

# Playing pranks with safety



## The Bangabandhu stadium may collapse due to structural flaws

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

The Bangabandhu National Stadium in the city is at 'grave' risk of collapse due to structural flaws caused by indiscriminate alteration works undertaken by numerous shops and other commercial chambers, sources in the National Sports Council (NSC) warned.

Inaugurated in 1954, the stadium was never renovated till 2001. Over the years number of shops on the structure increased so rapidly that the officials lost control over the expansion. More shops were allocated when the national stadium was made double storied in 1978 prior to Asian Youth Football Tournament.

The owners of the shops, commercial spaces and especially restaurant owners started altering the structures according to their own convenience.

At present, there are 269 shops in the stadium on both floors. A source said that some of the shop owners expanded their office rooms by digging the slanting end and creating underground spaces. Also kitchens and even water reservoirs were made by some of the restaurants which are posing severe threat to the foundation of such a big construction.

Moreover, numerous cracks have appeared on the stadium structures especially on the closest side to Moulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.

The Bangabandhu National Stadium has an official capacity of accommodating 33,000 people, providing a space of four-teen inches for each person. In addition, VIP galleries can accommodate 3000 people.

However, during a popular occasion, more than double its capacity is crammed in by unscrupulous gatekeepers and

police. Around 75,000 people are crammed inside the stadium during a good football or cricket match. The public entrances of the stadium are so narrow and dark that there is also a risk of a serious stampede incident during a sporting event.

The Bangabandhu stadium has turned into a commercial hub generating legal and illegal income for different people. A ruling party leader has his dairy farm set up on the stadium premises.

Commercial activities in the stadium area are so lucrative that possession of each of the shops might cost as much as Tk 2 Crore. The National Sports Council (NSC) receives a monthly rent of Tk 10 per square feet from the shops on ground floor and Tk 9 from shops on the first floor. Yearly allocation of Tk 10 lakh is grossly insufficient for the NSC to conduct maintenance on the stadium, NSC officials claimed.

However, a group of NSC people along with the police is allegedly collecting 'rents' from hundreds of illegal shops in the area. They also collect tolls from hawkers. Moreover, new shops are being allocated near the swimming pool in the name of union office renovation, said sources inside NSC.

The NSC in a survey of the stadium in 1985 revealed that the whole stadium structure was endangered. The next survey was conducted in the mid eighties by a committee comprising teachers from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET). However, nothing was done till 2001, when authorities took up minor repair works.

A fresh committee comprising chief engineer of the Public Works Department and Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), chief architect of the government and Dr. Shamimuzzaman from BUET decided to renovate the stadium rather than dismantling it. The renovation works would be done in phases. The renovation work is expected to make the stadium befitting for next twenty-five years, officials claimed.

Bangabandhu stadium, grossly altered from original plan, is now at great risk of collapse.

# Poachers, traders make merry with wildlife

SULTANA RAHMAN

The continuing sale of wild birds by poachers and traders are in full swing in the city. This is due to the lack of the strict enactment of the law.

Passersby are apparently approached by the poachers carrying

their ware of chickens and ducks dangling in their hands with the cry that they have birds for sale. Then they lead the customer to a nearby market where they keep these birds and sell them as if they are throwing sprats to catch herrings in using the chickens and ducks to attraction attention. The varieties of birds they sell are swans, ducklings, doves, storks, white-breasted water hen and many

more.

This illegal trading is going with impunity in open places. The sellers are adept in deceiving the law-enforcing agencies. This is possible because the law has never been strictly enforced, sources said.

"The Wild Animal Conservation Act of 1974 has not been implemented properly due to lack of wide publicity and seriousness on the part of law enforcing agencies," said Dr Enam-ul-Haq of Bangladesh Birds Club. "Though the law was very stringent, the implementation of the law was rarely seen," he added.

The law imposes punishment of six-months' imprisonment or fine of Tk 5,000 or both, along with the confiscation of the firearms used in bird hunting. The district and session judge has the authority to hear bail petitions in cases filed under this law.

People of the country including the law-enforcing agencies have regarded bird hunting a minor crime, observed Dr Enam-ul-Haq, himself a former Inspector General of Police. He added that due to lack of awareness and sensitization, the law-enforcing agencies are not motivated to implement the existing law against bird hunting strictly.

New Elephant Road, Moghbazar, Kakrail, Farmgate, Banglamotor, New Market, Satmasjid Road, Asad Gate, Mohakhali and Gulshan Bazar are the main haunts of poachers selling birds in broad daylight.

The birds are sold at different prices and set ratios. Eight ducks at Tk 1000, 12 doves at Tk 1500, four storks at Tk 400 and two-water cormorant at Tk 190. The prices are relatively high at during this season as the winter and migrant birds will start coming in after mid-October.

"Winter is a prosperous season for selling birds due to the increasing number of guest birds at this time," said Mizan - a bird seller on New Elephant Road.

According to the Bangladesh Birds Club, a total bird population in the country comprises of 200 species of birds. Among them, 120 species are water birds, heron, share birds and waders, 56 small birds, fly catchers, warblers, wagtail and the rest of the 25 species are ducks.



A trader sells wild storks openly at New Elephant Road.

# Archeological sites fading

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Archaeological sites of the city are facing extinction due to some serious maintenance shortcomings arising from severe fund crisis.

According to the Archaeology Department of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, 16 projects have been submitted to the ministry but no money was allocated for those in the fiscal 2002-2003.

"Every year more archaeological sites are being marked as protected monuments but the funds are getting smaller," said Delwar Dewan Hossain, Director of the Department of Archaeology.

There are 355 archeological monuments across the country and 25 of them are in Dhaka city. Among these, the Lalbagh Fort, Boro Katra, Choto Katra, Dhanmondi Eidgah, Rose Garden, Ruplal House, Nimtoli Deuri, Musa Khan Mosque, Sat Gombuj Mosque, Haji Khaja Shahbaj Mosque etc. are some of the most well known sites.

The Ruplal House, Musa Khan Mosque, Sat Gombuj Mosque and Haji Khaja Shahbaj Mosque have been categorised as protected monuments but the archaeology department has failed to acquire the land due to lack of funds.

"The owner of a protected monument can not renovate the site without the consent of the archaeology

department. But we can't do any work on it either until the monument has been acquired," said Habibur Rahman, an official of the archaeology department.

Encroachment and illegal occupation of historical sites is also a common problem in Dhaka. The sites that are a source of income are therefore very tough to acquire.

"We can't even enter Baro Katra and Choto Katra (the two Mughal caravansarais) because of the local residents, while Ahsan Monil has been encroached by market owners," said an engineer of the department.

The yearly operational cost of the department is about Tk. 4 crore. Currently 317 personnel are working

for the conservation of 355 monuments all over the country and only 26 site attendants are responsible for the protection of these archaeological sites.

"We need at least 800 personnel to protect the monuments and the ever diminishing funds could prove fatal for our rich archaeological heritage," said Dewan Hossain.

This year, the government has provided funds for partial renovation of the Lalbagh Fort as it would be a popular site for tourists and visiting dignitaries and the delegates of commonwealth countries who are scheduled to arrive in Dhaka for the commonwealth parliamentary conference scheduled from October 4-12.



The Department of Archeology does not have access to Boro Katra, a protected site in the city as a madrasha has taken it over.