

LIBERATION WAR MUSEUM'S EXPANSION PLAN

Struggle on for a piece of land

DURDANA GHIAS

With over 14,000 memorabilia, the Liberation War Museum, country's lone museum focusing on the Liberation War, is unable to display its huge collection due to shortage of space.

In March this year the museum, founded in 1996, has formally applied to the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs for allocation of land and is now waiting for reply from the government side.

"We have applied for a 1.5-acre plot in Agargaon behind the IDB Bhaban. If we get the land, it will be possible for us to display all our collections," said Dr Sarwar Ali, member secretary of the museum.

"The comprehensiveness of the war will be perceptible if we can display all the collections we have," he said.

Sources at the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs said they received the application and forwarded it to the public works ministry in June. Sources at the works ministry said they dis-

cussed the matter at a meeting on Dec 13.

"The land allocation is under consideration. But there may be some problems in the process because the Ministry of Liberation War just forwarded a letter, they did not suggest any allocation," said a source.

"Secondly, the Liberation War Museum represents a particular group. There may be other groups dealing with Liberation War affairs. So we are thinking whether we should give the allocation or not," the source added.

The museum is unable to put on display 14,814 pieces of its collection of which 3,369 are photographs; 7,745 newspaper cuttings, 2,030 documents and 1,670 other memorabilia of the Liberation War.

At present around 1,300 collections are being displayed.

"About the need of land we got positive response from the Awami League government but failed to apply formally for it at that time. During the BNP-Jamaat rule we did not see any positive attitude from the gov-

ernment, so we did not apply for land allocation," said Dr Ali.

"We always wanted to run the museum through civil initiative so that the history we present remain free of controversy," he added.

The museum at Segunbagicha attracts every day a large number of visitors imbued with the feeling of patriotism and the spirit of 1971.

"When I come to this museum its tranquil premises fill my heart with a feeling of peacefulness and revitalise the spirit of the Liberation War inside me," said Sakhina Begum, a freedom fighter from Kishoreganj who comes to the city to visit the museum in December every year.

A black Volkswagen, bearing the number Dhaka Ga-3220, will greet a visitor on entering the premises of the museum. Martyred physician Dr Fazle Rabbee drove this car to a place in old Dhaka on December 15, 1971 to visit the last patient of his life.

He was killed by the Pakistan Army and their local collabora-

tors following his refusal to issue false death certificates to those massacred on March 25.

The Liberation War Museum started its journey in 1996 with the slogan 'Face the truth, know the history' and to commemorate the long struggle for democracy and establish the rights of the Bangladeshi.

In six small rooms of the museum the historical events are kept in order chronologically, starting from several thousand years. Valuable puthis (old scripts) like Monoshamongol and Siddhartho Muktaboli written on tulot (handmade) paper and leaves of taalpata (palm leaves) are preserved at the museum.

The first gallery displays the rich heritage of Bengal's syncretic culture that attempts to merge different beliefs and schools of thought leaving room for an inclusive approach to other faiths. Historic movement against British colonial rule is presented in this gallery.

The second gallery displays the struggle for secular democracy, the mass uprising of 1969 and the victory of Awami League in the general election in 1970. The third gallery displays the opposition's non-cooperation movement and the genocide by the Pakistan Army in March 1971.

The last three galleries depict the armed struggle of the people of Bangladesh, personal stuff of the martyrs and freedom fighters, killing of intellectuals, the role of collaborators and the people's inhuman life in refugee camps in India during the war.

Pictures of peasant guerrillas and native weapons like borsha (spike) made to fight the Pakistan Army depict the involvement of ordinary people in the war.

The museum displays newspaper cuttings on the 1952 Language Movement, mass uprising of 1969, the devastating cyclone of 1970, the declaration of the independence and the assassination of Bangabandhu.

"I come here sometimes to see the memorabilia of the war. This is one place that honours the war. In TV channels I saw that public toilets were constructed on the killing fields in Mirpur that hurt me a lot. Things like these should not be tolerated in independent Bangladesh," said Md Barkat, a businessman while visiting the museum.

