

Homeless and miserable

Slum evictions have displaced thousands of families, whose contributions towards the city have never been recognised

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

About 28,000 families were evicted from over 49 slums in Dhaka through drives between 2003 and February 12, this year, according to estimation made by some human rights organisations.

Those evictions caused damages worth about Tk 34 crore displacing thousands of families including a huge number of children. Among the eviction drives 22 drives were conducted this year under the caretaker government.

Social science experts told Star City that the displacements of such a large number of urban poor might bear a significant impact on urban life, as those evicted are service providers to the city dwellers.

Considering the vulnerability of the slum dwellers, authorities in a press release on Friday said that no eviction would take place without permission from the advisory committee on law and order.

The press release also said that influential people and musclemen illegally occupied government land and set up the slums, collecting rents from the dwellers. These musclemen also use the slums for criminal activities.

Mostafa Kamal, of the Coalition for the Urban Poor, an alliance of some NGOs working in the city slums said that many evicted families are still living

under the open sky.

At the Tejgaon Railway slum Star City found that most of the evicted families chose not to leave the area and built up makeshift shelters with polyethylene sheets.

"Now we are living under open sky. There is no toilet and we feel extremely insecure," said Anjuman, a female member of an evicted family.

Aminul Islam, a child rights worker of Aparajeyo Bangladesh, an NGO working there said that children have been the worst sufferers during the displacements.

Aminul said that because of insecurity many parents were forced to quit their jobs for protecting their children.

Sadeque Hosain Khoka, the city mayor, told Star City that Dhaka City Corporation has an on-going slum development programme. The mayor said that he felt 'extremely sorry' for the evicted people.

"But in one hand, the owners have the right to use their lands while the evicted people have the right to be rehabilitated," Khoka added.

Nehal Karim, a social science professor at Dhaka University said that these evictions would have grave impact on the city life even in the middle class and upper class families because most of these evicted people provide different kinds of services to the city dwellers.

"Under the prevailing social



structure of urban life, relation between husband and wife would have been harsher if the regular domestic help was absent in the family," he added.

Slum eviction would also increase the number of floating population in the city. "Where will these poor people from rural background live if no slum remains in the city?" he said.

"Only rehabilitation would not solve the problem because a great number of poor and working people are migrating to the city regularly from the rural areas," Karim said.

About the migration rate into Dhaka, Rita Afsar, senior researcher of Bangladesh Institute of Development Services said that administrative and political decentralisation with an investment-friendly atmosphere in other cities of the country can reduce the migration flow to Dhaka.

"The city needs these working class people but surprisingly the city has no cheap housing facility," Ritaisaid.

"Up to 4,00,000 people migrate to Dhaka every year," she said.

River erosion, poverty and lack of job opportunities in the rural area trigger the push towards the city.

"Why will these poor people be interested to go to a place where job is not available," she said.

FOLLOW-UP

Justice delayed justice denied

Parents of a slain young man cry for justice

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

"I have no other reason to live. The only reason I'm still breathing is because I want to see justice of my son's killing," said Renu Ara Begum, mother of Iqbal Hossain Masum, a Jagannath University student who was killed in so-called "crossfire" in 2005.

There was no criminal case against Masum, but the law enforcers branded him as a notorious criminal to justify the death in custody. Even the enquiry committee formed by the police failed to prove Masum as a criminal.

"We will not let the perpetrators go unpunished. We know that we will not get back our son but watching them face

centre. According to the TV news, Masum died in "crossfire" during a shootout between criminals and the crime-busting force Cheetah, a special wing of DB, at Rayerbazar.

"It was evident that the bullet wounds were made by very close range shots in his head, armpits and kidney. How come bullets hit him such an organised way," said Masum's father. He said that it was definitely a planned execution.

"There was a rainstorm on that night but Masum's white outfit and shoes did not have any spots of mud on it," Khaer added.

Following the killing, DB issued a press release branding

Khaer.

Masum's father challenged DB's allegation after the killing and went to Mohammadpur police station to file a case against the DB men involved in the incident. But police refused to register the case. Mohammadpur police station only recorded a general diary (GD).

Khaer then filed a petition at the Dhaka CMM court on August 18. The court directed ASM Mizanur Rahman, the then DMP commissioner, to conduct an inquiry. He assigned ADC (South) Shahriar Rahman to conduct the inquiry.

When contacted, Shahriar Rahman (currently DC-South, DMP) said he has already submitted the report to the commissioner's office.

On June 19 after cross-examining 21 persons, Shahriar Rahman submitted a 10-page report where he failed to prove Masum as a criminal. He admitted that Masum was killed 'in a pre-planned or without planned way' but did not mention by whom.

Mysteriously, the report did not reach the court from the DMP commissioner's office in the last eight months. This correspondent tried to contact DMP Commissioner Naim Ahmed for his comments, but could not reach him.

Khaer demanded the police send the report to the court immediately. "Without the report trails could not take place. Justice is being delayed because of this. My son's murderers are still at large," he said.

The only enemy Khaer had with Iqbal Hossain Likhon, chairman of Nilkomol union of Charfashion upazila in Bhola, home district of Khaer. Khaer and Likhon had a legal battle going on for the last few years.

Khaer believes that a Tk 26.9 lakh money lawsuit brought by Khaer against Likhon and some police officials might be a reason behind his son's death. Khaer eventually won the lawsuit.

DMP wakes up to ban honking, reduce noise pollution

WAHIDA MITU

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) finally wakes up to enforce an old law banning vehicular horns in certain areas of the capital.

In a press release on Friday, DMP said it has decided to implement the motor vehicles ordinance of 1983 that forbids honking horns within 200 yards of places of worship, educational institutes, hospitals, courts and offices.

Moreover, in a bid to turn the city's noise pollution level down, DMP has primarily banned honking horns on VIP road between the stretch of Sonargaon intersection and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical university intersection, the press release added.

"Because this road always

experiences steady traffic jam, the vehicles standing there always honk horns unnecessarily. Initially on the basis of a trial, DMP choose this segment (of the road) to ban honking horns unreasonably," said Nazimul Hoque, assistant commissioner of public relations (ACPR) at DMP.

Indiscriminate use of vehicular horns in this city is the major cause of serious noise pollution that turned the city into one of the noisiest urban areas in the world.

City dwellers appreciated the DMP move. "It's better late than never. The banning of unnecessary honking should be implemented effectively in the city. Otherwise, it would not be possible to curb unnecessary honking on in the city," said Junaed Ahmed, a government official

who lives in Malibagh.

The noise pollution is rising to a dangerous level -- especially due to a sharp rise in the number of vehicles -- exposing millions in the city to serious health hazards.

Moreover, thousands of construction sites, factories and unabated use of loud speakers are adding to the noise pollution. Exposure to high level of noise pollution can cause nausea, high blood pressure, cardiac arrests, insomnia and various other diseases, health experts said.

The government after years of delays has finally worked out a set of rules to control noise pollution, but it surprisingly, it overlooked to incorporate the biggest polluter -- vehicular horns.

The rules were made under Environment Conservation Act of 1995 and gazetted on

September 3, 2006 by its implementing agency -- the Ministry of Environment and Forest

The unnecessary honking of cars is the biggest nuisance caused, according to some non-governmental organisations (NGO).

According to the circular, noise level set for Dhaka is 50 decibels in the day and 40 decibels at night for Silent Zones with hospitals and schools. For residential areas, the allowed level is 55 decibels in daytime and 45 at nighttimes. For industrial areas, the level is 60 decibels in the daytime and 50 decibels at night.

The ideal sound level in commercial areas is 70 decibels in the day and 60 at night while in industrial areas 75 decibels during daytime and 70 decibels at night.

"Continuous and unneces-

sary honking of cars exceed the permissible level by manifold and thus cause serious pollution," said Nazmul Karim Sabuj, member secretary of Noise Pollution Control Committee.

According to a World Health Organisation (WHO), Unicef and World Bank (WB) research, noise pollution is one of the 12 environment pollutants that cause 30 serious diseases, Sabuj added.

"Constant exposure to noise can cause different problems which include loss of hearing, cardiac problems, sleeping disorder, various psychological problems, gastro-intestinal tract (GIT) upset and problems with unborn babies," said Professor Dr M Abdullah, head of ENT department and principal of Sir Salimullah Medical College.

DU violates building laws, construction rules

TAWFIQUE ALI

The Dhaka University authorities have violated the building rules in extending the building of Modern Languages Institute and erecting a pedestal for setting up a telephone tower on the rooftop of the university's central library, Rajuk sources said.

Though it is mandatory to obtain approval for any kind of building construction, modification and alteration from Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk), the DU authorities have started construction works without meeting the legal obligations.

According to the Building Construction Act of 1952, Metropolitan Building Construction Rules of 2006 and Bangladesh National Building Code of 1993, anybody has to obtain prior approval for any building construction work from the designated authorities.

Authorised officer-1 of Rajuk

Nurul Islam said the DU authorities have not obtained any permission for this construction and modification work. "Any government organisations including public universities must obtain permission from us."

However, DU Treasurer Prof Syed Abul Kalam Azad claimed any building within the university campus does not require approval from Rajuk. "I have never seen that the university authorities took permission from any authority for any construction work."

Honorary chairman of Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) Prof Nazrul Islam said the public universities, Dhaka City Corporation and Public Works Department have an attitude to defy the building laws and rules while constructing their buildings.

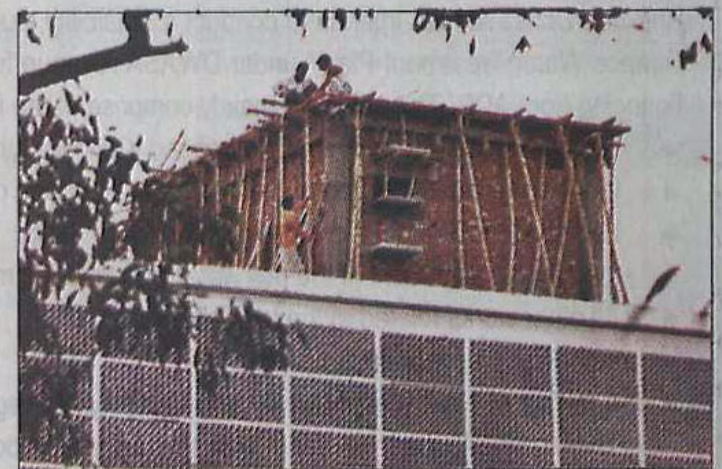
"But, as per law, they have to obtain approval for any kind of building constructions simply because nobody is above the law," said Prof Islam.

Rules must apply to everybody equally unless one is given exemption, said Islam who is also a member of the government's Urban Development Committee. He said the DU authorities cannot go on with the construction works in the manner they are doing.

Government amended The Building Construction Act of 1952 in February 2006 incorporating specific penal provisions for violators of building rules.

The Building Construction Act of 1952 (amended act no-15 of 2006) provides that whoever violates section 3 of the act or Building Rules of 2006 or provisions of the Bangladesh Building Code (BNBC) shall be punishable with imprisonment of up to seven years or with fine not less than Tk 50,000 or with both.

The Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB) on February 15 applied to the Rajuk chairman calling for action against the unauthorised construction



DU violates construction laws and also defaces the sanctity of the famous Central Library.

work on the DU central library building, terming the building as a unique work of architecture.

Leading architects said the DU authorities have shown disregard to this landmark architectural work by renowned architect Muzharul Islam.

IAB President Mubasshar Hussain said the library building is one of the pioneering works of architecture accomplished during Pakistan period. Architectural Review published from London ran a feature in April 1960 on this library building.



Khandaker Abul Khaer and Renu Ara Begum display Masum's portrait demanding justice for his brutal murder.

justice will at least bring peace to our soul," Masum's father Khandaker Abul Khaer told Star City.

In the evening of July 8, 2005, Masum was attending a party at Mehedi Community Centre in Asad Gate. Receiving a call on his mobile, Masum left the community centre.

Masum's worried family could not trace him that night.

The next morning they heard the horrifying news of Masum's killing on a television channel.

A team of Detective Branch (DB) of police allegedly picked him up from the community