

# Eve teasing: Combat the scoundrel

Considering eve teasing as a serious crime, some states in India have introduced stringent laws. However, this did not work well as there was no step adopted there to launch any social movement against this. So, if we want to reduce this crime, we must launch a social movement against this in addition to introducing punitive legal measures.

MD. ANWARUL KABIR

**S**URVEYING the newspapers over the last few months we must have to be shocked realising the unprecedented rate of suicide cases among the young girls due to eve teasing. As reported in the newspapers in the recent past Nurina, Elora, Simi, Trisha, Tonni, Swapna, Tithi, Rumi committed suicide to escape the cruelty of stalkers' repression. Over the last four months, as reported in The Daily Star, fourteen girls, due to repression of stalkers, opted for ultimate destiny of their lives finding no other alternatives.

Apart from suicide, one statistics has revealed that during January-July 2008 period only, about 13,000 women became victims of

eve teasing of different forms across the country. This figure counted only the reported cases. Many occurrences remain unreported as the majority of the victims of eve teasing prefer to ignore this out of fear or not to be 'disgraced' or part of a social 'gossip'. The situation has become so alarming that, in general, it can be argued that at present no girl has been spared from being a victim of eve teasing in one form or another.

Eminent sociologist Pratikha Baxi of India has stated, "Eve teasing is a euphemistic expression that lives in post-colonial India and refers largely to sexual harassment of women in public spaces, thereby constituting women as 'eves', temptresses who provoke men into states of sexual titillation. This popular percep-

tion of sexual harassment posits the phenomenon as a joke where women are both a tease and deserve to be teased. Considered a growing problem throughout the subcontinent, eve teasing ranges in severity from sexually-coloured remarks to outright groping."

Eve teasing begins as an attempt to irritate a girl or catch her attention. A lewd stare, a sly whistle, a well-timed clap, an unwarranted bump, a seemingly causal touch, a lingering look at a vulnerable time, the humming of suggestive song, passing downright uncouth comments, cheap gestures, display of indecent snaps or videos, giving "unwelcome call" or "missed call", sending indecent texts ....., all these are typical examples of eve teasing.

Although the term 'eve teasing' originates from India, in recent times, this vice has spread over all the sub-continent countries. Perhaps, India's scenario in this context is the worst and so it has initiated a number of steps to combat this social menace. Eve teasing was not that acute problem in Bangladesh till 1980s. However, from 1980s, when girls and women, especially at rural areas started going out for education and employment at a large scale, eve teasing with its sharp jaws has started to pollute our social fabric.

Eve teasing might seem harmless 'fun' to some, but gets the nerve of the victims. The severe impact of eve teasing is taking away the lives of young girls as Bangladesh has witnessed recently. Based on empirical study (2008) the Hunger Project has identified some impacts of eve teasing in the society of rural Bangladesh. These are:

a) Curtailed education: Sexual harassment increases girls' drop-out rate from school. Parents concerned about their daughter's honour or safety sometimes keep their daughters home and/or marry them off at an early age. b) Early marriage: Girls who are teased or harassed are also pushed into marriage, before they are physically or mentally prepared.

d) Hindered development: Eve teasing contributes to maintaining the low status of women. It also hinders women in participating in the formal employment sector. As nearly half of the population of the country are women, for the economic development of the country their participation in employment is a must.

Considering the above, as conscious citizens, we should initiate some effective measures to encounter this gender biased social menace. But prior to this, we need to unmask the causes of eve teasing. Who get involved in eve teasing and why? One statistics suggests, 32% of the eve teasers are students, 35% are anti-socials while 33% are middle-aged men.

So, the spectrum of eve teasers are very wide starting from teenagers to middle-aged men, either illiterate or educated. Psychologists and social scientists suggest eve teasing to be a result of the frustration suffered by a majority of youth. Disappointed by the unbecoming attitude of teachers and indifferent parents, they yearn for an outlet to vent their aggression and depression. Moreover, those who do not inherit good values involve in acts of sexual harassment.

In a male dominant society like ours, the concept of 'masculinity' is usually equated with patriarchy. So, eve teasing can be viewed as a rite of passage for boys on their way to

becoming men. Considering that sex is not the only motive, it would be reasonable to conclude the psychodynamics of eve teasing are closely associated with the issue of masculinity and the masculine agenda. Gender segregation from the childhood and the domination of the male members in a family over the female members contribute much to reinforcing the patriarchal model of masculinity in the society.

To the society, in general, being male signifies 'powerful', while the female is always a 'second sex' or weaker one.

Electronic media, especially some movies (both Hindi and Bengali) may be blamed for propagating eve teasing. Many movies depict scenes of teasing, showing this behaviour as a way to win a woman's heart. Others show this as a behaviour for men indulged in some fun, at a woman's expense of course.

Sometimes, women are blamed for 'alluring' eve teasers by their 'seductive' dresses or make-ups. But the reality is, the majority girls who become the prey of eve teasers are from rural areas and they are more conservative in wearing dresses compared with their counterparts in the urban areas. Even in Pakistan rural women in strict 'purdah' are not escaped from the harassment of the eve teasers. In a recently held discussion on eve teasing, alleged war criminal and the apex leader of Jamaat Motiur Rahman Nizami has blamed women as they go out at night time. What an audacity! Limiting the movement of women-folk goes against the essence of our constitution as it has ensured both the genders indiscriminately to move freely.

In our country, yet now there is no strict law that can effectively curb eve teasing. Article 76 of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance 1976 of the Penal Code of 1860 affirms that any acts, conducts or verbal abuses that are used to disgrace women are punishable by law. However, these provisions seem minor compared with the crimes they commit.

Recently, the government is planning to introduce a strict law against eve teasing. No doubt, this is a timely step to move forward. However, if we consider the case of India, we may assert that law alone cannot eliminate this social vice.

Considering eve teasing as a serious crime, some states in India have introduced stringent laws. However, this did not work well as there was no step adopted there to launch any social movement against this. So, if we want to reduce this crime, we must launch a social movement against this in addition to introducing punitive legal measures.

First of all we need to reduce the gender segregation in the society so that children of both genders can know each other well. In a family, children of both sexes should be given equal emphasis. We also need to formulate a mass awareness programme in this context. Media, NGOs and other social organisations may play pivotal role in this respect. Besides, the government should also initiate special projects focussing school/college students with a view to increasing awareness about and against eve teasing. However, all the steps will be futile unless the male segment of the society change its patriarchal mindset.

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In protest of eve-teasing



# UK election: the real winners

**I** flick through newspaper after newspaper in deep shock these days. In all the coverage of the UK election, the international media has totally missed the real story.

The Monster Raving Loony Party beat the Communist Party. I sit at my desk applauding.

The raving loonies are a political body campaigning to highlight the potentially catastrophic shortage of humour in the world.

Soon after it was founded, the Loony Party's manifesto called for:

- 1) All pets to be given passports.
- 2) Teenagers to be given the vote.
- 3) Pubs to be allowed to open all day.
- 4) Socks to be sold in packs of three as one always gets lost.
- 5) Semi-colons to be banned; no one knows how to use them.
- 6) Superheroes to be legally prevented from using their powers for evil.
- 7) A 99 pence coin to be introduced to save change.
- 8) The Queen of England to be replaced by a statue to save money.

I first met the founder Lord Sutch in the 1980s (shown above left meeting a real politician).

Although he called himself an earl and a rock star, he was neither. He never had any money (I had to pay for dinner) and he couldn't sing.

He was hilarious in front of the cameras, but terrifyingly depressive away from them. His only real groupie was his mom.

But his gang's campaign to increase the amount of zaniness in the world was wildly successful.

Members of his gang then amazed themselves by winning large numbers of votes in local elections, sometimes defeating the serious political parties.

But in the late 1990s, Lord Sutch, whose real name was Dave, went through a bad patch.

He'd persuaded some of the world's finest rock musicians (including guitarist Jeff Beck and half of Led Zeppelin) to help him make an album.

In 1998, the BBC declared his CD "the worst album of all time." They were probably right. Then his mother died. Dave hanged himself. It was a shocker. Dave, Dave, what are you doing, mate? That was seriously unfunny. We all thought that was the end.

Fortunately, his spirit lived on. One of his colleagues changed his name to R.U. Seerius and re-started the mission. Below is another supporter, Lord Toby Jug.

Party leadership was shared between a human and a cat until 2002, when the cat was run over by a truck.

In last week's UK election, the Monster Raving Loony Party's campaign was led by senior member Alan Hope, who walked the streets with a banana on his head, shouting through a megaphone: "Vote for insanity! You know it makes sense!"

Scanning news outlets on the web, I finally uncover a complete set of results for last week's UK election.

I smile to see that the Monster Raving Loony Party received more than seven times as many votes as the Communist Party.

Dave is looking down from heaven and smiling.

And this is the totally amazing bit. The first three items on their manifesto have all been passed into law, not just in the UK, but in most countries across Europe and several other places around the world. (This is not a joke.) Pets have passports (physical and microchip) the voting age has been lowered to 18 and bars can open all day.

It can only be a matter of time before the rest of the manifesto items follow.

Superheroes and sock manufacturers: you have been warned.

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# Institutionalising political system for development

At this juncture of our national life we are no longer prepared to hibernate and let our destiny be mapped by capricious leadership. Once political institutions are strengthened then people's aspiration will be reckoned with as they will act as formidable pillars to guard against diversions that are anti-people.

