



thecitythatwas

Dhaka's famous cotton textile industry reached its peak of prosperity by the end of the seventeenth century, and continued throughout the eighteenth century. Dhaka was most famous for its extremely fine and flowered muslins..

An architectural oasis

Architect, Rafig Azam, offers hope and inspiration as he attempts to change the way people think about architecture

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The mushrooming of high-rises and unplanned growth in Dhaka barely allows breathing space for city dwellers. Particularly for residents of the old city, the crowding and congestion due to haphazard construction becomes more suffocating with every passing day.

However, there is at least one individual working in the city offering us all some much needed hope and vision.

Architect, Rafiq Azam, has embarked on a mission to design houses for the most neglected areas of the city, particularly in old Dhaka. But the most unusual and inspiring aspect of this project is that Azam is willing to offer his vision and expertise free of cost. By offering his services to private landowners wishing to develop their property, he hopes to educate people about the importance of architecture in a city fast becoming the proverbial 'concrete jungle.

His first such endeavour was the Kazedewan apartment building in Lalbagh. A single glance will tell you that it is distinctively

A combination of terracotta red-brick and concrete plasterwork characterises the exterior of the building.

"The outer surface of the apartment is very special because I didn't apply any paint to it. Paint can fade and decay very quickly in Dhaka because of the excessive humidity. That's why I kept it paint-free," said Azam.

Another unique feature of

the apartment are its gardens.

"Almost every flat in the building has space enough to make a small garden. The house was built only a year ago, so the creepers haven't spread their branches around the building yet. But after a year or two, the green branches will be quite visible," said Azam.

The five-storey apartment was constructed on just four *kathas* of land. Yet 14 families are comfortably accommodated there. Three different designs or sizes of flat are available. The smallest are 650 square feet, up to 750 square feet being

The architect's ingenuity is in evidence by the fact that each apartment is awash with sunlight, even within the confined environments.

"In the past, the houses of old Dhaka used to have large courtyards with a touch of greenery. I have made a provision of a courtyard on the ground floor so that the inhabitants can feel the warmth of a little space annexed with a garden," said

The building has been erected in such a way so that every flat has access to the southerly wind.

Azam has designed the rooftop of the apartment as a place for rendezvous. "Many people prefer to spend their leisure period on the roof. So I have made three cubicles for three different generations on the ceiling. The front cubicle is for the young, the middle one is for the children and the one at the back is for the middle-aged and even older people.

'I have received offers from all around the city to design houses for free. My next project is in Basabo," said the selfless architect.

Abdur Rahman, who is the landlord of the apartment, was understandably a satisfied man.

"I am really happy because all my tenants are getting ample air, light, sun, and greenery. I don't feel that any





The Kazedewan apartment building is an oasis of architectural vision in old Dhaka.

CNGs ill at ease

SABRINA KARIMMURSHED

Harassment by police has become a new dilemma for the CNG scooter drivers in the city, most of them claim. They explain that police sergeants working on the roads of the capital harass them for money even after showing valid docu-

Most of the CNG drivers noted they are directed to submit their previous license at Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and get a fresh one, which is a computerised document. It was written in the earlier license that they are able to run a "Baby Taxi" but the new computer made license says

they can drive a "CNG run autorickshaw," said Sadek Hasan, a

The drivers are supposed to get the new license within three months of submitting their old copy of license and are given a document as a permit slip to run their vehicles on road. However, even after showing that legal permission given by BRTA, police sergeants do not consider it enough, said most of the CNG drivers. "They (the police sergeants) threaten to file cases against us and then ask for bribes," said Mohammed Shajahan, a CNG driver. "It is basically to squeeze out some money that they grab us and ask for our license," added Majnu Mia, another CNG driver.

hardly found to be charged according to the meter, fixed by the authority, since they were introduced in the city. Lack of fuel supply due to few refueling stations and increased amount of daily deposit demanded by the scooter owners hasd led the drivers to ask for more fare from the commuters. Harassment by police is another reason they are asking for more fare. "I was simply amazed when a CNG driver asked for Tk 10 more than what the meter charges on Rokeya Sarani where there are so many police," said Shakil Ahmed, a commuter. "The driver said he will have to pay at least Tk 50 to Tk 100 if caught by a police sergeant there.'

The fare of CNG scooters was

"If the document is issued by BRTA, the police will definitely consider it legal," said Sheikh Muhammad Mahbub-E-Rabbani, Assistant Director of BRTA, Dhaka, Circle North. "If police seizes any of the drivers, there must be some confusion with his papers," he added.

However, most of the police sergeants this correspondent spoke to denied harassing CNG drivers or taking bribe from them. "Those who are charged are found having fake licenses most of the time," said Sergeant Mohammed Afzal Hossain. He added the drivers accuse the police of taking bribe to create sympathy among the commuters and then ask for more fare.



CNG drivers regularly face police harassment and extortion.

Traffic policy signals city improvement

SOHEL ISLAM

There will be a serious clamp down on illegal rickshaws in the city. The old illegal ones will be scrapped and the functional ones will be sent to district and thana towns

A new corridor for rickshaws will be constructed through the BDR headquarters at Pilkhana once the rickshaw ban on the Mirpur Road is fully enforced.

The Bangladesh Air Force have revised a previous decision and will provide a designated area inside the Old Airport to the DCC and the DMTP to use it as a riskshaw graveyard.

These and other major decisions were taken at a meeting at the Prime Minister's Office last

Corridor for Rickshaws through BDR Headquar-

The BDR headquarters at Pilkhana will have a new rickshaw corridor once the ban on rickshaws on Mirpur Road is

"We will ask for land from the BDR for this corridor and within a short period a joint survey will begin," said a source at the meeting said.

Illegal Rickshaws of Dhaka City

"The DMTP with the help of the DCC will soon clamp down on illegal rickshaws. The old illegal rickshaws will be scrapped and the functional ones will be sent to the district and thana towns. The district administration will then distribute these rickshaws to unemployed youths," said a senior government official at the meeting.

SAARC Fountain

The meeting also decided to



An officially designated area inside the Old Airport will be used as a riskshaw graveyard.

reduce the circumference of the Under a major improvement SAARC fountain on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue to allow more room for traffic movement. The fountain will be reduced in size from 105 feet to 95 feet, sources

Installation of Traffic Signals

The meeting discussed the faulty electronic traffic signals at important intersections in the

It was decided that the defective signals will be replaced by modern ones at 59 major cross ings in the city. The DCC will be responsible for their installa-

Improvement and beautification of **Airport Road**

and beautification project, Airport Road is to be turned into eight lanes for improved flow of traffic. But the construction has been delayed owing to noncooperation from Navy Head-

"The navy has installed an abandoned gun ship in front of its headquarters. If they don't remove this how will we build an eight laned road?" asked a participant at the meeting.

It was decided to send a delegation to the Navy Chief to request him to remove the gun ip very soon.

Relocation of Karwan Bazar wholesale market

Most of the participants at the meeting agreed that Karwan Bazar needs to be relocated.

"The wholesale market of Karwan Bazar, Tejgaon Truck Stand and the 'sweepers' colony' inside Gulshan Park will be relocated to an area around the proposed Tongi Diversion Link Road in the Hatir Jheel area," said another participant of the

The DTCB along with RAJUK, the DCC and other utility service providers have undertaken a decision to construct the Tongi Diversion Link Road, which will be connected from the east end of Panthapath to Pragati Sarani via Hatir Jheel.

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui presided over the meeting, also attended by representatives from utility service providers, Dhaka Metropolitan Traffic Police and the Armed