

Part of Kalachand temple demolished; inhabitants moving furniture and belongings from the temple building; a vulnerable building housing 10 families adjoining the temple.

PHOTO: PINAKI ROY

Heritage building being knocked down in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Workers of the sebayet (custodian) are knocking down the Kalachand Temple, an endowed property with heritage status, to construct a high-rise at Shakhribazar in Old Dhaka.

Locals alleged that the custodian of the temple, reported to be over a hundred years old, had signed an agreement with a developer to erect the multi-storied housing.

As buildings stand in alignment in Shakhribazar area, the ongoing demolition work of the temple has put the lives of over two dozen families, living at the houses adjacent to the temple, at great risk.

After Bishwajit Dutta Bulu, original custodian of the holy place, died couple of years back, his in-laws took possession of the temple property and initiated the process to construct the high-rise.

The priest, Bijay Bhattacharya, had been forced out of the temple amid threat from the in-laws and a Swachhasebak League leader, locals said.

"The hammering on the temple structure is making its adjoining

structures vulnerable," said Naren Biswas, a resident of a building adjacent to the temple.

"As we protested, they [followers of the Swachhasebak League leader] threatened us with dire consequences," he said.

In June 2004, 11 people were killed and several others injured when a century-old building in the area came crashing down.

The government issued an order in 2009 announcing 142 buildings in Shakhari Bazar area protected.

Dhaka City Corporation and Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha identified 32 houses as highly vulnerable and 91 as risky at Shakhari Bazar in the same year.

Visiting the area yesterday, this correspondent wanted to meet Avijit Sur, brother-in-law of former custodian Bishwajit Dutta Bulu. But he did not show up there to give his version.

The local leader of Swachhasebak League, who was allegedly involved in evicting the temple priest, could not be reached for his comment, either.

A fatal clash of civilisations?

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reaches of Brazil's Envira River, "a few dozen" members of an unnamed Amazonian tribe finally made contact with a settled population 20 days ago. That came four years after a tribal group, reportedly from the same Amazonian tribe, were filmed from the air in 2010. When the images were released in January 2011, they created a worldwide sensation.

It is believed the tribe had been driven across the border from their centuries' old nomadic existence by the activities of illegal loggers and possibly drug-traffickers operating in their traditional territories in Peru. Brazil's Indian Affairs Department, Funai, confirmed that the group had taken the momentous decision to make contact at the village of Sympatico in the state of Acre, more than a week's travel by foot and canoe from the nearest road.

Sympatico, just 25 miles from the border, is very close to the area where a tribe group was filmed four years ago. It is estimated that there are at least four such communities living in Acre, constituting a population of around 600. A further two tribes are believed to occupy territory in Peru. But no one knows exactly how many individuals there are now living in the pristine

forest of the western Amazon.

What is known, however, is that international concern over the presence of heavily armed loggers in Peru has been growing, sparking warnings that their activities could mean the end for the world's last "lost" tribes. The mahogany and teak harvested by the gangs is believed to be destined to be made into garden furniture in Europe or the United States. Under international law the Indians have the right to their own traditional territories.

It is the first time since monitoring of the area began in the 1980s that a tribe has ventured forth willingly.

José Carlos Meirelles, who has monitored this region for the department for 20 years, said the situation was unique. "Something serious must have happened. It is not normal for such a large group of uncontacted Indians to approach in this way. This is a completely new and worrying situation and we do not know what has caused it," he said.

Now is the most perilous time for the Indians, it is warned. For the first time since their forefathers escaped the genocidal impact of the 19th-century rubber boom, they face new viruses – chicken pox, measles even the common cold – to which they

have no immunity. Relocation also brings new threats of conflict with settled groups.

Under Brazilian law the state pursues a no-contact policy, allowing the indigenous groups to choose if they wish to engage with people.

Funai already has doctors and linguistic specialists in the area. At present though the tribe is co-existing with their new found Asháninka hosts. Despite being initially frightened, the Asháninka are said to be deeply moved by the plight of their fellow forest-dwellers.

Sarah Shenker, of the human rights organisation Survival International, which campaigns on behalf of indigenous people, said no one yet knew which language the Indians spoke. "We don't know who they are," she explained. "This is clearly a conscious decision to make contact because they must have felt they had no other choice. They really could face the prospect of being wiped out."

Campaigners say pressure must be brought on the region's governments to protect their lands and abide by the law. It is argued that aerial photos have shown the tribespeople are healthy and that their way of life – hunting, gathering and growing their own vegetables – is viable.

