

A scar on the charming Chummery House

TAWFIQUE ALI

While conservationists decry construction of a 6-storey building on the premises of century-old Chummery House at the city's Topkhana Road labelling the act as ruinous for the magnificent architecture, the government goes on with the work.

Such a tall structure on the premises of Chummery House will spoil the heritage building's aesthetic beauty, said architects and historians.

Chummery House, popularly known as Chameli House, is an integral feature of a unique township set up during the British era, said noted historian Prof Muntasir Mamoon, who has extensively worked on Dhaka's history.

"Chummery House is witness to many historic events," said Mamoon.

Destroying surroundings of the beautiful house mutilating its original view is unacceptable, he said adding that frontal view and entire area of Chummery House must remain intact and unspoiled.

Chummery House used to be the residence of bachelor British high officials. In 1938, it was used as the girl students' dormitory of Dhaka University, according to Mamoon.

During the Pakistan rule and after the country's independence, the building used to be either as government office or residential quarters.

The building was handed over to the Centre for Integrated Rural

Development for Asia and Pacific (Cirdap) in the mid 1970s to run its office.

The Public Works Department (PWD) is constructing the 6-storey building for Cirdap which will hold a conference of the Cirdap member countries there in 2009.

Sub-divisional Engineer of PWD Zillur Rahman said his department will construct three floors of the building in the first phase with a Tk 10-crore fund from the Bangladesh government. The first phase structure includes two conference halls.

The new structure will be built in a way that it will not spoil

of the LGRD ministry on demand from Cirdap, he said.

"The present solid wall was built in 2001 beyond knowledge of the Department of Architecture," the official said requesting anonymity.

The roof of Chummery House, made of red slats, was renovated in 2006 replacing the original building materials with new stuffs. A two-storey building with a conference hall was built in 1995 at the back of the original structure.

An environmentalist group, Save the Environment Movement, organised a press conference in the city on April 2

Chairman of the movement, Abu Naser Khan, said the old building must be kept in its original layout with open lawn and backyard.

According to Prof Muntasir Mamoon, Chummery House, Curzon Hall, Governor House (Old High Court building), the foreign ministry office and the Ramna Green would together constitute a magnificent and charming landscape.

The entire area was elegantly planned as an urban settlement in the Ramna Green at the heart of Dhaka as the new capital of East Bengal and Assam following division of British Bengal in 1905

heritage buildings.

"But the government authorities, particularly the Department of Architecture, appear insensitive and irresponsible to a heritage building like Chummery House," he said.

ASM Ismail, chief architect of the Department of Architecture, said in consideration of the reality of a land-starved country, it is difficult to keep this amount of space unused.

"We have consciously blended the motifs and architectural elements of the old building in the design of the new one," he said. "Architectural features of the new building will be consistent with those of the old one."

He said the authorities will not spoil the existing garden in front of the building. "Not a single tree has been felled on the premises," he said.

Ismail mentioned that two tin-shed structures were built on the premises of Chummery House in 1972 and they have been there for more than three decades. Later, a two-storey building was constructed replacing one of the tin-sheds.

Now the government is constructing the six-storey building at the place of the other tin-shed structure.

Ismail agreed that heritage buildings should be conserved but cited examples of Louvre Museum in Paris, Tate Gallery in London and Museum of Modern Art in New York, saying that extensions took place on those age-old heritage building premises too.

A six-storey building being built on the historic premises at Topkhana Road ignoring objections

the original building or its frontal garden, Zillur said. "It will not obstruct the view of Chummery House."

However, sources concerned said certain original features of Chummery House have already been altered and distorted in the name of renovation by the government.

A top official at the public works ministry admitted that many original features of the building's interior and exterior have been altered and spoilt at different times.

Originally, Chummery House had a see-through boundary wall, which was turned into a solid concrete wall at the behest

on the issue.

Kamal Lohani, a veteran journalist and convenor of the Heritage Conservation Committee of Save the Environment Movement, said the original red tiled roof of the house has been replaced spoiling its originality and aesthetic look.

"It is an architectural relic and a mark of past history with a distinct architectural style that we must conserve for our cultural identity," said Lohani.

"It is not understandable why the government is hell-bent on erecting a new structure on the premises of an old building with distinct architecture."

known as Bangabanga, he said.

