

On the banks of the Buriganga in Dhaka stands the pink majestic Ahsan Manzil, an example of the nation's rich cultural heritage. It was the home of the Nawab of Dhaka and a silent spectator to many events. It has 31 rooms with a huge dome atop which can be seen from miles around. Ahsan Manzil has been renovated and turned into a museum recently which has now 23 galleries displaying portraits, furniture and household articles and utensils used by the Nawab.

Weightlifters with heavy heart

Women athletes tell the tale of their struggle for choosing a 'discouraged' event

DURDANA GHAS

Shabira wiggled her fingers around the practice rod for a few seconds and lifted the 75 kg weight in one go and then dropped it on the padded floor with a bang.

"Since I was a student it was my dream to become a weightlifter," said the national gold medal winner in women's weightlifting.

The big practice room of weightlifting at the National Sports Council (NSC) room was

Chhatra) Shibir activists. Some of my friends and classmates came to my aid and just three months after my start I got a gold medal at the national level," said a beaming Shabira.

There are around 13 regular practicing women weightlifters in the city now and 11 of them in the care of Ansar.

Till today the women weightlifters are not fully equipped with instrument for practice. Even in 2006 they had to practice with the 20-kg rods meant for the male players.

players have to practice with 20-kg. But during the competition they lift the 15-kg rod and face adjustment problem," she said.

"Besides, proper food, especially eggs, and conveyance are often missing," she added.

"Among other things we need is a four-year course planning for weightlifting," said Kajal Datta, who won 10 gold medals at the national level.

"Single events should be given priority. Another problem is that the game is still mainly Dhaka-based," said Kajal, also a physical

secretary general of Bangladesh Weightlifting Federation, said they face fund constraints due to absence of sponsors.

"We do not have necessary funds because sponsors are not coming forward. The instruments we have [the two 15-kg rods] were grants from the IWF. Government could not import the instruments in the last 14 years. We do not have the money to buy them as one rod with sets of discs costs around Tk 3 lakhs. It is expensive because only three companies manufacture

Regarding the potentials of women weightlifters Mohiuddin said, "They have taken part in international competitions with significant achievements. They got a good exposure in the sports media. I think a little attention can make them able to achieve Commonwealth gold medal."

"Now we are trying to include the event into the next Saaf Games scheduled for January 2009," he said.

Asked if any problem of social taboos Mohiuddin said, "Our girls are very brave and have lots of stamina. If women can swim then why can't they go for weightlifting?"

"Ours is a moderate Muslim country so I think social outlook will not be any major problem. But more encouragement is needed to bring new faces to the game," said Kajal, also Shabira's husband.

"I am lucky that until now I have not faced any social trouble because of weightlifting and I am proud of it," said Nisha, a weightlifter also working as an executive manager of a boutique house.

But all stories are not the same.

Weightlifter Firoza Parveen, daughter of a gold medalist national champion, faced problem coming to practice after her father passed away in December last year.

"I am under pressure to leave practice since my father, who brought me into this game, passed away. To tell you frankly I don't know how to get away from these troubles and I can't think what would happen to me after my marriage in case my husband does not cooperate," said Firoza, a student at Metropolitan Degree College.

In district levels most of the players leave practice after wedding.

Among achievers of significant laurels Shabira stood third in Asian Weightlifting Championship 2003 (Thailand), second in Asian Club Cup 2005 (Korea), fifth in Commonwealth Game 2006 (Australia) and second in Junior Asian weightlifting Championship 2007 (Jordan).

"I feel very nice when I picture myself as a woman weightlifter. When I started it I was a bit doubtful but now I am addicted to it. If I don't practice for a day I feel like missing something," said the proud athlete who came a long way wading through the troubled water of weightlifting.



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buzzing with activity.

Strong and pretty, Molla Shabira Sultana recalled how she started weightlifting when she was a student at the Islamic University of Bangladesh (IUB). For her it was a family tradition to join sports as both of her parents were national athletes.

"In 2000 four girls at IUB used to practice weightlifting. I was the first one among them. Sometimes we could not do practice because of [Islamic

Female players have only two 15-kg rods in the country available at the NSC, the players lamented.

"Till 2006 we had to practice with 20-kg rods procured for the male players. Today those practicing in Dhaka have just two 15-kg rods so only two of us can practice simultaneously," said Shabira, also a physical instructor at the Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University.

"Due to lack of appropriate rods at the district level female

education officer at United International University.

Besides the prominent 13 in Dhaka, there are around 30 women players in Kushtia, Khulna, Narail, Bogra and Rajshahi.

SM Alam, sports officer of Bangladesh Ansar VDP, which has 11 women weightlifters, also pointed at poor supply of food after training.

When asked Wing Commander Mohiuddin Ahmed,

weightlifting instruments in the world," said Mohiuddin, also a promoter of women weightlifting in Bangladesh.

