



TMC IN A FIX OVER SOBHANDEB'S QUIET DEFIANCE, LEADER'S SUPPORTERS TAKE OUT RALLY | 4

TRAIN MOWS DOWN TWO-YEAR-OLD ELEPHANT CALF IN SILIGURI | 5



Danish Team On Heritage Trail

Join Heritage Panel To Look For Fredriksnagore Among Hooghly Ruins

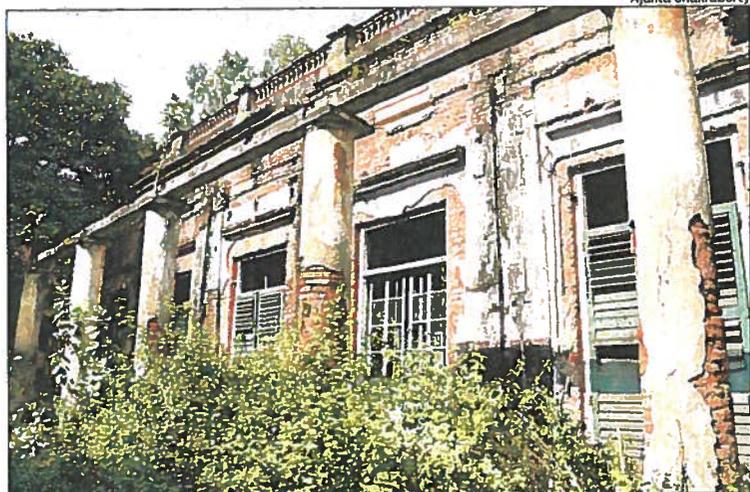
Ajanta Chakraborty | TNN

Serampore (Hooghly): They wish to turn the clock back to a time when the ruins of Serampore used to be their very own Fredriksnagore. But it's bound to be a tall order for the Danish team that's here to dig out their glorious history, because the present hardly resembles the past.

That is evident from the sketches of the bygone era that conservation architect Flemming Aalund and historian Simon Rasten are carrying with them. The Serampore riverfront, cluttered with concrete structures of unvarying ugliness, doesn't look anything like the row of whitewashed buildings erected circa 1800 that depicts the silhouette of the heritage town in the sketches, with St Olav's Church as the most significant landmark. The steeple of St Olav's seems to be the only thin link between the past and the present. Architectural wonders have been reduced to haunted houses that serve as the perfect haven for anti-socials. Some of the crumbling buildings and monuments have been declared condemned by the PWD.

But not to be daunted by all this, the Danish team, along with a strong-willed district administration and West Bengal Heritage Commission (WBHC), has embarked upon possibly one of the most challenging assignments ever. The task is to trace out the Fredriksnagore and its picturesque white buildings with expensive porticos and Venetian blinds, from years of neglect and piles of rubble. The former Danish colony had been named after King Fredrik V who ruled between 1746 and 1766.

The National Museum of Denmark (NMD) had initiated the Serampore Initiative way back in 2008, but not much happened. But the project has now been revived with the WBHC signing an MoU with NMD to revive the glorious Indo-Danish past. Funds are flowing in from the Danish government's coffers as well as the Indian government's ministry of culture to execute the ambitious project in phases.



The facade of the Danish Government House in Serampore

Serampore Initiative

- 1. St Olav's Church (construction began in 1800 and ended in 1821)**
The external facade and roof will be restored, doors and windows repaired and painted, interiors restored and church ground landscaped
- 2. The Government House (1780)**
Wall to be repaired, plastered and whitewashed, northern gateway building and guard's house to be repaired, the temporary storehouse to be relocated, the southern gateway buildings to be restored for re-use
- 3. The Danish Government House (1770)**
The building was condemned in 1999 after a part of the roof collapsed. The first phase of the work includes walling and roofing. The second phase includes floors and joinery repairs. Related work



Inside the Danish Government House

- includes documentation of building history, establishing a museum in a part of the building
- 4. The Square in front of St Olav's Church (circa 1800).** Renovation will include relocation of the bus terminal to a location near the railway station and landscaping of the square
- 5. Landscaping of the river bank area**

cut the ambitious project in phases.

The Serampore Initiative, in its new avatar, involves preservation and enhancement of St Olav Church, the Government Compound, the former Danish Government House, the square in front of St Olav's Church and landscaping of the river bank area.

"This is the real beginning of this cooperation," said Flemming. "We have begun with the Government House that would be one of the greatest landmarks of Serampore. The building is testimony to the unique heritage originating from the Danish, British and Indian periods."

