# Why our religious leaders must condemn Nusrat's murder



NY Bangladeshi with an iota of **L** humanity should still have their conscience reeling over the heinous murder of Nusrat, the brave girl who refused to remain silent after her madrasa principal, Siraj Ud Doula, sexually abused

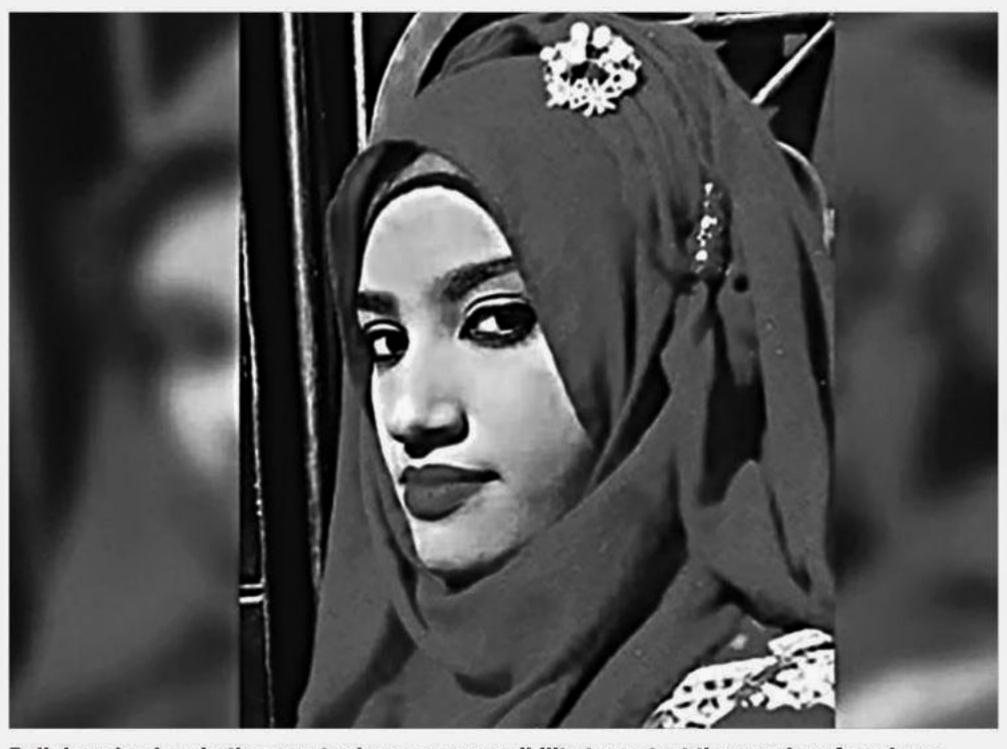
her. It is because of this bravery and for exercising her basic right to seek justice that she was abducted on the day of her exam, tied up, doused in kerosene and set on fire by a group of burkha-clad individuals, at least one of them female. Nusrat eventually succumbed to her burns a couple of days later, leaving her family devastated and all those who were praying and hoping for her recovery. Siraj had been sexually harassing Nusrat

for quite some time and reports suggest that he had harassed other students too in the past without any consequences. Nusrat had to face overwhelming odds in trying to bring Siraj to account, facing discouragement and stigmatisation from some of her teachers, classmates, and the police too. On one occasion, she was even physically assaulted by unidentified miscreants who spread rumours about her being in a romantic relationship with someone which resulted in the beating. Eventually, she was able to lodge a case on March 27, 2019, but since doing so, she and her family faced multiple death threats. It is in this context that the conspiracy to burn Nusrat to death was hatched and executed by Siraj and his supporters. Even after facing this brutal ordeal of attempted murder, Nusrat refused

to be subdued. On the hospital bed, she made her elder brother record her testimony, knowing that she may well not be able to testify against Siraj in court. Nusrat inscribed in her notebook the details of how Siraj abused her and ended by writing: "I will fight till my last breath. I will punish the one who hurt me in a way that others will learn a lesson. God willing, I will give him the maximum punishment possible."

True to her words, Nusrat did fight till her last breath, bravely attempting to pierce the insidious cloak of impunity enjoyed by Siraj, not just to seek justice for herself, but for all the past and potential victims of Siraj's sexual abuse. Nusrat's fight for justice imbues the oft-cited Hadith where Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is reported to have said: "Whoever among you sees an evil action, let him change it with his hand [by taking action]; if he cannot, then with his tongue [by speaking out]; and if he cannot, then with his heart [by at least hating it and believing that it is wrong], and that is the weakest of faith," (40 Hadith Nawawi 34). Indeed, Nusrat saw an evil taking place and she tried to change it by both speaking out and then taking action, and lost her life in

I went to the weekly jumu'ah prayer on the Friday following Nusrat's death, really hoping that the Imam of my local masjid (one of the largest in the city) would make at least one mention of Nusrat's heinous murder, laud her courageous struggle for justice, condemn the person who sexually abused her and then had her killed, or at the very least mention her name when reciting the munajat. However, in the sermon that lasted for about half an hour and the munajat that followed, the Imam did



Religious leaders in the country have a responsibility to protest the murder of madrasa student Nusrat Jahan Rafi.

not make a mention of any of these. The khutba mainly centred on the

importance of nafl (supererogatory) acts such as fasting during the month of Shaban and praying tahajjud. At the end of the sermon, there was one slightly random mention of how sitting beside the lake for picnic is against Islamic adesh (commandment). I wondered, surely the case of a madrasa principal who sexually abuses his Alim students and then has one of them burnt to

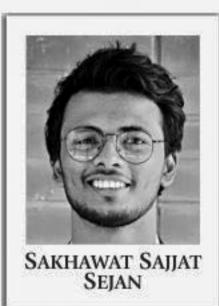
death for daring to seek justice is a bigger affront to Islamic adesh—that deserved condemnation or at least a reproachful mention—than that of harmless picnickers by the lake. Even during the munajat, he prayed for the success of all the students giving board exams around the country but again, failed to mention the one student who was abducted, tied up, doused in kerosene and set on fire at the venue of her Islamic board exam, and subsequently died from severe burn injuries. Surely, the Imam could have spared a word of prayer for her soul and her family's forbearance at the loss.

Khutbahs are meant to provide introspective reflections on the existing practice of Islam in our society. They are meant to act as a weekly reminder which inspires, guides and educates the community. When an Imam delivers this weekly reminder, they shoulder the monumental task of representing Islam and speaking on its behalf. How then can an Imam ignore an atrocity that took place inside a madrasa, involving a madrasa principal and scores of his supporters marching on the streets shamelessly demanding his "unconditional" and "immediate" release? How can they make no mention of the sordid state of affairs in the country we live in, where "religious" leaders enjoy such a high degree of impunity that not only do they feel comfortable enough to sexually abuse children in their place of education, violating the core teachings of the very religion they are supposed to preach, but even after allegations against them are found to be true and a young girl has been burnt to death for daring to seek justice, they have this many men and women marching in support of them?

Anyone who turns a blind eye to the abuse of power in schools, madrasas, colleges and other educational institutions becomes a part of the problem. Their silence becomes complicity. We owe it to Nusrat to ensure that the uphill battle to end this insidious culture of impunity she so bravely struggled to fight does not end in vain. Our religious leaders owe it to Islam to do the same.

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## The Clean Air Act should be passed without further delay



been ranked as the second most polluted capital city in the world in the 2018 World Air Quality Report released by Greenpeace and AirVisual. It scored 187 in the AirVisual Index and 361 in Air Quality

Index. High levels of PM2.5 (ambient airborne particles) have been found in Dhaka's air. Also, in the Environment Protection Index, Bangladesh stood 179th among 180 countries. This clearly depicts the state of Dhaka's air which is extremely hazardous for public health.

The consequences are evident. Tens of thousands of people suffer from respiratory diseases per year in the country. Global Burden Disease Project showed that the average lifespan went down by 1.87 years due to ambient air pollution in Bangladesh. Already, Bangladeshis are spending an exorbitant sum of money on medical treatment for respiratory illnesses. This means that diseases due to ambient air particles risk having a huge economic impact in the country by dragging down the working capacity of

Poribesh Bachao Andolon and Nagorik Odhikar Songrokkhon Forum have said that 90 percent of dust pollution in Dhaka is due to the construction of different flyovers and metro-rail roads, and 56 percent of air pollution stems from uncontrolled brick kilns. Air Quality Index has found that the following five pollutants, namely ground level ozone, carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter in Dhaka's air, are present in dangerous levels. There are several sectors contributing to air pollution. Brick kilns are the number one contributor to air pollution in Dhaka, as many of the kilns are still using 120foot black chimneys that release harmful gases



Dhaka has been ranked as the second most polluted capital city in the world in the 2018 World Air Quality Report.

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which ultimately penetrate the ozone layer. And according to Department of Environment data, there are about 7,000 brick kilns in Bangladesh Almost 2,000 of the kilns don't have a licence or permission from the DoE. 88 percent of kilns do not adhere to the Brick Manufacturing and Brick Kilns Establishment (Control) Act and the newly enacted provisions before establishing kilns. And as far as established kilns are concerned, they do not upgrade to zigzag kilns, Hoffman kilns or Tunnel kilns.

In addition, among 3.89 million vehicles

registered with the BRTA, 5,00,000 are unfit to be driven on roads. According to the law, if a vehicle becomes unfit, reaches its shelf-life or causes serious environmental pollution, registration shall be cancelled immediately. But these vehicles are running daily on the country's roads-releasing harmful gases with high amounts of sulphur contributing significantly to air pollution.

The situation has worsened. The Bangladesh government should have paid heed to this foreseeable manmade disaster a

long time ago. The draft of Clean Air Act-2019 has already been proposed by the Departmen of Environment and Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA). It is waiting to be presented before the cabinet and parliament. But this process started in 2018. The fact that a law regarding something as critical as air pollution takes so long to get passed in parliament reflects the lack of policy attention.

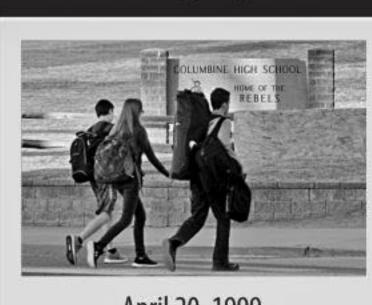
Moreover, some of the sections of the Clean Air Act have been emphasised by DoE and

BELA. They prescribe for the establishment of the National Air Quality Management Plan in Section 6, declaration of "critical" areas due to air pollution in Section 7, establishment of an advisory council consisting of 29 members from different ministries and departments under Section 11, and 10 years' imprisonment for violating any provision of this law by any person, private or public agency under Sections 25 and 27. So far the proposals seem wellthought-out and we know that prevention is better than cure. This law shall be mandated with measures for preventing air pollution rather than only concentrating on cure.

The sources of pollutions may be marked along with critical areas under Section 7 of the Act. It will help in reducing the release of detrimental gases and protecting people living in those places. The vehicles marked unsafe under this Act and Road Transport Act-2018 shall be removed immediately from the roads with the help of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority. National Air Quality Management Plan under Section 6 may set some national standards for the emission of particulate matters, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, etc., so that the amount of fuel containing sulphur can be reduced and monitored by the board. Manual brick kilns may be updated to environment-friendly brick kilns as soon as possible by removing the black chimneys as prescribed under Brick Manufacturing and Brick Kilns Establishment (Control) Act. The advisory board under Section 29 of the Clean Air Act 2019 may be formed within two months after the Act gets passed as we don't have even one year to spare. The Bangladesh National Ambient Air Quality Standard may be set up before the Act comes into force for carrying out technical and scientific research and promoting advanced technologies to prevent air pollution. We hope the law gets passed in no time.

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### ON THIS DAY **IN HISTORY**



April 20, 1999 13 KILLED IN THE COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL MASSACRE

A further 24 victims were injured when two teenagers opened fire on students and teachers at Columbine High School in Colorado. At the time, it was the deadliest shooting at a high school in United States' history.

#### **CROSSWORD** BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS** 1 Gum-shoe's job 5 Blame recipient 9 Accept eagerly 10 Chops finely 12 Golf bag group 13 Brighten 14 Panhandler's activity 16 Atlantic catch 17 "-- haw!"

18 Ankle-to-waist wear 20 Playground retort 22 Comfort 23 Polygon corner

3 Warbled 25 Ollie's buddy 28 Spring holiday 32 Identifying 6 Engine need

34 Notre Dame's 7 Spiny tree Parseghian 8 Wyoming range 9 Egypt neighbour 35 Lyric poem 36 Chilling (out) 38 Classic detergent 40 Pitcher Reynolds

41 Henry VIII's house 42 Game sheet info 43 Quite a few 44 Ruby and Sandra

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31 ls furious 33 Creamy colour 4 Letter after delta 37 Sticky stuff 5 Rock's Allman 39 Heir, often

11 Grassy plant 15 Period of the Cenozoic Era 19 Turns right 21 Zesty flavour 24 Slow-poke 25 Squash, for one 26 Boredom 27 To-do list 29 Feudal tax 30 Pyle and Banks

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4-20 YESTERDAY'S ANSWER AC

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#### by Mort Walker **BEETLE BAILEY**



### **BABY BLUES**

## by Kirkman & Scott

