

On the banks of the Buriganga in Dhaka stands the pink majestic Ahsan Manzil, an example of the nation's rich cultural heritage. It was the home of the Nawab of Dhaka and a silent spectator to many events. It has 31 rooms with a huge dome atop which can be seen from miles around. Ahsan Manzil has been renovated and turned into a museum recently which has now 23 galleries displaying portraits, furniture and household articles and utensils used by the Nawab.

Luxury tomtoms on last legs



SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Gani Mia, the 20-year-old *kochoan* (coachman), was feeling quite blissful sitting on his newly decorated carriage *tomtom*, though yoked to two malnourished horses. Compared to the dreary look of other *tomtoms* standing nearby, Gani's one was shimmering amidst the hustle and bustle of Gulistan.

The red rexin hood with yellow tassels is hanging from four corners over the red seats while the rest of the *tomtom's* body has spotless white decoration.

"This is my dream job. I only wish I could ride my carriage in a more open road. This horrible traffic jam ruins all the fun," said Gani, oblivious of the fact that he has been carrying on with a 200-year-old heritage of the city.

Gani, who has been a *kochoan* for the last eight years, said during weekends he usually stands near places where people spend leisure time such as Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban or Dhaka University campus. "Many people still admire horse carriage and hire it for a brief joy ride on weekends or special festival

days," he noted.

However, during weekdays the carriages become passenger carriers plying from Sadarghat to Gulistan. The route starts from Sadarghat launch terminal and ends at Gulistan near Golap Shah Mazar via English Road, Johnson Road and Nababpur Road.

Although designed for six, these vehicles are usually crammed with as many as 12 persons in every trip. The fare for a trip from Sadarghat to Gulistan

run till the age of 11 or 12. However, most of these animals and the carts are in an appalling condition. Good breed of imported horses are very expensive, he said.

According to eminent historian Prof Muntasir Mamoon horse carriage was on the only mode of transport in Dhaka city back in the 19th century.

The first horse carriage landed in Dhaka from Kolkata in mid-19th century. According to Prof Mamoon, it was brought in

According to Prof Mamoon, there were various designs of this carriage available in Kolkata. In Dhaka, however, the *palki* style became very popular. As the name suggests it was designed following another traditional transport, *palki*.

The horse carriage of today is a slight modification of sedan, used mostly by the zamindars and rich of that period. *Palki* was more popular among the middle class.

The *palki gari* had four

areas such as *tanga*, *jurigari* or *ekka*. These were mostly two-wheel without roof.

Painter and cartoonist Rafiqunnabi (Ranabi) lived for many years at Narinda in Old Dhaka from 1950s. Nabi described the horse carriage he saw during his childhood.

"I was a student of class three when my family arrived in Dhaka in 1953. I saw this fascinating transport for the first time when we got off from the train at Fulbaria station. Outside the station stood the four-wheeled gorgeous ride," Nabi recalls.

He said the horse carriage was a common mode of transport at a time when motorcars were very few in Dhaka. From Gulistan to Sadarghat the fare was Tk 1 in the 1960s.

Prof Mamoon said until 1950s horse carriage was the main transport of Dhaka. After that the city gradually became modern. With the arrival of motor vehicles, horse-drawn carriages could not compete anymore. Its usage died out with the passage of time.

Today only 20 to 30 horse carriages are left in the city to carry on with the century-old heritage. The owners have to take licence from the wheel tax department of Dhaka City Corporation for running the carriage in the street.

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is Tk 12. To hire the carriage for a special occasion it will cost about Tk 400 to Tk 500 per hour.

The owner earns around Tk 1500 of which Tk 500 is spent on feeding the horses.

Usually run by young boys the carriages make six or seven trips daily. Most of them stay at the carriage owner's place. Their job also includes taking care of the horses and the cart.

Gani said most horses are brought from Bikrampur and Mymensingh area and they can

by the Armenian community who used to live in Dhaka at that time and played an important role in trade in Bengal.

"By the end of 19th century horse carriage became the main mode of transport in Dhaka. Following the colonial culture, local zamindars and the elite started using it to flaunt their status," he said.

After the arrival of horse carriages the roads of Dhaka had to be redesigned and renovated with materials suited to its need.

wooden wheels and was usually pulled by two horses. The sitting area had wooden roof and was covered from all sides just like a *palki*. Unlike the ones we see today it was designed for six passengers.

The driver of the horse carriage is called the *kochoan* or *sahis*. Besides, the zamindars always had one attendant standing at the rear of the carriage.

Tomtom is the carriage pulled by one horse. The carriages have different names in different



A quaintly decorated *tomtom* on a city street.

Stadium that bears ravages of neglect

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

After years of lacklustre state, the Birshreshtha Sipahi Mostafa Kamal Stadium at Kamalapur was finally shaping up to be a decent sporting turf for footballers. That was until last month when hundreds of people marched inside the ground for a cultural celebration.

After a daylong merrymaking and hurrah, the visitors left behind a ground that could be easily mistaken for a cattle grazing field. Ground officials spent days scraping chewed gums, peanut shells and cigarette butts off the 35,000-seat football stadium.

"We have been trying to improve the quality of the field so that it can meet international standards," said a ground official, "things have been pretty smooth and it was good enough to host sporting events. But these recent social events did a lot of damage to the ground, undoing much of our work."

