

Home of Slumdog Millionaire child actor destroyed by Mumbai authorities

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Civil authorities in Mumbai, India have torn down the home of Azharuddin Mohammed Ismail, the 10-year-old boy from Mumbai's slums who appeared as young Salim in the Academy Award-winning film *Slumdog Millionaire*.

The home, more properly described as a shack or a lean-to with a tarpaulin roof and situated in the Garib Nagar slums, was destroyed by bulldozers Thursday in order to make room for a drainage path in preparation for the oncoming monsoon season. Approximately 30 more homes were destroyed along with Ismail's, whose previous home was also destroyed in similar fashion while filming for *Slumdog Millionaire* was still taking place.

Those whose homes were destroyed were given no advance warning. Ismail's mother told the press, "We didn't even get a chance to remove our belongings. We are now left with no roof over our head tonight and the monsoon will begin in a few weeks. We have lived here for 15 years. I don't know what we will do next."

The 10-year-old actor, who had been asleep in the home when the bulldozers came to demolish it, told reporters, "A police officer took a bamboo stick to hit me, and I was frightened."

The authorities, no doubt embarrassed by the sudden publicity of the event—the outrageous and inhumane destruction of the homes would never have found its way into the news had it not been for the level of fame achieved by one of the victims—have suggested they will provide the Ismail family with housing, but that promise has not yet been kept.

The destruction of the Ismail family's home is the second highly-publicized tragedy to befall a young cast

member from the Oscar-winning film. Last month, the impoverished father of 9-year-old *Slumdog* actress Rubina Ali allegedly tried to sell his daughter to a wealthy family. Since then, the *Jai Ho* Trust, established by the makers of *Slumdog Millionaire* to provide for their young child stars when filming was completed, has hired a social worker to see that Ali is kept safe.

The *Jai Ho* Trust was meant to provide young Ismail and Ali with housing, education and, once they turned 18 and completed school, an undisclosed amount of money with which to begin their adult lives. The filmmakers also donated \$747,500 to a charity charged with providing support to the large number of Mumbai's slum children.

In spite of their efforts, the filmmakers have been unable to secure a stable, healthy life for their child actors. Both Ismail and Ali continue to suffer in the slums, with Ismail and his family now forced into homelessness. Ultimately, such acts of personal charity, while well-meaning, are inadequate.

There are some 18 million people living in Mumbai. Over half of them are consigned to the slums.



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