

Policemen and policewomen swoop on Shanta in full view of photojournalists.

Protectors turn into Predators

MORSHED ALI KHAN

IT was brutality in broad daylight, in front of dozens of media personnel, who recorded the event. A group of policemen and policewomen dragged Shahin Sultana Shanta, a mother of a ten-year-old boy and three months pregnant, out of the clinic, at the intersection of Road 27 and Mirpur road, and beat her mercilessly. She was caught and beaten as she was wearing a pair of trainers and assumed that she was an activist of the opposition, who participated in the day's protest programme on March 12. The time was 12-10 PM and protesters had already clashed with the police several times, setting a passenger bus ablaze round the corner.

The beating did not end on the road. As men and women police personnel unleashed their violent anger on the helpless housewife, others dragged her inside a prison van nearby. About half a dozen policemen and policewomen entered the van and beat her again. She screamed in agony. An hour or so later as she lay in pain she was forced to sign a blank paper and set free.

Just following the incident, when the pictures of the police brutality started to emerge in the media, top police officials embarked on justifying the acts. Police press releases were issued, in which police attached photocopies of documents, trying to prove that Shanta was indeed an activist of the opposition Awami League.

On 14 March, Shanta sued 28 policemen and policewomen, including two police commissioners with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrates accusing the police of assaulting her mentally and physically. Daughter of Justice Shamsul Huda and wife of Supreme Court lawyer, Shanta narrated to the court how mercilessly she was tortured. The Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullahel Baqui directed the Inspector General of Police to appoint an investigating officer and submit a report on the matter by April 16.

On March 19, flanked by her lawyers, a limping Shanta, filed a second case against the same policemen and policewomen with the First Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka. The judge incharge of the tribunal Mujibul Kamal ordered a judiciary probe and asked the probe body to submit a report within seven days.

Now the police were desperate. They had to find something to teach Shanta a lesson. On March 22, two cases --- one for "extortion and another for "theft" --- were filed by one Daud Mia and one Firoz Mia separately implicating Shanta and her husband with the crimes at the Chief