

COUNTRY

## Number of slum dwellers increases in Rajshahi

✍ By Regional Correspondent

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In this recently snapped photo, the slums of Choto Bongram area of Rajshahi city are seen submerged in rainwater.

The number of slum dwellers is increasing in Rajshahi, a survey conducted by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and the Centre for Urban Studies revealed the fact.

It is learnt that, there having no industrial infrastructures, Rajshahi remains a city consisting mainly of students, teachers and professionals. The number of daily wage earners is very scanty in the city because of the absence of any industrial hubs here.

Even without any industrial infrastructure facilities in Rajshahi, the cause of increasing floating population in the city is worrying for the city planners and the city dwellers as well.

Rajshahi is regarded as one of the cheapest and the friendliest cities in the world. It is also one of the best green, clean cities in the world. It is recognized as the city of clean air by international organisations. Due to laudable programmes of Rajshahi City Corporation Mayor AHM Khairuzzamam Liton, Rajshahi has turned to a livable, clean, fresh air and green city.

The city of Rajshahi was declared as the happiest city in the world by the World Happiness Survey in 2006. The city has a very peaceful environment, almost free from mugging. Political clashes and even the clashes among urban people on various issues are also rare.

For being a friendly and livable city, a huge number of poor, landless people, mainly day labourers are rushing to the city and taking shelter elsewhere-on the pavement, beside the railway track, river banks and even in the open spaces.

According to sources, not only the number of poor and slum dwellers are increasing in Rajshahi but also the number of well off people are also increasing in the city. Those wealthy people, who used to live in

rural areas, are purchasing plots of land in the city, constructing houses and shifting there with their family members.

Recent increase of cultivation of mangoes, tomatoes, paddy and even pisci-culture and poultry farming have made hundreds of rural people wealthy. Most of those people are now rushing to the city or suburban areas for various purposes including for education of their children and for enjoying civic facilities. Those who are failing to purchase land or houses in the city areas are living in the rented houses.

On the other hand, poor and helpless people are also thronging to city centres in search of jobs. Those include auto-rickshaw, rickshaw and van pullers, helpers of tempoos, buses and minibuses, vegetable vendors, fishermen, small traders, masons, artisans, garbage hunters and beggars.

These people with their low income are living inhuman lives in shanties and slums by erecting makeshift cottages with bamboo, polythene and straw. The largest slum in the city is situated at the west side of Padma Housing Area. Here are around 160 shanties where more than 160 people reside. All the slum dwellers are deprived from all civic facilities including the facilities of latrine, pure drinking water and electricity.

Rajshahi City Corporation every year spent a huge sum of money under the project on 'Alleviation of Poverty through City Partnership Programme' but instead of poverty alleviation, the flow of poor people is increasing in the city and the number of slum dwellers is also increasing continually.

Dr Kausar Hossain, former Professor of Pabna Medical College and a resident of Rajshahi Upashahar area informed, slum dwellers used to suffer from various contagious diseases like Diarrhoea, Cholera,

Typhoid, Jaundice and Pneumonia because of their living in unhygienic atmosphere and because of not using sanitary latrine and safe drinking water.

Rajshahi City Corporation sources informed, under poverty alleviation project of city partnership programme, a total of 63,963 families are being benefitted in 30 wards of the city.

RCC Community Development Committee(CDC) sources informed, the number of people is continually increasing in the city. Well off people who settled in the city do not bother about the welfare of the floating, poor people. They think it is the sole duty of the city corporation.

According to a survey report of BRAC, more than 30 percent people of Rajshahi city live below poverty line. Even, the NGOs do not dare to take them under their poverty alleviation or credit programme. As a result, those poor people used to lead a miserable life.

AHM Khairuzzaman Liton, Mayor of RCC informed, RCC has taken up various development projects for the welfare of poor city dwellers. With the assistance from various local and international organisations, those projects are being implemented, he mentioned.

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