



Dangarchar: A spot for investment

SHAHIDUL ISLAM

Dangarchar, located just opposite to the glittering and bustling port city, can be an entrepreneurs' dream place for investment provided some basic infrastructures were improved.

It takes one to a half-an-hour ride on a country boat and less than that by an engine boat to reach the huge 'untouched' open space at Dangarchar village in Juldha union under Karnaphuli thana of Chittagong. Nevertheless, one can have a 'crystal-clear' view of the scenic wide-open land that stretches up to the horizon if he stands even on the northern bank of the river. From aerial viewpoint, it offers a deltaic look down on the earth.

Dangarchar, a vast landscape on the southern bank of the river Karnaphuli, has been ignored for long.

The near 20-sq. kilometer site has been ignored for years by all quarters. It seems, nobody never-think of such a place, which had golden opportunity to attract investment from home and abroad, for greater economic interest. Even the state machinery, too, was found to be extremely indifferent and apathetic to explore whether there are any opportunity at all at Dangarchar or not.

Local people in Chittagong, however, said with little touch of infra-structural development this vast 'unnoticed' location could poise for a money-spinning industrial zone.

Referring to several countries they said, planned cities were built on both sides of rivers in those countries having blessed with river ports. Neighbouring India and Singapore have such intended cities. But, in spite of unique opportunities for making an exclusive and profitable industrial zone, let alone building a bubbly suburb, the southern part of river Karnaphuli remains unheeded and neglected.

Besides, an apparently 'bizarre' system of 'tripartite' administrative rule on this huge area has made its prospect more uncertain and bleak in near future. The region and its people belong to Anwara upazila during parliamentary elections, to



PHOTO: STAR

Under-construction building of Star Cement factory at Dangarchar village.

Patiya upazila during upazila elections and revenue collection, and to Karnaphuli Thana under Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) when law and order come.

Two villages-- Juldha and Dangarchar -- constitute the Juldha Union. The river Karnaphuli separates the union from the city while the canal 'Donar Khal', isolates the region from the Karnaphuli thana. This makes the communication of Dangarchar with other parts of the union and city very difficult, wretched and scratchy.

One needs to travel over 30-kms to reach Dangarchar from Chittagong city by mechanized mode of transport while it takes only a 30-minute journey through river-route to cover up a distance of

merely 1-km.

Knowledgeable circles think, the Karnaphuli thana- the vicinity of Dangarchar- on the other bank of the Karnaphuli, could have grown more important than Keraniganj, situated on the other bank of the river Buriganga in Dhaka, if planned development programmes were taken removing existing crises for development components there that include road-network, culverts, electricity, gas and tele-communications system.

Were there such initiatives, an entire and revolutionary development could have taken place not only at Dangarchar but also at the whole area of Karnaphuli.

Despite living in the parliamentary constituency of the present

commerce minister, though on the other bank, the people of Dangarchar are deprived of development. Yet they, as if accustomed to it, do not have much resentment over the deprivation. With the eight ministers from Chittagong frequently making their journeys through the airport, only a few yards off their courtyard, they are very much reasonable to nurse a hope that 'some thing may turn up one day'.

They firmly believe that with a huge potentiality, Dangarchar is sure to bring forth prosperity and golden days for them removing the transitory clouds that kept their bright prospect blanketed for years.

However, going against this immense adversity, MA Quader a young 'Chittagonian' entrepreneur, dared to set up an industry on this deserted place recently. This courageous businessman established a cement factory --Star Cement- in January last year. He even bothered not to bring electricity facility for his industry at a cost of Tk.33 lakh from Baltali Feeder Station in Anwara, about 18 kilometers away from his factory.

During a recent visit to the area, MA Quader regretted to a group of journalists that the country was spilling a golden opportunity of huge investment here only for lack of infra-structural facilities and for the indifferent stand of the authority concerned.

He said Dangarchar don't have any college or even a bazaar. About 90 per cent of the roads are kuccha and inappropriate to ply any vehicle. The area has only one junior high school and one primary school while the college going students of this village had to make a long stride of nearly 15 kilometers to attend their classes.

