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Demands ARTICLE 19

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

As the interim government moves toward finalising a Data Protection Ordinance, rights organisation ARTICLE 19 has called for the proposed framework to be firmly rooted in international human rights law and constitutional safeguards.

In a statement yesterday, it warned that poorly drafted provisions could weaken privacy rights and centralise excessive power in the hands of the government.

The UK-based rights body welcomed the government's initiative to introduce a comprehensive data protection regime but stressed that the ordinance must balance security, innovation, and fundamental freedoms.

"The protection of personal data is essential to safeguard human rights, foster an open and inclusive digital ecosystem, and enable innovation and economic growth in Bangladesh," it said.

Civil society groups have previously voiced concerns that certain provisions under consideration could allow arbitrary surveillance, restrict cross-border

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HEAT INITIATIVE

UGC to ink deals
for 151 sub-
projects with
universities

BREAKDOWN

- » 9 pandemic-related projects
- » 40 projects focus on teaching-learning infrastructure
- » 102 advanced research projects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The University Grants Commission (UGC) will sign agreements with public and private universities today for 151 sub-projects under the Higher Education Acceleration and Transformation (HEAT) initiative.

The signing ceremony will be held at the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital's Agargaon, UGC officials announced at a press briefing yesterday at the commission's auditorium.

At the welcome speech, UGC Chairman Prof SMA Faiz said the selection process was conducted with "100 percent transparency".

Responding to allegations of nepotism or political favouritism, Prof Faiz said the commission took all necessary measures

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BNP suspends
Fazlur Rahman
for 3 months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



BNP has suspended its chairperson's son's adviser, Fazlur Rahman, from all party posts, including his primary membership, for three months.

According to a letter issued by the party yesterday, Fazlur was warned to exercise caution in his remarks on television talk shows and social media so that the country's dignity, the party's policies, and people's religious sentiments are not undermined.

A BNP source confirmed the development to The Daily Star.

The letter noted that, given Fazlur Rahman's role as a freedom fighter in the Liberation War, the party refrained from imposing

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PATHAO AND SHOMVOB
Bangladeshi
startups earn spot
on Forbes Asia list

STAR REPORT

Bangladeshi startups Pathao and Shomvob have been named in the prestigious Forbes Asia "100 to Watch" list for 2025, marking a significant recognition for the country's burgeoning technology ecosystem on the regional stage.

This year's list includes companies from 16 countries and territories, with India leading with 18 entries, followed by Singapore and Japan with 14 each. Bangladesh's representation, though modest, signals its gradual ascent in the regional startup landscape.

Pathao is a multi-service platform offering ride-hailing, food delivery, logistics, e-commerce, and fintech solutions.

"The company says its app has been downloaded more than 6 million times and it has fulfilled more than 70 million trips and orders across Bangladesh and Nepal," according to Forbes.

Founded in 2015, Pathao was listed under the

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60% of rape victims
aged under 18

Girls in grades 6-10 most subjected to sexual violence; children, young women face threats even within family and school circles, says Mahila Parishad report on 2024

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Among all age groups, girls in grades 6-10 were subjected to sexual violence the most last year, according to a new media monitoring report by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad.

It said it came to this conclusion based on the reported ages of victims of various forms of sexual violence in 2024.

It also said girls in grades 1 to 5 were the victims of rape the most in the same period.

The report found that these young girls also faced attempted rape, child marriage, dowry-related abuse, and sexual harassment, and were highly vulnerable to cybercrime and exploitation as domestic workers.

University students were also frequently targeted, as they faced rape, gang rape, attempted rape, and cybercrime.

Alarmingly, 60 percent of rape victims were children under 18, and the majority of victims across all forms of violence were also under 18, underscoring the widespread abuse of girl children.

The findings of the report, titled "State of Violence Against Women and Girls - 2024", were presented yesterday at Bangladesh Mahila Parishad's central office in Segunbagicha, Dhaka.

Froza Arman, senior training and research officer at Mahila Parishad, presented the data compiled from 14 national dailies.

She noted that there was no occupational distinction in the risk of abuse. "Women from all walks of life - schoolgirls, housewives, working women, and labourers - fall victim to horrific crimes like rape," she said.

While schoolgirls constituted the majority of victims, adult women across professions were also affected, particularly housewives.

By location, the highest proportion of sexual violence occurred at the upazila level, followed by the district level.

At the upazila level, 57 percent of rapes, 44 percent of gang rapes, 44 percent of attempted rapes, 48 percent of dowry-related abuses, and 63 percent of child marriages were recorded.

Most perpetrators were known to victims, including close relatives and neighbours.

Classmates and boyfriends were responsible for 14 percent of rapes, as well as 3 percent of gang rapes, 3 percent of attempted rapes, and 2 percent of harassment cases.

In gang rape cases, strangers were responsible for 42 percent, while harassment was most often committed by familiar criminals (31 percent) or teachers (24 percent).

Cyber abuse was primarily carried out by boyfriends, ex-husbands, classmates, and neighbours.



PERPETRATORS

- Most were known - relatives, neighbours, classmates, boyfriends
- Children were often abused in their own homes, neighbouring houses
- Gang rape by strangers - 42%
- Harassment by teachers - 24%
- Young offenders rising:
 - 28% of rapists aged 11-30
 - 24% of gang rapists aged 16-25
 - 50% of cyber offenders aged 16-30

VICTIMS BY AGE

- Girls in grades 1-5 were victims of rape the most last year
- High school girls most subjected to sexual violence
- Majority victims across all forms of violence under 18
- University students frequent victims of rape, gang rape, cybercrime
- Women from all walks of life fall victim to sexual violence

CASE TRENDS

RAPE CASES

- 364 in 2024
- 354 in Jan-Jun 2025 (nearly same as whole of 2024)

GANG RAPES

148 (2024) - 106 (first half of 2025)

MURDER AFTER RAPE

112 (2024) - 127 (first half of 2025)

SEXUAL ABUSE & HARASSMENT

224 (2024) - 320 (first half of 2025)

DOWRY-RELATED VIOLENCE

68 (2024) - 96 (first half of 2025)

Perpetrators ranged in age from adolescents to men over 60, with young people heavily represented among accused rapists.

Twenty-eight percent of accused rapists were between 11 and 30, with the highest proportion aged 21-25.

A significant share of gang rapists (24 percent) were aged 16-25, while 17 percent of harassers and half of cyber offenders fell within the 16-30 age range.

The report also highlighted risks in both public and private spaces.

Children were often abused in their own homes or neighbouring houses, showing that presumed safe spaces can be dangerous.

Besides, a high number of rape incidents occurred at the hands of classmates or boyfriends, indicating that trusted social circles can pose a significant danger.

Public transport and interactions with drivers exposed women and girls to harassment and violence during commutes, while politically and socially influential individuals often misused their power to commit sexual abuse, reinforcing systemic vulnerabilities.

Meanwhile, the report observed a positive trend that more rape cases are being filed than in the past, with very few incidents remaining unreported.

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Formulate
'Journalist
Protection Act'

Action plan by MRDI, IMS seeks
stronger press freedom safeguards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Legal reform is essential to ensure journalists can work without fear of censorship, harassment, or arbitrary detention, said speakers at the launch event of a strategic action plan yesterday.

The Media Resources Development Initiative (MRDI) and International Media Support (IMS) launched the "Strategic Action Plan on Advocacy for Media Reform in Bangladesh", which proposes enacting a "Journalist Protection Act" and repealing criminal defamation laws. The launch event was held at The Daily Star Centre.

According to the plan, the proposed law would serve as an umbrella for safeguarding journalists against threats, attacks, surveillance, misuse of legal tools, and other physical, digital, and psychological risks.

It would also address exploitation by employers, including denial of formal contracts, identity documents, fair wages, and benefits.

Repealing defamation laws would strengthen press freedom, enabling journalists to report independently and without fear, the plan added.

Moderating the event, MRDI Executive Director Hasibur Rahman said a legal framework is needed, as journalists

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PURBACHAL PLOT SCAM

7 witnesses testify
against Hasina,
family in 3 cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seven prosecution witnesses yesterday testified in three cases filed against 23 people, including deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her daughter Saima Wazed Putul and son Sajeeb Wazed Joy over irregularities in plot allocation in Purbachal New Town.

The witnesses are Dhiraj Chandra Barman, Sourav Das, Mahbubur Rahman, Ashim Shil, Ullas Chowdhury, Akter Jahan and Shofiqul Islam.

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BNP and Jamaat
lawyers urge SC to
reinstate CG system

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Counsels for BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday pleaded before the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court to turn down its verdict that scrapped the non-party caretaker government system, saying that this system ensured democracy in the country through holding free and fair elections.

The 2011 Appellate Division verdict that cancelled the non-party caretaker government

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Covered with advert and political posters, this community-built Shaheed Minar in the capital's Dayaganj area lies in a dilapidated state. Locals said the tribute to the Language Movement martyrs deserves more respect. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON