

100 heritage

FROM PAGE 16
The NUC at its meeting on December 28 decided that Rajuk would publish the notification immediately. But the Rajuk delayed in doing so thinking that publication of the notification might make the job of its special committee difficult.

Dhaka Metropolitan Building Rules of 2008 requires approval of the special committee to implement any sort of land development and construction within 250-metre radius of a listed heritage site.

The NUC at its January 28 meeting again urged the authorities to publish the notification immediately.

Chief Architect ASM Ismail said, "Rajuk was supposed to publish the notification the next day."

Mubasshar Hussain, president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh and a member of NUC said that the committee agreed to review its condition of restricting construction work within the 250-metre radius of the heritage site.

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Irregularities

FROM PAGE 1
The alleged irregularities including donations from VIP prisoners for construction works at the Dhaka Central Jail, the change in the jail directorate's monogram and misappropriation of command funds.

Ministry sources said the committee led by the additional secretary of home ministry has been asked to complete investigation by February 28.

Jail sources said senior jail high-ups received huge donations from some VIP prisoners and renovated a mosque and built sheds for training purposes inside the Dhaka Central Jail.

The high officials took the donations in exchange for giving 'unlawful facilities' to VIP prisoners violating the jail codes, sources said.

Besides, the jail authorities changed the monogram of the jail directorate replacing the picture of boat with that of a pigeon.

Moreover, senior officials allegedly misappropriated several lakh taka of the command funds created with the money of visitors and income from bakery shops and factories inside the jail.

When contacted, acting Inspector General-Prisons Col Dr Ashrafur Islam Khan confirmed the formation of the four-member committee.

Same syllabus

FROM PAGE 1
The same, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said.

Eleven systems of primary education exist in Bangladesh creating sociocultural divisions, he observed.

The minister was speaking as the chief guest at the "English in Schools" (EIS) programme jointly launched by The Daily Star and private cellphone operator AKTEL at Spectra Convention Centre in the capital.

The new syllabus would include the country's language, history, geography and culture, among other subjects, the ministers said.

If one cannot speak mother tongue and does not know the history and culture of the motherland, the bondage with his or her country becomes weaker, he said. A tendency of neglecting Bangla has developed here for some or other reasons, he added.

Citing that education is being downgraded by serious lack of quality teachers and absence of a consistent education policy, the minister said the present government has initiated steps to upgrade the education policy based on the Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission report.

The minister said the education policy formulated by the Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission after independence was upgraded in 2000, but the next government postponed it.

"It has become a tradition in our country that one government formulates a policy and another cancels it. This time we want to change that practice," he said.

"We want to upgrade it with opinions of education experts. This is not a party matter. We are serious about it," he added.

Cruel father

FROM PAGE 16
Government Hospital for autopsy.

In primary interrogation, Abdul Huq said he killed his two children failing to control anger at his father's refusal to give him a share of his property.

He said he drowned the two ignoring their plea for mercy.

"The children of my brother wear fancy dresses and have rich foods as my father gave them shares of his property. But I could not afford those for my children as my father refused to give me a share of the property. So I decided to kill my children," he said.

Abdul Huq has been suffering from mental illness for the last one year, said his wife Fahima Begum with tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Sometimes he claims himself as a member of the parliament or a police officer", Fahima said, adding, "But I never thought he would do something so cruel."

Mohammad Shahidullah, maternal uncle of the two children, filed a murder case against Abdul Huq, his four brothers and their father Mohammad Kalu Mia.

Sub-inspector Masud Khan, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, told The Daily Star that he talked to Abdul Huq's neighbours, who said he has been suffering from mental illness.

"When I reached his house after the murders, I found him taking rest in his room while his wife was weeping," the IO said.

"During the interrogation, he was quiet and gave details about the incident," Masud added.

Sheraton's star at risk

FROM PAGE 1
The hotel made an operating profit of around \$4.79 million in 2008, a 10 percent rise from a year earlier, amid intense competition from its new rivals in the hospitality sector.

Despite such profitability, Sheraton is now leaving the hotel management because of BSL's refusal to renovate the hotel.

