

Today	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Low: 29 °C High: 35 °C Partly sunny, warm and humid	Low: 29 °C High: 34 °C A couple of morning t-storms	Low: 30 °C High: 33 °C A p.m. T-storm in spots	Low: 30 °C High: 31 °C Cloudy, thunderstorms, humid	Low: 29 °C High: 34 °C Overcast with thunderstorms	Low: 30 °C High: 33 °C Cloudy, thunderstorms, humid	Low: 28 °C High: 32 °C Cloudy, thunderstorms, humid

## A silver lining in the clouds

### Urban development committee to take steps to save heritage buildings

DURDANA GHIAS

At last the government has taken a concrete step to save the heritage buildings of the capital city by constituting a subcommittee that will make a list of the heritage sites and take necessary actions.

Urban development committee, the highest government body to look after the development of the city, in a meeting on May 27 decided to take immediate steps to save the city's heritage sites.

This is the first time the committee, comprising experts and government representatives, has discussed the heritage issue, committee members said.

The meeting also decided to take steps to save Barabari, a magnificent heritage building of the colonial period at Farashganj in Old Dhaka.

A proposal was placed at the meeting to form an 11-member subcommittee comprising architects, historians, representatives from Department of Archaeology (DoA) and other relevant persons working in this field.

"The subcommittee will make a list of the heritage buildings because the present list of the DoA does not include all historically important buildings," said ASM Ismail, chief architect, DoA.

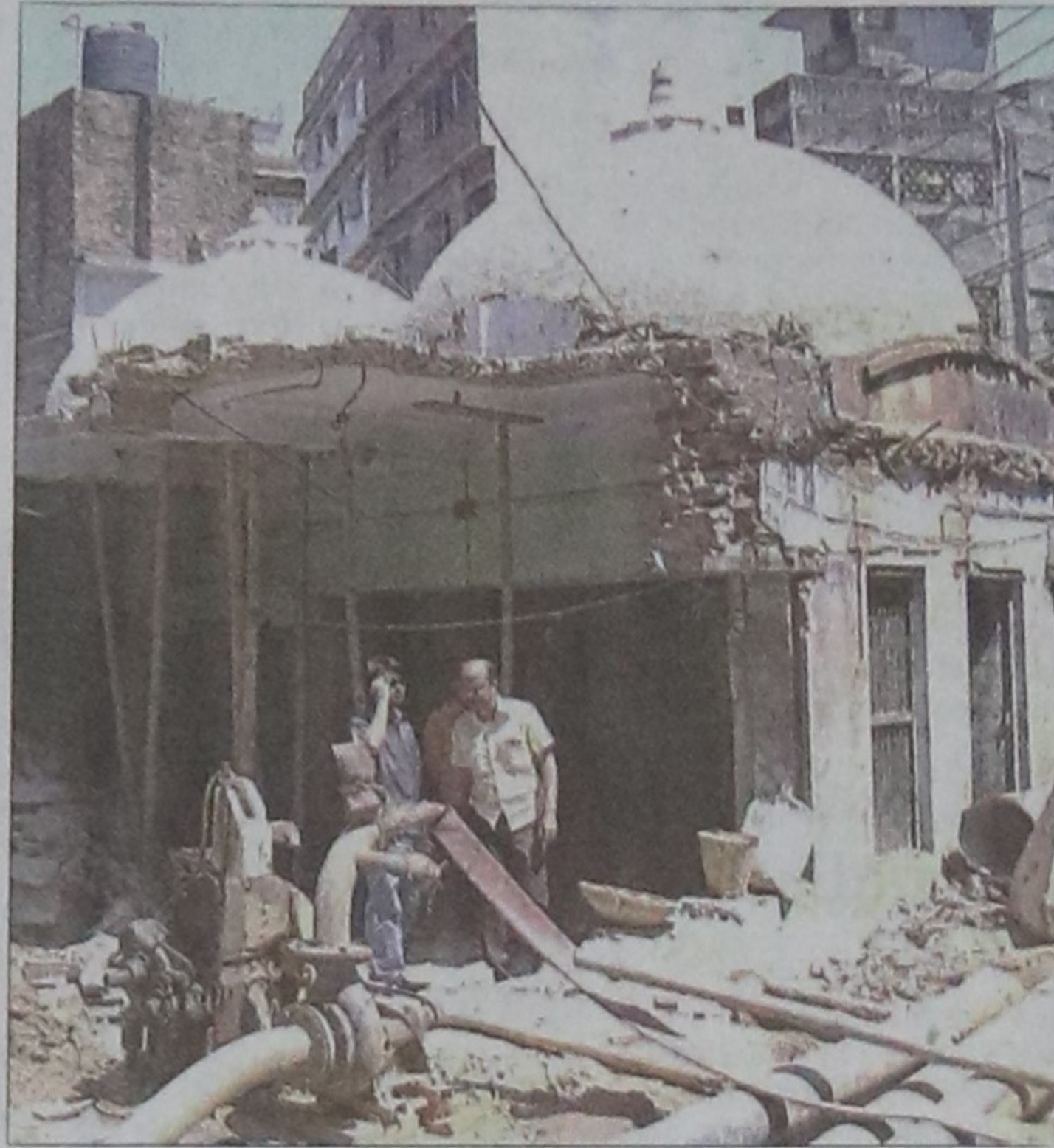
"Besides, DoA has to work under many limitations and is unable to take action sometimes," said Ismail.