Inspired by the International Weightlifting Federation (IWF), the local federation went for women weightlifting in 1999.

"At first I motivated four girls to come to weightlifting and in 2000, 11 girls took part at the national event," said Mujibur Rahman, NSC coach for weightlifting.

KARWAN BAZAR TRAFFIC JAM REMAINS AS BEFORE

Evicted parking space occupied again

TAWFIQUE ALI

The entire Karwan Bazar commercial area including its wide thoroughfares turns into a virtual car park every day with the designated parking ground left in an abandoned state.

Vehicles are parked on the roads in a haphazard manner, creating serious hindrance to public movement in the area specially during the rush hours.

Karwan Bazar is one of city's busiest commercial districts, home to the biggest kitchen market in the capital and scores of government and private offices.

The joint forces reclaimed the car parking space, to the east of the DCC's kitchen market at Karwan Bazar, from a two-decade long illegal occupancy in the last week of January evicting several hundred illegal set-ups.

Unauthorised shops and offices of different political parties had been running for decades at the site with political leaders' blessings and back-up of gangsters.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has never taken any action in this regard.

The parking space has now been occupied with stockpiles of goods, rickshaw vans and garbage with the DCC yet to



Rickshaw-vans occupy afresh the parking space at the Karwan Bazar.

develop the car parking facility. The area is earmarked in the Rajuk's master plan to facilitate car parking and prevent traffic congestion in the commercial area, said experts.

Hasan Arif, executive of an electronic appliance showroom at Karwan Bazar, said that it becomes difficult to move in the area during normal working hour as almost all the roads and roadside spaces are blocked by parked cars.

The abandoned parking area has also turned into a safe haven for anti-social elements like drug addicts, gamblers and druggists, said shopkeepers in the vicinity.

According to sources, DCC could not evict 16 shops in the western side of the parking area, as it had earlier leased out the land.

A public toilet was set up under Urban Primary Healthcare Project of DCC on

the eastern side of the parking space a couple of years back. The toilet has now been abandoned.

Syed Kudrat Ullah, superintendent engineer of DCC's Traffic Engineering Division, said they have decided to develop a hard standing pavement for car parking at the site temporarily as developing a multi-storey parking facility will take a long time.

"Tendering process for the

work is complete," he said. "We are now going to appoint a contractor."

However, he could not say when they would be able to begin the work.

Replying to a question on whether they have obtained land use clearance from Rajuk to develop the parking facility, he said, "The process is on."

Kudrat Ullah said DCC intends to develop a multi-storey car parking facility at the site.

Entrusted by Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), the DCC is the custodian for developing and taking care of the car parking space.

Maintenance of the Karwan Bazar kitchen market was handed over to DCC during the HM Ershad regime by an office order in 1985.

During the tenure of mayor Mohammad Hanif, the DCC leased out the parking area to the wholesale traders to make room for 160 makeshift shops and a road.

After Sadeque Hossain Khoka took over as mayor, he too leased out a designated children's park to the wholesale traders of the kitchen market.

The children's park was set up in 1985 on two bighas of land. It was finally turned into a market in 2005.



A landing station of the circular waterway at Aminbazar point.

SECOND PHASE OF CIRCULAR WATERWAY PROJECT

New river port, two more landing stations planned

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) is extending the Dhaka circular waterways to reduce traffic pressure from the city roads.

In the second phase of Dhaka circular waterways project, BIWTA is going to set up a new river port at Tongi and two more landing stations at Ishapur and Demra.

Abul Kashem, the additional chief engineer of the project said, "I am very hopeful with the second phase because it will play a significant role in easing traffic pressure on the roads."

He said for ensuring navigability of the waterways from Ashulia to Kanchpur, at least 40 kilometres of the river and canals would be dredged under the second phase.

The second phase of the project -- from Ashulia to Kanchpur via Balu and Shitalakhya rivers -- has also included three canals between Rampura and Trimohini, between Rampura and Gozaria via Badda and between Trimukh and Lamapara.

Kashem said inclusion of the canals is significant as these canals would enable carrying cargos from the port to the city centre through waterways.

The extension work will be completed within 2010 at a cost of Tk 47.5 crore.

The Tk 36 crore original waterways project with ten landing stations covering a distance of 29.5 kilometres between Sadarghat and Ashulia was abandoned soon after its inauguration in

2005. In the first-phase, BIWTA constructed landing stations at Sowerighat, Kholamora, Rayerbazar, Basila, Gabtoli, Aminbazar, Nawaberbagh, Shinnirtek, Birulia and Ashulia.

Cargoes of more than 2,500 trucks are being transferred through this waterway every day, generating Tk 3.5 crore revenue annually.

The first phase of the project also met the demand of the traders of Amin Bazar where a business centre of construction materials is growing and providing thousands of people their livelihoods.

