

More victims of stalking

IN YET another manifestation of stalkers prowling, a school-girl was killed in Gazipur early Tuesday morning and another was stabbed in Jhenaidah on Monday. As New Age reported on Wednesday, the mother of the Gazipur victim alleged that a 20-year-old boy of the village, who used to stalk the girl on her way to and from school, stormed into the girl's room and strangled her to death while the family of the Jhenaidah victim alleged that a 22-year-old man indiscriminately stabbed the girl on the roof of the house when she rejected his proposal for a love affair. With the latest victims, at least seven girls have either been killed or wounded at the hands of stalkers in Dhaka and elsewhere since August 24 when a Class VIII student of Willes Little Flower School and College in the capital was stabbed to death by a stalker. Moreover, according to rights organisation Ain O Salish Kendra, at least 75 girls, women and protesters died in attacks by stalkers until mid-September in the past five years while at least 90 girls and women committed suicide because of stalking in the period.

Meanwhile, at least 781 girls and women have fallen victim to sexual harassment in the country since 2011 although the actual number of the victims may be much higher as many such crimes remain unreported for various reasons, including social stigma and further harassment from the stalkers. What is more worrying is that the government still looks anything but serious about taking deterrent measures against the menace. Firstly, there has so far been hardly any case, in which a stalker has received any exemplary punishment for committing the heinous crime. Secondly, the High Court issued directives on more than one occasions in the past few years for the government to enact a law to deal with the crime, which has so far fallen on deaf ears. There is no denying that there were many incidents of stalking in different parts of the country in the period in which mobile courts meted out punishment to the perpetrators of stalking. But none can deny that while the number of such mobile courts is inadequate in view of the need, the punishment meted out so far by them have proved ineffective in tackling the menace.

In any case, there is no room for any indifference to the menace that is believed to be one of the key reasons for the drop-out of girls from secondary level education, which has already reached an alarming level. Above all, it poses a serious threat to women empowerment and thereby economic and social progress of the country. The government should seriously tackle the issue. However, unless and until there is a sustained public voice against sexual harassment, including stalking, the incumbents are unlikely to become active in this regard.