

Osmani Udyan: A saga of neverending renovation

Major park in capital closed for three years; experts blame repeated changes in plan, slow work progress

HELEMUL ALAM

When Dhaka South City Corporation inaugurated the renovation work of Osmani Udyan in January 2018 with a promise to complete it by 10 months, it was hailed by residents. Three years later, the renovation work is yet to be completed due to repeated changes in plans and slow progress of work, said experts.

According to Dhaka South City Corporation, this seemingly "never-ending" project will drag on for another six months as they are "hopeful" to open the park in July this year.

They, however, could not say for sure when the work will finally finish.

More alarmingly, as part of the renovation, an underground parking space would be built inside the park. As a result, the project deadline has been extended till June this year and the cost will increase to accommodate that, they said.

Experts, however, questioned as to why such establishment is necessary inside a park as it will shrink public space.

OSMANI UDYAN

Nestled between the secretariat and Nagar Bhaban, this park is named after General Muahammad Ataul Gani Osmani, the commander-in-chief of Bangladesh forces during the Liberation War.

It is divided into 11 sectors, as a tribute to the country's forces that were divided in 11 divisions designated as sectors.

The 29-acre green sanctuary has a number of rare trees and plants of different shapes and sizes, two small lakes and islands made of sand along with walkways, sculptures, auditorium.

One of its major attractions is Mughal-era cannon "Bibi Mariam" commissioned by Emperor Aurangzeb's trusted general Mir Jumla II to protect Dhaka -- the 17th-century capital of Bengal -- from raids by bandits.

DSCC is now custodian of the park.

DEADLINE KEEPS ON GETTING EXTENDED

According to the city corporation, at first, the project deadline got extended in 2019 and the cost escalated from Tk 54 crore to Tk 89 crore for additional works like setting up food courts, museum, library and better drainage system.

Then last year, DSCC Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh said they will set up an underground parking space inside the park, which will be able to accommodate around 200 cars.

Now, the project deadline has been extended till June 2021. However, sources at the city corporation said they will not be able to meet the project deadline as work for the proposed underground parking has not even started yet.

WHAT URBAN PLANNERS SAY Adil Mohammad Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said the renovation process since the first development project proposal (DPP) has not been shared with professionals or public.

Therefore, analyses of the proposed design could not be done by professionals, which is an obligatory process before implementing any planning project, he said.

In addition, delay in implementation is leading to not only extra spending of public money, but also depriving people of civic amenities for over two years, he added.

He also said the additional structures would occupy considerable amount of space inside the park, which is against the maximum allowable establishment space limit inside a park or public place, according to the country's existing planning rules and regulations.

Architect Iqbal Habib, joint secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, said the law stipulates that structures should not occupy more than five percent of a park's total area.

"But they are building structures on around 12-13 percent area of the



Work at Osmani Udyan goes on at a snail's pace, depriving Dhaka residents of open and green spaces, top. Notices hang on the pillar and entrance, reminding that it's been three years but the work is yet to be completed, left. A walkway being constructed inside the park, right. These photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

park, which will shrink free public space," said Habib.

He also spoke against the construction of a parking space inside the park. "To accommodate it, they will have to cut a number of 40 to 50-year-old trees. Besides, the parking ramp would also consume considerable amount of space," said Habib.

He said library, museum and

parking space are not normally associated with a park.

WHAT PROJECT DESIGNER SAYS Contacted, architect Md Rafiq Azam, principal designer of the project, said they have taken an "innovative" approach of keeping the green top intact while designing the underground parking.

About the need of such parking space, he said, "Every day 30 to 40

cars park here while many keep their vehicles next to the park. You have to provide parking facilities and this a common trend worldwide."

Regarding such structures taking up more space inside the park, he said those are being set up for the benefit of people.

About not sharing the proposed design for analyses, Azam said if experts indeed have an issue, they can

discuss it.

The underground parking will be like an exhibition gallery with paintings by renowned painters. The upper level will be completely green for people to walk around, he assured.

He also said they will plant at least double the amount of trees they would have to fell for renovation works.

"We did not cut any existing tree so far except some weeds. We will construct the parking space near the road for which we may have to cut some 30 small trees," he said.

"We are also planting 60 trees. We will plant trees like Krishnachura and Radhachura. Also, the 6 percent space used for parking will be covered by grass and large trees," he assured.

He said it is important to make the park useful for people as it used to be occupied by drug addicts and vagabonds.

The principal designer said the maximum length and width of the parking would be 450ft and 120ft respectively.

About the museum, he said it will depict both the old and new Dhaka.

WORK GOES ON AT SNAIL'S PACE

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw that the development work was ongoing. Even though the main structure was almost completed, the work was progressing at a slow pace.

Architect Md Rafiq Azam said the contracting company was not doing their job properly, for which the work was going on very slowly.

