A Note from the Editor

VOICE, this quarterly newsletter, has been born to act as a bridge between those who have been so cruelly violated due to acid violence and those who want to hear them and support them by speaking out against such a crime.

This newsletter will support the voices of the acid survivors, their thoughts and ideas; those who work towards supporting their rights and preventing more incidents of such heinous nature; and those who are always ready to lend a hand in supporting such activities.

We hope that VOICE will be a medium by which thoughts, facts and ideas will be generated and feelings shared. Your active participation will help develop the newsletter further.

We admit that this first issue has some limitation and hope that our readers will forgive us for this. I am deeply grateful to those whose hard work has enabled us to launch VOICE and made the publication of this newsletter possible.

We Can Stop Acid Violence!

It has not been ascertained how and when acid violence took root in Bangladesh, but from newspapers we have learnt that the first reported incident occurred due to refusal of a proposal in the 1960’s. Later on, when a popular folk-drama (jatra) artist was marred with acid in the 1980’s, the newspapers took up the issue and it created a wide stir.
Acid violence has taken its place in society as another form of violence against women. It is a tool to suppress and control those who are socially and economically vulnerable and politically weaker. From 1999 to 2002, acid violence has increased every year by a rate of 35%. According to data and statistics, there are more that 1500 acid survivors (those victims who have survived an acid attack) in Bangladesh today—more than half below the age of 18 years, most of who are infants, children and girls.

According to present information, acid violence was first instigated due to refusal of sexual advances and proposals of love and/or marriage. In such cases, the victims are, obviously, always female. In the last few years, acts of acid violence have been seen to occur over land disputes and as retaliation and revenge for filing legal cases or police complaints. Such incidents are on the increase. Violence over land and property is between the male members of society, since men own the land. However, even in such cases women are victimised. To add to the horror, many women who are victims of acid violence are also victims of sexual and mental harassment and rape. Needless to say, much of this is due to the poor protection society affords to women and the patriarchal nature of socio-economic status in the country.

It is a fact that unless we change the attitudes of men towards women and the social status of women in the country, it will be very difficult to reduce and remove violence against women. However, in the case of acid violence, the picture is slightly different.

There are a few root causes that, if addressed and controlled, will enable us to reduce incidents of acid violence. Firstly, acid violence involves the collection and procurement of acid from specific places. If all acid users (those using acid in their daily profession/trade) obtained the legally required license to trade in, sell and procure acid, the illegal and illicit trade/sale of acid would be curtailed. Acid users are also members of society. It is their negligence and willing sale of acid to any one seeking to purchase it, that is causing this violence to increase. They need to understand the horrendous consequences of their sales and it is also society’s responsibility to carry the message to them.

Secondly, present data and facts show that most perpetrators of acid violence are between the ages of 18-22 and 25-30 and from low socio-economic backgrounds. Involving potential perpetrators from such age groups and social backgrounds, in the anti-acid violence campaigns, will contribute towards awareness raising of the social and legal repercussions of this act and help decrease such violence. We have seen that long-suppressed rage and long-term disputes often end abruptly in acid violence. If community leaders and friend and
Finally, in many cases we have seen that the family of the victim and that of the perpetrator come to an agreement or settlement. This is truly unfortunate. A perpetrator of a crime, if not brought to justice, will keep breeding violence. Acid violence is a non-bailable, criminal offence and a perpetrator of such violence is a criminal in the eyes of the law and must be treated as such. Remember that perpetrators of acid violence have no place in society. 1600 survivors of acid violence can vouch for that.

First Aid for an Acid Burn

**POUR WATER - SAVE A LIFE**

- When someone is burnt/attacked with acid, pour fresh, clean water over the affected areas for at least half an hour.
- If the face is the affected area, close the eyes and pour the water directly on the burns. **TAKE CARE to seal the ears with cotton wool or cloth to prevent water and acid from pouring into them.**
- If the eye/eyes have been affected, hold open the eyelids and pour water directly on the eye/eyes.
- If acid has entered the ear/ears, pour water directly into it/them.
- If the affected person had lost consciousness, or cries out when water is being poured on the wounds, **DO NOT** stop pouring the water.