Quader said, "Many of my friends and wellwishers had discouraged me not to go with any business in this abandoned place, while the timely advice and blessings of my mother gave me courage and enthusiasm, resulting in building of Star Cement. I strongly believe that Dangarchar is sure to usher in an era in near future."

Who knows, one day, many more brave entrepreneurs would follow the path paved by this young dreamer.



PHOTO: STAR

Chittagong Port Workers' Parishad, an alliance of 22 trade unions, formed a human chain in Dhaka yesterday protesting government move to allow the SSA, an American company, to build a private port in Chittagong.

Girls fight for accommodation

ATAUL GANI SUMON

The female students of Chittagong University (CU) and the Chittagong Medical College (CMC) are facing severe accommodation crisis.

They are also facing problems of acute water crisis, supply of unhygienic and substandard food, poor toilet facilities, guest charge rule and sun set law in the dormitories.

A good number of first year students from outside the port city are yet to turn up for the classes beginning first week of June, as they could not manage their seats in the dormitories of the university.

For this, university sources said, some of them will not be able to attend their classes. And they went back to their village homes, as they could not manage their seats in the dormitories.

Every student-- male or female-- is attached with a hall of the 9 dormitories of the university.

But only two are for female students who constitute 40 per cent of the 16 thousand students of the university. The rest six halls are for the male students.

About 3500 students, 1500 of them are female, take admission in the university every year. Most of them come from outside the city.

A small number of female students stay with their relatives or family members in the Chittagong city while the rest take admission expecting to get accommodation in the residential halls.

But due to lack of adequate seats and strict rules in the female dormitories, the freshers face serious accommodation problems.

The rules are so rigid that they cannot even stay in the halls being the 'attached students'.

On the other hand, the seat allotment process is very cumbersome.

A very poor number of seats of each female hall are allotted for the first year honours students every

year. As a result, most of them, who come from outside the city, usually are to share seats with their seniors.

According to rules, CU authorities do not allow any non-resident student to stay in the halls. Defying the rules, outsiders belonging to the different student organisations, are staying in the male halls. But the rules are strictly enforced in the female dormitories, campus sources said.

A female student from the Dhaka district narrated her sad story to the Daily Star as she was facing the accommodation problem.

'I have no relatives in the Chittagong--nowhere I can stay here," she said adding 'I would have never taken admission into Chittagong University if I had an idea of the sufferings before like this.'

She said some girls were looking for student leaders to solve their problems.

Another girl from Chandpur district, who got admitted into economics department, said she was forced to stay in the rented house in the city with some other girls which is very expensive and insecure. Even if any fresher goes to the halls to stay at night the authorities force her to go out. Some students alleged that the hall authorities had treated them harshly when they contacted them for permission.

The condition of reading room and the common room of female dormitories is not so good. The hall authorities hardly keep the popular daily newspapers and the weekly magazines in the common rooms, some of the resident students of Pritilata hall told this correspondent.

The students are also facing acute water crisis in the dormitories. In most of the cases, the water is not available during day time. The toilet facilities and sanitation condition are also very poor.

The hall authorities take addi-

tional TK 3 for per meal as guest charge in the dining room.

The sunset law is still effective in the female dormitories.

The female students of the dormitories alleged that they could not do their library works as the authorities closed the gate of the halls by 6 pm. The male students are enjoying the facility but we cannot. I think it is very inhuman to us." a girl student said on condition of anonymity.

The majority of the female students of the dormitories opposed the sunset rule and demanded its withdrawal immediately.

In the Pritilata hall, there is no point of the electricity line in the rooms to switch over the fans. In the summer the female students of the halls suffer a lot due to this. But the authorities have not yet taken any step to resolve the problems despite repeated complaints by the students.

The VC of the Chittagong University, Prof AJM Nuruddin Chowdhury said there was no serious accommodation problem for the female students." we are going to construct a new hall for the female students and hope that we will overcome the accommodation problem," he said.

