

## Form a commission on sexual crimes

### Persistent violence against women calls for stern, proactive action

We are deeply troubled by the tragic death of the eight-year-old girl from Magura, whose six-day struggle for life ended at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka on Thursday despite the efforts of doctors. Her passing, after being allegedly raped and choked, is a heartbreaking reminder of how unsafe women and girls continue to be in a country grappling with widespread gender-based violence. While the outrage that has followed the news of the cruelty inflicted upon the third-grader by her sister's in-laws shows a broader sense of solidarity, it will mean little unless we channel this grief into meaningful action, challenging the deep-seated sociocultural biases against women and ensuring stronger protection for victims. Without such efforts, tragedies like this will continue to occur.

We have written on this issue several times in recent weeks amid disturbing revelations about sexual violence and harassment, domestic violence or abuse by husbands and relatives, child marriage, abuse of street children, and unrestricted circulation of misogynistic content online. These have prompted frequent protests across the country, leading the government to pledge swift justice, including by setting deadlines for rape investigation and trial. Bangladesh's abysmally low conviction rate in sexual violence cases is no secret. While the law adviser's statement that law enforcement agencies will have to complete rape investigation within 15 days, and the trial within 90 days, marks a step in shortening waiting periods for justice, this is neither enough nor a guarantee that justice will be served.

Experts say that the real challenge in such cases lies in ensuring thorough investigations, preventing interference or intimidation by influential quarters, addressing systemic flaws that allow perpetrators to escape accountability, and also tackling societal attitudes that perpetuate impunity. How can we ensure justice or prevent such crimes without addressing these challenges? Equally importantly, why does it always take a tragedy of this magnitude to pledge, or prompt, government action?

The truth is, mere pledges—or reactive policies—are not enough. We need stern, proactive action to tackle such crimes from the outset, not as an afterthought. We need regularly meted out punishment rather than exemplary punishment in the face of public outrage. The interim government, which emerged from a mass movement demanding accountability, has a particular responsibility in this regard. Given the level that gender-based harassment and violence has reached of late, we urge the government to establish a commission to look into such crimes and suggest comprehensive legal and administrative reforms so that no crime goes unreported and unpunished. Moreover, society, too, must confront the harmful cultural norms condoning or downplaying such violence.

## End the crisis in kidney treatment

### Awareness and affordable treatment options are vital

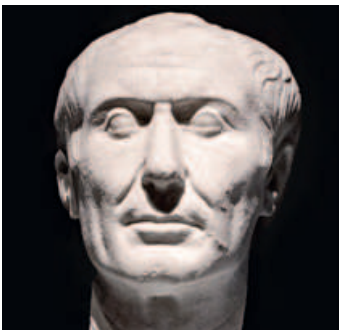
It is quite distressing to see the inadequacy of doctors and treatment facilities for kidney patients in a country where almost a quarter of the population suffers from renal diseases. Reportedly, there are only 350 specialists in Bangladesh, which amounts to just one per five lakh people. This gap may widen further in the coming days as, according to the Bangladesh Renal Association, the number of kidney disease patients is rising.

Cost is another major barrier to treatment for patients seeking dialysis. There are about 35 government hospitals that offer dialysis at a relatively lower cost of Tk 400 per session, while private facilities charge about 10 times more—sometimes even higher. Worse still, most hospitals providing kidney disease treatment are concentrated in cities, meaning increased associated expenses such as travel, food and accommodation for rural patients and their attendants.

According to a report in this daily, medication and transfusion-related costs further add to patients' out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure. For kidney dialysis patients, these costs are recurring, draining family savings and pushing many into financial debt. Unfortunately, the alternative treatment—kidney transplant—is not an option for most due to its high one-time cost and the shortage of donors. The current organ transplant law restricts the definition of donors, and cadaveric kidney donation, or deceased donor kidney transplantation—though legally permitted—has not gained traction due to social and religious beliefs.

Under these circumstances, we think that the health authorities in consultation with religious and community leaders should launch campaigns to raise awareness about the benefits of cadaveric organ transplants. Simultaneously, public awareness must be increased about kidney disease prevention, including its association with smoking. Since the disease often shows no early visible symptoms, physician recommended tests such as serum creatinine and the albumin-to-creatinine ratio for early detection must be made more accessible and affordable. Also, expanding dialysis facilities to every district has become essential. Finally, an overhaul of our healthcare system is necessary to relieve people, including kidney patients, from the crushing burden of out-of-pocket health expenditures.

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY



### Julius Caesar assassinated

On this day in 44 BCE (referred to as the Ides of March), Roman dictator Julius Caesar was launching a series of political and social reforms when he was assassinated by a group of nobles, among whom were Cassius and Brutus.

