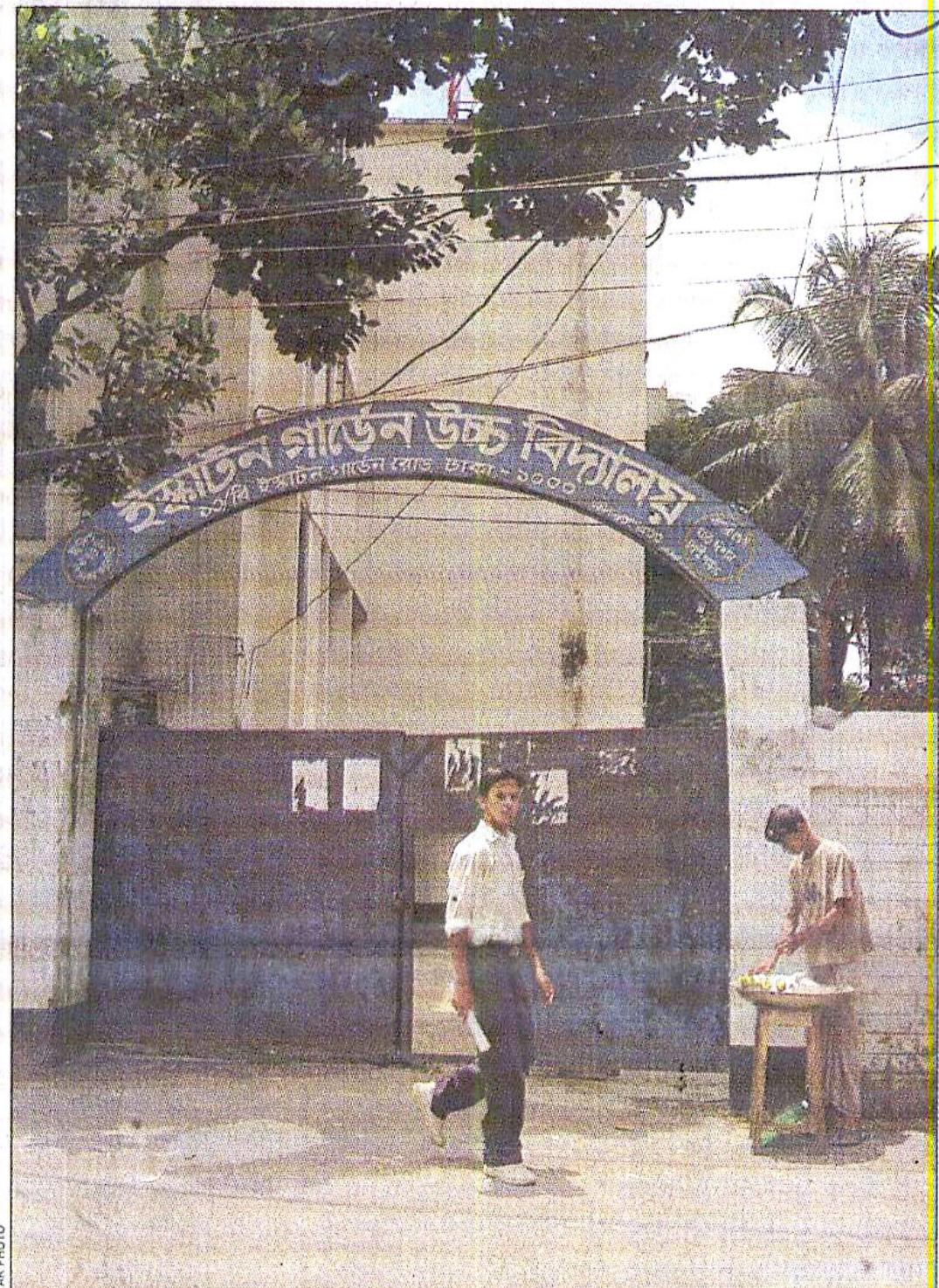


Dhaka Central Jail was set up, it is assumed in the early 19th century during the East India Company rule. Central jail prisoners worked as labourers when Saint Thomas' church was built around 1820. Documents of 1833 state the then Dhaka jail could accommodate 800 prisoners. On an average there were 526 prisoners a day, from different areas of the then East Bengal.

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Theatre groups' rehearsals silently fall silent

They were doing it there since 1991. All of a sudden a complaint lodged to stop it for good just on the plea of 'noise pollution'



A student walks past Eskaton Garden High School at Eskaton Garden Road once a hub for theatre artists.

STAR PHOTO

DURDANA GHIAS

Theatre groups have been barred from rehearsing at the city's Eskaton Garden High School for the last three months at the instruction of the authorities.

Md Abdul Gafur, headmaster of the school, said they have stopped the rehearsal following notices issued by the Department of Environment (DoE).

But DoE officials said they did not ask the school authorities to stop rehearsal. "We just asked them to control noise," said a DoE official, seeking anonymity.

The DoE issued the notices after an influential government official complained about 'noise pollution' due to rehearsals by the theatre groups.

The groups had been using the place to rehearse for stage shows since 1991 but there was no complaint about noise pollution due to the rehearsals.

"We did not have any problem for the rehearsals until the first complaint lodged to DoE for noise pollution. DoE said the sound level was ok after the windows were sealed with glass," said a member of the school committee.

"But we stopped it after some officials from the 'administration' saw the headmaster in the middle of June," the member said, requesting anonymity.

The headmaster said: "We got the first notice from the DoE in May 2006. Then we covered the windows with glass. But the theatre groups opened the glass. Then DoE sent us notices that they would fine us if the groups did not stop sound pollution. So we stopped rehearsals three months ago."

He said, "the groups used to play loud music during rehearsals. They played flutes, beat drums and used mikes during Azan. Complaint came as this is a residential area where high government officials live."

But a theatre activist who used

to rehearse there said: "We did not open the glass. We did not use mike and we never played music during Azan."

Officials at DoE said in the third and last notice (July 2006) they asked the school authorities to take measures to control noise pollution.

"After serving the third notice the school authorities sealed the windows. Then we went to the school and saw that the windows were sealed. After that we did not visit that place," said a DoE official.

"The artistes themselves were very concerned about the noise and they themselves proposed for sealing windows," he said.

The DoE officials said members of law enforcement agencies sometimes come to check whether any theatre activity is going on there.

Ramendu Majumder, director, Theatre, said they used to rehearse there from 1990 but shifted to Bailey Road one and a half years ago. After that some other groups started doing rehearsals there.

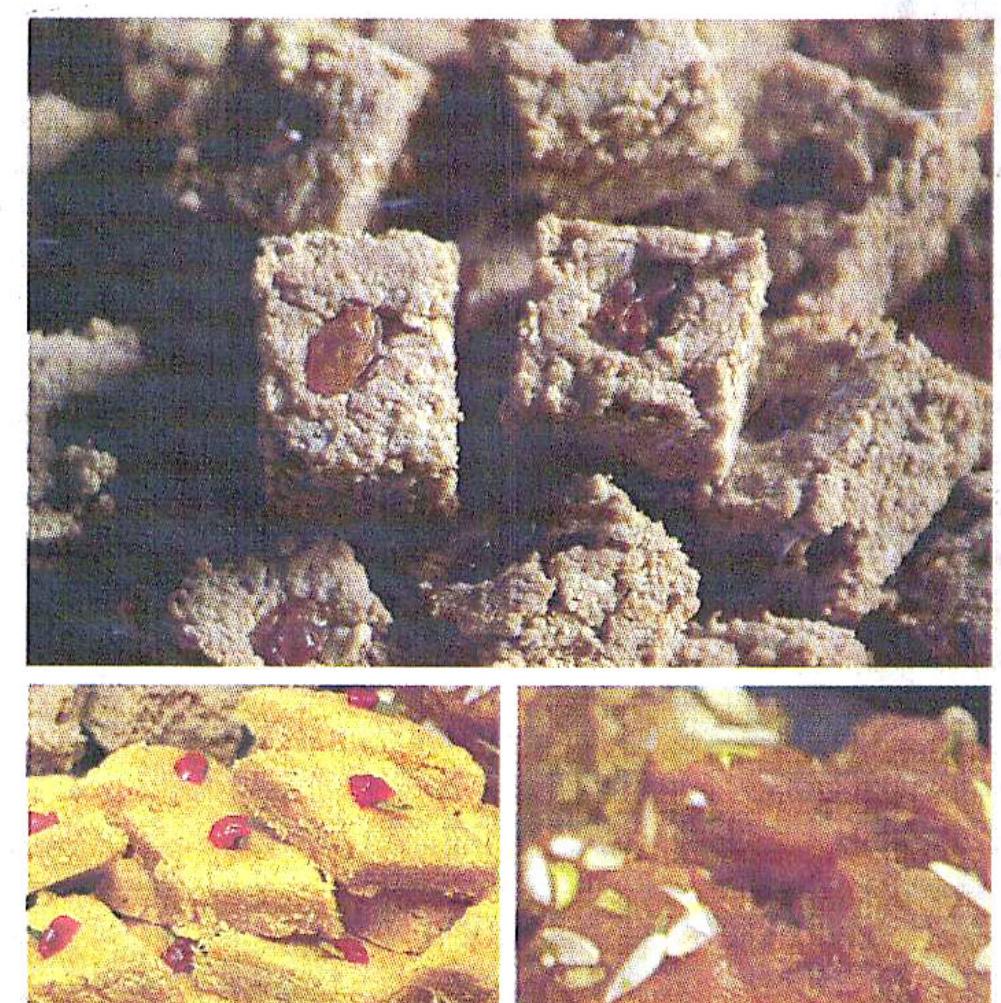
A theatre artiste, who used to rehearse there, said they had meetings with the school authorities but the matter remains unresolved.

"After the DoE notice windows of the rehearsal room were sealed. Then DoE officials came to check the sound level. They said that it was ok and sound did not reach the nearby house of the complainant," he said.

"But then the official complained to the police. SB police came to the school and asked them to stop rehearsals. Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation had a meeting with the complainant's husband but to no avail," he said.

