

Nusrat Jahan Rafi, Bangladeshi teenager set on fire after accusing teacher of harassment

Tuesday 28 May 2019, by [BEAUMONT Peter](#), [MONTU Rafiqul Islam](#), [SABBIR Mir](#) (Date first published: 18 April 2018).

Nusrat Jahan Rafi was doused with kerosene and burned at her school, dying 10 days later of her injuries.

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Nusrat Jahan Rafi, who died 10 days after the attack, whose claims of harassment were initially ignored by police and school authorities. Photograph: Handout

A teenage Bangladeshi girl who reported being sexually harassed has died after being set on fire at school. Police and school authorities had ignored her complaints.

The murder of 19-year-old Nusrat Jahan Rafi, who was doused with kerosene and set on fire at her school in Feni on 6 April, followed her allegations of sexual harassment against her headteacher two weeks before. Nusrat suffered 80% burns to her body and died 10 days later from her injuries.

The case, which has received widespread attention in Bangladesh, has been investigated by a two-person commission led by a local judge that has identified negligence in the handling of her initial complaints.

According to investigators, Nusrat, who lived in the small town about 100 miles south-east of the capital, Dhaka, had complained to her family of being touched inappropriately by the headteacher of her Islamic school in late March.

Unlike the many girls who decline to complain, Nusrat decided to raise the issue with police on the same day. A police officer filmed her evidence on his smartphone.

When her distressed testimony was leaked to local media by police after the arrest of the headteacher, Nusrat faced abuse and threats of violence from the local community as she tried to continue attending school.

The fatal attack occurred on 6 April, when she had gone to school for her final exams.

According to a statement given by Nusrat before she died, a fellow female student asked her to accompany her to the school's rooftop on a pretext. When there, four or five people, wearing burqas, surrounded her and allegedly pressured her to withdraw the case against the headteacher.

When she refused, they set her on fire.

The Police Bureau of Investigation chief, Banaj Kumar Majumder, told BBC Bengali that the killers wanted "to make it look like a suicide". Their plan failed when Nusrat was rescued after they fled the scene and was able to give a statement.

"One of the killers was holding her head down with his hands, so kerosene wasn't poured there and that's why her head wasn't burned," he added.

In the ambulance, fearing she might not survive, she recorded a statement on her brother's mobile phone.

"The teacher touched me. I will fight this crime till my last breath," you can hear her say.

Two young men have confessed to involvement in Nusrat's killing. They include a man who admitted to having a grudge against her for refusing his own advances.

The results of an inquiry by the National Human Rights Commission, published on Tuesday, disclosed that the headteacher involved had been accused of sexual harassment before, and blamed police for their handling of her complaint.

At a press conference, NHRC chairman Kazi Reazul Haque said: "If the administration from the district level to madrasa acted responsibly, then the incident would never have taken place."

He said the madrasa management committee should have known that there were previous complaints of sexual assault against the headteacher, who is now suspended.

"We questioned [the madrasa committee] how [the headteacher] was appointed as the principal despite having this kind of past. [The committee] could not give us an answer," Reazul Haque added.

Nusrat's killing has been held up by observers as evidence of the widespread social issues facing women who complain of sexual assault in the country.

Mia Seppo, UN resident coordinator in Bangladesh, told local reporters: "Here, we have a case that is tragic on so many different levels, in terms of the system's failure, in terms of a girl who is brave enough to stand up against gender-based violence.

"And what happened is that her brave decision to do so led to more violence, leading to her death."

Peter Beaumont

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<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/apr/18/bangladesh-girl-set-on-fire-harassment-nusrat-jahan-rafi>

Nusrat Jahan Rafi: Burned to death for reporting sexual harassment

Nusrat Jahan Rafi was doused with kerosene and set on fire at her school in Bangladesh. Less than two weeks earlier, she had filed a sexual harassment complaint against her headmaster.

Her courage in speaking out against sexual assault, her death five days after being set alight and everything that happened in-between has gripped Bangladesh and brought attention to the vulnerability of sexual harassment victims in this conservative South Asian country.

Nusrat, who was 19, was from Feni, a small town 100 miles (160km) south of Dhaka. She was studying at a madrassa, or Islamic school. On 27 March, she said the headmaster called her into his office and repeatedly touched her in an inappropriate manner. Before things could go any further she ran out.

Many girls and young women in Bangladesh choose to keep their experiences of sexual harassment or abuse secret for fear of being shamed by society or their families. What made Nusrat Jahan different is that she didn't just speak out - she went to the police with the help of her family on the day the alleged abuse happened.

At the local police station she gave a statement. She should have been provided with a safe environment to recall her traumatic experiences. Instead she was filmed by the officer in charge on his phone as she described the ordeal.

In the video Nusrat is visibly distressed and tries to hide her face with her hands. The policeman is heard calling the complaint "no big deal" and telling her to move her hands from her face. The video was later leaked to local media.

'I tried to take her to school'

Different organization held a protest rally against the murder of Nusrat Jahan Rafi, a madrasa girl from Feni who was burnt in reprisal after sexual abuse charges against the principal, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on April 12, 2019



Protests have been held in Dhaka and in Feni - Nusrat's hometown

Nusrat Jahan Rafi was from a small town, came from a conservative family, and went to a religious school. For a girl in her position, reporting sexual harassment can come with consequences. Victims often face judgement from their communities, harassment, in person and online, and in some cases violent attacks. Nusrat went on to experience all of these.

On 27 March, after she went to the police, they arrested the headmaster. Things then got worse for Nusrat. A group of people gathered in the streets demanding his release. The protest had been arranged by two male students and local politicians were allegedly in attendance. People began to blame Nusrat. Her family say they started to worry about her safety.

Nevertheless, on 6 April, 11 days after the alleged sexual assault, Nusrat went to her school to sit her final exams.

"I tried to take my sister to school and tried to enter the premises, but I was stopped and wasn't allowed to enter," said Nusrat's brother, Mahmudul Hasan Noman.

"If I hadn't been stopped, something like this wouldn't have happened to my sister," he said.

According to a statement given by Nusrat, a fellow female student took her to the roof of the school, saying one of her friends was being beaten up. When Nusrat reached the rooftop four or five people, wearing burqas, surrounded her and allegedly pressured her to withdraw the case against the headmaster. When she refused, they set her on fire.

Police Bureau of Investigation chief Banaj Kumar Majumder said the killers wanted "to make it look like a suicide". Their plan failed when Nusrat was rescued after they fled the scene. She was able to give a statement before she died.

"One of the killers was holding her head down with his hands, so kerosene wasn't poured there and that's why her head wasn't burned," Mr Majumder told BBC Bengali.

But when Nusrat was taken to a local hospital, doctors found burns covering 80% of her body. Unable to treat the burns, they sent her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

In the ambulance, fearing she might not survive, she recorded a statement on her brother's mobile phone.

"The teacher touched me, I will fight this crime till my last breath," you can hear her say.

She also identified some of her attackers as students at the madrassa.

News of Nusrat's health dominated Bangladeshi media. On 10 April, she died. Thousands of people turned out for her funeral in Feni.

Police have since arrested 15 people, seven of them allegedly involved in the murder. Among those arrested are the two male students who organised the protest in support of the headmaster. The headmaster himself remains in custody. The policeman who filmed Nusrat's sexual harassment complaint has been removed from his post and transferred to another department.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina met Nusrat's family in Dhaka and promised that every person involved in the killing would be brought to justice. "None of the culprits will be spared from legal action," she said.

Huge crowds gathered in Nusrat's hometown for her funeral

Nusrat's death has sparked protests and thousands have used social media to express their anger about both her case and the treatment of sexual assault victims in Bangladesh.

"Many girls don't protest out of fear after such incidents. Burqas, even dresses made of iron cannot stop rapists," said Anowar Sheikh on BBC Bengali's Facebook page.

"I wanted a daughter my whole life, but now I am afraid. Giving birth to a daughter in this country means a life of fear and worry," wrote Lopa Hossain in her Facebook post.

According to women's rights group Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, there were 940 incidents of rape in

Bangladesh in 2018. But researchers say the real number is likely to be much higher.

“When a woman tries to get justice for sexual harassment, she has to face a lot of harassment again. The case lingers for years, there is shaming in society, a lack of willingness from police to properly investigate the allegations,” said Salma Ali, a human rights lawyer and former director of the Women Lawyers’ Association.

“It leads the victim to give up on seeking justice. Ultimately the criminals don’t get punished and they do the same crime again. Others don’t fear to do the same because of such examples.”

Now people are asking: Why did Nusrat’s case only get attention after she was attacked? And will her case change the way people view sexual harassment in Bangladesh?

In 2009, the country’s Supreme Court passed an order to establish sexual harassment cells in all educational institutions where students can take their complaints, but very few schools have taken up the initiative. Activists are now demanding the order be implemented and enshrined in law to protect students.

“This incident has shaken us, but as we have seen in the past, such incidents get forgotten in time. I don’t think there will be a big change after this. We have to see if justice gets done,” said Professor Kaberi Gayen of the University of Dhaka.

“Change has to come in, both psychologically and in implementing the rule of law. Awareness about sexual harassment should be raised from childhood in schools,” she said.

“They have to learn what is right and wrong when it comes to sexual harassment.”

Mir Sabbir

BBC Bengali, Dhaka

- <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47947117>

Nusrat murder: Nur, Shahdat confess implicating upazila AL president

The judge recorded their confessional statements for over nine and a half hours.

Two of the key accused in the Nusrat Jahan Rafi murder case have confessed in court — implicating 12 other people, including Awami League’s Sonagazi upazila unit’s President Ruhul Amin, in the crime.

Nuruddin and Shahadat Hossain Shamim, students of Sonagazi Islamia Fazil (Degree) Madrasa, were produced before Feni Senior Judicial Magistrate Zakir Hossain’s court at 3:30pm on Sunday.

The judge recorded their confessional statements for over nine and a half hours.

The duo, who were arrested by PBI from Mymensingh on Friday, in their statements implicated Ruhul and 11 others, who were directly and indirectly involved in carrying out the attack on Nusrat on April 6.

Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) Additional SP Abu Taher Sohan said: "Nuruddin and Shahadat gave confessional statements at the judge's private office under Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedures. The court sent them to jail after recording the statements."

He said: "Nuruddin has also described the whole incident, detailing how Nusrat was set on fire and who were involved in the act."

According to sources, after now suspended madrasa Principal Md Sirajuddaula was arrested in a sexual harassment case filed by Nusrat's family, Ruhul Amin instructed Nuruddin and Shahadat to initiate a movement demanding Sirajuddaula's release from jail. Sonagazi Municipality Councillor Maksud Alam gave them Tk10,000 for the job.

Later, another teacher of the madrasa also gave them Tk5,000 to stage a demonstration and burn Nusrat to death.

In his statement, Shahadat, who directly took part in the murder, said after setting Nusrat on fire, he quickly fled the scene and informed the matter to Ruhul over phone. In response, Ruhul said: "I know. You guys go into hiding."

Mentioning he held a personal grudge against Nusrat, Shahadat said: "Nusrat had rejected my romantic advances several times a few months back. I was eager to be part of the mission after receiving orders from Sirajuddaula."

Shahadat and Nuruddin are the second and accused, respectively, in the Nusrat murder case. They are leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League unit at the madrasa, where Nusrat also studied and was molested by Sirajuddaula at this office.

Investigation also revealed that Nuruddin met Sirajuddaula in jail to receive instructions for Nusrat's murder.

Councillor Maksud remanded

Meanwhile, a Feni court yesterday placed Maksud Alam, who was arrested on April 11 by PBI, on a five-day remand in the murder case.

Senior Judicial Magistrate Sharafat Uddin passed the order after police produced Maksud before his court in the afternoon, the plaintiff's lawyer Sahjahan Saju told Dhaka Tribune.

Another arrest

PBI yesterday also arrested another Alim student of madrasa from Chanchandia village under Sonagazi upazila.

Md Shamim, 19, was taken into police custody around 7pm, said PBI Additional SP Moniruzzaman. "Shamim has been arrested for his suspected involvement in the murder."

Police so far have arrested 14 people in the case.

Rafiqul Islam, Fen

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<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2019/04/15/nusrat-murder-nur-shamim-confess-im-plicating-upazila-al-president>