# Stop tiptoeing around women's safety



**MIND THE GAP**  
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In a country where women's safety is often treated as a footnote, the recent assault on two young women in Dhaka's Lalmatia area is a glaring indictment of our societal and legal failures. On March 1, 2025, these women were harassed, assaulted, and humiliated in broad daylight for the audacity of smoking in public—a choice that, while debatable health-wise, is hardly out of the ordinary. Let's break it down, shall we? The Smoking and Tobacco Products Usage (Control) Act bans smoking in specific public spaces, i.e. hospitals, educational institutions, government offices, transport hubs, etc. Nowhere does it say that a woman lighting a cigarette in an open space is committing a crime punishable by public flogging. Even if they did break the law (which they explicitly did not), the penalty would be a fine. Not mob justice. Not assault. Not the kind of humiliation that makes women think twice before stepping out of their homes.

The incident escalated from verbal abuse by a man in his 60s to physical assault. The man decided their choice to smoke in public was unacceptable. That was all it took. The message was clear: a woman doing something that men don't approve of is not just a woman making a choice. It's a provocation, a challenge, an invitation for society to collectively decide whether she deserves punishment. Because Bangladesh currently is united only in its hate for Hasina and misogyny.

The man in question has been taken into custody. Meanwhile, as rape cases continue to rise, anti-rape protests are shaking Dhaka to its core. In response, the government has decided that the best course of action is to shorten the period of investigation and expedite justice, because, clearly, efficiency is the missing piece in our broken system. But I have thoughts. Thoughts on how this isn't just about faster trials but about reforming laws that were drafted in a different century, by and for a different generation. Thoughts on why we need to go beyond just addressing rape and finally tackle the gaping holes

in our laws on sexual harassment.

The problem isn't just the assault, it's the fact that this is how the system is designed to work. The man who attacked them did it because he knew he could get away with it. Because this country has built a culture of impunity so strong that a woman being harassed in public is just part of the scenery. And when she dares to fight back? That's when the real outrage begins. Not over the fact that she was assaulted. No, the outrage comes from the fact that she didn't just quietly accept it. That she had the audacity to push back.



VISUAL: SHAIKH SULTANA JAHAN BADHON

Where was the law in all this? Oh, right. Nowhere. Because—and brace yourselves for this—Bangladesh does not have a law specifically criminalising sexual harassment.

Yes, that's right. A Law Commission draft for an anti-harassment law was submitted in 2010. It is now 2025. Still no law. Instead, we have a patchwork of outdated, vague provisions that do not go far enough. The Penal Code, 1860 criminalises “outraging a woman's modesty,” as if we are delicate porcelain dolls who simply cannot bear the emotional trauma of some uncle making a lewd comment. The Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act, 2000 deals

street harassment, no law that makes it a specific, punishable crime, no law that ensures immediate justice for the thousands of women who face this every single day. What we have instead is a system that tells women to just be careful. To be silent. To modify their behaviour, their movement, their clothing, their speech—anything to avoid attracting the kind of attention that men insist is inevitable. But it is not inevitable. It is allowed. And it is rewarded with the kind of casual indifference that makes incidents like Lalmatia possible.

What happened to those women is not an isolated event. Women are harassed on the streets, on public

# Strategic choices in the new space race



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President Vladimir Putin had to complete one crucial task before ordering Russian forces to launch a massive multipronged assault on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. He ensured systematic disruption of Ukraine's terrestrial internet services, crippling communication vital for military and civilian planning and operations, illustrating the modern battlefield's dependence on digital infrastructure. Starlink, SpaceX's satellite-based internet service, quickly stepped in with satellite-based internet, providing a lifeline that propped up Kyiv's strategic and defence operations.

Starlink's high-quality internet became a decisive factor in the war, and both Ukraine and Russia—bypassing US sanctions—used it to conduct drone and other tactical manoeuvres. And SpaceX became such an influential player that in September 2023, it could disallow Kyiv (by blocking internet service) to launch an attack on the Russian naval base at Sevastopol in Crimea, the Ukrainian territory that Russia illegally seized in 2014. It exposed the pitfalls of reliance on a single, albeit effective, service provider. Recently, under US President Donald Trump's major policy shift, Washington has threatened to suspend Starlink and other satellite-based services to Ukraine (to coerce Kyiv into signing the \$500 billion rare earth minerals deal),

raising questions about the reliability of such services during critical times such as conflicts or natural disasters. Sensing a business opportunity and strategic gap, Europe's EUTELSAT entered discussions with Kyiv, offering to replace Starlink, highlighting its desire to bolster position in the space industry. Meanwhile, Beijing is pressing ahead with developing its ambitious Qianfan (Thousand Sails) mega-constellation project as the China-US battle for tech and strategic supremacy rages on.

