

The Daily Star

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When will this monstrosity stop?

Death of child with throat slit reveals how defenceless victims remain

We are devastated and outraged by the death of a seven-year-old child, who was rescued from near Sitakunda Eco Park on Sunday, with her throat slit, which rendered her literally speechless and unable to provide details of her attacker(s). The child succumbed to her injuries at the Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH)'s ICU early Tuesday morning. The child's mother filed a case on Sunday against unidentified individuals, and law enforcement agencies—including police and Rab—launched investigations into the incident. So far, police have arrested one suspect. According to the One Stop Crisis Centre at the CMCH, the victim was swabbed to test for evidence of sexual assault, but the report is still pending.

Sadly, besides this heinous crime, a number of other criminal incidents involving the abuse of women and children happened in Bangladesh over just the past week. On February 25, the body of a 15-year-old was found in a cropland in Narsingdi. Fifteen days earlier, the girl had sought justice from the local union parishad member, alleging abduction and rape by miscreants. Those same accused abducted her on the night of February 26 when she was travelling to her relative's house with her father. This time, they killed her. In Pabna, a 15-year-old girl was raped and killed on February 28, allegedly by her relative, after he killed the teenager's grandmother.

What is unconceivable is how common such atrocious acts have become nationwide. In 2025, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) recorded 749 rape cases, including 569 gang rapes. At least 370 victims were under 18. After rape, 36 women were killed, seven died by suicide, and six died after attempted rape. ASK also recorded the abuse of 1,023 children and the deaths of at least 410 children due to rape, murder, physical abuse, abduction, suicide and explosions.

In recent memory, one case that saw major public outcry and also received a rare, speedy trial was the rape and killing of an eight-year-old in Magura last year. Unfortunately, there appears to be a correlation between the intensity of public response that a case of child or woman abuse generates and the speed with which the trial concludes. In a country where many incidents of sexual violence go unreported due to associated stigma, the authorities should feel morally obligated to strongly pursue reported cases. Unfortunately, the reality is often otherwise, which emboldens perpetrators to carry out heinous crimes without fear of facing justice.

This must change. Now that a new elected government is in place, it is crucial that the public's trust in law enforcement and the judiciary is restored. That police in Sitakunda are investigating the seven-year-old's murder as a high priority is reassuring. We urge that they pursue justice in this case until it is achieved. But without all cases of abuse against children and women being treated as emergencies, the crimes may only get more frequent and crueler.

A worrying trail of deception

Govt must stop forced participation of migrants in Russia-Ukraine war

The findings by Fortify Rights and Truth Hounds that more than 100 Bangladeshis were misled and forced into fighting for Russia in its war against Ukraine—with at least 34 reportedly killed—are both shocking and deeply regrettable. The report, based on interviews conducted in Bangladesh and Ukraine with survivors, families and prisoners of war, exposes a disturbing pattern of deception in the recruitment of desperate, unemployed young men. Some of them believed they were heading to factory jobs in Europe; others thought they would take on non-combat roles linked to the military. Instead, many were deployed to the front lines without adequate military training or even basic language skills.

The result is, young men who sought overseas employment to support their families have returned home in coffins, if at all. Others have come back injured or deeply traumatised. Equally tragic is the financial devastation left behind: many families borrowed heavily to pay brokers, shelling out between \$1,000 and \$5,000 per person in the hope of securing legitimate jobs abroad. In numerous cases, they lost both their sons and their life savings, leaving them trapped in debt. Although the report identifies at least 104 such victims, experts believe the actual number could be significantly higher.

Perhaps most troubling is our government's failure on two fronts. First, it has been unable to curb the illegal activities of brokers and human traffickers who facilitate such recruitment. Second, it has not taken sufficient diplomatic steps to prevent Russia-linked groups from recruiting Bangladeshis and placing them in harm's way. In the absence of any formal labour migration agreement between Bangladesh and Russia, the government should press Moscow to immediately stop employing Bangladeshis in military roles or in any capacity linked to its operations in Ukraine. One particular concern in this connection has been the apparent inaction in repatriating the bodies of those killed. The report cites anguished families who described prolonged delays, a lack of clear communication, and insufficient empathy from the authorities in response to their requests to bring their loved ones' bodies home.