Adilur gets int'l award on human rights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Adilur Rahman Khan, a leading human rights lawyer of the country, has been selected as the honouree for the 2014 Robert F Kennedy Human Rights Award, now in its 31st year.

The award recognises his courageous work uncovering the most serious human rights violations in Bangladesh, and initiates a partnership to support his efforts to promote and safeguard human rights.

Adilur, also secretary of rights organisation Odhikar, was selected from a group of 70 nominees after a months-long process by a prestigious panel of judges, said a press release of the Robert F Kennedy Centre for Justice and Human Rights.

"We are inspired and humbled by his [Adilur] work protecting peace and dignity in his own nation and abroad, and we are proud to honour him with the award," said Kerry Kennedy, president of the centre.

In his reaction, Adilur said "This award is an acknowledgement of the tireless work of human rights defenders presently at risk."

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KL widens scope for Bangladeshis

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[government to government] arrangements. Besides, we will urge employers to hire workers from our country for other sectors," said Expatriates' Welfare Secretary Khondaker Showkat Hossain.

Employment of Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia was banned for around four years from 2009, due to anomalies in the recruitment done through private recruiting agencies.

The ban was withdrawn in 2012 before the signing of the MoU.

The expatriates' welfare ministry at the time set a target of sending a minimum of 10,000 workers to Malaysia a year, but it could send only some 5,000 workers from April last year.

The target could not be achieved due to errors in visa applications. The Bureau of Manpower,

Employment and Training (BMET) submitted documents of over 9,500 jobseekers to the Malaysian authorities between April and December last year.

But the authorities sent back the documents of some 7,000 workers after they had identified errors in their names and photographs attached to the visa applications, said Begum Shamsun Nahar, director general of BMET.

BMET corrected the mistakes and sent the documents again to the employers, causing a delay in the visa arrangements, she added.

It has resolved the technical problems and thus simplified the visa procedure, Nahar said.

Meanwhile, Malaysia witnesses an increasing demand for foreign workers in various sectors, especially construction.

Master Builders Association Malaysia recently said it was facing problems in completing the projects in the pipeline as the registration of foreign workers took a long time.

"It's not like we haven't faced manpower shortages before, but it is more serious now considering the surge in new projects we are getting. We are dependent on foreign labour to get jobs done," The Star, an English newspaper of Malaysia, quoted Matthew Tee, president of the association, as saying.

He urged the Malaysian government to consider extending stay permits of the foreign workers after their three-year visa expires, since they will be skilled enough to support the industry by then.

Tee also requested it to ease the recruitment system.

Japan PM may visit

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extended her invitation to Abe to visit Bangladesh as soon as possible at a mutually convenient time.

Abe accepted the invitation with deep appreciation and looks forward to touring Bangladesh at his earliest convenience, they said and added that Hasina had invited Abe to come to Bangladesh in late August.

According to a recent report of Kyodo News agency of Japan, Abe is expected to discuss Japan's candidacy on the UNSC with the leaders of the two South Asian countries as only one member state from the Asia-Pacific region can win each election and Bangladesh has expressed interest in contesting a seat.

If Abe makes the visit, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is likely to announce the withdrawal of her

country's candidacy for the 2016-2017 non-permanent seat on the UNSC, said the Japanese news agency.

At a news conference hosted by the Japan National Press Club during her trip, Hasina hinted Bangladesh would withdraw its candidacy before the council election in 2015, saying, "For a trusted friend, Bangladesh is ready to do any sacrifice."

"Definitely, we will get some good news during Abe's visit," she said.

Kyodo reported that Abe hopes to agree with the leaders of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka on the importance of the rule of law in the light of China's bid to expand its maritime presence.

Abe also plans to attend a session of the UN General Assembly in New York in late September and explain his drive to make Japan a proactive contributor to international peace.

