

Begum Bazar mosque was built by Murshid Quli Khan in 1700-1704 AD. The mosque was also known as Kortolob Khan's mosque one of Murshid Quli Khan's other names. This is one of the important mosques built in Dhaka during the Mughal period.



A van puller struggles to shuttle men, women and children returning to Dhaka in chaotic situation.

RETURNING TO WORK AFTER EID

Stranded and anxious millions pray for peace

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

The uncertain political situation and lack of transport facilities have left thousands of Dhaka dwellers stranded at their home districts and many of those returning to the city after the Eid holidays are facing immense sufferings.

On Saturday, Selim Haldar and his family travelled about 125 kilometres from Shariatpur to Dhaka. But they had to walk at least 40 km with luggage to reach his Tejgunipara house in the city. Even his five-year-old son walked about 25 km, Selim told Star City.

Selim said they reached Mawa by trowler and reached Nimtoli from Mawa by rickshaw. Then they walked to Buriganga Bridge at Babubazar in Dhaka. From Babubazar, they got a rickshaw but had to leave it near

Gulshan.

The journey took 12 hours more than usual, Selim said. "On the way we saw violent clashes between the pro-government and opposition backed activists." Every time the family faced a mob of political zealots they prayed.

"I pray for peace in my country, this kind of situation is unacceptable," Selim said.

Abonti Nurul, staff lawyer of Ain O Salish Kendra, left Dhaka to celebrate Eid with her parents at Nilphamari and became stranded there for the political unrest. She called to The Daily Star several times to know when transport will be available.

She told Star City over telephone that she had bought bus tickets for October 28 but no inter-district bus left for Dhaka from her area on that day. Now she does not know when she will be able to reach Dhaka and join office.

Golam Murshid Pintu, assistant secretary of Bangladesh Bus, Truck Owners Association, said he himself got stranded at Kurigram and waiting for resumption of bus service between Kurigram and Dhaka that was stopped due to political unrest.

When asked about the transport problem, GM Siraj, chairman of Bangladesh Bus, Truck Owners Association, said the bus owners are in big trouble due to the unrest. He said the bus companies had sold advance tickets for next 10 days and now they cannot carry the passengers, which created a backlog in ticket management.

Ashok Kumar, station manager of Kamalapur Railway Station, said the railway authorities had to cancel scheduled trips and return price of tickets to the passengers for the ongoing

political situation. An official of the railway said some trains started for their destinations but were stopped at different stations by the political activists.

Badiuzzaman Badal, senior vice chairman of Bangladesh Inland Waterways Passenger Carriers Association, said that water transport owners did not cancel any trip but under the present circumstances, passengers are not available.

He said the owners sought security from the administration but failed to get any help. Most of the passengers have cancelled their booking of cabins and the vessels are being operated with only a few passengers, he added.

About five million people had left the capital city for celebrating Eid.

Supply down, demand up

Disruption in supply bites city homes

TAWFIQUE ALI

Long Eid holidays followed by turbulent political situation has virtually stopped supply of rice, fish, chicken and vegetables to the city as transport system has almost collapsed.

Prices of kitchen stuffs have shot up unusually as fresh supply is not available. City kitchen markets were a deserted look with scant supply of vegetables.

Both traders and transport owners said the situation has occurred as all modes of transport are out of operations in the face of ongoing political unrest.

"At least 90 percent supply of vegetables in the capital is transported by trucks from across the country," said President of Bangladesh Bus Truck Owners Association GM Siraj. "But the truck operations have come to a standstill in the face of political chaos."

Senior Vice-chairman of Bangladesh Inland Waterways Passenger Carriers Association Md Badiuzzaman Badal said

many vessels with rice, lentils, vegetables and fish are lying unloaded as labourers could not move from place to place.

Only an insignificant amount of cargos are being unloaded by mechanised boats, rickshaw vans and push carts, said Badal.

Usually each of the water vessels including passenger launch carries 700 to 800 sacks of cargos, which has now reduced to 40 to 50 sacks, he said.

Train services of Bangladesh Railway suffered severe disruption because of volatile political situation from October 28 causing acute shortage of kitchen stuffs in the city.

Manager of Kamalapur Railway Station Ashok Kumar said, "We had to cancel many train services Saturday because of turbulent situation. Though many trains started to and from Dhaka, they got stranded at different stations."

The largest wholesale chicken market and wholesale banana market at the city's Station Road (Nimtala Bazar) in Tejaon expe-

rienced remarkable shortfall in supply.

An elderly chicken trader at the market, Mokhesur Rahman said yesterday, "We got only two cages of chicken today whereas truckloads of chickens arrive here every day."

Shahadat Ali, another trader, said, "Only one truck with chicken arrived here last night."

The chicken market looked deserted with most shops and depots closed.

Green chilli sold at Tk 200 per kilogram in the city's kitchen markets Saturday. The price was Tk 40 just before Eid but it soared due to lack of supply. Potato, tomato and other vegetables are also selling at much higher prices.

Price of per kilo long beans has shot up from Tk 20-30 to Tk 50-70 while price of potato rose from Tk 22 to Tk 26, dried chilli from Tk 140 to Tk 160, cucumber from Tk 18 to Tk 26 and garlic from Tk 90 to Tk 120 per kilo.

Dhaka: Yesterday, today and tomorrow



Sajahan Sarder is a bird specialist, president of Bangladesh Bird Watcher's Society and Secretary general of Nature Conservation Committee spoke to Wahida Mitu.

The Daily Star (DS): What is your first memory of Dhaka?

Sajahan Sarder (SS): As a child I had to live in three places -- Narayanganj, Munshiganj and Dhaka -- because of the family business. I came to Dhaka in 1964 when I was about five or six years from Narayanganj by train. The station at was then Phulbaria. It was quite large and the hustle and bustle of busy people caught my attraction. Interestingly what caught my eye were the coolies in red dresses.

DS: What was Dhaka city like when you first came?

SS: I used to live in Old Dhaka, where rickshaws were the main method of transport. For those who travelled long distances used three-wheeled scooters. Dhaka then was a rather enjoyable place. Festivals and melas (fairs) took place every now and then; among them were the Muharram Mela, the night of Shab-e-Qadar,

cockfights, and egg cracking festivals, Kawali programmes and many others.

Hizra's (hermaphrodites) participated in different social activities at that time. They were a part of life. It is said that **Hizra's** are looked down upon now. As the city expanded; the more civilised we became, the more we rejected the **hizra** community.

DS: What do you miss most in the city at present?

SS: Oh! I really miss lot of things -- the cordiality, hospitality, and festivals, the joyless, solitude in the city, the natural beauty of Dhaka and the Dhaka full of rickshaws. I also miss the Buriranga river and the pleasant scenery surrounding it.

I miss the birds. In 1980's as a keen bird-watcher, I started the habit at different places in the city like the Ramna Park, at Segunbagicha, along Minto road, in the Buet and Dhaka University campus area and wetlands near the Ramna garden, and had the pleasure of watching various species of birds. But in the last two decades the number of birds, their species and biodiversity has reduced a lot.

At that time, I remember watching over 80 different species of birds in Ramna in a day. But now there are only about 15 different species of birds that I watch in a day.

DS: What is your most memorable event in Dhaka?

SS: I formed the bird watchers society in 1989. I used to hang out at the Elderdo restaurant at the Aziz super market regularly, where I was able to encourage lots of people to watch birds. Later they became members of the

society. The number of members increased gradually as I hung around the restaurant.

DS: How have the changes in the city influenced your life?

SS: I became a nature conservationist in the 1980's that I consider to be an influencing factor of the positive side of the city. The 70's era influenced me to practice philosophy, science, art and literature, while the 60's had influenced me as a revolutionary.

DS: Which part of Dhaka in your eyes, should we be proud of?

SS: We should be proud of not any special part of the city, but of the ancient trees which are our pride. Whenever I look at these trees, they make me feel that we are a civilized and ancient nation.

DS: Is today's Dhaka the city you want to live in?

SS: No, not at all. But it is difficult to go back to yesteryear. We had harmony among birds and animals, human beings and nature then. We have destroyed these bonds and encroached retention ponds and wetlands.

DS: What do you envisage for Dhaka in the future?

