

Fight for Bogra's historic soul

MAMUN-UR-RASHID with ANDREW EAGLE

A town removed from its history has lost its soul. With the surprise sale of the over 150-year-old Nawab Palace in Bogra last Friday, despite longstanding efforts by social activists to secure its preservation, Bogra's heritage is threatened.

THE HISTORY OF THE NAWAB PALACE

Within the walls of the palace is the history of the family risen to prominence as zamindar landlords based in Bogra's Manikpur who went on, as Nawabs, to exert substantial local and national influence.

It's a history of interesting characters: when Tohruunessa, the daughter of zamindar Shobdel Ali first learnt of the premature death of her brother, one wonders if the news didn't weigh heavily. It'd been the brother who administered the landholdings. With his demise that responsibility fell to her. Hardly a usual role for a nineteenth century woman; yet one she assumed until her death.

Thereafter husband Syed Abdus Sobhan Chowdhury, the son of a zamindar from Tangail's Deluar, took control. He established an enviable reputation as a progressive who promoted education, transport and social welfare. On 20 March 1894, for his beneficent contributions to society, the British conferred the title of Nawab.

To serve as his palace, Nawab Sobhan purchased the then 3.75 acre property on the Karatoa River's bank from one Mr. Abo, a British indigo industrialist.

In due course the Nawab's daughter Altafunessa married the zamindar of Dhanbari in Tangail, and their only son Altaf Ali Chowdhury took charge of the estate as Nawab Ali, following his grandfather's death.

Interestingly, a claim on the estate was pursued by one Habibar Rahman Chowdhury who alleged he was also the

son of Nawab Sobhan, born of a second wife, a Jew converted to Islam named Mozelle Cohen. But when the case reached Calcutta's High Court in 1919 the inheritance claim was dismissed.

Nawab Ali's son, Mohammad Ali, was born in 1909. More renowned as a diplomat than a politician, he became Pakistan's third Prime Minister in 1953. As Prime Minister he sought to resolve the Kashmir dispute and enjoyed warm relations with Jawaharlal Nehru. He initiated high level contact with China and is credited with aligning Pakistan more closely with the United States.

Ali also developed the "Bogra formula" for a bicameral parliament in which all five provinces could have an equal voice. The formula was never implemented. In 1954 with military support the assembly was dissolved, Ali's Prime Ministerial term done.

Ali had four children: sons Syed Hammad Ali and Syed Hamde Ali with his first wife Hamida Banu; and a son and a daughter, Syed Mahmud Ali and Mahamuda Ali, with his second Lebanese wife Aliya. After his death in 1963 the ex-Prime Minister was buried in the palace grounds.

THE PALACE SOLD LAST FRIDAY

According to sub-register of Bogra's land registry, S.M. Shohel Rana, the palace sale was registered unusually, on the weekly holiday in Dhaka, to be put into effect on Sunday 17 April 2016.

The now 1.55 acres were sold for Tk 27.45 crore to three Bogra businessmen: the president of Bogra's chamber of commerce Masudur Rahman Milon, its vice-president Shafiqul Islam Jewel and former vice-president Abdul Gafur, while an adjacent plot was sold to a building company for apartment construction.

Shafiqul Islam Jewel states there are no legal issues connected to the sale. But the land was sold by brothers Syed Hammad Ali and Syed Hamde Ali without informing Mohammad Ali's other



Despite repeated calls to preserve Bogra's 150-year-old Nawab palace by various organisations and the local office of the archaeology department, the palace was quietly sold off last Friday. Figurines carrying a palanquin and a cannon and a mosaic, inset, at the palace compound.

PHOTO: STAR

children. Sale arrangements were kept under wraps by the registry and even the district administration wasn't informed.

From the second half of last year the movement to protect the property has grown. According to Toufique Hasan Moyna, local president of the Shomhillito Shangkritik Jote, when news arrived on Sunday of the secretive sale many locals were shocked. "The cultural affairs ministry assured us the

property would be saved," he says.

Indeed when Mohammad Ali's youngest son Mahmud Ali visited Bogra from Canada in January he held a press briefing to rally against selling the land.

Protesting the sale, organisation Shoketon Nagorik Shomaj submitted a memorandum at 5 p.m. on Monday to the district commissioner in Bogra. The deputy commissioner, Md. Ashraf Uddin, says the land can still be preserved with direction from relevant

government authorities.

Bogra's regional director of the archaeology department Nahid Sultana notes that a proposal has been sent to higher authorities seeking declaration of the palace as an archaeological site.

It's not the first time palace lands have been sold. A few years after the inauguration of the museum and amusement park on palace grounds in 1998, 63 decimals were sold to a hous-

ing company, while large shopping centres were constructed on northern portions.

Around the world, cities and towns take care to preserve their heritage. When even a flashy new city like Dubai prides itself on the fishing village displays recreated in its museum, the importance of such efforts is undeniable. Landmarks like the Nawab's Palace bring to Bogra self-identity, are a key to the town's soul.

82,500 kids get primary scholarship

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday published the list of scholarship recipients in Primary Terminal Examinations 2015, increasing the number by 27,500. It also raised the stipend amount for the students.

A total of 82,500 students got scholarships in two categories -- talent pool and general -- on the basis of their results in the exams held in November last year.

Of them, 33,000 students will receive scholarships in the talent-pool category and the remaining in the general category, said Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman while announcing the list at a press briefing in his ministry at the secretariat.

"These scholarships have been awarded to prevent dropouts and increase the students' presence in classroom. It is the recognition of their merit," he said.

Earlier, 55,000 students had been nominated every year for the government stipend since the introduction of the public exam in 2009.

The recipients in the talent-pool category will get Tk 300 per month instead of Tk 200, while those securing scholarships in the general category will receive Tk 225, up from the previous Tk 150.

Wong returns

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during Tuesday's resumption of the hearing of the Senate blue ribbon committee that Wong's company, Eastern Hawaii Leisure Co Ltd through its lawyers, turned over the money to their office "for safekeeping" on Monday.

"I understand Mr Kim Wong returned P200 million yesterday? Am I correct?" committee chair Senator Teofisto Guingona III asked.

"Yesterday, your honor, Eastern Hawaii Leisure Company through its lawyers turned over the amount of P200 million to the AMLC for safekeeping to be returned to the people of Bangladesh," Abad said.

Guingona then asked Wong, who was also present in the hearing, whether it was part of the P450 million funds that he promised to return if proven that the money was part of the alleged stolen funds from Bangladesh.

"Yes, Sir. Because I have promised that within a month, I'll return P450 million," Wong said.

Wong earlier told the committee that a total of P1 billion of the \$81 million funds remitted to Rizal Commercial Banking Corp (RCBC) on Jupiter Street, Makati City branch, went to his company, P450 million of which, he said, was debt payment to him by junket operator Shuhua Gao.

He said the remaining P550 million was converted into chips and played in the casino, and only more than P40 million of the amount was left.

Target Trans-Asian railway linkage

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connected with it.

The cost of the revised project, however, is 10 times higher than that of the original project.

According to the planning ministry, the project cost was Tk 1,852 crore when it was approved in July 2010.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the project in April 2011. But it couldn't make much progress due to

changes in the design, and problems over land acquisition and funding.

As of June last year, Tk 313 crore was spent on the project. But its physical progress was only 2 percent.

At yesterday's Ecneec meeting, the PM asked the railway ministry to build a 100-kilometre rail line from Dohazari to Cox's Bazar via Ramu within three years, said meeting sources.

The premier also gave a directive to include the project in the list of the government's fast-track monitoring projects to ensure its completion in time.

With this, the number of fast-track projects would stand at 10.

A planning ministry official said the original project was taken up in 2010 following a feasibility study in 2001.

Around a couple of years back, the ADB carried out a feasibility study. And

major changes were made in the project design on its recommendations.

The rail line was supposed to be metre gauge under the original project. But it has now been changed to broad gauge as a prerequisite for Bangladesh to be linked with the China-Myanmar rail network.

The planning minister said economic zones, Matarbari deep seaport and coal-based power plants would be

included in the economic development plan for the country's south-eastern region.

Once the rail track is built, it would play an important role in the expansion of communication network in the region, said Kamal.

