



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Mughal heritage Boro Katra attacked again

MH HAIDER

A portion of Old Dhaka's iconic Mughal monument Boro Katra has recently been demolished. In response, Urban Study Group, an organisation that campaigns for the protection of the architectural heritage of Dhaka, hosted a press conference last Wednesday, where its CEO, Taimur Islam, elaborated on the damages done and called for the protection of this age-old site.

The demolition activity took place during – and arguably by taking advantage of – the chaotic aftermath of the fall of the Hasina-led government, Taimur claimed.

Boro Katra was built in the 1640s – a relatively early Mughal structure of our city that is older than Lalbagh Fort. Tradition says that was originally intended to be the palace of subahdar Shah Shuja, son of Emperor Shah Jahan, when the prince was the Mughal ruler of Bengal. But he probably never

lived in the edifice; it was used as a caravanserai and many rooms were converted into shops, incomes of which were utilised to maintain the building and help the poor.

"People in Dhaka always seem to take pride in the city's Mughal past, but when it comes to the protection of its heritage, we often see neglect and disregard," Taimur opined, but he also added that certain sectors of society, such as the judiciary, have been supportive in stopping unscrupulous activities in the capital's heritage buildings.

This is not the first time that Boro Katra came under attack. To illustrate, Taimur exemplified that in 2022, an attempt was made to tear down the section which has now been demolished. That attempt was partially successful at that time, but it was halted by creating pressure on the authorities. In fact, there have been multiple endeavours to destroy Boro Katra.

Taimur said if Boro Katra can be preserved, or even better, if it can be returned to its former glory, there is an immense potential for tourism and local commerce.

In a rendered image shown during the press conference, Taimur put forward the beauty of the site and the various shops which could be accommodated there. But if you visit the area now, you may have to stretch your imagination to understand the true value or to gather a proper appreciation. This is because of all the settlements, encroachments, and ownership claims that are prevalent there.

Taimur urged the authorities to put a plan in place, on how to relocate these institutions or establishments on the Boro Katra premises.

"Protecting heritage buildings is an interdisciplinary affair that requires tackling legal issues, understanding conservation technicalities, and

appreciating culture and tradition," said the Urban Study Group chief. "We would like to see a clear plan in this regard."

Boro Katra's case is not unique in our city: there are many buildings of heritage value which have been partially destroyed, fully demolished, defaced, or taken over by encroachments over the years.

If the government can step forward to stop further damage on Boro Katra and make it return to its former glory, it will set an example for Puran Dhaka, and the city can relish in this Mughal monument's true splendour, perhaps doing justice to an adulation enshrined in one of its inscriptions:

"What a building! It putteth high Heaven to shame

A copy of Paradise ye might it name." (History and inscription have been taken from the book "Notes on the Antiquities of Dacca" by Sayid Aulad Hasan)

Left veteran Sitaram Yechury no more

AGENCIES

Veteran Indian politician and CPM general secretary Sitaram Yechury died yesterday. He was 72.

He was undergoing treatment for pneumonia at Delhi's All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). The CPM leader was admitted to the emergency ward of AIIMS on August 19 and later shifted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

The AIIMS said in a statement that Yechury died at 3.05pm. The family has donated his body to AIIMS for teaching and research purposes. His body will be at AIIMS for two days now and then shifted to AKG Bhavan, the CPM headquarters, so that his admirers and comrades can pay their respects. Later, the body will be shifted to AIIMS again.

Yechury is survived by his wife and senior journalist Seema Chishty, daughter Akhila and son Dhanish. His

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TAX SCRUTINY NBR seeks bank account info of Aziz, Taposh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Board of Revenue has asked for bank details of five individuals, including ex-Army chief General (ret'd) Aziz Ahmed and former Dhaka South City Corporation mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, for scrutiny of their tax compliance.

The three others are journalist couple Farzana Rupa and Shakil Ahmed, and former Election Commission secretary Helaluddin Ahmed.

NBR's Central Intelligence Cell (CIC) wrote to all banks and financial institutions, seeking bank account details of the five, confirmed a top official of the CIC yesterday.

Their income tax files will be examined to ensure whether they paid their taxes properly.

According to sources, the CIC will investigate their assets through field inspections.

"We have sent letters to all banks and financial institutions asking for all kinds of transaction information, including credit cards and deposits," said an official, seeking anonymity.

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Deeper crisis feared as 219 factories shut

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in Ashulia to resolve the crisis through discussions, industry owners are worried about the safety of their factories, he said.

Industrial police have yet to start fully functioning more than one month after the ouster of the Awami League government, further fuelling safety concerns. Harsh measures like internet shutdown amid street protests during the mass uprising already hampered production and orders heavily.

Owners say they are not getting help from the industrial police even after lodging complaints. The number of personnel patrolling the industrial zones is inadequate.

