

Fort city open to destruction

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boundary walls, five acres which belong to the district administration, and 3.70 acres which belong to the Shah Sultan Balkhi Mazar.

The majority of the land -- 319 acres -- belongs to local villagers since Partition in 1947.

Mahasthangarh was declared a protected monument under the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act-1904 by the then Bengal government in 1920.

Naheed Sultana, regional director of the DoA, Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions, said Mahasthangarh houses important metal, stone and earth artefacts from the pre-Maurya, Maurya, Shunga, Gupta, Pala, Sen, Mughal, and even the British, periods.

"The place contains valuable archaeological evidence from the 4th century BC to the 19th century AD -- such a chronological history of human civilisation is found nowhere else in Bangladesh," she said, adding that Mahasthangarh has been on the list of probable Unesco world heritage sites since 1999.

"Therefore, acquiring the land for preserving this archaeological evidence immediately is crucial, not only for Bangladesh but also for the rest of the world."

She said generation after generation of villagers have been using valuable ancient bricks from the site to build houses and digging deep tubewells and drains, damaging the archaeological site. "Once these artefacts are lost, we will never get it back."

In 2012, the High Court ruled that the government immediately acquire all private land within the fort city and also directed that during this acquiring period, no new construction take place.

The Antiquities Act, 1968 (amended in 1976) states new buildings, walls, demarcation marks, drains cannot be constructed and no harm be done to archaeological sites.

Over the years, at least 987 houses and other structures have been built in the fort city in violation of the antiquities act, according to the DoA.

Razia Sultana, custodian of the Mahasthangarh Archaeological Museum, told The Daily Star they filed 13 complaints with the Shibganj Police Station this year, against 26 people constructing illegal structures in the fort city, in violation of both the High Court order and the antiquities act.

Contacted recently, DoA Director General Md Hannan Mia told the Daily Star, "We sent a proposal to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs on December 29 last year on acquiring the land immediately. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, it is taking more time."

The 393.31 acres of land will require an estimated Tk 739.5 crore to acquire, the DG said.

VILLAGERS' CONCERNS

Morium Begum, 35, of Garh Mahasthan village, which is inside the fort city, said, "The government is neither buying our land nor allowing us to build new houses. As our family gets larger, we need new homes and infrastructure."

Another resident Dulu Sheikh said for the last seven to eight years, the villagers have not been allowed to build any new houses, tubewells, drains, set up irrigation machines, or dig a graveyard in the area.

"If we take any step to do new construction, the local archaeological department file case after case at the police station and police are stopping us from building new houses and harassing us," he said.

However, DoA officials refuted the allegation that they impede agricultural work and digging of graveyards in the area.

On visits to the site this year -- in February and November -- this correspondent found many new brick houses being constructed, violating the High Court order.

Multiple villagers -- requesting to remain anonymous -- also claimed police officials in exchange of bribes allowing people to build new houses.

Contacted, SM Baziuzzaman, officer-in-charge of Shibganj Police Station, refuted the allegation.

Mosharaf Hossain, another villager, said, "The High Court ordered the archaeology department to acquire the fort city land immediately, but seven to eight years have passed without the archaeology department or the government taking any initiative to acquire the land."

"We villagers are facing many problems to construct even a small drain for irrigation."

Manzil Murshid, president of Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB), which filed the writ petition for the preservation of the site leading to the HC order, told the Daily Star that the villagers went to the court this February for a status quo, so that they can build new infrastructures in the area.

"But the High Court denied them and ordered the department concerned, district administration and police to protect the site from illegal structures."

On December 29, 2019 the DoA sent an application to the secretary of the cultural affairs ministry urging all the necessary steps to acquire all 393.31 acres of land in the fort city.

The application, which The Daily Star has obtained a copy of, states that Mahasthangarh and its adjacent archeological sites are under consideration as a Unesco world heritage site and the land is not acquired soon, the government will lose control of the ancient fort city and important archeological evidence is already being occupied by local villagers.

The application also warned that tension between the villagers and the local DoA is growing and violence might break out if the land is not acquired in time.

Top priority given

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government has attached the highest priority to the agriculture sector. Referring to the food shortage in the country, Bangabandhu says the aim of government efforts is to attain self-sufficiency in food within the shortest possible time. In this regard he mentions the import of 35,000 power pumps are intended to boost the winter crops in the country.

Bangabandhu calls for a halt to the menacing population explosion in the country and emphasises the need for family planning. He says that proper education and training of women are essential for popularising family planning in the country. He also points out that the constitution provides equal opportunities to women in the country.

