

W H Y A R E S L U M S B U R N I N G ?

AN INVESTIGATION BY NIVARA HAKK SURAKSHA SAMITI

SITE OF FIRE	WARD	NO. OF HUTS GUTTED	AFFECTED POPULATION	DATE OF FIRE	TIME	LAND OWNERSHIP
1. KANDIVILI	P SOUTH	100	500	24TH OCT.	1.30 A.M.	B.M.C.
2. CUFFE PARADE	A SOUTH	330	1650	30TH OCT.	11.30 A.M.	COLLECTOR
3. MAHALAXMI	G SOUTH	2000	10,000	14TH NOV.	7.30 P.M.	BMC
4. WORLI	G SOUTH	170	850	10TH OCT.	2.20 A.M.	COLLECTOR
5. MATUNGA LABOUR CAMP	G NORTH	15	75	2ND DEC.	12.30 A.M.	BMC
6. GOREGAON	P SOUTH	500	2500	8TH DEC?	5.00 P.M.	BMC
7. VILE PARLE	K EAST	150	750	20TH DEC?	2.00 A.M.	STATE GOVT.
			3,265	16,325		

Report of an investigation into fires in Bombay Slums
Between October - December, 1987, by a team of the
Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti.

Introduction:

The complete devastation by fire of several thousand huts in seven incidents within a short space of three months (October - December 1987) has raised several suggestions in the minds of those involved in the struggle for housing in Bombay.

- 1) Were these fires the result of accidents as the police reports claimed?
- 2) Was there any nexus between the Government onslaught on slums and these fires?
- 3) Were interested parties delaying aid and succour to the affected slums?
- 4) Was this, in short, a quick way of clearing prime land for speculation and profiteering?
- 5) Was there any nexus between the Government and the Builders, Estate agents and Business interests?
- 6) Were there larger social, political and economic interests leading to attacks on slum dwellers?

Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti which was formed in 1981 and comprises several slum, social work and youth organisations as well as individual professionals, set up a fact-finding team to investigate the slum fires. The team visited the sites of all the fires, spoke to slum dwellers as well as ward officers and other authorities.

The team presents below its report. It has also decided to append to the report, three case studies, pertaining to the biggest fires which are marked by a complexity of issues. These are of Rajiv Nagar (Goregaon), Dhobi Ghat (Mahalaxmi) and Ambedkar Nagar (Cuffe Parade).

Before going into the report of the fire itself, the team would like to present a brief background to the housing question in Bombay, which it views as integral to the investigation.

PRESSURE ON URBAN LAND

Over the past decades there has been an increasing number of people migrating to the city of Bombay. Lack of rural development, unemployment as well as widespread drought is pushing people into the cities in search of livelihood. On the other hand, concentration and further growth of industries and work opportunities has attracted the poor from villages and small towns.

Business, private investments and speculation in land and housing has pushed the price of land to a phenomenal high. For example, in South Bombay, the combined rate of land and building is as much as Rs.4,000 per sq.ft.

Lack of political will, total disregard and apathy, lack of relevant and systematic planning and total failure in the implementation of programmes by the Government has led to the mushrooming of slums and the total degradation of living conditions in the city. Today, approximately 60 per cent of the city's population live in slums and in the most inhuman environmental conditions, posing a serious threat to their lives and in particular to women and children.

While speculation in real estate has made a few into millionaires overnight, for the vast majority the owning of a house remains an impossible dream. (Average income of a slum household: Rs.419.00; average price of a one room slum tenement : Rs.5,000.00; chawl: Rs.1.5 lakhs, subject to location). Hence, what is a basic necessity has been converted into a luxury and even denied to the vast majority.

THERE IS NO DEARTH OF LAND

The common belief is that there is no land available in the city of Bombay or that it is the lack of space which is causing the congestion and housing problem. But this is patently untrue.

