

## Making them vocal about rights from childhood

SHAHINAZ PARVEEN

Children of all ages gathered at Ramna Park last Thursday to launch Child Protection Movement, a national platform run exclusively by children, aiming to ensure their rights in Bangladesh.

The movement, first of its kind, is a joint move by 40 children's club of Dhaka run by 20 NGOs associated with Save The Children, Sweden-Denmark. The member of the movement now stands at 90.

One of the campaigners Nazrul Islam, a 15-year-old school dropout, said, "Before joining these clubs I had no idea that there are some things

called child rights. I had seen things and thought this is how it is and never questioned the adults."

"This movement is about giving voice to the children to tell the adults about their needs. It is about raising questions and pointing out the child rights issues from children's point of view," said Ibrahim Khalid Mamun, a class IX student of Mohammadpur Preparatory High School.

"Sometimes children know best about what they are going through. If the adults listen to their points of view attentively they will discover many unspoken issues," he added.

Primary agenda of the move-

ment is to ensure basic securities like food and shelter, education, health services, recreational opportunity to all children, giving special focus on working children, the physically and mentally challenged, displaced street children and children from the indigenous community.

The movement will work to prevent child trafficking and sexual abuse, provide advocacy to children in distress, create awareness among the adults giving them a children's point of view, and help working children being vocal about their rights. The activists will also work as observers of the general status of child rights in Bangladesh.

Another teen activist Jahanara Afreen, a student of Agrani School and College said, "These are the most pressing issues that demand urgent attention right now. Once these issues are addressed child rights can be ensured to some extent."

Campaigners explained that anyone below the age of 18, interested in working on child rights issues can be a part of the movement.

The movement has three committees -- the guideline committee will prepare work plans and organise activities, the advocacy committee will answer to the call of the children in distress and the reporting team will stay in touch with the media to convey the messages to all.

The movement will function with supervision from the adults of the associated NGOs.

The movement also has an agenda to send two annual reports to the government and one report in five years to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child about the status of the child rights in Bangladesh.

Earlier in February this year a forum of these young club members prepared and sent the first-ever alternative child rights status report to the UN committee.

Sheuli Islam, a student of Agrani School and College, said, "During our brief work period to prepare the report we discovered that the general status of child rights in Bangladesh is appalling. Children are being abused in many ways, especially the working and street children.



A boy at work: Will the wheel of fortune ever swing back?

## Transporters care little, still zip across streets in daytime

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

If you are a resident of Faridabad, then possibly your daily commuting experience is anything but pleasant thanks to the frequent presence of heavy transportation vehicles in the local streets.

The narrow streets of Gandaria, Faridabad or Farashganj barely have any traffic officials to monitor the traffic movement, local residents said.

Large pickups and covered vans crawl along the jam-packed lanes making the area a virtually a hellhole for pedestrians, they added.

"Almost every evening on my way back home, I notice heavy trucks honking those ridiculously deafening horns amid tailback in the Faridabad streets," said Fahad Mahmud, a resident of the area.

"Other day I saw a truck almost hit a rickshaw. They (lorry and bus drivers) seem not within the purview of any traffic regulations and drive as if the streets belong to them," he added.

According to the sources at the traffic department of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), any truck or lorry, regardless of being medium-duty or heavy-duty are barred from using city streets from 8:00am to 8:00pm. However, the ban is hardly

imposed in the area, local residents observed.

While most of these heavy vehicles are inter-district lorries and cargo carriers transporting goods to and from the capital, rows of lorries can also be seen carrying construction materials into the area to support the different constructional works in the area.

A lot of transport companies are also using large pickup trucks instead of large lorries to transport goods during daytime. These pickups trucks can be as big of a culprit as their larger colleagues in disturbing smooth traffic movement.

"Some of the roads in the area are too narrow even for a pair of cars. The lorries and trucks make them even worse," Fahad said.

The fact that the area happens to be close to some of the busiest exit points of the city makes the situation unbearable.

Locals say the truck stand near the Bangladesh Bank School makes the area virtually a jamboree for heavy trucks and lorries.

"I find the truck stand in the area totally pointless. It creates frequent traffic congestion in the streets," said Jalal Ahmed, of Gandaria.

Children shambling with their schoolbags and toddling their way to the Bangladesh Bank School amid the rows of

parked trucks and lorries in the mornings and afternoons is a common sight for Faridabad residents.

"We [residents] have appealed to the local authorities to rid the street from the heavy transport vehicles as they pose threat to the safety of the school children and their guardians everyday," said Mahabubuddin Chowdhury, a resident of Gandaria. "An accident is just waiting to happen in that road."

The situation is no different in many other zones in the city. City frequenters are bound to come across the odd five-ton truck during daytime.

Bulky transporters are often seen zipping across the thoroughfares in Syedabad, Jatrabari, Pallabi, Uttara, Mirpur, Gabtoli, Postogola and adjacent streets especially during the evening hours.