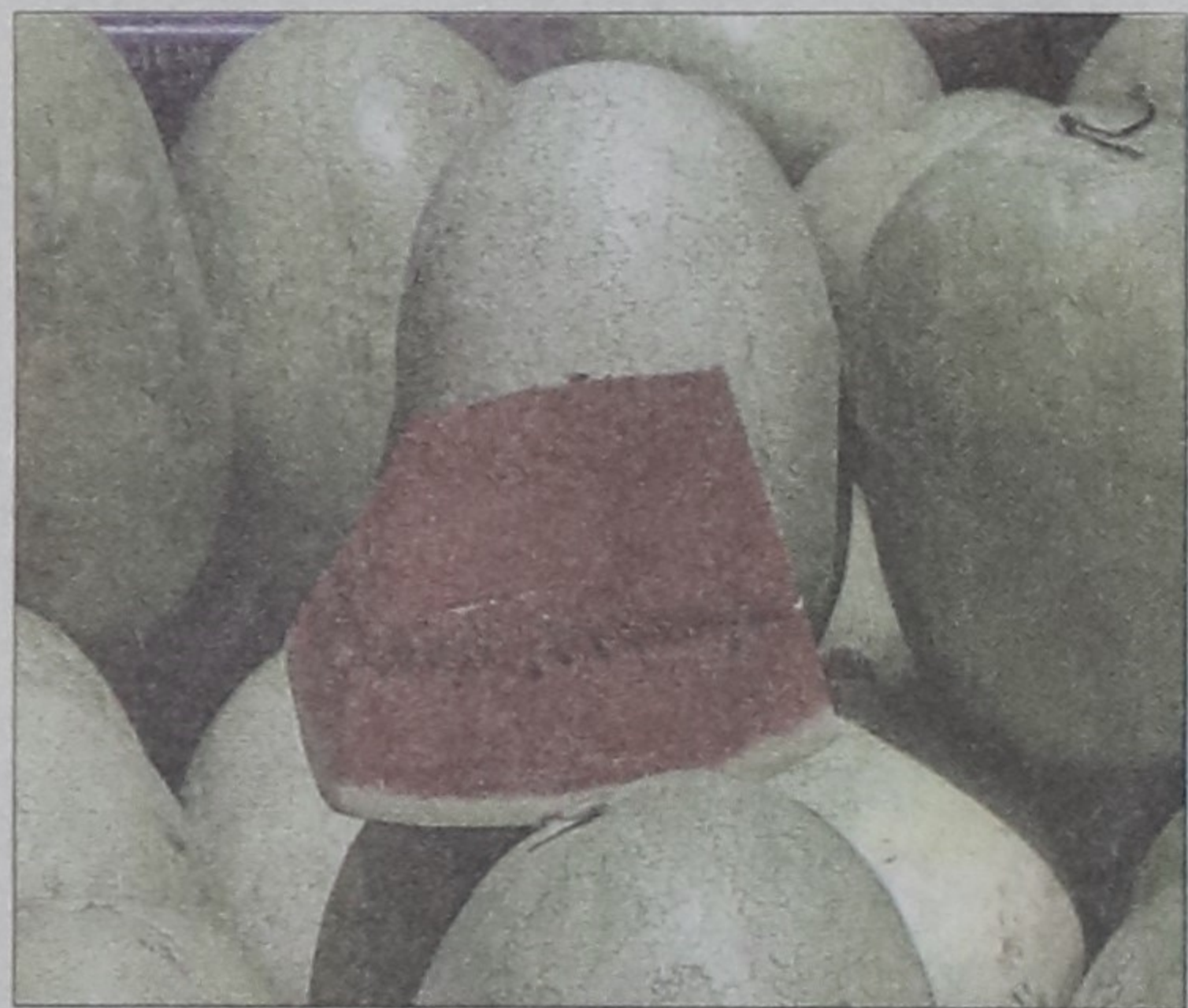
British architect Robert Luis Proudolk designed the layout of the area and some buildings there, said a leading architect.

"It is an example of beautiful town planning," said Mamoon. "We are losing these historical and architectural treasures one after another. The government could have built a new building anywhere else to save the unique entity of this historic house."

Architect Iqbal Habib, member secretary of environmentalist group Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, said that the Building Construction rules of 2006 require all to show respect for conservation of any historic and



A new structure is being built just on the face of Chummery House.



Delectable summer fruits still pretty pricey

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The delectable summer fruits have started to arrive in the city markets, though most of them are still beyond the capacity of the commoner's wallet.

Most fruits are being sold at double the last year's prices. Wholesale traders at Karwan Bazar said the prices would hopefully decline within a couple of weeks.

Traders attributed the high prices of fruits to the increased cultivation and transport costs.

They predict a supply shortage of fruits this season as extreme weather, especially rain during winter and spring, has affected the harvest of some fruits.

