

The new part of Dhaka city walks in beauty while the old part is left neglected.

## CITY BEAUTIFICATION

# Old Dhaka left in the cold

SULTANA RAHMAN

When the entire Dhaka is decorated under a beautification project for giving the capital a facelift, the old part of the city is ignored

and kept out of the programme.

The project was designed for the 13<sup>th</sup> Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (Saarc), which was scheduled for this month but

deferred for the recent tsunami that devastated two Saarc member countries -- Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

"We have been deprived of development for long, and now it is

clear that Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) treats us as stepchildren," said an aggrieved Sukur Salek, president of Dhakabashi, an organisation of the Old Dhaka residents.

"We appreciate the city planners for the massive beautification programme but we believe the old town should also be beautified," he said.

DCC has already decorated roads, medians, pavements, road islands and roundabouts in an integrated plan for beautification. A total of 66 private and government organisations are engaged in the project but none was assigned to beautify any part of the Old Dhaka.

"The DCC could have asked the old town-based private organisations to take part in the programme as it happened in the other parts of the city," Shukur said.

Dhaka is distinctly divided into two parts so far as development is concerned. The narrow lanes and by-lanes in the old town are the witnesses of negligence. The over-populated and congested part of the capital is deprived of all sorts of development.

Most streetlights in the area are not switched on in the evening. The narrow roads in Kotwali, Sutrapur, Bangshal, Lalbag,

Hazaribagh and Shahidnagar areas have remained uncared for.

Most of the manholes are left uncovered leaving the pedestrians in danger. Garbage is disposed regularly at intersections. "Due to lack of streetlights, roads are not safe at all. Mugging takes place here almost every day," said a Swarigat resident.

However, City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka who heads the beautification committee said he is aware of the development of the Old Dhaka. Many development programmes have been undertaken for this part of the city, he claimed.

The mayor denied the allegation of depriving the old town saying: "The ongoing beautification programme is for the guests from South Asian countries. We are trying to beautify some specific areas, where they will visit. It does not mean we are neglecting the old town."

Khoka mentioned a number of environmental improvement programmes in the old city's Dholai Khal, Lalbagh, Kamrangirchar, Sayedabad, Matuail and Jatrabari areas. It covers construction of roads, drains, footpaths, sanitary latrines and land filling.



## Mohakhali flyover at half anti-quake strength

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

The Mohakhali flyover remains vulnerable to earthquakes as all its shock transmission units (STU) have not been installed yet.

The country's first flyover was opened to commuters on November 4, 2004 even before it became completely tremor-proof. So far, 21 STUs have been installed although there are provisions for 42 of them in the original plan.

According to the Bangladesh Earthquake Society (BES), the possibility of a strong earthquake in Bangladesh has increased following the devastating quake across SouthEast and South Asia

on December 26.

"Dhaka may experience an earthquake measuring 'intensity VIII' which could be very serious," said Dr. Mehdi Ahmed Ansary, secretary general of BES.

He added that Dhaka had experienced one massive earthquake in 1897 which brought about huge destruction and sounded an ominous warning.

"Big earthquakes usually recur 100 years after the last one which means Dhaka could be jolted at any time," Ansary explained.

In case of a severe tremor, the 1.12 km long and 17.9 meter wide Mohakhali flyover might not be able to withstand the shock as it lacks enough STUs. Experts said

that STUs were necessary not only for flyovers to survive from earthquakes but also to reduce the effects of pressure from heavy vehicles on the structure.

Sources in Dhaka Urban transport Coordination Board (DTCB) had earlier told Star City that at least 54 STUs were necessary for the flyover, but that number was later reduced to 42 apparently because of budget constraint.

