



CHOKED BY 2

shipbreaking yards

Once 50ft wide, Sonaichhari canal now a narrow stream

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Md Fardoush Anwar
deputy director of DoE
(Chattogram)

SIFAYET ULLAH

Not so long ago, Sonaichhari canal, which is linked directly to the Bay of Bengal, used to be a vibrant 50-foot wide water body. However, over the last three years, the canal has not only lost its lustre, it has also fallen victim to mindless grabbing, especially by two ship-breaking yards at Sitakunda upazila of Chattogram.

This has also affected the canal’s

the canal turned narrow. Seiko shipyard has filled the canal by dumping soil and Jiri Subadar has taken possession of the site by erecting various iron and cement pillars along the canal, collectively filling almost 35 feet from their respective sides. According to a report by Survey of Bangladesh, the canal was flowing through the Bangladesh Survey (BS) lines 185, 187, 182 and 192. The land office of Sitakunda leased



navigability, hampering the livelihoods of 300 fishers who depend on the water body. Both the yards, Seiko Steel (Darus Salam Enterprise) and Jiri Subadar Steel Mills, have encroached the canal from two sides, right under the nose of Sitakunda Upazila Administration and Department of Environment (DoE). Local fishers alleged that they’re facing problems while moving with their boats as

out a 10.47-acre land around the canal to both the shipyards. But they grabbed the natural canal, as it wasn’t mentioned in the survey. Visiting Sonaichhari area recently, this correspondent found the canal was around 15-foot wide. Bijoy Das, a fisher of Sonaichhari Jelepura, said, “We’re facing problems as our boats often get stuck along the boundaries put up

by the grabbers.” On February 8, assistant commissioner (land) of Sitakunda upazila submitted a report to the DoE over the encroachment. This correspondent obtained a copy of the report. The DoE officials said Jiri Subedar Steel and Seiko Steel have grabbed the canal without taking any permission. “We’ve already visited the area and found that both shipyards grabbed the canal by filling it. In addition, both changed the leased land’s shape without permission,” said Md Fardoush Anwar, deputy director of DoE (Chattogram).

“We have already sent an inspection report to the high-ups, mentioning that both shipyards violated the environmental law and action should be taken against the grabbers,” he said. He further said notices have been served to both yards for a hearing. Contacted, Naem Ahmed, managing director of Jiri Subedar Shipyard, said they leased the land 20 years ago and didn’t grab the canal.

Asked about changing shape of the leased land, he claimed, “Shape of the land hasn’t changed, as we’ve built a wall to protect it.” Contacted, Nazim Uddin, managing director of Seiko Shipbreaking Yard, said, “The canal wasn’t on the BS record, so we filled it. However, as per Sitakunda UNO’s direction, we’ll withdraw our boundary from the canal.” Sonaichhari canal was included in 1969 master-plan of Chattogram Development Authority (CDA). The canal is also in the Revisional Survey (RS), said Aliur Rahman, general secretary of Movement to Protect Rivers and Canals of Chattogram. “We held a human chain to protect the canal, but the administration isn’t taking any action against the occupiers,” he said. Md Shahadat Hossain, UNO of Sitakunda, said “The BS survey didn’t mention the canal, so both shipyards filled it up. This is a natural water body, so this canal will be recovered from the occupier.”

Furniture for all seasons

Bolir Haat a go-to destination to buy quality products for cheap

ARUN BIKASH DEY

If one takes a right turn from Bahaddarhat intersection in the port city, they’ll find Khaza Road, and after walking further down the road they would reach Bolir Haat, one of the largest furniture hubs in the country. Bolir Haat has around 10,000 furniture makers (carpenters), working in around 500 shops. Of the makers, most are born into the profession, following footsteps of their ancestors. The haat became the most popular place for furniture buyers, as they can find quality items for cheap. However, this whole thing didn’t happen overnight. It took a long time, traders said, adding that the furniture hub has been satisfying people of all strata, without compromising on quality, for decades.

The area’s fame has now even reached overseas. Members of many families in the area work in Malaysia or the Middle East for their expertise as carpenters, said locals. Traders said furniture priced between Tk 4,000 and Tk 15 lakh are being sold in this hub. Well-off people as well as those from low- and middle-income groups go there to shop. While visiting the market recently, it was seen that both male and female workers were busy with their work in different factories.

