

Armeena fights for life while rapist still at large

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Armeena, only 13, teeters on the brink of death. Her eyes, blank and surrounded in dark circles, suggest that she is hoping for the end to get rid of her sufferings.

More than six months ago Armeena was raped and later set on fire by a group of hooligans. Since January 31, she has been undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH)'s burn unit.

Almost her entire body is burnt, appearing as little more than a skeleton wrapped in a loose layer of wrinkled skin. The flicker of life still inside her is getting weaker every day. For more than six months she has undergone numerous surgeries for her injuries. She will need still more time for full recovery. A number of sores have spread all over her body, numb-

ing her in severe pain.

On the morning of January 27, Armeena, a student of class-V at Tetulia Primary School, was called by Mahbubur Rahman Mahbub and his maternal uncle, Rakib, as well as their common friend Rabiul, to a neighbouring house owned by one Dudu Hazi. Before she could realise what was happening, Armeena was locked inside a room, while a cassette player blasted at full volume to drown any unwanted sounds. Mahbub then raped Armeena and confined her to the room for about 3 hours, from 10am to 1pm.

Armeena ran to her family when she was finally let go. The news of her rape then quickly spread throughout the village, culminating in public outcry. Shalishes were arranged but the accused and his accomplices denied the incident. They also threatened



Armeena's family against going to the police. Her father Mamunur Rashid eventually defied their threats, recording his complaint with local police, who assured him that after investigating the incident the police would record a formal case.

Three days after the incident, Armeena was sleeping next to an open window. Suddenly she woke

from intense pain and found her entire body on fire. Someone had thrown kerosene on her and set it alight before fleeing the scene.

While Armeena struggles for life, her father, Mamun, a farmer in Tetulia, Dhamrai, has been fighting a different battle. Since the incident, attempts have been on his family by the family of the accused, who are influential in the area and trying to force a settlement out of court. At one stage, they offered compensation of five lakh taka to Armeena's family, but her father, who farms on rented land, refused to accept anything other than justice.

Dudu Hazi and Mahbub's father, Mizanur Rahman, a staff of Gazipur Military Factory, have forced landowners to refrain from renting land to Mamun. One Abdur Rahman, who used to rent about 3 bighas of land to

Mamun, has refused to rent to him any more, following Dudu Hazi's threats. "I cannot rent my land to you any more. If I do, Dudu Hazi and his accomplices will create problems for me," Abdur Rahman expressed his helplessness.

On January 31, a case was filed with Dhamrai police station by the victim's father, accusing Mahbubur Rahman Mahbub, Rakib, and Rabiul. Rabiul was arrested immediately while the other two accused are still at large.

A forensic report, meanwhile, has been prepared and confirms that Armeena was indeed raped.

These are dark days for Mamun and his family. With Armeena fighting for life, Mamun also has two more daughters and a son to maintain. But he no longer knows how he will cope, watching his young daughter waging a fierce battle for life.



PHOTO: STAR

Citizens' Rights Movement forms a human chain at Shahbagh in the city yesterday protesting adulteration of food and demanding that the drive against unscrupulous traders be intensified.



PHOTO: STAR

Children are engrossed in painting pictures during an art competition at the Fine Art Institute yesterday. The National Mourning Day Observance Committee organised the event to mark the 30th death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

More bodies condemn bomb blasts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More organisations yesterday condemned the series of simultaneous bomb blasts across the country on August 17 and demanded judicial probe to bring the culprits to justice.

Leaders of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) staged a demonstration in front of the party office at Paltan to protest the attacks.

They said the alliance government cannot avoid its responsibility for the nationwide bomb blasts on Wednesday.

They also questioned how the home minister is still in office after such massive bomb blasts.

CPB President Monjurul Ahsan Khan, General Secretary Muzahidul Islam Selim, Azharul Islam Arzu and Mahbub Alam spoke on the occasion.

Leaders of Left Democratic Front alleged that there might be a collaboration between the Islamist militants and lawenforcers behind the bomb blasts.

Bangladesh Awami Olama League also held a rally at Dhanmondi demanding judicial probe for all bomb blasts including those on Wednesday.

National Public Resistance Movement, Five Left Party, and Human Rights International Bangladesh also condemned the bomb attacks and demanded immediate arrest of those responsible for the incidents.