

Cities mostly unsafe for women

ActionAid survey shows 88 percent women face harassment on city streets, markets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sexual harassment or violence against women is not limited to women of any certain age. Women experience sexual harassment at some point in their life irrespective of their age, a survey conducted by ActionAid shows.

About 81 percent women, however, do not prefer to seek help from law enforcement agencies fearing further harassment.

According to the survey carried out from June to September of this year, 47.5 percent women in urban areas feel unsafe in public places like markets, streets and public transport while 88 percent have reported harassment by pedestrians, passengers of public transport and buyers in market places.

ActionAid Bangladesh unveiled the survey findings at the launch of a nationwide campaign "Safe Cities for Women" at Spectra Convention Centre yesterday.

The survey covered a total of 1,200 people including 800 women and adolescent girls from seven cities in a bid to understand people's perceptions on sexual violence against women in public places, and to explore links between violence against women and urban public services.

The survey has also found that 64 percent of the female respondents avoid going outside at night as a preventive measure against sexual harassment and 60 percent prefer going outside in groups.

MA Mannan, senior research fellow of BIDS, presented the survey findings.

The findings show that the root causes of sexual harassment and violence include inadequate laws and their poor enforcement, ineffective and untimely prosecution of the offender, complicated and lengthy legal process, and lack of gender sensitivity among police, hospital staff and judicial authority.

To stop sexual violence against women, the survey underscores the need for collective efforts by the government, political leaders, donor communities, NGOs, women rights organisations, human rights bodies and civil society representatives.

The survey proposes a set of recommendations which include amendment of existing laws related to sexual harassment, ensuring protection of survivors by police and judiciary and human rights groups, and inclusion of gender sensitive courses on the school curricula.

Stressing the need for strict enforcement of laws, Narayanganj City Corporation Mayor Selina Hayat Ily said that government could prevent sexual violence against women if it wanted to.

Perpetrators of sexual violence often take political shelter which hampers punishment and this needs to be stopped, she added.

"A criminal is a criminal and he must be punished," she said.

Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu said special training is necessary for the police to learn how to behave with a woman.

Inu also said he would suggest the DMP commissioner to include women police along with their male colleagues in patrolling the cities of the country.

He urged women and girls to protest instantly in the case of their subjected to harassment or violence instead of keeping silent.

Among others, Lynne Featherstone MP, parliamentary under secretary of state for international development of the UK, spoke at the programme as a special guest.

Hafizuddin Khan, treasurer, executive board of ActionAid Bangladesh and former adviser to a caretaker government, chaired the programme.

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India SC slams failure to form Delhi govt

AFP, New Delhi

India's top court yesterday slammed top officials for dragging their feet in forming a new government in the national capital more than eight months after the last administration resigned in chaos.

New Delhi, a city of some 17 million people, has been without a proper government since February, when the capital's firebrand chief minister Arvind Kejriwal quit to protest the blocking of an anti-corruption bill.

The Supreme Court urged authorities and political parties to resolve the impasse, saying Delhi residents deserved a democratically elected government.

"We gave you enough time but nothing has happened so far," Chief Justice H.L. Dattu, who heads a five-judge bench, told the court.

"The people of Delhi have a right to have a democratically elected government and not be ruled by the president," he said.

The court was directing its criticism at Lieutenant Governor Najeeb Jung and the national government which have been running the city-state since Kejriwal quit as head of a minority administration.

Kejriwal, an anti-corruption campaigner and a self-described "anarchist", had only taken power 49 days before his shock resignation.

He has since been demanding fresh

elections in the capital, a move opposed by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has the biggest number of seats in the Delhi assembly.

Kejriwal's upstart Aam Aadmi (Common Man) Party lodged a petition in the Supreme Court seeking new polls in the hope of strengthening its fortunes.

The court said Tuesday that President Pranab Mukherjee has now instead given his consent to a proposal to invite the BJP to form a new government.

Kejriwal, a former tax official, and his party sent shockwaves through India's political establishment when it scored a series of stunning successes during local elections in Delhi last year.

Verdict today

FROM PAGE 1

Nizami played a key role in forming the four-party alliance ahead of the 2001 election and led his party, which fought tooth and nail against the birth of Bangladesh, to taste state power along with their key ally the BNP. Nizami and Jamaat's second man Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, who was convicted in war crimes last year, became members of Khaleda Zia's cabinet, amid protests from the country's pro-liberation minds.

Five top Jamaat leaders have already been punished for their 1971 crimes and three other top leaders are being tried in two war crimes tribunals.

Having assumed the power with a landslide victory in 2009, the Awami League-led government formed the International Crimes Tribunal in 2010 to bring the perpetrators of 1971 to book. Later another tribunal was constituted for speedy handling of wartime offences. The tribunals so far have delivered nine judgments and five more cases are awaiting verdicts.

Fixing the date of verdict at 11:03 yesterday, Justice M Enayetur Rahim, the chairman of the ICT-1, directed the jail authorities to produce Nizami before the court by 10:30am today [Wednesday] "positively".

The word "positively" reminds the incident of June 24, when the all-set tribunal had been compelled to defer Nizami's verdict as the jail authority didn't produce the accused citing his "sickness" on the day, frustrating thousands of justice seekers.

Following the order, Nizami was shifted from Kashimpur jail to Dhaka Central Jail around 8:00pm. There, jail doctors conducted a health check-up and found him sound, Farman Ali, senior jail superintendent of Dhaka jail, told The Daily Star last night.

Nizami, president of the then Jamaat-e-Islami student wing Islami Chhatra Sangha that turned into Pakistan army's auxiliary force Al-Badr during the Liberation War, was arrested on June 29, 2010, in a criminal case and later shown arrest in war crimes cases.

The ICT-1 framed 16 charges against Nizami on May 28, 2012. According to the charges, Nizami had conspired with the Pakistani army, planned and incited crimes; was complicit in murders, rapes, looting and destruction of property; and was responsible for commissioning of internationally recognised wartime crimes in 1971.

But, it took around one and a half years for the completion of the trial, thanks to the lack of preparation of the prosecution and a range of dilatory

tactics of the defence.

The tribunal first kept the case awaiting verdict on November 13 last year. But the proceeding faced further delay when tribunal's chairman Justice ATM Fazle Kabir went on retirement without delivering the judgment. His successor reheard the closing arguments and kept the verdict waiting again on March 24.

The tribunal could not deliver verdict on June 24 due to Nizami's sudden "illness" forcing the court to keep it waiting again.

BGB DEPLOYED

Meanwhile, to prevent any untoward situation centring on the verdict, the government yesterday deployed BGB personnel across the country.

The paramilitary troops were deployed at 7:00pm, a BGB official told The Daily Star.

Earlier in the afternoon, State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan told reporters at the secretariat that the government would resist any anarchy attempt "at any cost".

WITNESSES IN FEAR

Prosecution witnesses from Santhia upazila of Pabna were concerned about their security centring on the Nizami verdict, reports our Pabna correspondent.

"We are now worried about the safety of our family as Jamaat men will try to take revenge if the verdict goes against Nizami," said freedom fighter Johurul Haque, one of the eight prosecution witnesses from Santhia.

Local police, however, claimed they have taken "adequate" steps to ensure safety of the witnesses.

"We have taken security measures across the upazila ahead of the verdict. We have also ensured special security arrangement for the witnesses. Mobile teams have been deployed around the residences of the witnesses," said Sahed Mahmud, officer-in-charge of Santhia Police Station.

JAMAAT STANCE

Unlike the other verdict days, Jamaat yesterday didn't call hartal for today. However, the party is likely to announce protest programmes including countrywide daylong hartal for Sunday, and instant processions and rallies at different parts of the country if the verdict goes against them.

Talking to The Daily Star, Jamaat leaders of Pabna and Dinajpur yesterday said they had taken preparations to wage instant protests following the announcement of the verdict.

Jamaat high-ups held an emergency meeting yesterday evening to layout

THE CHARGES

1. Causing the arrest, detention, torture and murder of three people, including head maulana Kasim Uddin, of Pabna Zilla School on June 4, 1971.

2. Conspiring to commit crimes, and causing the killings of 450 people, rape of 30-40 women and deportation of the villagers of Baousgari, Ruposhi and Demra in Pabna on May 14, 1971.

3. Complicity in torture, murder and rape at Mohammadpur Physical Training Institute in Dhaka during the Liberation War.

4. Complicity in murder, rape, looting and destruction of properties at Karamja of Pabna on May 8, 1971.

5. Complicity in the murder of 21 unarmed villagers of Arpara and Utvergari under Ishwardi Police Station on April 16, 1971.

6. Command responsibility for and involvement in the murder of 30 people in Pabna's Dhulaura village on November 27, 1971.

7. Complicity in torture and murder of Sohrah Ali in Brishalikha village of Pabna on December 3, 1971.

8. Murder of Bodhi, Rumi, Jewel and Azad at Old MP Hostel in Dhaka on August 30, 1971.

9. Complicity in the genocide of about 70 Hindus in Brishalikha village on December 3, 1971.

10. Involvement in the destruction of Onil Chandra Kundu's house in Santhia's Sonatala.

11. Delivering an inciting speech at a meeting of Islami Chhatra Sangha at the Muslim Institute of Chittagong on August 3, 1971.

12. Delivering an inciting speech during a meeting organised in remembrance of Al Madani at the Islamic Academy Hall on August 22, 1971.

13. Delivering an inciting speech at a programme organised by Dhaka city unit of Chhatra Sangha on the Arts Building premises of Dhaka University marking the defence day on September 8, 1971.

14. Delivering an inciting speech to Razakars of Jessor on September 10, 1971.

15. Hatching a conspiracy to commit crimes at Santhia Pilot High School with Razakar commander Samad Miah.

16. Planning and committing genocide to eliminate intellectuals and professionals.

US school shooter 'invited victims to lunch'

AFP, Los Angeles

The alleged shooter whose gun rampage in a US school left three people dead invited five friends to lunch before opening fire on them, police said Monday.

The gunman, widely identified as Jaylen Fryberg, killed one person and injured four others in the cafeteria shooting last Friday before taking his own life. One of those injured died Sunday.

Perpetrators of sexual violence often take political shelter which hampers punishment and this needs to be stopped, she added.

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Gender gap cut

FROM PAGE 16

gender gap grow since 2006.

The WEF, which each year gathers the global elite in the plush Swiss ski resort of Davos, said Bangladesh has experienced significant improvements on the economic participation and the educational attainment and health and survival sub-indexes.

The country ranks 127th on the economic participation and opportunity sub-index with a score well below the average, according to the report.

On the Educational Attainment sub-index, it ranks 111th to emerge as the best performing country in the region on the enrolment in primary education indicator and among the top 10 countries on the enrolment in secondary education indicator.

Bangladesh grabs the 122nd spot on the Health and Survival sub-index and came out as one of the twenty lowest-performing countries on the healthy life expectancy indicator.

In Political Empowerment, Bangladesh ranks the 10th due to a very high score on the years with female head of state indicator as the country has had a female at the helm of the country for 21 years out of the past 50.

After Mali, Bangladesh is the second-ranked country with the highest percentage of women (15-19 years old) in early marriage.

The female singulate mean age at marriage is one of the lowest, at 18.6

years. Bangladesh is also one of the countries with the lowest percentage of firms with female top managers and female participation in ownership.

Increased access for women to politics and the workforce has narrowed the global gender gap in the past 10 years, the WEF said.

India fell 13 places to 114th in the overall performance this year and is the lowest out of the so-called Brics countries.

Rwanda came into the rankings for the first time and took the seventh place, making it the highest-ranking African economy.

Report author Saadia Zahidi said Rwanda's success was because there are almost as many women as men at work -- and in the country's ministerial offices -- rather than because of improved access to health and education services.

Nicaragua rose to become the sixth-best place, up from 10 last year, for women. The Philippines remained the highest-ranking Asian state, but fell from the fifth to the ninth place.

Globally, much of the progress on gender equality has come from more women entering politics and the workforce, Zahidi said.

Almost all the countries had made progress towards closing the gap in access to healthcare, with 35 nations filling it completely, while 25 countries had shut the education access gap, the report showed.

India unearths JMB plot

FROM PAGE 1

New Delhi correspondent of The Daily Star.

Their interrogation may lead the Indian probe agencies to locate at least 120 Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) that were transported to Bangladesh in four consignments from India, Indian intelligence sources said.

The October 2 explosion killed two persons -- Shakil Ahmed and Suwon Mandal alias Subhan -- reportedly residents of Bangladesh, when they were making IEDs at a house in Burdwan, West Bengal.

The NIA has already found that all accused and their associates are members of JMB.

The JMB detonated nearly 500 bombs almost simultaneously on one day in 2005 across Bangladesh, including in the capital, Dhaka. Its militants later carried out suicide attacks on several courthouses, killing 25 people and injuring hundreds.

Earlier this year, gunmen opened fire and tossed bombs at a security van carrying members of the group on the way to court.

"The group was a very serious threat in 2005 and up to 2008, but they have now been very badly decimated," said Ajay Sahini, executive director of the Institute for Conflict Management in New Delhi that monitors militant groups across South Asia.