

Last vestiges of Jagannath Mandir set for oblivion

DURDANA GHILAS

Last vestiges of the hundred-year-old Jagannath Mandir, one of the oldest temples at Tantibazar, is now at the final stage of its demolition process with the authorities showing utter indifference to its protection.

Walking by the narrow lanes of Tantibazar one will notice the magnificent decorative work of the temple that now stands with only its main entrance.

According to locals, the temple was built by Hariprashanna Dey, Kartik Sen and other elite of the trader community of the area around 150 years ago.

A new building is being constructed inside the temple compound where the old structure has already been pulled down.

According to experts, the two-storey temple was built in late 19th century and is known for its decorative ceramic tiles and moulded tiles.

"The decoration is a hybrid one with the use of *chini tikri* and ceramics," said Taimur Islam, a conservation architect of Urban Study Group.

The doorway of the temple, at the ground floor level, is flanked by two octagonal columns bearing Corinthian capitals. Cupola or small ornate domes are its important features, he said.

Pilasters, relief work, decorated cornice and parapets, lantern-shaped decoration on domes, lotus-shaped base and bay windows are other significant architectural features of the temple.

"Many of the tiles in the facade have come off the wall and are lost. These moulded tiles can be restored in this country with the help of *chini tikri* artisans. Then these will have to be replaced selectively," said Taimur.

"But first we will have to have a detailed documentation and then we will have to replace them selectively," he added.

Babul Das, head of the temple committee, said they are trying their best to save the most decorative frontal facade of the temple but they do not have funds to save it and it looks awkward in front of the new building.

"We know that it is a part of our heritage. But if we are not given any financial assistance from the government then it will not be possible for us to save it," he said.

"At first we decided to keep the facade but the inner sections were demolished to make space because for a long time we are suffering from space problems," he added.

Babul said that the condition of the temple deteriorated in the last ten years. The thick old walls of the temple developed cracks, the iron pillars eroded and the structure turned quite rickety.

"We covered the cracks in the wall with plaster at some places but it did not work. Besides, the structure became risky for the worshippers. We do not have any other plot to build a new temple so we had to take some decisions to build it anew," he said.

Taimur Islam said that strong government support and state intervention are needed to save these old decorative temples.

"Many temples in the old Dhaka have been vanished as a result of the negligence from the authorities. For an example, a temple at 11, Tantibazar is now gone. Another temple, Sithi Mandir, at Nayabazar is also gone. So we need strong governmental support," he said.

Officials at the Department of Archaeology said that unless the owners are given compensation it is very difficult for them to save the old structures.



The decorative facade of Jagannath Mandir stands alone in front of the demolished structure.

Quest for more professional and service-minded cops

DMP sets up monitoring cell

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Metropolitan Police in a praiseworthy bid to make the police stations more professional and service-based has formed an operational and administrative monitoring cell.

"Different operational and administrative orders are made from the office of the police commissioner to make DMP a legal service-based organisation and to establish professionalism at the highest level. Monitoring is needed to see whether these orders are duly followed and implemented," said Tareq Bin Rashid, Assistant Commissioner, DMP Headquarter.

"The cell will investigate if there is any complaint of lax investigation in any case, whether the administrative and operational orders were carried out properly or if anyone is harassed while seeking legal assistance," he said.

The cell will monitor and evaluate the real condition of administrative and operational works at the field level and at every unit, he added.

The monitoring cell includes seven members with additional police commissioner Abdus Salam as the chief.

According to sources in the police, there were lots of complaints from units of DMP and at the field level on executing administrative and operational works. Often problems were created just for lack of clarity in understanding the importance of the work.

Many administrative and operational circulars are issued from the home ministry, police headquarters and DMP headquarters. A lot of officials lack the idea as to which of those are the most important and which should be done as early as possible. The pace of work suffers for mixing up most important, important and usual orders.

The sources said it takes a long time at the unit and police station level to carry out the orders. In case any police officer had a connection with political leaders nothing could be said for the non-compliance.

The initiative was taken to address these problems.

Divisional actions will be taken if anyone is found wasting time in carrying out orders.

To evaluate the state of execution of orders the cell will see whether the related officers have

police commissioner. Saiful Alam Chowdhury, officer-in-charge (OC), Uttara PS, said that monitoring will be very useful in locating and amending mistakes.

"One of the undeniable facts about police is that they do lots of work and have to address a vast number of issues. Therefore, it is hard to give attention to specific issues and important details. If there is a monitoring body then important specific things will get attention. If there is any lapse we



Monitoring cell for cops will hopefully improve their professionalism.

grasped the issued orders, whether they are executing orders according to their spirit or whether any misunderstanding was created in executing the orders. The cell will also monitor whether desired results were achieved in the light of executed orders or the orders are preserved duly. It will also look into the complaints of any negligence and abuse of orders and examine whether those orders should be revised in changing situation. In case of any negligence the report and other important matters will be brought to the notice of the

people," he added.

AKM Daulat Akbar, OC, Ramna PS, said that proper implementation of the monitoring cell will help speed up the work of police.

"It is a very positive step. If implemented it will expedite the work of police and bring more transparency. We are now trying to make the police stations more service-oriented than before and it will help us in that direction," he said. "Monitoring will also help provide legal services to the people," he added.

