

Say 'Why not Me?' and Split!

THERE is a story that during the Non-aligned summit in Algiers in 1973, General Yakubu Gowon of Nigeria had asked Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman if it was really necessary to create Bangladesh.

"Why do you have three countries in India? Why not one?" Gowon had asked Bangabandhu, according to the story. In reply, Mujib was said to have turned the table on Gowon and asked back, "Why do you have 47 countries in Africa? Why not one Africa?"

stroppiness. Bickering is a favourite pastime for a Bengalee. He is wonderful when it comes to damning his nextdoor neighbour, from pouring scorn on his son's chances at the university to setting fire to his property.

But it is in the political arena that Why not me? reigns supreme. Why do political parties split? Why are there so many of them anyway? Some blame it on the lack of any democratic tradition or culture.

version of democracy? The real stuff, in fact? Individualism at its most unrefined? Why not me, to be precise.

There was a story doing the rounds during the anti-Ershad mass movement in 1987 that a "leader" had formed a political party for reasons quite explicitly other than any grave, ideological difference.

too. Rather less inexplicably, neither faction managed to win a seat at the February polls. I once heard a joke which sounded suspiciously like a true story, and went something like this: The leader of a new party, during his maiden interview to the press, revealed he was the president, secretary general as well as the treasurer of his party.

Left-wing parties are, of course, renowned throughout the world for their splitting habit, and also their incredible ability to make every split look the result of some profound ideological dispute.



THE FACELESS PEDDLER : A surreptitious salesman hiding his face from the camera while displaying his prize merchandise — wild geese — for sale in defiance of law that prohibits trading of wild birds. Star Photo by Enamul Haque.

kept on splitting. Why not me? has had a field day, but the syndrome has never been given the credit it deserves.

standard-bearers of ultra-nationalism — some call it fascism — are many, but they are really splinters of something which they haven't quite managed to identify yet.

So, when you get your chance, you simply follow the textbook: TV cameras whirr as you stand regally, while humble citizens hand you cheques that could easily have been deposited in a bank account: you wheel out ministers and dignitaries and get them to line-up at the airport whenever you and your ever-increasing entourage leave on one of your foreign trips; then you make sure TV puts out a special programme on your trip which shows how those foreigners very nearly fell off their chairs by your charm. It was all done by the other fellow, wasn't it? So

why not you too? Then there was the great cyclone. All the disaster-management mechanism were in place, but they were all in somebody else's name — president's this, president's that. So all of them had to be duplicated, relief fund, relief godown, the lot. After all, why should it be him? Why not me? Never mind that precious days, weeks went by before the clones could begin to operate as efficiently as their originals, that was never the point anyway.

THE festive spirit is every inch a homebody. Halloween is never quite as thrilling transplanted to Indonesia, and Durga Puja somehow loses a touch of life when celebrated in Copenhagen.

Expatriate Eid

S. Bari

born-and-bred son. Expatriates world-wide are obliged to internalize their festivals, to confine their celebrations to the four walls of their homes or community centres.

the underlying symbolism in issues they had once accepted blindly. These Bengalis emphasize the spirit of sacrifice that Eid commemorates, and pay homage to that through some real sacrifice, not of another living being bought specially for that purpose, but by giving up something, anything, dear to them.

too distant a future urban mobility will be a major headache. Let us start to think in some positive direction.

emerging scenario on various sectors. The combination of the worst of all scenarios is a picture of disaster waiting to happen. The question is, is it possible to change or moderate the scenario? I believe that with out efforts disaster will happen. However, with maximum efforts the situation can be moderated and made livable until a stability reaches in the population growth and the rural migration is abated.

intensively in the form of mixed use high density developments of commercial and residential uses. Housing and Urban Development

of existing stock. However, these should be done under strict and enforceable rules and regulations.

DHAKA : 2000 AND BEYOND

(From preceding page)

Dhaka was estimated to be about 4 million. Of this total approximately 75% or about 3 million people were thought to have some form of permanent shelter.

shelters available would be woefully inadequate for the increase in the projected population. By then (2000 A D) the proportion of permanent type dwelling residents will have dropped to less than 50% from 75% in 1985.

