



Unconcerned, unmoved

Speaker, his deputy's houses almost complete ignoring Louis Kahn's master plan



The speaker and his deputy's houses inside the parliament complex will be complete by March: Nobody to speak out?

SOHEL ISLAM

The government has almost completed the construction of the speaker and deputy speaker's houses, ignoring renowned US architect Louis I Kahn's master plan of the parliament complex in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

Architects and environment activists viewed the construction that went ahead despite protest in Dhaka and request from an international body of architects as defiant of people's concern.

"The speaker's house will be complete by the mid-February and the deputy speaker's will be a month's delay. The contractors are now busy fixing civil and electric wires," said a senior official of the Public Works Department (PWD) of the Jatiya Sangsad, requesting anonymity.

The construction that began on 1.37 acres in July 2002 was approved by the speaker's office in September 1996 apparently in violation of Sangsad Bhawan's final master plan of 1973.

Kahn who laid out his project of developing Sher-e-Bangla Nagar (the then Ayub Nagar) submitted the final plan to the Bangladesh government in 1973 after independence.

The construction of the houses drew flak from the civil society, environmentalists and architects, as the PWD started the construction on the basis of Kahn's incomplete plan of 1968, which was later revised.

President of Union Internationales des Architectes Jaime Lerner's in a letter in

August 2003 appealed to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to protect the parliament complex that the Paris-based organisation of architects described as a landmark of modern architecture and symbol of Bangladesh.

The High Court (HC) Division on May 23, 2003 stayed the construction of the two houses following a case filed by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) and the Institute of Architects, Bangladesh (IAB).

On August 18, 2003, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court stayed the HC ruling allowing the construction to continue for three months -- enough time to complete the residential structure in the complex regarded worldwide as an architectural marvel designed by one of the greatest architects of the 20th century.

"It is disheartening that the Appellate Division ignored people's demand and allowed the construction. On top of that, the case was not ready for hearing in court even after three months' time expired long ago," said Bapa's General Secretary Abu Naser Khan.

"We will fight the case till the end, no matter how much time it takes to settle it. Louis I Kahn's original plan has been distorted and we will prove that in court," Khan said.

"I hope we will win the case and the government will be held responsible for the distortion," Khan added.

The IAB also expressed concern at the construction and complained that justice was denied.

An appeal to PM

In accordance with the International Union of Architects (UIA) Council's request, President Jaime Lerner addressed the following letter to the Prime Minister, Ms. Khaleda Zia. (Source: UIA Newsletter, September-October 2003 issue)

Dear Begum Khaleda Zia:

We the architects of the world, represented by the International Union of Architects, would like to transmit our concern regarding proposed alterations and additions to the Parliament Building in Dhaka, designed by one of the great architects of the 20th century, Louis I. Kahn.

This great American architect, remembered for his poetic vision towards architecture, left a rich legacy to the architects of the world, an example of social responsibility. His entire life was dedicated to studying architecture, and his most productive years to the construction of the ideas he had envisioned.

The Parliament Building in Dhaka was one of these great ideas, which has surpassed its own qualities as an outstanding building, as an engineering and architectural achievement, to become far more than this: an icon of a city, of a whole nation. For this circumstance, it has become a treasure for humanity which we should protect and preserve.

Therefore, we are asking for your support in protecting this unique building that has become a landmark of modern architecture and a symbol of your magnificent country.

Thanking you in advance for your interest in this endeavor we remain sincerely yours.

Jaime Lerner
UIA President

Banned polybags creep back

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Banned polythene shopping bags have made a comeback changing their types and shapes.

Shopkeepers now use polybags without handle (unlike the previous ones), nylon net-made bags and various packets and packing materials made of modified polythene. Bags made of toxic fertiliser and cement packets are used in kitchen markets.

Although the government banned the use of polythene bags in 2002, dishonest manufacturers have slowly but steadily reintroduced them to the markets.

On a visit to various major markets in Elephant Road, Farmgate, New Market, Karwan Bazar, Mirpur, Gulshan, Banani, Mouchak, Gulistan, Bangabagar, Baitul Mukaram and other areas this correspondent found that both shopkeepers and shoppers use the banned polythene bags openly.

