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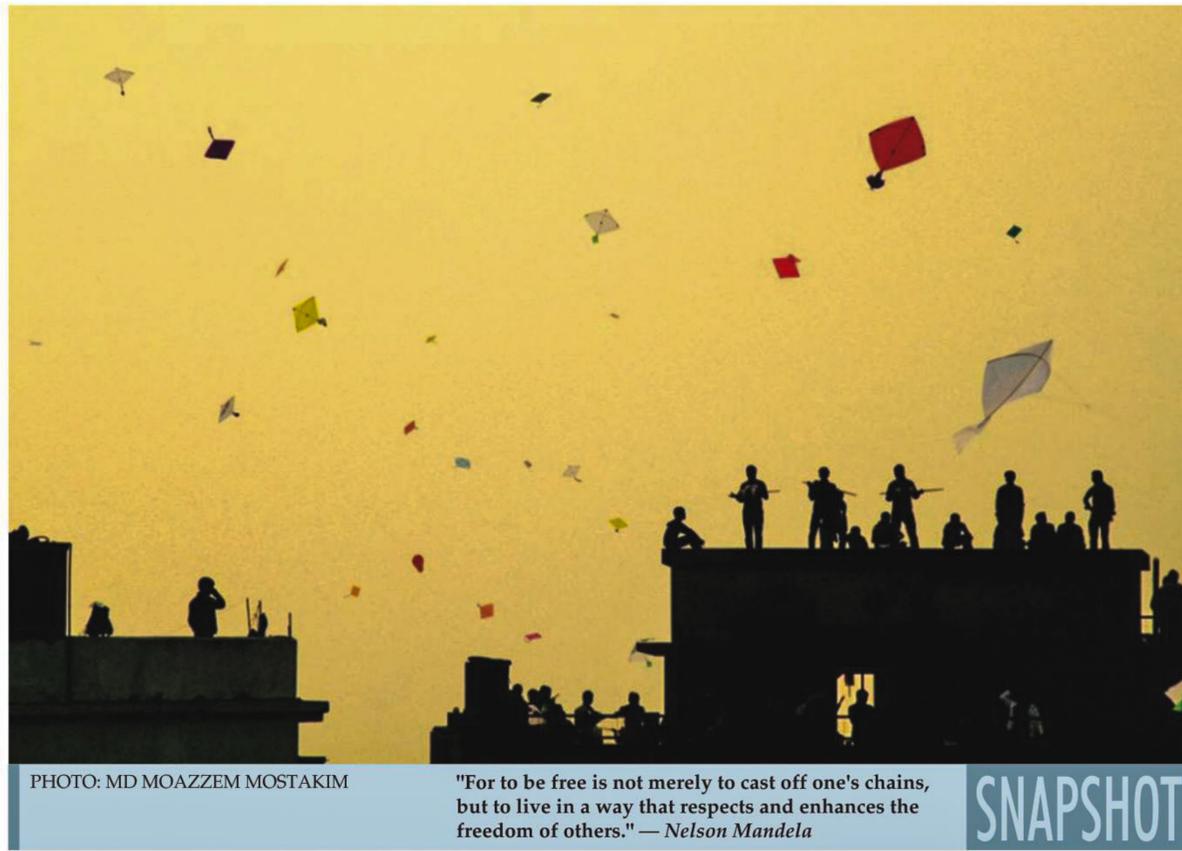


PHOTO: MD MOAZZEM MOSTAKIM

"For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." — Nelson Mandela

SNAPSHOT



IMAGE: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

GUILTY OF WHAT?

ZYMA ISLAM

"We suspect that they were committing a crime under Section 377 but we can't investigate it because the court did not consider it," says the investigating officer of the case. He was talking about the arrest and subsequent imprisonment of several men from Keraniganj who reportedly identify as queer.

"I would not even have needed the 10 days I asked for, the two days the court provided would have been enough for me to prove it and press charges," he says, a tinge of disappointment lacing his voice.

The *Star Weekend* was talking to Subinspector Mehedi Hasan of Keraniganj (south) police station, who is presiding over the case. By Section 377, he refers to the penal code law that punishes "Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal" with life imprisonment.

