



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

## Juvenile shield in line of fire



A juvenile in action at Kanwan Bazar during Monday's clash with

### Political parties continue to use children for street agitations

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Political parties continue to use children and juveniles in the street agitation and fighting against their opponents and the law enforcers, alleged child rights activists.

Sources said the criminal gangs active in the city control some juvenile groups and they engaged them to take part in the political parties' street agitation.

A mid-level gangster in Mirpur area said about a hundred children aged 12 to 17 years are under his control. "They are mostly from slums. They don't have any work to do. I pay them regularly for helping me," the gangster said seeking anonymity.

Asked what kind of help they extend, he said he needs political shelter for protecting himself and he has to change his political identity whenever needed. "That's why I help parties and supply manpower for their programmes. This is an investment for the future."

Ashiqur, a 15-year-old boy who works for the group, told Star City that he collected some others of his age for participating in political rallies after being instructed by his 'boss'.

He said his 'boss' bears all expenditures of those boys and pays them for joining the rallies.

Ashiqur knows the risks of these activities and said he has to do what his boss asks him to do. "He helps me in my bad times. So it is my duty to help him."

The gangster said juveniles are more dependable than the adult persons. "They work for me as they know if I don't exist they will not exist."

Child rights activists said the government took initiatives to protect these children from the 'political crime' but the initiative still remains on paper.

The government, inspired by some NGOs,

planned to conduct a survey on this juvenile force used by the criminal groups and the police was tasked with the study.

The government allocated fund for the survey but it is yet to start, the child rights activists from NGOs alleged, blaming bureaucratic tangles for this.

The national taskforce on releasing children from prison at its 8th meeting on September 3 expressed grave concern over the involvement of the juveniles in politics and crime.

The taskforce members feared that the juvenile force might be used in the political activities.

The meeting emphasised that the police should be more careful while arresting children. It decided that the police would try to avoid arresting children and putting them in detention.

About the protection of the children during pre-election period, Phoni Bhushon Chowdhury, a deputy inspector general of police, said that the police headquarters regularly reviews the implementation of Children Act 1974 by the police force.

Chowdhury said these children are often engaged in 'destructive activities' but they should not be blamed for the crime. It is their employer, who should be brought to justice."

Wahida Banu, chairman of the Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF), said they are planning to submit memorandums to the major political parties asking them not to use children in the political activities.

She said the BSAF would urge the political parties to include the child protection and child rights issue in their election manifesto.

The BSAF will start campaigning through television channels for the child rights protection in the pre-election period and against the use of children in political activities.



Construction of the third Buriganga bridge continues.

### THIRD BURIGANGA BRIDGE

## Approach road in syndicate's grip

MORSHED ALI KHAN

As the construction of the third Buriganga bridge at Basila continues in full swing, authorities are now worried about the approach road at the end of Satmasjid Road, which remains under the grip of a powerful syndicate.

Official sources said that the 2,300 feet long and 33 feet wide third Buriganga bridge would be completed early 2010. The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development is paying bulk of the Tk 49 crore needed to complete

the bridge.

Initially the plan was to connect the Satmasjid Road with the road leading to the third Buriganga bridge. But Satmasjid Road meets an abrupt dead end at the Mohammadpur bus stand. A local influential syndicate built up a market on the public land. Most recently the tin shed market has been demolished and the same syndicate has earmarked the area for a multi-storied market complex.

This is happening before the very eyes of the high officials, who drive past the spot regularly to inspect the construction work of the bridge.

"If the Satmasjid Road is not connected to the approach road of the bridge then we are sure the benefits of the bridge would be significantly reduced," said Reza Mohammad Ali Omar, a homeowner at Katasur.

"This syndicate of grabbers are already causing enormous suffering to thousands of people who have to use a clogged and narrow road to come to the embankment, the problem becomes unbearable when in the evening trucks ply on it," Omar said.

Officials of the third Buriganga

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### DHAKA INTERNATIONAL TRADE FAIR

## Decreasing number of foreign participants

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

This year's Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF) is going to start on November 18 with the lowest number of foreign participants comparing to the last five years.

Besides Bangladesh, only eight countries will take part in the month-long 12th DITF. The number of prospective foreign buyer teams has also declined by half this year, sources said.

In 2002, a total of 22 countries took part in the biggest annual trade fair of the country. In the next year the number went down to 20, followed by 16 in 2004 and only 10 last year.

Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) officials said they are not worried over the declining number of participants, rather they are concerned about the less participation of foreign buyers.

They said the number of foreign buyers this year would be the lowest since 2002 and this might affect their main target that is to reach Bangladeshi products to

the foreign buyers.

The EPB officials said so far buyers from only two countries, Malaysia and Nepal, have expressed their interest to join the fair.

"We tried our level best to attract trade bodies and organisations in sending their representatives and taking part in the fair. Unfortunately, the response is very poor," said Mir Shahabuddin Mohammad, vice chairman, EPB.

He however said: "Time is not over yet. We have seen in the past that many buyers contact us after the fair is open."

Last year four trade associations from China, Pakistan and Myanmar sent their representatives to visit the DITF.

When DITF was launched in 1995 its main objective was to attract the foreign buyers to promote exportable goods produced in Bangladesh. After a few successful events the number of foreign participants started to decline.

The organisers said they had to change the fair schedule due to

'unavoidable circumstances.' Besides, the Delhi International Trade Fair is taking place at the same time. This might be one of the reasons for poor response from the foreign participants, they said.

"We have sent invitation to more than 50 countries through Bangladesh's foreign missions abroad. Still we are negotiating with many countries to send buyers. We hope the number will increase," said the EPB vice chairman.

He admitted that the decrease in the number of foreign buyers would affect the fair.

The EPB officials said they are happy to see that the percentage of exporters among the participants from Bangladesh has increased this year. This year 60 percent of the local participants are exporters while it was below 40 percent last year.

But the export-oriented participants said their participation would not be worthy as they believe that DITF has gone a far

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## Dhaka botanical garden fighting for survival

### Unplanned urbanisation around this pristine garden is destroying its ecological features

WAHIDA MITU

The National Botanical Garden, one of the richest storehouses of plants and wildlife in the city, is losing its ecological features day by day as a housing complex built besides it is inflicting enough damage to the ecology of this rare collection.

A high official of the garden authorities said nearly 9 years ago they had made a proposal to the government to acquire the adjacent wetland for extending the garden's area, but for some unknown reasons the proposal was rejected.

Later, one of the leading real estate developers occupied the place. The area near the garden is now always buzzing with people, vehicle horns and continuous noise. This correspondent heard a deafening sound hammering in the ears from a nearby building, which is very harmful for the plants and the ecology, said environmentalists.

According to the environmentalists the garden has multidimensional landscape, with a combination of wetland and the jungle. All these qualities have made the place a proper refuge for different types of birds and wildlife.

"The continuous cleaning of bush is reducing the herbs. As a result, biodiversity is decreasing. The nearby human habitat, continuous activities of people and noise are hampering the natural qualities of the garden," said Shajahan Sarder, president of Bangladesh Bird Watchers' Society and secretary general of Nature Conservation Committee.

"This is a wonderful land of resident birds for breeding. In

the same place both terrestrial and marsh birds are seen. In the last 20 years bird watchers recorded nearly 125 species of migratory and resident birds here," he added.

