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16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Legal frameworks failed survivors Says MJF

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The progress in addressing violence against women and children in Bangladesh has been slow, said Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) in a statement yesterday. MJF issued the statement on the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

The organisation expressed strong concern over the slow progress and condemned the existing ineffective

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structures designed to combat such violence. The statement highlighted that women and girls continue to face significant insecurity, with reports of rape, gang rape, and other forms of sexual assault on the rise. MJF called for a stronger commitment from the state to ensure the security of women and girls and to prevent violence and child marriage by making local committees functional and accountable. The statement also said current institutions and legal frameworks have



failed to ensure justice for survivors, with the conviction rate for rape remaining low at just 2.3 percent. MJF also demanded the launch of a national campaign to challenge victim-blaming and promote respect for women. Women and girls deserve to live in safety, security, and without discrimination in the "New Bangladesh", the statement said.



Specific laws needed to combat cyber harassment

Discussants tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

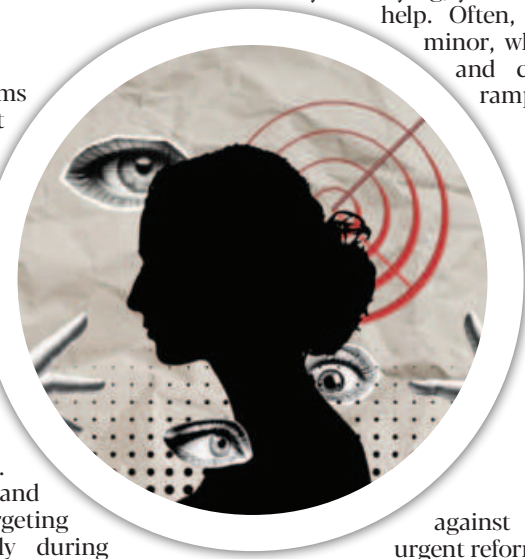
There is an absence of a clear legal framework and proper definitions when it comes to cyber violence against women, speakers said at an event yesterday. They urged for specific legislation to combat such crimes.

The roundtable, titled "Scanning the Horizon: Addressing Cyber Violence against Women and Youth Through Policy and Awareness", was jointly organised by UNDP and The Daily Star at The Daily Star Centre. Anowarul Haq, assistant resident representative at UNDP, said digital violence is a reality we cannot ignore. "As the legal framework is weak and there is no clear definition of cyber violence, this issue must be addressed under specific legislation," he said. He urged the government to strengthen law enforcement agencies through specialised training, recruit gender-sensitive personnel, and incorporate cyber violence awareness into school curricula. Supreme Court lawyer Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua criticised the lack of clarity regarding digital rights and laws. "Our laws fail to define and address



globally recognised forms of cyber violence, let alone ensure justice... We haven't even established the National Telecommunication Monitoring Center," he said. He called for judicial training on sensitive gender-related issues. Rezwan Islam, regional editor at Global Voices, stressed the absence of institutional policies on cyber violence. "A comprehensive policy is urgently needed in organisations," he said. Investments are necessary to create safer digital spaces, he added. Sharmin Ahmed, senior vice president at Mutual Trust Bank, linked a lack of digital literacy to harassment and fraud in cyberspace. She called for private sector involvement in enhancing digital literacy. UNDP Research Analyst Faisal Bin Majid urged women to remain vigilant and resilient against growing cyber violence. Sharmin Islam, gender team lead at UNDP, said her organisation is working to bridge the digital divide. "Women

face new forms of harassment regularly, even while engaging in e-commerce. When they seek police help, a lack of expertise often worsens their problems," she said. She advocated for smarter policing and victim counselling services. Misinformation and disinformation targeting women, particularly during elections, were also discussed. Qadaruddin Shishir, fact-check editor at AFP, said such tactics are used for personal vengeance or political gain. "Alarmingly, the state was previously involved in spreading disinformation, and now political parties and groups are adopting these tactics," he said. The lack of counselling services for victims was highlighted by Maliha Tabassum, assistant professor at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism at Bangladesh University of Professionals. She called for culturally driven programmes and a shift in the mindset of law enforcement. Golam Sarwar, a UNDP consultant,



Girls are particularly vulnerable to cyberbullying, yet only one in 100 victims seek legal help. Often, police dismiss these cases as minor, while instances of victim-blaming and character assassination remain rampant.

against such actions. The laws require urgent reform," she said. Sirazum Munira, former lead member of the Grassroot Network of the Youth Policy Forum, said 89 percent of cyberbullying victims in Bangladesh are aged between 18 and 30, with 73.4 percent not seeking legal action. She identified deepfake and generative AI technologies, lack of digital literacy, and insufficient fact-checking infrastructure as significant challenges. "Pornography, offensive messages, and derogatory statements dominate crimes against women," she added. Maliha Tabassum, faculty member of Bangladesh University of Professionals, pointed out that while urban youth are aware of AI, teens at the grassroot level lack digital literacy and often overlook online harassment, enabling perpetrators. "We need to raise awareness at the personal level," she urged.

Attempts on to destabilise country Say Mahfuz, Sarjis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two prominent student leaders yesterday spoke out against what they described as efforts to destabilise the country and create unrest. Mahfuj Alam and Sarjis Alam, have condemned the actions of individuals trying to provoke conflict and undermine the progress made after the July uprising. In a Facebook post, Mahfuj Alam, an adviser to the interim government and prominent leader of the anti-discrimination student movement, said, "Some leaders and individuals from both left and right-wing factions have become desperate after being unable to secure a role in the uprising and the subsequent government formation." He accused them of creating divisions among student organisations and disrespecting students. Mahfuj Alam also

DEMENTIA IN BANGLADESH Lack of awareness leaves patients vulnerable: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 1.1 million elderly people in Bangladesh are suffering from dementia, with women comprising 75 percent of patients, speakers said at a seminar yesterday. They warned that the prevalence of dementia is rising, yet visible initiatives to address the issue remain scarce. The seminar, titled "Dementia Care and Conservation of Universal Human Rights", was jointly organised by the National Skill Development Authority and the Alzheimer Society of Bangladesh at Biniog Bhaban in Agargaon. Dr Halida Hanum Akhter, senior faculty member at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, presented findings from a 2020 study by the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) and icddr,b. She said that of the 1.1 million dementia patients, 2,80,000 were men (24.5 percent) and 8,30,000 were women (75.5 percent). By 2025, the number is projected to exceed 1.3 million. Dr Halida also cited Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data from 2015, saying 72 percent of women experience domestic violence, and 42 percent of teenage wives face abuse. She stressed that both physical and psychological abuse contribute to dementia, alongside longer life expectancy, with old age being the primary risk factor. She called for a combined effort from families, society, the private sector, and the government to improve old-age healthcare and reduce the burden of dementia.



Champions of the Cyber Defense Innovation Challenge (Shakib Izaz Mahmud, Mahdi Mohammad Shibli and Sa Adat Azam Saniat) pose for a photo alongside the runners-up (Sidratul Muntaha and Jannatul Ferdous) and second runners-up (Fayruz Tania Haseen and Anisha Meridha). The competition was a joint initiative of The Daily Star and UNDP, supported by the South Korean government. The event took place at The Daily Star Centre yesterday. This was an initiative to mark the 16 days of activism against Gender Based Violence.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON