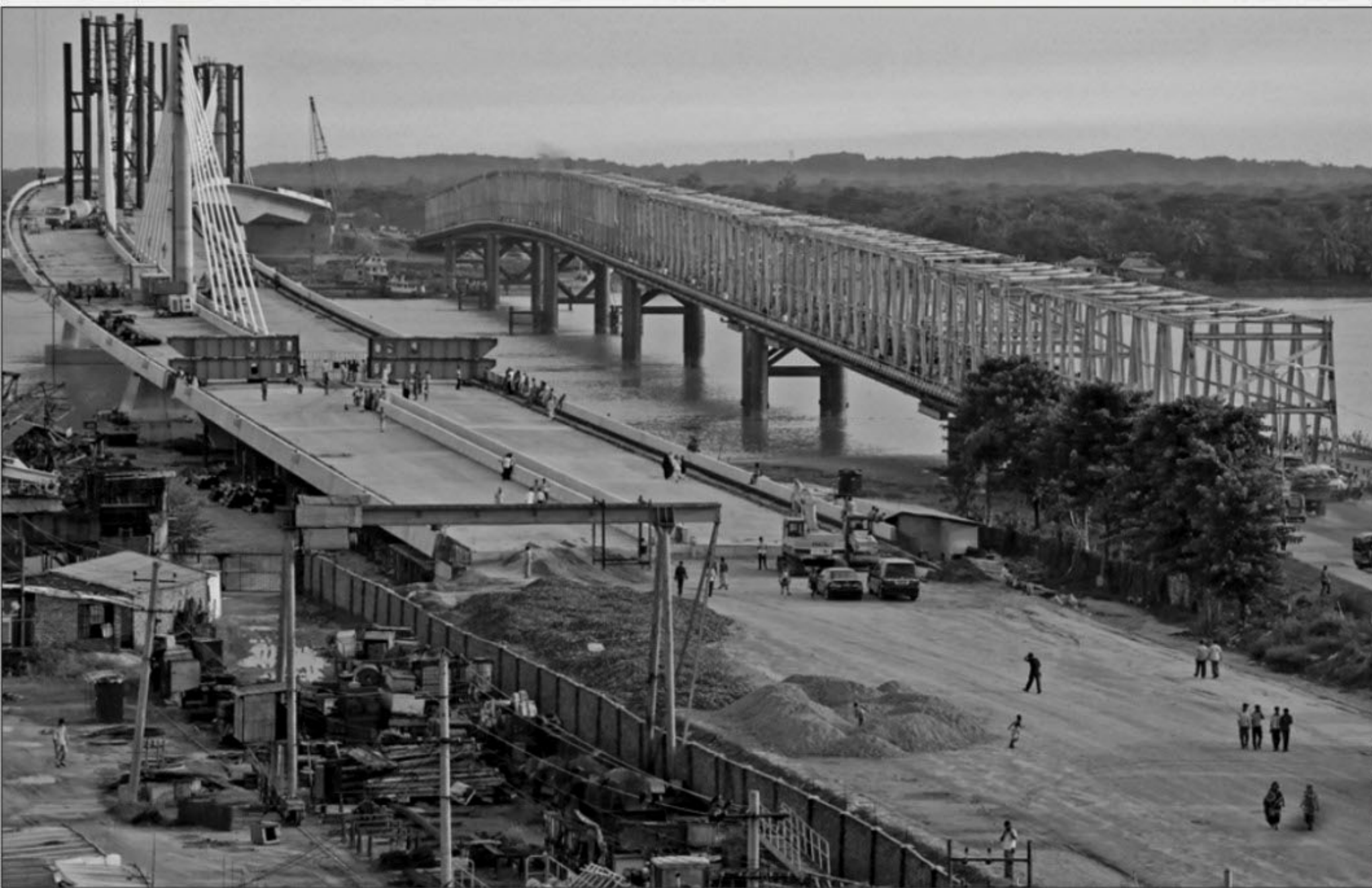


## Bridging the infrastructure gap



Additional infrastructure is needed to ease the congestions that afflict the lives and productivity of millions.

At this historic juncture, when there is a possibility of leaving poverty behind, Bangladesh needs to reform the domain of land acquisition and resettlement and move on to a more conducive legal, policy and implementation environment to ensure that its growth potential is not compromised.

FABIO PITTALUGA and SABAH MOYEEN

BD. BANGLADESH can reasonably aspire to become a middle-income country by 2021. This transition will ultimately require further shift in the economy towards higher value-added manufacturing and services. Such a transformation, among others, will require substantial investment in physical infrastructure (especially power sector, ports, industrial estates or economic zones, and transportation) all of which has a physical "footprint" -- land.

At present, the situation in Bangladesh is characterised by a combination of inadequate power supply, congested ports and underdeveloped transport networks -- including roads, bridges, and railways. Recent surveys by private sector operators consistently cite access to power and gas among the biggest obstacles to investment. Energy shortages are choking households and businesses alike.

Furthermore, bottlenecks and horrific traffic jams in Dhaka and inter-regional roads have become a part of daily life. There is no doubt that additional infrastructure is needed to ease the congestions that afflict the lives and productivity of millions. While sustained develop-

ment is possible and is underway, major infrastructure gaps need to be filled to relieve the stress on the quality of life of the citizens. However, the challenge of getting access to a significant footprint in a land scarce and overpopulated country is seldom addressed adequately. Yet, implementing agencies of the Government, financing institutions and private sector leaders deem access to land for growth and development as one of the primary stumbling blocks in bridging the "infrastructure gap."

In the past, the issue of "public good" related to benefits accrued to society at large via infrastructure projects was seen by states as an overriding benefit vis-à-vis those impacted by land acquisition. Many legal frameworks -- including those in Bangladesh -- were based on the principle of "eminent domain," or the right of the state to expropriate for the sake of public good (electricity, water, roads, etc.).

Eminent domain legislation is based on the principle of legal rights to lands that the affected person has to demonstrate to the state in order to obtain compensation. In Bangladesh, however, this is complicated for two reasons:

Complexities in determining legal

claims over lands;

Existence of many squatters (or illegal occupants) that are part of the fabric of Bangladeshi society and many of whom are the victims of river erosion.

Furthermore, forced evictions are not indicators of democratic processes, as they often result in a "re-cycling" of poverty rather than eradication. And it is often the poorest sections of the Bangladeshi population who are affected, because there is no possibility of voicing their concerns.

It is difficult to estimate how many people will be affected in this journey to middle-income status, but if we put together the proposed eastern by-pass road, the need for additional fly-overs, roads, rehabilitated canals to prevent flooding, transmission lines, power generating plants, and so on, it is not difficult to envision that a large number of people will be affected by such projects.

Currently, the legal instrument for expropriating lands for public purposes is the 1982 Land Acquisition and Requisition of Immovable Property Ordinance. The Ordinance presents significant challenges in its application. Only people who can demonstrate legal title to lands are eligible for compensation, compensation rates are often inadequate, and no assistance is provided to affected people to move elsewhere.

Effectively, there is no resettlement policy to facilitate people's movement from the areas of impact to other zones. In practice, this means that compensation alone does not allow people to retain the same standards of living in other locations, and in many cases their situation is exacerbated.

However, despite the weak legal framework

on land acquisition and the policy vacuum on resettlement of affected people, the government has taken some very good steps to implement projects where affected people are fully safeguarded. This happened during the construction of the Jamuna Bridge in the 1990s and is currently the case in the preparation of the background work for the Padma Bridge.

In the case of the Jamuna Bridge, for example, the government implemented a resettlement program. Similar steps are being taken for the Padma Bridge, which requires the relocation of approximately 4,000 families. In both cases, the government has also chosen to provide compensation for squatters -- people with no legal title to lands and who are not covered by the 1982 Ordinance.

The Jamuna Bridge also signaled a shift in focus from compensation alone to restoration of livelihoods for affected people. An ex-post Brac study concluded that, while not perfect, considerable success was attained in other aspects of the resettlement program, such as a significant increase in affected people's average annual income despite their shrinking land-base, and the quality of housing for the resettled ones also improved.

In addition, as a result of the resettlement program, affected persons had better access to health services, drinking water and sanitation -- not an insignificant achievement in Bangladesh.

However, despite the good practice emerging from the Jamuna Bridge experience, to date Bangladesh has no clearly formulated resettlement policy for project-affected people. The experience of the Jamuna Bridge has established a "precedent" -- linked mostly to large infrastructure projects -- rather than a "tradition" for formal resettlement plans to mitigate project impacts on affected people.

At this historic juncture, when there is a possibility of leaving poverty behind, Bangladesh needs to reform the domain of land acquisition and resettlement and move on to a more conducive legal, policy and implementation environment to ensure that its growth potential is not compromised.

There are a number of innovative approaches to resettlement, from market-based examples to community-driven ones where the state invests in the capacity of people to find their own solutions as opposed to providing ready-made options. The concept of "benefit sharing" with affected people is also being experimented with in various countries. But there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach that can be readily replicated.