SS: If there is a chance to reconstruct Dhaka, we should plant more trees to give shade; arrange sufficient playgrounds, gardens and wetlands. If trees can be provided city dwellers will automatically be provided with birds also. Shrubs cannot meet this purpose.

We need to reconstruct Dhaka for the better future; otherwise it cannot move forward.

Overheard in the last two days ...

DURDANA GHAS

Last week the air of the city was filled with gossip and speculations. People from all walks of life from rickshaw pullers to government officials were shocked to watch the violent confrontation among political activists in the city that started on Friday night.

The following remarks by commoners were overheard by our staffs at various places

including offices, markets, tea stalls and eateries over the city in the last two days.

• "This is a ploy of the prime minister to make ways for the army to take over," said a man in Eskaton.

• "For those politicians who are so desperately trying to create an anarchy there is only one reason. While in power they can make a lot of black money," overheard at Dhanmondi branch of Dutch Bangla Bank.

• "In Gazipur and Narayanganj army was deployed and was seen on the streets" overheard in a canteen at Karwan Bazar.

• "Five ministers of the ruling party took shelter in cantonment" heard in a satellite TV channel.

• "Twelve ministers of the ruling party were caught while trying to cross the border in an attempt to leave the country" -- a passenger overheard from a CNG driver on his way to a bookshop in Gulshan.

• "The two parties are showing off at the cost of people's lives and properties in the race of grabbing power. But interestingly, leaders of both the parties will feast at the same table once things are settled," said an official bound for Comilla on Saturday.

• "In the face of political instability ordinary people lay down their lives making no meaningful difference for themselves leaving their families in dire helplessness while politicians harvest the crop finally," said a frontline sports organiser while watching the street battle between police and activists in the satellite TV channels.

• "Ramadan was a month of restraint but as soon as it ended people just jumped into violence. It seems as if Ramadan did not teach us anything," from an elderly man at Karwan Bazar.

• "The moon was sighted on Monday but Jamat celebrated

Eid on Wednesday to embarrass [Leader of Islami Oikkojot Fazlul Haque] Amini," overheard in the city.

• "Tarique will leave the country as soon as the army takes over" was heard in an adda.

• "A state of emergency can be declared as the situation is spiralling out of control and political activities can be banned if the talks fail," was overheard at an office.

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.

"Despite repeated bid to create chaos and anarchy, they failed. This is the reality and this is the truth"

-- Khaleda Zia

BNP chairperson and outgoing prime minister

Said in a televised address to the nation marking the end of her five-year rule, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"I am doing this in the interest of the people and as one who loves his country"

-- KM Hasan

Former chief justice

Said in a press release deciding to stay away from performing as chief adviser to the caretaker government, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"We have developed a system to maintain the law and order and if the next government follows it, the law and order situation will be good"

-- Lufazzaman Babar

State Minister for Home

Told a group of reporters at home ministry on his last day in office, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"Hawa Bhaban was the centre of all corruption in the last five years and people have rejected its prince"

-- Col (Rtd) Oli Ahmed

Executive President, Liberal Democratic Party

Told journalists at a press conference, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"What did microcredit do regarding life expectancy, women literacy and reserve of foreign exchange?"

-- Saifur Rahman

Finance Minister

Said while addressing a farewell programme at the finance and planning ministry, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"I have used press as a shield on some occasions. I had no problem to keep my door open to the DCAB [Diplomatic Correspondents' Association of Bangladesh] members although some consider journalists as enemies"

-- Morshed Khan

Foreign Minister

Said while inaugurating a press lounge for the DCAB on the first floor of the foreign ministry, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"The map will look clumsy if we detail every bit of information of each area in the city in one map"

-- MA Hadi

Managing Director, The Mappa Limited

Told a reporter when asked why they are not printing a single map including all details for smooth commuting, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"I am a victim of something I do not know of at the last minute of the government's tenure"

-- Emdadul Islam

Former Chief Engineer, Rajuk

Told a reporter after he was forced into retirement by the ministry of housing and public works for trying to stop real estate developers from filling up thousands of acres of low lying lands earmarked in the city master plan as flood flow zones, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"Who are the masterminds of Islamist militancy in the country?"

-- Alamgir Kabir

Former state minister and alleged patron of militants led by Bangla Bhai

Told reporters, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star