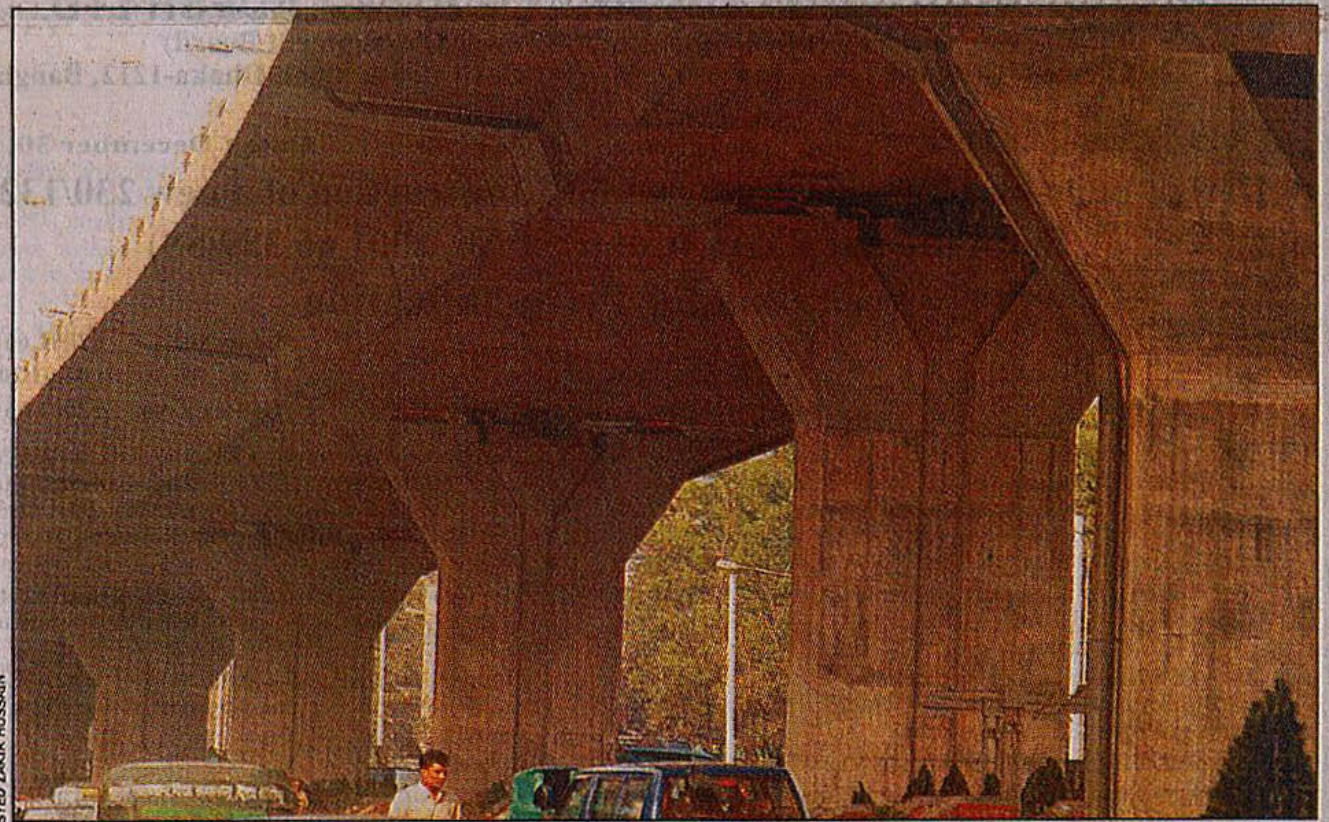
When asked why all the 42 STUs have not been installed as yet, DTCB officials attributed the delay to contractual factors.

DTCB sources said the contractor wanted to use Chinese STUs on the flyover but the authorities refused to permit those. Instead

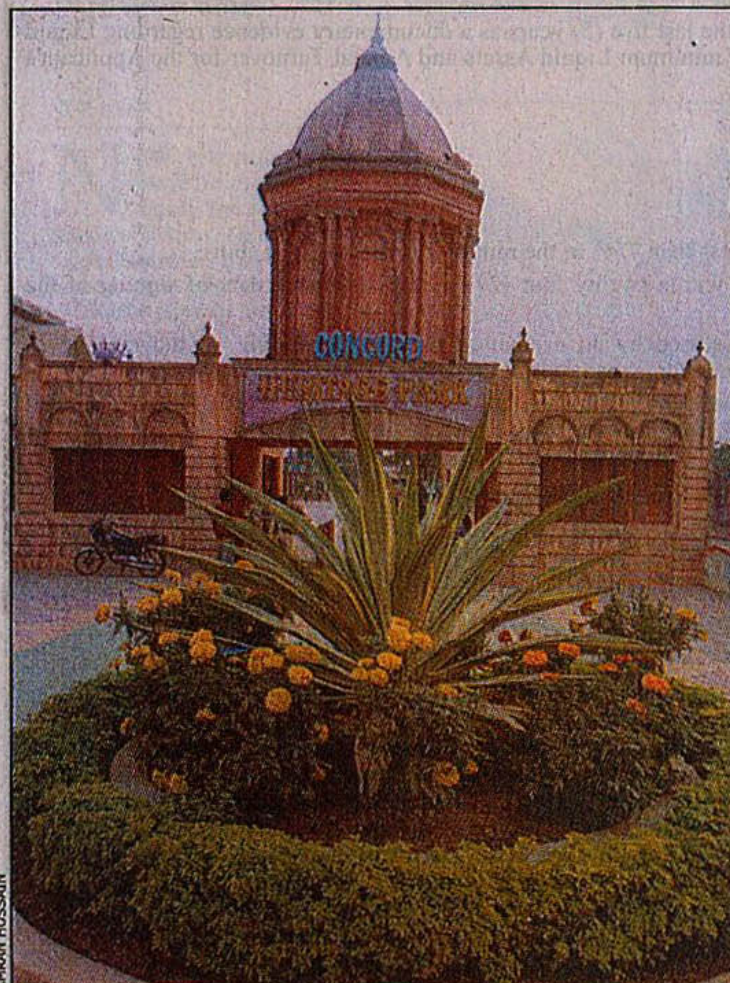
they suggested using US-made STUs which were costlier but of much better quality. The contractor then brought 21 STUs worth Tk 6.40 crore from the US and installed them but was reportedly delaying in bringing the other 21.

"It is a serious breach of contractual obligation. All the STUs should have been installed on time," said Quamrul Islam Siddique, former executive director of DTCB adding that the flyover remained at risk.

DTCB officials however said the remaining 21 STUs were on their way to Bangladesh. "Hopefully those will be installed by March," said one official.



Although some of the STU's have been installed, the flyover is still prone to earthquakes.



The entrance reflects the door of Ahsan Manzil, with a complete replica to its right, as Kantajir Manzil stands tall flanked by the Shat Gambuj Mosque.

## Heritage in miniature

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The sight of Kantajir Mandir may surprise you a little, but the beauty of the terracotta and luscious pink of the Ahsan Manzil will definitely mesmerise you.

At Concord Group's Heritage Park one will get a chance to see some of the well-known heritage sites of the country, of course in the form of replicas. The park, on 20 bighas, stands beside the group's famous Fantasy

Kingdom at Ashulia.

"The thought of projecting our identity made us create this park," said SM Kamaluddin, Concord Group's chairman, at a Heritage Park press briefing yesterday.

He said Bangladesh is portrayed in the international arena as a land of famines, tornadoes, floods and violence. "The image of our country has been tarnished but the rich history and our heritage has not been pro-

jected as yet," he said. He believed the replicas in the park would make people want to visit the real ones.

At present the park houses 11 replicas with four more awaiting installation. On entering the park visitors can see the Sat Gambuj Masjid, Ahsan Manzil, Paharpur Bouddha Bihar, Puthia Rajbari, Kantajir Mandir, Chunarhola Masjid, Jatiya Smriti Soudha, Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, Greek Smriti Soudha and Sita Kotbihar.

The chairman said installation of the other four replicas, which would also include World Heritage Site -- The Sundarbans could not be finished because of paucity of space. "A minimum of 100 acres of land is required to re-create such a park but buying land is a tough job for a private company like," he added.

The replicas are created in proportion to the real ones and around Tk 28 crore has been

invested in the park so far and more investment will follow in the future, the chairman further said.

Apart from replica installations, the park has 10 different rides to entertain both children and adults, be it a family Roller Coaster or Mini Pirate ship, people would enjoy the excitement, the management believed. Paddle cycle boats, Igloo theme (mini flume), waterfall (him chori), family train, family swing,

battery cars, teacup swing and dryslides are the others.

The entrance fee is Tk 60 -- a price within the reach of the common people -- but a separate fee would be charged for each ride.

State minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammed Nasiruddin and Selima Rahman State Minister for Cultural Affairs will formally inaugurate the park on January 13.