Meanwhile, the female students of Chittagong Medical College (CMC) are also facing the accommodation problem. The common room of the lone girls' hostel was being used as the residential room for the last six years due to accommodation problem.

The female students, especially the freshers, are facing the problem very seriously.

There is a lone dormitory "Kanta Chhatr Nibash" for 350 students. To reach the door of the common room, one must cross the cots of another student by jumping over, the inmates said.

About 92 female students were residing in the three tiny common

rooms. Recently, the CMC authorities took an initiative to turn two reading rooms of the hostel into common rooms.

But the agitated female students protested the move and staged a sit-in in front of the office of principal and boycotted the classes.

The female students of the dormitory withdrew their sit-in programme when the authorities assured them of resolving the problem.

In addition to accommodation problem, the students are also suffering a lot due to acute water crisis.

The authorities supply water at the hall only for 25 to 30 minutes everyday. A long queue is always seen in the hall for collecting the water.

"For this problem we cannot set our mind to the studies and everyday we have to take trouble," said one student seeking anonymity. "For that we missed our classes which are more important to us, she added. But the authorities did little to resolve the problems".

For lack of repairing works the electric lines have become risky but the authorities charged TK 260 from the female students more than that of the male, they alleged.

The resident students are also forced to take unhygienic and substandard food due to massive irregularities in dining halls of the dormitories.

Many resident students have been suffering from intestinal diseases like chronic dysentery and diarrhoea.

But they hardly dare to complain fearing a problem during their viva tests.

However, the hostel superintendent could not be contacted for comments.

