

MY DHAKA



PHOTO: SHADAB SHAHROKH HAI

MIRPUR BERIBADH

# A soothing escape in Dhaka

ASHIF AHMED RUDRO

Dhaka residents often complain that there is no escape from the loud and congested city. While open space here is very limited indeed, there are a few places in Dhaka where one can still take a soothing walk, enjoy a quiet sunset, or take a boat ride to rejuvenate themselves.

Mirpur Beribadh is one of those few places.

**Where is it?**

Mirpur Beribadh stands on the bank of the river Turag, which is still very much alive and flowing. It's on your left as you approach the Botanical Garden. Getting to the Beribadh is quite easy. One can ride a bus, hire a CNG or even get on a rickshaw from Mirpur-1 and in less than half an hour you can be at the Beribadh.

**The Walk**

The Beribadh offers quite a few interesting activities but the tranquil walk is probably the one to appreciate the most. It is recommended that you arrive at the Beribadh before sunset to

revel in the cool afternoon breeze and a great view on your walk.

A footbridge expands along the riverside. It's close enough to the water, giving you the illusion that you are walking on water. Roughly two kilometres long, the footbridge offers an amazing view of the river along with the opportunity to walk.

The sights around, above and under you are truly something else. On one side there's the river, which becomes progressively enchanting as the sun drives its chariot beyond the horizon. On the other side, foliage creates a green wall. Underneath the bridge, sometimes water, sometimes a little bit of dry land and sometimes a couple of haystacks really make you feel like you are in a distant village.

Standing here, you can get a view of

Dhaka in the distance and be amazed at the contrast created by nature.

**The River**

Albeit a small one, Turag still paints a scenic view. In the late afternoon, the river is far from tranquil. The ebb tides make sure the water is flowing and present you with a spectacular sunset.

Water hyacinths flowing with the tide, the reed and aquatic weeds on the banks of the river create a verdant carpet on both sides of the river.

There are large boats in the river and people on their decks are well occupied with their daily jobs. It's a reminder of aquatic life, a divergent lifestyle and almost a forgotten one. Smaller boats are running up and down and if you feel like indulging yourself, you can get on a boat and get to know the river from

up close.

An hour's ride on a boat will cost you around Tk 500 but make sure you haggle. You can ride until darkness falls.

**For the spectators**

There are several private parks on the edge of the Beribadh. Tamanna World Family Park, Fairy Land, and Neverland are a few to name. One can find sitting arrangements with views of the river here, along with snacks and fast food. Some of these parks even have rides like merry-go-round, making them interesting for the children. There's an entry fee starting from Tk 20 into these parks but if you are visiting with your family, the accommodating arrangements will make the visit more comfortable for you.

While the Beribadh will certainly offer you an escape from the cruel grasp of Dhaka, the small river will also remind you that our rivers are dying out and make you wonder if this place will remain the same after a decade. Nevertheless, we should cherish it while it lasts and work to protect our nature.



## The child brides of Rasulpur

FROM PAGE 1

Despite these hardships, the cycle of child marriage persists.

Locals acknowledge the dangers but feel compelled to marry off their minor daughters because of insecurity – the fear created by threats from miscreants and addicts to their unmarried teenage girls as well as the sheer worry of another mouth to feed.

**RISE OF THE CHAR**

In the 1980s, Rasulpur Char was built from the dredging soil of the Kirtankhola over 23 acres of land. But due to gradual filling with soil, the boundary of this char is now 50 acres.

Over the years, influential people became owners of the Char's land. Many of them rent or sell the Char's land by issuing cards. These influential first proved them as landless, and then the land was allocated against their names from the government. Later, they again sell that land to actual landless people in exchange for money. They complete the process of handing over the land by giving a piece of paper, which is locally known as the "card".

The Char came under the jurisdiction of Ward-9 of the Barishal city. Although there are 1,496 voters on the land, six to seven thousand floating people now live here for work.

Locals said the number of children in the char was more than a thousand.

Although closest to Barishal city, this area has no civic amenities, no health-sports or cultural activities. Despite the area being under the city corporation area, there is no piped drinking water system here. There are only 10 deep tubewells.

The Char has four non-formal schools – Chandradip Shishu Surokha Community Hub, Totini Community Hub, Chander Hashi Community Hub, and Avijatri Community Hub.

Around 500 students study in these schools. Children are made aware of the ill effects of child marriage, but this has not reduced the number of child marriages by any means.

Out of thousands of girls in the char, half of them were victims of child marriage, according to these school and awareness centres.

**STORY OF CHILD BRIDES**

Being married so early, Meem was not able to pass all subjects in the SSC exam. She is now preparing to take the exam again.

"I missed my old days. I stood first in the weight-ball throwing game in class eight. I may not be able to go back to those days but I do want to take the exam," she said.

Meem's mother Jhumi Begum explained that her husband is a vegetable seller and they couldn't meet

the expenses of all three children, so they had to marry off their daughter.

Sharmin Begum, now 20 years old, lived next to Jhumi's house with her rickshaw-puller husband Mehedi Hasan, and three daughters – Mithila, 6, and twin daughters Fariha and Fahima, both 18 months old.

She got married at 13 when she was in class five. Sharmin looked undernourished and fatigued.

"My father Hemayet Fakir is a day labourer, and my mother Niru Begum, is a homemaker. They forced me to get married as local addicts used to disturb us coming to our home," said Sharmin.



Teenagers themselves, these young mothers of Rasulpur Char crave what anyone at their age would want -- playing with friends. Married off between the ages of 13 and 15, they are, however, thrust into the responsibilities of adulthood far too early in life.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Niru Begum said, "When the girls become a little older, the evil eyes of the local unruly youths fall on them. We have to shut off the doors and windows after sunset. They throw bricks at our house. We did not even get any remedy after complaining to the police. Marriage remains the only option for us to save the girls."

Like Sharmin, another young girl Nasrin Akther Happy, now 22 years old, got married at the age of 13. She got divorced as her husband married for a second time.

Happy's eight-year-old daughter Irsat Jahan Akhi now lives with her husband, and Happy survives by working in different homes as a domestic help.

Tanzila Akter, community mobiliser of Chandradip Child Protection Centre, said there are around 300 children studying at the centre, and half the children's mothers got married at the age of 13 and 16.

"Even though there are efforts

to create awareness about child marriage, nothing is being done. At the ages of 14 and 15, girls are more likely to be child brides. The problems arise later, as we often heard that these girls were tortured by their husbands," Tanzila said.

In 2022, Asika Akter, 13, was married to a hawker named Mizanur Rahman at the Char. Within a year, she gave birth to a child but had to be admitted to a hospital as she fell sick. After undergoing treatment at different hospitals for six months, she died of complications.

**A DISMAL STATE OF HEALTHCARE**

Sumon Chandra Shikar, who runs a

medicine shop at the Char, said there are no doctors or community clinics in Rasulpur.

"For any complications, one has to visit city hospitals by crossing the Kirtankhola to get a doctor's consultation. Irregular menstruation, headache, allergy, and stomach upset are major complaints we receive daily from people in this Char," he said.

Mizanur Rahman, a local visiting doctor, told this newspaper, "Majority of the girls in the Char are facing physical complications from pregnancies at such an early age."

**A CHAR TURNED INTO A DRUG DEN**

During the visit, this correspondent found garbage strewn here and there. There was no amusement park anywhere in the area. Youths were seen playing carrom board, and cards on the banks of the river during the day.

But after dusk, the Char becomes a haven for all kinds of drugs, according

to some locals.

Tanzila Akter, the community mobiliser of the area, said, "It becomes difficult to leave the house because of the addicts. If anyone tries to raise their voice they attack them. No one can do anything. Even telling the police does not help."

Locals claimed a former councillor of ward-9 Harun Or Rashid had a strong influence on the narcotics trade. A police source named Kulsum also has control of the narcotics market.

Harun, however, denied the claim and said he is not involved with any such activities and does not have any idea who is responsible for it.

Kulsum also denied her involvement with the drug trade.

Syed Human Kabir Linku, the incumbent councillor of ward-9, said, "I do not want to name those who are involved in the narcotics trade. But some of them are working in the lower tier of the police, and some are journalists. The area has become drug prone and has spread to every corner."

"We are trying our best to make the area drug free," he added.

Arichul Haque, officer-in-charge of Kotowali Police Station, however, denied the allegations of police officials' involvement with the narcotics trade.

"We often conduct drives and recover drugs based on specific information," he said.

Enayet Hossain, assistant director of the Department of Narcotics Control of Barishal Division, told this newspaper that a total of 60 narcotics cases were filed last year. "In these cases, 97,806 pieces of yaba, and 292-kilogramme marijuana were recovered. We have come to know a majority of these drugs came from the Rasulpur Char," he added.

**CHILD MARRIAGE IN BARISHAL**

There were no statistics on the number of child marriages in official records. However, the District Women's Affairs Officer's office gave the number of early marriages they stopped.

The data showed the department received news of 29 child marriages between January 2022 and January 2023, out of which, they managed to prevent 18.

District Women's Affairs Officer Meherun Nahar Munni said child marriage increased during the Covid period in 2020-21.

"Child marriage is especially rampant in slum areas," she said. "People in areas like Rasulpur do not give us information about child marriages. But we are alert and whenever we get the information, we stop such practices with the help

## 2 fishermen found dead next to shrimp enclosure

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Police yesterday recovered the bodies of two fishermen on the bank of a shrimp enclosure in the Khurushkul area of Cox's Bazar Sadar upazila.

The deceased were identified as local residents Abdul Khalek, 25, and Yasin Arafat, 23, said Khurushkul Union Parishad Chairman Shahajan Siddiqui.

Locals said that the bodies bore marks of electric shocks.

The relatives of the victims said the men were killed on allegations of stealing shrimp from the enclosure by its owners.

The UP chairman said, "Immediately after locals found their bodies abandoned next to the shrimp enclosure, the police were informed."

"Two days ago, they returned from the sea. But I can't say how they died. The police will be able to tell after the post-mortem", he added.

Cox's Bazar Sadar Model Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Rakibuzzaman said the police were investigating the incident.

## School headmaster beaten to death over land dispute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A school headmaster was beaten to death allegedly over a land dispute in Mymensingh's Phulpur last morning.

Sajjad Hossain Kamal, 55, was the headmaster of Goatola Raghurampur Govt Primary School in Dhobaura upazila.

Sajjad of Phulpur's Boula Puran Nagor village had a long-standing feud over a piece of land with his cousin Zakaria, said Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Phulpur Police Station, quoting family members and locals.

Sajjad and Zakaria got into a fight over a pond on the disputed land around 10:00am yesterday, and at one point Zakaria and his men beat Sajjad with sticks, leaving him injured critically.

He was taken to the Phulpur Upazila Health Complex, where the doctors declared him dead. On information, police recovered his body and sent it to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

Police detained Zakaria, 30, his brother Muhibullah, 18, and their mother, Afia Khatun, 45. They were being interrogated at the police station, said the OC.

## 'Advice from foreigners won't bear fruit here'

FROM PAGE 1

of the 22nd Biennial Conference-2024 of Bangladesh Economic Association at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, in the capital's Ramna area.

Hasina said if any plan is devised focusing on local realities and public welfare, it would be effective.

"If someone [a foreigner] comes here for a day or two and leaves after giving us advice, it would not be useful."

The PM said Bangladeshi experts of course can learn from abroad but they would work here keeping the country, its people and resources in mind.

Mentioning that making Bangladesh a developed country is her goal, she said Bangladesh has already achieved significant progress.

"Insha Allah, we will continue moving forward like we are doing now. We will be able to overcome all the obstacles, no matter how many they are," said Hasina.

The premier asked the economists to work on plans to boost the country's exports and strengthen its

**The PM said Bangladeshi experts of course can learn from abroad but they would work here keeping the country, its people and resources in mind.**

rural economy.

"We need to produce export-oriented goods on a larger scale and diversify our exports... I would like to see our economists working on identifying products that can be added to our export basket."

Hasina said her government will place the proposed national budget for the fiscal 2024-2025 in parliament on June 6. She expressed optimism that the budget will be implemented.

She said her government is focusing on boosting agricultural production based on cooperatives.

The PM described different measures taken by her government to strengthen the rural economy, self-employment, expand the coverage of social safety net and utilise marine resources.

Hasina also highlighted various programmes like "My Village-My Township", "My House My Farm", and self-employment loan scheme.

"All our policies have been adopted targeting the grassroots people," she said.

of police and magistrates. We will continue our efforts in this regard," Munni added.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) survey, released on March 24 this year, at least 41.6 percent of young women in Bangladesh were married before turning 18.

Besides, as per a report of Unicef published in 2021, the prevalence of child marriage in Bangladesh stands at 51 percent, putting it among the top 10 countries in terms of child marriage.

Manisha Chakrabarty, member secretary of the Barishal district of Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal, told this newspaper, "The influential have built a drug empire in Rasulpur with the poor inhabitants. Parents here marry off girls quickly because they do not feel safe -- this system has been going on for a long time."

"We have prevented around 10 child marriages, but they even got married later," she said.

Pankaj Roy Chowdhury, president of Khelaghar Barishal district committee, said although Rasulpur is the closest area to Barishal city, there is no civic facility there.

"There is no playground, no cultural activities have been developed. As a result, the area is turning into a dark zone," he said.

Contacted, Kohinoor Begum, panel mayor-3 of Barisal City Corporation, said, "The city corporation has no ongoing programme to prevent child marriage but we are working to come up with measures like awareness campaigns. Besides, several NGOs are working in this regard."

## Heatwave to continue till tomorrow

FROM PAGE 1

low-pressure system could form in the Bay of Bengal on May 22 or 23.

Yesterday, the country's highest temperature was recorded at 39.6 degrees Celsius in Chuadanga while it was 37.7 degrees Celsius in Dhaka.

According to the forecast of BMD for 24 hours commencing at 9:00am

on Saturday, rain/thunder showers accompanied by temporary gusty/squally wind are likely to occur at many places over Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Chattogram, and Sylhet divisions, and at a few places over Khulna and Barishal divisions with hails at isolated places. And at one or two places over Mymensingh, Dhaka and Khulna divisions with hails at isolated places.