

Star CHITTAGONG

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Chentury-old Chittagong Building on Paris Pahar

PHOTO: STAR

Old bldgs embody Ctg of past

GOLAM SARWAR CHOWDHURY

Chittagong is a city of the past as it is also one of the present. Many historians suggest that it has behind it a history of a thousand years. Whatever the case may be, Chittagong has grown over the last three hundred years somewhat briskly. It has attracted people of many races and colours. Some left quickly while others decided to stay behind, lending variety to the indigenous people. Trade and commerce have flourished here for obvious reasons: access to the sea meant a reach touching the rest of the world. Along with navigators came Arab preachers and Sufi dervishes, also arrived the Portuguese and the British. The latter consolidated their stay, beginning the colonial period that lasted for two hundred years. Even today, some of the surviving old buildings of Chittagong serve as a throwback on the past.

One of the oldest Portuguese architectures still extant is a dilapidated rectangular building, once used as the police record room, in the Lalidighi area atop the hill where the Police Commissioner's office is situated. There is a difference of opinion as to whether this building was actually constructed by the Portuguese or not. One strong reason behind the claim that it was indeed built by the Portuguese is the fact that close to this site is what is now called the Bandel Road. Bandel is Portuguese for Port of Bandar in Bangla. Another Portuguese building that has been torn down a few years ago was the original academic building of the Government Muslim High School located close to the Police Commissioner's office. In the same locality

another hilltop marvel of an architecture built in 1894 by the British is the Court Building. Not only has its existence been threatened by time, it has also been a victim of gross human insensitivity. Had it not been for a group of bold people belonging to the civil society, the majestic Court Building would have been already pulled down to give way for a new construction suiting the need of the present time. Our inability to protect old buildings is in keeping with our reluctance to objectively review the past. Old monuments and institutions are objects of neglect perhaps because we are not very confident to turn back to our immediate past. Although, ironically we do boast about our national heritage of a thousand years!

Not very far from the Court Hill is the Cathedral in Feringhee Bazar. Now frequented by only a few thousand of the city's remaining Catholics, this is also another building with a history of more than one hundred years. Close to the Cathedral are the other two wonderful examples of late nineteenth-century architecture, the St Scholastic's School and Convent and the St. Placid's School, both built in the early twentieth-century. This area is worth visiting, along with children, at a time when present-day schools are being housed in apartments and residential houses! When one stands in front of the Catholic Church moving the eyes across the two schools, it becomes clear why Micheal Foucault compared the architecture of the school-house with those of the prison-house, and the hospital: in their different ways they are institutions that either train or correct the human mind and body.

Two more mentioned monuments of nineteenth-century colonial architecture are the Chittagong Railway Building more popular in its abbreviation, CRB, and the main building of the Chittagong Club. The British constructed the enormous Railway Building in the last decade of the nineteenth-century as the headquarters of the Assam-Bengal Railway. A few years later the Chittagong Club was introduced keeping in mind the recreational needs of the civil servants of the Raj and the English officers of the Railway. It is said that for a while tea plantation was experimented in Chittagong but the results were not satisfactory. The main building of the Club is supposed to have been the bungalow of the abandoned tea plantation's manager. The Club building is more than a hundred year's old. Even so, it seems to be firm though the roof has been repaired quite a number of times. Some of the older residential houses that still remain with the Bangladesh Railway are strikingly similar to the main building of Chittagong Club in terms of the red brick structure, the high ceilings, the Doric columns, the rectangular shape and the spacious balconies. A similar residential house is that of the DIG of police on the Batali Hill close to the Chittagong Club.

Yet another outstanding work of architecture, probably completed also in the last few years of the nineteenth-century, is the PK Sen Building in the city's Sadarghat area. For a very long time, well into the early seventies of the last century, this building was regarded as the tallest concrete structure of Chittagong. Past Sadarghat, along the Strand Road, by the obscure waterfront, one could still discover smaller old buildings erected nearly a hundred years ago reminding the city's old glory. This street, now long beyond its prime, is the one through which, perhaps, entered men of various races and nationalities after landing in the port.

One of the oldest surviving monuments in Chittagong, called the mazar of Badar Shah, close to the Chittagong jail, was built in 1340 AD by the Sultan of Sonargaon, Fakruddin Mubarak Shah. Historians agree that he conquered Chittagong that very year. Among the other formidable Muslim architectures of Chittagong is the Jame Masjid located in Anderkilla. It was built between the period of 1667 and 1669 by Buzurg Umed Khan, son of Shaesta Khan, Subedar of Subeh Bengal. Also deserving mention is the Kadam Mubarak mosque built in the early eighteenth-century by Mohammed Shah a latter emperor of the Mughal dynasty.

