

TITLE: HERITAGE TRAIL OF DHAKA: A COMPARATIVE PUBLIC OPINION ANALYSIS BASED ON UNESCO'S CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OVER CASE STUDIES OF TWO MUGHAL RIVER FORTS.

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Aim of the research

- To identify the scope of the effectiveness of UNESCO benchmarks in Bangladesh's heritage context.
- To understand how locals, perceive and experience the Mughal river forts of mediaeval Bengal in today's urban context. This will help to trace the proper scenario of public awareness for heritage conservation in Bangladesh.
- To understand the key factors in the failure of existing law enforcement and heritage management (not economically but strategically) and derive suggestions and recommendations accordingly.



Akbar prays after Bengal victory, 1575

Scope and Limitations of the research

The research aims to analyze river forts and urban fabric in Narayanganj, Bangladesh, using public opinion and pictographic, survey, and technical documentation.

It aims to improve heritage protection laws, align with UNESCO criteria, and incorporate authenticity and integrity in Bangladesh's existing laws.

The study is limited to two river forts and acknowledges the need for nationwide studies

Selecting
Case studies

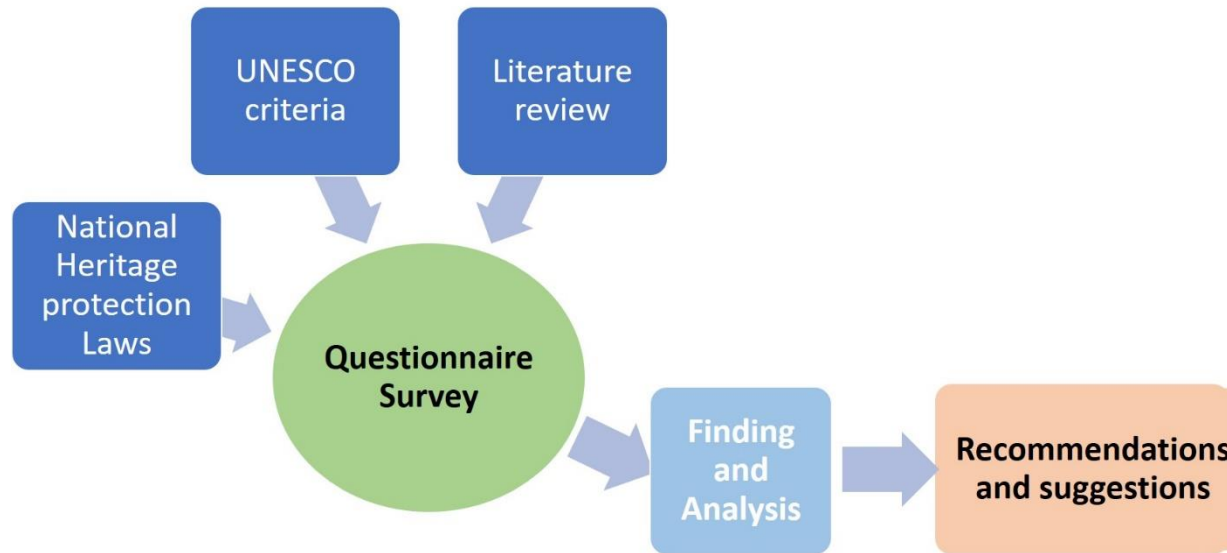


Analyse
UNESCO
criteria with
local
interviews



Possible
hypothetical
findings and
recommendat
ions

Methodology



1. To establish a framework for the identification and analysis of the article's development, a thorough review of the literature would be conducted. Parts of the technique include reviews of related books and surveys of previous literature.
2. To identify the gap of law enforcement in realty, UNESCO criteria of 2004 and National Heritage protection law of antiquities from Bangladesh will studied and compared.
3. To validate the claim, nevertheless, this study will also conduct a questionnaire survey in two historically significant river forts in the Narayanganj region. The primary data for this study were gathered using a variety of combined techniques, such as site surveys and in-person semi-structured interviews for further analysis. These forts are chosen meticulously for neighbourhood differences, situated in quite different urban environments compared to each other: Hajigonj fort is in the city corporation area, while Sonakanda fort is in the municipal area, separated by the river Sitalakshya.

