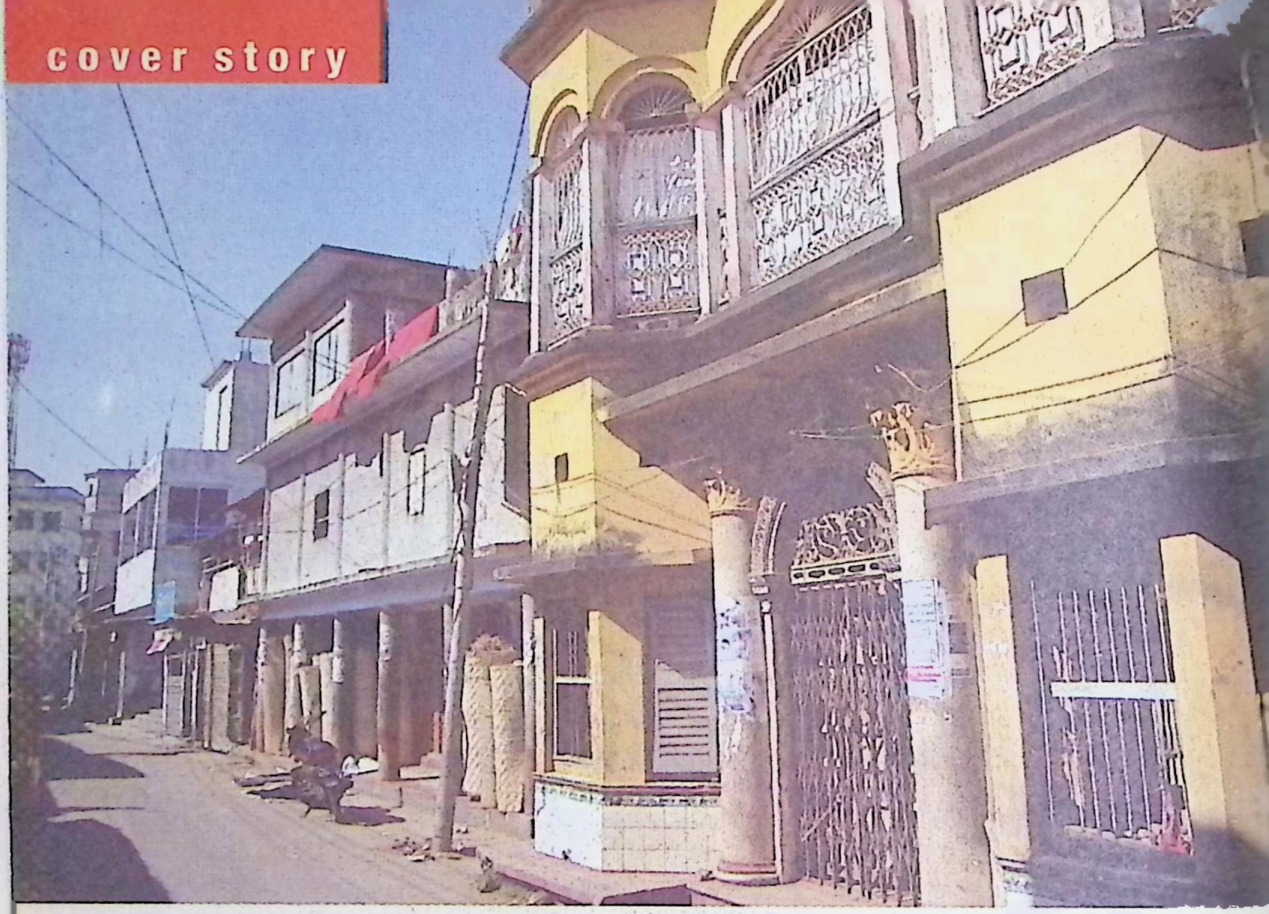


Jhalakathi, built on trade.

From the village road alongside the Gabkhan Channel not far from Jhalakathi town even today there are boats to be seen – large cargo ships and a low-lying barge with some kind of goods beneath its black tarpaulin. Two small-engine ferries are chugging passengers towards the town side; the steamers plying the route from Dhaka to Bagerhat pass that way.

Built by the British in 1918 the Gabkhan is a vital east-west link for river transport in a region marked by deep, navigable north-south rivers. The British must've recognised Jhalakathi's most advantageous trading geography. Though the bulk of the bustle is gone, easy access to the sea has long been the key to sustained, rhythmic activity.

And besides, it'd all happened once before, hadn't it? It was on the bank of the altogether less suitable Hooghly that the behemoth of trade had once arisen – Kolkata.

The 1981 Government Gazetteer for Bakerganj District which included Jhalakathi notes that Bakerganj was a great exporting district in the second half of the 18th century, with boats arriving from all parts of Bangladesh to purchase rice in particular. "The superior quality Bakerganj rice used to be exported to Calcutta which was facilitated by easy river communication in comparison with other districts. Rice was selling at 17 seers a rupee for best rice and 21 seers a rupee for common rice at Barisal in 1875."[1]



Chinese graves are traditionally aligned in accordance with feng shui principles.

Jhalakathi became one of the largest river ports in the region, with trading products including timber, rice, paddy, coconut and betel nut.

From 1940 to 1975 as a navigation landmark passing steamers could rely on the thick band of smoke rising from the chimney of the only automatic rice mill in the region. The enterprise of Shudhangshu Bhushan Das was enormous,