

'Human trafficking is a \$32 bn worldwide business'

Afsana Khatun, a 15-year-old Muslim girl from Kolkata's Kidderpore area, has never met 13-year-old Rakesh who works for 18 hours in a Punjab village like a slave after he was trafficked from his native village in Bihar.

But on Sunday, Afsana will march with thousands of others from [Kolkata](#) so that Rakesh and other boys and girls of his age who are trafficked every day are not enslaved in a stone quarry or a red light area forever.

'I will walk because of other children of my age who are forced into hard labour or prostitution. Even in my area I work to stop trafficking. I will raise my voice against this evil,' said Afsana, who works with Apne Aap Women's Worldwide here.

'Trafficking is a \$32 billion business worldwide, especially of women forced into prostitution. Of this about \$12 to \$14 billion is a turnover from child trafficking,' said Kailash Satyarthi, chairperson of Global March Against Child Labour and founder of the BBA (Bachpan Bachao Andolan), organisers of the South Asian March Against Child Trafficking.

Organised by BBA and a host of other non-government organisations, the march will end in [New Delhi](#) March 22 after nearly a 25-day-long campaign to sensitise people about child trafficking, especially of girls who are forced into prostitution.

The march involves mostly people from India, besides Nepal and Bangladesh. It kicks off from the city Sunday.

'The march is important because as we live smug in our own world boys and girls are being trafficked. There has to be a mental and attitudinal shift in all of us about the issue of trafficking. My public domain may be acting but that is only one-third of me. We all have to chip in with our bit by either writing or talking about it or stopping in our homes,' said actor and social activist Nandita Das.

'It is an extremely connected issue. I was watching a news report on TV the other day where a small girl was being forced to marry while the media person was filming the whole thing. I was shocked. We cannot live in islands and have to think about these and do something,' Nandita told IANS.

'I express my solidarity with this movement. Though I have to leave for Pakistan for a film shooting, I am very much with the movement,' she said.

Approximately a billion marchers, nearly half of whom are children and youth who were themselves victims of trafficking, will criss-cross cities, villages and hamlets and cover 100 km every day during the march.

At least two mass public meetings would be held everyday in schools, colleges and academic institutions while local mosques, temples, churches and gurdwaras would be encouraged to host the core marchers at every place, said Satyarthi.

The march will span 2,500 km for 20 to 25 days, he said telling people the need for a law to prevent human trafficking.

'A new law is needed to curb and prosecute the traffickers. There is a law for trafficking only for commercial sexual exploitation and not for other as serious aspects of trafficking like forced labour, etc,' Satyarthi said.

'The objective of this march is to build a mass movement against child trafficking and forced labour. There is no regional protocol to prohibit trafficking. We would march to make the government answerable and people aware,' he said.

'To start the march from Kolkata is significant and appropriate since West Bengal is both a transit point for trafficking as well as a source state,' said Indrani Sinha of Sanlaap.

Organisations like Women's Interlink Foundation, Apne Aap, Sanlaap and UN agencies like the UN Development Fund for Women, among others, are taking part in the march.

Sujoy Dhar (© IANS / India eNews)