The government must address this matter urgently and fulfil its fundamental obligation to its citizens. Finally, there must be a thorough investigation to identify and prosecute the recruiters who deceived these young men and sent them to fight in a foreign war in which Bangladesh has no direct stake. This must be done without delay. It is also imperative to establish the true number of those recruited and to determine whether any ideological networks or other organised interests were involved in facilitating their deployment.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Radio Pakistan renamed as Dhaka Betar

On this day in 1971, during the non-cooperation movement launched by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the vital decision to rename Radio Pakistan as Dhaka Betar was taken by the officers and employees of the radio's centre in Dhaka.

A stress test for Bangladesh's export logistics



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Bangladesh's export success has never been just about competitive labour or entrepreneurial energy. Logistics—the quiet, disciplined movement of goods from factory floors to port gates, from container yards to mother vessels, and from ships to global retail shelves—has also played a massive part in it. That machinery now faces one of the most serious external stress tests in recent memory.

Amid the ongoing war between US-Israel and Iran, the suspension of trans-Suez services combined with a closure of the Strait of Hormuz will not only disrupt shipping routes but also expose structural vulnerabilities in global trade lanes, as well as in Bangladesh's own trade architecture. These two maritime chokepoints serve different but equally critical roles. The Suez Canal, the 193-km artificial waterway in Egypt, is the principal artery connecting Asia to Europe. When it shuts down, vessels are forced to divert around the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, which significantly extends sailing distances and transit times. A round trip between South Asia and Northern Europe can lengthen by roughly one to two additional working weeks. In liner shipping, time is of the essence: when ships stay longer at sea, global capacity shrinks. Containers remain tied up, and schedules lose rhythm.

Meanwhile, the Strait of Hormuz, which sits between Iran and Oman, is one of the world's most important energy transit chokepoints through which more than 20 percent of global oil and liquefied natural gas exports is shipped. Its closure will send immediate shockwaves through oil and gas markets. For Bangladesh, that translates directly into higher fuel import costs, increased power generation expenses, rising inland transport costs, and more expensive bunker fuel for ships. Freight rates would inevitably respond.

Taken together, these disruptions would produce two simultaneous shocks: a "time-and-capacity shock" and an "energy-and-cost shock." And for an export-driven economy like Bangladesh, that combination is consequential.

In FY2024-25, Bangladesh exported roughly \$48 billion worth of goods, of which more than 80 percent was ready-made garment products. This is a highly containerised, schedule-sensitive industry. Retail supply chains in Europe and North America are calendar driven. Missing a delivery window is not simply a delay; it can

mean discounted sales, contract penalties, or lost future orders.

Our exposure is concentrated in precisely those markets dependent on these trade corridors. The European Union and the US together account for the majority of Bangladesh's apparel exports. When shipping routes lengthen and freight costs rise, our competitive edge, built carefully over decades, faces pressure from both cost escalation and delivery uncertainty.

Rerouting shipping lines is not free. Longer voyages increase ton-miles, absorb vessel capacity, and strain container rotations. Disruption often results in port congestion as ships arrive in uneven clusters instead of predictable weekly intervals. Under such conditions, variability becomes the enemy.

Bangladesh's primary maritime gateway has demonstrated impressive growth capacity, handling record container volumes in recent years. However, resilience under disruption is not only about scale but also about flexibility and predictability. When vessel arrivals become irregular, container dwell times increase, yard density rises, inland container depots face pressure, trucking corridors become bottlenecks, and customs delays compound the strain. Even modest inefficiencies become magnified during systemic stress.

Bangladesh's evolving trade relationship with the US introduces

another dimension. The recently announced reciprocal trade framework signals deeper two-way commerce, including expanded imports of American cotton, wheat, and other inputs. Stronger bilateral trade ties are welcome, but increased inbound volumes will compete for shipping space, port handling capacity, foreign exchange liquidity, and trade finance

are recurring features, not exceptional events.

Fourth, trade finance resilience must be safeguarded. Longer transit times tie up working capital. Banks and financial institutions should anticipate this shift and adjust liquidity planning accordingly.

Finally, communication must be clear and credible. Markets react



VISUAL: ANWAR SOHEL

precisely when outbound logistics may already be strained.

Bangladesh could therefore face a dual flow challenge: exports grappling with longer transit times while imports rise under new trade commitments. Is this scenario inevitable? Not necessarily. But it is plausible enough to demand preparation.

The first step is recognising that logistics, during disruption, becomes a central economic priority. A coordinated, data-driven supply chain response is essential. Government agencies, port authorities, shipping lines, terminal operators, customs officials, banks, and exporters all must operate in close alignment. Daily monitoring of berth schedules, yard occupancy, container dwell time, and inland evacuation rates should be institutionalised during such periods of instability.

