

OLD HOUSES IN SHAKHARI BAZAR

# Owners to renovate risky buildings

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Residents of the age-old buildings in Shakhari bazar have decided not to demolish the buildings though Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has identified those as risky structures. They want to renovate the buildings keeping their historical importance.

"There is no need to demolish these buildings. We will not let DCC do so. We will renovate these buildings by ourselves. We will inform the mayor about this and ask for experts' help for it," said Advocate Bholanath Dutta, convener, Shakhari bazar Panchayet Committee, a local governing body.

The committee at a meeting on last Sunday decided that the building owners will reconstruct the buildings at their own cost. Members of the committee said that they had to take such a decision as they fear they will lose ownership of the buildings.

"When the building number 81 collapsed the government promised help in constructing another building at that place but a few months later the owners received a letter stating that it has been identified as vested property," said a member of the committee.

"Who knows the government will not do the same with us?" he said.

Nineteen people were killed when the building no. 81 in Shakhari bazar collapsed on June 9, 2004. After the incident a committee was formed that

identified 572 buildings in old Dhaka as most vulnerable including 14 in Shakhari bazar.

On March 19 this year DCC sent the final notice to the building owners to demolish the buildings. The deadline for demolishing the buildings no. 2, 3, 10, 11, 15, 21, 22, 27, 31, 32, 33 and 48 expired last week. Now DCC has decided to demolish five of these buildings within next 15 days and the rest will be demolished in phases.

Among these buildings, the owners of building no. 27, 33, 48 have taken initiatives to demolish and reconstruct their buildings. "I have already demolished half of my building and will reconstruct it," said Ajay Kumar Nandi, joint convener of Shakhari bazar Panchayet Committee and one of the owners of building no. 27.

But the owners of 11 buildings will not accept any interference from the government. "We will not let them touch our buildings. Without any specific step for our rehabilitation DCC cannot do this," said Subir Nandi, resident of one of the 14 buildings.

Many of the building owners are now not ready to demolish the buildings even if they are rehabilitated. They informed the DCC officials of their decision when they went to hang notice for demolition on the identified buildings.

"By any means we want to keep the buildings constructed by our forefathers and we have trust in our Panchayet Committee. We will take our next steps according to its decision,"

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said Dipak, resident of another 'risky' building.

The Urban Study Group (UGS) has been making a campaign for conservation of Shakhari bazar buildings since

2004 considering their historical importance.

"It is our duty to protect, preserve and conserve these buildings with unique urban fabric, intricate artistry and craftsman-



ship so that we can pass it on to future generations," said Taimur Islam, architect and team leader of UGS.

"With a little effort by authorities, Shakhari bazar can be turned into

an attractive tourist spot that will continue to be a tangible part of our heritage," he observed.

Taimur and other experts said these buildings can be saved and made risk-free.

"Although these buildings are in dilapidated condition, there is no need to demolish these. These could be restored using steel beams and columns at a cost of 40 percent less than that

of reconstruction," said engineer SM Shaheedullah, managing director of a leading engineering firm having expertise in salvaging and restoring risky old buildings.

# Losing from 'weight-less' weights at markets

Shoppers allege sellers using inaccurate weights

IMRUL HASAN

Hundreds of grocers, butchers, greengrocers, fishmongers, newspapers and peanut sellers are cheating customers by giving lesser weights and amounts although they charge for the accurate weights, alleged city dwellers.

These vendors use weighing-stones that have been tampered with to read inaccurate weights.

When Jalal Uddin, from Rampura went to the nearby

other weighs 20 percent less. "We use the second type for customers who don't pay properly," said a staff member of Moon Steel Agency.

The magistrate slapped a Tk 10,000 fine on both shops, while Md. Shahidul Islam, owner of Moon Steel Agency was jailed by court for six months on charge of obstructing court functions and Badiuzzaman, manager of Bicnok, too was jailed for six months.

During the drive the mobile team also found some technical flaws in Mecca Petrol Pump's fuel delivering machine.

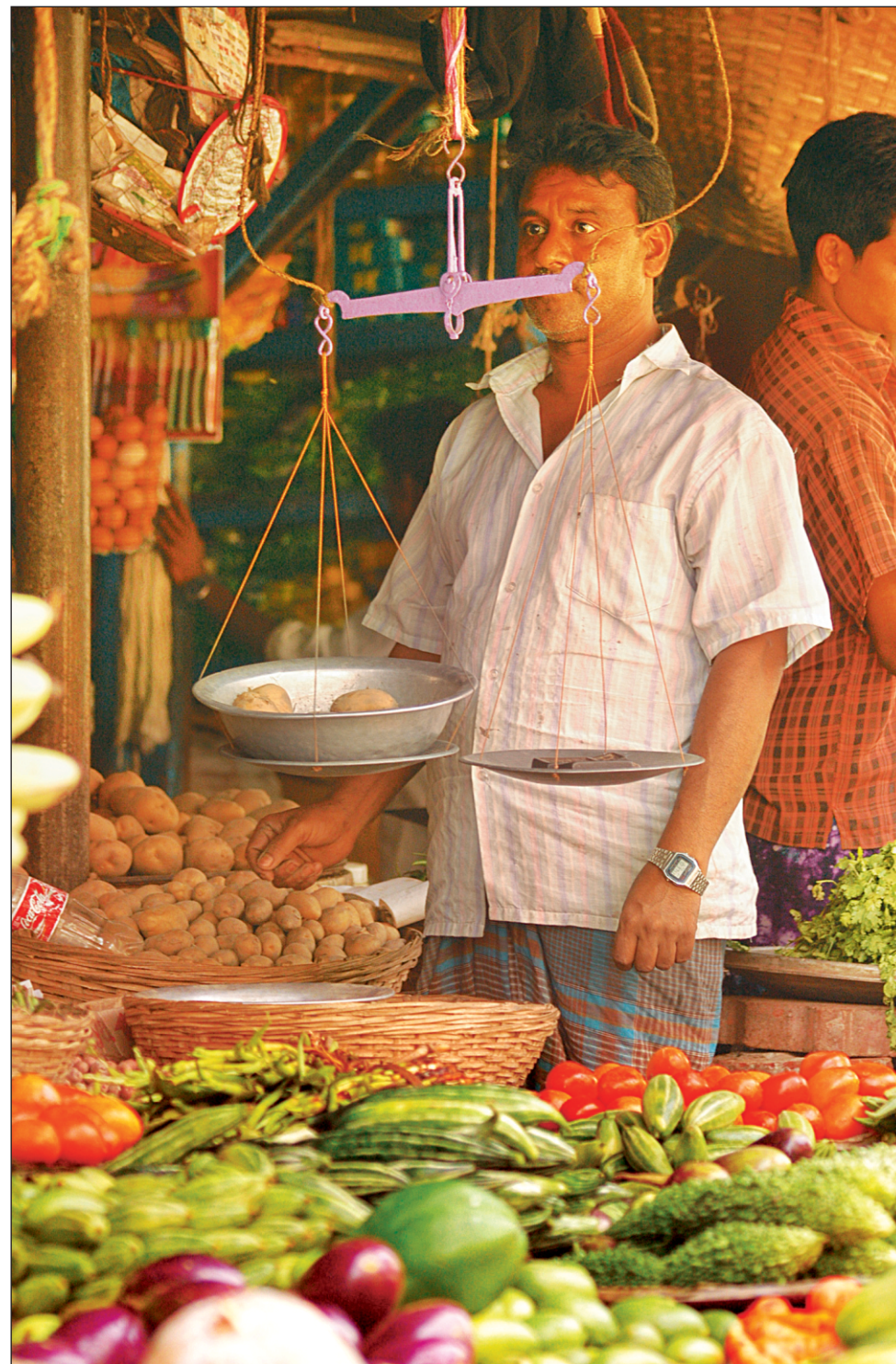
They observed the owner pumping 90 millilitres less in every 10 litres of fuel.