There are 50,000 acres of vacant land available in Bombay according to the Governments own statistics. Of this about 7,500 acres of private land is already vested with the Government under the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act, 1976. Even with a density of 200 persons an acre, the total land required for housing the entire 5.5 million slum population would require 25,500 acres. This is exactly half of the total vacant land in the city. It may be noted here that these figures of vacant land does not include the land occupied by existing slums. Decentralisation and change in the priorities of land-use pattern can very easily help the situation.

The problem then is not of too many people or too little land, out of a cogent housing policy for the benefit of the poor and the toilers.

GOVERNMENT'S ROLE :

The gravity of the housing problem in the metropolis compelled the Government to take note of the situation. It came out with a token gesture in the form of a census of slums. This census was conducted in 1976 and the status of "unauthorised encroachments" was bestowed on the slums. Photopasses were given to slumdwellers at the time and the municipality began collecting a monthly "fine" (dand).

It must be stressed here that the majority of the population living in slums does not comprise of just lumpens and goondas as made out by the Government and its protagonists.

In fact, the slumdwellers work in various sectors and form an absolutely essential part of the city's work force. Industrial workers, municipal & Government employees, those employed in the informal sector form the main part of the slum population.

But, in 1980, the Government decided to launch an offensive against slums and the Antulay Government began large scale evictions in the middle of the monsoons. Slumdwellers were bundled into S.T. buses and dumped outside the city. The brutality of these evictions shook the city. A temporary respite was obtained from the courts, but since then the onslaught has continued in a more planned but cautious manner.

VESTED INTERESTS AND LAND:

The skyrocketing land prices have made many a profiteer cover the available land within the city. But it is not only the Builders who are involved in get-rich-quick schemes by taking over whatever sites are available. An increasingly common trend is the development of slum lords, who prey on the poor, pushing them out of their houses and land in order to make a quick buck. These goondas also collect money from slumdwellers at will, enjoying as they do the protection of organised crime racketeers, political patronage, with the police at best turning a blind eye at all this and at worst, in active collusion with these anti-social elements.

LACK OF AMENITIES AND THE RESULTANT VULNERABILITY OF SLUMS

Apart from living under constant threat from both the authorities and goondas and the consequent insecurity that this breeds, the slumdwellers have to suffer a multitude of practical problems.

The manner in which these slums have come up and the way in which they are presently constructed, makes conditions within a slum extremely hazardous. The lack of amenities like roads, water, electricity, adds to this problem. As a rule, the slums are extremely congested and are built mostly from inflammable materials. In the event of a calamity like fire, the dimensions of a tragedy are aggravated. It also means that the task of fire fighting becomes much more difficult in terms of reach and accessibility of water hoses-etc. (As we found in the case of the Matunga Labour Camp Fire and Mariamma Nagar).

The location of slums close to railway stations and highways increases the risk of accidents (ref: Mahalaxmi and Vile Parle). As it is, accidents involving children are quite common.

LEGAL STATUS

Most of the affected slums have come up around 1980 and have not been censused in 1976. In line with the official policy they are considered unauthorised and not entitled to any civic rights or amenities. However, residents of Kamaraj Nagar, Vile Parle, have been there since 1970, but they have not been censused.

Despite being unauthorised, all residents are on the 1980 electoral lists. All the slums had been demolished atleast once, some twice (Worli Mariamma Nagar) or even thrice (Kandivli, Cuffe Parade). Of the seven slums investigated, 4 were on BMC land, 2 on the Collector's land and 1 on state Government land. In at least four of these slums, there has been a longstanding dispute between the residents and the authorities. They are :

- 1) Ambedkar Nagar, Cuffe Parade: A case has been filed against the Collector and a stay-order obtained against eviction.
- 2) Ganesh Nagar C. & D Committees, Mahalaxmi: The land has been reserved for residential accommodation for retired fire brigade officers. The rest of the land is reserved under the green belt.
- 3) Rajiv Nagar, Goregaon: The land has been allocated for a cemetery, a garden, and for the rehabilitation of displaced civic employees.
- 4) Kamraj Nagar, Vile Parle: The road development authorities want to acquire the land from the BMC to widen the highway by 30 feet.

Residents of 2 of these areas i.e. of Ambedkar Nagar, Cuffe Parade and Rajiv Nagar, Goregaon, have been given eviction notices after the fires by the Additional Collector for Slum Encroachments and the BMC respectively. In Cuffe Parade, the authorities have asked residents to produce proof of residence since 1980 which is impossible as all the relevant documents have been destroyed by the fire. In Goregaon, the residents filed a case against the eviction order and obtained a stay on 8th Jan. 1988.

Having lost all their life's belongings and savings in the fire and having re-built their houses by taking loans, the people from all these areas live under the constant threat of demolition.

POLITICAL SITUATION

Despite being sadly neglected in all respects, the slum dwellers' right to vote is granted promptly. They serve as vote banks which are wooed by politicians during elections. False assurances of providing basic amenities and security of tenure are made. Residents of Kamraj Nagar, Vile Parle, have learnt a bitter lesson in this respect. There are 1,215 voters on the electoral rolls of this area. They belong to the mayor, Dr. Ramesh Prabhoo's constituency. Just a week before the fire, the assembly elections were held and candidates from all parties visited the area and gave tall assurances. Even four days after the fire, the people had not received any relief. To date, no assurance has been given of providing alternative accommodation.

Censuses, recognition of slums, the concept of cut-off dates and electoral rolls only prove to be handy tools to divide and rule the slum dwellers.

In Mahalaxmi, the Congress I Corporator, Mr. Virji Solanki, has come up with a novel scheme to build new houses. He has floated a co-operative housing society inviting people to join as members by paying a sum of Rs.2,051.00. He has promised to arrange loans of around Rs.10,000.00 per member, knowing very well that the people do not have legal rights over the land. What is the Corporator's interest in this scheme? He is a Builder himself.

Further, even the MLA, Mr. Dadu Atyalkar of the Kamgar Aghadi has offered to build houses for people at a cost of Rs.1,100.00. Some 80 people have already registered in his scheme. Most people however, are afraid to invest any money unless some guarantee against demolitions is given. None of the political parties involved in this area have bothered to raise the most fundamental issue of tenancy rights.

In Goregaon, the local Councilor refused to recognise more than 200-odd people who had voted in the last election. In short it was a threat to those who did not vote in support of the MLA.

It is clear that while the politicians are eager to use the slums as vote banks, they are doing precious little in the way of actual help in times of emergency. Even on a regular basis, on the question of basic amenities, health and education, they do little.

Further, there are many local lumpens associated with some political parties, who make their living by threatening local residents and extorting money. When their authority is challenged by the local people, they unleash terror by armed assault or by threatening to set the slum on fire. This is what happened in Rajiv Nagar, Goregaon. A group of Shiv Sena goondas have been extorting money and terrorising people here. As local people started resisting, there was an armed attack in October, resulting in serious injury to one person. A complaint was made to the local police station but no action was taken. Before the fire, on Dec. 8th, there were several oral threats by these goondas but the local people were helpless.

ACCIDENT OR ARSON?

After a fire, the local police station investigates the causes of the fire. Their report is accepted as the basis by the Collector (in order to distribute compensation), the fire brigade and the press.

The police have shown much haste in establishing a theory of the fires being an accident. Rumours are accepted as facts and the cause is dismissed as accidental - either a lit cigarette butt carelessly thrown, a stove bursting, self-immolation, a fire cracker being burst etc. No investigation worth the name is done as to the situation in the slum before the fire, history of disputes, etc. People affected in three of the fires investigated, in Cuffe Parade, Goregaon and Mahalaxmi, suspect foul play because there have been conflicts in the area and attempts have been made in the past to evict them. They say that there have been fires in the past due to accidents but these have affected only a few huts and not the whole slum. Further, the fact that eviction

notices have been served on two of the slums after the fire, has only strengthened the argument that there was foul play and vested interests involved.

