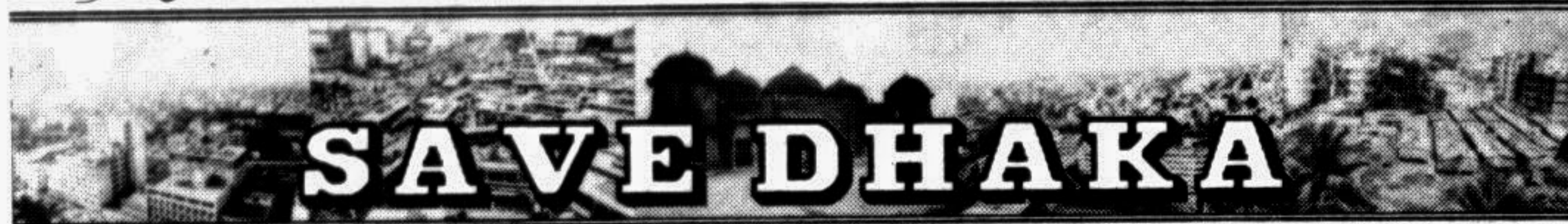


# The Daily Star — BUET Roundtable on



## Need for a Unified Authority to Run the City

**Dr. Nizamuddin:** It is my profound pleasure to announce the opening of this roundtable on Save Dhaka jointly organised by the Post Graduate Centre, Department of Architecture, BUET and The Daily Star, Dhaka. At the very outset my request to Honourable Acting Vice Chancellor of BUET Prof Deepak Kanti Das to kindly deliver the address of welcome.

**PROF. DEEPAK KANTI DAS:** Honourable Minister, Head of the Department of Architecture Prof. Ali, Mr. Anam the Editor of The Daily Star, my respected colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. The theme of today's discussion is Save Dhaka. Bangladesh is a small country and its capital city is not that big. In spite of this, the task to save Dhaka appears at the moment to be an immense one.

I would urge the speakers today to address Dhaka's numerous problems, such as those pertaining to water, and to the lack of it. Dhaka is at times flooded, like in 1987-88. Then again we have the problem of scarcity of drinking water. We have problems of traffic and traffic jams all the time. Perhaps you could throw light on how a fast vehicular system could be arranged. We at BUET are always ready to come forward to assist in building, in constructing anything good. I therefore, welcome you all in this august session to speak on how to Save Dhaka.



Dipak Kanti Das

**Dr. Nizamuddin:** Now it is my pleasure to invite the moderator Mr. Mahfuz Anam, Editor of The Daily Star, Dhaka to begin the proceedings of the roundtable conference.

**MAHFUZ ANAM:** May I welcome you all to the Save Dhaka Roundtable organised jointly by the Post Graduate Centre, Department of Architecture, BUET and The Daily Star. The Daily Star occasionally organises roundtables on important national issues. We felt that given the fast rate of growth of Dhaka City and the dramatic increase of problems we are facing, it was time to put our minds together to think about the problems and their solutions of the city that we love so much. At the beginning of this year The Daily Star took up three major agenda items for the year 1995 and the number one agenda for us was to focus on the problems of Dhaka City. This is not to say we are not conscious of the problems of the other major urban centres of Bangladesh. We thought that we would start with the city in which we are located.

We have invited all the actors concerned to this Roundtable to deliberate on issues relating to the future of Dhaka City. We have invited the Minister of Works, the Mayor and all other major actors including two major donors, namely the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. To add to the intellectual context of the discussion, we have invited some of the leading experts of the country who belong to the Engineering University.

We start off with the minister and he will give us an overview of the government policy on the future of Dhaka City. I now request the Honourable Minister to start the discussion.

**Barrister Rafiq:** I extend my heartfelt thanks to The Daily Star and members of Post Graduate Centre for giving me this opportunity to speak at this roundtable.

One of the handicaps that the government is facing is that we have an almost unlimited population in this country with limited land and limited resources. This is the real constraint.

Land resources simply cannot be increased. Moreover, erosion is acting against us. There are other factors too. The source of rivers is controlled by other countries, not by us. In such a difficult situation, only scientific management can possibly resolve the problem.

