

SAVE DHAKA

URBANISATION & HOUSING: PART-7

Dhaka losing its rich history

By Morshed Ali Khan

In Zinjira, on the other side of the river Buriganga and directly opposite to Boro Katra, stood a splendid palace. It was built by the successor of Shaista Khan, Nawab Ibrahim Khan II, between 1689-97.

History claims it was in this palace that the mother, Aminah Begum, the aunt, Ghoseti Begum, and the wife, Latifah of Sirajuddaula, the last independent nawab of Bengal, were kept as prisoners before being taken out and drowned at the confluence of the Buriganga and the Dhaleswari rivers. Today, the site of this historical palace is in ruins. The cruel and mindless acts of man and nature have almost succeeded in erasing it from the map.

The history of Dhaka of the pre-Mughal period is shrouded in mystery. Dr K M Karim, a leading archivist of the country, emphasises in his article in the 'Dhaka—Past, Present, Future', published by the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, that Dhaka was an obscure place before the Mughals. But between 1299-1608 AD Dhaka was noted for its industry. The Portuguese settled here. In 1608 Dhaka became the capital of Mughal Bengal and remained so until 1764.

During this time, Dhaka became the entrepot for the whole of South East Asia. The built up area of the city extended for twelve miles along the bank of the Buriganga and for eight miles inland.

Like the Zinjira Palace, Dhaka has silently witnessed the destruction of countless historical sites over the years.

Today, with a population of 4.4 million inhabitants, facing acute shortage of housing, business centres and other civic amenities, preservation of Dhaka's heritage has always remained a neglected and low-profile issue for successive governments since independence in 1971. Many precious historical sites were left to themselves, and even destroyed, only for ugly, haphazard settlements, controlled by influential dons and toll-collecting mastiffs of the area, to grow up in their places.

In 1986, for instance, a government minister took active steps in demolishing the 120-year-old Bhawal Raj Palace in the Nolgola area of the city. A super market was planned on the land. The project failed to take off because a row broke out between the occupants of the palace and the 'developers'. A long judicial dispute over who would control the three-bigha plot was started. Now the palace is in a deplorable state. Unless the government, particularly the Department of Archaeology, takes immediate and strong measures to protect the site, it will soon be lost for posterity.



The Ahsan Manzil, palace of the Dhaka Nawabs in the older part of the city, in its restored glory. — Star photo

Both Bara and Chota Katra, two of the most important remains of the Moghul period in Dhaka, are in similar condition. The brick-and-mortar structures are faced with decadence as slums, huts, factories, godowns occupy them. The different floors of these fort-like buildings have been rented out to serve as working class dormitories, party offices and students' hostels. It was alleged that the rents are regularly collected by 'agents' recruited by the government department which is supposed to conserve these relics.

Amiruddin, 60, who has always lived in the area, expressed his sadness about the way the Katras have been used. "A lot of tourists come here everyday. They come, stand here and ask 'Where is the Katra?' The buildings are almost buried," he said. The original grandeur of the structures can hardly be seen nowadays.

Unplanned and illegal extension work on many historical sites has also been rampant in the city, especially in cases of mosques. Recently, a 400-year-old mosque in the Nolgola area underwent such an extension and restoration work that its historical value has been totally sacrificed. It was learnt that no permission was either sought or taken by the mosque committee prior to this gross reconstruction. The plans for extension and renovation were designed by a committee

member who had little or no qualification to do so. Originally, the mosque was built by Shaista Khan in the 17th century. Two identical mosques were built at the same time. One was the famous Satmasjid in Mohammadpur, which has been protected by the Department of Archaeology, and the other the Nolgola Mosque, which has now been defaced. One wonders how the historians and relevant authorities could have failed to prevent the disaster.

Gloomy reports on the almost total apathy towards the need for preservation of Dhaka's historical sites could probably fill pages, but there also exist a few happy stories. The Ahsan Manzil stands out as an inspirational monument in this regard. Until not very long ago the palace, built by the Nawabs of Dhaka in 1872, was home to innumerable destitutes, slum dwellers and factories recycling trash. In 1988, the government took over the building and later turned it into a beautiful museum through extensive renovation work. Now thousands of tourists visit the site every week.

