The colder days of winter have once again set in around the country, and the capital is no exception. This means those who had to step out in the morning, whether to go to their workplaces or attend other needs, were seen wrapped in additional layers of clothing to take refuge from the shivering cold. This photo was taken recently from the Second Buriganga Bridge near Babubazar. PHOTO: **ANISUR RAHMAN**

History turning into rubble

Scores of buildings being built in heritage areas under Rajuk's nose

DIPAN NANDY

Old Dhaka's Paridas Road is starting to turn grey, not in the sense that it's getting older by the day, but due to concrete slabs being erected all around.

While walking through it, one will be surrounded by rows of buildings with modern architecture. Although there are still some old structures, they are increasingly getting overshadowed by the brand-new homes and offices.

On Rupchan Lane, the scene is the same, where preparations to demolish the old structures to replace them with new ones is well underway.

There's only one small problem. Both the roads should be preserved as historical sites, according to Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk).

On February 2, 2009, Rajuk published a gazette declaring four such areas to be Dhaka's heritage. Considering the historical, aesthetic, scientific, social and religious importance of sites in the capital's masterplan, the organisation also declared 93 structures of Dhaka as pieces of heritage.

According to Rule 71 of Dhaka Metropolitan Building (Construction, Development, Preservation and Removal) Rules-2006, changing the condition of buildings, installations, open spaces, roads and alleys

located within historically important structures and areas without permission is completely prohibited.

But with every passing day, these remnants of the past are being wiped out, as the laws, including Rajuk's gazettes, only remain on paper.

According to the Rajuk gazette, there are four protected areas in

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Dhaka.

In Farashganj, four roads are protected: Rishikesh Das Road, Rebati Mohan Das Road, BK Das Road and Farashganj Road.

The protected roads in Shankharibazar area include Shankharibazar Road, Tantibazar Road and Panitola Road.

In Sutrapur area, Hemendra Das Road and Paridas Road are to be protected, and in Ramna area, Baily Road, Minto Road, Hare Road and Park Avenue were mentioned in the gazette.

The structures, buildings, roads, alleys and even open spaces in these areas will be considered as historically important. But a visit to these places will reveal that this history is slowly fading.

Of the holding numbers 50 to 56 on Paridas Road, only 51 and 52 still have their old structures.

Although the houses numbered one to three on Hemendra Das Road are old, everything else is new. It was learned that many have not taken permission from Rajuk or Urban Development Committee to construct these newer buildings.

Architect Taimur Islam, chief executive of Urban Study Group, told The Daily Star that Rajuk has never protected these areas in a proper way.

Although construction work for some buildings was stopped, Rajuk later let it resume. This happened in the case of 7, Rishikesh Das Lane. It allowed the construction of buildings there, showing various arguments, he said.

Contacted, Ashraful Islam, town planner (in-charge) of Rajuk, said, "If any building violates the rules, we identify them as illegal. If a building is built in a heritage area without any kind of approval, we will take action in accordance with the building construction rules."

Faulty design, negligence and much more

Says Ashis Kumar Dey of civil committee formed to probe MV Abhijan incident

ASIFUR RAHMAN

On December 24, the MV Abhijan fire hazard took the lives of 49 people and injured many more. A month since the tragedy, one question still lingers in everyone's minds: who was responsible?

On January 23, a civil committee formed to probe the fire incident disclosed their findings and put forward 25 recommendations. During the probe, they found negligence of four government officials, four launch owners and four operators.

The Daily Star sat with its chief coordinator Ashis Kumar Dey — also general secretary of National Committee to Protect Shipping, Roads and Railways — to get more insights about the whole incident.

The Daily Star: The government has conducted its own probe. Why was the civil committee formed and what issues did it find?

Asish Kumar Dey: The committee, which consists of waterway experts, lawyers and environmentalists, emphasised on the reasons behind the incident and problems in management.

Initially, we tried to obtain the report of the government-led probe body to analyse it, but failed to acquire it, as the body did not publish its findings. We only found some details of the report through the media.

With our own probe, we found that while MV Abhijan-10 was registered by declaring that each engine was 1,100 British horsepower, it was actually 3,036 horsepower.

There was a lack of firefighting measures as well. For example, there should have been at least 12 fire hydrants on the launch, but we found only six, and those too were out of order.

> There are no government statistics. But we collected data from several media reports, which showed that in the five years since 2017, 304 accidents took place, while at least 560 people died.

Ashis Kumar Dey

This old structure, surrounded by under-construction buildings, on Paridas Road is one the few symbols remaining of a bygone era. As new concrete towers fill up the area, which is apparently a protected historic site, the heritage will eventually fade away, unless something is done to stop this practice. PHOTO: **FIROZ AHMED**