

# Silencing our outcry

## When the right to protest becomes a crime, what are we to do?



UPASHANA SALAM

**W**HY should the police brutality on protesters come as a surprise? They felt 'obliged' to act on the behalf of their helpless compatriots who only had a few

guns and shells to protect themselves against the onslaught of (defenceless) protesters. After all, they unnecessarily raised their voice against a crime that apparently never happened. They should have known better than to protest against the criminals who are so difficult to apprehend. The IGP AKM Shahidul Hoque in fact lamented that the public should have "arrested" the miscreants instead of depending on law enforcement officials who, might we point out, were appointed for this very reason.

How do you expect such a force to understand what constitutes sexual assault? A policeman thinks that it is appropriate to grab a female demonstrator by her neck, knock her to the ground and have her cornered by at least three other cops who consider kicking and hitting a woman to be completely normal.

If they can be so ruthless as to chase a girl, throw her on the ground and beat her mercilessly, why then do you think that they would consider a "little shoving", "jostling" and "pushing" of girls by some "naughty boys", as the IGP has suggested, at this year's Pahela Baishakh to be out of the ordinary?



PHOTO: STAR

Everything is media constructed. Because what else does the media have to do apart from gathering video footage and detailed news of girls being molested at the largest secular festival of the country? The news outlets of the country are so devoid of news that they felt the urge to blow up a simple case of 'eve-teasing' (a 'nice' way to describe sexual harassment) by a handful of miscreants into a full-fledged incident of sexual assault. They are just out to

tarnish the image of the country. And so what if there are CCTV footage? What's the need to believe your eyes? The people of Bangladesh are surely suffering from a case of collective myopia. Hence, their vision is hampered, their logic tampered with.

So protesting against social injustices is now against the law? That's what it seems like. How else do you explain why the law enforcement officials found it necessary to discon-

nect the loudspeaker used by the protesters and then immediately unleash their wrath on them with batons, water canons and teargas shells to disperse them? The DMP Commissioner Asaduzzaman Miah had promised to meet the protesters to talk about the developments, if any, regarding the investigation of the sexual assault of April 14. Unlike what the cops would have us believe, the "police were attacked" with bricks

only when the protesters were unnecessarily targeted and assaulted.

This whole 'attack on cops' theory perpetuated by the law enforcers is a tad laughable. Simply because the demonstrators were not armed and wanted to speak to the DMP commissioner while the police were equipped with batons and guns.

The perpetrators of the April 14 assault are yet to be apprehended because apparently the police don't have enough evidence to catch the culprits. Despite there being police officers present at the venue, they couldn't (or wouldn't) prevent the attacks, and yet, they expected the public to do their duty for them. If the police showed the same 'machismo', the same verve, timeliness and strength that they employed while attacking the unarmed protesters, perhaps we would not still be waiting for an answer as to who were responsible for such a heinous public attack on women.

Unsurprisingly, we are yet to get any kind of acceptable response from the government or other authorities concerned regarding either the sexual assault or the attack on protesters; only one cop got suspended for the brutal violence. And yet, the police force keep defending their acts and claim that the cops' action was within the boundaries of law.

The IGP's suggestion that the public defend their rights and fight for their safety, thus, does not sound like a bad idea. In a country where the police are provided an implicit sense of impunity, we seem to have no choice but to save ourselves.

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# Das Stuff



AMITAVA KAR

**O**UR houses are just a pile of stuff with a roof over it. That's why we build them; to keep our stuff. Sometimes we have to move to a bigger house because we need

more room for our stuff. Even at work, everybody's got a little place for their stuff. I can see it on your table — memorabilia, photos, phones, laptop, iPad, a half-eaten apple and, boredom. You are not yourself without your stuff.

Just look around when you are travelling on a bus, train or in an airplane, to see family or friends, and, get...more stuff. It's a frenzied land grab for the overhead bins to put our stuff in. These are, however, the little piles. We left most of it at the house which we had to lock up. We wouldn't want some bad guy to pay a little visit and take some of our stuff!

It's strange that they always take the good stuff. They never bother with the stuff we have been saving for years. Like the treadmill that is gathering rust due to non-use. Occasionally, we make attempts at getting rid of some of the old stuff to make room for newer stuff. But the idea does not intrigue the spouse. "How can we throw away our own stuff?"

That's right. At the end of the day, we are, after all, known by the stuff we keep.

When we go on vacation, we have to take some of our stuff with us. That's a smaller version of our houses in two big suitcases and a carry-on luggage. As soon as we get down to the hotel room,



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we open the suitcases and lay out all our stuff. And just when we start feeling at home because we have at least some of our stuff with us, an old friend, who now lives there, calls and says, "Why don't you come over and spend a couple of days with us?"

Now we have to pack even a smaller version of our stuff. We left the main stuff back home. We have several bags full of our stuff in the hotel room. And now, we carry some of it—just enough for a couple of days—to the friend's

house. The supply chain is getting longer and harder to maintain.

But when we get there, we never quite feel at home. Wonder why? None of the stuff we see there is ours. It's the friend's stuff all over the place! The friend is kind enough to give us a room to sleep in. But right next to the bed there's a dresser with their garbage on it.

Have you noticed that other people's stuff is garbage and our garbage is stuff? This time we've only got the wallet,

nail clippers, medicine, two books, toothpaste, toothbrush, shaving accessories, cologne, laptop, cell phone, chargers, clothes and sandals. We put everything up. It takes about an hour and a half, but we finally feel okay after a while. That's when the friend says, "I think tomorrow in the morning we'll go over to the other side of the town, go fishing with a friend of mine and maybe stay over." Oh, no! What do we do now? More packing follows.

I think we get the idea.

Some of us simply buy too much stuff. For instance, the amount of money Americans spend shopping on a Black Friday alone is more than the GDP of many countries. I understand when we buy stuff other people can have jobs, that's how we keep the econ-

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omy running etc.

But the problem is some people can't even afford the basic stuff. Perhaps that's one of the "root causes" why so many migrants from poor countries end up dead in the unforgiving seas trying to get to greener pastures. I am sure the poor Bangladeshis found in the Thai mass graves did not have much stuff under their roofs.

We are also too attached to our stuff. But it is interesting to watch how an earthquake can change all that. When we felt the tremors from the earthquakes in Nepal, wherever we were, almost all of us ran for the ground, an open space.

What stuff did we grab then?

The writer is an engineer-turned-journalist.

### QUOTABLE Quote

Truth is everybody is going to hurt you: you just gotta find the ones worth suffering for.

Bob Marley

