

# 93 heritage buildings, sites listed for preservation

TAWFIQUE ALI

At long last, a government-formed expert body has come up with a preliminary list of heritage buildings and sites in the 400-year old capital city for preservation. "We have prepared the first list of 93 heritage buildings and four areas in Dhaka city and submitted it to the works ministry on December 4," said Chief Architect of Bangladesh ASM Ismail said adding that they will prepare more lists in phases.

The list has been made in consideration of historical, aesthetic, scientific, social, cultural, religious, political and heritage value of the structures and sites.

Government's Nagar Unnayan Committee, headed by the public works secretary, formed a standing committee for the job with the chief architect as convener on June 23 last year.

The committee at its 19th meeting on December 28, 2008 endorsed the list.

The Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) is expected to recognise the list officially through a gazette notification and issue public notice in this regard soon.

The development control wing of Rajuk will now notify the private owners of the heritage properties asking them to be cautious in any development intervention.

The Nagar Unnayan Committee has decided that the listed buildings and areas could not be fully or in part be demolished, rebuilt, altered or modified without its approval.

The standing committee has representatives from the Department of Archaeology, Buet, Dhaka University history department, Institute of Fine Arts, Bangladesh Institute of Planners, Institute of Architects Bangladesh, Asiatic Society, Dhaka City Corporation Public Works Department and a heritage conservationist Urban Study

Group (USG).

Prof Muntasir Mamoon, a noted historian who has extensively worked on Dhaka, said that it was a praiseworthy initiative. The committee should make a complete list and send it to the experts concerned. He suggested for a heritage council.

"They should seek and accommodate opinion and recommendations from the architects, planners, historians and those who have worked on Dhaka's heritage

buildings and gazette notification are yet to be done.

He suggested speedy introduction of the concept of TDR (Transfer of Development Right) to compensate the private owners of the listed heritage properties and persuade them to cooperate with the conservation move. The TDR system has been in practice in India and Hong Kong in Asian region, he said.

The chief architect said that they are thinking of TDR

Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) area. It was formed as outlined in the Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC), Antiquities Act 1976, and Dhaka Metropolitan Building Rules 2008.

Apart from specific significant buildings, the committee has enlisted particular roads in four areas including Farashganj, Shankharibazar, Sutrapur and Ramna.

The listed heritage properties will be categorised roughly in three groups of

tee is mandated to enlist such an edifice considering historical, architectural, political, aesthetic and cultural value even if it is not 100 years old.

There are only 13 archaeological sites enlisted by the Department of Archaeology in Dhaka city.

Conservation of heritage properties in Dhaka has always been in a deplorable state.

According to Prof Mamoon, successive governments have allowed destruction of country's priceless cultural properties one after another.

According to Shamsul Wares, a noted architect, there would be hardly any testimony to the history, past traditions and lifestyle if heritage properties are not preserved.

Panamnagar, a township set up by Hindu merchants during colonial era in Sonargaon near Dhaka, has lost its originality and uniqueness as an architectural heritage site in the way of restoration carried out by the government, said experts.

The World Monuments Fund rated Sonargaon-Panam City as one of the most endangered heritage sites in 2006.

Conservationist architect Abu Sayeed M Ahmed said that Unesco refused to declare Lalbagh Fort as a world heritage site because of wrong restoration.

Dhaka University authorities have mutilated original architectural features of historic Curzon Hall in the name of 'repair and maintenance,' according to experts.

Private occupants have demolished inner block of Barabari, a grand building of colonial architecture at BK Das Lane in Farashganj. Ruplal House in Shyam Bazar has been occupied by traders. Shankhanidhi House, an enlisted heritage site, has been leased out by Dhaka district administration for commercial use.



Barabari in Farashganj stands with its inner blocks demolished.



The partly demolished Nawab Bari Gate in old Dhaka.



File photo of the demolished library building at Jagannath College.



Ruplal House in Farashganj is now a storehouse of spices.

treasure to set a modus operandi for conservation," said Prof Mamoon.

Architect Taimur Islam, who represents USG in the standing committee, expressed disappointment over delay in the committee's function.

The works ministry initially directed the standing committee to come up with a preliminary list within a month but the spirit of urgency did not work and it took six months, he said.

Crucial jobs like setting development guidelines, categorisation of the listed

structures in consideration of their heritage value. One group will include structures unalterable at all, another group will contain those could be reconstructed partly and the last group will comprise those could be rebuilt completely, sparing a symbolic part as a relic.

As per provision in the Antiquities Act (Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904), the Department of Archaeology can consider enlisting a historic or archaeological edifice only if it is 100 years old.

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## Electronic billboard that hinders study at a school

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Afia, a student of Tejgaon Government Girls High School, was attending her mathematics class sitting beside the window. While simplifying a differentiation of calculus suddenly she looked out of the window. Outside an electronic billboard was displaying the music video of her favourite song.

For a moment Afia forgot about the math and started watching the video until the teacher noticed her distraction and asked her to get attentive.

"This kind of situation is very common in our school. For a long time we are going through this problem. It is creating noise pollution in the whole area and hampering the academic environment in the school," said Khaleda Ahmed, a senior English teacher of the school.

"It is a problem especially while taking the science, math, physics and chemistry classes," said a science teacher of the school. Students and teachers in the classrooms near the billboard are suf-

fering the most.

"We are unable to shift those classes because we do not have sufficient classrooms," said Khaleda.

Sometimes they display indecent things or videos not suitable for schoolchildren, said teachers.

Snigdha, a student of class 10, said, "Sometimes students start dancing sitting in the class with the music when the teacher is not there."

"Sometimes students keep on looking at the screen for their favourite music videos. Girls often come out in the veranda

during gaps between classes to watch the big screen TV," said Khaleda.

"We even had to issue warning to some girls because of this," she added.

"We informed the Tejgaon Police Station several times about the problem. When we inform them the TV remains shut for some days and after that they turn it on again. So now we have stopped submitting complaint. Last time we lodged complaint in March 2008 before the SSC exam," she said.

Officials at the Tejgaon Police Station said they have nothing to do with the electronic billboard since it is under Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

Asked about it, Commander Maksud, chief conservancy officer of DCC, said that they can take action regarding the billboard if they get any complaint from the school authorities.

"Till now we have not received any written complaint from the school. We shut down the electronic billboard at Shahbagh after we received complaint from Dhaka University students and the National Museum. If we get a complaint from the school then we will definitely investigate the matter and take action accordingly," he said.



The 'disturbing' electronic billboard at Farmgate.

## Two govt schools of same name on same compound

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

The names of the two schools are the same -- National Government Primary School. They share same premises and same playground. But they have two headmasters, separate administration, separate students and teachers.

The two primary schools have been running in city's Mirpur section-2 since 1973. The then authorities recognised the morning shift and day shift of the schools and enrolled them separately.

Another set of two government primary schools is located in Mirpur section-1. Locals said these twin schools, founded in 1965, are still showing the discriminative attitude of the Pakistani rulers who arranged separate shifts for Bangalee and non-Bangalee students.

However, both the National Government Primary School (morning shift) and National Government Primary School (day shift) have expanded over the years and are now running in double shift -- morning and day with around 700 students.

Kanchan Mia, headmaster of the school (morning shift), could not see any logic behind running two government primary schools on the same premises.

"People may think this is one school, but we are two

different schools with separate administration and building," he said. Both the schools used one building for over two decades.

Bashonti Rani, headmaster of the school (day shift), could not say why the two schools with the same name are located on the same premises.

"I was a student of the day shift before independence. At that time it was one school with two shifts, said Rojob Ali, a resident of H block, Mirpur Section-2. "The morning shift was for the Urdu-speaking students and the day shift for Bangalee children.

The Urdu-speaking non-Bangalees dominated Mirpur area before independence.

Daud Masud Babul, another ex-student of the National Government Primary School, said, "Due to pressure from the non-Bangalee guardians, the school administration was very strict against mixing of Bangalee and non-Bangalee children."

Munshi Bazlul Basit Anju, councillor of DCC ward-7, where the National Primary Schools are located, said the school was split because of the discriminatory attitude of the Pakistani rulers. Anju

too studied in a such twin school. He was a student of Bengali Medium Government Primary School at Uposhahor in Mirpur Section-1.

Md Nazrul Islam Khan, director general of the Directorate of Primary Education, said, these schools were established in the Pakistan era and Bangladesh government enrolled most of the primary schools in 1973.

During the enrolment the government combined such joint schools in the city but these two sets of primary schools were somehow left out, he added.



The two school buildings on the same compound in Mirpur.