

Bara Katra, in south Chawk, close to the river Buriganga, was a prominent building in Dhaka during the reign of Mughals. In 1822 Doylee wrote: Bara Katra was a pompous, huge and beautiful building. Shah Suja wanted to build his own palace in Dhaka but he did not like the Bara Katra after it was finished. He donated it to Abul Kasem, the chief architect.

Delay in canal recovery affects circular waterway

TAWFIQUE ALI

Reclamation of the one kilometre long Sutibhola canal in Badda to facilitate Dhaka's circular waterway has been delayed as the authorities find it very difficult to remove the earth filled and structures built by a housing company.

Sources in the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) said they will again extend the deadline for completing reclamation of the natural canal, an important component of the circular waterway project.

BIWTA, Dhaka Wasa and Dhaka district administration started the Sutibhola canal reclamation drive on September 11. Authorities expected to complete the job in following two weeks. Later, BIWTA extended the deadline by 20 days.

But the work could not be completed by the deadline. "It will take up to the 15th of November to complete the work," said BIWTA Additional Chief Engineer Abul Qasem.

He said that a housing company carried out a 20-foot deep filling with sand in the canal for its Aftabnagar housing project.

The company in fact, Qasem said, built a 120-foot wide one-kilometre road on the surface of the filled-up canal, installed a 4-foot radius RCC (Reinforced Cement Concrete) drainage pipeline underneath, and also built 10 to 15 RCC sewage pits along the canal. There are around 64 pieces of RCC drainage pipes laid down.

"Though our job was just to



Recovery drive gets tough in Sutibhola canal in Badda, as a private housing company has already filled part of it with earth and erected quite a few concrete structures.

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excavate and reclaim the canal to its original state, we are actually facing an enormous task in removing the road and heavy RCC constructions in addition to earth cutting and removal," Qasem said.

Once restored to its original state, the Sutibhola canal will facilitate city's circular waterway and storm water discharge.

It will play a vital role in dis-

charging Dhaka city's rainwater, enhancing quality of water in Begunbari and Hatirjheel canals and facilitate transportation in the circular waterway, said the engineers concerned.

According to BIWTA Chairman Md Abdul Mannan Howlader, the canal linkage will facilitate transportation of goods by country boats along Badda and Rampura canals from the

rivers Balu and Shitalakhya.

Sutibhola is an integral component of Dhaka's circular waterway and now it will establish a link between Badda canal and Rampura canal.

According to a Wasa engineer, the canal will play a crucial role in Dhaka's drainage system and easing waterlogging. Water from the river Balu will flow into the Begunbari canal through it. The

rainwater will flow along the Begunbari canal, Hatirjheel and Rampura canal and finally fall into the river Balu through Sutibhola canal.

Sutibhola is a one-kilometre stretch of the 10-kilometre long Gazaria canal that flows through Shahjapur and Badda and connects with Rampura canal, BIWTA officials said.

It is part of the work for exca-

vating three canals with a total length of 24km under second phase of Dhaka's circular waterway project.

The three canals that BIWTA has to excavate under the circular waterway project are Gobindapur canal (flowing from downstream of Tongi), Gazaria-Badda canal and Rampura canal. Dhaka Wasa owns the three canals.

Except for Rampura canal, excavation of the two other canals is now going on. Rampura canal's excavation will start soon, Qasem said.

He said they have so far finished 70 percent of the total excavation and earth-removal work and established connections of Rampura and Badda canals with Sutibhola.

The canal will be 21 feet deep from the existing surface and 50 feet wide at the bottom.

But the width will be around 120 feet at the top and a total of 1.40 crore cubic metres of mud will be removed.

Though the initially estimated cost of the canal excavation was Tk 57 lakh, Qasem said now it would cost Tk 35 lakh to be spent out of Tk 70 lakh allocated for the 24-km river excavation work. Japan will finance the second phase of circular waterway.

The government will file a case against the housing company to realise the excavation cost after completion of reclamation work.

"We will place the demand for excavation cost to the Wasa that will accordingly realise the money from the occupier of the canal," said Qasem.

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 have come here not to make any political speech. But I have to say that many of our former ministers, lawmakers and leaders went into hiding when the government sent out leader Khaleda Zia to jail."

-- ASM Hannan Shah
Adviser to BNP chairperson

Said in a public meeting violating emergency power rules at Lodhuya High School ground at Matlab in Chandpur organised by an aspirant for BNP nomination, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"If I answer all your questions in one day then what will I say on the other day?"

-- Khaleda Zia
BNP Chairperson

Said while reporters were plying her with questions at a press conference, on Monday. Source: Prothom Alo

"If Sheikh Hasina's lawyers can direct her case with more skills then they can get what they want."

-- Hossain Zillur Rahman
Commerce Adviser

Said replying to a question about Hasina's not getting bail, on Thursday. Source: Prothom Alo

"1/11 did not come on its own. We, the politicians, made ways for it."

-- Lt Gen Mahbubur Rahman
BNP leader

Said at a seminar, on Saturday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"The state of emergency is the younger brother of martial law."

-- Zillur Rahman
Acting president of Awami League

Told reporters while talking about polis amid emergency, on Tuesday. Source: Prothom Alo

"Relaxing the state of emergency by phases does not mean that the government is withdrawing it due to the demands of BNP and Awami League."

-- Iftekhar Ahmad Chowdhury
Foreign Affairs Adviser

Told reporters after the meeting with the secretary general of Commonwealth, on Monday. Source: Jugantar

"The significance of this date is that if the election fails to take place on this date then a situation of uncertainty will be created."

-- Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud
Economist

Said replying to the questions of reporters at a book-launching programme at the Brac Centre, on Friday. Source: Prothom Alo

Risky living at frail Shankhari Bazar houses

Govt initiative urgent to address the intricate issue

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Several thousand people are living a precarious life at awfully dilapidated buildings in congested, dingy Shankhari Bazar, a 300 years old urban settlement in the old part of the city.

The tragedy on June 9, 2004 still haunts most of the residents who early morning that day woke up with an earthquake-like vibration that ended with a thunderous sound. As the residents came out one by one in the dark alley, they saw the most appalling scene they had ever seen.

Building No 81 of the area subsided to the ground with all its inmates asleep. The collapse of the six-storey building had killed 19 members of a family and injured 30 more people.

The incident worked as an eye opener for every one as most houses of the area are more than 100 years old and in seriously dilapidated condition. Shankhari Bazar is considered one of the most risky areas in the city.

Even four years after the tragic incident residents of the area are still reliving the horror with danger looming over their head. However, they have hardly any option but to languish in these dilapidated old buildings.

Following the incident a technical committee was formed. In November 2004, a total of 672 old buildings were identified as vulnerable to collapse in different parts of the city.

In Shakhari Bazar alone, there are 91 such identified buildings.

In 2006 authorities decided to demolish houses No 2, 3, 10, 11, 15, 21, 22, 27, 31, 32, 33 and 48 as they are facing the most serious threat of collapse at Shankhari Bazar. Officials also announced list of some other houses that can be inhabited again after renovation.

Many plans were made to rehabilitate the residents including plan to replace the Shankhari Bazar area with 12-storey residential buildings.

However to this day, the intricate and sensitive matter still could not be solved with files languishing in red tape as well as for many social dilemmas of the community.

"As the building tumbled



Residents at Shankhari Bazar are living in dilapidated buildings risking their lives.

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down [on June 9, 2004], the electricity went off. We could hear the cry for help from inside the rubble but we could hardly see anything. Even with this memory I am still living here with a ten-member family. With a small income, where will I go?" said Khokon Sarkar, owner of building No 10, listed as one of the most risky buildings in the area.

"This has been my home for 60 years. Four generations of my family lived here. All my relatives are still here. Every inch of this alley evokes memory," he added.

"We simply cannot move from this place whenever the government asks us to. We cannot have faith on our system. Even four years after the tragic incident the officials could not come up with a better plan about what to do with these old buildings," said Anup Sur, one of the owners of building No 62, which is in the list of houses that can be inhabited after renovation.

The residents are no longer willing to accept interference from the government after all this year. Many of the building owners are now not ready to demolish the buildings even if they are rehabilitated.

Advocate Bhola Nath Datta, convener of the recently abolished Shankhari Bazar Panchayat, a traditional local governing body, explains why.

"The social structure of the area is an aspect that needs to be considered. Most buildings of the area have 10 to 15 owners, sometimes even more. Everyone inherited the land, which is often only three to four feet wide," he said.

Originally the buildings were two to three storied. As the list of inheritors become longer every year, along with the addition of new faces in the family, every household added extra room and floors on top. Building No 81 had three extra floors. The area grew dangerously vertical, Datta describes.

"This created a complex situation. Once the properties are handed over who will ensure that all these inheritors will get the land back in equal share and how will one share that tiny piece of land having 20 owners," Datta said.

Fate of building No 81, which is now a small open space remaining as the testimony of the tragic incident is still hanging in balance, he added.

Many owners do not have legal paper for ownership, he said, adding, "Pakistani soldiers committed massacre during the Liberation War. They set fire to these buildings. Most owners lost their papers and because of the type of attachment between neighbours no one really needed

the papers till now."

Historians say part of Shankhari Bazar area was built during the Mughal period and the later part during the British rule. The name of the area derived from the profession of Shankha craftsmanship. Once all the residents of the area were involved with this profession.

The entire area is located roughly on five acres of land. On both sides of the 600 feet long narrow alley, there are 143 houses noted for their unique architectural styles.

Inside these crumbling houses, sunlight hardly ever makes its way through the windows. A riddle of thick eroded walls, dark narrow corridors and steep staircases is a common feature of these households. The alley is packed with buildings leaning on each other dangerously.

"Most of the buildings at Shankhari Bazar underwent unplanned modifications over the years and it has posed serious threat for the houses with rich heritage value," said Mehedi Ahmed Ansary, professor of civil engineering department at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), who has worked on these buildings.

Floors were added to over 100

years old buildings without assessing whether the structure would be able to endure the pressure.

Besides, buildings in the dangerously congested area are awfully close to each other, making many of them leaning against each other on the upper floors.

"Demolition of the buildings may cause further trouble to neighbouring houses as it will lose the lateral support. It happened to building No 81 when the neighbouring building was demolished and earth was dug out to construct a modern building," he noted.

Prof Ansary, who along with many others, considers heritage conservation a better option than demolition, said retrofitting can be a solution although it would require a huge amount of budget.

Sirajul Islam, Chief Town Planner of Dhaka City Corporation, said a meeting of the technical committee held on October 23 had decided to conduct a technical survey for detailed assessment of the buildings at Shankhari Bazar with assistance from the Civil Engineering Department of Buet.

"There is no doubt that many buildings at Shankhari bazar is risky especially those located in ward No 71. The first assessment was based on visual condition of the buildings only. This time we will go for a detailed technical survey," said the town planner.

"After the survey is done, it will be decided whether the buildings need retrofitting or renovation. No matter how we do it the cultural legacy of the area will be respected," he added.



RISKY CROSSING ON VIP ROAD: A rickshaw van being shuttled over a road divider on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue near Karwan Bazar, although the road is off-limit to non-motorised vehicles.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN