



star city

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thecitythatwas

The pre-Mughal settlement of Dhaka was established as a **thana**, a fortified military outpost, in 1583 during the reign of Akbar, the first Moghul emperor. But it was Akbar's son, Jahangir, who transferred the capital of Mughal Bengal to Dhaka, which renamed Jahangirnagar flourished for over a century.

An urban nightmare

Kamrangirchar peninsula, home to 1.3 million people, has no sewage lines, water or gas supply.

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The story of the 4.59-square-mile Kamrangirchar peninsula is that of utter negligence by successive governments and local administrations. Although it is an integral part of the city, it is beyond the jurisdiction of Dhaka City Corporation. Over the years, this small island, with the river Buriganga flowing on its southern and northern sides, has grown so haphazardly under the administration of the Tejgaon Circle of the Dhaka Deputy Commissioner's office that architects and town planners call it an 'urban nightmare'.

Home to over 1.3 million people (according to the 2001

census), Kamrangirchar is a network of narrow lanes and by-lanes, where even a rickshaw driver has a hard time plying his vehicle. It is a haven for the city's cheap accommodation seekers. Most people living here are low-income service providers to the city. Hawkers, sweepers, *tokais*, rickshaw pullers, boatmen, day laborers and laundry men -- all are packed together in the most unplanned way without any basic amenities.

Kamrangirchar does not have any surface drains or sewerage lines. It has no supply water or gas. There is not a single playground in the area. Liquid household waste flows onto the lanes and by-lanes. For sewage disposal, every home-owner has to

build a pit underneath his or her house. The various separate 'commercial' and 'residential' sections have grown so haphazardly, that without immediate intervention by town planners some interior areas will automatically become inaccessible.

Local people have claimed that the area has one of the largest mortality rates among pregnant women in the city. Chairman of Sultanganj Union Parishad, Haji Monir Hossain, said that the lack of any medical centres in the area the mortality rate is responsible for the mortality rate.

"Most families are so poor that they cannot afford to conduct any ante-natal checkups while the woman is pregnant," Hossain said.

"When a woman suddenly goes into labour there is no local help available, she has to be carried on a rickshaw van to Dhaka Medical College Hospital or to the Mitford Hospital and many are dying due to related complications," said Hossain.

The Circle Officer of Tejgaon Circle, Serajur Rahman, who has been in the same post for over half a decade, said that like all other Union Parishads of the country, Kamrangirchar also lacks civic amenities. Other sources in the Tejgaon Circle however said that because of its proximity to the city, Kamrangirchar has had huge allocations of wheat and cash for development over the years.

"But most of the funds were never used properly. The Tejgaon

Circle office is an obscure place and higher officials never conduct any monitoring in Kamrangirchar due to difficulty of access to the area," said a source in the district administration.

At present, the Local Government Engineering Division is constructing a 10.18 kilometer network of roads, and a 45 meter wide bridge at a projected cost of 2.18 crore taka.

An official source said that the government has also allocated 140 metric tons of wheat to fund a project to landfill low-lying areas in order to building children's playgrounds for seven organisations.

First ever female traffic police

City dwellers will witness women traffic police for the first time in Dhaka's history from today.

As many as 40 women traffic police will now direct traffic at eight different crossings in the city, beginning from eight in the morning today.

Police Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Nurul Huda, announced the introduction of women traffic police in the traffic department at a ceremony in Rajarbagh Telecom Auditorium yesterday (Saturday). Senior officials of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police and Traffic Police were present on the occasion.

The new dress code for the female traffic police is blue trouser with untucked shirt -- the sleeves will be white like their male counterparts. The women will wear oblong caps which are similar to that worn by airforce

personnel.

They will be deployed at Sheraton crossing, Russel Square, Kakrail, Bailey Road (west side), Shahid Jahangir Gate, Bijoy Sarani, Manik Mia Avenue (west) and Dhanmondi Road No 27 (east).

They will perform their duties in two shifts -- one is from 8 am to 12 pm and the other one is from 3 pm to 7 pm. Two women traffic police will be deployed at the designated crossings besides their male counterpart.

"The women traffic police have been inducted from the regular police force of Dhaka Metropolitan Police. We have just provided them with traffic police training," said DC Traffic (north) Ansuruddin Khan Pathan while talking to Star City.

"They have been included in the traffic department to give women more exposure to the jobs where they are necessary. They have been put on the streets to help the children and women commuters," said the DC Traffic (north).

"Today is just the beginning. More women traffic police will be enrolled in the department very soon," added the DC Traffic (north).

SOHEL ISLAM

Monsoon rains arrive at last

CITY CORRESPONDENT

With the sweltering heat disappearing, the monsoon will soon hit with full force.