"We are only investigating the narcotics charges against them," says Hasan. He says the source of the drugs is exactly what they will be looking into. However, he also adds: "The drug haul was not very large, but these people operate as an organisation through Facebook and meet here often, and I want to get to the bottom of this."

On the days leading up to the remand hearing, the media last week was plastered with reports quoting the law enforcers that the youth were arrested because they were suspected to be gay, as per primary interrogation.

The commanding officer of RAB-10, Mohammed Zahangir Hossain Matobbar, told BBC, "They confessed that they gather at the location mainly to do this (have intercourse). Upon the RAB's arrival they could not do so—they were arrested before they could."

Amnesty International circulated a statement on May 22, saying, "Multiple sources told Amnesty International that RAB officers physically and verbally assaulted many of those present, and forced all of them to stand in a line. Officers then proceeded to 'inspect'

them and arrested those they suspected of being gay men, based on their clothing and mannerisms."

With the court dismissing all the other complaints, the narcotics claim is the main battleground now. However, when the case is analysed, what comes up is that the law enforcers found only 45 yaba tablets. Twenty-eight men were sent to jail for it. Breaking down, it is 1.6 tablets per person only—that is, if they were even discovered on the bodies of all 28 of them. Four were remanded for two days, and 12 were to be interrogated at the jail-gate while the rest were directly shipped to jail.

"Since this is a narcotics case, how are they all in jail? Did the law enforcers discover drugs on all of them?" asks Jyotirmoy Barua, a senior human rights lawyer at the Supreme Court.

"Because they are reportedly queer men, it is important to question whether this judgment is creating space for harassment," he adds.

Extrapolating from the fact that all of them were sued, and assuming that all of them were taking drugs, this seems to be the only logical question the police can ask them: "How did you come across a single piece of yaba?" Even more interestingly, the Keraniganj police sought a ten-day remand each—10 days of grilling for a single piece of yaba?

To put into perspective, during the entire duration of last year, just RAB itself discovered 36,70,676 pieces of

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MAILBOX

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Who defines masculinity?

Society plays a leading role in defining masculinity. It imposes strict social behaviours by which a person can be defined as masculine or feminine. It is not a dynamic illustration of the Bangladeshi context but a universal burning issue in today's world. The article "A Fiction of Myself", published last week, asks 'Does society reserve the right to define gender?' Moreover, a family has become the institution of gender teaching where children are first taught the characteristics of masculinity or femininity that they should possess. Children who do not adopt these behaviours of gender identity are being subjugated not only in their own family but also in society. But in a true sense, physical construction and mannish behavior does not define masculinity. We should be more conscious before defining a gender. *Jashita Areng Notre Dame University, Mymensingh*

Where rapists do not fear to tread

This article published last week narrated the typical features of our patriarchal society where men are encouraged to treat women as objects. The situation is so suffocating that even after becoming a victim of sexual assault, society blames the woman for being assaulted, pointing fingers at her attire and character. Due to this blatant patriarchy, which protects the male members of the society at any cost, women victims have to face derogatory comments even from their own relatives and family members. This obnoxious social norm has also influenced national laws, which have failed to ensure justice for women who become victims of sexual assault. One of the worst examples of this failure is Tonu's murder. More than a year has passed but still none of the perpetrators have been arrested by law enforcement agencies. The current trend of increasing sexual violence clearly indicates that perpetrators are highly encouraged by the fact that they will get off



ILLUSTRATION: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

scot-free after committing these crimes. I believe if exemplary punishment could be ensured for perpetrators, incidents of sexual assault would significantly decline. *Rafid Alam Mohammadpur, Dhaka*

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

Leak of competitive exam question papers – where are we moving as a society?

Recent leaks of different competitive job recruitment tests, in addition to that of various public examinations (JSC, SSC, or HSC for instance), are of deep concern. Aside from this, there is a huge gap between vacancies and numbers of job applicants which already puts a lot of pressure on students. Leak of question papers further befuddle the young generation. Higher education in the country suffers from session gaps, and students are moreover pressured by aged parents seeking release from the stress of their jobs. It is high time to protest! The role of the media can be more effective in addressing the problem of question paper leaks. *Shibbir Ahammed Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University, Mymensingh*