He said the subcommittee will be formed by next week.

"The subcommittee will decide which buildings will be saved. If anyone [owner] wants to renovate any part of the building he will have to take permission from the committee," he said.

Asked how they are going to save the heritage buildings, which are privately owned, Ismail said, "We will practise things like transfer of development rights (TDR) where arrangements will be made for the owners to construct building without harming the heritage building. We will also take steps on giving support to the owners."

The subcommittee will be formed according to the National Building Code 2006 that says such



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a committee will comprise noted experts from the fields of architecture, planning, engineering, history, art, literature or any other discipline which may be deemed relevant to identify and save buildings with historical, architectural, archaeological and aesthetic values.

In the last few years several edifices of historical importance were razed to ground or modified to the convenience of the occupiers.

In several reports published in Star City this year on Barabari at Farashganj, Nimtoli Deuri and a magnificent edifice at Tantibazar presented a picture of vulnerable state of the city's heritage buildings.

Star City also reported the steady demolition and vulnerable existence of old edifices like 600-year old Binat Bibi Mosque at Narinda, 150-year old Ruplal House at Farashganj, 120-year old Bhawal Raja's Kachharbari (tax office) and retreat at Nolgola, and 87-year old Shankhanidhi House on Tipu Sultan Road which has turned into an automobile workshop.

Historians, conservation architects and experts working in the field of conservation architecture expressed hope that though late the high-powered body has woken up to save the heritage of the city at longlast.

"To us working in the field of conservation it is a milestone in the history of the campaign to save the heritage of the city," said a conservation architect. "Practical laws are needed to uphold the spirit of saving heritage."

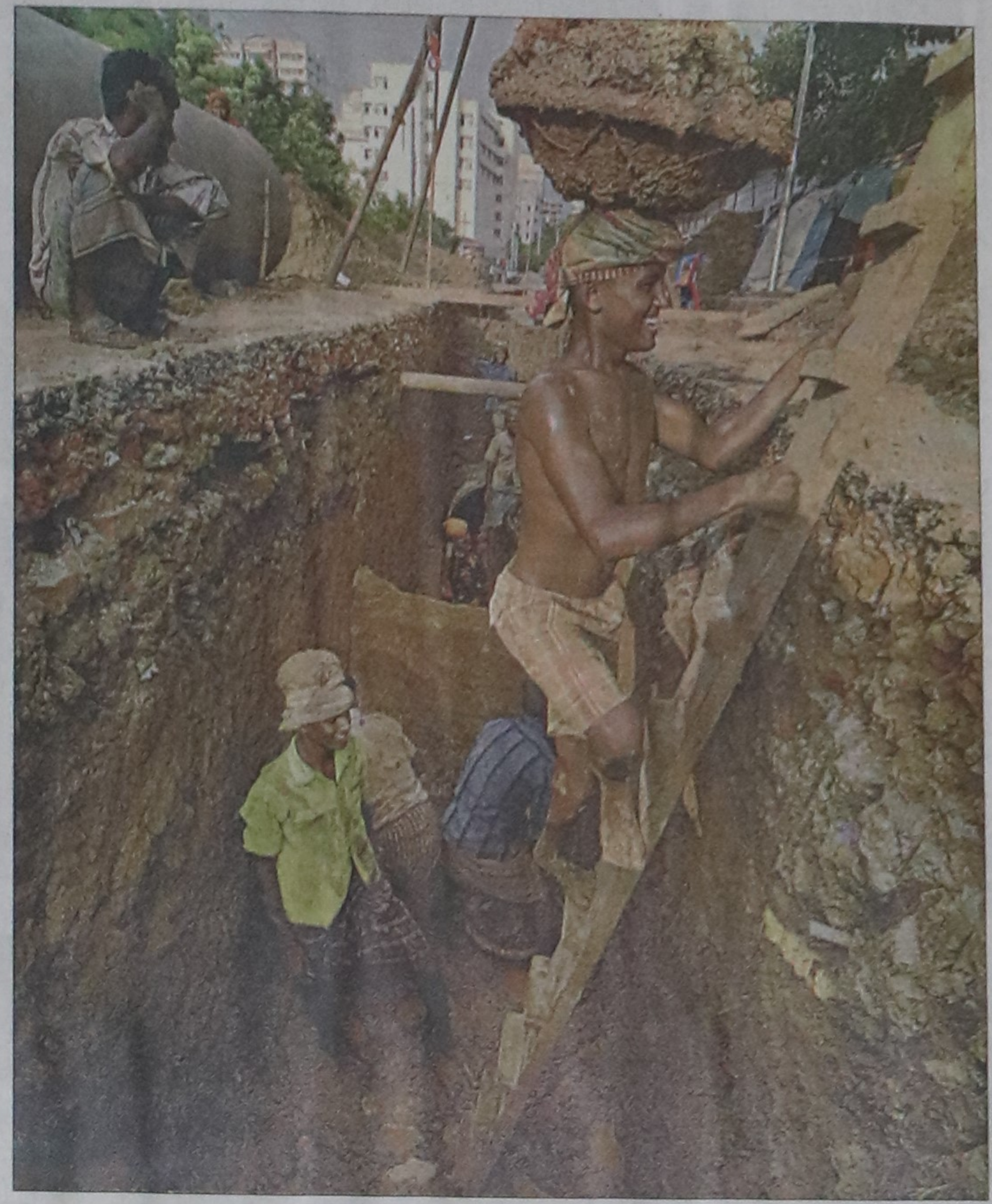
Members of the urban development committee also term it a turning point.

"It was the first time the meeting discussed the heritage issue of the city. We expect that this time something concrete will be done to save heritage," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan, director, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), and a member of urban development committee.

"It was essential to form a such committee to make a list of the buildings because at present we have a short list for our heritage buildings. Many important buildings are not on this list and many are being demolished for commercial purposes," she said.

Bureaucratic tangles are another reason the buildings are being demolished.

"Rajuk has a mandate to save DoA-listed buildings. But many important buildings are being demolished because they are not listed and Rajuk cannot save those because they are not listed. On the other hand, DCC is frequently sending notices to the owners of these buildings to demolish those terming them 'risky'. This is a cycle which should be broken," said Taimur Islam, a conservation architect of Urban Study Group.



Road digging begins with the advent of rainy season. Here digging has blocked a lane of a two-way road beside Shilpakala Academy causing serious inconvenience to the commuters and pedestrians.

## The myth and mystery of CNG refuelling

### Varying mileage raises questions

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Kabir Wahid takes a furious look at the tiny red dot gleaming beside his steering wheel as he waits for the long queue of car in front of him to move.

Spending an hour at a CNG filling station was not in his morning schedule. And it is definitely not one that his clients waiting for him at the office would appreciate.

"I do not get it," said a bemused Wahid. "I refilled my car [with CNG] only yesterday noon," he said.

"After last refilling the car I picked up my son from school in Uttara and dropped him home before coming to pick me up from office. That is barely 50 to 60 kilometres. I do not even use the air conditioner. By no means that should gobble up CNG worth Tk 180," he told this correspondent.

Like Kabir, most owners of CNG-driven vehicles voice concern over erratic mileage of their vehicles. They cannot predict when the gas will finish.

"When I used octane, whenever I refuelled my car I knew the probable distance my car would run and when I would need to refill. But with CNG that sort of speculation would be a wild guess. The four dots in the meter can be misleading at times," said Kabir.

"It was not a big issue before, but since the price of CNG has been doubled, it is hard not to notice the difference in mileage," he said.

Shafiqul Islam, another car owner who drives his own car, shares similar views. Last week Islam took gas worth Tk 210 from a filling station in Moghbazar. It was not before a good two days when he had to queue up in another filling station for a refill.

"I filled my car with around Tk 180 gas (around 11 cubic meters) yesterday and my meter has already gone red this morning," he said. "I doubt the car has travelled any more than it usually does. So, how come the big difference in the mileage?"

"The same thing happens for different filling stations. Even taking gas from the same station gives different mileages," he said. Abdul Sattar, a chauffeur from Jhigatola told this correspondent that his employer keeps scolding him for the frequent need to refill the car with gas.

"As if it is my fault that the car needs frequent refilling," he said. "I cannot help but suspect they are not giving us pure gas. Maybe they are mixing something like

air with the gas like people mix water with milk," he mockingly added.

Kabir Ahmed, project engineer of Navana CNG Limited, bashed the idea of tainting gas when it is being compressed.

"That is impossible," he said. "There is no way you can do anything to spoil the gas coming from Titas. The filling stations have big machines to compress the gas. Trying anything funny may damage the multi-million takamachines," he said.

The filling stations are just compressing the gas coming from Titas and supplying it to their customers. Therefore, if the gas, by any means is adulterated, it is Titas who is to be blamed for

optimum gas pressure. Rarely any station gets the required 12 to 15 pounds per square inch (PSI) of pressure. Most get around 7 PSI, and sometimes the pressure is as low as 3 PSI," said Nayeem Chowdhury.

According to sources at Rupantarita Praktik Gas Company Limited (RPGCL), many of filling stations are using low-end compressors that are barely managing to keep the right balance between the required temperature and the pressure.

According to Nayeem Chowdhury, one cubic meter of gas is equivalent to 1.3 litre of octane. Therefore, the mileage from each cubic meter of gas,



supplying tainted gas, he said. "People raise questions about their car's mileage without knowing what they are talking about," said Jahurul Islam, an engineer from Eastern Filling Station in Mohakhali.

"You would have to empty your cylinder, zero the mileage clock in your dashboard and refill the car with gas. Afterwards, when your car runs out of gas, you repeat the same process and compare the two readings in the mileage clock," he said. "Only then you would get a clear idea of your car's actual mileage."

