

DU students dread collapse of old buildings



New or old, are all DU halls equally safe for students?

Condition of some halls reminds them of Jagannath Hall collapse

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

At least six halls of Dhaka University, including Curzon Hall, are in a rundown condition, but the authorities reasoned out that allocation of funds in the DU budget for maintenance and repair of buildings was not enough.

The resident students are passing their days and nights in panic, mindful of the dreaded night of October 15, 1985, when 39 people died in the collapse of the old assembly room of Jagannath Hall.

Surya Sen, Zahirul Haq, Fazlul Haq, Shahidullah and Saimullah halls and two old buildings of Jagannath Hall are among the worst.

"Fazlul Haq, Shahidullah, Curzon and Jagannath halls were established at the same time and the DU authorities took slapdash measures like using red oxide once in ten years to maintain the buildings," said Professor M Anwar Hossain, chairman of the biochemistry department.

The condition of some rooms of Fazlul Haq Hall became so bad that the authorities had declared the rooms abandoned.

The residents of Surya Sen Hall have recently requested DU Vice-chancellor SMA Faiz to repair the ramshackle rooms, but he suggested that the students be extra-careful to avoid accidents. He said immediate repairs are impossible, as the DU does not have enough funds.

In the fiscal 2003-4 budget of DU, Tk. 2.39 crore has been sanctioned for all maintenance and repairs, of which Tk. 1.5 crore for road and building maintenance.

But the DU chief engineer said the fund allocated for maintenance is not enough for all DU buildings. "Every year we need at least Tk 11 crore for DU road and building maintenance, but we received only Tk. 1.35 crore last year," the engineer said.

This year, the DU has asked the University Grants Commission for Tk. 1.6 crore to repair the 20 rooms of Fazlul Haq Hall, he added.



Fruits are available in abundance but beyond reach of the common people.

Prices soar as Ramadan nears

SYED TASHFIN

Prices of fruits and other items, especially those used during Ramadan, are feared to soar high, as their supply to Bangladesh came to a near-stop because of the Iraq war.

"The price of dates is Tk 32 or above a kg. But this Ramadan it may rise by Tk 5-10," said Sumon, a fruit-seller at Karwan Bazar. "But local items such as watermelon and papaya will be in abundance," he said.

Due to the growing demand for fruits, the price of a medium size papaya rose from Tk 20 to Tk 26 and the same rate applies to watermelons as well.

Plantations in Gazipur, the region noted for papayas, and Natore, famed for watermelons, have been bought off by the merchants to meet the high demand during mid-Ramadan. But the prices of *bel* and banana would remain high as before.

The prices of vegetables are

also feared to rise at the same rate.

"Prices will be a bit up this year round, since most customers prefer to stock up on food and end up buying in bulk in a day," said Mosharrar, a grocer at Karwan Bazar.

Although the supply of vegetables is always the same, scarcity surfaces as customers go bulk-buying, leading to higher prices.

"The prices of *chira* and *muri* have already risen since wayside stalls and *iftar*-selling stalls have started to buy off these items in bulk," said Hashem, a seller.

On the other hand, the price of molasses depends on weather: if the weather feels damp because of rains, the price of molasses will rise.

A fishmonger at Karwan Bazar said, "We always try to keep the price as low as possible, but the fishermen who sell us the fish raise the prices."

The trend of high price might also be more or less similar with beef, mutton and chicken.

Public passages at national stadium 'leased out'

The proliferation of commercial activities is blamed on a shady dealing between a certain quarter of the NSC and the stadium business group

TAWFIQUE ALI

Almost all entryways to the playground and galleries of the Bangabandhu National Stadium have been leased or occupied by traders, evidently with a go-ahead of the National Sports Council (NSC).

Each entry passage leading to the playground has been divided into two parts to house small shops on both sides, almost blocking the way in.

The space at the base of 21 entries to the galleries has been 'rented out' to the traders who filled their places with cartons, keeping only a small approaching space and the staircases aside for entry.

"This deplorable state of the stadium, meant to serve as a centre of pure sports amusement, is because of the commercial frenzy of the authorities who turned the outer front of the stadium into a business hub," a source said.

The proliferation of commercial activities is blamed on a shady dealing between a certain quarter of the NSC and the stadium business group.

The gate Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 21 of the 21 entries are meant for VIPs and NSC officials, four entryways lead to the playground and 13 to the general galleries. But a number of gates have been closed to construct commercial shops.

The original plan of the stadium had two players' lounges close to the gate

No. 1, which too have been converted into shops, sources said.

Beside the stairs to the Bangladesh Football Federation office stands the shop No. 83/A, spoiling the elegant look of the office and causing inconvenience to the officials.

The electronics shop Nos. 94 and 94/A are sandwiched between the demarcated sides of a passageway to the playground. The shop No. 98 has placed its signboard on the gate of another entryway and the shop No. 98/A has found its place on the other side. Both staircases of a first-floor entry are occupied by the shop Nos. 30 and 30/A.

"The stadium suffered the worst assaults on its original architectural

features in 1980 to 1990 in the name of facelift by a vested quarter," said one of the eminent sports organisers seeking anonymity.

Gross irregularity marked renovation work: renovations were carried out to eastern and western galleries without floating tender, he added.

About the allegation, NSC Director (planning) Engineer Nurul Huq Pradhan said, "As far as I am concerned, nothing like that happened. I don't know what happened before."

But a NSC source seeking not to be named alleged that structural alteration continued from 1983 to 1990 when "both Pradhan and Director (administration) Enam had worked in close association with the then NSC chairman".

As part of structural alteration in 1984, public toilets along the entryways were demolished to give place to commercial shops in the name of cleanliness and enhancing NSC revenues.

On the lease of entryways, Enam said, "You better talk to the director (planning)."

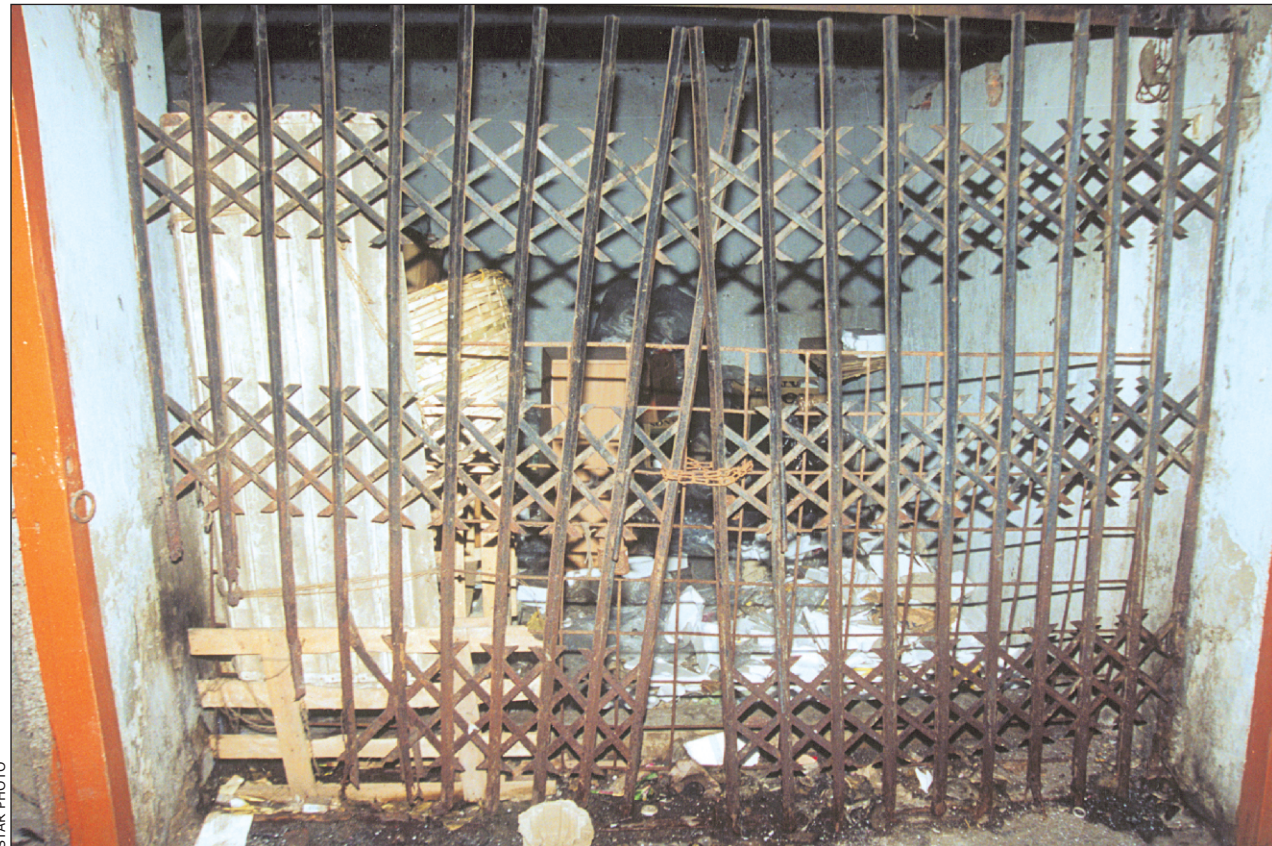
Pradhan said, "The space has not been leased out the way the traders are occupying it and doing business."

Replying to why the NSC did not take administrative action, the director (planning) said the NSC administrative department executes the task.

A judicial probe committee headed by Justice Wadud Chowdhury, recommended punitive measures, including termination or transfer, against four NSC officials in 1991. Pradhan and Enam were among the officials charged with graft.

Both were transferred to Bangladesh Krira Shikhya Pratishthan (BKSP) the same year and served there until 1996 before they were fired on corruption charges in 1999.

But they were reinstated in the service in 2001 and posted back to the NSC after the four-party alliance came to power.



An entrance to the stadium gallery closed for long is now being used as a store room for traders.

Malitola mosque: Fingers crossed for protection

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The Haji Mainuddin mosque at old Dhaka's Malitola should become a protected archaeological site under the Archaeology Department of the Cultural Ministry for its aesthetic value, believes Wolfgang Vollmann, the Country Representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). While visiting the mosque last weekend, Vollmann also said

Mainuddin's family, who have inherited the mosque, were reportedly trying to arrange funds to construct a five-storied mosque on top of the structure which will certainly mean demolishing its three majestic tombs. "We hope to start construction after the holy Eid-ul Fitr," informed a family member of Haji Mainuddin.

The family also feared that if the government didn't come forward to save the historical masterpiece, they won't be able to

stave off the pressure of the local people and worshippers who want more accommodation in the mosque.

"There are other mosques in the area but none with the same aesthetic splendour. The worshippers can easily go to other mosques and pray," said a local resident

A source from the archaeology department said that even if the site is taken as a protected site, the decision could take three to four months to come into effect.

Unesco is considering consulting the archaeology department regarding measures that could be taken for conservation of the century old mosque

that his organisation was considering consulting the archaeology department regarding measures that could be taken for conservation of the century old mosque. The site officer of the archaeology department also visited the mosque last Thursday and is expected to submit his report of feasibility soon. "The mosque has to meet certain criteria before it can be protected by the archaeology department. We have seen the site and will verify all the areas of our requirement before sending a letter to the cultural ministry for it to be protected," said the site officer. The present generation of Haji



The century-old mosque awaits rescue.