

Everybody's welcome to my city

I love my city! Yes, this very tattered, tainted, and terrifying (and just about every other bad adjective my dictionary can conjure up) city has a profound pull on me.

This point was proven once more last Sunday, when I tagged along with a colleague doing some research work for his many upcoming assignments in the south part of the old city.

I had nothing much to do except for my usual old Dhaka routine: doing the Bakarkhani round, the 'cheese tasting' and bargaining for the best ball of deshi paneer (sheer bliss), the street side luchi daal bajhi, with small bite sized jilapis on the side, and of course, the mandatory dunking of an oil-free paratha in Pannu's delicious cuppa.

But that day, I again saw my favourite part of the city in a new light. There is a surprise waiting for you at every corner in the form of an amazing *chanachur wallah*, who 'definitely maybe' has a degree in mixology, or a vendor selling fresh red plums for only Tk 250 per KG, while



to Bangladesh sports. He used to take me through Badamtoli, Water Works, or Sikkatoli, which cemented my love for the culture and heritage, and old Dhaka treasures," says Qazi Saad Ullah Hill Alim.

The rich family history boasts many feats since the time of the Mughals, but nothing like Qazi Abdul Alim, a sportsman who won the provincial athletics championship nine consecutive times, from 1948 till 1956. He held many official sports positions. He was the founder and Director of the country's

spacious Narinda, a beautiful residential area, where the Christian Cemetery is located, and a place you must visit, at least once. The cemetery has graves dating back to 1774. If you are lucky, and you have been granted permission, you can get access to this private property.

An old Mughal gate leads you to the ancient tombs, some as old as 350 years, relics of unknown crypts, as well as the new graves, creates a time traveller vibe, bringing about a humbling experience.

Before calling it a day, I went to Bishmillah chaap in Nazira Bazar for one of my favourite dinners; chicken chaap and oil free parathas. While my colleague gulped eight such chaaps and brain masala, and udder fries, with a few bottles of fizzy drinks, under the pretext that this was his breakfast and lunch all-in-one meal. I quickly chomped down and headed towards Haji Biryani, one of the most famous joints of old Dhaka. There has to be something great about this rice and meat dish, cooked in mustard oil, otherwise, why would a gigantic pot, holding exactly 420 plates, vanish within an hour?

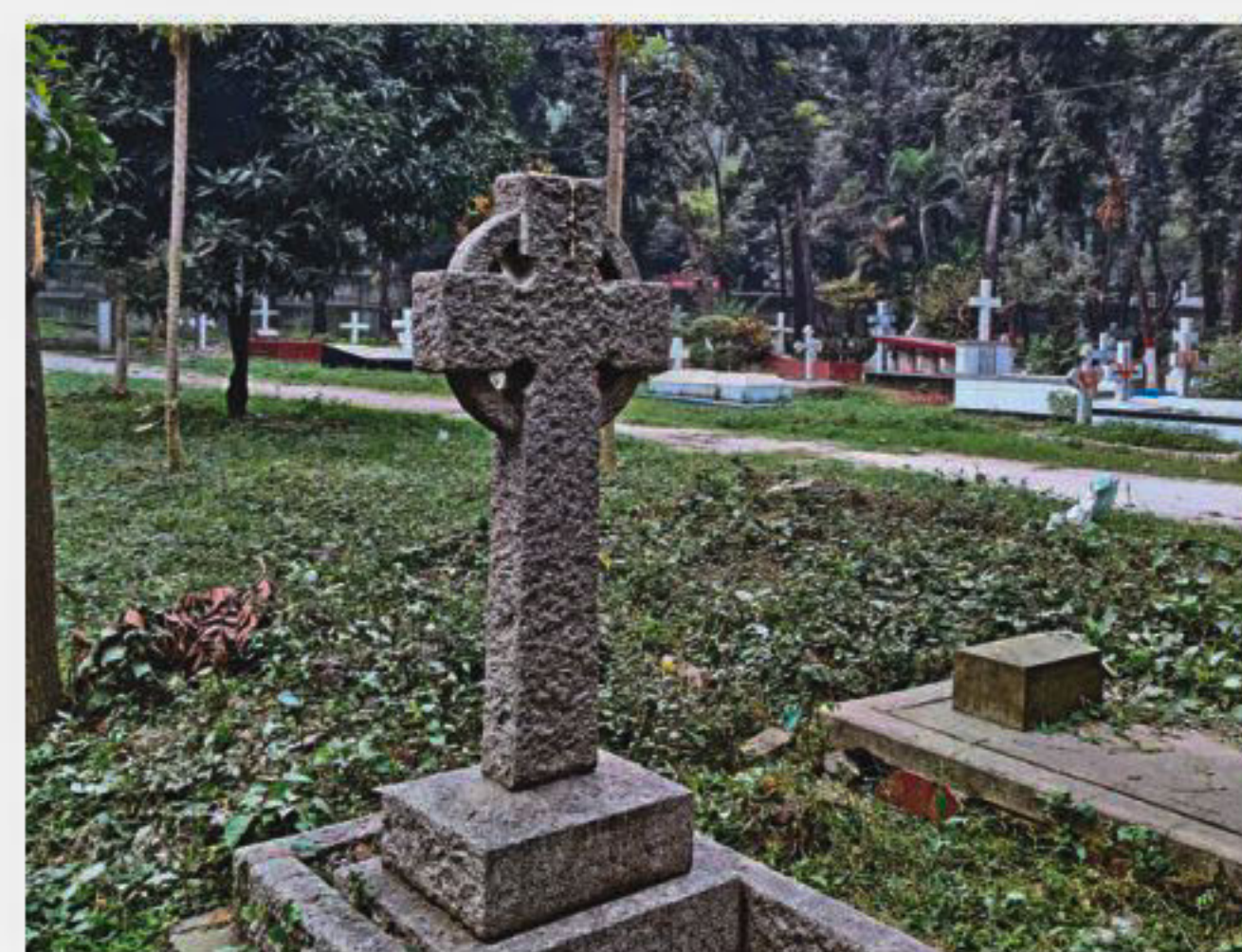
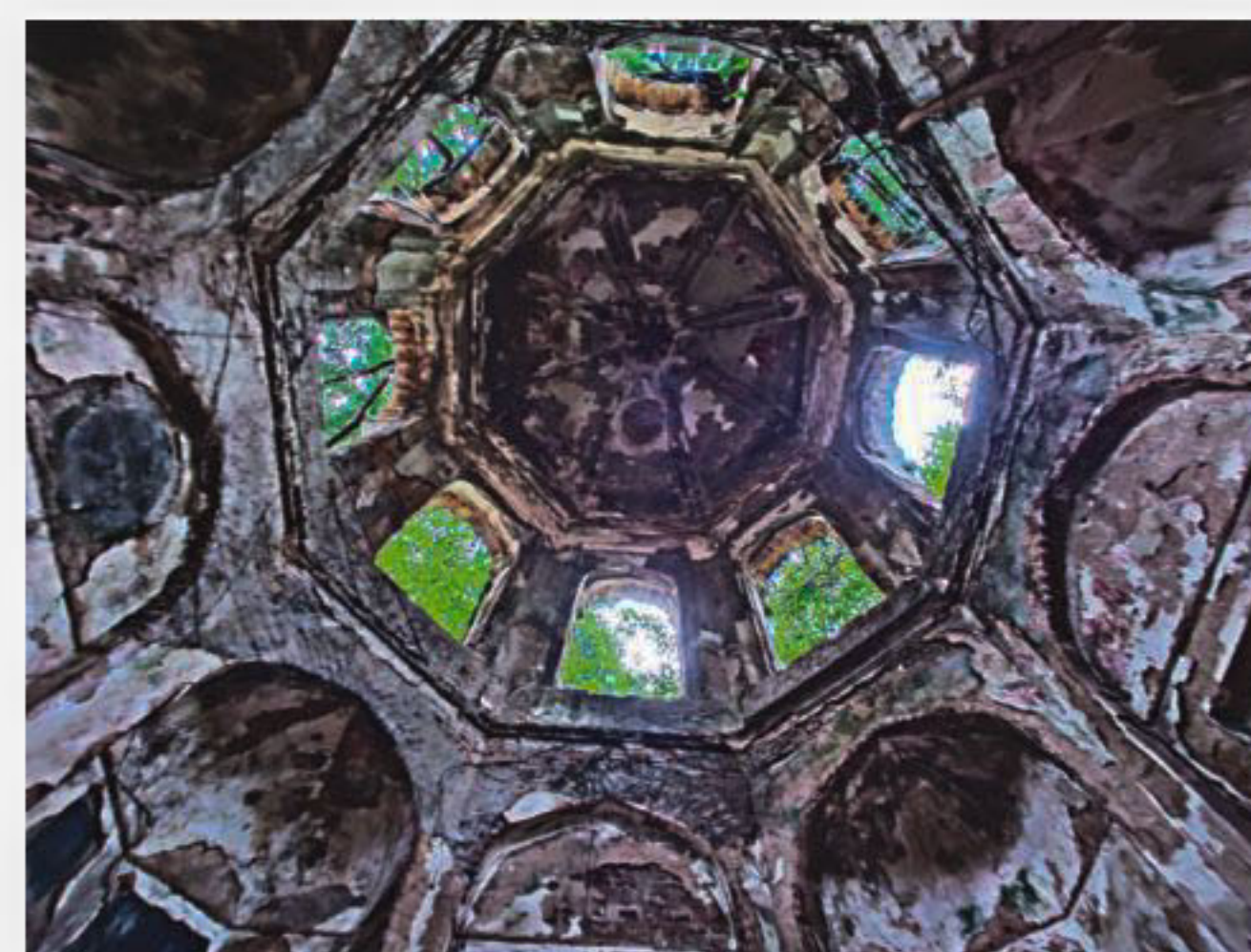
I steeled myself and joined the long queue, and elbowed my way towards the pot, where men, in a unique rhythm, were dishing the biryanis in plates and parcels simultaneously, without a break.

