

CUMILLA RAPE Naripokkho, ASK, MJF for punishment of culprits

Demand urgent support for victim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK) and Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF), in separate statements, yesterday strongly condemned the brutal rape and violence committed against a woman in Cumilla's Muradnagar, expressing deep concern over the incident and demanding a swift, impartial, and exemplary trial.

The crime is not only a horrific act of violence but also a deliberate attack on a woman from the Hindu religious minority community and a blatant expression of hatred, said ASK.

Such brutality, it said, violates the fundamental principles of the Constitution of Bangladesh, the rule of law, and human rights.

The organisation also said this crime is not just the result of an individual's actions but also a reflection of the state's indifference, a long-standing culture of impunity, and failure to enforce the law against influential perpetrators.

"If a woman is not safe in her own home and identity, it represents a serious failure of the state and a breakdown in security," ASK said.

It added that this incident followed a pattern seen in past cases of violence against women, where justice was delayed or the perpetrators were shielded.

ASK called for a thorough and expedited investigation, immediate arrest of the accused, and the assurance of exemplary punishment.

It also demanded that the safety of the victim and her family be ensured, along with compensation and urgent legal, psychological, and medical support.

The organisation warned that without proper and severe punishment in such heinous cases, the dignity and rights of women and the rule of law will continue to erode.

"The state must send a clear and

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Leaders and activists of progressive organisations carry torches while marching from Purana Paltan to the Jatiya Press Club in the capital last night, protesting the rape of a woman in Cumilla's Muradnagar and demanding exemplary punishment of the perpetrators.

IMF expects FDI inflows as polls timeline firms up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Monetary Fund has expressed optimism that foreign investment into Bangladesh will begin to flow again as the country's election timeline has removed a key source of uncertainty for investors.

"With the elections now being firmed, we believe that the investments will start coming in. This is very important for Bangladesh because it has one of the lowest foreign direct investments in the world," said Chris Papageorgiou, IMF mission chief for Bangladesh.

Papageorgiou made the remarks during an online briefing on the progress of Bangladesh's loan programme with the IMF yesterday, noting that foreign direct investment had slowed considerably in recent months amid concerns over political uncertainty and governance transitions.

"There was an investment summit when we were on mission, and there was a lot of interest in investing in Bangladesh," he said.

investment decisions, especially from external sources, are sensitive to the timing and perceived credibility of elections.

The IMF believes that with the electoral timeline now firmed, Bangladesh may begin to unlock greater volumes of capital inflows, a much-needed boost for an economy seeking to graduate from least-developed country status and recover from recent economic and political turbulence.

Papageorgiou's comments come against the backdrop of a broader IMF-backed reform programme for Bangladesh. The original loan package, approved in 2023, totalled \$4.7 billion. Following the augmentation approved on June 23, the total size of the programme has increased by \$800 million to \$5.5 billion. Of this, \$3.31 billion has been disbursed so far.

In its latest assessment, the IMF cited

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IMF mission chief for Bangladesh is less upbeat about revenue performance, describes it as "not very encouraging" so far under its \$5.5b loan programme.

New CrPC rules

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council meeting, reports BSS.

The false cases and people who make money by implicating innocent people in these cases embarrass the government, he said at the Foreign Service Academy in the capital.

He added that the amendment to the CrPC would prevent these.

"When a murder case is filed in line with the CrPC, the investigation takes three to four years. There are hundreds of accused in some cases..."

According to the new section, 173(a), a police commissioner, superintendent of police (SP), or any police officer of the rank of SP in a district will use their discretion and may direct the investigation officer to prepare and submit a preliminary probe report to the magistrate.

The magistrate will then exempt the individuals against whom there is no evidence before the trial begins, Prof Asif said, adding that a gazette notification will be issued in this connection soon.

NCP to unveil declaration of July on Aug 3

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on anyone. It's now our responsibility to present the proclamation on behalf of the students and the people."

The July declaration is a proposed document aimed at enshrining the aspirations of the people born of last year's mass uprising that ousted the Awami League government.

Speaking at a press conference at the party office in Banglamotor yesterday, he also announced a 36-day nationwide party campaign titled "Desh Gortey July Padajatra (July March to Rebuild the Nation)", set to begin on July 1.

The programme will culminate in the reading of the July declaration and the party's manifesto at the Central Shaheed Minar on August 3.

The march will begin with a visit to the grave of Abu Sayed in Rangpur and continue through all 64 districts.

"We want to get closer to the people, to those who took part in the July movement, and hear their voices," said Nahid.

As part of the 36-day programme, the NCP will observe "Anti-Discrimination Martyrs' Day" on July 16 in memory of Abu Sayed and celebrate August 5 as "People's Liberation Day", marking the fall of the Awami League government.

NCP leaders Sarjis Alam, Hasnat Abdullah, and Anik Roy were also present at the press conference.

