



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Unraveling stories behind AN ICONIC FOOTPATH

RBR

The long strip of pavement from Tin Natar Mazar near Doyel Chatter by the High Court Mazar, by the east gate of the old court premises, has always been a hotspot.

Mystery surrounds the identity of the saint lying in the tomb; nevertheless, devotees and dervishes made the place an akhra – a religious house for Sufi ascetics who renounced their worldly possessions and dedicated lives to the worship of God.

As is the case near any Sufi shrine, a flower market took form as followers wished to place garlands, wreaths, and flower petals as offerings. Since the 70s, this large flower market has been set up under the canopy of trees lining the place.

However, as years went by, Dhaka began to evolve and so did this pavement. In recent years, the pavement, which was once famous solely for its terracotta and pottery shacks, transpired into a nursery haven situated on both sides of the streets. At this point in time, novelty items like ornaments and household décor make rare appearances.

Pottery found in bigger stores began making appearances on this footpath, at discounted prices. Flowers pots in the shapes of elephants, swans, and frogs, with intricate coloured alpina or folk-art motifs, also found a big fan

following here. Handcrafted terracotta pots in intricate details of garland and leaves, along with other traditional designs, minus any paint coat, are also on offer.

At these street-side shops, small sculptures, wall hangings, effigies of

The stores, right at the start of the footpath near Shishu Academy, also sell showpieces made of wood, bamboo, jute, cane, and ceramic. Here, you will find mementoes of the city like miniature rickshaws



famous persons, animal figures, vases, ashtrays, candle stands, and pen stands are popular items, with wooden lamps of contemporary design being the most recent addition.

and rickshaws-art, and colourful black and yellow baby taxis. The price of products varies from Tk 30-500 or more, depending on the intricacy of design and size.



Most of the pottery products come from Barishal, Cumilla, Faridpur and places surrounding Dhaka – including Dhairai, Savar, and Nabnagar. Jute and wooden items, on the other hand, come from Bogura, Narsingdi, Rangpur, and Kaliakoir.

These days, apart from random customers, the major business of this place comes from event planners. The vendors here are one of the main suppliers of decorative items needed for wedding ceremonies, gaye halud events, office decoration, and various stage shows. Festivals like Pahela Baishakh, Pahela Falgun, and Valentine's Day are times when these footpaths see a lot of sales.

This colourful market has been around since the early years of Bangladesh and has slowly evolved into a sought-after place for souvenirs and other folk artefacts. It attracts Dhakaites and tourists with equal zeal. Undoubtedly, it is the best place in Dhaka to shop for souvenirs that encapsulate the core of the city.

CORRECTION

The report titled "11 power plants mostly sat idle last fiscal" published on January 15 had included state-owned BR Powergen among the plants that were mostly sitting idle for a large part of fiscal 2022-23.

Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB) informed that BR Powergen has two power plants, one operating in Gazipur and the other in Mirsarai. The Gazipur plant had produced electricity at 31.32 percent plant load factor (PLF) while the Mirsarai one had started commercial operation in May 2023, a month before the fiscal year ended. As a result, the PLF of BR Powergen was calculated to be less than 20 percent in fiscal 2022-23. We stand corrected on this.

Last fiscal year, 10 power plants were mostly idle and not 11. The rest of the information in the report remains the same.

Duty cuts on essentials

FROM PAGE 1
The fisheries and livestock ministry will sell fish, meat, eggs, and milk at more than 20 points in Dhaka. The ministry is also exploring whether it would be possible to extend this operation outside the capital during Ramadan.

The commerce ministry also requested BB to direct banks to prioritise LC opening with minimum margins for edible oil, sugar, chickpea, lentil, and date imports. Ahsanul Islam Titu, the state minister for commerce, is planning to visit India to request the neighbouring country to keep a quota of seven essential commodities for Bangladesh with the view to keeping the prices of the items stable. Besides, the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh will continue selling rice, sugar, edible oil and lentils at subsidised prices to one crore families to give respite to the poor and low-income earners. For Dhaka residents, TCB will sell chickpeas and dates during Ramadan.

Scammers go scot-free

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the syndicate members tampered the weight by placing the trucks in wrong positions on the weighbridge scales 4, 5, and 6 or even by altering the trucks.

In case they failed to take the desired weight at the weighbridge scales, the syndicate members would use the admin ID and password to edit the weight and erase old weight data from the backend of the software to avoid getting caught, said an IT expert, who was a member of the investigation committee formed by the land port authorities in July last year.

The admin ID holders used to control the computers at the port to edit and erase data from the backend using "Any Desk" software remotely, the expert said.

Pointing out some loopholes in the system, the IT expert said the software lacked simple security measures such as unique user IDs for officials and multiple authentication systems.

"Now it is almost impossible to track down the versions of the weight they had deleted or tampered with since the software keeps no database logs," he said, adding that the software operated with a standalone server, which is a major flaw.

HOW IT CAME TO LIGHT
On July 12, the port authorities caught an outsider at weighbridge 5, where Jaber Billah, a traffic inspector at Benapole port, was in charge. The outsider was using Jaber's user ID.

Four days later, Jaber filed a complaint, saying his user ID has been hacked and that someone was using it for weight tampering, prompting the port authorities to form a probe committee.

Sources said Jaber filed the complaint to save himself.

Over the last six months, Benapole Customs wrote to the Benapole port authorities on multiple occasions seeking information about 60 consignments, each of which had two weight reports. The Customs authorities also

expressed dissatisfaction that the port authorities did not patch the software, including for preservation of all records in the database.

"A section of customs and land port officials, importers and C&F agents are dodging customs duties, capitalising on the glitches in the automation system," one of the

letters read. Benapole Customs House Commissioner Abdul Hakim said a standard feature of any software is that when any data is archived on the server, it cannot be erased or deleted.

From the stored data, IT experts can detect any error or manipulation in the system and track down the person responsible. "We came to know that Benapole land port data are not stored properly. So, we sent letters to the port authorities to reconfigure and rectify the software," he said.

Akter Unnesa Sheuli, director (traffic), Bangladesh Land Port Authority, who was head of the probe committee, said they failed to hunt down the manipulators since they deleted their digital footprints from the software. "We have found proof of manipulation at the weighbridge

scales and made several recommendations to make the system error free," she added.

Port authority Chairman Zillur Rahman Chowdhury said they already spoke with the government's ICT division to fix the flaws.

UNDER SCANNER
Benapole Customs is now separately



A truck laden with imported goods on the weighbridge scale at Benapole land port.

PHOTO: STAR

investigating a number of suspects, including importers, C&F agents, operators, supervisors, and those with admin login access to the software.

A committee formed by the intelligence and investigation wing of Benapole Customs has already grilled some port officials, including Md Hossain Ali Foyjul and Mohammad Moinal Islam, about incidents of some specific duty evasion through weight tampering.

Traffic Inspector Jaber Billah, now posted at Jamalpur land port, and dismissed traffic inspector Abdul Kader Gilani are due to appear before the committee today.

Weighbridge scale 4, once operated by Gilani, is being investigated over six weight reports relating to three consignments. In August last year, Gilani was fired for his involvement in a

separate scam where more than Tk 12 lakh in land port charges were misappropriated by writing off the information of around 11 vehicles at Akhaura land port in 2016-17.

Weighbridge scale 5, which Jaber used to operate, was compromised after an outsider was in possession of Jaber's user ID and password.

Weighbridge scale 6, known as the transshipment yard, was operated without specific IDs for traffic inspectors, making it a hotspot for weight tampering, especially for perishable items.

Traffic Inspector and CBA Secretary Saiful Islam Sagir, CBA President Jahangir Alam, Kamrul Hasan Palash and Khoda Box Liton operated this scale for long since its inauguration.

Besides, two outsiders, Billah Hossain and Anwarul, were involved in handling the three scales in question on behalf of port officials, according to internal documents.

Monirul Islam, deputy director (traffic), who was responsible for the operation of all the weighbridge scales at the port when the scam was underway, stopped receiving phone calls after he was asked to comment.

Primary investigations by the port authorities also reveal that admin IDs of two officials – Md Ali Hossain Foyjul, assistant programmer of the Land Port Authority, and Shahadat Hossain, project coordinator of DataSoft Systems Bangladesh Limited – were used for weight tampering.

