

CHILD RAPE SURVIVORS WITH DISABILITIES

The never-ending road to justice

NILIMA JAHAN

"It makes me so angry when I see the man who raped my 13-year-old daughter with disabilities proudly roaming around the neighborhood, saying, 'What's so wrong with raping a retard? She's a reject any way!'" lamented a frustrated Mujtoba Ali*, a construction worker in Bogura.

"We used to hope for justice, but all hope has disappeared now," he said.

Samia*, a girl with intellectual and physical disabilities, was raped in November 2016 by one of her neighbours. On that very day,

79 girls with disabilities subjected to rape in first 8 months of this year

Conviction rate close to zero, say activists

Lack of gender sensitive, disability friendly lawyers, judges, police, first responders

Survivors with speech and hearing impairment cannot give testimony to court directly

Only 10 court interpreters in country; most based in Dhaka

Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act does not specify how a girl child or woman will get remedies for rape cases



the family filed a case against the perpetrator.

Five years later, the case has seen little progress, although trial proceedings of cases under the Nari O Shishu Nirjatan Daman Ain are supposed to be finished within 180 days after the lower court concerned accepts the case for trial, as per a High Court directive.

Meanwhile, the accused is out on bail after only three months of imprisonment.

Samia, who had a weakness in her right hand and leg since her

childhood, is completely paralysed now, after an accident four months ago. On the other hand, the father's physical condition has deteriorated such that he cannot work on a regular basis, let alone afford the prolonged legal battle.

"Seeing our desperate condition, the accused is trying to get us to withdraw the case in exchange for Tk 1 lakh," he said. "I have no choice now."

According to advocate Naresh Mukharjee, the public prosecutor for Bogra Nari O Shishu Tribunal 1,

the case is moving at a snail's pace, and it is uncertain how long it will take to resolve.

However, this case can be dealt with session trial and the court can complete the hearings within seven days, if the judge is willing to do that, he said.

The experience of seeking justice for Lamiya*, a 14-year-old with intellectual disability from Khulna, was even more frustrating. She was raped and impregnated by one of her neighbours she used to call "grandfather" in 2016.

"It was a curse to seek justice for my daughter -- the accused was almost 70 years old and died all of a sudden in 2019. But his family filed a murder case against my labourer husband and 13-year-old son," said her mother.

"My husband was jailed for three months and my SSC candidate son is now a fugitive. Everyone is mocking me for being so ambitious with justice for my 'reject' of a girl," she said. Lamiya's family is unable to afford the cost of the anticipatory bail for her brother's exam, as they spent almost everything in Lamiya's case.

A latest media monitoring report by the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum Bangladesh found that a total of 79 girls with disabilities have been subjected to rape in the first eight months of this year.

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Pandemic reversed work done to counter child marriage

Say speakers at webinar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the rate of child marriage in Bangladesh has dropped by 40 percent since independence, 13 million girls in the country are still married off before they are 15, mostly at the compulsion of family or society.

The Covid-19 pandemic has put another 10 million girls at risk of child marriage, as society still considers girl children burden, according to various research.

In addition, the continual use of fake age certificates and misuse of "special provision" of the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2017 is also contributing to the alarming rate of child marriages in the pandemic.

Afsana Alim, programme officer, Young People, ActionAid Bangladesh, presented the information yesterday at a webinar titled "Celebrating International Day of the Girl Child: Progress and way forward for Bangladesh", jointly organised by The Daily Star and Action Aid Bangladesh.

Due to child marriage, adolescent girls are being subjected to physical and mental health risks, which is aggravated by the fact that they have limited access to healthcare services, said Afsana.

Besides, although almost two-thirds (72.6 percent) of ever-married women experienced one or more forms of violence by their husband at least once in their

13 million girls' childhood cut short by early marriage; another 10 million at risk

Due to child marriage, adolescent girls are being subjected to physical and mental health risks

REASONS FOR RISE IN CHILD MARRIAGE

- Use of fake age certificates
- Misuse of 'special provision' in Child Marriage Restraint Act
- School closure
- Family's financial instability

lifetime, very few report their experience to a formal authority, due to the limited access to legal procedures, she added.

Aziza Parvin, a class ten student from Naogaon, who works with Baradoash Shapla Jubo Foundation, highlighted how their

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Need another mass uprising like 90's

Says Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday called upon students and people in general to unite for "another mass uprising", like that of 1990, to oust the current government.

"Students and people overthrew the then dictatorial government through a mass uprising in 1990. Our leader Khaleda Zia led the movement. We need such a mass uprising again," said Fakhrul.

He was addressing an event at the capital's Jatiya Press Club, marking the death anniversary of Chhatra Dal leader Naziruddin Jihad, who was killed during the movement against the Ershad regime.

BNP's acting chairperson Tarique Rahman virtually joined the programme as chief guest.

Urging the students to unite, Fakhrul said, "People will be able to elect a government and parliament of their choice through freely exercising their voting rights, if the election is held under a neutral caretaker government."

BNP, a party with no democracy

Says Quader

BSS, Dhaka

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said BNP is now looking for democracy in the country, despite having no democracy within the party.