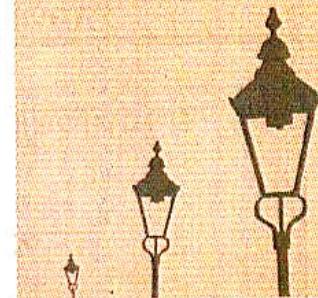
In 1999, two killing fields, Mirpur Jalladkhana and Muslim Bazaar, were excavated at the initiative of the museum with the assistance of Bangladesh Army. A large number of human skulls, bones and things used by the martyrs were found during the excavation. War Crimes Facts Finding Committee (WCFCC) helped in disinfecting the remains.

In preserving the killing fields across the country the museum is encouraging local initiatives and creating public awareness. Recently the museum has constructed a memorial at the Jalladkhana killing field in Mirpur.

Around 91,000 students of 346 schools across the country are under the coverage of the museum's outreach programmes and 2 lakh students under its 'mobile museum programme' that aims to make the students aware of the true history of Bangladesh, specially of the Liberation War.



Enough space is needed to display the huge number of mementoes collected by the Liberation War Museum.

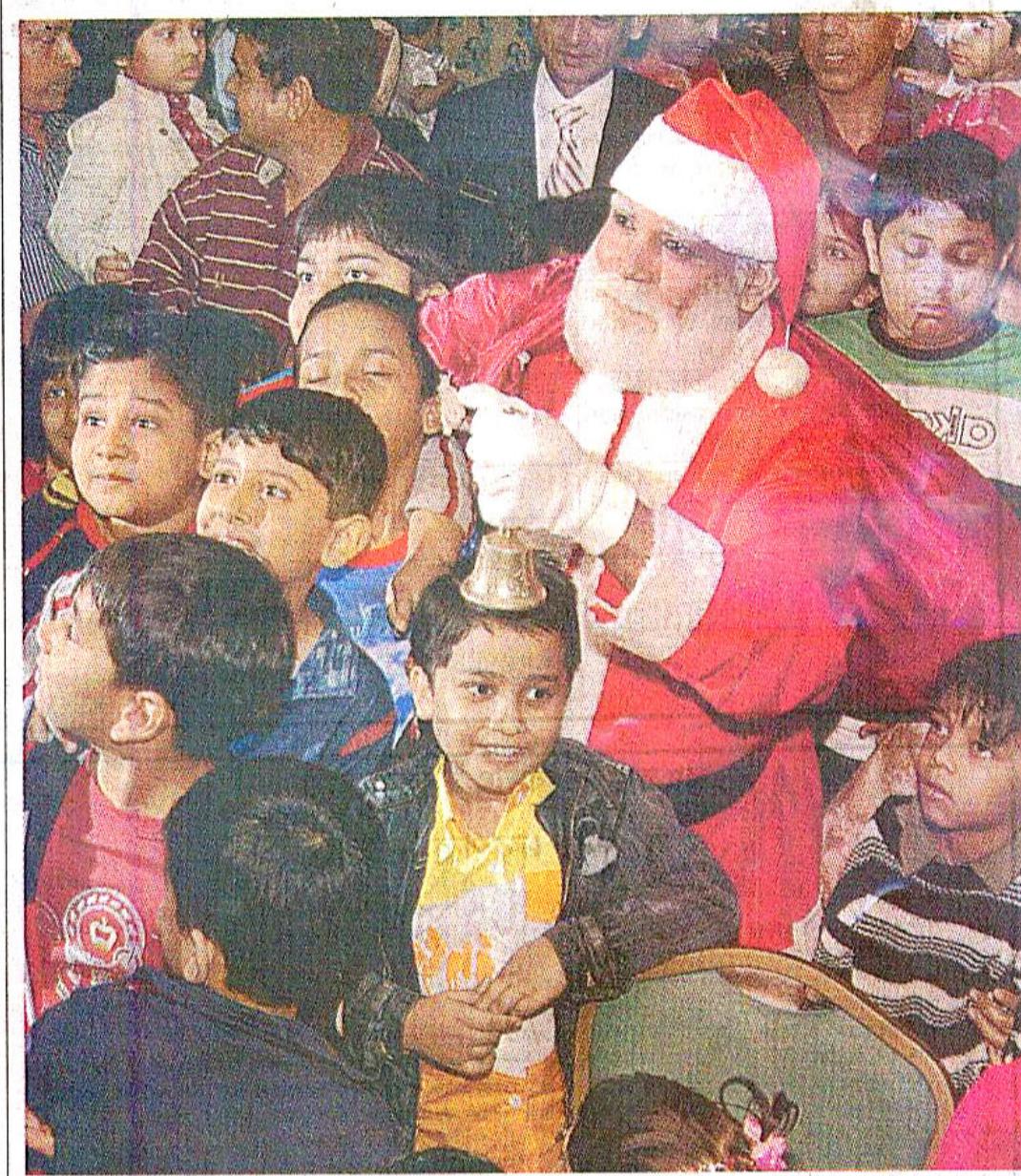


the city that was

The Portuguese were the first among Europeans to step into Dhaka lured by its wealth aiming at only doing business. They set up many khutis (structures) here. However, it was the British who stayed in Dhaka for long. There was no relation between the Portuguese in Dhaka and those in Arakan and Swandip. Those in Dhaka came during Shahesta Khan's regime and set up homes at Sripur.

e-mail: starcity@thecitythatwas.com

SANTA WITH CHILDREN



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Santa Clause, the imaginary old man with red clothes and a long white beard, giving away candies and gifts to children at the Sheraton hotel yesterday. Santa spent the day at the hotel entertaining and telling stories to children as the Christian community celebrated Merry Christmas.

Waning winter chills hopes of quilt makers

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Light chill in the air, gentle sunlight in the afternoon and the thin layer of fog at dusk are the evident signs that winter has finally set in.

Mercury may be dipping down but the bedding stores are just warming up as city dwellers have started visiting the stores for quilts and blankets.

Bedding storeowners at Nilkhet city corporation market, the largest market for quilts and mattresses in the city, however say they are witnessing a downside in business.

"We had been sitting idle the whole month of November and until mid December. Finally we received some orders. Within two days my co-workers and myself finished sewing 15 quilts," said Mohammad Mizan, a quilt maker working at Bengal Bedding Store.

"I remember around 10 years ago we used to get orders for quilts from mid October. Gradually our working season is getting squeezed into hardly one month," added Mizan.

