

In old days, the present Shahidullah Hall area of Dhaka University was known as "Baag-e-Musa Kha". According to Hakim Habibur Rahman, the area was a garden and was famous as garden of Muslims. It was named after Musa Kha, who was the son of Isa Kha, one of the famous Baro Bhuiyan. Musa Kha was captured when he lost a war with Subader Islam Kha. However, Subader Islam Kha was very kind to him.

Heritage falls victim to apathy

Elegant structure at Tantibazar being demolished to build high-rise

DURDANA GHIAS

Yet another elegant structure is being demolished in the old part of the city because of lack of sense to preserve the historical buildings and inaction of departments concerned of the government.

The century-old house has become the victim of the recent trend of constructing apartment buildings demolishing flamboyant old edifices.

The building at 27/1, Kotowali Road (previously Hari Prashanna Mitra Road), Tantibazar, is now almost extinct as the owner of the house demolished the structure terming it 'risky' and 'uninhabitable'.

The other part of the building, with the holding number 27/2, still stands but is now at the risk of crumbling down due to the vibration caused by the demolition work of its twin, said experts.

The part 27/2 is a vested property leased by the Deputy Commissioner's office of Dhaka, said Abdul Kuddus Talukdar, a

lessee of this part.

According to the residents of the area the house is at least 70 to 80 years old while conservation architects say that it can be hundred years old.

"Even a few years ago I used to see many old majestic buildings adorning both sides of the streets of Tantibazar. But all of them have been demolished to construct apartment buildings making the area congested," said a housewife of the area who has been living there since her childhood.

According to locals, the house originally belonged to local elite Kartik Sen and his brother Anantlal Sen.

Historians say the building is a remnant of the rich history of Tantibazar, which was once a posh area of the city. The edifice has a rich ornamentation of cast iron work, which adds to its architectural value.

Dr Sharifuddin Ahmed, professor, Department of History, Dhaka University, said that both government and the civil society

will have to come forward to save the remaining historical structures to save the area from going into oblivion.

"Tantibazar was one of the Muslim hubs for which Dhaka was famous. If we lose the remaining buildings of Tantibazar then how we will be able to characterise the area in future?" he said.

"If the owners of these buildings are not properly compensated these buildings cannot be saved," he said.

The building is the only majestic structure in the Tantibazar that attracts the passers-by. Locals said that tourists from different European countries came to take pictures of the building.

During a visit to Tantibazar last week, this correspondent found the 27/1 part of the building standing with long sheets of rags hung from its roof, with all the decorative cast iron grills vanished.

Under the rags the carcass of the once majestic building was stand-

ing, denuded of its ornamental look. The demolition workers were hammering away whatever left of the skeletal structure.

Lack of awareness among the owners of these invaluable buildings to protect those is another reason of the demolition.

Shafiqur Rahman Khan, owner and demolisher of the house, said that he had no idea that this house bore such architectural values. He claimed himself as the owner through a mutual agreement done in 1977.

"Sometimes I saw foreigners come to take photographs of this house but other than that I had no idea about the importance of this house," he said.

"I got the plan of this house passed from Rajuk about a year ago but no government department informed me about the value of this house."

Taimur Islam, conservation architect and convener, Urban Study Group, said the house has a high heritage value because of its unique ornamental wrought iron

work, which is quite rare in the city's old edifices.

"The architectural value of the house is very unique as it displays Creole, a unique feature of architecture, that includes ornamental iron posts, metallic palisades, lattice work of wrought iron and wooden works," he said.

Asked what the Department of Archaeology (DoA), the government entity for protecting heritage buildings, can do to protect the building, Shafiqur Alam, director, DoA, said the building is not a listed historical site.

"Since the building is not a listed site, first we will have to see whether it is worthy of being protected. Secondly, if we find it precious then we will have to obtain the owner's consent," he said.

Asked what can be done now, Alam said an inspection team can be sent to the site but without the owner's consent or mutual understanding between the government and the owner it will be difficult to save the building.

"It is not always possible to send inspection teams because we are working with less manpower," he said. "Besides, taking the owner's consent is a long process. It may take a month or two to convince the owner."

According to the Building Construction Rules of 2006, Rajuk is supposed to keep a list of heritage buildings of its own and take advices from relevant persons and institutes for maintaining the list, said experts.

"The rule leaves scope for Rajuk to extend the list following suggestions from DoA, Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB) or any institute or individual renowned for working with heritage conservation," said Taimur.

"We want Rajuk to play a proactive role to save the buildings with heritage values but are not enlisted. When a building is said to have such values Rajuk can at least assess its true importance by seeking DoA opinion."

Asked about Rajuk's responsibility to save the building, its chairman KAM Haroon referred this correspondent to talk with Rajuk's member (development). Contacted, the member (development) said that Rajuk is responsible for the heritage buildings listed by DoA. Since the building is not listed, Rajuk has little to do to save it.

"Rajuk is responsible for saving DoA-listed buildings and prevent any kind of construction within 500-metre diameter of those buildings," he said.

When asked about the validity of the plan of the building in the light of the Building Construction Rules of 2006, Aminur Rahman, authorised officer of Rajuk, said he will have to go through the files of this house first.



A file photo of the elegant historical structure in the busy alleyway of Tantibazar before demolition, below, close view of some rich cast iron works of the building.

PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



The rich history of Tantibazar

There was a time when Tantibazar was one of the posh areas of the city. It was dotted with beautiful buildings. The area lost that grandeur because of the migration of the rich inhabitants, mainly renowned Hindu businessmen, to India after the partition in 1947, said historians.