Z.A. KHAN

**I**NTEREST in good governance and development in Bangladesh both in isolation and in combination are commonplace and growing. Much of the scholarly pursuit in has been aimed at initiating a debate on the unexplored theme of governance as a critical variable in the development process. Its main focus centres around delimiting the boundary of the broad concept of governance especially when one attempts to mix it with development.

To some governance means managing affairs of state, focus being on the institutionalization of political system while some others think that it is essentially a reflection of the role of the state giving direction to the development of the country and the political regime which derives authority from the role that the state assigns to itself. There is yet a third perspective of the civil society which is often missing in the traditional conceptualisation and has made evaluation of the status of state-society interaction difficult.

People are of the opinion that politics in greater part of our brief history after the liberation war has been fiercely confrontational that divided our population sharply even on the intrinsic national issues regardless of the consequences that the divide may bring about. This often insulated people of common political belief into isolated segments. Leaders of the parties demonstrated insensitivity towards their opposite number's position on governance and development.

normal process in democracy, people of this country who have suffered marginalisation so long, are no longer willing to accept perennial poverty and misery due to irresponsible and erratic political behaviour combined with bureaucratic inefficiency.

Focus of this article is on the nexus among governance, development and institutionalization of organs of political parties. The demand of the hour is to identify the challenges that have occurred in our country to streamline inflexible and inward looking administration responsible to augment the process of development mapped by political leadership.

We are yet to ascertain the status of state-society interaction. Have we to think that governance means functioning under democratic dispensation where civil society hardly has any role except for pointing out where politics has faulted?

Religious extremism and ethnic divide have also thrown challenges to good governance, democracy and development. Initiative should be underway to develop a nexus on the critical public policy areas i.e. governance and development. Pace of economic liberalisation and revolution in global communication is sure to hasten the process of understanding the need for the nexus.

The biggest challenge confronting Bangladesh is government's weak-kneed approach to governance fearing bureaucrats' non-cooperation. This may sound to be an arrogant statement but an evaluation of government's performance manifestly shows that none since independence has sincerely done some-

thing substantial to develop people-orientated political institutions to work with commitment to chase out the ills that beset our democratic culture which fuels development.

Indifference of the political leaders will probably continue for the lack of a truly people's welfare oriented precept of commitment to make our country a precinct of peace, protection and prosperity for our people. Lukewarm attitude of the politicians (not directly involved in governance) could have had far less effect in the implementation of government's development schemes had the bureaucracy played the role of an honest broker to guide or to constrain the leader from infringing upon the rules of business.

To be able to ensure even handed governance the political government should mark stamping out corruption as its priority agenda. One does understand that "corruption exists and has always existed, it is pervasive and it has far reaching consequence. It represents one of the most significant obstacles to development and it also distorts proper functioning of democratic institutions".

Although we all hope that political leaders abstain from corruption, a broad majority of our people think it is going to be a gigantic task. In the recent past the government was left with no choice but to withdraw most of corruption cases filed against its leaders by a 'benign' Anti Corruption Commission as the political leaders believably threatened to topple the government by throwing their towels if it did not withdraw the cases.

Political parties should take initiatives to effectively utilise their political institutions to restrain the members from interfering with the activities of the government. One wonders whether the political parties are at all inclined to follow the writs of their institutions. Therefore the institutions should be strengthened and empowered to regulate or chastise those members who show little regard to the norms of the institutions.

To revamp the political institutions, Richard Pelizzo suggests that the parties should consider

the following:

- Notion of the institution covering a combination of factors like age of the organisation, generational age of the party members, adaptability, complexity, flexibility, autonomy and coherence should be made clear to all.
- What kind of notion of institutionalisation can be applied to parties and what it means for the parties to become institutionalised should be mapped after deliberate discussion in the party which will be mandatory for all to follow in letter and spirit.
- Level of institutionalisation needed to open the party forum to identify the violators of institutional culture and the 'modus operandi' to admonish or chastise the defaulters should be ascertained after which the institutions should be given freedom to uninterrupted implementation.
- What kind of institutional arrangement can be made to deter the politicians from interfering with the running of the administration.
- At this juncture of our national life we are no longer prepared to hibernate and let our destiny be mapped by capricious leadership. In the past it used to be alleged that development schemes were drawn by a band of 'Semper Fidelis' bureaucrats to translate the objectives of the political leaders or donors whose objectives were not beyond question. Once political institutions are strengthened then people's aspiration will be reckoned with as they will act as formidable pillars to guard against diversions that are anti-people.
- Our people too should whip up their conscience to put their act together to involve themselves in a fundamental shift that promises proper institutionalisation of political party organs so that whims of a few are overtaken by collective wisdom. Political leadership should part with duality which is observed in the contemporary leadership to make the foundation of democratic politics formidable and only thus power of the institutionalised politics will pave the way for development.

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