Besides, many farmers are switching to paddy cultivation hoping to earn more amid the rising trend in rice prices.

However, watermelon farmers are considerably happy. The first supply of watermelon has arrived from Bhola and some northern districts like Thakurgaon. Mountains of watermelons can be found at various fruit markets in the city.

Price is also mountain high. In the fruit shop a small size watermelon costs from Tk 60 to Tk 80 while a large one from Tk 120 to Tk 150.

Mohammad Aziz, a watermelon trader at Karwanbazar wholesale fruit market, said farmers in some parts of the country have seen a good harvest this season because of the extreme heat, which is suitable for watermelon cultivation.

The white-fleshed melon locally known as Bangi also saw a good harvest. A medium size Bangi costs about Tk 50 to Tk 60 in Dhaka's fruit markets.

Hazi Abdul Baten, a Bangi wholesaler, said the first shipment of Bangi arrived from Shitakundo and Comilla while the next harvest will arrive from Jessore area.

The price of banana, one of

the most affordable fruits, has also increased. A dozen of bananas are selling between Tk 35 and Tk 40, which was around Tk 25 last year.

Banana trader Abdur Rahman from Gopalpur, Chuadanga said summer species shobri and champa have become popular in recent times increasing the demand in the market. A good supply of these bananas has arrived from Chuadanga and Jhenidah.

A small size papaya costs Tk 40 while a large one costs Tk 70 to Tk 80.

Popular for its medicinal value, a good size wood apple sells at Tk 40 while the price of a half (4 pieces) of big size can reach up to Tk 400. One of the wholesalers said, "Wood apple is not grown commercially, so its price is always high."

Jackfruit, the largest edible tree grown fruit of the world, is still quite a few in number in the market. A small quantity of this

fruit has arrived from Chittagong. The price is between Tk 130 and Tk 300 depending on size.

Local ripe mangoes are still not available in the market. However, tanga green mangos can be bought at Tk 60 per kg. A considerable amount of ripe Indian mangos are being sold at around Tk 120 per kg.

Extremely popular during summer for the refreshing sweet water, green coconuts sell at Tk 15 to Tk 20. Chico, also found in the summer, costs Tk 60 per kg.

Custard apple, popularly known as Aata, that had almost been missing in the market are becoming popular again. It costs about Tk 90 to Tk 100 per kg. Superstores in the city revived its popularity, the traders said.

Aata seller Abdul Halim said, "People almost forgot about this fruit. It was grown in small quantity in the household level and consumed by the family itself."

"After some department

stores began to display them people started tasting it once again," he added. "The demand is quite good."

A few baskets of water apple or Jaamrul are just beginning to arrive.

Most customers are now waiting for fruit prices to come down.

A police constable who was surfing the Karwan Bazar fruit market, said, "The way everything is becoming dearer, I don't even dare to look at the fruits."

An employee of BTMC while shopping at Karwan Bazar said, "Rice and other essentials must come first. Then I'll think of fruits, which has now become a luxury."

Another customer Abdul Halim from Tejpuribazar however said, "It is summer time and all the delectable fruits of Bangladesh are available in this season. There is no option but to buy some fruits for the children."



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.

"A judge does not need clapping. He should give judgement by staying within the framework of laws."

-- Chief Justice M Ruhul Amin

Said at a six-day workshop of senior assistant judges organised by Bangladesh Institute of Laws and International Affairs at its auditorium, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"Allah has not created any discrimination. Then why should we discriminate between men and women?"

-- Maolana Muhibullah Mujaddedi

Pir of Shantipur Darbar Sharif

Said at a roundtable on National Women Development Policy 2008 at the National Press Club, on Tuesday. Source: Prothom Alo

"Indeed, there will be some sufferings from CNG price-hike. But how long will you continue to give subsidies on some materials like gas, fuel and fertiliser?"

-- Mirza Azizul Islam

Finance Adviser

Told reporters on the sidelines of a seminar organised by Bangladesh Statistical Association at the National Economic Council auditorium, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"It's a painful matter for us that big loan defaulters thwart the process of loan recovery by filing writ petitions with the High Court while small borrowers, despite being affected by floods and river erosion, are repaying loans on time."

-- Syed Abu Naser Bakhtiar

Chief Executive Officer, Agrani Bank

Told a reporter as four state-owned commercial banks achieved only 21 percent of their targeted loan recovery from the top 20 defaulters of each bank last year, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"I see no alternative to begging now if you do not help us recover the money we spent to get a job abroad."

-- Mohammad Milon

A returnee Bangladeshi jobseeker who was dumped in war-torn Iraq. Told a reporter, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghilas