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(The Daily Star)

Mahfuz Anam

Editor (Star Weekend)

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Published by the Editor from

Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon

Industrial Area, Dhaka on

behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52

Motijheel C.A., Dhaka-1000.



PHOTO: MAEEN AHMED

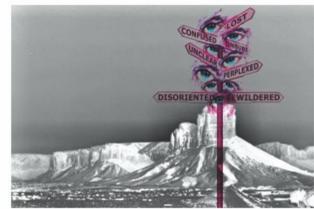
“He allowed himself to be swayed by his conviction that human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves.” —Gabriel García Márquez

SNAPSHOT

MAILBOX

Please note we have a new email address:
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Engage with us by sharing your thoughts and comments on the stories written! Please feel free to criticise or praise, as is the case, but do avoid summarising or repeating the story. We look forward to your feedback!



Punish him, Punish him!

The stories of the abuse faced by women migrant workers in the Gulf are nothing new. In light of these, our government needs to take, and stand by a decision to no longer send new migrant workers, male or female, until these countries respect the human and legal rights of our citizens. Equally important, as mentioned in the article, is that recruitment agencies here, who often mislead and cheat workers desperate to go abroad for money, be punished too for their role in these workers' misfortunes.

Syeda Parvin Jatrabari, Dhaka



5 years since Tazreen

The fallout since Tazreen shows us that nothing really has changed in the garments industry. As the accounts of the Tazreen workers illustrate, they are left alone to pick up the pieces. Disabled, physically and mentally, debt-ridden, and under pressure to provide for their families once more, have they truly been compensated for the horrors they suffered? The justice system has so far, been unable to deliver justice and punish the culprits, the owners of the factory among others. When will the victims finally get closure?

Samir Hossain
Mirpur, Dhaka

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Star Weekend.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Little Akib was in the last stages of advanced AIDS. A boy of 12, he looked six years old and was all skin and bones. He breathed his last on Sunday night. “He was fine this morning, talking and getting ready. I fed him as usual,” said his nani. She has now watched both her daughter and her grandson die of the deadly disease that is AIDS.

Akib was diagnosed almost three years ago. He wouldn't let it get him down though. Akib would come himself, every month or so, all the way from Gazipur where he lived with his grandmother, to collect his medicine from the hospital in Dhaka. “Whereas I should be the one bringing him for treatment, he would bring me, because he knows his way around the city and knows his letters,” said his grandmother. Akib lay beside her, unable to talk or move. His mother had died of AIDS two years ago and his father too has advanced AIDS.

Two months ago, he caught tuberculosis (TB) as well and this, in addition to the HIV virus, combined to weaken him substantially. For those with HIV, the immune system is suppressed, making it harder to fight off other infections. TB is responsible for the most deaths among people with HIV.

His counsellor at Ashar Alo Society (a local NGO), Azhar Hossain, says that Akib should have been hospitalised after he caught TB. A wilful child, however, Akib refused to stay in the hospital and would always go back to his grandmother. “We couldn't enforce that he took the TB or the antiretroviral (ARV) medication regularly at home. Try as we would, he just wouldn't stay at the hospital,” said Hossain.

Of the 11,700 adults and children presently living with HIV in Bangladesh (as of 2016), only 2,475 are on ARV therapy. Many remain unaware of their HIV-positive status. Within the last year, almost 1,000 died as a result of AIDS and new infections amounted to 1,500. The figures for this year will be released by the government today, December 1—World AIDS Day.

Stigma runs deep

There remains a silence around the virus and disease and stigma runs deep, even among the HIV-positive themselves as well as in the medical community.

Internalised stigma among those living with HIV/AIDS is not uncommon. A study by UNAIDS, Plan International, BRAC and others found that 68 percent of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLHA)

**LIVING WITH HIV
A FIGHT TO THE DEATH**

MALIHA KHAN



Of the 11,700 adults and children presently living with HIV in Bangladesh (as of 2016), only 2,475 are on ARV therapy.

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

felt ashamed and 54 percent felt guilty due to their HIV-positive status. Shame and guilt hinder their participation in social activities and lead to withdrawal from their communities.

More worryingly, it can prevent them from going to the hospital for treatment. The same study found that 17.1 percent of males and 16.3 percent of females

surveyed would not visit the hospital even when they needed to—to collect their medicines or to avail treatment—as a result of internalised stigma.

Equally worrying is stigma from healthcare workers. PLHA are further discouraged from seeking treatment because of discrimination they face at hospitals and clinics. In a 2010 study

which surveyed doctors, nurses, medical technicians and support staff, the results proved troubling. 47.9 percent of healthcare workers felt that those who have HIV/AIDS should not be allowed to mix freely with other people. A breakdown reveals that 21.9 percent of doctors, 48.1 percent of nurses and an

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THE COLOSSUS RISES OUT OF THE MIGHTY PADMA

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