

Only bypass studded with ditches, potholes

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The only bypass connecting the old part of the city with Savar road in Gabtoli is in a dilapidated state with ditches, potholes and encroachments on it.

Every day thousands of commuters in buses, trucks, taxis and other vehicles are forced to take the run-down road to commute to the old city avoiding the city centre. The Gabtoli end of the 30-kilometre road from Tongi to Kellar Mor seems like a ride on the surface of the moon, where both vehicles and passengers are constantly at risk of breaking down and sustaining injuries.

The Water Development Board (WDB) built the road on the Dhaka Flood Protection Embankment in 2003. Despite its bad shape, the road is used by thousands of people in Mohammadpur, Rayerbazar, Hazaribagh, Kamrangirchar, Nawabpur, Chawkbazar, Lalbagh, Swari Ghat, Babubazar and Sadarghat areas. People prefer this shortcut to their destination rather than entering the city roads, which are always choked with traffic.

If the road is made usable for normal traffic, residents in the



Ramshackle condition of the bypass stymies the smooth flow of traffic and adds to the commuters' sufferings.

western part of the city could travel to Sadarghat in minutes. They could also reach the Savar highway, avoiding traffic snarls on the Mirpur Road. Normally from Dhanmondi, it takes over an hour to reach Sadarghat through the congested city during day-

time. The bypass winds its way around the western fringe of the city ensuring a traffic-free passage to those areas. Ever since it was built, lack of maintenance has encouraged encroachers to build shops, markets, mosques

and slums on it, almost choking the thoroughfare mainly used by the commoners. Had the VIPs used the bypass, the authorities would never have allowed it to become so bad, locals said.

The Superintendent Engineer of WDB's Operations and

Maintenance Circle, Mujibur Rahman Khan blamed the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) for "destroying the road" at Gabtoli end. He said that for over two years DCC has illegally chosen a vast area along the bypass to dump wastes.

Heavy garbage trucks dumped rubbish along the road where mechanical earth removers worked day and night to level the surface after the trucks unloaded the rubbish. The plying of such heavy vehicles soon removed the surface of the road exposing the earthen core and creating large ditches.

"They (DCC) have not only destroyed this important road but also polluted the environment of the area by dumping thousands of tonnes of garbage," the WDB superintendent engineer said.

"We officially asked the DCC not to dump rubbish along the road but they ignored our request and kept dumping rubbish using heavy earth removers," Khan said.

DCC's Waste Management Division officials however said that they had stopped dumping rubbish at Gabtoli embankment area over a month ago. "We have moved the site to a far away area in Aminbazar where sanitary

landfill is in force," said an official requesting anonymity.

Sources said that the WDB has no priority in funding the maintenance of the road. Since it was built the WDB has not looked into the importance of the road. Most of the allocation for its maintenance was spent on tree plantation on the slopes of the embankment but over 95 percent of those plants never survived due to lack of maintenance.

Unwilling to spend anything in the maintenance of the bypass, the WDB recently requested Dhaka Wasa to incorporate the repair costs of the road at Gabtoli end into Wasa's pump house project at Kalyanpur. WDB even requested Wasa to show the road repair in their project expenditure as the job of an 'approach road' to the pump house. Wasa is now considering the request.

Mohammad Qaiyum, a bus driver from Gabtoli, told this correspondent that every day from dawn-to-dusk he has to make at least 20 trips between Gabtoli and Kellar Moar on this road. "My vehicle breaks down every day and I have become sick of negotiating with such ditches and potholes on this road," Qaiyum said.

STAR PHOTO

LALBAGH FORT

First phase of Light and Sound Show inaugurated

IMRUL HASAN

It will be a fast-track historical journey in Bangladesh through light and sound, back to ancient Dhaka with the 300-year-old Lalbagh Fort in the spotlight.

Visitors to the fort will be able to witness the historical events of the incomplete Mughal palace fortress through modern laser lighting and sound system at night.