Weathermen said like any other year, the monsoon, a unique phenomena for the sub-continent, might stay until September and it is expected to send about 76 percent of the total rainfall of the year. Flooding takes place in the country during or after monsoon, although about 92 percent of the floodwater flows down river from India, Nepal and other countries within the range of the monsoon.

In the city, the disappearance of rainwater retention ponds causes water logging during the monsoon. The huge volume of rainwater, having nowhere to go, inundates Dhaka's peripheral areas, where unplanned urbanisation has occurred within the last few years.

From the end of May until about three days ago, humidity rose up to 98 percent and the mercury teetered around forty degrees Celsius. City dwellers, especially those who pulled rickshaws, vans, or other manual labourers, received the bulk of the battering from the heat wave.

Weathermen in Dhaka said monsoon rains coming all the way from an island near Madagascar called Mascarene have now replaced the heat wave. The monsoon is a unique weather phenomenon occurring only in this region of the world.

Every year from March 23, the sun starts approaching the Northern Hemisphere and it

sends in heavy cold air to fill the vacuum. As the air travels over oceans towards the sub-continent it gathers a huge amount of moisture. By the first week of June every year the monsoon enters Bangladesh from the southeast.

The monsoon has its wet and dry spells. The wet spells might last up to five days. There may also be a failed monsoon in an

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continues to do so until June 21. During this time the sun heats up the land quicker than water and the whole of the sub-continent becomes a seat for low pressure, creating a massive vacuum of air in the atmosphere.

The Mascarene area in the Indian Ocean, known among weathermen as the home of high pressure, immediately

exceptional year.

During the monsoon the country is free from the threat of cyclone.

"A cyclone can only occur with little or no 'vertical wind-shear,' the presence of which is very strong during monsoon," said SK Dev Sarma, Assistant Director (senior meteorologist), of the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.



SID ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Dhaka breathes a collective sigh of relief as the monsoon appears on the horizon.

All that glitters

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

They work with small hammers on anvils and with other necessities like moulds, acid and pincers scattered around. Sitting in front of burning flames, they translate their innate creativity into glittering designs.

They are the goldsmiths of Old Dhaka. Tantibazar, an area of labyrinthine alleys and age-old buildings, has been home to the artisans for years.

But the ornaments that come from Tantibazar are sold in huge modern showrooms in plush shopping complexes with all their razzmatazz, neon signs and mirrored walls.

Be it a necklace, earrings or bracelet, almost all articles are created by at least 30,000 crafts-

men labouring at 2,500 small workshops in Tantibazar.

However, the golden days are gone and the heritage of goldsmiths is fading, most of them claim. "We work for different showrooms in the city on contract. But we are facing a slump in orders these days," said Sumon Das, a goldsmith at Tantibazar. "The old days were better for us when customers came directly to us rather than through showrooms," he added.

Local craftsmen are losing out to the flood of imported gold jewellery, complained one craftsman. The ornaments from India and Dubai are invading the local market, he said.

"We are capable of showing the same dexterity as in *minakari* or *jorwa* ornaments from India," said Mithu Gani. "But they will not take

them from us," he added. People opt for machine-made chains or bangles because these cost less.

These days, a goldsmith cannot earn more than Tk 7,000 a month even after a strenuous work shift from 10:00am to 2:00pm in a small claustrophobic workshop, Gani added. "It is hard to live on that amount with a big family," he said.

Sometimes, the Tantibazar goldsmiths feel their work goes unrecognised. "The sellers bring sample designs from India and order us to copy the designs. But they tout the ornaments as Indian-made," said Sumon Das.

Most jewellers denied selling any ornaments imported from India or Dubai. However, some said they sell a few imported items. "We need to keep them in shops as our customers

demand," said Binoy Kumar Sen of Bangladesh Pearl House at Chandni Chawk. "There are some designs they are fond of."

However, most stores sell only local-made jewellery. "We never sell foreign-made ornaments," said ATKM Azmal, proprietor of *Goldsmith*, a jewellery showroom. "Moreover, we patronise conventional Bangladeshi designs in new forms," he added.

The gold craftsmen of Tantibazar expressed frustration over not getting any help from banks or the government to expand their industry. They would be able to export their items and compete on the international market, if they could get assistance, they said.



GOLDSMITHS OF THE CITY, MOSTLY BASED IN TANTIBAZAR, ARE EXPERIENCING A SLUMP IN BUSINESS.

hello
dhaka

Int'l Radio Timetable

VOA, SW (m)

0730-0800: 16.87, 19.72, 25.4

2230-2300: 25.1, 31.3, 41.1

MW 190.5 (m)

Both sessions available in 97.6 MHz in FM

BBC (All sessions available in FM 100 MHz)

0630-0700: 49, 31, 25 mb

1400-1410: 25, 19, 13 mb

1930-2000: 41, 31, 25

2230-2300: 49, 41, 31 mb