

Sampan race to save river Karnaphuli

PRANABESH CHAKRABORTY

The river Karnaphuli can not be imagined without sampan and its majhi (boatman).

Many songs, poems and folk rhymes have been versed on the river Karnaphuli and its sampan and majhis like "O re sampan oala tui omare korli dioyana" (oh my boatman you have made me mad).

The traditional sampan and their majhis are disappearing day by day as a section of industrialists and influential quarters are illegally grabbing the banks and ghat (mooring) of the river.

Around 800 small and big factories are releasing wastes in the river daily causing damage to its biodiversity. As a result, many of fishermen who live on fishing in the river have already lost their livelihoods and rests are eking out their existence.

The boatmen who take people or goods to the either banks of the river are losing their livelihood after the influential quarters take the ghats lease from the Chittagong City Corporation (CCC), forcing them to give tolls at a higher rate or change their profession.

To save the river from the encroachers and pollution as well as their existence, the sampan majhis organised a three-day sampan khela (boat race) and Chantgaiya (Chittagong) cultural fair in the river Karnaphuli and its field adjacent to Char Pathar Gatha in the port city.

Sampan Majhi Kalyan Samity Federation (SMKSF) in association with Chattagram Anchalik Sangskriti Academy (CASA) organised the events titled "We are boatmen of the river Karnaphuli and we have pledged to save the river".

The boatmen took out a procession of 300 traditional sampans carrying colourful banners and festoons with a slogan "Dorjar kulat bas gori aanra sampan majhi, Karnaphuli raksar laijiban railam baji".

The procession began from the Aboymitra Ghat ended at Fery Ghat via Bangla Bazar.

Fishermen, boatmen and local villagers thronged the fair at Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) ground at Char Pathar Ghata. A huge number of village women crowded the fair.

A seminar and folk poets' duel were held on the first day where 30 folk professional versifiers depict how the Karnaphuli, economic lifeline of the country, is gradually turning into a dead river through their beautiful songs and verses.

The duels started with the beating of dhol (folk drum) of Babul Jaladas, son of Ekushey award winner drum player



Sampan Majhi Kalyan Samity Federation and Chattagram Anchalik Sangskriti Academy organise a sampan procession in the river Karnaphuli.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Binoy Banshi. The bards narrated the history of the river and how it was named Karnaphuli and its present condition saying that the life of the river is at stake.

Thousands of people enjoyed the sampan race from the river bank on the concluding day of the fair.

Prof Edris Ali, one of the organisers of the fair and researcher on the river Karnaphuli, told The Daily Star that the port city, its culture and traditions including sampan and sampan majhi and their livelihoods all have been shaped centring the river.

"So we need a massive social movement to save the river", he said, adding that if condition of the river deteriorates, not

only will the boatmen lose their jobs but also whole economy will be at stake.

He said 60 percent of the wastes and garbage of the city fall into the river through the canals and 25 to 30 percent of insecticides and chemicals used in the farm lands are falling into the river causing pollution to the river.

"If the present condition continues the fishes of different species of the river will be on the verge of extinction threatening the livelihoods of the boatmen as well as the fishermen and causing health hazard to the city people," he added.

Emphasising capital dredging of the river, Prof Edris said

the influential people and organisations have grabbed the moorings inside the river hindering its main current that helps strips of islands to emerge".

He said around 76 fish species were found available in the river in 1972 but now no sweet water fish species are seen.

SM Payar Ali, president of SMKSF said to save the river from pollution and the encroachment they arranged the events.

Aliur Rahman, director of the CASA and an organiser of the movement, said this kind of events will help protect the river from the grabbers as well as the pollution.

Kharana bridge a death trap



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

The Kharana bridge on the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway at Patiya. A picnic bus, inset, fell from the accident-prone bridge recently.

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Abdur Razzak, correspondent of The Daily Prothom Alo in Patiya, burst into tears seeing the body of his youngest daughter Sadia Khanam under the Kharana bridge on September 19 last year.

Sadia was killed in a road accident. Razzak said road accidents are occurring in the area frequently following the unplanned construction of the bridge as well as the approach road.

He said the accident occurred in the bridge area when his wife along with three children were returning home in a CNG-run tempo from his in-law's house. A speedy bus hit the tempo which fell into the canal, leaving two year-old Sadia dead on the spot.

He said the bridge has been constructed in an unplanned way, the approach road is too narrow in comparison to the highway and two speed bumps have been erected in a very short distance. Following these, the drivers who are not familiar with the road are to brake suddenly to stop on the speed bumps, causing accidents," Razzak said, adding that moreover railing of the bridge is broken and

unable to protect the vehicles from falling into the canal.

The bridge on Kharana canal is situated on a very important national highway connecting Cox's Bazar with Chittagong and rest of the country. The road will connect Myanmar and other South Asian countries through proposed Asian highway.

Sources said at least five people were killed and around 200 got injured in 12 road accidents in the Kharana Bridge area during the last eight months. In most of the cases, the drivers of the vehicles lost their control over the steering and consequently the vehicles fell off the bridge into the canal.

"In the rainy season the situation becomes more vulnerable as the canal is full to its brim," said Aniket Paul, a local.

The latest major accident occurred when a picnic bus fell into the canal from the bridge, leaving 20 injured seriously on February 23. The bus was returning from Cox's Bazar to Dhaka.

