

# Rescue Pogose house before too late



DURDANA GHIAS

Weis House, one of the magnificent structures built by Nicholas Pogose, an Armenian elite in the late 19th century, at Weisghat in the city is now under threat of being occupied illegally.

Locals say British civil surgeon Dr Weis later bought the house built by Pogose and so it is also known as Weis House. Bulbul Lalitakala Academy has been using the house since 1955.

According to the Banglapedia, Armenians came to this country from Central Asia and flourished in trade towards the end of the 17th century. Many of them turned into business tycoons and built palatial houses in the city.

Ruplal House, one of such houses that turned into a wholesale market at Farashganj, was owned by an Armenian called Aratoon.

Shamsuz Jahan Noor, acting president of the academy, said the house and the land is now under the threat of being occupied by some people.

The land is now a property of the Court of Wards as it is an estate of Sir Salimullah or the Nawab family, said academy sources.

Four big semi-circular arches on both sides of a big portico greet visitors to this grand palace. The portico has a wooden ceiling. Pilasters with projected designs stand in the middle of the arches.

A large open space lies in front of the house where big trees grew up lavishly spreading their branches over gigantic wooden lattice windows.

"These windows are called Louvered windows or khorkhori in local language. These windows were very suitable for our local climate. They were good for cross ventilation and protection from sunlight," said Conservation Architect Dr Abu Sayeed M Ahmed.

The hall on the ground floor has marble floor while rooms on the first floor have wooden floors. A decorated wooden staircase with floral motifs and sculptures in the balustrade is the most attractive thing.

There are four exotic wooden statues on four posts of the railing of the stairs in a state of prayer with an eerie expression on their faces. The sculptures in the banisters represent dancing figures, winged angels and also many forms of working class people.

There are similar wooden works on the top parts of the doors, leading to the vestibule on the ground floor. According to experts, the wood used in the balustrade was expensive Burmese teak wood.

Along spiral staircase, held by a cylindrical tower, leads up to

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THE PORTICO OF POGOSE' HOUSE: Quiet and shrouded in greens in the midst of the hustle and bustle of Weisghat.



Clockwise from left, an exotic statue on the railing of the wooden staircase, partial details of the ornamentation of the balustrade and woodwork on the top part of the main entrance.

theroof.

"The tower has perforated screens and is terminated by battlements," said Dr Sayeed. "The house is in a good condition and has no structural damage. It can be restored. One reason its wooded staircase and floor were not plundered is it has been under Bulbul Lalitakala Academy," he said.

The Pogose family contributed a lot to making educational and other institutions in the city. Pogose School established by them is one of the oldest schools of Dhaka.

"The house and the land is now under the threat of being occupied by some people who were expelled from the academy due to misappropriation of around Tk 55 lakh from 2004 to 2006," said Noor.

"The corruption came to light after an audit done by the deputy commissioner's office. Following the audit we had to take action and expel two members," she said. "The audit is still going on."

"The expelled members are now trying to gobble up the land with the assistance of local influential people. They have a plan to demolish the house and build a super market with apartment building at this place. But if it happens the peace and tranquillity of the academy will be gone forever and we will lose the nice old place," said Noor.

"This is not only the building of the academy but also a part of the heritage of this country. It will be a misfortune if the house cannot be saved."

She said it will be best if the Department of Archaeology takes hold of the house. "Then we will be assured of at least the safety of this place. An executive order from the government can also save the house."

"We have applied to the Land Reform Board for a lease. If we can have the lease then we will be able to put up a signboard declaring the lease and that will help us a lot to ward off the land grabbers," said Noor.

Contacted, two expelled members Amanullah Chowdhury and Nasir Ahmed, denied all allegations against them and said they are trying to save the land from the grip of the other group.

"We are trying to buy the land for the academy but the other party is trying to take hold of the land," said Nasir Ahmed.

Asked if they have any plan to demolish the house, Ahmed said he wants to keep the house as it is because it is a heritage building in old Dhaka.

Monirul Islam, chairman, Land Reform Board, said they have received an application in this regard and it is under consideration of the board.

He, however, could not specify when they can take a decision on the lease. "We have received an application and it is being examined. If there is no legal objection we will give them the lease," he said.

## 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.

"I don't know how it will be determined which is a big case and which is a small one. Does a big case refer to corruption involving a large amount of money or the profile of the suspect? I don't know big, middle or small. To me a case is a case under our jurisdiction, no matter who the person is."

-- Justice Habibur Rahman

Chief, Truth and Accountability Commission (TAC)

Said replying to a question regarding a recent comment made by ACC Chairman Hasan Mashud Chowdhury in which he said his commission will not compromise in the cases involving large-scale corruption, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"Previously, first you had to be a leader and then you could go to the power. But now you become a minister first and then try to turn into a leader."