Poor progress may delay July Charter

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their opponent, because it was merely fulfilling a responsibility.

The two matters on which the parties agree are: first, lawmakers will be allowed to vote against party lines, except on no-confidence motions and finance bills; and second, opposition MPs will chair at least four key parliamentary standing committees.

On June 18, the BNP and like-minded parties opposed a proposal to form the National Constitutional Council, which was supposed to oversee appointments to constitutional bodies and the position of chief adviser to caretaker governments.

Several political parties, including the Jamaat-e-Islami and National Citizen Party, supported the proposal.

On June 19, political parties remained poles apart over how the president should be elected.

The method of electing the president came up in the discussions again in the second phase, and the BNP rejected a proposal to elect the president through an electoral college, comprising MPs and local government representatives.

The Communist Party of

Bangladesh and the LDP said the current system, in which MPs alone elect the president, should remain unchanged, while the Jamaat and the NCP endorsed the idea of an electoral college.

On June 22, after two days of discussions, all political parties, except the BNP and two others, agreed that an individual cannot be the prime minister for over 10 years.

The consensus commission, on June 25, revised the structure and functions of the proposed National Constitutional Council and renamed it as the Committee for Appointments to Constitutional and Statutory Bodies. It also dropped "pluralism" from the proposed basic principles of the constitution because the BNP, Jamaat, and several other Islamic parties were against it.

Unlike the proposed NCC, the committee will not oversee the appointment of the chief adviser because the BNP and like-minded parties were against it.

In the coming days, the commission will also hold discussions on several other key issues, including the process for amending the constitution, declaring a state of emergency,

women's representation in local government bodies, formation of district coordination councils, and the establishment of an independent commission for redrawing boundaries of constituencies.

NO BREAKTHROUGH

At yesterday's discussion, most parties except the BNP and its allies supported the formation of the Committee for Appointments to Constitutional and Statutory Bodies.

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said amendments to current laws to appoint individuals to constitutional posts would be enough.

NCP leader Javed Rasin said at the meeting that the process stalled after hours of discussions.

"I propose that the commission first consult Salahuddin Bhai or the BNP about the proposals. Let them identify the ones they agree on, and only then should the commission bring them to the floor for discussion. Otherwise, there's no point in holding talks like this," he said.

Jamaat Naye-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammad Taher said, "It seems achieving consensus on such matters is nearly impossible."

Most participating parties suggested that the upper house be elected through proportional representation. However, the BNP, and several other parties opposed it.

Salahuddin at the meeting said that his party agreed to a bicameral legislature, 100 seats in the upper house, and having deputy speakers from the opposition in both houses.

However, the BNP wanted upper house seats to be allocated based on lower house constituencies; the Jamaat and NCP supported the commission's proposal; two leftist parties and the Amjanata Party opposed the idea of an upper house.

The Khelafat Majlish said those opposing the bicameral legislature were creating confusion.

"On the one hand, they talk about institutional independence, and on the other, they claim the executive's hands are being tied. That's contradictory. The executive branch should not interfere in appointments to constitutional bodies," said its Secretary General Ahmad Abdul Quader.

NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossain said if upper house seats were allocated based on lower house,

Khelafat Majlish to contest in all 300 seats

Says Mamunul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish yesterday announced that it was preparing to nominate candidates in all 300 constituencies for the upcoming national election, prioritising Islamic values and national interests.

"However, if broader alliances or electoral understandings can ensure greater protection of Islam and the country's interests, the party is ready to take that route as well," Mawlana Muhammad Mamunul Haque, ameer of Khelafat Majlish, told a press briefing at the auditorium of Institution of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh.

Outlining the party's position on the proportional representation (PR) system in parliament, he said, "We want a partial PR system. The current system does not truly reflect the majority's opinion. Therefore, to ensure fair and inclusive representation, a partial PR system should be introduced in the lower house and a full PR system in the upper house."

Proportional representation is an electoral system in which the distribution of seats corresponds with the proportion of the total votes cast for each party.

Calling upon the government, Mamunul said, "We urge the interim government to clarify unresolved issues in the electoral framework to the nation without delay. Although there is consensus on a bicameral parliament, a decision is still needed on how the upper and lower chambers will be formed."

Responding to a question, he said that Khelafat Majlish has traditionally been a proponent of Islamic unity. Shortly after its formation, the party played a role in forming a broader Islamic alliance.

"We still uphold that tradition today."

Regarding local government polls, he stated that they too should be held based on national political consensus.

Calling for maintaining the anti-fascist unity, he said, "The historic unity forged on the streets must not be undermined. The current trend of political coordination -- where no one is toppling or suppressing the other -- must continue. If anyone reverts to the Awami League-style politics of suppression and elimination, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish will call for national unity and play an active role."

He further said, "Bangladesh must be governed based on the will of its own people. Our efforts will continue to ensure that no foreign agenda is reimposed."

"Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish believes that a strong and constructive opposition is essential for the country. The politics of eradicating opposition parties cannot continue in Bangladesh."

Before the press briefing, an orientation and introduction programme for potential candidates was held at the same venue from 10:00am.

Over 300 aspiring candidates from across the country, who are interested in contesting with the rickshaw symbol, attended the event.

Central leaders provided them with necessary guidance on elections, politics, and party ideology.

Govt pledges a swift trial amid public uproar

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respondents why their failure to prevent disclosure of the victim's identity, video and audio on social media should not be declared illegal, deputy attorney generals Shafiqur Rahman and Tanim Khan told The Daily Star.

The court fixed July 14 as the next hearing date on this issue.

Government officials concerned, including the home secretary, inspector general of police, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication and Regulatory Commission (BTRC) and Cumilla superintendent of police have been made respondents to the rule.

The HC bench of Justice Fahmida Quader and Justice Sayed Jahed Mansur passed the order and issued the rule following a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyer Mir AKM Nurun Noby seeking necessary directives.

The incident has sparked nationwide outrage with people from all walks of life demanding exemplary punishment to the perpetrators. Several rights organisations have sharply condemned the crime and extended their support to the survivor (read the full report on page 2).

Earlier in the day, the lawyer

submitted the petition as a public interest litigation. He appealed to the HC to order the respondents to initiate a judicial inquiry into the rape incident and ensure Tk 5 crore in compensation and adequate treatment for the rape survivor.

DAG Shafiqur told the court that a case was filed over the rape, and five men had already been arrested in this connection.

Later in the day, Law Adviser Prof Asif Nazrul expressed his shock and outrage over the heinous crime.

"The home ministry took immediate action ... the key suspects and others have already been arrested," he told reporters at the Foreign Service Academy yesterday.

"We are committed to dealing with the case with the utmost importance." Meanwhile, Cumilla's Additional Superintendent of Police (Muradnagar Circle) AKM Quamruzzaman said, "Many people tried to label the incident as an extramarital affair, but our primary investigation didn't bear out anything like that."

"The woman, whom we found to be quite simple in her demeanour, was subjected to brutal torture. We're attaching highest importance to the matter."

He made the remarks after visiting

the rape survivor yesterday.

"We're trying to know whether any other people were involved in the torture and recording of the video," the official added.

So far, five people have been arrested in connection with the rape incident.

Of them, the prime accused, Fazor Ali, 36, was arrested in Dhaka around 5:00am yesterday.

Four others were arrested for assaulting the woman, filming the incident and spreading the video on social media. They are Sumon, Romzan, Arif, and Anik from Cumilla, said Cumilla Superintendent of Police Nazir Ahmed Khan.

A Cumilla court sent the four to jail yesterday, said Sadequr Rahman, police inspector assigned to the court.

On top of Friday's rape case, the woman yesterday filed another case under the Pornography Control Act, 2012, with Muradnagar Police Station.

The four who have already been arrested and several other unnamed people stand accused in the case.

Fazor Ali was made the sole accused in the rape case filed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, with the same

police station.

According to the case statement, the woman was raped at knife-point in Ramchandrapur Panchkitta village under Muradnagar upazila. She, a mother of two, had gone to visit her father's house about two weeks ago.

The Daily Star correspondent yesterday visited the area and spoke to the rape survivor, her mother, and their neighbours.

The survivor said Fazor, one of her neighbours, broke into her house on Thursday night while other family members were out attending a programme.

He raped her at knife-point and threatened to kill her if she disclosed the incident. Locals rushed to the scene when she began screaming. They apprehended Fazor and beat him up.

Around that time, a group of people arrived at the scene and started assaulting the woman as well. A video of the assault and tearing of her clothes was later circulated online.

Her mother told The Daily Star that her daughter was home alone Thursday night as she and other family members went to attend Kirtan nearby.

When she heard that people had gathered at their house, she rushed back. "When I got back to my house, I saw that my daughter's clothes had been torn off and she was being beaten."

Abdur Rob, a former member of the local union parishad, said Fazor is notorious in the area for his involvement in drug dealing. "Although he does not hold any political posts, he switches from one party to another with the change of the regime."

Muradnagar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Jahidur Rahman said Fazor is currently undergoing treatment at the Cumilla Police Lines Hospital with a broken hand and a leg.

Fazor was first admitted to the Cumilla Medical College Hospital after being beaten up by locals on Thursday night, he said.

He fled from the hospital to a private clinic at Jatrabari in Dhaka after hearing a rape case was filed against him on Friday.

Police arrested Fazor from there the following morning, the OC added.

[Our Correspondent from Cumilla contributed to the report.]