Asked, Ariful Haque, executive director of the project construction company -- The Builders Engineers, said they are not solely responsible for the delay, rather it was a collective failure.

"The structural part of a project is more challenging than the architectural portion. Besides, the pandemic has also slowed down our work progress," said Ariful, adding that they are hopeful of completing the project by June.

Regarding the delay, DSCC Executive Engineer Tanveer Ahmed

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Men in 'uniforms' dupe jobseekers of Tk 36 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around one and a half years back, Hasan Sikder, a village farmer, got introduced to Sheikh Selim alias Shuvo, who introduced himself as an official of the army.

After getting introduced, the two set a meeting near Mirpur's Sony Cinema Hall in the capital, where Selim came in a microbus, wearing a camo print uniform resembling those worn by armed forces personnel. But Hasan later found out that Selim was a member of a fraud gang, he said on Sunday.

A few days later, Selim told Hasan that he had given many people jobs in different positions of an official establishment for Tk 6 lakh per person. "If any acquaintance of mine wants the job of a gardener or messenger, Selim will arrange it," Hasan told The Daily Star.

He demanded Tk 5 lakh for a gardener job, and Tk 8.5 lakh for messenger, Hasan said.

Hasan sent his nephew Bony Israil, and neighbours Rana Mollah and Masud Rana to Selim for messenger posts. He also sent his younger brother Ahadul Sikder, and other neighbours Riaz Mia and Mahamudul Hasan for gardener jobs.

For the jobs, they gave Selim Tk 36 lakh. Selim, dressed in uniform and using his microbus, took the jobseekers to a place through the capital's Kachukhet, said Sohrab Hossain, father of Masud Rana, quoting his son.

He said the microbus then stopped at a canteen, from where Selim and two others

in "uniform" took the jobseekers to an office.

They then took interviews, said Sohrab, a farmer from Gopalganj's Muksudpur upazila. Their clothes and mannerisms were so believable that no one doubted their legitimacy.

He, however, said none of the interviewees could pinpoint the office's exact location, as they are villagers. When the whole interview process was completed, the group of fraudsters gave appointment letters on "official letterheads". They also forged signatures of officials concerned and put memo numbers on the letters.

Hasan said when the jobseekers went to the location to join work, they found out that the appointment letters were forged. He then told Selim to give the money back, but Selim did not comply.

On January 30, Hasan filed a general diary (GD) against the fraudsters with Mirpur Model Police Station, after which Sub-inspector (SI) Tapan Kumar arranged a meeting between Selim and the jobseekers to settle the issue.

At the meeting, Selim admitted to taking money, Hasan said. He alleged that during the meeting, SI Tuhin Kazi of Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Tejaon division went to the station to take Selim away.

Contacted, Tuhin said Selim is his friend's uncle, and on his friend's request, he went to the police station. He claimed that when he came to know that the matter involved money, he went away. A police inquiry team also questioned him

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Senior BNP leaders apologise to Khaleda for 'failure to free her'

UNB, Dhaka

BNP senior leaders yesterday apologised to their party chairperson Khaleda Zia for their failure to wage a strong movement or take any step for her release from jail over the last three years.

They, however, vowed to take to the streets soon by organising their party rank and file to have Khaleda freed from jail.

"I humbly apologise to our imprisoned leader Begum Khaleda Zia and acting chairman Tarique Rahman as we're so unfortunate and so unsuccessful that we've not been able to take any step to free them," said party standing committee member Mirza Abbas.

Speaking at a protest rally, he also said Khaleda Zia will not be in jail forever as their party's movement will gradually intensify, paving the way for her release.

"We want to say firmly that we'll take to the streets soon reorganising the party to completely free Begum Khaleda Zia from jail and bring Tarique Rahman back home," the BNP leader said.

As part of BNP's countrywide programme, its Dhaka south and north city units jointly arranged the programme in front of Jatiya Press Club, marking the third anniversary of the imprisonment of Khaleda Zia in a graft case.

BNP standing committee member Gayeshwar Chandra Roy said their party must wage a "war" in a democratic manner to "restore" democracy in the country.

"That war won't be limited to only slogans. We'll have to free Khaleda Zia through that war for the sake of the country and democracy. Her release will pave the way for the restoration of democracy," he observed.

Gayeshwar said the Election Commission has been working to appease the government instead of ensuring credible elections.

He said Khaleda Zia has now been under house arrest

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Rapist handed life sentence after 13 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A Rangpur court yesterday sentenced a man to life-term imprisonment for raping an underage girl in the district's Pirgachha Upazila, 13 years ago.

The court also mentioned in the order that the boy born from the rape would be the heir of the man. Besides, the convict has to bear his all his expenses, mentioned the judgment.

The accused Shafiqul Islam was present at the court during announcement of the verdict by Md Rokonuzzaman, judge of Woman and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-2 in Rangpur, at a crowded courtroom.

