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ENDEAVOUR

The world has become smaller with new discoveries. Human beings no longer live in an insular world. It is a boon for modern civilisation. People have become more outgoing. They go places for the love of it. The distance, ethnic and cultural divide are no longer inhibiting barriers. From Cairo to Katmandu, from Marrakech to Maldives and from Venice to Vienna - one does not have to discover these places. From travellers' tales the names do not stop there.

# PLACES TO DISCOVER

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

There are places, which are not illustrious yet so inviting. Let us start with *Bagan* in our neighboring Myanmar. Bagan or Pagan is an ancient city in Mandalay region. It was built in second century and fortified in 849 A.D. by Pagan ruler Pyinva. From 1044 to 1287, Bagan was the capital as well as the political, economic and cultural nerve center of the Pagan. Over the course of 250 years, Bagan's rulers and their wealthy subjects constructed over 10,000 religious monuments (approximately 1000 stupas, 10,000 small temples and 3000 monasteries) in an area of 104 square kilometres (40 sq mi) in the Bagan plains. The prosperous city grew in size and grandeur, and became a cosmopolitan center for religious and secular studies. Air Mandalay operates direct flight to Nyaung U or Bagan from Yangon. Bagan is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Another place to discover is also in South East Asia. *Hoi An*, meaning A Peaceful Meeting place is a town of 120,000 people in Quang Nam province of Vietnam. It has been designated UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. Old town Hoi An is a splendid example of well-preserved South-East Asian trading post. Prominent is the covered Japanese bridge built during 15th to 17th century in the Japanese quarter. The Cham people controlled the

spice trade. Eventually Cham the harbor town at the estuary of Thu Bon River became an important Vietnamese trading post in the 16th and 17th century. The Chinese, the Portuguese, Japanese, Dutch and the Indians settled there. During this period Cham became *Hoi Pho* (seaside town) in Vietnamese. Air connection to Hoi An is from either Bangkok or Singapore to Hanoi and from Hanoi to Danang by domestic flight. Take a bus to Hoi An. One hop away is Siem Reap the gateway to Angkor Wat. It is the capital of the province Seam Reap of Northwestern Cambodia. Seam Reap in Kampuchean language means the "defeat of the Siam". It relates to age old rivalry between the Siamese and the Khmers. Khmer king (1516-1566) named the town Siem Reap after he repulsed an army sent to invade Cambodia by the Thai king Maha Chakraphat in 1549. Siem Reap was visited by French explorer Henri Mouhot in the 19th century. Although it was known to outside before that. Siem Reap today is ranked as the forth in the World's Best cities of Travel and Leisure. The main town is a gateway to Angkor

Wat and consists of cluster of small village along the river Siem Reap built around Buddhist pagodas. The river Siem Reap meets big Tonle Sap lake in the north. Siem Reap is a bustling town of colonial buildings and shopping centres. Air flights from Bangkok connect it. Siem Reap is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Zanzibar is not around Bangladesh. -away in East Africa, an autonomous region, Zanzibar archipelago is 16 to 31 miles off the coast of mainland Tanzania. It consists of two larger islands, Unguia or Zanzibar and Pemba and smaller islands. Islam came early to Zanzibar. The people of Zanzibar are of African heritage with Swahili language. Later when the Arabs came and settled around coast a mixture of Swahili and Arab ethnicity developed with trading links steeped in history. Zanzibar has a history of trading in spices, namely, nutmeg, cinnamon, black pepper. It also has a history of slave trade. It was under the suzerainty of the Omanis, Saif bin Sultan pressed hard in Zanzibar in 1690. Later the Portuguese came. They were however dislodged by the Omanis. Said bin Sultan made Zanzibar his man place of residence. He built palaces, castles, harems and gardens. Now the stone city of Zanzibar has been designated as UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is now an important destination of the western world with air connection from different parts, hotels and shopping centres have been built. There are lots of things to see in Zanzibar - stone city, spices tour and Swahili cultural show.

The world is more, more becoming one country. Familiar places beckon, but the world understands that there are places lesser known yet so inviting, so much part of world heritage. Those who can - they go out to discover these places. ■

HERITAGE

# A BLESSING IN DISGUISE: BONGSHAL POND

FAYEKA ZABEEN SIDDIQUA

PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

While you go through the chaos of Dholaikhal, at the edge of Tanti Bazaar, you will find a pond surrounded by the narrow streets that lead to Bongshal, old Dhaka. Bongshal pukur (pond)- as local people call it, has its unique charm reflecting the effervescent history of old Dhaka.

Amidst the urban hustle and bustle a pond like Bongshal pond, might seem like an unusual sight, a little out of step with modern life. But the way this pond has been serving as a communal facility for the entire locality might seem a matter of surprise to the rest of the Dhakaities.

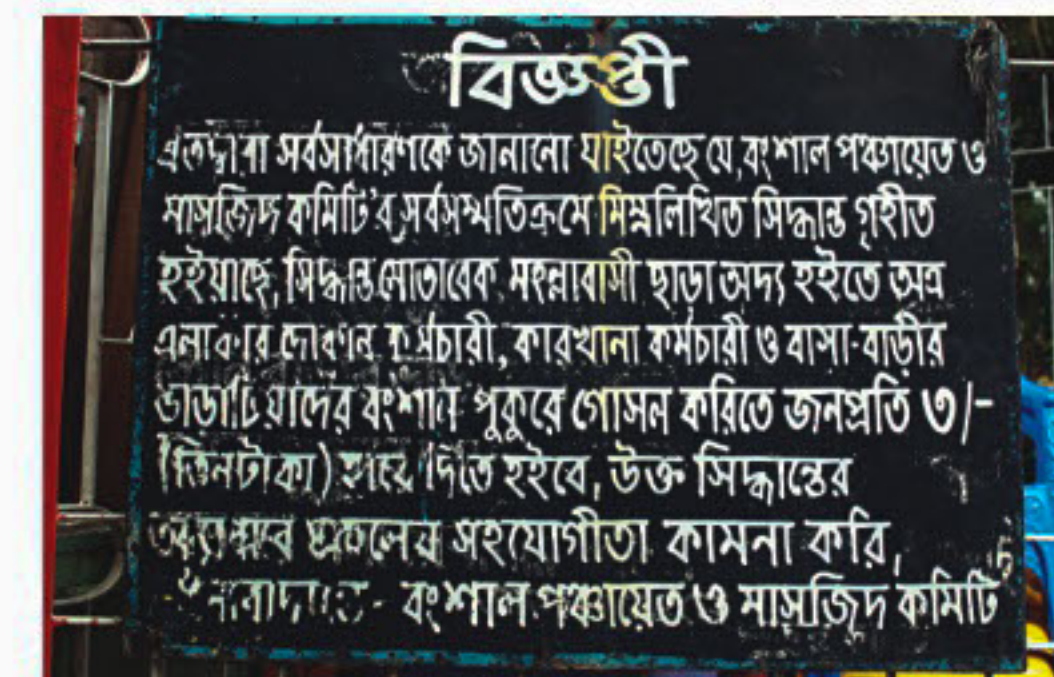
Experts believe that this pond made an appearance in the 1908 version of the Cadastral Survey Map, and is one of the few remaining in Dhaka that is maintained by the community. "Probably sometime in the 1940s, this 6 acre pond was founded by Haji Badruddin Bhutto, a rich businessman of Bangshal who thought the pond could be a solution to the water crisis Bongshal was going through during that time," says Abdur Rahim, the man who voluntarily works as the supervisor.

Beside its obvious charms as a natural haven, and a centre to relax awhile, Bongshal pond is widely used to cater for households of these communities.

But other than that, this pond is also making a positive difference in many people's lives.

How? By starting an effective method to raise funds that to be used for people who are in need. "Anyone can bathe here for 3 taka only. Everyday around two to three thousand people come here to bathe, end of the day when we look at our collection its not much to fulfil everyone's need, but we thought if we could channel it properly this could benefit the underprivileged people of our community," says Abdur Rahim. The money that we collect from the pond goes to the fund of our local mosque first, and then gets disbursed according to people's need. For example, a few months ago, one of our neighbours fell short of money when his daughter was getting married. As soon as he approached us, we decided to help him with our fund.

The guards who make sure the safety of this place are also getting paid from this fund. "I do it voluntarily, for free," says the ever smiling Rahim. "I sit here, and supervise the pond's activities, also because I enjoy the pond's serene ambience, and the cool breeze- something that is very rare in Dhaka."




refreshing dip in this pond is a common sight to find, "in fact countless people have learnt swimming in this pond with their peers," Rahim comments. "We also have a deep tube well maintained by the same panchayat (local committee). People living in this locality can come and collect drinking water for free from here."


Bongshal pond also provides local residents with a place to meet and recreate. People- both from this locality and outside, come here for fishing- sometimes for competition, sometimes just for recreation. People taking a cool




## PEARLS OF WISDOM



"THE RIGHTS OF EVERY MAN ARE DIMINISHED WHEN THE RIGHTS OF ONE MAN ARE THREATENED."  
**JOHN F. KENNEDY**  
35th President of the United States of America



"A POLITICAL STRUGGLE THAT DOES NOT HAVE WOMEN AT THE HEART OF IT, ABOVE IT, BELOW IT, AND WITHIN IT IS NO STRUGGLE AT ALL."  
**ARUNDHATI ROY**  
Indian author



"THERE CAN BE NO PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE AND RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS."  
**IRENE KHAN**  
Bangladeshi lawyer and former Secretary General of Amnesty International