Dr Sharifuddin Ahmed, professor, Department of History, Dhaka University, said that Tantibazar was one of the important points of Dhaka where famous muslin (finest cotton) was woven by expert weavers.

"In the early 17th century (1608-1610) around 50,000 army personnel and civilians migrated to Dhaka with Mughal Subadar Islam Khan Chishti. At that time privileges like tax rebate were given to people of different professions from Mughal Subadar to settle down in the new capital Dhaka.

"A place was selected for weavers too. They produced famous muslin and finest

cotton, which was craved by the elites and the ruling class. Often customers came to the weavers' house to take the cloths they wanted and gradually the place wore the look of a bustling market. Therefore the name Tantibazar evolved," said Dr Sharifuddin.

"It was a very rich and thriving area," he added.

Conservation Architect Taimur Islam said that in 1850 an urban revival or redevelopment took place in Dhaka. At that time the Muslim became extinct and cotton trade started to thrive. Cotton fabric was exported to European countries.

Tantibazar, Nawabpur and Islampur were the hubs of the cotton trade.

"The boshaks or cotton traders emerged as the new elite class of the city and shaped an urban revival. As one of the centres of urban revival, Tantibazar has a significant place in the history of Dhaka," he said.

Parks and playgrounds put under microscope

TAWFIQUE ALI

A comprehensive list of public parks and playgrounds owned and maintained by different agencies in the capital city has been submitted to the LGRD ministry, as part of an attempt to take measures to reclaim and restore the public spaces from abuse.

Chief estate officer of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), who is convener of a 10-member inter-ministerial committee instituted for stocktaking, submitted a compilation of lists provided by different agencies concerned on January 27 to the secretary to Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (LGRD) ministry.

But the list was submitted without lists from National

Housing Authorities (NHA) and Public Works Department (PWD), as they failed the latest deadline for submission, which was January 21.

Sirajul Islam, chief town planner of DCC and member secretary of the inter-ministerial committee, said, "We have sent the report containing lists of different agencies to the LGRD ministry without lists of the NHA and PWD."

The lists submitted by respective agencies have basic information and focus on the present use, area, latest status and whether there are any illegal setups in the parks, playgrounds and graveyards, he said.

"The agencies concerned will take actions in accordance with the ministerial instructions on the report," said Islam.

Leaders of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) met the adviser to the LGRD ministry on August 21 and placed a number of recommendations including a demand for restoring the public parks and playgrounds with coordinated maintenance and conservation with community participation.

According to the lists provided by different agencies, the DCC has a total of 49 public parks, including two roadside strips at Fulbaria and Nimtali, 10 playgrounds, six graveyards and two cremation fields at its disposal, said Islam.

Rajdhani Unnyan Kasrtipakkha (Rajuk) has 11 parks and playgrounds and three graveyards in Uttara and 20 parks and playgrounds in Gulshan, Banani, Nikunja, Mohakhali and Badda.

Bangladesh railway has three playgrounds and one graveyard in Dhaka, National Sports Council has seven playgrounds, Directorate of Sports has one playground (Mohammadpur physical training college ground).

The committee at a meeting on January 16 decided that PWD and NHA would have to submit their respective lists positively by mid-day of January 21 but they failed deadline, said meeting sources.

Aim of the stocktaking of the parks and playgrounds is to ascertain what state the city parks are in and to take necessary measures to reclaim and restore them in proper shape.

The 10-member committee was formed at an inter-ministerial meeting on September 5 to prepare and

submit a detailed list delineating state of the parks, playgrounds and graveyards under custody of different agencies within the DCC area.

The LGRD ministry formed the committee to get a comprehensive picture of the city parks.

Public parks and playgrounds under custodianship of DCC for maintenance are utterly at deplorable state with total failure of governance over those scanty breathing spaces, crucially needed for the city dwellers.

Some of the public parks exist only in paper while some children's parks are bare of any features worth the name with the rest seemingly in abandoned condition, according to recent findings of DCC itself and environmentalist group.

That the DCC itself is unaware

of how many parks and grounds it is responsible for maintenance is clearly indicative of how pitiable state they are in.

According to the DCC information guide, it has 47 public parks. According to its estate department records, DCC has 41 parks. According to the latest survey of DCC, it has 49 parks.

There is an unspecified number of city parks and playgrounds that are in possession of different clubs and groups for exclusive and commercial uses with tacit approval of DCC.

Rajdhani Unnyan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) handed over 42 public parks in the capital city to DCC for maintenance by an order in the 80s, according to officials concerned. Many of those are untraceable as parks today, sources said.



A park at Lalbagh and two playgrounds in Mohammadpur and Indira Road areas. The government has recently taken some steps to reclaim and restore the public spaces from abuse.

STAR PHOTO

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.

"The ongoing trial is not trial of Sheikh Hasina but trial of the integrity of the judicial process."

-- Payam Akahavan

Canadian jurist, human rights activist and professor of McGill University Told reporters terming the Tk 3 crore extortion case against Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina 'non-existent' after hearing the deposition of the complainant in court, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"If I wear mask my customers will think my chickens must be infected otherwise why would I be protecting myself? I don't want to scare away all my customers."

-- Mohammad Bilal Hossain

A poultry seller at Karwan Bazar Told a reporter sitting right beside a pile of faeces and feathers, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"I know only one and he is Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim."

-- Azam J Chowdhury

Businessman Told the prosecution chief asserting that he knows only Selim as the accused during the hearing of the extortion case against Sheikh Hasina of which he is the complainant, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias