

NHA's decade-long dillydally over public money

TAWFIQUE ALI

Over 6,000 applications for plots in a government housing project in the city's Mohammadpur area have been gathering dust for past one decade with the National Housing Authority (NHA) now converting the scheme into an apartment project.

Those who applied for the plots alleged that the NHA erstwhile Housing and Settlement Directorate, is now preparing to construct more than 1,000 apartments in the area beyond their knowledge. The NHA officials also said they are making a prospectus of the new project.

An applicant had to deposit Tk 30,000 for a 2.5-katha plot, Tk 25,000 for a 2-katha plot and Tk 15,000 for a 1.75-katha plot. The 6,000 applicants kept at least Tk 9 crore deposited with the NHA account. The amount has yielded at least another Tk 9 crore bank interest in ten years.

The authorities have not informed the applicants about the fate of the project during the last ten years, said Nazma

Akhtar, an applicant.

"They have not told us anything about the project development," she said, "I even do not know the authorities is making such drastic changes in the nature of the project."

Project Director AKM Abdullah said: "We will build a total of 1,011 standard flats in the project. Each of the 15-storey buildings will have 60 flats of 1,000 square feet size."

The NHA undertook the 23-bigha housing project in 1997 for the lower and medium income group people near Ring Road in block F, Mohammadpur.

People who applied for plots following advertisement in newspapers in 1997 said illegal occupancy of the land by influential people delayed the plot allotment for years.

According to the project director, the change in the nature of project took place around four years back and the "idea" came from the Planning Commission because plot project can accommodate only a limited number of people."

The Planning Commission approved the project as an

apartment scheme around a year ago instead of a plot scheme, said Abdullah, who is a superintendent engineer of NHA.

A total of 22,000 aspirants applied for plots in the project.

Of those, around 16,000 applicants have already withdrawn their deposit money while the rest 6,000 are still waiting for allotment, said the project director.

"We will allocate 500 flats for the remaining applicants for plots while the rest of the flats will be allotted among the new applicants."

Asked why the authorities have not made it public, Abdullah said, "We will make it public by June next."

An applicant, who set out with Tk 3 lakhs for a 2-katha plot, now has to arrange at least Tk 15 to 20 lakhs for a 1200-square foot (including common spaces) flat.

The project director said that a lessee would get a five-year period to pay the installments.

Besides, the NHA would facilitate 50 percent bank loan in case one needs so, he said.

