



ILLUSTRATION: NAHFIA JAHAN MONNI

ABUSE

behind the closed doors of madrasas

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Jahid (not his real name), a nine-year-old boy from Mohammadpur of Magura district, was admitted to Panihata Hafizia madrasa by his father Abdul Aziz. He wanted to make his son a *hafiz*, a person who memorises the entire Holy Quran. Unfortunately, his only son is now under treatment in Mymensingh Medical College Hospital. Jahid has been groaning in pain and cannot even fully recognise his parents due to the traumatic experience he went through in the madrasa. He was allegedly raped by his teacher, Alauddin, the principal of the madrasa. According to Jahid's father, after molesting Jahid, Alauddin threatened him that if he told anyone about the rape, he and his family would die from vomiting blood. However, seeing Jahid's disastrous condition, one of Jahid's friends called his father and after much

persuasion, Jahid described what had happened to him.

Alauddin was arrested by the police who later found that Jahid was only one of Alauddin's many victims. He confessed to the police that he had raped two other children in the same week he raped Jahid. Students of Panihata madrasa, most of whom are eight to 15, also revealed accounts of inhuman corporal punishment by their teachers. Lashing mercilessly with two or three sticks bundled together, shackling kids for a full day, slapping them on the face and frequent sexual molestation—these are the ways Alauddin and his colleagues used to treat their infant students who, according to Islam, are free from sin and cannot be held accountable for their wrongdoings.

Recent reports published in the media about brutal punishment and sexual abuse in madrasas indicate that Jahid's fate in Panihata madrasa

is probably not an isolated incident. Students of madrasas, many of whom are from poor families or even orphans, who have to spend their entire student life in the enclosed, residential premises of the madrasas, rarely get the chance to inform their guardians in case of any abusive treatment. Despite that, at least 42 cases of brutal punishment and sexual abuse in madrasas were reported in the media just in 2018. This indicates that these reports of molestation in madrasas is the tip of a much bigger problem. But why in madrasas, where children are supposed to live in a sacred environment, do they sometimes face the most traumatic experiences of their lives?

The answer may lie in the current administration system of the madrasas which lacks accountability and are extremely prone to political influence and corruption. There are

various types of madrasas in Bangladesh which operate independently. They don't even follow the rules of the central and regional boards of Qwami madrasas. They provide non-formal Islamic education, run entirely on donation and do not follow any standard curriculum or academic process. Since there is no central administrative body to supervise these madrasas, their actual number cannot even be confirmed.

Nurani and Furqania madrasas provide elementary level Islamic education and Hafizia madrasas are residential madrasas where children are sent to complete *Hifz* course, a traditional method of memorising the entire holy Quran. Usually, the donor(s) who establish or support these madrasas also recruit teachers and such recruitments depend on their whims.

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