Inside, he pointed out the few traces left of the hugely elaborate facade as some masons worked meticulously to dig out the lime-stone tiles beneath the concrete flooring. The Danes ruled from here between 1755 and 1845, and the Government House was their epicentre. The British later added a new portion to the building, after the Danes left. There is a marked difference between this part of the building and the original structure.

"We are looking at a five-year time-frame to begin with. But more than the time, what is crucial is the sensitivity to bring out the past from the disorderly present," said Rasten, intrigued by the mishmash of architectural styles in the Danish, British and Indian eras.

Accompanying them was a WBHC team, led by chairman Shuvaprasanna. "Fredriksnagore is older than Kolkata. So we are determined to restore these derelict structures that have been camouflaged by years of insensitivity and neglect," said Shuvaprasanna. The MoU signed, WBHC is now concentrating on the Government House which will be turned into a museum portraying Serampore's rich past, the chairman said.

The labour of love is more than apparent. "Conservation is time-taking and needs a lot of patience," said conservation architect Partha Ranjan Das, who is a member of WBHC and chairman of the projects committee. "We have sent the mortar samples for testing. The lime mortar we will use should match the mix used by the Danes. Otherwise, it won't bind and cracks will develop," explained Das. WBHC has set up the lab recently to give holistic and scientific approach to conservation.

"The Serampore Initiative is not only about architecture and conservation. To execute the project, we must work in tandem with the administration and share every bit of our work. Or, everything will come to a naught," said architect and WBHC consultant Manish Chakraborty.

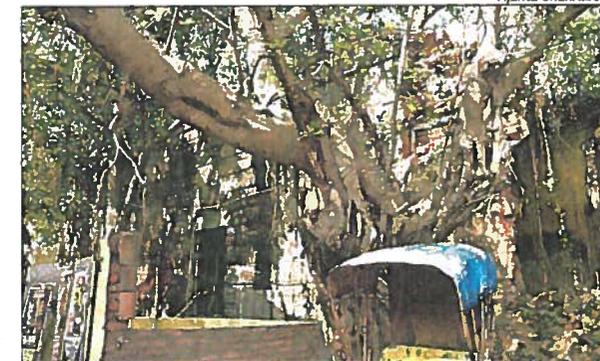
Restorers convince encroachers to shift

Ajanta Chakraborty | TNN

Serampore (Hooghly): Two outsiders have done what our government very often finds difficult to achieve - to convince encroachers to make room for a task undertaken for greater good. The latter, in this case, it's an ambitious heritage preservation project.

The restoration of the South Gate of the Serampore subdivisional court compound has been planned as part of the conservation of the built heritage of Serampore supported by the National Museum of Denmark (NMD). Conservation architect Flemming Aalund (57) and historian Simon Rasten (30), here to work on the project along with the West Bengal Heritage Commission (WBHC), have been camping in Serampore for a couple of weeks, soaking in the ambience and talking a lot to locals. They will return in February next year.

The hours of discourse between the two temporary residents of Serampore College campus and the local chair-wallah and bidi-sellers have been fruitful. When they were asked to attend a presentation by the Danish citizens on Saturday, along with a host of administrative officials, none stayed away. Subdivisional officer Jayasree Dasgupta translated the presentation in Bengali for their benefit. "We shall find alternate space for all of you. After the conservation is over, the entire area will turn into a tourist hub.



The South Gate is used as a public toilet and also a criminals' den

And then, your businesses will prosper more than ever," she explained to them.

Dasgupta then handed over the microphone to Kalua Prasad, who has been running a bidi shop in front of the South Gate for 35 years. "The *sahibs* (Aalund and Rasten) have told us about the project. We'll be happy to be a part of it and would move to the alternative sites to set up our shops," said Prasad.

"We are now concentrating on the South Gate, which is currently used as a public toilet and is also a criminals' den. The structure has been condemned by PWD after a part of it collapsed," said Aalund. "The South Gate building, which was constructed in early 19th C, has high heritage value as part of the Indo-Danish heritage. The gate provided access to the Danish Government Compound from the south," he added.

"The South gate has been reduced to ruins, but the details are still there and it will be a challenge to restore it," said Rasten. "So we decided to convince the shop-keepers about the worth of the project. They are simple people and easily understood the need to protect the past," he said.

The duo has have picked up Bengali words like *esho* (come here), *jao* (go) and *dhan-nyabad* (thank you) from the shop-keepers.

There are rooms in the South Gate which are used as godowns, said Shuvaprasanna, the chairman of WBHC. "The interaction was necessary because the locals have to be taken into confidence before any work like this is initiated."

The restoration of the South Gate will have a bearing on the former Danish Government House, improving the immediate surroundings and restoring dignity to the court compound.