

# Evicted slum people back in same place

CITY CORRESPONDENT

People evicted from different slums of the city have started returning to their makeshift dwellings. Because of this, residents of many areas, who had heaved a sigh of relief following the eviction, are again complaining of a rise in criminal activities around the slums in their localities.

Last February, the authorities had started clearing slums near the diplomatic zone in Gulshan in view of the impending SAARC Summit. The eviction drive however stopped due to the postponement of the regional conference. In less than a month's time, the shanties were up again.

It is now an acknowledged fact that criminals treat slums as safe hideouts. In March, a team of Rab-3 ceased huge numbers of phensydyl bottles from Kamlapur's Titipara slum. The

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law enforcers had demolished 40 houses, which were being used by drug peddlers, but by May the shanties had been built again.

Some 150 new huts have been built at the Mohakhali Sattala Slum which has almost 7,000 shanties. The slum is notorious for phensydyl dealers.

"At present not only drug ped-

dling but incidents of robbery, mugging and killing have spread to the nearby Niketon residential area," said an official of Ansar at Mohakhali Sattala Slum. It has been alleged that each shanty here has to pay Tk 500 on an average to the staff of the Infectious Diseases Hospital (IDH), Health Directorate and Public

Work Department (PWD) for allowing them to live there.

When asked Abul Kalam Azad, the commissioner of Dhaka City Corporation's Ward 20 admitted that the Sattala slum was a hub of anti-social elements but blamed the PWD for inaction.

"The staff of PWD do not want to evict the slum," he said.

Slum dwellers meanwhile complained that eviction drives are launched without prior notices.

"I could have saved some of my belongings if they had warned us before," said Anwara Begum who lived in a slum around the diplomatic zone in Gulshan. Anwara came to Dhaka having lost everything in river erosion and was making a living by running a makeshift shop in the slum. Anwara claimed that the authorities had announced that they would destroy only 100 shanties at one particular block of the slum but then went on to demolish the entire area.

"There is no source of income in my family but I am still bound to pay Tk 500 a month as rent. If the rent is not paid timely, we are forced to leave and our rooms are kept under lock and key," said Rabeya Begum of Mohakhali Sattala Slum.

The city has around 4,500 slums housing at least 60 lakh people belonging to the low-income groups.

A study conducted by the Institute of Social Welfare and Research of Dhaka University found that some 65.62 percent slum dwellers were engaged in drug selling and 9.37 percent were involved in prostitution. Moreover, a total of 3.91 percent were involved in women and child trafficking. Some 14.04 percent slum children were also linked to criminal activities.

The study also noted that most slums in the city were situated on government or disputed land and the owners of those slums put strong resistance to any government drive against eviction.



Elderly boarders are now happy as they find mates to share their joys and sorrows at the home in Agargaon.

## Where the elderly feel safe...

MOON MOON SULTANA

"I have been living here for the last five years. I'm enjoying life in this homely environment and I have got some friends to spend my leisure chatting with them," says Md Fayzul Hossain Yusuf, 65, a widower, who lives in an old home in the city.

"I have only one daughter living in Canada. I visited Canada on many occasions but I did not feel comfortable staying there. I'm leading a peaceful and cheerful life in this old home," added Yusuf, a retired director of Bangladesh Rural Development Board.

Elderly people like Yusuf just want to be loved, cared, nursed and most importantly they love to talk. Keeping this in mind Bangladesh Association for the Aged and Institute for Geriatric Medicine started its operation back in 1960 at Agargaon in the city.

A few elderly women also live in this home. Fifty-seven years old Yakutunnesa is one of them. She is a widow; even she does not have any son or daughter.

Yakutunnesa has been staying in this old home for one year. Her niece bears the expenses. Asked why she opted to live there, she said: "To enjoy life...I'm fine here. I don't have to worry about anything. Medical facili-

ties are always available here."

The eligibility for becoming a boarder of this home is that a person must be above 55 years old and he or she has to have the financial ability to bear the expenses. In addition to that, they must be able to take care of themselves.

Then what about the elderly people who are sick and insolvent?

"We've a plan to rehabilitate the poor elderly people but it depends on the availability of funds. If we get more financial assistance from the government, we will execute the plan," said Kazi Abdur Razzak, manager of the home.

He said they are running the old home as a non-profitable organisation. "We can't afford all the expenditure as we've limited fund," he added.

Razzak mentioned that there is a Geriatric Hospital attached to the old home where the boarders receive treatment free of cost. People from outside also come to the hospital for treatment at a minimal cost.

All kinds of medical treatment -- cardiology, dental, ear, skin, women and child care -- are available at the hospital. Even open heart surgeries were done at the hospital by specialists and foreign doctors, Razzak said.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare runs both indoor and outdoor services of the

hospital with the assistance of the World Health Organisation, Geriatric Welfare Society and other foreign old homes.

"All ages of people get proper treatment here," says Dr Obaidul Khobir, who visits patients at the outdoor. A person above 55 years of age gets 5 percent discount on treatment charges. Poor patients get free healthcare and medical service.

The outdoor is open from 8:00am to 2:00pm while the indoor service starts at 2:00pm to continue for six hours.

At present 20 boarders live in the home, which has the capacity to accommodate 30. "Some take back their father or mother after a few months due to social pressure as people do not like the idea of old home even today," Razzak noted.

This is the only old home in the country which is assisted by the government. The expenses for a boarder include Tk 1,000 admission fee, Tk 1,000 per month for a single bed, Tk 3,000 for a twin-bed cabin and Tk 1,200 per month for meal.

The home is located on the third floor of a calm, quiet and square-shaped four-storey building at Agargaon. Apart from this, a couple of private old homes have been established at Gazipur, Savar and in city's Dhanmondi area.



Dwellers evicted from Sattala slum near Infectious Diseases Hospital in Mohakhali have made a come in the recent weeks.

9x3

9x2

9x3