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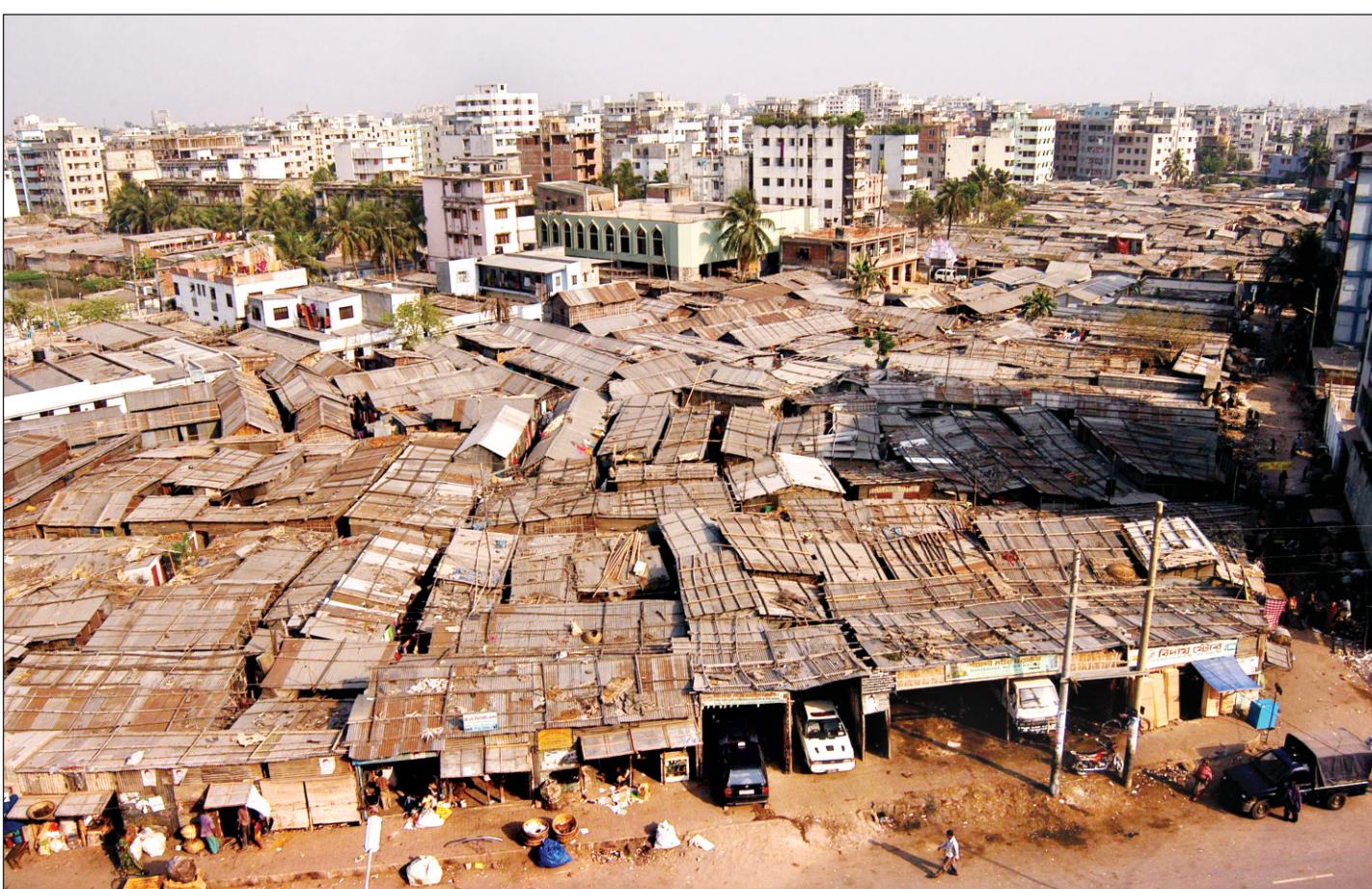
been able to implement the housing project because of court cases filed by the slum squatters and their political patrons who had occupied the land, said NHA Chairman Shafiqul Alam.

Locals in the neighbourhood said that the proposed land of the project has been occupied by the slum settlement for last six to seven years.

Only eight bighas out of the 23 bighas of land were freed of tangle of court cases but recently the slum dwellers have filed more cases on that land, he said.

"It is true that the NHA has not maintained any correspondence with the applicants of the housing project over past one decade," said the chairman. "Because it is difficult to maintain correspondence with so many applicants. But the applicants may withdraw their deposit money if they wish."

Apart from the deposit money, the housing authorities charged Tk 200 for application form meaning it got Tk 44 lakh against 22,000 applications.



NHA's project area is now a slum controlled by local hoodlums.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

R&HD's MISSING LAMPPOSTS



These Victorian styled lampposts were installed along the Airport Road under the city beautification program at an unspecified cost two years ago. The Roads and Highways Department (R&HD) was in charge of the maintenance of the roadside lampposts. Recently most of the lampposts went 'missing'. Only the stumps bear the testimony of R&HD's failure to protect public property (right). The area is within 500 yards of Khilkhet Police Station.

WAHIDA MITU

The Dhaka Zoo is facing problem in accommodating its deer population. At present the zoo has 150 deer against the accommodation capacity of 50.

The zoo has a scheme of selling deer but despite the regular sale the zoo authorities now find it difficult to accommodate the increasing number of the animals.

The sale of deer decreased this year as the Department of Forest raised the fee of possession certificate to Tk 10,000 for a pair of deer from Tk 1,000 earlier, said Ishtiaq Uddin Ahmed, Wildlife conservator of the DoF. The annual renewal fee of the certificate is Tk 5,000.

The zoo authorities started the

deer selling scheme in 1986. They sell mainly spotted deer with the permission of the Department of Forest.

Since 1986 Dhaka Zoo has sold more than 300 deer. A deer usually gives birth to two cubs a year.

"Last year Dhaka Zoo sold 70 deer while in the preceding years the number was 20 to 25 on average," said Dr NC Banik, deputy curator of Dhaka Zoo. The sale had increased due to reduction of a pair of deer from Tk 48,000 to Tk 30,000.

Buying deer from the zoo is not a difficult task but the buyer has to obtain permission from the Department of Forest (DoF).

The buyer has to obtain possession certificate spending Tk 10,000 for each deer, said Ishtiaq

The person who buys a deer must inform DoF if the number of deer increases or decreases in case of birth or death. For the newborn deer no possession certificate is required. The owner has to register the birth with the DoF

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When asked what action Department of Forest might take when the buyer fails to maintain contact for a long, he said that in these circumstances the DoF issues a letter to the defaulter or in special cases DoF inspectors visit the premises where the deer are kept.

One can sell his additional deer

DESCO

Hassle in bill payment to disappear soon

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The hassle of standing in long queues for hours to pay electricity bill is about to end for Dhaka dwellers. Soon the bill payment will be as easy as sending an SMS to a friend. Desco subscribers will be the first to enjoy the facility.

"Desco subscribers will be able to pay the bill using the BillPay system of GrameenPhone very soon," said Saleh Ahmed, managing director of Dhaka Electric Supply Company Ltd (Desco).

"We have not set up a tentative date to launch the system. We are still discussing the best options for our customers. The negotiations are in the final stage. We hope to launch the system within a month," he said.

Power Development Board (PDB) introduced the system in Chittagong in December 2006 on an experimental basis. There are now 215 BillPay centres in Chittagong for 3 lakh PDB subscribers.

"We want the information to be transferred to Desco and the customer instantly," said Ahmed.

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the system. Desco became interested after the system was introduced in Chittagong," said Ahmed.

Delwar Hossain Azad, head of New Initiatives, GrameenPhone, explained how the system is going to work. "We are using similar technology used in the Flexiload system. Flexiload sends money to the subscriber's cellphone. In the BillPay system it will be just the opposite," Azad said.

Azad explained that there will be BillPay centres in every neighbourhood similar to Flexiload. They will have 'BillPay' sign outside the outlet.

The customer will have to show the bill at the centre from where the money will be sent to the subscriber's Desco account number electronically using a software.

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"The ledger of the Desco subscriber will be instantly updated since it is electronic transaction.

The customer will receive a confirmation SMS from Desco shortly after he pays the bill. This will prevent human errors," Azad explained.

Azad also mentioned that every transaction will have an ID number so that the customer can easily inquire about the status of his payment calling '1200' at GP call centre.

Desco subscribers will have to register for the service. Registration will require information such as Desco account number, meter number, cellphone number, etc and a fee of Tk 10 to 15. There will be no charge after that.

The customer can easily change the information if he/she changes house or cellphone number. All it requires is a phone call to GP.

Most interestingly, users of any mobile operator can avail the service. "Even a person without a mobile can use BillPay centre. They can check the status of the payment by calling 1200," said Azad.

Azad said in future subscribers will be able to pay the bill directly from their personal cellphone.

BillPay centres will be open from 9:00am to 9:00pm every day, including holidays.

Initially the service will be available in only Desco area. Gradually it will be introduced for all Dhaka dwellers and later the entire country will be brought under the facility.

Desco officials however are not sure about how they will collect the money from GrameenPhone. "In the current system designated banks pay us the money one month later. The one-month interest is their fee," said Saleh Ahmed.

"We are still discussing about it with GP. I think we are going to propose the similar arrangement," he added.

At present there are around 1.5 crore mobile phone users in Bangladesh. GrameenPhone officials hope that with current growth rate the number of user will reach 2.3 crore at the end of 2007.

Booming deer population crams Dhaka zoo

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