

The Chawkbazar Shahi Jame Mosque.

Days of historic Chawkbazar mosque numbered?

Move to build market on mosque property heightens tension

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

A dispute over the construction of a multi-purpose market on the mosque property is heightening tension between the management committee of the Chawkbazar Shahi Jame Mosque and local devotees and shop owners on the mosque premises.

Demonstrations are planned by both parties on the issue on the same day today, one for and the other against the construction.

There is a rumour in the area that some influential people of the locality are out to reap benefit in the name of the mosque's welfare.

"We don't want a multi-storyed market here, we want more mosque area for the musallis (devotees)," said Jamal Naser Chowdhury, convenor of the newly formed mosque protection and expansion committee.

Jamal referred to a showcase notice of March 9, 2004 from Rajuk to the

mosque committee barring the construction of the market.

But Abul Kasem Khan, general secretary of the mosque management body, affirmed Rajuk's permission to restructure the market.

"We had a meeting with Rajuk and they will visit the construction site," Kasem said.

Chawkbazar Shahi Jame Mosque was established by the Mughal Subedar Shayesta Khan in 1676. As a waqf property the mosque has been managed by a committee formed by the government as it falls under the purview of the Religious Ministry.

The present mosque committee has been managing it for the last 25 years. The original Shahi Mosque is beyond recognition as it has been expanded and renovated through the ages. What is left of it is only a black stone inscribed in Parsi, a hallmark of Shayesta

Khan's regime.

All of the 170 shops -- 60 on the ground floor and 110 in the market adjacent to the mosque -- have been rented out by the committee. The maintenance of the mosque and the payment of staff salaries are done from the rents.

"We need Tk. 1.5 lakh for maintenance. We get Tk. 75,000 from the 110 shops and Tk. 55,000 from the other 60. This is not sufficient for maintenance," added the general secretary.

Aiming at an increased revenue, the committee decided to reconstruct the market. The shop owners have been asked to vacate on the premise that the 110 shops will be accommodated first in the 11-storyed Chawkbazar Shahi Jame Masjid Centre, he said.

The building is being constructed at an estimated cost of around Tk 20 crore under the supervision of a foreign company. The build-

ing will be constructed on 'turn key' basis, meaning the construction firm will fully invest in the project and recover the investment from the advances and rents.

According to the plan the basement area is 9000 square feet. Basement to 5th floors will house shops and offices, while doctors and lawyers chambers will occupy the 6th floor. The 7th floor will house offices as a Quran and Hadith Research Centre, Imam and Muazzin Training Centre, committee office, computer, CD and recording centre and conference room are planned on the 8th floor, and the 9th will house a community centre, while the roof would be designed for a helipad and restaurant.

The Chawkbazar Shahi Jame Mosque Committee is fearing a confrontation between the two groups and have asked the authorities to take steps to prevent any untoward incidents.

Ageing water plants, growing need

Output of three treatment plants dropped 50 percent. Only the fourth one at Sayedabad is running with its full capacity

MIZANUR KHAN

The output of three water treatment plants in Dhaka and Narayanganj has dropped 50 percent because of run-down equipment and severe pollution in the Buriganga.

A Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) official said Chadrighat water treatment plant, built in Dhaka in 1876, came down to about four crore litres and Shonakanda and Godnai plants in Narayanganj to 10 lakh litres and four crore litres of water a day.

Only a fourth plant, located in Sayedabad, is running with its full capacity that produces 22.5 crore litres of water a day, making it the biggest plant in Bangladesh.

"We treat a little more than 30 crore litres of water in these plants, but we supply 150 crore litres against a daily demand of 200 crore litres," said Wasa Managing Director ANH Akhtar Hossain, adding Wasa depends on groundwater to make up for the shortfall.

"The quality of the river water at the sources of the plants has deteriorated over the years resulting in an increase in the treatment cost," he said.

Wasa may choose the Meghna river as an alternative water source for Sayedabad plant and formed an environment cell after a request from the World Bank, as the Department of Environment could not check the pollution.

To cope with the growing demand for water in the city, Wasa had planned to install the second phase of Sayedabad water treatment plant, now hanging in the balance because of fund shortage.

Sayedabad plant was approved in 1993-94 in three phases with the capacity of producing 90 crore litres of water a day, with the first

phase costing Tk 580 crore beginning in July 2002.

The second phase involving Tk 265 crore will also produce 22.5 crore litres of water and the proposed third 45 crore a day.

For the installation of the second phase, authorities sought financial support from the Danish government and a Danish team visited the site last month to review the situation and will decide by next month on funding the project that a high official said would cost Tk 300 crore.

But another official, asking not to be named, said the Danish government set a raft of conditions such as commercial run of Wasa, amendment to the Wasa Act, pollution-free water source of Sayedabad plant and reduction of

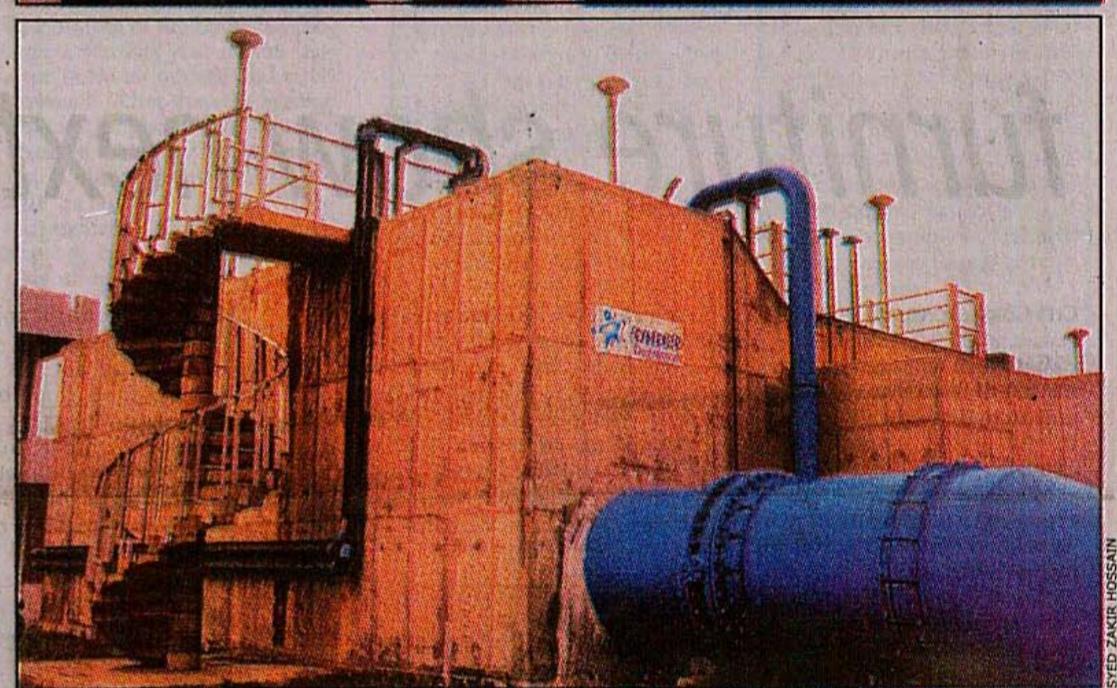
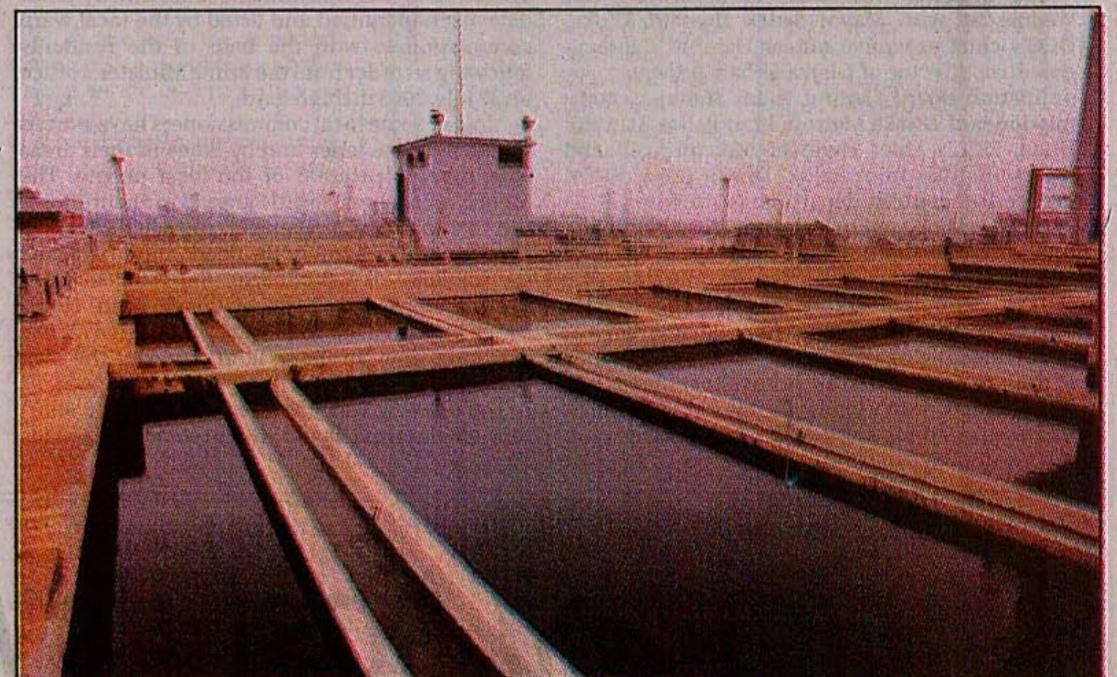
systems loss to 30 percent from 50 percent.

"Running the utility agency commercially means a balance between its revenue and expenditure. The production cost of 1,000 litres of water now is Tk 6.5 but we sell the same amount at Tk 5. We have to withdraw Tk 1.5 in subsidy to profit from it which is now impossible," Hossain said.

With the installation of the first phase of Sayedabad plant, Wasa's dependency on deep tube wells came down to 85 percent from 98 percent and there is no alternative to treating surface water to increase the output, Hossain said.

Experts warn that the city will face an acute water crisis if more plants are not installed. According to Wasa, the average shortfall of water in Dhaka is 50 crore litres a day and slides to 60 crore litres in summer as the demand goes high.

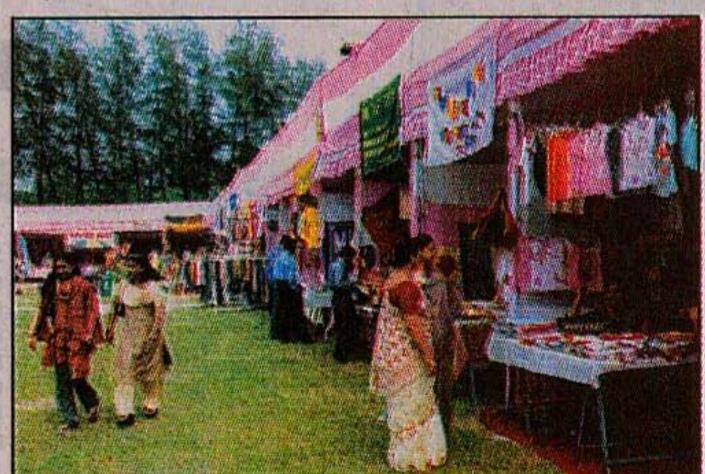
"If it continues, the shortfall will be 70 crore litres in 2005 and 120 crore litres in 2010," the Wasa managing director said.



The Sayedabad water treatment plant. Plan to install its second phase is hanging in the balance.

RAOWA MEENA BAZAR

The Retired Armed Forces Officers Welfare Association (Raowa) ladies Thursday organised a three-day Meena Bazar at Raowa ground at Mohakhali. About 70 stalls showcased various commodities at the fair. The proceeds from the entrance fees will be used to help the victims of natural disasters such as cyclones and floods, the organisers said.



ARCH MOHSIN AND SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN