

OUTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Men should be worried

NO STRINGS ATTACHED



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

MEN all over the world are getting worried. Or at least they should be. What started out as a movement in the US against sexual harassment of powerful men at top positions in Hollywood, beginning with chilling allegations against American film producer Harvey Weinstein, has now spread all over the world exposing this insidious crime that has seeped into almost all institutions one can think of. The film and entertainment industry have always been notorious for this crime, more so because of the impunity enjoyed by the harassers and because the victims have always been in positions of less power. But with the #MeToo movement, women across the globe have realised that this powerlessness is enabled by the culture of silence, hence the best weapon is to speak out or even shout out. And now journalists are exposing the same crime in news organisations in countries in South Asia where patriarchy is celebrated with pomp and parade.

The Telegraph India online recently ran a story that named some of the most well-known editors of various prominent Indian newspapers against whom there are allegations of sexual misconduct by women journalists. Some of them have narrated their harrowing experiences through writing. Pressure from journalists and rights defenders has led to internal inquiries being conducted in these papers and there is an indication that the offenders will be held accountable. The allegations range from obscene gestures and sexual innuendos to inappropriate physical contact and direct demands for sexual favours.

Last year, two women anchors of PTV, the state-run television channel, exposed a director of the organisation for sexually harassing them. They appeared in talk shows



In Bangladesh the fact that media organisations are disproportionately male-dominated makes it even harder to address sexual harassment. The bosses are usually all male and the cultural orientation is overwhelmingly patriarchal. The most tragic part is the apparent oblivion regarding what constitutes sexual harassment.

do not speak out.

But wait, we are talking about newsrooms and media organisations where journalists and non-journalists should be well aware about the nuances of inappropriate behaviour. It is hard to believe that employees of a news media organisation do not know that, when they openly stare at young female colleagues from their desks or in the cafeteria or unnecessarily become over-familiar when they are clearly in a formal relationship, they are crossing the line. It is unfathomable that they do not know the dos and don'ts of workplace etiquette. People who work in news organisations are especially expected to know what constitutes sexual harassment. They are the ones, moreover, that report on this when it occurs in other industries. Just because some men get away with their lewd behaviour does not mean that they are unaware of the seriousness of their offence. They do know, it's just that they also know how to take liberties and get away with it. They know that they can take advantage of a female colleague's young age, or lower rank or sheer politeness that makes them endure the behaviour. The illogical part is that these men don't take the hint when the woman is not interested, when she is clearly not responding in the same way. This is where the need for sexual harassment policy in every media organisation comes in and one that is sincerely and effectively enforced.

There is an argument that some women may take advantage of the growing sensitivity to sexual harassment allegations, that innocent men may be victimised. While that is always possible, let's not get distracted from the fact that more often than not these allegations are true and they come after a lot of trauma—feelings of being humiliated, violated, powerlessness and even worthlessness. As far as news media organisations are concerned, they have a bigger responsibility to make sure that their female employees feel safe and are not subjected to any kind of harassment. It is about time they practice what they preach.

Aasha Mehreen Amin is Senior Deputy Editor, Editorial and Opinion, The Daily Star.

and also talked about their experiences in social media. PTV decided to ban the women anchors for "defaming the organisation". But these women remained undaunted and disagreeing with the probe body of the organisation that concluded that there wasn't enough evidence against the perpetrator, they approached the federal ombudsman for hearing their case and a five-member committee submitted its report. Eventually the director was terminated and the women anchors were reinstated.

While the possibility of getting justice for such a hideous crime may have slightly improved, though not without an arduous fight, this is usually true for well-known media organisations and in many cases, the standing of the journalists themselves. Even then there are attempts to malign the reputations of these women and intimidate them within the workplace and on social

media. For women in junior positions it is the same as their counterparts in other industries where complaints against sexual harassment are discouraged not explicitly but implicitly, where the victims may decide to either remain silent to keep their jobs or quit.

