

## WORLD HABITAT DAY

## Building homes and changing lives...

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Bijoy Das was lost for words when he was given the key to his new home by Habitat for Humanity Bangladesh (HFHB) during the United Nations (UN) World Habitat Day celebrations last Monday at Summer Palace Hotel in the city.

The highlight of the celebration was this handing over as it was the 500<sup>th</sup> house donated to yet another poverty stricken family by the HFHB.

Moved by HFHB's actions, a thankful Das struggled with words to express his sentiments. "I had no proper place to live in before Habitat stretched out its helping hand," Das managed to blurt out, his eyes swelling with tears.

Rickshaw puller of Jhikorgacha, Jessore, Das lived in a mud house with his wife and four children; spending days in apprehension as the cracks in the walls kept widening while the house was on the verge of collapse during heavy monsoons.

Thanks to the aid given by HFHB, who provided him loans

for low cost housing and sanitation, Das and his family now live in a durable brick house.

Hundreds of other families who were in a similar position as Das have too been provided with low-cost and affordable homes by HFHB.

HFHB initiated its operations six years ago, dedicating its work to apprehend the extent of the housing needs in this country and resolve an appropriate organisational response.

The organisation assists poverty-stricken people to build their homes by providing them with loans for low-cost housing. It assigns Global Village Volunteers to help homeowners build their homes. These volunteers comprise of both students and professionals from different countries who invest their time and labour to construct Habitat houses.

Speakers at the ceremony said that the construction of 500 low cost and affordable decent houses in such a short period is HFHB's significant achievement.



Finding shelter for the homeless is a challenging task.

"This is undoubtedly a major milestone in HFHB's progress, reaching a figure of 500 houses

in just six years", said Gene V. George, UNAID's mission director and chief guest.

The organisation envisages building 56,000 affordable housing opportunities for an

estimated 70,000 people by the end of 2010; which was appreciated by George.

"Providing housing for 70,000 deserving people would be a tremendous accomplishment," he said.

Kyle Scott, regional manager, HFHB in South Asia, said that everyone has a right to shelter, especially against natural calamities.

"A decent shelter is the right of every human being. We have seen pictures of the devastation of cyclones and floods, and how the poor are made homeless," he said. He also stressed on working together with home owners for the cause.

"Habitat's priority is to build affordable houses and we would like to work with home owners to help people and raise funds for the cause," he added.

Other guests at the occasion were Andrew L. Fawthrop, president and managing director, Chevron Bangladesh and Peter Halder, chairman, Habitat Bangladesh, who both congratulated HFHB for its dedication and commitment to its cause over the years.

Every first Monday of October is celebrated as World Habitat Day; an annual event sponsored by UN all over the world. The theme for this year's UN Habitat Day was "Cities, magnets of hope".

However, having considered its accomplishments over the

years, Habitat for Humanity Bangladesh had chosen a different theme "Celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup>, Reaching Thousands..." as it reached its 500<sup>th</sup> mark in handing over a house to to Bijoy Das's family.

## Milking the consumers

Agents and traders take advantage of Milk Vita demand and fleece city dwellers

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Consumers of Milk Vita bear the brunt of price manipulation as the distribution agents and retailers overprice the packed liquid milk in the capital.

While unscrupulous agents and traders fleece the consumers, the Milk Vita authorities attribute the situation to inadequate supply against increased demand during Ramadan and lack of punitive measures against the malpractice.

"Deficit in supply results in such situation of overpricing," said Idris Ahmed, additional general manager (marketing) of Milk Vita, the trade name for dairy products of Bangladesh Milk Producers Cooperative Union Limited (BMPCUL).

"The supply position this year is worse than that of last year," he said. "In Ramadan the demand for milk products doubles from the normal demand."

A one-litre packet of liquid milk of Milk Vita was sold at Tk 30 in retail market in the city a month ago but the BMPCUL raised the price by Tk 2 a couple of weeks ahead of Ramadan. Now the retailers overprice it to Tk 35.

A resident of Uttar Badda Wahida Mili said that she had to buy one litre of milk at Tk 36 a week ago though the company fixed the price at Tk 32.

Fahim Hasan, an executive of a private industry, from Dhanmondi said he has to buy two litres of Milk Vita daily for his two-year old kid and other use.

"Such a price hike of an

essential item is inflicting unbearable suffering on limited income consumers like me," said Hasan.

Asked about justification of increasing the price, Idris said, "We raised the price of milk from Tk 30 to 32 per litre to give a higher cost to the producers."

Abdur Rashid, shopkeeper of A to Z grocery shop in Gulshan circle-1 was found selling per litre of milk at Tk 35, as this correspondent appeared as a customer.

"Though company-fixed retail price is Tk 32, now we are to sell at Tk 35," Rashid said. "The Milk Vita van driver named Haq overpriced the milk. He stopped supplying me milk as I protested the price hike and I could not sell Milk Vita six out of the first eight days of Ramadan."

The grocer of Masum General Store at Dakshinpara in Mohakhali said that the Milk Vita van driver Zakir does not give him the supply daily. "I managed another driver from whom I take some extra supply paying extra price to meet the increased demand for Ramadan. So, I have to overcharge the customers."

"Actually, both van drivers

and shopkeepers indulge in price manipulation," said Motiur Rahman, supervisor of Milk Vita agents for Gulshan area.

In case a retailer overprices the milk, the union can stop supplying him. In case a driver overprices a product, any retailer can hold him on the spot and call the Milk Vita head office or Distribution Centre seeking redress.

Normally demand for liquid milk varies from 1.8 lakh to 2 lakh litres, said Idris. "Normally we can supply 1.8 lakh litres and in Ramadan 2 lakh litres."

BMPCUL is the central union of 345 primary Milk Producer's Co-operative Societies and has a membership of about 40,000 milk-producing farmers.



Installing extra bumper on motor vehicles became controversial when over two years ago a doctor on a motorbike was dragged to death. Following this incident bumpers were banned. But later the ban was lifted by a high court order. The same bumpers still pose serious threat to public safety, the picture shows the bumper of a taxicab stuck with that of a CNG scooter at Sat Rasta.