# Uncertain Future

TWENTY-EIGHT year old Fatima came to Dhaka along with her husband after the great flood in the eighties (The year she does not quite remember; but she says at the time of that deluge Ershad was always seen on television). Her husband, who started working as a help in a rickshaw-garage, left her after the birth of their second girl-child. So she really did not have an option when a neighbour offered her one hundred taka and suggested that she could sell boiled-eggs and bread to ricksaw-wallas on Rupnagar main road, near the Shialbari intersection.

Fatima has never heard of Women Empowerment nor does she know how her decision to send both her girl-children to school ("No matter what happens...I do not want them to grow up a feeble woman like their mother.") is going to help boost her beleaguered country's Gross Domestic Product. Even before members of the Rapid Action Battalion, like Death itself, in their menacing black garb turned up and told her to close down her small stall, which consisted of only one clay stove and a pot to boil the eggs, even before that, life, for Fatima, has never been smooth sailing. Law enforcers were a problem: Policemen from nearby thana would turn up, asking for the daily toll, sometimes handing down a ten taka note would not quench their thirst: our men in blue would pick up one or two eggs or a loaf of bread to eat on their way back to the police station; or worse still they would stare at her work in a gaze that she knew was lecherous.

Still, life had a pattern then, Fatima told us, the attack never came on her very livelihood, or the future of her two children, or thousands of women and men like hers.

This is not Fatima's story alone; ten-year-old Razzak, an orphan, had to stop selling candy at Maghbazar intersection because some gun-toting army-men have told him to do so, now this child, raising his emaciated hand, begs to get his day's meal.

The move to clean the roads and footpaths of hawkers (read poor people) may have a cosmetic aspect, it

Evicted hawkers keep their goods on top of a tin shed. Where they will sell them is a question that will plague them day and night.