-- Advocate Sultana Kamal

Former adviser

Said at a book launching ceremony at the Jatya Press Club, on Wednesday. Source: Prothom Alo

"I am grateful to the people for electing me. I want to set a good example. But I am a human being, not an angel. If you see me somewhere surrounded by bad people, who appear to be my friends, or are party-men or even my relatives, please alert me as they can detach me from the people."

-- AHM Khairuzzaman Liton

Rajshahi City Corporation mayor-elect

Said at a press conference held in the city, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"People have utilised the first opportunity to give their verdicts against the BNP-Jamaat alliance."

-- Rashed Khan Menon

President, Workers Party

Told a reporter regarding the sweeping victory of AL in the municipality polls, on Wednesday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"They claim that peace prevails everywhere. Then what is the necessity of the state of emergency?"

-- Zillur Rahman

Acting AL Chief

Told reporters, on Friday. Source: Jugantor

"Now we do not have a piece of forest left that can be called natural forest except for the Sundarbans."

-- Dr Reza Khan

Noted wildlife expert and head of Dubai Zoo

Said at a roundtable titled 'The Vanishing Forests: How to save the Last Bit' organised by The Daily Star at its auditorium, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

"Can you imagine how the expectations of my family, my children were shattered when I returned empty-handed and injured from that cloud-cuckoo-land after two years?"

-- Mukul Hossain

A tortured and deported worker from Kuwait

Told a reporter after the Kuwaiti authorities arrested over 1,000 and decided to deport 850 Bangladeshis over a strike, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias

## DRIVERS LACK MONEY TO BUY 5000 CNG-RUN AUTORICKSHAWS

# Fear of falling into owners' clutches

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The process to add 5000 more CNG run auto rickshaws to the current fleet in the city finally began ignoring all hiccups and previous disagreements.

Sources at Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) told Star City that since publication of advertisement on July 20, around 1400 applications were sold. The deadline to buy and submit the application form is August 31.

According to the rule, only drivers with valid driving licences are allowed to apply for these yellow colour autorickshaws. Allotment will be held through lottery if the number of submitted applications exceeds 5000.

Drivers however say, the new allotment will neither benefit them nor the commuters in case the drivers do not get bank

loans without which they will hardly be able to purchase the vehicles.

Md Golam Faruq, General Secretary, Dhaka District Autorickshaw Auto-tempo Transport Workers Union said, a CNG autorickshaw now costs around Tk 2,80,000 in the market. Registration fee is Tk 7000 and installation fee for manual metre is also around Tk 7000. Cost of installation increases if the metre is digital.

Drivers will have to purchase the vehicles from private importer. Currently only Uttara Motors is the sole distributor of Bajaj autorickshaw in the country. Drivers also fear that the price may increase further like in the previous cases.

"There is much enthusiasm among the drivers but where will they get such a huge amount of money? We don't

have enough property to mortgage to the bank," he said.

"It would have been easier if the government arranged the bank loans. We have urged the government to be our guarantor so that we can obtain loans easily. But there is no response yet from the authorities," he added.

Faruq also feared a possibility of backdoor dealings between mahajons (owners) and drivers.

"Owners will approach drivers with money to buy the vehicles. The driver will be owner only in papers while in reality the Mahajons will control the whole thing. It will also create a new breed of middlemen to do brisk business," Faruq pointed out.

Owners had earlier opposed the decision to register vehicles only against driving licence. They termed it unjust and a

violation of their agreement with the ministry and BRTA in 2002.

ATM Nazmul Hasan, General Secretary, Dhaka City CNG Autorickshaw Owners Association said, "Many owners were deprived when the government in 2001 phased out 31,500 two-stroke three-wheelers and introduced environment-friendly four-stroke ones."

"The government many times promised that the deprived owners would be compensated and the fresh lot of CNG autorickshaws would be allotted to those deprived owners," he added.

Hasan also raised the issue of ability of the drivers. "Where would the drivers get so much money to invest?"

Humayun Rashid Khalifa, director (Engineering), BRTA however told Star City that the

first phase of registration process started smoothly.

"The idea was to bring down the chaos in the sector. If the drivers go for any secret understanding with the owners then we are undone. However we did not receive any complaints from them so far. The first phase of the project began smoothly," he said.

The communications ministry on November 8 last year approved the plan to add 5000 more autorickshaw, the most popular mode of transportation in the city hoping that the new addition will bring down the existing chaos in the CNG autorickshaw sector and reduce public sufferings in the capital.

The number of CNG-run auto-rickshaws in Dhaka city will rise to around 18,000 with the latest addition to the existing fleet of 13,000.



Five thousand yellow autorickshaws to join the green fleet of 13,000 shortly.

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