

India drops demand for last Mughal emperor's remains

AFP, New Delhi

India has decided not to pursue a half-century-old request for Myanmar to return the remains of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, the government said yesterday.

The government had received a request from the Bahadur Shah Zafar Memorial Society in 1949 to bring the "mortal remains of the last Mughal king from Yangon to New Delhi," the government said.

"It was decided that the proposal need not be pursued," Culture Minister Ambika Soni told parliament in a written statement, without elaborating.

In 1857 at the age of 82, Zafar became leader of an uprising against British colonial rule -- initially referred to as the "Indian mutiny" but now known in India as "The First War of Independence" -- despite preferring penning poetry to waging war. The revolt was the largest the British Empire had ever faced and transformed Delhi, the seat of the great Mughal capital, into a battleground.

The insurrection caused "unimaginable casualties on both sides," according to Delhi-based British author William Dalrymple, who in 2006 published a book on the revolt.

Finally after four months of fighting, the British, backed by Sikh and Pathan fighters, recaptured the city and massacred great swathes of the population.

Though the royal family surrendered, most of the emperor's 16 sons were hung and Zafar, a name meaning paradoxically "victory," was humbled from "divine highness" to state prisoner.

Zafar was exiled to Yangon, formerly known as Rangoon, and died in captivity five years later, the last of the emperors of the once sprawling Mughal empire.

Poultry waste can generate 6MW electricity a day

Experts tell seminar

AFP, Gazipur

As much as six megawatt electricity can be generated everyday from poultry excrement at Gazipur poultry zone, also known as the 'Poultry capital', experts said at a seminar in Gazipur.

Around 2.7 crore poultry birds are being raised in Gazipur that excrete around 1350 metric tons of wastes everyday, well enough to generate six megawatt electricity.

The seminar titled 'Poultry waste: Environment-friendly renew-

able energy' was held at Rajanigandha Rest House located at Bhawal National Park on Monday. The Centre for Environmental Studies (CIS) and State University of Bangladesh jointly organised the seminar.

A total of 90 people, including 40 poultry farm owners and government and non-government officials, participated in the seminar while four papers were presented. Prof MS Islam of environmental science department of State University took part in the discussion on the papers.

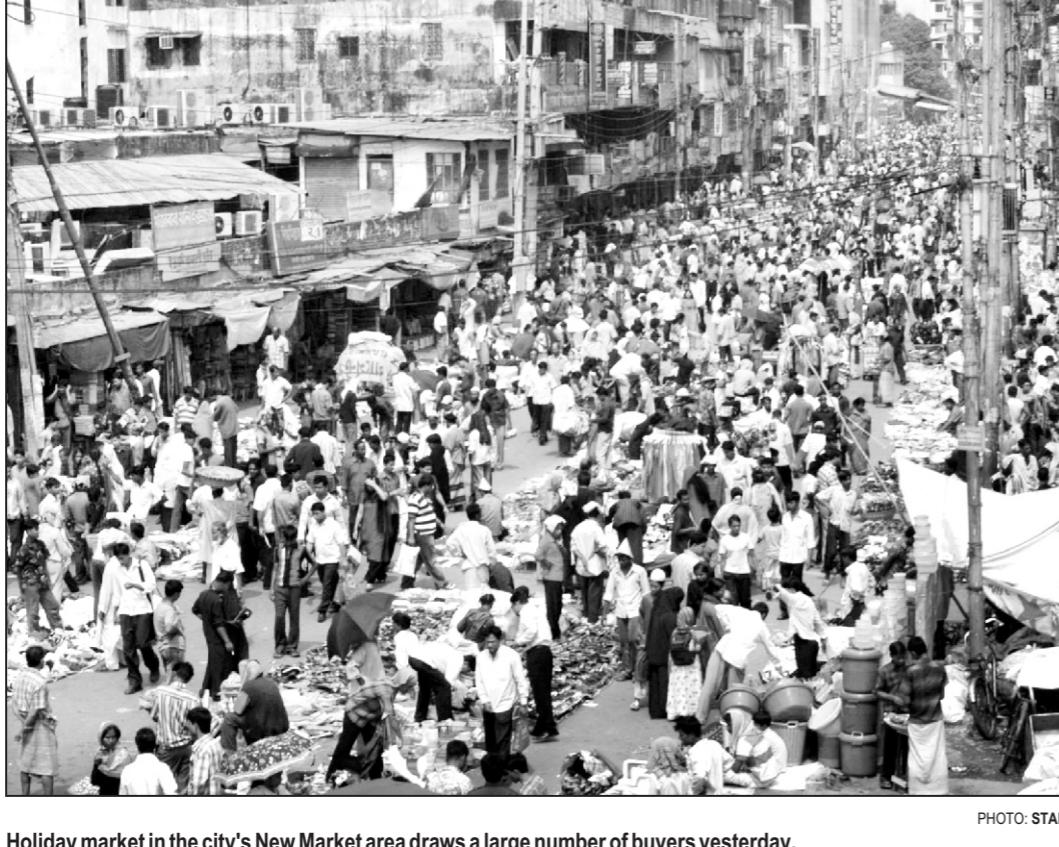


PHOTO: STAR

Holiday market in the city's New Market area draws a large number of buyers yesterday.

