

Christmas gift: New Market clock tower restored ahead of deadline

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Kolkata: The restoration of the New Market clock tower was completed three days before the Christmas Day deadline the civic authorities set for the privately funded project.

Father-son duo Anjan and Saptarshi Mitra of the firm Appropriate Alternative, who anchored the restoration, said the tower was thoroughly cleaned. Debonded elements, vegetation and fungus were removed, and de-rusting was carried out on structural elements.

"We undertook strengthening of the structurals and crack repair. The ornamental elements were restored, and the wooden teak floor was relaid inside the tower. The facade treatment, plastering of the interior and exterior, and restoration of damaged woodworks were completed. Internal and external surfaces were painted," said Anjan. Currently, the team is fixing green glass in the louvre of the steeple to allow light into the tower. Thereafter, the illumination will be redone, and the scaffolding will be removed. "The only job that will be left is the restoration of the clock and chime mechanism," said Anjan.

The clock repair is being done by another father-son duo, Swapan and Satyajit Dutta. They started work on the four-faced Gillett & Johnston clock with Westminster chimes. The clock, which last functioned seven years ago, is expected to start ticking by Feb. "We transported the clock mechanism to our factory near Calcutta Medical College Hospital for overhaul. Some parts that wore out need to be remade. Others need to be refurbished," said Swapan.

Three weights control the three mechanisms — time, quarterly chime, and hourly gong — with winding required every three days. The clock tower has five bells. The New Market tower clock is one of just four clocks that Gillett & Johnston — a renowned English clockmaker and bell foundry from UK — supplied to India. The second one is at the Indian Institute of Engineering Science & Technology, Shibpur. The other two are at Lower Parel railway workshop in Mumbai and Chennai Municipal Corporation.

The restoration undertaken by Kolkata Restorers and funded by Techno Electric and Engineering Co Ltd commenced on July 24, 2025. "Apart from the material costs, what really went into the project was 2,700 person-days," said Mudar Patherya, who represents Kolkata Restorers.