

# The spectre of online sexual harassment



**Y**EANUR Rahman came to Dhaka with big dreams. She studied hard, aced her final exams maintaining a good GPA and got admitted into a public university in the capital. Things were going exactly as she had envisioned. Better yet, the freshman thought she had fallen in love with someone in her very first year.

However, the relationship did not work out. It was a mature enough break-up, she thought, as the couple mutually decided to move on. Days later, all of Yeanur's assumptions took a pounding. She was horrified to find nude pictures of herself trending on her Facebook timeline. She became physically ill thinking of the consequences of her parents, relatives, friends—everyone—seeing these pictures.

Her face had been cropped onto a nude body and it was being shared by strangers. Some of them found it funny, some of them were saying horrible things about her. Living the dream in the capital turned into a nightmare.

The photo appeared with objectionable text, inappropriate comments and was posted in such a way as though she was making sexually provocative statements. It was clear that her ex was on a mission to destroy her reputation. He posted her pictures as a

means of revenge for discontinuing the relationship. She called the man, but found his mobile switched off.

Twenty-five-year-old Naina Rahman from Brahmanbaria experienced something similar. A stranger had opened a fake account and photoshopped her face onto images of naked bodies. While she did complain to the Brahmanbaria Sadar Police Station she did not get any help. Desperate, Naina contemplated suicide, but was thankfully talked out of it.

Cases of sexual abuse online have been on the rise. While the country now has more than 80 million internet subscribers, issues like these haven't been addressed properly.

"We receive 20–25 complaints from girls a day," says Jennifer Alam, President of Crime Research and Analysis Foundation (CRAF), an NGO that works on issues related to social media harassment.

"The problem is that most adolescent girls are unaware of this new type of crime. In this digital age, access to the internet and smartphones has made it possible for almost anyone to have a social media account. This is why more and more teenage girls are falling prey to some sort of sexual harassment or the other," she adds.

Jennifer explains that the absence or dearth of sex education and the lack of awareness on harassment in social media are some of the reasons why so many girls are facing harassment.

"People think it's a safe place to abuse a girl, whether it is out of revenge or hatred," she says.

According to Minhar Mohsin,



General Secretary of CRAF, these cases take different forms. Some blackmail girls for revenge, while others do it for money.

"Although jilted lovers are the common offenders, there have also been cases where couples claim that their Facebook profiles have been hacked and they are being threatened that their intimate photos will be shared online or shown to their parents if they don't pay money through bKash," states Minhar.

Aside from data provided by CRAF, the number of cases filed under Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology Act also suggests that sexual harassment online is quite common. More than 70 percent of the cases filed under the section are

filed by teenage girls, according to a public prosecutor.

In addition, M Najmul Islam, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Social Media Monitoring of Counter-Terrorism and Cyber Crime told *The Daily Star* that cases of intimate videos of girls are also being uploaded on pornographic websites without the victims' knowledge.

CRAF believes that one of the key ways to alleviate this problem is to spread awareness based on internet literacy. CRAF initiated activities last November to teach girls how to take legal steps. "Cyber crimes on Facebook are alarming. I believe that if the perpetrator gets exemplary punishment then he will think twice before participating in such heinous

acts," says Jennifer.

However, activists say that law enforcement agencies are not well-equipped to deal with such matters.

Human rights activist, Nur Khan Liton, says, "These cases are not solved in a legal manner because law enforcement has limited knowledge as far as technological advancement is concerned. Police fail to trace perpetrators because they do not have the capability to fight cyber criminals."

Another issue that Nur points out is the absence of a regional Facebook office in Bangladesh. "If Facebook authorities operate from Bangladesh, the number of harassment issues can be minimised as the victims can directly report the culprits," he says.

The fear of public humiliation is another reason why such cases are often dismissed. "A girl is reluctant to complain to law enforcement because authorities would want verification and that would paint a poor picture of her in society," he adds.

According to Mahtabul Hakim, Programme Analyst, Ending Violence Against Women, UN Women Bangladesh, there is a need for dynamic prevention of cyber harassment. The perpetrator feels that attacking someone online is not a crime and thus is not as harmful as other crimes. But the truth is that such crimes attack the privacy and mental wellbeing of the victim; they can cause lifelong damage to the victim's reputation and even lead to suicide. Such online harassment should be considered violence against women and treated as such by the legal system.

Shadma Malik is a reporter at *The Daily Star*.

# The uncertain future of Rohingya children

SHARIFUL HASAN

**A**LL I could see was a sea of people. Young, old and every age in between, standing in line for hours, to receive food. What shocked me the most was the number of children. There were just so many of them. So many hungry eyes.

This was not only in the Kutupalong camp, but in Balukhali, Thangkhali, Hakimpara—in all of the camps and settlements. Instead of playing, or going to school, children were in line everywhere for food, house items or materials for them and their families' temporary shelter.

Manjur Morshed, a social services officer in the district of Cox's Bazar, revealed a depressing number; their team has identified 36,373 orphaned Rohingya children.

I thought about the incidents that made headlines in 2014 and 2015. Thousands of people had been trafficked to Malaysia and Thailand



The department of social services has identified 36,373 orphaned Rohingya children. Among them, 65 percent have lost their fathers and 22 percent have lost both parents.

Over half a million Rohingyas have entered Bangladesh since August 25, 2017. Half of them have been identified as children.

When I see faces of the children, I think of my 11-month-old boy. I cannot stop imagining all the children here becoming victims of human trafficking and ending up floating in the sea instead of playing happily like my child.

I saw a four-year-old at the child-friendly space at Shamlapur. He had his one-year-old baby brother on his lap. The atrocities of humans have forced a four-year-old to become the sole guardian of his baby brother.

Journalism was my passion and profession before I joined BRAC. I covered trafficking and migration for twelve years. The Rohingya crisis is not unknown to me. I have also visited the

Rakhine state of Myanmar where the people have been victims of these atrocities for a long time. I saw many Rohingyas with refugee cards, not only in the camps of Bangladesh, but also in Malaysia and Indonesia. They said if they were in Myanmar, they would surely face death. At least if they crossed the sea, they had a chance of surviving.

The right to life is a fundamental right for everyone, everywhere. Rohingyas have been deprived of their human rights in their own country for decades. They have been coming to Bangladesh as refugees since 1978.

BRAC's total coverage (based on sanitation) is 540,600 people with installation of 13,515 latrines as of December 17, 2017. BRAC ensures access to safe water for 340,612 people through 1,227 shallow tube wells, 50 deep tube wells and three ring wells.

3,250 bathing cubicles were set up especially for women and adolescent girls. BRAC's 10 primary health centres and 50 satellite clinics have provided 588,035 services. 71,631 cases of pneumonia and 74,814 cases of diarrhoea have been treated. BRAC has helped to deliver 363 babies so far. BRAC vaccinated 1,296 children during the immunisation campaign against diphtheria and brought 3,666 children to government vaccination centres. 200,425 blankets and 241,651 sets of clothes have been distributed, especially to children and elderly people for protection against cold weather. Some 34,108 children received recreational support through 206 child-friendly spaces.

These Myanmar nationals are occupying forest land and hilly areas by chopping down many trees for making

their huts and collecting firewood for cooking. Rapid plantation of various trees is a primary requirement to restore the environment in the makeshift settlements as well as in the host communities. So, 3,047 trees have been planted by BRAC in makeshift settlements. 7,356 trees have been planted in host communities to contribute to environmental restoration. For securing food sources, 56,924 households in makeshift settlements have received vegetable seeds.

Among everything we are doing though, the child-friendly spaces touch my heart the most. The hundreds of children, across the settlements, playing and singing. Anyone can feel the happiness in their chorus even if you do not understand the Rakhine language.

In Shamlapur, I found eight-year-old Bahar, six-year-old Rahman, nine-year-old Jaber, and many other children. Every one of them was so happy to be in Bangladesh. I asked them why, and they said they knew Bangladesh people to be good. They knew that they would not be killed here.

There are a number of paintings hung on the walls at the child-friendly spaces. The children have painted them. In one picture, I saw the cartoon character of Meena, but she was crying.

Cox's Bazar's social welfare officer, Manjur Morshed, said, "The department of social services has identified 36,373 orphaned Rohingya children. Among them, 65 percent have lost their fathers, and 22 percent have lost both their parents."

I do not know what the future holds for the 36,000 children, or the 350,000 children in total who are already here, or any of the Rohingyas fleeing to Cox's Bazar. But we have to figure it out. Otherwise we will all be responsible for this crime against humanity.

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through the Bay of Bengal. Countless children had fallen victim to human trafficking.

The images of those mass graves in the jungles that bordered Malaysia and Thailand will haunt me forever. I couldn't help but think: Will these orphaned Rohingya children become victims to a second manmade tragedy now, just when they thought they had reached safe shores?

A WORD

A DAY

to stay with...  
fun. The lake  
ninton and  
water! Its really  
mp back into the  
every once

**S**OLECISM  
NOUN

A grammatical mistake in speech or writing

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

1 Like Superman

6 Not feral

11 Unaided

12 Yucca's kin

13 Dangerous situations

15 Pig's place

16 Buddy

17 Quill need

18 Ruby or garnet

20 Yam or potato

23 Stories

27 Lake near Buffalo

28 Ripped

29 Contest form

31 Horse's cousin

32 Up to now

34 Spots on TV

37 Poorly lit

38 Phone download

41 Feline owners' purchases

44 Some messages

45 Wastes time

46 Harvest goddess

47 Skilled

**DOWN**

1 Felines

2 Stepped down

3 Race runner

4 Football position

5 More profound

6 Laptop's kin

7 Before today

8 Long dress

9 Tied up

10 Cubicle fixture

14 Unrefined

18 Mocks

19 After a while

20 Golf prop

21 Coffee dispenser

22 Drill part

24 High hit

25 Screw up

26 Isle surrounder

30 Alpine calls

31 Malawi neighbour

33 Fragrant tree

34 Baldwin of TV

35 Thin coin

36 Headliner

38 Car bar

39 Small sound

40 "Hey, you!"

42 Father's Day gift

43 Eccentric

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

NOW YOU'RE SUNBATHING INSTEAD OF RAKING!

I'LL GET YOU, BEETLE!!

OOPS!

HE ALWAYS USES TOO MUCH SUNSCREEN

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

YOU... YOU...

YOU... UM... YOU... GAAA!

I'VE RUN OUT OF NAMES TO CALL HAMMIE.

DOES THAT MEAN YOU MET A GOAL, OR ARE YOU ASKING FOR SUGGESTIONS?