



Resembling remnants of an abandoned structure, this portion of Dhaka Gate, an iconic part of Dhaka's Mughal history dating back over 400 years, lies in shambles. Popularly believed to have been erected by Subedar Mir Jumla II in the mid-17th century as the northern entry point to Dhaka, after its reestablishment as the capital of Bengal. It is thought to have been rebuilt in 1825 by British Magistrate Charles Dawes. However, little appears to have been done to preserve this piece of history. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

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TURNOUT AT THREE PHASES OF MUNICIPAL POLLS EVMs drew fewer voters than ballots

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Voter turnout at municipalities that used Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) were five percent lower than the turnout in municipalities that used ballot papers.

Turnout analysis of three phases of municipal elections held so far revealed the trend.

The Election Commission is holding elections to municipalities in five phases. Three phases have already been completed, on December 28, January 16 and January 30 respectively.

Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar proposed that EC should have a study to know whether there was any distrust among voters about casting their vote using EVM.

"EC should give explanation why there is voter turnout gap between municipalities using EVM and ballot papers. During the last parliament polls, voter turnout rate was 30 percent lower at the constituencies that used EVM compared to ballot paper," he added.

A total of 24 municipalities went to election in the first phase, all held using EVM.

Next, 60 municipalities went for election in second phase, of which 26 used EVM and the rest used ballot papers.

Lastly, 63 municipalities went for election in third phase, all of them using ballot papers.

TURNOUT IN MUNICIPALITY POLLS

PHASE 1: **65.25%**
(24 municipalities, all using EVM)
PHASE 2: **61.92%**
(60 municipalities, a mix of EVM and ballot papers)
PHASE 3: **70.42%**
(63 municipalities, all using ballot papers)

LOWEST TURNOUT

EVM	BALLOT
Savar (Dhaka) 33.59%	Moulvibazar 41.87%
Dagabhuiyan (Feni) 38.63%	Doulatkhan (Bhola) 54.58%
Mongla (Bagherhat) 40.46%	Ramganj (Laxmipur) 56.09%

HIGHEST TURNOUT

EVM	BALLOT
Kalapa (Patuakhali) 85.31%	Dhamoirhat (Naogaon) 92.14%
Godaghari (Rajshahi) 83.44%	Kahalu (Bogura) 88.08%
Bagha (Rajshahi) 83.10%	Keshorhat (Rajshahi) 87.22%

Are they interconnected?

HC asks on gambling, casino business and money laundering

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday wanted to know whether gambling and casino business are related to money laundering.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Mohi Uddin Shamim asked the lawyers concerned to place arguments on this issue on February 8.

It passed the order while hearing of six bail petitions filed by Joy Gopal Sarkar, general secretary of Dhaka Wanderers Club, which was allegedly linked with casino business, in six money laundering cases against him.

During yesterday's hearing, Anti-Corruption Commission's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan opposed the petitions, saying the petitioner has committed organised crimes by running casino business and he was also involved in money laundering. Meanwhile, Sarkar's lawyer Md Qamrul Islam told the court that his client was not involved in money laundering. The money laundering allegation against Sarkar is false and fabricated, the lawyer said.

Sarkar was arrested on July 14 last year in connection with five money laundering cases filed with different police stations in Dhaka on different dates in 2019 and 2020. Another case was filed with Bangshal Police Station on August 31 last year against Sarkar and others.

MONEY LAUNDERING CASE AGAINST SK SINHA

Two more witnesses testify

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Two more prosecution witnesses, including a bench reader of Bangladesh Supreme Court, yesterday gave their depositions before a Dhaka court in a money laundering case filed against former Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha and 10 others.

The witnesses are: SC Bench Reader Mahub Hossain and Dhaka Bank's Savar EPZ Branch Manager Abu Zahid Ansary.

Judge Shaikh Nazmul Alam of the Special Judge's Court-4 of Dhaka recorded their statements. However, the defence declined to cross-examine the witnesses as they did not mention their clients' names in the statements.

The judge then set February 14 for next hearing of the case. In his statement, Mahub said he took Tk 80 lakh and Tk 60 lakh from Sonali Bank Ltd at Supreme Court Branch on December 11, 2016 and January 8, 2017 respectively. Later, he bought some savings schemes from a post office with some money for SK Sinha, his wife and daughter and later handed over the rest of the money to Sinha.

Zahid told the court he submitted some documents to the investigating agencies of SK Sinha's nephew Sankhajit Sinha's personal account at his branch.

Seven of the accused were present at the court yesterday while SK Sinha and three others are absconding.

The bike lanes to nowhere

Cyclists, urban planners say the two dedicated lanes in the capital are of little use without a wider network

MATHWEWS CHIRAN

Around 15 months after the inauguration of Dhaka North City Corporation's first dedicated bicycle lane in Agargaon, the initial optimism of cyclists surrounding the lanes is waning due to illegal occupation and lack of integrated networks.

In addition to the one in Agargaon, DNCC later unveiled another lane in Manik Mia Avenue a couple of months back -- as part of a Tk 694 crore urban development project. But either of them is yet to make any meaningful impact in city life, cyclists say.

"We've been calling for such lanes for a long time. But now that they're here, we're disappointed that they aren't serving their purpose," said cyclist Rafiq Zaman, a regular at Manik Mia Avenue.

"What we need is a long, integrated lane that can take us from one place to another. Without any link between them, the two bike lanes lead to nowhere," he told this correspondent.

"Both of the lanes are marred by illegal parking, makeshift stalls, and hawkers, basically rendering them unusable for us," Rafiq complained.

On the occupants' side, traders said when it comes to illegal occupation one problem leads to another.

"Bikers park their vehicle here (on the cycling lane). If they can do it, why can't I set up my stall?" said Md Hasan, a hotpoti seller at Manik Mia Avenue. "In fact, I have a greater need for this, as my family's survival depends on this stall."

On December 28 last year, DNCC conducted a drive on the road to free it from such obstructions. But within a few days, the scenario returned to normalcy, sources said.



The initial optimism of cyclists surrounding the bike lanes is waning due to frequent encroachment and lack of integrated networks. This photo was taken from Manik Mia Avenue recently.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

"We try to conduct drives every week to free the place of illegal possession," said Masud Hossain, zonal executive of DNCC (zone-5).

"But it's difficult to accomplish this properly as occupiers disappear the moment they sense us. Once we're gone, things go back to usual. It is quite a challenge," he said.

"(In light of this) We have suggested fencing around the cycle lanes to our high-ups. We believe it can reduce indiscriminate illegal possession," he added.

INTEGRATED NETWORK NEEDED
Bangladesh Institute of Planners general secretary Adil Mohammed Khan said, "If we want traffic or transport solutions in a city, we need to ensure it comes as part of a

network. Without this, it's almost a case of 'Developed countries have bicycle lanes, let's have one here too.'"

As a way out, Adil proposed some solutions. "We can start with thinking of community or ward-based lanes."

"The reverse can happen too," he continued. "If the government decides that instead of community-based lanes, they want lanes in major roads across the city, then a plan to construct a network could work too. Unfortunately, there is no such plan in place yet," he added.

"Without these steps, the lanes are little more than a token or symbol of development," he opined.

On July last year, climate action activists and urban planners took a voluntary initiative to prepare a

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GIRL KILLED AT SHAHEED MINAR

Karmojibi Nari demands capital punishment of culprits involved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Working women's platform Karmojibi Nari demonstrated at Central Shaheed Minar premises yesterday afternoon demanding capital punishment for those behind the killing of a flower-seller girl in the area.

The speakers also said the existing culture of impunity only fuels further incidents of sexual violence and the state must take the responsibility of the murder of the homeless teenager, who was killed after a rape attempt, near the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital on January 31.

They also demanded that the prime minister stand by the family of the deceased and provide financial assistance. Dozens held banners and placards in her memory.

The mother of the deceased girl was also present at the demonstration and she said, "I want justice for my daughter so that no mother has to experience such pain and this doesn't happen to anyone else."

Sanjida Sultana, acting executive director of Karmojibi Nari, said, "It is the state's responsibility to ensure basic needs of all citizens; the state must ensure safety of all women regardless of social class."

Demanding a fair trial through an impartial investigation, the speakers also expressed their concern over the increasing number of incidents of violence against women and children during the pandemic.

Rajib Ahmed, central committee secretary of the Jatiya Sramik Jote Bangladesh; Sabina Yasmin, assistant project manager at Naripokkho; Sheikh Shahnaz, general secretary of Jatiya Garment Shilpa Sramik Jote; Naripokkho members Nazma Begum and Syeda Salma Parveen; Karmojibi Nari coordinator Hosne Ara Naqib, and organiser Al Jahid spoke at the event among others.

Another one bites the dust

Demolition of 28-yr-old movie theatre begins in Bogura; 33 more have closed down in last 10 years

MOSTAFA SHABUI, Bogura

Due to the sharp fall in the number of theatre audience for commercial movies, curtains are being drawn on a 28-year-old cinema hall in Bogura's Dhunat upazila.

