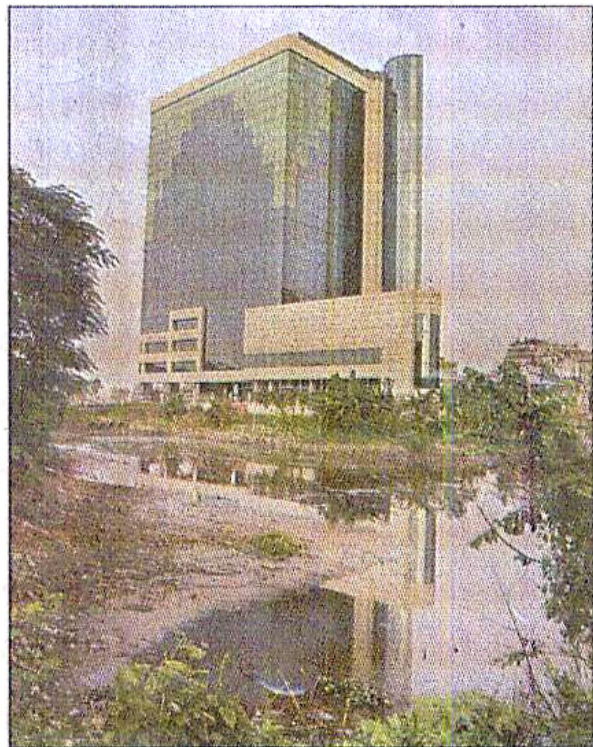


EXPERTS ON ACHIEVING GOALS OF HATIRJHEEL-BEGUNBARI PROJECT

Anything obstructing drainage flow has to be removed



TAWFIQUE ALI

Unauthorised structures in the city's Begunbari canal have to be removed and allotment of plots in the area must be cancelled to achieve the goals of Tk 1,474 crore Begunbari-Hatirjheel integrated development project, said experts.

Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) approved the project on October 8 with a view to restoring water flow of the canal for drainage and easing east-west traffic load in the capital by constructing a ring-road.

Under the project, Begunbari canal will be dredged to mitigate waterlogging in the city.

Vice-chancellor of Brac University Professor Jamilur Reza Chowdhury who is a civil engineer and traffic planning expert, said, "There should not be any obstruction within the canal area if the project is aimed at serving drainage purposes restoring the Begunbari canal and Hatirjheel catchment area."

An expert team of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) led by Professor Mujibur Rahman has been employed to carry out a comprehensive feasibility study for detailed designing of the project.

The team is ready to start the study and it may take a little more than six months.

"Our priority in the detailed drainage study would be to ensure drainage facility and adequate flow of storm water," said Prof Rahman. "In case we find any structure in the channel that obstructs the drainage flow, we will recommend its removal."

LGRD and Cooperatives Adviser Md Anwarul Iqbal at an inter-ministerial meeting on October 18 instructed the authorities concerned not to allot land in the Begunbari canal area which would come under the Begunbari-Hatirjheel integrated development project.

Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) earmarks the Begunbari canal as a natural canal and a designated flood flow

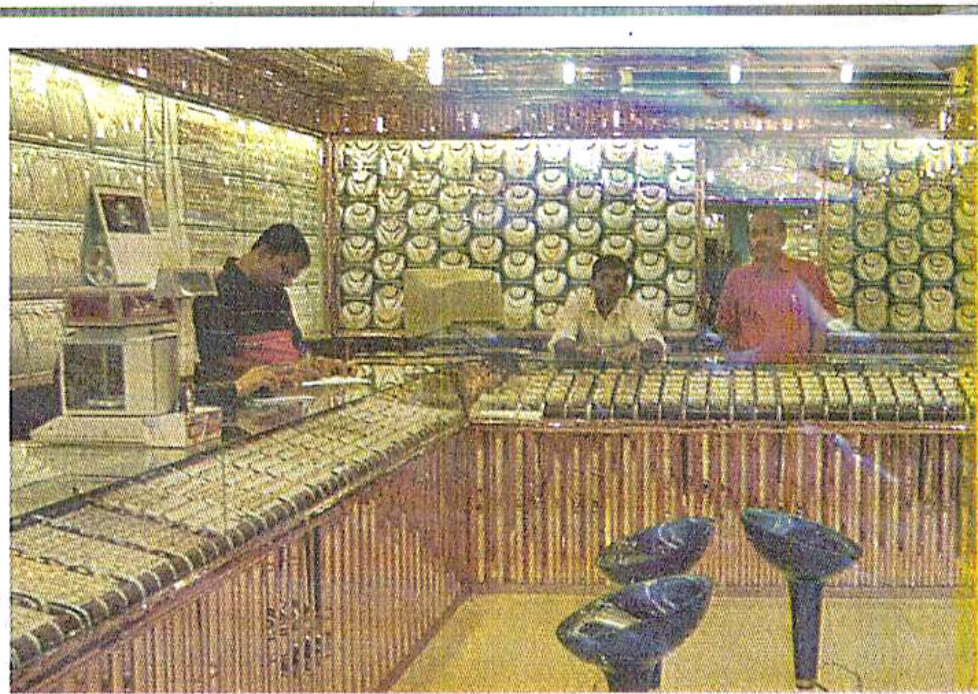
zone, prohibiting any change to its character.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has constructed a 15-storey commercial building in the city's Begunbari canal area without obtaining design approval from the authorities.

The BNP government, at the flag end of its tenure, allotted four plots to Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA), Hotel Hilton (Millennium Holding Limited) and International Arbitration Centre in violation of environment and wetland conservation related laws.

The BNP government had also leased out eight large plots in the Begunbari canal including four for CNG filling stations, not only in violation of the city's master plan but also bending Bangladesh Railway's land management rules of 2006, sources said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



STAR PHOTO

Gold market gloomy for sudden price hike

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Despite the festivities of Eid and Puja, gold witnessed a dull spell of sales following a sharp rise in prices.

According to jewellers, sale of gold is down by about a third of its normal average daily sales.

The recent increase of gold price by Tk 500 each 'bhor' (11.66 grams) is highest in 28 years. Geopolitical tensions are believed to be the main reason behind the price hike, said industry experts.

Even though this time of the year -- October through December -- is considered to be the peak season for the sale of gold with major festivities including Eid, Puja and weddings, the flow of customers has thinned out dramatically, jewellers at different markets said.

Be it the showrooms with sparkly glass cases and dazzling lightings in posh areas or the tiny and shoddier ones in old parts of the city, most of these jewellery stores are almost deserted, they added.

Alamgir Khokon, owner of New Chandni Jewellers in New Market, said, "The market of gold has been really bad lately."

"This time of the year is supposed to be our peak sales season with all the festivals and weddings, but customer response this year has been below 50 percent than that of last year," he added.

"Especially for the Eid and Puja, we undertook lavish preparations with exciting offers and new collections to attract customers. But sales were not upto our expectation," said Jamil Hasan of Nova Jewellers in the Baitul Mukarram Market of the city.

"Frankly, I cannot really blame the customers. With the rise in prices of almost everything, people are buying fewer luxury items these days. It was especially true after the recent price hike on the international gold market," he added.

Prospective shoppers, unaware of the recent price hike, were found baffled as they were shopping around for gold ornaments at jewellery stores in the city recently.

"The same type of jewellery that I had purchased for Tk 20 thousand only a month back is now selling at around Tk 23 thousand," said Ishrat Jahan, a prospective gold shopper at Mouchak Market at the city.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Top: BGMEA building. From left: plots for Hilton Hotel, BTMA Bhaban and FBCCI Bhaban.

DYING ARTS OF SHANKHARI BAZAR-2

Idols have name, fame but artisans see no future

DURDANA GHILAS

In a small room of a dilapidated old building at Shankhari Bazar, an artisan was moulding idols with utmost care. The young man was shaping a life size idol while two other big idols were reposed at the corner of the room.

The statues, denuded of any kind of ornament till then, were of Durga, her two daughters Laxmi and Swaraswati, two sons Ganesha and Kartik and of the evil Mahishashur, being prepared for the Durga Puja.

Once upon a time there were many such idol making shops on two sides of the narrow lane of Shankhari Bazar but now there are only a few. On the eve of festivals like Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Bishwakarma Puja and Manasa Puja these little work-

shops become busy with activity.

"We start working [on the idol] from the middle of the Bangla month of Srabon and the Puja is in Ashwin," said Shanto Chandra Pal, the artisan, moulding with his hands and a sharp slender bamboo stick called 'cheri'.

Other than the life size statues on the overhead shelves of the room there was an array of small figurines of gods and goddesses.

Shanto and his fellow artisans were working under their master Balai Pal to make idols for the puja. The most flamboyant life size idol costs Tk 65,000.

