

A laudable move!

Locals unite to widen their street



The power of people united helped claim back this street from local landowners.

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

For long, the residents of Shantinagar witnessed how their locality was growing haphazardly. As new buildings were built, the road into the area became increasingly narrow. Like in any other unplanned area of the city, the plots in this area were never set in a planned way.

The narrow Shantinagar road became totally blocked at one point when some musclemen forcibly took over the road. But residents have recently united to fight back and get hold of the possession of the road linking Shantinagar with Inner Circular Road, with the help of their local MP, Mirza Abbas.

The width of the road had narrowed down to nine feet because of encroachment, but now the success of taking back its possession has inspired the local people to shift the boundary walls of their own homes inward by two to three feet to expand the road.

"People are enthusiastic and even breaking their own walls for expansion of the road," said Engineer Saidul Alam, convenor of the Shantinagar Shamaj Kalyan Samity, a neighbourhood welfare committee.

The committee was formed to solve the problems the locals have been facing for long. The problem of the road was more nagging for them.

"We have solved the gas and

water supply problems in our area. Now widening the road is our priority," says Saifur Rahman Dulal, a resident of Shantinagar.

Although Shantinagar residents are living in the heart of the city, they were deprived in many ways due to the narrow road. "The road was so narrow that truck, ambulance, fire-brigade vehicle could not enter it," said Obaidur Rahman Paltu of Shantinagar.

The dynamism of the young generation and the guidance of the elderly together made it possible to recover the road from encroachment, but the tougher task -- completion of the expansion work -- is ahead.

The widening of the 1,500 feet long road depends on the collective will. "We have vowed to complete the road this time. People started to understand the value of a wider road," said Ashraf Haq Titu.

The price of the land is about Tk 16 lakh a *katha*, whereas the house rent for 1,000 square feet is Tk 5,000 only. If the road is widened back to 15 feet, the landlords will benefit from it, as the rent of 1,000 square feet will increase to Tk 10,000. The price of the land will be Tk 20 lakh a *katha*, says Saidur Rahman Titu.

Local landowners agreed to contribute part of their land to widening the road. The widening of the road will be a relief for 5,000 inhabitants of Shantinagar.

Don't let your guard down

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Cashing in on the public's sense of insecurity did not appear a particularly good business opportunity even a decade ago. But growing crime has prompted corporate houses, banks and individuals to hire private security agencies to secure their houses, offices and, of course, money.

After all, it seems preferable to pay someone else to worry about security risks rather than tackle them oneself. Security guards and using hi-tech systems run by a pool of retired army and police personnel are now regularly advertised. Apartment blocks, offices and hospitals almost without exception now have young men in uniforms and shiny boots guarding the entrance and perimeter, batons in hand.

But the fledgling industry did not get off to such a smooth start. Few companies were there to begin with. In the past, city dwellers often employed men from their own home villages as guards who also doubled as caretakers.

But rising security concerns along with a growing corporate culture, that considers employing security agencies as a status symbol, soon led to an expanding industry.

Now, scores of security agencies offer their services: Active Force Security, Elite Force, Securex, Integrated Security Service and Al Baraka are just a few of the established companies.

Employing guards privately can be a risky business, according to Sharif Ahmed, who had a bitter

experience with two guards at his Khilgaon house. Both were involved in robberies on his house. Now he has a guard supplied by a company and is much happier. "Al Baraka takes responsibility of any wrongdoing by its guards," said Ahmed.

But how far are the companies willing to take liability for their guards' acts?

"We have already taken action against errant guards and the clients are satisfied with our services," said an executive of Elite Force.

The companies have a selection procedure for guards before employing them. Sarbananda Das Ripon, director of Active Force Security, told Star City, "We look for young energetic men, aged between 18 and 35, in sound health. We train them up. Usually, retired military personnel give training. Before employing a security guard we inquire extensively about their background. We even carry out surprise visits to ensure their credibility. You see we need clearance from the home ministry to employ guards and fix their uniforms. Naturally we are extra-careful."

The salary of the guards is negotiable between the company and clients and varies from company to company. But the average pay is usually between Tk 2,000 and Tk 10,000.

The security firms also provide armed guards and special vehicles for money transfer.

However, providing such services can tempt unscrupulous individuals into the business who set up bogus firms. So keep a look out, and be sure of secure security guards.



Old City heritage becoming history

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Moving around old Dhaka these days a strange blend of architectural trends can not be avoided.

Within the same small area can be seen the latest steel and concrete designs side by side with 100-year-old beams and masonry. Monstrous high-rises reaching for the sky are dwarfing ancient palatial mansions that crouch and crumble under the imposing structures.

There's no doubt that the architectural heritage of old Dhaka is being lost. And you have to rely on the power of your imagination to find the hallmarks of the building styles a century ago, which was part Mughal, part Victorian and indigenous to a certain degree.

The ancient mansions, a part of the glorious history of this city, in places like Chowk Bazar, Showari Ghat, Debidash Ghat, Becharam Deuri, Imam Ganj, Armanitola, Bangshal, Nazimuddin Road, Mitford, Islampur, Dhupkhola, Gandaria and other old neighborhoods are on the verge of extinction because of lack of maintenance.

The people living in these houses are mostly those whose ancestors were rich businessmen or worked under the Nawabs during that era.

Hasan Haqimul Haq of Lalbag area is one of them. He was born and brought up in old Dhaka and the house he lives in is reportedly among the oldest in the city. The

building is now in a decrepit state. Yet some of the pillars stand out boldly, mocking the passage of time. The fine carvings and designs on each pillar are still visible.

Haq explains that the house was built around 1938 by his grandfather who had settled in Dhaka during the 1920s.

It's a three-storied structure with balconies on the second and third floors. "The windows and window panes still have heavy wood carving and the pillars are beautifully designed with a mixture of Mughal and Victorian patterns," Haq said.

The patterns are discolored now and some pillars might have developed cracks, yet whatever is left is good enough to announce what a masterpiece this house was in its glory days. There are numerous other buildings scattered around the old city which haven't completely lost their glory.

Sadly the authorities, namely the Dhaka City Corporation, is yet to take any initiative to preserve such relics. Most of the owners of these houses have been living there for generations but their resources are stretched to maintain the structures.

The reality is modern apartments, multi-storied apartment blocks - some even ten to twelve storeys high - destroying the vista of old buildings. In many cases, the old structures have been scrapped and new houses have been built in their place.

"It would have been a different



Historic buildings like these could soon become just a memory.

picture if the entire old Dhaka had been declared a world heritage site. That way, its ancient buildings would have been faithfully preserved," observed Dr Momin Chowdhury, vice chancellor of National University and a former

professor of the History Department of Dhaka University.

As far as the maintenance or preservation of these relics are concerned, the 'Ahsan Manzil' refurbishment, which took place over a decade ago, can be seen

as a positive example.

Previously, the building and its premises were occupied by undesirable elements and the area was in tatters. The government took an initiative to protect the site and it is now one of the

most well looked-after historic attractions of the city.

The same kind of enterprise could save historic old Dhaka from becoming just a memory.

Museum bus ban

CITY CORRESPONDENT

School children of Dhaka City may lose a unique opportunity to visit The National Museum located at Shahbagh. Under a special programme, for the past two decades, a bus sponsored by the museum has been transporting children from different schools to keep them in touch with many aspects of history and culture at home and abroad.

The move to ban 20-year-old buses and trucks from the roads has been a big blow to the city's school children. The only bus, which drove them to the museum, has fallen under the ban.

"The bus was purchased in 1976. After that the museum could not afford to buy another one for school children over the years. After the ban, a year has gone by, no bus hasn't been procured yet," regrets a source at the National Museum.

"We are trying to expedite things relating to buying a new bus so as to restart the children's programme. Our proposals need to go through a number of channels and departments of the government. A few months ago, we have requested the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) to examine the bus and declare it abandoned. After this procedure, we can only approach the Ministry of Culture for a new one," says Director General of the Bangladesh National Museum Iftikhar-ul-Awaal.

Another programme of the Museum, the Mobile Exhibition

Bus, has also embraced the same fate like the children one, as it is not operating any more since the ban. The idea of the mobile bus is to make the people outside of Dhaka aware of some elements of the past like swords, clothes and other valuables of kings of this land.

"After the final nod from the Ministry of Culture we will buy a bus. Then the programme will see the light of the day," says Iftikhar-ul-Awaal.

Meanwhile, the electronic security system of the National Museum has also not been functioning for a long time. This security system consisted of close circuit cameras and monitors, which were installed way back in 1986.

"Instead of fixing the system, we are thinking of replacing the old electronic security with a more sophisticated one. We have already discussed this matter with the ministry. Now our experts care checking out the best possible alternatives in the market. Very soon, the National Museum will have a new but modern electronic security system," says Iftikhar-ul-Awaal.

Adequate manpower of the museum is another problem. As many as 357 people work there. Out of 357, 50 posts including a number of important ones have been lying vacant. "Owing to vacant posts we sometimes cannot function smoothly. Nonetheless for the first time in the history of Bangladesh National Museum, its activities are thriving more than before," says optimist Iftikhar-ul-Awaal.

essential numbers, cabs & train timing

COURIER SERVICES

International
Air Borne Express- 9561371, 9561372, 9550724
Air Couriers Int'l (BD) Ltd.- 8815970
Aramex International Courier- 9558003, 9559582, 9565075
Airspeed Express- 9563494
Asian Courier Services Ltd.- 8313543
Baishakhi Courier Service- 9558606
Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd.- 9565114
Bangladesh Courier Service- 9563989
Bengal Express- 9560642, 9552666
Bangladesh Int'l Courier- 953636
Continental Service Ltd.- 9552948, 9558425
DHL Worldwide Express- 9881703-7, 9886305-9, 9882057
Enem Express- 9330699
Fedex Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd.- 9565114

Modhuban Courier Service- 9550884
Overseas Courier Service- 9352431, 8321169
Pacific Courier- 9568446
Reliance Express Service- 9558515, 7110249
Sky International service- 9660442
Skynet world Wide Express- 9558062, 9560258, 7114787, 7113184
TNT Express- 9566662, 9558239, 8618155
Union Courier Service- 9341722
United Parcel Service Air alliance Ltd.- 8826429, 8810223

National
Asian Courier Service Ltd.- 8313543
BAE- 9884851
Central Courier Service- 9881118
Confidence Courier Service Ltd.- 9567036
Chisty Courier- 7110177-9,

7100842-4
Cosmopol Services- 9552793, 9557975
Dhaka Courier Services- 7236222
Solphin Courier- 9558802
Dreamland Courier Service- 9550326, 9566975
Pioneer Courier Services- 9561727, 9569759
Probashi Courier Services- 9346359
Rainbow Express Parcel Services Ltd.- 8322773, 8315703
Reliance Express Services- 9558515, 7110249
Sundarban Courier Services- 9551984, 9556189, 9551656
Sunrise Courier Services- 9568751

UTILITY

Libraries, Cultural and Information Centers
Central Public Library- 8626001-4, Shishu Academy- 9564128
Shilpakala Academy- 8614673
Bangla Academy- 8619550
Islamic Foundation- 9550280, 9556407
Nazrul Institute- 9114602
Ford Foundation- 8116133
Alliance Francaise- 8611557
British Council- 8618867-8, 8618905-7
Community Development Library- 8113769, 8113604
Goethe Institute Int'l- Dhaka- 9126525-6
Indian Information Centre & Cultural Library- 8615096
The Russian Cultural Centre- 9116314, 9118531, 9118314
Drik Photo Gallery- 9120125, 8112954, 8123412

Museum and Zoo
National Museum- 8619396-9
Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday 3 pm- 6 pm, Thursday closed
Muktijuddha Jadughar- 9559091
Open: 10:30 am 6:30 pm, Sunday Closed
Bangabandhu Smiti Jadughar- 8110046
Open: 10 am 5 pm, Wednesday closed
Ahsan Manzil
Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday: 3 pm - 7 pm, Thursday Closed
Shishu Jadughar- 9666466
Open: 10 am- 6 pm, Sunday Closed
Sonargoan Jadughar
Open: 10 am 5 pm, Wednesday Closed
Dhaka Zoo- 9002954, 9002020
Open: 9am 5 pm, Sunday Closed

TAXI CAB

Yellow Cab
Navana 9558065
Salida 9344477, 0171620881
Cosmo 9112959 and 8127191
Cab One 7113282-3
Nihon 8624741-2
Orion 9347277
Anudip 8125285 and 8127611
Capital 9352847

Union 8130485
Kool 0171826731

Black Cab
Cab Ex 9358401
Cabline 8321162
JBS Cab 019364575
Sajan 018126036
Anudip - 8125285 and 8127611
Cab One 7113282-3

Palki 0171052500
Cab I 7113282
Jatri 0171540074
Nipun 9572277
R-Cab 8914782
Star Cab 9571919
Shihab 018202477 & 018228675
KGN 8620011

RAIN TIMING

Subarna Express Leaves Dhaka at 4:00 pm
Mahanagar Prabhati Leaves Dhaka at 7:30 am
Mahanagar Godhuli Leaves Dhaka at 3:05 pm
Turna Leaves Dhaka at 11:00 pm
Parabat Express Leaves Dhaka at 6:30 am
Joyantika Express Leaves Dhaka at 12:30 pm
Upaban Express Leaves Dhaka at 9:30 pm
Tista Express Leaves Dhaka at 7:00 am
Ekata Express Leaves Dhaka at 5:00 pm
Upakul Express Leaves Dhaka at 6:00 am
Padma Express Leaves Dhaka at 9:20 pm

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Leaves Dhaka at 3:05 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 11:00 pm
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Leaves Dhaka at 9:30 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 7:00 am
Leaves Dhaka at 5:00 pm
Leaves Dhaka at 6:00 am
Leaves Dhaka at 9:20 pm

Reaches Chittagong at 10:15 pm
Reaches Chittagong at 2:55 pm
Reaches Chittagong at 9:11 pm
Reaches Chittagong at 7:05 am
Reaches Sylhet at 2:30 pm
Reaches Sylhet at 9:20 pm
Reaches Sylhet at 6:40 am
Reaches Bahadurabad at 1:05 pm
Reaches Bahadurabad at 11:55
Reaches Noakhali at 1:35 pm
Reaches Jagannath at 2:30 pm