These old buildings representative of diverse architectural styles are now threatened by age. In order to protect the heritage of our glorious past, immediate steps must be taken to declare these buildings as essential sites of historical importance to be preserved for the posterity. Some of these older buildings have to be saved by undertaking necessary protective repair. In the years to come, these historical monuments will speak to the posterity about the glorious past of our nation.

Prof Golam Sarwar Chowdhury, Chairman, Dept of English, University of Chittagong.

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Aerial view of Chittagong port

PHOTO: A K M MOHSIN

CHT: An ideal place for tourism

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD

With an array of vast hilly tracts, chains of hills, valleys and serene lakes of panoramic view, the wilderness and the colourful cultural diversity of different ethnic groups, the CHT is undoubtedly an ideal place for the growth of tourism.

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) that comprises three hilly districts of Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban has a tremendous potential in tourism side by side related small-scale industries such as textiles and bamboo-crafts.

After the CHT was declared 'Free Movement Zone' for the tourists, nature-loving people started swarming into different tranquil resorts of the CHT districts. It also brought in signs of impressive development of tourism with quick success of a few new ventures.

A good number of ventures are there in the CHT region to attract the tourists.

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation-owned 26-acre complex namely 'Parjatan Holiday Complex, Rangamati' made remarkable development in the recent time. This oldest tourist establishment of this region started its journey as 'Deer Park' in 1963.

At present, the complex with a 19-room motel with restaurant, gift-shop, honeymoon cottages, children-park, auditorium, a hanging

bridge and speedboats and engine boats offers the tourists a wide range of facilities.

The Green Water Project is a tourist venture of Bangladesh Army, located at the mouth of Subolang Channel. A luxury hotel and arrangements for water sports are also there. Under the project a floating restaurant named 'Girishbhaba' started functioning in mid-2000 and has become popular.

"Holiday Blast Resort" -- the first private sector venture in Rangamati that started operation in November 2000 -- has been an instant success as claimed by the local people.

The 6-acre island resort is located at Hazaribagh at the mouth of Subolang Channel, about five km off Rangamati city. It has a restaurant named 'Peda-ting-ting' an unusual Chakma name meaning a 'full stomach' or a 'well-fed tummy making ting ting sound with the knock of fingers tips'.

With a teak plantation on the complex of 'Holiday Blast Resort', the venture promises an exquisite holiday in wilderness.

Besides, Sabarang Restaurant of Rajbari Road and Hotel Sufia of Kathaloli are also some successful stories of private sector ventures in the tourism industry in Rangamati. Meghla Parjatan Kendra is a major tourist attraction in Bandarban. Situated about five kilometres of the town beside Chittagong-Bandarban road, the 90-acre com-

plex is run by the Bandarban district administration.

The complex has an artificial lake and provides boat-ride facility. It is most remarkable as a picnic spot. However, it does not have any facility for overnight stay.

In Khagrachari, Alutila Parjatan Kendra of the local district administration is the main attraction. It has been developed on 200 acres of land on the eastern slope of Alutila hill, about 15 kms from the district headquarters.

Standing on the Outlook Towers of the complex, one can see the entire Chengi Valley as well as the town. But to many, the most attractive thing about the place is a walk through its underground tunnel created by a natural underground stream.

A recent ADB report on tourism said that CHT is an ideal place for developing tourism as an industry. Quoting statistics of World Tourism Organisation (WTO), the report said tourism was the single largest industry in the world with an estimated turnover of US\$ 4.4 trillion in 1998.

Besides in its report said CHT could pursue international tourism to have even a very small fraction of the huge industry that would mean a lot for Bangladesh. The knowledgeable circles also express the same optimism about the prospect of tourism in CHT.

However, they emphasise the

improvement of law and order situation and political stability as the preconditions. Besides, proper policy alongside political will of the government, sustainable peace and development are also underscored.

In this regard, development of house boat service under private sector on vast 600-sq km Kaptai Lake could enable the tourists to travel different places of different cultures, vegetation and wildlife, the circle suggested.

It further added that renovation and re-operation of the already existing 15-km long rope-way at Machhalong of Baghaichari upazila in Rangamati could offer the tourists thrilling rides over the jungles and a view of wildlife from the top.

The rope-way was constructed in the late fifties by Karnaphuli Paper Mills (KPM) authority to facilitate bamboo extraction from Kachhalong reserve forest.

To provide the tourists with sufficient boarding facilities the knowledgeable circle suggest proper use of the underutilised government guest-houses.

The guest-houses that have an occupancy rate below ten per cent despite huge money spent every year for their maintenance could be opened for all with some charges, they said.

From today we start a special weekly page on our port city and the Chittagong Division. This page will contain in depth reports, special features and profiles of famous people from this part of the country. We will give special focus on the economic and business potential of the area and report on the latest investments coming here. We will also highlight the unique cultural heritage of this region and the latest trends that are developing here. We hope our readers will find our latest endeavour to serve them better interesting. - Editor



Chittagong at a glance

There are different opinions about the naming of Chittagong. After the victory of the 'Goura' by the 'Musulman' twelve Saint came to this area for preaching 'Islam'. It is widely believed that these preachers hanged a big 'Bati' [lamp] with fire on a high place to drive out the 'Gin-Fore' [Giant & Fairy] from those places.

In the colloquial language of Chittagong -- 'Chat' means 'Bati' or 'Chera' [lamp] & 'gan' means 'gram' [Village]. Since these area came to be known as 'Chaligaon'. On the other hand the Buddhists conceive that the name of 'Chittagong' 'Chaito-Kiang' or 'Chaitogram' as a perversion of word, 'Chatagram' means the Buddhist monument. The founder of Asiatic society 'Sir William Jones' described that the name of 'Chittagong' has been originated from the name of a small beautiful bird 'chotog'. Some people presume that the Buddha king of 'Arakan' attacked Bangladesh during 953 a.d. & created a victory monument at present Chittagong. On the victory monument the word 'Tist-Tung' was engraved. Which means -- 'It is crime wage war'. It is widely believed that the name 'Chittagong' most perhaps has originated from the above words.

Area: 33771 km² -- **Population:** Over 24318000 -- **Districts:** 11, Such as -- Chittagong, Rangamati [Hill-tracts], Cox's Bazar, Bandarban, Khagrachari, Feni, Noakhali, Lakshmpur, Comilla, Chandpur, Brahmanbaria. **Literacy Rate [age 15 years & above]:** Over 50 percent.

Sigh For the Open, Longing For the Green

ABUL MOMEN

We need oxygen, without it we cannot survive a moment. We may stop respiration for a while, but we can do that only because we have intake of oxygen in the body. The newborn shows signs of life only after inhaling oxygen. It is the lifeline.

But what are we doing these days? By way of making our modern living more busy, more comfortable and, of course, most successful, we build, drive, and use all sorts of amenities, which contaminate the air surrounding us. We are, as if an anti-oxygen race, determined to ruin our own future.

As we have lungs in the body, which supplies oxygen to the blood, so do we need oxygen sanctuaries in our habitat. Chittagong is, however, a unique city, which grew in nature's bounty, with hills and dales, river and lake, and a sea at the door. All these ensure open space and pure air with oxygen.

But we are growing like ferocious carnivores that quickly devour the green and the open. We build concrete structures and the like, tirelessly and endlessly, with ever increasing speed and enthusiasm, eliminating all prospects of open space and green view to survive. Yes, our lust is unlimited and ever growing and finds open green spaces, the most tasty palatable dish ready only to pounce on.

The open spaces of Chittagong are fast disappearing. Trees are chopped, hills cut and then the bald denuded area is gang-raped, which finally results in most cases an ugly concrete cage. We love to be engaged, though we like to talk about freedom!

In Chittagong we still have open areas, which are like oxygen sanctuaries for the city dwellers. The Central Railway Building (CRB) and Tiger Pass areas, Foy's Lake area, Surson Road, DC Hill, the Stadium area and the Beach of Patenga are some such places that still survive our lustful paws and jaws. But all these places are not in good state, for some, we fear, the days of greenery and openness are numbered. Many

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Dreamland of prospect & potentiality

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD, Ctg

Terming Chittagong a northeastern district of the South East Asian country of Bangladesh overlooking the Bay of Bengal a 'worldly dreamland of prospect and potentiality' won't be much exaggeration of truth.

Generously blessed by the bounteous nature and having a very strategic geographical location, Chittagong might virtually emerge as the 'treasure trove' of the country and a place humming with commercial activities enriching the national economy.

Beset with hills and vales, clad with forests and many streams and rivers passing through, Chittagong is duly regarded as "The Queen of the East" for its panoramic and scenic beauty.

At the same time its port (Chittagong port), one of the busiest

as the 'Commercial Capital' and the 'Port City' of the country. And centring which all the commercial and business activities of the city developed is its port, Chittagong Port.

The history of this port dates back to the 4th century BC when Chittagong was known as Shetgang -- an Arabic word meaning Delta of the Ganges. At that time too, the port had sufficient trade and importance to attract fleet from Middle East ports, China and other south-eastern countries.

History says, the journey of the flourishing of Chittagong started since then and never had to look back. The Arabs and Yemeni traders landed at the port in 9th century AD and during the 16th century the Portuguese took great interest in the locality around Chittagong where it was popularly known as 'Porte Grande'.

In consideration of the tea industry

It was here in Chittagong that tea cultivation of the country first started. The first ever tea garden of the country was grown up on Pioneer Hill (where Chittagong Club stands at present) of the city centre on an experimental basis.