Washington's current dominance in the space industry extends beyond Starlink. Other US companies, like Amazon's Project Kuiper, are also developing their mega-constellations, promising to deliver high-speed, low-latency broadband internet globally. These ventures represent significant private sector investment and technological innovation, further solidifying the US position in the space-based services market. Several US companies, such as Blacksky and Boeing, offer high-resolution, real-time satellite imagery crucial for winning any modern-day war.

While facing economic and technological constraints, Russia has long maintained a strong presence in space. Though sanctions and the war have impacted its focus, it is committed to continuing its satellite navigation system (GLONASS), satellite communications, and remote

sensing capabilities. While its current endeavours may not match the scale of US or Chinese projects, it still boasts a formidable infrastructure and expertise. In November last year, Roscosmos sent 53 satellites into orbit, the highest number for the Russian space agency in a single launch.

All these drive home a critical truth: the space industry is undergoing a seismic shift, transforming from a technological marvel to a strategic battleground. The provision of global internet and satellite imagery, once considered niche applications, are now vital lifelines, shaping the very fabric of modern society and international relations. This emerging reality demands that nations make informed decisions to minimise commercial and strategic risks.

A global space race – ignited by the dangers of depending on single-source providers—has started with the US, China, and the EU vying for dominance. China's Qianfan is rapidly expanding, offering a comprehensive suite of space-based services to nations across the globe, particularly in the Global South. This trend will likely continue as Beijing aims to become a dominant space player and secure a strategic advantage over its rivals.

The EU is also accelerating the development of EUTELSAT, emphasising sovereignty and reliability. Last month, it announced the deployment of the world's first 5G non-terrestrial network connection, leveraging its OneWeb LEO (Low Earth Orbit) satellites. These developments signal a move from a US-centric model towards a more diversified and potentially fragmented market.

How can nations navigate this emerging industry, which might soon become an economic and strategic lifeline? Should they rely on established US-based providers, embrace Europe's or China's burgeoning offerings,

transport, in shopping malls, in universities, in workplaces, in their own neighbourhoods, in broad daylight, in the dead of night. Every single woman you know has a story (or more) of being grabbed, groped, something, anything. But what exactly is she supposed to do about it? File a police complaint so officers can smirk and ask if she “did something to provoke them”? Go to court and spend years trying to prove that, yes, she was harassed in public and no, it wasn't her fault? Wait for politicians to pretend to care for two days before they move on to something else? The public nature of the assault, the mob mentality, and the lacklustre response from the authorities highlight a systemic failure to protect women. The subsequent protests against the home minister's statements underscore people's frustration and demand for accountability. Every time something like this happens, there's a brief wave of outrage. And then, as always, it fades. The cycle repeats. And still, no law. No real change.

It's high time Bangladesh enacted a comprehensive anti-sexual harassment law that is actively enforced. Such legislation should clearly define sexual harassment and leave no room for ambiguity, covering verbal, non-verbal, and physical forms of harassment. The legislation needs to establish accountability mechanisms that mandate the formation of complaint committees in workplaces and educational institutions with the power to take decisive actions. A tribunal should be formed to ensure swift justice and implement fast-tracked courts to handle harassment cases, ensuring timely justice for victims. Meanwhile, nationwide campaigns should be promoted to educate the public about women's rights and the legal repercussions of harassment. This is a disease that needs to be uprooted and vaccinated.

The time for half-measures and lip service is over. Women in Bangladesh deserve more than token acknowledgments of their plight; they deserve concrete action. The Lalmatia incident should serve as a catalyst for change, propelling us towards a society where women can exercise their freedoms without fear of harassment or violence. Big words like feminism, patriarchy and empowerment need to be worth the ink used to write them. One legislation addressing the core issue of sexual harassment can make a statement bigger and better than a thousand wordy slogans and comments.

or invest in regional or national alternatives? The answer is not straightforward.

First, diversification is paramount. Nations must explore partnerships with multiple providers and invest in resilient, redundant infrastructure. Second, countries must actively participate in international forums to establish norms and standards for space activities. The lack of common protocols and standards could lead to technological fragmentation, hindering international cooperation in vital areas such as disaster response and environmental monitoring. Third, nations must invest in space capabilities, foster domestic innovation, and reduce reliance on external providers. This does not mean isolation but building a robust foundation for strategic partnerships and collaboration. Fourth, the commercial implications should be taken into account. The space-based services market is a multi-billion-dollar industry offering significant economic opportunities. Nations must create regulatory frameworks encouraging innovation and investment while protecting national security interests. Finally, the potential for militarisation of space must be addressed. As space-based assets become increasingly crucial for military operations, the risk of conflict in orbit intensifies. Nations must engage in diplomatic efforts to prevent an arms race in space and promote the peaceful use of this domain.

The emerging space race presents both challenges and opportunities. By making informed decisions, investing in resilient infrastructure, and fostering international cooperation, nations can navigate this orbital shift and minimise the associated risks, ensuring that space remains a domain for the benefit of all humanity.