Bangladesh will need to find its own solutions, homegrown out of a dialogue between the different parts of its body politic. To that effect, Brac Development Institute is spearheading a policy dialogue with the government, the private sector, civil society and the media to explore homegrown solutions.

The experiences of Jamuna and Padma provide fertile ground and should not be relegated to large infrastructure projects, as effective and responsible resettlement planning is equivalent to poverty reduction and improved standards of living for those affected.

Fabio Pittaluga is Senior Social Development Specialist, World Bank, BD. and Sabah Moyeen Social Development Specialist, World Bank, BD.

## Discipline in public universities

Because of politicisation in the university administration the real culprits are hardly punished.

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

PUBLIC university authorities have been accustomed to flouting financial regulations since long. It existed even before 1971. The reasons for this are the gradual fall of standards in administration, non-application of disciplinary rules, and tremendous increase in propensity for corruption in our society. This has emboldened the administrators, teachers and others to ignore willfully the regulations and orders of the government.

There is enough truth in the saying that public university teachers give more attention to consultancy work (both local and international) to increase their earnings, and do not spend enough time on teaching. Thus, students are deprived of service from the teachers, who are paid from the public exchequer for extending the benefit of higher education to them.

The government is fully aware of the malpractices in the public universities. Because of high politicisation in the university administration the real culprits are hardly punished. Such a state of affairs is certainly harmful for moral development of the students.

Some glaring examples of violation of financial rules, published in the weekly 2000, have been given in a recent report on governmental audit objections of certain public universities (mostly of 2007-08). Usually, the media pay greater attention to irregularities committed by politicians, the business community and, to some extent, the bureaucracy. It is time that they concentrate more on the irregularities in autonomous bodies like public universities as well.

Corruption is rife in Bangladesh, and university teachers also hold a similar attitude as others. Truly speaking, people who are supposed to serve are not serving. With rampant corruption and irregularities in the public universities we shall never be able to impart quality education to our students. The education minister may take note of the irregularities of university administration.

If the government is sincere and firm about implementing the recommendations contained in the National Education Policy 2010, it will have to be tough against the various violations committed by the public university authorities. If necessary, the government should not hesitate to impose exemplary punishment to wrongdoers.

It was recently stated by a member on the Public Accounts Committee that appropriate action would be taken, after thorough discussion in the parliament, if the audit objections about the violation of financial rules were brought before them. We welcome such an attitude.

It appears that the Rajshahi University authorities have committed a large number of irregularities. Similar flouting of financial regulations have been committed by Sher-E-Bangla Agricultural University and Islamic University.

These irregularities include realisation of less electricity charge from the teachers, officers and staff, and unauthorised payment of telephone and mobile bills, rest and recreation allowance, book allowance, Ph.D allowance etc. All these happened due to laxity in observing relevant rules, regulations and governmental orders.

If the government is determined about bringing administrative discipline to public universities it will have to do away with politicisation completely, establish a merit system, and pay due respect and care to rules, regulations and governmental orders.

Usually, students belonging to middle and lower middle class go to public universities for higher education. Students from the rich class are either sent abroad or to private universities. Private universities are not yet capable of fulfilling the demand fully.

As students from the middle and lower middle class constitute the vast majority the government has no other option except to take proper steps to bring discipline in public universities for improving teaching standard.

A.B.M.S. Zahur is a former Joint Secretary.

## Woe for the eve teasers

The law enforcement community should demonstrate that such behaviour will not be tolerated by arresting the criminals and putting them in jail. The courts should not grant them any bail either.

ZEENAT KHAN

ON May 4th the internet news site Tazakhobor.com reported that, for the very first time, six young men aged between 16 and 22 were convicted for "sexual harassment" in Bangladesh. They were arrested in front of Gono Bidya school in Narayanganj where they were trying to harass young female students. All of them were sentenced to jail for seven days. The sentence should have been for a longer term.

The fear of going to jail will deter most harassers from teasing young girls. No one wants to go to jail. A lower court in Narayanganj district declared the verdict in accordance with Section 34 of the code of criminal procedure. This decision was a welcome change for everyone concerned.

This was only a small victory. In the last few months, eve teasers have taken over the city streets. With easy access to internet and mobile phones, young men are e-mailing, text messaging and leaving sexually explicit messages to girls. When the girls are out in public mobile phone cameras are used to take disturbing, graphic photographs, which are later distributed to the like-minded ones.

It is not a city problem alone -- young rural girls going to school are also affected by this kind of torment by guys older than them. Some girls have simply stopped going to school to avoid harass-

ment, bodily injuries and even death in some sad cases. It is happening all over our country. If challenged, the perpetrators beat up and torture the girl's family members. They are simply not intimidated. They come in a group.

