

# BASUG-Bangladesh Support Group

(A mouthpiece of Bangladeshi Diaspora in the Netherlands)

Special Issue

International Women Day

8 March 2009

*International Women Day being observed today*

“Women and men united to end violence against women and girls”

International Women's Day is being observed today throughout the world with a fresh vow to end violence against women and girls. The theme 'Women and men united to end violence against women and girls' has been chosen to observe the day in Bangladesh where millions have fallen victim to the social scourge over the years.



mobile and in text messages or by e-mail.' According to the human rights organisation Odhikar, 454 women, including 252 children, were raped in 2008. One hundred and ten women and 70 girl children were gang-raped, 68 women and 30 children were killed after rape and five women and four children committed suicide after rape in 2008.

BASUG has always been vocal on the issue violence against women in Bangladesh and among the Bangladeshi diaspora in Europe. Although there is a slight decrease in the incidence of violence against women over the past few years, the situation still remains very alarming. The causes are mainly dowry, wedding, land dispute, family dispute, failure of love, frustration etc. BASUG carried out a research among the Bangladeshi women in the UK in 2007 under a pilot project supported by Oxfam Novib. Social Vision of London School of Economics carried out the research which found an alarming rate of violence against the Bangladeshi migrant women in the UK. The situation among the Bangladeshi community in the Netherlands and Belgium was also not very encouraging.

Bangladesh Mahila Parishad secretary general, recently told a Dhaka newspaper that , 'Violence against women continues, but the character of torture has changed. Earlier males beat females; now the males throw acid on females and threaten them over

## Acid violence

Acid violence against women has also been on a downtrend. According to the Acid Survivors' Foundation, 2,808 women, children and men were victims in 2,196 incidents of acid violence between May 1999 and December 2008. The annual casualty of acid violence has continued to come down -- 176 in 2008, 192 in 2007, 221 in 2006 and 272 in 2005. Women continued to be the major targets of acid attacks, with the reasons such as dowry and poverty.

## Violence Against Women in Bangladesh in 2008

Raped: 454 women (among them 252 were children).  
Gang raped: 110 women and 70 minor girls  
Killed after gang raped: 68 women and 30 children  
Committed suicide after rape: 5 women and 4 children

A report puts the number women and children raped in 2007 at 459. Two hundred and thirteen of them are women and 246 children. One hundred and nineteen women and 72 girl child were gang-raped, 56 women and 23 children were killed after rape and one committed suicide after rape in 2007. In 2006, the number of rape victims was 639 - 412 women and 227 children. One hundred and twenty-six women were killed after rape and 13 committed suicide rape in 2006, the report said.

Between May 1999 and 2008, 1,405 women, 714 children and 690 men were victims in 2,196 incidents of acid violence. Although the trend might come down, the status of hundreds of thousands of women in Bangladesh, especially in the north, is worse. Dowry, divorce, polygamy, early marriage, hilla marriage (an interim marriage of a woman with a third person for reunification with the former husband after divorce), repression of women within family, and rape are now commonplace in all backward villages in Bangladesh. (by Alphan Arzu)

*40% women at work sexually exploited in Bangladesh*

## ***Women keep facing harassment at work***

Women keep facing harassment and discrimination in many forms at work although they hold some key positions of the country, according to rights activists in Bangladesh.

The activists blame a male chauvinism and lack of necessary legislation for the sorry state of women at work, and even at homes. A number of working women while talking to this reporter complained of discrimination in appointment, wages, training, promotion and social security. They also complained of harassment by their male colleagues in different forms. The rights defenders urged the government to create a women-friendly atmosphere at work.

Women activists hope that the government will work to improve the situation of the women at work as women are now holding some key positions - the prime minister, leader of the opposition in parliament, deputy leader of the house, home minister and

foreign minister. Bangladesh has approximately 1,600,000 women working in formal sectors while 9,700,000 in informal sectors.

Many women who were interviewed complained of sexual harassment at work by their colleagues which slows down their productivity. They also complained of being paid wages less than what their male counterparts get. Harassment against women is reportedly high in garment factories where more than 80 per cent of the workers are female. A survey conducted in 2007 by non-governmental organisation Sustainable Development Networking Programme on the state of women workers in garment factories says 40 per cent of the workers were sexually exploited. 'Workers usually do not lodge complain fearing job losses, retaliation and stigma,' it said, adding 47 per cent of the workers reported sexual harassment had harmed their productivity. (New Age)

### ***International Women Day***

The International Women's Day (IWD) is being observed today in both developed and underdeveloped countries to underscore women's equal rights and opportunities worldwide. The struggle for realising women rights has a long history. In 1857, thousands of working women in New York took to the streets to protest against inequitable wages, a 12-hour work day, and sexual nuisance in the workplace. On March 8, 1908, a large number of women assembled in New York City to realise their right to suffrage.

In 1910, as many as 100 women representing 17 countries decided to initiate an International Women's Day at an International Conference of Socialist Women in Copenhagen, Denmark. The first IWD was held in 1911 in Germany, Austria, Denmark and some other European countries. The IWD has emerged as a universal event for celebration.

The United Nations for the first time formally proclaimed International Women's Year on March 8, 1975. Since then, IWD has emerged as the most important day for women across the world to remember their prolonged struggles and commemorate their social, political and economic achievements. IWD is an official holiday in more than 15 countries, including China, Russia, and Vietnam. This year's special focus is on "Women and Education," in which women everywhere lag behind. Indeed, women's education is vital to any country's progress, be it social, political or economic.

## **BASUG Advisor Sultana Kamal won Award on Int Women Day**

Advocate Sultana Kamal, former advisor to the Caretaker government of Bangladesh won the International Women Day award for her outstanding service to the society. The award, named Radhuni Kirtimoti Award 2008 was handed over to her at a function in Dhaka on 7 March. Sultana Kamal took active part in BASUG's brainstorming meeting on "Violence Against Women" in Dhaka in 2007 and was the key speaker at the Experts meeting of BASUG in the Hague on "Women : Future of Bangladesh" in the same year. BASUG board in a message congratulated Advocate Sultana Kamal on the occasion.

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