1. Criteria from UNESCO to preserve International heritages

The Criteria for Selection is the benchmark of UNESCO to evaluate any heritage site in the world. To be included on the World Heritage List, sites must be of outstanding universal value and meet at least one out of ten selection criteria. There are six cultural (1-6) and four natural criteria (7-10) inscribed below:

a) Cultural criteria:

Criteria (i): to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;

Criteria (ii): to exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;

Criteria (iii): to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;

Criteria (iv): to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

Criteria (v): to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

Criteria (vi): to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria); (UNESCO-WHC, 2004).



News arrived in Akbar's court of Delhi, Bengal conquered! Mughal miniature. Souce: Bode museum, Berlin

National heritage protection laws in Bangladesh and its limitations

In 1968, an Act was published to consolidate and amend the law relating to the preservation and protection of antiquities. The Act defines "antiquity" as any ancient product of human activity, illustrative of art, architecture, craft, custom, literature, morals, politics, religion, warfare, science, or any aspect of civilization or culture.

After the Liberation of Bangladesh, the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh outlines the state's responsibility to preserve and protect cultural traditions and heritage. In 1976, the same antiquity act remained with the only change 'Bangladesh' instead of Pakistan.

During 1986, a gazette was published as the amendment of draft rule, which indicates that places of worship and shrines must remain their original characters and provides three guidelines for visitors under the draft rule number 6. (Bangladesh Gazette-APR, 1986).

The Bangladesh National Building Code, 2006, stipulates that structures and locations with historical or architectural significance should be preserved, and that rehabilitation, regeneration, and adaptive cultural reuse must be compatible with the sustainable use of natural and human resources.



