

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Proper implementation of HC guidelines demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) at a press conference yesterday demanded proper implementation of the High Court's (HC) guidelines on sexual harassment.

Demanding enactment of a new law based on the guidelines, it also expressed concern over the alarming rise of suicide incidents among young girls inflicted by stalking.

The organisation stressed the need for increasing the punishment under the current laws and formation of a special taskforce to tackle the issue.

Salma Ali, executive director of the organisation, said: "Though one year has passed since the HC issued the guidelines on sexual harassment, we've noticed with concern that it has not been implemented in any organisation yet."

According to University Grants Commission, seven public universities and 12

private universities have so far constituted committees. However, schools are still lagging behind in this regard although school-going girls are the most vulnerable group, she added.

There are also some other laws that address the issue of stalking, including section 509 of Penal Code and Metropolitan Police Ordinance. However, there are very little examples of using these laws to punish offenders. Under the Penal Code 509, a stalker can be punished with one-year jail term or can be fined, Salma added.

"The biggest challenge, however, is in the process of legal tangles. Women who lodge complaints become victimised for the second time. So, they refrain from complaining. Providing witness is also another major challenge."

The HC in May 2009 defined sexual harassment and laid down some guidelines. Under section 111 of the constitution, this guideline can be used as a law as long as a new law is not enacted, she pointed out.

The guidelines define that sexually evocative remarks directly or over phone, indecent emails, giving indecent looks or making indecent gestures in office space, educational institutions and public place can be regarded as sexual harassment.

BNWLA members called on the women to raise their voice against stalking and other forms of sexual harassment instead of victimising themselves and choosing self-destructive paths.

They called on parents to take the matters seriously and sensitise their children to this issue.

Lack of recreational facilities for young boys, open discussions about sexuality, absence of counselling for boys and girls are contributing to the incidents, they pointed out.

Law enforcers also need sensitisation, the BNWLA members noted.

Kohinoor Begum, director, Advocacy, and Chanchal Mukharjee, assistant programme manager, Legal Cell, BNWLA, also spoke.

DISABILITY WELFARE ACT

Submit report within a month HC asks govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday directed the government to submit a report within a month on what steps it has taken for the welfare of the persons with disabilities after enactment of Disability Welfare Act in 2001.

As per provisions of the act, the government is supposed to determine after conducting an assessment in which sectors of the state the persons with disabilities can be provided with jobs, a lawyer told The Daily Star.

After holding hearing on two writ petitions, an HC bench of Justice Md Mamtaz Uddun Ahmed and Justice Naima Haider passed the order, saying it would take further decision in this regard after examining the report submitted by the government.

Four human rights organisations -- Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Action on Disability and Development (ADD) and National Council of Disabled Women (NCDW) -- and Swapan Chowkidar, a lawyer, and Ridwanul Hoque, a teacher of law faculty of Dhaka University, jointly filed the petitions on April 19, seeking directions from the court upon the government to allow the candidates with disabilities to sit for the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) and Bangladesh Judicial Service (BJS) examinations.

Netherlands to expand help in water sector

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Netherlands government is going to expand its assistances in water sectors of Bangladesh under their 'Global Water' programme.

Under the programme titled 'Water Mondiaal (Global Water)', the Netherlands is making a long-term cooperation agreement and extend its contribution to five delta countries in the world - Bangladesh, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt and Mozambique.

In a press conference yesterday, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands Alphons Hennekens said, "It is my pleasure that Bangladesh has been identified as partner country for this programme."

The programme might be launched in Bangladesh from 2011 following an agreement with the government, he added.

The central theme of the programme in Bangladesh is 'Climate Change Adaptation and Water Governance'.

Presently, a group of officials, who are visiting the country, will meet government officials, non-government organisations, civil society members and others working in the water sector.

Alphons said, "As an outcome of the meetings, some other themes could be incorporated under the programme."

Over the last 38 years, the Netherlands assisted Bangladesh with direct project support and knowledge exchanges and built close relationships with the responsible government agencies, he added.

Currently, the Netherlands aims to support governance reforms in the water sector with special attention to strengthen the government interventions in the fragile and disaster-prone coastal zone and river erosion management.

The programme was launched in Indonesia and Vietnam in 2009.

The press conference held at a city hotel was attended by Water Mondiaal members Peter de Vries, Ben Lamoree, Raimond Hafkenscheid, Catharien Terwisscha, Martijn Van de Groep and Jaap Van Der Velden.

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