

## People and Places

# Megacity Dhaka : What Life Beholds

by Dewan Saad Jaglul

**D**HAKA, residence of presumably eight million plus people is going to stand at twenty-first position among all the cities in the world by the year 2000. This would be status has solely been determined on the basis of its population, that is, its land area limit has not been a factor for

"the city is a place for multiplying happy chances and making most of the opportunities. Throughout the globe more people will live in the urban area than the rural part by the year 2000. Surely, Bangladesh does not have as many cities to contain all the migrating rural folks. Nevertheless, Dhaka al-

playground for kids, schools, hospitals and so forth. Most neighbourhoods of inner city like Maghbazar, Monipurpara, Khilgaon etc. lack playground, park and community centres where people can interact with

semi-literates. And the people here are not necessarily healthy. Perhaps, it is fitting to mention at this point that, it patients require surgical or medical intervention at the government hospitals, they have to

have identical programmes at some particular localities, while none has any at others!

Though the City Corporation is doing its best to deal with the garbage generated by eight million plus people, the city is not exactly litter free. After a moderate drizzle or even after a mild storm the city looks exception-

remote places. Its gas and electricity is produced elsewhere in the country and the fuel is imported from abroad. However, Dhaka is (unfortunately) the hot bed of the country's troubled political arena.

On the other hand, Dhaka remains the cradle of creativity and ambition for the country's



Rickshaws jamming the traffic

thus destined, it would have surely produced someone near to that class or perhaps even better, who knows? Moreover, to focus on the degradation is to miss the deep well of pride and determination that inspire the urban poor to better their lives.

Abdur Rahman, a carefree rickshawpuller, came to this town about two years back. Now he earns about Tk 3000 a month and has five mouths to feed. He lives in the shantytown at Agargaon. While on the streets he shows some respect for the traffic signals, he never ponders to figure out the significance of indicator lights or brake lights of the passing motor vehicles.

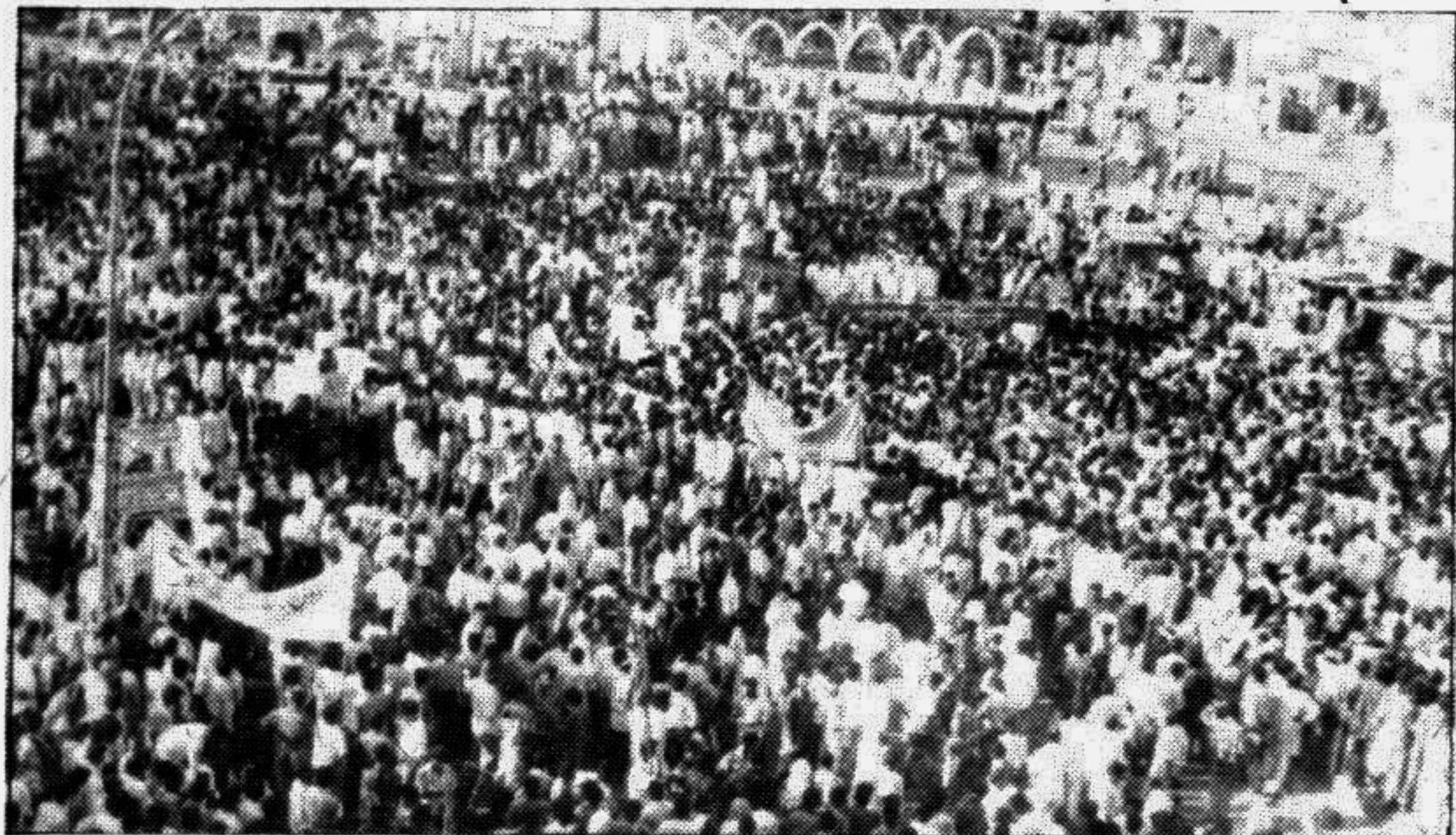
It is indeed an enormous task teaching the pros and cons of the traffic system to an illiterate rickshawpuller and may be it is a further bigger task to control the number of rickshaws on the city streets. Perhaps, our system of governance does not facilitate taking drastic measures like controlling the rickshaws like the way it does not facilitate implementing compulsory birth control. Here, intellectuals generally have one or two offsprings while

the illiterates and the semiliterates have many. Thus, the rickshawpullers Abdur Rahman kind and their working cousins and their jobless cousins constitute the multitudes.

The price of a city's greatness is an uneasy balance between vitality and chaos, health and disease, enterprise and corruption, art and inequity. Comes a time, this delicate balance threatens to tip, and when it does, cities can spiral into an anarchy that defies all attempts at reversal. History issues grim warning about future of a city. One must remember in this regard, since the beginning of civilization the rise and fall of great cities has been part of its cycle since humans first began to congregate in large numbers some 6000 years ago. Many a city has risen to greatness only to collapse because of epidemics, warfare, ecological calamities, shifts in trade and social disorder. As for our beloved Dhaka city, the present trend suggests that the combination of crowding, poor sanitation at the shantytowns and the suburban areas along with its implications elsewhere, noise and pollution can eventually become intolerable.

Ultimately, the responsibility for keeping Dhaka livable rests with the government and its residents. The social scientists need to figure out soon, a suitable explanation regarding how to engage the multitudes of have-nots without having the city burdened any further about it. The city streets, pavements and most of its parks and vacant area have been taken over by them already and the city is having it upto its neck.

Like the cumbersome humble bee that flies in the face of aerodynamic theory, Dhaka city will have to defy gravity and invent a sustainable future for itself. Since the fate of this country is entwined with that of this city a sensible soul has no other choice to wish for regarding this whole affair.



Public meeting at Baitul Mukarram square : Blocking the city centre.

consideration in this regard. Nevertheless, one can safely surmise that this city is steadily heading towards a condition whereby it can be considered among the most densely populated places in the world in near future.

It is difficult to point out exactly when men first started to congregate in large numbers within the limits of this city. But indeed, Dhaka is a historic city. However, the influx of people from all over the country originated soon after the independence of Bangladesh. And as time progresses the trend continues rendering it to a megacity status.