According to prosecution, the girl of Annodanagar village in Pirgachha Upazila of Rangpur was 14 years old at the time.

She and her siblings lived at her grandmother's home after their mother underwent separation from her husband. Shafiqul, who was 22-year-old then, often

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'Failures are mine, successes yours'

Outgoing anti-graft body chief credits staff, journo, critics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People from all walks of life -- including those from the government, political parties and civil society -- need to work together relentlessly to curb corruption, said the outgoing chairperson of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Iqbal Mahmood yesterday.

"It is not possible for ACC alone to drive away corruption from the country," he said, adding that corruption hinders achievement of sustainable development goals (SDG) and deprives people of services.

"The time has come to leave [the organisation]. But the question is whether I was successful in fulfilling expectations. It is not possible for me to evaluate my activities. I'm leaving it to the people to judge," he said while addressing a views-exchange meeting on ACC's Annual Report at its Segunbagicha headquarters in the capital.

Iqbal said, "I'm shouldering the burden of all failures that took place in the last five years, and giving credit of my success to my staff, officers, journalists, critics and people." "We all need to be vocal against corruption from our respective positions," he said.

A new commission will start functioning from next month, as tenure of the current chairperson, and Commissioner AFM Aminul Haque will expire in March. Both joined ACC on March 14, 2016.

The outgoing chairperson hoped that the new commission will perform even better. "Every day, a new sunshine gives us new hope. I hope the commission will do better in the upcoming days," said Iqbal.

After joining ACC, Iqbal took steps like conducting raids at government offices upon graft allegations, and introducing "106" hotline. Statistics also show that punishment rate in graft cases also increased in the last five years.

PAPUL'S JS MEMBERSHIP

HC sets Feb 22 for hearing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has set February 22 for hearing the rule that questioned legality of the parliamentary membership of Mohammad Shahid Islam alias Kazi Papul for providing false information to the Election Commission through his affidavit.

The bench of Justice Gobinda Chandra Tagore and Justice Mohammad Ullah on Sunday set the date after the petitioner's lawyer Sheikh Awsafur Rahman prayed for early hearing on the rule.

Following a petition, the HC on August 18 last year issued the rule asking respondents to explain why the parliamentary membership of Kazi Papul, an independent lawmaker from Laxmipur-2, should not be declared illegal for providing false information to the EC.

The petitioner told The Daily Star that the respondents are yet to place any reply to the rule before the HC.

Sheikh Awsafur Rahman earlier told The Daily Star that Papul submitted a degree pass certificate to the EC before the last parliamentary election, but he said in the affidavit that he passed master's degree.

Papul did not submit SSC and HSC certificates to the EC which is fraudulence, and therefore, he cannot hold the office of MP, the lawyer said.



Two workers repaint the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital, with less than two weeks to go for International Mother Language Day. However, the flimsy bamboo structure used instead of scaffolding for the work has left them perched in a precarious and unsafe position at a dangerous height. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABER DAS

Russel Sarker gets Tk 10 lakh from Green Line

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Russel Sarker, who lost his leg after a Green Line Paribahan bus ran him over around three years ago, has been given Tk 10 lakh more in compensation, in line with a High Court directive.

Green Line Paribahan had earlier given Tk 13.4 lakh to Russel for his treatment and compensation.

On April 4, 2018, Russel (26), a car driver, lost his leg after he was knocked down by a Green Line bus near Mayor Hanif Flyover. An altercation broke out between Russel and the bus driver over rear-ending his car. As Russel chased the bus, the driver ran him over.

Yesterday, Green Line Paribahan's lawyer Shah Monjurul Hoque sent a check of Tk 10 lakh to Khondker Shamsul Hoque Reza, the lawyer who fought a legal battle before the HC on behalf of Russel Sarker.

Shah Monjurul Hoque also sent a letter through his junior lawyer Harun Ur Rashid to Khondker Shamsul Hoque Reza saying that Green Line Paribahan will give remaining Tk 10 lakh to Russel within two months.

Khondker Shamsul Hoque Reza instantly handed over the check to Russel at his Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) chamber.

Talking to The Daily Star, Russel Sarker said he is happy after getting the money in line with the HC verdict.

"I will not get back my leg. But, I am grateful to hounarable High Court and my lawyers for their role in ensuring my compensation. I am now unemployed. I will run a small grocery business with a capital of Tk 2 or 3 lakh at my village in Gaibandha. I will deposit the rest of the money, which I got in check from Green Line Paribahan, to a bank," he added.

Reza told this correspondent that he has already informed the HC about getting a check of Tk 10 lakh from Green Line Paribahan.

Green Line had earlier given Tk 13.40 lakh to Russel, he added.

Following a writ petition, the HC bench of Justice FRM Nazmul Ahasan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader on October 1 last year directed Green Line Paribahan to give Tk 20 lakh more in compensation to Russel Sarker.