

# GOLDEN JUBILEE BEGINNINGS

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## Our attitude towards heritage

#HERITAGE

M H HAIDER

The history of this land is obviously not just 50 years old. It goes back much deeper than that; a long, complicated, and fascinating journey throughout several centuries, because of which, we have today a rich plethora of tangible and intangible heritages as testaments to that journey. Nevertheless, standing at a pivotal year where we celebrate the golden jubilee of independent Bangladesh, it is befitting to ask ourselves of how proud and interested we are about our past.

What is our general attitude towards heritage?

Let's start on a positive note. One may argue that there has been a spike in enthusiasm regarding history and heritage among general people. At least two indications point to that: the popularity of history-based Facebook pages on one hand, and a surge in



ad, an old photograph of a street still in existence, or a current photo of an archaeological site, the pages enjoy much audience engagement.

Save the Heritages of Bangladesh is one such Facebook page. Architect and academician Sazzadur Rasheed, the figurehead and one of the admins of the group, have seen a surge in interest regarding history.

He said, "Our page has a huge body of photographic albums on places of historical interest. And having travelled extensively all over Bangladesh, personally and also with our group, I was rather satisfied that we must have covered more or less all the heritage sites of our country. But more recently, some of our group members — hailing from different cities, small towns, and even remote areas — are clicking pictures of their local heritages and sharing them on the group. When I see some of these pictures, I get pleasantly surprised because even after so much travelling and exploring, I find that there are still some sites I am unaware of!"

This not only reflects an appreciation for heritage among people, but also that this appreciation is not limited to people of larger cities; it is arguably nationwide.

This enthusiasm also did not go unnoticed by Adnan M S Fakir, founder of Finding Bangladesh, a team which has made two documentary films (Finding Bangladesh and its second installation) featuring folklores, mythologies, and cultural and architectural heritages.

Talking about their ongoing heritage-related competition Find Your Bangladesh, where in the preliminary stage, applicants had to submit a proposal on a historically important site of their choice — identifying any legends or mythologies involved, and coming up with ideas on how to protect the site — Fakir pointed out that a huge bulk of the teams that registered for the challenge actually hail from smaller towns.

Back to Save the Heritages of Bangladesh, the team also undertakes monthly excursions as a group (although tours have been off since the



antiquity, where residents offer visits and a meal.

These are not restaurants! After booking in advance, the families will host you, give a tour of their house, and passionately talk about their heritage and share the history of their neighbourhood and Pura Dhaka at large. "Currently, there are only a small number of heritage homes, and we wish more will come up," Taimur commented.

All these initiatives point to the right direction towards understanding, appreciating, and protecting our heritage, and indeed the general awareness level among people is arguably growing.

Take for example the reactions that came out after we discovered the authorities' plans to replace the historic TSC building of Dhaka University with a new multi-storied one, or when we heard similar reports surrounding the iconic Kamalapur railway station. People were enraged and they vocalised their concerns.

Having said that, this very phenomenon of even toying with the idea of demolition of such significant buildings brings us to another issue: what does this tell us about the attitude of the government and the concerned authorities about the country's heritage?

So far, we have only scratched the surface on the attitude towards our legacies. Dig deeper and soon enough, you will stumble upon a Pandora's Box or two!

To illustrate, there have been several conservation/restoration/maintenance projects undertaken throughout the country that are rather questionable.

The notion of heritage conservation has not yet matured in our country, Taimur opined.



heritage tourism on the other.

There are a few Facebook groups dedicated to the heritage and history of Bangladesh, and those pages are very active, judging from 'likes', shares, and comments. Be it a vintage print

pandemic hit). And hence, this is not just an online page, but a group with a heritage tourism aspect to it as well.

"Those who register for our trips are usually very enthusiastic about heritage. Most of them do not sign up simply to go on a picnic; they are genuinely keen about history," Rasheed informed.

An organisation which has seen heritage tourism grow over the years, particularly in Dhaka, is Urban Study Group (USG), which campaigns for the protection and conservation of architectural heritages of the city.

In order to raise awareness among locals and foreigners, the institution started to organise 'heritage walks' in the streets and alleys of Old Dhaka around 15 years ago.

"When we began, such walks were scarce. But today, you will find plenty of groups or organisations offering these tours," said Taimur Islam, CEO, USG.

The concept of 'heritage home' has emerged in more recent times. For those who don't know, a 'heritage home' basically refers to an old building of

CONTINUED TO PAGE 37

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