In Goregaon and Cuffe Parade, the fires broke out at a time when most of the people were away at work and it was known that only a few women and children would be around. In Goregaon, the day the fire broke out is also significant. For the fortnightly rations had just been stopped and every family had its share of kerosene in the house.

In Mahalaxmi, the people claimed that the fire brigade arrived after a significant time lapse and even then did very little to put out the fire. People say that the fire fighting followed the path of the fire rather than stem it.

AID

The victims of the fire were only entitled to a mandatory Rs.110.00 per person under the National Calamities Provision, from the Collector authorities, though they lost all their possessions and savings (in many cases the slum dwellers just keep all that they have at home). This is a negligible amount with which they cannot even re-build a single hut let alone compensate for their loss.

In most areas, however, we found that it is help from surrounding slum areas and voluntary agencies that really sustained the victims. In cases like Ambedkar Nagar, Cuffe Parade, even the distribution of aid became a racket, and those who have suffered didn't get any relief while several profiteers were at hand to receive the benefits of any scheme.

One important point to be noted is that the destruction of homes by fire means that slum dwellers who have ration cards and therefore, proof of residence also lose these documents. There is firstly the difficulty of re-making ration cards. Then, being temporary ration cards, the new ration cards will be dated according to when they are re-made. This means that the slum dwellers lose whatever rights, available to them under the existing law. Their tenure will be counted from that moment onwards.

CONCLUSIONS

* Our investigations clearly indicate that there is enough circumstantial evidence that a majority of fires investigated were cases of arson, with local goondas, builders and sometimes even the civil authorities, being the prime suspects.

* The wilful apathy and the total disregard of the state Government and the civic authorities towards slum dwellers coupled with their present eviction campaign has created a climate of tension and insecurity among slum dwellers. The local goondas and slum lords prey on these anxieties and further exploit the hapless slum dwellers. These anti-social elements are also emboldened to physically attack slum dwellers as well as set fire to their houses if they display any resistance.

* The lack of basic amenities such as roads, water and electricity aggravates the miserable conditions in which the slum dwellers have to live. This also makes the task of fire fighting that much more difficult when fires break out.

* As the Government refuses to regularise the slums, the fear of demolition prevents the slum dwellers from investing in more permanent and fire resistant building materials. Therefore, most of the huts are built from inflammable materials like jute, bamboo and other scrap. Fires in such slums spread very rapidly and create immense havoc. Realising the situation, slum lords and other goondas use fire as an handy tool to threaten the lives of slum dwellers.

NIVARA HAKK SURAKSHA SAMITI DEMANDS:

- 1) All slum demolitions to be stopped.
- 2) All slums be recognised and regularised.
- 3) Basic amenities such as water, electricity and roads in slums be immediately provided.
- 4) Alternate land/housing for those slums located on marginal land such as along railway lines, pipelines, nallas etc. be provided.
- 5) A judicial enquiry be conducted into all fires and the attacks on slum dwellers and the guilty be punished.

MAHALAXMI DHOBI GHAT :

WARD G SOUTH
 CORPORATOR V. SOLANKI - CONGRESS I
 M. L. A. DADU ATYALKAR - KAMGAR AGADI
 DATE OF FIRE 14th NOVEMBER '87
 TIME OF FIRE 7.30 p.m.

The biggest fire that occurred last year was at Dhobi Ghat, Mahalaxmi, near Arthur Road Jail. Around 2,000 huts were gutted. The houses and property of around 10,000 people was destroyed. They belonged to Ambedkar Nagar, Sanjay Nagar, Ganesh Nagar (C & D Committees), Saibaba Nagar and Shakti Nagar.