"Other than Durga we make around 30 idols of Kali, 50 idols of Laxmi, 13 of Manasa, one or two of Shitala and 70 for Bishwakarma Puja round the

year," said Shanto. The Bishwakarma Puja, held in the Bangla month of Bhadra, is done amid much fanfare as he is the god of the artisans.

Till today Bangladeshi artisans use only one tool for moulding -- the 'cheri'. Most of the work is done by hands. The structure of the idol is first made with straws. Then a layer of clay is laid on it. Then another layer of bele mati (a special type of clay) is put of the figure.

The soil, used for making idols, is brought from Kashimpur village of Konabari in Savar. Truckloads of soil are brought twice in a year -- during the Bangla month of Magh and in Ashar-Srabon for Durga Puja. A truck full of clay costs around Tk 16,000 and bele mati Tk 13,000.

Balai Pal, the master artisan of the shop, said that he is in this profession for the last 26 years. "It is our family tradition to be an artisan. But at present only I am clinging to this profession among other family members," he said.

Balai has seen many artisans leaving their job gradually. "One big problem of this trade is that we do not get any loan or assistance from the government. We do not have any government recognition for our work. Besides, we do not have much work during off-season. We have to look forward to the puja seasons all the year," said the artisan.

"In India artisans are exporting their works abroad and those have a very good market. The works of Bangladeshi artisans have a unique appeal worldwide as we do the moulding work mostly with hands. If we get some government assistance in exporting our works then it can bring both money and fame for the country. But it is very unfortunate that there is no government attention towards this art," said Balai with regret.

Haripada Pal, an aged master artisan of Shankhari Bazar, said that in spite of the adverse situation the artisans have to do their work sincerely.

"Being an artisan is not that easy. A true artisan cannot change his profession just to feed his family. He needs to work with self satisfaction as he has a responsibility towards the society. It is his duty to preserve the art and culture of his country and protect the family tradition," said Haripada.

Although his business does not bring much profit with gradual migration of the Hindu community, Haripada never thought of leaving his country.



Jita Ashtami Puja in progress at Durgabari.

Oldest Durga Puja at Durgabari

The oldest possible Durga Puja of the city is celebrated at Durgabari in Shankhari Bazar area. According to the old residents, this is a hundred-year old puja and the oldest existing one in the area.

Shamapika Dhar, owner of the house (Durgabari) and in-charge of the puja for the last 17 years, said that the puja is completely a family affair; no official donation, is taken for it but everyone can enjoy the festivity.

"The legend says a childless lady promised to the goddess that she will do her worship every year if she gets a child. After the goddess bestowed her with a child she kept her promise by arranging Durga Puja every year in this house and changed the name of the house to Durgabari," said Shamapika.

Over the last one hundred years

there had been no changes in the designs of the idols. All the idols are made on a single platform, which is a unique feature. The priests follow the same ancient rules and rituals.

"We perform a full 10-day worship of the goddess that starts with sacrificing a pumpkin. We perform the puja of Jita Ashtami, the worship of the son of the sun, without which the Durga Puja is almost meaningless. It is a very ancient practice and a must for Durga Puja but at present Jita Ashtami is performed only in this house in this city," she said.

"The puja has nothing to do with the ancestry. The owners of this house have maintained the promise of that lady when they took over the house believing that this house is possessed by Durga," she added.



An artisan giving finishing touches to an idol at Shankhari Bazar.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"Why does always the Pakistani theory come up?"

-- General Moeen U Ahmed
Army Chief

Said at a press conference of the expatriate Bangladeshi journalists at Bangladesh Consulate in New York, on Friday.
Source: The Daily Star

"I do not call them reformists; they are opportunists. The government must take action against them."

-- Col (Rtd) Oli Ahmed
President, Liberal Democratic Party
Said in an interview with UNB, on Thursday.
Source: The Daily Star

"The finance ministry is supposed to look after the interest of the general public but they are looking after the interest of World Bank, IMF and ADB."

-- Prof Anu Muhammad
Economist

Said at a roundtable organised by Unnayan Onneshan at Cirdap auditorium, on Saturday.
Source: Prothom Alo

"Madam was mentally distressed on the Eid day."

-- Advocate Ahmed Azam
Khaleda Zia's lawyer
Told reporters replying to a question, on Sunday.
Source: The Daily Star

"For me this award is as good as winning the Nobel Prize."

-- Abdul Kalam Azad
FAO award winner Bangladeshi farmer
Told reporters after winning the award in the areas of horticulture, aquaculture, agribusiness, home gardening and community forestry, on Wednesday.
Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghilas