



Govt must act now to curb anti-women vitriol

Say 67 rights groups

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Samajik Protirodh Committee, a coalition of 67 women's rights, human rights, and development organisations, yesterday urged the government to take immediate and decisive action against the escalating tide of misogynistic speech and behaviour in public discourse and the media.

The committee made the call at a press conference titled "Protest Against Anti-Gender Equality and Demeaning Remarks and Behaviour Towards Women", at the Tofazzal Hossain Manik Miah Hall of the National Press Club in Dhaka.

At the event, speakers expressed deep concern over what they described as a growing and organised campaign to degrade women and reverse their progress.

The committee issued a set of demands, including the strict enforcement of laws against all forms of misogynistic propaganda, swift punishment for those involved in mob violence, and effective steps to prevent such incidents from recurring.

It also called for a ban on the use of religion in politics and the implementation of a science-based, secular, and gender-sensitive education policy grounded in human rights values.

Other key demands included ensuring speedy justice for violence against women, protecting press freedom, strengthening law enforcement for women's safety, and

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WHISTLERS OF THE WOODS . . . A blue-capped rock thrush perched on a broken tree branch in Fatikchhari's Hazarikhill Wildlife Sanctuary. One of South Asia's most striking migratory songbirds, these birds breed in the Himalayan ranges and journey south during winter. They favour rocky, forested slopes and riverine areas, feeding on insects and berries. Despite their vivid plumage -- especially the males, with electric blue heads and backs against fiery orange bellies -- they are incredibly shy, often vanishing into the underbrush at the slightest disturbance. Their mellow, whistling song, however, rewards those patient enough to wait and listen. Though listed as Least Concern by the IUCN, habitat loss remains a threat. As bird lovers mark World Migratory Bird Day, let us remember that every fluttering wing symbolises nature's fragile harmony and it is our responsibility to ensure their protection.

PHOTO: KAMOL DAS

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Four of family die as bus hits ambulance

Pregnant woman has a boy but loses husband, 3 in-laws

STAR REPORT

For long, Billal Fakir, 40, and his family wanted a fourth child. On the day their wish was to be granted, fate betrayed them.

Billal, who used to work as an Imam of a mosque in Madaripur Sadar upazila, was taking his wife to a private hospital in Dhaka for her delivery yesterday when the ambulance's tyre started leaking.

The driver parked the ambulance at one edge of the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway at Nimatola area of Munshiganj to fix the leak when a bus of Golden Line Paribahan hit the parked vehicle from the rear.

The accident claimed five lives and injured five others, said Billal's cousin Miraj Ahmed.

Billal's mother Saheda Begum, 57, died on the spot, and the rest were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for treatment, said Abdul Qader Jilani, the officer-in-charge of Munshiganj's Hasara Highway Police Station.

The ambulance driver Mahbub Sarder, 28; Billal; his father Abdus Samad Fakir, 60; and Billal's sister Afsana Akhter, 22, were brought dead to the hospital, said Md. Faruk, the in-

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Shrinking foreign aid threatening development

Experts call for alternative funding



“Women, children, and marginalised populations are disproportionately at risk. If left unaddressed, this could lead to widening inequality, increased poverty, and erosion of public trust in development efforts.”

FARAH KABIR, country director of ActionAid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The declining flow of foreign aid to Bangladesh is threatening key development initiatives, particularly those supporting marginalised communities, said development experts yesterday.

In 2020, about \$1 billion was in foreign assistance, according to the NGO Affairs Bureau. That amount came down to \$655 million last year, down 11.6 percent year-on-year.

"The funding shortfall is already having real impacts," said Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, at a roundtable titled "Strengthening Community Support Amid Changing Funding Landscapes".

Essential services in primary healthcare and social protection are being disrupted, particularly in underserved urban and rural areas.

"Women, children, and marginalised populations are disproportionately at risk. If left unaddressed, this could lead to widening inequality, increased poverty, and erosion of public trust in development efforts," she said at the roundtable organised by ActionAid Bangladesh at the BRAC Centre Inn in the capital's Mohakhali.

She called for "active and collaborative" action to ensure the long-term sustainability of community support programmes.

Civil society organisations must undergo strategic transformation to remain effective after graduation from the least-developed country bracket, said M Zakir Hossain Khan, chief executive of Change Initiative.

"We must adopt forward-looking strategies that focus on nature-based solutions, renewable

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Flights taking longer due to Indo-Pak tensions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman flights from Dhaka to London, Toronto, and Rome are currently taking one to two hours longer than usual because of rerouting amid the tensions between India and Pakistan, officials said.

Flights of Turkish Airlines and Jazeera Airways and several carriers that operate to and from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport are also being rerouted.

The disruptions are caused by airspace restrictions: Pakistan has closed its airspace to Indian aircraft, prompting reciprocal measures from India.

As a result, several international airlines have begun avoiding the region's airspace, leading to longer routes for flights between South Asia and destinations in Europe and North America.

Flights over India are operating normally, but the closure of Pakistani airspace is forcing planes to take detours, Biman officials said.

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US, UK agree on trade deal

10% levy on British goods to stay

AFP, Washington

US President Donald Trump unveiled a "breakthrough" trade agreement with Britain yesterday, celebrating the first deal in a tariff war that has rattled the world.

Speaking by telephone from the Oval Office to British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Trump said the deal would be the first of many with other countries.

The deal will reduce tariffs on British cars and steel, but a 10 percent baseline levy on British goods will remain.

Britain will, in return, open up markets to US beef and farm products despite consumer concerns over their quality.

"I'm thrilled to announce that we have reached a breakthrough trade deal with the United Kingdom," Trump said at the White House.

"The deal includes billions of dollars of increased market access for American exports, especially in agriculture."

Starmer said it was a "really fantastic, historic day", noting that it coincided with the 80th anniversary of "Victory Day" for allied forces -- including Britain and the United States -- over Nazi Germany in World War II.

The trade deal slashes export tariffs for British cars from 27.5 percent to 10 percent, Britain said.

"That is a huge and important reduction," PM Starmer said during a visit to a Jaguar Land Rover factory in the central Midlands area of England.

Both sides said there would be further negotiations on a fuller deal, but Trump denied overselling the agreement.

"This is a maxed-out deal -- not like you said it really incorrectly," he added, answering a reporter's question on whether he was overstating the breadth of the deal.

The deal follows a charm offensive by Starmer, who came to the White House in February armed with an invitation from King Charles III for a historic second state visit for Trump.

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Bill Gates accuses Musk of 'killing' children with aid cuts

Pledges to give away his entire fortune

AGENCIES

US billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates intensified his ongoing dispute with Elon Musk, alleging that the Tesla and SpaceX CEO was harming the world's most vulnerable children by making what Gates described as ill-advised reductions to US development aid.

In an interview, Gates said that the Tesla chief had acted through ignorance. In February, Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency in effect shut down the US Agency for International Development, the main conduit for US aid, saying it was "time for it to die".

The co-founder of Microsoft said the abruptness of the cuts had left life-saving food and medicines expiring in warehouses and could cause the resurgence of diseases such as measles, HIV and polio. "The picture of the world's richest man killing the world's poorest children is not a pretty one," he told the Financial Times.

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Battery-run rickshaws stand parked under a makeshift shed on railway land in the capital's Tejgunipara, where exposed illegal electric lines are used for charging, posing grave safety risks.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Israel closes UN schools in annexed east Jerusalem

AFP, Jerusalem

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees said yesterday that Israel closed three of its schools in annexed east Jerusalem, months after an Israeli ban on its activities took effect.

An AFP photographer at the scene reported that a closure notice in Hebrew was left at the entrance of at least one of the schools, and UNRWA said at least one of its staff members was detained.

"From May 8, 2025, it will be prohibited to operate educational institutions, or employ teachers, teaching staff or any other staff, and it will be forbidden to accommodate students or allow the entry of students into this institution," the closure order read.

UNRWA's director in the West Bank, Roland Friedrich, told AFP that "heavily armed" forces surrounded three UNRWA schools in east Jerusalem's Shuafat camp at 9:00 am yesterday.

Friedrich added that 550 pupils aged six to 15 were present when the closure was enforced, calling the event "a traumatising experience for young children who are at immediate risk of losing their access to education."