

Lasting legacy languishes

SOHEL ISLAM

The pink paint of the building has lost lustre. A pale look has descended all around. Cracks have opened in much of the building. Wooden and steel beams have eroded. Salty weather has softened the plaster.

Plaster shards or bricks may fall apart anytime. The fragile cement coat is struggling to hold the heavy wooden doors.

These are the aspects that now define the historic Ahsan Manzil -- one of the lasting legacies of the Nawabs of Dhaka.

Ahsan Manzil consists of two buildings -- one is the main palace and the other is Andar Mahal, which used to be the residence of the Nawabs. The palace has been converted into a museum containing many valuable items of the Nawabs. "It will only need a mild tremor to bring down the structure of the Andar Mahal to rubble. The Andar Mahal has tilted a bit towards the southern bank of Buriganga," said one of the officials at Ahsan Manzil Museum.

"Termite has done a lot of damage to a good number of lumber

beams. If steps are not taken immediately many of the roofs may collapse on the gallery of museum. Crossed marked wooden beams are bearing the testimony of the neglect and disrespect for the heritage. Damp walls are another worry which is destroying many of the paintings hung against the walls," regrets an employee.

In 1985 the Ahsan Manzil was converted into a museum after a massive renovation. Afterwards, the authorities have not carried out any developmental works to keep it in shape.

The Ahsan Manzil Museum now falls under the control of the National Museum. "Although we sent an estimate worth Tk 3 crore for its renovation to the government a long time ago, we have heard that it (government) has allocated only Tk 5 lakh in the revised budget. The money is not adequate to repaint the two buildings, let alone other maintenance works," says a source at the National Museum.

"It is really frustrating that I couldn't use the wooden staircase. They didn't even allow me to enter a number of rooms in the museum. I have come all the way from Chandpur to see the architectural

beauty of Dhaka. I felt very sorry to see the dilapidated building of our rich past," say Sumon, one of the visitors there.

Meanwhile, a huge shopping mall styled Gulshan Ara Market has been constructed on the eastern side of the Ahsan Manzil. The mall has no space for car parking. "Those who come here for shopping usually park their vehicles in the Manzil's parking space. It often creates a lot of trouble for them who visit the Ahsan Manzil," said a source at the Manzil.

"We have repeatedly complained about the problem but the local police station does not pay any attention to it," the source added.

When the renovation was carried out in 1991, around 7.5 feet of space was left for the spectators outside so that they can have a look at the majestic Ahsan Manzil.

"The Ahsan Manzil remains open from 10:30am to 5:30pm except Thursdays. Other than the stipulated time, people do not have opportunity to visit. The 7.5 feet space has been left for the visitors who cannot come in time. But the open space has become dirty owing to a number of trading activities," said another source.

Ahsan Manzil, a historic building of Dhaka, seems uncared-for



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



Treating guests beyond tax net



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

SULTANA RAHMAN

The Guest Restriction Order 1984 has lost its effectiveness due to law enforcers' lax attitude to it and lack of public awareness.

Almost every wedding taking place in the city invites more than 150 guests without paying tax. Recently, a rich businessman of Dhanmondi invited more than 3,000 guests to his son's wedding but did not pay tax.

The Dhanmondi ceremony is one of many lavish weddings taking place at community centres and plush restaurants every

weekend.

The community centres and restaurants do charge their customers taxes for events but don't pay the state, many alleged.

Last year, the food ministry reformulated the Guest Restriction Order to stop waste. But its effectiveness is now in question, although the ministry termed it timely, pragmatic and people-oriented during reformulation.

According to the rule, one can invite 150 guests to marriage ceremonies or religious and cultural events without paying tax. The events with 151 to 1,000

guests are subject to a tax of Tk 20 a person. If the number crosses the 1,000 mark, Tk 10 has to be paid for each additional person. Violators are subject to a fine of twice the actual amount.

Earlier, the Guest Restriction Order kept 100 guests beyond the tax net. A function entertaining between 101 and 500 guests was supposed to pay Tk 25 for each.

A community centre manager says the turnout of at least 250 people at any wedding or cultural event is common in the city. The number sometimes goes beyond 1,000, but a few pay guest tax. "The guest restriction is no longer effective," said the manager.

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) owns about 50 community centres and there are 100 private community centres in the city. But many of them cannot afford tax, says another manager.

The DCC said a group of dishonest officials is deliberately tampering with the number of guests for bribes. And the law could not be implemented because of those officials, said an official.

The Dhaka district commissioner, responsible for implementing the order, says the 25 magistrates under the district administration are too busy to think about it.

Viagra hits Dhaka streets

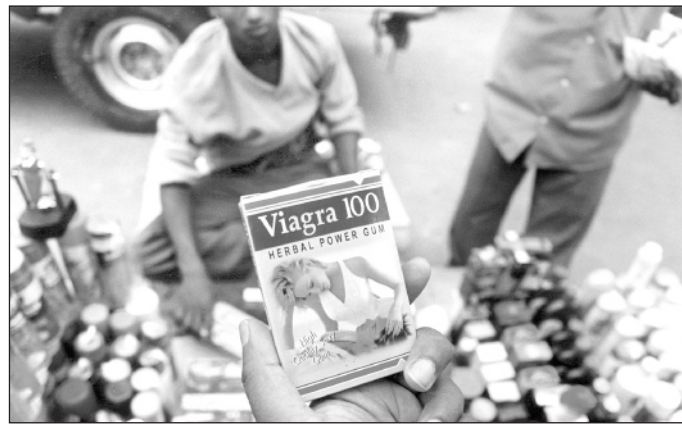
CITY CORRESPONDENT

The walkways and footpaths around the Bangabandhu National Stadium are a popular place to buy foreign shampoos, perfumes, cosmetics and even medicines at a much cheaper rate than in the market.

The hawkers involved in this trade claim that they buy the confiscated stuff legally through auctions from the customs at Zia International Airport (ZIA).

However, some of the items found on the streets should raise a few eyebrows as common hawkers cannot possibly sell them legally.

One of the most startling discoveries of one such item was 'Viagra', a controversial drug which has gained popularity for its effectiveness against male impotency.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

A pack of Viagra chewing gum is being sold for Tk 100-200 on the pavements although it is banned in Bangladesh and can only be obtained against a doctor's prescription in countries where it is allowed.

"We buy Viagra and other foreign goods from the customs at ZIA. These are illegal products seized at the airport and the customs sell them on," said Munir, a street vendor.

The label on the packets of chewing gums reads: Made in the USA.

The customs at ZIA however deny selling Viagra. "The confiscated goods are put on auction at our store but we don't sell Viagra as it's a contraband item," said Customs Inspector Haider Ali.

Whatever may be the source, customers are prepared to ignore the warnings to try this forbidden medicine.

Selling shoes secondhand

Summer -- the cruellest season for wayside shoe vendors -- triggers a slump in sales because they sell mostly formal shoes or sneakers rather than slip-ons.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

What do you expect from a shop in the open? Maybe, some shoddy goods unable to tempt you.

However, as you approach it, you will find some products worthy of consideration.

The pairs of shoes sold by the wayside at Karwan Bazar may confuse you with their upmarket look.

Why do they sell cheaper? Well, they are "Jawali Pura" or secondhand shoes, as the sellers claim. "We buy them from the Begum Bazar in Old Dhaka," said Mohammed Liton while talking a customer into buying a pair of shimmering shoes. The vendors collect used shoes from houses in the city and sell them at the Begum Bazar, he said.

"It's a barter trade," says another seller. "The vendors collect old shoes, clothes or even empty bottles of perfume and shampoo in exchange for kitchenware," he said.

Although he sounded convincing, Ikram Ali, a customer, dismissed the statement. "These are all pilfered items," he said.

"Don't you see where the shoes stolen from mosques go?" he grinned. Ikram buys shoes from the wayside shop because of affordable price.

However, not all customers have the same view. "The shoes we buy from wayside shops are often used items," said Romel, a student of Dhaka University. "Sometimes, they bring the shoes to our hall to sell," he added.

The shoes look impeccable since the vendors mend them beforehand. "We do the pasting using super-glue, add colour, do stitching and even change the

soles if necessary," says Abul Hossain.

The sellers collect and mend shoes all day long and sit on sidewalks to sell them in the evening. Evening is the time when people congregate. "We buy a pair of shoes at Tk 200 and sell at Tk 250," said Hanif Uddin.

The business may earn them up to Tk 4,000 a month, said a vendor. Summer is the cruellest season for the vendors, as it triggers a slump in sales because they sell mostly formal shoes or sneakers rather than slip-ons.



ALAUDDIN MACDONALD

crisistelephonenumbers

HEALTH

Hospitals

Heart
National Institute of Cardio Vascular Diseases (NICVD),
- 9130800, 9122560-59

Burn
Dhaka Medical College Hospital
Burn Unit-8626812-6

Cancer
National Cancer Institute-
80149148826561-65
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib
Medical University-8612550-4,
861455-9

Diabetes
Diabetic Research Hospital
(BIRDEM)- 9661551-5,
8016641-50

Mother & Child Care
Shishu Hospital- 9119119,
8116061-62
Azimpur Mother & Child Health
Training Institute- 8624827,
8624980

Eye

Islamia Eye Hospital-9110794,
9119315
National Eye Hospital- 8117202,
8114807

Dental

Dental College 9002035

Orthopaedics

National Orthopaedics (Pangu)
Hospital- 9114075, 912150

General

Dhaka Medical College Hospital-
8626812-6
Holy Family Hospital-
83111731-25

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib
Medical University Hospital-
8612550-4, 8614545-9
Bangladesh Medical College &
Hospital- 8115443, 9118202,
Shamaria Hospital- 9131901
Suhrawardy Hospital -- 9130800,
9122560-69

Salimullah Medical College
Hospital -- 7310061-4, 7319002-6

Cholera Research Hospital (ICDDR)

8811751-60
Infection Disease (ID) Hospital
602429, 601835,
T.B. Hospital 608031-34,
600211-5,
Azimpur Maternity Hospital
503329.

