

Child domestic worker allegedly raped and killed

Ensure proper investigation and justice

THE alleged rape and murder of yet another teenaged domestic worker, Mussammat Jonia, in Mirpur is testament to the vulnerability of girl children working in households. The 15-year-old had been filling in for her mother at the home of an official. The circumstances surrounding her death, apparently after falling from the terrace of the building, are mysterious.

The family of the dead child have alleged that when they tried to lodge a general diary stating that it was a murder after rape, the officials concerned recorded it as 'an unnatural death'. The post mortem report is yet to be released.

The frequent incidence of torture, sexual abuse and murder of minor domestic workers calls for a concerted movement to ensure the safety of these children. The government must take steps to protect the rights of domestic workers with particular attention to those who are minors. It is a shame that as a society, we have failed to recognise the valuable contributions of domestic workers, who provide comfort and care to the more privileged. Instead, many respected citizens of the country treat their household help like slaves, with contempt and even brutality. It is about time that we as a society, raise awareness about the violations of human rights that occur within households. The government, legal experts, activists and all sections of the society must work together to stop these crimes.

We hope the police department will make all efforts to carry out a vigorous and swift investigation to establish the truth behind Jonia's death. Too many times we have seen perpetrators of such crimes go scot free because of influence and money. We fervently hope this will not be the case here.

Save the Pyain River!

Local administration has a role

THIS paper has always been a strong voice against the destruction of rivers. We have highlighted in the past and continue to do so the plight of rivers nationwide, where unscrupulous business interests undermine rivers, which have continued to dwindle in the face of unmitigated dumping of toxic effluents from factories, relentless dredging and deliberate land fill, all in the face of a hands off policy by authorities concerned. What is happening over the Pyain River in Jafflong of Sylhet district is no exception. Stone traders have built a wooden bridge at one section of the river to facilitate faster movement of stone-carrying trucks.

According to a report published in this paper in December, 2015 the activity is illegal whereby excavators are being used to extract stones, and one which is in violation of a High Court verdict. All over the country it is the same story when it comes to the destruction of rivers. We find syndicates at work that converge interests of unscrupulous business entities, a section of the local administration and the blessing of local strongmen. That the local administration has turned a blind eye to a HC order in itself is shocking.

Regrettably the once pristine Pyain River has effectively been turned into a stone quarry and leading to environmental degradation. Such wilful violation of the law demands action and we expect authorities to act as the activity is contributing to not only the destruction of the river but also the obliteration of hundreds of acres of tea estates due to indiscriminate extraction of stones from the river bed.

COMMENTS

“Muhith fumes at central bank”

(March 14, 2016)

Adel

Nowadays, even a small transaction is followed-up by SMS. Why was no message generated following this huge transaction? We knew about this through Philippines' media. Otherwise we would still be in the dark!

“Auto-rickshaw strike: City people suffer badly”

(March 14, 2016)

Kingshuk

These 3-wheeler drivers harass the commuters each and every day. Is

The List of Shame

KNOT SO TRUE



RUBANA HUQ

HE stood there at the reception, with a sling bag filled with documents. He worked for a courier company. He was 10 years old. He was handsome. And he had the brightest eyes I had ever seen before. His name was Al-Amin. He had a mother who lived in the village, who did nothing, and yet received Tk. 1,000 from her 10-year old son every month without fail. Al-Amin earned Tk. 2,000 from his employers, sent half of his salary to his mother and kept the rest for himself in order to get through the month. He had studied only up to class three and had totally given up on the thought of going back to school. But he wanted to if given a chance. So when given the option to go back to school and have his mother employed at a garment factory, he bounced back. My next thoughts centered around the social rules of “compliance”. As readymade garment manufacturers, we are not supposed to have “any” trace of child labour linked to the supply chain. If that child were to continue delivering the parcels to our office, I would have to be transparent about it and share it with all concerned. My meeting with Al-Amin, therefore, ended on that note of concern. A week later, Al-Amin returned with his mother, quite fit and young, who, quite surprisingly, expressed her inability to work in a garment factory. I was shocked and dug a little deeper. She refused to budge and insisted that it would be “difficult” for her to work at this stage of her life. Here was a mother who was willing to allow her ten-year old to work and earn for her. Having left with no other alternative arrangement, Al-Amin was offered to be enrolled in a free school, meant for workers' children, and receive a monthly amount of Tk. 2,000 and live and eat at a safe place. I was relieved. After all, saving even one Al-Amin would ease my conscience for the day. Unfortunately, my relief did not last for long, as my daughter informed me yesterday that she had spotted Al-Amin delivering the parcels last afternoon. My heart sank. Not again! But then this is the reality. Al-Amin must have gone to school in the morning, seized the opportunity to do an afternoon job, earn a little and then returned to his designated safe haven at night.

Now, how do we make sure that we won't employ a child? How do we make sure that the same child will go to school? How do we make sure that a few of us spot a few Al-Amins every now and then? How do we make sure that our children remain safe out in the streets? How do we make sure that our children don't go hungry?

1,730 children faced abuse in Bangladesh in the last two years. RAB reports 35 children being killed in August 2014, along with 25

being killed over the two months of September and October of the same year. 968 kids were tortured and killed over a period of three and a half years between late 2011 and mid 2015. According to Ain-o-Salish-Kendra (ASK), 126 children were killed in 2012, 128 in 2013, 127 in 2014, and 69 till July 2015. In between July and August the same year, 13 had been brutally killed, and last but not the least, there was a 61 percent increase in the murder of kids in 2015.

The cycle of violence is on the rise. Starting from July 8, 2015, when Rajan was murdered with the video circulating in the whole of the social media sphere to the August 3, 2015 incident of Rakib in Khulna being tortured to death with a compressor machine pumping air through his back;

recently, from Rabiul Awal, an 11-year old's eyes being gauged in Barguna while being accused of stealing fish, from Zahid Hassan (15) and Imon Ali(13) being tortured for apparently having stolen cell phones in Rajshahi on February 12, 2016 to many others who go unreported and unlisted.

Cruelty has no bars. The acts of many of these tortures are videoed and shared on Facebook. Almost 13 million Facebook users have access to these tales of brutality in Bangladesh. According to the report of World Justice Project, Bangladesh ranks 93 out of the 102 countries being surveyed - only Afghanistan and Pakistan in South Asia rank worse than Bangladesh - in terms of justice. The Children Act 2013 has no definite law relating to the murder of children. But fortunately, death penalties and life



PHOTO: STAR

Nazim being mercilessly beaten up in Khilkhet with a metal rod being inserted to his back in Dhaka on April 13, 2015; Abdullah from Keraniganj being abducted and killed in February 2016, with Solaiman having the same being done to him in Gazipur; two children being poisoned to death in Pabna by their own mother; the Banasri kids being killed by their own mother, Mahfuza Malek, on February 29, 2016; the list just sits there, gets longer, stretches to a point of shame beyond tolerance, and pleads with us to immediately react, resist and protest the brutalities.

The extent of brutality stretches from the 64 bruise marks on the fourteen year old Rajan's body, to the body of an unidentified kid being dumped in a suitcase bearing burnt marks left near Dhaka Medical College

imprisonments are now being awarded to such culprits.

My fear is that with so many tales of brutality, we may find it increasingly difficult to read the newspapers, watch the news and maybe we may all just helplessly look away. Before we reach that level, let's arrest the desensitisation...If there's a child being employed by your neighbour, report it; if there's a child walking in your sector, stop it; if there's a child you spot being harassed or tortured, confront the abuser; if there's a child who's gone hungry, spare a meal. Every little kid walking on the street is ours. Their rights equal the rights of our own children. After all, the bar of conscience needs to be raised to a considerable level in this country.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

Using smarter stoves to combat household air pollution

BJORN LOMBORG

WHEN it comes to cooking indoors over open fires, the harmful health effects can be equal to smoking two packs of cigarettes a day. This indoor air pollution plagues nearly nine out of every 10 Bangladeshi households, which use wood and other biofuels to cook inside.

Over time, exposure to smoke from indoor cooking leads to deadly diseases such as lung cancer, stroke, and heart disease. This is why it's the most deadly environmental problem in the world. In Bangladesh, such indoor air pollution is responsible for 10-15 percent of all deaths.

It may seem obvious to say that we need to focus on cutting household air pollution. But such policies compete with many other potentially beneficial proposals for how to use scarce resources from the national budget or international stakeholders.

So what are the very best policies? This is what the Bangladesh Priorities - a cooperation with BRAC and dozens of the world's top economists - promises to help answer.

Our research suggests two principal ways to help decrease deadly air pollution inside the home: People could either burn the same biofuels that most Bangladeshi households currently use, but with smarter cook stoves that emit much less pollution, or

they could change to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), which burns much more cleanly.

