

## OPINION

# I am so tired of being A WOMAN THESE DAYS

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The headlines on my newsfeed blur into one another, a grim carousel of violence: "Woman gang-raped in Munshiganj"; "Ninth grader raped in Sherpur"; "Schoolgirl allegedly raped while collecting flowers in Rangpur"; "Robbery and sexual harassment on a Rajshahi-bound bus"; and so on. The list does not end; it never ends. I do not have to elaborate on the countless cases of murder, robbery, mugging, extortion, vandalism, and attacks that punctuate the daily lives of people in this country.

In the midst of all this, what I must ask – what I must question – is why am I still afraid?

Why, in 2025, am I still mapping out my movements as if walking through a battlefield? Why must I carry a taser, pepper spray, and a pocket knife just to step outside after dark? Why must I clutch my phone in one hand and my keys in the other, ready to strike, if I sense an unfamiliar presence behind me? Why, after the uprising that shook this nation six months ago, do women still have to gather in Shahbagh, holding banners and screaming themselves hoarse, just to be taken seriously?

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I have a privilege that most do not. The privilege of caution, of contingency plans, of knowing that if something happens, there will be people to call and doors that will open. But for most women in this country, there is no such privilege; only the inevitability of risk.

And here is the irony: We are told to stay inside for our safety, but home is often where the danger lives. We are told not to go out after dark, but for so many women, staying in is not an option. They must go out, they must work, and they must stay out late – on factory floors, in hospital corridors, behind cash registers, walking home long past midnight – because their survival depends on it.

I pass beneath the Shahbagh Metro Rail Station and catch myself holding my breath, as if the air itself carries the weight of what happened here – that a 10-year-old flower-seller was raped in this very place. She was a child, but survival doesn't wait. So, she had to work.

Only a month ago, a young woman was allegedly gang-raped while returning home to Habiganj for her wedding from Dhaka, where she worked as a domestic help. There is no safe space, no threshold that guarantees security. Not the streets, not the workplace,



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

not even the four walls of home. And yet, when the worst happens, the blame always circles back – to the hour, to the outfit, to the choices women never truly had.

This is not just an individual fear; it is collective. It is the quiet panic of a woman on a rickshaw, realising the streetlights are out. It is the shiver in a mother's voice when she tells her daughter, "Text me when you reach safely". It is the exhaustion in the eyes of the people who have grown numb to the news, and who have come to expect impunity as the status quo.

I ask my friends to share their locations. I keep them on the phone when I take an Uber, making sure the driver knows someone is listening, someone is watching. This is the choreography of caution, a routine so rehearsed it no longer feels strange.

I hear public transport is safe – until it isn't. I hear CNGs are safe – until they aren't. I hear ride-sharing services are safe – until a friend tells me how the driver made her feel. The illusion of safety lasts only until it shatters, and by then, it is always too late.

The government, six months ago, was shaken by the voices of its people. It was forced to look in the mirror and acknowledge the rot that had festered beneath the surface – corruption, misgovernance, the brutal weight of a system that did not serve its citizens but instead crushed them underfoot. And yet, despite the promises, despite the rhetoric, and despite the assurances that the people will be heard, safety remains a luxury rather than a right.

This country's women have learnt the bitter lesson that their safety is negotiable. A woman's life can be shattered in an alleyway, on a bus, and even in her own home. And the response from the state will be the same recycled platitudes: "We will investigate"; "We are looking into it"; "The perpetrators will be brought to justice". Words, so many words, and yet, the streets remain just as unsafe, the predators just as emboldened, the fear just as suffocating. We watch as 'devils' are dragged into the light, paraded as proof of justice

served – yet the streets remain just as treacherous, the night just as unwelcoming, and our doors still bolted shut.

Is this the nation we were hoping for? A nation where the vulnerable are preyed upon in broad daylight while their government looks away? Where justice is not a certainty, but a privilege for the few who can afford it? Where women are told to dress modestly, to not stay out late, to be careful, as if their safety is their own burden to bear and not the state's fundamental responsibility.

Take the recent case of Rajib Talukder in Kalmakanda, the rapist who has been murdered by the husband of the victim. A name that should have been another in a courtroom, a trial, a system designed to uphold order. Instead, it became another name swallowed by the chaos of vigilante justice, another story that illustrates a grim reality – when people stop believing in the law, they create their own. And when that happens, no one is safe.

There is talk of reform, murmured in press conferences and debated in government halls. But what good are reforms when fear dictates the rhythm of daily life? When stepping outside is an act of calculated risk? When the streets empty before nightfall, not out of choice, but out of necessity? What good is policy without protection, promises without enforcement?

The people are tired – bone-tired, soul-tired – but exhaustion does not mean surrender. They are watching. They are waiting. They are demanding more than empty condolences and carefully worded statements because a country that cannot protect its women, its children, and its citizens is not a country at all. It is a shattered illusion draped in rhetoric. A broken promise wrapped in barbed wire. And we are the ones bleeding.

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