The traffic police officials who are supposed to monitor the streets are usually found mingling with their colleagues while the heavy transporters cruise past them, observers said.

"You will often see them [traffic officers] shaking hands with the lorry drivers as they enter the city," said Moin Ullah, a resident of Gandaria. "I wonder how much money passes hands during the so-called handshakes".

Truck drivers allege that they have to bribe their way inside the city. According to Enamul, a driver from Mymensingh, the bribe usually depends on the time and the type of goods in the vehicle.

"Last week I paid Tk 700 in the Jatrabari intersection to get inside the city at around 6 pm," he said adding that the drivers usually start from the city an hour or two early from the designated time of 8:00pm to stay ahead of time.

"If we leave after 8:00pm -- as the rules suggest -- stocking the cargo would take hours which would put us behind schedule. Starting a bit early saves hours of time as we have to travel hundreds of miles every night," said Enamul.

An on-duty traffic officer from Kotowali said they allow some heavy transporters inside the city on "exceptional" situations.

"Sometimes we have many trucks and lorries queuing in the highways just after 8:00am. If we do not let them enter the city, they would have to wait there for the next twelve hours or so," he said.

"Having rows of huge lorries parked on the highways can do anything but good to the already chaotic traffic situations, so we allow some of them to enter when the situation demands," he added.



Transporters carrying goods to and from the capital at daytime still remain a common sight in many areas.



A RARE SIGHT IN THE CONCRETE JUNGLE: Common reed, a species of tall grass with tuft of soft downy white flowers, has covered the open space at Banasree in Rampura. Known as 'kaash' in Bangla, it is usually sighted near the rivers in rural areas.

## HOUSING PROJECT FOR GOVT OFFICIALS

# Dream come true for many

TAWFIQUE ALI

Government employees have been enthused by the proposed multi-storey housing scheme for them as they will be able to buy those on easy instalments.

Public Works Department (PWD) will build 4,256 flats in Mohakhali and Mirpur areas by 2011 and sell them among the government officials.

"We are very enthusiastic about it simply because it will provide us with some housing solutions," said JN Biswas, additional divisional commissioner of Sylhet. "Such housing project is an answer to the government officials' worry for shelter after retirement."

The next generation of a government official feel a sense of uncertainty and insecurity of housing after their father or mother retires from service, Biswas said, adding, "I will apply for a flat as soon as the authorities invite applications for it."

The government of India, for example, facilitates housing loan and provides other incentives for housing of government officials of all classes, he said.

PWD officials said the government targets to complete the project by December 2011.

"It is like a dream comes true for many of us," said Rashidul Hassan, an executive engineer of PWD. "I will surely apply for a flat at the government housing complex."

Hassan lived long 20 years in government quarters as his father was a government official. He said that he still remembers his childhood days when he used to play every day at big playgrounds in the government staff colony.

"But my 10-year-old son is deprived of such an opportunity today in private housing complexes," he regretted.

Security and surrounding environment are usually much better than what it is at a private housing complex, according to Hassan.

The core attractive features of a government housing initiative include adequate open space, playgrounds, greenery, ventilation and community centre.

PWD Chief Engineer Abdullah-Al-Shafi said they have already pre-qualified 13 builders for the Mohakhali site and 12 for the Mirpur site as private partners.

The pre-qualified developers will make financial offer by the end of November for share of the flats. Government will accept the highest offer of flat ownership.

The government portion of the flats will be sold among the government officials.

While the government will provide only land, private developers will build all the infrastructures at their own cost and get share of the flats at a ratio to be settled in bidding. They will be able to sell their flats following government rules.

Shafi said, "This is a pilot project and government may think of similar projects at district and divisional towns if it proves successful."

Prof Nazrul Islam, a noted urban expert who volunteered for drawing up the Housing Development Programme for Dhaka city and has just completed it, said that 15-storey buildings mean a very high-density housing.

The implementing agency should check whether the Detailed Area Plan of Dhaka

allows such land use at the proposed site, said Prof Islam. "They should also make sure adequate utility services and physical facilities are available before they start construction."

Asked about electricity, sewer system, utility services and roads for the residents, the PWD chief engineer said they would think about it in the second phase and that there will be deep tube-wells and electric sub-stations in the project sites.

In the first phase in 2007-2008 fiscal year, PWD will build the

high-rise apartment buildings at its own land in Mohakhali and Mirpur.

The Mohakhali site area includes around 20 acres of Banani Lake. There will be a 10-acre lake within the project and the rest will be earth-filled for the project, said Shafi. Around 40 percent of the project area will be built-up.

The site in Mohakhali is located on 42.38 acres land in Karail Mouja and that in Mirpur is located near PWD's Wood Workshop Division on 7.18 acres of land.

A total of eight 15-storey buildings will be built for 896 flats at Mirpur site. Four buildings will have 1400 square feet flats and the rest will have 1200 square feet flats.

