

Street vendors appeal for rehabilitation

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Fate of thousands of street vendors in the capital remain uncertain after they were barred to continue their only means of making a living on their preferred street spots as the rehabilitation schemes taken by the government following their evictions are yet to be proven effective.

Bangladesh Sammilito Hawkers Parishad in a press note appealed to the interim government to take a compassionate approach to ending the sufferings of the evicted street vendors and allow them to operate on their usual spots until the implementation of an effective and sustainable rehabilitation measure.

The association in the press note appealed the authorities to implement their 11-point demands that included standardising and intensifying effective rehabilitation programmes for the street vendors instead of recurring eviction drives.

The Parishad also demanded establishment of a ministry and specialised banks for vendors, issuing trade licenses, providing welfare services, insurance facilities and pension after retirement, designating suitable locations for rehabilitation after eviction along with alternate means to support their dependants until the rehabilitation programme is successful.

"We are requesting the government to allow us operate on the streets until a sustainable rehabilitation scheme is implemented and meanwhile consider our 11-point demands with a compassionate approach towards the street vendors," said M Waliullah Patwari, chairman of Bangladesh Sammilito Hawkers Parishad.

According to Bangladesh Sammilito Hawkers Parishad, there are over 3,00,000 street vendors in the capital who used to make an honest living through trading on the streets. These vendors are victims of the recent restoration process in the country and they are in distress now.

Most of these street vendors had no choice but to head for Dhaka chasing a better life as business and job opportunity outside the capital took a nose-dive.

"Majority of the vendors in the city are migrants who brave the odds and earn an honest living. As they come from all over the country, their earnings also reach to the remotest parts of the country, which consequently plays a major role in the national economy" said Patwari.

"They provide quality goods for reasonable prices and support the low income groups of the city," he added.

Although the authorities have set up holiday markets on designated city streets to rehabilitate the evicted vendors, the markets are yet to shape up. The new concept so far received poor response from both the vendors and customers.

"Aside from the modest crowd of customers and little transactions, the places specified for the holiday markets are too small to accommodate vendors from other areas. They would have to double the number of streets to make room for the extra 15,000 to 16,000 vendors," said M Waliullah Patwari.

According to the holiday market policy, the vendors are allowed to trade their goods between 8:00am to 5:00pm every Friday on specified streets. The places designated for the five holiday markets are north side of Manik Mia Avenue, the road beside Matsya Bhaban (to Segun Bagicha), a portion of the road in front of Motijheel Ideal High School, a portion of the road from Palashi intersection to Nilkhet and Shialbari slope on Mirpur Zoo Road.

"Our customers are usually pedestrians who tend to shop on their way to their destinations. Therefore, we cannot expect them to come to the designated holiday markets for buying things," said a handkerchief seller on Manik Mia Avenue.

"The fact that there are less pedestrians on holidays only makes the situation worse," he added.

According to Patwari, the authorities' effort to rehabilitate the evicted street vendors through holiday markets has done little to eliminate future uncertainties of the vendors as the specified schedule and places for the scheme is barely enough to support the hundreds of thousands of city vendors.

"It would be virtually impossible for the street vendors to transport their goods to the holiday markets since the locations are not near their dwellings. Moreover, the holiday markets are not attracting that many customers either," said Patwari.

"Under the current circumstances, I doubt if they would be able to even afford to bear the transportation costs by trading in the holiday markets," he added.



A policeman threatens a hawker trying to set up a stall in front of the Gawsia Market on Tuesday.

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