Idrakpur fort, Munshigonj



Hajiganj fort, Narayanganj



Sonakanda fort, Narayanganj

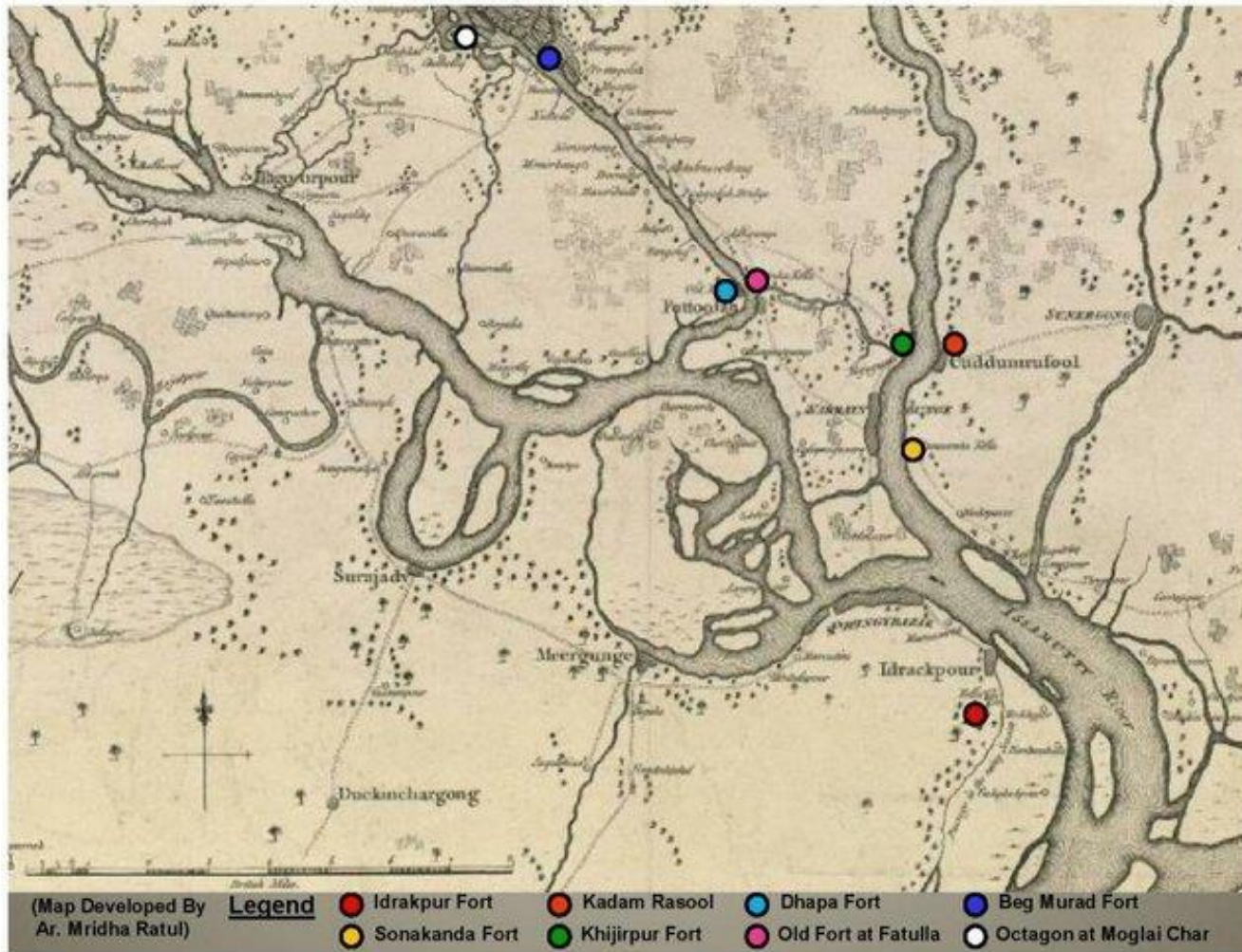


Lalbag fort, Dhaka

Findings and Analysis

1. Significance of choosing the fort locations

All forts acted as strategic expansion posts of the Mughal occupation in Bengal. Their expedition took place in Assam, Tripura, Chittagong, and Sylhet. Pagla area and the river Buriganga were avoided by the Mughals to reach Dhaka city.



Series Forts around Dhaka city:

Idrakpur

Sonakanda

Kadam rasul

Hajiganj

Dhapa

Gargaz fatullah

Beg Murad

Moghlai char

Lalbagh

2. Unusual purposes of the built environment



Dhanmondi Eidgah, fortified congregation space



Khwaza Amber Mosque, caravan outpost to Mymensingh road



Mir Jumla gate, outpost and slave market, one famous Bengal slave was Zamor, (1762-1820), a witness of French revolution.



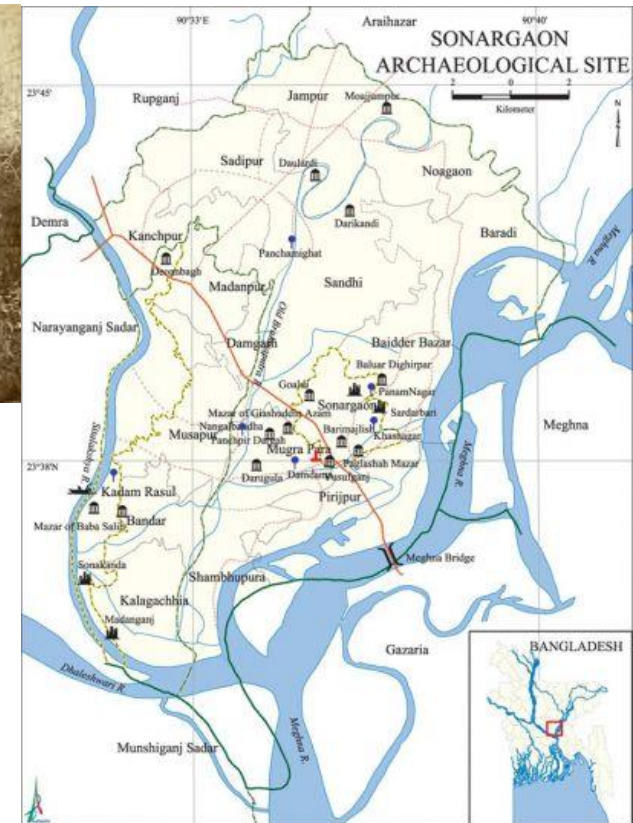
Saat Gombuj Mosque, unique feature of architecture of Bengal, route to conquer Vati, Sylhet and Assam. Its corner towers are observatory towers.



An etching of Saat Gombuj Mosque beside Buriganga River by Sir Charles D'Oyly in 1814

3. Dhaka against Sonargaon: the question of geopolitical survival

Banal named Banar (or Panar) united the Brahmaputra and Luckia (the branch of Buriganga) was important, as it desects the line apperoximately 90 degree. Because both rivers flow almost parallel to each other. Sultani-era city of Sonargoan, paid price like medieval Gaur city, as Brahmmaputra river, Triveni canal to connect Sonakanda fort and runs in a north-eastern direction to join the Brahmaputra slightly below the Kaikar Tek region, both Triveni and Banar canals were dried up.





4. Religious practices

This fortified route could be preferable for annual pilgrimage, from Bengal to Mecca, Arabia during the Middle Ages, as Mughals ensured security against robbery and pirates. Unfortunately, there were no manuscripts or inscriptions found for these forts' role. But, visiting Sufi saint's tomb as a ritual got popularized by Akbar (Saint Khwaza Mainuddin Chisti) the great and its influence spread in Bengal.

5. Cultural impact

Their special culinary practice had a great impact on our culture. The menu, like Bakarkhani (dried bread), is a perfect example of an addition that could be preserved for long days and is a suitable takeaway food for the Dhaka to Delhi long journey. Kathak dance and Qawali song adored in Zamindar Courts. Bangla hut, become a prominent architecture feature in Mughal architecture, for example, Naulakha Pavilion, of Lahore Fort. Craft like ivory and conch shell jewelry and show pieces were introduced.



Kathak dance



Ivory craft



Bakarkhani (dried bread)



Naulakha Pavilion, Lahore Fort, Pakistan



Conch shell craft

6. Communal pattern in administration

Mughals could not implement feudalism, local Landlords controlled revenue; it was not selected hereditarily.

Bengal always had a pro-industrial economy achieved by maritime supremacy and trade, where various craftsmen used to gather in tax-free zones of the city core.

A special class of bankers and moneylenders was formed and mainly controlled by non-Bengali ethnicities like Marathi and Marwari (Rajput).



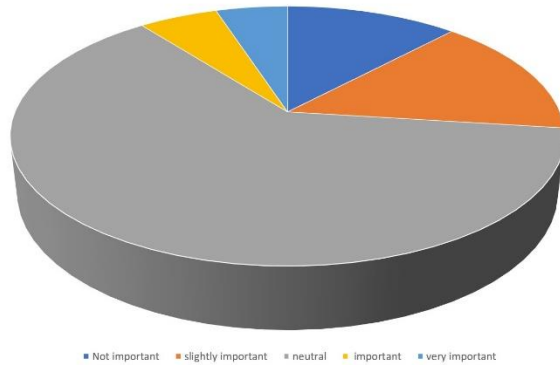
7. Social Pattern

Bag e Badshahi, Ramna area was a perfect and prestigious burial palace for the Mughal elites in Dhaka because a great Sufi saint, Hazrat Shah Khwaza Sharfuddin Chisti (High Court Mazar). Musa Khan became ally and his body is resting here, his grandson became revenue collector, Dewan and erected a mosque probably in 1670, called Musa Khan Mosque

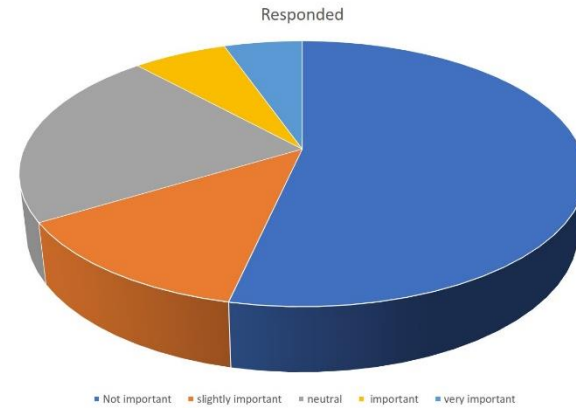
Questionnaire survey

Criteria 2 and Criteria 4 are more important, as UNESCO put all these river forts on its tentative list as of May 17, 2023, on the basis of these two criteria.

Criteria number	Questions	Degree of significance				
		Not important	Slightly important	Neutral	Important	Very important
1	Do you think it's a masterpiece? Were Mughals more creative and genius than modern days?	16%	7%	50.5%	25.5%	1%
2	Does this fort show interchange of developments in architecture or technology?	12%	15%	62.5%	5.5%	5%
3	Does this fort show unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition which is extinct today?	10.5%	20%	37.5%	30%	2%
4	Is it an outstanding example of a type of building which shows significant stage of human history?	50%	12%	20.5%	6%	11.5%
5	Does it represent the culture that includes an outstanding example of a traditional river use	10%	15%	25%	30%	20%
6	Is it relevant to public is it anyhow related to your living traditions, with ideas and beliefs, with artistic and literary works?	5%	10%	30%	45%	10%
7, 8, 9, 10	Not relevant to public opinion, thus was omitted during the survey (only for natural sites).	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%



Criteria 2: Architectural achievement of past

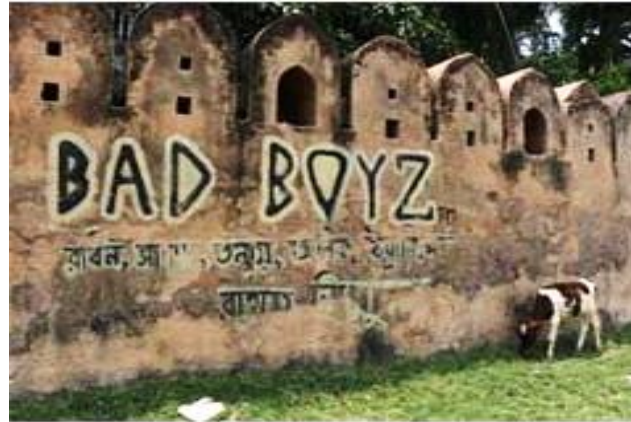


Criteria 4: Outstanding stage of history

The study reveals that 50% of respondents are not concerned about historical connection and outstanding universal view, indicating a lack of concern for heritage. Additionally, 62.5% of respondents do not care about architectural achievement and creative genius, indicating a lack of interest in heritage and potential vandalism.

Discussion

The antiquity acts of 1968, 1976, and 1986 have secured heritage status in Bangladesh, but they lack UNESCO benchmarks for protected heritages, causing confusion for law enforcement. The 1968 Act preserves public accessibility, but its definition of "ancient" is unclear. The 1976 Act removes the word "Pakistan" due to independence, while the 1986 Act includes draft rules and guidelines for visiting religious heritages. It is time to include concepts like authenticity, integrity, and outstanding national value in these acts to comply with international standards and UNESCO criteria.



Poor people started to live in heritage complex (left top), Dumping household wastes in corner bastions (top right) and graffiti as Vandalism (top middle) at Sonakanda fort.

School going students taking bricks of watch tower for playing cricket at Hajiganj fort, Narayanganj (bottom).

Heritage+Environmental solution+ Tourism

The Bangladesh government has been working to revive its canals, which have been filled by rapid urbanization and waterbodies destruction. The Water Resources Conservation Act, introduced in 2000, aims to include land that conserves rainwater. The Hatirjheel waterway and water reservoir project in Dhaka was successful, resulting in no water logging and acting as a large retention pond for the city's natural drainage system.



vs



Recommendations

Bangladesh government has been working to revive its canals, which have been filled by rapid urbanization and waterbodies destruction. The Water Resources Conservation Act, introduced in 2000, aims to include land that conserves rainwater. The Hatirjheel waterway and water reservoir project in Dhaka was successful, resulting in no water logging and a large retention pond for the city's natural drainage system.

From this point, Dholai canal and an extinct canal from ancient Mughal navy route, which could be reintroduced to develop a heritage trail. This could become a tourist hub, generating foreign revenue through cutting-edge tourist facilities and heritage tours. Sustainable strategies from environment and heritage specialists are needed for this revitalization.

Bangladesh's heritage regulations are insufficient and focus only on building and material aspects, neglecting intangible aspects. Raising public awareness, implementing environmental laws and promoting the relationship between social context and historic buildings can help promote economic sustainability through international tourism.



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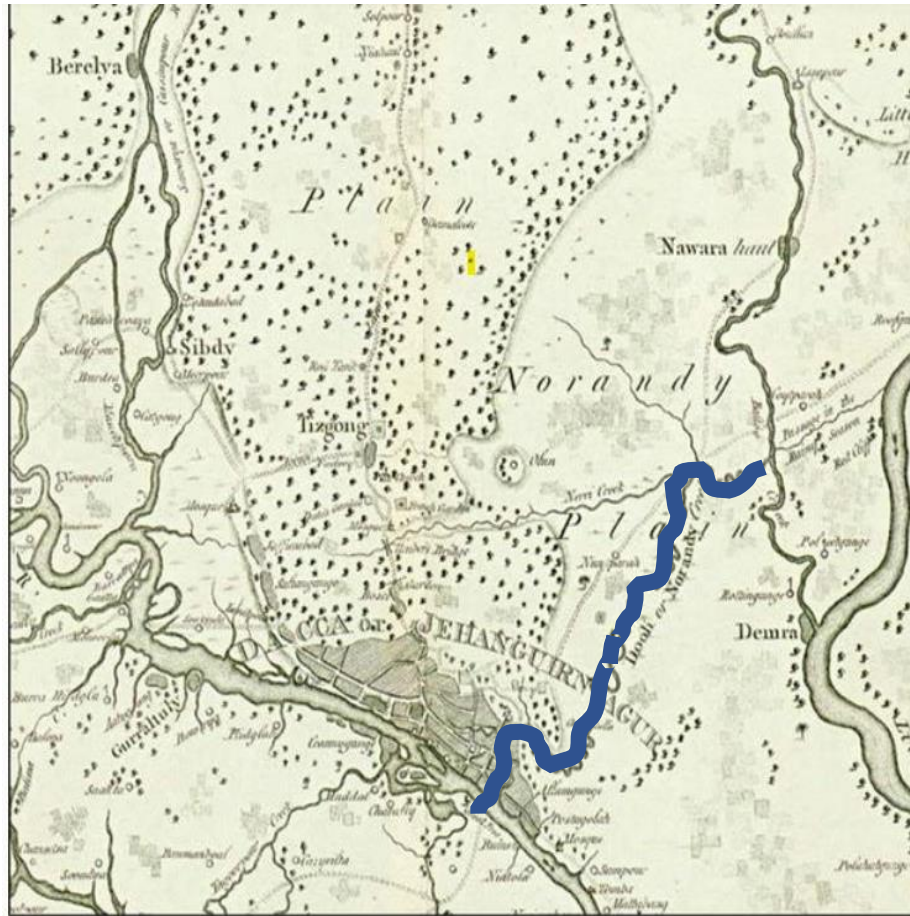