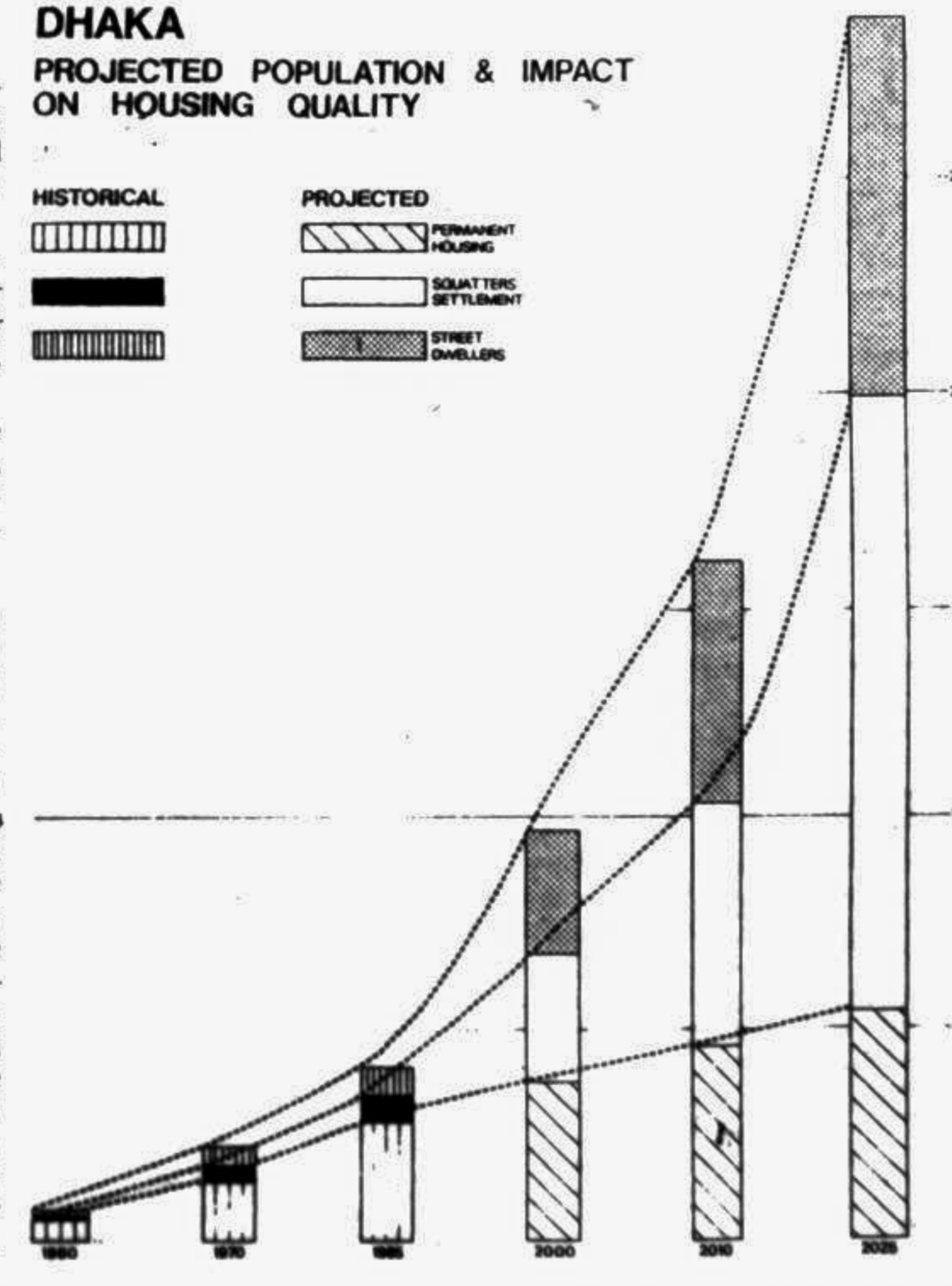
practically choked. By some estimates at this time there are over one hundred thousand rickshaws in the city of Dhaka.

Aside from the above which will need to be developed through a comprehensive and detailed planning and development process a most important element in the movement of massive number of people is a fully developed mass transit system unencumbered by the surface traffic.

going in to details, efforts should continue to : First reduce the rate of urban growth through population control through education and incentives to reduce family sizes.

particular social or economic class these developments should always be of mixed tenancy. These should be part of zoning regulation regarding the development of the land.

(Abridged from a paper presented at a Seminar organised by Canada Bangladesh Forum, at the Carleton University, Canada, recently. The author who is currently a resident of Ottawa and is working as a Senior Architect with a major firm was Deputy Chief of Physical Planning and Housing, Planning Commission, Bangladesh.)



Housing and Urban Development. After the liberation of Bangladesh (1971) there was a large influx of rural migrants to the Dhaka city. At the time, in the Planning Commission where I had recently joined, we estimated that approximately 250,000 people were urban squatters and slum dwellers of the City's total population of 1.7 million approximately (15% of the total population).

Roads, Traffic, Mass Transportation and Mobility. Where do you start a section under the above heading? Ever since the city of Dhaka has been growing geographically, the network of roads and the transportation system has been progressively falling behind.

Potential Intervention Scenario for the Future. To this stage we have discussed at some length an

Secondly, diversify employments and industries to other parts of the country so that there may be better options elsewhere as well perception of available employment in Dhaka is minimised.

Public housing policy must shift to provide large scale low to medium income housing mixed in with private upper income projects to avoid ghettoisation.

Intensification of existing housing and land use should continue as a policy, encouraging extensions and rebuilding