

PROTEST AGAINST THE MURDER OF A CHILD

Demand for punishment

Suborna Akhter Mim lived with her father in Belashwar village of Chandina upazila in Comilla district. Because of disputes and arguments, for nearly three years Mim's parents had been living separately.

Seven-year-old Mim was a student of class one at the local Belshwar Primary School. On December 6, 2017 noon, she went missing. Relatives, local started searching for her and used microphones to announce if anyone had seen her. Yet she could not be found anywhere. The next day, her body, with her scarf wrapped around her neck, was found near the Thangaon Bridge of Keronkhal Union under Chandina upazila.

In connection with the incident, Mim's mother Khadija Akhter filed a case against Mim's step-mother Lovely Akhter, 30, and her brother Salauddin Sarkar, 28, under section 154. On December 7, 2017, police arrested the suspects.

On the other hand, on December 6, a phone call was made to Mim's father demanding a ransom of Taka 10 lakh. Immediately, he went to the Chandina police station and told them about the ransom claim and provided the number from which the call was made. Based on the information provided by Korban Ali, Mim's father, a report titled "Murder because of non-payment of ransom, body of child recovered, step-mother and uncle arrested" was published by the Bangla daily *Prothom Alo* on December 9.



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In this context, the landless organisation organised a meeting at the Chandina Pilot School grounds to demand proper investigation of the murder. In the presence of nearly four hundred

men and women, landless leader Monowara said, "Filing the case is for plaintiffs, investigating is for the police. Who is responsible, who committed the murder? We do not know yet. We demand proper investigation. Arrest the accused—that is our claim". At the end of the gathering, 15 children and youth, under the leadership of school student Purnima, a member of the landless youth team, met the Officer-in-Charge of Chandina Police Station. They read out the *Prothom Alo* news report to the OC and demanded quick and unbiased investigation of Mim's murder. The Officer-in-Charge assured them of a proper investigation.

Through investigating the call list of the phone which was used to make the ransom demand, on the night of December 10, Omar Faruq, (19), was arrested by the police. On December 11, in Comilla Court, Omar Faroque stated, "I was cleaning a microbus beside the house of Subarna Akhtar Mim at around 12:30 pm on December 6. I told her that if she fetched water for me for washing the car, I would give her a trip in it. Mim brought me water.

After I was done cleaning the car, I started driving her around. At one stage, I started touching her body in several places and tried to hold her. She started shouting. I stopped but Mim threatened to tell her father. I became scared and inside the microbus decided to kill by strangling her with the scarf. In the darkness of the night, I left the body on the side of the Thangaon Bridge. Later, I called Korban Ali demanding ransom to make the murder look like a kidnapping."



It was decided to hold a protest gathering at the upazila headquarters with the participation of people from all classes and occupations on December 12.

In this situation, landless leaders of different villages held meetings to determine the next course to take. Members at the meeting said that the demand for the arrest of the accused arrested has been achieved. Now it was necessary to build a collective demand for proper investigation and for transfer of the case to the speedy trials court. Otherwise, the case may get lost and forgotten with time. For this reason, it was decided to hold a protest gathering at the upazila headquarters with the participation of people from all classes and occupations on December 12. For this, the landless organisations stated activities to create public opinion in different public spaces, through enacting plays, songs etc. In addition to this, they started collecting signatures for a memorandum

demanding the transfer of the case to the speedy trial courts. They explained why people should sign. As a result, a strong public opinion was developed in favour of the demands.

Participation of others

The landless organisation took some strategic steps to build a collective protest. In this case, the new generation of boys and girls of Nijera Kori came forward. They maintain contacts with local school students. Through discussions, they built up a mass movement for justice. They themselves made an effigy of the killer. Nearly 200 boys and girls marched in a rally with the effigy and joined the landless organisation on December 12 at the Belashwar School grounds. They participated in the processions led by landless organisation. At the end of the procession, they organised a meeting at the Upazila administration complex. The Chandinah Upazila Chairman, Upazila Vice-Chairman, Kernakhil Union Chairman and Chandina Police Station Officer-in-Charge expressed solidarity with the claims of landless organisations in the meeting because of the advocacy and mobilisation of the landless organisation. They expressed solidarity with the landless organisation.

The Chairman Chandina Upazila Parishad said, "What we as people's representatives could not do, the landless organisation has done it. It would not have been possible for the accused be



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brought to court so quickly without the role of landless organisation." Officer-in-Charge of Chandina Police Station said, "There will be no shortage of attempt in our part in ensuring the highest punishment for the punish the murderer. The landless organisation is active in the area, you are well aware of many issues. So, if there are any incidents of violence against women, you can come and tell me directly. I want to work with you to stop violence against women."

The meeting chairperson Morsheda Begum said, "Today, it is not only the landless organisation present here, with us are journalists, the OC, upazila chairman, upazila vice-chairman, UP chairman and many children. I would like to say before all, if today this had happened to one of our daughters, what would we have done? Mim is a daughter to all of us. Someone who can torture and kill a child should be hanged. If the murderer was my own child, even then I would want them to be hanged".

At the end of the gathering, the landless organisation submitted a memorandum with mass signatures to the Upazila Nirbahi Officer demanding the transfer of the case to the speedy trial courts. A copy of this was also given to the acting officer of Chandina. Hanufa Begum, one of the protesting landless leaders said, "The accused has been caught, he has been sent to jail. We are vigilant, so that he is not spared through loopholes."