Possibly the main problems faced by Dhaka city, are traffic, proper sanitation, safe drinking water, adequate electricity and the lack of housing. Now, what are the problems that I face as the government Minister for Works? Some people come and ask us to construct a house. If we do so on a vacant plot of land, the children will demand to know why their field has been taken over to built upon. So on one hand, the man who has no shelter wants some kind of shelter, on the other hand, people also want open space. This government undertook a programme to build 9000 government flats. They say high rise buildings cost 55 per cent more than the normal construction of a building. But due to limited resources, the government

The "SAVE DHAKA" Roundtable by The Daily Star and BUET — a unique conference of policy makers, administrators, experts, academicians, NGOs and media practitioners — has identified ten priority policy areas where immediate actions need to be taken. First of its recommendations deal with the creation of a unified authority to run the city. RAJUK, WASA, DESA, the Mayor's office were all looking after different aspects of city life, without any coordination between them. This lack of a centralized authority has led to virtual chaos in running the city which is growing at the rate of 6 of a year, and is projected to become one of the major unmanaged urban centres of Asia.

The problems are immense, but still manageable, the experts say. However they must be addressed immediately. Political will, administrative efficiency, policy coordination and immediate action are what is needed. The Roundtable, which was held on 8 June '95, and whose full transcript we publish today, provides insightful ideas about solving Dhaka city's problems. We hope that the suggestions contained in these columns will generate public debate and lead to urgent government actions. We in The Daily Star, commit ourselves to continue this campaign.

Transcript prepared by PROBE news agency

cannot afford to spend 33 per cent more for construction of high rise buildings.

I would say that the problems can be resolved through growing human consciousness, through discussions. Today's discussion is very encouraging. The views expressed by the experts will be seriously considered by my Ministry. I can put up your views if need be, before the cabinet. The suggestions may be considered by the government. I would like to assure you, that any suggestion made by the experts to save Dhaka will be welcomed by the government.

**DTI,** now known as RAJUK, had a master plan in the year 1953. From 1953 till 1995 that master plan, for practical purposes, has not been revised. In 1953 the area of Dhaka was 320 square miles, now we have got an area of 590 square kilometers. Out of 320 square miles, only one third of that area really came under the master plan. At that time our population was less than a million, now it is 10 million.

With UNDP's financial assistance, a fresh master plan is presently underway, to be completed within December this year. There will be lot of changes. To implement the changes we need the support, coordination and cooperation of all the citizens of Dhaka. Until and unless we have real assistance from them, it would be impossible on our part to resolve the problems.



Barrister Rafiqul Islam

The main problem is the lack of coordination among these various authorities in Dhaka. The experts who are working on the master plan are attaching emphasis to coordination of various groups. Another problem emerges when the City Mayor is elected from one group and the government is run by another. The experts might look into this too. The priority of the citizens is the main consideration, not the political consideration. Political consideration should be for the welfare of the inhabitants of Dhaka, nothing else. Then if the Mayor is elected from one group and the central government run by another, there would be no problems.

The other problem is that there are various authorities working in Dhaka. There is my ministry, RAJUK, the City Corporation, WASA which is under the LGD Ministry, gas and electricity under the Energy Ministry and so on. Traffic is mainly the job of the Ministry of Home Affairs. I recently saw a statement of the Honourable Mayor that this traffic should be brought under either the City Corporation or the police authorities so that he can control it. There are many cities in the world where this is done. The authorities may look into this.

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Then there is the traffic problem. If anybody considers the traffic



problem of Dhaka, they shall have to think about the lakhs of rickshaws. If you want to remove rickshaws from Dhaka, you must remember that the rickshaw-puller has a family to feed. So removing rickshaws would affect about 15 lakh people of this country. It is very difficult for any government to sustain the attack to be made by these 15 lakh of people.

I have spoken about the problems. Now I would like to say what the government should do. As I have pointed out, the government wants coordination and cooperation of all the groups. It is aware of the limitation of its resources, particularly about the limitation of land. It wants to handle the matter through good management.

