

BINAT BIBI MOSQUE

600-year old mosque being demolished

DURDANA GHIAS

A 600-year old structure at Binat Bibi Jam-e-Masjid at Narinda, which is one of the oldest buildings of Dhaka according to historians and experts, is being demolished for an extension work of the mosque.

The mosque committee undertook the extension project of this historic mosque illegally without consulting any expert or concerned organisation like the Department of Archaeology.

The plan includes construction of a 70 feet high minaret and extension of the present 3-storey building to make it a 7-storey one. This will accommodate more people during Jumma prayers, mosque committee members said.

Piling for the minaret is now going on in full swing just beside the old mosque threatening its structure. A wall of the mosque has already been knocked down.

Built in 1457 by Bakht Binat, in the pre-mughal sultanate of Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah I, this is the pride of the residents of Narinda in Old Dhaka and a precious piece of history of this metropolis.

Octagonal turret, single hemispherical dome atop a square room, arches on south, north and eastern sides, modest ornamentation, plaster coating and curved cornices are the original features of the mosque.

There is a law forbidding any new structure within the 500 feet of a protected site but this mosque is not enlisted as a protected site by the Department of Archaeology, sources said.

Asked, Shafiqul Alam, director of Department of Archaeology,

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said Binat Bibi Mosque is not a protected site and the department has no plan to declare the city's oldest mosque a protected site.

The environmentalists, architects and conservationists in a bid to save the mosque arranged a meeting at a private university on March 12 and called upon the mosque committee to stop the demolition.

Architecture students at the meeting presented 7 models of the extension of the mosque

designed without destroying the centuries-old structure to convince the mosque committee members. But in the meantime, the committee already started hammering down this edifice without showing the slightest respect toward the country's heritage.

Dr Abu Sayeed M Ahmed, head of the Architecture Department of Asia Pacific University and convener of Poribesh Bachao Andolon, told

Star City: "If the minaret is built too close to the original building then it can cause vibration. The capacity of the land should be taken into consideration."

"The proposed extension building should not be more than 4-storey or it will cause too much pressure on the soil which can develop cracks in the original structure," he suggested.

Ansar Uddin Bulu, secretary of the mosque committee, said: "We have informed the environmentalists seven months ago that we were going to tear down the structure but they did not bother to call us up or take any step in the last seven months."

The mosque has seen three extensions to date. In the first extension, around 80 years ago, a dome was built atop a single room. In the second extension, around 20 years ago a 2-storey building was built beside the mosque. In the third extension a 4-storey building started to crop up covering the two domes, which was later dismantled due to pressure from concerned bodies.

"Historically minaret is not that significant in mosque architecture in our country. There were no minarets in the mughal and pre-mughal structures. It is a new feature in the last 70 years. Adding a minaret to this ancient mosque is a kind of distortion. This is the oldest building of Dhaka which should be saved at any cost," said Dr Sayeed.

Parveen Hasan, professor of history at Dhaka University and the first who wrote about the mosque in her book, said, "This mosque is one of the last remnants of our beautiful past. If we cannot save it then how can we prove that the city is 600 year old?"



Mindless and brutal: The 600-year old mosque being demolished.

Sohel Ahmed Chowdhury, former secretary, ministry of public works, said, "The Indian government has shut down thousands of industries to save

Tajmahal. We also need that mindset. This is the last sign of Sultani period in Dhaka. The people of Narinda will have to understand that. The mosque is

the most important not the minaret. If we allow it to be destroyed then we will remain accused in the eyes of the next generation."

Follow up

RAYER BAZAR KITCHEN MARKET

DCC's dillydally over potential death trap

CITY CORRESPONDENT

While DCC bureaucrats keep busy shuffling and reshuffling files of 'extremely unsafe' Rayer Bazar kitchen market building, thousands of people continue trading and shopping inside the hazardous building risking their lives.

Executive engineer of DCC Bazar Circle told this correspondent on March 1 that the bureaucratic process had been started to demolish and reconstruct the structure.

This correspondent followed up the matter with the same DCC official on March 11. He said two files were prepared in this regard – one for dismantling the structure, the other for reconstruction and rehabilitation.

"Both files are being processed now. The file for dismantling the structure has been sent to the chief engineer. The other file for reconstruction and rehabilitation has been sent to the superintendent engineer. But as he has asked for some clarification regarding the structure, the file has been returned to us," said the executive engineer of Bazar Circle.

President of Rayer Bazar market shop owners' committee also wants demolition and reconstruction of the dilapidated structure as well as rehabilitation of the shopkeepers. He said around five months back, he along with other members of the market wrote a letter to the DCC authorities informing about the present condition of the structure.

"The engineers and the executive engineer of Bazar Circle paid a visit [to the market] and made a note of the state of the structure," said Nazir Hossain, president of Rayer Bazar market shop owners' committee.

"For the last three months, the executive engineer of Bazar Circle has been telling us that the process of dismantling the structure is 'under way'. We go to the DCC every week for an update on the status of dismantling the structure," he added.