Nazmul Ahsan, when contacted said that a huge number of city retailers are cheating their customers giving lesser amounts while weighing.

"We are detecting these culprits and sentencing them for six months on the charge of obstructing court affairs."

As an old customer of a single butcher at the Mohammadpur Town-Hall kitchen market, this correspondent was told that most butchers weigh 2 gram less in every 1 kg beef in using a sophisticated technique, which is very hard to prove.

"We buy cows and goats at a



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On April 14, a mobile court led by magistrate Nazmul Ahsan Majumdar detected two steel agencies weighing less, but charging the accurate price.

Ahsan found two types of weighing stones at Moon Steel Agency and Bicnok Steel Corporation at Progoti Sarani, Kuril Bishwa Road. One set has the accurate weight, while the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

# Street children continue to be victims of abuse

MAHBUBA ZANNAT

Mita (not real name), a 15-year-old has spent nine years on the streets putting up with incessant sexual harassment by people of different ages in the society.

She had left home at six, when torture by her addicted father was intolerable.

"Once I left my home in Mirpur 1, I have gone through a horrible nine-year stretch in Karwan Bazar and Farmgate streets, being physically and mentally harassed by males who disturbed me in different ways," Mita said.

"Some would pull my scarf, touch my private parts and whenever I tried to resist them, they, like villains of a movie, would tell me that if I want to live here, I would have to bear their torture," she added.

Eleven-year-old Tunni's experiences are more bitter and harrowing. She was abused by a coolie at the Shadarghat launch terminal in the middle of the night who threatened her to cut off her private parts with sharp blade, when she put up a struggle to stop him.

"I will never be able to forget that horrible night when a fat, dark-skinned man took me near a bush under the terminal bridge and gagged and left me helpless," said the little girl.

This is the picture of two of the many ill-fated girls that live on the streets, living in fear of harassment and torture every night.

These girls are mainly abused by passers-by, shop owners, employees, salesmen and bus-truck drivers, and helpers along footpaths, in rail stations, bus stop or kitchen markets.

Even the boys are not safe in the streets. According to a survey

conducted by Incidin Bangladesh on 100 street boys between seven and 12 years at Kamalapur last year, it was found that at least 94 percent children were victims of molestation.

Mita and Tunni have luckily found relief from the harsh reality of their lives thanks to Aparajeyo Bangladesh, an NGO that works with sexually abused street children, and are staying at the

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Drop in Centre (DIC) of Aparajeyo Bangladesh at Karwan Bazar.

They are going through some vocational training from and learning how to be self-dependent.

Compared to the total number of street children, around 70 are facilitated by the DIC.

According to the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies

(BIDS) report in December 2004 a total number of street children in Bangladesh is 6,74,178 who can do nothing but put up with abuse, said Laila Anjum Ara, an official of Aparajeyo Bangladesh.

"Night shelter must be ensured especially for girls on the streets to protect them from sexual harassment," she said.

"Adults take undue advantage of the vulnerability of street children. On the pretext of providing jobs, security and shelter they tend to abuse them," said Director of Incidin Bangladesh Mostaq Ahmed.

Termining 'sexual abuse of street children' a serious problem, Women and Children Affairs Minister Khurshid Zahan Haque told The Daily Star that it could not be resolved in a short span of time.

She attributed poverty as a reason for children to migrate to urban areas, and lauded the role NGOs are playing in the rehabilitation of sexually abused street children and motivating the community positively.

A pilot project for 'Chinnomul Shishu Kishore Sangstha' would be expanded in six divisions within a short period, she said.

The Social Service Department of the Ministry of Social Welfare started a project in 1999 titled Appropriate Resources for Improving Street Children's Environment (ARISE) with nine NGOs with a view of improving the life style of street children.

But it could accommodate only 986 street children in its 22 night shelters while a total of 22,336 street children are receiving services from drop in centres during the day, said a high official of the ARISE stressing the need for increasing night

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18