

House rent a big burden for fixed income group

NAJMU ALAM NOBIN

City dwellers, specially the fixed-income people, find it difficult to cope with the rising house rent and utility bills coupled with the price spiral of essential commodities.

House rent in the capital has increased by 285 percent during the past 18 years, says a recent study of the Consumers Association Bangladesh (Cab).

The rent increased by 21.48 percent in 2007 compared to the previous year.

The increase in water, electricity and gas bills added to the

sufferings of the people.

According to the Cab report of 2007, house rent of concrete buildings increased by 21.65 percent, semi pucca house rent by 18.57 percent and tin-shed house rent by 23.33 percent. Rent for bachelor houses went up by 26.98 percent.

Even the rent of slum houses increased by 16.88 percent.

Mahit, a tenant from Azimpur area, said almost half of his salary has to be spent on house rent. "For this I have to cut expenditure for food and other essentials," he said.

Every tenant of the city has

almost similar experience. The worst sufferers are the lower and middle-income groups who have a fixed income.

Ripon has recently completed his master's degree from Dhaka University and got a job in a private firm in Dhanmondi, but he could not find a shelter for him and his family anywhere near his office due to high house rent.

Ripon had to rent a house in Mirpur at comparatively lower rent. Now he has to experience the hassle of commuting between Mirpur and Dhanmondi twice a day.

"I have to spend at least three hours for going to my office and coming home. High transport cost has made it difficult for me to survive," said Ripon.

Tenants alleged that in most cases the house owners do not comply with the Rent Control Ordinance 1991. Even the owners and tenants do not know about the law.

According to the law, the owners have to sign agreement with the tenants and give them money receipts after getting rents but many of the owners do not follow the rules.

"No deal has been signed between me and the house owner. Even I have no freedom to invite my friends and relatives to the house at any time," Mahitsaid.

In most cases the owners do not provide any money receipt to the renters. According to the rent control ordinance, if any owner does not give any receipt to the renter then the owner would be charged twice of the rent that he has taken from the renter.

According to the law, there is no provision for the owners to take any advance from the tenants but in almost every case the owners take advance rent for one to six months.

Another clause of the law says the government will appoint a rent controller for certain area who will control rents and resolve problems between the owners and tenants.

If there is any need for re-fixing house rent then in every two years the owner and the renter could go to the rent controller to fix a rational house rent.

Eminent urban planner and University Grants Commission Chairman Prof Nazrul Islam said that huge population in the city has created a high demand for houses that caused such increase in house rents. The increase in price of land and construction cost also led to increase in house rent.

"The city dwellers have to spend almost 40 percent of their income for renting a house. The rent should not be more than 20 percent," said Prof Nazrul.

"People find it hard for them to spend so much on house and they are forced to cut their costs for food, education and treatment," he added.

Mahmudur Rashid, a resident of Moghbazar said owner of the house did not sign any deal with him and increases rent every year by at least Tk 500 to Tk 1,000.

Expressing anonymity owner of a house in the city's Mohakhali area said people of every section of the society enjoy increase in their salary or profit but house owners do not have such rise in income. That is why they increase rents.



Hawkers occupy a major portion of the footpath near Baitul Mukarram Mosque.

Hawkers return to footpaths

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Despite eviction drive hawkers continue to occupy a major part of the city's footpaths while contractors and traders keep construction materials on footpaths and roads, thanks to a lack of regular monitoring by the authorities concerned.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) are responsible for maintaining footpaths and dealing with hawkers but they failed to keep footpaths clear for smooth movement of pedestrians.

The government evicted hawkers from footpaths and rehabilitated them at some specific places but most of them have returned and occupied footpaths and roads again.

In Gulistan, New Market, Mirpur and several other areas hawkers are found doing business on footpaths and on rickshaw vans loaded with their merchandise, disrupting movement of pedestrians and vehicles.

The caretaker government rehabilitated the evicted hawkers at two holiday markets and 20 hawkers' markets at some

specific spots but the plan virtually failed to achieve its goal of easing traffic congestion in the city.

The little number of markets and odd location of holiday and hawkers' markets could not prevent the hawkers from returning to the footpaths taking the advantage of little monitoring by the DCC and DMP.

Last week this correspondent found hawkers selling their products at the second gate of New Market, a restricted zone.

Using a rickshaw van as a shop on road, Shamsul Alam selling hosiery in Mirpur area said, "I was doing business on footpath near Bangabandhu Stadium before the eviction drive. I lost my capital during the eviction drive."

Selling a piece of land he restarted his business. "The government allotted shops to the hawkers at different places but like many others I missed the opportunity and started business on this rickshaw van," Alam said.

He said the police were very strict for some days after the eviction drive and setting up of hawkers' markets. Then he planned to do the business on a

rickshaw van. "This van helps me cover more area and flee away fast from patrol police," Alam explained.

On the 2km western pavement of Rokeya Sarani, from Mirpur-10 crossing to Shewrapara bus stop, the reporter found a large number of hawkers doing business occupying the footpath and on rickshaw vans.

Selling of vegetables is totally banned on footpath markets but hundreds of hawkers were found on the pavements and on road in Pallabi.

According to DCC, the city has 388 km of footpaths. A survey conducted under the Strategic Transport Planning (STP) before the latest eviction drives revealed that about 40 percent of the footpaths is occupied by hawkers and with construction materials.

An official of the Estate Department of DCC said his department does not have any mechanism for monitoring the footpaths. "We just evict unauthorised occupants from the footpaths after getting report from the zone offices."

He said that Traffic

Engineering Department has one road inspector for each zone who monitors situation of roads and footpaths in the city. The inspector might look after illegal occupation of the footpaths, he added.

Mohammad Jashimuddin, joint commissioner of DMP, said, police always try to keep footpaths clean but it is not an easy task. "We usually deploy forces on the rescued points of footpaths for preventing hawkers but how long we could do it?"

He pointed out that they cannot do it due to manpower shortage.

About construction materials kept on the roads and pavements, he said no massive drive has yet been conducted against this type of road occupancy.

About monitoring, he admitted that patrol police should monitor illegal possessions on footpaths but they are not monitoring properly.

He said the police can only drive away the occupiers temporarily from a spot but cannot free footpaths permanently. "It is a matter of public awareness too," he added.



Increasing house rents have added to the misery of the fixed income group in the city.

Fitness certificates for cars rarely issued befittingly

CITY CORRESPONDENT

While returning home from office last Wednesday night, Uttara resident Sultan Ahmed stopped at the red light at Kuril Biswa road intersection.

Suddenly, a black taxicab rammed into Sultan's car from behind. Sultan got off his car to check the damage and found that both the cars were damaged quite badly.

"Fortunately, my hand brake was drawn, otherwise my car could have hit the car in front from the impact," he said.

It turned out that the taxicab's brake was faulty. Later, the young apologetic driver agreed to pay for the repair costs.

A week and a few days later, Sultan was cruising through the city's Rokeya Sarani. While he and his wife were waiting for the signal to turn green, a microbus hit his car bumper.

Sultan got down and found a traffic sergeant standing nearby. The microbus driver's answer to the police was it was an incident

of brake fail.

"After a row of disputes and wrangles, I had to be content with a fine of Tk 300 for the paint job of my rear bumper," said Sultan.

"My point is whenever I go to the BRTA office for my yearly car fitness certificate, they check almost all parts of my car and how fit it is for the city roads. It is especially the brakes that they check very carefully," said Sultan. "But what is it with the scores of vehicles plying without headlights, indicator lights, brake lights and proper brake system? How does that happen?" he said.

"The standard of some drivers in the street makes me afraid on the road. I urge the authorities to ensure the proper fitness of all the vehicles and make sure that only qualified drivers can get their hands on driving licences," he said.

Sultan is not the only to hold such notion. Vehicles grossly unfit to ply on city streets have been one of the biggest problems

of the capital over the past decade.

Sources at the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) say they are conducting regular mobile court drives to curb unfit vehicles.

"We are conducting mobile court drive four days a week to seize unfit vehicles. We have already seized a number of vehicles through the drives," a BRTA official said.

However, a source at the BRTA said the authority should be more active in scrutinising the relevant documents and the vehicles' fitness before giving the certificate.

Many car owners allegedly get their fitness certificates through a section of unscrupulous BRTA officials. Some do not even apply for fitness tests fearful that their vehicles would not pass the test. Some other car owners simply do not apply for fitness certificate because of the hassles that come with it.

"The other day I went to BRTA to renew our car's fitness certificate. I waited in the queue so that they could check the car and pass the fitness extension," said Badiuzzaman from Mohammadpur. "But 45 minutes went by and nothing happened. I approached the officer, who was in charge of inspecting the vehicles. He was signing a pile of papers, which belonged to car owners whose cars were not even in the waiting queue."

"The fitness certificate renewal process is unreasonably complicated. The other day when I went to renew my car's fitness, I circled around the different sections of BRTA for over three hours with no results," said Kabir Ahmed, a resident of Moghbazar.

"I have to go back there one of these days and get my car's fitness certificate. But after the hassle I went through that day, I want to stay away from that place," he said. "The process should be simplified by avoiding the needless duplication of receipts and photocopies among many other things."



Long queues of people in front of different counters at BRTA office in Mirpur. They often face hassle in collecting fitness certificates and other papers for their vehicles.