Meteorologists say the tremendous population density, mushrooming buildings, too much energy burning and too many vehicles are gradually warming up the city.

But winter is not getting shortened in the city as many assume, Met officials say. Nature simply cannot manifest its wintry features in this concrete jungle. Just 15 kilometres away from the city feelings of winter and all its flavours can be witnessed.

For quilt makers of the city this account simply translates into fewer work orders, reduced earning every year and changing pro-

fession.

Mohammad Hazrat Ali, a quilt maker of New Firoza Bedding Store at Nilkhet, said, "Nowadays storeowners are using automated machines to prepare cotton, which increased our working speed. But our working period has shrunk to only around a month."

"During peak season I used to make at least 5 quilts a day. Now it has come down to two on average. We have to think of alternative profession in the future if we want to survive," he added. Ali earns Tk 80 to 90 per quilt, which is not enough.

Due

to

sluggish business the number of automated machines at Nilkhet bedding market has come down to three from eight a few years back.

Another traditional feature of the winter, the calls of the quilt makers known as *Dhunuri*, who go from door to door to make and mend quilts, blankets and mattresses is also becoming rare.

Amir Hossain, a *Dhunuri* at Rupnagar, Mirpur said, "Winter used to be our best season. We walked around the streets in different areas and sewed at least two to three quilts a day."

"We used to spend winter period making quilts and the rest of the year making pillows and mattresses. Now we sit almost idle during our best income season," added Ali, who usually earns around Tk 120 per quilt, is now preparing to change his profession.

Ali mentioned that a quilt takes about three hours to make by hand. The only apparatus they use is an *ekta* that looks like a bow and a needle.

Price of cotton used for making quilts, mattresses and pillows has also increased. In the market one kg karpas cotton costs about Tk 180, which was around Tk 150 a year ago.

Bad days for the quilt makers, however, are a blessing for mushrooming hawkers population selling low-cost blankets on the footpaths of New Market, Baitul Mukarram and other places.

It is not just the low-income group, the middle class and upper middle class are also opting for light blankets sold in the streets, prices of which range between Tk 200 and 1500.

Move for DU math bldg in limbo

Funds may be withdrawn if authorities fail to find alternative site

TAIFIQUE ALI

The foundation that offered funds for the planned 10-storey Mathematics Building of Dhaka University has requested the university authorities to find an alternative site instead of the chosen one close to the Central Shaheed Minar.

But the university authorities said they have no other alternative site for the building.

"As we have no other alternative site we have proposed that we can move a little further eastward and use the site where presently there is a coffee shop," said Prof SMA Faiz, vice-chancellor of the university.

The trustee board of AF Mujibur Rahman Foundation is yet to respond to the VC's proposal.

Sources said the trustee board is now reluctant to sponsor the project following public criticism that the structure might overshadow the Shaheed Minar.

The foundation may think of withdrawing from funding the project in case the university authorities fail to select a suitable site, said the foundation officials.

The DU vice-chancellor agreed that Rezaur Rahman, chairman of the foundation, has expressed reluctance to provide the fund.

Recently, eminent architects and academics have expressed grave concern over DU authorities' move to build the high-rise in the close neighbourhood of the Shaheed Minar, as it would mar the sanctity of the historic monument.

They said that the proposed Mathematics Building would grossly deface the very neighbourhood of the highly sensitive monument.

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury said that such a high-rise building within the vicinity of the Shaheed Minar would undermine its supremacy and distinction.

Dhaka University is the custodian of this commemorative structure built in honour of the great Language Movement martyrs.

Commenting on the alternative site proposal of DU, chief

architect of the Department of Architecture ASM Ismail, who is a member of DU's technical committee on building construction and repair, said that it should not be a piecemeal or ad hoc approach.

"The DU must have an overall idea and planning of its physical development," he said.

Prof Nazrul Islam, an urban expert and chairman of University Grants Commission, said the site near the coffee shop is not going to be a very good alternative. "A 10-storey building near the coffee shop is not a feasible idea," he said.

The three-storey building of the medical centre can be developed vertically up to five-storey to meet requirement of the centre, he suggested.

Mubashar Hussain, president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), said that it is in no way a suitable and acceptable option to build the high-rise building 50 yards further eastward from the Shaheed Minar.

It will not make a difference because in that case too the visual attraction of the memorial will be undermined, he said.

"The DU authorities must have a master plan and employ competent consultants to resolve such problems of development works."

According to Hussain, the original road and a part of the university staff quarters by the Shaheed Minar were shifted further northward just to enhance the prominence and visibility of the Shaheed Minar.

Rezaur Rahman, son of late AF Mujibur Rahman, chairs the trustee board of the charitable foundation dedicated largely to promote education.

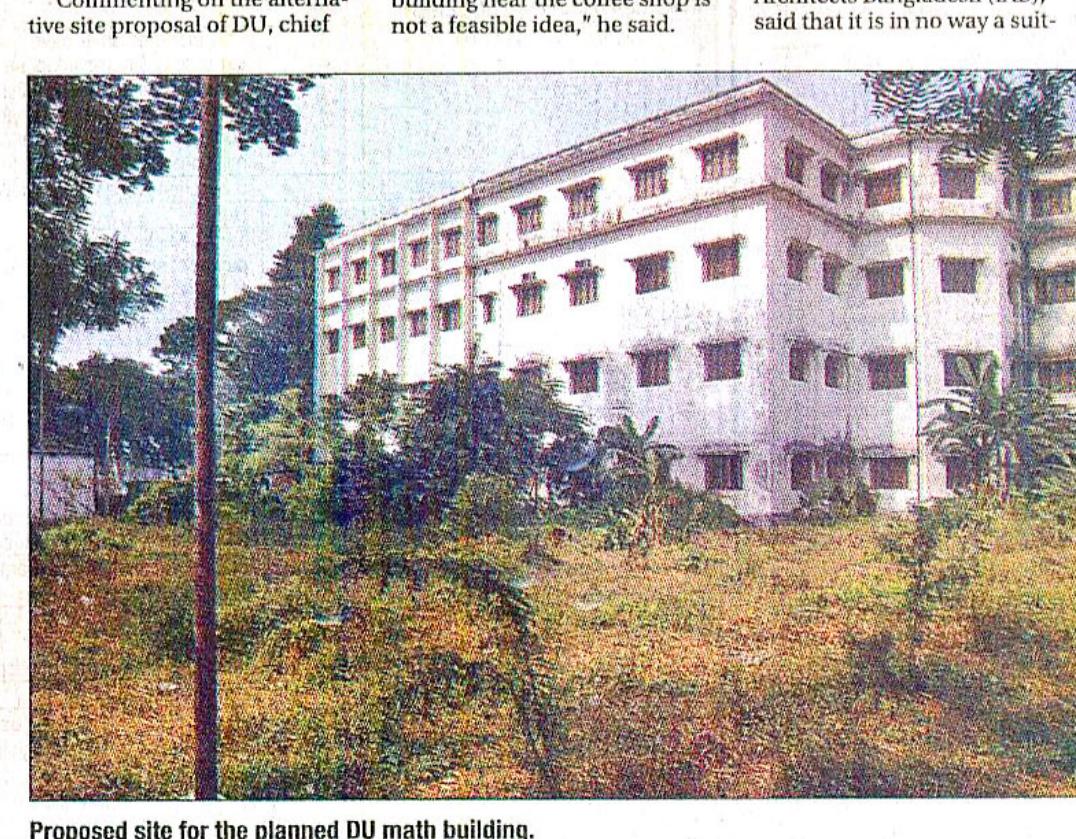
On November 25, Rahman told Star City that the foundation left the issue of site selection with the university authorities and they had no role in it.