GOKHALE CALLS ON PM

The visiting Indian Law Minister HR Gokhale calls on Bangabandhu at the Gono Bhaban today and stays with him for some time. They discuss various bilateral issues of the two countries.

TAJUDDIN CONDEMNS US BOMBING

Tajuddin Ahmed, minister for finance and planning, today demands an immediate halt to the renewed US bombing offensive against North Vietnam and withdrawal of the US armed forces from South Vietnam to pave the way to a lasting peace in that part of the world.

Source: December 30, 1972 issues of Dainik Bangla, The Bangladesh Observer and Ittefaq.

Ancient snack

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food which the shop keeper lowered into a counter with circular holes.

The front of the counter was decorated with brightly coloured frescoes, some depicting animals that were part of the ingredients in the food sold, such as a chicken and two ducks hanging upside down.

"This is an extraordinary find. It's the first time we are excavating an entire termpolium," said Massimo Ossana, director of the Pompeii archaeological park.

Archaeologists also found a decorated bronze drinking bowl known as a patera, ceramic jars used for cooking stews and soups, wine flasks and amphora.

Pompeii, 23 km (14 miles) southeast of Naples, was home to about 13,000 people when it was buried under ash, pumice pebbles and dust as it endured the force of an eruption equivalent to many atomic bombs.

"Our preliminary analyses shows that the figures drawn on the front of the counter, represent, at least in part, the food and drink that were sold there," said Valeria Amoretti, a site anthropologist.

Cabinet okays stern

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Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam told reporters after the cabinet meeting, which was presided over by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina virtually.

WHY THE NEW LAW?

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) prepared the draft and sent it to the Road Transport and Highways Division in December 2018. Later, the division finalised the draft and sent it to the law ministry for vetting.

Officials involved in drafting the new law said different new elements related to highways have been added, broadening its scope. Many "issues" do not come under the purview of the current law, they said.

The current law has only five sections -- title, extent and commencement, definition, temporary closing of government roads, power to make rules, and penalties. The new law will have 20.

As per the Highway Act-1925, all "government roads" are under the Public Works Department (PWD). But the situation is different in reality. For decades, they have been under the jurisdiction of the RHD.

On one hand, the number and usage of highways has increased since 1925, and on the other, many developments like expressways and controlled-access highways, toll roads have surfaced in the road sector.

There are some 22,361km of highways -- 3,943km of national highways, 4,882km of regional highways and 13,536km of district highways -- under the department, according to RHD's 2019-20 annual report.

Despite a ban, non-motorised vehicles continue to ply the country's 22 highways. Besides, simultaneous operation of fast and slow vehicles on the roads is commonplace.

Also, as of July this year, there were at least 16,505 illegal structures on or along roads and highways across the country. The RHD data shows 1,48,182.68 acres of the department's land were under illegal occupation.

These slow vehicles and the structures, especially near intersections, are largely blamed for highway accidents which claim thousands of lives every year.

A chapter of the draft law talks about road safety.

The department would ensure engineering safety while constructing or repairing highways, give highest

priority to safety issues while constructing or maintaining roads, identify and correct hazardous turns and evict risky establishments, as per the draft law.

WHAT OTHER SECTIONS SAY

According to the draft law, the government can declare any road a highway, controlled-access highway or expressway by issuing a gazette.

Besides, no road or highway can be connected to the controlled-access highway without prior approval from the RHD. If necessary, intersections, interchanges and merge lanes can be constructed upon approval of their design by the RHD. the draft said.

Government and non-government utility service providers have to take prior approval and pay charges to instal lines beside the highways.

And, the government and non-government authorities have to shift their establishments at their own cost if necessary, to make way for development or maintenance of highways, it said.

Setting up any infrastructure without approval from the RHD would be considered "invasion", and such an offence would be punishable under section 82 of the Road Transport Act-2018, the draft says.

Section 82 of the RTA stipulates a maximum two-year jail term and Tk 5 lakh fine, or both.

The department would have the authority not to allow a utility service that may hinder normal transport services.

Any motor vehicle that spills elements harmful to the highway would not be allowed on the roads. One has to pay a highest Tk 25,000 fine for violating this provision.

One may face a maximum fine of Tk 5,000 for using highways to dry crops, straw and similar materials or for walking through non-dedicated places. Hanging billboards, signboards or erecting arches without approval may result in a maximum fine of Tk 50,000.

All the offences will be punishable by mobile court.

Preliminary draft of the act had proposed bringing the Highway Police under the Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges but it was left out in the final draft.

Meanwhile, the cabinet also approved the RHD's Highways Landscaping Policy to protect national and regional highways from damage.

