

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

# How much have we done to end violence against women?



SHAHEEN ANAM

**T**HE 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, which began on November 25, is ending today. As many of us know, it is a global campaign to bring attention to the scourge of violence against women and girls, and to call for its elimination. The global

theme for this year's 16 days of activism is: "Orange the world: End violence against women now!" The colour orange symbolises a bright and optimistic future free from violence against women and girls.

The campaign received widespread coverage from the media this year, which in itself is an achievement. This increased awareness means that more and more people are realising the urgency of the issue of violence against women and girls (VAWG), and the necessity of addressing it. However, this has not stopped such incidents from occurring. As per newspaper reports, during this period, at least 74 women and six children have been raped and at least 75 girl children have been married off.

So, what can we do about it? Of course, the activism, protests, and raising awareness have to continue. However, we need stronger political commitment and actions. We must question institutions responsible for preventing VAWG regarding how much of the National Action Plans to end VAWG and child marriage has been implemented. Or what changes have been made within institutions, or what mechanisms have been put in place to hold accountable those responsible, such as law enforcers, healthcare officials, elected representatives and local authorities, etc, to address and prevent VAWG.

VAWG is a multi-dimensional issue and

requires multi-dimensional strategies to be combatted. It is as much an issue of the law working to prevent it, as it is about the attitude towards women and girls and their position within families and society. We have to analyse the upbringing of girls vis-a-vis that of boys. Are they brought up with a sense of self-worth and confidence, or taught to be docile, submissive and subservient? The differences in the ways boys and girls are raised determine their personality in adulthood. Society still perpetuates gender-defined roles for boys and girls, creating an imbalance and discrimination from childhood. Patriarchy negatively impacts men too, who face pressure to be the main bread-earners and take on all familial responsibilities. Thus, they showcase traits such as dominance, arrogance and aggression. Women, on the other hand, are not taught to rebel, take charge or protest, leaving them with lower levels of self-worth and confidence. That is why feminist discourse is around redefining masculinity/femininity and unpacking patriarchy.

There is also a need to review existing laws that often prevent women from getting justice. Women rights activists have been campaigning for changes in archaic laws related to rape. One of them is a certain clause in the Evidence Act, which allows for character evidence to be presented in court. While this law needs to be reviewed in its entirety, this specific clause in particular has been used to denigrate and humiliate women when they are being cross-examined by defence lawyers. Women are often intimidated to the extent that they do not want to continue with the cases.

As we look to reduce gender-based violence in the near future, we must also ask the government to take a more proactive stance in preventing child marriage. The progress in this regard was much eroded during the pandemic. There is evidence of



PHOTO: SUDESHNA BISWAS

Besides activism, we need stronger political commitment to eliminate violence against women and girls.

high rates of child marriage using the excuse of income loss and closure of schools. However, child marriage is a symptom of a negative attitude towards girl children, who are thought of as burdens to be sent away at the first opportunity.

Violence is a symptom of a wider issue that revolves around respect and dignity and the status of women and girls in their families. Highlighting their contributions can be an effective strategy to make families aware of the critical role they play in maintaining harmony and well-being of their families. In this regard, Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) has launched a national campaign to highlight women and girls' contributions to their families and society, especially in terms of their unrecognised and unpaid care work, with the assumption that this will raise their

status in families and prevent VAWG.

The other important issue to address is the culture of impunity that perpetrators enjoy. It is nearly impossible for the victims of sexual violence, such as rape, to get justice as the conviction rate for such cases is between two to three percent—meaning 97 percent of perpetrators believe that they will get away with it. VAWG thrives in a system where people are not held to account for negligence of duty and where bribes, extortion and misuse of power determine the outcome of cases filed for rape and sexual assault. The MJF conducted an analysis of 20 rape cases in the last five years, and found that, out of 34 accused in these cases, 28 were out on bail (although rape by law is a nonbailable offence) using money, power or loopholes in the law.

At the end of the 16 Days of Activism, we must also turn our attention to review the much-talked-about progress of women (which is without a doubt impressive) and find out who has actually benefited from the development that Bangladesh now enjoys after 50 years of independence. We have to admit that this progress has been partial, as a huge number of women have been left behind. Although VAWG cuts across classes, it is evident that women from low-income groups are more vulnerable to violence both at home and outside. Therefore, the economic independence of women, along with elevating their position within families, is central to the elimination of VAWG. Keeping girls in schools to complete their education, conducting skills training and creating jobs or enterprise opportunities are necessary to this end.

The last day of the 16 Days of Activism falls on Human Rights Day. Why was this day chosen particularly? The reason is to demonstrate that "Women's rights are human rights!"—a slogan used by rights activists globally. Quoting a UN source, "Attaining equality between women and men and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women are fundamental human rights and United Nations values. Women around the world, nevertheless, regularly suffer violations of their human rights throughout their lives, and realising women's human rights has not always been a priority."

Finally, achieving equality between women and men is fundamental to ending discrimination and violence against women and girls. On Human Rights Day, we must reiterate that every woman has the right to a life free from violence, injustice and discrimination. Fifty years after independence, is that too much to ask for?