In Bangladesh the fact that media organisations are disproportionately male-dominated makes it even harder to address sexual harassment. The bosses are usually all male and the cultural orientation is overwhelmingly patriarchal. The most tragic part is the apparent oblivion regarding what constitutes sexual harassment. Making vulgar, sexist comments in front of female colleagues is considered quite normal in newsrooms and those women who cannot "hack" it are welcome to leave. Ogling at women colleagues, paying inappropriate attention to their looks, sending vulgar texts, making inappropriate proposals to female colleagues

they barely know, repeatedly asking them to have lunch or dinner despite refusals, leaning against a female colleague on a bike ride for an assignment, calling or texting a female colleague at odd hours—all this constitutes sexual harassment. But for many men, such acts are part of acceptable behaviour. Giving some of these men the benefit of the doubt, an argument may be made that they are unaware of boundaries, the invisible perimeter that defines the line between camaraderie and inappropriate behaviour. A woman colleague's genuine attempt to be amicable is sometimes taken as a green signal to push the limits of decency. Sometimes women put up with the behaviour because they are in less powerful positions than the men—the harasser may be a senior colleague against whom it would be difficult for the young woman colleague to complain. Often it is out of pure embarrassment that women

Disaster preparedness: A shift in paradigm



MAHBUBA NASREEN

SINCE the late-20th-century, a shift in paradigm has happened in the intellectual arena of architecture, art, literature, philosophy, history, economics, fiction, etc. It happened mostly in the industrialised countries and emerged as Postmodernism, a critique of "modernism". Terminologies such as "deconstruction" and "post-structuralism" have also gained popularity in twentieth-century thoughts.

"Economic growth is not necessarily good" or the notion of sustainable development ("Our Common Future", 1987) urging for "meeting the needs of the poor, without compromising with the ability to meet the needs of future generation" directed a rethink of the ways in which economic growth are generated. The shift in paradigm (from human exceptionalism) was also connected to ecological disruptions in many parts of the world.

People in industrial societies identified changes in air and water qualities and expressed certain environmental concerns. Voices were also raised by affected women and men in non-industrialised countries (ecofeminism and post-modern feminism). By this time, rapid and unplanned industrialisation and urbanisation grasped almost all the industrialised and some non-industrialised countries following the Durkheimian model. Those who have not stepped into the so-called development process identified with "mechanical solidarity". Green movement and environmental think-tanks argued that people living with "organic solidarity" did

not realise that consumption; resource extraction would turn the world into a fireball. Globalisation has exhilarated and extended the process of win-win situation and made the genetically modified varieties common for all. Researchers and policymakers started to search for linkages between increased frequency of disasters and climate change with this historical process mostly in the twenty-first-century.

However, the discussions on double exposures and engendered new risks due to climate change and disasters on people living in extremely fragile environments have only started over the last couple of decades. Floods, cyclones, storm surge, heat-waves, cold-waves, drought, erratic rainfall, forest-fires, landslides, scarcity of surface and groundwater etc. continuously attracted international attention. To mitigate and reduce the loss of disasters, United Nations called for action through the declaration of Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA, 2005-2015) and the post 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR, 2015-2030, UNISDR). The four priorities for action and seven targets of SFDRR have to be followed as risk reduction and preparedness mechanisms for member countries.

In Bangladesh, though rapid development has not occurred through industrialisation and urbanisation, the then government's exploitative nature of resource extraction from East Pakistan to West, gradually led to the extinction of many of our natural species. The nature of exploitation at all levels forced the people of the land to fight for the independence of the country in 1971. The new country was identified as one of the most disaster prone in the world. Therefore, disaster preparedness has become an integral part of the country and her people. Bangabandhu inaugurated the "Cyclone



PHOTO: DILIP ROY

Preparedness Programme (CPP)" and constructed "Mujib Killa" to protect people and their livestock.

However, massive initiatives to manage disasters have not followed these early initiatives. This was reflected in the lack of preparedness to face the challenges of the two consecutive floods of 1987 and 1988 and the cyclone of 1991. The devastating nature of these two floods and casualties in the 1991 cyclone attracted international attention and criticism against the government as an example of lack of disaster preparedness. It has been identified that massive destruction and death due to disasters in Bangladesh were not only related to her geographical settings, but also to try to "control" disasters instead of "managing" or taking risk reduction efforts.

