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Confront social norms that normalise violence against women

Speakers tell MJF national dialogue marking 16 Days of Activism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh must confront and overturn the harmful social norms and entrenched power structures that normalise violence against women and girls, said speakers at a national dialogue yesterday.

They stressed that without transforming these mindsets, no law or intervention can ensure a fear-free future.

They said violence against women and girls must be treated as a national emergency, calling for major shifts in social attitudes, stronger state accountability, and a more responsive justice system.

The national dialogue, titled "Challenging Social Norms and Power Dynamics: Towards a Fear-Free Future", was organised by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) with support from UN Women, the European Union, Plan International, and the embassies of Sweden, Canada, and Switzerland at a hotel in Dhaka.

The event was part of the global 16

Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence 2025 campaign, under this year's UN theme, "UNiTE to End Digital Violence against All Women and Girls."

Presenting the keynote, MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam said violence is worsening despite progress in women's empowerment.

"Between January and October 2025, 503 women were reportedly killed due to domestic violence, 905 children were subjected to sexual violence, and more than 78 percent of women experienced digital abuse," she said, citing data from Ain o Salish Kendra and Bangladesh Mahila Parishad.

She said statistics cannot reflect the full extent of trauma and pain endured by a woman, girl, or child. "We must remember them and resolve to do our utmost to prevent such occurrences," she added.

She urged long-term investments in changing social attitudes, stronger law enforcement, better accountability in

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Distinguished guests at the national dialogue, titled 'Challenging Social Norms and Power Dynamics: Towards a Fear-Free Future', organised by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) with support from UN Women, the European Union, Plan International, and the embassies of Sweden, Canada and Switzerland. The event was part of the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence 2025 campaign.

Hold platforms, parties accountable to tackle polls-time misinformation

Speakers tell roundtable by Star, Tech Global Institute

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ahead of the upcoming national election, experts, political leaders, and civil society representatives yesterday voiced concern over online misinformation, misuse of social media, and the need for stronger accountability from both platforms and political parties.

They were speaking at a roundtable titled "Digital Transformation and Democracy: Bangladesh's Electoral Challenge and the Way Forward", jointly organised by The Daily Star and The Tech Global Institute at The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

Barrister Sara Hossain, honorary executive director of BLAST, said, "We cannot only rely on what political parties say. We must look at the behaviour of their people on the ground. Many of them are competing to win, and they often create fear for others."

"We are seeing defamation cases again. We are also seeing cases where religious sentiments are being exploited. We should look at who is filing these cases. If they belong to your political party, then your party should take action against them," she said.

"We cannot expect the courts alone to

solve these problems. There is also fear within the courts about who might react if they make certain decisions," she added.

She stressed the importance of challenging the misuse of laws, including

The Daily Star, said, "Important issues remain unaddressed, especially the risks linked to access to the National ID database. 183 institutions currently have access, and election candidates will also

access is not abused?"

He said the growing threat of AI-generated content and misinformation cannot be controlled without cooperation from global tech companies.

"We expected the government to negotiate with Meta, YouTube and other platforms. Their own codes of conduct already exist. Why are they not enforcing them? If they enforced these rules, much of the hate speech and incitement would not be published," he said.

He questioned the government's practice of granting indemnity to platforms for harmful content.

"Which country gives them indemnity? The US does not. The UK and the European Union do not. Why should Bangladesh do it?" he asked.

Citing the country's nearly 80 million Facebook users, he said this gives the government leverage to demand responsible behaviour from platforms.

He also pointed out that Meta operates multiple services beyond Facebook and Instagram, often allowing politically motivated groups to spread propaganda under seemingly innocent identities.

"Who takes responsibility for these abuses? It is Meta. The government should

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PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Speakers at a roundtable titled 'Digital Transformation and Democracy: Bangladesh's Electoral Challenge and the Way Forward', jointly organised by The Daily Star and The Tech Global Institute at The Daily Star Centre in the capital yesterday.

the Anti-Terrorism Act, and ensuring a level playing field for candidates and voters.

Kamal Ahmed, consulting editor of

need voter lists for their constituencies. If there are 1,200 candidates, each of them has the right to access the voter list of their constituency. How do we ensure this

Of recurring fires and lost homes

Residents of Korail slum see their lives uprooted yet again by another blaze



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

HELEMUL ALAM and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Yesterday, around midnight, a 50-year-old day labourer stood near the fire-ravaged Korail slum, a single suitcase balanced on his head.

Inside were the last of his belongings — some clothes and a few utensils he managed to save. Everything else had turned to ash.

The labourer, Mohammad Ismail, does not know what comes next. He only knows this is not the first time fire has taken everything from him.

"This is my third time," he said, his voice tired. "I don't know why fate always plays with me."

Ismail has lived in the slum for 26 years, renting a single-room house that now costs him Tk 5,000 a month. He lives there with his wife and two children.

His first experience with fire was about 15 years

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Wagon units and freight equipment worth crores of taka have been lying neglected in the open for years in Halishahar, Chattogram. Exposure to sun, rain, and mud has left most of them rusted and covered in vines. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Titumir's life, legacy deserve more attention

Say speakers at Star Itihas Adda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite Titumir's importance in the region's history, serious research on him remains limited on both sides of Bengal, speakers said at a discussion.

They were speaking at the fifth episode of The Daily Star Itihas Adda, titled "Titumirer Bidroho O Boishommohin Samajer Shopno", held at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

Researcher Prof Md Mizanur Rahman said Titumir was born only 25 years after the Battle of Plassey, at a time when the subcontinent was trembling on the hot pan of rebellion.

He said religious politics had long created divisions among Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and Christian communities, and that rulers took advantage of these divides. Born into such a context, Titumir had to endure many hardships, he added.

Prof Mizanur said although Titumir played a key role in mobilising peasants against oppression, very little work has been done on him across Bengal, even though his name remains strong in public memory.

Sahidul Hasan, associate professor of

Dhaka University's history department, said how Titumir is remembered has depended on who wrote about him. Early accounts praised him as a devout and disciplined Muslim while also portraying him negatively, reflecting the writer's position within the power structure of that time.



PHOTO: STAR

He said satirical village songs after the uprising mocked Titumir, his followers' beards, and the bamboo fort, while colonial reports labelled him a dacoit or fanatic. Later writers interpreted him through the lens of their own time, creating very different

portrayals. The accounts of Titumir's final battle mention Fakirs and Bauls taking part, showing the movement drew support from various groups.

Al Amin Sorol, author of the novel "Titumir: Jan Othoba Jomin", said he was inspired to write fiction about Titumir because of a gap in Bangla

literature. "Although research-based books exist, Titumir is almost absent in novels, plays, or stories," he said.

"What is available either presents him only as a religious reformer or solely as an anti-British rebel. The

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