Situated along the railway line near Mahalaxmi station and stretching upto Chinchpokli, this huge colony of slums, houses mainly workers from the nearby mills and the Municipal Corporation. The women are mostly employed as domestic servants or vegetable vendors.

Most of the residents have settled there after '76 and their houses have not been censused. The houses were surveyed a few years back and given numbers by the Collector. The land belongs to the BMC and most people living there have been evicted atleast once.

Part of the land (Ganesh Nagar C & D) has been reserved by the BMC in order to build quarters for the retired fire brigade employees. One building has already been built in the middle of the slum and there has been constant antagonism between the slum residents and the fire brigade employees. A case was filed against the slum dwellers which was won by the fire brigade in 1984. Since then, there have been repeated threats of eviction. People reported that they had been informed that there would be evictions by December.

Due to this background, there were many complaints against the fire brigade authorities. Firstly, though the fire station is situated closely at Byculla, it took the fire brigade nearly 45 minutes to arrive on the scene. Secondly, they were not equipped with ladders and thus could not reach the site of fire. Thirdly, there was no water in the fire hydrants and the water had to be got from Kasturba Hospital.

Cause : The fire started at Sanjay Nagar. In their haste to establish that the cause of the fire was accidental, the police and press declared that a woman had attempted to commit suicide by immolating herself. When it was discovered that the old woman who was blind and an invalid, was a victim of the fire and not its cause, the police then tried to prove a case that her neighbour, one Ram Choudhary set fire to his hut while

cooking. Members of the team who visited the area tried to meet him but he is reported to have left the area.

Aftermath : Members of the team met the various political parties like the Shiv Sena, Dalit Panther, Kamgar Aghadi and Congress (I) who work in the area. Opinion is divided as to the cause of the fire. While members of the Congress (I) assert it was undoubtedly an accident, members of the Kamgar Aghadi, Dalit Panther, Shiv Sena allege that the local Corporator Mr. Virji Solanki is behind the cause of the fire. The local people also strongly suspect foul play. The team felt that there were certain vested interests who have stood to gain from the fire and this calls for a thorough judicial investigation.

The Corporator Mr. Solanki, has begun collecting a sum of Rs.2,051.00 from the local residents, promising that their houses will be built. He has floated a co-operative society and around 150 people have joined. When the team visited the area around a month after the fire, he had not started constructing any of the houses. The Kamgar Aghadi had also started a scheme whereby they collected Rs.1,100.00 and have begun building some houses. The people are totally confused. Their main worry in rebuilding their houses is that they may be demolished anytime. Their primary concern is to somehow get an assurance from the BMC that there will not be an eviction. None of the political parties have attempted to solve this problem. When asked about this, Mr. Solanki claimed that those on the '83 election lists would not be affected. By his own admission, such persons would not account for even half of those living there.

AMBEDKAR NAGAR, CUFFE PARADE

WARD	A SOUTH
CORPORATOR	NARVEKAR - INDEPENDENT
M.L.A.	MURLI DEORA - CONG- I
DATE OF FIRE	30th OCTOBER '87
TIME OF FIRE	11-30 a.m.

A fire broke out in Ambedkar Nagar in Cuffe Parade around 11.00 a.m. on the morning of 30th October '87. Initial attempts by children playing in the area and a few adults working at home to douse it were quickly abandoned as the fire spread rapidly from the vicinity of a scrap godown in one corner of the Shanty Colony, consuming everything that stood in its way. At that hour of the morning, most of the adult population was away at work, the remainder - mostly old people and women and children fled from their homes to stand helplessly on the roadside waiting for the Colaba fire brigade, located less than half a kilometre away, to arrive. When the fire fighters did come, twenty minutes after the department was alerted, total damage had been done.

In less than an hour, 400 huts were razed to the ground and 2 people burnt to death an old lady of 65 years and a one year old girl. Two others were injured too. When the residents returned from work that afternoon, only ashes, a few stones and lumps of charred and misshapen metal remained to indicate that this was where they once lived.

