

#PERSPECTIVE



Animal cruelty goes viral, then disappears. The problem doesn't.

The image is difficult to forget: A mother dog in Pabna roaming from corner to corner, searching desperately for her new-born pups. Videos show her sniffing the ground and pacing in circles — unaware that eight of her puppies had already been drowned in a pond by someone who decided their lives were disposable.

The footage has spread across social media, followed by outrage and calls for justice. But anyone familiar with how this unfolds in Bangladesh also knows what comes next: a few days of noise, followed by silence. Another case replaces it. Another video pushes it down the timeline.

We have become disturbingly familiar with videos like these. So, what has happened to our collective conscience?

The psychology of cruelty

According to Dr Helal Uddin Ahmed, a professor of Child, Adolescent and Family Psychiatry at Faridpur Medical College, violence against helpless animals often stems from deeper emotional dysfunction. "There is a projection of one's own suppressed anger, frustration, and helplessness onto creatures who cannot retaliate. It becomes a way to feel in control when someone feels powerless in their own lives," he notes.

Animal cruelty, he says, is frequently tied to unaddressed stress, low emotional intelligence, and the inability to regulate impulses. For some individuals, harming an animal becomes an outlet — a deeply warped one — through which they release their own internal conflicts. But psychology alone does not explain the scale of the problem.

Cruelty is no longer shocking, and that is the real problem

The mother dog's suffering is not an isolated tragedy. Not long ago, a five-month-old kitten in Dhaka was beaten mercilessly — an attack so brutal that its cries echoed through social media. When the owner confronted the abusers, she was abused in return. For days, people debated the incident. Then it vanished into the digital churn.

How did we get here, to a country where harming defenceless animals is not shocking, but expected?



The widespread circulation of graphic videos has created a paradox. People are more aware of cruelty, yet more desensitised to it. Viral content produces rapid emotional responses, but rarely long-term engagement.

Farhana Sultana, a PhD scholar studying psychology, describes the current mindset. "People feel bad for a moment, share the post, and then scroll to the next thing. The concern rarely turns into action. I believe that this short-lived engagement compromises accountability."

Without sustained pressure, perpetrators go unpunished, allowing the cycle to continue.

Legal protections exist, but are barely enforced

Bangladesh introduced the Animal Welfare Act 2019, which outlines penalties for abuse and sets guidelines for humane treatment. On paper, the law is comprehensive. In practice, enforcement is limited.

Many citizens are unaware of how to report animal cruelty. Law enforcement agencies often lack training or interest in handling such cases. As a result, most incidents rely on social media exposure rather than formal legal processes.

Mahmudul Hasan, a university student, points out, "We see laws being quoted online, but when someone tries to file a complaint, there's confusion about where to go and who is responsible." Hasan, a regular volunteer at an animal shelter, has voiced his frustration with the inadequate and fragmented infrastructure for protecting, rescuing, and treating street animals.



This disconnect between legislation and implementation creates an environment where cruelty can continue without consequence.

Street animals are part of our neighbourhoods. They scavenge to survive. They curl up on warm corners to rest. They do not exist to disturb us — they coexist with us. Sultana remarks bluntly, "Every religion teaches mercy. But here, we treat animals as if their lives don't matter at all."

The truth is uncomfortable: harming animals has become normalised in a society that claims to value compassion.

A case that should not be forgotten

The cruelty that the mother dog has faced is a direct reminder of an unresolved act of violence. The incident is recent, ongoing, and representative of a pattern that deserves attention beyond a few days of social media visibility.

If we want to reduce cruelty, we must treat these cases not as isolated emotional triggers, but as indicators of a structural problem — one involving law enforcement, psychological health, public awareness, and ethical responsibility.

Animal welfare is not a minor social issue. It is a measure of collective behaviour, accountability, and empathy. And as long as cases like Pabna continue without meaningful action, the question remains: what does this say about our society's willingness to protect those who cannot protect themselves?

By Ayman Anika
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