

Beautification of Sangsad Bhaban lawn raises questions

Officials concerned are not aware of the work

TAWFIQUE ALI

A division of the Public Works Department (PWD) started decorative landscaping work on the lawn of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban last Wednesday without the knowledge of the PWD chief engineer and other officials concerned.

Sources said Executive Engineer of PWD's division-1 Mohsin Mian unilaterally initiated the work of uprooting the grass on the 5-acre lawn around the parliament building for "level-dressing of the ground and planting new grass."

When this correspondent contacted PWD Chief Engineer ASM Monjurul Islam for his comments, he instructed the executive engineer to stop the work. "I am not aware of the work. I will look into the matter," he said.

Asked if it is necessary to plant new grass spending a lot of money, he said: "In any case, waste of money is not acceptable in the name of unnecessary development work."

Islam said ornamental plantation work is usually executed by the Arboury Culture Department with the consent of Department of Architecture. "I don't understand how it is being done without involving these departments."

There is no such scheme of lawn beautification or development, he said.

The chief architect of the Department of Architecture and



Mounds of earth stacked at certain points on the Sangsad Bhaban lawn as a result of its development work.

the chief arboury culture officer were also unaware of the beautification work.

In Thursday evening, this correspondent found around 100 labourers engaged in uprooting the grass of the Sangsad Bhaban lawn.

Chief Arboury Culture Officer

Quamruzzaman said, "I am not aware of such work though it is the duty of my department to develop any decorative and ornamental beds and designs or make tree plantation."

Abdus Salam, chief architect of Department of Architecture, also said, "I am not aware of

the ongoing ground development and plantation works."

According to an official of the Arboury Culture Department, PWD division-1 has not involved the Arboury Culture Department with this project "to misappropriate money in the name of development work".

"The division-1 has recently got a special monetary allocation from the 'repaid fund' of public works ministry for some projects," the official said, "Usually such allocation is granted to meet emergency needs."

Executive Engineer Mohsin Mian of PWD division-1 said that the

ground development work has been undertaken to level-dress the ground and plant new grass "to make the ground even and rid the existing grass of weeds."

After planting of new grass, the Arboury Culture Department will do gardening, develop flowerbeds and make ornamental designs, Mian said. "We have got Tk 24 crore for the work to be completed in one month," he added.

A high official at the Department of Architecture said, "It is not understandable why suddenly level dressing of the Sangsad Bhaban ground became urgent, as the ground has been like this for many years now with none making any complaints."

"I don't think that level dressing and planting new grass are necessary at all on the pretext that the ground is uneven," he said.

Mohsin Mian however said he has stopped the work with the instant instruction of the PWD chief engineer, "The chief engineer has said the authorities would see and determine whether the work is necessary at all or not."

World famous architect Louis I. Kahn began the construction of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban in 1961 on an area of 200 acres of land. The magnificent building was inaugurated on January 28, 1982.

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 uphold the opinions expressed in this column.

"It can't be termed barbaric. What the police have done, they have done to uphold the law and order"

-- Abdul Quayyum
Inspector General of Police

Told reporters about the police action in Kansat, on Wednesday.
Source: The Daily Star

"We do not have any say about who will participate in the dialogue on your part and it will not be appropriate to impose your opinion about who will participate from our part"

--Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan
BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister

Said in the letter to the AL General Secretary asking them not to interfere in the nomination of its representatives in the proposed committee, on Wednesday.
Source: The Daily Star

"Is the prime minister's position in the alliance so weak that her three allies are not allowing the BNP to discuss the reform proposals alone?"

-- Sheikh Hasina
Leader of the Opposition and Awami League President

Said at the biennial council of the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) at the auditorium of the Jatiya Press Club, on Wednesday.
Source: The Daily Star

"Peoples' purchasing power has increased. Very few people talk about price level"

-- Moudud Ahmed
Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister

Told reporters on Sunday
Source: Prothom Alo

"Do I have to do agreements informing them [the opposition]? They have also signed papers when they were in power. That was for personal reasons"

-- M Morshed Khan
Foreign Minister

Told reporters about the allegation of appointing US lobbyists to improve government's image, on Sunday.
Source: Prothom Alo

"Everybody knows in which language he (Salauddin Quader Choudhury) speaks to. So I will not comment about what he said at Fatikchhari"

-- Shahjahan Siraj
General Secretary, BNP

Told reporters about SK Choudhury's comments in Fatikchhari, on Saturday.
Source: Prothom Alo

Candle prices on rise amid load-shedding

IMRUL HASAN

Prices of all types of candles have increased in the capital as severe power disruptions hit the city as well as other parts of the country.

City dwellers allege the frequent power outages give the traders an opportunity to hike the price of candles illogically.

All areas in the city are now facing blackouts in five to six spells, each spanning one to two hours, as the authorities cannot supply electricity to meet the increased demand in this summer.

Marufa Begum, a government official, said the price of candle has increased in the market in the recent months.

"The price is too high," said Marufa at Hatirpool market as the shopkeeper charged Tk 60 for a dozen candles. "I bought the same last year for Tk 30," she added.

Kamrul Alam, a resident of Rampura, said power failure has become a regular phenomenon after sunset. As the prices of candles have increased, he has taken initiative to produce candles at home for domestic use.

"I know the load-shedding will prolong for months. So I have bought wax and other raw materials from Chawkbazar to make candles," said Kamrul.

"Wholesalers, retailers and producers are making extra profit from candles as its demand has increased remarkably," he added. "This is happening because the government has no control over the market."

Market sources said the prices have increased by more than 50 percent in retail market. "There is a supply shortage. The producers are failing to meet the growing

demand," said Hasib Hossain, a retailer at Islambagh.

A dozen large candles are now selling at Tk 38 to 45. The price was Tk 25 only six months ago. "The retail prices rose to Tk 60 due to increased demand amid load-shedding," said Mozaffar Ali, a grocer at New Market.

The wholesale price of medium size candles is now Tk 28 to 30 per dozen which was Tk 18 last year. The retail price is almost Tk 40.

The wholesale price of small size candles is Tk 15 to 20 while the price was Tk 12 last year. The retail price is Tk 20 to 25.

"The prices of all essentials are on the rise. Our costs too have increased and to make some profit, we had to revise the prices," said Abdul Awal, a grocer at Rampura.

"The price of wax has increased over the last three years, but we did not hike our rates. If we have to sustain in the business, price hike is a must," said Md Alam, proprietor of Orphi Special at Siddhirganj in Narayanganj.

Alam said that six months ago they used to buy one kg wax for Tk 60 but now the price is Tk120. "Due to price hike of raw materi-

als, we have been compelled to increase the price of candles," he explained.

"The sellers are not capitalising the load-shedding rather higher demand against limited supply has led to the price hike," Alam added. He, however, said a portion of traders might make higher profit.

City dwellers also allege that some dishonest people are producing candles by mixing chalk powder with wax, which is causing dark fume.

Security in and around ZIA tightened

Visitors restricted from seeing off relatives while brokers enjoy free access

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Although the main threat to security and organised management within the building is over looked, total concentration has been made to cordon visitors to the Zia International Airport (ZIA) area, said a relative of a passenger.

This preventive step has been taken to tighten security in and around the area, but has disturbed those accompanying passengers.

Middlemen, brokers and frauds enjoy free access to the area and the existing syndicate business of cheating and tyrannising the passengers is being smoothly carried on, which is visible with the number of visitors at the entrance to the main building.

The ticket counters to the arrival and departure concourse have been closed for over three weeks.

"The situation here is not very



Crowds wait anxiously for their loved ones to arrive outside the cordoned area of the airport.

good. In the name of restricting us from entering the airport area, authorities have created chances for some people to engage in more illegal activities," said Atiqul, a visitor who had crossed the security barrier at the entrance to the airport paying Tk 300.

Civil Aviation authorities on March 23 declared 'red alert', still in effect, at ZIA following several anonymous threats.

The government recently formed a 12-member expert committee to examine flaws in the security system to make new recommendations, after a study of security systems at modern airports in other countries.

One committee member said it would take time to stop the syndicate business and corruption in and around the airport area.

To an allegation that only visitors have been made scapegoats in the name security, the member said that there would be a clamp down on anything threatening the security of the area.

"Those accompanying passengers range from five to 10 on an average. It is tough to control such a large number of unwanted guests," he said. "Once we have cleared corruption in the area we would permit one or two guests to accompany a single passenger," he added.

Visitors are aware of the interruption their presence causes, but find it difficult to contain their emotions.

"My son is going abroad for an indefinite period. I am not sure whether I will ever see him again. I want to be with him till the last moment," said 61-year-old Abdur Rashid, who came to see his son off with 12 members of his family. They were stopped at the entrance to the departure area.

Middlemen demanded Tk 1,500 to take five of them, one by one, up to the departure foyer -- a scene this correspondent witnessed.

Those coming to receive arriving passengers too criticised the system.



"We do not know whether my brother's flight has landed. No one here is ready to say anything. He will be looking for us inside," said Rahana, who had come from Netrakona in the morning. It was noon and she had not met her brother.

The committee voiced its concern about the uncontrolled access to the VIP lounge and the non-functional closed-circuit television system as some of the key problems.

"We need to restrict unauthorised entrance to the VIP area as we feel it is a threat to the security system," said the committee member. "It would not be easy as decision makers themselves like a showdown at the time of their departure and arrival," he added.

The deployment of armed police and the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) with dog squads has been increased in the airport area.

The government will impose security rules strictly on departments concerned including immigration, customs and cargo. They are working to make the CCTV at the airport operational.

But this tightened security measures will not save passengers from the tyranny of brokers until steps are taken to remove their presence in the area permanently, said passengers, visitors and some airport officials.