Foyjul, who was on the probe committee, shrugged off the responsibility.

Before his transfer to Dhaka, Foyjul was in charge of the Benapole Land Port's automation system as its sole IT expert since its introduction.

Shahadat, who has since been withdrawn over the scam, admitted to having the admin ID for maintenance purposes but denied having any involvement in the weight tampering.

Bodies of twins recovered from pond

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The bodies of four-year-old twin brothers were recovered from a pond in Kulaura upazila of Moulvibazar last morning.

The deceased were identified as Radian Ahmad and Raihan Ahmad, sons of Bachchu Mia and Rima Begum from Uttarbhag village in the upazila.

The deceased's uncle Badsha Mia said, "At around 4:00am, Bachchu Mia woke to find that his children weren't in the house. As he got out to look for them, he found them floating in the pond..."

After their bodies were recovered, family members took them to Kulaura Upazila Health Complex, where doctors declared them dead, said Ishaq Chowdhury Imran, former chairman of Baramchal Union Parishad.

Mohammad Ali Mahmud, officer-in-charge of Kulaura Police Station, confirmed the deaths of the two children and said the matter was being investigated.

Woman's throat-slit body found

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered the throat-slit body of a woman from her residence in Dhaka's Hazaribagh area yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Tania Begum, 35, wife of Tausif Ahmed from Cumilla.

Tania, who worked at an event management company, used to live in an apartment on Mitali Road by herself, said police.

Informed by the victim's relatives, a police team found her body in a bathroom on a top-floor apartment of a seven-storey building around 1:00pm, Noor Mohammad, officer-in-charge of Hazaribagh Police Station, told The Daily Star.

"The body has been sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy."

The OC said as the victim's brother failed to reach her despite repeated phone calls, the police went to her Hazaribagh residence and found the body after breaking into the apartment.

India plans to fence off Myanmar frontier

AFP, New Delhi

India plans to erect a fence along its vast and porous frontier with Myanmar and will scrap a free movement border zone agreement, Indian media reported yesterday.

The announcement by Home Minister Amit Shah comes after hundreds of troops from Myanmar who were fleeing insurgent attacks crossed into India.

The government had "decided to fence the entire open India Myanmar border", Shah said Saturday during a visit to the northeastern state of Assam.

The frontier stretches for more than 1,200 kilometres (750 miles), ranging from remote jungle to soaring snow-capped Himalayan peaks.

Shah, who gave no details of a timeframe or how the fence would be built, said the government would also end a free movement agreement.

The deal allows those living in border zones to venture a short distance into each other's territory without a visa.

Cold wave to sweep parts of country for next few days

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The overall weather is expected to remain mainly dry, with temporary partly cloudy skies during the 72-hour period.

There might be a slight decrease in night temperatures over the north-northeastern part of Bangladesh, while a minor increase is forecasted for other regions of the country. Daytime temperatures are anticipated to stay nearly unchanged nationwide.

In Kurigram, as the minimum temperature was recorded at nine degrees Celsius on Thursday morning, all schools and madrasas have been declared closed since that day.

Kurigram District Primary Education Officer Nabez Uddin Sarkar told The Daily Star that schools would open when the temperature would rise above 10 degrees Celsius.

"Due to the severe cold, teachers couldn't teach nor could the students study properly."

Subal Chandra Sarkar, in charge of Kurigram's Rajarhat Agricultural Meteorological Observatory, told The Daily Star the minimum temperature was recorded at 9.8 degrees Celsius at 9:00am yesterday.

Meanwhile, educational institutions have remained open in Lalmonirhat.

Rasel Islam, a primary school teacher at Khedabagh area the district's Sadar upazila, said although his school was still open, the attendance of students was low due to the cold.

Lalmonirhat District Primary Education Officer Swapan Kumar Chowdhury told The Daily Star that the minimum temperature was recorded at 10 degrees Celsius yesterday morning, so the primary schools, high schools, and madrasas were kept open.

Educational institutions will be closed if the temperature falls below 10 degrees, he added.