Bus ploughs

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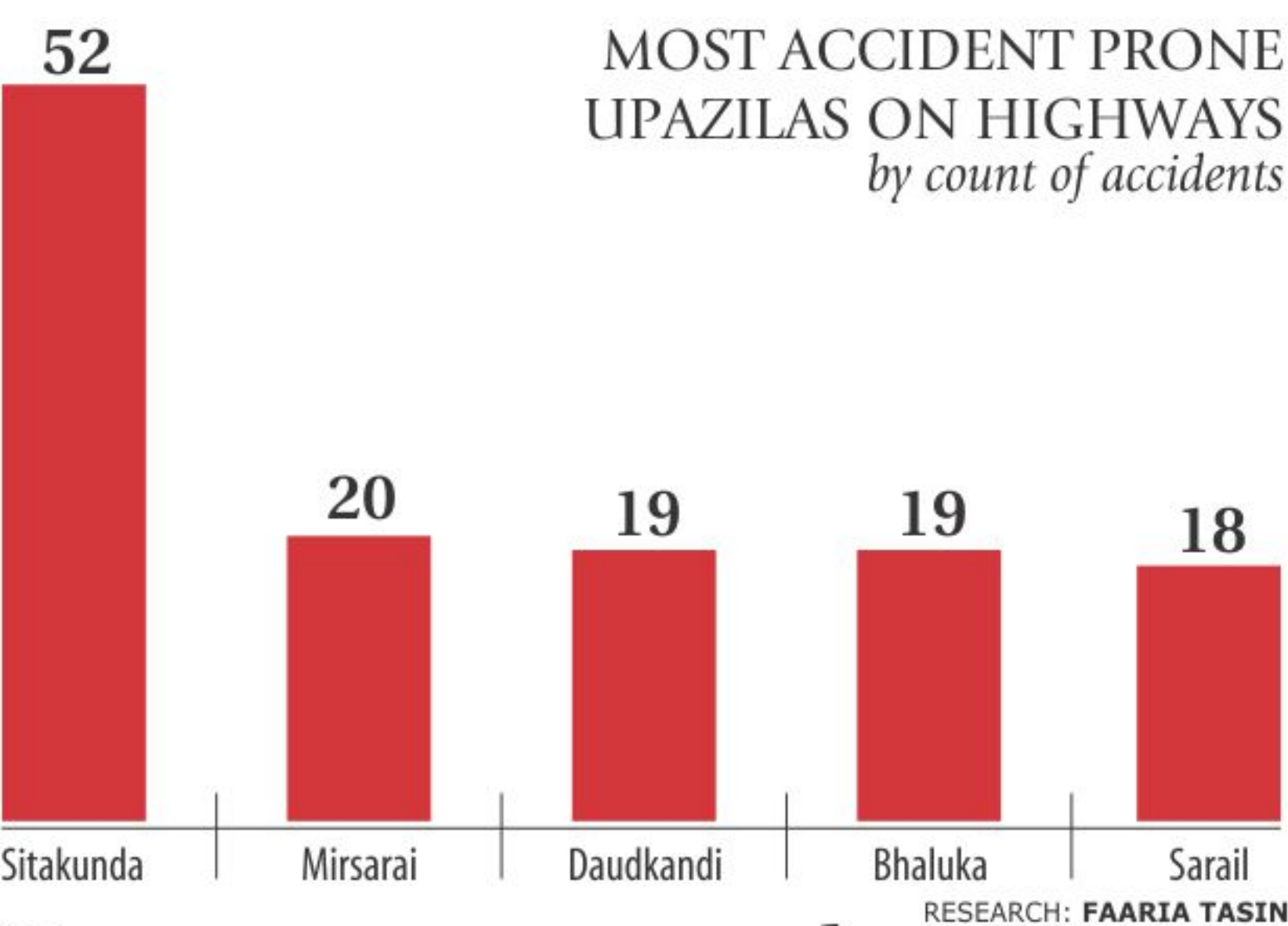
Ziauzzaman, officer-in-charge of Pallabi Police Station.

On information, police went to the spot and found Chan Mia and Shahnaz lying on the road unconscious. They were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared the two dead.

Locals caught bus driver Billal Hossain, 40, and gave him a good beating. Police seized the vehicle at the spot.

Receiving treatment at the DMCH under police custody, Billal said he lost control over the steering and tried to slow the bus down by hitting against the sidewalk.

A similar accident took place on April 2 when a speeding bus veered off the road near the Shahjalal International Airport intersection and ran over pedestrians on a crowded footpath.



Dangerous stretch

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Department (RHD) say there are eight speed breakers in the accident-prone 40km stretch.

All the speed breakers, save the ones near the rail gates and bridges, are totally unsafe and illegal. In some cases, locals built some of those on their own without taking any permission from the authorities. Shyamal Bhattacharya, executive engineer of the RHD in Brahmanbaria, told The Daily Star.

"Accidents happen mostly because of these speed breakers," he said, adding that the RHD removed five speed breakers from the area recently.

According to several officials of highway police, road accidents are very

frequent on the highway near Shohagpur, Bahadurpur, Bertola, Biswa Road, Kuttapara, Islamabad, Bariura, Shahbazzpur, Rampur and Islampur.