Shaheen Anam is the executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation.

## The crisis of wastage



CHINTITO SINCE 1995

**F**ROM my flat on the 5th floor, I could hear a beggar beseech anyone who would care to listen for alms. I had enough cash in the house, and even food, to give him. But going all the way down to the street to meet him was not a plausible option for me for several

reasons. Feeling guilty was the best I could do. His need and my intention were both betrayed by a faulty supply chain.

We have food on our table because, down the line, farmers fared well in fair weather and were able-bodied for labour. Then followed effective collection, storage and transportation, due to which the produce reached the market, and we were able to purchase them. At every step, there was a forward button that ensured that the food reached us within its shelf life. But food cannot always make the right journeys.

Due to ineffective distribution chains, while some of us are feasting—and perhaps shamefully wasting—there are millions who are half-starving, if not fully. Pictures of children searching for food in waste bins have shocked us, but not many of us have been awakened.

Erroneous misconnections between the beginning and literally "the end" has led to about one-third of the world's produced food go to waste. According to The World Counts, approximately 1.3 billion tonnes of food manufactured for human consumption worldwide gets wasted every year. Edible items are lost at every step of the food "life cycle": farming fields, agricultural production, post-harvest handling, storage, processing, distribution, consumption, and end of life. But a lot of it is wasted by us fortunate ones. Keep an eye on the food—or how much it is wasted—at the next wedding you attend. If the surplus of food could be channelled to

the hungry, we would have millions of happy people—mostly mothers and children. And we, too, could be happier.

Every now and then, we come across real-life tragedies that we think we could have avoided. More simply said than done. Every Eid, it is not unusual to read news about how a rickshaw-puller father could not afford a Tk 100 red frock for his daughter. She could not bear the pain and humiliation in the midst of her friends, all agog with new clothes. She then unfortunately took her own life. Our hearts were not ripped by this tragic loss, because we

thought her father had failed her, but she would never know that we did.

Lehengas, wherever that came from, are expensive, going by hundreds of thousands of taka. Sarees are similarly pricey. Modest ones cost several thousands. The red frock that the 10-year-old girl had her eyes on had a price tag of Tk 500. We cannot say "just 500," because that much was now the whole world's worth for her father.

The 12-year-old boy came home to a bed of tattered papers on the pavement beside a busy avenue in the capital. He had a long day,



The crisis of wastage is largely our fault, so it is upon us to resolve it.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

are that much strong.

We have thousands—nay, hundreds of thousands—of red frocks lying around in our wardrobes, but the supply chain has failed again. Now, each of us wanted to give her an Eid gift, and even more, but she did not want to hang about to be gifted with our pity. She

trying to find some money for himself and his mother. She was finishing up making the bed by dusting off pebbles and dried mud. The boy placed his head into the comfort of an imaginary pillow that many of us do not find in a spring mattress.

On the other side of disparity, some people

have five-bedroom residences, or even larger houses, if you can call them home. What the boy on the street would find really obnoxious are 150-room buildings for a dozen or so occupants. That, too, if perchance the family was not holidaying in the Bahamas. Mercifully, the lad does not watch television, because he would be disoriented by the amazing tales from around the world.

Electricity is not wasted that much, because we have to pay for it. But, you will see a light switched on in the stairwell at 11 am. Switch it off. Water is regularly misused because it is cheap. But, even in this day and age, there are long queues to collect drinking water in our cities and towns. Stop the running tap when you don't need it. Metering has somewhat reduced abuse of cooking gas. The most effective meter is our own conscience.

Okay, unlike almost every other pundit on our LNBT shows, I would not want to complain only. Nor would I want to impose myself with ideas that I did not care to implement when I had the authority to do so. That is a direct reference to some of the retired

government officers, who now say that this *kora uchi*, and that is a *bhoyongkor* mistake. On the contrary, I would really urge you to stop and take a hard look at our current living style. The solutions lie in us—what we will do or not do next. We don't have to get down from our fifth floor residence to give alms, but we can try to find more permanent measures to mitigate need and hunger.

Collective efforts are also ever so effective. That is why clubs, societies and associations are necessary in society. Places of worship, too, can play their part in spreading charity and compassion. There are great examples in the community. We only have to follow, or be more imaginative.

Every taka makes a difference, every drop of water matters, and each small step is a giant leap.

Please, please, someone ask me what I meant by LNBT above. I have to tell you, even if you don't: Late night, big talk...