Women/girls have the right to share the same public spaces, buses and schools. Men who are making it difficult for young women to be up and about should be aware now that the public and law enforcement people are onto them and, if caught, they will be severely punished. A much harsher law will be enacted now. Their unacceptable behaviour will not go unpunished now, and they will have to take responsibility for deaths of girls due to suicide as a result of harassment.

Their teasing is making young girls feel utterly helpless. They are unable to cope with such belittlement and do not know how to defend themselves against such unseemly and unjustified vulgar activities. They do not usually tell their parents because of the shame and stigma.

They do not understand why they suddenly become objects of sexual desire to young men. A mother or a female teacher almost never explains puberty to them. Ultimately, unable to deal with such an enormous psychological burden, they look for an escape and think that self-immolation is their only choice. To them, death seems a permanent solution so that none can cause

them any pain.

According to statistics, in the last three years thirty-two students committed suicide as they were continuously being harassed while out in public.

The reported deaths are causing an uproar in our country. Finally, it has received the attention it deserved in order to change the law. Recently, there was a seminar in Dhaka where creation of a safe environment for young girls/students was discussed. Home Minister Sahara Khatun and Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid were present.

There were many heads of educational institutions in attendance. They all were in agreement that teasing of young girls by juvenile delinquents must stop, that no teenage girl should become a victim of such abuse that she seeks to commit suicide as her only way of salvation.

At the seminar, the speaker of the parliament, Abdul Hamid, emphasised the passing of new laws in order to prevent the culprits from committing such crimes. They keep on harassing girls because their unacceptable behaviour is often ignored and they do not feel any responsibility for such deaths. The speaker called on everyone to act in a body to prevent such deaths as the government alone cannot handle it.

The home minister also urged the law enforcement agencies to keep vigil to catch the perpetrators. She put them on high alert. The education minister proposed an allotted day to raise awareness against teasing of any kind.

Women for Women chairperson Salma Khan blamed the political parties for having an unholy nexus with the immoral young men to get political backing. She urged them not to shield those who are responsible for the deaths of young girls. The panel adopted a zero-tolerance policy with regard to girls'

harassment.

Human rights groups had a panel discussion on television, where Dr. Hamida Hussain and advocate Sultana Kamal strongly urged the government to change the laws and see that the offenders are punished severely. There was participation by young girls in the audience. They are afraid and expressed their concerns in candid terms. There was exchange of ideas, and probable solutions were discussed.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid is very proactive. He kept his word. Education Day was observed all across our country on the June 13. A procession led by him was organised by the home ministry, where thousands of students, teachers and parents participated. Many political leaders and social and human rights activists also took part. The procession ended up at the Central Shaheed Minar.

Nurul Islam Nahid emphasised the safety of young girls and vowed that harassment would not be tolerated anymore. He urged the girls to be assertive and to inform the guardians and school administrators about any incident of harassment. He also conducted an oath taking ceremony.

The highly publicised protest was endorsed by prominent educators. Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof A.A.M.S. Arefin Siddique and Campaign for Popular Education Executive Director Rasheda K. Chowdhury, attended the rally at Shaheed Minar.

With this kind of exposure one would think that the eve teasers will back off and leave the girls alone. So we thought! The June 17 issue of the Daily Star reported "stalkers kill one girl, throw acid on another." It is the same story all over again. One girl became a victim of stalkers in Shatkhira and another one in Noakhali.



Eve teasers belong in jail.

One girl was mutilated for rejecting a love proposal in a remote area of the village on her way to school. The other girl's face and upper part of the body was burnt. In the middle of the night, her stalker broke into her house where she was asleep with her older sister and her young nephew and doused her with acid. She is in critical condition in Dhaka Medical College Hospital's burn unit.

What other measures can be taken to stop this kind of sadistic game by young men when the girls reject their unjustified proposals? The law enforcement community should demonstrate that such behaviour will not be tolerated by arresting the criminals and putting them in jail. The courts should not grant them any bail either. After the trial, the perpe-

trators should be put away for many years. The law must send a much stronger message and keep at it until this problem is under control.

Now, everyone can join hands to make sexual harassment an issue for a social movement, as was laid out by the education minister. As is evident, the government alone cannot do it. A concerted effort is necessary to resolve this problem once and for all. No one person can do it comprehensively. In spite of the reports of July 17, the recent chain of actions gives one hope that finally such a horrific thing will be dealt with in the right manner.

Zeenat Khan is a freelance writer from the Washington, DC metropolitan area.