

## INTERNATIONAL DAY AGAINST DRUG ABUSE AND ILLICIT TRAFFICKING

# Missing children in traffickers' web

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Lives of children yet to be traced are at a higher risk of falling prey to the hands of traffickers, fear experts though most of them have been located and brought back to the city.

Star City contacted those who had announced missing children in three national dailies -- Prothom Alo, Daily Ittefaq and Daily Inqilab -- in March 2005, and a survey conducted showed only 15 of 38 missing children reported were traced.

Although many attempts were made 13 who made the announcements could not be contacted and around 10 children are yet to be found.

Workers of various organisations trying to curb trafficking said the numbers of missing cases are higher in reality, as all incidents are not reported in the media. They are convinced that at least 70 percent of missing children become victims of trafficking.

"According to the Indicator for quarterly activities, 656 children and women went missing from all parts of the country in 2004 and 126 women and children in first three months of 2005," said Pranab Kumar Nandi, information and communication officer of the Action Against Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children (ATSEC), Bangladesh. "What is reported is a glimpse of the total numbers missing. In some cases announcements for missing children are not brought to light because of social or other restraints," he said.

A summary of the analysis of returnees' data by ATSEC Bangladesh showed that the highest number of trafficking incidents take place in Jessore with Dhaka following.

The Star City survey indicated that domestic helps rated high in the number of missing children. Jolly, Anjana, Shopna, Bubbly, Sheuli, Momena, Tashu and others were said to have left their employers' house on their own and could not be found until now.

"I tried my best to trace her and sought RAB's assistance too," said Tariqul Bari, 10-year-old Momena Khatun's employer. "I hope the girl is safe and has not been ensnared by a pimp," he said.

Pimps and others in the trafficking business coax children, especially home helps to leave home. Shopna, a 15-year-old from Mirpur was cajoled to leave her employer's house for better prospects at a garments factory.

At least 36 percent of reported trafficked victims according to ATSEC's data were subjected to deception by pimps. "There are cases where pimps marry the girls off and later sell them for sex," Salma Ali, executive director of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) told Star City on an earlier occasion.

In a few cases, children leave home to pursue adventure but in certain cases they cannot make it back. "We wonder whether the boy is alive. His parents are devastated in not finding him," said Rahima Majumdar, aunt of Mohammed Iqbal who left his

madrassa dormitory on February 25 with a note saying he did not like to study.

The missing children who are trafficked mostly end up in the sex-trade, servitude or bonded labour like 'camel jockeys', believe most of the development workers. Some missing children fall victim to the beggar racket as in the case of Kulsum, an 11-year-old domestic help who was missing from Bashabo.

"My father-in-law spotted her begging in front of a mosque in the neighbouring area. Her head was shaven and she was in a very bad shape," said Abdus Samad, her employer. He said the leader of the gang of beggars tried to convince that Kulsum was her own daughter but succumbed to threats of involving the police.

Though cross border trafficking is believed to be major issue, experts said cases of internal trafficking are higher. At least 61 percent of 600 trafficked victims according to ATSEC were trafficked within the country. "They are trafficked from village to town, and from small towns to big cities," said Pranab Nandi.

Rescued children are sometimes discarded by their parents, said development workers "Boys are repatriated easily if we can trace their roots but families refuse to accept rescued girls," said Salma Ali. This, she said, encourages trafficking of girls more.

Unless awareness is created among the community of the depth of such crimes, it would be a tedious task to curb these offences, she added.



A rickshaw moves along Topkana Road announcing on a loud-speaker detail of a missing child.

# No protection from rain for commuters



Long queues of commuters wait impatiently at Farmgate in the pouring rains on medians in the absence of ticket-counters.

SULTANA RAHMAN

Commuters are in for a miserable time during the monsoon as a good number of passenger sheds at bus stops have been removed by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

The DCC cleared around 500 bus counters and passenger sheds in March across the city. Most of these counters had been set up on pavements. Some 1800 buses belonging to 36 companies had erected those ticket counters and sheds. But following the eviction

drive, commuters are left with no protection from rain. At present, the bus operators are selling tickets under makeshift arrangements.

