FILE PHOTO: BSS

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so much the acceptance, but rather the lack of facilities or opportunities, coupled with a lack of athletes to look up to. Now, we finally have some facilities, role models, and momentum; yet, there are still those desperate to drag us backwards.

Having to write this opinion piece because of what happened in Joypurhat, or Dinajpur earlier, is heartbreaking. This is not just a

struggled to achieve. So, what fuels such hatred that it clouds your judgement to see that, despite all our obstacles, our female athletes are our best route to international success? Watching our female teams excel in their respective fields should not be a question of religion. Religion should never be a barrier to equality—just ask the Moroccan football team or look at

the growth of women's football in Saudi Arabia. Just two years back, Nouhaila Benzina became the first ever player to wear a hijab in a World Cup match, and she was celebrated for it. The two can coexist and will continue to coexist as the game grows bigger. They must—Islam is one of the world's largest religions, while football is its most popular sport. If they could not, we would not have Muslim women playing and excelling in sports today.

What happened in Joypurhat is dangerous, not just for sports but for our future. Preventing women from playing football is a perilous route for many reasons, including a negative impact on health and mental well-being. Factually, sports have no negative impact on society; in fact, the positives they bring overwhelm all other factors. Skills such as leadership, teamwork, mental strength, and handling pressure are positively impacted when children play sports. Sports does not cloud your mind or your judgement; it does not tell you to erase

or compromise your faith, neither does it force you into any other beliefs. The only thing it does is give people, especially young girls, a fighting chance.

Some argue that women's sports contradict modesty. However, sportswear has evolved to accommodate different cultural and religious needs. If modest sportswear exists, and women are comfortable competing while adhering to their beliefs, then any opposition stems from bias, not faith.

But here's the real question: how do we fight back against this mindset? Education is the first step. Schools must actively promote gender equality in sports and normalise the idea that anyone can play. A little girl should not grow up thinking she needs permission to kick a ball. We must highlight historical and contemporary female athletic figures to show that faith and sports are not at odds. Addressing gender stereotypes from a young age goes a long way. If boys grow up seeing their sisters, classmates, and female friends

playing sports, they will never question it in the first place. Secondly, change starts at home. Teach your son that if his little sister wants to kick a ball, she has as much right as he does. Not less, not secondary, but equal.

I will not get into the political nuances of which party has carried out such barbarous acts; I will leave that to readers' judgement. However, I will ask a simple question: if a world war can come to a halt for a game of football, surely, our differences and our beliefs, too, can take a back seat on the field. Religion and football are two of the most unifying forces in the world. If both can coexist in stadiums from Indonesia to Morocco, why should Bangladesh be an exception?

This is not about disregarding faith or traditions. It is about ensuring that women, just like men, have the right to chase their dreams, stay active, and represent their country with pride. Let our girls play—not as a challenge to culture or religion, but because sports belong to everyone.

Effective law and planning can control noise pollution

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Dhaka, the sprawling capital of Bangladesh, is gripped by an escalating crisis of noise pollution, primarily fuelled by unregulated vehicular horns and unrelenting traffic chaos. This incessant barrage of sound has profound physiological and psychological consequences, inflicting damage that extends far beyond momentary discomfort. Noise levels in Dhaka often range between 80 and 100 decibels (dB), far exceeding the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommended safe threshold of 55 dB for residential zones.

The city's chaotic traffic—a dense mix of different kinds of vehicles—is a primary contributor to this noise crisis. Smaller vehicles, particularly rickshaws and auto-rickshaws, often use outdated mechanical horns. In addition, unregulated loudspeaker use in social gatherings, religious events, and public announcements exacerbates the situation, with noise levels frequently exceeding 120 dB in Dhaka.

While addressing vehicular noise has been a focus, it is equally vital to regulate loudspeaker usage in communal and religious settings. Religious establishments and community programmes often use high-volume speakers to reach a wider audience. Although these practices are culturally significant, it is essential to regulate sound levels lawfully to prevent public health crises.

On the physiological front, chronic exposure to such high noise levels results in a host of health issues, including Noise-Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL), hypertension, tachycardia, cardiovascular disorders, increased risks of stroke and stress-related conditions.

Prolonged exposure to high-decibel noise also impairs cognitive function, reduces work efficiency, and leads to sleep disturbances, chronic fatigue, and heightened anxiety. For children, developmental delays, including cognitive and language impairments, are common consequences. Pregnant women face increased risks of foetal stress, leading to potential complications like low birth weight and developmental delays. Other stress-related conditions like epilepsy, vasovagal attacks, speech interference, headaches, memory issues, and nervous breakdowns are exacerbated by prolonged

exposure to noise pollution. Extremely loud and constant noise can also lead to gastritis, colitis, and even heart attacks.

