

FISHING IN BAY

Fishers stymied by lengthy ban



My family of ten needs about four-kg rice every day while the allotted rice only ensures that we have 1.32kg for each day. Besides, we also need to buy groceries which include vegetables and proteins. I have no other option but to leave my profession.

RAMAKANTA DAS
a registered fisherman

ARUN BIKASH DEY

With a 65 day government-imposed fishing ban being in action, almost half of Chattogram's fishermen, mostly the unregistered ones, have been pushed towards a serious financial crunch.

The ban was imposed on May 19 to conserve marine fish and will continue till July 23.

As these unregistered fishers are not entitled to any government subsidies or aids, many among them have already opted for different professions due to having very little or no income during such bans.

"I have to feed a family of six, including my aged parents.

I cannot afford to be unemployed," said

Sunil Jaladas, an unregistered

fisherman who has been pulling

rickshaw to survive since

the ban was imposed.

Many others have decided

to switch to industrial work

or take up the job of municipality

cleaners.

Even registered

fishers are seen walking

away from this profession as

they claim the government aids

to be "insufficient" to maintain a family.

Ramakanta Das, a registered

fisherman, received

56kg of rice from the government on May

25 along with an assurance

from the



district's fisheries office that he would receive another 30kg the following month.

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Chattogram is home to around 50,000 fishermen,

with only near half of them being registered, mentioned

Subal Chandra Das, president of Chattogram

Mohanagari Sanatani Motsyjobi Oikya

Parishad.

"The unregistered ones are left unemployed with no aid which makes them more vulnerable during bans. Thus, they choose to work at ice factories or construction sites instead, apart from taking up rickshaw pulling. Alongside reconsidering the aid package, the authorities should also work to register all the fishers if they wish to keep this line of work alive among locals," he shared.

The fishers were registered under a project initiated by the Department of Fisheries between 2012 and 2017. The list is updated annually between the months of July and December, informed Faruk Hossain Sagar, assistant director, Department of Marine Fisheries, Chattogram.

"A total of 27,300 registered fishermen receive aid during such bans. We have been collecting the information of the unregistered ones from different upazilas and will soon send them to the Department of Fisheries in Dhaka," said Bikram Jeet Roy, assistant director of Chattogram District Fisheries Office.



PHOTO:
RAJIB RAIHAN

Sajek roads turn death trap

Unfit vehicles, reckless driving causing fatal accidents

LALTANLIAN PANGKHUA

Sajek has become a popular tourist destination in Bangladesh, with its scenic view of hills, greeneries and skyline melting into one. Though it is situated in Rangamati's Baghaichhari upazila, one must go through Khagrachhari to reach Sajek.

The distance from Khagrachhari to Sajek is around 70 kilometres -- a 4-to-5 hour drive through the twisted hilly roads.

Jeeps, locally known as "Chander Gari", are the most popular mode of transportation, followed closely by CNG-run vehicles, Tomtom or Mahindra, and bikes.

However, the commute is not as easy as it sounds. The hilly roads of Sajek witness four to five fatal accidents almost every month, claim locals.

Every day, around 500 jeeps, 200 Mahindras, 150 CNG-run auto-rickshaws and numerous bikes use this narrow road from Khagrachhari to Sajek.

Jeeps are involved with the highest number of road accidents, as it is used by both tourists and locals who board them to take their produce to the market, mainly due to their flexibility and low fare.

The last accident occurred on March 3, 2023, when a tourist named Fardin Hasan Bishal, 35, lost his life. Eight others were injured in the accident.

Local engineers involved with the road construction projects said the most accident-prone area is a two-km steep road which comes after crossing Rului.

"Non-locals cannot grasp the turn taken by this road. Besides, the road is only 5.5 inches wide and the bikes have a tendency of overtaking, making it hard to navigate smoothly," said an engineer, requesting anonymity.

Locals claim that many of these drivers have no licence to operate a vehicle.



Gyanojuti Chakma, a local, said, "The number of accidents increased manifold in 2022. Most of the jeep drivers are not licenced. They start by helping out the driver and later are allowed to drive themselves. Most of these trainees are young or teenagers, who are often reckless."

Contacted, Parimal Debnath, Sajek Jeep Malik Samity, claimed that it takes almost five to six years to get a licence from BRTA, after passing the test.

"For example, my employee Kamal Uddin has been a professional driver for years. He applied for his licence some five years ago and still has not received it. Besides, it is not the drivers who are at fault. The nature of the roads in the valley makes it a difficult endeavour to drive safely," he added.

Rangamati District Deputy Commissioner Mizanur Rahman said Sajek's distance from the main district makes it harder to monitor the situation efficiently. "However, we have taken preventive measures to reduce the risks of road accidents."

Sajek Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Nurul Hoque said, "We set a rule where drivers can drive on only one lane. However, most of the time, this rule is not followed."

"Not only reckless driving but unfit vehicles are also responsible for these accidents. We have taken steps to identify these unfit vehicles. We have already instructed all bike riders to wear helmets," he added.

Pritilata Museum: 10 years of unkept promises

SIFAYET ULLAH

Mochud Doula, a 70-year-old businessman, has been living in the port city's Pahartali area for the past 42 years. Since 2012, he has been hearing promises that the European Club would be converted into Pritilata memorial museum soon.

Even though more than 10 years have gone by, the museum is yet to become a reality.

He said, "If there were a museum here, the young generation would've learned about Pritilata's contributions to the anti-British movement in Chattogram."

One of Pritilata's most notable contributions to the resistance against the British was in the Chittagong Armoury



Faced with strong resistance, Pritilata and her comrades chose martyrdom rather than surrendering to the British forces. Pritilata consumed cyanide to avoid capture and died on September 24, 1932. She was only 21 years old at the time of her death.

Raid. Alongside revolutionaries such as Surya Sen, Ganesh Ghosh, and Lokenath Bal, Pritilata played a vital role in planning and executing the raid, which aimed to seize control of the armoury and proclaim independence in Chattogram.

On September 1932, Pritilata, along with a group of revolutionaries launched an attack at the European Club in Chattogram that had a signboard that read "Dogs and

Indians not allowed".

However, faced with strong resistance, Pritilata and her comrades chose martyrdom rather than surrendering to the British forces. Pritilata consumed cyanide to avoid capture and died on September 24, 1932. She was only 21 years old at the time of her death.

Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, mayor of Chattogram City Corporation, announced in January last year that the club will be

soon converted into a museum.

Earlier, Bangladesh Railway (BR) authorities made the same announcement several times.

During a recent visit to the club, this correspondent found that the red tin-shed club room is locked. No signs were seen except for Pritilata's last letter written on a wall in front of the club.

Earlier the historical structure was used as an office by the railway authorities under

the then-Pakistan government, right after independence from the British in 1947. Currently, the club is under the jurisdiction of BR.

"Pritilata Waddedar is an inspiration to the women of the region as she was the first woman to lay down her life in the anti-British movement. But it is very sad as there is no memorial in Chattogram, her birthplace," said Pankaj Chakraborty, founding president of Birkonya Pritilata Trust.

"Pritilata Museum is still just a promise. We want a museum in the name of this revolutionary or her memory will be lost," he added.

Touhidul Islam, chief executive officer of the Chattogram City Corporation, said, "We haven't taken any step yet to turn the European Club into the Pritilata memorial museum. However, as instructed by the higher authorities, the divisional engineer office of the railway vacated the club by removing the office in October 2020. Since then, the club has been locked."

"We have appointed an architect to design the museum, said Abu Zafar Mia, chief engineer of the Railway Eastern Zone.

"We will also allocate a budget for the museum soon," he added.