Second, inland connectivity must be treated as strategic infrastructure. Greater reliance on rail-based container evacuation can reduce highway pressure and accelerate yard turnover. Inland depots must operate with strict turnaround targets. Even small reductions in average dwell time can create significant capacity buffers.

Third, contractual realism is required. Exporters and buyers must revisit shipment lead times, buffer stock strategies, and war risk clauses. The global supply chain is entering a period where rerouting and volatility

poorly to uncertainty. Transparent guidance to exporters regarding port conditions, expected delays, and contingency planning can prevent panic-driven decisions.

Bangladesh has demonstrated resilience before, from pandemic-era container shortages to global freight rate spikes. The private sector has shown adaptability in navigating turbulence. However, an indefinite suspension of trans-Suez services combined with Hormuz instability would represent a structural, not temporary, alteration of trade routes and energy flows, reshaping cost assumptions across Asia-Europe and Asia-America corridors. In such an environment, competitiveness will depend less on nominal production costs and more on supply chain reliability.

Global trade geography may be shifting. Sea lanes may detour. Energy prices may fluctuate. These forces lie beyond our control. What remains within our control is how efficiently we respond. Bangladesh has built a world-class export engine over the decades. The task now is to embed resilience into that engine. Cleaner customs processes, faster inland connectivity, digital documentation, diversified routing options, and disciplined institutional coordination will determine how well we can weather a prolonged maritime uncertainty.

Are we desensitised to violence against women and children?



MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

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In the span of a few days, an 18-year-old was arrested for attempting to rape a four-year-old. A 15-year-old girl was abducted in front of her father and found dead the next day, all because she had dared to demand justice for her rape. A grandmother was killed while trying to protect her granddaughter, who was then raped and strangled to death. A university student was assaulted by someone she knew and trusted. This is not an exhaustive list; these incidents are simply what pierced through the noise.

There is something deeply unsettling about how quickly we get accustomed to horror. We read, freeze, feel the sharpness of anger, and then, almost reflexively, move on to another breaking news, investigation, social media post, debate, or distraction. The tragedy shrinks into a statistic, a life gets reduced to a number, and a

family's devastation is compressed into a paragraph. When sexual violence recurs with such frequency, it ceases to shock institutions, and individuals' shock doesn't last long. And that is where the crisis lies.

It is tempting to frame these crimes as the work of monsters and aberrations detached from society. But monsters operate within systems. When perpetrators act with confidence, it is often because consequences appear uncertain, distant, or negotiable. Delayed trials, fragile investigations, uneven enforcement, and the shielding of the influential all contribute to an atmosphere in which deterrence erodes. Each case that lingers for years in procedural limbo signals that time is on the side of the accused. Each influential suspect who escapes scrutiny signals that connections can outweigh crimes. Each family

pressured into silence signals that reputation matters more than justice.

To describe these cases as isolated is analytically dishonest. Sexual violence thrives in environments where harassment is underestimated, survivors are doubted, reporting mechanisms are weak, and institutions lack urgency. It thrives where communities advise silence over scandal and where political ecosystems prioritise loyalty over accountability. Addressing this crisis requires certainty of punishment beyond symbolic arrests. It requires transparent investigations and time-bound trials. It requires institutional reform: survivor-centred policing, strengthened forensic capacity, and specialised prosecution units trained to handle gender-based violence with rigour and sensitivity. It requires political courage to ensure that affiliation, influence or proximity to power does not shield the accused.

Perhaps one of the most troubling questions is how we keep functioning as if these crimes are inevitable. Normalcy, in moments like these, becomes tempting. It shields us from the discomfort of confronting structural failure. Acknowledging the scale of the crisis would require institutional audits, budget reallocations, and sustained

public pressure. It would require confronting entrenched interests and admitting that existing approaches are insufficient. It is easier to treat each case as a standalone tragedy than to admit that they collectively accuse a system.

But safety is not a privilege to be intermittently delivered; it is a right. The state cannot outsource protection to families, nor can it reduce justice to rhetoric. Each case is a personal catastrophe, but together they form a national warning. A society that grows accustomed to violence against its women and children risks eroding its own moral foundation. We cannot undo the harm that has already been done. What we can decide is whether the victims' names fade into the background noise of the next news cycle, or whether they compel sustained demand for accountability that extends beyond temporary discomfort.

The question is no longer whether the situation is alarming. The evidence answers that unequivocally. The real question is whether we are prepared to confront what we need to do emotionally, institutionally, politically, and collectively.