SM Faruq, a local, said a Cox's Bazar-bound bus of Saudia Paribahan skidded off the highway on Saturday last in the area. The passengers of the bus were lucky enough to escape from the accident, he added.

Faruq said they formed human

chains many occasions in the accident-prone area demanding reconstruction of the bridge as well as the approach road.

Locals blamed the Roads and Highway (R&D) authorities for not doing maintenance of the bridge properly.

Executive Engineer AKM Rafiqul Islam of Dohazari R&D said repair of bridge or widening the approach road are not their duty as a project has been submitted for maintenance of the bridge along with 21km approach road. Superintendent Engineer Sudhangsu Bikash Saha can answer well why railing of the bridge is not being repaired and the approach road is not being widened, he added.

Sudhangshu said a project of Road Network Improvement and Maintaining Programme by Asian Development Bank for the bridge along with a 21km road is under consideration. "We will take step to repair the bridge immediately," he said.

But he refused to talk about frequent accidents in the area.

Local Awami League lawmaker Shamsul Huq Chowdhury said communication minister has asked the R&D officials to reconstruct the bridge and widen the approach road.

the week that was

'Make Yunus Grameen Bank chairman'

Grameen Bank employees here on Sunday appealed to the prime minister to appoint Nobel laureate Dr Md Yunus as the chairman of the bank.

They were speaking at a press conference at the Chittagong Press Club (CPC) auditorium organised by Grameen Bank Employees' Association, Chittagong unit.

Association's Chittagong unit President Mohammad Ali in his written statement appealed to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to appoint Dr Yunus as chairman of the bank.

He said they are hopeful to have Dr Yunus as their guardian when the government's review committee in its report did not find any financial irregularity. Besides, the committee in its report told that interest rate of the bank is the lowest among the micro credit organisations, he added.

Association's city unit Vice President Md Ibrahim, General Secretary Rokun Uddin and Treasurer Humayun Kabir were present at the press conference.

Music training camp begins

A fortnight long music training camp began at Shilpakala Academy in the port city on Saturday.

'Bangladesh Sangeet Sangathan Samannaya Parishad' (BSSSP) Chittagong Divisional Chapter, supported by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, organised the camp.

A total of 52 trainees, 32 from metropolis and 10 from districts, participated in the training camp.

Organisers said the solo artistes of the traditional instruments like setar, sarod, esraj, flute, violin and other musical instruments are disappearing due to lack of support from the society and state as well as practice and proper environment. Noted Rabindra Sangeet artist Mihir Nandi, Joyanti Lala, Swarnamoy Chakraborty and Abdul Rahim are the resource persons in the camp.

Ctg bar assoc installation held

Primary and Mass Education Minister Afsarul Ameen said the lawyers should play vital role in serving the people.

He was speaking as the chief guest at the installation ceremony of the newly elected office-bearers of Chittagong District Bar Association (CDBA) at its auditorium on Thursday.

Terming lawyers one of the most important professional communities in the society Afsarul said lawyers should perceive the suffering of the plaintiffs as they rush to the court considering it as their ultimate shelter.

District and Sessions Judge of Chittagong Abdul Kuddus Mian and Metropolitan Sessions Judge AKM Shamsul Islam, member of

Bangladesh Bar Council AM Anwarul Kabir were present as special guests.

Kuddus in his speech said the lawyers should work for establishing justice in the society. If the plaintiffs do not get justice from the court they will lose their faith in the court, he added.

CCC employees' memo to mayor

Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) employees' organisations on Sunday demanded regularisation of their jobs against the vacant posts, proper use and preservation of provident fund money.

They submitted a memorandum containing their demands to the mayor at Nagar Bhaban.

They also demanded 30 percent quota for the dependent of employees', solution to the housing crisis of the employees, transport facilities for the outdoor workers and transparency in giving promotion to the employees.

The mayor assured them of fulfilling the logical demands in phases.

CCC Workers League President Dost Mohammad, General Secretary Morshedul Alam, President of Jatiyatabadi Sramik Karmachari Union, General Secretary Saiful Islam, CCC Secretary Md Shamsuddoha and chief revenue officer Dipak Chakraborty were present at the meeting.

Charu Shaili Art School's 5th branch opens

Charu Shaili Art School launched its fifth branch with a slogan "Art is the best way to express creativeness" at Chittagong Rahamania School and College on Thursday.

Professor of Institute of Fine Arts of Chittagong University Mansur-Ul-Karim was the chief guest at the inaugural session with Sayed Nizam Uddin Chowdhury in the chair. Chittagong Union of Journalists' General Secretary Nazimuddin Shyamal, Prof Jahed Ali Chowdhury and lecturer Shujit Sarker were present as special guests.

AL south dist unit meet held

An extended meeting of Chittagong south district unit of Awami League (AL) was held at the residence of unit's president Akhteruzzaman Chowdhury Babu MP on Monday.

Babu in his speech blamed the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) for trying to create unrest in the country. He said BNP patronised fundamentalists when they were in power and now backing them to create unrest in the country for catching fish in trouble water.

AL leaders Moslem Uddin Ahmmad, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and Prof Partha Sarathi Chowdhury were present at the meeting.



Artistes perform a dance at Shilpakala Academy marking the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore. 'Naba Barsha Baran O Bidaya Sanmilan Parishad' organised the event.

STAR PHOTO