Dr Nizamuddin Ahmed is an architect and a professor, a Commonwealth scholar and a fellow, Woodbadge scout leader, Baden-Powell fellow, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**HENRI FREDERIC AMIEL**  
(1821 - 1881)  
Swiss philosopher

*There is no respect for others without humility in one's self.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 American marsupial
- 7 Play group
- 11 City on the Rio Grande
- 12 Lotion additive
- 13 Serenity
- 15 Accumulate
- 16 Dance bit
- 18 Jamaican products
- 21 Map line
- 22 Nativity figure
- 24 Shade tree
- 25 Golf goal
- 26 Pot brew
- 27 Water ladle
- 29 Sentry's command
- 30 "Nuts!"
- 31 Toy store buy
- 32 Bay
- 34 "Easy!"
- 40 Spur on
- 41 Scan, as data
- 42 Sacks
- 43 Gopher's task
- 14 Outcry
- 16 Sturdy
- 17 Florida city
- 19 Silver or gold
- 20 Period of time
- 21 Scarlet
- 22 Peanut butter buy
- 23 Bowler, for one
- 25 Tubular pasta
- 28 Catalog info
- 29 Chop shop buy
- 31 Putt off
- 33 Folk tales
- 34 Soho saloon
- 35 Lyricist Gershwin
- 36 Nest sight
- 37 Oklahoma city
- 38 Relatives
- 39 Conclusion

**DOWN**

- 1 Vitality
- 2 Bullring cry
- 3 Sauna site
- 4 Holy
- 5 Exhaust
- 6 Apollo goal
- 7 School grounds
- 8 Boxing great
- 9 Abel, to Adam
- 10 TV's Danson

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**SUNDAY'S ANSWERS**

C	L	E	E	T	T	A	M	P	A
A	E	R	I	E	O	C	E	A	N
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**মাওলানা ভাসানী বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়**  
সন্ধ্যা, টাঙ্গাইল-১৯০২।  
ওয়েবসাইট: [www.mbstu.ac.bd](http://www.mbstu.ac.bd)

তারিখ: ২৩ অগ্রহায়ণ ১৪২৮  
০৮ ডিসেম্বর ২০২১

২০২০-২০২১ শিক্ষাবর্ষে ১ম বর্ষ স্নাতক (ইঞ্জি/সম্মান), বি.বি.এ. ও বি.ফার্ম. প্রবেশনাল প্রোগ্রামে

**ভর্তি বিজ্ঞপ্তি**

মাওলানা ভাসানী বিজ্ঞান ও প্রযুক্তি বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে ২০২০-২০২১ শিক্ষাবর্ষে ৪ (চার) বছর মেয়াদি স্নাতক (ইঞ্জি/সম্মান), বি.বি.এ. ও ৫ (পাঁচ) বছর মেয়াদি বি.ফার্ম. প্রবেশনাল প্রোগ্রামে GST গুচ্ছভুক্ত ভর্তি পরীক্ষার ফলাফলপ্রাপ্ত শিক্ষার্থীদের নিকট হতে ১ম বর্ষ ১ম সেমিস্টারে ভর্তির জন্য অনলাইনে আবেদন আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে। অনলাইনে ভর্তির আবেদনের লিংক ও অন্যান্য নির্দেশনা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের ওয়েবসাইটে ([www.mbstu.ac.bd](http://www.mbstu.ac.bd)) পাওয়া যাবে এবং সরাসরি [mbstu-admission.net](http://mbstu-admission.net) ওয়েবসাইটেও আবেদন করা যাবে।

- আবেদনের সময়সীমা: ১১/১২/২০২১ সকাল ১০:০০ হতে ৩১/১২/২০২১ রাত ১১:৫৯ পর্যন্ত (যেকোনো দিন যেকোনো সময়)।
- GST গুচ্ছভুক্ত ভর্তি পরীক্ষায় অংশগ্রহণকারী প্রত্যেক শিক্ষার্থী শুধুমাত্র একটি আবেদনের মাধ্যমেই এ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে নিজস্ব ইউনিট ছাড়াও অন্য ইউনিটে ভর্তির জন্য আবেদন করতে পারবে।
- আবেদন ফি ৬০০/- (ছয়শত) টাকা বিকাশ (bKash)/রকেট (বক্রেটিক)/নগদ (Nagad)/DBBL পেমেট গেটওয়ের মাধ্যমে গ্রহণ করা হবে।
- আবেদনকারীর GST গুচ্ছভুক্ত ভর্তি পরীক্ষায় প্রাপ্ত নম্বর, এসএসসি/সম্মান পরীক্ষায় প্রাপ্ত জিপিএ হতে ৪০% (চতুর্থ বিষয়সহ) ও এইচএসসি/সম্মান পরীক্ষায় প্রাপ্ত জিপিএ হতে ৬০% (চতুর্থ বিষয়সহ) গণনা করে বিভাগসমূহের নির্ধারিত শর্তসমূহের ভিত্তিতে মেধা তালিকা প্রকাশ করা হবে।
- মুক্তিযোদ্ধা/উপজাতি/পোষা কোটা বিভাগভিত্তিক এবং বিকেএসপি কোটা অনুষদভিত্তিক বিধিমোতাবেক সংরক্ষণ করা হবে।

**বিশেষ দৃষ্টব্য :** ভর্তি সংক্রান্ত নীতিমালার যেকোনো পরিবর্তন, সংশোধন, সংযোজন, বিয়োজন ও পুনঃসংযোজনের অধিকার বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় কর্তৃপক্ষ সংরক্ষণ করেন।

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মাতাভিপ্রবি, ফোন : ০৯২১-৬১১২৮ (অফিস)

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