

Fresh move to grab Sylhet Jalalabad Park's land

City Corporation decides to build high-rise on the site

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Ignoring protests by citizens' groups and environmentalists and violating a High Court order, Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) has decided to construct a multistoried complex in Jalalabad Park in the heart of the city.

This is the second move to grab the park land. Earlier, in 2005, a move by some vested quarters to grab the park land in the name of rehabilitation of a group of small traders was stopped following protests by city dwellers and environmentalists.

There were repeated moves for grabbing Jalalabad Park by a powerful group, which has been eyeing the prime land since 2003. The value of the land would be at least Tk 20 crore, sources said.

The SCC plan to construct a multistoried complex was unveiled by Acting Mayor Azam Khan while announcing the city corporation's annual budget last week.

Targeted expenditure for the proposed project has been fixed at Tk 2 crore, he added. Khan announced the budget as mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran is in

jail.

In 2005, Sylhet unit of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) issued legal notice on SCC, organised rallies and formed a human chain protesting the move. In the face of mass protest, the then mayor tried to play innocent and assured that there would not be any construction at the site.

In 2003, some vested quarters allegedly backed by some ward commissioners and SCC officials, organised some 453 traders, most of them fake, under the banner of Sylhet Janakalyan Khudra Bayoshayee Samity.

The Samity, on the plea of rehabilitation of small traders, sent a proposal to the ministry for construction of a multi-storied commercial complex there.

It also managed an order from the ministry secretly, the sources claimed. The ministry on March 7, 2003 ordered SCC for a feasibility report. The SCC on May 17 sent a report to the ministry with a positive note.

The sources also claimed that the mayor had 'tacit support' to the move but he kept himself away

from apprehending protest by city dwellers.

As things came to light following protests by environmentalists, the project remained shelved. Talking to this correspondent yesterday, Field Manager of Bela in Sylhet Ayesha Chowdhury said now there is virtually no open space for city dwellers. SCC is planning to grab part of the Jalalabad Park area. City dwellers and environmentalists can not allow this.

"We protested in the past and will continue as long as the move is on", she asserted.

As Bela filed a writ petition for keeping Jalalabad Park intact, the High Court on October 22 last year asked SCC mayor to clearly demarcate the park area within three months and to take steps to retain the park as it is.

But things did not change while signboard of the Jalalabad Park was removed.

Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran at the time of placing the SCC budget for 2006-2007 denied his involvement in any move for construction of a commercial complex or shopping mall in the area and assured steps for keeping the park

intact.

When contacted acting mayor Azam Khan said, "We are not doing anything for commercial purpose. It will not be a commercial structure. We have decided to construct some hall rooms for holding meetings".

Khan also claimed that neither the mayor nor any of the ward commissioners were involved in the alleged move for constructing a shopping mall at the park site last year.

"Rather, a powerful syndicate was active to do that, which however came to a halt at a stage", the acting mayor said.

In 1959, Hasan market was established on the land of historic Govinda Charan Park despite protests by people. The authorities at that time filled up adjoining Beka Dighi (water body) and shifted the Govinda Charan Park there. Later, it was renamed Jalalabad Park.

The then Sylhet Pourashava Chairman Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran inaugurated the Jalalabad Park in 1999.

But within years, the area became a den of drug addicts due to lack of maintenance by the then municipal authorities.



Several thousand farmers crowded Uthrai Union Parishad complex in Dinajpur Sadar upazila yesterday for fertiliser.

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA



A view of the Jalalabad Park in Sylhet city where the city corporation plans to construct a building.

PHOTO: STAR

Police find fresh clues to Magura medicine scam

Arrested storekeeper of civil surgeon's office quizzed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Police have found new clues to the May 25 medicine scam at the store of Magura Civil Surgeon's office after quizzing arrested storekeeper Lutfar Rahman.

Lutfar was quizzed by Detective Branch police for two days from Thursday. He was produced before court yesterday on expiry of two days' remand. The court sent him to jail hajat.

