

Hanging on to hollow promise

No concrete plan yet to develop Karwan Bazar into a business hub

MIZANUR KHAN

Karwan Bazar has been regarded as a commercial centre of the city for quite a while now but no concrete measures have ever been taken to develop this area into a proper business hub.

Home to a number of leading business houses, utility agencies, a sprawling kitchen-market, some of the topmost national dailies and satellite channels and three international standard hotels, Karwan Bazar is a prime example of unplanned growth.

More than a decade ago, the then Jatiya Party government marked this area to develop it as the second largest commercial location of the capital as pressure on Motijheel was increasing by the day. But it has proved a hollow plan and no subsequent governments took any initiative over the last 13/14 years to improve the place in an organised manner.

"Karwan Bazar was developed by the Rajdhani Unnayan Katripakkha (Rajuk) and handed over to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). Now the DCC has no other option but to continue with what they have got," said a DCC Official on condition of anonymity.

Karwan Bazar's chronic problems include traffic jams, palpable condition of roads and inner streets, erratic power supply, water-logging, scarcity of water, presence of criminal operatives and pollution.

Frequent power loss is common in the area where a large number of offices depend heavily on computers and electronic gadgets. It is believed that unauthorised connections of numerous illegal installations drain the power and electricity away.

"A place where there is no electricity

for three to four hours everyday on an average, can not be called a commercial area," said an irate Shafiquzzaman who runs a phone-fax shop in Karwan Bazar.

DCC officials said that the authorities are confronted with thousands of illegal shops blocking all the major streets in the area entirely or partially. Some of the most prestigious business houses of the country have moved to Karwan Bazar during the past five years but parking space is at a premium as the roadsides have little room.

Streets and lanes have been encroached upon by vendors and every now and then, the whole stretch of major roads get occupied for holding political, religious and cultural gatherings.

A permanent mountainous chunk of waste generated from the kitchen market blocks the main road that connects the commercial area from south to north.

A huge pile of garbage is dumped at the north end of this road. Mostly this is the organic waste from vegetables and fruits that are sold in the surrounding markets.

Trucks and vans carrying vegetables obstruct the traffic round the clock.

During rush hours, the entire Karwan Bazar area becomes a tangled web of cars and heavy vehicles and the dilapidated roads contribute to the commuters' woes.

Vendors have set up makeshift stands on either side of the road that separates the kitchen market and the Karwan Bazar Mosque. In certain places, the sellers sit almost in the middle of the road with their commodities.

From the rail crossing to the corner of the kitchen market, a wholesale fish-market is located virtually on the footpath. This spot remains busy from mid-



A DDC bulldozer stands in the middle of a road at Karwan Bazar where piles of garbage from the adjacent wholesale vegetable markets are dumped.

night to 10am and the stench generated here pollutes the environment.

"Because of the prevalent situation, nobody is now interested to move to Karwan Bazar," said a young businessperson who was planning to shift his buying house from Motijheel.

"Motijheel is a living hell. Businessmen like me saw hope in Karwan Bazar when it was declared a

commercial zone. But now we are frustrated with the lack of development. This is the reason why people are now setting up their offices in residential areas like Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara," he added.

Since 1994, successive governments have vowed to relocate the Karwan Bazar wholesale market. The present government also directed concerned authori-

ties to find an alternative area for the relocation. But that process appears to have hit a snag.

"Karwan Bazar has not yet been developed as a commercial zone. Rajuk took the land and allotted plots but the DCC is responsible for the maintenance of the roads," said chairman of Rajuk when his attention was drawn to the prevalent situation of Karwan Bazar.

Eviction ordeal of slum dwellers

Authorities hardly issue any prior notice although it is their legal right

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

The city's slum dwellers are hardly ever given prior notice of eviction although it is their legal right.

Legal experts of different non-government organisations are of the opinion that almost in all cases of eviction, no preceding warning is given to the people

living in slums by the authorities concerned.

It is clearly mentioned in section 5 of government and local authority lands and building (recovery of possession) ordinance of 1970 that; "prior notice must be given to any kind of occupant in government land before eviction". In an amend-

ment made to the ordinance in 1997, the minimum period to serve a notice was fixed at seven days before the eviction. Earlier, it was 30 days.

However, according to the Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), a human rights organisation, prior notice of eviction was given in only one instance in Dhaka since 1989.

"It was in Amtali slum in Agargaon where we saw the 'received notice' sign of the Ministry of Housing and Public Works who evicted the place for building the SAARC Meteorological Research Centre," said Abu Obaidur Rahman of ASK.

"Even then we filed a case as it is the Constitutional right of the slum people," he added. Rahman said other slums like Kalyanpur, Jheelpar, Agargaon, Sattala, Kalshi, Bhashantek, Paris Road and Balurmath never received any advance notice before their eviction. No warning was also served when there was a drive to evict all slums of the city in 1990.

"I could have saved some of my belongings if they had told us before the eviction," sobbed Monwara Begum of Kalyanpur slum which was demolished last December by the House Building Research Institute (HBRI). Monwara came to Dhaka having lost everything in river erosion and was making a living running a makeshift shop in the slum. Like her, many others suffered. Monwara claimed that the authorities had announced that they would destroy only 80 shanties situated in one block of the slum but went on to smash the entire area of 20,000 people living in 3,000 shanties.

The city has around 2300 slums housing at least 30 lakh people belonging to the low-income groups. Rickshaw-pullers, home helps, day labourers, garment factory workers and other professionals directly related to the capital's economy live in these slums which are devoid of basic amenities.

"These people come from the grass root level. They arrive in the city in search of employment. They do not stay in slums willingly. If they are evicted by force, it would affect the whole city life," said Amina Khatun, a development worker.

However, there are others who believe that slums are safe haven for anti-social activities. "Most of the slums are hub of criminals," said Taiyabur Rahman who works in a private company.

The National Housing Policy of 1993 says in its clause 5.7: "(to) avoid forcible displacement of slum dwellers as far as possible." Moreover, it encourages "in-site up gradation slum renovation and progressive housing development with conferment of occupancy right wherever feasible and to undertake relocation with community involvement of clearance of priority sites in the public interest."

But legal experts say this was

never implemented anywhere even though it is always preached by different government authorities. They feel the authorities do not show any respect to the slum dwellers' right to live.

They also noted that the evicting bodies fear that the slum people would get legal help if prior notice were served resulting in postponement of the eviction.

"They know it very well that it is hard to replace a slum once it is destroyed," commented one lawyer.

When asked one of the higher officials in the Ministry of Housing and Public Works said that most of the time the government authorities serve notices to slum dwellers before eviction but they prefer not to receive them so that they can make an issue out of it later.

"In such cases, we announce the eviction warning over mikes," the official said.

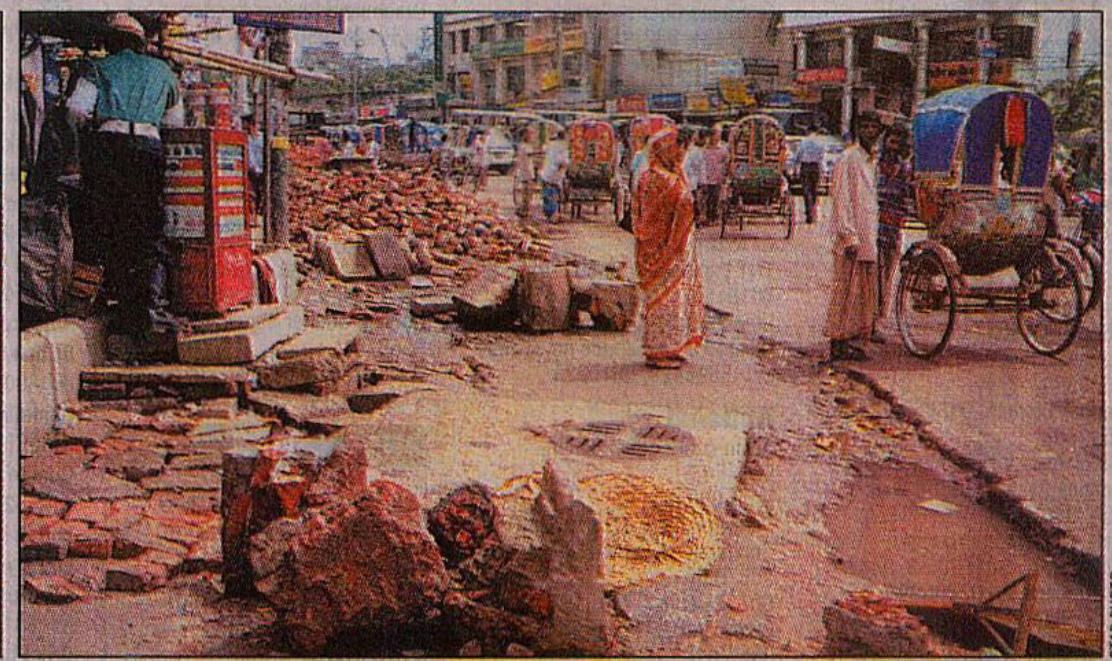
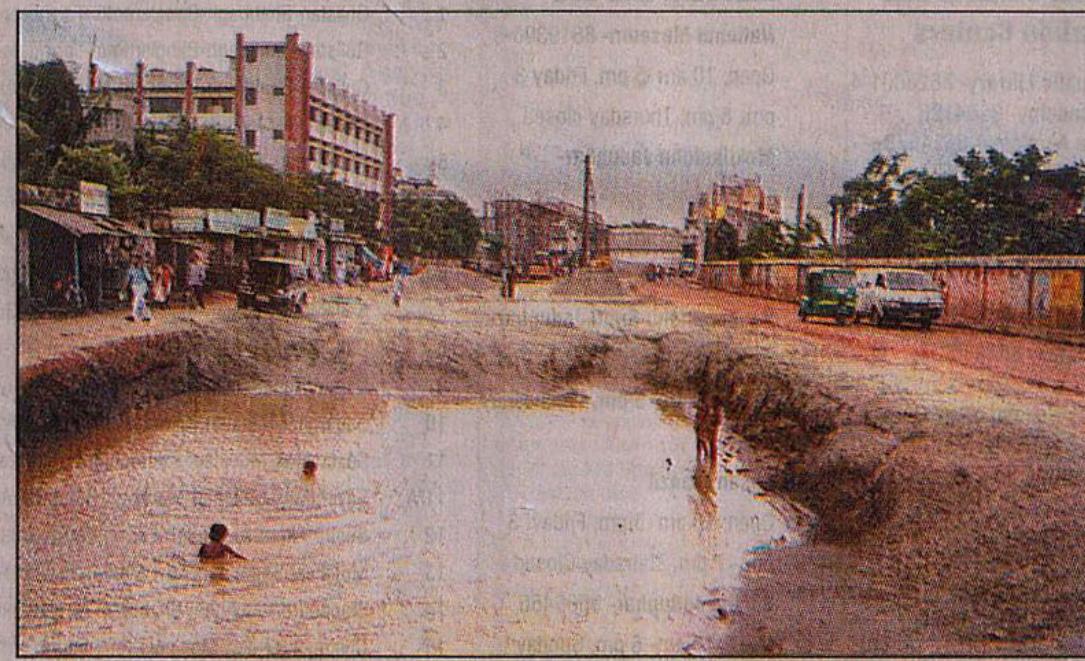
Some government officials admitted the tendency to avoid advance warning as slum dwellers can take the matter to the court and get an injunction issued.