"BNP alleges that democracy has disappeared from the country. Making such an allegation means shifting responsibility to others," he said while briefing journalists at his official residence yesterday morning.

BNP is creating impediment on the way of taking democracy ahead, said Quader, also ruling party general secretary. "BNP has no respect for people's mandate, and that's why they are remaining far away from the elections. But they are saying democracy is in exile..."

BNP has destroyed democratic values and ethics, he said, adding that the party is autocratic in nature whether it is in power or in opposition.

He said BNP knows that there is no alternative to election for a change of power. "BNP must join the elections for its existence in politics..." Quader said.



Dhaka Shishu Hospital was jam-packed with vaccine-seekers yesterday. While most were wearing masks, social distancing was nowhere in sight, creating an ironical situation, where people were putting themselves at risk of contracting Covid-19 by trying to acquire a safeguard against the disease.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Trucks are being parked on port city's Batali street illegally for quite some days now. This makes the busy road at Enayetpur narrower, making movement difficult for other vehicles and commuters going through the area. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

1-YEAR OF RAYHAN'S CUSTODIAL DEATH

Family still awaits justice

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

One year after the custodial killing of Rayhan Ahmed, the family still awaits justice, as the case's trial just began on September 30.

Rayhan Ahmed (33) of Sylhet city's Neharipara area was tortured at Sylhet's Bandarbaraz Police Outpost on early October 11 and died an hour after he was admitted to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical Hospital by police personnel.

After Rayhan's wife Tahmina Akther Tanni filed a case on October 11, Police Bureau of Investigation pressed charge-sheet against five police personnel and a local journalist on May 5.

The accused are Bandarbaraz outpost's suspended-in-charge Sub-inspector Akbar Hossain, Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI)

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Form separate ministry, commission: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Right activists yesterday urged the government to form a separate ministry and commission to safeguard the rights of indigenous people across the country in the wake of constant attack on their ancestral land.

They made the call in a national seminar titled "Minority Group's Right to Land: Realities and Challenges in North-West Bangladesh" organised by NETZ Bangladesh at CIRDAP auditorium in Dhaka.

Fazle Hossain Badsha, lawmaker from Rajshahi-2 who was the chief guest at the seminar, said, "Now I don't see any indigenous people in

my locality. They either got evicted or left the country. Indigenous people from the northern part of Bangladesh left the country most," he said.

Referring to the disparity facing the indigenous people, Badsha said though the constitution articulated equal rights irrespective of cast, religion and ethnic origin, indigenous people still experience disparity.

He said India has formed the Ministry of Tribal Affairs and allocated 7,500 crore rupees last year for the indigenous people.

"We urge the government to form a separate ministry,

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Journalist Rafiqul Haque 'Dadubhai' passes away

UNB, Dhaka

Ekushey Padak winning renowned journalist, dramatist and poet Rafiqul Haque, popularly known as "Dadubhai", passed away yesterday. He was 85.

Rafiqul, who had been suffering from old-age complications, breathed his last at his own residence in Mugda area in the capital at 11am, said his family.

He was the feature editor of daily Jugantor, and

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'Gono' rooms, health safety major concerns

Say students as JU dorms reopen

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN, JU

After one and a half years, authorities of Jahangirnagar University (JU) are going to reopen the institute's dormitories today, ending the students' long wait.

Although authorities underscored decisions centring on health safety and have planned to get rid of "gono" rooms, where many students cram into one room for accommodation, implementation of such decisions will be difficult, said the university's students.

According to JU syndicate, the institute's highest governing body, students who have received the first shot of the Covid-19 vaccine will be allowed into dormitories from today, while in-person classes and examinations will begin from October 21.

Students will have to strictly follow health guidelines, which includes wearing masks on campus, stated a circular signed by JU acting registrar Rahima Kaneez.

Talking to The Daily Star, Shovon Rahman, convener of JU Chhatra Front, said, "How will authorities get rid of all gono rooms when they fear student leaders



Staffers prepare the campus for students, who are set to come back to the university dorms today. PHOTO: COLLECTED

of the ruling party? They [authorities] earlier held a discussion session about the university's reopening with students, but mostly the ruling party's men were there. It'll be difficult to do away with gono rooms if the ruling party interferes in the procedure."

"University authorities don't have a clear roadmap to abolish gono rooms. Currently,

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DU dorms reopen for all students

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University authorities have finally reopened all the dormitories for all of its residential students yesterday, five days after allowing only fourth year honours and master's students.

Students of first, second and third years are now allowed in their respective halls after showing their student IDs and Covid vaccination certificate.

As the clock struck 8am, the gates were opened, and students started entering their respective halls.

As part of a welcoming gesture, employees of many halls were seen greeting them with masks, flowers and chocolates, after checking their temperatures.

Banners containing Covid safety rules were seen hanging in front of the halls. Sinks have also been installed for students to wash their hands before entering the hall premises.

The halls at Dhaka University were first reopened on October 5 after eighteen months, for masters' and senior year students.

- Dorms opened to students of first to third years yesterday
- Halls remained closed for almost 18 months
- First reopened for masters' and senior year students Oct 5
- Vaccination started for students, teachers and staff Oct 4
- In-person academic activities to resume from Oct 17

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