Lutfar was arrested by DB police on Thursday for his alleged involvement in the medicine scam.

Police sources said, Lutfar's confessions during interrogation indicated that the then acting civil surgeon of Magura who was on charge on May 25 was aware of the scam.

On May 25, at dead of night, police intercepted an ambulance of Shalikha Upazila Health Complex (SUHC) at Harishpur on Magura-Jessore highway and arrested its driver Zafar. The ambulance was carrying medicines worth about Tk 50,000. The medicines included

Cotrim tablets and syrup, Eritromycin syrup and Aspectomycin injections.

Zafar told police that the medicines were being taken for dumping into a river as those were date-expired.

Shalikha thana police, after investigation, said that the date-expired medicines with new labels were being sent to Jessore at dead of night for supply to shops.

Earlier on June 12, the first IO of the case Sub- Inspector (SI) Shahjahan of Shalikha police station said, "Investigation revealed that the date-expired medicines were being taken towards Jessore at dead of night for marketing after labeling those with new dates and claimed that the store keeper and a leader of the pro-BNP doctors' association were the mastermind behind it.

When contacted yesterday, medical officer Dr. Alimuzzaman who was the acting civil surgeon on May 25 said, "I signed papers prepared by the storekeeper. The medicines were being sent to Shalikha upazila health complex. It was not my duty to see whether the medicines were date-expired or not".

After interrogating Zafar, police had said the date-expired medicines with new labels were being sent to Jessore for supply to medicine shops. The case was transferred to BD on July 3.

A team of DB police led by Sub-Inspector (SI) Mohsin Ali arrested Lutfar on Thursday (July 13).

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, investigation officer of the case

More 336 jute workers axed in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Axe fell on more 336 permanent workers of laid-off Crescent Jute Mill (CJM). They received their termination notices Friday night.

With them, the total number of permanent workers terminated so far now stands at 981.

In the first phase 290 permanent workers were terminated from the state owned mill on June 4 and 5. More 355 received termination notices on June 25.

On the other hand, five permanent workers of Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills also received termination notices yesterday.

CBA leader of Crescent Jute Mill Mohammad Ali yesterday alleged that the plan to terminate permanent workers of laid-off jute mills was being made at the private residence of BJMC Zonal Coordinator Shamim Ahmed. His residence has become a 'secret place' for meeting of high officials of jute mills and zonal office of BJMC where decisions are being taken, the CBA leader alleged.

Shamim Ahmed, when asked, admitted that he had no other alternative but to sit with jute mill officials in his residence after dusk, fearing attack by angry workers.

QUAZI AMANULLAH, Khulna

Convenor of Khulna unit of Bangladesh Jute Association (BJA) Sheikh Kausar Ali said that India's reluctance to import raw jute has adversely affected export of the item from Khulna region.

The slump in export trade has forced exporters to sell their raw jute to other countries at cheaper prices.

"India purchased our raw jute at 250 dollars a bale. But we are to sell it now to China at 230 dollars a bale, incurring loss", he said.

Ali said raw jute exporters were not in a position to repay bank loans of over Tk 200 crore because there are several thousand maunds of raw jute in warehouses in Khulna region which remained unsold following India's decision to stop import from Bangladesh.

He said jute mills in India stopped importing raw jute from end of last financial year.

The BJA convenor said that 9,46,401 bales of raw jute worth

about Tk 366 crore were exported to India from Khulna region during 2005-2006 financial year.

It came down to 5,18,000 bales worth Tk 202 crore during last financial year, he said.

"We have already placed before the government a nine-point demand which include compensation to recover from the financial loss and fresh bank loan facility to purchase raw jute", the BJA convenor said.

He sought immediate government intervention to save the export trade of raw jute by providing soft bank loan.

He said political unrest, delay in getting bank loan in due time, severe power outage, crisis of ships at Mongla port and high cost for transporting consignments from Mongla to Chittagong port for shipment were the reasons, among others, for incurring loss by raw jute exports during last financial year.

3x2

4x2

4x2

1x1

1.5x1

3x3

5x2