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## Down to Earth

### City Slums and Mass Housing Plan

By ASM Nurunnabi

According to a recent report, government plans to construct two million houses for the people belonging to the low and the middle income groups. This is a grandiose plan aimed for implementation during the next five years on a participatory basis. The plan is based on the practical needs of our people. The housing shortage is likely to exceed five million by the year 2000, at least one third of which will be in the urban areas.

The Chief Engineer of the Housing and Settlement Directorate (HSD) told a delegation of the Bangladesh Habitat Council, a coalition of NGOs working on the housing problems of the urban poor, that out of the two million houses, a total of 50,000 are expected to be constructed for poor people including slum dwellers free of cost.

It is a well-known fact that a vast section of the slum dwellers is concentrated in the metropolis. With every passing day, the slum problem of the city is mounting because of further addition to the slum population through migration from villages. So, as things stand at present, slums and squatter settlements are ubiquitous in their presence in Dhaka city. By income indicators, about 55 per cent of the city population are below the poverty line and most of these people live in the city's slums and squatter settlements.

A large number of slums and squatter settlements have appeared during the period between 1991 and 1996. A study of urban poverty in 1991 showed that the number of poor people in Dhaka city was about 3 mil-

lion. Of these, 1.3 million or 43 per cent were found to be in the slums and squatter settlements. The question is: where do the other 57 per cent of the population live? They live in the city under a number of different arrangements. It is estimated that at least 300,000 of the city's maids and other domestic servants live in high and middle class residential areas with their employers. About 75,000 live in the institutional buildings such as hostels, schools, colleges and universities, mosques, temples and office buildings. Another 80,000 live in shops, katcha bazaars, construction sites and many sleep under the open sky in the city. There are many others who live in Dhaka under various arrangements outside the slums and squatter settlements. This was just an indication of the past trend which has since fast accelerated in the meantime.

Squatters and slum dwellers live mainly in dwelling units which are structurally very poor. Only about four per cent of the householders live in pucca or semi-pucca structures. The predominant types of their housing materials are wood, bamboo, tin and thatch. But the quality of housing depends largely on environmental condition rather than housing materials. An overwhelming majority of the slums and squatter householders live in one-room house with high housing density. In terms of utility services, these slums and squatter settlements enjoy facilities of mixed nature — some are tolerable while others are more or less primitive in nature.

Since under the proposed scheme, people in the low-income group will get loans for house-building at minimum rates of interest, this should bring about some perceptible changes by way of attracting a much broader section of poor people. Our fondest hope is that the proposed scheme gets under way as expeditiously as possible and achieve its goals within the given time-frame.

BNP-LDF dialogue to continue

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia held a meeting with leaders of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) at her Mint Road official residence yesterday, reports UNB.

They exchanged views on the latest political and economic situation of the country as well as the ongoing movement.

It was decided in the meeting that the dialogue would continue between the two sides, said a BNP press release.

LDF coordinator Morshed Ali and leaders Nirmal Sen, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Huq Imu, Mujahidul Islam Selim, AFM Mahbubul Huq, Dilip Barua, Abdullah Sarker, Shahidullah Chowdhury, Moluddin Khan Badal, Belayet Sikdar, Shafiqur Rahman Majumdar and Rezaur Rashid Khan attended the meeting.

Witnesses said the musulnis (devout Muslims) from Karatia and adjacent areas assembled at the Shaheed Minar here and demanded his death for the book, Bayazid Khan Panni, and his book.

They also held a rally with Shahidur Rahman Talukdar in the chair. The speakers demanded that Bayazid Khan Panni be hanged for hurting the sentiment of Muslims.

As the situation became tense, police rushed to Karatia and arrested the member of influential Panni family in the district from his residence.

The musulnis, who gathered at the Shaheed Minar, said Panni in the book 'E Islam Islam-e-Noi' (This Islam is No Islam At All) made many controversial statements about Islam and Muslims.

An organisation called 'Hijbut Tawhid' is the publisher of the book. Bayazid Khan Panni is the founder of the controversial organisation.

Talking to UNB at the Tanguail Sadar police station, Bayazid Panni said he projected the correct version and his organisation 'Hijbut Tawhid' is trying to establish the real Islam in the world.

He claimed that there is 'no real Muslim' in the world excepting the members of his organisation. 'Hijbut Tawhid' has a membership of about 400, he added.

Panni further said there is 'no Imam' in the world competent to lead the congregation as 'an Imam' has to be the leader of 'hukumat' (government) as well.'

Attending doctors said, the condition of Gupta is improving.

The storm was little chance that it may veer off course, meteorologists tracking it said at mid-night when it kept going towards its target of Noakhali-Chittagong coast, north of Chittagong.

Under the Pakistani law, the deportees could be arrested by the immigration authorities soon after landing. They face punishment up to three years of imprisonment.

KSA depots

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leaders underscored the need for making the people in Dhaka more aware of the DCC's recent steps in banning rallies on streets because such rallies cause traffic jam in the capital.

The meeting noted with satisfaction that during the last Opposition-called nationwide hartal, party leaders and workers in Dhaka played a positive role in creating public awareness about bad impacts of hartal.

He stayed for sometime at his bedside and talked to the attending doctors about his treatment and condition. Suranjan was admitted to the hospital on Monday following high blood pressure.

A seven-member medical board headed by director of the National Institute for Cardio-Vascular Diseases Prof Akhteruzzaman is supervising his treatment.

Attending doctors said, the condition of Gupta is improving.

The weekend turned sour for many, shopkeepers had little business, so did the rickshaw peddlers as foul weather kept people indoor.

The storm brewed off a seasonal depression, first located off India's Tamil Nadu coast last week in the Bay. But the cloud pack burst over Andhra State of India. Its tail spinned off the freak but deadly storm that turned its course, baffling Meteorologists in India and surprising Bangladeshis.

Director of the Meteorological Department Sajedur Rahaman told The Daily Star last night that it was unusual at this time of the waning Monsoon that the storm should be racing towards Bangladesh coast instead of roaring towards Indian coast where it was located first.

Though freak in nature, it was not the first time that such thing happened he added, as he scanned the Radar at his office, showing advance of the storm.

First it was feared yesterday morning at 9 am that it may hit the south-western coast. But it remained steady on a north-north-easterly course, reaching the fringe of the funnel shaped Meghna estuary at 9 pm yesterday.

They said the Pakistanis among the deportees were mostly labourers who went to the Gulf state in search of jobs.

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