

Editor and Publisher
(The Daily Star)
Mahfuz Anam

Editor (Star Weekend)
Sushmita S Preetha

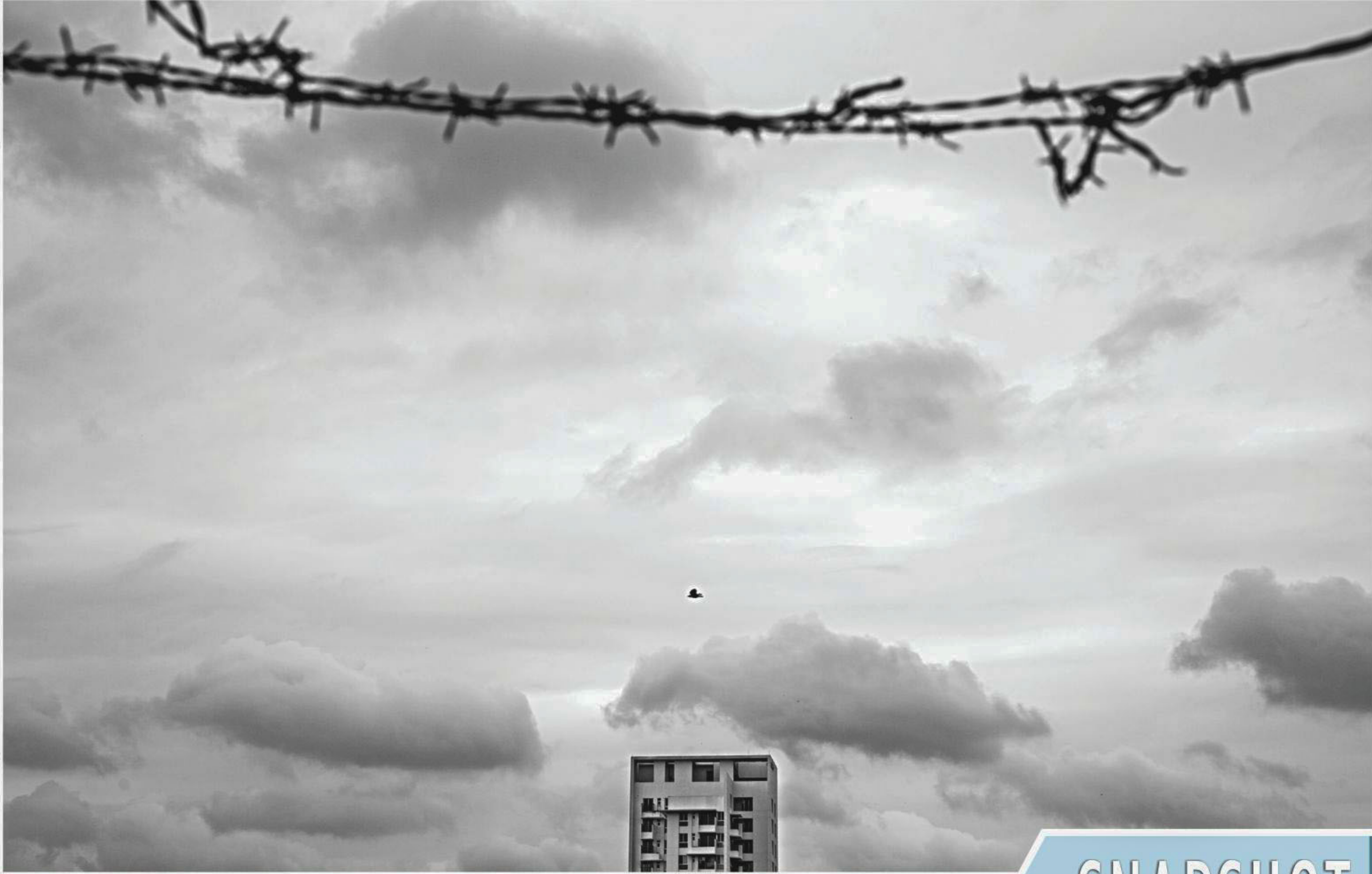
Staff Writers
Naimul Karim
Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan
Zyma Islam
Nilima Jahan
Maliha Khan
Abida Rahman Chowdhury
Sarah Anjum Bari

Staff Photographer
Kazi Tahsin Agaz Apurbo

Graphics
Debashis Kumar Day

Production
Shamim Chowdhury

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Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return.

— Leonardo da Vinci

SNAPSHOT

PHOTO: ALIM AL RAZI

MAILBOX

starweekendtds@gmail.com

Many Positions, One Single Goal

On the October 19 issue of *Star Weekend*, Zyma Islam wrote a piece on the #MeToo movement. In the writeup, she analysed obstacles for such a movement in Bangladesh. I felt her views were clear, sharp, and focused. She assessed duly that it is primarily a woman's responsibility to stand up in solidarity with other woman who have a story to tell.

She is spot on.

At least, if we review the root cause of workplace sexual violence, it is the acute and unchallenged male-dominant atmosphere, which gives men the audacity to prey upon and express their lust towards their female colleagues. This is undoubtedly a gendered situation, and we need to foster solidarity between women before we can expect men to also join this movement.

But the writeup bothered me for a specific reason. She portrayed me in such a way that one may find me opposing the #MeToo movement and those who raise their voice against workplace violence.

She referred to former Lux Channel 1 star Faria Shahrin's case who, months ago, gave an interview to *Prothom Alo* on how she felt about the sexual

harassment situation in and around Bangladeshi media, more precisely in the TV drama productions; Zyma also referred to the talk show where both Faria and I spoke on this issue. I think my position was explained out of context, sending a wrong impression to the readers about where I stand on the matter.

I mocked Faria—something I would have liked not to. But I did not mock her because she had “raised” her voice against sexual harassment, I did so because she, in “raising her voice”, reduced and bashed her female colleagues. They are two entirely different circumstances: when someone comes forward and states they had been sexually offended and then proceeds to identify the offenders; and when someone comes forward with a story of “we know it's happening and the women working in the media are compromising themselves”.

I am well aware of situations where women's conceptualisation or utterance can go easily beyond the broader interest of women, no matter if unwillingly. This is an easy card to play—to blame women regardless of their achievements in a tightly scrutinised gender-manipulative

situation, something many of our male counterparts are repeatedly doing.

I am disgusted with the particular act of defaming women professionals in media. My disgust was shown only on social media, and not on television or newspaper. While Zyma was focusing on my social media expressions, she concentrated on what Faria was saying on paper and television. Not surprisingly, Faria was very vocal on social media, sometimes specifically against her female colleagues. This is a methodological error on Zyma's end; things can be very different when you put them in proper context.

I do not feel comfortable in reviewing what Faria has done; I still believe she is not the main issue here, as long as she or anyone is unable to point at the wrongdoers or does not have an atmosphere to do so. It is about the framework of how to bring up an “issue”, especially when an entire system is waiting to find clues and target the women again.

Think of the arena I work in; be it film or television, this is a tricky workplace for women. We are objectified and sexualised by part of the male audience—something we can do little about. “Girls of media” is a phrase persistently used to refer to us that has nothing to do with

our sincerity, merit, struggle, hardwork, and commitment. My first and foremost concern is to contest anything that formally or informally uses this stereotypical rhetoric in any given context. As a professional that is my responsibility. And that was exactly what I was doing, and I expect my colleagues to do the same—see things from a broader context.

We are experiencing a new wave of gender consciousness and movement against sexual harassment. Everybody, especially the abusive male headquarters, saw it coming to Bangladesh; this is how the internet works. We, the women, were waiting for #MeToo movement. We all know this is a movement mostly for the literate, “cultured”, middle-class women. However, it has its own strength. Some misrepresentations can seriously damage the process; portraying me as a villain is not only false, but also has risks of isolating anyone having a broader and subtle perspective. Hypes may bring in oversimplified or crude polarities, but women are not in a position to afford this.

Bonna Mirza
Bangladeshi actress and social activist