Since last June, at least seven international hotel chains including InterContinental, Hilton, Carlson, Marriott and Wyndham expressed interest to take over the hotel management following Sheraton's exit.

But all of them except Wyndham demanded immediate renovation of the hotel by the government, saying the hotel building and its other setups are too old.

Wyndham is likely to strike the franchise deal under the name of Ramada Plaza in mid-February, said a BSL official, asking not to be named. Ramada is a three-star hotel chain owned by US-based Wyndham Worldwide.

Industry insiders said the main reason behind going for franchise is the government's reluctance to renovate the hotel, which means failure to appoint an international hotel chain to operate it.

But the government denied the need to renovate the hotel saying the proposal is 'unacceptable'.

"The condition of the hotel is not as bad as being told by some international chains. We are even making profit with its present condition," said Civil Aviation and Tourism Secretary Syed Mohammad Zubair.

"The decision over the necessity to refurbish it would be determined by the government's own observation, not by any company's unacceptable demand," he added.

The official said the renovation will cost around \$20 million and the government does not have enough money to bear the cost, while the hotel can make profit with its present condition.

At the same time, the government has refused to even renovate the hotel in the next 15 years, as interested chains proposed to keep the hotel closed for a year for renovation.

According to Zubair, renovations will leave 600 Sheraton employees jobless during the period.

According to the job contract, the employees are part of BSL, which will have to take responsibility for all employees. In 1983 when InterContinental left, BSL paid salaries and other facilities to all the staff for five months until Sheraton started its operation in 1984.

Finally, early this month BSL ran an advertisement seeking a franchise company, which was supposed to submit a technical proposal and a financial offer. Four companies turned in proposals by January 31.

"We have failed to find a company to operate the hotel, which forced us to look for an alternative option, such as appointing a company to manage the hotel under a franchise arrangement," said Zubair, also chairman of the state-owned hotel's Board of Directors.

Franchise, an authorisation to sell a company's goods or services in a particular place, is a new idea in the country's hospitality sector.

In line with the system, the government will appoint a franchisee, which will have a deal with an international chain and will be authorised to use the brand name in managing the hotel.

The decision to appoint a franchisee for managing the venture is instilling fear into industry people. They feel the hotel may fail to keep up its reputation or remain profitable, as a franchise arrangement is still an unfamiliar idea in the sector.

Meanwhile, several BSL officials hinted that the government has reached an understanding with Ramada over operating the hotel.

They also said the government has almost selected a company, American Property Management International (APMI), to get the franchise contract.

A BSL official requesting anonymity said a group of BSL staff is working in favour of Ramada, which lacks experience to manage any five-star hotel.

"Ramada desperately wants to operate the hotel and manage it through a franchisee, even after knowing that BSL is not ready to renovate the hotel," he said.

Earlier, among the other international chains, only Ramada Plaza agreed to run the hotel while renovating it.

This same BSL group is pushing the government to undermine the necessity to go for renovation, making the government reluctant over the issue and finally paving the way for hiring a franchise company, the officials said.

The group is now working for APMI, an inexperienced franchise company to manage any five-star hotel, and so APMI is likely to win the contract to use the name of Ramada and manage the hotel, said the BSL official.

However, Zubair denied the accusation and said: "This is the government's duty and responsibility to finalise any decision about appointing any company."

"Let the government do its job," he added.

WHAT SHERATON SAYS
Trevor MacDonald, general manager of Dhaka Sheraton, said the hotel can gain much revenue if it goes into renovation, including modernisation of rooms, kitchen, conference rooms, bathrooms, lobby and bar.

"It's urgent to renovate the hotel to attract more corporate business, now being captured by the Westin and Radisson," he said, pointing to the fact that Sheraton has already been losing corporate business for the last two years.

"The government should have a long term plan for the hotel. The hotel may seem profitable now, but after 10-15 years the profit won't be the same with the present condition of the hotel," he added.

ence to manage any five-star hotel.

"Ramada desperately wants to operate the hotel and manage it through a franchisee, even after knowing that BSL is not ready to renovate the hotel," he said.

Earlier, among the other international chains, only Ramada Plaza agreed to run the hotel while renovating it.

This same BSL group is pushing the government to undermine the necessity to go for renovation