

Yet another heinous crime by Chhatra League people

MONDAY'S brutal attack on a Sylhet Government Women's College student by a leader of the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology unit of the Chhatra League, the ruling Awami League's student wing, is indeed a fall-out of the government's indifference to stalking as well as troublemaking by Chhatra League activists. When the victim was coming out of the examinations hall in the MC College, the attacker, allegedly aggrieved because of her refusal to accept his love overtures, repeatedly hacked her, as New Age reported on Wednesday, in the head with a machete, leaving her critically wounded. In a series of similar attacks, stalkers killed two schoolgirls in Dhaka and Madaripur and wounded another schoolgirl in Dinajpur in recent times. Moreover, as rights organisation Ain O Salish Kendra says, stalkers killed at least 75 girls, women and protesters across the country in the past five years while at least 781 women and girls fell victim to sexual harassment from stalkers. It is needless to say that although almost all the attackers in the recent cases, including the one at hand, have already been arrested by the police, there are reasons to doubt if the victims will at all get justice.

It is all the more so as the government is yet to respond to the High Court directives that asked it a few years ago to enact a law about the issue as the existing laws have failed to clearly define stalking, let alone stipulate stringent punishment for the crime. There are provisions of mobile courts to try stalkers. But the punishment the mobile courts meted out to stalkers in the past was anything but deterrent. Above all, although stalking have become widespread since 2009 when the incumbents assumed office, relevant government agencies, including the police, became active against the menace, that too temporarily, only once there was a public outcry over the issue. It is, meanwhile, important to say that there have been many incidents of sexual harassment inside and outside campuses of educational institutions in the period perpetrated by people linked to the Chhatra League and other affiliated organisations of the Awami League. But none can refer to even a single case among them in which the victim got justice.

No doubt, in a number of such cases, the Chhatra League central committee took some disciplinary action, including expulsion from the organisation, against the perpetrators. But reports have it that most of such expulsions were withdrawn once media focus was shifted to other issues. In fact, the manner, in which even the prime minister has failed so far to translate her tough words, issued against those involved in criminal acts under the organisation's banner, into reality is enough for one not to be surprised at the situation. In any case, apart from immediately waking up to the problem, the government should streamline Chhatra League wrongdoers. Conscious citizens also need to raise voice in this regard.