"Sporting turfs require careful attention and maintenance," he explained, "when you have a ground full of trash and litters blended with mud and water, it is really difficult to clean them from the ground and prepare it for a match."

The ground officials are still struggling to prepare the ground for a second division football league tournament, he added.

According to sources, the stadium hosted a number of public events including concerts and festivals over the past year.

"A few months back a game was even cancelled to hold a charity concert in the ground," said an official at the Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium.

However, public events making damage to the ground seems to be only a part of the whole story.

Ground supervising officials alleged that the Tk 30.54-crore stadium was completed in a hurry and had a fair amount of construction work left when it was inaugurated in 2003.

"Bulk of the allotted money was pocketed by a section of unscrupulous officials. Only part of the amount was used to hurriedly finish the job and meet the deadline," said an official.

The official told this correspondent that a number of galleries were unfinished when the stadium was inaugurated. Some parts of the stadium need fair amount of construction work while some other have already deteriorated and require immediate renovation.

"It was only recently when a number of shops were handed over to their owners. These shops were not completed although they were allotted to them quite a while ago," he added.

Scores of floating families were also seen living in some of

the poorly maintained and unfinished stalls round the stadium. The rear section wore the worst look with scenes identical to a slum area.

"They (floating people) have been evicted a number of times but they always come back after

some days," said Mohammad Ata, the ground supervisor. "They would not leave the stadium until the shop owners take possession of those isolated shop stalls."

Another official who was seen supervising watering of dying

plants on the stadium premises pointed towards the piles of debris and trash scattered all over. He grudgingly blamed the authorities for not paying heed to the stadium's poor conditions.

"Even collecting these people

just to water these plants took a fair bit of effort, which is supposed to be a routine work. So you can guess the rest of the picture," said the official. "I have been with this stadium since its early days and it really hurts to see it like this," he added.

About the shabby condition of the stadium, sources at the National Sports Council (NSC) told this correspondent that the stadium has not seen any renovation or construction work since its opening in 2003.

"Some social events including a road show took place in the stadium, but there would not be any more of those," asserted arrested Fazlul Azim, regional officer of NSC and the official in-charge of the Birshreshtha Sipahi Mostafa Kamal Stadium.

"This ground is meant for sports, and hopefully it will remain so," he said adding that the stadium is currently holding a second division football tournament.

"There are plans to renovate and improve the ground. We are hopeful to start the work by the first quarter of next year," he added.

Mohammad Ata pointed at the muddy, slippery ground and blamed the sand upon which it was prepared because of the feral nature of the grass.

"The real ground lays about one and a half feet below the drainage system and probably it subsided due to the sand beneath the whole stadium," he said. "We need to fill the whole ground with two feet of soil before planting new grass to make it usable," he added.

The stadium was built over a ground that was previously used as a garbage-dumping site by Dhaka City Corporation. The authorities filled the dumping ground with sand before constructing the stadium, which barely helps the situation.

Locals alleged that a ring of floating people, drug addicts, sex traders and makeshift vendors take over the stadium at night. During a visit to the ground, this correspondent found some bottles of phensidyl (a banned drug) scattered around the ground premises.

"Before they put some security guards, which was quite recently, the ground used to turn into a den of criminals at night. For obvious reasons, we had issues to worry about and felt apprehensive of offences," said Arafat Huda, a resident of Mugda.

Scores of floating families were also seen living in some of the poorly maintained and unfinished stalls round the stadium. The rear section wore the worst look with scenes identical to a slum area



Above, scores of floating people occupying the unfinished stalls of the stadium, below, an aerial view of the stadium.

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 officials of the Bangladesh missions don't feel like visiting the workers."

-- Maj Gen Amin Ahmed Chowdhury
Former ambassador

Said at a discussion on protection of migrant workers' rights organised by Nagorik Sanghati and ActionAid at the National Press Club, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"How will a government ask people not to default on loans or utility bills if the country's legislators are defaulters?"

-- ATM Shamsul Huda
Chief Election Commissioner

Said at a press briefing at the Election Commission Secretariat, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"If the government releases the world champion in corruption then it has no right either ethically or lawfully to confine anyone even for one minute."

-- Syed Ashrafur Islam
Acting Secretary General, AL

Told reporters at a press briefing, on Saturday. Source: Prothom Alo

"Implementation of the verdict remains impossible unless the absconding convicts surrender or are caught."

-- Anisul Huq
Chief State Counsel

Told a reporter after the High Court verdict in the jail killing case finally ended, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"Those coming to the commission at their own will receive special privileges."

-- Justice Habibur Rahman Khan
Chairman, Truth and Accountability Commission (TAC)

Told a reporter about privileges of participating in polls for those directly coming to the commission, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"We expected justice from High Court but did not get it."

-- Zillur Rahman
Acting President, Awami League

Told a reporter reacting to the High Court verdict on jail killing case, on Thursday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"The song 'O re neel doriya' was downloaded one crore times in the last five years. Mobile phone companies did business of a few hundred crores of taka but I did not get even one taka."

-- Alam Khan
Lyricist of the song

Said at a roundtable, on Sunday. Source: Prothom Alo

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