"But we do that for the sake of the general public as slum people take over government lands. It is public land and a few should not occupy it," said an official preferring anonymity.



ROAD DIGGING IN RAINY SEASON

Road digging begins with the start of the rainy season, causing trouble to the pedestrians and triggering traffic jam. This year was no exception with pictures showing poor conditions of Biswa Road and Mouchak crossing.



the city that was

The Lalbagh Fort built in 1678 A.D. by Prince Mohammad Azam, son of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb was the scene of bloody battle during the first war of independence (1857) when 260 sepoys stationed here revolted against British forces. Outstanding monuments of the Lalbagh are the tomb of Pari Bibi, Lalbagh Mosque, Audience Hall and Hammam of Nawab Shaista Khan now housing a museum.

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city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.



"The directors of the private banks are jamai-bou-bhatija-bhagna (husband-wife-nephew)."

-- M Saifur Rahman

Finance Minister
Tells Parliament replying to a supplementary question of Awami League lawmaker Rafiqul Anwar on July 13.
Source: Prothom Alo

"The Water Development Board (WDB) officials have filed the case to cover up their own fault. They will be taken to task for this."

-- Golam Mohammad Siraj

Lawmaker, Bogra
Says on July 15 claiming that the leaders and workers of BNP had no hand in cutting the Ohunat dam.
Source: Prothom Alo

"Those who did not want independence have distorted the history of independence."

-- Sheikh Hasina

Leader of the Opposition in JS and AL chief
Tells Parliament while criticising the recent changes and inclusion in the history of liberation war and independence on July 14.
Source: Prothom Alo

"You have a million-dollar smile."

-- Prof. MA Hadi

Vice Chancellor, BSMMM
Tells a reception to Mosaddek Ali Falu, ruling party MP, elected in the recent by-polls on July 14.
Source: Prothom Alo

"He can not get away by shifting blame on Allah. Because Allah is not a member of the cabinet."

-- Dr Kamal Hossain

President, Gono Forum
Tells Jatiya Oikyamancha workers' meeting while criticising the commerce minister for failing to arrest the price hike on July 16.
Source: Prothom Alo

"Barrister Rokan is the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, not the country's president."

-- Nazmul Huda

Communications Minister
Tells emergency meeting of the lawyers in reply to their allegations, on July 15.
Source: Bhor Kagoj