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**েসিড আক্রমণে আপনার তৎক্ষণায় করণীয় পানি চালুন জীবন বাঁচান**

- এসিড আক্রমণের সময় সকল বেশি করে পরিষ্কার পানি অত্যন্ত গঠন করে চালুন;
- মুখে এসিড পড়লে চোখ বক্তা রেখে ক্রমাগত পানি চালুন;
- চোখে এসিড গেলে চোখের পাতা টেনে খোলা অবস্থায় পরিষ্কার পানি দিয়ে ক্রমাগত ধুতে থাকুন;
- কানে এসিড গেলে কানেও যত্নের সাথে পানি চালুন;
- এসিড আক্রমণের কারণে রোগী অক্ষর হতে পারে অথবা পানি চালার সময় রোগী চিত্কার করতে পারে, তাহে ভয় না পেয়ে পানি চালাতে থাকুন।
সংগঠনের খবর
এ বছরের শুরুতেই জানুয়ারি-ফেব্রুয়ারির মাসে এএসএফ বাংলা জন এসিড সারভাইভারের জন্য একটি প্রশিক্ষণের ব্যবস্থা করে। নাটক নির্মান, অভিনয়, পেশায়, মেকআপ ইত্যাদি বিষয়ে প্রশিক্ষণে অনুশীলন দেনে বিশিষ্ট নাট্যকার মায়ুর রশিদ। অপর প্রশিক্ষণটি ছিল নেতৃত্ব বিকাশ এবং কাজের কৌশল বিষয়ক। এটি পরিচালনা করে টেক্সট ট্যাগার্স ডেভেলপমেন্ট। ৮ মার্চ বিশ্ব-নারীবাদ দিবস প্রথম আলোর সাথে নেয়া উদযাপনে অংশগ্রহণ হয় মুক্তিযুগে আফ্রিকা মিলনায়নে। সেখানে এসিড সারভাইভার নির্মিত আমায় আমার এক নারী শিশুক নাটকটির মধ্যে যায়। গত ১২ মে ছিল এএসএফ-এর ৫ম প্রতিষ্ঠাবারিক। এই প্রতিষ্ঠাবারিক উপলক্ষে করি সুফিয়া কামাল মিলনায়নে। এসিডের বেরের আগে নাটক পরিশেষ করে।

Important Events
At the beginning of the year, the ASF held two training workshops for twelve survivors. One was on 'Leadership and Campaign' conducted by the NGO Steps towards Development. The other one dealt with how to formulate and write a drama and how to act, dress and apply stage make up. This was conducted by noted theatre director and actor Mr. Mamunur Rashid. The workshops were greatly enjoyed by facilitators and participants alike, and helped the survivors 'loosen up' and overcome shyness.

On International Women's Day, 08 March 2004, the 12 survivors performed the drama they created at the workshop-called 'We are not Alone' at a Prothom Alo-ASF event at the Liberation War Museum.

On 12 May 2004, the ASF celebrated five years of service to victims of acid violence. A cultural show was held at the Kobi Sufia Kamal auditorium at the National Museum. Many survivors sang and acted in another short play.

In August and September, the ASF held workshops in Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna and Dinajpur on acid violence and how to combat it and prevent further incidents. In order to strengthen its relationship with the media, it also organised press conferences. On 23 March, a press conference was held in order to report that a record number of 18 persons had become victims of acid violence in the week following up to the day of the press conference.

In August, another press conference was held in order to highlight the plight of Survivor Joynab Kahanam Eva, whose sister Mahfuza, had been brutally murdered by those who threw acid on her since the latter was a principal witness in her case. The conference also helped attract the relevant government organisations to her case.
Anti Acid Violence activities by Other Organisations

Apart from the ASF, there are several other organisations that are providing services to the victims of acid violence. Noteworthy among them is the news daily Prothom Alo that has an Acid Victims fund for female victims. It also has a large volunteer network called the 'Bandhu Shobha' that helps campaign against acid violence.

Other NGOs involved in the anti-acid violence campaign include the Barisal NGO Development Network (Barisal), Aggragati Shangstha (Sathkhira) and Steps towards Development (Dhaka). BNDN and Aggragati Shangstha, with assistance from Prothom Alo, the ASF and Steps towards Development, carried out street theatre, bicycle rallies and seminars to raise mass awareness against acid violence on 14 July. On International Women's Day, Aggragati Shangstha organised a human chain protesting such violence and on 29 and 30 May staged a play called 'Bholonkor Danob' (the Terrifying Monster) with support from the ASF.

Messages of Condolence

The Untimely Death of Ivy Rahman in a Grenade Attack

On 21 August 2004, at approximately 5:00 pm, an Awami League meeting was disrupted when several grenades went off in the midst of the supporters. Many of them were seriously injured—several succumbing to injuries in hospital. A total of 22 people died as a result of the blast. Among those seriously injured was Mrs. Ivy Rahman, women's rights activist and a member of the Trustee Board of the Acid Survivors Foundation. She was rushed to the Combined Military Hospital where she passed away on the 23 of August 2004. The ASF joins the family of Ivy Rahman in grieving her untimely demise.

Lives shattered by Acid Violence

According to data collected by the ASF, from January to September 2004, 11 persons have died due to acid violence. Among them were four women, one man, five female children and one male child. Thus, among the deceased, nine were female and two male. Even though the incidents took place in various Districts, there were three in Comilla alone. The ASF urges the relevant government organisations to ensure that proper justice is carried out in this regard.
A Self-reliant Face

Conquering the Un-abatable Pain
Tahmina is on the Way to Success

Tahmina is a young woman from Purbo Bodiripur village in Noakhali District. Every one at home calls her Munni. She is the eldest of four children—two boys and two girls. When she was young her father’s job took him and his family to live Chandraghona in Chittagong. In 1994, Tahmina passed her HSC examination with three letters. She wanted to become a doctor. Since her parents were unable to fulfill her dream due to financial constraints, she was admitted into a Medical Assistant course at Noakhali in 1994. She completed her course in 1996 and began working as a Medical Assistant in a clinic in Batiagonj in Sylhet.

A young woman called Poppy worked in the same clinic as Tahmina and struck up a friendship with her. Tahmina learnt that Poppy once had a suitor, but due to his demands for a huge dowry, all wedding plans had been cancelled. She was then married to another person. However, Poppy confided in Tahmina that her former suitor was still harassing her.

On 27 March 2000, Tahmina and Poppy finished work at night and got on the same rickshaw to go home. They could see a man standing not too far away. As they passed him, they felt something liquid hit them—and then begin to burn with intense pain. On hearing their screams, passers-by came to help them. They do not know who brought them to a local clinic. Later on, they were transferred to Sylhet Medical College Hospital. Tahmina’s condition was so critical that she was brought to the ASF, who took her to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Even while suffering such intense pain, Tahmina thought of her father and the condition of his heart and refrained from sending any message to home. However, on learning of the news in the daily papers, Tahmina’s paternal uncle notified her father who rushed to her side.
Voice
A Quarterly Newsletter

Tahmina's struggle for survival was just beginning. The wounds to her face and body were so critical that after treatment in Dhaka, she was flown to Italy thrice to undergo special surgery. She underwent a fourth operation in Dhaka. She still needs some more surgery today. However, Tahmina does not want any more operations. She is now working as a medical assistant at Jibon Tara—the 40 bed hospital run by the ASF, where she assists in the treatment and care of acid-burn patients. At the end of the working day she goes back to a room in a hostel in Farmgate, that she calls home.

Even though the perpetrator was apprehended, he was acquitted due to lack of evidence. Tahmina says that she wants perpetrators of such a heinous crime to be punished according to the law. She is sad that so many young faces and lives are being destroyed due to acid violence and wishes that this would stop. Despite the massive odds facing her, Tahmina today is leading an independent, orderly life, gaining respect and warmth from all her colleagues. Her struggle with life and her blooming into an independent person would inspire any woman.

The Acid Crime Control Act 2002

- The Maximum Sentence for acid throwing is the Death Penalty.
- A Special Tribunal will try perpetrators of Acid Violence.
- If Acid is sold, traded, kept or used without a license, it is a punishable offence.
- Acid throwing is a non-bailable offence.
- If someone assists/helps to commit the crime of acid throwing, he/she will receive the same punishment/penalty as the perpetrator.

The Right Partner

Standard Chartered
Emergency Treatment is the First Step towards the Rehabilitation of Acid Victims

The effects of acid violence are so extreme that the wounds can cause loss of hearing or sight and can render a person permanently disabled. Victims of such violence are often unable to return to their professions or earn a living. Due to lack of social acceptance and social awareness, such persons even have to struggle just to be accepted in their own localities. For those left vulnerable due to acid violence, physical and social rehabilitation is vital. The ASF recognizes this important fact and provides facilities for reconstructive surgery. Along with this crucial component, the ASF provides physiotherapy and counselling. However, the primary treatment for an acid burn is water, which has to be poured on the burnt area as soon as possible. This treatment and the time of its application determine what kind of follow-up treatment will be necessary.