A survey was conducted in 1890 for setting up a rail line from Dohazari to Gundum via Cox's Bazar, but it is yet to be laid, he added.

AP, Reuters, NY Times among 2016 winners

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report was an investigation into the mistreatment of workers in Southeast Asia used to supply seafood to American supermarkets and restaurants. The coverage resulted in the freeing of 2,000 slave labourers and sweeping reforms, the board said.

The reporters "found captive slaves, countering industry claims that the problems had been solved," AP Executive Editor Kathleen Carroll wrote in her nomination letter to the Pulitzer judges.

"US customs records show the (slave-peeled) shrimp made its way into the supply chains of major US food stores and retailers such as Wal-Mart, Kroger, Whole Foods, Dollar General and Petco, along with restaurants such as Red Lobster and Olive Garden," the AP reported in the series of 10 articles.

The New York Times, with a record 117 Pulitzer prizes and citations before this year's announcement, added two more in 2016, taking the prize for international reporting in addition to its photography award.

The Boston Globe, the Tampa Bay Times and The New Yorker magazine also won two awards each. In total, the board handed out prizes in 21 categories, selected from about 3,000 entries.

In the awards for letters, drama and music, the musical "Hamilton" by Lin-Manuel Miranda won for best drama. The Pulitzer board called the Broadway hit "a landmark American musical about the gifted and self-destructive founding father whose story becomes both contemporary and irresistible."

Viet Thanh Nguyen won the fiction award for "The Sympathizer," an immigrant story about a "man of two minds"

and two countries, Vietnam and the United States.

The board awarded the history prize to the T J Stiles book, "Custer's Trials: A Life on the Frontier of a New America."

MIGRANTS AT SEA
The Reuters photo coverage of Middle Eastern migrants arriving in Europe was led from Greece by Yannis Behrakis, chief photographer for Greece and Cyprus and the Guardian newspaper's 2015 Agency Photographer of the Year.

The team captured a series of images of migrants crowded on flimsy sea craft and their first moments upon reaching Europe.

"We showed the world what was going on, and the world cared. It showed that humanity is still alive," Behrakis said. "We made for these unfortunate people's voice to be heard. Now with a Pulitzer, we feel that our

work has been professionally recognized."

Some images showed families rushing ashore, flailing away in the water or collapsing on the beach. Others juxtaposed the rafters at sea with a cruise ship or a leaping dolphin or the setting sun.

The Reuters photo staff was named as co-winner for breaking news photography along with Mauricio Lima, Sergey Ponomarev, Tyler Hicks and Daniel Etter of The New York Times, also for their images of the migrant crisis.

It was the third Pulitzer for Reuters, a unit of Thomson Reuters, having won for international reporting in 2014 and for breaking news photography in 2008.

The Tampa Bay Times and the Sarasota Herald-Tribune shared the 2016 prize for investigative reporting. The two Florida newspapers won for

collaborative reporting on violence and neglect in the state's mental hospitals.

The Tampa Bay Times took a second Pulitzer, with three of its reporters being honored for showing the consequences of a school board turning some county schools in to "failure factories."

The prize for national reporting went to the staff of the Washington Post for developing a database on fatal police shootings and those likely to fall victim.

Alissa J Rubin of The New York Times won in the international reporting category for her stories on the inhumane treatment of Afghan women.

The Boston Globe's prizes were in the feature photography and commentary categories, while The New Yorker took prizes for criticism and feature writing.

DB claims Shafik admits meeting suspects in US

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Shafik Rehman is currently on a five-day remand in a case filed over an alleged plot to kidnap and kill Joy.

Monirul said Shafik had admitted meeting four persons who include the three convicted by a US court over bribing an FBI special agent to collect confidential information. They are US-Bangladesh citizen Rizve Ahmed Caesar, former FBI special agent Robert Lustyik and his "contact" Johannes Thaler.

The police have in their possession records of the meetings including the dates of those, he further claimed.

The DMP official, however, did not confirm if in those meetings they had discussed anything concerning Joy.

Monirul, who also heads the DMP's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit, made the claims hours after a team of the Detective Branch raided Shafik's apartment and office at the capital's Eskaton and seized some documents from there.

On Saturday, plainclothes detectives detained the pro-BNP intellectual. Shafik's wife Taleya Rehman said the cops entered the residence posing as journalists seeking to interview him. Police, however, denied impersonating newsmen.

At the briefing yesterday, Monirul claimed that Lustyik, in exchange for money, agreed to provide Caesar

information about Joy such as the holding number of his apartment, his car's licence plate number and his movements.

In the meantime, Shafik flew to the US in 2012 where the fourth person, a US-Bangladesh national, escorted him to a meeting, he claimed.

Caesar also had couriered some documents to daily Amar Desh Editor Mahmudur Rahman while Rehman received some documents through email, he claimed.

Asked why the names of Shafik and Mahmudur Rahman had not come up in the FBI probe, Monirul said the US investigators only probed the allegations of leaking of their information and identified only those involved in the process.

The DMP official further said Caesar's father Mohammad Ullah Mamun, vice-president of the BNP's cultural wing Jasas, had introduced his son to Shafik.

Asked about Mahmudur Rahman's alleged involvement, Monirul said detectives were looking into it.

A plea to show Mahmudur arrested and to put him on remand in the case is scheduled to be heard by a Dhaka court on April 25, he said.

response to a query.

Shafik, who also holds British citizenship, worked in various media outlets, including the BBC, but came in the limelight after becoming editor of the weekly Jajaidin in the 1980s.

According to the case statement, Caesar's father Mamun and some top leaders of the BNP and its allies met in the UK, the US and various places of Bangladesh before September 2012 and conspired to abduct and kill the PM's son.

In March last year, Caesar was convicted by a US court for bribing an FBI special agent to collect information regarding a Bangladeshi political figure.

The US Justice Department did not name the figure, but it is believed to be Joy.

In a Facebook post on March 9 last year, Joy, also ICT affairs adviser to the prime minister, accused BNP leaders of conspiring to abduct and kill him.

JOY'S POST
Meanwhile, Joy picked on the DMP official's claims and said this proves Shafik Rehman's involvement in the conspiracy against him.

"Confidential FBI files on my location in the US were hidden in a secret place in Shafik Rehman's home. He admits to receiving them from convicted former FBI agent Robert Lustyik," he said in a Facebook post.

"He also held several meetings with Rizve Ahmed Caesar and Johannes Thaler, the other two who were convicted by the US for plotting to kidnap and kill me ... Anyone want to try and lie about this anymore?"

RAID ON SHAFIK'S RESIDENCE
Around 12:30pm, detectives took Shafik to his Eskaton house and seized some files and documents, family sources told this newspaper.

A team of around 30 detectives came in three minibuses and 10 to 12 of them, including three top officials of the Detective Branch of police took part in the hour-long search. They scoured also the office of the Democracywatch, an NGO founded by Shafik and his wife Taleya Rehman, added the sources.

Detectives took away several documents and files containing information about Joy, according to the sources.

Taleya, however, claimed her husband had collected those documents only out of his journalistic and personal interest.

"As a journalist, he used to get information and documents on different issues and he would preserve those. But that does not mean that he believed in those information or would publish those without verification."

"When the detectives were looking

for the papers, my husband himself handed those over to them," she said.

DB OFFICIALS MAY FLY TO US
A three-member DB team is likely to fly to the US in connection with the investigation of the case.

DB Deputy Commissioner (South) Mashrukure Rahman Khaled, who may head the team, has confirmed this.

The other members of the team are Additional Deputy Commissioner Rajib Al Masud and Senior Assistant Commissioner Hasan Arafat, who is the investigation officer of the case, he added.

Mashrukure, however, could not say the exact date and time of their departure.

BNP TO CONTACT FBI
The BNP will contact FBI to know what information the agency has provided to the government over the alleged plot against Joy.

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and DB police alleged that Shafik Rehman along with BNP leaders were involved in the plot. So it is necessary to know first what information they provided to the government regarding the matter," a senior BNP leader to The Daily Star.

The party has taken the decision last night in a meeting chaired by Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office. Senior leaders, including standing committee members, attended the meeting.