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Bangladesh written by Dr Abu Sayed M Ahmed and published by the UNESCO in 2006, "All the outer surfaces are profusely decorated by recessed rectangular panels containing niches and ended in a straight parapet with rows of blind merlons. All the outer surfaces are covered with Chini-tikri (Chinese ceramics), a popular surface treatment material of colonial period. Instead of typical multi-coloured floral Chini-tikri ornamentation, they introduced the finest example of monochrome pattern, such as the recessed surface has darker tone of Chini-tikri tiles than the projected surface of the façade."

Almost a decade back, the Dewanbari



PHOTO: FATIHA POLIN

The present condition of the main residence of the Dewanbari complex.

complex comprising a palatial residence, a three-domed mosque, a pond and a graveyard was declared a "heritage site" through a gazette notification on February 2, 2009.

However, according to the current owner (fractional), who is a fourth-generation member of Alhaj Janab Ali's family, so far not a single step has been taken by the relevant authorities to conserve the heritage site or its surrounding areas.

In fact, in the last decade or so, following the gazette, Bashir Ahmed himself has paid countless visits to the Rajuk office and to the Department of Archaeology, but to no avail.

Upon calling both offices, the authorities kept on insisting it is the other party's responsibility to protect the heritage site in question.

In the years since the Gazette notification, Bashir Ahmed has tried to put up some resistance against the degradation of his beloved home. But, with so many stakeholders, the conservation of the heritage site has become a matter of personal risk for Bashir.

The defacing of the compound started when a major portion of the pond was filled up and a road was constructed from the central ghat of the pond, adjacent to the mosque.

"The ghat was used for the purpose of ablution. A new ablution place was later constructed. The half-demolished boundary wall is still there, but the building located on the east site is almost in ruins. Only a few segments of the main building to the north of the pond are in a liveable condition. The inner courtyard, dotted with numerous trees, has shrunk with

encroachment in the form of extended new structures like kitchen, toilet or extra living spaces. The beautiful ornamentations on the colonnaded façade, doors and windows are disappearing day by day," says Fatiha Polin.

Bashir Ahmed is willing to leave the premises, if the family were served with a notice, for the sake of Dewanbari's preservation.

"It hurts me to see this house being destroyed. It holds so much history and so many stories and these should be documented. Many movies have been shot here, like *Matir Moyna* and the likes, but still authorities seem to be least bothered to take any decisive measures to protect the house," laments Bashir Ahmed.

The complex houses nearly fifty people now, all fractional owners of Dewanbari complex, and somehow related to Alhaj Janab Ali. But not all of them are on the same page about the preservation of the complex.

Even Bashir's resolve is waning, as he looks at the destruction around the house and says the government needs to act soon or else this heritage site may be gone forever.

As I end this piece, thinking of why, if at all, we should preserve heritage sites, all I can think of is the beauty that lies in nostalgia, in the vivid memories of an unfairly romanticised past. I think of the days when people came to visit Alhaj Janab Ali, on a colourful Bajra wistfully floating on the Karnatoli river while the Chini-tikri mosque would glisten in the sunlight. It feels like reason enough to protect heritage sites.

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# Towards a safer and greener city

Sumona Akter, a 15-year-old girl from Begultila camp of Mirpur-12, used to study in grade eight. Her father, a fish peddler, and her garment worker mother could barely bear her educational expenses. However, in 2016, when her father married another woman and severed his ties completely with Sumona and her mother, Sumona's future became uncertain. She was forced to leave school and look for a job at a garment factory. Finally, after a few weeks, she got the job but she could not continue her education after grade eight. "Leaving school was a devastating experience for me. I used to cry every night. In the morning, when I had to go to the factory, I used to see my former classmates going to school. I felt really sad."

When Sumona's student life was about to be lost, Journey Towards Disaster Resilience Dhaka City (JTDRDC), a four-year project to empower slum dwellers to deal with urban child vulnerabilities implemented by Plan International Bangladesh and Social and Economic Enhancement Programme-SEEP, came with the flag of rescue. When the project officials learned about Sumona's misfortune, they asked her what she would need to continue her education. Sumona wanted a sewing machine with which she could support her family from

home. JTDRDC not only gave her a sewing machine but also trained her in tailoring. Sumona's neighbours now regularly come to her to prepare or mend their clothes. She has been supporting her family with a steady income and she has started her education again. "JTDRDC's sewing machine and the training were enormous blessings for me. I never imagined that I could be able to go to school again. Thanks to this support, I am now going to school again. I have also become a member of JTDRDC's youth group."

JTDRDC has been supporting children like Sumona of Dhaka North City Corporation's wards two and five by referring them to less hazardous jobs. These children participate in six months' training on sewing machine operation, dress making and tailoring by the Muslim Aid Institute of Technology while continuing their formal education.

Besides supporting vulnerable children, JTDRDC has been working to make Dhaka clean and green. It has been providing technical assistance and knowledge support to the inhabitants of wards two and five of Dhaka North City Corporation (project area). Iqbal Hossain, a resident of ward five took assistance of JTDRDC to start rooftop gardening. Iqbal received quality saplings from the project officials and

learned how to take care of the saplings. On the occasion of World Environment Day 2016, JTDRDC distributed 962 saplings among rooftop gardeners (June

and green. However, in Dhaka, we do not get enough room for gardening and planting trees. Rooftop gardening is the most suitable solution to this prob-



5, 2016 at ward two and June 6, 2016 at ward five). Iqbal Hossain, who is also now a member of JTDRDC's youth group says, "There is no alternative to tree plantation to make our city clean

lem. Besides providing us with fresh air, rooftop gardens can also meet our families' need for fruits and vegetables. JTDRDC's initiative to encourage rooftop gardening is praiseworthy.