



## 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 Hatirjheel 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 Tejkunipara. 6) Residents of Tejkunipara take shelter at Tejkunipara 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 Sardarni, 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, phenidyl 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 sexworkers.

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.

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