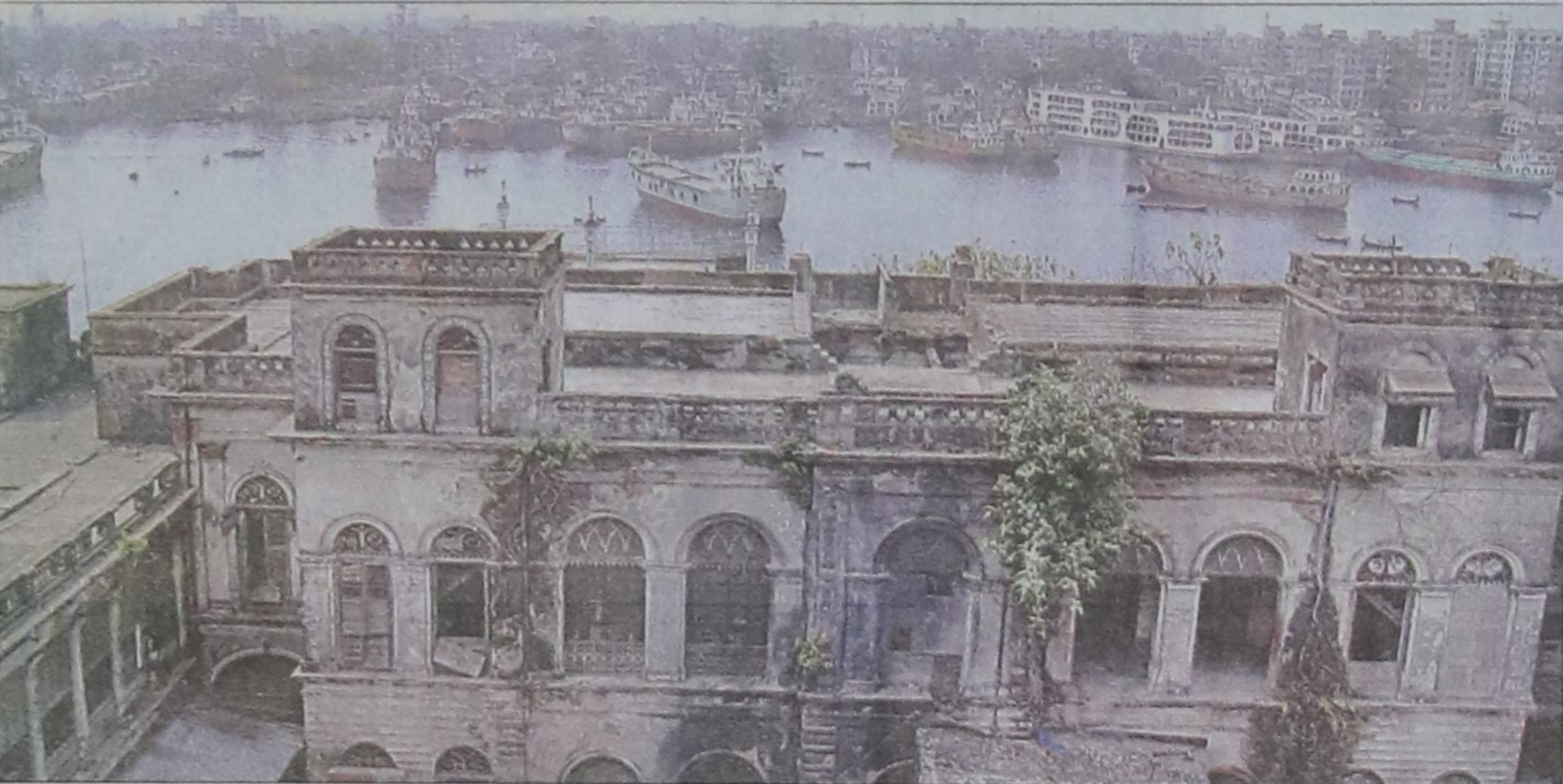
Nayeem Chowdhury from Southern Automobiles Limited, said mileage varies from cars to cars depending on the state of street traffic, condition of the car itself and most importantly, the pressure of the gas when the car was refilled.

"Not all filling stations enjoy

which costs Tk 16.75, would offer the same mileage as that of 1.3 litre of octane.

"A regular 40-litre gas cylinder would hold around 15 cubic meter gas, which is equivalent to about 18 litre of octane, offering a total mileage of approximately 110 kilometres. However, it greatly varies due to the pressure of gas," said Kabir Ahmed.

"Dust, water or other similar particles may also gather up inside CNG cylinder, which also may reduce the capacity of the cylinder and performance of the car itself," he said. "Car owners should do maintain regular servicing schedule to enjoy the top performance and enhanced mileage from the car."



Above, the 600-year old Binat Bibi Mosque at Narinda partially damaged and stands in a vulnerable state, middle, Ruplal House in a sorry state and, bottom, fate of Barabari at Farashganj still uncertain.



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## LEGAL NOTICE SENT TO SAVE BARABARI

A legal notice was served on May 22 by BELA, Ain O Salish Kendro (ASK), Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) and Urban Study Group on Rajuk, cultural secretary, DoA director, CEO of DCC and DMP commissioner asking them to take legal steps according to the law to save Barabari, a magnificent heritage building in the old part of the city.

"The demolition work is withheld for the time being and we are looking up to Rajuk to see what they are going to do to save the building. If the subcommittee is formed and they can do the things they are saying then we need to do nothing. But otherwise we will have file petition at the court to get a stay order," said Taimur.

Asked what can be done if they start demolition before forming the subcommittee, he said, "If they start demolishing again, then we will inform Rajuk. If they do not respond then we will file a petition for a stay order from the court."

## Exotic, fast-growing plants first choice at fair

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The National Tree Fair on the old airport premises is gaining momentum slowly with streams of tree lovers starting to visit the fair that showcases a wide array of plants.

Most stall owners said response from the visitors was poor in the first week of the fair that started on May 24. But on the first Friday (May 30) of the month-long fair, visitors swarmed the fair and showed huge interest in plants.

As usual the main attractions of the fair are fruit plants and ornamental plants drawing majority of the customers. Medicinal plants, seasonal flower and vegetable seeds, cactus, bonsai and indoor plants also attract a segment of the visitors.

Rooftop gardeners are the main customers of the fair while a large segment of the visitors are there just to escape from the monotonous cityscape.

Representatives from corporate offices and landscaping companies are also visiting the fair for wholesale purchase of plants.

According to stall owners, exotic and hybrid plant variety takes over local species at the fair with majority of the customers opting for fast-growing plants.

"Most people prefer hybrid because it takes less time to get

harvest and has the ability to grow more fruits than the local variety," said Md Shahidul Islam, owner of Natore Bahumukhi Nursery, at his stall in the fair.

For high demand, hybrids have become costlier these days, Islam mentioned.

He said grafted trees also have high demand as they reach harvest even faster.

Due to lack of open spaces in Dhaka, city dwellers are gradually becoming interested in rooftop gardening.

Mainuddin, a resident of Bashundhara, bought saplings of a variety of all-season mango. "I want to create a rooftop fruit garden at my just-finished apartment. This is the right place to find appropriate fruit plants that grow in pots."

"Local species need more care but produces smaller amount of fruit. So I opted for hybrids that will produce fruits round the year. Besides, it is not possible to grow local varieties in pots," he said.

"It's really wonderful to see colourful fruits hanging from all these small trees. I don't have enough space in my small apartment to plant any of them, so I bought some indoor plants," said Abdullah Al Mamun from Pallabi.

Bamboo Palm, Chinese Evergreen, Warneckii, Peace Lily, Corn Plant, Marginata are a few indoor plants available in the fair.

Nargis Begum, a resident of Shewrapara, plans to grow vege-

tables on the rooftop. "If I can grow some regular vegetables I may be able to cut down the kitchen costs. Besides, vegetables on the roof come very handy in times of urgent need," she said.

"This is a very good place for free advice if you are having trouble with your plants as there are hundreds of experts in the fair. This is also a good place for my children to learn about trees," Nargis pointed out.

This year 88 private nursery owners from across the country are participating in the fair. Total number of stalls is 109, including 15 government stalls and a few pottery and herbal medicine stalls. The number of stalls last year was 101.

The goal of holding the fair is to promote tree plantation and find a platform for nursery business owners that can help market their products.

Nursery owners from Bogra, Natore, Barisal, Savar, Ashulia, Manikganj, Gazipur are participating in the fair. However, majority of them are from Dhaka's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Khamarbari, Ramna, Doel Chatter, Mirpur, Dhanmondi and Gulshan.

According to the fair organisers, 28,930 saplings worth Tk 8.69 lakh were sold in the first week of the fair.

The fair will continue until June 24 and remain open every day from 9:00am to 9:00pm.



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