



Once a canal, now a narrow stream only

According to Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995, filling in or changing the landscape of any water body recorded in the government records is a punishable offence.

SIFAYET ULLAH

Due to illegal grabbing and inaction of the concerned authorities, Jolkodor canal in Chattogram's Banskhali upazila has reduced to be a 30 feet wide stream from its previous width of 150 feet.

The canal used to be the most crucial part of the upazila's drainage system. However, Banskhali gets inundated every monsoon due to the canal's encroachment, causing immense suffering to residents.

Abdur Rahman, a 70-year-old resident of the upazila, said the low-lying areas get submerged during the monsoons when water cannot flow through the canal.

"If the canal is not re-dug, our suffering will increase day by day," he added.

According to the Bangladesh Survey, the canal was over 33km long and around 150 feet wide.

Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) is in charge of maintaining the canal. However, they have not dug the water body in the last 45 years.

According to BWDB data, water cannot flow through the main canal of the upazila as more than 500 grabbers have occupied the canal.



Locals said once, traders of Banskhali used to bring all kinds of goods from the port city through this canal by boats, which has simply become unthinkable in recent years due to the encroachment.

"Even 30 years ago, large boats used to ply on the canal. Now even water cannot pass through the space properly," said Riadul Islam, a local trader.

He also mentioned that salt produced in Banskhali is bought by traders from different parts of the country through this canal. As the canal is full, the boats cannot ply the waters properly.

Prakashan Chakma, sub-assistant engineer

of BWDB, told The Daily Star that all illegal establishments on the canal have been listed for eviction.

"This is a natural water body. The degradation of the canal threatens not only the upazila's drainage infrastructure but also its ecosystem," said Aliur Rahman, general secretary of Movement to Protect Rivers and Canals of Chattogram.

According to Bangladesh Environment Conservation Act, 1995, filling in or changing the landscape of any water body recorded in the government records is a punishable offence.

Contacted, Nahiduzzaman Khan, executive engineer of BWDB, told The Daily Star, "We have taken a project to re-excavate the canal and rehabilitate the embankments on both sides. If the ministry approves the project, we will start the work."

However, Ashraf Uddin, assistant director of the department of environment in the Chattogram office, could not confirm any eviction drive by the DoE anytime soon to recover the occupied land of the canal.

The legend of Parir Pahar

ARUN BIKASH DEY

The administrative centre of Chattogram division and Chattogram district stands on the top of a hill with a peculiar name of "Parir Pahar", which translates to fairy hill.

As the Chattogram Court Building, offices of the divisional commissioner and deputy commissioner of Chattogram are all located on the hilltop, it remains abuzz with people in working days.

"Parir Pahar, once a silent hill adjacent to Laldighi, became an important place after the British shifted the court and other government offices on the hilltop in 1857. Earlier, the court and government offices were located on the hilltop of present Government Hazi Muhammad Mohsin College near Chawkbazar," said Prof Anupam Sen, Vice Chancellor of Premier University Chattogram.

Since then, Parir Pahar has been the heart of Chattogram's administration and judicial activities, he said.

Asked, Dr Anupam said there was a myth that fairies used to dance once upon a time on the top of that hill. People believed that genies and fairies used to rule over Chattogram.

"The name Parir Pahar or Fairy Hill came from this legend. There was no formal name for the hills at that time, people used to call the hill adjacent to Laldighi 'Parir Pahar' as they believed fairies occupied the hilltop."

According to the legend, Chattogram was run by genies and fairies in the fourteenth century, who made the lives of common people miserable.

At that time, Peer Badar Shah, a Sufi Saint, came to Chattogram to preach Islam. In the middle of the jungle surrounded by hills and hillocks, he made his way and started to climb a hillock.

However, the legend suggests that the genies and fairies did not agree to make any room for him. They told him that the hills, hillocks and jungles in Chattogram belong to them and so they would not allow any human being to stay there.

At one point in this conversation, Badar Shah

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sought permission for a place to light a lamp as it was getting dark after sunset, to which the mythical beings agreed. But that was the end of them, as the light forced them out of the area.

During the British regime, Parir Pahar was known as Fairy Hill. At that time, the hill belonged to a Portuguese man named John Harry, from whom British Captain Texra bought the hill.

Later, One Pareda bought the hill from Texra, who sold it to Zamindar Akhil Chandra Sen of Chhanahara village in Chattogram's Patiya Subdivision for Tk 9,000 in the middle of the nineteenth century.

During the British regime, the administrative centre was located initially on the top of Madrasa Pahar (currently Govt Hazi Muhammad Mohsin College Hill, in front of Chattogram College).

As the new town was expanding through the south, the British government felt the need to shift the offices and the court to another place. For this purpose, the government acquired Parir Pahar from Zamindar Akhil Chandra Sen in 1889 and built a two-storey building at a cost of Tk six lakh on the top of the hill in 1893-1894. Later, the court and other government offices were shifted there from Madrasa Pahar.

An absolute football frenzy

Fans go crazy for collecting flags and jerseys

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

With the beginning of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Chattogram has entered a festive mood with jerseys and flags taking over the markets and footpaths of the port city.

Tailoring shops are also spending busy times with orders of flags and jerseys pouring over them from fans.

Chattogram's New Market, MA Aziz Stadium Sports markets, Apollo Shopping Centre, Agrabad footpath market and local sports and clothing shops are abuzz with the vibrant presence of football fans of different ages.

During a recent visit to the Kazir Dewri MA Aziz Stadium market, his correspondent saw jerseys of different Fifa World Cup teams occupying every shop.

Sellers said the volume of sales has risen in the last 15 days. Depending on the quality, a jersey is being sold between the range of Tk 300 and 1500.

"Every day, we are selling about 200 to 250 pieces of jersey in different price ranges. Along with Bangladeshi customers, foreigners working in the port city are also buying their favourite ones," said Md Altaf of Green Sports in MA Aziz Stadium.

"We are also selling caps, wristbands, footballs and other sports kits. We have collected the jerseys from local garments and apparel factories in the

EPZs and Dhaka," he added.

Md Sajjad, a worker of Players Sports, said, "From premium quality to local, we have every kind of jersey as customers want the best-fitted jersey at an affordable price. The sales are great."

However, customers are complaining about the prices being high.

"Sellers are very aware of the emotion of football fans and they are cashing in on the issue," said Kazi Munjurul Hoque, a customer.

Debabrata Roy Debu, a fan of the German team, said "To avoid the hassle, I have collected a premium replica jersey of the German team from an online shop."

Sellers in New Market area said the price of jerseys varies upon the measurement of the fabric's weight. Local sellers use to make a profit of Tk 200 to 300 for each jersey depending on its quality.

Rashed Nabi, who sells flags on the streets, said a three-foot flag of Argentina can cost Tk 500 to 600 depending on its fabric quality.

Md Abu Khalifa, owner of 'Pataka Bitan' in Kotwali, said, "Fans are mainly going crazy over the flags of Argentina, Brazil, Germany and Italy. We sell flags at a wholesale price depending on their size."

"So far, thousands of Argentinian and Brazilian flags have been sold before the opening of the greatest show on earth," he said.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN