



For as long as anyone can remember, port city's culture, trade and history revolved around Cheragi Pahar. From art to activism, from music to literature, this place has witnessed a lot, and will continue to do so as the city continues to flourish.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

# MOTHER NATURE

## guarded by her daughters

“Timber lifters do not enter the forest anymore. Deer, monkeys, pigs and other species of wild animals can roam freely in the sanctuary.”

Shafiqul Islam  
Divisional forest officer of  
Chattogram South Forest  
Department

SIFAYET ULLAH

Parveen Atker – with a baton in her hand and a seemingly ever-lasting smile on her face – looked confident as ever, while guarding the Dudpukuria-Dhopachari Wildlife Sanctuary in Chattogram.

She used to work as a day labourer and continued in this profession for more than a year. But her calling was elsewhere, amidst nature. Following the call, she decided to join the forest department as a temporary guard.

However, the decision was not welcome in her family. The job was unconventional for women of Bangladesh, to say the least.

The dedication she had for the job had its prices as well. Parveen was abandoned by her husband four years ago, following her decision to work as a forest guard.

Looking back, Parveen – a 28-year-old independent working woman – has no



forest department officials in Chattogram.

The area was officially declared a wildlife sanctuary by the government of Bangladesh on April 6, 2010.

During a recent visit to Dhopachari, this correspondent suddenly heard a whistle. Following the sound, a group of women were found walking in the forest with flutes and sticks.

These women have been engaged in forest protection under various projects implemented by the forest department since 2015.

Earlier, 21 women worked as forest guards in the wildlife sanctuary under the Climate-Resilient Ecosystems and Livelihoods (CREL) project, funded by USAID. Five women are currently working in this sanctuary under the Sustainable Forests & Livelihoods (SUFAL) Project of the Forest Department, after the expiration of the first one.

There are stories quite opposite to Parveen's as well. Take Salma Begum, a mother of three, for example. Her story is one of immense support and equal load sharing

by the family.

“I was the sole bread earner of the family before. Now my wife also works and earns money. We are now a prosperous family and together we do household work,” said Salma's husband Mohammad Ayub.

Like male rangers, these women work eight hours a day, chasing wood thieves and animal hunters. To these thieves and hunters, they have turned into quite a nightmare.

“Timber lifters do not enter the forest anymore. Deer, monkeys, pigs and other species of wild animals can roam freely in the sanctuary,” said Shafiqul Islam, divisional forest officer of Chattogram South Forest Department.

Under the SUFAL project, more women will be involved in forest work through the Cooperative Forest Management Committee (CFMC), according to forest officials.

“Women will also get loans for improving livelihoods and community development under the SUFAL project,” said Shafiqul.



regrets. “We get paid Tk 250 per day for the job. This is a whole new life of possibilities for us,” she said.

The 11,654-acre Dudpukuria-Dhopachari Sanctuary is home to at least 608 species of plants and more than 500 wildlife species, making it a wildlife hotspot, according to

# SAMPAN

## a quintessential Chattogram ride

NAIMUR RAHMAN

There are a few things that every city can call its own. Whether it's the yellow taxi cabs in New York or the street food in Dhaka, these are the things that capture the essence of these cities. For many Chattogram residents, its Sampan – a wooden boat going around the Karnaphuli for years – is something that is everything quintessentially Chattogram.

The structure of this boat has been derived from the traditional Chinese sampan. Over the years, the designs have evolved to give it a look that is proudly Chittagongnian in every sense.

In the span of 200 years, these sampans have managed to keep their existence on focus in most of the ghats of Chattogram such as Avoymitra ghat, Char Pathar Ghata, Old Bridge Ghata, Kalar Para and Dighir Para.

The dependency of the port city on the Karnaphuli and the availability of the easiest route of communication between north and south Chattogram are considered to be the reason why the fame of the sampan boat took a rise.

Compared to any other travel route, the sampan journey began to gain more acceptance among people, as it required less time and money.