Within a day, the Ambedkar Nagar Committee, a local organisation, launched a fund raising campaign in the neighbourhood. Various social and political organisations and individuals including the BJP, Congress I, Shiv Sena, Lions Club of Colaba, Hare Rama Hare Krishna, contributed to the fund, providing assistance directly to needy families like church agencies, voluntary agencies and colleges. The Collector's office distributed Rs.110.00 as relief per person in the affected area.

The residents of Dhobi Ghat are a mixed population of diverse religions which include Hindus, Muslims, Dalits and Christians, Tamilians, Kannadigas, Kolis and Lambadis. The majority have been living there for over eight years while a few of the residents have been there since the '70's. The majority of the people are daily wage earners; the men work as unskilled labour at the numerous construction sites in the area, as coolies at "Macchi Bunder" at Saseon Docks - a 10 minutes walk away, and as rag pickers. The women work at the Docks, selling prawns and cleaning fish. Several of the children attend the Colaba Municipal School. All the families have ration cards and also have voting rights.

Almost all the political parties are represented, including the BJP, the Bharatiya Dalit Panthers, the Dalit Mukti Sena and the Dalit Alpa Sankhya Gomakshen Mahasangh.

The slum is located on "reserved" land under the jurisdiction of the Collector. It is said that the land has been earmarked for the construction of a road in the developmental plan. Half hearted attempts were made by the authorities to demolish the first structures that mushroomed up in the area in 1981-82. Subsequently, two eviction notices were served to the residents, the last about 4 years ago. The Ambedkar Nagar Committee challenged this notice, filing a writ petition in the Bombay Sessions Court in 1986. Less than a month after the fire, the Municipality issued notices to a few shop owners and to houses on the road front. A few weeks later, eviction notices were again served to other residents of the neighbourhood.

Fires are not an uncommon occurrence in this slum pocket, where a mere spark is sufficient to set fire to the bamboos, chattais and cardboard strips that makes a house. Minor fires have broken out suddenly in the night as a kerosene bottle lamp has been accidentally knocked down or a small bonfire lit for warmth has spread to adjoining huts, but they have been as rapidly been put out without much damage.

In February 1987, a major fire raged across another section rendering about 250 families homeless. However, the November '87 fire was an occurrence of an unprecedented scale. Almost 3,000 people have been affected with total damages to the tune of Rs. 6,00,000.00

No one knows or is willing to describe how precisely the fire started. There are no eye witnesses on record. Some of the women prefer the opinion that the fire was an accident, started by a stray spark from the fire cracker set off by children playing near the godown filled with rags and other inflammable materials. Nobody knows or is willing to express an opinion about the purpose of the fire or the means and methods by which it was started although there is a strong suspicion that the fire was deliberately caused and that it appears to be arson, especially in the wake of the rash of fires that have broken out in the past month. The fire and events preceding and following its occurrence, raise certain issues.

The spate of eviction notices issued to the residents of Ambedkar Nagar before and after the fire, make it clear that the land on which they are currently living on, is considered valuable property which the Government wishes to regain in order to implement their development plans.

These victims of the fire have lost all their worldly goods and their very lives have been threatened. As long as the land issue is not resolved, they are apprehensive about their security in the area and re-investing in housing, yet they cannot shift elsewhere as their work places bind them to the neighbourhood.

Each organisation sees the fire and relief work as a means of entry into the community to broaden their base and start work and develop their organisation. People in a crisis situation are more vulnerable to the overtures of these groups.

Relief does not appear to have reached all the people in an adequate manner as it was dispersed in an unco-ordinated fashion. We would recommend that the Government form a citizens committee to organise or co-ordinate relief work at an All Bombay level and also constitute a committee of enquiry into incidents of this nature.

