

I can manage myself just fine, thanks

The only thing getting 'hacked' here is a woman's agency



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IQRA L QAMARI

I felt the first premonition on the night of "July 36." In a post-rebellion Dhaka, festive streets, no certainty of what lay beyond that night—but hope permeated the air that perhaps we could finally recalibrate and aim for a dignified future. My partner and I were on a celebratory rickshaw ride when another rickshaw puller beside us, still elated and reeling from the uprising, announced loudly, "Finally, the country has gotten rid of the two prostitutes. Now a man will come to power and show how things are run." Not willing to dampen my spirits, I ignored it. I was well-versed in such run-of-the-mill rhetoric in Bangladesh. A woman accused of wrongdoing has her body and character put on trial before her competence and motives are questioned. Before calling her corrupt or inept, you attack her character, you say something anatomical, something sexually profane. In a passing moment of naivete, I told myself all that was about to change.

But here we are, less than a week from an election, watching that same logic harden into political doctrine. Let's cut to the chase here. The ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami, in a recent interview with Al Jazeera, admitted that no woman can lead his party, justifying it with religion and her childbearing capacity. Talk about the ultimate political paradox: the capacity to create life makes one unfit to govern. Let's unpack the ridiculousness a little. Women can support the party and campaign for it, but leadership is to remain within a men-only lounge. Instead, Jamaat is poised to knight women as *Rotnogorva*, jewel-bearing citizens, for their ability to conceive and raise children. Motherhood is to be declared sacred and a national service, while simultaneously being used as evidence of political incompetence. A woman is celebrated for her biology only until she somehow threatens male authority.

Let's not forget that this is a country that has spent most of its political life under the authority of women prime ministers. Jamaat's sudden discovery that Islam forbids female



VISUAL: ALIZA RAHMAN

leadership sounds more than just an oversight on their part. Jamaat formed strategic alliances with Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government in 1996 and, again, formally joined the BNP-led coalition government under Khaleda Zia in 2001. In both cases, Jamaat functioned within a political system headed by a woman, without any divine wrath befalling the country. It seems that religious objections are being raised only now, when female leadership no longer needs to be accommodated or, rather, exploited.

In the context of the Muslim world, this argument sounds increasingly parochial. Indonesia, home to the world's largest Muslim

population, has previously elected a woman president and continues to place women in senior political and administrative roles. In Malaysia, even Islamist parties operating within a conservative framework have accommodated women's participation in parliament, cabinet, and public life, rather than declaring it divinely impermissible. And Pakistan—riven by religious politics and contradiction—has produced women

is safest inside her home—the place where not only labour remains disproportionate and unpaid, but also where, statistically, women are susceptible to extreme domestic violence. Isn't it even more ironic that women are having to be protected from the very species that have assigned themselves as protectors?

Jamaat's solution to women's insecurity is simply confinement. Over time, this produces something resembling "political Stockholm

pink. This is straight out of the patriarchal playbook, where one woman is lauded for her passive acceptance of suffering through her loyalty to male authority figures, while another who seeks to better her lot through self-assertion and the pursuit of ambitions is vilified as a nefarious agitator, or simply a prostitute.

In a now-deleted post on the X handle of the Jamaat ameer, all working women were compared to prostitutes, prompting widespread criticism and outrage before he claimed the social media account had been hacked. The controversy took a striking turn when the Detective Branch (DB) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police detained an assistant programmer from the ICT section of Banglabhaban in connection with the incident, saying they were investigating. However, without getting into much technicalities about how the account was retrieved so quickly or why they had to wait for the public backlash before announcing that the account had been compromised, the whole debacle was a stark reminder their official rhetoric remains pretty much the same. A woman who leaves home to work is hovering around moral bankruptcy. Except that the whole country's economy is propped up against the backs of women who bleed, give birth, and then return to factories that run on 14-hour shifts. What an arresting notion that their vulnerable bodies do not disqualify them from endless labour, just power!

I am always either a mother or a sister, but never an individual with equal opportunities and rights. My worth is derived from the sum of all my relational values or my capacity to procreate. This reminds me of last year's moral panic and mayhem when the Women's Affairs Reform Commission submitted its reform proposals. Demanding equal rights was equated to an "attack on Islam" and "family values" by the Islamist parties, followed by vitriolic attacks and threats of nationwide protests.

There is, in fact, a running joke among historians that masculinity is always in crisis; it looks like it is under threat once more, but this time with religious gravity. If going out to work to earn my bread, ensure my financial security, and practise my own agency challenges a male chauvinistic worldview, then so be it, I will get ready for work every morning and venture out. I will make sure to do my bit to be worthy of the great terror my autonomous existence inspires and wear these insults as a badge of honour.

prime ministers, parliamentarians, judges, and activists without imposing a blanket theological ban on women's authority. Islam, in these societies, has not collapsed under the presence of female leadership. Religion is not the factor here; the point of contention is the political will to loosen control over women's lives.

Instead, it was proposed to truncate eight hours of work to five (and promises were made to pay for the three hours they would lose), as if that was ever the problem, not the unpaid eternal shift waiting at home. The household does not close at noon, nor do children clock out. Let's not forget their claim that a woman

syndrome." A woman is taught to identify with the very doctrine that suppresses her. This is the logic now being echoed by the party's women members. When they say they have made peace with men being "managers" of women, they mean they are okay with men supervising, evaluating and disciplining women and their way of life. A manager is necessary only if the one being "managed" cannot be trusted with self-rule.

Jamaat-e-Islami has been trying to push its women empowerment policies, but so far, the well-marketed package has simply been a lazy copout. This handbook has men becoming managers, women becoming wards, and toilets

Can Jahanara's story be a turning point for women's sports?



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BADRUL HASSAN

On February 2, the High Court issued an order asking the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to explain how it handled sexual harassment allegations raised by former women's national team captain Jahanara Alam. The court directed the board to submit a report within four weeks. The ruling was issued following a writ petition filed in public interest by sport shooter Sabrina Sultana, who argued that repeated failures to address sexual harassment in sports reflect a deeper institutional problem.

The High Court's intervention is a reminder that safeguarding cannot remain a policy slogan. By asking the BCB to explain, the court has drawn a clear line: institutions need to be judged by the efficacy of their actions rather than the existence of their

protocols. This is a warning that failure to provide a safe, gender-sensitive environment for women athletes may itself be unlawful. By questioning why action was not taken earlier and directing the board to properly implement harassment prevention measures, the court has made it clear that ignoring complaints is not a neutral act. This matters because it shifts attention from personalities to systems. It asks a simple question: can women athletes in Bangladesh expect safety, fairness and dignity from the institutions that control their careers?

Jahanara Alam is not an ordinary cricketer. She is one of the most recognisable faces of women's cricket in Bangladesh and a former captain who represented the country for years. When someone of her standing says

she submitted written complaints against the chief selector of the women's national cricket team, Monjurul Islam, and others as early as in 2022 and received no meaningful response, it forces us to face an uncomfortable reality. If this can happen to a national icon, what protection does a younger, lesser-known player really have?

What makes the story even more painful is where Jahanara is today. Out of frustration and deep disillusionment with cricket in Bangladesh, she has stepped away from the game and is now living in Australia. This is not a professional break or a sporting opportunity. It feels like self-exile, driven by a loss of trust in a system she once served with pride.

When a national team captain says she complained and was not heard, parents lose confidence. Young girls watching from schools and local clubs begin to doubt whether talent and hard work are enough. Many decide that staying quiet is safer than risking their future. Over time, women's sports will weaken not because women lack ability, but because the environment feels unsafe and unpredictable.

At this point, we must ask what standards already exist and why they have not worked. Cricket does not run in isolation. Global

cricket expects member boards to maintain safe environments, enforce codes of conduct and clear behaviour rules, provide trusted reporting mechanisms and channels, and ensure protection for those who speak up. Safeguarding is meant to work before harm occurs, not only after a crisis becomes public.

There is also a broader global principle: Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). The logic is simple: when someone has power over another person's career or opportunities, that power must never be misused. Organisations also have a duty to make reporting safe and to respond quickly and fairly when concerns are raised. This applies whether the setting is humanitarian work, education or sport, because the risk is the same: people stay silent when they fear consequences.

The timing of the High Court's intervention is also significant. On January 29, 2026, the government gave final approval to the draft Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace and Educational Institutions Ordinance, 2026, alongside the Domestic Violence Prevention Ordinance, 2026, signalling that protection from harassment and abuse is now treated as a clear legal obligation, not a moral appeal.

The global safeguarding expectations,

PSEA principles, and Bangladesh's law all point in the same direction. Yet, Jahanara's experience suggests that, in practice, these protections were either weak, unclear, or not enough to work. That is why the High Court's recent intervention matters so much. They turn what could have remained a sports controversy into a test of governance and duty of care.

So, the way forward must focus on rebuilding trust, not just completing a process. BCB needs to clearly explain how players can report complaints safely and independently, without fear that doing so will harm their careers. It must demonstrate through action, not just words. And it must be honest about what changes it is making so that similar situations do not arise again.

Women's cricket in Bangladesh has come too far to be pushed back by fear and silence. Progress is fragile. It depends not only on coaching and performance, but on confidence that institutions will stand with those who speak the truth. Jahanara's story should not be remembered only as a controversy, but as a warning and, hopefully, as a turning point. Because a country cannot build women's sport on courage alone, it must be built on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment.

CROSSWORD
BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS
1 Rap sheet name
6 Michael of "A Fish Called Wanda"
11 Bond portrayer Roger
12 Dodge
13 Car stoppers
15 Pampering place
16 Energy
17 Have something
18 Bona fide
20 Used a crowbar
23 Dinner setting
27 Mystique
28 Inside picture
29 Walker's line
31 Stop
32 Continental coins
34 Dude's address
37 Knight's title
38 Couple
41 Workday intermissions
44 When expected
45 Disney's mermaid
46 Sugar source
47 Rodeo rope
DOWN
1 Band boosters

- 2 Velcro feature
- 3 Corn Belt state
- 4 "Roses - red"
- 5 Did restaurant work
- 6 Sanction
- 7 In the manner of
- 8 Leia's brother
- 9 Concept
- 10 High home
- 14 Massive
- 18 Renter's paper
- 19 Price add-ons
- 20 Buddy
- 21 Regret
- 22 S&L offering
- 24 Lingerie item
- 25 Vegas
- 26 Retina setting
- 30 Silences
- 31 Ranch pen
- 33 Vault part
- 34 Amorphous mass
- 35 Celtic letter
- 36 In the past
- 38 Speaker's stand
- 39 Luau instruments
- 40 European capital
- 42 Director's cry
- 43 Geological period

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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