Johnny's friend Ferdous, who works for an NGO in the city.

"The only follow up you hear of within a day or two following your complaint is when you receive a call from none other than the river grabber, who invites you to visit his place and check the documents," Ferdous continues. "By now you realise you have invited enough trouble for yourself. The police have asked the offender to settle the matter with the complainant."

Demolition and BIWTA

For the last ten years BIWTA (Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority) has been evicting settlers and demolishing hundreds of structures from the shores, foreshores, and channels of the rivers Buriganga, Turag, Balu and the Sitalakhya. The authority, mandated under the Port Act has done so to protect its port area, which stretches over an area of 84 kilometres, including both banks of the rivers Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Sitalakhya.

BIWTA has been doing this arduous job in the most rudimentary way, using anything from a hammer to rope, every time leaving piles of blasts either in the river water or on their shores.

BIWTA's top officials admitted the drawbacks. An official, requesting customary anonymity said that the persistent media campaigns forced the policymakers to launch eviction drives "without even asking if the BIWTA has the equipment to conduct such drives."

"We demolished the structures but failed to reclaim our rivers as we left the debris where they belonged encouraging the encroachers to return," said the top official.

Another senior official of the BIWTA eviction team said the half-done job was worse than not doing anything to save the rivers: "The eviction drive is futile if the river is not reclaimed and demarcated immediately after eviction to deter future encroachments," he pointed out.



AMDADUL HUQ/DRIKNEWS

Flow of the river

The rivers and canals around the capital become totally stagnant with the onset of dry season when their flow is cut off at the confluence of Jamuna in the south of Dhaka. For seven months the slight movement in the river waters occurs when high and low tides from the downstream rivers take place. The Buriganga, the Turag, the Balu, and the Sitalakhya during the lean period become pits for millions of gallons of solid and liquid waste, emitting unbearable stench.

According to experts at the Institute of Water Modelling, the only way to keep the city rivers flowing during lean period is to dredge the confluences open. The Ghior Khal in Manikganj, the Pungli in Tangail, and the Old Brahmaputra in Jamalpur are the main water conduits for the rivers around Dhaka.