RAJIV NAGAR, VIRWANI ESTATE, GOREGAON EAST

WARD	P SOUTH
CORPORATOR	M.I. PATEL - CONGRESS I
M.L.A.	MRINAL GORE - JANATA
DATE OF FIRE	8th DECEMBER '87
TIME OF FIRE	5-30 p.m.

Rajiv Nagar is a slum of around 2,000 huts inhabited by people who have settled there in the early 80's. Some of its earliest inhabitants have been censured. The land on which it is situated belongs to the BMC and has been reserved for building a garden, cemetery, road depot and to rehabilitate dishoused civic employees. It has been demolished thrice since '83.

The residents of the area predominantly belongs to Maharashtra, U.P., Bihar etc. and are mainly occupied as rickshaw drivers, shop keepers, mill workers etc. Since most of their women folk have been left in the villages they come from, the place is mostly deserted during the day.

The fire started here on 8th Dec. at 5-30 p.m. Only a few women and children were present at that time. The fire rapidly spread in all directions gutting around 500 huts. The local fire brigade arrived at around 6-30 p.m. The fire was finally prevented from spreading by the residents, by breaking down a whole line of huts. The police had also arrived there and cordoned the entire area. When the men returned from work, they were kept out. Around 9-30 p.m. the police allowed them to enter the area for a short while. By then the fire had been put out and people found that their houses had been destroyed saving some of their belongings. The police did not allow any of them to take away their belongings and cordoned off the area again for the night. By the next morning however, the belongings of the people had disappeared. This clearly shows the nexus of the police with the thieves.

When the team visited the area and interviewed people from the community as to the cause of the fire, it was discovered that a group of Shiva Sena lumpens have been terrorising people in the area and extorting money from them. Certain individuals like Manohar Khavilkar who is the Upa Sarpanch and Sharafat Mahale, entertain them. The local people began resisting these goondas and this resulted in an armed attack by the goondas on 24th October. 14 residents were injured and hospitalised. Some of them were even arrested. When a complaint was registered with the police against the harassment, no action was taken against the anti-social elements. After

this incident, there was open hostility between the local residents and the Shiv Sena. Some individuals like Maruti Satpal and Asghar openly threatened to set fire to the area if their authority was challenged.

The people of Rajiv Nagar are better organised after the fire. The huts were re-built soon. On 6th Jan. the residents got wind of the demolition plans by the BMC and approached Nivara Hakk Suraksha Samiti to get a stay-order from the High Court. The stay-order was granted on 8th Jan. The residents also put up a barbed wire fence demarcating their area. However, the BMC sent a squad comprising of 20 vehicles and some hired men and began demolitions, ignoring completely the stay-order granted by the High Court. The BMC men also looted the people of their money and possessions. One woman clutching Rs.500.00 in her hands was slashed with a knife and the money forcibly taken. Another resident who had purchased 200 chickens for rearing, lost all of these to those men. Finally when the Samiti intervened on receiving this news, the Municipal Squad withdrew. The Ward Officer expressed his ignorance of the court order.

Surprisingly, a contingent of about 25 security guards of 'The Royal Security Guards' soon moved into Rajiv Nagar and claimed that a part of the site was owned by the Builders 'The Estate Investment Co. Pvt.Ltd.' and that they were there to safeguard the property. These guards stopped people from entering their houses which they claimed were on their path. This resulted in a fight between the people and the guards in which many women were injured.

When the plot on which Rajiv Nagar is, is clearly defined for four uses viz. a garden, a cemetery, a road depot and for re-habilitation of displaced municipal employees, how did the Builder move in his security to claim a portion of the land? How did the Builder send his security force immediately upon BMC's demolition? Obviously there is a nexus between the investment company and the demolition squad of the Municipal Corporation.

It is significant to note that an adjacent plot, previously marked for a cemetery has now been taken over by Raheja Towers. We therefore strongly feel that once the land is cleared, it will be used for commercial exploitation.