Sromojibi Hospital 240066-69,
Monowra Hospital 8319802,
8318135

Blood Bank

Red Crescent Centre- 9116563
Sandhani (DMCH)- 8624040
Sandhani (SMCH)- 7310061,
7310061, 7319022
Dhaka Medical College Hospital-
8626812-9

Eye Bank

Sandhani International Eye Bank-
8614040

Ambulance Service-

Fire Service & Civil Defence
Ambulance 9555555, 9556666-7,
9567734, Fire Services Siddique
Bazar (HQ) 9556667,

Mohammadpur 9112078, Tejgaon

605272, Khilgaon 7218329,
Lalbagh 505778, Mirpur 9001055,
Cantonment 605168, Tongi
9801070, Palassey 509670,
Demra 7400111, Postagola
7410771, Narayanganj 9715644,
Sadarghat 7119759,
Mirpur 10 Circle 9002269,
9001055, Mirpur TVG Complex
9001189, Narayanganj Port
9715365,
Hajiganj (N Gani) 9715531,
Mondalpara (N. Ganj River)
9712015, N. Gan Bander 9712095,
Dhaka EPZ (Savar)
7701444, Markajul Al Islami
9127867, Anjuman e-Mafidul
Islam 324067, 239808, 248166,
Holy Family Hospital 8311721-5.

Ambulances For

Dead Body
Anjuman Mafidul Islam (Kakrail
9336611, Gandaria 7319808,
7318166,
Al-Markajul Islam 9127867,
324069.

UTILITY

Electricity

Electricity Complex- PDB- 9566061-5,
9560170-9
Electricity Complex (DESA)- 8616737-
43, 8617626
DESCO- 8123138-40
Complaints (Rural Electrification
Board, Dhaka)- 8916424-8

Gas

Titas Gas Exchange (Emergency)-
9563667-8
Kawrnabazar-8112135-42
Mirpur- 8014132-3
Mohammadpur- 9117215, 9113903
Mohakhali- 9884741, 9885922,
8824993
Motijheel-9667612

WASA

WASA (PABX)- 8117829-31
Mirpur- 9000519
Mohammadpur- 8120192
Fakirapool-9115343
Asad Gate- 8917492
Uttara- 9559142,
Segunbagicha- 7316348
Pagla- 8113900-39

Fire Services

Siddique Bazar (HQ)- 9556667
Mohammadpur- 9112078
Khilgaon- 7218329
Mirpur- 9001055
Tongi- 9801070
Demra-7400111
Postagola-7410771
Sadarghat- 7119759
Mirpur 10 Circle- 9002269, 9001055
Mirpur TVG Complex- 9001189

DO YOU KNOW

Fire services provide cheap, fast and efficient ambulance service too?



TAXI CAB

Yellow Cab

Comfort 881710-4
Navana 9558065
Salida 9344477,
0171620881
Cosmo 9112959 and
8127191
Cab One 7113282-3
Nihon 8624741-2
Orion 9347277
Anudip 8125285 and
8127611

Capital 9352847

Union 8130485
Kool 0171826731

Black Cab

Cab Ex 9358401
Cabline 8321162
JBS Cab 019364575
Sajan 018126036
Anudip -- 8125285 and
8127611

Cab One 7113282-3

Palki 0171052500
Cab I 7113282
Jatri 0171540074
Nipun 9572277
R-Cab 8914782
Star Cab 9571919
Shihab 018202477 &
018228675
KGN 8620011

TRAIN TIMING

Subarna Express	Leaves Dhaka at 4:00 pm	Reaches Chittagong at 10:15 pm
Mahanagar Prabhati	Leaves Dhaka at 7:30 am	Reaches Chittagong at 2:55 pm
Mahanagar Godhuli	Leaves Dhaka at 3:05 pm	Reaches Chittagong at 9:11 pm
Turna	Leaves Dhaka at 11:00 pm	Reaches Chittagong at 7:05 am
Parabat Express	Leaves Dhaka at 6:30 am	Reaches Sylhet at 2:30 pm
Joyantika Express	Leaves Dhaka at 12:30 pm	Reaches Sylhet at 9:20 pm
Mohaban Express	Leaves Dhaka at 9:30 pm	Reaches Sylhet at 6:40 am
Tista Express	Leaves Dhaka at 7:00 am	Reaches Bahadurabad at 1:05 pm
Ekata Express	Leaves Dhaka at 5:00 pm	Reaches Bahadurabad at 11:55
Upakul Express	Leaves Dhaka at 6:00 am	Reaches Noakhali at 1:35 pm
Padma Express	Leaves Dhaka at 9:20 pm	Reaches Jagannath at 2:30 pm