



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

Nusrat Imrose Tisha

Prarthana Fardin Dighi

Mousomi Nag

## 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM



Sabnam Faria



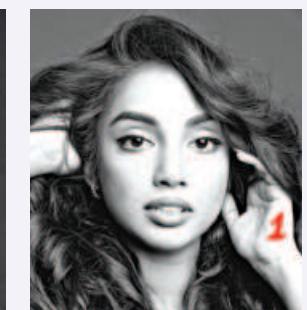
Runa Khan



Ashna Habib Bhabna



Putul Sajja Sultana



Ridy Sheikh

# ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

## Showbiz women clap back at virtual harassment

SHARMIN JOYA &amp; RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

*"Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women."*—a widely attributed line by Maya Angelou, the African American author, poet, and civil rights activist. Her words are a reminder that individual courage is collective strength—each woman's resistance fuels the fight against gender-based violence.

Since 1991, from November 25 to December 10, the world has observed the "16 Days of Activism" to end gender-based violence. This year's theme is "UNITE to End Digital Violence against All Women and Girls." Needless to say, this issue remains one of the most urgent global challenges today.

Four headstrong women from our showbiz industry—Rafiatul Rashid Mithila, Ashna Habib Bhabna, Nusraat Faria, and Azmeri Haque Badhan—have come forward to share their experiences of virtual abuse.

Cyberbullying can take many forms—abuse, stalking, posting or sharing inappropriate content in private or public spaces; issuing threats; making hurtful comments; leaking personal information—all fall under its scope. The most common patterns of virtual abuse are personal



**“Online bullying taught me something important that silence only feeds the trolls. I chose to stand tall, speak my truth, and remind myself that my worth isn’t defined by anyone hiding behind a screen. Women are told to stay quiet, to not ‘make a scene,’ but I believe that raising our voices is the only way to break this cycle.”**

NUSRAAT FARIA

Taking a pause, she continued... “These weren’t just comments—they were reminders of the everyday misogyny women continue to face, even in spaces meant to amplify their voices.”

The actress shared that UNW informed her they would follow up on those comments. “I’m not sure if they’ll publish anything, but this is the reality we face every day in the virtual space, especially those of us in the public eye. My question is, why are we allowing this to become normal?”

She was courageous enough to take legal action against her abuser, setting an example which gave confidence to many victims. “A few years ago, I posted a picture with my mother on Mother’s Day. For the same reason, Chanchal Chowdhury and I were targeted, and sadly 99% of our fellow artistes stood by his side and not mine. Many renowned newspapers also showed such bias, which hurt me and, in fact, gave me more strength to stand alone.”

Besides, her mother also requested her not to share any photos with her, which broke her heart as a daughter. Bhabna was adamant about seeing this come to an end. “I had to take action, because this was about my mother! At that time, only one person from the industry was by my side, and that’s Shahiduzzaman Selim. Initially, when we went to complain, the authorities were pretty reluctant to lodge the complaint, and they were even trying to convince me to let it go as it’s ‘just a comment.’

However, due to my nagging, they at last took the complaint, saying that this was the first time that they were taking any complaints from any actress for online harassment through comments. So yes, I proudly say that I began with this to set an example that you cannot just make a disgusting remark and easily get away. What was the worst part was that the perpetrator easily got away just by giving a ‘mukhleka’ (contract of guarantee).

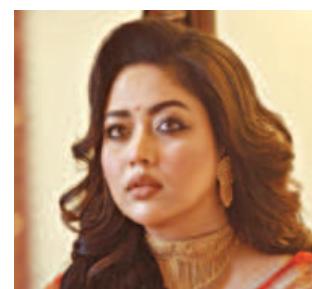
She also spoke about the growing concerns surrounding mobile journalism, YouTubers, and the spread of fake news.

“Earlier, when we attended press shows or events, there were only TV cameras capturing us from standard angles. Now, we have to be constantly alert because we don’t know who is filming from which angle, and how that footage might be uploaded with absurd captions on social media, and make it viral.”

Alongside online abuse, she noted another rising threat—AI-generated videos and photos, particularly deepfakes, which have become a disturbing global issue. “A few months ago, a fake page posted an AI-generated photo claiming I was found unconscious in a car in Dubai. Do I really need to show my passport to prove that I haven’t even been there in the last eight years?”

A strong advocate of women and child rights, Rafiath Rashid Mithila, an artiste and a development specialist, mentioned, “Cyberbullying is all about character assassination and is the most common pattern particularly used for breaking mental strength. Although it mostly comes from men, but shockingly from women as well. Despite their socioeconomic status, their remarks highly contain abusive language, slang. And no matter what my achievements are, they would end up attacking my personal life!”

In 2019, Mithila became the



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ASHNA HABIB BHABNA

However, there was a public petition made from the government’s end as an order to put down all the materials from the print and electronic media, and this is it. But they couldn’t remove them from social media!”

Online bullies often operate multiple fake accounts, using them to vent their frustrations; however, many are desperate enough to post from their real accounts as well, which are trackable.

“Nobody cares or sees the sufferings,” she said. “Like, how it would affect their personal life relations, leading to constant tensions and sometimes panic attacks. The mental trauma that leads to virtual abuse must be addressed, and perpetrators must be punished; only this way can it be minimised.”

Mithila insinuates that the harassers can never get away with these comments and actions if authorities take serious actions. “Setting examples will help, and I believe if we keep raising our voices being public figures, we will inspire and give courage to others to voice out. So, we must keep on talking about these.”

She also questioned the



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AZMERI HAQUE BADHAN

victim of cyberbullying, which was the worst of its kind. “During that time, I sought legal help, and the path was not smooth,” she said. “The perpetrator is still unidentified. I had to file a written complaint at the police station, and I don’t know if we are still lacking an advancement technologically that the IP address of the convicted couldn’t be identified. They were there to give me moral support rather than the justice I needed the most. I thought our cybersecurity has intelligence that can identify the IP addresses and identify the actual culprit.”

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efficiency of the cyber cell unit, as they should be quite prompt in investigating such matters smartly.

Throughout her career, Nusraat Faria has faced relentless online bullying, whether it was trolling over her bold fashion choices or being labelled “100 percent plastic” by those who claimed she had undergone multiple surgeries or even compared her to a witch. The abuse intensified further when she portrayed Sheikh Hasina in the Mujib biopic. Although she addressed the issue responsibly, naysayers continue to target her on social media simply for doing her job as an actress. Like many women in the public eye, she has been attacked for nothing more than expressing herself freely.

Speaking to The Daily Star about how she confronts online abuse, Nusraat said, “Online bullying taught me something important that silence only feeds the trolls. I chose to stand tall, speak my truth, and remind myself that my worth isn’t defined by anyone hiding behind a screen. Women are told to stay quiet, to not ‘make a scene,’ but I believe that raising our voices is the only way to break this cycle. I didn’t fight back with anger; I fought back with resilience. And every woman who refuses to be intimidated online becomes part of a larger movement that says:

with laughing emojis, even on a topic as sensitive as this.

“The way we are bullied online is clearly visible to others because most of our profiles are public. People see all the abusive comments posted on our pictures and posts. I have faced severe harassment online and received various types of threats, especially after the July mass uprising. Awami League activists have used fake profiles to harass me, and I have even faced harassment from my colleagues. It is not just unknown people or fake accounts. What hurts the most is being harassed by colleagues I have worked with and even by people close to me,” she said.

“I undergo regular therapy, which has helped me understand that what people say about me does not define who I am. My true personality is reflected through my work and behaviour. I try to react politely and usually do not respond to bullying or harassment. I mostly ignore it. At 43, having faced all sorts of harassment, I have built a certain immunity to it. I know how to cope. But for teenagers, this kind of bullying is very hard to handle. I believe society needs to change. There are laws addressing harassment, but implementing them is not always easy. More than laws, what we need is a shift in mindset.”

## HELP IS ONE CALL AWAY

National Emergency Helpline

— 999

For immediate police, fire, ambulance support.

Violence Against Women &amp; Children Helpline — 109

Rescue, legal aid, psychosocial support.

Police Cyber Support for Women — 01320000888

For cyber harassment, blackmail, image misuse.

Police HQ Women’s Hotline (24/7) — 01320002001 / 01320002002 / 01320002222

Direct police assistance for threats and abuse.

Quick Response Team (MoWCA) — 01713659573 / 01713659574

Emergency rescue, counselling, safe shelter.

Victim Support Centre — 01320042055

Police support, counselling, safe space.

National Legal Aid Helpline — 16699

Free legal advice and state lawyers.

Child Helpline — 1098

Rescue and protection for children.

enough is enough.”

Azmeri Haque Badhan has long been a strong and outspoken advocate for women’s rights. However, her activism and her role as a July warrior have often made her a target of abusive comments on social media. As a single mother and an actress, she has repeatedly faced harassment from both industry colleagues and activists from banned political groups. Yet, Badhan remains unwavering, meeting the abuse with courage and determination.

Recently, she shared a video as part of the 16 Days of Activism campaign, raising awareness about violence against women. In the post, she spoke directly to her followers and highlighted a hotline where survivors of abuse can seek help, urging women to speak out and access support. Despite the seriousness of the message, some trolls responded

As a matter of fact, abusers get away far too easily because institutions often lack the will to take proper action. If law enforcement and the relevant authorities responded swiftly and decisively, the rate of online abuse would drop significantly. A responsible state must protect its citizens—especially those most vulnerable to harassment. There can be no excuses when it comes to online abuse.

Whether an actor, athlete, singer, journalist, a corporate, or as a woman, they have to carry the burden of such acts regularly. Every form of abuse must be addressed. In this era of technology, where it takes seconds to post a derogatory comment, the action should be just as swift. Clear rules are needed to ensure that profiles can be properly identified, regulated, and held accountable. Without this, we only empower abusers to continue.