

No let-up in stalking

STALKERS continue to prowl different parts of the country, with the latest victim of the heinous crime being a schoolgirl in Madaripur. When the girl was going to school at Kalkini in the district on Sunday, as New Age reported on Monday, a distant cousin of hers, also private tutor of her younger brother, stabbed her to death. In less than a month, at least three schoolgirls fell victim to attacks resulting from stalking, in two of which the victims died. On August 28, a Class VIII student of Willes Little Flower School and College in the capital died in Dhaka Medical College Hospital after being stabbed by a stalker near the school. On September 7, another Class VIII student of a school at Bochaganj in Dinajpur was stabbed by a stalker inside her house. Although the perpetrators of all the three attacks have already been in police custody, one cannot say for certain that the justice would be meted out in the cases. As experiences show, using the loopholes in the legal system, the offenders might ultimately get away committing the crimes.

One can recall in this connection that there have been scores of incidents of stalking, many of which resulted in death of the victims, across the country in the past seven years or so. There were also many incidents in the period in which several people, including parents and teachers of the victims, lost their lives and limbs after protesting against the crimes. Regrettably, however, many of the perpetrators captured by ordinary people and handed over to the police were subsequently reported to be remanded on bail and to further engage in similar crimes. It is important to note that the High Court ordered the government a few years ago to make a law to strictly deal with cases of sexual harassment, such as stalking of women and girls. Besides, the court even gave some guidelines in this regard. But, unfortunately, all this has so far fallen on deaf ears. Against such a backdrop, one has, indeed, little reasons for surprise at the recent incidents of stalking. One can refer to mobile courts that jailed many stalkers in many areas. But it cannot be denied that such action was sporadic while the punishment proved hardly deterrent to the crime.

In fact, the lack of sustained public protests against such crimes, which can largely be attributable to patriarchy that has been pervasive in society for long, contributes to the menace as well. There is no denying that a public outcry against stalking or any form of sexual harassment of women and girls has so far erupted on several occasions. But all this disappeared when media focus shifted away. In any case, the government immediately needs to effectively address the problem while there should be a massive social and cultural movement against any form of sexual harassment.