

# The interim government's silence over misogyny is tragic



NO STRINGS  
ATTACHED

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To say we are like Alice hurtling down the rabbit hole with no clue where we are headed would be a euphemism. We are actually in freefall into an abyss with quiet acquiescence, taking the hits with silent resignation. There is chaos and dissent in every corner and no one seems to have a grip on anything.

What has been most crushing and baffling is the silence of the interim government regarding the blatant misogyny publicly displayed—in rallies, mob violence, and online propaganda. Certain sections have decided that the current sense of freedom granted to them due to political expediency or fear—or both—has given them the licence to vent all their venom on women who dare to even speak of their rights as equal citizens.

It's not like we didn't know about these groups. Over the past decade or so, we have seen how emboldened these groups have

become, how they have multiplied, and how easily they spew hatred against women and use religion to justify their hatred. Now, under the guise of freedom of expression and emboldened by a tacit indulgence from the government, they are amplifying the voices of hate and drowning out the voices of reason.

This is tragic considering the mandate with which this government came to power: to lead the country to democracy and freedom. The enthusiasm with which the chief adviser accepted the final report of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission was unquestionable. One could not mistake the obvious delight on the faces in that photo op with the commission members that included prominent rights activists. The chief adviser even instructed all relevant ministries and divisions to act swiftly on the commission's recommendations aimed at ending gender

discrimination. He said, "This is not merely a women's issue; it is a matter of national significance. The report will be printed, widely distributed, and published in book form, like a textbook, to ensure accessibility." All this pointed to real change, and nothing could have been more refreshing.

So, when the commission was viciously reviled at a rally called by Hefazat-e-Islam, which demanded its total demolition because

commission and its recommendations to be scrapped. This wholesale dismissal of the work of a commission, which has painstakingly chalked out possible ways to remove various kinds of discrimination that impedes women's fundamental rights, demonstrates a political agenda: to create a narrative that religion is being attacked. Apart from the fact that one of the most contentious recommendations, which was to do with

unwarranted and created an unsafe, hostile environment for women.

The silence continued when Nadira Yeasmin, assistant professor of Bangla at Narsingdi Government College, was made officer on special duty (OSD) because she had advocated equal inheritance rights for men and women through an online magazine she edits and publishes. Groups including Hefazat demonstrated on the college campus demanding her dismissal, claiming that her views contradict Islamic inheritance laws. And shockingly, she was made OSD and transferred to Satkhira.

So why didn't the interim government, or more importantly its chief, who has always stood up for women's rights, intervene and stop this injustice? How much influence do these groups have that they get the administration to professionally punish a teacher merely for her expressing an opinion?

If this is freedom of expression, we would like to know why this freedom is the privilege of only those who hide their hate in religious rhetoric. It seems if you can invoke religion, you can say the vilest, most undemocratic words in human language. But that is not all. It looks like groups that have politicised religion have the power to trash a women's affairs reform commission, transfer teachers, change vice-chancellors, and even change the history of this nation.

Our constitution, the one born out of a bloody, hard-won independence, states explicitly in Article 28 (2), "Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and of public life." If it is democracy that this interim government is working towards, they must ardently uphold this principle and loudly object when it is being violated. It is the least we can expect from a leader as progressive as Prof Yunus.



VISUAL: SALMAN SAKIB SHAHRYAR

they deemed certain recommendations to be against religion, the least that was expected was a statement of condemnation from the one person you would think was a great champion of women's rights: Prof Muhammad Yunus. But this did not happen even though this was a commission that he had wanted and thought was so necessary.

