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LIBRARY LANE

The forgotten bookshops of NEW MARKET

ASHIF AHMED RUDRO

Nilkhet, Mirpur, Banglajabazar -- many destinations are well known amongst bookworms of Dhaka. However, nestled within the bustling New Market lies a lesser-known, historical book market. What happened to Library Lane, this once vibrant hub of knowledge? Today, the future of the place hangs in the balance, its rich history fading into memory.

The forgotten lane

It used to fashion an apt moniker. Library Lane -- they used to call it. And fittingly so.

Once upon a time, there used to be more than 50 bookstores here. This fabled lane is on the left of the Gate 1 of New Market. Shopkeepers here say the bookstores used to expand from Gate 1, all the way to Gate 2.

One could find all sorts of books here. Novels, self-help, classic literature, books on religion and law -- you name it. It was also a major hub for academic

and reference books. The books sold here are original, either collected directly from the publisher or imported. However, their collections have been fading, much like the lane itself, which has been dissipating for years.

From more than 50 to 40, at the moment, barely 10-12 shops remain. Some of them have yielded to the market demand and given up their identity, making room for stationary products. Iconic bookshops such as Zeenat Book Supply, which had been a popular go-to place for book lovers since 1963, closed its business in 2023.

Others stubbornly stand, but barely so under the pressure of the present market.

What happened?

It's a good question to ask. What drove such a popular section of the market into the present sorry state? The answer is: a lot happened over the last few decades!

Firstly, reading habits changed. Md

Jumma, the owner of one of the older shops in the market called Aligarh Library, which has been here since the '70s, holds a very strong opinion about this.

"Ever since passing became easy, reading habits went down. Nowadays, you can just write anything in the exam and still pass. There is no desire for knowledge, no desire to read. This has been one of the biggest issues that caused the decline in business. Of course, then came Covid," he said.

Md Reazul Hakim owns "Book Syndicate", one of the oldest bookstores in the market. He inherited the business from his father, who started the business back in 1954 when New Market was first opened.

"We sell original books and as you can imagine, they can be costly. Piracy has taken the market off bibliophiles by printing and photocopying books whenever they feel like it. And of course, they can sell at less than half price because of this," he said, referring

to the declining state of the library lane.

The bleak future

At midday, when the Nilkhet book market is abuzz, the Library Lane feels desolate. Standing on the pavement in the middle of the clearing, one can feel how much this place has witnessed and now it's a decaying history of Dhaka itself. Whatever buzz you find here is less because of the bookstores and more because of the stationary, crockeries, and accessories shops.

Since 2019, six bookstores have bidden farewell to their business here. The past year alone has witnessed the fall of four of those. At this rate, the lane will be nothing more than a memory in a few years.

Whatever remains of this once popular hangout of bibliophiles is now a skeleton of its older self. Whether or not this place can be revived, remains to be seen. But don't miss your chance to visit this place if you have a soft spot for books.

At least 30 leaks in 12 years

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transactions worth at least Tk 25 crore in the bank accounts of the syndicate members.

With assistance from the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, the CID seized the bank account documents of 17 accused.

Sources said multiple money laundering cases could be filed after reviewing the documents.

Touhidul Islam, special superintendent of the CID's cyber investigation and operations, told The Daily Star yesterday, "We have found evidence that the 17 arrestees, including the PSC officials, were involved in leaking question papers for the railway recruitment exams held on July 5."

The syndicate was also involved in leaking questions of some other exams, he said.

Asked when the syndicate started leaking questions, Touhidul said one of the arrested PSC employees joined the commission in 1997 and began leaking questions within five years.

"We are investigating and conducting drives to arrest all those responsible," he said.

Asked about leaking questions of BCS exams, Touhidul said, "We have information, but we need to verify those."

Sources in the CID said they suspect more people from the PSC were involved.

Second semi

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is anything to go by, considering 12 encounters between the two teams have produced only a single drawn result with Uruguay leading 6-5, the Bank of America Stadium is poised to stage an even battle between two sides unwilling to take the game to a penalty shootout.

This type of high stakes match calls for individual brilliance to become part of folklore, a tailor-made stage for attacking midfielders like Colombia's James Rodriguez or Uruguay's Real Madrid star Fede Valverde; players who possess the skill and nerve to conjure a long distance goal out of thin air.

Colombia have continued to impress under Nestor Lorenzo, with the late-career "second wind" for playmaker Rodriguez providing them with a creative spark. Rodriguez has never quite lived up to expectations at the club level but has recaptured the electric form he showed at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. "Everything is coming together," he said after providing two assists and scoring a penalty against Panama.

Uruguay, a side buoyant after

During interrogation, Sajedul said he used to get the question papers from Zafar a day before the exam and that two members of the syndicate -- businessman Sakhawat Hossain and his brother Siam Hossain -- would teach examinees the answers at flats in Dhaka.

Abed and his son's job was to get the examinees who would pay for the questions, said sources.

According to sources, PSC DD Jahangir, who hails from Gaibandha, has multiple flats in Dhaka in addition to a home in his village.

He has a 2,000sqft well-furnished flat in Block-D of Bashundhara Residential Area. The CID arrested him from there on the night of July 5.

The CID also found multiple flats owned by Jahangir in Mirpur and Bhatara of the capital.

Investigators have information that there were transactions worth at least Tk 13 crore in his three bank accounts, sources said, without mentioning when the transactions were made.

On July 5, when the railway exam was being held, there were unusual transactions in his bank account.

PSC DD Zafar, who hails from Patuakhali, lives with his family in Azimpur Government Colony of Dhaka. However, he owns a plot of land and a flat in Mohammadpur.

Along with Jahangir, Zafar owns a coaching centre -- Jyoti Commercial Center -- for jobseekers

at Chowdhurypara of Malibagh in the capital. The coaching centre is named after Zafar's wife, the sources said.

Asma Begum and Humayun Kabir, who run the coaching centre, used to gather jobseekers willing to pay for the leaked questions too, they said.

Meanwhile, six out of 17 arrestees yesterday made confessional statements before a Dhaka court. The 11 others were sent to jail.

Abed, Khalilur, Sajedul, Sakhawat, Siam and private university student Liton Sarker made the confessional statements.

Yesterday evening, the PSC suspended Jahangir, Zafar, Alamgir, Sajedul, and Khalilur.

The PSC also formed a three-member probe committee, led by Joint Secretary Abdul Alim Khan, to investigate the allegations of leaking questions.

The other members of the body are PSC directors Mohammad Azizul Haque and Dilawer Durdana.

The committee has been asked to submit a report within 14 working days, said PSC Chairman Sohorab Hossain at a press conference at his office.

He said the railway recruitment exam would be cancelled if evidence of question leak was found.

His announcement came following a protest rally of jobseekers in front of the PSC Agargaon office yesterday demanding scrapping of the test.

Court orders

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Kamrul also owns properties in a 12-storey commercial building in Savar named "Savar City Centre and Savar City Centre Tower".

The cop invested nearly Tk 8.02 crore in the commercial building, but the actual value of the properties is several times higher. He owns flats, shops, and commercial spaces in the building, the ACC investigation revealed.

The couple owns movable properties worth Tk 9.44 crore and immovable properties worth Tk 1.90 crore. Kamrul's wife owns M/S Sowdagar Navigation, which operates in the maritime sector.

ACC sources said the couple was trying to hand over their properties to others after the commission launched an investigation into their wealth.

Sanowar Ahmed said, "It's not possible for a police official to own such huge businesses and properties with his income. As the couple is trying to hand over their properties, we appealed to the court to issue an order, and the court granted our appeal."

The premier said Bangladesh plans

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polyester staple fibre and other man-made fibre textile mill on 33 acres of land in Mongla Economic Zone.

The MoUs were signed on the sidelines of the "Summit on Trade, Business and Investment Opportunities between Bangladesh and China".

Bangladesh embassy in Beijing, Bangladesh Investment Development Authority, the SEC, and China Council for the Promotion of International Trade organised the event at the China World Summit Wing of Shangri-La in Beijing.

Speaking at the summit, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said now is the time for Bangladesh and China to explore new areas of further collaboration in trade and investment to create a prosperous future for both nations, reports UNB.

"Our shared vision for economic growth, technological advancement, and sustainable development forms the cornerstone of our bilateral relations," she said.

Hasina, now on an official visit to China, invited the Chinese businesses to visit Bangladesh, explore opportunities, and experience the warmth and hospitality of Bangladeshis.

"You will find in us all the support and assistance you need. Let us work together to build a stronger, more prosperous, and more connected world."

The PM said, "We are committed to addressing trade imbalances and creating a more equitable trade relationship."

Hasina said Bangladesh is keen on exporting more products, including textiles, garments, leather goods, jute products and agricultural produce, to China.

"We welcome Chinese investments in our export-oriented industries, which will help us diversify our export basket and reduce trade deficits," she said.

The premier encouraged Chinese companies to form joint ventures with Bangladeshi firms.

She also invited Chinese companies to establish R&D centres in Bangladesh, leveraging Bangladesh's skilled workforce and academic ingenuity.

Hasina called upon the Chinese business community to consider investing in infrastructure, energy, including renewable energy; and logistics in Bangladesh.

She said that climate resilient smart farming opens opportunities for collaboration.

The premier said Bangladesh plans

to establish three special tourism zones where Chinese firms can invest.

She also urged Chinese investors to explore portfolio investments in Bangladesh, as the SEC is working to further develop the country's capital markets.

"We have made significant progress in developing a robust bond market. We are on the brink of introducing derivative products, which will further diversify and widen our financial markets," she said.

"China has been significantly contributing to our infrastructure projects, technological advancements, and overall growth of our economy."

She said Bangladesh offers one of the most liberal investment regimes in the world, and BIDA provides a number of services to foreign investors under one roof.

"... We are establishing 100 special economic zones [SEZs], each equipped with state-of-the-art facilities."

Bangladesh is also developing five country-specific economic zones to foster closer economic ties with the key partner nations, the PM added.

OTHER MOUs

China Road and Bridge Corporation and Ningbo Cixing Company Ltd signed an MoU on the investment framework agreement in Bangladesh's Chinese Economic and Industrial Zone.

Billion10 Communications Ltd and CHTC (HengYang) Intelligent EV Company Ltd signed a deal on manufacturing electric vehicles.

The Bangladeshi firm signed another MoU with Ningbo Sun East Solar Co Ltd to set up a solar farm in Sylhet. It also made a deal with HeSheng (Hoshine) Silicon Industry Co Ltd for investment in Bangladesh's renewable energy sector.

Billion10 also signed an MoU with Zhongke Guorui (Zhuhai) New Material Technology Co Ltd for investment in Bangladesh's waste lubricant oil recovery and refining industries.

EB Solution Ltd and Hongji Intelligent Transport Co Ltd signed a deal to invest in the Dhaka City Mobile Project.

The Bangladeshi company signed another deal with Ningbo Shering New Energy Technology Ltd for investment in Bangladesh's smart cold chain logistic solutions sector.

Under an MoU on technical and financial investment collaboration, \$20 million will be invested in Bangladesh's waterways and road transport. The deal was signed between Intraco Refueling Station PLC and Shijiazhuang Enric Gas Equipment Co Ltd.

BB CYBER HEIST CASE

CID gets 79th date for submitting probe report

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday asked the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to submit the probe report in the Bangladesh Bank cyber heist case by September 4.

Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury passed the order after Raifah Uddin Khan, additional superintendent of police and also the investigating officer of the case, failed to submit the probe report by yesterday.

CID has now taken 79 dates to complete its probe into the case filed over the heist of \$101 million from Bangladesh Bank's account with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in February 2016.

On May 6, the same court asked CID to submit the probe report on the case by July 9 (yesterday).

At least \$81 million was transferred to the accounts of Manila-based RCBC, from where it disappeared into the casinos of the Philippines.

Bangladesh Bank Deputy Director (Accounts and Budgeting) Zobayer Bin Huda filed the case with Motijheel Police Station on March 15, 2016.

So far, Bangladesh retrieved \$15 million from RCBC and recovered another \$20 million sent to a bank in Sri Lanka.

On February 1, 2022, Bangladesh Bank sued Rizal Bank in a US court in order to recover \$66m of stolen funds.

Chhatra Dal leader 'missing' for 9 days

BNP claims he was 'picked up' by plainclothes men

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka College Unit Chhatra Dal Vice President Atiqur Rahman Rasel has been missing for nine days, after he was allegedly picked up by plainclothes men from Dhaka's Azimpur on July 1.

His father Md Abul Hossain on July 2 filed a general diary with Lalbagh Police Station regarding his son's disappearance.

Talking to The Daily Star, Abul Hossain said he wants his son back safe. "We are anxious as we could not trace my son yet."

"If my son committed any crime, the law enforcers should produce him before a court. If they did not pick him up, it is their responsibility to trace him," he added.

Abul Hossain said they could contact Rasel on July 1 evening for the last time, when he said he was going to Azimpur. Shortly after, his phone was found switched off, he added.

Earlier, BNP in a statement, claimed plainclothes men picked Rasel up from Azimpur area.

CUT INTEREST RATES OF LOAN

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) yesterday asked the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) to further cut the interest rates on its loan for Bangladesh.

She made the request when the president of the Beijing-based lender, Jin Liqun, along with high officials of AIIB paid a courtesy call on her.

The AIIB officials said Bangladesh is one of its biggest borrowers and the bank has given Bangladesh a special concession in interest rate.

Financing infrastructure, river dredging, and climate-change resilience came up for discussion.