

A part of the corridor has collapsed in front of the office of Public Prosecutor Enamul Hoque on the first floor of Chittagong Court Building, left, and the dilapidated court Bhaban, right.

Ctg court building needs repair to save lives

DWAIPAYAN BARUA
The renovation of century-old Chittagong Court building remained stalled for over one year as the contracting firm has failed to complete the work on schedule.

Public Works Department (PWD) started the work for renovation of the three-storey building and restoration of its original state as well as construction of another four-storey building in November in 2005.

But, the authorities concerned cancelled the work order and floated a fresh tender in this regard due to expiry of the scheduled one-year time for completion of the work.

Under the situation the half-demolished court building now lies in a most dilapidated condition, posing a threat of serious accident at any time.

Around 5,000 judges, magistrates, lawyers, court officials and staffs and over 10,000 litigants stay during office hours at the

hilltop court building in the city centre built in 1892.

Sitting on the panoramic Parir Pahar, the building was the largest structure of the undivided Bengal.

But, for lack of initiative for conservation of the building for years caused it to develop cracks on almost every wall and floor.

The building houses offices of chief metropolitan magistrate, metropolitan magistrate, metropolitan judge, district and sessions judge, divisional special judge, joint district judge, two public prosecutor (PP) -- metropolitan and district --, different court rooms, copy rooms, ledger rooms, family court, forest and environment court, district record room, court jail, government record officer (GRO) sections (district and metropolitan), AC prosecution's office, court inspector's office, two common rooms of Chittagong District Bar Association and several offices of concerned personal assis-

tants, stenos and others. PWD sources said originally it was a two-storey building until construction of the 'mismatching' second floor on it in 1953. With a complete different design and form, the second floor not only destroyed the aesthetic setting but also brought about the ruin of the court building, said Sub-assistant Engineer Pradip Barua at PWD Division-1. Growth of fungus and leakages and seepage of rainwater damaged the floors of stone tiles when overuse made the wooden staircases decayed and worn out. Dampness caused the plaster come off exposing the reinforcement of the roof slabs, said the engineer.

Serious accident may occur at any moment on the veranda in front of the district public prosecutor's office on the first floor where a large crack developed.

Lawyers urged the adviser for ministry of works to look into the matter and to take measures for immediate start of the renova-

tion work so that the lives of judges, lawyers, litigants and others are not endangered.

"Water seeps through the ceilings and pour into the rooms during heavy rain, damaging important documents on the floors," said PP Enamul Hoque.

Sheikh Iftekhar Saimul Chowdhury, general secretary of Chittagong District Bar Association, said the court building is now in danger as the upper roofs and floors are in bad shape.

Mahbubul Hoque, a businessman and a frequent visitor to the building, said he prays to god for protection when he enters the building.

In 1985, Public Works Department (PWD) declared the building unusable for use and suggested in its 'project concept paper' to demolish the original building.

But vigorous campaign and agitation by different forums of professional groups like Forum for Planned Chittagong (FPC),

District Bar Association and political parties forced the authorities to overturn the decision to demolish the court building, said the then general secretary of Chittagong District Bar Association Advocate Akhter Kabir Chowdhury.

Besides, the district court issued an injunction against vacation of premises and demolition of the building in July in 2001, sources said.

On October 2001, a writ petition was submitted to the High Court division that led to the imposition of rule nisi on the government against the demolition.

A Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) survey in 2002 recommended to conserve and renovate the old building, demolish the 2nd floor built in 1953 and construct a new building.

PWD started the renovation work and construction of a four-storied new building under a project titled 'Construction of New Court Building, Chittagong'

in November 2005. But, the contractor firm ICC Limited could not complete the work within the scheduled one-year time, said a senior PED official preferring anonymity.

The firm was fined Tk 98 lakh in this regard, he said.

Executive Engineer Abul Hashem of PWD Division-1 said they have already demolished 75 per cent of the DC-block (middle portion) on the 2nd floor of the original building while partial construction of the new building has been done.

He said PWD floated two fresh tenders on 'Remaining work for construction of New Court Building at Chittagong including Electrical, sanitary and water supply arrangement' and 'Renovation and Restoration of Middle Block of Court Building, including electrical, sanitary and water supply arrangement' on October 9 and October 29 this year.

But nothing could be learned about opening of the two tenders.

The rate of disposal of cases has increased significantly in Chittagong after the separation of judiciary from the executive on November 1. Many justice-seekers expressed their confidence in the positive impact of the independent judiciary and said their sufferings have declined to a great extent since November 1.