Challenging task of birth registration

Many street children are ignorant about their birth, even their parents cannot say the date

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Munna is bubbling with joy as he has got his birth certificate, although he is not quite sure what the certificate is actually meant for.

It was totally unexpected to the 11-year-old boy who does not have a permanent home or address. He earns his living by picking vegetables at the Karwan Bazar wholesale market and selling them to small traders at the kitchen market.

"This is the first important document of my life. I heard that it is extremely valuable and it will help me in future," said Munna about his latest possession -- his birth certificate.

Sharmin, another lucky girl of the same age, however, knows exactly why it is so important. "It will protect me in many difficult situations such as child marriage or trafficking," said Sharmin who lives in Bashpotti slum in Tejgaon.

Arafat, a floating child labour at Karwan Bazar who also received a birth certificate, said this would be helpful if he ever wanted to get a driving licence. His dream however is to become a singer by participating in the Close-up 1 or Channel-1 singing competition.

Like Munna, Sharmin and Arafat, around four lakh street children of the city are getting their birth certificates under a special initiative taken by Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) in cooperation with UNICEF, Plan Bangladesh and 11 other partner organisations.

Colonel Dr Md Showkat Ali, chief health officer of DCC, said the project began in last March and they have completed data entry of about 20,000 children. So far around 10,000 street children have received their birth certificates.

"Those who have conscious parents get their birth certificate easily. But these less fortunate

street children are being left out as they do not have anyone to take care of it. Our aim is to include the hard-to-reach children in the system," said Col Showkat.

The official informed that according to Births and Deaths Registration Act 2006, street children without parents or floating children without any address cannot be denied a birth certificate because of their social status.

Under the law parents are required to register the birth of their babies within 45 days.

SM Abdul Quader, project manager (birth registration) of Plan Bangladesh, explained its importance. "Without birth certificate it becomes extremely difficult to address child rights issues. Street children and child labourers are especially vulnerable," he said.

"For children, birth certificate is a protection tool in case of child trafficking, child marriage and

commercial sexual exploitation as it works as a proof of age," he added.

"It gives them nationality and an identity. Most importantly it is the first bond between a child and the state. With its help children can demand their rights to the state."

Field level workers of the project working closely with the street children said that collecting information about street children is extremely challenging.

"Most of the street children without parents or lost children who ended up on the streets do not know anything about their age or the place they were born. The runaway kids usually refrain from giving the right information," pointed out Ashrafun Nahar Rainy, in-charge, Drop-in Centre of Assistance for Slum Dwellers, one of the partner NGOs.

"Many street children who have parents are also ignorant about their birth year or date. Even their parents do not know

anything. It becomes quite hard for us to gather information when the situation is like this," she added.

Rainy also mentioned that often it becomes difficult to gain their trust in the first place. These children move from one place to another, making it hard to trace them. Unwanted newborns and lost toddlers found in the streets are the most challenging to work with.

There are certain provisions and guidelines in the Births and Deaths Registration Act 2006 regarding how information can be gathered about these children and how they can get their certificate.

Several discussion sessions are usually held with the children or with their parents to find out a significant event of the period they were born.

"It could be a flood, cyclone, election or even a football match. This is how we search for a possible age or birth month," said Rainy.

The act also has provisions

that in the case of parentless street children, officer-in-charge of local police station can apply on their behalf.

Birth registration has been made mandatory to get 16 basic services for every citizen.

A birth certificate serves as a proof of nationality and legal age verification document.

The Births and Deaths Registration Act requires a birth certificate to be used as proof of age for a number of essential services such as appointment in government, non-government and autonomous bodies, issuance of passport, driving licence, enrolment in voters' list, land registration, trade licence, marriage registration etc.

The government has set a target to register births of every citizen (adult and newborn) by December 2008 and announced birth registrations free of charge from February 2007 to 31 December 2008. In the beginning the date was 2 July 2008.



Little children struggle to carry water-filled heavy pots from the Maghbazar pump house as the area faces acute water crisis.



Crows, as if now shelterless, sitting on the branches of trees felled Thursday on the premises of Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University.

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.

"Those days are gone. We do not do it anymore."

-- Praful Patel

World Bank (WB) vice-president for South Asia said at a press conference at the end of his two-day visit to the city claiming that the WB now does not tag any condition while sanctioning loans to any country, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

"People want to know under which law police returned the properties seized from the arrestees. The confiscated properties would have to be added to welfare funds and used for people's welfare."

-- Dr Kamal Hossain

President, Gono Forum Told reporters at a press briefing at his Bailey Road residence, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"You don't stand against eviction of indigent people from their ancestral lands, against encroachment on rivers and lands. You don't stand against pollution through industrial waste. Where is your contribution in the field of agriculture? You are speaking of eliminating poverty but you are doing nothing for the betterment of farmers. Rather you are making them poorer by distributing loans on high interest rates."

-- Prof Muzaffar Ahmed

Chairman, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Said at a convention titled Institutional Good Governance of NGOs organised by Sushasonee Jonno Procharabhan (SUPRO) Campaign for Good Governance in the LGED auditorium, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"Did they want to make trouble? Let them."

-- Gen Moeen U Ahmed

Army Chief Said in an interview with TIME magazine when asked if the growing outrage among the political parties and their cadres spill on to the streets in the form of mass people-power protests, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghilas