

# HUMILIATED AND INSULTED

ANANTA YUSUF

Rina Akther, a 16 year-old domestic worker begins her day at the break of dawn. She has been working in the same house in Niketon for the last six months and has never received a day off since the beginning of her employment. "Before working here I worked at a house in Dhanmondi," she says. "The employer used to beat me every day for the smallest mistakes. At least, here my employer does not act that way."

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), domestic work is the earliest form of employment for millions of women around the world. However, they remain outside the protection of a legal framework in Bangladesh. The sad

part is, the only existing law "Domestic Servants' Registration Ordinance, 1961" was ignored during the enforcement of the Labour Law in 2006.

In absence of legal direction and appropriate laws, workers are hired at cheaper rates and often abused. Rina gets Tk 1500 per month but works for around 12 hours every day. According to the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), a labour rights organisation, 398 workers were brutally killed between 2011 and 2014. In addition, 399 workers were physically abused and tortured.

Well-educated upper and middle class families cannot avoid the responsibility of not taking any positive steps to change the

existing situation. Mostafiz Ahmed, an associate professor of Social Work Department, Jagannath University, writes in his research paper, 'Organising Domestic Workers in Bangladesh', that the mindset of law-makers and policy-makers toward domestic workers and the less organised nature of the labour force are the two most important reasons behind exclusion of these workers from the existing labour law.

His research further states that most employers believe that domestic workers working at homes have a better life than they would have if they remained in their respected villages - a way to justify their actions. Bangladesh had begun to work

## THE STATE OF DOMESTIC WORKERS IN NUMBERS

- 50 percent of domestic workers are children aged 5-15 years.
- 76.67 percent of all domestic workers are women.
- 50.8 percent of the domestic workers have never attended school.
- 40 percent workers have primary level education.
- 100 percent of these workers claim that there is no formal or written agreement with the employer.
- 10.73 hours: domestic workers work on an average per day.
- 63.33 percent do not get any leave from their employers.
- 13.33 percent domestic workers enjoy regular leave.
- 53.3 percent do not get their wages after the completion of their wage period.

SOURCE: BANGLADESH INSTITUTE OF LABOUR STUDIES- BILS

on a national policy for domestic workers three years back. The draft policy is yet to be finalised and it might take a few more months to come into light. Even though activists appreciate the initiative, they also criticise the government for erasing important points like registration and minimum wage.

However, a legal framework alone cannot bring about a change in this situation unless there is a mass campaign in favour of domestic workers across the country. Besides building a legal framework, the government should start working with labour rights activists to change people's attitude toward domestic workers. ■



PHOTO: STAR FILE

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## STAR DINARY

Two days after the Pahela Baishakh incident this year, I was crossing a foot-bridge to go to work near Farmgate. Not that it matters, but I was dressed in jeans, a fatua and had covered myself with a large scarf. As I was crossing, two young boys came towards me from the other side and as they passed me one of them said, "Shikkha hoy nai? Ki porsish eshob?" (Haven't you learned your lesson? What are you wearing?), they also called me a name I will not mention here but you can use your imagination. It pissed me off so much I started screaming at them to stop, but they made a run for it. There were two police officers standing close by and I asked them to help me stop them, but instead they asked me to calm down and let it go. I have been harassed on this bridge before, but it is the only way I can get to work without spending an extra 40 minutes in traffic, so I have been putting up with it, but after what happened in TSC I really think ignoring these monsters just encourages them more. So, I have started carrying a huge iron rod with me when I go to work, I make sure I carry it over my shoulder for everyone to see and so far it has worked. I don't hear one comment and haven't been groped a single time I have crossed that bridge. I encourage other women to do the same.

AH  
Gulshan, Dhaka

## A TEMPORARY SOLUTION

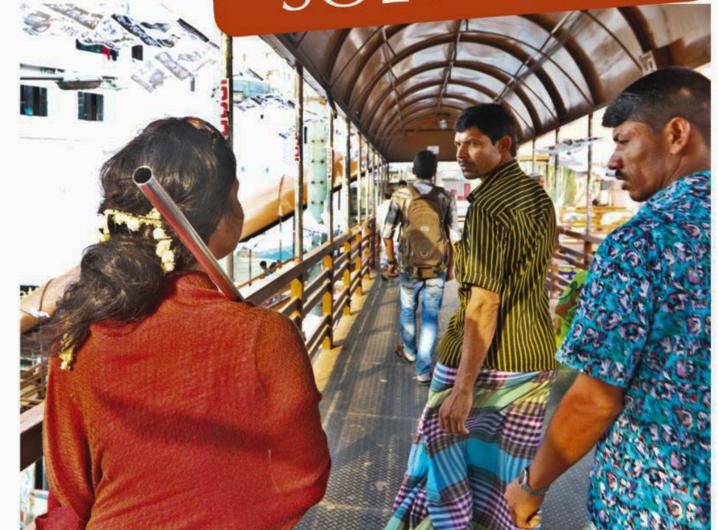
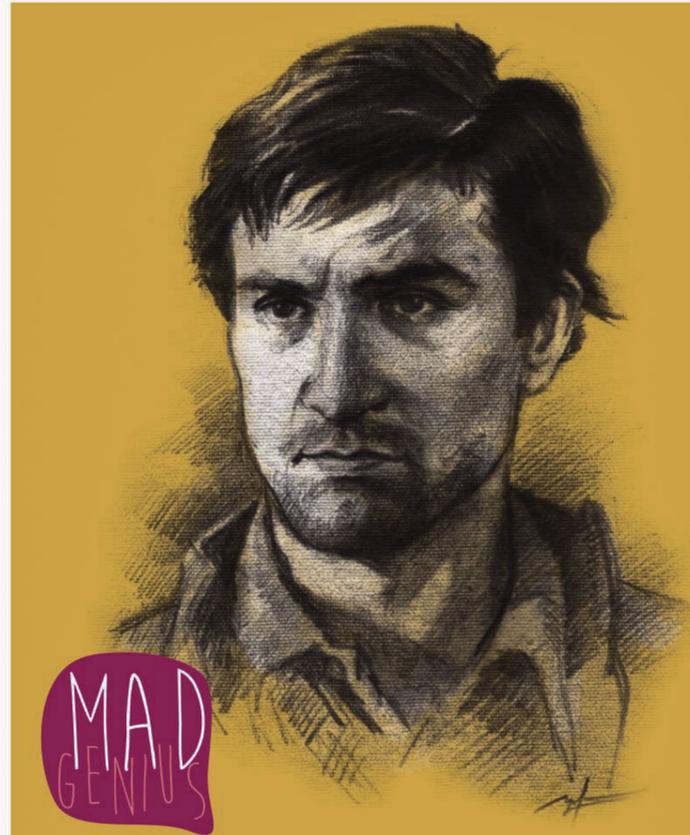


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



SKETCH: YARIZ SIDDIQUI

## MAD GENIUS

### ROBERT DE NIRO

August 17, 1943

Appeared in over 90 films, an American actor and film producer Robert De Niro is famous for his role as young Vito Corleone in *The Godfather Part II* (1974). In 1974, after being turned down for the role of Sonny Corleone in the crime film *The Godfather* (1972), the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor. De Niro's long time collaboration with director Martin Scorsese later earned him an Academy Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of Jake LaMotta in the 1980 film *Raging Bull*. De Niro gained 27 kg and learned how to box for his role as Jake LaMotta in *Raging Bull*.

"LONELINESS HAS FOLLOWED ME MY WHOLE LIFE. EVERYWHERE. IN BARS, IN CARS, SIDEWALKS, STORES, EVERYWHERE. THERE'S NO ESCAPE. I'M GOD'S LONELY MAN."

YOU'LL HAVE TIME TO REST WHEN YOU'RE DEAD.

MONEY MAKES YOUR LIFE EASIER. IF YOU'RE LUCKY TO HAVE IT, YOU'RE LUCKY.

THE HARDEST THING ABOUT BEING FAMOUS IS THAT PEOPLE ARE ALWAYS NICE TO YOU."

### ACADEMY AWARDS

YEAR	CATEGORY	FILM	RESULT
1974	Best Supporting Actor	The Godfather: Part II	Won
1976	Best Actor	Taxi Driver	Nominated
1978	Best Actor	The Deer Hunter	Nominated
1980	Best Actor	Raging Bull	Won
1990	Best Actor	Awakenings	Nominated
1991	Best Actor	Cape Fear	Nominated
2012	Best Supporting Actor	Silver Linings Playbook	Nominated

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA AND BRAINY QUOTES

## IT STARTS EARLY

My daughter studies in class 5, in a well reputed school in Dhanmondi. For the past few weeks she had been very upset after school and unusually quiet which concerned my husband and I quite a bit. We asked her repeatedly what was wrong but she wouldn't tell us. So finally, I started calling her teachers and classmates, making inquiries. What I learned from her friends was terrible. A few of the boys in her class were teasing her about her body, talking about her breasts and making sexual innuendos which humiliated her. I was shocked because I never imagined children that young to know and do such things, but it made me realise the world has changed since I was young. Children are exposed to so much more these days. What surprised me was the harassment. All the children in this school come from similar respectable family backgrounds, so where did these boys learn to harass girls at such a young age? I decided to write a letter to the school and call the parents of these boys. They were all equally shocked and promised to take appropriate action. I decided to change her school anyway.

Mom  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