The Department of Architecture has drawn a primary layout design for both the sites. The layout provides for 30 apartment buildings, each of which will be 15-storey, to create 3360 flats at Mohakhali site. Ten of the buildings will have 2000 square feet flats, ten will have 1700 square feet and the rest ten will have 1400 square feet flats.

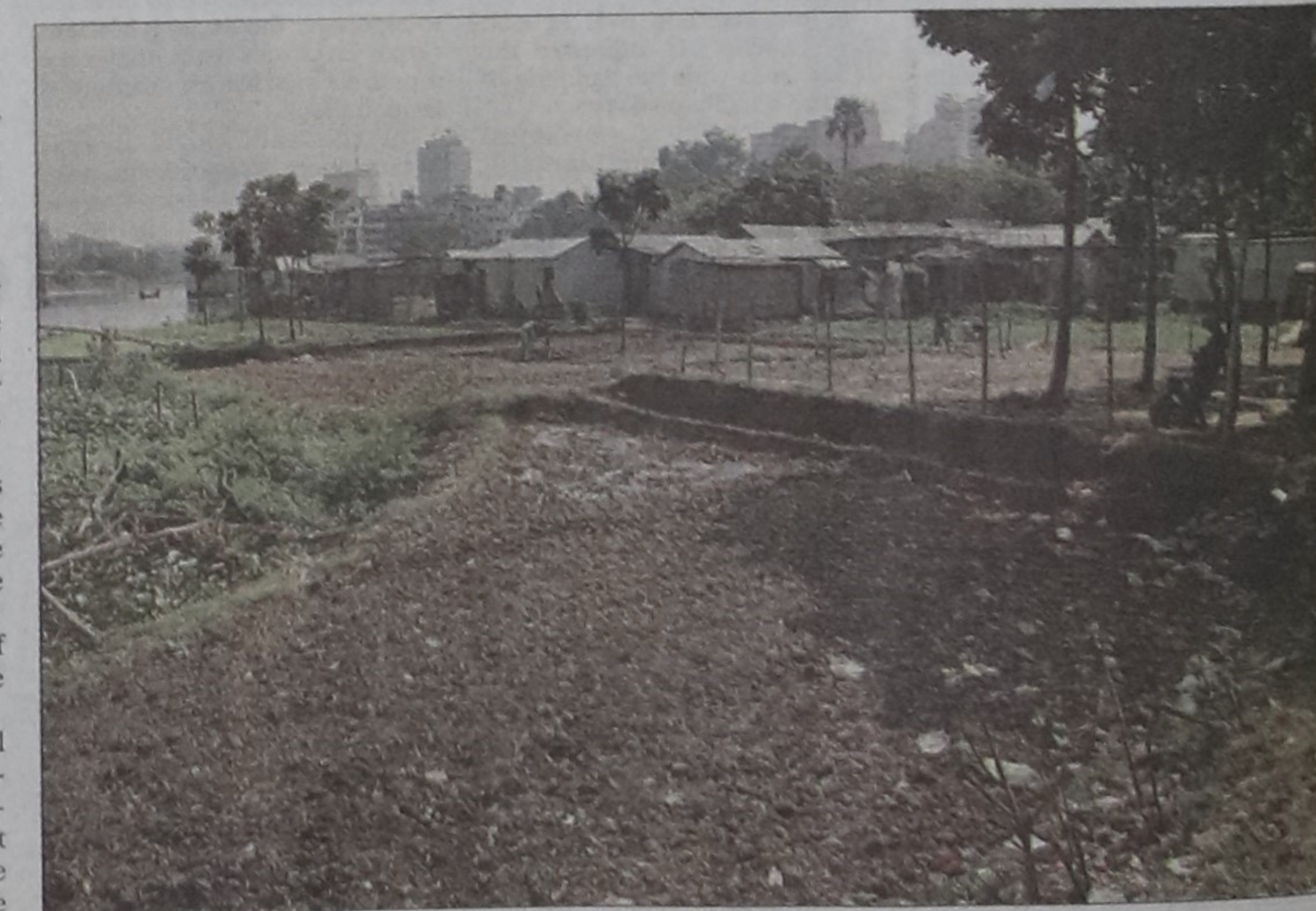
The housing complex will have amenities like lake, garden, playground, arboury culture, community centre, shopping centre, health centre and swimming pool.

A 1400 square feet flat in Mohakhali will cost Tk 40.84 lakh, a 1700 square feet one Tk 49.69 lakh, and a 2000 square feet flat will cost Tk 58.34 lakh. In Mirpur, a 1200 square feet flats will cost 33.11 lakh and a 1400 square feet one Tk 38.62 lakh.

PWD has undertaken the project in the light of government's infrastructure development on public-private partnership policy of 2008. The draft project proposal is yet to be sent to the Planning Commission for approval.



A large number of government officials spend their precious time of life in colonies and can only dream of a house of their own.



Proposed site for multi-storey housing for government employees at Mohakhali.