

## Historic Nimtali Deuri to get heritage facelift

ERSHAD KAMOL

As part of its three-year-long programme to celebrate 400 years of Dhaka city, the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh (ASB) has embarked on a project to conserve 244-year-old Nimtali Deuri, the only existing gatehouse of Nimtali Palace Complex.

This historic landmark is now protected by the Department of Archaeology.

The project, supported by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, is scheduled to be completed by next year. A technical committee has been formed to prepare a detailed conservation plan. As part of the conservation work, de-plastering of the inner part of the Deuri has already begun.

The Nimtali Palace was constructed in 1765 as the residence for Jasarat Khan, the then deputy governor of Dhaka province. Instructed by Lord Clive, Lieutenant Archibald Swinton initiated the construction of the palace. The East India took over the palace in 1843.

Since then, the palace has gradually fallen into ruin and it does no longer exist. Only the Deuri, the entrance to the palace, now stands as testimony to the historical landmark.

"The Deuri is the first and only remaining part of Anglo-Mughal architectural heritage in Dhaka," said Project Director Prof Dr Sharifuddin Ahmed, an eminent historian.

The structure of Deuri bears many features and styles from both the Mughal and British eras. It follows the Mughal architectural order in spatial arrangement.

The most significant elements of the Mughal tradition reflects in the kiosks, eaves, pinnacle, merlon shaped battlements on the roof, turrets, high plinth hanging balconies and rectangular panels on the exterior surface, according to a dossier prepared by noted Indian conservator Architect Manish Chakraborti, who was invited



244-year-old Nimtali Deuri

PHOTO: SHAWKAT JAMIL

by the Asiatic Society to conduct a workshop for the technical committee for the conservation of the historical site.

As the testimony to other Mughal style, Architect Chakraborti's paper refers to the thick masonry walls built with small hand-made bricks bonded with thick lime surki mortar covered by lime surki plaster. "This is probably the earliest surviving building that used wooden joists and girders in the roof construction system."

"Two layers of brick tiles covered by lime concrete and supported by timber or iron joists are the most accepted or widely practiced construction system of Colonial period," the paper adds. According to the architects, the polygonal shape of the Deuri is unique that distinguishes it from

other gatehouses of earlier and later period.

The Asiatic Society plans to use the Deuri after the conservation as a museum on conservation and documentation heritage of Dhaka city.

"The historic palace started to fall into ruin from the beginning. It was partly damaged in an earthquake. After taking it over, the then East India Company gradually demolished most of the structures of the palace except the Deuri," said Prof Sirajul Islam, chairman of the Asiatic Society.

In recent times, Dhaka University, Dhaka Museum and the Asiatic Society have modified the structure of Deuri as per their requirement, he added.

However, the Asiatic Society now plans to restore the original state of the Deuri

and conserve the historical site, he said, adding, "We want to take the help of local and foreign experts in this regard."

Appreciating the initiative of the Asiatic Society, Architect Taimur Islam, who has been involved in conservation work on old buildings at Tantibazar, said, "The Asiatic Society should collect the master plan of Nimtali Palace and display it for the public. This will create a scope for research on the development of urbanisation in Dhaka."

Noted archeologist Sufi Mustafizur Rahman, however, said, "Without the involvement of foreign experts and formulation of the conservation guideline, the decision of de-plastering of the inner part of Deuri is unexpected. It might create problem if the Asiatic Society takes much

time to initiate the rest of conservation work."

He also hoped that this conservation work would set an example in the country. "Instead of concentrating on the government-fixed timeframe, the Society should focus on the perfection. A chemist having knowledge on preserving the architectural heritage must be included in the technical committee," he added.

Project Director Prof Dr Sharifuddin Ahmed said, "We have already invited a noted Indian architect to conduct a workshop on the conservation. We will also consider the opinions of local and foreign experts presented at the workshop. We will also make our work policy available for public for further suggestion."

## MoU signed to work on AIDS

METRO DESK

Independent University Bangladesh (IUB) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the UNAIDS to work on the HIV/AIDS issue, says a press release.

The agreement signing ceremony was held at Spectra Convention Centre in the city yesterday.

## INT'L MOTHER LANGUAGE INSTT Complete construction work by December: Nahid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday directed the concerned officials to complete the construction work of the International Mother Language Institute by December.

"We are determined to hold the programmes of the next International Mother

Language Day at this new complex," he said. He gave the direction to the concerned officials while visiting the site.

He informed that around 75 percent of construction work has been finished and the rest will be completed by December. The construction work of the institute began in 2001.

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