

Female garment workers not safe on city streets

FAIZUL A TANIM

Ferdousi, a young garment worker walks almost two kilometres every day to her workplace in Mirpur. On her way she faces harassment and teasing by local goons almost daily. But she has to endure all to continue her job.

"I must work for living," said Ferdousi who is the bread earner of her family. "I cannot afford even the cheapest transport service -- bus -- as my salary is only Tk 875 per month. I have to go to factory and return home on foot in this insecure situation."

While Ferdousi and her co-workers walk home every day in the evening, they are subject to teasing. A few policemen patrol the streets but they never come to help the victims. "They are busy collecting tolls from hawkers and vendors," alleged Ferdousi.

Another garment worker, Rahela, 20, was abducted when returning home from factory at Savar on August 22. She was raped and critically injured by miscreants in a jungle near Mir Mosharaf Hossain Hall of Jahangirnagar University. After fighting for life for over 30 days, she died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on September 24.

These are just few cases of 80 percent women workers of the garment industry that employs about 20 lakh workers, mostly women. The rape and killing of Rahela worried almost all garment workers of around 1,800 to 2,000 factories in Dhaka city.

Female workers of Gulshan and Banani-based garment factories alleged they are teased on the way in the Badda area. They are

sometimes robbed of.

"Muggers often swoop on us on our salary days. Many of us have fallen victims to the muggers on way home in the evening after drawing monthly salary," said Amina who works in a factory in the Gulshan area.

Most of these workers said they feel insecure when returning home. "The killing of Rahela has increased our fear," said another worker. "But what can we do? Who will arrange regular and safe transport for us?"

The garment workers agree that it is difficult for factory management to arrange transport for so many workers. "But they can make some safety arrangements at least on pay day to save us from muggers," said a female worker.

Another problem is that most of the garment workers live in such places where there is no bus service. Some workers can reach the nearest bus stand but poor salaries force them to go on foot, as they cannot afford bus fares.

"Although the standard rate of wage is Tk 930 per month, most workers allege their salary are below that figure," said Nazma Akter, general secretary of Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation (BIGUF).

Alauddin Ahmed, manager administration of Alpine Group, which owns several factories, said: "We always try to help our workers. If any worker lets us know about mugging or harassment by miscreants, we report these incidents to the police."

Shahana Begum who works in a factory in Tejgaon said the area has become quite unsafe for women to get about after 8:00pm. "The administration of our



Garment workers stream home on foot late in the evening after a hard day's work unsure if they would reach their destinations safely.

factory, after the Rahela incident, decided not to let us go home at night. We stay on factory premises through the night and we are permitted to leave at 6:00am when it is safe to travel. This step indeed is appreciable," voiced Shahana.

When asked, a Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association official

(BGMEA) said "It is not possible for garment factory owners to ensure the security of female workers outside the factory premises."

"But some can provide transport, set up hostels for female workers or let them leave by 5:00 pm on pay day," said Rafiqul Islam, senior deputy secretary of BGMEA adding that the biggest problem is social insecurity.

An official of a non-governmental organisation, Karmajibi Nari said: "A new labour code is being formulated. We are trying to convince the authorities, to include under the new regulation the safety of female workers outside factory premises."

"Social safety must be improved. Local political leaders

back most goons who tease garment workers on the streets. They should ask their boys to stop teasing girls," said another union leader.

BIGUF and Karmajibi Nari get at least two complaints on harassment each week, 95 percent of these are related to teasing or mugging while five percent are sexual harassment.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.



"If the sun shines for three consecutive days, it will have a positive impact on the price of rice"

-- Altaf Hossain Choudhury

Minister of Commerce
Told a press briefing at the commerce ministry on October 14.
Source: The Daily Star

"Educated people are more communal as distorted history is being taught in this part"

-- Dr. Asgar Ali Engineer

Indian Researcher
Told at an international seminar on "Religion based extremism and safety of South Asia" in the city on October 12.
Source: Prothom Alo

"Water logging problem in the city began to deteriorate with the filling up of Dholaikhal following pressure from the locals"

-- Mirza Abbas

Housing and Public Works Minister
Told a roundtable on "Urban flooding, case Dhaka city" on October 13.

"When the tournament took place confronting so many obstacles, I assume I will be able to continue football in future"

-- Shraboni Poddar

Best player
First Women Football Tournament
Told a newperson on October 13.
Source: Prothom Alo

"I am quite sure people who often give Paltan-style speeches demanding the separation also don't know what judiciary separation means... and I, too, don't understand the term,"

Barrister Shahjahan Omar

State Minister for Law
Told a roundtable on "Good Governance and Judiciary" organised by the law ministry on October 14.
Source: The Daily Star

"Assistant engineers along with resident engineer are related to electricity pilferage. Drives conducted during office hours and with prior notice never become successful. That is why this time we conducted the drive secretly at night"

-- Md. Mozammel haque

Superintendent Engineer
Power Development Board (PDB), Mymensingh Circle
Told journalists about the secret drive of PDB to prevent pilferage at Bhaireb following a news item, on October 13.
Source: Prothom Alo

New security arrangement at Ramna Park attracts visitors

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

Ramna Park, one of the oldest parks of the city, has been experiencing a high inflow of visitors since deployment of a private security force in the park this month.

The authorities undertook the step to ensure security of the park-goers by preventing the disturbing elements like drug peddlers and sex workers from wandering around the park.

The lush green park, set up in 1955 at the city centre, is also undergoing renovations as part of the capital's beautification ahead of the upcoming Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit slated for January.

"We are trying to keep the park

free from the disturbing elements and the common problems that they used to create regularly before," said Priyomath Sen, a guard of Providence Security, patrolling near Kakrail Mosque gate of the park.

The private security force began their operations in the park from October 1. The guards work 24-hours a days in three shifts -- seven in each shift. Six of them stand guard at six of the park's eight gates while the seventh guard patrols the vicinity.

An officer-in-charge of the security company supervises the guards sitting at the base, which happens to be the centre point of the park.

The park is open from 6 in the morning until 10 at night. Loiterers and miscreants used to

roam in the park all the way, and some of these people have been living inside the park for the last five to six years, according to sources.

They said members of the Ansar, who previously engaged in providing security for the park-goers, used to collect regular toll from the tea-vendors, flower sellers, sex-workers, drug addicts, streeturchins and so on.

"The park was infamous for its darkness, as the light-bulbs of the lamp posts were regularly stolen by thieves," said another guard. "Due to the darkness the place became a safe haven for muggers as well," he added.

Most of the walls of the park and some fences have broken down over time.

Also the umbrellas and

benches of the park, and swings and slippers of the children's playground inside it, need urgent repair.

After deployment of the security force, the park's environment has changed a lot and their role has been highly appreciated by nature-lovers.

"I have recently stopped coming to the park due to its deteriorating environment," said Ronny, a jogger. "But now the park's environment seems to be improving and I would like to visit the place again for regular jogging."

The renovation work of the park will be completed by the next two months, official sources said. "The park is being renovated at a special order from the Prime Minister's Office," said an official of Public Works Department.



Ramna park will once again be a children's playground and recreational spot for city dwellers, with the completion of the ongoing renovations.

WASA plans big

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (WASA) requires Tk. 454 crore to initiate a post-flood reconstruction and rehabilitation project.

WASA has already placed two alternative budgets of Tk. 454 crore and Tk. 397 crore to the government for the project.

ANM Aktar Hossain, managing director of WASA informed that they want to reconstruct the total system under this project.

"We need 454 crore Taka for complete reforms and if the donors come forward, we can do it. But if they do not respond, then the government might not provide such a big amount in this fiscal year. That is why we have

THE PROPOSED BUDGETS		
Priority	Budget 1 Tk 454 crore	Budget 2 - Tk 397 crore
Drainage System	Tk 287 crore	Tk 100 crore
Sewerage System	Tk 53 crore	Tk 150 crore
Water Supply	Tk 114 crore	Tk 147 crore

STAR GRAPHICS

placed the alternative budget with priority given on repairs," said Hossain.

"Very little repair was done after the flood of 1998 and following the recent flood, water logging in the city has worsened. If we do not do something immediately, it would become a massive problem soon," Hossain

added.

The managing director also pointed out that the existing wastewater treatment facilities that have been jammed, should be cleaned as soon as possible and that is why they were giving extra emphasis on the drainage system.

"A project for improving the

drainage system will start under Japanese financial assistance. In case we have to complete the project with the government's money, we will spend only Tk. 100 crore for emergency repairs while the Japanese project will take care of the rest."

He also informed that WASA had already started some reconstruction and development work with its own resources and hoped the project will be launched by this December. It is expected to take over a year to be completed.

"In the past WASA's maintenance of its systems had been poor and because of that, reconditioning of the WASA facilities will be a time-consuming job," said Hossain.

This file photo shows commuters wading through knee-deep water along with the overflowing sewage in Motijheel, logged with the recent downpour. The DCC does not have funds to repair the broken drainage system.

