

Lessons from Aduri's ordeal



NO STRINGS ATTACHED
Aasha Mehreen Amin

TUESDAY'S verdict by a special court in Dhaka, which sentenced Nawrin Jahan Nodi to life imprisonment for torturing an 11-year-old domestic help, Aduri, and dumping her into a dustbin awaiting death was dead. This is because while we often get the news of the abuse of child domestic workers from the media, it is rare to hear about the abuser being punished, let alone given a harsh sentence by the court. And we know why this is so. The social status of the employer or a relative of the employer or a relative of the employee makes a certain kind of immunity against legal action being taken. Human rights lawyers have often expressed their frustration at the inevitable out-of-court settlements that the victim's family agrees to – out of fear of repercussions and because they do not believe they will actually get justice. Parents send their children to work in houses because they cannot afford to feed them. They also think that their children will live in a safe, respectable environment. Until their children are left broken by their employers.

This time, however, the persistent efforts of BNWLA (Bangladesh National Women Lawyers

Association), a human rights and legal aid organisation, as well as the extensive coverage of the electronic and print media, paid off and resulted in Aduri, now a teenager, getting justice. The 2013 images of an emaciated Aduri, her eyes vacant and her face and body displaying the gruesome wounds left by her employer, evoked shock and disgust among people. But sadly, until Tuesday, most of us had forgotten about Aduri and her nightmarish ordeal. Because there have been so many other cases after Aduri, of children working in households being subject to the worst kinds of physical torture. And in most of these cases, after the initial sensation created by the horrific details and images, we sit down and everybody forgets about that child who will never forget the nightmare of being at the mercy of a sadistic stranger. The news of this groundbreaking verdict has reminded us once again of the extent of cruelty human beings are capable of.

The details of Aduri's case are sickening. It indicates a systematic torture of a child by a monster in the guise of a middle-class housewife. Eleven-year-old Aduri was allowed only one meal a day – some puffed rice or rice with salt – at night. But being practically starved was a mild form of abuse compared to what Nawrin Jahan Nodi did to this child. According to Aduri, Nawrin would torture her on a regular basis. She would cut Aduri's face, scalp and



after four years in her mother's care, the child is visibly traumatised. She is no longer emaciated but her face has the deep scars of the horridity she has experienced. She still has nightmares in which Nawrin continues to torture her.

It is shocking when we read news of such savagery or watch it on television. But why are we so surprised? Have we not heard of people beating up their child domestic worker? It has happened among our relatives, in our innermost circles – even within our own households. We may not be direct abusers but in many cases we are silent spectators, not wanting to disrupt the status quo or be at odds with people from our own social status. The fact that Aduri had to be dumped half dead into a dustbin for the nation to know about her ordeal and then for the court to sentence her torturer, is ample proof of the implicit complicity within privileged classes that overlooks abuses committed by one of their own. The victims, after all, are just domestic workers, they are from the voiceless, powerless, representation-less section of society. They are dispensable and of no consequence.

If this is not how it is, then why didn't anyone stop this monster? What was her husband, her mother, doing when it was obvious that the child had been abused? Were they active participants or silent bystanders? Did no one, not a single

SOURCE: SERENITYTALK.BLOG

parts of her body with a blade, burn her with a hot iron or heated spatula, beat her with sticks and so on. One day, when it seemed Aduri had succumbed to her wounds, Nawrin

dumped her in a dustbin – the ultimate manifestation of her contempt for a child whose only crime was that she was poor, helpless and had no way of escaping. Even

Seeing colours in Korail

EFADUL HUQ

THE Daily Star recently reported that at least 20 utilities "syndicates" are operating in Korail slum. The local police and several government bodies are also involved in the distribution scheme. For those not familiar with Dhaka's informal settlements, the details are alarming. The syndicates are associations of local residents who take on roles such as "lineman, rent collector, and manager," providing utilities in negotiated turf areas. Police officers and government utility employees take bribes to help establish and run the "unauthorised services."

These local utility associations provide at least 10,000 gas connections and 15,000 water and electricity connections to people living in Korail while making around Tk 1.5 crore per month in profit which goes into bribing government officials. Given the turf-based operational scheme, the slum occasionally experiences violent turf wars among the syndicates. The government officials interviewed referred to the utilities connections as dangerous, and one official went on to say that "he had lost count of how many times they have snapped illegal gas connections at Korail slum." All in all, Korail slum appears to be a criminal stronghold beyond the regulatory control of the government.

In public opinion, slums are often perceived as sites for hijacking, smuggling, drug dealing and other antisocial activities. The report on informal utilities providers seems to strengthen that perception and justify the eviction of Korail residents as an anti-social activity. As the government moves forward with the plan for a high-tech park development in Korail, the fear of eviction, either by fire or force, looms large in the minds of the slum residents. To avoid lending credibility to the criminalisation of slum inhabitants and rationalising evictions, even as we face the facts, we must step back and pay closer attention to Korail's context.

Korail slum is home to at least 100,000 citizens who work in diverse

sectors in the city. Without getting into the complicated push-and-pull factors that bring more than 70 people per hour to Dhaka, and the vulnerabilities of a slum life, we can say that the residents of Korail slum are facing a chain of social and economic precariousness. According to a 2014 government census, the majority of Dhaka's slum residents are garment workers, rickshaw pullers, domestic helps, construction and labour workers, small business owners and service sector employees, students and housewives. It is noteworthy that the survey does not mention any slum residents engaged in criminal activities as their occupation. The employment profile is similar in case of Korail. In other words, Korail residents constitute a significant section of the urban workforce that runs the city.

Understandably, when thousands of people live in a place, they are going to need gas, water, and electricity, and as citizens, they have the right to access these utilities. Since the responsible government bodies don't provide sufficient connections, private associations arrange for the required utility infrastructure. In Korail, these are borne dependent on unauthorised and unsafe utility grids. This is not just a story of "syndicates" operating and making huge profits out of informal utilities in Korail. Nor is it a story of turf wars resulting in violence. This is a story of organised associations without the know-how and resources for safety, making basic utilities accessible to thousands of citizens. This is also a story of how Korail inhabitants have to pay exorbitant amounts to access the basic elements of urban life, making their per square foot housing cost more than the housing cost in affluent neighbourhoods.

If formal utilities connections were made available to slum residents, they wouldn't have need for illegal connections, and as citizens, particularly as informal utilities require bribing government officials involve hazardous and unreliable connections, and result in violence that disrupts the social fabric of slum residents, who have a rightful claim to public resources. The absence of an

institutional response to realise their rights compels them to meet their basic needs. The problem then is not that there are "illegal connections" in Korail but that the relevant government bodies—WASA, DESCOS, and Titas Gas—don't provide utilities for Korail's residents. The problem is not that "goons are eating away public resources," but that working citizens inhabiting slums are not

strategy failed. They then took a community-based approach where instead of snapping illegal lines, they set up a system to understand the needs of slum-dwelling citizens and informed them about the importance of safety and reliability of formal connections. The number of legal utilities connections jumped manifold in a year.

In fact, research exists specifically about the electricity access in Korail

slum citizens would be able to make their recommendation a reality.

To the proposal for community-centred utilities and housing planning in Korail slum, we might add the urgency to explore the potential for providing sustainable utilities. While countries like China, Japan, India, and Germany are shifting to renewable energy.

Bangladesh is aggressively pursuing a fossil fuel-based energy policy as

neighbour, hear the shrill cries or mournful groans of that little child she is laying writhing in pain in the veranda where she lies.

These are uncomfortable questions but ones that we must answer. As a society we are all part of this shame – the government for not banning child domestic labour which, by definition, should fall under hazardous work, the legal system that has too many loopholes for abusers to go scot-free, individuals who think nothing of making a child do adult work and depriving her/him of school, absence of laws to specifically protect child domestic workers' rights and all those of us who do absolutely nothing when a child worker gets hit, cursed or treated with utter disrespect and negligence. We can no longer feel good about ourselves by saying we are not like Nawrin or any of those other members of so called "respectable society" who have displayed their basest instincts and got caught.

Yes, we are measured by the verdict that has given justice to this brave child. But this is just one case. Children, especially from marginalised groups, are vulnerable to all kinds of abuse in our society, and when they are confined to households as domestic help, they are doubly vulnerable. If we cannot reverse this frightening reality we will have failed as members of the human race.

Aasha Mehreen Amin is Deputy Editor, Editorial and Opinion, The Daily Star.



There may be colourful possibilities under grey appearances. Korail slum doesn't present government authorities with a challenge to get rid of criminal activities but rather to help citizens of this city access affordable, reliable, and sustainable utilities.

PHOTO: MUNIR UZ ZAMAN/APP

receiving accessible, reliable, and affordable utilities.

The Daily Star article reported that the authorities carry out drives against illegal connections instead of providing utilities for all Korail residents. It is unsurprising that utility officials have seen no result in snapping connections. Global experience with informal utilities connections show that snapping connections doesn't impact the operation of informal utility associations. This, for example, is the case of Kenya Power and Lighting Corporation and its project in one of the largest slums in the world. Their project started in Kibera, Nairobi, and early in their work, Kenya Power was taking down unauthorised connections. The

slum. In a 2014 study, two researchers found that the illegal status of Korail slum is a major barrier to electricity access. In their detailed list of recommendations, they identified giving Korail slum "the authorisation of permanent status" as a first step. An on-site rehabilitation project, developed and implemented through community participation, for Korail

slum citizens would be able to make their recommendation a reality.

To the proposal for community-centred utilities and housing planning in Korail slum, we might add the urgency to explore the potential for providing sustainable utilities. While countries like China, Japan, India, and Germany are shifting to renewable energy.

Bangladesh is aggressively pursuing a fossil fuel-based energy policy as

environment also impacts the health and livelihood of vulnerable populations in numerous ways. So it is expected that providing formal utilities to the slum residents will coincide with a transition to renewable energy through community-controlled development projects. Establishing a local infrastructure of renewable energy resources would be a step in the direction of sustainable development.

Bangladesh, and such a project would lower household energy cost in the long run while creating jobs for the community members.

During this year's G20 summit, "zombie" protesters took to streets in Hamburg. Covered in clay, the performance artists staggered and crawled along until one of them rubbed his eyes, unbuckled his dusty grey shirt revealing the colour inside, and "came alive." He then went around waking up other zombies. The awakened performers got rid of their dirty grey attire and danced together. Similar to working our way through Dhaka city everyday, it is possible that we also stagger through the streets—past the slums, through the traffic congestions, past the filled-up water bodies. It is possible that in many cases, we undergo a feeling of catastrophe after catastrophe.

Just as we reach this point, we could recall the G20 zombie performance as a reminder that there may be colourful possibilities under grey appearances, that there may be another Dhaka city everyday in Dhaka we inhabit. Korail slum does not present the authorities with a challenge to get rid of criminal activities but we need to recognise the right of the residents to access affordable, reliable, and sustainable utilities.

EFADUL HUQ is a doctoral student in urban and regional planning at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

www.bsr.com

We are the country's pioneering steel manufacturing company operating since 1952 with a track record of serving the construction industry with innovative, cost-efficient, best quality steel products. **BSRM** currently stands tall in the minds of the people of Bangladesh as a brand and a corporate house that is synonymous with Strength, Safety and Sustainability. The company has always sought the most talented and ambitious people to lead it in an ever changing world with new challenges in the horizon.

Post-Graduation in any discipline, PGDHMR or PGDPM will be given preference. Minimum 10 years working experience in any manufacturing unit. Incumbent should have experience in implementation of ISO 9001:2015 & 14001:2015. Also capable to handle labour union with vast knowledge on Bangladeshi labour law 2006.

B.Sc. in Mechanical Engineering having 10 years experience in similar field. Incumbent will be responsible for planning, monitoring and maintaining mechanical equipment in the plant. Sound knowledge and understanding mechanical characteristics, usages of the machine and requirements of schedule / preventive / predictive maintenance for melting rolling application is required.

B.Sc. in Materials & Metallurgical Engineering from BUET with minimum 05 years working experience in any steel melting plant. Sound knowledge on IF, LRF/CCM functions, Production process & utilization, Operation & Maintenance is required.

B.Sc. in Electrical Engineering having 08 years experience in similar field. Incumbent will be responsible for maintenance of Electrical Equipments as per schedule and requirement in the plant. Capable of understanding Automation (PLC & Drive) process and giving feedback to the operation.

Graduate Engineer in any discipline with minimum 07 years working experience in any heavy manufacturing unit as Safety In-Charge. Incumbent will be responsible for implementing occupational health related programs and providing safety support for any exigency in the group.

Preference will be given to applicants with experience in any steel plant or heavy industry. Interested candidates are requested to send their applications in strict confidence with CV and a recent passport size photograph to career@bsrm.com or Head of Human Resources, **BSRM Group of Companies, Ali Mansion, 1207/1099, Sadarghat Road, Chittagong** within 07 days from the date of publication of this advertisement.

A WORD A DAY



PARAPHERNALIA

noun

miscellaneous articles, especially the equipment needed for a particular activity

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

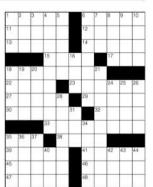
ACROSS

38 Listen to
39 Egg part
41 Rudimentary
45 Moon-based
46 Verdi creation
47 Flag features
48 Film trophy
21 Eternally
25 Eventually
26 Bears' lairs
28 Ties down
29 Auction buy
30 Has debts
40 Independence Day show
55 Watches over
56 Gym patron's concern
57 Some amount of concern
58 Early garden
59 Mimics Porky Pig
60 Silene

DOWN

1 Up in the air
6 Storybook elephant
11 Rocker David
12 Kept in reserve
13 Boat's back
14 "Blowing in the Wind" singer
15 Nervous
17 Illuminated
18 Parades
22 Crooner Perry
23 Followed
27 Set off
29 Treasure stash
30 Fiddle (with)
32 Early garden
33 Mimics Porky Pig
35 Nile serpent

38 Listen to
10 Monthly bill
16 Obtained
18 Jazz style
19 Rain dance tribe
20 Yemen neighbor
21 Dangerous buildings
24 Ore source
25 Eventually
26 Bears' lairs
28 Ties down
31 Regret
34 Forbidden
35 Piercing tools
36 Close
37 — colada
40 Black goo
42 Min. part
43 Nest egg choice
44 Superfruit berry



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B | A | L | S | A | C | A | R | E | D |
| I | N | A | L | O | P | E | R | A | P |
| S | C | R | U | B | T | E | N | O | R |
| T | H | E | M | E | S | O | D | E | S |
| R | O | D | E | R | O | K | I | E | S |
| O | R | O | O | R | O | U | N | E | R |
| P | R | O | N | T | U | N | E | R | S |
| A | P | T | Y | E | Y | E | Y | E | Y |
| B | I | A | N | C | A | R | E | D | S |
| R | W | O | S | E | A | R | E | D | S |
| O | U | S | T | E | A | R | E | D | S |
| L | I | D | E | S | A | R | E | D | S |
| I | D | I | M | E | A | R | E | D | S |
| M | A | N | N | A | A | R | E | D | S |
| P | L | E | A | D | S | E | E | D | S |

Safe. Strong. Sustainable. **BSRM** building a safer nation