Sikta Cinema Hall Private Limited is being demolished after a run that started in 1992, beginning with the movie 'Swapner Thikana' and ending with 'Beporowa'. The demolition work began on Monday.

Zahid Hossain Mukta, one of the owners said, "We made profit till 2015, but it has dried up since then. In fact, things got so bad that we counted losses of Tk 2.5 lakh last Eid-ul-Azha."

"I have even had to sell land to try to continue the hall, but this is not sustainable anymore," he lamented, "I have decided to demolish the hall and construct a market in its place."

Aynal Haque, secretary of Dhunat Upazila Theatre, said, "It comes down to the lack of good cinemas. People of the area used to come to the hall even a couple of years ago, but that's not the case now."

"The government should patronise the film industry and provide subsidies to cinema hall owners," he added.

"A culture of watching good movies can be beneficial for society,"



A desolate Sikta Cinema Hall Private Limited awaits demolition after operating for 28 years.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

said Ziaul Haque, a lecturer at a local college. "Dhunat used to be a centre of good entertainment, but those days have passed. In fact, no one even bat an eye at the hall's closure."

"There were three cinema halls in Dhunat town, but all of them have shut down now. Cleopatra Cinema Hall (established in the 80s) and Jhankar Cinema Hall (established in the 90s) have both shut down for similar reasons, said Ziaul Haque.

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BIGD named among 'Top 40 Think Tanks Worldwide'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brac Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), an independent research and post-graduate teaching centre at Brac University, has been recognised as one of the top 40 transparency and good governance think tanks and one of the top 120 social policy think tanks in the world.

BIGD was placed in the internationally renowned "Global Go To Think Tank Index Report" published by the University of Pennsylvania last Thursday, said a statement released by the university yesterday.

It is also the only Bangladeshi research organisation to be included in the transparency and good governance category of the report, said the statement.

"We are committed to engaging in research and projects that are relevant to Bangladesh and impactful on a global scale," said Brac University Vice-Chancellor Prof Vincent Chang.

The annual ranking, published by the Think Tanks and Civil Society Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania since 2006, compares research institutions and think tanks across the world by region, area of research, and special achievements.

The 2020 rankings were compiled by evaluating perceptions submitted by nearly 4,000 policymakers, journalists, public and private donors, and functional and regional area specialists, which were then ranked and reviewed by expert panels comprised of international professionals from a spectrum of disciplines.

SCHOOLGIRL MURDER IN SAVAR

AL leader's son arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

Five months after the tragic murder of Savar school student Nila Roy, police have arrested Sakib Hasan, the son of an AL leader, who was allegedly involved in the killing.

The twenty-year-old arrestee is the son of Shirajul Islam Shiru, an AL leader and also the joint secretary of Savar Municipality. Sakib Hasan is locally known as a leader of "Shakil and Sakib gang."

Confirming the arrest, Nirmol Kumar Das, inspector (intelligence), told The Daily Star that they conducted a drive at Shirajul's house around 3am yesterday after receiving intelligence on Sakib's whereabouts.

Sakib was arrested from the house at Dakshinpara area.

He was sent to a Chief Judicial Magistrate Court in Dhaka with a five-day remand prayer, added Nirmal Kumar, investigation officer of the case.

Nila Roy, a 10th grader at a local school, was stabbed to death on her way to a hospital on September 20. She was accompanied by her elder brother Alok and they were going to have her respiratory problems checked.

On their way to the hospital, they were intercepted by one Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, who threatened Alok and forced him to leave him alone with Nila, police had said quoting family members after the event.

Mizanur then forced Nila into an abandoned house, and stabbed her with the help of two associates. The perpetrators fled, and Nila was rescued by locals after crying for help.

Locals had rushed the girl to Enam Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared her dead within minutes of her arrival.

The following day, Nila's father filed a case against Mizanur and his parents. Police arrested Mizanur and his associate Selim Palawan (28).

Mizanur on October 1 confessed to a Dhaka court that he killed the girl because she refused to continue a "love affair" with him, court sources said.

Mizanur also revealed Sakib's involvement in the crime, but Sakib had been absconding then.

The Daily Star found in its investigation that Mizanur was also a member of "Shakil and Sakib gang". The gang is infamous for extorting people and business, and its members are often found involved in stalking and harassment of girls as well as trading drugs, said locals of Savar's Dakshinpara.

Locals say that Shakil and Sakib run the gang with help from their father Shirajul.