Most accidents involve CNG-run three-wheelers, as they often flip over while crossing these speed bumps.

Many unregistered CNG-run autorickshaws and improvised vehicles still ply the highway, although the government has banned those, said police and locals.

Saidul Islam Khan, a traffic inspector in Brahmanbaria, said the ever increasing number of vehicles operating on the highway was making things worse.

He said at least 54 traffic policemen were needed to maintain traffic in the area. They only have 27.

Shady deal

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department has no trained technicians to operate the machine.

For opposing the purchase, Prof Mollah was dropped from the purchase committee, according to different sources at the 375-bed public hospital located at the capital's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

Contacted, Prof Mollah said, "I have told the authorities whatever I had to tell." He declined to comment further.

A doctor at the hospital said the ophthalmology department has an acute shortage of many basic instruments, including operating table, ophthalmoscope, slit lamp and auto refract metre. But the authorities are reluctant to buy those.

Moreover, the department does not have an air-conditioned room that can accommodate the equipment, added the sources.

The National Institute of Ophthalmology (NIO), only five minutes' walk from the Suhrawardy Hospital, bought a Lasik machine a couple of years back. But it is not being used currently.

"If one needs Lasik surgery, he can get the service from the NIO. Why should Suhrawardy Hospital have the same equipment spending so much money?" said another doctor, preferring anonymity.

Mitford Hospital also bought the machine two and a half years ago. But not more than 140 patients received the facility. The government has to spend at least Tk 5 to 7 thousand for using the

equipment for every patient.

The Lasik machine was also bought for Barisal Medical College Hospital at Tk 11.35 crore recently. But it has remained useless in the absence of trained manpower.

Contacted, BMCH Director Kamrul Hasan Selim said the process of buying the machine started around one and a half years ago and the authorities during the term of his predecessor invited bids following the requisition from the department of ophthalmology.

The supplier, SP Trading, would provide four-week training to four hospital staff in Singapore. The four would go for the training soon.

Asked whether there is any need for such an expensive machine in the hospital, the director said BMCH is the only such hospital in the entire south region and having the machine would definitely be helpful for patients.

Sources said the influential quarter helped manage funds for purchase of the machine for Suhrawardy and BMCH hospitals allegedly in exchange of huge amount of money from the supplier.

The Daily Star could not verify whether the supplier bribed anyone to ensure their sale.

SP Trading, local agent of the American Medical Optics (AMO), outright rejected the allegation while talking to this correspondent.

Neither Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) nor Bangabandhu

Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) has the instrument though they have expertise and higher number of patients.

Sources said influential people from the DG health office, health ministry and the hospitals are "behind the deal". The specifications in the tender document have been drafted in a way that their favoured company wins the bidding, added the sources.

Sensing irregularities in the tender process, other bidders protested the specifications at a pre-bidding meeting on June 8.

"The hospital authorities assured us of changing the specifications. But they haven't done it," one businessman said.

According to a source, the specifications mentioned by the hospital matched only with Star S4 Excimer Laser.

Contacted, Suhrawardy Hospital Director Prof AKM Mujibur Rahman outright denied any irregularities in the process.

He said they sent their requirements – based on demand letters received from various departments of the hospital between April and May this year – to the health ministry and the office of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

"For the hospital's prestige and patients' special care, we can buy a Lasik machine," he said, adding that it would also be helpful for medical students.

About the specifications, he said

engineers along with three doctors of the department of ophthalmology, prepared "right specification" in a coordinated way.

He brushed aside the allegations that any specific company has been favoured.

About the opinion that buying such an expensive machine would not be viable when NIO is close by, he said, "How will our students learn then?"

Professor Dr Sharfuddin Ahmed, chairman of BSMMU ophthalmology department, said such a sophisticated and expensive machine should not be in a hospital like Suhrawardy, which has neither the expertise nor a high number of patients.

"If it is really needed, it should be in the BSMMU and DMCH considering the number of doctors and patients," he told The Daily Star. Buying a Lasik machine for Suhrawardy Hospital will be wastage of public money, he added.

According to a World Bank survey in 2012, only 49 percent of medical equipment in the public hospitals in Bangladesh are properly used, while the rest remain idle, uninstalled, dysfunctional or partly used.

MM Niazuddin, secretary to the health ministry, said he has no knowledge about the purchase. "You deal with one or two issues, but I have hundreds to them," he told this correspondent.