

## Galloping house rent makes tenants' life a misery

Low and middle income groups bear the brunt as rentals double in 17 years

RIZANUZZMAN LASKAR

Taslima Alam (not real name), 32, and her three children live in a two-room flat at East Badda, said she is facing eviction as she cannot afford to pay the monthly rent that her landlord had suddenly increased -- from Tk 4,000 to Tk 6,500.

Her rent was paid through a teaching job in a nearby school and the occasional endowment sent by her husband, a construction worker in Saudi Arabia.

Her employers refused to give her a pay raise that would help her meet the increased rental.

"My landlord informed me that I would have to pay Tk 6,500

starting from January. I had no prior warning," said Taslima Alam.

"I could not pay the whole sum in January. Now they are asking me to pay the balance due plus this month's rent altogether," she said.

Taslima's father lives just a few doors away and she also helps him look after her sister, who is physically handicapped.

"I'm being forced to move out and find a place somewhere else. I don't want to move. I want to stay near my family," said Taslima.

A million people who live in rental houses in Dhaka can easily relate to Taslima's story as they also bear the brunt of indiscriminate increase in rentals.

Mozaffar Hossain, a resident of Mohakhali, recently received a notice from his landlord that his monthly rental would go up starting from the next month.

"He [landlord] asked me to pay Tk 8,000 in place of Tk 6,000 from February," said Mozaffar. "He told me that he is charging all the other tenants Tk 8,500, but since I have been residing in the flat for quite some time, I would have to pay Tk 8,000 -- not Tk 8,500."

"This is outrageous. Not only did they raise the rental by a quarter without any prior notice, they are charging the tenants as much as they please," he added.

A recent study conducted by Consumers Association of

Bangladesh (CAB) shows that house rentals in Dhaka have more than doubled (249.62 percent) in the last 17 years. The increase was around 17 percent in 2007 and 16 percent in 2006. The rentals in Dhaka witnessed a jump in 1991 by over 23 percent and it continued the trend later on, finds the study.

Tenants who are from upper middle, middle, lower middle and lower income groups are the worst victims of the rising trend of house rentals. This section of the population spends nearly 50 percent of their monthly incomes in house rentals alone.

"I wonder how long I can continue to live in this city if

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



House to let in Basabo ... but the rising rent is now a cause of concern for the tenants belonging to low income groups.



COURTESY: NURUL ISLAM BADAL

A PRECIOUS PICTURE: Language Martyr Abdul Jabbar, extreme right, with his colleagues while taking part in training at an Ansar camp in 1951 at Mymensingh circuit house.

## Little has been done to remember my father

Laments son of language martyr Abdul Jabbar

DURDANA GHIAS

Language Martyr Abdul Jabbar's son, M Nurul Islam Badal, has lamented that till date little has been done to remember and respect the memories of his father.

"The Language Movement was the seed of the Liberation War. Had there been no Language Movement, there wouldn't be any war. The Language Movement clearly delineated that the Bengalees and the Pakistanis are two different nations. But how much do we know about them [language martyrs]?" Badal, who is also a freedom fighter, told this correspondent, last week.

Nearly 60 years have gone since the Language Movement -- a struggle that inspired the independence movement -- took place, but the nation is yet to know much about the lives of the

language martyrs, observed a historian.

"As yet, little is known about the lives of the language martyrs. More research should have been done on the history of the language movement. But it is time we shed more light on it," said Dr Sharifuddin Ahmed, professor, Department of History, Dhaka University (DU).

Junaid Murshid, 26, a service holder residing at Uttara, said, "All I know about them are their names." He also said he does not know any place where he can learn details about the language martyrs.

"A museum and a library is being built in Jabbar's name at Gafargaon [the martyr's birthplace], but none of us lives there now. All of his relatives now live in Haluaghat thana," Badal said.

"The person whose father purchased our ancestral house at

Gafargaon now claims to be a relative of Jabbar," Badal alleged saying that the museum and the library is being constructed under the new homeowner's supervision and Jabbar's living family members.

"We appealed to the authorities and the deputy commissioner (DC) of Mymensingh was assigned to resolve the matter. The DC however proposed Gafargaon [as the site of the museum and the library]," Badal went on saying, "A meeting was held with families of language martyrs, but we came to know about the meeting from newspapers. We staged hunger strikes and many reports were published in newspapers, but nothing happened."

"It is our desire that at least one road or a sculpture is named after him," he added.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



STAR PHOTO

The house given to Abdul Jabbar's mother by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibar Rahman at Tejkunipara in the city.

## 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.

*"Do or die, we must have to hold the election within 2008."*

-- ATM Shamsul Huda  
Chief Election Commissioner

Said while exchanging views with Peshajibi Samannoy Parishad, a coalition of professional bodies, at the Election Commission, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

*"We're trying to give the police a humane face which is required in democratic polity."*

-- NBK Tripura

National Project Director, Police Reform Programme and AIG of Police  
Told reporters, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

*"If any written complaint is submitted at the police station the photocopy of the complaint reaches the terrorists."*

-- Dr Abdur Rob Mandal

President, Pallabi Arambagh Samity

Said at the open day discussion at the Pallabi Police Station in the city, on Saturday. Source: Prothom Alo

*"Such violence on the campus is unprecedented and incidents of this sort did not take place here even during the Liberation War."*

-- Dip Chandra Roy

Principal, Rangpur Carmichael College

Told a reporter after Islami Chhatra Shibir activists rampaged through the campus, ransacked principal's house, vandalised his car, torched the house of a mathematics professor and a power substation, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

*"And now cases are being filed on the basis of lies. Sometimes those in power forget that Allah is omnipresent."*

-- Sheikh Hasina

Awami League Chief

Said while talking to her lawyers and relatives in a makeshift courtroom on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

*"As a fact, none can retire from politics. All humans are rational and political beings."*

-- Anwar Hossain Manju

Chairman, Jatiya Party faction

Told reporters over phone from USA when asked whether he would join politics, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

*"Even if I fail to do my duties I should quit."*

-- Nur Mohammad

Inspector General of Police

Told reporters, on Tuesday. Source: Jugantor

Compiled by Durdana Ghias

## BRIDGE OVER GULSHAN-BANANI LAKE

### Legal battle likely alleging lack of environmental clearance

TAWFIQUE ALI

The LGED ministry's project to build a bridge across Gulshan-Banani Lake may face a legal battle as environmentalist groups and locals are planning to file a writ petition against the project for "not having environmental clearance and impact assessment."

Vice-president of Gulshan Society Fazlur Rahman said they have decided to go for public interest litigation (PIL) jointly with Paribesh Bachao Andolon (PBA) against the project.

Though the government declared the lake an 'ecologically critical area' in 2001, the project has been undertaken without carrying out environmental impact assessment and clearance, said Abu Naser Khan, chairman of PBA, an environmentalist group.

However, LGED officials claimed that they have done such assessment.

A legal notice has recently been served upon the authorities concerned asking for explanation within seven days on whether they have complied with all the technical and environmental prerequisites for the project, Fazlur said.

But the authorities have not yet responded to the notice.

"Our legal counsel has already prepared the draft of the writ petition," said Naser Khan.

The Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives ministry has undertaken the Tk 12.47-crore project to build a 90 metres long bridge across the lake.

Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) will implement it.

Locals fear that land filling in the Gulshan Lake for building the bridge will virtually destroy the water body and encourage the land grabbers.

While environmental experts alleged that the project has been undertaken without environmental clearance or impact assessment, transport experts said there has been no detailed engineering analysis for construction of the bridge.

According to the legal notice served jointly by Gulshan Society and Paribesh Bachao Andolon, the project is required to obtain environmental clearance certificate as per section 12 of the Environmental Conservation Act of 1995.

The legal notice maintained that in accordance with rule 7(6) of the Environmental Conservation Rules (ECR) of 1997, the authorities are required to carry out a prior Viability Assessment Report, an Initial Environmental Examination and an Environmental Management Plan, for the project.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) on November 26 wrote a letter to the LGED asking whether they have obtained environmental clearance or carried out any environmental impact assessment for construction of the bridge. But the project authorities did not make any response to the query.

Md Haider Ali, executive engineer of LGED and project director of Gulshan-Banani

Bridge, said the project consultants have carried out an environmental impact assessment.

About the required clearance certificate from the Department of Environment (DoE), he said, "Secretary to the environment ministry attended the inter-ministerial meeting on the project and we took his presence as a clearance."

Architect Md Ehsan Khan, one of the directors of Vitti Associates, a consultancy firm for the project, said that they carried out environmental impact assessment as per the contract and submitted the report along with the layout design of the bridge.

"But it is up to the LGED to get the report approved by the DoE," he said.

About earth filling in the lake, he said earth filling was recommended as a relatively cheaper means for construction of the bridge. The structure could be built bank-to-bank avoiding earth filling if it were a straight structure.

According to legal experts on environment conservation, even if any environmental impact assessment has been carried out, it has to be approved by the DoE.

According to Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, who headed a 31-member advisory committee on Strategic Transport Plan (STP) and is vice-chancellor of Brac University, the authorities should have carried detailed engineering analysis prior to project intervention to determine whether the project is compatible with the STP.



Work on the Gulshan-Banani Bridge in progress.

STAR PHOTO