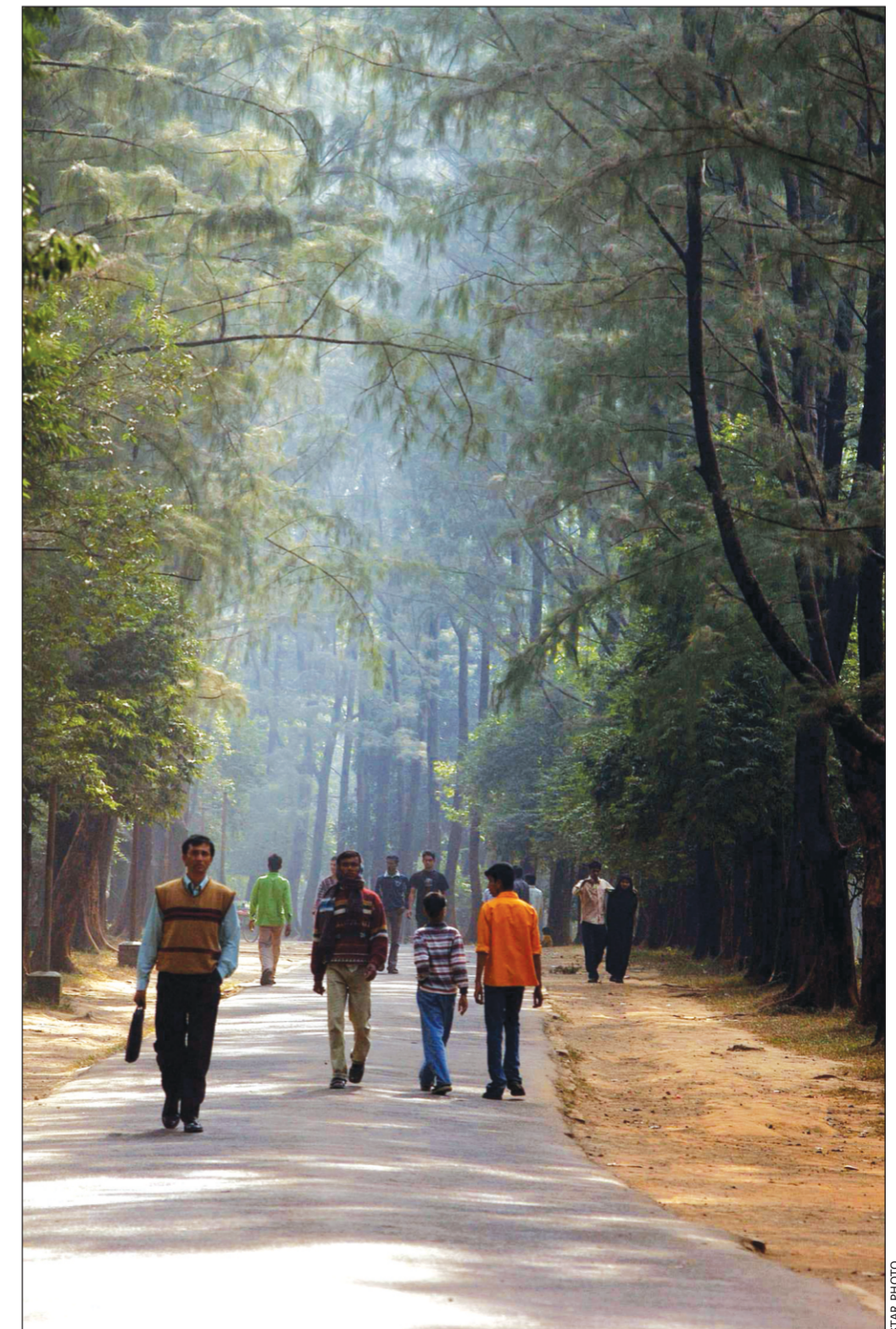
There are 950 species of trees in the garden on 208 acres of land. Every year 20 species of new trees, vines and herbs are added to the garden on average, mainly collected from National Tree Fair, said the garden officials.

In 1961 the forest department set up the park to collect and preserve different species of trees of local and foreign origin there.

This year the garden authorities have collected 30 species of plants from different sources. Among them white padma, originating from Rajshahi, Naogaon and Dinajpur was recently added. Another is Paan bilash, a kind of plant with fragrant leaves eaten with betel leaf for its aromatic flavour and is found in Jessore, Bagerhat and Barisal.

Some fascinating trees are found in this garden. 'Laily Majnu' (scientific name Car aria bicolor) is one of them. The tree is so named because one side of the leaf of the tree is green while the other side is red. Another fascinating tree is Krishna Banyan tree.

Other than a vast storehouse of trees it has a wide variety of wildlife including jackal, wildcat, grey monitor lizard, mongoose, dove, green pigeon, parrot, owl, different reptiles, kite, kingfisher and eagle.



Pristine botanical garden faces onslaught of unplanned urbanisation.



DITF authorities put final touches before the fair starts on November 18.