

We cannot let violence silence our daughters



BLOWIN' IN THE WIND
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Earlier this year, we got united for a fleeting moment for an extraordinary reason: the tragic rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl shattered our complacency and forced us out onto the streets. Our collective anger found sympathetic ears in the government and its allies, who joined our rallies and assured us that justice would be delivered promptly, going beyond hollow promises.

The girl was laid to rest. The authorities made several arrests. The apolitical nature of the crime allowed people to come together. In retrospect, we can now view the impressive promise of swift trials as a crisis management strategy. If we had exposed, analysed, and addressed some of the hidden issues of patriarchy, the child's family would have received justice.

In the past, numerous rape incidents connected to power dynamics occurred. One might have expected that after the revolutionary change last year, there would be some relief. Instead, we were alarmed by the sudden rise of moral policing that started viewing women in public as an anathema. Alongside news of public beatings and humiliation of women, a series of leaked videos, audio clips, and testimonies of gender-based violence have emerged. The façade of patriarchy has begun to crumble as more incidents of sexual violence are reported. Some of the instances came from within certain party circles, bringing déjà vu into currency. Men with connections, standing, and power are caught on record harassing women, boasting of sexual conquests through leaked videos, and manipulating the legal system. Every time another news story of rape or harassment comes to the surface, we are compelled to contemplate the innumerable others whose agony remains unseen. Some

of them suffered in silence or compromised. Take the instance of a celebrity marrying the woman who had accused him of raping her—at the jail gate—last month.

The problem of sexual abuse is not new. And it is not unique to Bangladesh either. But somehow, its spiral into normalisation has taken on dangerous new forms. A man who allegedly owed the victim's brother some money assaulted and even allegedly raped a woman while visiting their paternal home in Muradnagar, Cumilla. A recorded clip of it was later released on social media. Instead of condemning rape as a crime, there were attempts to politicise it. The political affiliation, the girl's estranged status, and minority identity dominated the discourse more than anything else. By the time the High Court ordered the video to be removed, the damage was done.

We have developed a knack for justifying or normalising sexual violence. We know how to explain such violence by referring to a girl's clothing (even if a girl in a burqa or an eight-year-old child can fall prey to male lust); or her desire to join friends for a social outing or an excursion; or her audacity to speak her mind or mix freely with boys; or her family's alleged political alignment; or her fate of being born into the wrong sect in a largely homogenous society. Every day, women face trials both in private and in public. The sociocultural court sweeps aside their defence, and the verdict is essentially predetermined.

These justifications reflect entrenched cultural norms that predate any government and require long-term social re-education. We have heard endless talk shows and read equally endless op-eds, so we know that legal reforms alone can't uproot moral justifications. It doesn't help to know that rape is more than a

lustful act. In our patriarchal culture, rape is a tool of retribution or symbolic domination. Our Biranganas, the rape victims of 1971, are living testimony of such a culture.

Last week, fate offered a rare blow to our patriarchal ego. An HSC examinee in Barishal narrowly escaped an attempted rape when an unexpected group intervened during the assault. Members of the local hijra community acted with courage and moral clarity, which

international matches, but we try to control them the moment they are back in their localities.

What is perhaps more insidious than the acts themselves is the language that now surrounds them. The lexicon of liberation has deliberately opted for expletives. Once censored or spoken in private, the Bangla forms of sexual slurs have now become an indiscriminate part of daily lingo. They

of replacing and articulating one kind of tyranny with another. The oppression of noise obscures the voices of genuine victims. And those cries are everywhere.

Revolution is fiery, but it does not have to be rage only. Revolution must embrace empathy. The courage that we have seen in our youth transcended the need for cameras to gain widespread recognition. As a society seeking civility and democratic norms, we



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

many of us lack. They saved the girl who was crying for help, rescued her father whom the perpetrators had attacked in his own house, nabbed the main assailant, and handed him over to the police.

Deep down, we know we are failing to protect our own female citizens. We grudgingly approve of our "Indigenous" or "rural" girls playing and winning for us in

supposedly symbolise raw anger and youthful rebellion, or the rejection of hypocrisy. But let us not forget: words matter, and they have their consequences.

