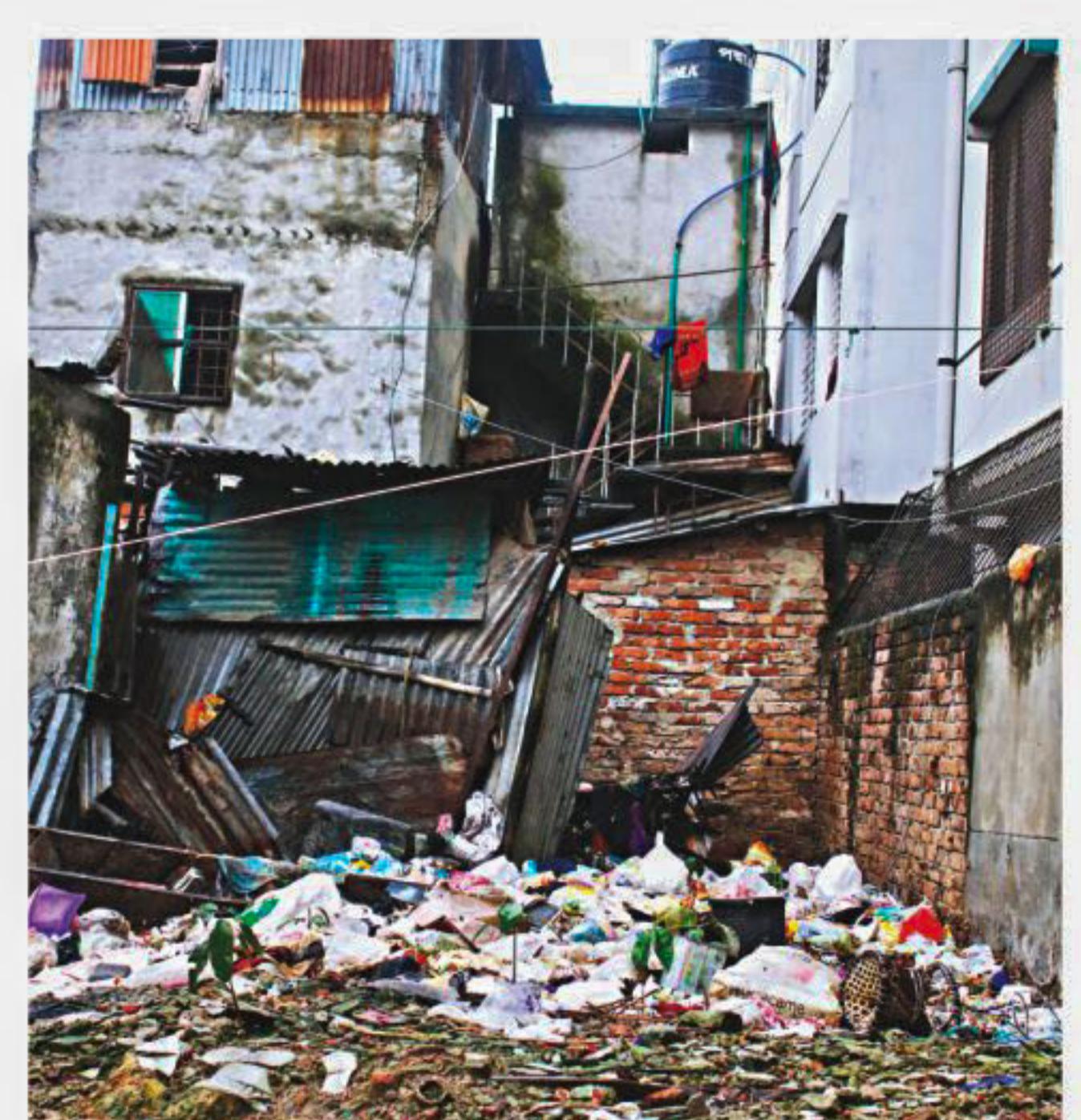




Clockwise from the top: The Bihari community living in refugee camps in Mirpur; Momtaz posing with his four daughters inside the house that the government is claiming is not his; A small poster of Cinderella in Momtaz's house; A home broken down by private evictors.

PHOTOS:  
KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO



# How a lottery ticket became an eviction threat

National Housing Authority project allegedly sold Bihari camp lands away as residential plots

ZYMA ISLAM

It all started years ago, when an advertisement by the National Housing Authority appeared in *The Daily Inqilab* on February 14, 1995, inviting prospective buyers for land in Mirpur.

The project, called Dhaka City Infrastructure Development Project (DUEP for short in Bangla), was being funded by the Asian Development Bank, and included 642 residential plots of 1.75 katha each for "middle-class groups". The buyers would have to buy in with a Tk 20,000 deposit and could pay the rest in Tk 1,445 instalments over 25 years.

It was a sweet deal. Except many of these plots were located in the Bihari refugee camps. And now the community has locked horns with the government and the buyers of the plots. 18 plot holders filed a writ

petition against the Bihari community in 2011, while nine members of the community fought back with a writ of their own in 2017. Both of the petitions received judgments—one in favour of eviction of the Biharis, and the other restricting it—leaving both the buyers and current dwellers hanging.

*Bhaater hotel* busser Momtaz is the fly caught in the spider's nest. His home was included in that list of plots. The government is now claiming that the 38-year-old member of the Bihari community in Mirpur is illegally occupying the house that he was born in. "We were all born in the room that Momtaz lives in now. This is called Shahid-e-Millat camp. As a Bihari refugee, my father was given the room by the government," reminiscences

Momtaz's sister Sharbari.

Worse yet, the government sold off the plot in 1995—and the plot exchanged hands twice while Momtaz still lived on the land. Then finally, in a bid, seemingly to remove Momtaz once and for all, the buyer of the plot filed an extortion case against him.

Located at Road 8, Block A of Sector 10, Mirpur, the house being debated about is barely an eight feet by six feet room. A large double bed takes up most of the room, leaving a tiny strip of concrete floor for a dish rack. The family of five, comprising Momtaz's four daughters, himself and his wife, all share the bed. Shelves built into the fluorescent green walls provide the majority of the storage space for the family. The bathroom is a shared facility that is

Continued to page 5