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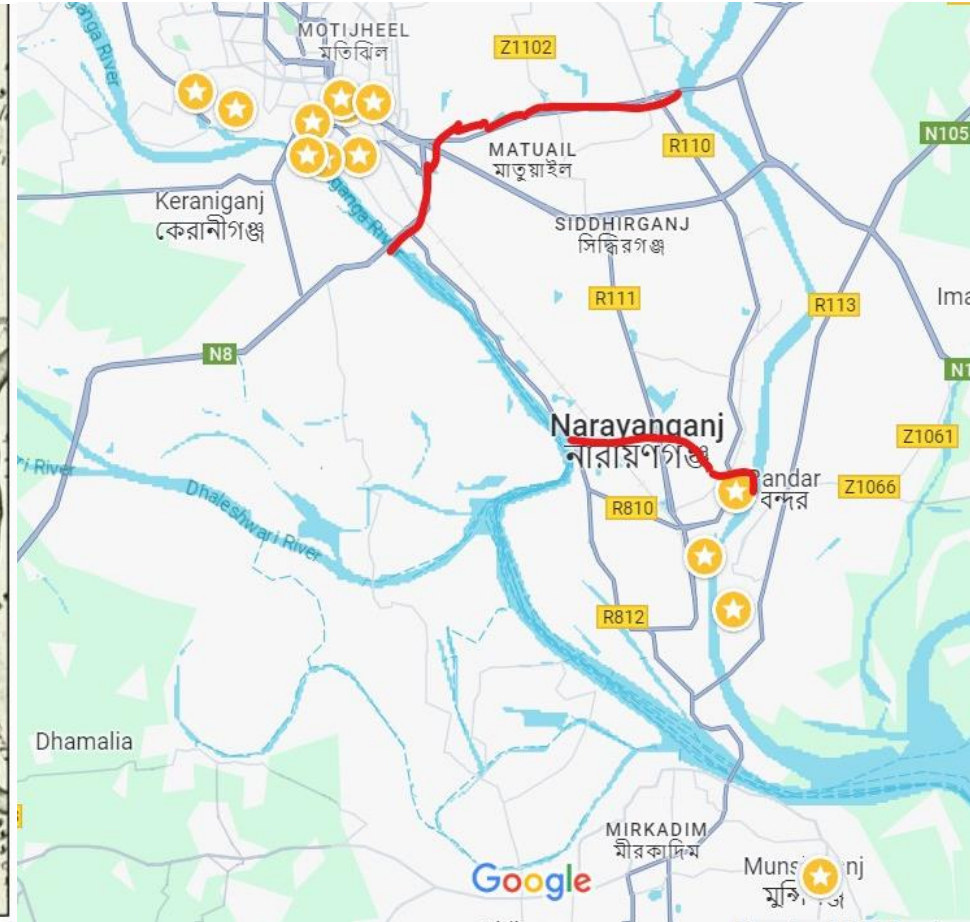


Jinjira palace

Is it possible? May be !



Map of greater Dhaka region in 1778, prepared by James Rennell. It shows Dholai canal connected Demra with Postagola.



The two Mughal water routes should be re-excavated to integrate Mughal heritages of greater Dhaka region. Two waterways can bring connection between Shitalakshya river with Buraganga river.

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Thank you!

Any Question?