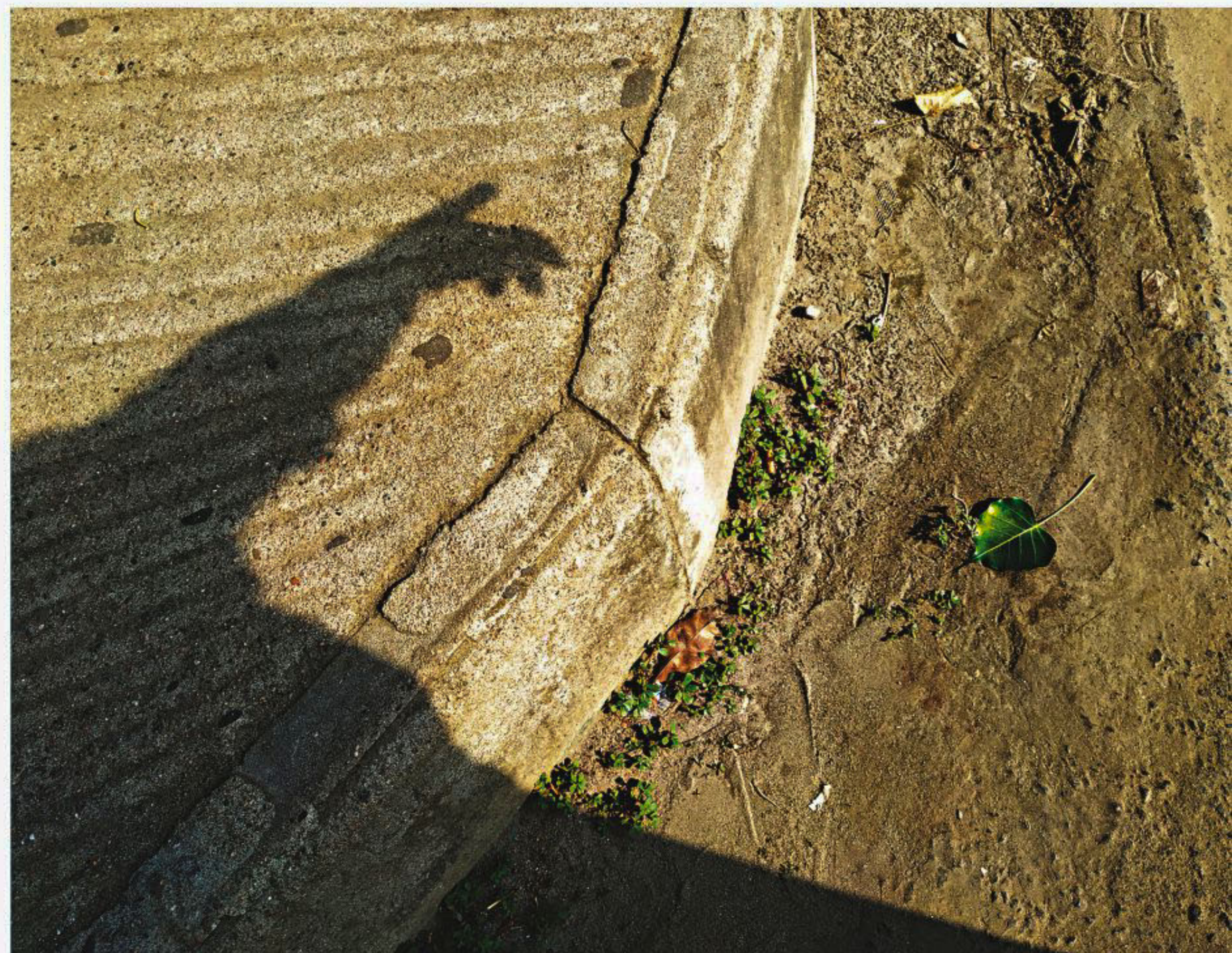


Sohagi shows the place where her son was hit inside the residential quarters.



Sohagi points towards the roadside cub where Alif's body was disposed.