Till recently, acid burn patients would have to travel to the UK, Spain, Italy, Germany and India to seek effective treatment. This was obviously expensive and not an option open to a vast majority of the patients. Fortunately, Bangladesh is now in a position to provide such treatment. In the 1990’s, incidents of acid violence began to escalate. Initially, the ASF would send acid burn patients to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment and operations. There were eight beds reserved for victims of acid violence at the DMCH. However, with the numbers escalating, eight beds were not enough. In order to reduce pressure on the DMCH, the ASF founded Thikana, a nursing centre where pre and post-operative care was provided. The operations were still performed at the DMCH. Due to the fact that the patients would have to wait for a long time before being operated on, in 2001 the ASF approached the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralysed (CRP), which gave them a 15-bed ward for acid victims. However, the CRP was in Savar, an
hour out of Dhaka, and it was not possible for doctors to provide emergency treatment or operations there all the time. As a result, in January 2004, the ASF rented an apartment block and converted it into a 40-bed hospital with a fully equipped operation theatre and physiotherapy centre. The hospital is called Jibon Tara—the Star of Life.

Operations are performed at Jibon Tara by a group of highly regarded plastic surgeons. Their unifying contribution to the cause helps almost 40 to 50 acid burn patients every month. The operation can take between two to more than four hours and in a large majority of the cases, two or three consecutive operations are necessary. ASF is the only organisation that provides this sort of services for those burnt with acid. This sort of effort by the ASF is not only helping patients to receive individual, timely treatment but is also helping build up an expertise in the medical arena of Bangladesh regarding the treatment of specialised burns.

A medical team assists every doctor working at the ASF, always on stand-by for new patients. Constant follow-ups are carried out for every ASF patient—and not just in the area of post-operative care. Their counseling and physiotherapy needs are also assessed, organised and carried out accordingly. The atmosphere at Jibon Tara is homely and comforting and some of the medical support staff are former victims of acid violence, which has an immediate morale boosting effect on a new patient. Foreign plastic surgeons have also come to the ASF to operate on patients with their Bangladeshi counterparts.

Unfortunately, such treatment is only available in Dhaka, while a majority of acid violence occurs outside the Capital City and even out-
sido Dhaka District. Each District urgently requires effective emergency services to treat acid burn patients so that no time is wasted in transportation to Dhaka. There have been times when such delays have caused serious risks to the life of the patient.

The ASF would like to establish Jibon Tara as a full-fledged, 50-bed specialised hospital with its own premises where effective and modern treatment for acid burns will be provided. It also plans to work with the Ministry of Health to provide training on acid burn treatment to doctors and nurses at the local level and in the District and Thana health complexes.

Dear Apa

I hope you are well. I cannot describe to you how I pass my days. My childhood was spent basking in the warmth and love of my parents and going to school. I did not know what hardship was. I was in class nine when I became the target of acid violence. It was then when I understood suffering and pain. Only those who have been cruelly victimised like me will understand how deeply I suffered. What sort of human beings throw acid on another person? Good people never throw acid. I want all those who throw acid to be hanged so that this violence is stopped.

Yours truly
Sraboni Akter Rupa
Thana: Shatulia
Dist: Manikgonj
Dearest Rupa

We have read your letter with deep sadness. How much you have had to bear at such a young age! Even though you did not mention any specific problem you face, you have voiced your opinion that all perpetrators of acid violence must be given capital punishment. It is true that the law is not properly implemented in our country, but if we were all to unite in the campaign against acid violence and for justice for the victims, then I am sure there will be improvement in that area. This newsletter is published for you and others like you who wish to express their opinions and thoughts. So keep writing to us!

Section Editor
A Note to Our Readers

We take great pleasure in announcing that the ASF has decided to publish a quarterly, bilingual newsletter with updates and case studies on acid violence in Bangladesh. Despite limitations and time constraints, we have attempted to highlight the inhuman violence of acid throwing by including various data, etc. in this first issue. Due to the fact that we shall be publishing this newsletter every three months, your comments and suggestions for improvement will be extremely welcome. You can send us your suggestions, any information regarding acid violence and comments, with your name and address, to our address. Your inputs will enhance the quality of information. Thank you.

Voice
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A Quarterly Newsletter

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