Lawyers at Chittagong court echoed the similar feelings, saying that everybody has noticed a marked change before and after the separation.

"I have long been shuttling between the court and my village at Rangunia Upazila over ten years in vain for disposal of a case seeking punishment of the influential criminals who had launched a brutal attack on my two brothers and father," said Mohammad Yakub, adding that the case is all set to be disposed of soon, thanks to the separation.

He said the pace of trial at court as well as the sincerity of the lawyers concerned that he noticed in his case after November 1 is itself a proof of the fact that the separation was long overdue and inevitable.

Iqbal Ahmed, a small trader from Bakalia in the city, had a problem with his two elders over the share of ancestral land property after the death of his father two years ago. The two filed a lawsuit against Iqbal, what he thinks, aimed at depriving him of rightful share on the property given by his father.

He said his ordeal began when he had lodged a counter complaint. Instead of getting justice in those few months, he said, he got only deferment of date of the hearing until November 1. But after the separation of the judiciary, he has gotten the justice, Iqbal said.

Court sources said five judicial magistrates in Chittagong headed by Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) disposed of 1,559 cases in little over one month since November 1, whereas seven executive magistrates until September disposed of 1,120 cases.

Another striking fact is that a judicial magistrate on an average disposes of 312 cases in comparison to only 160 cases by the executive magistrate earlier, sources added.

Another marked change, which contributes to the present speedy trial, is the total working hour of the magistrates, lawyers told The Daily Star.

The judicial magistrates enter the courtroom at around 9:30am and start proceedings of the cases as per daily cause list. The early start of work is not only helping the litigants to get justice in quickest possible time but also saving their valuable time and money and protecting them from unexpected harassment, said Sheikh Iftekhar Saimul Chowdhury, general secretary of Chittagong District Bar Association.

He said the executive magistrates earlier used to start their work at around 12:30pm for which litigants especially those come from distant upazilas of the district were to endure lot of troubles.

SEPARATION OF JUDICIARY

Litigants begin to reap benefits

SHAHIDUL ISLAM

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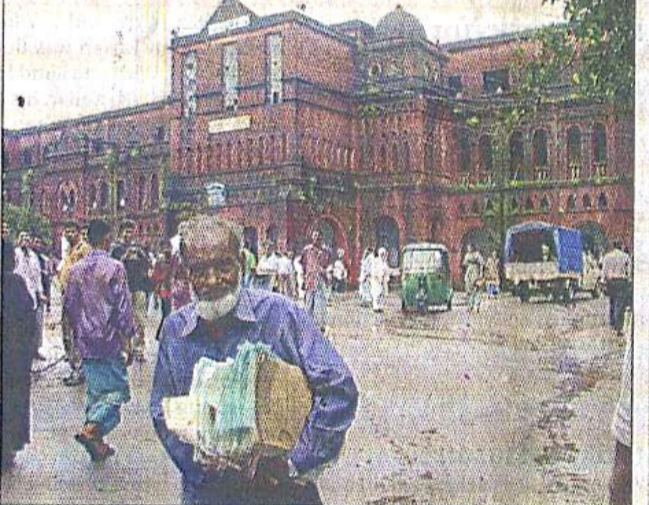
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A busy Chittagong Court building.

the week that was

Writer Begum Mustari Shafi speaks at a function marking the 127th birth and 75th death anniversary of Begum Rokeya, organised by Rokeya Dibas Ujapan Parishad, at Muslim Institute Hall on Sunday.



'Prepare list of war criminals'

Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) President Col (Retd) Oli Ahmad urged the sector commanders of the Liberation War to proceed in a planned and organised way to pave the way for trial of the war criminals and their collaborators.

He called upon the sector commanders to prepare, first of all, a list of war criminals along with their activities, which can be collected from the mass people.

The list and misdeeds of the war criminals of 1971 should be made public through media before lodging cases to bring them under trial, he said.

He was addressing the inaugural ceremony of two-day victory festival styled 'Bijoy Utsav' as the chief guest at Nazrul Square with local daily Bir Chattagram Mancha editor Syed Md Omar Faruq in the chair on Saturday.

Dr Chowdhury Jahurul Hoque, Dr MA Gafur, The Daily Purbokone News Editor Abu Taher Mohammad, Ekramul Karim and Kamal Uddin also spoke.

Policy for visually challenged emphasised

Speakers at a workshop on Wednesday emphasised the need for formulating a

proper policy for the visually challenged persons for their normal growth in the society.

Addressing the workshop and orientation programme for the voluntary writers, they also stressed the need for extending time for examination and establishing Braille library for smooth study of the visually challenged people.

Two non-government organisations Sangsaptak and Centre for Disabled Concern (CDC) organised the workshop in cooperation with ActionAid Bangladesh at JM Sen Hall in the port city.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (Education and Development) Mahiuddin Ahmed Khan was present as the chief guest at the programme with Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) Ward Commissioner Rehena Kabir Ranu in the chair.

Chittagong Education Board Examination Controller Majibul Alam was the key speaker while Sangsaptak Chairman Prof Dr Abul Kashem, Prof Mir Mosharraf Hossain, Chittagong Deputy Regional Director of Bangladesh Betar Mohammad Bashir Uddin, Prof Mohammad Jasim Uddin and Advocate Khademul Islam were present.

3rd Chittagong furniture fair held

A five-day furniture exposition titled '3rd Chittagong Furniture Fair 2007' began here on Thursday with a call for advancing the industry with quality

products of latest and various designs.

Bangladesh Furniture Industries Owners' Association (BFIOA) in cooperation with event management firm Scintilla -- organised the fair at Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) Chittagong auditorium with a slogan 'My Furniture, My Pride'.

Inaugurating the fair as the chief guest Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CCI) President Saifuzzaman Chowdhury called upon local manufacturers to come up with quality and modern furniture to survive the competition with those coming from outside the country.

BFIOA Chairman KM Akteruzzaman, Sanjita Managing Director Mohammad Shahjahan, Fair Committee Chairman Mohammad Yunus and BFIOA, Chittagong divisional General Manager Mohammad Nurul Azam were special guests at the inaugural ceremony with BFIOA, Chittagong divisional President Syed ASM Noor Uddin in the chair.

A total of 25 furniture companies from Dhaka and Chittagong displayed wooden, cane and plastic furniture in 70 stalls at the fair.

'Follow BB guidelines'

Speakers urged commercial banks to play their role following the guidelines of Bangladesh Bank to protect the society from money laundering.

They were speaking at a workshop on 'Money Laundering Prevention Act 2005' organised by Exim Bank, Chittagong zone on Wednesday.

General Manager of Bangladesh Bank, Chittagong SK Sur Chowdhury was the chief guest at the workshop with Regional Chief and Senior Vice President of Exim Bank Md Alamgir in the chair.

Exim bank Agrabad branch Manager Mohammad Shahidullah, Khatunganj branch Manager Mahibul Abrara Chowdhury, Jubilee Road branch Manager Md Hanif and CDA Avenue branch Manager Mohammad Hasem and senior officials participated in the workshop.

Rly opens complaint cell

Authority of Bangladesh Railway (East) on Saturday opened a "complaint and information cell" at the new terminal building of Chittagong Railway Station as a part of passenger service programme on the eve of Eid Ul Azha.

The cell was opened to solve any problem arising out of issuance of advance ticket or passenger service. The authority requested the passengers to contact the on-duty officer of the cell at the Station Manager's room in this connection.

Concern over price-hike of paper

Chittagong Press Owners' Association leaders at a monthly general meeting

on Saturday expressed concern over the price-hike of paper.

At the meeting at The Azadi conference room, the participants discussed the crisis of press industry.

With Association President MA Malek, also the editor of the Azadi, in the chair, Vice-president Nur Ullah, General Secretary Aferuddin Chowdhury, M Zebul Hossain, Saleh Ahmad, Subimal Das, Ramzan Ali Chowdhury spoke at the meeting.

Banshikhal Printers Proprietor Abul Kashem Chowdhury moderated the meeting.

Drama festival begins at TIC

A five-day drama festival titled, "Natyā Hoimantika 1414" began at Theatre Institute, Chittagong (TIC) auditorium on Sunday.

Premier University Vice-Chancellor Dr Anupam Sen inaugurated the festival organised by Ritu Bhittik Natya Mela Parishad, a cultural organisation, held six such drama festivals based on seasons here every year.

Poet Bishwajit Chowdhury, also assistant resident editor of the daily Prothom Alo in Chittagong, was the special guest at the inaugural ceremony with Mahub Hasan in the chair.

In the festival being held in two phases -- from December 9 to December 10 and December 14 to December 16.

Science writer Dwijendra Sharma addresses the inaugural ceremony of a daylong festival on child literature titled 'Shishu Sahitya Utsav' organised by Bangladesh Shishu Sahitya Academy at Engineer Abdul Khalek auditorium of Chittagong Press Club on Friday.