Polythene bags are used widely to sell cakes, biscuits, fish, meat, flour, different types of spices and even soybean oil.

Grocery, department stores and sweetmeat shops often use bags made of nylon net. Clothes including saree and lungi are packed in polythene material.

Failure to effectively monitor the markets, raid on illegal polythene factories and indifference of law enforcers are blamed for the return of polybags.

Jute-made shopping bags captured market immediately after a ban on polythene products but soon became unpopular because of 'unreasonable' price. Eventually cheaper shopping bags made of nylon net, toxic fertiliser and cement packets flooded the market.

In a desperate bid to 'control' the situation environment minister Shahjahan Siraj himself made several 'surprise raids' on city markets. He recovered shopping bags, fined shopkeepers and warned them of stringent action in future.

Sources said, law enforcers filed more than 100 cases against the offenders, but till now none has been chargesheeted.

Frequent raids on markets failed to stop the use of banned

bags and shoppers and shopkeepers urged the government to provide them with a less expensive alternative to jute bags. A move is now underway to make cheap bags using thread produced from garment waste.

Recently, Shahjahan Siraj held several meetings with the garment factory owners who showed eagerness to extend all cooperation in producing the proposed bags.

Welcoming the move, garment owners said that this would be the best method in recycling the waste. On the other hand, this will also help protect the environment as most garment waste decomposes in the soil easily. They also said that the production cost would be cheaper than other bags in the market.

Sources said the garment owners recently urged the government to allow them to use a portion of the now closed Adamjee Jute Mills in Narayanganj for the purpose.

"Discussions on the issue are on and once the government gives a go-ahead we will take necessary steps without any delay," said a garment factory owner.



Back to square one: Although the government banned polybags in 2002 they are now being used openly but in changed forms.



Mugging drama on mobile phone

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

His cellphone rang at odd intervals at work around 8pm Sunday evening. As he picked it up, he could hear a few people talking in a CNG (compressed natural gas) autorickshaw. In the midst of the discordant sound of the running CNG the Daily Star photographer heard someone screaming into the cellphone. He heard voices with one directing the autorickshaw driver to a by-lane.

He heard yells, blows delivered, struggles, a man asking another

to watch the main road, while another voice wanting the CNG to go straight. A voice directed someone to get a CNG from Tejgaon. Then the sound of a fading CNG engine and finally the cellphone goes out of range.

It sounded like a live show on air. The call came from the photographer's friend, whose cellphone was switched on by accident in his struggle with muggers. The photographer worried about his friend.

Fortunately, the friend escaped alive -- brutally beaten up by the muggers. It so happened, that he

was returning from work at Gulshan in a CNG autorickshaw, when the driver stopped abruptly in front of the shooting complex to fix the headlight.

No sooner had the CNG stopped, a gang of three got into the vehicle and threw powdered chilli on the passenger's eyes. They forced the passenger to hand over all his belongings including the cellphone that gave away the incident. The victim suspects the CNG driver was involved in the mugging.

Apart from the harassment of taxi and CNG drivers in forcing

passengers to pay extra money, incidents of this nature are common to commuters.

After the two-stroke autorickshaws were banned, city dwellers breathed a sigh of relief believing that days of mugging were over. It was perceived that registrations of vehicles in line with government regulations and police control would be tight as only 10,000 CNG three-wheelers were brought in against the 55,000 two-stroke ones.

But the mugging trend in connivance with CNG drivers is continuing more than before. The

CNG driver is after all a member of the gang!

CNGs do not need proper licences, therefore they are not traced by the police. The drivers do not necessarily wear uniform.

"Most of the CNG drivers don't have a driving licence and so we have no address to look for them," said a police sergeant.

Passengers are however warned to lock the doors on either side of the CNG autorickshaw or a taxicab once they have got into it.

Other instances have shown that if the doors are not locked, the muggers enter the vehicle from

both sides, sandwiching the passenger between them. They grab whatever is with the passenger and get out of the vicinity in fleeting seconds.

It has been observed that though the government decided to introduce only 10,000 CNG autorickshaws, there are more than 15,000 that have hit the city streets.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) do not have a tab on the exact number of registered CNGs which should be provided by Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

