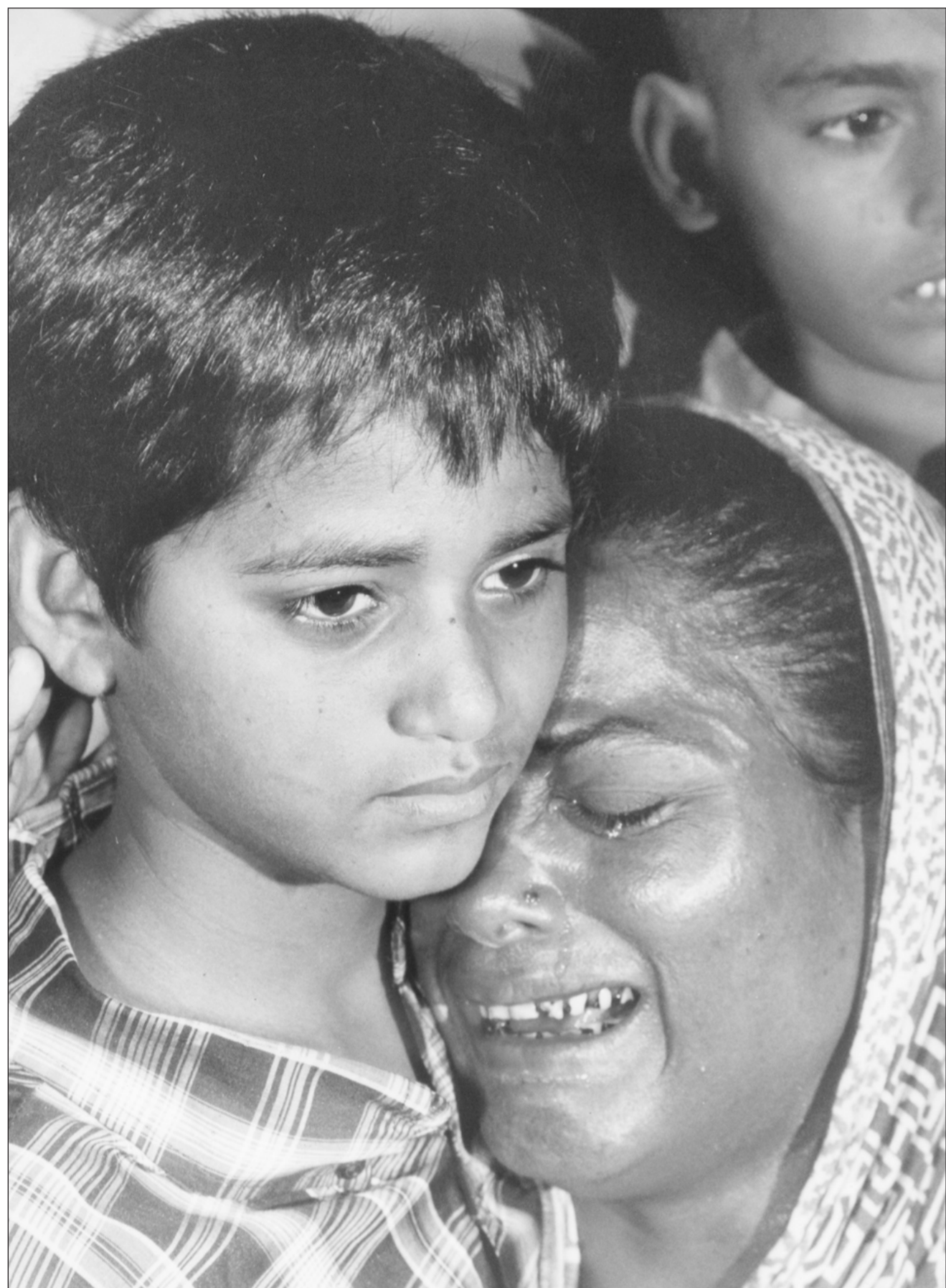


Persistent poverty perpetuates human trafficking



Bedona Begum of Narayanganj could not hold back her tears when she was reunited with her son Alam after seven years. He was rescued last year after being taken by traffickers to serve as a camel jockey in the Middle East.

SULTANA RAHMAN

Human trafficking is rapidly rising due to persistent poverty that forces the vulnerable people to be trapped in the name of better jobs in abroad.

Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) in a study revealed that almost all victims of human traffickers are from poor families. Of them 95 per cent female victims are illiterate, 5 per cent have primary education, 61 per cent landless, 50 per cent women are lured with offers of lucrative jobs and 15 per cent are trafficked by marriage offers. BNWLA repatriated a total of 116 women and children from different parts of the country in 1999.

Meanwhile, UNICEF revealed that most of the guardians of trafficked women and children are landless, and of them 45 per cent are farmers and 16 per cent day-laborers while the rest are small traders.

"Trafficking may not be controlled without poverty alleviation specially in boarder areas," Masud Hassan Siddique, project

Most of the guardians of trafficked women and children are landless, and of them 45 per cent are farmers and 16 per cent day-laborers while the rest are small traders, according to UNICEF. 95 per cent female victims are illiterate, 5 per cent have primary education, 61 per cent landless, 50 per cent women are lured with offers of lucrative jobs and 15 per cent are trafficked by marriage offers, according to BNWLA.

coordinator of Trafficking in Children, South Asia (TCSA) under ILO said. TCSA has identified poverty along six other causes for trafficking of women and children from this part of the world.

Over two lakh women and children were trafficked out of Bangladesh to India in the last 10 years while the rescue rate is only 8.88 per cent. The 4 victims who are smuggled to various middle eastern countries and Pakistan, and mostly forced into prostitution.

The report showed that 20 per cent of the trafficked women are working in brothels of Kolkata while some five lakh in Pakistan and other parts of India. Some 25,000 women and children are trafficked out of Bangladesh to other countries every year.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimated, between 700,000 and 2 million women and children are trafficked globally every year for exploitative purposes. It makes an annual business of about ten to twelve billion US dollars.

The history of women and child trafficking from Bangladesh goes back to the early 50s when camel race and the use of children as 'jockeys' gained momentum in the Middle East. In the course of time, this criminal business has taken an alarming proportion.

Women and children are trafficked out of Bangladesh to various countries through a good number of routes. Sathkira frontier is one through which 66 per cent women and children are smuggled out of the country. Creating job opportunities is needed to curb the menace of human trafficking in boarder areas.

Khurshid Jahan Haque speaks to Star City

State supervision to protect women working abroad



"Trafficking of women could be stopped if they are sent abroad under the government's control and monitoring."

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MWCA) is planning to send female workers abroad to work under state supervision to reduce trafficking, Minister Khurshid Jahan Haque told Star City in an exclusive interview.

The minister explained that the MWCA has already instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take initiatives to put the proposal into action. The Ministry for Expatriates will also be involved to smooth the way for the immigration of women who wish to join the scheme and go abroad for better job opportunities.

"Trafficking of women could be stopped if they are sent abroad under the government's control and monitoring," the minister said adding that most of the trafficked women were deceived into migrating abroad by false offers of good job prospects.

"We have to identify the organised gangs, who control the trafficking of women and

children," the minister stressed, saying that a concerted effort is needed for a comprehensive strategy to stop trafficking.

To this end, the MWCA has recently undertaken a pilot project named 'Child Development Co-ordinated Programme to Combat Trafficking'. The project, which aims to substantially reduce the trafficking of children to neighbouring countries, is being implemented in 25 upazilas of 14 border districts in Bangladesh.

Moreover, the ministry has also established a special anti-child trafficking cell, while the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) have two separate cells to identify and arrest traffickers and also rescue the trafficked women and children.

"We are also planning a major campaign to raise awareness of the issue which will consist of processions and media coverage organised in 20 different district towns at the end of the year," said Minister Khurshid Jahan Haque.

Trans-border flesh trade

Trafficking in humans for profit and exploitation is said to be the third largest form of illegal trade after drugs and arms trafficking

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Women who went through various forms of abuse including beating and rape came up with the stories of their sufferings at a three-day meeting of South Asian women activists, which ended in Dhaka on August 13.

The Asian Women's Human Rights Council organised the court of women in association with the UNDP and UBINIG to protest the injustice suffered by the women of South Asia.

The symbolic court of women on trafficking and HIV/AIDS was held at China-Bangladesh Friendship Conference Centre in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

Trafficking in humans for profit and exploitation is said to be the third largest form of illegal trade after drugs and arms dealing and has gained the status of international crisis that requires multilateral responses from states. The govern-

ments need strategies to combat the sophisticated networks of trafficking throughout the world.

More often the anti-trafficking initiatives both from the state and civil society are concentrated on illegal migration and criminal prosecution. The conflation of trafficking with migration and movement on the one hand and prostitution and sex work on the other influences the views of the way of women's movements, both internally and externally.

Lack of definitional and conceptual clarity and half-baked policies on trafficking continue to deny the victims justice and fuel rape, forced prostitution, labour exploitation, slavery apart from the stigma of HIV and perhaps the finality of AIDS.

The testimonies during the session at the symbolic court attempt to broaden the scope, notion and definition of trafficking through its different faces like forced marriage, camel jockeying, forced

adoption, forced labour, domestic work and prostitution.

Testimonies of women from the South Asian countries were delivered in front of a jury board comprising eminent personalities like Winnie Mandela, president of Women's League, African National Congress, South Africa; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak of Columbia University, USA/India; Salma Sobhan, lawyer and founder member of Ain O Shalish Kendra; and Faryal Ghaur, women's rights activist and artist of Pakistan.

The members of the jury listened to the live testimonies and viewed the videotapes of the women throughout the day. One of the testimonies given by an Indian woman aptly suggested the virtue of organising such a symbolic court.

The story of the Indian woman revealed a peculiar idea of a brothel where male customers with HIV-positive believe that they would be cured of their disease if they could have sex with young women. She is one of many young women systematically becoming victims of the ignorant and heinous practice of men.

The testimonies also revealed that institutions of the state like the police, judiciary and health systems, supposed to ensure the rights of citizens to justice, redress or care, are often the greatest violators of the rights of the people, particularly the poor and the vulnerable.

The court issued a 12-point statement, including a need to improve the quality of grassroots education for the long-term eradication of patriarchal values, which it said are one of the causes of human trafficking and other forms of violence against women.

"We want a regional as well an international court with transborder jurisdiction to allow perpetrators to be punished," said Salma Sobhan, also a leading lawyer in Bangladesh.



Young and homeless children are the most vulnerable and trafficking in the city.



Kamapur Station: One of the main entry points for rural women who flood to the city in search of work. Dhaka has therefore become an open opportunity for human traffickers to catch young adolescent girls at the city's entry points.

Dhaka becomes major trafficking transit point

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

Human trafficking has become a lucrative business for the city's traffickers, especially in an environment where poverty is endemic. Due to increasing rural poverty, Dhaka city has become a magnet for urban migration as people from all parts of the country pour into the city in search of the means for survival.

There are about 1500 readymade garment factories that are situated in and around Dhaka. Rural women have been flooding to the city in search of work in these factories over the past two decades. Dhaka has therefore become an open opportunity for human traffickers to catch poor young adolescent girls who come in search of jobs.

Many forms of deception, in love, marriage, work and money, lead the women to be trapped by these traffickers. Unfortunately, the guardians of these girls have very few options but to believe the traffickers' lies. Although, some parents know what the fate of the girls will be in advance, poverty stops them from being able to take any legal action.

Consequently, Dhaka city has become a major transit point of external and internal human trafficking. Women are sold and brought to Dhaka and then resold at higher prices to other parts of the country

and also in transborder trafficking.

After the evacuation of government licensed brothels in Tanbazar and English Road, mini brothels sprang in the residential areas and hotels throughout the city. These have become the major causes of internal migration for young women to Dhaka. The teen-aged girls are sold and resold in mini brothels throughout the city and also sold out to larger brothels in Tangail, Zamaipur, Doulatdia, Baniashanta, Mymensingh and Jessore.

According to a survey of ATSEC Bangladesh Chapter, on 406 women and children, 178 victims were found to be trafficked from Dhaka.

Dhaka city is also prone for external trafficking because of the expert services of the travel agencies, the majority of which are located in the Arambagh area. The external trafficking from Bangladesh is mainly to India, Dubai and Kuwait for prostitution, body organ trade, domestic work and young camel jockeys.

The recent rescue of five boys and girls, by the immigration authorities at Zia International Airport, while being smuggled out by a Gulf Air flight on August 27 last Wednesday illustrates the city's exposure to human trafficking. Due to poverty, lack of education and deception, traffickers are rarely caught which has made the city a vanguard of human trafficking.