



Plan to hand over Osmani Udyan to private management

SULTANA RAHMAN

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is planning to hand over Osmani Udyan to a private company which will build a commercial complex inside the park, sources said.

The company has proposed to develop and manage the park and build the commercial complex on build, own, operate and transfer (BOOT) basis.

The complex will include shopping malls, health club, children's park, swimming pool, arrangements of boating and aquatic sports.

When asked, DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said, "A private company has proposed to take care of the park. The proposal is being examined."

"The idea has come from the recent beautification programme

executed successfully by private companies. We think there is scopes for beautifying the Osmani Udyan," he said.

Sources in the Nagar Bhaban said ARK Group has made the proposal that is supposed to be discussed at the next meeting of Osmani Udyan management committee on April 16.

A decision will be taken following the recommendations of the committee.

"The mayor has expressed his interest in handing over the park to the private sector," said a Nagar Bhaban senior official asking not to be named.

Civil society representatives have meanwhile expressed deep concern over the issue saying that Osmani Udyan is a public property which will lost its characteristics if it is handed over to private management.

Professor Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, who earlier led a

social movement in protest against felling of a large number of trees at the park, said he will take a strong stand against the proposal for the commercial use of the park.

"This park is a public property and it should remain intact. It is the corporation's duty to maintain the park for the use of people," the former Dhaka University professor said. "If it goes to private hands, it will be a disaster," he added.

Prof Chowdhury said if the city corporation is allowed to hand over the park to private management without resistance from the society, it will hand over other parks also.

Earlier, DCC formed a committee headed by Professor Chowdhury to suggest ways to develop Osmani Udyan. The committee is working to make it a model park.

The 26-acre park is losing its

natural harmony due to illegal occupation of several parts of the park. A portion of the park has become a parking zone for vehicles.

Besides, a tin-shed office of the ruling BNP's labour wing Jatiyatabdhi Sramik Dal was established inside the park without permission.

The visitors allege the park is not maintained properly. Dug addicts, vagabonds and hoodlums have virtually taken over the park managing the law-enforcement agencies.

"It is the authorities' responsibility to keep the park visitor-friendly, the corporation should keep it up," said Ibrahim Khalil, a visitor to the park. He also discouraged the idea of handing over the park to private sector for commercial purpose.

The Osmani Udyan, one of the city's green open areas, is likely to be handed over to a private company for maintenance.



STAR PHOTO

Baishakh Mela already buzzing



STAR PHOTO

The Baishakh Mela at Siddheshwari draws many visitors to its 10-day fair which will end on April 14.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Baishakh, the first month of the Bengali year does not only announce summer, it also ushers in an air of festivity at the forefront of which is the Baishakhi Mela (fair).

Although the festivities traditionally kick off from the first day of Boishakh, the Jatiya Mohila Sangstha (National Women's Organisation) this year has already organised a 10-day fair at its premises in Siddheshwari that started on April 5.

"We thought this would enable the women entrepreneurs to take part in other upcoming Baishakh fairs later on and invest in those with the profit they make here," said Masuda Hossain, chairperson of the organisation when asked

why the fair had begun early. There are 55 stalls at the fair owned by small-scale women entrepreneurs of low and middle-income groups who have arrived from all over the country.

The women have come from Dhaka, Chittagong, Narayanganj, Sylhet, Jamalpur, Chandpur, Manikganj, Tangail, Faridpur, Sirajganj, Narail, Gaibandha, Panchagar, Bikrampur, Feni, Bogra, Thakurgaon, Rajbari, Gazipur, Barisal, Sharariatpur, Munshiganj and Mymensingh and belong to the grassroots level of different projects of the organisation.

"There are many items at our stall including bedspreads, cushion cover, greeting cards and handicrafts. But women's wear, especially salwar and kameez are the most sought after. Fatua for men is another attraction," said Purabi Das, a stallholder who has come from Gaibandha.

"Embroidered, block-printed, hand painted, appliquéd worked and all other types of saris and kameez have attracted the customers. Whatever the motif, the combination of red and white is a must to wear on Pahela Baishakh," said another stall attendant Benu Ara of Fen.

Apart from attire, food items like pickles, dalmut, nimki were attracting some visitors. However, little ones like Maisha had their eyes firmly fixed on dolls.