Chittagong was first to bring in the first ever foreign investment for the medicine industry in the country with the Glaxo Group of Companies setting up its first branch here in 1948.

Having sufficient raw materials to

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MA Hannan international Airport in Chittagong City.

The port was established at its present location in the year 1887 and by the year 1910 four jetties were constructed to handle an annual quantity of 0.5 million tons of cargo initially.

As the business started booming centring the port, at the end of 17th century the traditional commercial centre of Khatungon, once regarded as the Wall Street of Bangladesh, had its foundation laid.

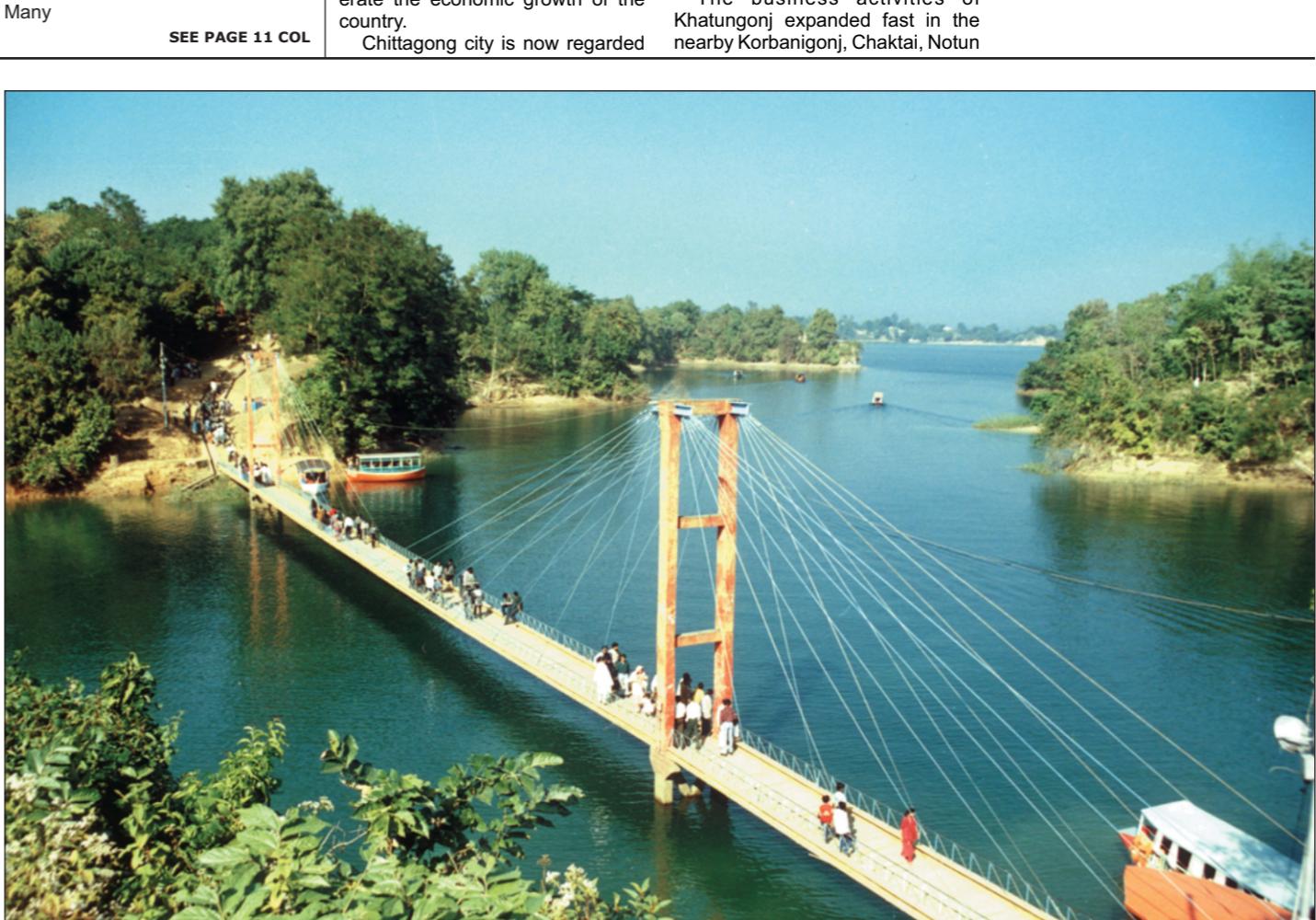
The business activities of Khatungon expanded fast in the nearby Korbanigon, Chakta, Notun

try and easy transportation of goods through Chittagong Port, investments from both home and abroad started increasing here.

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Hanging Bridge over Kaptai Lake in Rangamati

PHOTO: STAR