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## [Rubana Huq](#)

# The shadows of the shanties

April 5, 2012



Photo courtesy: BRAC



Why are people put on the streets? Why does even the question of “legality” apply indiscriminately to them and not many of who defy the law and grab lands on a daily basis? Why are laws applicable to mostly those who are powerless?

Thousands of people stranded under the open skies are supposed to be a pretty sight as long as it's for stargazing. Last night they weren't thanking God, they were cursing God's men who bulldozed their way into their homes and flattened their lives out. The TNT bosti is hardly a ten-minute drive from where we live. Yet, we learnt about the news through a late night television bulletin. This is what we call an ideal case of disconnect.

At midnight, my husband, Annis and I went to see them. Who were we going to meet? Only the residents of the area that no more stood as their home or their identity. That space had been occupied by most of them for over two decades. Yet today, their habitat defied legality. Most of them have been paying rent to a few ever-powerful mastaans of the area; some have just continued living there by erecting their own tin sheds and had hoped to do so forever. Unfortunately for the poor, 'forever' does not exist.

'Forever' in this land, is meant for people, who finalise findings targeting the helpless. 'Forever' in this land, is meant for authorities that act at the quickest pace when it comes to the poor. After all, what can the evictees do but bring traffic in between Mohakhali and Gulshan to a standstill for three hours? A quick action by quick battalion and police force obviously can iron out the creases on the starched governance, within a few hours. In fact, I wonder, why didn't the authorities simply burn the shanties in the middle of the night when most of them would have been sleeping? That probably would have taken care of their problem once and forever. After all, 'forever' happens to be their sole property.



Photo courtesy: BRAC

I am not an activist who has engaged earlier in the eviction issues. I am simply a citizen who ventured out last night to see why things are the way they are in a land that I live in and trust my life with. When I called a friend of mine who is usually involved in almost all that goes right with the country, he briefed me in despair and added that none of the institutions could go forward and reopen the issue with the judiciary as the verdict from the Supreme Court was already in place. I looked at the face of a poor guard who works for TNT, who earns Tk 2700.00 and needs the extra Tk 2000.00 that his wife earns from working as a domestic help in the neighbourhood and I did not know what to tell him, except leave our driver's cell phone number, and asked him to call if he needed us. I did not know how to answer a sixty-year-old woman who rambled about a certain political leader grabbing lands in the area. I felt shame thinking that we must have had some semblance with the corrupt and the heartless. How can we ever be different? Our features are nurtured with care; our hearts are well taken care of; our mirrors lie every minute. Therefore, how can we not belong to the clan of the heartless?



Photo courtesy: BRAC

The headlines in most of the papers today stated that the authority has “reclaimed portion of 170-decimal government land from Korail slum on the bank of Gulshan Lake”. The remaining portion of the 80 decimal land of BTCL, the 43 decimal land of PWD and the rest by ICT would soon be recovered within the next two months, the official had pledged. Unfortunately instead of the 20 feet that the slum dwellers were asked to evacuate a day earlier, the authorities had levelled the land, evicted all and had apparently “reclaimed” the slum of Korail that stands on 99 acres of land. Question is, whom are we reclaiming the land from? I put this question to activists who fight for the environment and for enhancing the beauties of the lake. If the lakes are meant for beauty and if these slum dwellers' children play in the lakes, read in schools built in boats by generous teachers, spit and urinate in the lake and turn it into an uninhabitable zone for our us and our children, then how do we plan on carving out an alternative space for them? Which ones of us will vouch to ensure the existence of those naked slum kids, the faceless voters, and the powerless grimy faces who live right around our huge corners?

There is not an iota of doubt about their illegal occupancy. But then again, there really isn't any way to define Right when it comes to hunger and deprivation. Without rehabilitation, eviction is absolute cruelty. Without a plan, bulldozing people into homelessness is an utter shame. The evictees are the shadow people, following our mood swings, playing into the current tunes of our times. If we don't stand for them today, then we better find the shadow spaces for them to live in.

I urge the community of lawyers to come forward and find a way for these men and women. I urge our activist friends, the youth and the resourceful to join hands and visit these shanties and extend their hands to at least stall the eviction till next winter so that these people don't burn in this summer, in hunger and heat. And then REHABILITATE THEM FIRST before steering another bulldozer their way.

[Rubana Huq](#), Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

Tags: [Bangladesh](#), [eviction](#), [Korail Slum](#)



This entry was posted on April 5, 2012 at 8:35 pm and is filed under [Law and Justice](#), [Poverty](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [RSS 2.0](#) feed.

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**9 Responses to “ The shadows of the shanties ”**



[H.Iqbal](#) on April 7, 2012 at 11:28 am

“Why are laws applicable to mostly those who are powerless?”—Is it because “Might is Right”? but the powerless are gradually gathering courage and strength, and it may not be far off when we might witness a reversal of fortune.

[Reply](#)



russel on April 6, 2012 at 2:16 pm

Thanks for raising your voice on this painful issue. Ms Rubana’s questions are also mine. The news was so shocking.

Why is our government so callous? Aren’t they doing the same thing British did with the sub-continent? Minor groups are always oppressed, but why?

[Reply](#)



Ali on April 6, 2012 at 2:08 pm

EVERYTHING, every action is for the People, by the ‘people’ and of the people! Play the people card well and continue with what we call politics. No solution is on the horizon because election is around the corner.

[Reply](#)



Rezaur Razzak on April 6, 2012 at 12:18 pm

Keep up the good work Rubana. You are writing thought provoking articles regularly inspite of your busy life.

[Reply](#)



Ruma on April 6, 2012 at 10:49 am

Creating a ground for the Awami leaders to grab the land later?

[Reply](#)



Aa on April 6, 2012 at 10:00 am

On Gulshan Avenue alone these influential people have encroached onto the footpaths. They have built buildings flouting the height laws. But they are above the law. And the poor people of Korail have to face the full brunt of the law.

[Reply](#)



mohammed gaosul azam on April 6, 2012 at 12:44 am

Please keep on writing.

[Reply](#)



Golam Arshad on April 5, 2012 at 11:10 pm

Rubana: Justice denied to the powerless! Anis and you are humane and kind. Who cares ? Weak trembles to the blade of the powerful. Bless your heart. Keep up the good work!!

[Reply](#)



Akhtar Shah on April 5, 2012 at 9:25 pm

This unfairness is particularly hard to swallow when you hear Prof. Abul Barkat of DU (in a key note speech) stating that 90% of Khas (public) land are in the hands of the



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