"We are not interested to sponsor the building at the proposed site as it has become an emotive issue," said Rahman.

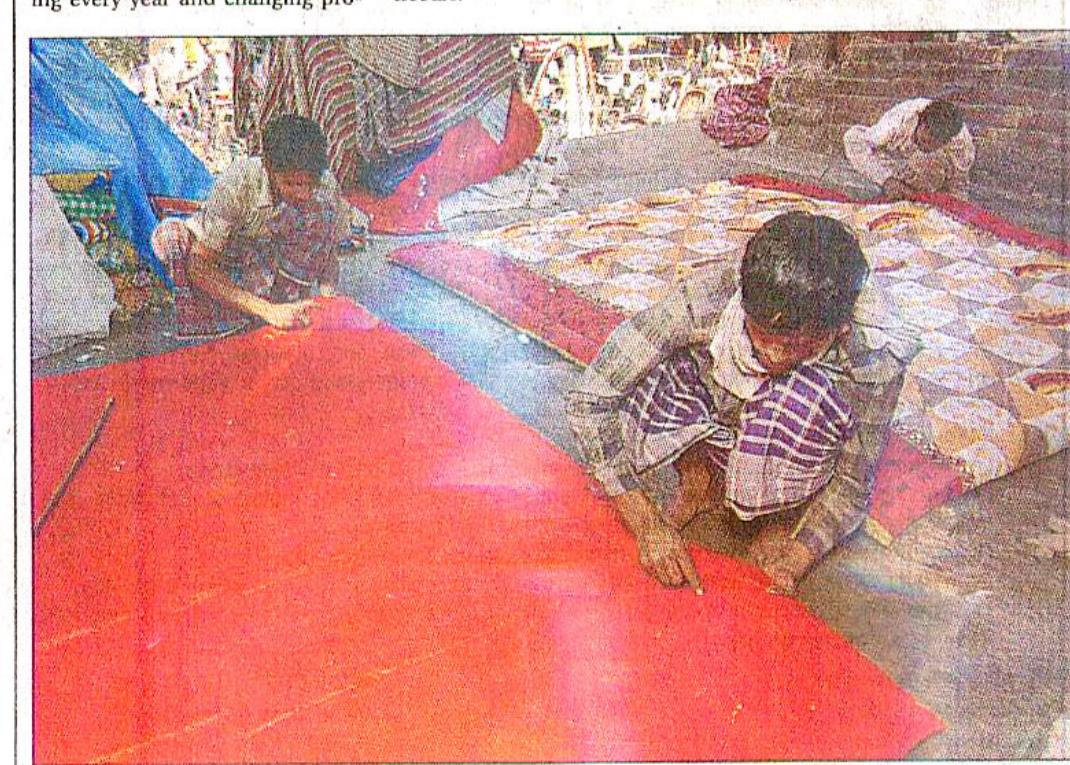
"But the offer is still on and the university authorities have to find an alternative site free from any dispute. It must be acceptable to all."

The building would be named after late AF Mujibur Rahman, a renowned mathematician.

"All we are interested in is to fund for a well-equipped modern building with 10,000 square feet space on each floor," said Rezaur Rahman. "Our goal is to provide the students with more



Proposed site for the planned DU math building.



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