CHATTOGRAM'S UNCOMMON TOURIST ATTRACTION: A WAR CEMETERY

|| ARUN BIKASH DEY ||

PORT CITY CHRONICLES

This scenic cemetery is a testament of the past. Visitors frequent the site to learn about history in a serene environment.

PHOTO: **RAJIB RAIHAN**

Graveyards are considered a site of mourning, a place to remember the dead, their many trials and triumphs. But a graveyard can also serve as a historical site, a place to learn not only about the individuals buried there, but also of our collective past.

Chattogram Commonwealth War Cemetery is a graveyard, but the number of visitors and tourists it attracts everyday shows there's more to this place. The sheer vastness and splendour of the site prove that even a graveyard can become a museum-like attraction.

"I brought my daughter to introduce her with the history. It's a beautiful place, she loves it," said Rokeya Akter, visiting the cemetery with her five-year-old daughter Alvee.

This is no surprise. The cemetery is designed to evoke a temporal awareness in the visitors, such that even a child may have a rewarding outing. At the entrance stands a large cross that sets the stage for a spiritual trip to the 500 visitors who come here every day.

Located on a seven-acre land at Badshah Miah Chowdhury road, opposite to the Art Institute of Chattogram University, the cemetery was established by the British Army in 1945. It serves as a memorial ground for Commonwealth soldiers and others who died in World War II. There are 755 graves of war victims in the lush parkland.

Of them, 731 are Commonwealth graves, while there are graves of 20 more foreign

nationals -- 19 Japanese soldiers and a Dutch Navy seaman, informed Hillol Sattar, country manager of Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), Bangladesh. There are also four non-war British military personnel buried here.

These soldiers fought against Japanese Army in Burma front during World War II. Those who were wounded in the war were brought to Chattogram General Hospital and Chandroghona Christian Hospital in Kaptai.

Those who died were buried in the war cemetery, said Abu Syed, former country manager of CWGC.

All 755 gravestones bear on them the names, nationalities, age, and date of death of those resting under them. Many gravestones come with epitaphs, and all of them have small gardens beside them.

The cemetery would not be itself without these epitaphs. Left and right, one will see

both young ones and the very old leaning forward to read the inscriptions. They make for a surreal experience. To read of a person who once was but is no more, evokes great mysteries in one's mind.

This reporter spoke to a group of students from Chattogram College's English department. Shubhechha Ghosh, who initiated the visit, said, "My classmates accepted in an instant when I asked them to come here." The cemetery is a historic place, a scenic surrounding and its away from the hustle and bustle of society, so it's clear why Shubhechha's friends accepted her offer so readily.

One epitaph, of Flight Lieutenant AG Osmand, a Royal Air Force pilot who died on October 20, 1943, reads -- "Greater Love Hath No Man Than This."

To be a Bangladeshi reading this in 2020 must feel fascinating, and it's one of the things that attracts visitors to this place, not just from Chattogram, but from afar as well.

For example, Arifur Rahman came here all the way from Cox's Bazar. "I came to know about the cemetery from the internet. It intrigued me, and I came here right away. It's remarkable that this place is both eye-catching and eye-opening at the same time."

Plaudits for the cemetery's maintenance must go to a group of five staffers, including manager Hillol. It remains open from 7am to 12pm noon and again from 2pm to 5pm every day.

Picnic bus plunge injures 30 students in Cox's Bazar

Schoolboy among four killed in other road accidents across the country

STAR REPORT

A picnic bus fell into a roadside ditch in Cox's Bazar early yesterday, injuring all 30 students from different educational institutions, including Dhaka University, reports our local correspondent.

The accident happened on Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway in Lomba Bridge area of Ramu upazila around 6:30am, said one of the victims.

Two of the injured were identified as Md Kamal Hossain and Mahmudul Hasan, a Dhaka University student.

The hired bus carrying 30 students from Dhaka University, Dhaka Medical College and Government Titumir College started from Dhaka towards the picnic spot in St Martin, said Kamal Hossain.

The accident happened at a turning point while the speeding bus was trying to save a battery-run auto-rickshaw, he said.

One of the injured was sent to Dhaka for better treatment and the other four -- including Kamal -- to Chattogram Medical College Hospital, said Dr Shaheen Md Abdur Rahman.

The rest took treatment at Sadar Hospital, said Dr Shaheen.

Ramu Police Station Officer-in-Charge Abul Khayer said efforts were underway to lift the bus.

They did not find the driver or helper on the spot, he added.

Meanwhile, our Savar correspondent adds, a school tutumin was killed as a bus hit him in Dhamrai upazila of Dhaka yesterday.

Imran Hossain (12), son of Motiar Hossain, was a sixth-grader of a local

school.

