



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Authorities will soon launch a fresh eviction drive on the river Buriganga.

# Fresh eviction drive soon on Buriganga

### No steps yet to contain pollution

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Authorities will soon launch another eviction drive to remove nearly 600 large and small structures encroaching on the river Buriganga over an area of 17 kilometres.

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) will conduct the drive between Kholamura and Fatullah, sources in the Shipping Ministry said. The move comes after nearly one year of silence from the authorities to remove the illegal structures.

Last year the BIWTA removed more than 700 illegal structures from the river in a campaign to ensure free flow of water and to stop pollution. A source in the BIWTA said that although the official order has yet to be signed for the drive, preparations are now underway to launch the drive sometime during this month.

During the upcoming drive the authorities would be facing a tough job to remove more than a dozen religious institutions including mosques, which have sprouted over the years encroaching on the river. The Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain, heading a

task force to save the river Buriganga, had said earlier that he would initiate talks with the mosque and madrasa authorities to convince them to remove their structures elsewhere.

While the authorities emphasised on removing illegal structures and other occupation from the river, hardly any steps have been taken to stop pollution of the lifeline of the city. Relocation process of the Hazaribagh tanneries has remained stuck in bureaucratic tangles, raising speculations that these extremely polluting industries would probably not be relocated within a foreseeable future.

Moreover, millions of gallons of untreated sewage is also dumped into the river everyday. Dhaka WASA has a plan to divert the sewerage lines to its treatment plant at Pagla but the project remains a far cry due to shortage of funds.

The Water Development Board is now constructing embankments along both banks of the river, which appear most vulnerable to encroachments. The Tk 630 crore project, scheduled to be completed in 2005, would also be a demarcation of the river.

# Police inactive as hoodlums take over shops at Dhanmondi lake

SULTANA RAHMAN

Gangs of local hoodlums, allegedly backed by the local Ward Commissioner broke into two shops in the Dhanmondi lake area and have illegally occupied those since last month.

Soon after the illegal occupation on the island near Road-3 and opposite BDR Gate, Chief Engineer of

Planning and Design Division (P&D) of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) sent a formal complaint to Dhanmondi Thana on September 1. DCC also sent a letter to Deputy Commissioner (South) seeking police intervention to evict the illegal occupiers.

So far Dhanmondi police have done nothing to evict the offenders, who are now running businesses. DCC sources alleged that

Dhanmondi thana refused to accept any of the six official complaints against the hoodlums.

According to the DCC complaint, the hoodlums, led by the local Ward Commissioner Abul Khair Bablu broke open the shops and occupied them. Local BNP activists Shibli, Lemon and others forcibly ousted the legal lease holder M/S Dynamic and the Food Kiosk. Shibli allegedly asked the DCC inspectors to talk to

Abul Khair Bablu if had any complaint.

Ward Commissioner Abul Khair Bablu denied the allegation saying, "DCC officials did not come to me to remove Shibli and his gangs. I did not even hear about it," he added.

Many of the recently completed structures of the Dhanmondi lake development project still remain to be handed over to the lease holders.



ALASDAIR MACDONALD

The picture shows one of the shops illegally taken over by hoodlums on the island situated on the southern side of the Dhanmondi lake. Several other components of the lake project could not be started mainly due to complication arising from law and order situation.

# Rental problems bug CAAB

### 26 shops at ZIA have not paid any rent for over 10 years

SOHEL ISLAM

The Civil Aviation and Airport Authority (CAAB) has failed to collect any monthly rent from 26 shops and restaurants located at different buildings of the Zia International Airport (ZIA) for the last ten years.

The outstanding rents now amount to about Tk 60 crores, said State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin.

"I think that a section of CAAB officials are unofficially collecting the rents from the shops. Although our

papers indicate that those shops have not paid any rent for ten years, I think they have not paid anything for at least 30 years," said Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin.

"It is really frustrating that during this period successive governments have come and gone but none has paid any attention to this matter," said the state minister.

He added that his ministry would take stern action if any CAAB official is found responsible for inaction to realise the rents.

The minister said that his ministry was now trying to cancel the lease allotment for these shops. But the

'defaulters' have now gone to the court to defend it.

"We have won the lawsuits at the High Court but they have again appealed to the Supreme Court," said the state minister.

Some of the shops at the ZIA are rented at one lakh taka each monthly.

"Not only the shops and restaurants, a few offices housed at the ZIA are also defaulters. Among them, the National Security Intelligent (NSI) has been carrying out the operation without paying a single penny. They do not even bother to contact us," a CAAB official said

requesting anonymity.

"Apart from that, many government and private organisations owe a huge sum of money, which is enough to pay salaries to its staff for the next 100 years," said the CAAB official.

"Some of the shop owners are well connected to the underworld gangsters of the city," added the official.

Meanwhile, after a defeat in a lawsuit, Ishrat Enterprise, a photostate shop at the ZIA was evicted on Monday. The rent Ishrat owes the CAAB is about Tk 10 lakh.

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

It has always been a dream of Bangalee women to wear Benarasi saris. The fine texture, fabulous designs and beaming colours of traditional Benarasi saris enthrall a woman's heart more than any other attire.

With every stroke of a needle, the weaver translates his creativity into a gorgeous designer wear that adorns mostly a bride. An occasion loses its air of festivity without Benarasi-clad women.

Mirpur, one of the busiest parts of Dhaka, is home to a large number of Benarasi workshops that can turn into a thriving industry, if given proper assistance. Benarasi saris are supplied throughout the country from the area that is popularly known as Benarasi Palli.

At least 5,000 weavers practise their craftsmanship on around 10,000 looms in the Benarasi workshops from sections 10 to 12 of Mirpur. Also, around 150 showrooms are waiting to welcome customers with a wide range of Benarasi

saris.

Almost 75 per cent of weavers now working in Mirpur are the successors of those craftsmen who came to Bangladesh in 1947. Their ancestors brought this tremendous skill from Benaras of northeastern India and passed it down to the next generation. Another 20 per cent among the weavers are those who acquired the dexterity from them.

The task of weaving a Benarasi sari requires at least a week but the time may extend depending on its design. They work for at least 12 hours from eight in the morning with a small lunch break. Wages of the weavers range between Tk 800-Tk 3,000 depending on the designs of the saris. The weavers are given designs by the owners of showrooms and weave saris for them.

However, people within the industry mentioned the problems that are preventing their business from expanding. They need to import pure silk threads from China, since silk threads produced in Rajshahi do not meet the demand. "Not only the Benarasi weavers but also

cotton sari weavers in Tangail use the threads," said Mojibur Rahman of Resa Sari Kutir.

Bangladesh produces only up to 50 tons of silk thread, sources said. They mentioned it meets only 20 per cent of local demand. The rest is imported from China and Taiwan.

"We prefer to use local thread because of its good quality but cannot afford it as it increases our production cost," said Belal Ahmed of Zareen Silk House.

The owners of workshops expressed their frustration that Indian saris flooding the Dhaka market have an adverse effect on their business. They said their sale would have increased if there had been proper security to check cross-border smuggling.

They said they need assistance from the government in loans or exports. They accused the textile and industries ministries of doing nothing for them.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

A weaver concentrates on weaving a Benarosi sari at Mirpur Benarosi Palli.