A thinking man must agree with the fact that the more attractive a city becomes the more it will attract overwhelming number of immigrants. In comparison to the chaotic thoroughfares of Dhaka, the sprawling countryside may project a picture of peace and serenity. However, the most wretched city slums offer better access to paying jobs, more varied diets, better education and better health care than most of the rural communities.

The late social critic Lewis Mumford once remarked that

ready contains a fare share of them upto its brim.

In Dhaka, the fastest urban growth are in those areas that are poorest and least prepared. Multitudes of people live in the suburban areas of Jatrabari, Bashabo, Badda etc. where they lack proper sanitation facilities.

one another. This very lack of interaction causes segregation and classification of its society. Moreover, adult recreational facilities are literally absent.

Though private sector schools and clinics have lately sprung up in the city, so has the number of illiterates and

supply their own drugs. And it is well known to all that the private sector institutions only cater to the economically better part of the society. The NGOs are working for the betterment of the needy. But even today, their activities lack coordination. As a result, several NGOs



Crowd at Sadarghat terminal : Overloading of launches.

ally dirty. Recycling is almost absent. And here, air pollution goes unnoticed.

The city is not rich by any standards and its contribution to most of its resources is negligible. Its required food items partly arrive from neighbouring countryside while the rest from

civilization. Here poets and painters, intellectuals and professionals, that is, most of the prime citizens of the country contribute to its glory. The Elizabethan London that nurtured Shakespeare, after all, was a fetid dump cloaked in coal dust. If only Dhaka was



Demolition and construction go on side by side, but not to ultimate cure. — Star photos



# Amsterdam : A City Coming to Life by Night

by Asiuzzaman

**W**HEN it gets dark, Amsterdam comes to life. It seems as though you are wandering through a fairy tale landscape when thousands of mini lamps illuminate the bridges and historic buildings. And night is the time to discover the bustling life of Amsterdam. This is a city on water. There are more than 130 kilometers of canals criss-crossing the city in its length and breadth.

Naturally, eating will be part of one's evening programme and Amsterdam offers a wide choice of good restaurants and cheerful bistros. You can see a

French, Greek, Indonesian, Indonesian-Chinese, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Lebanese, Mexican, Moroccan, Pakistani, Filipino, Polish, Russian, Spanish and Thai restaurants. The vegetarians can choose separate restaurants. Restaurants are usually kept open from 5 pm to 10 am. Some restaurants have special offers which include dinner and a visit to the theatrical performances.

One can also have one's dinner on board during a canal cruise. You will experience a different feeling passing through the illuminated canals and your atmosphere featuring wine and

eastest way to travel through most of the interesting places of Amsterdam where one can hardly reach by foot. During the roundtrip cruise you can enjoy sights of the 17th century houses with their beautiful facades, the narrowest house, the famous western tower, the city-centre, the infamous red light district and much more. You will also visit the harbour with its big oceanliners and smaller vessels and the on-board residence which was built scores of years ago when the Dutch peo-

ered to be the gateway to Europe. The city is the commercial hub having headquarters of almost all the major reputed companies and Amsterdam is always ready for the tourists.

"You can enjoy every moment in Amsterdam as long as you don't possess illegal drugs and weapons," said a Dutchman now residing in Bangladesh.

Dutchmen consider themselves to be too liberal. Because of such liberal attitude criminal activities are comparatively

thick of the crowd. "Don't show that you have money with you", they cautioned. In case of street robbers, they cautioned, "think about your life and health first. Try to stay in places with many others and do not act like the tourist 'prototype'."

The Dutch people are hard-working and very dutiful. Delay by a minute is considered by them as 'delay for the day'. "Dutchmen never wait, they live," commented another Dutchman. They have proved themselves as a hard working nation by stopping the encroachment by sea. The Amsterdam city of an altitude about

chores. Some 15.5 million people of Amsterdam have about 11 million bicycles.