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doing there? Why did his mother let him leave at night? She must be more alert," he says.

Star Weekend also contacted Md Shaha-dat Hossain, chief engineer of the Public Works Department (PWD), who claims to have been unaware of the illegal parking of buses at the government residential quarters and driving training. "No allotted inhabitant of a government residential quarter has the jurisdiction to park or drive public transport within the area of the quarter. We will look into the matter for sure, and the accused must be punished for his unlawful acts," assures Hossain.

Pursuing legal battle is a nightmare for the poor and powerless

Sohagi and her brothers went to Mirpur Model Thana to file a case the day after Alif's death. "The duty officer wrote a case statement. But a few moments later, the officer-in-charge of the police station came and tore up the paper. He refused to take the case and then made us wait for hours.

Later, my brother requested some locally influential people to convince the OC to take the case. Only then did he allow us to file the case. But he still didn't write down the entire train of events," claims Sohagi.

Although the accused fled the scene after leaving Alif on the main road, the police didn't write this down in the statement, according to Sohagi. The case was filed as an ordinary accident case under section 304(A), which says that the accused caused Alif's death through the rash and negligent driving of a bus. According to section 304 (A) of penal code 1860, for such offences, the accused is punished with maximum five years of imprisonment or with a fine, or both.

But Sohagi still asks: if a person without a driving licence, with no right to park or drive buses at the playground of a quarter, leaves a injured child on the road without informing his family, isn't that murder?

This case isn't the first time that law enforcers have filed road accident-related cases under section 304 of the penal code. When a driver hit and ran (thereby killing) Kushtia's child Afifa on August 28 last year, the case was filed under section 304. The same thing happened on July 28 last year, when two students were killed by the reckless driving of the driver of Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan at the Dhaka Cantonment area of the city. Cases related to road accidents previously used to be filed under section 302 (as murder), but from 2015, law enforcers were told to file such cases under section 304. The decision came after a meeting of the sub-committee members of the Home Ministry.

According to Barrister Md Abdul Halim, chairman of the Children Charity Bangladesh Foundation, the decision by the parliamentarians was taken upon the demand of road transport workers.

According to the latest update from sub-inspector Shahidul Islam Shahid, the investigation officer (IO) of Alif's case, the accused first took bail from the High Court. But later on June 19, the lower court cancelled his bail and sent him to jail. "We wanted remand today [June 23]. If the court allows remand, we will ask who was actually driving the bus and get

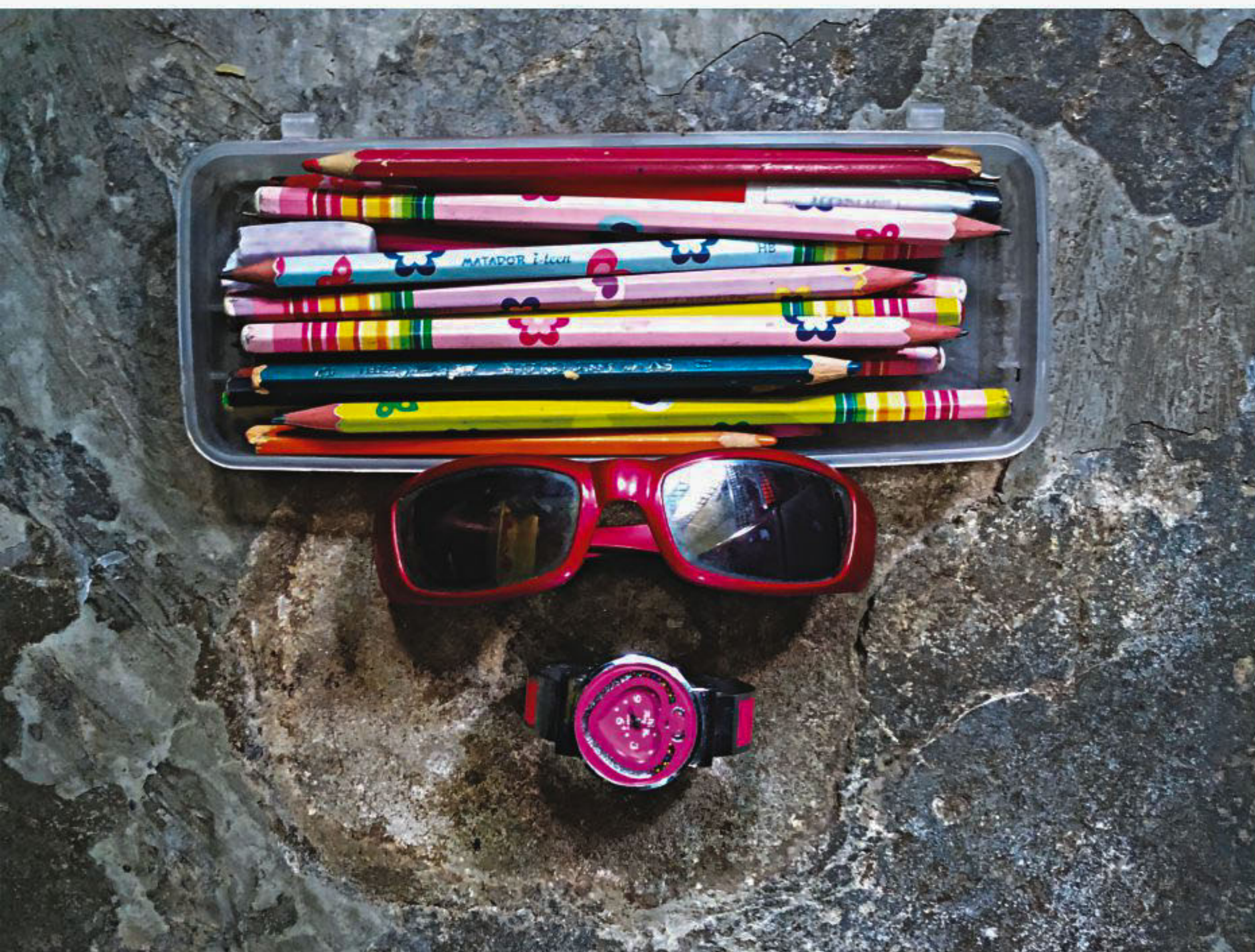
information about the helper. We haven't gotten his address yet. I hope everything will be clear after interrogating him," the sub-inspector says.

When asked if they are aware of illegal parking in the quarter, Shahid replies in the affirmative. "Nobody is following any rules and such practices have been happening for a long time. In fact, Alif's family cannot live here as per the law, because there are no rules to rent a room of a government quarter to outsiders," he states. But the IO couldn't answer when asked why everyone has been silent about such unlawful activities, or why the police never took any action for such openly committed crimes.

The secretary of the quarter welfare association has meanwhile met with Sohagi to try to settle the matter with a lump sum amount of money (around Tk 5,00,000). But Sohagi has not agreed to any settlement. Many are threatening her to withdraw the case, reminding her that they can never win the battle, as the opposition is in a position of power and wealth. Sohagi and her daughter have even received phone calls from unknown numbers. If she doesn't stop, Sohagi might lose her only daughter, she was threatened.

"We have filed a general diary with the police about this. But still, we are not out of danger. I cannot leave my daughter at even a nearby shop to buy things. She is just confined within the house. Every day is hell for us," she cries.

Sohagi left her husband nearly four years ago, as he was addicted to drugs. She had hopes of living in peace with her son and daughter. "My son was my future. But they didn't allow him to live. I have already spent Tk 11,000 for the lawyer. I don't know how I can manage to be present in the court on the next hearing day, because I don't even have that transport fare. I don't know where I will live one or two months later, because I know I cannot manage my rent. I have already lost my appetite. I want only one thing— justice for the murder of my son. If I need to sacrifice even my life for this, I am ready to do that."



Alif's prized possessions. The watch and sunglasses were something he would wear everyday.