When contacted, DCC chief estate officer Kamruzzaman Chowdhury said, "It [the file] will reach the Mayor after being scrutinised by the chief engineer and the executive engineer. It will then reach my office."

He could not however say how long it would take for the file to reach his desk. "May be it will take a few days or a few months to get the approval..."

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Uniformity and quality of police uniforms are not being maintained – giving a rise to confusion among the citizens of the country while discomfort and dissatisfaction within the force.

Police uniforms with different shades of the approved colour can lead to serious crimes and misunderstanding. The failure of police to maintain standard uniforms makes it easy for criminals to masquerade as law enforcement personnel.

Over 12,000 police personnel in Dhaka serving in 33 police stations, traffic wings and Reserve Cell have been receiving uniforms that do not comply with the official approved colour or quality.

Sources in the police supply department said the inconsistency in colours of the police uniforms started to occur after an 'influential' uniform supplier failed to maintain the standard set by the authorities.

A number of police personnel from different police stations showed their uniforms to this correspondent and complained that colour and quality of the clothes are so poor that they often have to buy their uniforms from stores in the city's Polwel (Police Welfare) Market – a market that specialises in police uniforms.

All police personnel upto the rank of sub-inspectors get two sets of uniforms every year while other officials get a yearly allowance for uniforms.

Sources said the police needs 3.7 lakh yards of cloth for uniforms annually and the government spends roughly around Tk 15 crore per year on uniforms.

"If you closely look at three uniformed cops at the same place, you will notice the variation in their clothes. Of course, there will be a few cops wearing uniforms that got faded," a police sergeant working in Mirpur area told Star City.

A police constable in the same area wearing a faded uniform said the quality of the fabric of his uniform was so poor that its colour faded off right after the first wash. "It is uncomfortable to wear it for a long period of time. All of us have the same problem."

"Sometimes the general public get confused and cannot distinguish us from private security guards as our uniforms look similar to theirs," he added.

Another traffic sergeant at Gabtoli bus terminal alleged that comparing to the previous year, the quality of their boots has worsened. He displayed his boots to this correspondent and said, "It's very difficult to work in these boots for too long. I already got blisters on my feet, but I have no other way but to wear these."

The police authorities are aware of the problems with uniforms and the problems would be solved soon. However, the authorities are not willing to look into the real reason that started the problems, said a top police official requesting anonymity.

After Star City contacted Media

Cell at the office of inspector general of police on Monday noon and asked about if any measure was being taken to solve the problem, the on duty officer said the department did not have any information on the matter.

The current police uniform was commenced by then prime minister Khaleda Zia on the occasion of Police Week on January 10, 2003.

The then home ministry decided to bring the change to give police a facelift and win 'more credibility'. Besides, the ministry took the decision considering the fact that the old colour combination of the police uniform was being widely used by security firms, making it difficult for police to stand out from others.

Even after the police received

an outer facelift, the situation remains unchanged and newspapers across the country are still full of corruption stories about the law enforcement agency.



The colour of police uniform is often inconsistent.

DCC taken off guard by rickshaw pullers

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Thousands of rickshaw pullers who are queuing in for the driving licenses have taken an unprepared DCC by surprise.

DCC is unable to cope with the demand and the police beat up the rickshaw pullers.

This shows how in calculative DCC is in handling the issuance of driving licenses for rickshaw pullers owing to poor planning and lack of proper coordination.

Every morning thousands of rickshaw pullers are flocking in

front of the regional offices. While many was able to get the license but others had to

Shariat Hossain, a rickshaw puller narrated his experience how he spend three days in the queue and was compelled to return empty handed.

"I spend three days huddling with the crowd 8 am to 3 pm each day and saw people clashing with each other to get the licence. Even the police didn't shy off from charging with batons and left many rickshaw pullers wounded," said Hossain.

On the fourth day he was able to get the license after a hard toil.

When contacted Md. Azizul Islam, revenue officer, zone-6 of DCC said,

"Other than city rickshaw pullers lots of rickshaw pullers outside the city came for the driving licence. As a result there is a huge crowd."

Syed Jahangir Hossain, the project in-charge earlier told Star City that DCC have medical experts and traffic officials examining the physical fitness and traffic awareness of the pullers before giving out the licences.

However, the rickshaw pullers alleged that no medical experts and traffic officials were available there and the DCC is delivering licence without them.

DCC's move to resume the issuance of licence to streamline movement of rickshaws is a welcome step. Restoration of order in this area has been long overdue.

Although DCC in the past years did take some measures in regulating movement of pedal rickshaws on the city streets, these measures did not meet their desired objectives.

During the establishment of

'Dhaka Municipality' in 1864, registration of rickshaws and carrying driving licences by the pullers were made mandatory. But with the rapid increase of rickshaws, the system has collapsed.

Now an estimated number of 85,000 rickshaws in the city have licences while another 4 lakh to 5 lakh are operating without licence. The number of rickshaw-pullers could be around 10 lakh, according to DCC and other sources.



Rayer Bazar kitchen market was declared extremely hazardous structure a year ago. Hundreds now risk their lives trading and shopping there every day.