Army personnel have been deployed to the industrial zones, but they do not have the magistracy powers to arrest protesters, said Shams Mahmud, managing director of Shasha Denims.

"We aren't getting the confidence to run the factories because of safety concerns," Mahmud told The Daily Star over the phone.

Foreign buyers are putting pressure for timely delivery but the factories are shut, said a frustrated Mahmud. Many shipments may get cancelled, or the buyers may demand big discounts or expensive air shipments, he added.

Many international retailers and brands are cancelling buying trips because of the unrest although this is the peak time to confirm work orders for the next winter season, exporters said.

"So, a massive impact of the unrest will be noticed in the next winter season," Mahmud said.

A senior officer of the industrial police, requesting anonymity, said they are conducting joint patrols in the industrial zones and responding to incidents. Industrial police are trying to be fully functional, the officer added.

AK Azad, chairman and CEO of

Ha-Meem Group, echoed the views of Mahmud. He said most of the incidents were taking place in Ashulia and local groups were involved.

Police are not working, which is helping the unrest in one factory to spread to the others, said a garment exporter based in Narayanganj's Rupganj who asked not to be named.

In some cases, political issues are also involved, the exporter said.

For instance, he said, the unrest in the Beximco garment factory has political influence as one of its owners, Salman F Rahman, was an adviser to ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

He also said that buyers, worried and frustrated over the situation, are sending a lot of queries to know about the condition of work orders for the next season.

Giant Group Managing Director Faruque Hassan claimed the ongoing unrest is not about wages because the pay was hiked in December last year.

In many cases, the workers are demanding the removal of senior officials, equal ratio in appointment of male and female workers, he said.

The workers are placing "unusual demands" in some cases, said Md Saleudh Zaman Khan, vice president of Bangladesh Textile Mills Association.

For example, he said, protesters demanded the recruitment of 300 workers when a factory in Narayanganj needed only 20. The factory management decided to hire a little over 20 workers, but the protesters did not return to work, Zaman said.

Worker leaders pointed the finger at partisan politics and conflict in fabric scrap trade for the unrest. They said a section of fabric scrap traders were trying to maintain control by using the workers.

Many are taking advantage of weak law and order, said Md Towhidur

Rahman, president of the Bangladesh Apparel Workers Federation.

If the factories do not reopen fully on Saturday, the sector may face a deeper crisis in near future, he said.

Nazma Akter, president of Sammillito Garment Sramik Federation, said many workers are also involved in partisan politics. In some cases, outsiders are instigating them to launch unrest, she said.

She recommended holding a dialogue among the stakeholders to find a way out of the crisis.

Labour and Employment Secretary AHM Shafiquzzaman believes those involved in the vandalism of factories are not real workers.

The secretary said he held a meeting with BGMEA leaders and union leaders at Tongi yesterday as part of measures to improve worker-owner relations.

Asif Mahmud, youth and sports adviser to the interim government, suspects a conspiracy behind the ongoing unrest in the garment sector.

Speaking at a media briefing at the Foreign Service Academy yesterday, he said that around 20 percent of total orders have been cancelled.

"And we have witnessed that the buyers of a certain country have been desperately lobbying to get those orders," he said, citing Secretary Shafiquzzaman.

Asif said that workers prevented attacks on factories by a group called Bekar Jubo Songho, or Unemployed Youth Association, and one leader of the association arrested in Netrokona was found to be involved with AI's student front Chhatra League.

He admitted that the protesting workers have some genuine demands besides the conspiracies.

The adviser also warned of strict action against fabric scrap traders who are fuelling the unrest.

those who were involved were powerful, more so because these institutions were politicised and professionally bankrupt. We have to look into these organisations as part of reforming the ACC."

Unless these organisations are strong, it would not be wise to expect that the ACC will be able to function fruitfully.

Fourthly, if the power-hungry political culture and partisan bureaucracy persist, the ACC would not be able to control corruption even if it was an ideal organisation.

"The nation has seen enough of the devil of partisan bureaucracy working in collusion with the abuse of political power to create the superstructure of authoritarianism to sustain corruption."

The scope of reforming the ACC cannot be viewed in isolation from the reform in the political and governance space in a manner that people in power are held to account by the people.

"The commission will make proposals such that the ACC can apply the law equally against anybody – be it a politician, a businessperson, a bureaucrat, a lawmaker, a minister or any high-profile people."

Want to build strong owner-worker relations

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"We want to elevate our position from number two to number one [in garment exports]. At the dialogue, businesses demanded the deployment of joint forces in all industrial areas round-the-clock as such a move has already proved effective in improving overall security in some places.

"Right now, improving the law-and-order situation is our number one priority," said Mir Nasir Hossain, a member of the International Chamber of Commerce, Bangladesh (ICCB), in his keynote speech at the dialogue.

Nasir delivered the speech on behalf of ICCB President Mahbubur Rahman, who was unwell, at the event held at the Intercontinental Dhaka. The ICCB in association with 15 trade bodies organised the dialogue.

Since the public uprising that saw the ouster of the Awami League government of 15 years, there has been a big vacuum within the law enforcement agencies in the country, Nasir said.

'Law for appointing polls commissioners has to be reformed'

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There is a need for the inclusion of representatives from the treasury, opposition benches and the third-largest party in parliament in the search committee responsible for appointing the CEC and other election commissioners so that none can manipulate the system.

Besides, changes must be made regarding the types of information candidates provide in their affidavits

ahead of polls.

By and large, the electoral law RPO is acceptable. But there is a need for some changes.

For example, according to RPO's section 90B, political parties registered with the Election Commission must not have provisions for associated and affiliated bodies in their constitutions. This was intended to disband such bodies.

"This has been misused. The

uncertainty. However, where the joint forces were deployed, improvement in the overall situation was observed."

If such measures are implemented in all industrial zones, the situation can be brought under control soon, he said.

Bangladesh's economy is now under threat due to dishonest practices and financial irregularities of some unscrupulous businessmen.

"On behalf of the business community, I strongly appeal to you [Muhammad Yunus] to take strict legal action against those dishonest businesses and their associates."

He requested the government to create an environment conducive to conduct business safely and responsibly.

Finance and Commerce Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed and Education and Planning Adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud also spoke.

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'ACC's allegiance to the bureaucracy, politicians must end'

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"That's why the reform of ACC gets priority among other initiatives to reform the state in the 'new Bangladesh'," Iftekharuzzaman said.

Firstly, all the commissioners and top office bearers of the ACC, with few exceptions, were appointed based on partisan political considerations, said Iftekharuzzaman, also the executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh.

"As a result, the allegiance of ACC bureaucracy has remained with the government bureaucracy and their political masters rather than the ACC mandate, resulting in its failure to take action against people in positions of power. This must be stopped."

Secondly, there are allegations that many ACC officials used their position of privilege to earn illegal income. "We have to find a way to stop this."

Besides, the ACC was made ineffective and its power was curtailed by bringing several amendments to the Anti-Corruption Commission Act and rules.

"We will propose to amend these to make it time-befitting."

The ACC was also weakened by bringing amendments to some other related laws.

For example, the government allowed legalising black money using the income tax law and the ACC could not raise questions about it.

Besides, an amendment to the Public Service Act made prior permission from authorities concerned mandatory to arrest government officials.

The Anti-money Laundering Act was amended to curtail the authority of the ACC. "Such acts have to be amended too," Iftekharuzzaman said.

Thirdly, the ACC will have to work in tandem with other agencies to control corruption. Money laundering, which is a major manifestation of corruption, could not be prevented by the ACC alone.

Several organisations including Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit, the National Board of Revenue, the Criminal Investigation Department and the Attorney General's Office were supposed to work in coordination with each other to prevent money laundering and repatriate laundered assets.

"But that was not happening because

political parties removed such provisions from their constitutions but kept those affiliated bodies by terming them as brotherly organisations."

The nomination process needs to be changed, he said.

The voter list needs to be changed too: there is a gender gap in the list, with fewer women voters than males, he added.

Carry out reforms fast, aim for polls

RMG sector in a better way.

Quader said the government should take steps to stop the indiscriminate filing of cases and bar a section of people from "putting pressure on the judiciary" for filing cases.

"Otherwise, the situation will be like that period when the Awami League suppressed dissent. If all are arrested in such cases, it will not be good for politics," the JP leader said.

Expressing disappointment over the chief adviser's speech, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince said that Yunus did not mention the measures to restore law and order, control the prices of essentials, break the syndicates, and address the current power crisis.

"On the one-month anniversary of the government, we expected to hear the concrete steps on those issues rather than just a summary of the government's activities," he said.

Prince, however, appreciated the formation of six commissions by the interim government. He said reforms should be made after consultation with the political parties.

"We would have been happier if the chief adviser had discussed electoral

reforms. He could have said that he would reform the electoral system radically and arrange elections soon."

The CPB leader said Yunus kept mum on the recent attacks on shrines and distortion of the history of the Liberation War.

He said he had expected that the chief adviser would speak clearly on the controversial appointments to some key posts, including the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal.

He said they had hoped that Yunus would announce a roadmap for implementing reforms and holding polls.

Biplobi Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Haque viewed Yunus' address positively as it outlined both the activities and limitations of the interim government.

"The six commissions constituted to reform six sectors seem to be a good initiative. The government should engage with political parties regarding reforms because if things happen otherwise, the reforms may not be sustainable after the takeover of power by a newly elected government," he said.