It is here that I realised that women's emancipation isn't even worth two cents in places like this, totally dominated by chauvinistic men. I was asked to stand aside because I should feel bad with men pushing and shoving in the line. I was flabbergasted with the audacity of the old man at Haji'r Biranyi, but when I saw him shooing away a beggar, I figured he is not as mighty as he thinks himself to be. I paid for an extra packet, and gave the beggar his dinner while the old man glared at me. My faith and integrity is not as feeble as he thought it be, that I would be compromised if I stand in a queue with ludicrous men.

Despite this 'incident,' I still love my city folks nonetheless. They too, like the city, are nonsensical and foolish, and yet, they are mine to love or hate.

I wish you all a Happy New Year, and as you flip through the pages, don't forget to read your horoscope. And remember, Star Lifestyle is all about #deshifirst #deshialways.

— RBR
Photo: Intisab Shahriyar



only sports-based educational centre, the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan (BKSP). In 1977, he was given the national sports award for his contributions to the sector. And now, his sons Qazi Ehsan UI Alim and Qazi Saad Ullah Hill Alim upholds their father's feats and their heritage home by opening their doors to guests to experience this slice of history.

From there, we headed towards the

I was there an hour short of dusk, and seeing that old graveyard in the sunken light definitely gave me the chills. The fallen yellow leaves, jackdaws crowing back home, and amid all these, I stood inside the relic of one tomb, belonging to 'Colombo Shaheb, Company ka Naukar.' It definitely gave a strange feeling; one of this being our final destination, and other about encountering beings from other realms.

explaining to his curious buyers how he got these from *Badamtoli phol patti*, and that it's the Alu Bokhara before it is dried up. I grabbed a kilo, because it costs Tk 1,200 where I usually buy from. What a surprise deal!

There is so much more I added that day to my already packed to-do list in Old Dhaka. Walking a few extras kilometres through the narrow lanes of Bangshal, Dholaikhal, Nazira Bazar, Narinda, in my 12-hour expedition, from 9AM to 9PM, has made me a 'wannabe' old Dhaka guide (a profession I intend to take up once I retire).

Dholaikhal is an interesting place; it's the home of the petrol head, with all kinds of automotive parts available there, and amid so much, my eyes were glued on the stolen spare parts of luxury cars, which were spread out like Qurbani Eid beef, ready for distribution, and amid all that grease and soot, I saw some shining steel woks tied to a bamboo pole. "The woks would last you a lifetime," said a tiny pint sized helper, while stating that the price was fixed. I don't know whether it was his salesman skills, or my actual need for it, but I bagged two.

A turn in Dholaikhal took us to Rokunpur Qazi bari, a heritage home that, since 1820, stood the test of time.

"I used to take walks with my late father, Qazi Abdul Alim, a recipient of the Jatiyo Purushkar, Shadhinota Purushkar and UNESCO award for his contributions