"At least we got navigability in the rivers and evicted encroachers. But the whole benefit of the project will not be achieved if the second phase is not completed," Kashem observed.

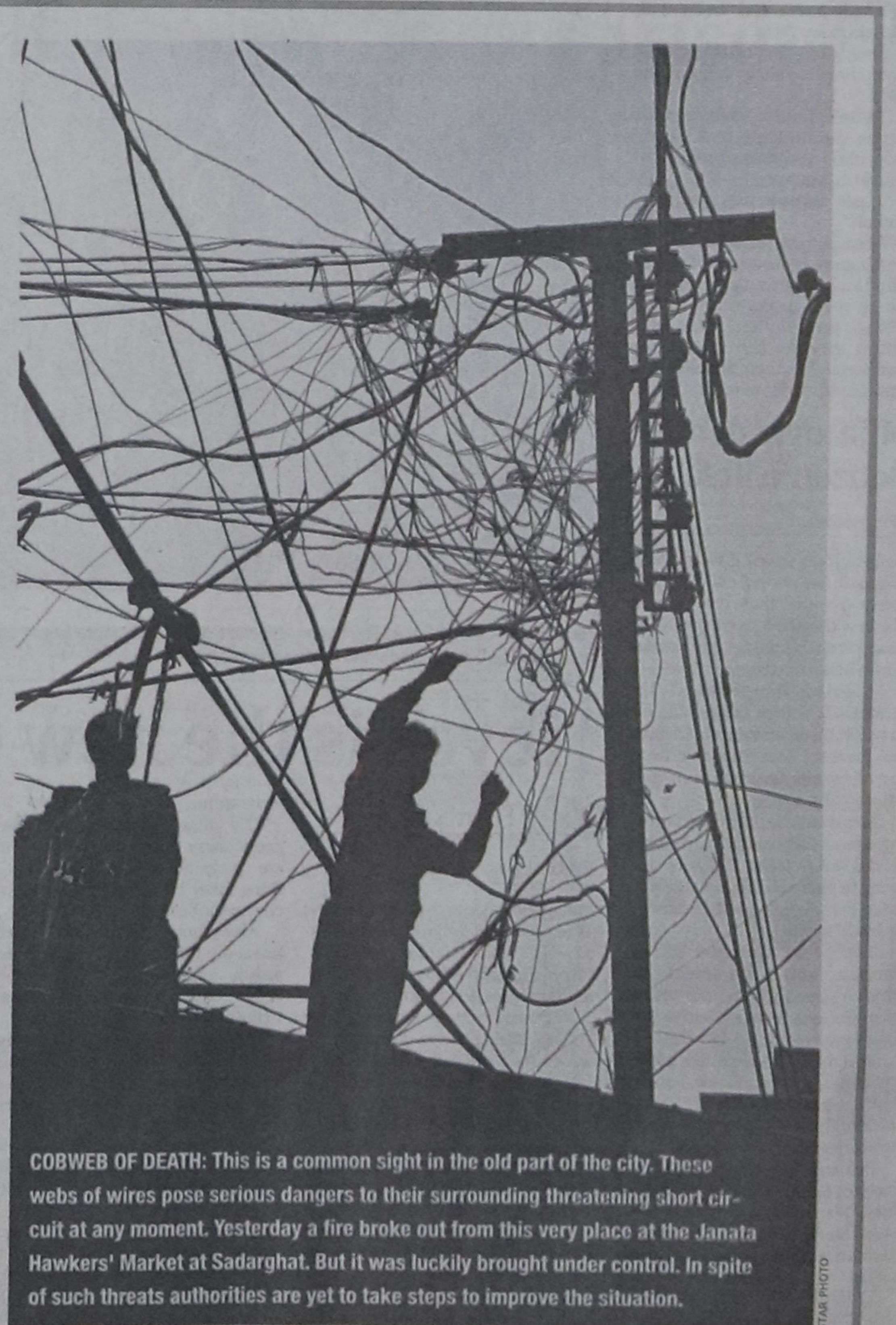
The landing stations with modern facilities are no longer lying idle. BIWTA leased those out to public for running transportation business.

However, the project engineer admitted that the project could not attract expected passengers. BIWTA focused on revenue income from goods transport through the waterways.

He said there were two reasons behind the failure of passenger service. Firstly, there was less population in Ashulia and secondly there is no fast moving vessel for transporting passengers.

"But now the scenario is changing. The city is developing there in the river banks, while fast moving vessels like 'water taxi' has already been introduced for passenger transport."

The water taxi named "Meghna Rani" was launched in the Chandpur-Dhaka route.



COBWEB OF DEATH: This is a common sight in the old part of the city. These webs of wires pose serious dangers to their surrounding threatening short circuit at any moment. Yesterday a fire broke out from this very place at the Janata Hawkers' Market at Sadarghat. But it was luckily brought under control. In spite of such threats authorities are yet to take steps to improve the situation.

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