"I would buy nothing else," said the five-year-old while looking at a doll wrapped in a red sari. The entrepreneurs said that their products have attracted customers because of their quality and low price.

"The total sale amount was 89,000 Taka on the day of the opening. By the third day, it had reached Tk 2,22,000," the chairperson said adding that the stallholders had to pay only Tk 500 for the entire duration of the fair.

Masuda Hossain said that they have encouraged the entrepreneurs from each district to bring something unique. "We directed them to use creativity and give a fresh touch to old items," she said citing the example of terracotta items from Bogra where the medium remained the same, but unconventional designs and colours added a new dimension.

The fair is open to all from 9am to 8pm until the Pahela Baishakh which will be celebrated in April 14.

ARTISTS EYE PAHELA BAISAKH

Python, doel to add to this year's carnival colour

All set for new year celebrations

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka is all set to welcome April 14, the Bengali New Year 1412 in all its splendour.

Pahela Baishakh Udjapan Parishad, a 1001-member national committee with poet Shamsur Rahman as its convenor, will bring out a Mongol Shovajatra (colourful procession) from Central Shahid Minar at 8.30 am, which will come to a close at Rabindra Shrober Mancha in Dhamondi.

Keeping with tradition, various cultural organisations including Chhayanot, will hold programmes at Ramna Park from dawn.

Dhakabashi, an organisation of residents of Old Dhaka has arranged a *Ghori Urnor Ashor* (Kite Flying festival) at F Rahman Hall premises at Dhaka University at 7.00 am on April 14. There will be a *Mehedi Ashor* (Hena festival) at Bangladesh Shishu Academy at 9.30 am on the same day.

The same has organised arranged a rally today at 12.00 noon from Bangladesh Shishu Academy under the slogan "Save Buriganga, the heart of Dhaka City".

The British Council, Bangladesh organised an outdoor art exhibition at its premises beginning today and will continue until April 30, which will be opened to the public from 10.00 am to 7 pm daily. The works of Ferdousi Priyabhashini, Ruhul Amin Kajol and Tayabuzzaman Topu will be on display.

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

The city is once again preparing to be adorned in vivid colours of decorations and crafts as the students of the Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University started their tasks with a bang awaiting the dawn of *Pahela Baishakh*, the Bengali New Year

celebration.

Following the usual tradition, the Institute organizes a colourful carnival cum procession where people, from all walks of life, along with the participation of first and second year students.

"We are expecting a very large and positive response this year too," said Abdul Aziz, a teacher and mem-

ber of Pahela Baisakh Udjapan Parishad of the Institute. He said Grameen Phone will sponsor the carnival.

The programme will begin at ten in the morning from the institute and go through Doel Chattar, Ramna and Shahbagh, and wind up at the same venue. "The entire programme is so vivacious and

spontaneous. I am eagerly waiting to take part in the procession," said Tania Ahmed, a student of Dhaka University.

This celebration has, in fact, has turned into a part of our culture," said Selimuzzaman, a fresh graduate from Dhaka College. "For me, the celebration of *Pahela Baishakh* will be incomplete if I can not attend the

procession that the Fine Arts Institute organises," he added.

The organisers said every year they try to bring something new in the carnival. "This time it will be a long python and the national bird Doel and a rooster," said one of them. He dismissed any implication of fundamentalism being personified by the python. "The python is



also a part of our culture. Think of those snake charmers, whose livelihood solely depends on this business," he said.

As the frames of the long python and the national bird Doel are seen covered up by coloured paper by some of the students at the Institute premises, the sight of happy, jovial students making masks and other items attract passers-by.

Apart from the procession, the Institute has also arranged two *jatra* shows in the evening of second and third days of Baisakhi. The students themselves will stage one while professionals will perform in the other. In addition, the traditional cultural programme will be held at the Bakutala of the Institute. "We welcome the New Year with songs, poetry and lots of colour," Aziz said.

When asked the organisers said no sense of insecurity prevails there. "Why should we feel insecure when we are not doing anything wrong," Syed Ashraf, a class seven student.

However, the organisers said they have requested the Dhaka University authorities to take adequate security measures. "We made the request just to be on the safe side," said one of them.



Finishing touches on the exhibits, masks and other Baisakhi items are now in progress at the Institute of Fine Arts.