In the same way, the Lalbagh Fort has been preserved by the Department of Archaeology, attracting a great number of tourists.

There are, however, hundreds of small and big historical sites in Dhaka still waiting to be detected and duly protected.

Historical remains not only attract wanderlust people from around the world, helping the country's tourism industry, they also represent our glorious historical past. The government should bring all the old buildings under a charter, as in the case of Great Britain, where any building at least a hundred years old or having a historical significance, automatically falls under the charter and is thus protected. It is time that a master plan is drawn up to renovate and conserve the spots. The government should immediately declare all the historical monuments and buildings as protected sites. Small museums in some of these spots can be established. And the historical remains should be tied with tourism by developing different itineraries.

In the past, celebrated travellers like Ibn Battuta (1345), Nicholas Pisento, Lewis Vertomannus (1503) and Francois Bernier (1666) visited Dhaka and gave vivid descriptions of Dhaka society, its economy, government, administration, buildings and architecture. This shows that Dhaka has always been a place worth visiting. If today we are deprived of tourists, the blame is definitely ours.

Professor AH Dani, in his book 'Dhaka—A Record of its Changing Fortune', laments: "Man, in his neglect, has forgotten the value of his magnificence that is this heritage."

PM on Tagore's works

From Page 1

Minister for Cultural Affairs Prof Jahannara Begum, the inaugural function was also addressed by former Chief Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman as the special guest, and Cultural Secretary Mukhlisur Rahman.

The anniversary is also being observed at Silaidaha, Shajadpur and Patisar at the government level.

Paying tributes to the great poet the Prime Minister recalled with honour his contributions to the Bangla language and literature.

Reminding all that poet Rabindranath had preached for peace and advised all to shun jealousy, malice and

confrontation, Begum Zia said "It is possible to quickly ensure peace and prosperity of the country if all of us can work unitedly, sinking our petty differences."

Emphasising the need for placing reason above emotions, the Prime Minister urged the country's artists, litterateurs, cultural activists and critics to evaluate poet Rabindranath Tagore on the whole not in a fragmented way.

She urged all who genuinely respect the poet to supplement the nation's march towards progress.

The Prime Minister said Bangladesh and its people were the main inspiration behind the literary works of Rabindranath.

She said Rabindranath's relation with Bangladesh was deep and added that the varied nature and the people of this land had greatly influenced the great poet.

Recalling the contributions of the poet in the enrichment and modernisation of the Bangla language and literature the Prime Minister said Rabindranath's songs and poetry had provided great encouragement in Bangladesh's Liberation War.

Muhammad Habibur Rahman said that the people of Bangladesh were now enjoying the constitutional rights after the end of the dark era of the martial law.

The Prime Minister also opened the Rabindra Exhibition there. The inaugural function was followed by a cultural show.

Nirmul chief starts Europe, US tour today

By Staff Correspondent

Convener of the Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee, Begum Mushtari Sha, leaves Dhaka today for a two-month organisational tour of Europe and America.

During her visit in Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, England and the United States, Begum Sha will meet the leaders of the Nirmul units there to discuss organisational matters, says a press release. The overseas branches of the organisation will also accord receptions to her and hold seminars, discussions and rallies, it added.

Shahrear Kabir will act as convener of the Nirmul Committee until Begum Sha returns.

Trader killed

From Page 1

Jinnah who sat beside Dipu as he tried to resist the gang from snatching the cash, witnesses added.

But their efforts failed and the muggers took away the cash.

Jinnah was rushed to the DMCH where he died after about two hours.

Shamsuddin and Dipu were also under treatment at the hospital.

Ramna police said a case has been filed with the thana. No one was arrested in this connection until last night.

At the Kamalapur Railway Station this correspondent found that many ticket seekers

were returning disappointed since the tickets for May 8, 9 and 10 of different inter-city trains were sold out in advance. Some of them, however, were seen looking around with the hope to find the 'middlemen'. These men purchase tickets from passengers who have changed their decision to go home at a lower price and resell those at higher prices.

One such middleman, Md Idris, however, said that their business was going dull since the Railway authorities have this year allowed 'standing passengers' in inter-city trains.

Asked about this, the station manager concerned said, "We are releasing tickets beyond capacity on the requests of passengers who told us that they want to go home even by standing."

The station manager further said, advance tickets were on sale from May 1 and three special trains on Dhaka-Noakhali and Dhaka-Dinajpur routes were arranged. In addition to that, two extra compartments will be given with each train during the Eid period, he added.

The manager said, "The higher authorities directed us not to refund tickets once those are sold during the Eid period, it may happen that some people outside are doing the job of refunding and reselling. We can't check it."

At the Sadarghat launch terminal the launches and ferries were seen sailing off highly over-loaded.

According to available information, some 1200 buses with a total capacity of nearly 56,000 passengers operate daily from the city's inter-district bus terminals — Gabtoli, Mahakhali and Sayedabad, the bus stand for luxury coaches at Fakirerpool and the Gullistan bus stand during the normal period.

Some 260 steamers and launches sail for different destinations from Sadarghat terminal, carrying about 20,000 passengers, on a normal day.

From the Kamalapur Railway Station, 27 trains with about 23,000 seats usually operate on a normal day.

During the Eid period, most of the transports carry passengers beyond their capacity. Besides, additional trips are also made by trains, buses and river transports to cope with the rush.

Under the new system, all teachers will open accounts in their names with the thana headquarters branch of the banks concerned and will draw the money through cheques.

The division-wise prescribed banks include Agrani Bank for Dhaka Division, Sonali Bank for Rajshahi Division, Rupali Bank for Khulna and Barisal Division and Janata Bank for Chittagong Division.

The authorities further decided that the teachers will open their accounts in Sonali Bank where the prescribed banks for them are not in existence.

Meanwhile, the government had already taken necessary measures to send the benefit-money up to thana level through concerned banks. Those teachers having no account, have been asked to open accounts immediately.

Why should my leader remain behind bars when the leaders of the other parties will be campaigning for their candidates? he asked. "This is a question of fairness — the unfair attitude to JP during the election of 1991 should not be repeated."

He said that the JP will also reiterate other demands, such as decentralisation of the judiciary, restoration of the Upazila system and development of the rural areas.

The JP Secretary-General, however, pointed out that his party would not do anything to disrupt the constitutional process.

He said that the JP will also reiterate other demands, such as decentralisation of the judiciary, restoration of the Upazila system and development of the rural areas.

The JP Secretary-General, however, pointed out that his party would not do anything to disrupt the constitutional process.

He said that the JP will also reiterate other demands, such as decentralisation of the judiciary, restoration of the Upazila system and development of the rural areas.

The JP Secretary-General, however, pointed out that his party would not do anything to disrupt the constitutional process.

He said that the JP will also reiterate other demands, such as decentralisation of the judiciary, restoration of the Upazila system and development of the rural areas.

The Midnight File

UN condemns Serbs for killing 10 people

SARAJEVO, May 8: The United Nations today condemned the Bosnian Serbs for killing ten people by shelling in an act of 'heartless evil' and said it would take measures, possibly military action, to punish them, reports Reuter.

Transport fares up

From Page 1

other modes of transport.

But the home-bound passengers suffering know no bound due to a number of factors. They face troubles like sudden rise of transport fare, non-availability of tickets, black marketing of those, overloading of transports and harassment at bus terminals.

Visiting different bus terminals and Kamalapur railway station yesterday, this correspondent found that despite various problems, people were returning home in large numbers.

Talking to this correspondent at Sayedabad inter-district bus terminal, transport owners and workers admitted that they had increased bus fare by 10 to 20 per cent.

Justifying the fare hike, one bus owner claimed 'prices of engines, tyres and spare parts have shot up. We have to procure a pair of tyres at a price of Taka 28,000 now as against Taka 12,000 three months back. A Mitsubishi new model engine now costs Taka two and half lakh while its price was half of that only a few months back.'

More over, during the Eid period, unlike Chittagong-bound buses, buses plying in different other routes get capacity passengers when they leave Dhaka but come back almost empty, he added.

When enquired about the price hike of tyres, one of the transport owners said, "We have been told by the tyre sellers at Bangla Bazar that due to recent fall of rubber production in India, cost of tyre swelled."

The staff at some ticket counters said that this time bus fare might not come down even after the Eid period.

At the Kamalapur Railway Station this correspondent found that many ticket seekers

were returning disappointed since the tickets for May 8, 9 and 10 of different inter-city trains were sold out in advance. Some of them, however, were seen looking around with the hope to find the 'middlemen'. These men purchase tickets from passengers who have changed their decision to go home at a lower price and resell those at higher prices.

One such middleman, Md Idris, however, said that their business was going dull since the Railway authorities have this year allowed 'standing passengers' in inter-city trains.

Asked about this, the station manager concerned said, "We are releasing tickets beyond capacity on the requests of passengers who told us that they want to go home even by standing."

The station manager further said, advance tickets were on sale from May 1 and three special trains on Dhaka-Noakhali and Dhaka-Dinajpur routes were arranged. In addition to that, two extra compartments will be given with each train during the Eid period, he added.

The manager said, "The higher authorities directed us not to refund tickets once those are sold during the Eid period, it may happen that some people outside are doing the job of refunding and reselling. We can't check it."

At the Sadarghat launch terminal the launches and ferries were seen sailing off highly over-loaded.

According to available information, some 1200 buses with a total capacity of nearly 56,000 passengers operate daily from the city's inter-district bus terminals — Gabtoli, Mahakhali and Sayedabad, the bus stand for luxury coaches at Fakirerpool and the Gullistan bus stand during the normal period.

Some 260 steamers and launches sail for different destinations from Sadarghat terminal, carrying about 20,000 passengers, on a normal day.

From the Kamalapur Railway Station, 27 trains with about 23,000 seats usually operate on a normal day.

During the Eid period, most of the transports carry passengers beyond their capacity. Besides, additional trips are also made by trains, buses and river transports to cope with the rush.

Under the new system, all teachers will open accounts in their names with the thana headquarters branch of the banks concerned and will draw the money through cheques.

The division-wise prescribed banks include Agrani Bank for Dhaka Division, Sonali Bank for Rajshahi Division, Rupali Bank for Khulna and Barisal Division and Janata Bank for Chittagong Division.

The authorities further decided that the teachers will open their accounts in Sonali Bank where the prescribed banks for them are not in existence.

Meanwhile, the government had already taken necessary measures to send the benefit-money up to thana level through concerned banks. Those teachers having no account, have been asked to open accounts immediately.

Why should my leader remain behind bars when the leaders of the other parties will be campaigning for their candidates? he asked. "This is a question of fairness — the unfair attitude to JP during the election of 1991 should not be repeated."

He said that the JP will also reiterate other demands, such as decentralisation of the judiciary, restoration of the Upazila system and development of the rural areas.

The JP Secretary-General, however, pointed out that his party would not do anything to disrupt the constitutional process.

He said that the JP will also reiterate other demands, such as decentralisation of the judiciary, restoration of the Upazila system and development of the rural areas.

The JP Secretary-General, however, pointed out that his party would not do anything to disrupt the constitutional process.

He said that the JP will also reiterate other demands, such as decentralisation of the judiciary, restoration of the Upazila system and development of the rural areas.

The JP Secretary-General, however, pointed out that his party would not do anything to disrupt the constitutional process.

He said that the JP will also reiterate other demands, such as decentralisation of the judiciary, restoration of the Upazila system and development of the rural areas.

The JP Secretary-General, however, pointed out that his party would not do anything to disrupt the constitutional process.

He said that the JP will also reiterate other demands, such as decentralisation of the judiciary, restoration of the Upazila system and development of the rural areas.

The JP Secretary-General, however, pointed out that his party would not do anything to disrupt the constitutional process.

Voters' identity cards

From Page 1

elections just on the plea of ID cards," he said. There was also scope to go for alternatives, he added without elaborating.

He, however, added that some experts believed the preparation of ID cards for nearly 60 million voters could be accomplished within six months. The EC would start work on the ID cards by June 25.

The next parliamentary elections are scheduled for next winter. The situation would be different if there was an early election, Justice Sadeque said.

He said the EC would soon go for an open tender to select computer firms for preparation of laminated ID cards containing the picture of every voter.

