

DARUL ADALAT in shambles

Port city's first colonial court building dilapidated due to lack of conservation

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Land arable, but uncultivated

SIFAYET ULLAH

Despite the government's priority programme to make the best use of every inch of available cultivable land, more than 15 thousand hectares of arable land in Chattogram remain uncultivated.

According to agriculture officials, the reasons for this include a lack of irrigation and other problems over many years.

Jashim Uddin, a farmer of the Hathazari upazila, said, "I have two acres of arable land. However, due to the lack of water, I could not plant paddy in about an acre of the land."

"I planted paddy in the remaining one acre with pump irrigation, but half of my crops died for the same reason," he added.

According to the data of the Chattogram Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), the total cultivable land in the district is 2 lakh 28 thousand 966 hectares. Of this, farmers cultivate 2 lakh 14 thousand hectares of land.

Md Aktaruzzaman, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Chattogram, told The Daily Star that due to a lack of agricultural inputs, irrigation, financial options, and technical and agricultural knowledge, the lands stay fallow.

About a lakh tonnes of food grains could be produced annually if the land is brought under cultivation, he added.

"We are encouraging farmers to bring cultivable fallow lands under cultivation. But the agriculture department cannot force the farmers by enforcing the law," said Abu Salek, agriculture officer of Banskhali Upazilla.

Farmers said agricultural machinery, irrigation, pesticides and labour costs have seen a massive increase.

Moreover, most farmers have moved to the cities in search of livelihood. There is also a lack of interest in agriculture among the educated younger generations.

According to the data of the Chattogram Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), the total cultivable land in the district is 2 lakh 28 thousand 966 hectares. Of this, farmers cultivate 2 lakh 14 thousand hectares of land.

"Last year, I cultivated paddy on 2 acres of land but did not make any profit. On the contrary, I counted a loss of Tk 36 thousand," said Jaynal Abedin, a farmer from Fatikhhari upazila.

"Due to the increase in the cost of labour, seeds, fertilisers and other accessories, I did not cultivate paddy this year. Two acres of my land are lying fallow now," he added.

Kalpana Rahman, agriculture officer of Patiya upazila, said, "600 hectares of land remain permanently uncultivated in the upazila due to flooding, lack of irrigation and being unfit for cultivation."

"We have taken the initiative of motivating the farmers through field assembly, and distribution of free fertilisers and seeds to bring the land under cultivation. Hopefully, the uncultivated land will come under cultivation next year," she added.

There is a divisional museum in every division except for Chattogram. The building can be used for that purpose as well.

DR MD ATAUR RAHMAN
a former regional director of DoA, Chattogram.

ARUN BIKASH DEY

On a hilltop adjacent to Government Hazi Muhammad Mohsin College in Chattogram, stands an establishment from the British colonial era.

The two-storey building has unique architectural traits, incorporating elements from both Mughal and Western architecture. The three feet wide walls were made of brick lime mortars. There are sixteen rooms and two towers on the northeast and northwest corners of the building.

History suggests that it was the first-ever court building in the port city.

However, Darul Adalat, a building of much historical significance, has been left in a dilapidated state for around 20 years due to the lack of conservation.

The college authority declared the building risky in 2002 and stopped all academic and official activities from taking place in the building.

According to sources in Mohsin College, the building was used as the college library as well as the office of the college branch of Bangladesh National Cadet Core.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw that the rooms and the entrances of staircases were sealed off, while weeds took over the abandoned building, with the plasters falling off.

Maimun Uddin, a graduate student at

Government Hazi Mohammad Mohsin College, said visitors often come to see the site but they cannot enter the building.

"It is a historical site and it should be protected by the state," he said.

Some students from Chittagong University came to visit the site but they expressed their frustration over the sorry state of the building.

It was known that officials of the Department of Archeology (DoA) in Chattogram visited the site in 2013 and wrote to the DoA director general to protect the site, declaring it a heritage.

However, no initiative has been taken to that effect yet.

Contacted, Dr Md Ataur Rahman, a former regional director of DoA, Chattogram, said, "I visited the site when I was the regional director in 2019 and submitted a report to the head office with a recommendation to protect the building." "There is a divisional museum in every division except for Chattogram. The building can be used for that purpose as well," he added.

Contacted, Prof Kamrul Islam, principal of Government Hazi Muhammad Mohsin College, said the DoA wrote a letter to the college authority showing interest for conserve the building in 2013.

"In that letter, the DoA asked to transfer the ownership of the land on which the building

stands. But we are not authorised to transfer the rights of government land," he added.

AKM Saifur Rahman, DoA regional director in Chattogram, said he joined the office recently and did not know about the issue in detail.

"So far I know that a recommendation to protect the building has been sent from the Department of Archeology to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs," he said.

A site of historical importance
Locals call the building "Portuguese Bhaban". According to a local myth, the building was built by Portuguese pirates. It also had a tunnel that connected the Karnaphuli through which pirates would frequent secretly.

They also used to conduct surveillance from the two towers on the top of the building, the myth suggests.

