



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

AJAR ALI MOSQUE

A Mughal-era architectural wonder

As you approach the Halishahar area in Chattogram, your eyes will be drawn to a striking red building with majestic domes that seem to reach for the sky. This is the Ajar Ali Mosque, a stunning example of Mughal-era engineering design that takes visitors on a journey back to the late 18th century.

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

With its unique aesthetic beauty and significant historical value, this cultural heritage is a must-visit attraction for anyone who appreciates the artistry and craftsmanship of past generations.

The mosque, built in 1795 by Asi Mia Chowdhury, son of wealthy landlord Ajar Ali Chowdhury, boasts a unique aesthetic beauty that is sure to leave a lasting impression on anyone who visits.

The square-shaped mosque features three terracotta domes with Mughal architectural style on the top.



The mosque was constructed on 10-decimal land, with a total of 24 minars (small towers or spires) adorning the top. The lime-sand and powdered brick structure is complemented with beautiful designs both inside and outside, with columns and supporting ceiling made of stone.

The main entrance features wood crafted doors with two windows on either side. Inside the mosque, eight Khilan (arches) with carved designs are located, and it can accommodate around 31 to 34 devotees for prayers at a time.

Despite the fact that prayers are not being held inside the mosque since 2016, it remains a popular attraction for people from all walks of life. The locals take great pride in the Ajar Ali Mosque, and its preservation is of utmost importance to them.

Gias Uddin Chowdhury, the motwalli (caretaker) of the mosque, spoke of his family's legacy and commitment to preserving the history and beauty of the mosque.

"Our ancestor built the mosque in 1795, and we renovated the mosque with our family funding a few years back to keep the history alive," he said.

"For devotees, we have built another mosque beside it spending around Tk 4 crore. Our forefather never sought money from anyone to fund the mosque. From the family fund, we are maintaining the cost," he said.

The Ajar Ali Mosque is easily accessible from the Boropole Halishahar area of Chattogram.

Drinking water crisis grips Sitakunda

7,000 tube wells go dysfunctional due to depleting groundwater, rampant use by industries

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

The drinking water crisis in Sitakunda has been worsening as over 7,000 tube wells have become dysfunctional due to the fall of the groundwater layer amid scorching heat.

The situation has been ongoing for nearly 25 days, causing untold sufferings to women and children. Locals said they are now forced to drink and use arsenic-contaminated and unclear water, leading to health problems.

Sitakunda accommodates almost 300 small and large industries, including iron factories and ship-breaking yards. These factories reportedly pump groundwater with high-power submersible pumps to meet their daily necessities for production.

Locals allege that due to the industries, the groundwater level goes down during every dry season, causing a tube-well water crisis, putting local life in immense trouble.

The Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) Sitakunda office has reported that a total of 5,000 tube wells



installed by the DPHE have become dysfunctional, forcing people to collect drinking water from other sources.

Additionally, more than 5,000 tube wells set up privately have also become out of order.

Officials of DPHE said they can do nothing but wait for the rain to relieve the situation.

The crisis is affecting Kumira, Banshbaria, Muradpur, Syed Para, and the municipality area, as well as 32 coastal colonies

of fishermen communities and seven indigenous villages. People are collecting water from nearby canals and ponds, but this water is often polluted, causing physical problems for children and women.

Banker Nazmul Alam, a landlord in Sitakunda Bazar area, said his tenants have reported water crises for the last several years, and this season has brought more woes as there is scanty rain, and the water level is going down every year due to the

increase in demand.

The situation has led to diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases in fisher communities.

Admitting the crisis, Sitakunda DPHE office's Deputy Sub Engineer Md Rasheduzzaman said there is no water in around 5,000 tube wells in different parts of the upazila.

"The problem will ease if torrential rain starts in the locality, otherwise there is no solution," he added.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Sitakunda Md Shahadat Hossain acknowledged the situation and said they are trying to tackle it by advising people to use nearby ponds and similar water sources.

When asked about the allegation of rampant use of groundwater by the industries in Sitakunda, the UNO said they asked the industries to use reserved water by installing ponds and are demotivating business organisations from using groundwater.

He also claimed that some factories have sought permission to use spring water from hills, but it was declined.

Sitakunda accommodates almost 300 small and large industries, including iron factories and ship-breaking yards. These factories reportedly pump groundwater with high-power submersible pumps to meet their daily necessities for production.

Port city to get third bus terminal soon

ARUN BIKASH DEY

Chattogram City Corporation is going to construct a bus-truck terminal, which will be the third of its kind in the city, after 30 years of constructing the second one.

The terminal will be constructed at Kulgaon, on the outskirts of the port city. The CCC has already floated a tender for land development at the site.

Chattogram's first bus terminal was launched at Kadamtoli Intersection in 1966 and the second one at Bahaddarhat in 1993.

Kafil Uddin, former president of Chattogram Jela Sarak Paribahan Malik Group, said the buses bound for different districts from north to Chattogram used to move from Kadamtoli earlier. Now, only Noakhali-bound buses move from the terminal.

As the Bahaddarhat terminal caters to buses moving between the port city and seven upazilas in south Chattogram, Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts, the buses bound for eight other upazilas in north Chattogram and Rangamati, Khagrachhari and other districts have to stand on road due to a lack of bus terminal.

The third bus terminal will be

beneficial, said Kafil Uddin.

The new terminal will accommodate a total of 160 buses and trucks that will ply on different routes, said CCC Executive Engineer (civil) Rifatul Karim

According to CCC sources, a total of 28 acres of land at Kulgaon have been earmarked for a bus terminal in the masterplan formulated by Chattogram Development Authority in 1995. However, the CCC would develop 8.1 acres initially for this purpose.

Following this masterplan, the CCC initiated the Tk 296 crore project back in 2018, which was approved by the Ecnc in October 2018, said Rifatul Karim.

Contacted, Jasim Uddin, CCC executive engineer and deputy project director of the project, said they have already floated tender for land development.

Jasim said the deadline of the project implementation would be expired in June and so they would apply for extending period for one more year.

When asked about the delay, Jasim said the district administration could not hand over the acquired land for the project in the past five years due to some issues raised by local land owners over compensation.

Life on the edge of a broken embankment
No renovation in 15 years led to farmers losing cultivable land

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

The five-kilometre embankment in Musapur union of Sandwip upazila was repaired in 2008. But the union has lost a vast area of its land to the sea due to erosion, since no further renovation work has been done.

Abul Khair Nadim, chairman of the union, said, "In the last 15 years, the embankment has not been renovated. Thousands of people living in coastal areas fear drowning due to high tidal waves during cyclones."

Noruttom Banik, a resident of Maitbanga union of Sandwip, said, "Our union's land has lost fertility due to salt water, for which, crop production here is difficult."

According to the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), in 1963, a 58km embankment was built in the coastal area of Sandwip upazila under Coastal Embankment Project. Of this, around 17km of the embankment has not been repaired for the past 15 years.

Anis Haider, sub divisional engineer of BWDB, admitted that around 17km of the dyke has not been renovated for many years due to fund crisis.

However, BWDB officials have no official data about the condition of the remaining 33km (approx) of the dyke.

Jahangir Hossain, a resident of Alakdia village in Sitakunda, used to cultivate various types of crops on a half-acre land adjacent to the coastline. However, his land remains uncultivable for the last five years due to the saline water entering from an adjacent dyke.

During a recent visit to Alakdia village, this correspondent found that a large portion of an adjacent dyke has broken down, making way



Sandwip two months after cyclone Sitrang last year.

FILE PHOTO

for saline water to enter the area.

Villagers said surging water from the sea washed away parts of the dyke during the flood last year, flooding cropland and dwellings.

Mohiuddin, a farmer of the Kumira union, said, "During the cyclone last year, tidal water entered the locality and the crops on my 2.5 acres of land were destroyed. We are at risk of losing everything as the embankment has not been repaired yet."

Imran Bin Sabur, a resident of the Raipura union of Anwara upazila, warned that huge areas of the union will be flooded through the breached points, which will lead to croplands and homesteads going under water in the coming rainy season.

Abul Khair Nadim, chairman of Musapur union, said, "We appealed to BWDB several times to repair the dyke, but no initiative has been taken as of yet."

Nahiduzzaman Khan, executive engineer of BWDB, said if there is high tide due to cyclones, there is a danger that these dams will break and water will enter the locality.

"We are alert in these danger-prone areas. Geo and synthetic bags are kept ready for immediate response, in case of any untoward incident," he said.

"We already took on a project for constructing a sustainable dyke in Chattogram including Sandwip upazila. Hopefully we will start working on this project after monsoon," he added.