Since then there has been calls for disaster management and for disaster risk reduction following HFA. Large number of changes were made in the policy environments and

institutional structure: now we have Standing Orders on Disaster (1997, revised 2010); Disaster Management Act (2012); National Plan for Disaster Management (2010); Disaster Management Policy and some other relevant documents published by the Ministry of Disaster Management and relief. The disaster management model has shifted its paradigm from mere relief distribution to risk reduction mechanisms, which acclaimed international recognition, terming Bangladesh as a role model for disaster management.

People in Bangladesh have developed a science combining with indigenous knowledge-based disaster preparedness and proving their resilience. Being one of the early researchers in social science discipline, I feel privileged to have produced a grounded theory in the mid-nineties, showing a gender dimension in disaster preparedness at household levels. During those times there was almost no early warning or institutional

support for affected people in coping with or better prepare for disasters. It was women's home-based preparedness which was vital in living with disaster. Over the past decade these home-based initiatives have been strengthened through central to local level institutional supports and response.

The natural disaster related casualties have been reduced to a remarkable level following improvement in early warning system and constructing multipurpose shelters in both cyclone and flood plains. It is expected that technology based early warning system will be more accurate and advanced with the information flow from the newly launched Bangabandhu satellite.

Inclusive approach is one of the recently emphasised agenda in disaster preparedness for Bangladesh at the government level in collaboration with academia and civil society. The country has successfully organised two conferences on disability and disasters towards achieving the inclusive principles of the Seventh Five Year Plan (interfacing climate change and disaster risk reduction) and Sustainable Development Goals (leaving no one behind).

However, although Bangladesh is doing well in context of managing "natural" disasters, social disaster or human induced disasters require more focus. Emerging "natural disasters" such as thunderstorms, landslides, early flash floods in haor areas, are also indicating that further research and initiatives are needed. Most strikingly, the influx of Rohingyas from Myanmar has shown us the increased need for preparedness in case of social disasters.

Mahbuba Nasreen is Director and Professor of the Institute of Disaster Management and Vulnerability Studies (IDMVS), University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

A WORD A DAY

AELSTROM
NOUN

A situation or state of confused movement or violent turmoil.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Book unit
- 5 Water channel
- 11 Singer Tori
- 12 Mexican resort
- 13 Spring
- 14 In unison
- 15 New soldier
- 17 Appomattox name
- 18 Indy auto
- 22 tolerate
- 24 Replay feature
- 25 Dramatist Jonson
- 26 Help out
- 27 Microwave sounds
- 30 Tuna sandwiches
- 32 Useful ability
- 33 Chair feature

DOWN

- 1 Washed out
- 2 Sermon end
- 3 Sites for defensive stands
- 4 Spotted
- 5 "Get lost!"
- 6 Some beers
- 7 Fantastic
- 8 Water cooler
- 9 Actor's signal
- 10 Complete
- 16 Take in
- 19 West Virginia worksites
- 20 Give off
- 21 Gangsters' guns
- 22 "Waterloo" group
- 23 Hive group
- 28 Mortar's mate
- 29 Painter Frank
- 30 Great Leap Forward leader
- 31 Book blunders
- 35 Comfy spot
- 36 Valued wood
- 37 Saddler's tools
- 38 Watering hole
- 39 Had a snack
- 40 Pinnacle

Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dsopinion@gmail.com.

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

THEY LIKE TO LET EVERYONE KNOW WHEN THEY'VE HAD A SUCCESSFUL MISSION!

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? TWENTY-FOUR... TWENTY-FIVE... TWENTY-SIX...

I'M COUNTING THE DAYS UNTIL SCHOOL STARTS AGAIN.

UM, IT ISN'T EVEN SUMMER YET.

I NEED A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE APPROACHING TUNNEL, DARRYL.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

F	E	T	A	S	Q	U	E	A	L
I	T	A	L	A	U	R	O	R	A
J	A	I	L	G	O	S	S	I	P
I	L	L	D	A	T	A			
	C	A	U	S	E	S	O	B	
P	O	O	C	H	S	T	A	G	E
R	O	A	M		A	I	R	S	
A	Z	T	E	C	A	X	L	E	S
Y	E	S	A	D	L	I	B		
	P	R	O	F		P	O	R	E
I	N	V	I	E	W		P	A	I
N	E	A	T	E	N		E	T	N
S	E	N	T	R	Y		A	S	K