



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

CRB may never be the same

Despite concerns and protests, hospital construction underway

ARUN BIKASH DEY AND SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

CRB, headquarter of BR's east zone, surrounded by hills, valleys and century-old trees, is a habitat to different species of birds and wildlings. The area's Shirishtola has served as a cultural centre for years. The place is also of immense historic importance.

While going for a morning walk in port city's Central Railway Building (CRB) area on Thursday, Abdul Aziz, a resident of Kazir Dewri, was taken aback after seeing a notice that read "This road has been closed permanently for public use; kindly use an alternative road".

Interestingly, no authoritative agency was named in the notice. Aziz told the correspondents that the notice was not there even a week ago.

The correspondents also noticed that gates were being built at three CRB entrances.

Contacted, Md Ahsan Jabir, additional chief engineer of Bangladesh Railway's (BR) east zone, confirmed that they issued the notice to restrict mass movement on the path, as a hospital's construction work is underway, despite mass protests from Chattogram residents, who consider the area to be the oxygen centre of the city.

Ahsan Jabir is also the director of the hospital project.

However, Md Rafiqul Islam, divisional engineer of Chattogram Railway, said, "We have started erecting three ornamental gates at three points of CRB recently, but the gates are not the part of the hospital's construction work."

INITIATION OF THE PROJECT

On March 18, 2020, BR signed an agreement with United Enterprise and Company Limited for a public private partnership project worth Tk 400 crore, under which the latter would set up a medical college, a 500-bed hospital and a nursing institute, according to sources in BR's east zone.

The project was approved by a cabinet committee meeting of economic affairs

importance. The present CRB was built by the British as the headquarters of Bengal and Assam Railway in 1895. Chattogram's anti-British youth revolutionaries conducted several drives in the area to collect funds.

When the initiative was brought to light in July last year, people from all strata in Chattogram started protesting.

A total of 17 distinguished personalities of Chattogram, including late Mushtari Shafi, Premier University Vice Chancellor Prof Anupam Sen, East Delta University VC Prof Sekandar Khan, poet and journalist Abul Momen and theatre personality Ahmed Iqbal Haider, issued a press statement in protest in the same month.

In the statement, they said the people of

Fazilatunnesa Mujib, with approval from Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Trust.

Following an application from the railway secretary, the name was approved by the memorial trust at a trustee board meeting on October 27 last year. The Daily Star obtained a copy of the approval.

However, Mashura Hossain of the trust, who signed the paper on November 25, last year said, "I cannot recollect whether I have signed it or not. I have to check before commenting anything."

Contacted, Kayes Khan, general manager of United Enterprise, said, "We have recently



Chattogram need a hospital, but it should not be built compromising the environment. They urged the government to shift the project site to any other BR land to avoid environmental consequences.

In a separate statement, Consumers' Association of Bangladesh demanded the same.

VIEWS OF EMINENT CITIZENS

Mujib Rahman, associate professor of English at Chattogram College, said, "The authorities concerned must not demolish anything that they cannot restore easily. We have only one CRB in the city."

"CRB is significant not only for its natural beauty but also for historical reasons," said poet and journalist Bishwajit Chowdhury.

Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua, a senior lawyer of the Supreme Court, said, "Destroying the city's heritage to construct a hospital is completely illogical."

Opposing the initiative, Prof Anupam Sen said, "CRB is a unique natural gift for Chattogram, which we need to protect at any cost."

Contacted, town planner and Chattogram Development Authority's (CDA) board member Ashiq Imran said CRB has been kept as a reserved area in CDA's Detailed Area Plan (DAP).

"According to DAP, there is no provision for an establishment in an open space," he added.

PRESENT SITUATION

While visiting the spot on Thursday, the correspondents saw the construction work already underway for the hospital, to be named after Bangamata Sheikh

the construction work. We will preserve the century-old trees of CRB if need be."

Meanwhile, eight houses of Railway Hospital Staff Colony have already been demolished during the construction, according to Md Ziaul Haque, a staff member of Chattogram Railway.

"We left CRB leaving our quarters, as the railway authority threatened to get us transferred if we didn't comply," said Ziaul. "We submitted a memorandum to the prime minister last year through the deputy commissioner to stop the construction at CRB."

AUTHORITIES' TAKE

Contacted, Md Jahangir Hossain, general manager of BR's east zone, said the project would have no negative impact on the environment. "We will not even cut down a single century-old tree."

"The city needs modern hospitals. Those who are opposing the initiative don't understand this at all."

The Daily Star could not contact Railway Minister Nurul Islam Sujon in this regard despite repeated attempts.

However, the correspondents talked to the minister in July 2021 over the issue, and he mentioned that the initiative was taken some eight years ago. "The office of the PM oversees it directly. The land of the railway has been left unused. We are going to build a hospital there, which is necessary for people."

About concerns of eminent citizens, he said, "I will have to know who these eminent citizens are first. I will also talk to the political leaders of the city in this regard."

CMP wants dog squad to enhance security

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

To increase and ensure security at the airport, seaport and other key points, Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) has again sent an official proposal to get a full-fledged dog squad (K-9 unit).

In 2014, when Abdul Jalil Mondal was CMP commissioner, an initiative was taken to form a dog squad, but it did not come to fruition, despite repeated attempts.

In the new proposal, the K-9 unit will be formed under Counter-terrorism (CT) Division of CMP, said officials. For the unit, CMP has sought 20 trained dogs of two different species - eight German shepherds and 12 labradors.

Signed by CMP Additional Commissioner (administration and finance) Sana Shamimur Rahman, the proposal was sent to additional deputy inspector general (DIG, Transport) of Police Headquarters on December 19, said sources at CMP headquarters.

According to the proposal, 40 employees, including 38 police officers, will be required for operating the unit.

The proposal stated that a full-fledged dog squad will increase CMP's efficiency, as the dog squad will be used in raids at the airport and seaport areas to ensure security and prevent smuggling of contrabands.

An official of CT told The Daily Star, "The headquarters has already given the green signal for the unit's formation, and around 15 dogs will be provided primarily."

Deputy Commissioner Farook-ul-Haque of CT said, "Senior officials have accepted the proposal. The trained dogs will be kept at CMP's Mansurabad Police Line."



When the quality is right Shop with no name proudly selling butter for three generations

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

For a small shop without a signboard or even a name, the popularity of this butter store is unparalleled among the residents of the port city. For 80 long years, this shop with no name has ruled the hearts of the city, solely with the quality of its produce.

Located at Enayet Bazar, the shop is owned by Sanjay Das. "Our business is three generations old," he told this correspondent.

"My grandfather Khetro Mohon Das started selling butter in early 1942. After he passed away in 1996, my father Madon Mohon Das took over the shop and managed to keep the goodwill of the business intact," said Sanjay.

Md Mahiuddin (50), a resident of the city's Bayzid area, agrees. A regular at the shop, he said he still can't resist its allure after many years of visit. "For around 25 years, I have bought my curd and butter from here. They always ensure the quality is premium. Even though the times have changed and everything around it has changed, the quality of their produce remains unparalleled."

Owner Sanjay Das had acquired a master's degree in chemistry back in the day. Right after finishing his studies, he was even offered two government jobs. However, he refused them to run the family business. "I chose to run the business to keep my father's memories alive," said Sanjay.

Madhab Basu, a worker of the shop since 1997, mentioned that they produce the butter in the old and traditional way, picking it manually by moving bamboo sticks.

"This involves a lot of hardship, but when it comes to ensuring quality, a little hard work is not going to stop us," said Sanjay.

"And once you have the quality control down, the rest of it comes along easily. This is why people from all over the city flock to Enayet Bazar for us, even though we don't even have a signboard or a name," he said, with pride.



on August 14, 2013. The prime minister approved it on February 23, 2020.

Under this agreement, the company would pay BR Tk 75 lakh annually in the third and fourth year and Tk 1.5 crore in the fifth and sixth year as fees. The fees would increase by 10 percent every year after that.

The company would operate the hospital, college and institute for 50 years and then would hand the project over to BR.

CRB'S SIGNIFICANCE

People have been protesting this initiative due to environmental, cultural and historical concerns.

CRB, headquarter of BR's east zone, surrounded by hills, valleys and century-old trees, is a habitat to different species of birds and wildlings. The area's Shirishtola has served as a cultural centre for years.

The place is also of immense historic