

HERITAGE OF TANTIBAZAR

Shocking demolition of old buildings

Conservationists urge for immediate step to protect buildings with architectural and historical significance

TAWFIQUE ALI

era, he said.

"These old buildings form a living cultural entity," Taimur said. "Features of colonial architecture are dominant in these buildings with manifestation of architectural influence of the Mughal era.

The architecture of these buildings reflects mostly classical style as well as influences of contemporary European architecture reminding the spectators of the Mughal legacy.

An urban revival took place in today's old part of Dhaka during mid-19th century propelled by a thriving trade of jute-based industry and handicrafts.

Tantibazar and Shankharibazar during colonial period were abuzz mainly with a business elite class including artisans and craftsmen community.

Architects said some of the buildings of colonial period have been redeveloped from time to time. Architectural and historical significance of all the buildings may not be equal but all the buildings have to be conserved for the sake of area conservation and total urban fabric of the particular area.

It is all the more necessary to conserve the entire stretch of the old buildings to retain the sense of place and symmetry and harmonious look of the set-ups, they said.

Over past couple of weeks,



Similar privately owned houses are being demolished in Tantibazar.

the locality has seen a mindless demolition of a number of irre-placeable historic buildings.

The private owner of the

building no 28/29, an architec-turally very significant building, has already demolished

the entire structure.

Demolition of another similar building, holding no 27/1, is towards the end.

In case of the building no-32,

the elegant decoration of classi-cal motifs on the elevation (frontal facade) has been flattened

and replaced with plastering of

dull look, Taimur said.

Owner of the house Salah Uddin said it was not in his knowl-edge that there is any need to conserve such buildings. "The beautiful look of these old buildings is all that catches our attention."

"Nobody has approached us for conservation of these build-ings," he said. "The govern-ment has to take initiative for conservation, mere words will not do."

He further said, "There are many such buildings in Tantibazar and Shankharibazar areas but it is very risky to live here, as the old buildings are in dilapidated state."

President of the IAB architect Mubashar Hussain said the government must take necessary measures to pay due com-pensation to the private owners in the same manner as private land is acquired for public infra-structures like roads, to conserve sites of historical and architec-tural significance.

Director of Department of Archaeology Md. Shafiqul Alam said that they are very much aware of such destruction of historical monuments particu-larly in the city area but they hardly can do anything for con-servation.

"We do feel that a particular site or edifice should be pro-tected," Alam said. "But we can-

not protect it unless and until its private owner gives consent in favour of conservation."

Authorised officer of Rajuk Nurul Islam said that conser-vation of heritage buildings is difficult for Rajuk unless the Department of Archaeology specifically declare such sites. "But I will send a build-ing inspector to Tantibazar to see what we can do there," he said.

Nurul Islam said that none of the private building owners has obtained design approval for construction of new build-ings.

Building owner Salah Uddin claimed that he has obtained approval of design for construction of a six-storey building from Rajuk.

Originally, during the pre-Mughal times this mohallah (traditional neighbourhood) belonged to the Tanti (weavers) community, reputed for the famous Muslin of Bengal.

It is from this community that the mohalla borrowed its name "Tantibazar".

During much of the 18th and 19th centuries, Tantibazar used to be considered one of the elite neighbourhoods of the city.

A relic of the pre-Mughal era, Tantibazar even today boasts of a fair collection of 2 to 3 storeyed shop houses.

DHAKA METROPOLITAN POLICE

Service improved, investigations limp

Introduction of Service Delivery System has improved police image but its investigators are grossly overburdened with cases

RAHMAN SABUXTAGIN

Number of cases at 33 police stations of the capital has been increasing fast while the investigation capacity of the police remains unchanged.

On March 1, the government launched a new initiative called Service Delivery System at 9 police stations under Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) where each police station would have a designated police officer for filing in complaints or cases. The service was introduced to the remaining 24 police stations of the city on March 8.

Introduction of the system has turned the atmosphere of police

stations more inviting and people-friendly. Since more people are now coming forward to take advantage of the friendly system, police stations are getting swamped with cases. This scenario however is alarming for police officials because their human resources were not increased to cope with the increased number of cases.

According to DMP records, average number of cases filed each month do not exceed 2,000. In February this year, number of cases filed was 1,896. After introduction of the new system, within only 15 days till March 15, police stations witnessed a staggering 1,395 cases.

After introduction of the new sys-tem, number of sub-inspectors to investigate cases under the 33 police stations and detective branch of police still remains at 850.

Before launching the service, each sub-inspector used to handle 20 cases on average. "Even handling 20 cases was a tremendous pressure since beside investigating, a sub-inspector has to perform many other tasks such as patrolling, writing cases and often attending case hearings at courts," said a sub-inspector at DMP.

Officials at police stations had always unofficially employed a 'writer' for filling out forms and writing down information of a case so that the officials can perform other tasks.

The officials used to bear the writer's expenses. After the changed political scenario in the country, police officials cannot afford to employ a writer now since they do not have any means of 'extra' income any more.

About the massive number of cases piled up after launching the Service Delivery System, the sub-inspector said, "I can not imagine what will happen and how it can be handled since we no longer can afford to have a writer."

Another sub-inspector told Star City that he was just transferred to DMP recently and he was oblivious about what to do with the huge number of cases on hand. "This is my first time in DMP and I don't even know this town very well yet."

About the investigation capacity of DMP, three top officials of DMP told Star City that they would take measures to solve the problem as soon as possible.

When asked what type of measures they would take, two of them avoided the question while the other said the issue is still being discussed, and they could not reach a solution yet. He also said currently, a sub-inspector is handling at least 30 to 35 cases.

If the workforce is not increased soon, the overburdened sub-inspectors might fail to investigate their cases properly and that might lead to the denial of justice, he observed.

Naim Ahmed, DMP commis-sioner, told Star City that the vacant posts of sub-inspectors would be filled within a short time by transfer-ring in sub-inspectors from outside the capital. "I know the situation is stressful for my officers, but they should keep this in mind that everyone has to go through the pressure to do something good for the country."



A police officer manning the Service Delivery System at Dhanmondi police station.

Wildlife on sale here!

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

The existing laws are too poorly enforced to effectively constrict the trade of various species of endan-gered birds in the city and conserve the rich biodiversity.

Even though the Department of Forest is very much aware of the open violation of the wildlife preser-vation policies and open trade of endangered species, it can do little to protect them due to lack of aware-ness and adequate staff, sources said.

According to the Wildlife Preser-vation Act of 1974, only crea-tures including dogs, cats, hares, lovebirds, pigeons and quails -- the species that can be bred in captivity -- are permitted for commercial trad-ing.

"It is a criminal offence to sell or purchase wild birds for keeping in captivity or breeding, but you can buy exotic birds bred in captivity," said Nazrul Islam, deputy secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forest.

However, exotic birds of endan-gered species are being freely traded throughout the city while the authorities put a blind eye to it.

Local bird species like munia, parakeet, hill mynah and dove attract a large number of customers each day in the pet-outlets of Dhaka, most of which are located at Katabon and a number of isolated pet markets in the city.

"I don't know if such a law exists...how come no one charged us for anything after all these years of business," said Munir, a sales-person of a pet shop at Katabon who was seen selling cage full of black-headed and white-throat munias.

Besides these shops at Katabon, several other pet-shops and mobile traders run brisk business in and around the capital throughout the year. Some go door to door with cages of small, chirpy wild birds.

Moktar Hossain, a roaming pet vendor who was seen with cages full of green munias and parrots told this correspondent that he is not aware if his birds are wild or were bred in captivity as he purchased them from another seller.

"Birds are birds...does it really matter if they are wild or not wild because everyone likes them for what they really are," said Hossain.

Rare and exotic species of birds including spotted doves, rose-ringed parakeets, Alexandrine parakeets, blossom-headed parakeets, red munias, green munias, black-headed munias, white-throat munias, hilly mynahs and some

World Conservation Union (IUCN). "Without assistance from the Department of Forest the police can barely do anything as they cannot identify wild birds and are ill-equipped to handle the situation," he added.

According to Department of Forest officials, conservation of the endangered species is all the more sensitive and difficult in the capital because of the sheer vastness of the city and the lack of specialised man-power in the department.

"We are aware that an unscrupu-lous section of the society is involved in illegal trade of these endangered species but we simply don't have the manpower to bring any big changes," said Sultan Ahmed, deputy secretary of Department of Forest.

"We will discuss the issue with the law enforcement authorities and see if we can do anything different," he added.



A bird trader selling wild doves at Paltan area.