Other groups have also asked for the

equal inheritance rights, has been provided as an option rather than compulsory, the outburst of rage from certain groups was both exaggerated and unnecessary. Like in all the other commissions, these are just proposals and are open to discussions with various stakeholders. Holding mammoth rallies and publicly denouncing a commission and humiliating its members was completely

## Budget must reflect a rights-based approach to disability



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The national budget is expected to reflect a country's vision for inclusive development. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for Bangladesh, as here the budget allocation for persons with disabilities continues to be insufficient for ensuring their rights, inclusion, and equal opportunities. One of the most pressing challenges in this regard remains the lack of accurate and comprehensive data on persons with disabilities in the country, which significantly hampers appropriate planning and budgetary allocation. According to the World Health Organization's 2022 report, about 16 percent of the world's population (130 crore) live with some form of disability. However, data within Bangladesh varies widely. The 2022 Population and Housing Census reports the number of persons with disabilities in Bangladesh to be 23.6 lakh, which is only 1.43 percent of the population. Meanwhile, an ongoing disability detection survey by the Department of Social Services under the Ministry of Social Welfare, which started in 2013, identified over 36 lakh persons with disabilities as of May 24, 2025. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2022 suggests that the figure is 5.71 percent of the population, while the National Survey of Persons with Disabilities 2021 puts it at 2.8 percent. This inconsistency in data not only raises questions about the reliability of national statistics, but also leaves millions of persons with disabilities invisible in

development planning.

In the FY2024-25 budget, Tk 3,812.13 crore was allocated for disability-related programmes. This represents just 2.8 percent of the total social safety net budget and a mere 0.48 percent of the national budget, an amount grossly inadequate when considering the needs and rights of lakhs of persons with disabilities. Although the number of recipients under the disability allowance programme has increased, the monthly allowance of Tk 850 remains unchanged in the current fiscal year, despite rising costs of living and inflation. Similarly, the number of stipends available to students with disabilities has not increased over the past five years, stagnating at just 100,000 beneficiaries.

Another major concern is the lack of effective participation of persons with disabilities in the national budget formulation process. Their voices and experiences are not reflected in planning, and allocations are mostly concentrated within the social welfare ministry. Of the 140 social safety net programmes, only eight are targeted at persons with disabilities, seven of which fall under the social welfare ministry and just one under the education ministry. To ensure inclusive development, disability inclusion must be mainstreamed across all ministries.

The national budget fails to address the implementation needs of existing laws and

policies, including the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2013 and the Neuro Developmental Disability Protection Trust Act, 2013. As a result, persons with disabilities remain excluded from basic services such as education, healthcare, employment, training, and transportation primarily due to barriers, discrimination, and lack of awareness.

To address these gaps, several actions can



SOURCE: ACCESS BANGLADESH FOUNDATION

For persons with severe disabilities who require full-time caregivers, a caregiver allowance programme should be introduced.

be taken. The allowance for persons with disabilities should be increased to reflect actual living costs. For persons with severe disabilities who require full-time caregivers, a caregiver allowance programme should

be introduced, recognising that caregivers often cannot engage in income-generating activities.

The government should also initiate targeted projects to promote entrepreneurs with disabilities. Budget allocations should support skills development and job placement. The private sector should be incentivised to employ persons with disabilities through various benefits and tax rebates.

Supportive devices tailored to the specific needs of persons with disabilities such as wheelchairs, tricycles, specialised scooters, walkers, white canes, hearing aids, portable ramps, magnifying glasses, prosthetic-orthotic, speech-to-text and text-to-speech screen reading software, Braille printer, keyboard, head pointer and joystick should be duty-free or have minimal import duty. It is necessary to allocate adequate budget to provide these products free of cost or at subsidised rate to poor individuals with disabilities. Additionally, all VAT and tax on the interest from savings instruments, including fixed deposits and deposit pension schemes held by persons with disabilities, should be withdrawn to support their financial security.

In the education sector, all students with disabilities should be brought under the stipend programme. Technical education institutions should receive special allocations to support learners with disabilities. Inclusive education requires accessible infrastructure, reasonable accommodation and learning materials, such as Braille books, accessible e-books, and sign language services. Teacher training curricula must address the needs of learners with disabilities, and funds should be allocated to adapt teaching and assessment methods to diverse learning needs.

We need special projects in the budget to ensure the higher education needs of persons with disabilities. Besides, there are currently few accredited sign language

interpreters in the country. The government should take the initiative in the next budget to prepare at least 100 skilled interpreters across the country.

To foster inclusive public infrastructure, the budget must support the import and manufacturing of ramp-equipped public transport, accessible shelters, and barrier-free infrastructure at railway stations, bus terminals, and government offices. All digital government services, including union digital centres and ministry websites, must be made fully accessible.

Healthcare is another crucial area where persons with disabilities face systemic exclusion. Accessible and specialised health services must be ensured through targeted budgetary allocations.

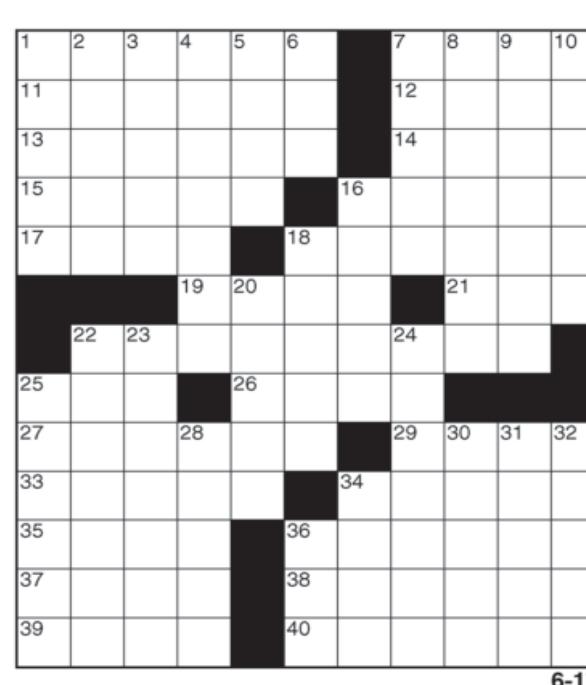
To encourage education, employment, and the prevention of violence against persons with disabilities, funding support should be given to organisations of persons with disabilities to carry out community-based campaigns and programmes.

There must be ministry-wise budget allocation for the inclusive development of persons with disabilities. Beyond the traditional reliance on the social welfare ministry, ministries such as education, health, youth and sports, labour and employment, women and children affairs, local government, rural development, housing and public works, food, disaster management and relief, all must play a role in ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities.

Despite some incremental progress, the national budget still treats disability from a welfare perspective, rather than as a rights-based development agenda. To uphold the dignity, rights, and potential of persons with disabilities, bold and inclusive financial planning is essential. It is time for the government to prioritise disability inclusion as a core component of national development.

ACROSS  
1 Highway divider  
7 Frosh's elder  
11 Right now  
12 Skilled  
13 Gently jabbed  
14 Bike part  
15 Periphery  
16 Bulldog  
17 Course needs  
18 Bow treatments  
19 Captured  
21 Crafty  
22 Swell  
25 Upper limit  
26 Watch reading  
27 Be attentive  
29 Bit of rind  
33 Diner patron  
34 Singer Frankie  
35 Shepard in space  
36 Plane's place  
37 Bakery buy  
38 Deep-seated  
39 Plops down

40 Gazed  
DOWN  
1 "Olympia" painter  
2 Piano piece  
3 Avoid  
4 Takes in  
5 Good pair  
6 Homer's neighbour  
7 Long tales  
8 Cleopatra's Needle, e.g.  
9 Without doubt  
10 Galileo's crime  
16 Abner's surname  
18 "The Kiss" sculptor  
20 Mink's cousin  
22 Fronton sport  
23 Parvenu  
24 "Joueurs de Cartes" painter  
25 Traction aids  
28 Circus sights  
30 "Enigma Variations" composer  
31 List of candidates  
32 Worn out  
34 Wind pointer  
36 Not square



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	P	I	N	S	S	W	V	I	S
P	I	N	O	T	T	E	N	T	H
I	N	T	R	O	A	S	T	R	O
R	A	H	P	S	I	H	O	W	
A	T	E	P	E	N	E	V	E	
L	A	S	T	E	D	B	L	E	D
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