Will the procession of burnt people stop?

After burning of how many innocent faces?

Selina returned home, on June 9 2012, with certain amount of panic in her mind. Terrorists attacked her with acid on May 1, 2012 after she went to the court to deposit witness. On June 15, 2010, the attackers threw acid on her younger sister, madrasa student Farzana, when she declined to accept a proposal for love affair with one of them. Selina had tried to convince her younger sister sitting on the bed of treatment facilitated by ASF. Unfortunately, for her as well, Selina eventually became a victim of acid attack and joined her sister to receive treatment at ASF Hospital.

“We had demanded justice for my younger sister for two years. I had to helessly see the suffering of my loving sister for days and months together. And I, too, had to embrace the same consequence of being victim of acid attack,” said Selina. She expressed her belief that the attackers would have refrained from attacking her, if there had been trial and justice in time. “Earlier I could not sleep because of injuries from acid attack but now I slept sleepless night fearing further attack,” she said. Her mother was taking shelter at the houses of their relatives one after another seeking safety and security of her sister.

“Now I may have to stay there to lead an abscording life once I go back home. Unless we withdraw the case, the dangerous elements would not perhaps allow us to live,” Selina added.

Before leaving the hospital, Selina said she had no idea where she would actually take shelter. “Who will guarantee my security? When the police failed to secure our security, who will then provide us with security?” she said. The incidents of acid attack on Selina and Farzana had dealt a devastating blow to the entire family. “My hopes of bringing back smile to the face of my widowed mother have been dashed by the acid attack. But I promise I will not stop here. I still dream of living a healthy life and doing something for others. I also want to serve the acid survivors,” Selina said.
Statistics

Acid attack trend (1995 - April 2012)

In 1999 - April 2012, 1,332 persons were acid attacked from 1,486 incidents.

Statistics of Acid Attack May 1990 to May 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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Acid attack statistics - Gender Perspective

Acid attack statistics - Age Group (1990 - April 2012)

Acid attack statistics - reasons/year - 1999 to April 2012

Editorial

Denial of justice sparks off more violence

Wherever a news item on acid violence is printed on newspaper pages, it adds to the list of victims including those who lose lives and we are concerned, every time. We are further concerned when we see that an acid survivor has been knocking at every door of justice system seeking remedy, but is effectively denied it by the delay in justice delivery. As a victim sometimes cannot continue pursuing the case over the years and as there is hardly anyone found as witness, the prosecution often loses momentum, it sometimes takes years and even a decade to dispose of the case. Acid survivors are continually struggling with harsh reality of life. They are fighting for consolidating a life which has by this time lost its normal course, unfortunately. Limits of application of law and pre-straing in disposing of cases are a major barrier to building confidence in the minds of survivors and the masses. The survivors suffer further for certain negative attitude of some social actors. And a much-expected delivery of justice is being hampered by the pressure from rivals and influential ones to withdraw the complaints lodged with administrative and legal institutions.

An acid attack snatches away a decent life from a human being. She has to cross a rugged path to come back to the mainstream of society. The incidence of acid attack is rather a curse that acts as a barrier to establishing of human rights. Still every man and woman has the right to access to justice. Therefore, the authorities in the state machinery including the administration and the social leaders can stand by the victims of acid attack and assure them of access to justice. Restoration of justice can give some relief to the victims and deter those who have violent mind to commit a cowardice act of attacking a fellow human being with acid.

We no longer want to see recurrence of distortion of faces of human beings due to acid attack. We are no more willing to witness a longer procession of the acid survivors in society.

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Acid survivors hold meeting with community people in Bhola

The conference of acid survivors with community people in Bhola was held on April 18, 2013. Coast Trust, with the patronisation of ASF and assistance from Manusher Jonno Foundation, organised the conference that upheld the cause of resisting acid violence, providing medical facilities for victims and ensuring their rehabilitation and right to access to justice. Deputy Commissioner (DC) Khandaker Mostafizur Rahman inaugurated the conference at 10am.

A procession brought out by them paraded different streets of the town and concluded at poet Mozammel Haq auditorium. More than 200 men and women including 43 acid victims took in the rally. Coordinator of Coast Trust Md. Shamin Rassian, in his welcome address, said they worked on issues of rape, human trafficking and throwing of acid, especially for providing legal and financial assistance to the helpless people. ASF representative Rusa Laila read out the concept paper of the conference. The DC recited a poem reflecting on the message that those who never suffered lifting of snakes would never understand the pains of its venom. “Others will not be able to feel the agonies of the acid survivors. Those who attack and those who fall victim of it are somehow our people,” said Mostafizur Rahman and assured all that he would ensure licensing only for genuine users of acid. He said that the amount of DACC fund would also be raised in line with the necessity of the people.


Bhola's district correspondent of Prothom Alo emphasized that licenses must be secured for the users so that no one could misuse acid taking advantage of the availability of acid in the market. District Jatiya Party leader Anwar Rassian said acid violence must be eliminated from the society. Former principal of Bhola Government College Dulal Chowdhury stressed the need for proper enforcement of law to address the acid violence. "Otherwise, it will not be possible to stop acid violence," he said adding that the society has a responsibility to stand by the side of those who would fall victim of violence committed by the elements of depravity. Acid victim Surma narrated her story and asked the district administration if it was the responsibility only of the survivors to identify and search for terrorists. She demanded that the society must ensure a normal life for the acid survivors.

Chairing the session, Fazlu Qader Mazzu Molla said throwing of acid on woman and man is a crime. "It is a matter of regret that the rate of acid attack in Bhola is relatively higher," he said and pledged that it would soon go down in view of the campaign and improvement in the overall situation. There was no acid attack in Bhola in the past one year, he pointed out. "It's our collective achievement." Expressing solidarity with ASF and Coast Trust, he declared that all possible steps would be taken to ensure maximum welfare for acid survivors at the district level. He finally thanked the two organisations for their humanitarian activities.

Campaign at schools to stop acid violence

ASF organised a campaign program titled ‘role of student community in resisting acid violence’ at Chittagong Secondary School in Charfia Union of Bhola district on April 15 to create awareness among students and youths about horrifying effects of acid attacks on men and women. A total of 139 people including students of class X-V and teachers took part in the campaign. The campaigners highlighted issues such as first aid required immediately after acid attack and upheld the role and contribution of ASF. ASF-prepared drama “Oshi” (Bird) and Ayna (Mirror) that featured on reasons, perspective and negative effects of acid attack was screened through multimedia projectors. During the open discussion, students and teachers expressed their opinions and called upon the local people to help the acid victims. They also urged the people present there to make others aware of the issues and pledged to provide assistance to the acid survivors so that they could live with honour and prestige in society.

Schools campaign at Bhola District

Nonviolent movement against acid violence

Sayed Hafizur Rahman, a local nonviolent movement activist, expressed his strong desire to see the law against acid violence in the country. He said, “I am very glad to see the people of Bhola district are working together against acid violence. This is a true example of nonviolence. My heartfelt appreciation to the people of Bhola district for their work against acid violence.”

Nonviolent movement activists from the district

The nonviolent movement activists of Bhola district expressed their satisfaction over the activities of the people of Bhola district in combating acid violence. They said, “The people of Bhola district are making commendable efforts against acid violence. This is a true example of nonviolence.” They added, “We are very happy to see the people of Bhola district working together against acid violence.”

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Campaign in market places to stop acid violence

ASF carried out publicity campaign at two market places Lette Bazor and Dularhat Basar in Charsadda upazilla on April 15 and 16 to make the commoners aware about acid violence issues. Organised in collaboration with Coast Trust, the campaign focused on crimes relating to acid attack and highlighted the punitive measures for such violence. "Chhi" ( Shame) and Ayna (Mirror) plays prepared by ASF that highlighted devastation caused by acid violence and punishment for acid attackers were screened through multimedia projector. About 6,000 people watched the drama and came to know about the acid violence issues. Later, leaders of market committees and representatives of ASF and Coast Trust spoke on acid violence. They called upon those including goldsmith and battery manufacturers who use acid to ensure proper use of acid so that terrorist could not get it. The people present there were apprised of what needed to be done once someone was attacked with acid and services required for treatment.

Civil servants visit ASF office

A 35-member delegation of deputy secretaries who were taking part in the 84th higher administration and development course at Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre visited the ASF office in Banani recently. ASF Executive Director Monira Rahman talked with them in detail about the overall picture of violence against women in society and the justice delivery system. She highlighted the latest trend of incidence of acid violence. A few acid survivors narrated the horrifying experience of their life while talking to members of the delegation. The survivors sought intervention by and assistance from the officials to remove barriers to their treatment, rehabilitation in society and access to justice. The public servants gave them a patient hearing assuring them that they would take necessary steps from their respective positions.

Ten years elapsed to secure lower court verdict!

A housewife of Phoolbari upazila in Dinajpur district, Mukta Rani along with her mother-in-law, came under acid attack on January 15, 2002. It was a sequel to the land dispute between Mukta Rani’s husband Dukkumar and a neighbor. The rivals abducted Dukkumar and beat him up mercilessly on the night of the occurrence. Mukta Rani and her mother-in-law Shundhita Boral went to rescue Dukkumar. Instantly, the rivals threw acid targeting the two innocent women and fled the scene. They were taken to Phoolbari health complex in critical conditions. Later, they sent them to Acid Survivors Foundation in Dhaka for better treatment and care. Dukkumar filed a case with Phoolbari police station, accusing six people in connection with the acid attack. Mukta Rani said she had to engage 6-7 lawyers, apart from the public prosecutor, to pursue the case. The lawyer of Iris also helped her. Everyone wanted punishment to the culprits. Everyone involved in the process had to be present physically in the court and they had to make sure that the witnesses were present during the cross-examination. The family of victims had to bear the costs of food and transport for bringing the witnesses. Charges were framed against five people excluding the name of the main accused Aurul Chandra. The plaintiff alleged that Aurul Chandra’s name was dropped for reasons unspecified.

The case was filed under Women and Children Repression Act since the Acid Crime Prevention Act had not been enacted before 2002. Mukta Rani had the feeling that it would not have taken 10 years, if she could receive cooperation and support from everyone concerned. Her family had to pay a lot of price which was unaffordable to them. They had to even remain unacquiring. Her husband is the only earning member of the family whereas they had to send money for different purposes of the case. Sometimes, the witnesses failed to be present for deposition on the scheduled date or they just declined to be present. No witness wanted to provide his/her transport cost or any other cost. Mukta Rani’s family had to seek time through their lawyers. This also delayed the process of justice delivery among other factors that had protracted the process.

The judgment on this sensational case was delivered on April 25, 2012. Two of the accused were sentenced to suffer 10 years of imprisonment while another was awarded with seven years in jail. Mukta Rani looked more or less happy to see the punishment of the culprits who wanted to destroy her life. She added, “It would have been happier, had the main culprit been punished,” she said adding that she was suspicious about getting justice. She had to cross a long way to secure a verdict. It is believed that the acid violence in society would come down significantly if the justice delivery could be expedited for the sake of justice and fairness.

Bazar Campaign at Dhaka

Mukta Rani

Shundhita Boral
Acid survivors held public rally in Sirajgonj

Acid survivors held their conference in Sirajgonj on May 25, 2012 with a call for rescuing acid violence as well as ensuring treatment, rehabilitation and right to access to justice. Manob Mukti Sangsta, with patronisation of Acid Survivors Foundation and assistance from Unicef, organised the conference with the slogan "Time to bounce back". Additional deputy commissioner (ADC/Revenue) Umme Salma Tazia inaugurated the rally by releasing balloons in the morning. The procession paraded different streets of Sirajgonj town before ending at Maulana Ishrani auditorium. As many as 10 acid-affected men, women and children took part in the procession while more than a hundred people of different walks of life including the social welfare officer, the women affairs officer and a number of other professionals joined them.

Throwing of acid on an innocent person to harm him/her is a crime of inhuman nature said Manob Mukti Sangsta’s coordinator Md. Anwar Hussain in his welcome address at the conference. He called upon all to get united against such violent act in society. ASF made documentary with statistics on relevant issues was shown through multi-media projector. ASF representative Tahmima Islam read out the concept paper of the conference. The chief guest, the ADC, said she was not ever aware of the higher rates of acid violence in Sirajgonj. "Unfortunately we in Sirajgon are at the top of the list of acid violence incidents," she said and assured the gathering of disbursement of higher amount from the DAC fund. Daly Pretoria Alo’s local correspondent said availability of acid is one of the reasons of acid violence and demanded that the administration should take required measures to step unauthorised sales of acid.

Expressing determination to eliminate violence relating to acid attack, the district officer for the people with disability, Farzana Taj assured the acid survivors of providing official assistance earmarked for them. Social welfare officer Md. Reazul Haque, too, extended his support to acid survivors to secure assistance from welfare fund. Representatives of acid survivors Arunava and Shamsul Haque narrated their experience as victims and demanded that the administration should ensure arrest and trial of the attackers for giving them exemplary punishment to the culprits. They urged upon the social actors to help the acid survivors to return to normal life.

Presiding over the session, MIM Amer Hossain described acid violence as heinous crime. He also highlighted the role of Manob Mukti Sangsta in resisting acid violence. He thanked ASF for taking initiative to hold the conference of the survivors.

