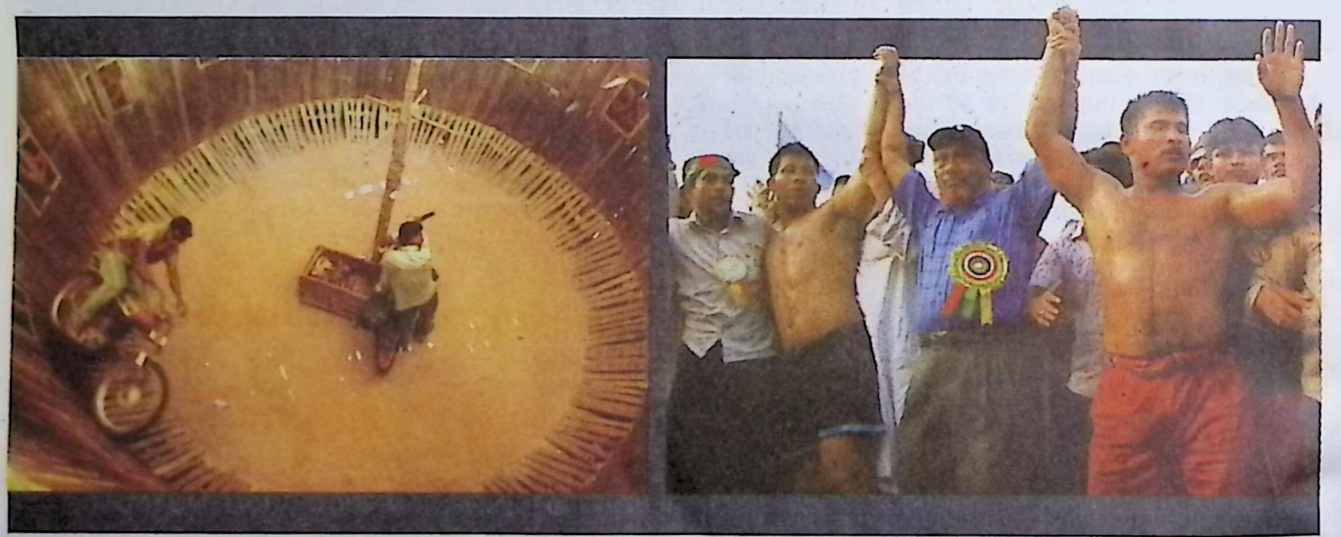
Jabbarer Bolikhela- at 99 still going strong

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BY the time the readers read this, Chittagong's historic *Jabbarer bolikhela* (Jabar's wrestling) will be over. Count down will have started for the centenary celebration of the event next year. Began in 1909, this traditional *Boishaki mela* of Chittagong accompanied by free style wrestling has already managed to attract national and international media attention. The general people of Chittagong, awaits eagerly the entire year for this three day festival, the wrestling bout taking place on 12th. day of Boishak. *Jabbarer bolikhela* is perhaps the only *Boishaki mela* in the country which began hundred years back with a political message. The locals are fond of calling it '*Jabboirjar bolikhela.*'

In Chittagong wrestling is known as *boli khela; boli* means wrestlers, *khela* means sport. It is a traditional popular game of the district, coming down from the days of the Muslim rule. The Muslim nobility used to keep in their pay roll well-known wrestlers who would put up a fight against their enemy in times of danger. These wrestlers would give demonstration of their physical strength and skill on suitable occasions in presence on large number of crowds. These wrestlers would train under different *ustads* and often they would meet in challenge bouts to the entertainment of the general public. Drums (*dhol)* would be beaten continuously while the wrestlers sweated out in the make shift sand or mud pits to beat each other. *Jabberer bolikhela* has somehow managed to cling to the tradition and in 2009 will be celebrating its centenary.

Chowdhury Jamal Khan of Chittagong had several slaves, who were noted for wrestling and arrow shooting. Bakshi Hamid, who had erected a mosque in 1684 in Banshkhali started a *bolikhela* in Bukshi's Chawri in village Ilsha in Banshkhali. It used to be held on flat hillock on the 1st of Boishak every year and attracted crowds from all over Chittagong. The *Jabbararer bolikhela* held at the Laldighi maidan is the biggest event in the district and now attracts people from all over the country, especially artisans and craftsmen who sells traditional household items, like earthen wares, cane furniture, earthen toys painted red and grey, hand fans with artistic designs, various household articles made of bamboo reeds, famous *shitalpati* (fine reed mats) of Satkania, summer fruits, most notable being giant cantaloupes and melons of Patenga (Patengar *tormuz,* currently a dying breed), traditional food items like chana monar teng, sirmai, batasha, anda mitai etc. Most of these wares and items would not be available during other times of the year.

Jabbarer bolikhela was started by Abdul Jabbar Sowdagar of Boxirhat (Badarpatti) and is held on 12th. Boishak every year. Now his grandsons organize it in memory of their grandfather. Abdul Jabbar Sowdagar's purpose of initiating the *boilkhela* was to organize and inspire the youths for anti-British movement.

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