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# AND STILL THE MAN STAYS UNSCATHED

ZYMA ISLAM



**WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

**MARCH 1<sup>ST</sup>**  
**12 yr old girl** with disabilities **raped** in Lalmonirhat by a 62 yr old man. **No case was filed.**

**MARCH 2<sup>ND</sup>**  
**Infant** and her **mother killed** by a man in Gaibandha. He had five wives and wanted them to live together.

**19 yr old girl** in Habiganj **hacked to death** by husband after **she left him to go live with her parents.**

**MARCH 3<sup>RD</sup>**  
**24 yr old woman** from Mymensingh **killed** by ex-husband after **she divorced him.**

**MARCH 4<sup>TH</sup>**  
**12 yr old** in Pabna **bound, beaten up and tortured with pins** for allegations of stealing a mobile phone. **His mother was beaten up** when she tried to intervene.

**22 yr old woman** in Noakhali **killed for dowry.** Her dead body was found buried under her husband's house

**MARCH 5<sup>TH</sup>**  
**Two minors** in Pirojpur and Manikganj **assaulted** by their stalkers for **refusing to be their girlfriends.**

**18-20 yr old woman** in Sitakunda **found dead** in a field. She had head and face injuries.

**MARCH 6<sup>TH</sup>**  
**School student** in Sherpur **raped** by her tutor.  
**Woman hacked to death** by her husband for **dowry** in Moulvibazar. She had head and neck injuries.

All in a week's work. March has barely started. We already have five men (at least) raping, assaulting and killing the women they thought were below them.

This month isn't special of course – a glance through any month of the calendar gives similar numbers. The last day of February delivered an injured 15-year-old hacked indiscriminately by her boyfriend for refusing marriage. At the same time, a 16-year-old laid in the burn unit of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, hooked to life support with two front teeth missing. She was tortured for dowry.

In some of these cases the victims had dared to question the authority of men and paid dearly for it. For example, the case in Mymensingh where all Fatema

Khatun had done was get out of a bad marriage. Her husband ambushed and stabbed her. Or the case of Nazma Begum, who just didn't want to live with all four of her husband's other wives. In the other cases these women belonged to the most vulnerable portion of society – like the physically challenged 12-year-old.

But the men, the men were all the same. They were all men who felt a sense of entitlement and acted upon it. Maybe newspapers can just cut to the chase and start publishing these stories under a heading called "Victims of Male Entitlement". There seem to be enough of them every day to populate an entire section anyway.

But the article today is not about numbers. It's about figuring out how

courage to rape that child. It's because the people around him taught him everything will be okay in the end.

Of course now we have to add the word 'allegedly' before the word 'rape'. Seeing that our very patriarchal society ensured that no case was filed, the entire validity of the victim's experience has been jeopardised forever.

The man stays unscathed. I can imagine what they told her parents to keep her from receiving medical attention, or from filing a case. I'll wager it's the same thing that that random person on the street told me in Mohakhali that other day, when I was yelling at a man for passing lewd comments while I walked by. "Be quiet and save your dignity. Let it be," he said. Numerous women across the world were probably hearing the same sentence directed towards them on the exact same day. This, after all, is the most common reaction when women dare to speak out against injustices, against men using their bodies for sexual crimes.

That person asking me to be quiet gave the oppressor arsenal. The oppressor gained validation from the crowd in the street and rose to claim his entitlement to sexually subdue women.

"You can understand what type of a girl she is by how she drew attention to herself on the street," he said. The other most common reaction heard by women when they speak up. It's a reaction that reduces the women's experiences to 'she was asking for it' and gives the men's actions legitimacy.

So the men keep quiet about other men and the women are made to keep quiet, and a crime travels from being a passing comment on the street to full-blown rape in a tobacco field.

And a 12-year-old girl who is forced to keep quiet because she cannot talk or hear becomes the ultimate sacrifice at that altar. ■



The beautiful and blue Rangamati Kaptai Lake, with blooming flowers on its banks and the green mountains on each side, imbues in one a sense of peace.

But behind this tranquil scene lies a history of violence, a history that speaks of displacement of thousands of

people. A history so heart-wrenching that once you learn, you may be forced to question the serenity of the surroundings.

PHOTO: PAHN CHAKMA

**SNAPSHOT**

## MAILBOX

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### Caught Between Dream and Reality

Bangladesh is an overpopulated country, which is burdened with a huge number of unemployed men and women. Every year, huge numbers of these people, unemployed and under employed, go abroad to change their fortune. However, instead of getting a good job they see that they have been tricked by the recruiting agencies into being enslaved in a foreign country by some ruthless employers. Recently, we have witnessed a number of heart-wrenching accounts given by the abused female workers who went abroad to earn for their families. It is very unfortunate that our government fulfilled its responsibility only by deporting these exploited and abused female workers from Bangladesh, whereas our country's economy is actually run by these workers' hard earned wages. I really appreciate the article titled "Caught between Dreams and Reality" published in Star Weekend on March 3, 2017, as it



IMAGE: KAZI TAH SIN AGAZ APURBO

clearly revealed the terrible condition of the migrant female workers. As the rate of migration of the female workers is increasing by the day, I believe, the government should take immediate steps so that rights of these workers can never be violated in said countries. And, I think, to do so, empowering the respective diplomatic missions and fair monitoring of the overseas recruiting agencies are the most important steps that the government should consider. *Jahid murad*  
Dhaka College, Dhaka

### Save the Rivers and its Tributaries

Recently, it has been reported that the Bangladesh government has launched a project to dredge 24 major rivers by June 2018. A total of 101.4 million cubic metres of area will be dredged, which will cost Taka 18.73 billion. On completion of the project, heavy water vessels will be able to ply throughout the year that will facilitate movement of passengers and goods at minimum cost. I would like to thank the government for taking such a significant initiative. However, we should remember that these major rivers are actually fed by their hundreds of tributaries spread all over the country. Due to fish cultivation, river encroachment and unplanned irrigation, many of these tributaries have already been covered up. As a result, the quantity of water a major river used to receive has been reduced significantly which contributes to its abnormal siltation during the dry season. To get the full benefit of such a massive dredging project, the tributaries of these twenty four rivers have to be protected from encroachment and should be dredged first. Otherwise, we will not be able to stop the siltation of major rivers. *Md Ashraf Hossain*  
Central Bashabo, Dhaka



PHOTO: COURTESY

### The Forgotten History of Dhaka Gate

I personally want to thank the writer for the article titled "The Forgotten History of Dhaka Gate" published in Star Weekend on February 17, 2017. The well-written piece took us back to the fading history of the ancient, historic Dhaka city, some 354 years ago from the current mechanised city of traffic and pollution. The charm of Mughal Dhaka and its colonial heritage during the British rule has been preserved in these centuries-old structures. However, many of these heritage sites have been engulfed by the jungle of concrete buildings and shopping malls. I felt disheartened to see that the historic Dhaka gate has also become such a victim of our negligence and unplanned urbanisation. The writer has been writing very interesting articles on the lost historical heritages for some time in the past, helping us revisit and rekindle our valuable history. *Mashudul Haque*  
Central Road, Dhaka

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Star Weekend.