



PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

## Two water ambulances lie abandoned in Sandwip

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

Two water ambulances worth almost a crore have been lying abandoned on Sandwip island of Chattogram for a long time. This has barred locals from accessing healthcare facilities. Around four lakh inhabitants of the island have been facing untold suffering to cross around 17km long Sandwip channel to go to city hospitals during emergencies. The two water ambulances – one given by the health directorate in 2008 costing Tk 32 lakh and another by the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief in 2015 costing Tk 65 lakh – are not being used due to their poor fitness, lack of drivers and maintenance, according to sources. Upazila sources said the water ambulances are not fit for sea voyages but they are fit enough to



run in the haor region or river. Till now, the patients of the island are taking treatment by riding on local speedboats or trawlers or “red boats” locally known as “lal boat”, putting their lives at risk. The situation usually turns worse during rough weather in the monsoon. According to local journalists, one of the ambulances with “Water Ambulance” written on the back is lying abandoned near Guptochara Ghat coastal area. The other one – “Rescue Eagle” is kept near the Haramia 20-bed Hospital territory. The one given in 2015 is around 10 feet long, light-weight and with a low engine capacity. It’s not suitable for the sea. The other one, sent by the health directorate in 2008, is too damaged to use. Admitting that the ambulances are unfit for the Sandwip channel, Dr Hasan Shahriar Kabir, Chattogram divisional director of DGHS, said, “The water ambulances cannot cross the rough sea or heavy water current. I’ve sent letters to the authorities for suitable ambulances.”

## More than a graveyard

Chattogram War Cemetery offers glimpses of history

NAIMUR RAHMAN

19 Badsha Mia Road, Chattogram, holds an old cemetery on its lands. Except that it’s not just any other cemetery, but rather one with huge historical significance. The story of Chattogram War Cemetery goes back almost a century, to the tumultuous and horror-stricken times of World War II. Officially known as Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery, this is the place where soldiers who died during WWII were buried.



Located on a seven-acre land in Dampara region of the port city, this burial ground was established by the British army after WWII as a memorial to honour the martyrs who died on the eastern front in the war. According



to the commonwealth war commission, the cemetery has 755 graves, both identified and unidentified. When the ground was established as a memorial at first, 400 graves were discovered under the supervision of the British army. The numbers gradually increased, confirming 17 unidentified casualties after the war commission’s research. Another reason behind the numbers increasing was the burial of sailors, pilots and citizens coming from England and other countries such as Japan, Myanmar, New Zealand, Canada and Australia in 20 burial grounds. Some of the graves were later transferred to temporary graveyards in Lusai, Dhaka, Rangamati, Patiya, Dohazari, Dhowa Palang,

Cox’s Bazar, Chittagong Civil Cemetery, Khulna and Jashore. Four non-war UK military burials were also done here. The site has now turned into one of the finest tourist spots in the port city, maintained by the Commonwealth War Community. Visitors from both Chattogram and other cities visit the place to be in touch with its history and the tranquillity that the place offers. “The cemetery is surrounded by beautiful flower-bearing trees. The entrance gate leads through a tarmac lane to the burial grounds, offering a perfect place to spend the afternoon,” Sumon Chowdhury, a visitor from GEC area, told this correspondent. The identity of each deceased is engraved on their epitaphs, accompanied by tiny flower plants beside them. Sadia Afroz, another visitor, said, “The entire structure of this solemn memorial manifests a humbling feeling. The cemetery now serves as one of the oldest and most famous historical sites in the city.” This connection between the known and the unknown, the living and the dead – accompanied by the history of a war that tore the world apart – makes the experience of visiting the cemetery even more overwhelming, making it more than just another graveyard.

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## CU launches seven biotech research labs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chittagong University (CU) inaugurated seven international-standard biotechnology research labs at the Department of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology on May 23.

CU is the first and only university in Bangladesh to launch such labs, which have specialised equipment, on university premises.

Six labs will be facilitated by the university’s Biotechnology Research and Innovation Center, and one will be supported by Child Health Research Foundation (CHRF) in Dhaka, and Find Diagnostics of Switzerland.

That one lab, named “Next Generation Sequencing, Research and Innovation Lab Chittagong”, is the first international, joint laboratory for genome research in the country.

The labs were inaugurated by Dr Shireen Akhter, vice chancellor of Chittagong University. Researcher Dr Senjuti Saha, director of CHRF and advisor to the World Health Organization, was present as guest of honour.

Prof Benu Kumar Dey, pro-vice chancellor of CU; Prof Touhid Hossain, dean of the biology faculty; Dr Golam Mostafa, director of Laboratory of Science and Industry, and Dr Nasiruddin, director of Bangladesh Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases, were also present at the inauguration event.

Senjuti said, “The reason for setting up labs at Chittagong University is that students have a lot of desire to do research here... Now, the researchers don’t have to go elsewhere with their samples.”

Associate professor of the department Adnan Mannan said, “In these labs, we can research cancer as well as infectious and genetic diseases... This is a huge milestone.”



## The land is green again

Forest department plants 4 lakh trees on 400 acres of recovered forestland

SIFAYET ULLAH

The forest department has reforested a total of 400 acres of protected forestland – which was grabbed by locals in Kodolpur area of Chattogram’s Raozan upazila – bringing a positive change for the region’s biodiversity.

Under the “social forestry” project, 25 native species of trees – including gamhar, arjun, olive, neem and haritaki – are now spreading their branches.

Besides, the department listed 400 destitute families in the area as beneficiaries under the project. These families will get 45 percent dividends from the sale of trees, after the project ends.

Around four lakh trees have been

planted under the project, which started in 2018 and will end in 2032.

During a visit to Kodolpur on Sunday, this correspondent saw the saplings being nurtured by locals. Many of the trees are now 10 to 12 feet tall, and beneficiaries were seen guarding the forest.

Md Didar, a beneficiary of the forest, told the newspaper, “We treat the forest’s trees as our children. We care about them; we protect them, so that on one can cause harm.”

“At one point, local encroachers grabbed the land and installed different kinds of illegal establishments. But now, the situation has totally changed. It’s now turning into a green haven, full of different species of trees,” said Abu Ahmed, another beneficiary.

“We will get money as beneficiaries after the trees are cut down, which will bring us prosperity,” he added.

“The project not only maintains ecological balance in our area but also brings happiness to poor families,” said Nizam Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury, chairperson of Kodolpur Union Parishad.

Khasrul Amin, forest ranger of Ichamati (Raozan) Forest Range, told The Daily Star that the land had been grabbed by locals, but the forest department recovered the land from them and planted trees. “Four hundred indigent local families were listed as beneficiaries under the project. They safeguard the forest.”

Mozammel Haque Shah Chowdhury, divisional forest officer of Chattogram North Forest

Department, said the department’s hard work finally paid off, because the saplings have turned the place into a dense, green forest, inhabited by snakes, wild boars and birds.

Environmentalists have praised the work.

Kamal Ahmed, professor of Forestry and Environmental Science Institute at Chittagong University, told this newspaper, “Deforestation is one of the biggest problems in Bangladesh. Global warming has accelerated in recent years due to deforestation.”

“Stopping deforestation and focusing on reforestation is the need of the hour, but it is easier said than done. The forest department of Chattogram has shown that it is not impossible,” he said.

