



## REELING UNDER WATER

Most parts of the city went under water yesterday following downpour all through the night. 1) The motorcade of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina crosses Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. 2) A child plays in the Ramna Park. 3) Onlookers gather at Hatirheel near Sonargaon Hotel as some people try to catch fish there. 4) Vehicles pass through Arambagh area. 5) A man wades through waist-deep water at Tejgunipara. 6) Residents of Tejgunipara take shelter at Tejgunipara Model High School as the area was inundated by rainwater.

PHOTO: SHAWKAT JAMIL  
ANISUR RAHMAN



## No govt steps to prevent child prostitution

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

An estimated 19,000 children aged below 18 years are engaged in commercial sex and forced to live in inhuman conditions.

Though child prostitution is considered one of the worst forms of child labour as per ILO convention, the government has no mechanism to prevent it. The child sex workers, who ended up in brothels because of grinding poverty or after falling victim to trafficking and dowry, are deprived of basic rights. Moreover, they face constant threats and harassment by local goons, brothel leaders who are known as Sardami, and policemen.

According to a study conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) in 2008, some 45 percent of child sex workers are suffering from sexually transmitted diseases. One fifth of the children are addicted to heroin, ganja, phensidyl and

alcohol.

"This is not a life. We have no dignity, no money and no love. And there is no way to get out of this trap. I drink alcohol just to forget the agonising ordeals I go through everyday," said Parag (name changed), who had been sucked into prostitution when only 15-years-old.

Parag, now 20, has aborted two fetuses in the last five years. Like Parag, there are several girls living in the C&B Ghat brothel in Faridpur, who were forced into prostitution in their childhood. All of them had aborted fetuses once or twice.

The child sex workers are more vulnerable to pelvic inflammatory diseases and also sexually transmitted infections, said Prof Sayeba Akhter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

They also suffer from infertility, chronic pelvic pain and excessive bleeding during their

period throughout their life, she added.

The government has ratified the ILO Convention in 2001 that calls for elimination of the worst forms of child labour. According to the Child Rights Convention (CRC), child prostitution is a punishable crime and it is considered as sexual abuse.

But those who force the children into prostitution go unpunished in most cases.

The real age of many children engaged in commercial sex through legal process was not mentioned in their affidavit and there is no way to challenge it, said Mohuya Leya, programme manager (rights), Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF).

She also said that the affidavit should take place in the presence of magistrate and there should also be facilities for medical test to determine the age of girls. Otherwise these

children would continue to be victimised.

According to a pilot survey titled 'Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children', child sex workers in the registered brothels in metropolitan cities and district and upazila headquarters account for 83 percent of sex workers.

The national survey on 1418 child sex workers also revealed that nine percent of them are transsexuals and eight percent are boys.

Some 27 percent of child sex workers reported that they were arrested by the police several times and 56 percent of them fell victim to repression.

At a programme on May 26, Planning Minister AK Khondokar said there are around 19,000 sex workers aged below 18 years in the country.

But the rights activists said the figure would be much higher. However, no survey was carried out in this regard.

## GRAFT CASE Dr Afzal gets ad interim bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted ad interim bail for six months to Dr Afzal Hossain Raj, son of former adviser to caretaker government Justice Fazlul Huq, in a corruption case filed by the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC).

The HC bench of Justice Syed Muhammad Dastagir Husain and Justice Md Rais Uddin also issued a rule upon the government to explain within four weeks why Afzal should not be granted regular bail in the case.

The court passed the order upon a bail petition filed by Afzal.

His lawyer Advocate Helal Uddin Mollah told The Daily Star that there is no more legal bar to the release of his client from jail following the HC order.

Deputy Attorney General AKM Jahid Sarwar Kajal stood for the ACC.

A Dhaka court recently sent Afzal to jail in the case filed against him for amassing wealth illegally and concealing wealth information to the ACC.

ACC Assistant Director Ibrahim filed the case on September 14 last year with Ramna Model Police Station on charge of concealing information and amassing wealth over Tk 1.40 crore beyond his known sources of income.

On July 19, Afzal surrendered to

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court in Dhaka framed charges against him in the case and sent him to jail when Afzal surrendered to the court on July 19.

## TIPAIMUKH DAM PROJECT 'Adequate info a must before site inspection'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliamentary body must equip itself with adequate information before it embarks on inspection of the proposed Tipaimukh dam project on the cross-border river Barak, said the experts at a seminar in the city yesterday.

An uninformative 'political tourism' venture may help India to justify the project saying that Bangladesh was involved in the dam construction process, they said.

The seminar titled 'Tipaimukh mega dam project: Looking into international river laws, environmental and human security perspective' was organised by the Centre for Human Rights, Development and Human Security (CHRDHS) at Brac Centre Inn.

An unprepared parliamentary body's visit to the project site may bring for India an opportunity to use it as an excuse that Bangladesh was involved in and aware of the project's implementation process, said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, executive director of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA).

"Bangladesh parliamentary delegation should take the

position that India will not proceed any further with the proposed dam until both the parties come to an agreement," she said.

Rizwana said Bangladesh should take a move for a regional water sharing policy along with Nepal, Bhutan, China and other South Asian countries to table it at an international forum.

She said the UN Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourse 1997 requires good neighbourliness of an upper riparian country and sustainable utilisation of an international river.

Utilisation is not all, she said, adding, conservation of a river is equally important.

She said an upper riparian country cannot utilise a cross-boundary river in the name of territorial sovereignty damaging the interest of lower riparian country.

She also referred to Indo-Bangla Ganges Treaty that enshrines the spirit of equality, fairness and no-harm.

BNP Vice President Major (ret'd) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed said during his tenure as water resources minister, he wrote a letter to Indian counterpart on August 11, 2003 asking for

information on the proposed dam.

Three letters including one through the foreign ministry were sent to Indian authorities but no reply was received from them, he added.

Hafiz said there should be massive mobilisation of public opinion irrespective of political affiliation against the proposed dam to put pressure on India.

He said BNP preferred not to join the parliamentary delegation, as there is no impartial expert.

Ana Pinto, executive director of Core in Manipur of India, said there has been no assessment 'to her certain knowledge' on the cumulative impacts of the dam and other infrastructures displacing more than 1300 indigenous families and affecting 100 villages.

According to Pinto, the cost of the project is 8800 crore Indian rupees to generate maximum 15000-megawatt electricity.

Tipaimukh is just one of 1000 such projects in the northeast region, she said.

CHRDHS Executive Director Fazlous Sattar also spoke at the seminar chaired by former adviser to caretaker government Major General (ret'd) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury.

## 1,560 more arrested

UNB, Dhaka

Police arrested 1,560 people on various charges in separate drives across the country in last 24 hours until 6:00am yesterday.

Three home-made bombs, one gun and five bullets were seized during the countrywide drive, said a press release.

Two cases were filed under the Arms Act, it said.

Besides, 106 motorbikes without valid documents were seized during the drive. Some 447 cases were filed in this connection.



PHOTO: PID  
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina speaks at the inaugural session of a Deputy Commissioners' Conference at the International Conference Centre of the PM's Office in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 1)

## 'Take steps to stop child labour at Dublar char'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar yesterday urged the government to take immediate steps to stop seasonal child labour in the fishing sector at Dublar char under Bagerhat which is a flagrant violation of the worst forms of Child Labour Convention 1999.

Terming the employment of children at the char for fishing just 'slavery', they said each year from October to March, the children from destitute family were taken to the char by some unscrupulous fish traders with nominal wages.

It was disclosed that a total of such 67 child labour at the char were missing between 1998 and 2003 and

assumed that tigers, crocodiles, sharks and wild pigs ate them up.

Combating Forced Child Labour (CFCL), a project run by Prodipan, an NGO, and Child Labour Forum organised the seminar on 'Duties to stop child labour at Dublar char' at the National Press Club in the city.

Speaking as the chief guest, Chief Whip Abdus Shahid said it is important to reduce poverty first as it is the main cause of all sorts of social ailments, including child labour.

"Taking advantage of poverty, some unscrupulous goverts, who want to earn money easily, employ children into their businesses or industries providing nomi-

nal wages, but this culture should be stopped through proper application of law," he said.

Shahid also said proper monitoring system with available inspectors should be strengthened which will ensure application of law to reduce child labour from different sectors.

He stressed the need for 100 percent primary education along with incentive programme for all to reduce child labour significantly.

Taking part as the special guest in the programme, Shajahan Khan, chairman of parliamentary standing committee on environment and forest ministry, said there is a huge shortage of inspectors in all sectors to

monitor to find out any violation and take steps accordingly.

"The government is much sincere to fill up such vacant posts, but it is sorry to say that it will take two tenures of the government due to complication of law and bureaucratic tangles," he said.

Shahid stressed the need for formulation of a national children protection policy as well as creating awareness to reduce child labour in the country.

Executive director of Prodipan and general secretary of Child Labour Manju MP, Aniruzzaman Ratan, vice president of CLWF, Mahbubul Alam Tahin, programme manager of WBBTrust.

in fishing industry in char areas, legal obligation for the forest department official to strengthen monitoring system, compulsory submission of birth registration cards for the concerned labour, rehabilitation of recovered child labour and alternative employment of the parents or guardians of the children who engage their children into worst forms of jobs.

Journalist Khairuzzaman Kamal presided over the seminar which was also addressed by Nazrul Islam Manju MP, Aniruzzaman Ratan, vice president of CLWF, Mahbubul Alam Tahin, programme manager of WBBTrust.

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