"Through this modern system, a spotlight will focus on Pari Bibi's Mazar within the ramparts, with simultaneous narration on a hi-tech surround sound system, describing historical background of the shrine," said Habibur Rahman, custodian of Lalbagh Fort Museum.

"The light will also streak through each building of the fort with brilliance – every moment revealing the memories of the Mughal rule amid descriptions on speakers that might transport the audience back to the half-forgotten past," he added.

Last Sunday, State Minister for Cultural Affairs, Selima Rahman, formally inaugurated the Light and Sound project at the Lalbagh Fort.

According to the proposal, the

project is to be completed in three phases. The first phase that was inaugurated was completed in June. The second phase will include the main project work and is expected to finish by end 2006/beginning 2007 while the last phase will be completed by June 2007.

The second phase will incur a cost of Tk 5.9 crore.

"After the entire installation we will be able to fix the times and fee for the show," said a source of the Archaeological Directorate.

The 25-minute light and sound show will be presented three times every evening, and is expected to attract a lot of tourists and visitors.

"The specialty of the programme is the surround sound system. No-one tried anything like this here before," said Shafiqul Alam, director of the Archaeological Directorate, adding that shows like this are held at the Delhi Red Fort and it will be first experimented here.

"The architectural heritage of Old Dhaka can be a very good source of entertainment for city dwellers, and the government approved the 'Light and Sound' event at this Fort so that all, including foreigners could learn our architectural heritage," he

said.

However, during the conversation with this correspondent, Habibur Rahman said that it was important to widen the narrow road and take steps for visitors' security.

"As the old city is an over populated area and almost all of the roads are narrow, authorities should take steps to widen some roads leading to the Fort," he said adding that tight security measures should also be applied.

The construction of the fort that began in 1678 is not complete. Prince Muhammad Azam started construction of the fort during his 15-month vice-royalty of Bengal, but before he could complete the work, Aurangzeb called him back.

His successor, Shaista Khan did not continue the work though he stayed in Dhaka up to 1688. Shaista Khan's daughter Pari Bibi (fairy lady) died here in 1684 and this led him to consider the fort to be ominous.

Three buildings – the Diwan-i-Aam and the Hammam on the east, the mosque on the west and the tomb of Pari Bibi between the two – all in line, but not at equal distance, occupy the central area of the fort.

A water channel with foun-



Lalbagh Fort

tains at regular intervals connect the three buildings from east to west and two similar channels run from south to north, one through the middle of the ground between the Diwan-i-Aam and the tomb forming a square tank with fountains at the intersection with the east-west channel, and the other from the water reservoir passing through the bottom of the tomb.

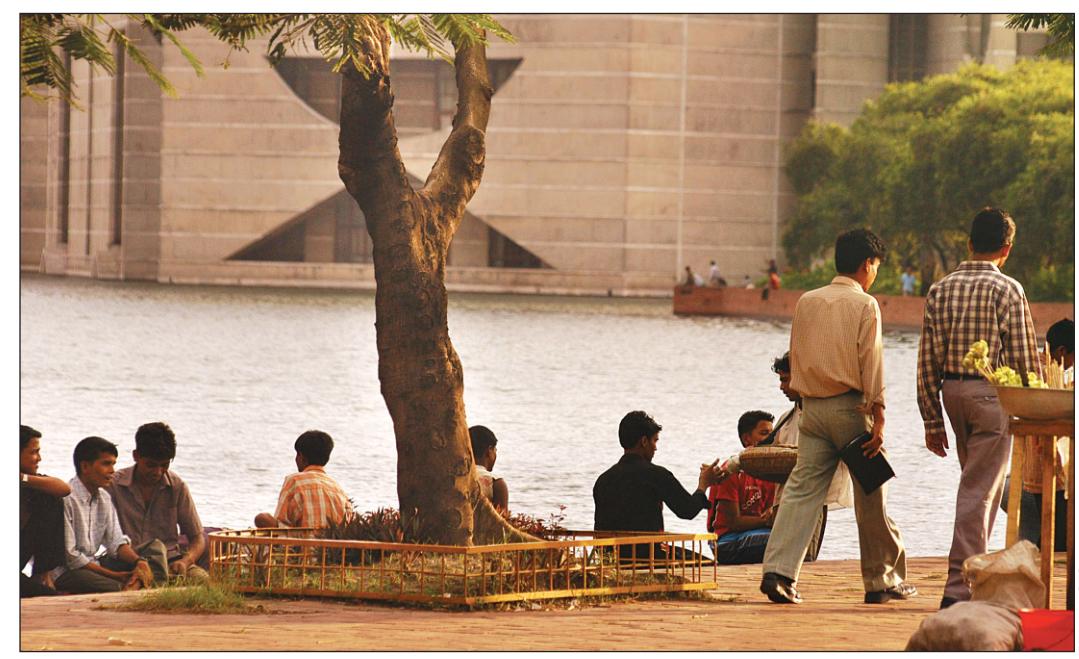
The Lalbagh Fort Mosque is a

three-domed mosque with a water tank in front (on the eastern side) for ablution.

The rectangular fort encompasses an area of 1,082 x 800 square feet (sq ft). Only some gateways and a long fortification wall with semi-octagonal bastions on the south side and high defence walls running along the western side remain. The two monumental gateways at the southeast and northeast ends

face each other at a distance of 800 ft.

Admission to the fort is Tk 5. The fort is open in winter from Sunday through Wednesday from 10:00am to 5:00pm; Friday from 2:30pm to 5:30pm and closed on Thursday and holidays. From April to October its opening and closing times are half an hour later.



There are a very few places left in this congested city where one can breathe some fresh air. The lake opposite to the Jatiya Sangsad is one such place.

Dhaka: Yesterday, today and tomorrow

TDS: What are your childhood memories of Dhaka?

NI: When my elder brother and I arrived in Dhaka in December 1950 following transfer of my father, the city being the capital of the then East Pakistan was growing at a faster pace following the partition of 1947. Government officials from across the country were transferred to Dhaka to run the central administrative functions.

This sudden influx of population in Dhaka made the housing problem acute. The government too did not have adequate accommodation facilities for its officials.

We rented a two-room government-requisitioned house at

Tk 14 per month at Kaptan Bazar, then a mixed area inhabited mainly by middle and lower-middle class people, some professionals and businessmen.

We had no electricity. I used to study with a lantern. Most of the Kaptan Bazar residents had to collect water for domestic use from roadside hydrant provided by Dhaka Municipality.

TDS: What did you do in your leisure time?

NI: We used to go to Paltan Maidan, hockey stadium and the park in front of the Bangabhaban, to play. The Buriganga was a live and active river. People used to bathe and fish in it and stroll on the bank. Ramna Park and the Race

Course ground (now Suhrawardy Udayan), were the biggest open spaces in the entire city.

People would either move on foot or by riding bicycles from one part to another. We used to walk a lot around the city from one corner to the other.

TDS: Do you remember any special incident?

NI: One day while walking in the Ramna Park in either 1959 or 1960, I happened to see the great leader of Bengal, Hussain Shahid Suhrawardy playing golf.

When I sought his permission to take a photograph of him, he readily posed for it. But later he said that my way of taking the photograph was wrong with the

sunlight behind and made me take the photo again.

TDS: How do you see the development of Dhaka?

NI: New roads and residential areas began to take shape following the adoption of master plan in 1959 and establishment of Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT) in 1955.

Jinnah Avenue (extension of Nawabpur Road), national stadium and Gulistan Cinema were landmarks of the development of Dhaka in the mid 50s.

From 1971 to 2001, Dhaka as centre of education, commerce, employment opportunities and

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Prof Nazrul Islam