

Evicted families want rehabilitation

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

us in after the eviction," said Tulsi Mukharjee.

"They forced us to vacate the premises after giving each family one lakh Taka without ensuring proper rehabilitation. But we have nowhere else to go. This is our ancestral home," said one member of an evicted family who went on to claim that their forefathers had lived there for more than a hundred years.

The families now live scattered in nearby areas like Sheikh Sahib Bazar and Azimpur. Some of them have managed to rent rooms but most of them had to take shelter in houses of relatives.

"We have rented a medium-size room for

3,000 Taka a month. But it is becoming harder to provide that money. We also live in anxiety and unease as we have been asked not to perform any *puja* or other religious rituals," said Tulsi.

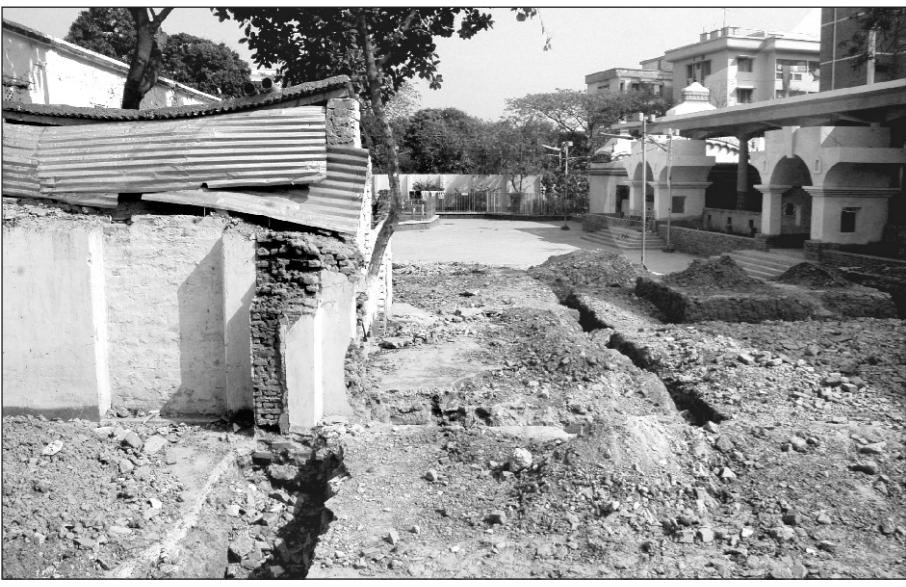
The families admitted that they were asked to move into the new five storied building inside the temple's premises. "But they (the authorities concerned) had allotted only one room per family with only two toilets for all the nine families. We could not accept it," said one of the sufferers.

Secretary general of Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee Manindra Kumar Nath told The Daily Star that the families were offered only a temporary shelter in the new building which is not a residential facility. He said the committee could provide no rehabilitation as it lacked the money and space.

"These people have lived illegally inside the temple's premises for around 16 years. That destroyed the sanctity of temple. We have been receiving negative reviews from even tourists because of their presence," said Nath.

He added that the committee gave them shelter on humanitarian considerations when they were evicted from a nearby slum.

Nath also denied that the families had been driven out forcibly. "They had accepted the one lakh Taka compensation per family in the presence of the Mayor. At that time they agreed not to stake any claim regarding the area. But now they are trying to make an issue out of it," said Nath.



STAR PHOTO

The Dhakeswari Temple is being renovated and beautified (above) at the cost of eviction of the families that lived on the premises for long (left).

DCC community centres in shabby state



The Lalbagh Community Centre, one of the 39 under the DCC in its shabby outlook.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has 39 community centres in the city but people are reluctant to use these centres for holding any social function due to lack of necessary facilities and maintenance.

Most of the community centres are now in a shabby condition as the DCC has not taken any step to renovate the centres for a long time.

Although hiring a DCC community centre is cheaper than a private one, DCC is failing to attract people.

"Only those who cannot afford private community centres opt for the DCC centres," commented Zahirul Alam, a resident of Nababganj.

DCC has six community centres in zone-1, eight in zone-2, eleven in zone-3, three each in zone-7 and 9, two each in zone-4, 5 and 6, and one in zone-8.

The rent of these centres range from Tk 1,000 to Tk 2,900. This charge is only for using the community hall and there are additional charged for dining chairs, tables, utensils, decorative lights, pandal and portal.

Arranging a function at Paltan Community Centre costs Tk 17,500 where 250 guests can dine at a time, said the DCC caretaker at the centre.

"Even then it is cheaper. The private centres charge at least Tk 35,000 only for hall. The additional expenses make it a minimum of Tk 50,000," said Akhlakuddin, a resident of Mohammadpur.

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None of the DCC community centres have air-conditioning facility that discourages people to hire these centres especially during summer.

"Air-conditioning system is necessary for any social function where large number of people gather," said Shahidul Alam, a resident of Naya Paltan.

Even the DCC centres do not have adequate number of electric fans and bulbs. "Recently our officials inspected some centres and found ceiling fans left with a single or two blades," said a DCC official.

The toilets in the DCC community centres are the shabbiest. Most of the washbasins are broken. The utensils are old, dirty and almost unusable.

Some of these centres face problem due to lack of manpower. Only three cleaners are there in Fazlul Karim Community Centre on English Road. They also work as security guards of the centre.

Another discouraging factor is the locations of these centres. Some of the centres are situated in narrow lanes where there is no parking facility.

"People find it inconvenient as they cannot bring cars to such centres, like Siddiqbazar Community Centre," commented a DCC official.

When asked, the officials at the social welfare department of DCC admitted that the community centres cannot attract people.

"It is a service-oriented and non-profitable job of DCC and we want to serve people at low cost," said one of the high officials at the department. "But we lack funds to renovate these centres," he added.

The official said DCC does not earn much from the centres. This year the community centres received more allocation in the DCC budget.

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