I had an opportunity of going to Singapore to talk to the people who are responsible for the supply of water and electricity. Our system loss is about 56 per cent in water and 40 per cent in electricity. The Singapore authorities do not even know about system loss. They had private organisations running both the electricity as well as the water supply.

If we could manage things properly, we could get rid of 56 per cent system loss in the water sector. We could get rid of 40 per cent system loss in electricity. I think the government is trying, but just trying will not resolve the problem. I would rather like to invite the experts to place suggestions how to resolve these problems. Whatever views are aired during this roundtable conference, will be taken into consideration by my ministry, and if need be, will be raised in the cabinet.

Apart from this master plan, for the first time we have a National Housing Policy put forward by my ministry, and this has some effect on Dhaka City too. In formulating the national housing policy we have said that the government will not build the houses. It is not the function of the government to build houses for private citizens, rather, the government will play the enabling role to help the citizens to build their own houses through proper planning. The government may assist with the planning process.

So until and unless we can formulate a better and more efficient management, get rid of the so-called system loss, and until we are prepared to cooperate with each other, we will not be able to resolve the problem.

I apologize for having to leave because of a cabinet meeting. Before I leave, I assure you that my ministry will examine the opinions put forth and if found relevant, these will be taken up by the ministry.

**MAHFUZ ANAM:** The participants may have direct questions to pose to the minister. Normally we would go around the table before opening up for questions. But as the minister will be leaving, I want him to answer some questions.

**BRIGADIER (RETD.) MOMEN, PRESIDENT REAL ESTATE AND HOUSING ASSOCIATION OF BANGLADESH:** About our problem of land, you have very rightly pointed the constraints. How judiciously are we going to use the existing land? My point is that in every country, more so in Bangladesh where the land constraint is very acute, the government could act as a facilitator and develop the land, maybe not in the prime area,

but in neighbouring places with all the infrastructure as you have said. The government will not build, just give it to the private sector, with your design to keep the costs low. As developers, we are yet to touch upon the bulk of the people. We are really serving the top people, that is my point.



A H M Abdul Momen

**RAFIQ:** It is a very important and interesting point. Those who are private developers, particularly in housing, build the house and sell it, private house starts from any where between 15 lacs to 50 lakh taka. An ordinary citizen cannot think of paying that amount for a house. But how can we reduce the price? The price of land as well as construction material costs are so high. If we are to keep it within the reach of the common people, buying a house should be within one or two lakh taka. If you could develop the house outside Dhaka where the price of land is not so high, the problem could be resolved.

But even if we could build houses

for the landless people and accommodate them there, they do not want to stay there. They say there are no working facilities. We cannot find any jobs there. These are the main difficulties we are facing. The government has undertaken a new project in Yusufganj, which is called Purbachal. This consists of about 7,000 acres of land, and we can possibly allocate land to 30,000 people where we can give some of the land to the private developers who can build high rise buildings. This can resolve part of the problem. We are thinking about earmarking 1000 or 500 acres of land for the private developers who can build low cost houses for low income people.

**MAHFUZ ANAM:** We have Professor Nazrul Islam from Dhaka University.

**Prof Nazrul Islam:** We have heard the Honourable Mayor of Dhaka City demanding cooperation from the ministries of the government with regard to solving traffic and law and order. How has the government taken this?

**RAFIQ:** I have seen this in the newspaper but I have not been directly approached by the Honourable Mayor. Maybe the relevant ministry knows about this. But I feel cooperation between the Mayor and the relevant ministries is essential to resolve these problems. As a minister I can assure you that the government is prepared to assist anybody to improve the traffic situation in Dhaka.

**MAHFUZ ANAM:** It is my great pleasure to welcome the Honourable Mayor of Dhaka City, Hanif Bhai, welcome to you.

**MOHAMMED HANIF:** Bismillah

Rahmaner Rahim. Assalamu alaikum. Today I have been given the chance to speak on the topic SAVE DHAKA for which I have been searching for an opportunity to discuss. I thank Mr. Mahfuz Anam for this.

Dhaka City Corporation is an autonomous body about which I have a



Mohammed Hanif

The first problem is population. According to the latest statistics presented in the parliament, the population of Dhaka city is 86 lacs. Just a little while ago, I was contesting in the election it was 70 lacs. But my problem is not with 86 lacs people. The land area upon which these 86 lac people live is only 345 sq.km. This is a hard fact indeed. Researchers on the subject would say that even with half the number of people, it would be a problem. And even with the 86 lac people, every single day people are streaming in from the villages for mere survival, in search of a living, dreaming of a better life, that Dhaka will provide something for them. But Dhaka can give nothing to my brothers who stream in from the villages with their rosy dreams. They end up plying rickshaws or with a basket looking for job as day labourers.

few words for you all. Whenever an infant is born, the parents or relatives of the child come rushing to the city corporation to have its name registered. And when this same child grows to bear adult and reaches the end of life, the relatives again come rushing to my office straight from the cemetery to register the death. So this life, between birth and death, is very much a part of Dhaka City Corporation.

From the beginning I have tried to identify the problems of Dhaka City Corporation and to pinpoint the solutions. The first problem is population. According to the latest statistics presented in the parliament, the population of Dhaka city is 86 lacs. Just a little while ago, I was contesting in the election it was 70 lacs. But

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If you really want to save Dhaka, this calls for a detailed discussion. It is impossible to save Dhaka without proper planning. I must save my environment. The traffic jams must be controlled. The people living in Dhaka must be given a chance to live. What must I do to achieve this?

During the election I spoke of the footpath hawkers. I admit that this is a problem. I have said that at the moment I would not be able to remove the hawkers from the pavements until I can offer them an alternative arrangement. If I simply evicted the hawkers overnight, how would they survive? I could have evicted them immediately or with even just 24 hours notice, this is still possible. This will just give rise to another problem — the curse of unemployment which can lead to what neither you nor I can ever hope for. So I had requested the Honourable Works Minister Barrister Rafiq to give me land for two purposes. One is to make alternative arrangements for the hawkers, and the other is for political parties to hold their public meetings. Random holding of meetings must be prevented. Simply fixing up a mike, delivering speeches and creating traffic jams cannot be allowed. (So I wanted land for hawkers' rehabilitation and for a specified site for the public meetings of political parties.)

There is another matter. The hawkers whom I allowed to remain on the footpath, trickled onto the streets. I have never condoned this and I shall never say that this should be allowed. Just a week ago I spoke with the police, DC traffic, and with BRT. I asked for their cooperation, said it was their duty to clear up the streets of hawkers and their shops as this obstructed public movement. I suggested to join hands and clear the streets, then we will start on the footpaths. They have assured us of their help and are taking measures accordingly.

Environment is another problem. We must save the inhabitants of Dhaka from pollution. How can this be done single-handedly? Civic awareness must be increased. We always read that a dustbin is needed here or a dustbin is needed there. But when set up, we hear, "Please, not near my house." So these are the practical problems we face. But now we have arranged for a different type of container. We have 20 five ton such containers so far which are picked up and taken away in the evenings. These will be increased. In some places smaller containers will be kept if there is no room for the bigger containers. We are trying to arrange this to keep Dhaka clean.

I have always said that united effort is needed to save Dhaka. I will want assistance and will put forward the proposal that WASA, DESA and even T&T be put under the City Corporation. If anyone feels that this is simply Hanif's ambition for power, then let us have a coordinated body, a joint effort headed by anybody. Drop me if you don't like me, but the work must be done. Do it for the sake of Dhaka City. Mr. Khadem, Chairman of RAJUK, is here, I have spoken with him. I repair a road, Khadem Bhai comes and digs it up. I repair it again, WASA comes and digs it up. I repair it yet again, this time T&T comes along and digs it up.

A few days ago T&T came up with a plan to install 1,30,000 digital telephones in Dhaka City. If I stop this, you all will confront me, asking me what I think I am doing. If these phones are not installed, the funds will be returned. But I also have to look after the road which I have just repaired. So a coordinated body is needed. The road has to be dug up for water, for gas, for telephone. I do realise this. But there must be a specific time. I can give you June to December. Do whatever work you need to do within this time. Then from January to June I will repair Dhaka City beautifully. But you must give your word that you won't touch the roads for the next four years. This will

save money considerably and the hassles of civic life will be avoided, particularly during the monsoons. I hope that the present government pays attention to this and we can go ahead in coordinated efforts, only then we can solve the problems. Otherwise this will be impossible. If things continue as at present, in ten years, many of you sitting here will go off to the village. You will not be able to stay in Dhaka.

My suggestion is that the government must also go for a decentralisation of administration and authority. This will make it unnecessary for those who live in nearby districts of Mymensingh, Keraniganj, Narsinghdi, and so on to come to Dhaka. They can do their work in their own districts. People from Teknaf or Panchagar will not need to come to Dhaka. This accumulation of authority in Dhaka must be dispersed to the districts. If we can proceed with such a system, it will be possible to save Dhaka City, to save the citizens of Dhaka. Thank you.

**MAHFUZ ANAM:** Thank you, Mr. Mayor. I request the participants and observers to pose any direct question to him if they so wish. From Shakti Foundation.

**PARTICIPANT FROM SHAKTI FOUNDATION:** Can a civic body not be created with young students from the university or from ansars, who can create public awareness? I understand the City Corporation has its limitations in extending this kind of activity, so I was thinking would it be possible during the vacations for university students to create little groups, like we have in task forces, and work



Humaira Islam

on solutions to problems like traffic jams and garbage. I think we have problems of attitude and awareness. This could be tackled in the same way. Is there a possibility to have markings on the crossroads so one cannot go beyond that point at a red light, etc. like we see in other countries?

**HANIF:** Yes, it is very much possible, but there is a question of civic awareness. If I cross the margin, what will you do? If the traffic policeman just stands silently, what will you do? There are laws, but there is no system. I need assistance from everyone regarding civic awareness, particularly from the youth front. I call upon all, even political youth fronts irrespective of political affiliation, to come and help us.

**CHAIRMAN, RAJUK:** Mr. Mayor, you said that you had asked the Works Ministry for land to rehabilitate the footpath hawkers. Do you think a bigha of land to rehabilitate the hawkers will solve the problems of Dhaka City? In the past we have seen Banga Bazar and other places set up for the hawkers. But the same volume



Humayun Khadem

of people migrate to the city from the rural areas. It is a continuous process. We must think at a national level about the problem. About political meeting sites, the government has been considering this in the past, like the historical Paltan Maidan.

**HANIF:** Your question about whether we can do away with hawkers completely is rather hypothetical. Which country in the world has no hawkers? It is not as if hawkers exist in a poor country like Bangladesh alone. If you see the developed countries of the world, in Paris and London, there are hawkers there. But they have specified places, specified times. There will be hawkers, but we must remove them from the streets and footpaths and give them an alternative place to do their trade. At least then we can do something to solve this problem.

About the political rally site, I have wanted this and the government too has attempted to arrange it. If they are a bit more sincere in their attempts, this will be a solution to some extent of the traffic jams.

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## Recommendations

The roundtable on 'Save Dhaka' made the following recommendations:

- 1) Bring all government agencies such as WASA, DESA, T&T, Titas Rajuk and traffic and transport authority under a single umbrella, to be headed either by the mayor or some newly created body;
- 2) Make urban planning pro-poor. Without proper focus on the poor, no urban plan will succeed;
- 3) Form an urban coalition council, comprising people having expertise in different sectors to work as a watchdog group. Such a council would approve major projects, stop those which have negative impact and promote democratic culture in planning;
- 4) Launch a massive civic awareness programme so that each and every inhabitant can participate in the running of the city. All information about the city's development should be made available to the city dwellers;
- 5) Hold public debate on the proposed national housing policy;
- 6) Policy of acquisition of land and eviction without rehabilitation should be abandoned and a comprehensive land use plan be formulated;
- 7) Set up an urban-poor bank to allow the poor to save and have access to credit;
- 8) Youth groups and students should be involved in the city cleanliness drives. They should be encouraged to learn about environment issues;
- 9) Air and noise pollution should be checked; and
- 10) Policy for solid wastage management should be formulated. Privatisation of the garbage collection process should be examined.