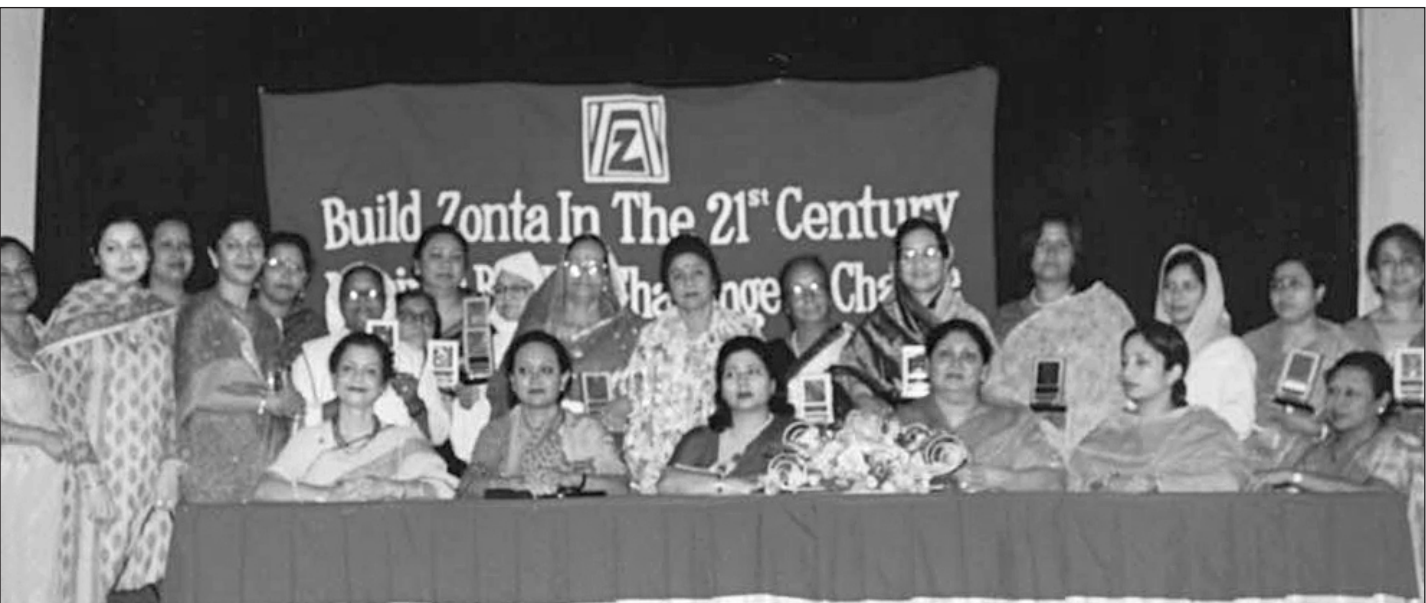


PHOTO: STAR

Zonta Club, Chittagong Unit, awarded crests to 14 women for their contribution to different professions, at a function in the city on May 22. The prize winners are seen with the club leaders.

The road that speaks history

MOHIT UL ALAM

Demarcating the easternmost border of the city, the Nawab Sirajuddinwah Road is probably the oldest thoroughfare in Chittagong. It links Chawkbazar in the east with Anderkilla in the west, a distance covering nearly three kilometers.

In the olden days people coming from the village to the town on a visit found that it was the only road on which vehicles of any significance did ply. The horse-drawn carts, used to be called Pankshiraj, were the common transports while the newly arrived Ford Pheonians also ran but very infrequently. It was about 50 years ago.

Since then Chittagong has developed into metropolis, though nothing big had happened to the N.S. Road. It remains the same narrow straight street as it was in the past. The city has consistently grown to the western side of it.

The historic Chandanpura Mosque, very famous for its thin columns and coloured minarets, stands on this road. Except for this, there aren't seen many buildings and monuments from the past on this road, thus hardly justifying its name.

Both Chawkbazar and Anderkilla are major downtown areas. Chawkbazar connects the outlying areas of Chittagong with the main part of the city, while Anderkilla is like what Gulistan is in Dhaka, providing an access road to the major business centres -- Terry Bazar, Bakshir Hat, Korbanigonj and Khatoongonj, finally ending up in Chaktai.

As the city has extended beyond

Chawkbazar up to the Bahaddarhat vegetable market in the east, and as the modern C.D.A. (Chittagong Development Authority) Avenue has passed it by, Chawkbazar has lost its previous importance of being the gateway to Chittagong.

Though Bahaddarhat has developed as another major joint, Chawkbazar has not lost its business altogether. But the road between Chawkbazar and Bahaddarhat through Badurtala has become a trading centre for timbers, the curved road on both sides being decked with a string of shops stuffed with processed timbers. But then one will see more timber sheds on the C.D.A. Avenue from Bahaddarhat to Muradpur.

Muradpur and Chawkbazar are the business centres for all kinds of motor parts and machinery. In fact all buses and trucks are repaired and remade, and then painted, in garages located in Chawkbazar.

The workshops in Muradpur mainly deal in the used parts of cars and other kinds of motor vehicles. A car owner may find out the stolen parts of his car in the shops here.

There are many garages here in Muradpur that sell out secondhand cars. Muradpur perhaps is the biggest production zone of aluminium utensils in the country. Hundreds of shops are to be found within a radius of half a mile. Thus Muradpur, Bahaddarhat and Chawkbazar form a triangle of intense business activity.

Anderkilla, on the other hand, is busy with a very different nature of business. It is both ancient and aristocratic. The City Corporation Office comprising two four-storied

buildings is situated here.

The incumbent Mayor of the CCC is at once witty, deft and hospitable.

When you see the Mayor's blue Pajero jeep parked under the portico of the office, you will know the Mayor, Mr ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, an incredible humorous but deft person is in office.

Must you go to his office during lunch hour you'll automatically become a guest of his for the lunch. Mr Chowdhury once confided to his guests that he tries to follow the rituals observed by Hazrat Ibrahim (S:) as regards hospitality.

Across the road is Chittagong Jame Mosque, built up above a hill, a broad flight of stairs leading up to it. There is an atmosphere of sanctity inside and the floor of the mosque is smooth and rather cool for those sensitive to cold.

