

Our laws against cyberbullying are catching up:

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Cyberbullying is a growing global concern, intensified by rapid technological advances. Women, whether public figures or ordinary individuals, increasingly face online harassment, abusive comments, and AI-generated content, affecting their mental health and social life—often worsened by victim-blaming. Many of these acts are criminal offences, yet questions remain about accountability and legal protection. To explore these issues, we spoke with singer Dola Rahman, a Barrister-at-Law and Advocate of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

Given the rise of cyberbullying and AI-generated and deepfake abuse in Bangladesh, what legal remedies are available for victims, and where should they go first to receive immediate and effective help?

Under the previous Digital Security Act and now the Cyber Security Ordinance (2025), amendments are being made continuously to respond to Bangladesh's evolving digital landscape.

Having said that, offences such as AI-generated abuse or deepfake content are dealt with under existing laws based on the nature of the content. For instance, many AI-generated images or videos fall under the definition of pornography, and therefore, cases can be filed under the Pornography Control Act 2012. Victims can file complaints either at their nearest police station or directly in court.

Victims can initially call 999, lodge a General Diary (GD) or file a formal complaint at the nearest police station at their discretion, but they must preserve evidence—such as screenshots, chat logs, or links—since Bangladesh has also seen a rise in fabricated cases. Once a complaint is submitted, the concerned cyber tribunal conducts a preliminary investigation to verify authenticity. If the allegations appear genuine, the case is formally taken under cognisance.

Depending on the severity of the offence, the police may proceed with arrests even without a

warrant for cognisable offences, particularly in cases involving pornography or serious cybercrimes, and these have punishments ranging from a fine to imprisonment as well. The process is step-by-step, but the essential point is that victims must come under the protection of the law and follow the proper legal channels to seek justice.

Many victims face hurdles when seeking legal help, authorities are slow or reluctant to take action at times. How to navigate this?

It is unfortunate, but this reflects a systemic gap. Our laws, including the Cyber Security Ordinance, are still catching up with emerging digital crimes, and past negligence has contributed to these inefficiencies.

That said, action can be taken if victims approach the appropriate authorities with proper evidence. For example, a client received threatening calls from an anonymous number; when she reported it, the police investigated, identified the perpetrator, and took legal action.

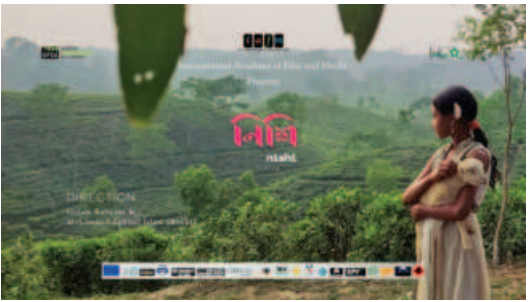
Systemic gaps remain, and delays are common, especially given the judgmental attitudes often faced by media professionals. However, procedures are gradually becoming more efficient.

Can raising awareness alone, like past campaigns against eve-teasing, effectively prevent these threats, or are additional measures needed to ensure people understand the legal consequences?

Real change starts at home, and responsibility must be shared by both families and educational institutions. Staying silent won't help.

It is also concerning that in this era, basic digital precautions—such as proper authentication on Facebook and Instagram—are essential, yet many still overlook them. Organisations can play a key role in spreading this guidance so that people can better protect themselves.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



First Bangladeshi EMA-winning film ‘Nishi’ to premiere in Dhaka

Nishi, the first Bangladeshi film to win the Environmental Media Association (EMA) Award in the United States, will premiere in Dhaka on December 6. The screening will take place at the German Cultural Centre in Dhaka as part of the European Film Festival.

The film is directed by Golam Rabbani and Zahirul Islam. It follows a tea worker's daughter whose education collapses under a severe water crisis. A timber trader then pressures her into marriage, offering a tube well in return.

The project is co-produced by the European Union, Bangladesh, Green Film School Alliance and UNESCO Dhaka. It was shot in Sylhet's tea gardens. Post-production took place at Poland's Łódź Film School, with cinematography by Natalia Pusnik.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

‘Dhaka Pen Show’

A rare convergence of pen collectors, sellers, and enthusiasts brings a world of vintage tools, retro treasures, and writing lore under one roof. From repair craft to ink history, the event celebrates the enduring beauty of handwriting through discovery, exchange, and creative indulgence.

DATE: FRIDAY | DEC 5, 2025

TIME: 10AM-8PM

VENUE: BISHWA SAHITYA KENDRA



NEWS

Country sees sharp rise in HIV cases

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with HIV remain unaware of their health status. The estimated cases are 17,480.

SHARPEST RISE

The new data shows that 14.21 lakh people underwent HIV tests in last one year, which is 1.91 lakh fewer than 16.12 lakh tested in the preceding year.

Besides, another 10.72 lakh people were tested for HIV as part of health screening during the same period, up from 10.34 lakh the preceding year.

A DGHS official said the decline in tests among migrants going abroad – from 13.05 lakh to 10.11 lakh – was the main reason behind the overall drop in testing numbers.

Among the tested population, the data shows that 1,891 new HIV cases were detected, including 217 Rohingya.

The previous biggest year-on-year rise was 329 cases recorded between 2022 and 2023.

Asked about the reasons in going up HIV cases, Zubaida Nasreen, deputy director of the National AIDS/STD Control Programme, said the increase in testing among “key populations” is the main factor behind the rise.

Key populations include people who inject drugs, female and male sex workers, and transgender individuals, officials said.

The data shows that 1.17 lakh people from key populations were tested during the November-October period, up from 96,922 in the previous year.

The expiry of a government programme in June last year caused disruptions to preventive services

such as the distribution of condoms, needles, and syringes among key populations, officials said.

Asked whether this could be a reason behind the rise, Zubaida said the expiry of the programme caused some disruptions in preventive services, but it could not be directly attributed to the increase.

She, however, said further research would be needed to identify all other factors contributing to the rise.

Among the new cases, key populations accounted for 56 percent, migrants 12 percent, Rohingyas 11 percent, and the rest were from the ordinary people, according to the data.

Male accounted for 81 percent, female for 18 percent, and Hijra individuals for 1 percent. Of them, 52 percent were married, 42 percent single, while the rest were either

widowed, divorced or separated.

The highest proportion – 63 percent – falls within the 25-49 year bracket, followed by 21 percent in the 20-24 year group.

The data also shows that the proportion of HIV-positive individuals receiving treatment dropped to 74 percent from 78 percent in the preceding year.

A DGHS official said the rise in “lost to follow-up” cases, a term used when an HIV-positive person stops taking medication for more than three consecutive months – might be the reason behind the decline of people under medication.

The data shows that 82 percent of potential HIV-positive individuals were aware of their health status, and 91 percent of people living with HIV were able to achieve viral suppression.

Some displaying

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“After the era of misrule in Bangladesh, Ziaur Rahman came to power and fundamentally changed the constitution. If anyone now talks about the 1972 Constitution, they are essentially speaking against the martyred president. Begum Khaleda Zia, who is in deep crisis [gravely ill] today, never spoke in favour of the 1972 Constitution. We hope those who love these two leaders will refrain from mentioning it.”

He claimed that from village courts to the highest, those without influence “do not receive justice in Bangladesh.”

He added that Jamaat seeks “the victory of the oppressed”, assuring the youth that the like-minded parties would fight on their behalf.

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Ameer Maulana Mamunul Haque, speaking as a special guest, said the July uprising had divided the country into two camps – those aligned with the 1972 pro-Bakal ideology and those aligned with the revolutionary forces of 2024.

“After crossing a sea of blood, the fascism that was uprooted in July will never return to the soil of Bengal,” he said.

Mamunul insisted that a referendum must be held to give the July charter a legal basis before the national election.

He issued a warning to the interim government, saying that “history will not forgive you” if the referendum is not held before the polls.

Mamunul also sought prayers for the recovery of BNP Chairperson Khaleda.

12 parties sign children’s rights manifesto

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are rooted in evidence and based on the voices of the most vulnerable and least heard. Today's signing represents a lifeline for millions of children whose futures depend on the decisions and investments political leaders will make,” she added.

BNP Standing Committee member Abdul Moyeen Khan said he spoke on behalf of the six crore children of Bangladesh, stressing that children stand above party politics. He noted Bangladesh's early commitment to child welfare, from establishing a welfare ministry for women and children in 1979 to quickly ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

“Bangladesh has made progress, but limited resources have constrained what we could do,” he said. “The 10 commitments are important, but achieving them will take time and resources. As an LDC, we face structural limitations, yet the struggle must continue.”

Md Shafiqul Islam Masud, a member of Jamaat's Majlish-e-Shura and secretary of its Dhaka South unit, highlighted the party's ongoing projects for street children and low-income families in Dhaka, including primary and secondary education support, learning materials, uniforms, bicycles, tuition fees, and nutritious meals.

“So far, 18,501 children and 27,348 family members have benefited. In the first six months of this year, we allocated 3 percent of our organisational income to advance children's welfare,” he said.

NCP Senior Joint Member Secretary Tasnim Jara called the manifesto a nonpartisan commitment essential for the nation's future. She stressed investment “from before conception” and strict enforcement of zero-tolerance policies on child labour and child marriage. “A child's health lays bare the inequalities of our society... If we fail to invest today, our future will collapse.”

Jatiya Party Secretary General Shamim Haider Patwary called for a high-powered task force led by the prime minister to coordinate the 17 ministries working on child issues. He also proposed forming a parliamentary caucus, noting such

bodies have effectively served as checks on government in the past.

Mujibur Rahman Manju, chairman of Amar Bangladesh Party, said, “Even after 54 years of independence, if we still need to reaffirm the fundamental rights of children, it is a failure of the state.”

He also announced an ‘Eleventh Commitment’ to make Bangladesh a safe nation for children within the next five to 10 years.

Gono Forum General Secretary Mohammad Mizanur Rahman said ensuring children's healthy survival and education is a fundamental state responsibility. Including child issues in election manifestos without clear implementation plans, he warned, “will be meaningless.”

Other speakers at the event included Gono Odhikar representative Shakil Uzzaman, Gano Samhati representative Monir Uddin Pappu, CPB's Abdullah Al Kafee Ratan, Bazlur Rashid Feroz of Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal, Nagorik Oikya's SM Kabir Hasan, and Khelafat's Kazi Minhajul Alam.

Naimul Ahsan Jewel, member secretary of the National Coordination Committee for Workers' Education; Vidiya Amrit Khan, vice president of BGMEA and deputy managing director of Desh Garments Ltd; and Abu Eusuf, professor at Dhaka University and executive director of RAPID, also spoke at the event.

The signing comes as Bangladesh's latest child-focused indicators reveal a worsening situation. One in eight children under five is wasted, up from 9.8 percent in 2019 to 12.9 percent in 2025, while nearly 700,000 babies are born with low birth weight.

The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2025 shows that child labour has risen to 9.2 percent from 6.8 percent; and 3–4 million school-age children remain out of school.

Essential services also lag: 41 percent of births are unregistered and only 73 percent of children have basic sanitation.

Climate and environmental risks are intensifying, with 20 million children directly exposed to climate hazards, and 87 percent of drinking water contaminated with E. coli while 15.8 percent contains unsafe arsenic levels.