He dismissed reports about Maid murder

From Page 1

the house where Monowara worked as a maid, and her daughter Sharmin Chowdhury, 15, alias Farah — on a two-day remand Saturday.

Meanwhile, detective police questioned two sweepers of the Concord Tower yesterday, the sources said.

Sources indicated the police may seek additional remand of the detainees today. Earlier, Rokhsana had stated that Monowara fell down from the house while trying to flee with a gold necklace and some clothes.

Police said that Rokhsana has been involved in various anti-social activities in different posh areas of the city for several years.

AL: CEC office

From Page 1

Parliamentary elections, it was Awami League which moved a bill in Parliament and BNP strongly opposed it, said a resolution.

It said the Awami League had built up countryside agitation and forced BNP to accept Parliamentary form of government. "But after restoration of Parliamentary democracy, BNP systematically crippled it and made Parliament inoperative," it added.

The meeting alleged that the BNP had created fertiliser crisis and amassed crores of taka through illegal means. Even a minister admitted that Tk 131 crore was missing from a ministry, it said.

Expressing concern over the law and order situation, the meeting said a son of a ruling MP was killed by the supporters of the same party. This incident indicates to what extent the law and order situation has deteriorated.

During the rule of Begum Zia, more than five lakh incidence of crimes like murder, dacoity, hijacking and terrorism has occurred, a resolution of the meeting said.

Cattle markets

From Page 1

Gabtoli in the city, 17 sacrificial animals markets were leased out by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). Sale of sacrificial animals will continue in these markets upto the Eid-day, May 11.

While visiting some of the cattle markets yesterday, this correspondent found that most of the small number of prospective buyers were walking around to have some idea about the price position.

Talking to The Daily Star, a coordinator of the Kamalapur-Mugdapara cattle market, said import of cows was much higher this time than in the previous years. The sale would be gear up by tomorrow, he hoped.



French President-elect Jacques Chirac (R) is mobbed by supporters upon his arrival at his campaign headquarters in Paris Sunday after he defeated Socialist leader Lionel Jospin with around 52 per cent of the vote. — AFP/UNB photo

Unemployment Chirac's main foe

PARIS, May 8: In a huge street party, supporters of conservative president-elect Jacques Chirac feted until the wee hours of today while leaders soberly pointed to the tough job ahead to fight high unemployment, reports AP. Chirac, who three months ago looked headed toward a third presidential defeat, triumphed over Socialist Lionel Jospin by 52 per cent to 47 per cent Sunday night. It ended the left's 14-year hold on the presidency by Francois Mitterrand.

Already holding 80 per cent of Parliament, the conservative coalition consolidated its grip with Chirac's win and has three years before the next legislative elections. But union leaders have promised more strikes without quick action by Chirac to cut the 12.2 per cent unemployment rate. "Our main battle has one

name: The struggle against unemployment," Chirac, the 62-year-old mayor of Paris and a former prime minister, said in his victory speech Sunday night. "I measure the difficulty of the task that awaits us."

"The Right has nearly all the power, which will give it enormous responsibilities," said Socialist Laurent Fabius, ex-prime minister and former presidential hopeful.

Polis showed Jospin, a 57-year-old former education minister, closed in on Chirac in the final days with calls for job programmes, a boost in the minimum wage and reduction of the work week to spread jobs around.

But most voters decided against another Socialist presidency, embracing Chirac's promise to slash heavy social security taxes on businesses and expand worker training. Chirac's victory marked the

first time the neo-Gaullist Rally for the Republic controlled the presidency and dominated Parliament since 1974. Live on French TV, Chirac went to his campaign headquarters symbolically riding in a modern version of the long, low Citroen the late president Charles de Gaulle preferred.

Meanwhile, revelers estimated in the hundreds of thousands filled the Place de la Concorde and the Champs Elysees, splashing in fountains, chanting, dancing and blowing horns. "Adieu to the Left" read one sign.

Initial market reaction was positive. Computerised trading at the Paris Bourse opened for two hours Sunday night and boosted the CAC40 index by 2 per cent. The franc gained against the German mark in Tokyo trading today, though it began to slip back later in Paris.