

DU students spending a nice time near Swadhinata Stambha at the Suhrawardy Udyan. Sometimes what goes awry forcing some of them to take a deadly decision?



STAR FILE PHOTO

DU wakes up to worrying trend of suicides among students

Nine psychologists to be appointed for counselling as 11 take their own lives in last 5 years

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Increasing cases of suicide among the Dhaka University students, especially girl students, have prompted the authorities to go for appointing psychologists in the dormitories.

Nine psychologists will be appointed for five residential halls, two each at Rokeya Hall, Shamsunnahar Hall, Kuwait Maitree Hall, Fazilatunnisa Mujib Hall -- and one in Nawab Faizunnisa Hall. Advertisements have already been pasted to the university walls and fixed to the notice boards.

For more than 30 thousand students currently there is only one psychologist working at the Students Counselling and Guidance Centre of the university.

"Considering the gravity of the situation that needs immediate attention, we have decided to appoint psychologists in dormitories," said Prof SMA Faiz, vice-

chancellor, DU.

"Usually any appointment requires approval from the University Grants Commission. But in this case we did not wait for the approval. We have already posted advertisement while the commission is working on the approval," he added.

Provosts of different halls led by Razia Akter, the provost of Shamsunnahar Hall, is drafting the terms of reference of the psychiatrist post. There will also be a permanent psychiatrist at the university's Students Counselling and Guidance Centre.

In July and August last year, special counselling sessions were arranged in different dormitories to instill positive thoughts into the students.

"It is a matter of grave concern that this suicidal tendency grips many of our brilliant students," said Prof Faiz. "They should not ignore life like that. They should know that their life is very valu-

able both to their family and to the nation as a whole."

Statistics show suicidal tendency has increased notably among the female students of Dhaka University during the last few years. A total of 11 students, including nine girls, of the university committed suicide during the past five years.

In Rokeya Hall alone four students committed suicide during the past one and a half years.

In the most recent incident Rehnema Taslim Antu, a master's student of Economics Department committed suicide at her Paribagh residence on June 4. Her father reported that Antu had been very upset for the last few days as she could not obtain first class in her master's examinations.

A fourth-year student of the Institute of Education and Research (IER), Sandhya Rani Sarker, committed suicide on April 15 by hanging herself from a ceiling

fan inside her room at Begum Rokeya Hall. Reason behind the suicide could not be known.

Sabera Yasmin Papry, a third-year student of the Fine Arts Institute and a resident of Kuwait Maitree Hall, ended her life in August last year. She had chosen the path of suicide after a breakup with her boyfriend, according to her friends.

Zohra Khan Progrya, a second-year student of Law Department, chose the same path in June 2007.

Humayun Kabir, a master's student of Marketing Department committed suicide in March 2005 as he was unable to bear the burden of family problems.

Prof Shaheen Islam of DU Psychology Department and director of Students Counselling and Guidance Centre said, "Most young women in Bangladesh suffer from low self-esteem. From childhood they are brought up in such a way that they

become dependent on others."

"When a relationship breaks, they feel ignored and insignificant. They take desperate actions thinking that they have no other purpose in life. Other young people with similar problems often imitate such action leading to a suicidal tendency," she added.

Prof Shaheen mentioned that students' visits to the counselling centre have increased in recent times. Classmates and roommates of the deceased, who are emotionally affected by the recent suicide incidents, are visiting the centre for guidance.

She said mental health needs to be taken seriously, which is usually ignored in Bangladesh.

"This is a crisis period for the young people. They are restless and constantly searching for identity," she said adding that parents should listen to their children more and make them feel more important. Too much expectation from parents to chil-

dren might also frustrate them.

"Students should try to find their inner strength, have a positive outlook on life," she suggested.

Renowned sociologist Prof Sadeka Halim of DU Sociology Department said counselling for only female students is not adequate. There should be similar programmes in male dormitories.

"Relationship involves both men and women. Men should also learn to take responsibility for the consequences inflicted by their emotional actions," she explained.

"Most of the cases that happened in recent times have similar story. Feeling rejected and betrayed, the young women ended life," Prof Sadeka added.

"Female students should learn to respect themselves. There are other wonderful options in life than only a boyfriend who did not appreciate her," she noted.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"Our military policy is defensive but we have to protect ourselves if the nation comes under attack. And I purchased the warplanes for the sake of our protection. Is it a criminal offence? If I am to stand in the dock for this offence then I am worried about the independence and sovereignty of this country."

-- Sheikh Hasina
Awami League Chief

Said during the hearing of charge framing in the MIG-29 purchase scam case against her at the special court on the premises of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"It is not possible to move the country forward without politicians."

-- Khaleda Zia
Detained BNP Chairperson

Said at the trial of Gatco graft case at a special court set up on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"To ask the government to review the constitution and to ask the monkey to split the bread are the same things."

-- Rashed Khan Menon
President, Workers Party

Said at a press conference at Rajshahi, on Thursday. Source: Bhorer Kago

"Price has soared in Dhaka only and it has decreased in the whole country."

-- Mirza Azizul Islam
Finance Adviser

Said at the seminar room of NEC at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar while replying to the question on how the inflation decreased, on Saturday. Source: Prothom Alo

"When the Sector Commanders' Forum has been urging all political parties not to join hands with the anti-liberation forces, BNP is trying to revive its coalition with Jamaat."

-- Syed Ashrafur Islam
AL Acting General Secretary

Told reporters after a meeting held at party chief's political office at Dhanmondi, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghilas

Helping out victims of criminal offence

Victim Support Centres to be set up at police stations

DURDANA GHILAS

In a groundbreaking initiative the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) with the aid of Police Reform Programme (PRP) of UNDP is going to introduce a full-fledged centre for helping out victims of criminal offence.

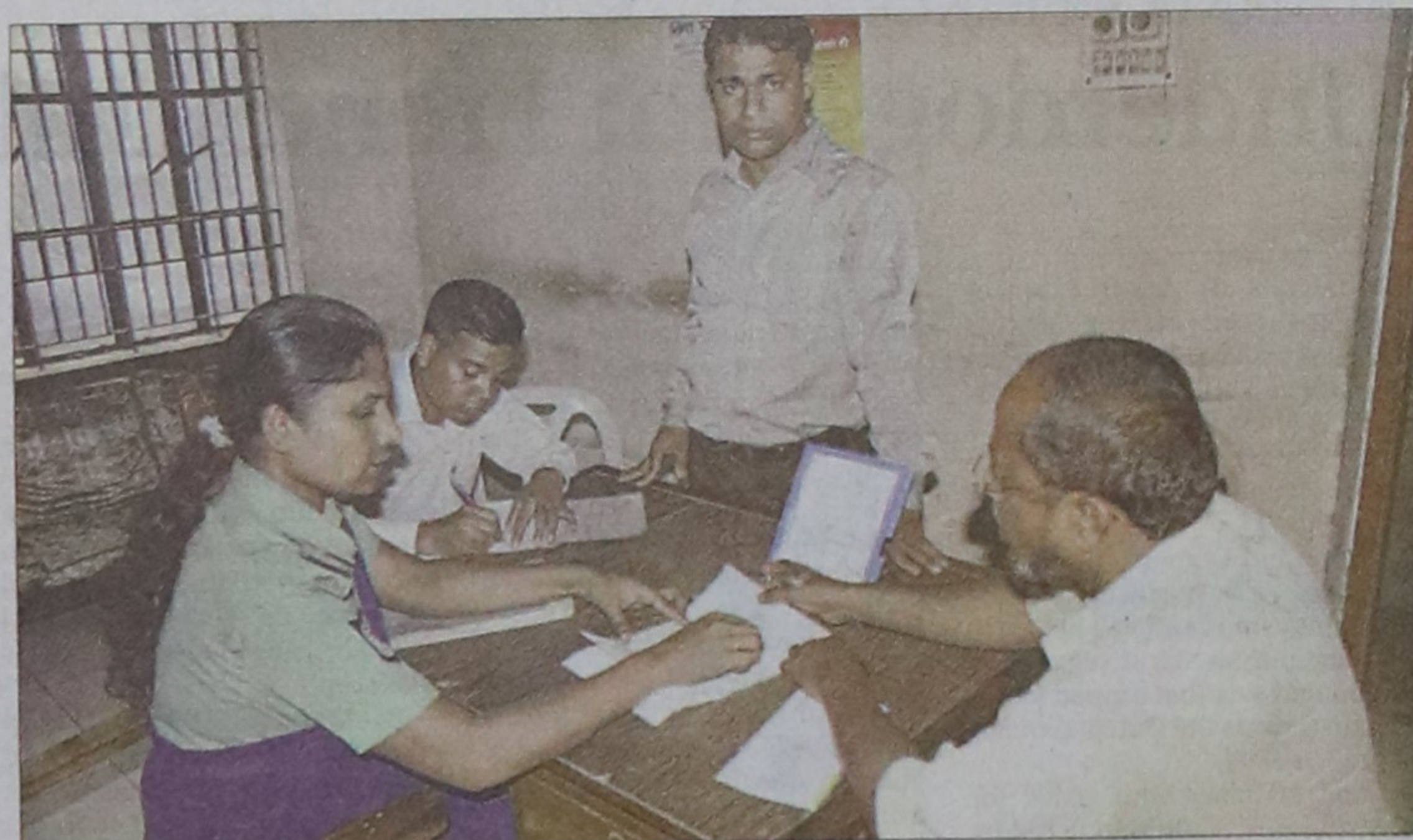
Under the Victim Support Service victims seeking police help will get all kinds of legal and medical assistance while human rights activists, NGOs and social workers will extend cooperation to police personnel.

This is for the first time that Bangladesh police and NGOs are working together for a common cause and under the same roof.

At present almost all police stations in the city have service delivery officers who attend those coming to the police to file a case. They handle normal or non-severe cases. But the job of the Victim Support Centre (VSC) will be to handle severely traumatised victims. Mostly female police officers will be engaged in delivering this service.

The service is expected to open in the next two months. To start the programme 33 police personnel and NGO workers have been given a 10-day training on how to deal with a victim, how to interview or respect him/her, FIR writing, understanding victim's mental state, studying the constitution on victim's right and other related things.

"The concept of victim support centre is new in Bangladesh. Generally people are not used to imagine police as someone very



Police stations already have service delivery desks. Soon there will be Victim Support Centres to help out victims of criminal offences.

helpful but we are going to change the picture through proactive policing," said Farid Ahmed, public relation officer, PRP.

Initially the service will start in two rooms at the Tejgaon Police Station. The future target of the programme is to open VSC at 600 police stations across the country. To widen the programme the 33 trained people will work to train others.

"By the time we start VSC at Tejgaon PS we will be able to assess the reality like how much manpower, funds, doctors, psychologists, ambulances and logistics we need to run a centre like this," said Farid.

"Victims will always have a contact with the centre and if the former victims want they can work as volunteers," he said.

Police do not have specialised knowledge in some cases like handling traumatised victims. So they will take the help of a psychologist. The NGOs working in the field of helping rape victims, acid victims and other victims will assist police.

Sohel Rana Akhond, one of the trainees and senior reintegration officer, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), said, "After the training with police we realised that some jobs were done by both the

police and the NGOs. So there was some overlapping. If we work together then we will be able to avoid the overlapping."

"At the VSC the victims will be able to ask the on-duty officers about their rights," he added.

Hubert Staberhofer, an investigation, prosecution and operation expert and programme manager, PRP, said, the perspectives of police and NGOs will be different while dealing with victims. Police are used to help on legal sides and NGOs are supposed to assist in taking care. But at the centre it will be a combined approach from both sides.

"Talking with the victim is a

part of the investigation because he can reveal many vital information to apprehend the offender. A traumatised victim needs time to recover before talking with the police. He will not be able to reveal much information if he remains traumatised. He may need a few days before talking with the police. This period is called reflection time. A psychologist can help him recover from this trauma and help police in investigating the case," said Staberhofer.

Asked how they got two different groups of people like police and NGOs in one place, he said, "At first we started with both groups separately. After a few days we put them together. At first they were sceptic but then gradually the ice started to break and they discovered arrays of common interests and expertise. They found out that they were dealing the same problem just in a different way."

"We are trying to change police attitude towards a victim. It is a long way to go but I think it is possible especially after the introduction of service delivery system as many police personnel said their self-esteem increased when the victims turned to them for help," he said.

Muminunnessa Shikha, victim support specialist, PRP, said a steering committee will be formed after the inception of the programme to monitor the project on a monthly basis.

PRP is going to follow the models of Nepal and Thailand in introducing this service, sources said.



Bangladesh Postal Service, with the assistance of Western Union, has initiated a revolutionary money transferring system by setting up 24-hour money transfer services up to the upazila level. Soon this service will be available at all post offices across the country.

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