If you take a long walk across the city, you will see the whole city is arrayed in a perfect order. Most of the city buildings are constructed in ancient architectural designs which are the hallmark of the 17th and 18th century. There are only two buildings with trendy fashion following the modern architectural designs, but the Dutch people demonstrated to lodge their protest saying that such buildings would spoil the beauty of the city.



The windmill: Traditional landscape

alised from the car owner. Hundreds of cars, buses and trams ply in the city around the clock but surprisingly there are no traffic jams. You will hardly see a traffic police in the city. Compared to Amsterdam, Holland's capital the Hague is a sleeping city.

Amsterdam can boast of many things. The city has the world's biggest flower auction market at Aalsmeer. More than 60 per cent flowers of the world is produced in Holland. A cooperative of about 5,000 growers are engaged in flower production.

Aalsmeer flower market is also a major tourist attraction in Amsterdam. Several hundred tourists everyday visit the auction market which occupies an area of 715,000 sq m and is located close to the city. "You can get all kinds of flowers produced in the world," said an owner of a company bidding regularly in the auction. Orders are placed to some 1200 companies from around the globe to purchase flowers. Roses are the best selling variety in the market followed by tulips. The Aalsmeer authorities provided a list of 75 types of roses and 35 different tulips. Some of the flowers are imported to the auction markets from different parts of the world and later reexported to other

countries. Flowers worth seven billion Guilders are being exported annually from Holland.

Over the past four centuries, Amsterdam has developed into one of the pioneer diamond centres of the world. The unparalleled craftsmanship of Amsterdam's diamond cutters brought this reputation for the diamond trade. Tour operators usually include a visit to a diamond factory.

It is a shoppers' treasure trove with many markets scattered across the city. Amsterdam offers varieties of dance, music and theatrical performances. You can be fortunate to witness classical Indian dance in a city auditorium. On November 19, when a 12 member media team from Bangladesh was visiting Amsterdam, The Tropenmuseum organised a dance performance of Nand Siddiqui who developed her skill in Kathak dance.

The infamous red light district is, perhaps paradoxically, seems to be the number one tourist attraction of the city. Several hundred girls and women are involved in the world's oldest 'trade' in the red light district located near the city centre. All over the world Amsterdam is known as the gay

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Rivers are everywhere enhancing serenity. Skyscrapers seldom changing the skyline



restaurant named after the mighty river Meghna or the Bengali Nobel Laureate Tagore or the Mughal Emperor Akbar. You can also come across such names as Kohinoor, Mounihal, Shiva, Swagat, India Corner, India Cottage and Tandoor — where these are restaurants you can relish the typical sub-continental delicacy.

The European city also offers you hundred of English

cheese, candles and soft background music. There are special menus for the tourists.

Some 250 restaurants in the Netherlands offer such menu comprising of first course, main dish and dessert for only 25 Guilders. Considering the varieties of menu, the Dutch people say, in Amsterdam you can eat in any language.

Tourists usually prefer a canal cruise because it is the

ple had faced an acute housing crisis.

The Netherlands is a comparatively smaller European country which has borders with Belgium and Germany. Divided from the Great Britain by the North Sea, the country has joined the European Union. The Dutch people also have a rich historical background.

Amsterdam is the main city of the country which is consid-

higher in number. On arrival, a tourist is instructed by the front desk man of the hotel that "leave the valuables and money in the safety-locker of your room. Just take with you the required amount of money."

They also cautioned a newcomer about the danger of pickpockets and street robbers. The pickpockets are deemed as 'very professional' and they find the best opportunity in the

15 meter below the sea level. They live with water and they know well how to manage water. Coincidentally, some of the Dutch companies are now working for river training with the Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge project in Bangladesh. Drizzling and cloudy weather is a part of their life. Amid incessant drizzle, Dutchmen and women take a long bicycle ride to complete their daily

Like other European cities, Amsterdam has left hand and right lane driving system. There are hardly any garage in the city. There are specific roadside areas demarcated for parking. Recently a new parking policy has become effective in Amsterdam. One can buy a parking card or pay fees on every parking. For illegal parking, a car is fitted with wheels clamp and a certain amount of fine is re-