“It takes only 20 minutes and Tk 20 to reach Anowara from here whereas the bus would've cost Tk 90 and taken almost two hours,” said Jamir Uddin, a businessman crossing the Karnaphuli from ghat-15.

The livelihoods of the scullers also started to move in a better direction because of these boats. There are currently 3,000 members of Karnaphuli River Sampan Majhi Welfare Association. Around 1,700 boatmen own boats.

Most are in the profession for generations, like Rafiq Miah, who came to work as a boatman at a very young age with his father.

“Now my son has inherited my engine-run Sampan,” he said.

Each boat can carry 10 passengers at a time. The daily income of a boatman is around Tk 500, which came down to zero during the pandemic.

Motorised Sampans have taken away much of the attention from the antique ones, due to being time savvy. Trying to save the legacy of sampans, the scullers have been trying to get back to their old form as well.

According to the information presented by the association, a total of 2,700 sampans pass through the 16 ghats of the Karnaphuli. Of them, 250 are manually operated.

Sailors of Sampans are constantly struggling to keep the spark of the tradition alive. They have complained of being scammed in various issues of tax and lease and extortion by big merchants and traders, who are snatching the leases from them.

Amidst all this, Sampan upholds a classical feature of Chattogram, for which it has been projected in many special ways like in the monologue of Chittagong University, the fountain area of a five-star hotel etc, as a reminder of its heritage.

And the lives of many people in some areas of Chattogram are still driven by this heritage in a determined way, as it has been associated with life since time immemorial.



# JAGAT CHANDRA MAHAJANER PANTHOSHALA

## A 100-year-old inn lost in time

ARUN BIKASH DEY

The story of Jagat Chandra Mahajaner Panthoshala starts around 100 years ago. Those were the times when locals mostly travelled on foot or boat.

Merchants used to load their goods on boats and take them to distant markets by the river, while small traders carried their goods on their shoulders to the weekly market on foot.

One such market was the weekly market in Dengapara in Dakkhin Bhurshi Union under Patiya Upazila of Chattogram.

Situated on the opposite side of Krishnakhali canal, this Krishnakhali Bazaar came to life every Monday and Friday, said locals.

At the close of this weekly market, traders would prepare for their next destination.

However, they needed to spend the night somewhere on the way, but hotels or rest houses didn't exist back then.

So, late philanthropist Jagat Chandra Mahajan built the inn beside the canal bank to offer shelter to weary passersby.

This century-old inn can still be



found in the village of Dengapara, or at least what's left of it.

During the inn's construction, a huge pond, about four acres in size, was dug next to it to provide drinking water to people taking shelter.

The road beside the inn had recently been named after revolutionary nationalist Pritilata Waddedar. She was



born in a village named Dhalghat, in the neighbouring union of Dengapara.

It's rumoured that anti-British revolutionary Masterda Surya Sen and his companions used to use this road quite often while travelling.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw that the two-storey, tin-roofed inn is in a dilapidated state due to negligence. It

was left abandoned.

Locals said the successors of Jagat Chandra live in the city and seldom visit the place.

The name of the inn and its year of establishment were written on the inn's front. It was mentioned that the inn was built in 1334, based on the Bangla calendar, meaning that it was built in 1927.

With time, all the doors of the inn were gone. The ceiling of the first floor was cracked and damaged.

However, the seating arrangement inside the inn and the pond outside are still there.

Meer Ahmed, a local who runs a shop beside the inn, said although Jagat Chandra was not a landlord, people called him a zamindar for his philanthropic activities. He was a successful merchant and did a lot of philanthropic activities in the area, said Ahmed.

“I have heard that travellers used to pass their night at the inn. A total of 12 people could stay on the ground and first floors,” he added.

Pankaj Chakraborty, a trustee of Bir Konya Preetilata Trust in Dhalghat, said the inn is historically important. “It's a testament to history, and the government should take a step to preserve the inn,” he added.

Contacted, Motaaherul Islam Chowdhury, chairman of Patiya Upazila Parishad, said, “I wasn't aware of the inn's existence. I'll talk to the chairman of South Bhurshi Union Parishad to know the details. I will visit the place soon.”