The edifice of the Jame Mosque has a market complex at the base that is rented out to cloth merchants and book traders. In fact, the largest book trading centre in Chittagong is here.

The bookstores, however, are a great disappointment for book lovers, as they sell nothing but only textbooks. The Janata Book House, a leading publishing house of textbooks in the city, is located at the Anjuman Market, an old building-complex just beside the Jame Mosque. Opposite to the mosque is the General Hospital of Chittagong also situated on a hill.

It is an old red building probably built by the Portuguese. Beside the old building two new buildings, also red-coloured, have sprouted, one of them a children hospital and the

other a tuberculosis clinic.

As the N.S. Road winds through Anderkilla, it is first intercepted at the Terry Bazar More by two roads leading off in opposite directions. The one branching off to the west is known as Hazari Goli which is undoubtedly the main sales centre for imported medicines.

The other road on the east disappears into the maze of the country's biggest wholesale commercial triangle of Khatoongonj, Korbanigonj and Bakshi Bazar.

At Khatoongonj, the merchants are all called Sowdagars and business is executed by words of mouth. Crores of taka pass hands here without any written document.

However, such faith has recently taken a jolt due to the occurrence of incidents of fraud and forgery within the business community. Conspiracies between rival business houses do often flare up into violent clashes sometimes even leading to death, and in a recent incident a top businessman was kidnapped and then released in a mysterious situation, leaving a deep scar in an otherwise peaceful community of Khatoongonj.

Moreover, the narrow old roads of the area have proved to be a maze of continuous traffic jams forcing a fall in trade volumes and compelling many to shift their businesses to more spacious areas like Agrabad. This shifting is also a result of generation preference, the father willing to stay put in Khatoongonj while the son trying to come out of it.

The writer is Professor, Department of English, Chittagong University.

Red tapism delays plot allotment for WTC

NURUL ALAM

Despite hectic lobbying with the higher echelon of the government Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CCCI), the apex trade body Of the country's main port city, is yet to secure the allotment of the additional plot of land to initiate construction of the World Trade Centre (WTC) at Agrabad commercial area.

Talking to The Daily Star CCCI president Farid Ahmed Chowdhury said bureaucratic tangles had delayed to secure the additional plot of 1.02 bighas of land at a nominal price at the site owned by Bangladesh railway.

"But we hope to get the land shortly as our local ministers also gave assurance in this regard. So we are expecting to start the construction of WTC on a land of about

four bighas by July this year," CCCI president said.

He said rest of the land required for installation of WTC were already allotted during the last tenure of BNP government and the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia ceremonially laid the foundation stone Of WTC in 1995.

But after the foundation laying function the project of WTC could not see any headway as the additional plot of land could not be achieved, he said.

Later, at the fag end of immediate past government of Awami League, a delegation of CCCI met the former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who gave approval for handing over the additional plot of land for installation of WTC at Agrabad, he added.

CCCI president said " though former Prime Minister verbally

approved the allotment of the additional plot of land at nominal price, the bureaucrats did not translate it into reality after she resigned before parliamentary poll".

"Even when we contacted the concerned departments of the government we did not get proper response. As a result, the total process ran into a trouble," he said.

"When the new government took over we again started lobbying and the Prime Minister also gave assurance in this regard," he added saying " but it is moving at snail's pace due to red tapism".

He said response was already received from foreign investors who were keen to have financial involvement for construction of the WTC.

"Now we need the allotment of additional plot of land only and then we can go for the construction works," CCCI president said.

The 20 storied world trade centre will have infrastructural facilities of preserving data and information cell, big display centres of exportable goods, five star hotel, banks, insurance etc, he said.

The foreign delegation and investors can have information from his trade centre about the areas of interests and possibilities on global prospects," he added.

He said after completion of construction, the investors can make

Profit of huge amount by selling the space and giving the five star hotel to any international chain of hotel management.

"We are expecting an economic revolution in Chittagong if transit facilities through Chittagong port are allowed for neighbouring countries," CCCI president said.