

## Ancient mosque in peril

107 years' old Malitola mosque faces demolition for construction of a five-storey building



Aerial view of the ancient mosque and the interior showing ancient china clay and glass works.

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

Dhaka city was once rightfully named the city of mosques. That wasn't only for the sheer number of mosques but also for their architectural finesse.

But some of the old mosques, which are an indispensable part of Dhaka's heritage, have become victims of unplanned renovation.

The century old Haji Mainuddin mosque of Malitola in old Dhaka was once renowned for its grandeur. Now the family that takes care of that beautiful mosque is planning to destroy its magnificently decorated tombs to build a five-storied modern mosque.

Haji Mainuddin, a textile merchant was the caretaker of the mosque, which he had inherited. His father Zangu Bepary and uncle Jan Mohammad had settled by the bank of Dholai Khal (which is now part of English Road) in 1890.

Back then, Malitola was a predominantly Hindu area and there were only two Muslim families including theirs. The mosque was built in 1896.

Although Mainuddin's father recorded the mosque as a waqf property, its maintenance responsibility has remained with the family. The present mutwalli or

caretaker of the mosque is Haji Nasiruddin, the eldest grandson of Mainuddin.

"The yearly maintenance cost of the mosque was Tk 36 in 1899. Now it has increased to around Tk 90,000 per year," said Nasiruddin while explaining the reasons for renovation.

The rapid increase in number of devotees at Friday prayers has also prompted the family to go for the remodeling plan.

"Even in 1950, not more than 30 people used to attend the prayers at this mosque. At present, we have to accommodate about 500 although the mosque's capacity is of only 100 people. We are forced to use the Haji Mainuddin Road during Friday prayers," said Haji Bahauddin, another grandson of Haji Mainuddin.

"The mosque is situated on one and a half katha land. Therefore we have to demolish three tombs of the mosque to construct the five-storied structure. Local people also are not that interested in the beauty and heritable value of the mosque. All they want is more space," said Bahauddin.

People of the area also claimed that the mosque needed renovation as early as possible because some hoodlums were keen on destroying it in order to grab the land.

### city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

*"When I am not a minister even then I united the public to launch a social movement against misdeeds of Jamuna Group."*

-- Mirza Abbas  
Minister for Housing and Public Works  
Speaking at a press conference at his secretariat office on September 11.  
Source: Bhorer Kagoj

*"BNP is the patroniser of terrorism and communalism and Jamaat is its umbrella."*

-- Hasanul Haque Inu  
President of Jatiyo Somajtantrik Dal  
Said at a round table discussion of Shonmilto Shanskritik Jote, September 10. Source: Prothom Alo.

*"Islam is being used for business. Some quarters are also trying to exploit it."*

-- Professor Mozaffar Ahmed  
Economist  
Speaking on the Islamic life insurance on September 13. Source: Bhorer Kagoj.

*"The people of Bangladesh and Pakistan, two friendly nations, should work together to make better future, forgetting bitter past."*

-- Mia Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri  
Foreign Minister, Pakistan  
Speaking to the journalists at the Zia International Airport before leaving for Pakistan on September 12. Source: Sangbad

*"It is not far when the Sufi cabinet led by the today's chief guest will be formed."*

-- Moinuddin Ahmed  
Leader of the Sufis  
Indicating his remarks towards Awami League President Sheikh Hasina (chief guest) at the meeting of Bangladesh Sufi Majlis on September 12. Source: Prothom Alo

*"The members of the civil society, even the ministers will have to work hard to prevent land grabbers."*

-- Abu Naser Khan  
General Secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon  
Demanding implementation of circular water around the capital on September 12. Source: Prothom Alo

## Cityfire fighters in primitive outfit

It took the firefighters four hours to contain Mirpur blaze for lack of proper equipment

SULTANA RAHMAN

The fire fighters last Friday took a long time to control the fire in a transformer at Mirpur substation, as they did not have proper equipment to fight such a fire, said Fire Brigade and Civil Defense (FBCD) officials.

"It took us about four hours to control the fire in Mirpur because the fire brigade does not have CO<sub>2</sub> tender or DCP (Dry Chemical Powder), which are essential to contain such a fire originating from a large transformer," said Abdul Hamid, Deputy Director of FBCD.

Hamid added that the set up of the city's fire brigade has not changed much since independence.

"The city population has tripled to about ten million since independence but if you look at what equipment and manpower the city fire brigade has, you will feel

sorry," he said.

With eleven fire stations scattered around the city, the fire brigade has a fleet of 45 specialised vehicles and a manpower of about 330 to extend their services for a population of ten million. Some of these vehicles are age old and out of order.

FBCD sources said, they have only one 'turn table ladder' (mechanised ladder) which can reach as much as twelve stories for fire control. If there is a fire on a higher floor of a building, the fire brigade does not have any modern equipment to fight it.

Moreover, disappearing ponds and water bodies in the city is also making the firemen's lives more difficult. Fire officials said, there are areas where fire services can not have access due to extreme urban build up without proper roads for the fire fighting vehicles. The city had 26 underground water reservoirs for the fire fight-

ers till independence, but due to lack of awareness among concerned departments, the reservoirs were demolished, Dhaka division fire service sources said.

"The city population living in congested flats having no fire exits is at great risk all the time also because most of the modern furniture and decorative items at home are highly inflammable," a fire fighter said.

"We do not have any life insurance policy. At Mirpur blaze on Friday if we did not take adequate measure at the right time, the entire generator area would have been burnt down," said the inspector of the operation.

"If the department of fire service is not equipped with sophisticated fire equipment we do not know what will happen to the city if a massive fire strikes," added the inspector.



Firemen at city's Asad gate area on routine exercise at the station.



Blacksmiths face harsh and dangerous work for little reward.

## Karwan Bazar blacksmiths feel the heat

SYED TASHFIN

Most of the blacksmiths at Karwanbazar live days and nights out, always fearful of police harassment and extortion.

Police and local hoodlums intimidate them into paying them money, alleged Mohammad Sultan, a blacksmith in his late 20s.

"They threaten to arrest us and file cases if we refuse."

The blacksmiths have been living in their shops on the sidewalks for the last 30 years or so, but their condition has not yet improved.

Although the blacksmiths have been working in Karwanbazar area since independence, the financial crisis restrained them from having their own workplace.

About 75 per cent of the blacksmiths reside in their roadside shops, coping with usual city-based problems.

Their average daily income is not good enough to support their families but helps

them survive.

"Our biggest problem is the lack of living space," said Nani Babu who has been working in the area for over 12 years.

The requirement of a written permission from the government, allowing them to carry on with their work is another hurdle.

At present, Karwanbazar has 12 shops to which they sell their products. Their major buyers are construction workers. They also sell products such as sledge hammers, mallets and chisels to city dwellers.

"Previously, these products were brought in from villages and the city dwellers had to buy them at a high price," said Abdur Rouf, a middle-aged blacksmith. "The prices of such items dropped after we began our business here. Now we need approval from the authorities," said Rouf.

The blacksmiths have paid for the necessary documents needed for their trade to be legal in Karwanbazar area. But the authorities are still waiting on

approval. The rate of the blacksmiths is yet to be decided.

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