Md Ayub, a worker, earlier said they had to craft furniture manually, but nowadays, they do it with machinery. “It saves both time and labour.” Md Shah, another furniture maker, said people mostly go there to order furniture on the occasions of marriage ceremonies. Ali Azgar, a banker visiting the hub, said, “I’ve heard good things about this place from my relatives. So, I’ve come here to order furniture for my daughter’s marriage ceremony.” Asked how they sell quality furniture at affordable rates, Md Hasan, manager of Rangdhanu Furniture Collection, said most factory owners at the haat were once makers themselves. They know how to make quality furniture in a cost-effective way. They don’t have to pay money for marketing or to intermediaries, and so, the prices are lower, he said. Hazi Md Jasim Uddin, president of Bolir Haat Furniture Traders’ Association, echoed him. He also urged the government to assist traders through providing facilities, including, bank loan on easy conditions and reduced interest rate.

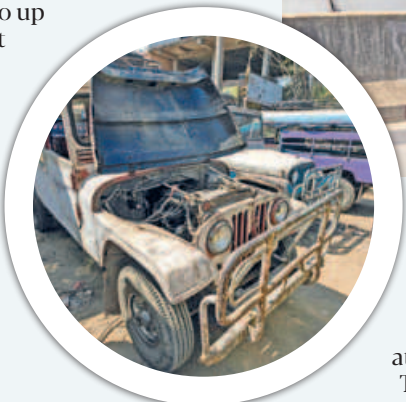


Moon ride on ‘chander gari’

NAIMUR RAHMAN

Travelling is always a delight, but what makes it even more enjoyable is the various kinds of ride you get to take through the journey. The Chattogram Hill Tracts (CHT) is already a preferred destination for tourists, but one of its attractions is the open quarter or open roof genre of jeep, commonly known as “chander gari”. The CHT is not the only place with the chander gari. Sajek, Bandarban, Rangamati, Khagrachhari, Cox’s Bazar and more also have it. In more than 20 sub-districts across the CHT, the chander gari is in use. There’s some folk tales surrounding the jeeps. There’s a saying by locals of Khagrachhari and Rangamati, who believe that it must’ve come from the moon, mostly because for the folks of these areas, engine-driven vehicles were still a novelty when they first came around. There’s also the belief whereby locals think the vehicles are capable of going up to the moon given how it treads the difficult terrains of CHT at the speed of a hurricane. “That such a car can ride so fast in

these terrains gives you a tremendous adrenaline-pump when you ride it. It has also very good functionality, as it helps you reach your destination in a short time and can visit remote but beautiful places of the CHT,” shared one passenger while travelling to Sajek. The idea of such vehicles was inspired by the signature jeep car of the British age. They are mostly modelled after army cars, except for the open quarters, open roof style, which was later redesigned by locals from its primary infrastructure. Army cars that would go up for auction were bought and modified in the chander gari fashion. Gradually, it took over the hilly regions for their superiority in navigating the mountainous terrains over other cars. Although the primary motive behind the chander gari concept was for its



convenience in transporting people, eventually it also became a vehicle to deliver goods and a tourist attraction. The treacherous journey of

going up and down through these steep, slender roads can be terrifying and scary, but even that fear of death succumbs to the sheer beauty of the hills, said visitors. Compared to a natural roller coaster, the terrains of CHT are no less jerky. This is why they sometimes carry a bad reputation

for tourists, but the drivers of the chander gari are adept and acquainted enough to cross these roads comfortably enough to drive these fears away, they said. But this is not to say the terrain and the vehicle doesn’t have its own crash history. “The passengers often start screaming when we turn the more sharper roads. Driving in rocky and hilly roads on a daily basis does sound scary but we (drivers) don’t worry about it anymore because the other drivers of the road know the ways as well as I know them. We have just adapted to these roads,” said Mohammad Khorshed, a driver of chander gari in Bandarban. The sitting arrangements in each cars are for 12 people maximum, but sometimes it exceeds according to need. The passengers are often seen covering the windshield of the front-glass of the vehicle by hanging their legs while sitting on the roof, which can be a hazardous behaviour. And yet, if the passengers are cautious enough of their own safety, the ride can be a beautiful introduction to the beauty that is CHT.