



The main seaport of the country, Chattogram port, is also one of its most important economic hubs. It stands in all its might along the Karnaphuli River, grinding day and night to keep the country's economic wheels rolling by facilitating export and import activities to an unprecedented degree. This photo was taken from Chattogram's Dangar Char area recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Jatisangha Park decaying away

Negligence, unplanned initiatives to blame, say locals

Jatisangha Park, one of the very few parks in the port city with free access, has been left in a sorry state for five years due to the authorities' negligence.

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Located in Panchlaish residential area, the 55-year-old park has a long history and bears memories of residents' childhood and adolescence.

During a recent visit to the park, this correspondent found that there was no room for visitors to roam around or sit. For years, soil has been piled up for development, while the whole park is now full of bushes. Two staffers were seen in a dilapidated room at the entrance.

But it wasn't always like this. The park had a beautiful garden, which charmed visitors. There was a walkway around a waterbody, and seating arrangements surrounded an artificial lake even some 10 years ago.

The park was once abundant with trees, said Dipankar Barua, a local of Katalganj residential area. A beautiful pond enhanced



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



the park's beauty, and there was a water tank there, in which fish swam around, captivating visitors.

But all these features are nowhere to be seen now. Public Works Department (PWD) established the park in 1964, to provide

some open space for port city dwellers. The park was handed over to then Chittagong Municipal Corporation in 1969, and was named Jatisangha Park in 2002.

Locals alleged that the park lost its character when Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) initiated a project to build swimming pools there in 2012, in place of the waterbody and walkway.

The park was divided in half by a boundary wall to separate two swimming pools, built at a cost of Tk 4.80 crore, said Abdul Aziz, a local of Panchlaish area.

A teenager drowned in the swimming pool around that period, and since then, the pools have been left abandoned.

In 2016, CCC decided to lease out the park to a private organisation for 25 years, but locals and then housing minister opposed the initiative, said Khorshed Alam Sujan, a former CCC administrator.

"Mosharraf [then housing minister] was against the initiative. He said PWD would develop the park, so people would have open space to walk and pass their time," he said.

"The tug of war between CCC and PWD has left the park in a sorry state for around five years," he added. "When I was CCC administrator, I gave authority of the park to PWD last year."

PWD is going to develop the park. Contacted, Rahul Guha, executive engineer of PWD, Chattogram (Div-1), said a development project proposal, with a budget of Tk 12.12 crore, was placed in a pre-Ecneq project evaluation committee meeting last month. The meeting approved the two-year project with some observations.

"We are working on the observation. We expect the revised project to be approved soon, and the work to start in six months," he said.

'Declare Halda as dolphin sanctuary'

In conversation with Prof Manzoorul Kibria

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Prof Dr Manzoorul Kibria is the chairperson of Chittagong University's zoology department. Born and brought up in a village that borders the banks of Halda river, he grew up with a great passion for rivers. After graduating from the same university, he decided to pursue research on Halda, writing a good number of articles on it for national and international journals. Currently working as the co-ordinator of CU's Halda River Research Laboratory, he was one of the visionaries who brought the lab into being in 2017.

He recently talked to The Daily Star over Halda's dwindling Ganges dolphin population, elaborating the scenario and suggesting steps for a way out.

DS: What makes Halda so important?

Manzoorul: Halda has some exceptional characteristics. It's the only river where eggs from indigenous carp fish can be collected directly. It's also the lone natural gene bank of country's indigenous carp fish. Besides, it's a major habitat of the endangered freshwater Ganges dolphins (Platanista Gangetica).

The river plays a vital role for the national economy, contributing around Tk 800 crore a year. It's also one of the main sources of the city's drinking water. Chattogram Wasa collects 18 crore litres of water from the river every day, which is then purified and supplied to city dwellers. There is a reason why it's called the lifeline of the city.

DS: Speaking of the Ganges dolphins, what is their role in the ecosystem?

Manzoorul: Dolphins are an integral part of the area's ecosystem, to the point that their conservation can benefit a wider range of aquatic and threatened species, including turtles, gharials and otters.



DS: What are the reasons behind their slow disappearance from the Halda?

Manzoorul: It's true that the species has been disappearing from Halda at a worrying rate over the last few years. The reasons are entirely human-made. Most of the blame can be attributed to engine boats and unsustainable fishing practices. Since 2017, a total of 50 dolphins have been killed in the river.

According to the records, engine boats are the main cause, as they killed the most number of dolphins by hitting them. We conducted our first autopsy on a dolphin carcass in 2018 and found that it died after suffering injury from a sharp propeller.

Fishing nets come in second – dolphins get stuck on them and suffocate to death. Then there are hunters who kill dolphins for their fat.

We have submitted a six-point recommendation to the authorities in 2018, which included a ban on plying mechanised boats in the river, not allowing grill nets for fishing in the river and declaring it as a sanctuary for dolphins.

The authorities complied with most of our recommendations; as a result, the rate of death has decreased to a great extent.

For example, a total of 18 dolphins were killed in five months between September 2017 and February 2018, while a total of 32 dolphins were killed in the three years between February 2018 and December 2021.

DS: What more steps can be taken to save Halda's dolphin population?

Manzoorul: Besides the points we have already recommended, taking legal action against mills and factories that pollute the river can help immensely. Moreover, locals should be made aware regarding dolphin conservation.

UNCOVERING mysteries of sea

18 species of fish recorded in St Martin's Island, adjacent areas

NAIMUR RAHMAN

Even though life under the sea remains a mystery for many, from time to time, there are some noteworthy breakthroughs.

Recently, a Chittagong University (CU)-based research team has recorded 18 new species of fish in the south-east coast of Bangladesh.

The research was conducted over three different phases from 2018 to 2020, and was recently published in three international journals. Of these, 11 species were found in St Martin's tide pool, one in Teknal's Jaliapara and six in the shallow waters west of St Martin's.

Tide pools hold water permanently at low tide and creates small reservoirs.

According to the study, 441 samples of 20 species were collected. Seventeen new species were

found following the process of classification and nomenclature, and the other one by DNA barcoding.

Among the discovered species, the length of adult fish of 11 species is 19.2 to 40 mm, while length of the other seven species is 36 to 220 mm.

The research projects were supervised by Prof SM Sharifuzzaman of Institute of Marine Sciences, Chittagong University. Prof Saidur Rahman Chowdhury, Dr Md Shahadat Hossain and Dr M Shah

Nawaz Chowdhury were also part of the research team. Besides, Prof Ahsan Habib of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University and Prof Seishi Kimura from Mie University, Japan, were part of the project, funded by CU.

At present, three species of urukku (flying fish) have been located in the coastal areas of the country. With this study, researchers have identified a new species of urukku – Cheilopogon spilopterus.

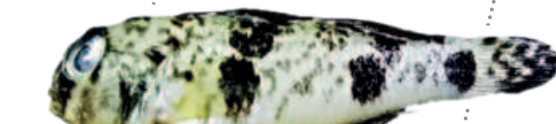
The study was published in the journal Conservation Genetic Resources in February last year. A research paper on six species was published in the Journal of Fish Biology, one of the fish classification journals of the international publishing house Wiley.



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