

LOST CHILDHOOD

Immediate action needed to stop child labour

AMENA KHATUN AND PANKAJ KARMAKAR

Working hard for over 10 hours a day at a garage, Raju gets only some food in exchange for his work.

Hailing from Shariatpur, the 12-year-old boy has been working as an assistant of a mechanic at the garage in Khilgaon in the city for last three years as a non-paid labourer.

He, however, feels happy when his employer gives him some money on special occasions.

"When Eid comes, my master gives me Tk 200 to 300 to bear my expenses for going home," said Raju.

But the rest of the time he has to live in hardship. Even sometimes his master beat him mercilessly for a silly mistake.

His suffering adds further when his master compelled him to bring drugs for him from nearby areas.

"I wanted to continue my school, but my father wanted me to help the family," he said, with tears rolling down his cheeks.

Another 11-year-old boy Rakib has been working at a CNG station at Malibagh since his father died five years ago.

He is paid Tk 20 for working at least eight hours a day.

His job is very risky as gas may explode anytime if there is any mistake in handling it.

Both Rakib and Raju shared their experiences to The Daily Star at a programme in the city to mark the World Day Against Child Labour on Friday.

There are thousands of children like Raju and Rakib who are engaged in hazardous works with nominal wage or only in exchange for food across the country.

According to a study of Bangladesh Institute of Labour Study (BILS) in 2005, most domestic workers in Mohammadpur and Dhanmondi in the city are children and they work 10.73 hours daily on an average. They do not enjoy any weekly day-off and around 33 percent of total domestic workers sleep on the floor of kitchen room.

The number of child workers is increasing day by day, as most people are living below poverty line. Moreover, the government is not strictly implementing the existing rules.

According to a survey of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) conducted in 2005, there are 79 lakh child workers aged between 5 and 17 years in the country -- 64 lakh in rural areas and 15 lakh in urban areas. Of them, four lakh children are engaged as domestic helps, one of the hazardous work for children.

The survey also said 52 percent of these workers were abused and scolded and 16.7 percent were physically abused.

According to the National Labour Survey 2002-2003, a total of

12.90 lakh children are engaged in hazardous child labour. Of them, 11.70 lakh are boys and 1.20 lakh are girls. Some 6.7 percent of workers are engaged in formal sector while 93.3 percent in various informal sectors.

A research report on the State of Child Labour 2001, Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum and Unicef identified some 430 forms of child labour. Among them, 67 types of work are identified as hazardous, including Bidi factory, match factory and domestic help.

Though the Labour Law 2006 doesn't allow employers to hire workers under 14 years, the reality is that many under-14 children are engaged in various jobs.

According to ILO-Unicef Baseline Survey 2007, a total of 1.47 lakh children aged between 6 and 17 are working as domestic help in the city.

The National Child Labour Policy 2007 finds that the major reasons behind children working in dangerous and hazardous workplaces are poverty and lack of education. Poverty is increasing day by day in our country and education comes way down in the list of priorities, especially to those who do not get enough to eat.

International Labour Organisation (ILO) held a convention in 1999 titled 'ILO Convention No.182' considering the need to adopt new instruments for the prohibition and elimination of the worst form of child labour. Bangladesh ratified the convention in March 2001. But the government is yet to define the worst forms of child labour, which is considered as the first step of elimination of child labour.

The ILO convention no.138 in 1973, concerning minimum age for admission to employment, fixed the minimum age 18 to enter in job for the developed countries and 14 to 16 for developing countries.

The Child Labour Elimination Policy-2008 was drafted during the tenure of the previous caretaker government, but it is yet to be approved.

Talking to The Daily Star, Arun Kanti Aich, joint secretary (labour) of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, said, "The drafted policy is at the final stage of approval in the ministry. After completing our homework, we will send it to the cabinet for approval."

According to the policy, the working children aged between 14 and 18 would be considered as child labour, he said.

At a meeting on Friday, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed said the government would update the existing labour law in order to eliminate child labour from hazardous work.

Ensure quality education

President tells pvt universities

UNB, Dhaka

President Zillur Rahman yesterday underscored the need for ensuring quality of education in private universities.

"Private universities were established as per demand of time, but we must ensure that no one could raise question about their quality of education," he said while speaking at the first convocation of Uttara University at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city.

A total of 1090 students were conferred graduate and postgraduate degrees for the academic year of 2004-2008 of the university.

Masuma Khatun received Chancellor's gold medal for outstanding result in B.Ed.

Saying that research activities are not that much done in the universities these days, President Zillur Rahman emphasised on enhancing research programmes at university level in line with developed world.

"We need to take necessary steps to uphold values among the students as education without values could not be able to contribute in nation-building process," he said.

President urged country's planners, teachers, civil society and implementing agencies to play their role with sincerity to ensure maximum utilisation of resources for implementing the prime minister declared 'charter of change'.

Congratulating the new graduates the president urged them to be committed to their duties and responsibilities throughout their life in the interest of country and its people.

Education, Social Development and Political Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister Dr Alaaddin Ahmed also spoke while Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University AAMS Arefin Siddique gave the convocation speech.

Uttara University Vice Chancellor Dr M Azizur Rahman, Chairman of Board

of Governors Dr M Fazlul Haque and Vice Chairman of Board of Trustee Eaysmin Ara Lekha also spoke.

BDR, BSF meet at Feni

A CORRESPONDENT, Feni

A courtesy meeting was held between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Indian Border Security Force (BSF) near Majumderhat border at Parshuram in Feni yesterday.

Acting Commander of 19 Rifles Battalion Major General Ekramul Kabir Hawlader, Major Shahriar Shams and Major Masud Haider represented the Bangladesh team while DIG of Gokul Nagar Sector in Tripura MN Sajjan Koma and Commanding Officer Lalit Sharma represented the BSF delegation.

Different problems, including smuggling, were discussed in the meeting where both sides assured each other of solving them through mutual cooperation.

Six robbers arrested

A CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

Police arrested six robbers of an inter-district gang and recovered looted goods from them while they were trying to flee after a robbery in Narsingdi yesterday.

The arrested robbers are Sohrab, 35, Sakib, 22, Mizanur Rahman, 25, Nasir, 30, Habil, 30 and Mansur, 35.

Police arrested them from a jute field at Bhagdi Bakultola under Polash upazila on Narsingdi-Gazipur road. Police also seized a microbus used by the robbers and 13 mobile phone sets.

Getting information from the victim of robbery police conducted a raid and arrested the robbers.

A case was filed with Shibpur Police Station in this connection.

Chevron donates incubator to maternity hospital

METRO DESK

Chevron Bangladesh donated an incubator to the Durre Samad Red Crescent Maternity Hospital and 50,000 carrier bags to Mujib-Jahan Red Crescent Blood Centre at a simple ceremony in Sylhet recently.

Marcos Olmedo, finance manager of Chevron Bangladesh, handed over the incubator and carrier bags to the authorities concerned.

The incubator will serve a critical need for the neonatal intensive care unit in the treatment of ill or premature newborn infants, and will provide better temperature support, isolation from infection risks and specialised feeding. The carrier bags will facilitate transportation of the blood bags.

Senior hospital officials and staff, including Vice-Chairman of Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, Sylhet Monsuruzzaman Babul, Director of Sylhet Red Crescent Maternity Hospital and Child Welfare Centre Dr AKM Ahmed Hussain and In-Charge of Mujib-Jahan Red Crescent Blood Centre Dr Md Tareque Mehdi were present.

Chevron's Community Engagement Manager Zulfikar A Chowdhury and other Chevron officials were also present on the occasion.

Monsuruzzaman Babul said, "We have had a dire need of such an incubator for a long time. Chevron's generous donation will now allow us to cater to the needs of premature infants born in this hospital."



Hundreds of vehicles got stuck in a gridlock at Shahbagh in the city yesterday, to make it worse for the city dwellers who have also been suffering from scorching heat.

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Father, daughter among four killed in road crashes

METRO DESK

Four people, including a father and his daughter, were killed in separate road accidents in Chittagong and Barisal yesterday.

Three of them were killed and three others injured in a road accident at Fatikchhari upazila in Chittagong, our staff correspondent in Chittagong reports.

The dead were identified as Md Idris, 60, his daughter Hasna Banu, 24, and Faruq Ahmed, 45.

According to sources, a CNG-run auto-rickshaw collided head-on with a public jeep, locally known as Chander Gari, on Chittagong-Khagrachhari Road at

Kumberpara around 10:30am, killing Idris and his daughter on the spot.

Faruq, who was among the four injured, died in the local health complex at Nazirhat.

The police seized both the auto-rickshaw and the jeep. A case was filed with Fatikchhari Police Station in this connection.

Our Correspondent in Barisal adds: A rickshaw vaulter was killed when a speeding truck ran over him in Goriar Par area on Barisal-Dhaka highway at about 7:00am yesterday.

The police recovered the body of Russel, 25, and sent it to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) morgue for autopsy.

UN rights experts call for fair trial of Suu Kyi

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A group of independent United Nations human rights experts yesterday called on the authorities of Myanmar to ensure an 'open and fair' trial for opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and her two aides.

"So far, the trial of Aung San Suu Kyi and her aides has been marred by flagrant violations of substantive and procedural rights," said Leandro Despouy, special rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers.

The trial has mostly been conducted behind closed doors and the media have been denied access to defence lawyers. "Transparency in the administration of justice is a pre-requisite of any state governed by the rule of law," stressed Despouy.

In addition, the defence team has only been allowed to

present one witness and one more was granted permission to testify, compared with the prosecution which has called 14 witnesses.

"The court must ensure that all witnesses who may have relevant evidence are able to testify," said Despouy, said a report of UN News Centre last night.

Security forces arrested Suu Kyi, who leads the National League for Democracy (NLD), and two aides on May 14 and took them to Insein Prison, where they were charged by a special court.

They are said to have been charged with violating the terms of her house arrest, after an uninformed United States citizen gained access to their home.

She has been under house arrest for more than 13 of the past 19 years, according to a news release issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva.

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Marcos Olmedo, finance manager of Chevron Bangladesh, hands over an incubator to the Durre Samad Red Crescent Maternity Hospital authorities at a simple ceremony in Sylhet recently.

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