

Where do they go now?

540 residents of 'vulnerable' buildings at AGB colony asked to move out without alternatives

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Case Study one: Monowara Begum, wife of Hasan Ali, a service holder of Ministry of Home Affairs is expecting. The family lives in an H-type building in the Motijheel AGB colony. Although the family members are trying to keep Monowara free of unnecessary worry, the government has put a ton of tension on her as well as the entire family and the other residents of the building by declaring the building vulnerable and risky for living.

Case study two: Khondoker Abu Al Hossain's daughter, is a student of class three at Motijheel Govt. Girls' High School. Her half-yearly examinations start today. But being a resident of a similar building (H-type) of the same colony she cannot concentrate on her studies because government has declared her residence vulnerable too.

Such is the situation of almost 540 residents of 84 allotted flats in the seven buildings of Motijheel AGB colony's Staff Quarters ever since the government has started to identify and single out risky and vulnerable buildings.

Fear and panic has gripped the innocent members of the fourth class employees families, left with no ability to move to other rented abodes. These workers are placed on a pay-scale of Tk. 1,800 to 3,000.

"I love my children more than my life but I am so helpless, that I do not have the ability to move out knowing the risk my family is put

under," wailed Abdur Rahim a resident of one of the vulnerable buildings.

The Housing and Public Works Department (PWD) has put up individual red-and-black inked signboards against each singled-out building. The notice reads: This building has been abandoned, major accidents likely to occur at anytime. Living in this building is risky. People are requested not to use the road besides this building.

Fear drives these residents to spend most of the time out of their homes. "We are ready to move out of this hellhole at anytime but we must be provided with alternatives," said Abul Khair Bablu.

The marked buildings are B-33, B-34, B-35, B-36, B-84, B-85 and B-97. These buildings were constructed in 1952, and initially allotted to sweepers and other minor government employees. They were later allocated to the fourth class employees.

PWD officials said these buildings were constructed with sub-standard material and thus turned risky for living.

"There are no reinforced cement concrete (RCC) pillars in these building and these three-storey structures are made up of only bricks," said Reazul Haq Mullah, PWD employee of the Motijheel local office.

On finding that the buildings were risky, after the initial survey, the PWD sent out notices to all residents requesting them to vacate the premises and they had to put up the signboards because these residents did not respond to



Signs of decay show how risky the buildings of the AGB colony are, and authorities have put up signboards requesting residents to leave the buildings.



even the second notice.

With the signboards being put up, officials of the PWD claim that their job is done, but have not taken any responsibility in relocating these innocent dwellers.

When contacted the Minister for Housing and Public Works Mirza Abbas said: "If anyone wants to commit suicide what can I do? We gave them prior notice to leave the quarters then put up signboards and yet if they do not

leave then I can do nothing to help them."

They (the authorities) made us live in such a building that can collapse anytime. The surroundings of these building are also risky but we are living inside that building with our family," said Habibur Rahman, another resident.

All residents said their lives have virtually become a living hell since the signboards were put up

on April 20.

"Our homes have now become live graves, and the building I live in has slightly tilted and can collapse at any time," said Motur Rahman another resident.

But the Housing Minister said that the ministry is not in a position to relocate these residents immediately. "Ninety percent of government employees have not yet been provided with quarters and these residents could be included in the

same list," Abbas said.

He however, said that the construction of six new quarters in this colony is on the cards and when completed these residents will be given priority.

But dwellers of these building said that residents of B-84 in the same colony were evicted with a promise of allotments in a new building eight years ago. The promise is yet to see the light of day.

Top class hospitals to keep provisions for the poor

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

The five new joint-venture hospitals, set to start operating at full swing in Dhaka shortly, have promised to keep provisions of free treatment for the poor people.

There are some 1550 beds in total in four out of these five hospitals and 135 of these will be dedicated to the poor patients.

Officials of the recently completed hospital belonging to the Apollo chain, which started its operation from April 16, said ten per cent of its 450 beds would be kept reserved for free treatment of patients who can not afford to pay.

Sources say that as the budget for the current fiscal year (2004-05) waived duties over all forms of imported medical equipment to facilitate the growth of hospitals of international standard, more and more companies are coming into the picture to provide world class medical facility in Bangladesh.

Abu Sayeed, consultant of Continental Hospital Ltd in Gulshan, said that the hospital will have executive health checkup and advanced health-



A view of one of the recently opened private hospitals in the city.

counselling facilities. It is scheduled to open in June.

Although it is targeting the upper middle class, the 450-bed Continental Hospital also plans to

serve around 20 very poor patients free of cost. Continental will have doctors and consultants from home and abroad with a Malaysian team supervising, said

Abu Sayeed. Square Hospitals in Panthapath also starts its operation in June. The two other hospitals pledging world class service

are Escort Hospitals at Nikunja, which will work in collaboration with Japan Bangladesh Friendship Hospital, and American Hospital Consortiums IIC (AHCL) which will be set up on the space allotted for the Kuwait Moitree Hospital in Sector 6 of Uttara.

"We have decided to hand over the vacant Kuwait Moitree Hospital, which has been lying idle for a long time, to the American company. There is a condition that 20 per cent of the 200 beds at the hospital must be kept reserved for free treatment of the poor," said a top official of the Health Ministry.

Representatives of these hospitals said that their main aim was to save around 3,000 crore Taka which is being drained out of the country every year for treatment abroad.

Square will be backed by the world-renowned Bumrungrad Hospital of Bangkok where a large number of Bangladeshi patients go every year.

"The hospital will have highly qualified physicians from the USA and Europe along with local doctors. It will have state of the art equipment like logic 9 ultrasound machine, finest intensive care

and coronary care units, two kath labs with flat panel machines, latest MRI and 16 slice CT scan, interventional radiology and top class cardiac treatment facilities. This will be one of the best hospitals in Asia. Our only aim is to stop patients from going abroad as we will provide them with world class medical services Dr Rubaiul Murshed.

"We do not have a shortage of good doctors or medical facilities. It is the management, which is holding us back. If our patients are treated with proper care and dedication and with our optimum medical resources, we can show groundbreaking performance in medical tourism. Soon, patients from Nepal and Myanmar will come to Dhaka to avail such high standard facilities," he added.

Square also promised to keep 30 beds for the needy patients. It plans to develop Telenetry service through which it will treat patients by using satellite communication. The system will be developed by 2010.

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.

"It has become imperative to take effective measures against risky buildings and illegal structures"

-- Khaleda Zia Prime Minister

Said at the inauguration of the Shapatya Bhaban (Architecture Building) of the Department of Architecture at Segun Bagicha asking authorities to identify risky buildings in all parts of the country, on April 18. Source: The Daily Star

"They are well aware of their political goals, which is to grab the state power through implementing their economic programmes"

-- Abul Barakat General Secretary, Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA)

Told a seminar on 'The Economy of Fundamentalism in Bangladesh' organised by the Samaj, Arthonity o Rashtra (Society, Economy and State), a research journal, on April 21. Source: The Daily Star

"What's the problem if anyone wants to surround his house with boundary wall?"

-- M Morshed Khan Foreign Minister

Told journalists on April 20, at his office commenting on the news that India was setting up a barbed wire fence in the border. Source: Prothom Alo

"We can not consider the factory collapse as a simple accident, rather we consider it as planned mass killing"

-- Rashed Khan Menon President, Workers Party of Bangladesh

Told a press conference on the 9-storey building collapse tragedy that left more than a hundred workers killed and many more injured, on April 19. Source: The Daily Star

"Many big leaders will lose the next election and many small ones will enter parliament"

-- Mufti Fazlul Haque Amini President, Islami Okiya Jote

Told a party gathering in Rajshahi, on April 21. Source: Prothom Alo

"Sometimes the newspaper is a big problem in this country"

-- Barrister Nazmul Huda Communications Minister

Said at an opinion-sharing meeting organised by Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) in the city, on April 18. Source: Prothom Alo

Mohakhali bus terminal renovation nears completion

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The renovation of Mohakhali bus terminal is almost complete and the new infrastructure with improved facilities for passengers and buses is set to open in the first week of May.

"The haphazard situation in the terminal will come to an end with these new facilities," said Shahabuddin Ahmed, project director of the renovation work.

The project includes renovation of the terminal building, parking spots, paved walkways, toilets, goods loading and unloading places, passenger sheds, taxi stand, ticket counters, mosque and police control room.

Dhaka City Corporation

(DCC) took the project last year to renovate three inter-district bus terminals in the city at a cost of Tk 44.20 crore.

Financed by the World Bank, the project is being implemented by the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in Mohakhali, Sayedabad and Gabtoli terminals.

The terminals will be given to private companies for maintenance after renovation.

The renovated Mohakhali terminal was scheduled for opening in December last year but the contractor failed to complete the work.

The officials of the constructing agency, Abdul Monem Ltd (Bangladesh)-JPCC (China), a Bangladesh-China joint venture, said they could not complete the

work in due time because of not getting land from DCC in time.

"We have done the construction work without suspending operations at the terminal. Moreover, we had to stop the work during the heavy rush of two Eids," Abul Kashem, supervisor of the site, said.

Passengers who use the terminal are also happy with the facility but they express doubt whether it will be maintained properly.

"Lack of proper maintenance would hamper the project and deprive the passengers of the facilities," said Khaleduzaman Khan, a passenger.

Many DCC officials, however, are not happy with the renovation. One of the DCC officials feared proper maintenance

would not be possible in the terminal.

"The narrow sheds having no boundary walls would not be able to protect the passengers during rainy and hot days," said Nasir Uddin Humayun, assistant director (on duty), Mohakhali terminal.

He said there is no space for setting up shops inside the terminal. "Passengers need shops in the terminal. This will create scopes for setting up illegal shops," said Humayun. Dozens of illegal makeshift shops have already started occupying the sheds.

The terminal is used by buses to and from Mymensingh, Tangail, Sherpur, Jamalpur, Kishoreganj, Netrokona, Bogra and some other places.

Renovations to the Mohakhali Bus Terminal are almost complete and will be open for commuting soon.