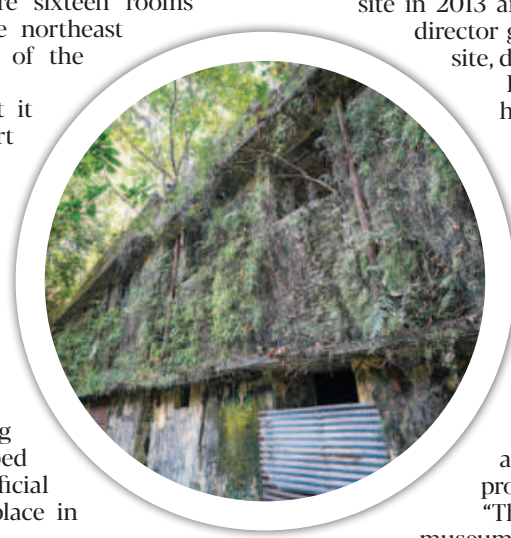
However, historians dismissed the authenticity of the myth. According to them, the building was built during the British colonial period.

Historian Abdul Haque Chowdhury in his book "Bandar Shahar Chattogram" (Port Town Chattogram) said the structure was built soon after the British took over Chattogram in 1761.

"During the early period of the British era, they constructed the building to establish their court. There were two towers in the two-storey building built following Mughal and western architectural practices," the book suggests.

It also mentions that there was a dome in each tower from which the British watchmen used to watch the movement of ships in Karnaphuli river and the sea through binoculars.

The building was used as the court until the British rulers of the region shifted the court to Lalkuthi (Red Building) beside Laldighi in Chattogram around 1857.



Homemakers in Ctg more prone to uncontrolled diabetes

Finds study

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Homemakers in Chattogram tend to be suffering from uncontrolled diabetes at a greater rate due to different reasons, including a lack of a balanced diet.

Students and youths are also inclined to be affected by type-2 diabetes, said experts.

A study conducted on a total of 2,136 diabetes patients admitted to five hospitals in the port city revealed that around 52.3 percent of the respondents were homemakers.

An article on this study was published in the US-based international journal PLOS ONE on May 25, 2022.

Dr Farhana Akter, associate professor of the Department of Endocrinology at Chattogram Medical College, also co-author of the study, said, "In our study, we have found that homemakers do not maintain a healthy lifestyle, which makes them more prone to the risks of uncontrolled diabetes."

"Many of those patients cannot even go for a walk due to their families' conservative mindsets. Many of them do not take their medicines regularly," she added.

Obesity, lack of physical activities – including outdoor games – unhealthy lifestyle, and excessive consumption of fast food are among the main reasons for type-2 diabetes in children and young people, said Dr Farhana.

The study also found that 42 percent of the respondents were students of higher secondary level (12th graders), said another author of the article Dr Adnan Mannan, also an associate professor of Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology at Chittagong University.

Around 41 percent of the respondents were overweight. "Chattogram lacks open space and fields and so children and young people cannot take part in outdoor games. Instead, they are becoming addicted to electronic gadgets," said Dr Mannan.

"Furthermore, many children do not eat a balanced diet and prefer to eat an excessive amount of fast food," he added.

The main attraction remains shut off

Cable car service in Sheikh Russel Aviary Park closed for a year

SIFAYET ULLAH

The cable car service in Sheikh Russel Aviary and Eco Park in the port city's Rangunia upazila has remained closed since September 2021. The authorities have been working to restart its operations but no progress has been made to that effect in the last year.

The cable car service is considered to be the main attraction of the eco-park. Its closure has left many visitors disappointed, causing a loss in revenues as well.

The park authorities said the cable car is not running due to a mechanical fault.

According to them, the park was opened for tourists in 2013 and the cable car service was introduced in 2014.

Park officials said the cable car rides about 100 feet above the ground, allowing the tourists an aerial view of the park.

Solaiman Sawon, a visitor at the park, recently told The Daily Star that the park is the only amusement centre in the port city that offered this service.

"I was disappointed to see the service closed. The whole trip went in vain," he said.

This park is under the jurisdiction of Chattogram



South Forest Division and is managed under a project of the Ministry of Forests.

Md Shofiqul Islam, divisional forest officer of Chattogram South Forest Division, said, "A financial problem arose as the project under which the park was run expired in June last year. The project has been extended again, so work has begun to relaunch the cable car."

"The contractor has already made a site visit to see the cable cars. We are hoping to relaunch the service soon," he added.

Currently, the park has a one-kilometre-long cable for the car's movement. The cable will be extended for another kilometre, said the park authorities.

Masum Kabir, in charge of the park and ranger of the Rangunia forest range, confirmed the matter to this correspondent.

"The higher authorities of the forest department have already verified the feasibility of this extension. We hope to start the work of extending the cable soon," he said.

The location of this park covers an area of about 500 acres of hills and plains.

About 200 species of endangered birds have been preserved in this park. In addition to these native species of birds, African pelicans, swans, Electros parrots, macaws and other exotic birds have been added to this aviary.

"A financial problem arose as the project under which the park was run expired in June last year. The project has been extended again, so work has begun to relaunch the cable car."

MD SHOFIQUUL ISLAM,
divisional forest officer of Chattogram South Forest Division