His brother, nephew testify

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at Shahjalal Islami Bank Ltd's Uttara Branch in their names in which Tk 2.25 crore was transferred without their knowledge.

Narendra said he was an employee of the Shipping Ministry and he was retired from service in January of 2005.

Narendra Sinha said his brother SK Sinha one day told him that he [SK Sinha] needed to open a bank account for a special purpose, but it was impossible for him as he was a government service-holder.

Narendra Sinha also said he never went to the bank and did not sign any cheques, adding that he had no business transactions.

Moreover, he had no knowledge of depositing money to their joint

account from SK Sinha's account at the Supreme Court branch of Sonali Bank; SK Sinha was "solely aware" of it, Narendra continued.

He also said he never went to that bank and did not sign any cheque. Besides, he had no business relationship with Shankhajit.

In his deposition, Shankhajit told the court he went to Uttara branch of Shahjalal Islami Bank following a request from his uncle SK Sinha and signed some papers given by the manager.

He also said he didn't know anything about transactions of the account and his uncle SK Sinha and his wife made transactions in that account.

Shankhajit also said as per SK Sinha's direction, he opened two FDRs of Tk 50 and 10 lakh at Dhaka

Bank Ltd's Uttara Branch and later he deposited Tk 14 lakh to Dhaka Bank's EPZ branch.

Earlier on August 18, complainant of the case Anti-Corruption Commission Director Syed Iqbal Hossain gave his statement before the same court.

Sixteen out of 18 prosecution witnesses, including the complainant, gave their statements.

Seven of the accused were present in the court yesterday while Sinha and three others are on the run.

On December 10 last year, the ACC pressed charges against the 11 accused.

On August 13, the same court framed charges against them.

Justice Sinha resigned on November 11, 2017, from abroad. He is now in the USA.

14-day quarantine must for all UK

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Airport by the same flight, Nasrin Akter, a doctor at the health desk at HSlA, told The Daily Star.

After their health screening, all the passengers were allowed to go home as they had Covid-19 negative certificates.

"But they will have to be in home quarantine for 14 days," added Dr Nasrin.

Several health experts opined for suspension of air communications with the UK, following the discovery of the new strain of Covid-19 in that country.

At least 40 countries have so far suspended air communications with the UK, according to media reports.

On December 24, some 165 people, including five infants, who reached the Sylhet airport from the

UK by a Biman flight, were allowed to go home following their health screening as they had Covid-19 negative certificates.

In the same flight, another 29 passengers landed at the Dhaka airport. Two of them were sent to institutional quarantine at Diabari in the capital's Uttara.

Meanwhile, Obaidul Quader, Awami League general secretary and also road transport and bridges minister, yesterday said at a regular briefing at his residence that the first shipment of the Covid-19 vaccines would reach the country by the end of January or early February next year.

NEW DEATHS

Twenty-seven more people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours ending 8:00am yesterday, said a DGHS press release.

With them, the number of deaths reached 7,479 and the death rate was 1.47 percent.

At least 932 new infections were recorded in the meantime, taking the number of people infected to 5,10,080, said the release.

Against 12,617 tests in those 24 hours, the positivity rate was 7.39 percent, while the overall positivity rate was 16.02 percent.

In the same 24 hours, 1,357 Covid-19 patients recovered, raising the number of recoveries to 4,53,318.

The recovery rate stood at 88.87 percent.

Among the 27 deceased, 23 were male.

One was aged between 41 and 50, two were aged between 31 and 40, six between 51 and 60, and 18 were above 60 years old, added the release.

Sudan to deploy troops in Darfur after tribal clashes

AFP, Khartoum

Sudan is to send troop reinforcements to the south of its Darfur region after 15 people were killed in tribal clashes, the official news agency SUNA said.

The governor of South Darfur state, Musa Mahdi, announced "the deployment of a large number of military forces in order to arrest those involved in the clashes and to collect the arms", it reported Sunday.

"The era of reconciliation conferences is over and the era of implementing the law has started," Mahdi said, referring to talks in recent months, as quoted by SUNA.

A local official, also cited by the agency, said a dispute between the Massalit and Fallata tribes in the Gereida area had led to armed clashes in which two members of the Fallata were killed.

The Fallata mounted reprisal attacks that left 13 dead and 34 wounded among the Massalit, SUNA said, without specifying when the violence broke out.

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

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A Shari'ah Based Islami Bank**

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Scheduled Downtime	Suspended Services
From 30 December 2020, Wednesday, 06:00 PM (end of business hours) to 02 January 2021, Saturday, 10:00 PM	- ATM Services - Debit Card Transactions - Internet Banking Transactions - DigiBanking Transactions
From 30 December 2020, Wednesday, 06:00 PM (end of business hours) to 04 January 2021, Monday, 10:00 PM	- Interbank fund transfer through Cheque and other Electronic medium - BACH (Clearing) Operations - BEFTN and Digital Banking (EFT) Operations - RTGS Operations

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EXCERPTS FROM THE INTERVIEW OF
SYED MANZUR ELAHI
JOURNEY TOWARDS THE APEX

Growing Up
Our family had a lot of law and judiciary practitioners. My father passed away when I was five. I was practically brought up by my brothers. There was a very liberal attitude in our home. There was a plain living high thinking environment in our household. My eldest brother was not particularly fond of capitalists. He believed that businessmen have no idealism. My other elder brother, though not very progressive, also had a plain living high thinking attitude. This plain living high thinking of my family somehow triggered my rebellious spirits and I started thinking that this approach is not for me. So, in principle, I sort of rebelled.

Role Model
In boarding school, I met people from various backgrounds. I had a friend there, who belonged to a very rich business family from Ranchi, Bihar, India. I went to Tatanagar with him, where his father worked. There, I saw the industries made by Tata and I immediately knew that Jamsetji Tata would be my role model. When I told my brothers that I wanted to be an entrepreneur, they taunted me, "What do you know about business? Nobody in our family has ever gone into business. Give that thought a rest and study law, or sit for the government exam." Then, call it a twist of fate or not, I got a job offer from Pakistan Tobacco. The starting salary and facilities they provided were so lucrative that it impressed my eldest brother, my guardian.

Opportunities after Independence
When we gained our independence, there was a huge vacuum. I was looking for an opportunity after independence to leave Pakistan Tobacco and start a business. And I saw that entrepreneurship was not increasing for some reason. While this was going on, one day, at a dinner party, I met a Frenchman. We started chatting. I asked him what he did for a living and he told me he was involved in import-export. I asked him, "What kind of business?". He said leather. He added, "I want to make you an offer, will you join me?". I said I will not take up another job as I am already well employed. To this, he said, "No, I am not offering you a job, I am offering you an agency. You will get a certain percentage from what you sell. You will also get a certain percentage from the goods you buy here. Do you want to do it?" So I came home and told my wife. She was furious. She told me it would be unwise to bid farewell to all the facilities provided by Pakistan Tobacco. My eldest brother told me that he would not speak to me ever again if I did this. Obviously, it became a very hard choice. But the person who really helped me at that time was my father-in-law. He told me that he supported me.

Starting with a Challenge
After this journey of mine started, I went up and down for the next 6-7 months. Then, Chittagong port, which was being salvaged by the Russians, opened up. This opening up

improved things a bit. We started using the port and we did very well. I was able to accumulate some capital. Then the great tragedy struck us in 1975 and the government changed. The new government started privatizing sectors which used to be public. The first sector the then government privatized was the tanneries corporation. The first tannery that they put up for auction was Orient Tannery. I went to the auction and I bought it for BDT 12,22,000, which was a lot of money in 1975. So, this marked my entry into the leather business. And the rest is history.

My message for our future entrepreneurs is that working capital is the biggest problem. Now-a-days, there are venture capital firms who invest in green field projects. Bangladesh Bank has also started a fund for entrepreneurs. There, if you apply for up to a limit of BDT 5 million, you will get working capital. There is also a website for this fund. I would like to request my young entrepreneurs to visit their website. However, the situation has undoubtedly improved a lot.

Dreams for the Country
There was not much political stability after the tragedy in 1975. There has been political stability since 1990, but we had a break in between with two years of army rule. Now, democracy and development go together. If there is rule of law and democracy, I will invest. I need more investment. And for us, investment translates into job creation. The biggest challenge for South Asia, not only for Bangladesh, is job creation.

Who is the friend of an entrepreneur?
According to me, the best friend of an entrepreneur is the banker. Those who are entrepreneurs, please remember that your best friend in business is the banker. You choose the banker, but your relationship with the banker must be very good. And if there is a banker behind you, your life is much simpler. My young friends, please always remember that. Do not upset the banker. Keep them happy.

Message for Young Entrepreneurs
You must acquire the habit of listening. Let everybody speak their mind. And you should take the mic at the last. Of course, in between you can intervene and contradict. You must earn the respect of the people. You should try to conduct a meeting or run an organization through respect, not fear. I always say that respect is probably a much stronger affection than love.

Interviewed by Dr. Melita Mehjabeen, Associate Professor, IBA University of Dhaka.

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You can watch this interview on the official YouTube channel of Prerona Foundation