

The Portuguese were the first among Europeans to step into Dhaka lured by its wealth aiming at only doing business. They set up many Khuthi (structures) here. However, it was the British who stayed in Dhaka for long. There was no relation between the Portuguese in Dhaka and those in Arakan and Swandip. Those in Dhaka came during Shayesta Khan's regime and set up homes at Sripur.

TURAG POLLUTED AND ENCROACHED



The river Turag is at the mercy of sand traders of Amin Bazar. The traders have conveniently filled up the river and converted the encroached area into their dumping ground. Like the Buriganga, Turag's water is also extremely polluted due to incessant dumping of various toxic wastes by hundreds of industries along its banks in Tongi, Amin Bazar and Mirpur.

DHAKA CIRCULAR WATERWAY

Victim of pathetic planning

DURDANA GHAS

The proposed circular waterway (CW) around Dhaka will remain incomplete and abandoned if the second phase of the project is not completed, said sources at Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA).

The widely publicised CW project, although only halfway complete, was inaugurated by the then prime minister with 10 landing stations between Sadarghat and Ashulia at a cost Tk 35.99 crore in 2005. It included Tk 15 crore for dredging. Parts of the Buriganga and the Turag were dredged during the first phase.

The project envisaged to 'revolutionise' the transportation system for the city. Unfortunately, the authorities only looked on as the project slowly came to a total standstill.

At present, all landing stations except one are virtually abandoned. According to experts, the failure to kick-start the CW was caused by lack of planning.

"The ministry of shipping had the idea and funds, but they had no planning whatsoever about how to revive this age-old waterway," said an expert.

The landing stations completed in the first phase are Sowarighat, Kholamora, Rayer Bazar, Basila, Gabtoli, Aminbazar, Nawaberbagh, Shinnirtek, Birulia and Ashulia. The first phase of CW project starting from Sadarghat to Ashulia covers a waterway of 29.5 kilometres of which 17.5 km required dredging.

The objectives of the project were to restore the navigability of



Amin Bazar landing station on the river Turag lies idle.

waterways around Dhaka, reduce traffic jam within the city, save environment, facilitate fishing and irrigation and promote tourism.

Abul Kashem, additional Chief Engineer of the project, said around 2,000 cargo-laden trucks are being transported through this waterway everyday and the revenue collected from the cargo is Tk 2.5 crore every year.

"From the very beginning, we were not concerned about any kind of advertisement. The first coverage we got from the media was a negative one. But now I think the project [first phase] is paying off," he said.

When asked about why the project did not yet attract regular commuters, Kashem said, "There are two reasons behind this. Firstly, Ashulia has a low population and secondly, there is no fast-moving vessel for transporting passengers. We got navigability and evicted encroachers, but the whole benefit of the project will not be achieved unless the second phase is completed."

Terminals were built at 7 landing stations. Two-storey terminal buildings were built at Sowarighat, Aminbazar, Gabtoli and Ashulia and one-storey buildings were built at Kholamora,

Basila and Shinnirtek. RCC stairs were built at Nawaberbagh and Rayer Bazar.

Iqbal Habib, architect and member secretary of urbanisation and city governance, Bangladesh Poribesh Bachao Andolan, said the main reasons behind the failure of this project are the authorities' lack of sincerity, comprehensive planning, proper dredging and ensuring supplementary services like approach roads.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

Tangles of overhead wires cover city

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

A densely cluttered web of cables dangling between utility poles throughout the capital adds to the vision pollution in this city.

The view of jumbled up cables not only ruins the aesthetics of the city, but haphazard distribution of cables runs the risk of causing short-circuits and thus damage thousands of expensive electrical and electronics appliances being used in households and offices. Moreover, these messy cables expose millions of city dwellers to fatal electric and fire hazard.

With the monsoon and season of rainstorms just around the corner, the close proximity of the overhead web of cables to electric transformers and air conditioners peeking out from roadside buildings might lead to fatal accidents to road users and adjacent building occupants.

According to sources, based on their locations in the city, preservation and maintenance of the overhead cables along with the poles fall under the three service providing authorities -- Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa), Dhaka Electric Supply Company Limited (Desco) and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

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Various utility service providers including Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB), internet service providers (ISP) and cable TV operators run their cable network through utility poles maintained by Desa, Desco or DCC.

"Although there is no provision to accommodate other utility cable such as telephone lines, internet or satellite TV cables on our poles, we have four clamps installed on each pole to help the service providers allocate their cables," said Mahiuddin, secretary to the Desa chairman.

"We tried to negotiate with them (utility service providers) to compensate us so that we can maintain the poles and the cables more effectively, but

there was poor response from them," he added.

M Mainuddin, executive engineer of electricity circle 2 of DCC told this correspondent that the only way to fix the tangled up cables would be to start over by removing all slapdash cables.

"We try to fix the tangle from time to time, especially the ones that look potentially hazardous. Apart from that, there is very little we can do. We cannot remove the tangled up cables since it would cause an uproar amongst the people," said Mainuddin.

Although Desa took an initiative to remove the tangles as part of a beautification project in 2005, no tangible effort in detaching these tangles has taken place since then primarily due to the lack of coordination between different utility service providers, sources said.

"Desa has long been trying to organise the cables in a systematic way and we asked different service providers to build their own structure for their cables or to pay Desa for organising their cables," said

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

BRAHMO SAMAJ

Internal feuds, greed mar reputation, threaten existence

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

The existence of Brahmo Samaj in the city is threatened due to divisions in the society and legal battles between confronting groups of its members.

Founded by Raja Ram Mohon Roy in 1828, the Brahmo Samaj has now around 60 members who are divided into two main groups. Members of the society said the two groups are now moving 14 legal suits in different courts over the society's executive power and property.

The society maintains a century-old temple and a library on Lyall Street, carrying the memories of Rabinranath Tagore and other illustrious Bengalees.

Ram Mohon Roy established the society with the philosophy of worshipping one Creator and removing all social taboos and superstitions.

Brahmo Samaj welcomes individuals from any religion, caste or creed to practise their beliefs, values and nurture their intellect and soul.

The Dhaka Brahmo Society was established on December 6, 1846.

Members of the society said government intervention can save the temple, property and heritage of the century-old organisation.

The society members inherited property worth about Tk 200 crore. Recently, the Brahmos locked

in legal battle over the plan to construct a six-storey business complex demolishing Raja Ram Mohon Roy library building.

A group of Brahmos signed an agreement with Nuruzzaman Sikder, a property developer, to construct the complex while another group claimed that the agreement is illegal as cases are pending in the court over the legality of the executive committee.

Last month one group of

Brahmos at a news conference in Dhaka alleged Nuruzzaman forcibly occupied the library building and damaged the books and other property. This correspondent on a visit recently found the library building empty.

Leaders of both sides showed lots of court documents to this correspondent to prove their points on the dispute over the executive body, the library building and the temple.

A source from the society told

Star City that both the groups need executive power of the society to have their control over the property and the income sources.

Both the confronting sides are also interested to rent out as much as spaces of the society for self-interests.

With the help of a group of Brahmos, one tenant has already constructed a six-storey building

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Some members of the Brahmo Samaj are trying to replace this library building with a tall structure.