"We approached high officials of the police to talk about the matter but nobody listened to us," he said. "We found the school authorities very liberal but it seems they went against us out of fear."

But a theatre activist who used



Dear Shab-e-Barat with dearer treats

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

To relish the delicious treats in this Shab-e-Barat, the lower and middle-income people are destined to lose a hefty amount of money from their wallet.

The celebration of Shab-e-Barat appears costly for them as all the ingredients, except for sugar, needed for making halwa, ruti and burfi are dearer.

The ingredients of these two traditional items are flour, sugar, chickpeas, coconut, carrot, vermicelli, semolina (suiji), milk powder, ghee and butter oil. Saffron, raisin, almonds, pistachio, peanuts and cashew nut are used for garnishing them.

Asma Khanom, another homemaker from Shahinbagh, said: "No

matter how pricey the commodities are, I have to do something. I will prepare ruti and beef, nothing more."

"This year I will manage somehow. The way

prices are going up, I

don't know what will happen next year," she added

Beef is now selling in the city at Tk 180 a kg, a staggering increase from last year's price of Tk 120.

Grocers at Karwan Bazar said most people shop for Shab-e-Barat on the eve of the day when the prices of these essential items go up further.

Shab-e-Barat, one of the main festivals for the Muslims, is observed on the night of 15th Shaban in Arabic calendar. The Muslims believe that a person's fate for the next year is determined on this night. People spend the night praying and enjoying delectable sweet items and sharing them with relatives, neighbours and the less fortunate.

However, the soaring price hike this year has dampened the festive mood to some extent.

"It has become impossible to keep up with the market price, especially for the middle class people like us," said Mahmuda Biswas, a resident of Iqbal Road, Mohammadpur. "This year I will cut back on the expense from other necessities and spend it on Shab-e-Barat."

"Usually I prepare five types of halwa and burfi along with ruti and beef. This year I have to cut back on spending and limit to two halwa and burfi items," she added.

"Prices of every essentials have gone up but our income is the same as before. The situation is getting out of the hands for middle class people like us," said Md Afzal Hossain, an employee of a state-run corporation.

Hossain however said: "We cannot cut back on consumption despite the tough situation. Shab-e-Barat celebration will go on."

Asma Khanom, another homemaker from Shahinbagh, said: "No matter how pricey the commodities are, I have to do something. I will prepare ruti and beef, nothing more."

"This year I will manage somehow. The way prices are going up, I don't know what will happen next year," she added.

RESTORATION OF KALYANPUR CANALS

Wasa eviction drive hits snags

RAHMAN SABUPTAGIN

Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) could not complete restoration of the Kalyanpur canal and its branches through frequent eviction drives as the government is yet to acquire land and cancel leases of land to the private sector.

The city's north-eastern part cannot be freed from

waterlogging unless Kalyanpur main canal and its branches are restored fully, Wasa officials said.

Zahirul Alam, chief of the drainage wing of Wasa, said the total length of the Kalyanpur main canal and its 6 branches is about 8 kilometres and Wasa is conducting eviction drives for widening the canals according to the drainage master plan.

"It's impossible to drain water

through the existing narrow sewerage pipes. The canals should be there in sound condition to get rid of waterlogging," he said.

Filling up of land by the Roads and Highways Department and land lease to private sector at the south-western side of Kalyanpur main canal and its 6 branches is about 8 kilometres and Wasa is conducting eviction drives for widening the canals according to the drainage master plan.

"It's impossible to drain water

good condition.

According to the master plan, Kalyanpur main canal between Agargaon and Kalyanpur pump station should be at least 60 feet wide while the branch canals 30 feet each.

Kalyanpur 'Ka' canal has been choked by land filling behind Beauty Cinema near Gabtoli. The canal passes through land of ex-lawmaker SA

Khaleq.

The government has not acquired the land as it has an agreement with Khaleq who is supposed to maintain the canal with his own expenditure. The place is now occupied with huge structures. Wasa eviction team visited the spot but did not remove them.

Wasa demarcated Kalyanpur 'Ka' canal in 2005. On March 29 this year it conducted a drive and demolished at least 13 structures.

Kalyanpur 'Ga' canal has already vanished from the map of the government. The one and a half kilometres long canal was between Habuler Pukur at Paikpara and Astina.

Absence of this canal is now causing heavy waterlogging in Paikpara and Monipur areas. Wasa engineers said the canal have to be dug again to prevent the waterlogging.

Kalyanpur 'Gha' canal in Monipur is in good condition. Wasa cleaned the canal by demolishing 12 structures on May 14. Wasa did not demolish two permanent structures on the canal. Officials said they could not do it due to 'lack of time'.

Kalyanpur 'Uma' and 'Cha' canals were restored in 2005. These canals were cleaned again through recent eviction drives. Twenty structures including a madrasa were demolished during the drives.

Wasa officials said they were trying at their level best to restore the canals but facing different kinds of obstacles.



STAR PHOTO

The much awaited and much talked about lake in Osmani Udyan which underwent 'costly' renovation for a long time still awaits public access.