Dhamrai Police Station Sub-Inspector Sheikh Kamrul Islam said the accident took place around 8am while the boy was crossing Dhaka-Aricha highway in Sreerampur area.

Our Faridpur correspondent reports, two women were killed and eight were injured as a bus hit a tree beside Gopalganj-Takerhat road in Bhannabari of Sadar upazila in Gopalganj yesterday, said police.

Rubicha Begum, wife of Nur Mollah from Chamta village; and Shefali Bala, wife of Subal Bala from Mahistali village in Muksudpur upazila died on the spot, said Liakat Hossain, sub-inspector of Boiltali Police Outpost.

The SI said the accident occurred as the driver lost control over the vehicle.

The injured were given primary treatment at local hospitals, he said, adding that they seized the bus but the driver managed to flee.

Our Mymensingh correspondent adds, an imam was killed and another was injured as they fell off a motorbike they were riding on Kishoreganj-Bhairab road in Jaamtoli Bazar area of Bajitpur upazila in Kishoreganj district yesterday, said law enforcers.

Maulana Md Abdul Aziz from Borobagh in the district died on the spot.

The injured -- Habibur Rahman Babu -- was admitted to Jahurul Islam Medical College and Hospital in Bajitpur of Kishoreganj, said Johirul Islam, in-charge of Katiadi Highway Police Station.

The two were going to Katiadi upazila headquarters, he added.

UNO to seize smartphones from students

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

Students at Hathazari Parbati Model High School had quite a shocking revelation yesterday as Upazila Nirbahi Officer Ruhul Amin at an event there declared to seize their smartphones.

The UNO made the announcement at a meeting with guardians at the school in Hathazari Sadar upazila.

Amin said he observed that students were getting involved in altercations and scuffles using smartphones as a tool to communicate and organise.

"A few days ago, school authorities found e-cigarettes along with smartphones in students' bags. They were using those to organise themselves to clash with another group," he said.

Considering all this, Ruhul Amin, also president of the school management committee, said he decided to seize smartphones from students, if found.

Apart from this, he also urged guardians to keep an eye on the children and know properly about their whereabouts.

Contacted, the UNO said he took the decision thinking of students' welfare. He also said teachers and guardians agreed with his decision.

When asked what if there is a problem and a student has to contact his or her guardian, the UNO said he is not against cellphones. "Students can carry regular phones with them," he said.

Tk 5 in 'honesty box' is all they'll need

BRTC to launch 10 buses for school, madrasa students on 2 routes in Chattogram city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

The Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) is going to launch 10 buses for the students in Chattogram next week.

Only school and madrasa students will be able to use these buses when travelling to and from their educational institutions. The buses will initially operate on two routes in the city in morning and afternoon.

Students will have to pay Tk 5 for each trip and show their school ID cards before getting on the buses. They will deposit the fare in one of the two boxes placed at the doors of the buses.

"There will be two helpers in every bus but there will be no conductor or supervisor to realise the fare. Instead, there will be two boxes on each side of the bus which we call 'honesty box', where students will put Tk 5 when they get off the bus," said BRTC's Chattogram Bus Depot Manager Ziaur Rahman.

"We want to see if students are practicing morality by paying fares by themselves."

During the students' movement for safe roads last year, the prime minister pledged to launch a bus service for the benefit of the students, Ziaur told The Daily Star, adding that in light of that commitment, the initiative to launch these buses was taken.

He said buses under the first route will leave from Bahaddarhat and go to New Market via Baduratala, Muradpur, Chawkbazar, Gani Bakery, Jamalkhan, Cheragi Pahar, Nandankanan and Amtal and travel back on the same route.

Bus under the second route will go to Agrabad via Oxygen, Muradpur, Sholashahar Gate No 2, GEC

PHOTO: **RAJIB RAIHAN**

Intersection, WASA Intersection, Tiger Pass, Dewan Hat and Chowmuhani and travel back on the same route.

BRTC officials said all buses have already been fully prepared for the operation.

Students and parents welcomed the government's initiative.

They said once the buses are launched, the students and parents, as well as the common people, will be benefited.

"My daughter is a student at a private school in the city," said Sudhir Dutta, a resident of Chawkbazar in the city.

"But on her way to school, she has to struggle to get on a public transport. She has to wait for long due to the inadequate number of vehicles compared to the passengers

on the road."

This service will ease the pressure on other commuters during rush hours, said Sudhir.

Ziaur said although each bus has 75 seats, around 100 students will be able to board it.

Deputy Commissioner of Chattogram Mohammad Elias Hossain told The Daily Star that a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with a private company -- GPH Ispat -- was signed and the company would sponsor all buses and pay Tk 5 lakh per month in exchange.

He said three CCTV cameras will be installed on each bus for security adding, "I would like to urge all parents to send their children to school on these buses instead of sending them by private vehicles."