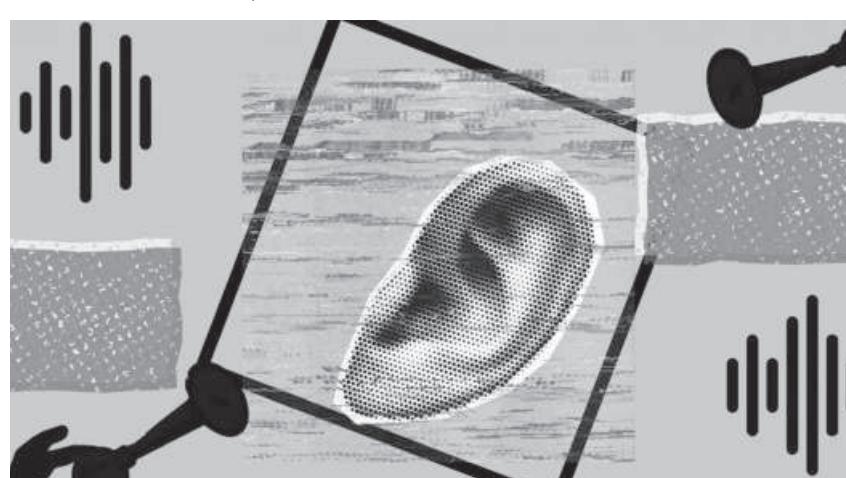
The socioeconomic impacts are equally alarming. Sleep deprivation from nocturnal noise reduces productivity, increases absenteeism, and elevates healthcare costs. Chronic medical conditions linked to noise pollution strain the healthcare system, while the diminished quality of life can

public events and impose penalties for violations. However, enforcement remains a challenge due to the lack of awareness and insufficient monitoring resources.

Stringent regulations must be enforced for vehicular noise control. Licensing protocols should include mandatory decibel-limit testing for horns across all vehicle types. For smaller vehicles like rickshaws and auto-rickshaws, the law should mandate the replacement of horns with manual ringing mechanisms to reduce overall noise pollution.

Larger motorised vehicles must adhere to a 65 dB horn limit in urban areas,

with penalties including fines, licence suspension or vehicle confiscation for repeat violations. Newly manufactured vehicles must integrate advanced noise-



FILE VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

Noise levels in Dhaka often range between 80 and 100 dB, far exceeding the World Health Organization's recommended safe threshold.

deter tourism and foreign investment, further complicating Dhaka's economic challenges. Recent studies indicate that Dhaka's economic loss in terms of GDP from noise pollution amounts to billions annually.

Bangladesh's legal framework for noise pollution is outlined in the Environment Conservation Rules, 1997, which categorises noise zones into residential, commercial, industrial, and silent zones with prescribed decibel limits. For example, the maximum allowable noise level for residential areas is 55 dB during the day and 45 dB at night.

The Sound Pollution Control Rules, 2006, which specifically addresses noise pollution, provides detailed guidelines for permissible sound levels in different zones and emphasises control measures for vehicular horns and public address systems. These rules mandate obtaining prior permission to use loudspeakers in

reduction technologies, and retrofitting older models should be mandatory within a defined timeline.

Loudspeaker usage should be similarly regulated. Public address systems must include decibel limiters, capping sound levels at 75 dB in residential areas and 85 dB in commercial zones. Special attention should be paid to noise-sensitive areas such as schools, hospitals, and residential neighbourhoods, with stricter sound limits and monitoring enforced.

Technological advancements can also play a pivotal role. Smart noise sensors, strategically installed in high-traffic areas, can monitor sound levels, enabling authorities to identify hotspots and penalise violators. AI-driven traffic management systems can optimise vehicle flow, reducing congestion and unnecessary honking. Additionally, noise-dampening technologies, such as soundproofing measures at large public

venues and community centres, should be encouraged. Mobile apps enabling residents to report noise violations, coupled with AI-powered monitoring systems, can transform noise regulation in Dhaka.

Public awareness is another cornerstone of effective noise control. Campaigns to raise awareness about the health hazards of noise pollution should target schools, universities and workplaces. Media must highlight the physiological and psychological toll of unchecked noise pollution, fostering a collective sense of responsibility. Community initiatives should encourage behavioural changes, such as minimising honking and adopting quieter practices in both residential and commercial zones.

Collaboration among key stakeholders is essential for sustained progress. The Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), the Department of Environment, law enforcement agencies, and public health experts must work together to implement comprehensive solutions. Pilot projects in high-noise areas can serve as testing grounds for new initiatives before broader adoption. All vehicles, regardless of size, should undergo regular noise compliance inspections during licensing and roadworthiness evaluations. Swift penalties for violations and consistent enforcement of these regulations will be key to ensuring compliance.

Addressing noise pollution in Dhaka is not merely an environmental concern, it is a public health imperative. By implementing stronger regulations, leveraging technology, and fostering awareness, the city can significantly reduce the impact of relentless noise. This transformation will enhance the quality of life for millions, reduce the socioeconomic burden, and create a healthier, more productive urban environment.

CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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