"During the last couple of months, we had to stand under the scorching sun. Now we are destined to get wet whenever there is rain because there are no shelters," said Habib, a regular bus passenger from Uttara.

Commuters and bus operators are highly critical of the DCC's eviction drive as the corporation has not offered any alternatives. Owners of the bus companies have met the authorities several times

to solve the problem. A committee has also been formed with officials of the communication ministry, the DCC and representatives from bus companies but no decisions have been taken yet.

DCC officials said that they had evicted the ticket counters for the sake of the city's beauty as the counters were illegally established on footpaths creating hazard for pedestrians.

"Many pedestrians complained to us that they could not walk on the footpaths because of the bus counters," said DCC mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka.

The general public's view however is that the DCC could have shown that it had genuine good intention by providing alternative counters and especially passenger sheds.

Officials of the Association of Bus Companies (ABC) said that when the beautification programme for the SAARC conference was on, the DCC had sent a notice to bus operators asking them to paint the counters and sheds. After the bus companies had complied with the DCC's request, suddenly the eviction drive was launched. ABC officials said the money spent

on renovating and beautifying the counters and sheds had gone to complete waste.

Mahtab Uddin Chowdhury, joint convener of ABC said that they were still prepared to cooperate financially if the DCC established passenger sheds. "During the rainy season passengers will wait under the open sky and get wet. It is the DCC's duty to provide them with protection from rain. If the DCC wants to build passenger sheds, we are ready to provide financial support," said Chowdhury.

# Hotel management courses gaining popularity

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

Hotel management and catering courses are gaining popularity in Dhaka with the growth of tourism and hospitality industry.

Government and private tourism training institutions are offering various courses for the prospective hotel and tourism staff. The number of students is increasing rapidly, sources said.

The National Hotel and Tourism Institute run by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) at Hotel Abakash at Mohakhali offers both short and long courses for their students.

Purbani Hotel and Tourism Training Institute, Tommy Miah's Institute of Hospitality Management at Mohamadpur and Hotel Razmoni Isha Kha Catering Institute at Kakrail are among other institutions offering train-

ing.

These organisations mainly offer diploma courses with the duration of two weeks to two years. The minimum educational qualification of the students is higher secondary certificate (HSC).

BPC has been offering a two-year full time national diploma course in hotel and catering supervisory management (HCSM) since 2002.

Besides, it offers six short courses -- food and beverage production, food and beverage services, travel and tour operations, front office secretariat operations, bakery and pastry production, housekeeping and laundry operations and computer course.

"About 23,000 students have been trained at this institute since 1974 and many of them are working overseas," said Alamgir Khan, acting principal of the National Hotel and Tourism Institute.

He said language courses

are offered to students to enable them to communicate with foreigners. Chinese, Japanese and French languages are taught in this institute.

"We are also trying to get affiliation to foreign institutes," Alamgir said. Most of the teachers are trained abroad and students get on-job training attachment programme facilities.

The two-year diploma course offered by the BPC is divided into four semesters. During the third semester, the students get the on-job training attachment programme at Sheraton and Sonargaon hotels.

Two groups of students are sent to these two five-star hotels for a six-month professional training.

Tommy Miah's Institute of Hospitality and Management has been operating since last year. Its counsellor Aminur Rahman said they offer four



Training in session at Tommy Miah's Institute of Hospitality Management.

short-term certificate courses on tourism and hospitality management.

"We have a one-year diploma programme also," he said. The institute has about 275 students and the number is increasing, he added.

"Our courses are recognised by the tourism ministry. We will soon get affiliation of some UK institutes for these courses," Aminur said.

Students are getting jobs both at home and abroad catering to staff requirements of the growing international standard hotels in the city.

Heads of the institutes said students have a bright prospect in the job market as there is a huge demand for skilled and semi-skilled caterers and housekeepers in European countries.

A few private universities and training institutes are also offering some special courses on catering and hotel management.