Campaign in market places to resist acid violence

ASF, in collaboration with Manob Mukti Sangtha, launched a campaign covering five local haats (market) and bazzars to make the people aware of acid violence. Such publicity campaign was organised at Shohagpur Haat at Neakuchi on May 23, Bonbura Bazar on May 24, Enayetpur Haat on May 25, Shongshahla Haat on May 25 and Purjana Haat on May 27. The headmaster of Shohagpur High School was among other important people who spoke against the acid attack. The people were told that attack with acid is a serious punishable offence. During the campaign, local baul (mystic) singer performed folk songs to espouse hatred for acid violence.

Later, ASF-made plays, “Chula” (Shame) and Ayna (Mirror), highlighting devastation of acid violence and punishment for acid attackers were screened through multimedia projector. More than 1,000 people watched the drama. Leaders of media committees and representatives of ASF and Manob Mukti Sangtha spoke on acid violence. The discussants asked the goldsmith and manufacturers of acid batteries to ensure proper use of acid so that any person with violent mind and ill motive could not get it. Also services required for acid victims were discussed there. Representatives of ASF thanks the people of all walks of life and urged them to play an active role in stopping acid violence.

Unnati Salma Tazia, ADC/Revenue, Inaugurates the Rally

Support, We are with You!

The March 2012 issue of the Voice Quarterly Newsletter...
Acid violence and barbaric act

It is difficult to say when and how acid violence started in this country. At the early stage a few incidents of hurling acid occurred but none took it into serious consideration. Even none of the government and non-government organisations was aware of it. The record of Acid Survivors’ Foundation shows that the first incident of throwing acid occurred in 1967. Acid was hurled on jatra artist Beauty on June 23, 1980, as she rejected a marriage proposal. Her two eyes were damaged forever due to the acid attack. She was to embrace blindness. After the incident, protest demonstration began. The issue of acid violence was widely discussed when women leaders including Sufia Kamal and Dr. Nileema Ibrahim got involved in the movement.

Acid can be bought without any restriction in every nook and corner of the country. Anyone can buy sulphuric acid at a cost of Tk 20 or 25. Acid that is detrimental to human body includes nitric acid, sulphuric acid, acetic acid and hydrochloric acid. Of them sulphuric acid is the dangerous. This acid is used widely as its density is high. Different research organisations including laboratories at universities, colleges and even schools use acid. Besides, acids are used in dyeing factories, leather factories, in making inks, battery shops, jewellery shops and studios.

Women are in bad shape in comparison to men in the context of socio-economy and culture. The women become victims of different forms of violence as they are not treated equally. Legal steps also cannot prevent violence on women by men. As a result, the womenfolk cannot advance. Acid attack is the worst form of women oppression. It is also learnt that the incident of acid violence takes place in other countries. Different research identified a number of causes of acid attack including denial of marriage proposal, money matters, land dispute and family conflict. Although women are not the owners of two percent land, most of the women and children are victims in the matters of land dispute.

The impact of acid attack on human body is seriously damaging. Acid melts the tissue underneath the skin, in some cases, acid melts the bone on human body. It damages eye and ear seriously. Many acid survivors have lost one or two of their eyes and ears forever. It is impossible to compensate the acid survivors for their losses. Acid victims become helpless forever. Mental agony becomes higher partner forever. S/he cannot return to normality with his/her body burnt. S/he cannot keep in close touch with near and dear ones. S/he becomes alienated and feels self-confidence. S/he can neither study nor work. Life virtually comes to a standstill.

Aid Comilla started working on preventing acid violence in Comilla. The organisation had carried out mass awareness programmes engaging people from different sections including teachers, imams, chairmen of upazila and union parishad of Comilla. Incidents of acid take place frequently. Aid Comilla in association of ASF organised awareness campaign in the district headquarters and at upazila, union parishad and school levels. Aid Comilla also exchanged views with sellers and users of acid.

Aid Comilla is providing treatment, training, legal assistance and rehabilitation to the victims. Besides, the district acid control committee and the directorate of social welfare were providing assistance to rehabilitate acid victims. Many organisations in Comilla also help the acid victims. In 1992, Comilla was second out of 64 districts in the country in terms of incidents of acid violence. Now its position came down to 20th because of reduction of the rates of incidents. It has been possible due to concerted efforts by all concerned.

A gathering of men with the assistance of ASF was organised on March 8 every year on the Women’s Day to engage man with the movement to prevent acid violence. To the best of my knowledge, men in most of the cases hurl acid on women. We think a man can check a man from hurling acid which is a heinous crime. We hope we will get Comilla a district free from the curse of acid violence. In course of time, Bangladesh will be free from acid incidents.

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