When the language of revolution echoes the act of assault, we need to be wary. What exactly are we revolting against when we characterise every ideological adversary in terms of sexual violence? We are in danger

must try to respond to every scream with equal attention. The tendency to use race, religion, or party affiliation as a controlling mechanism impacting the rights of women can never be healthy for any society.

This is not the freedom that our rebels of both 1971 and 2024 envisioned. Freedom now must not let our daughters be silenced, violated, or die.

Bangladesh's secret elixir



BEYOND THE DUGOUT
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nation's fabric. Ritu Porna Chakma, whose efforts propelled Bangladesh to qualification, embodies this resilience and promise.

Ritu has now become an indispensable pillar of the starting line-up and the very foundation of the team's recent successes. Her decisive goal in the 2024 SAFF Women's Championship secured

for granted nor lets them sway her rhythm.

There is an ineffable quality in witnessing her on the field, stirring a quiet hope that one day she will grace bigger leagues and grander stages. It is a destiny her talent demands, a vision shared wholeheartedly by the national team coach, Peter Butler. Butler himself faced immense

Ritu has now become an indispensable pillar of the starting line-up and the very foundation of the team's recent successes. Her decisive goal in the 2024 SAFF Women's Championship secured the title for the second time—a feat that, for those who have followed her journey, comes as no surprise. Watching her play is a distinct kind of joy: so confident, so composed, with a radiant smile that never fades.

There has never been any doubt that the youth of Bangladesh are built differently. They have bled for liberation, risen to crush authoritarianism, and stood firm as the voice of the nation. Their fire has always been the country's backbone. And that same fire burns on the sporting field. We have seen young men thrive under pressure on global stages; now, it's the women. In qualifying for their first ever AFC Women's Asian Cup, Bangladesh found its gold not in experience, but in the youth.

The team that embarked on this qualification journey carries an astonishing average age of just 21.4 years. With most players barely beyond their twenty-first year, their youth is both striking and inspiring. In 2022, India held the record for the youngest squad, averaging 23.13 years. Bangladesh is now poised to eclipse this milestone should the same youthful ensemble journey to Australia in 2026.

Though they are the lowest ranked team ever to qualify for the AFC Asian Cup, this should not be seen as a deterrent. Rather, it stands as a powerful motivation, a testament to the spirit and potential of the team that refuses to be defined by rankings, choosing instead to rise above expectations through courage and resolve.

There is beauty deeply woven into their story. At a time when the nation grapples with questions of



This Bangladesh team stands as a vital testament to the power of equality, integration, and harmony—foundations essential for any country's flourishing.

FILE PHOTO: AFC

identity, sectarian divides, and social fragmentation, this team stands as a vital testament to the power of equality, integration, and harmony—foundations essential for any country's flourishing. Many among these players hail from communities that are often marginalised and face disproportionately steep challenges to thrive within the

the title for the second time—a feat that, for those who have followed her journey, comes as no surprise. Watching her play is a distinct kind of joy: so confident, so composed, with a radiant smile that never fades. She is a player who savours the grandest occasions and flourishes under pressure, a rare presence who neither takes these moments

pressure to prove why the football federation's unwavering support was justified, especially as several key members of the national team recently voiced their dissent against his strict policies and rigorous training regime. The situation grew tense, amplified by media scrutiny and public debate, leading to those players being excluded from further

participation. This opening paved the way for younger talents, eager to seize their moment and demonstrate their abilities. The outcome was rewarding: with a swift, dynamic style and attacking flair, a new identity began to shape within the team.

This shift also signals a new dawn within the Bangladesh Football Federation itself. With fresh leadership taking the helm, it appears that Bangladesh football is finally receiving the attention it has long deserved. A thorough overhaul of the top executive ranks has placed those with ambition and vision firmly in charge. Among them is Fahad Karim, one of the rare figures who has actively championed improvements for the women's team.

A few years ago, Karim embarked on an ambitious venture to launch the Women's Super League (WSL) in Bangladesh. The WSL held immense promise, featuring dedicated branding for women's football, the inclusion of foreign players, and recruitment of international talents to elevate its profile. Yet, Karim soon encountered a hesitancy and a lack of committed belief from investors—individuals unable to grasp the visionary blueprint he laid out.

Now, with qualification achieved and a new milestone reached, I find myself pondering whether this will shift the future perception of our female athletes. Their passion,

commitment and calibre are unmistakable, yet the absence of a well-organised domestic league remains a glaring gap. For sustained growth and the cultivation of consistent, replicable excellence, the establishment of a full-time league is imperative, one that will unlock even greater opportunities and nurture continuous development.

This qualification stands as a monumental achievement for a nation still striving to carve its place on the global stage. By March 2026, these players will embark on a journey to Australia, stepping onto pitches that hosted the World Cup merely two years prior. They will walk the same corridors that have been graced by icons like Alexia Putellas, Aitana Bonmati, and Sam Kerr. There lies the possibility of facing World Cup semi-finalists Australia, a team boasting multiple Champions League winners.

Predicting the outcome might seem straightforward on paper, yet victory is not the ultimate aim. The true objective is growth: forging the next steps, cultivating a mindset that affirms we belong among the sport's grandest arenas.

For a long time, I have wondered if I would ever witness Bangladesh step onto the global arena. Now, that moment feels closer than ever, ushered in by young athletes, barely out of adolescence, yet bearing a remarkable sense of responsibility and pride in their emblem.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

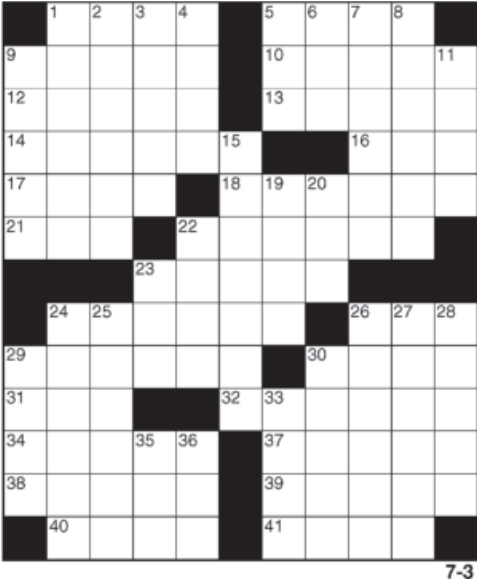
ACROSS

- 1 Envelope part
- 5 Throws in
- 9 Hawaiian greeting
- 10 Palette stuff
- 12 Farmer, at times
- 13 Game show host
- 14 Fine-tunes
- 16 Fleming who created 007
- 17 Tear asunder
- 18 Polite word
- 21 Peculiar
- 22 Misdeeds
- 23 Playing area
- 24 Work week's finish
- 26 Sheep sound
- 29 "Jeopardy!"

DOWN

- 30 Bears' lairs
- 31 Evergreen shrub
- 32 Makes orations
- 34 Trims
- 37 Trig topic
- 38 Approves
- 39 Small body of land
- 40 Gush forth
- 41 Sediment
- 1 Moved smoothly
- 2 Cheap
- 3 In the lead
- 4 Urban oasis
- 5 Gorilla, for one
- 6 Beavers' creation

- 7 Chopping into cubes
- 8 Moves furtively
- 9 Houston player
- 11 Some bills
- 15 Runs in the nude
- 19 Sacred
- 20 What's more
- 22 Broad
- 23 Little lie
- 24 Has a cow
- 25 Fix, as a bandage
- 26 Darwin's ship
- 27 Foot joints
- 28 Useful skill
- 29 Keyboard goof
- 30 Thick
- 33 Bucket
- 35 Retina setting
- 36 Compass pt.



7-3

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

DECK	THEFT
ARIAS	AUDIO
TONYA	CHILD
ETE	IRK
SIMILE	TORY
CANISTERS	
ANTON	
GANGSTERS	
SORE	OTTAWA
PAC	ONE
AWARD	RAINS
TONED	SINGE
SLEDS	MESS

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