The cheapest way to quality indoor air is to get widespread investment in an improved biomass cook stove. This is simply an enclosed stove, often with a chimney, that reduces heat loss, protects against the wind, and transfers heat to a cooking pot more efficiently than traditional stoves or open fires. It burns the fuel - often biomass - more effectively and hence with less pollution. In Bangladesh, the cost of such a stove with two burners and a chimney that will last three years is about Tk. 1,000 per year. This is both to cover the aggregate that needs replacement every third year, as well as some maintenance. And almost a third of the cost goes to promoting awareness of the opportunity in the first place.

But the benefits are many. If all 30 million households switched to improved cook stoves, it would save more than 33,000 lives each year. Each life will live on average another 28 years, which is worth about Tk. 79 billion or Tk. 2,600 per household each year. Moreover, each family will get slightly fewer sick days, worth another Tk. 260.

But the families would also save 15 minutes per day in cooking time, because the improved cook stoves are faster, and because less fuel is needed, it will reduce fuel collection time by half each day. In total, that benefit is worth another Tk. 2,000. For each Tk.

1,000 spent on a better cook stove, a family will get almost Tk. 5,000 in health and time savings benefits: every taka spent will do Tk. 5 of good.

This is an important step to improve household air quality. But it still leaves most of the problem in place - we will “only” save 33,000 of 150,000 deaths each year.

That is why we could consider a more thorough option. LPG burns very clean - almost like an electric stove. Adoption of these stoves would produce much higher benefits: it would save 91,000 lives, a total value of Tk. 218 billion, or Tk. 7,300 per household. It would also avoid some Tk. 700 of disease per household, speed up cooking by 40 minutes, and save all fuel collection time, at a net worth of Tk. 5,200.

But, the cost of LPG is also significantly higher. It would cost about Tk. 10,000 each year, plus Tk. 2,000 in cooking fuel costs. In total, you would pay about Tk. 12,000 for about Tk.13,200 in benefits. So spending on LPG stoves would not be a loss.

This shows that the most expensive option is not necessarily the best option. Cheaper options, despite helping less, can be a much better way to help everyone. In the long term, however, the more expensive options can be solutions. Many countries at similar income levels as Bangladesh have adopted modern cooking fuels such as LPG at substantially higher rates.

But there are challenges to implementing smarter stoves. With some prior efforts, it has proven difficult to get households to adopt new stoves. And widespread adoption is crucial given the community-based nature of fighting air pollution. If not everyone in a community adopt improved cook stoves, there would be more local air pollution leading to fewer benefits.

Well-targeted information campaigns about the benefits of cleaner cook stoves could help spread the message about their benefits, and projects should also tailor stoves to customers' preferences. And, ideally, households would be allowed to pay for stoves over the course of multiple installments, making them more affordable.

Last week you saw how poverty policies can help do Tk. 2 of good for each taka spent. Making cook stoves cleaner can help fight household air pollution with about Tk. 5 of good for every taka spent. Are these some of the best investments for Bangladesh? Let your voice be heard on facebook.com/dailystarnews. Let's start the conversation about where Bangladesh can do the most good.

The writer is president of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, ranking the smartest solutions to the world's biggest problems by cost-benefit. He was ranked one of the world's 100 most influential people by Time magazine.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Stop construction of Rampal power plant

The Rampal power plant could increase chances of a catastrophic spill, a concern brought home in 2014 when an oil tanker spilled 75,000 gallons into the fragile ecosystem of the Sunderbans. People from all walks of life must compel the government to drop the plans of setting up the Rampal power plant.

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Is ICC being just?

It is really unfortunate that ace fast bowler Taskin Ahmed and spinner Arafat Sunny are under radar for “suspicious” bowling actions. Apparently both of them may have to report in Chennai if the umpires and match officials think that there's something wrong with their bowling action. But many cricket lovers think that ICC should rather take a closer look at India's new fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah who has one of the most unorthodox bowling styles.

ICC should treat its member countries equally and not play the game of discrimination.

Muhtashim Uddin Ahmed
Dhanmondi, Dhaka



Lousy security check at airport

On March 6, 2016, while the nation was glued to the TV set to watch the Asia Cup T20 final, I was at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to catch a flight abroad.

It was a scene that resembled Dante's Inferno. There were at least three or four flights going out at the same time. But just one scanner was being used for checking the passengers' luggage. In the thunder, rain and lightning that were going on outside, hundreds of passengers were made to wait with their luggage in pouring rain jostling just to get inside.

This is not the way to treat passengers. How come we have just one scanning machine at our main airport?

Engr. ABM Nurul Islam
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