Pakistan's ancient ruins fast disappearing

REUTERS, Lahore, Pakistan

Many Pakistani archaeological sites from its thousands of years of rich history are crumbling away as officials tussle over who should look after them.

A cradle of ancient civilisations and crossroads of Greek, Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim cultures, Pakistan has a treasure-trove of ruins but many are being built over, pilfered by art thieves and villagers or succumbing to the elements.

The federal government's archaeology department has control over most of the country's main sites but provincial officials argue they should be in charge of looking after their ruins.

Orya Maqbool Jan, head of the

Punjab provincial government's archaeology department, says the province has a history of conservation and preservation dating back to British colonial times at the beginning of the last century.

"But for the last 50 years things were shifted back to the federal government and Punjab was not given the responsibility of looking after its own heritage," Jan said in an interview in his office in the city of Lahore, the provincial capital.

Jan said federal authorities' neglect had led to the destruction of 32 sites in Punjab.

"People have razed them to the ground and built houses over them. It's a big loss."

Restoration efforts by federal

authorities had also caused irreversible damage, he said. "The principles of conservation laid down by Unesco have not been adhered to," he said.

DONE NOTHING

Three years ago, the federal government handed Jan's department responsibility for three sites -- the Mughal-era Shalimar Gardens in Lahore, the Lahore Fort and the Katas Raj Hindu temple.

Jan says he has improved the sites though he says up to half of his spending has gone on correcting the wrongdoing of the federal authorities. He says he wants to take over responsibility for all of the province's monuments.

Across town in his office in the huge Lahore Fort, federal government archaeological engineer Muhammad Tanweer scoffs at Jan's assertions.

"They've done no conservation work, no restoration work. They've not spent a single penny," Tanweer said.

"They've just done the gardens," he says, pointing to lawns inside the magnificent 500-year-old fort where school children in red and blue uniforms were playing.

Federal Minister of Culture Sayed Ghazi Gulab Jamal bristles when asked about Jan's criticism.

"The provincial government has not done a great job with what belongs to them," he said. But he said responsibility for more monuments could be handed over if provinces showed they could improve sites and had the capacity to handle more.

"The main aim of everyone is to conserve and improve the sites so if somebody else can show it, why not?"

NO PROTECTION

The federal government has 380 registered sites that it is responsible for.

But Pakistan's most prominent archaeologist, Ahmad Hassan Dani, said many more sites were not registered under a colonial-era act and they got no protection at all.

"There are so many monuments that have not been brought under that act," said Dani, who has worked as an

archaeologist across South Asia since 1944.

"They are not looked after by them at all, in fact, they do not know about them at all," he said.

Only about a third of Pakistan's sites had been excavated, he said.

Villagers often looked after old mosques, but Buddhist and Hindu ruins were often pillaged by thieves supplying artefacts to the international black market, and picked over by people looking for masonry to build their homes, he said.

"They will disappear."

Dani said authorities should work together: "If the federal government can't look after them, then the provincial government can or the district council can."

Another huge problem for whoever is in charge is encroachment. Sites are meant to be protected by a 200-foot (60-metre) buffer zone but unregulated construction crowds many.

The ornate pavilions and fountains of the Shalimar Gardens, built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in 1642, are an island of tranquility in a traffic-clogged Lahore suburb.

Up to now, the garden's walls have kept out most of the din and fumes and kept at bay the sprawl of concrete and tarmac. But illegal construction up against the thick, white walls is causing flooding and damaging artwork inside the gardens, experts say.

Jan said 106 structures built illegally against the wall had been earmarked for demolition, but some residents said they would refuse to go.

"We'll set ourselves on fire in protest," said factory worker Mohammed Saeed who lives in a tiny house in the shadow of the wall.

British troops target Taliban chiefs

AFP, London

British troops in Afghanistan have changed tactics, targeting top Taliban leaders in order to counter their switch to a new wave of bombings and suicide attacks, a senior commander said on Tuesday.

Lieutenant General Nick Houghton, the chief of joint operations, said British forces were attempting to drive a wedge between Taliban chiefs and ordinary Afghans.

Taliban militia have seemingly ditched their tactics of last summer, when they suffered heavy casualties attacking heavily defended British positions, Houghton told the defence committee of parliament's lower House of Commons.

"Increasingly, the switch this year has been towards the Taliban not taking on this tactic of mass attack but adopting a more asymmetric approach -- the utilisation of improvised explosive devices, suicide bombers, that sort of thing," he said.

"What we are attempting to do is use a far more intelligence-focused approach to the elimination of key Taliban leaders."

"We recognise that the (whole-sale) eradication of the Taliban is not a sensible option. That alienates the public, locally and internationally."

"Therefore, to attempt to dislodge the key Taliban leadership and attempt to drive a wedge between the irreconcilable, tier one Taliban leadership and the local potential Taliban fighters, that is the nature of the tactic we are following."

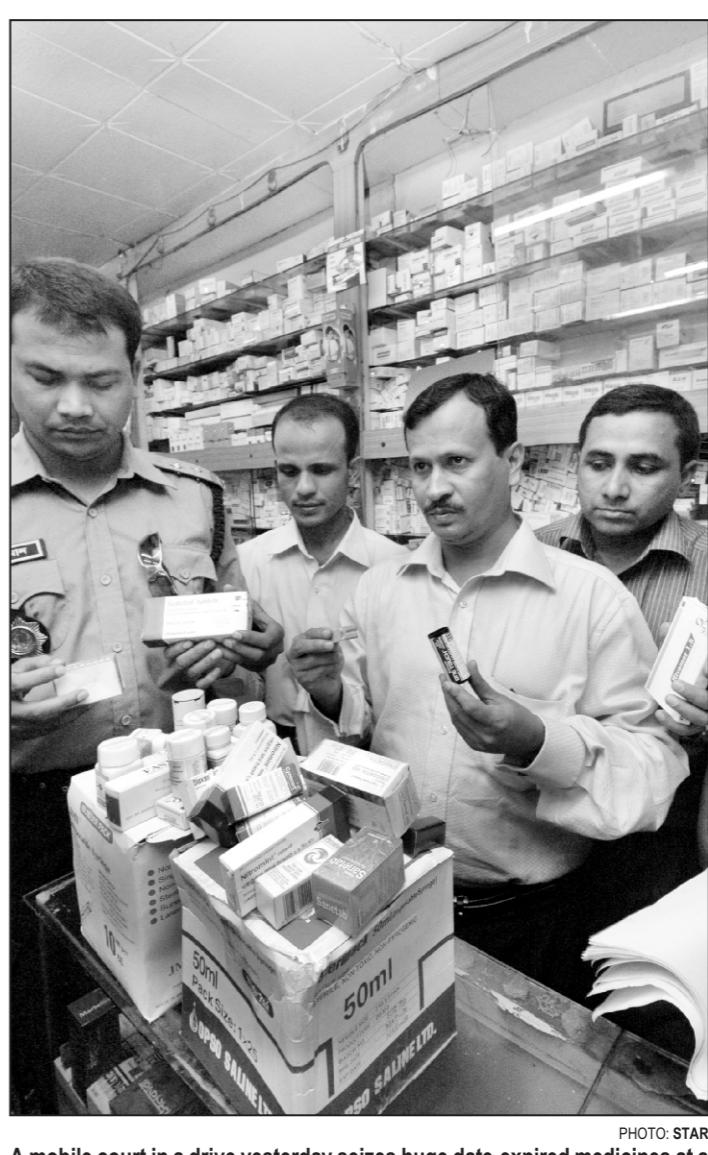


PHOTO: STAR
A mobile court in a drive yesterday seizes huge date-expired medicines at a drug store in front of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University at Shahbagh in the city.

UN envoy seeks independence for Kosovo: report

AFP, Paris

The UN chief mediator for Kosovo is proposing independence for the Albanian-populated Serbian province in his final report to be presented to the UN Security Council next week, the French daily *Le Monde* reported yesterday.

"Independence under international supervision is the only viable option" for Kosovo, special envoy Martti Ahtisaari wrote in the report sent to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon last week, the newspaper said.

Until now, Ahtisaari has scrupulously avoided any mention of the word "independence" in connection with Kosovo's future status, given the vehement opposition of Serbia and Russia to such a move.

In Vienna, Ahtisaari's spokesman refused to confirm or deny the *Le Monde* report, but said all parts to the Kosovo question understood that Ahtisaari's proposal was for "supervised independence" with limited sovereignty.

According to *Le Monde*, which published excerpts of the report, Ahtisaari states that "maintaining an international administration was not tenable" for Kosovo but that its "reintegration into Serbia was not a viable option."

"Independence offers the only guarantee against the risk of instability," he added. "It's also the only chance for a sustainable partnership with Serbia."

Road crash kills two

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Patuakhali

Two bicyclists were killed in a road accident on Kuakata-Dhaka highway in Patuakhali on Monday night.

The victims were identified as Basir Jomaddar, 20, and Jamal, 26, both hailed from Pasaribunia village under Sadar upazila.

The accident occurred at about 9:30pm when a Dhaka-bound bus of

Druti Paribahan knocked the bicycle they were riding on in Basak Bazar area.

Basir died on the spot while Jamal was rushed to Barisal Sher-E-Bangla Medical College Hospital (BSMCH). On duty doctors declared him dead at around 3:00am yesterday.

Locals caught Shahjahan, 45, driver of the bus and handed him over to Sadar Police Station. Police also seized the bus.



PHOTO: STAR
Prof Nizamuddin Ahmed speaks at a press conference on an international seminar on 'Architecture for the economically disadvantaged' at the Department of Architecture, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, yesterday. The two-day seminar will begin on March 23.