

# WHY # METOO IS NOT HAPPENING IN BANGLADESH

*It's certainly not because our men are better*

The #metoo and #metooindia hashtags are felling old oaks in Indian media including the likes of veteran actors such as Nana Patekar and Alok Nath, singer Kailash Kher, filmmaker Sajid Khan, author Chetan Bhagat and even deputy foreign minister and former founder editor of *The Telegraph* MJ Akbar. Multiple women are now using the hashtag to band together and name their perpetrators—the total list as it stands now is approximately 38-strong.

It has been primarily women extending their support—and more importantly their belief—to the other women coming forward with the allegations. Industry maestro Farah Khan tweeted that her brother Sajid Khan “has a lot to atone for” should the allegations be true.

Who will be the ones in our industry

with them. “They straightaway ask me for how much money would I go with them!” the actor had said. The article created a shitstorm on social media—except it was not the #metoo kind. Because the actor had refused to name and shame anyone citing “fear of revenge”, the media sphere pounced on her for the offense of “generalising”. What she is alleging are isolated events, they said. Not everybody does it, they continued, their thin-skinned defense completely silencing Faria's initial comment, turning it into the tired topic of “not all men are like that”. In addition, instead of looking into her allegations, the Actors' Guild allegedly threatened to file a lawsuit against her for “spreading falsehood”.

“Who is this girl? Someone please give her some work so that this does not happen to her again,” mocked actor Bonna Mirza in a scathing social media post. Later in a talk show hosted by a

the fact that she would jeopardise her entire future if she named to shame.

“Desperate” was the word Selim used. “Agenda-driven” is what it meant. Rarely ever, is an allegation of sexual harassment taken at face value for what it is—a woman wronged, trying to regain control.

There's an even more recent example: Just last week a popular Bangla daily interviewed a rising female actor and a former Lux Channel I Superstar Runner-Up about whether the #metoo movement is relatable to Bangladesh's media industry.

“The men don't have any fault,” she said. “It is the women who allow themselves to be violated.”

Our women have internalised patriarchy to such an extent that even the “feminist” logic they craft fall within boundaries and lines drawn by men, and carefully toed by the women. They rally around rape victims because rape has

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private television channel, she said, “Faria's allegation perpetuates the stereotype that women in the media industry have loose morals.” Mirza stated she did not disbelieve that Faria may have encountered sexual harassment when looking for work—but she added a hundred caveats like the ones mentioned above, which hardly made her an unwavering supporter.

When the women weren't standing up for their lot, the men too saw no reason to. “Listening to her, it seems like she is a very desperate girl, so she should have the courage to take names,” said veteran actor and producer Shahiduzzaman Selim, at the same talk show as Mirza. Selim, who is years older than her (something he carefully also pointed out to validate his statement), was seated opposite to Faria Shahrin on the same table. Not once did he mention that he will take her side should she drop the name-bombs, putting the entire responsibility of ensuring accountability, on this young actor. “Who will give me security if I name the producers?” she asked. “Why do you think you are so insecure?” he yelled back at her. His question lacked complete cognizance of

ideal, unquestionable evidence, while anything short of a *fauzdari* crime is not taken seriously. The inherent message is this—for their voices to be heard, women need to shed blood. The activism scene of Bangladesh in this sector fights the cause in general—but rarely has there been any noise surrounding the everyday and particular experiences of women that platforms like #metoo are meant to shed light on.

I was sitting at the Press Club lounge deep in the middle of an interview a couple of weeks back when this older woman interrupted us, introduced herself as a veteran journalist of a reputed Bangla newspaper and then proceeded to ask me to lower my scarf.

“Shape *bujha jacche*, and everyone is looking,” she said, motioning at my scarf which had hiked two inches above its socially-mandated position.

Seeing my stunned face, she proceeded to explain that the male journalists were stealing glances, and that I should be aware of that. Meanwhile the person I was interviewing tried desperately to look anywhere but at us.

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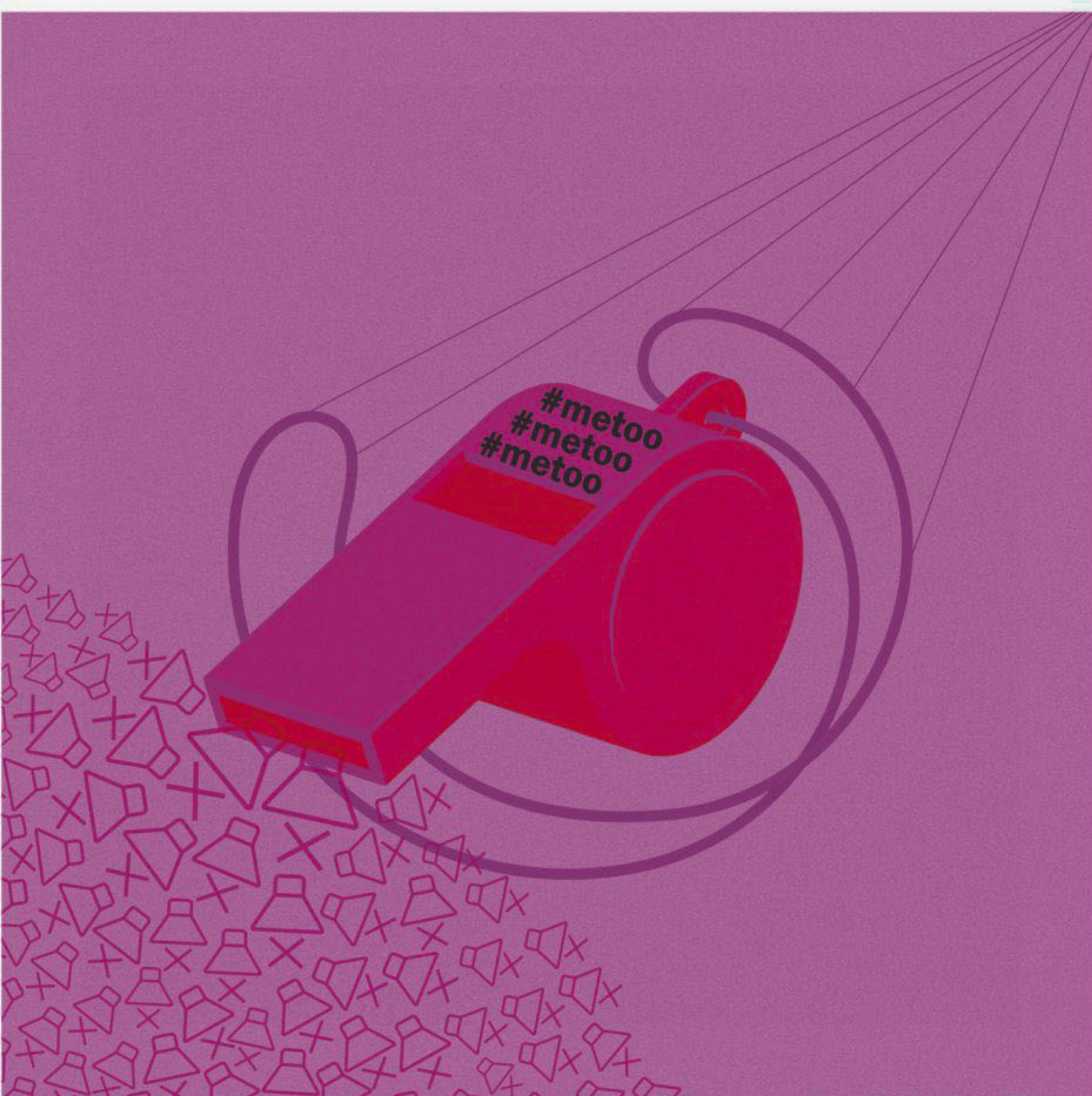
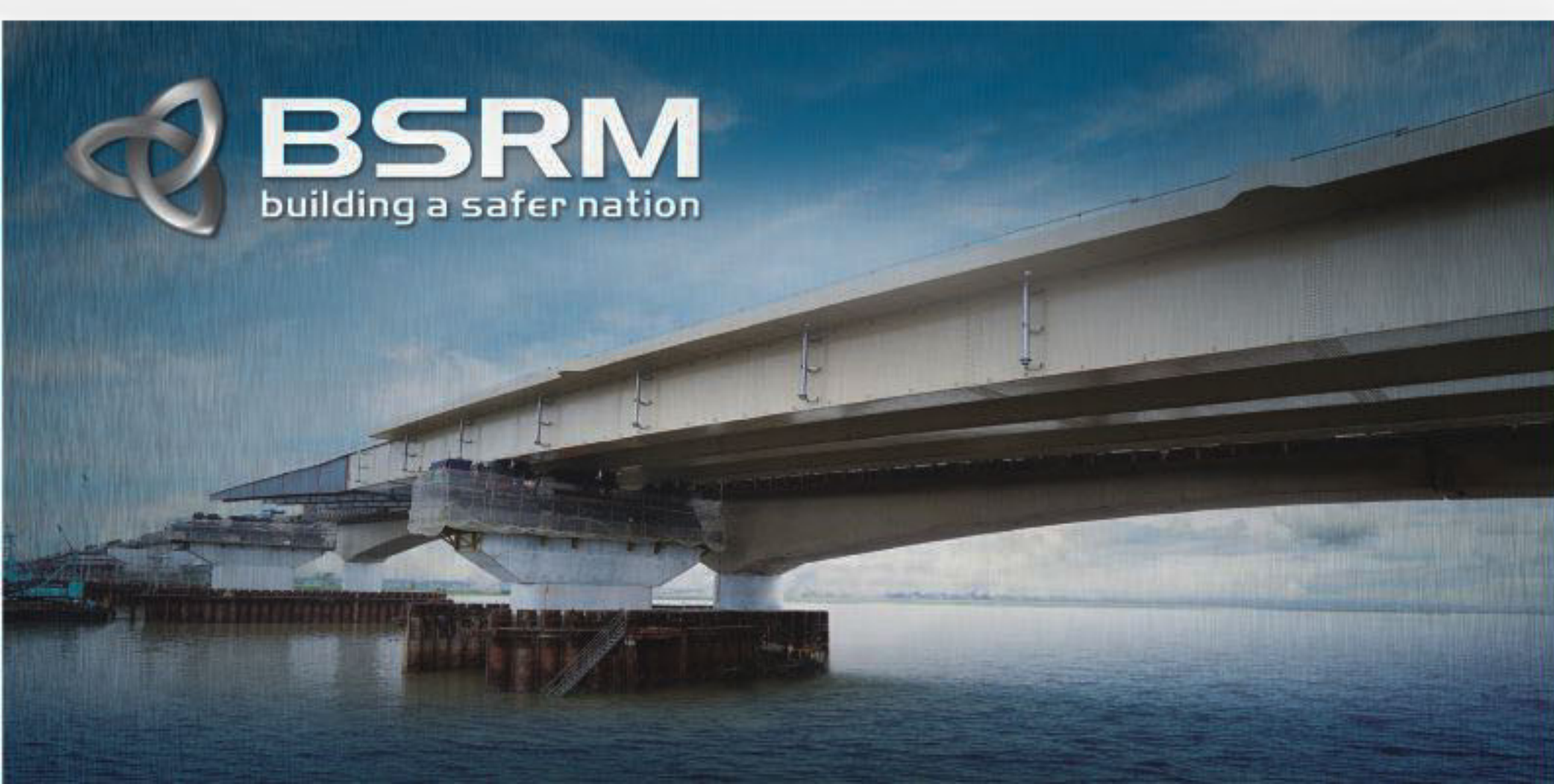


ILLUSTRATION: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

ZYMA ISLAM

to stand up for the vulnerable among their lot?

Several months back, a former Lux Channel I Superstar participant called Faria Shahrin told *Prothom Alo* that actors routinely get asked by producers to sleep



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