

Citizens Must Take Responsibility for City Affairs

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that process of consultation. And over the next six months to a year, we arrive at a plan which everyone believes in and wishes to implement. So that is my first proposal.

The second proposal I have is that there should be a residents' association. We need to mobilise the energies, the interests and the concerns of the people, not keep complaining that the government doesn't do this. We have seen that the government is a series of agencies, uncoordinated, without a single voice. The citizens should think of organising themselves, to mobilise the skills that they have to demand a better city and to contribute to a better city.

The last idea I have is to urge the government together with the Mayor, in response to the Mayor's proposal, to set up a coordination committee. You can't locate anyone who is responsible for the overall development of Dhaka. Now it may be difficult politically to have a single person who is the overseer of Dhaka, but certainly there is a mechanism to bring the concerned agencies together to talk to each other and to agree with each other on what needs to be done. It is urgently needed so that the development partners who are willing to put money in can also talk to such an organisation. I know the Chairman of RAJUK says they don't need any assistance from the World Bank, so that is fine. We are concerned and if it were found that some money was needed to improve the roads and the infrastructure, we certainly stand ready to put in significant amounts of money, maybe a thousand crore taka or more, for the development of the city provided there is some coherent plan which we can support and there is a coherent agency able to articulate the needs of the city and can be counted on to respond to those people who are keen to help.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Now we have Ms. Humaira Islam, Executive Director of Shakti Foundation.

HUMAIRA ISLAM: The issues of the poor that have been raised by Prof. Nazrul Islam and by Dr. Kazi Farook, are absolutely crucial if we are thinking about saving Dhaka. Here I will speak on just three points about the issues which concern a woman in the urban perspective.

Access to public transport is absolutely impossible for women in the morning rush hours. If these women have to make it to work on time, whether it is the garment industry or the office, they just can't make it with the men because basically Dhaka is a man's city and a rich man's city. Another thing is a question of security. When women return home at late hours, again public transport becomes a great problem. The second thing is public toilets. Women do face a problem in having access to public toilets. In other countries there are facilities in the supermarkets or public places. But we do not have those here.

The first would be about transport. Access to public transport is absolutely impossible for women in the morning rush hours. If these women have to make it to work on time, whether it is the garment industry or the office, they just can't make it with the men because basically Dhaka is a man's city and a rich man's city. Another thing is a question of security. When women return home at late hours, again public transport becomes a great problem.

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The third thing is housing for single women. These are women who come to Dhaka in search of work and have to work late hours. So housing is also a very important problem. We have some hostels but these are very inadequate.

There are many more issues, but I just wanted to raise these three because these are of really great concern. I think the private sector could come forward here. We would welcome it if the public sector would do something about it, but I think the private sector could play a leading role.

MAHFUZ ANAM: May I now request Mr. Rana of the Asian Development Bank to speak.

MR. RANA: I think the point is that the rapidly worsening problem of urbanisation in Bangladesh, and in Dhaka in particular, has to be tackled now and it has to be tackled comprehensively by all concerned.

The economy of Bangladesh is overwhelmingly agricultural, overwhelmingly rural. But urbanisation is increasing. The level of urbanisation is now 18 to 19 per cent, lower than other South Asian countries. But urban population is increasing at about six per cent, nearly three times that of the national population growth. The population of Dhaka itself is now eight million. There are forecasts that this might triple by the year 2025.

But what has the government done? The government has been fairly limited in its activities. The national housing policy has been approved, urban housing policy has been approved, master plans have been prepared, but there are very fundamental problems in relation to urban governance, in relation to municipal fi-

nance, cost recovery and maintaining infrastructure.

The work of Proshika, of Shakti Foundation is most encouraging. But they are relatively new, located in only a few areas. They need to be expanded greatly.

In relation to donor involvement, my colleague Mr. Landell Mills referred to the comment made by the Chairman of RAJUK. He said that he does not need foreign assistance. That might be true, but we are willing to help. I might mention here that we donors have established a group to discuss urban development issues in Bangladesh. We have had several meetings and have tried to coordinate our activities in relation to helping urban development as development partners in this country. But I note that only three to four per cent of foreign resources that have come to Bangladesh since 1972 have been spent on urban sector projects. The rest has been in rural areas.

In relation to ADB activities in Bangladesh urban problems, I firmly subscribe to the view that rural-urban migration is a symptom, not a disease. The disease has to be addressed in the metropolitan town, in the secondary towns and in the rural areas of Bangladesh. The Bank for its part, has been involved both in Dhaka as well as secondary towns in relation to urban operations. In Dhaka we have two on-going integrated urban services projects. We have the Dhaka flood control project and the Dhaka urban infrastructure project. In the secondary towns we have several integrated services projects. In the future we realise that the plans have to be for the people and the majority of the people are poor. So our main thrust in the future will be in the area of urban poverty.

In many instances, the situation of the urban poor is worse than that of their counterparts in rural areas. Poor people are very credit worthy, they are enterprising and given the opportunity, they will produce. We subscribe to that view. There are 15 million people who are basically left to fend for themselves. So we intend to go very aggressively in the areas of slum improvement, of credit for income and employment generating activities, health services and low income housing for the urban poor.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Now we have Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed of BUET.

DR. NIZAMUDDIN AHMED: I will speak on the safety and security issues of Dhaka City. Dhaka is not a safe city neither does it provide security to its citizenry. While safety refers to protection from accidents, security is assumed to mean safeguarding the people, their possessions and property from planned and intentional attack. In this city it is possible for someone to die from illegal electrical connection, for someone to be mugged in broad daylight yards from a police station, to find yourself at the bottom of a manhole suddenly. In this city taxpayers stay indoors after dark. In this city many have perished in incidents of fire and gas explosions. Road accidents are a common phenomena. Construction workers have fallen off scaffolding. Drainage workers have been buried in sub-terranean works. Children, in search of balloons, have been charred by explosions. Our streets are teeming with killer vehicles, infested with muggers. The unfortunate aspect of this narrative is that we now presume accidents as unavoidable and the lack of security as the natural consequence of modernisation.

But preventive measures can reduce the frequency and the dire consequences of accidents. Dhaka City will remain prone to accidents because it lacks adequate safety inspections. The city does not have the manpower, the mechanism and the technical support required for accident investigations. Vehicles are granted corrupt acceptance certificates. There is no proper publicity on television and the print media to promote safety, there is no safety training by law. Fire prevention precautions are almost non-existent.

Safety can be promoted by regulations, codes, specifying the duties of persons concerned, rules for medical supervision, standardisation, technical and medical research, teaching safety as a subject in schools, colleges and universities, providing financial incentives to promote accident prevention, etc. With reference to security, it can

be said that with the increasing number and height of boundaries walls in Dhaka City, the provision of grills to secure any conceivable opening in a building, the deserted streets after dark, the fear of strangers, all indicate that the Dhakaites are fearful of dacoits. Most crimes have gone unrecorded and unpunished, contributing to people's apprehension and notion of security. The citizens are held hostage to the declining law and order situation in this otherwise burgeoning metropolis. The city is sadly lacking in detecting offences and penalising the offenders. This has encouraged the frenzied growth of law-breakers.

Good relationship amongst neighbours can reduce crime. Even in England there is a government sponsored project called the Neighbourhood Watch where the neighbours keep an eye on the neighbourhood and inform the police or each other of any suspicious activities. This works well in Old Dhaka, but efforts may be taken to institutionalise this practice. It is important to improve our police force. Presently it is common to believe that taking matters to the police will only complicate the situation. The youth should be encouraged to undertake community service to learn life skills such as decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, effective communication and coping with emotions and stress. The World Health Organisation supports a programme for school children which provides lessons that avert high risk behaviour like drug use, alcohol use, sexual activities, suicide, crime, vandalism and violence. We need to apply this programme now.

However, in our quest for security, we must be careful not to curtail human freedom. It is pointless to allow the security system to destroy the way of life it seeks to protect. Let the walls come down, let the grills

and services. We have to take this into consideration at first.

I noted that our Honourable Minister had to leave us in a hurry. Our Mayor too left. Yet we had wanted to submit our ideas on Save Dhaka to these people. This means our seminars and symposiums will simply remain in pen on paper. What is the use of talking so much? There is need for action. For action we need a group. We need a pressure group of professionals who will monitor, who will observe and keep the pressure on.

MAHFUZ ANAM: I fully endorse this view and I am always ready to play my part from the media side.

An observer: The title of this roundtable Save Dhaka indicates that it is in poor health, that it needs to be operated upon immediately. But the discussions so far have dwelt upon long term plans. I feel there are two requirements - immediate action and long term plans.

One problem is the location of our industries, the booming garment industry in particular. We must see how these workers stay, where they stay and how they go to work. These things must be looked into carefully, diversified. This will help the traffic problem to some extent.

Another point is environment. No one mentioned the pollution emitted by vehicles. The diesel used in our country has one per cent sulphur, though elsewhere in the world this is .20 or .30 per cent. If the vehicles are maintained properly, this will also reduce pollution. If the existing agencies are a little more active, this can be brought under control. Television can show programmes on road safety, the traffic police can be given training. All this will reduce the problems.

AFROZA AHMED, PLANNING CONSULTANT, DMD PROJECT: I just want to highlight some points of the national housing policy which is being prepared. The minimum plot size for the urban poor, as approved by RA-

jects which will have a negative impact on society. This council will have no political affiliation and will have highest authority for physical development of the city. They will be able to interfere with projects, both private and public, if the council considers it necessary.

AFROZA AHMED: We need immediately implementable action, the effects of which will be long term. Obviously Dhaka can't be saved by just a handful. We need participation from every walk of life. I therefore propose that students at primary level should be made aware of the environment, about how Dhaka is being polluted, maybe through simple things like picking up polythene bags or things like that. Little drops of water make an ocean, so if we can save Dhaka by creating awareness at that level, then when they are adults, they are that much more aware. Our schools do not have anything in the curriculum on environmental awareness and I think that would be very instrumental in saving Dhaka in the future.

NAQUIB HASAN, EXECUTIVE ENGINEER OF THE GOVERNMENT: Land use planning must be stressed. Each space must be used to the optimum. What is on paper is not being implemented. There is zoning of residential areas, industrial areas, commercial areas, but this must be more specified with the optimum use of every inch of land.

Then there is the institutional aspect. I feel that a metropolitan government, like in Manila, should be looked into. The sectoral policy planning in the Planning Commission should be decentralised and handed over to the various city corporations.

Another point is that solid waste management is not being carried out in a controlled way in Dhaka City. Only collection and disposal is being carried out, with no treatment of the daily 3000 tons. Ground water pollu-

tion like the Calcutta Improvement Trust which the British government made because they did not trust the local people. They wanted it in the hands of the bureaucracy. In Pakistan, this was the Dhaka Improvement Trust. Who are the people of DIT? The bureaucracy. The bureaucracy cannot administer Dhaka, the people must do this. The whole power has to go to the elected body, the city government. RAJUK Chairman made many proposals, but what is the process? We don't want it. Gulshan was made as a service scheme for Tejgon industrial area. What has happened to Gulshan? It has become a posh area. So all their plans are to acquire land, divide it and give it as plots. This is social injustice to take land from a poorer person and give it to a richer person. Even if it improves the picturesque quality of the city, we do not want that. We want no acquisition of land. It is a free democratic country. If you want land, buy it. BDR has to go, the cantonment has to go from here. This will give a big track of land for the development of Dhaka City and the people.

Policies should be formulated so that slums and squatters cannot be evicted without rehabilitation. The bureaucracy has never approved of this. They say they will try to acquire as little as possible, be as least cruel as possible, but they will never pass a law saying the squatters cannot be evicted without rehabilitation. So I want to stress these three points, that there should be a city government, there should be no acquisition of land for housing and the BDR and cantonment should leave the city. This was another colonial aspect. They had to be in the city to rule by arms so there would be no uprising. That is not the situation now, so they have no business here anymore. Another point is that there should be no eviction.

There should also be greater involvement of Bangladesh Television in the issue of Save Dhaka.

Mahfuz Anam: I would like to express my sincere thanks on behalf of The Daily Star to all of you, the teachers and professors of BUET and also the Vice-Chancellor for the use of this facility. And our sincere thanks to the Post Graduate Centre also, Dr. Mobasser Ali and others who have helped us.

Many people have expressed the fear that nothing follows the many seminars and discussions. Now, what will happen after this discussion depends on us. This is not a government organisation, you are intellectuals, professionals, we are a private newspaper. If nothing else happens, you

shah, which would not possible because Gulshan didn't exist then, then I have to stay there. But why? The first thing to do is divide Dhaka into ten cells. Every cell should be self-sufficient. People interested in universities, whether students, teachers or other employees, they should live around the universities. This is a sort of replanning.

MAHFUZ ANAM: But can you force people to move if they don't want to move?

ALI ASGHAR: You don't have to force. If you make arrangements, they will move themselves. You have to first build the infrastructure. You should make it easy for people to move out of their old houses to find a place near about their workplaces. If I have a flat in Gulshan, why cannot I sell it and buy one near my office? Some mobility has to be given. Our ideas are too fixed. The houses, workplaces, shopping centres, schools all should be within one sq. mile.

MAHFUZ ANAM: I think this is a bit too idealistic. You are talking about a city that is already there, growing at six per cent per year. There is the problem of urban migration, of slums.

AN OBSERVER: The question is, how to increase community governance. Dhaka has a tradition in this aspect. That is reflected in the old system of Sardars. We cannot revive that system. This is now metropolitan Dhaka. We come from all over. My parents have come from Khulna. We have to see how this functions in other metropolitan cities of the world.

If you see the election manifesto of the candidates who contested for the office of mayor, you will see that they all have goals, but do not have the power to carry out these because when the British handed over this power to a local person, they gave him the responsibility just to sweep the roads, to control the sweepers and to look after the street lights. Law and order was in the hands of the DC or the Deputy Magistrate.

There are 90 wards in Dhaka City with a ward commissioner each. If Dhaka is taken as a unit, then these 90 ward commissioners and the Mayor form a parliament. In that case, some mandate must be given as there is no such mandate. About law and order, at present all the Mayor can do is keep in contact with the police. About the roads, as soon as a road is made, someone else comes and digs it up. We will have to reformulate our structure with these 90 wards commissioners. Citizen committees can work as pressure groups to float a particular topic. Someone just suggested to abolish rickshaws, but I think rickshaws are most efficient. Baby taxis, auto rickshaws are the most disturbing form of transport. If anything is to be abolished it should be these because of the space they occupy and the pollution they create. Bigger and more buses must be launched.

metropolitan city. There should be more use of cycles. Honking of horns also disrupts the environment. The haor in the Sabujbagh area should be deepened to preserve water for the city since we have problems with water.

TANVIR NAWAZ: I just want to emphasize some points I made earlier. The Daily Star is doing a wonderful job in organising these roundtables. The next one I may suggest should be specifically on the governance or management of Dhaka, where we can take up the institutional structure of Dhaka and how Dhaka should be run, the coordination and so on. As things are, we can spend a lot of money and not get anywhere.

The second point is about an urban management structure. We should encourage the government and the agencies to set up a coordination council of the various agencies. We should not wait for the Dhaka structure plan to emerge in another three years, half a year or whatever. Counter to that, we should also establish an urban coalition. This can be a coalition of urban poor, professionals, politicians, all coming together.

MAHFUZ ANAM: How do we get started on this urban coalition idea?

Prof. Mubashar Ali: Dhaka being the metropolitan centre does not have identification as other cities of Bangladesh. For example, in Chittagong there already is a coalition group which has raised different issues at different times. This is also true in Khulna.

Ali Asghar, BUET: The minister said that the government is elected by one group and the City Corporation by another. Now these people, in the government, in the Corporation, always think in terms of groups. They have lost the meaning of democracy. We citizens do not belong to any group. We vote for somebody because we think he is more efficient. If we find that he is not efficient, we vote for somebody else. The government when elected is the government of all the people, not only of the group. Same with the Corporation. If the hawkers have voted for the Corporation, the Corporation will think it has to save them. Or if the government feels that a certain area has supported them, they go all out to develop that particular area. But the meaning of democracy must be clear to those people who are benefitting most out of the concept. If we don't understand the exchange of ideas, the meaning of democracy, it is pointless to have meetings and associations.

The second thing is about communication. Simple technical planning can solve the problem. It is not more money or more vehicles or more wide roads. In the morning you find countless people coming from the Gulshan area to their offices in the city. And people from the city go towards Gulshan or Banani, also going to their offices. Why could their residences not be around their offices? If my grandfather made a house in Gul-



Dr. P. Rana



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be unnecessary, let us walk safely on moonlit nights and broad daylight.

MAHFUZ ANAM: Thank you very much. We have finished going around. Our discussion continues and the floor is open to debate. We would like to stress on what to do. We have some very positive suggestions. One is a citizens' coalition. One is a coordination council of all the bodies.

I should take it for granted that I will be able to use the park built in my area. The City Corporation cannot just place its sweepers there, or simply keep it under lock and key. Then, since I directly pay conservancy tax, the roads must be swept. A road cannot be left unswept for the entire year. The Mayor must first see whether he has done these things, the things which he had declared in his manifesto. Only then can it be seen whether his corporation can be given charge of the law and order system, or traffic. The Dhaka City Corporation, till today, has not constructed a single road longer than 40 feet. It must be seen whether the Mayor and the 90 elected ward commissioners have the capability to bear these additional responsibilities. The municipality in the fifties would spray the roads with water, would sweep the roads. Now, in the 90s, the roads are only being swept in Gulshan, Baridhara and Banani.

I feel that just as the citizens of the city have their rights, they also have their responsibilities. They should pay directly to the City Corporation or to any agency. I don't think I have the right to refuse to pay a single paisa to the city, while littering it the whole day long. So we must pay direct taxes. If we have the right to reside in Dhaka, we have to take some responsibility too, even if to pay a nominal amount of taxes.

DR. AMIN: Dhaka City still looks beautiful at times. If you take a drive at midnight, the city looks quiet neat and clean. The footpath dwellers are not blocking your path, the throngs of people are not overflowing the roads. But we have to do something. It is true that we all must contribute towards the city. We can expect this from a human being. By human being I mean someone who lives like a human, with human dignity. But we cannot expect this from a person who has not had the chance to live as a human being. These people live in tiny spaces, no sanitation, no water, nothing. They are inaccessible during the rains. You cannot expect any money from them for basic amenities

JUK. is half katha, about 30 sq. metres. But 76 per cent of the urban poor cannot even afford 20 sq. metres. So does that mean they will not have any place in the housing policy? They will have no land? The affordability must be looked into.

SAJEDUR RAHMAN, HEALTH FOR ALL: No representative of WASA, DESA or the police has turned up today. They are never eager to attend such seminars.

I want to talk about health. If someone has a heart attack in Jatrabari, how is he to reach Medical College Hospital? How will you reach a critical patient in Inslambagh slum, where an ambulance has no access? We have ignored health and security. We have pondered on housing and road planning. But the main problem of housing is RAJUK itself. There are very few houses in Dhaka City constructed according to RAJUK plans. Some houses have not kept the required space around the house, have not left the specified amount of distance from the road. Some have submitted plans for a two-storey house but have built four stories. Then there is the matter of land allocation. If I am from the higher middle or upper class, I can easily have two or three plots allocated to me in Dhaka City under various names. This poses as no problem. We are worrying about the lower income groups. There are laws, but no enforcement of the laws. There are more accusations against RAJUK. A hotel like Sundarban has been built in Dhaka City without any plan. You often read in the paper of buildings tilting over to one side. We don't know the reasons behind this, but they do have RAJUK's approval.

Finally, we should pay attention to four points in order to save Dhaka, to save Bangladesh. We must have political will, accountability, commitment and planning. Whether I am a government official, a teacher, a citizen of Bangladesh I have to be accountable.

AN OBSERVER: I have a proposal for the formation of a city council consisting of a number of citizens, each of whom has some expertise, high standing and credibility in the society. These experts can be from among architects, planners, engineers, ecologists and so on. This council will approve all important projects affecting city planning and growth. It will not finance or implement any project but will guide and maintain a balance of growth in the city and will particularly stop all pro-

duction is being caused by this uncontrolled dumping. Priority must be given here.

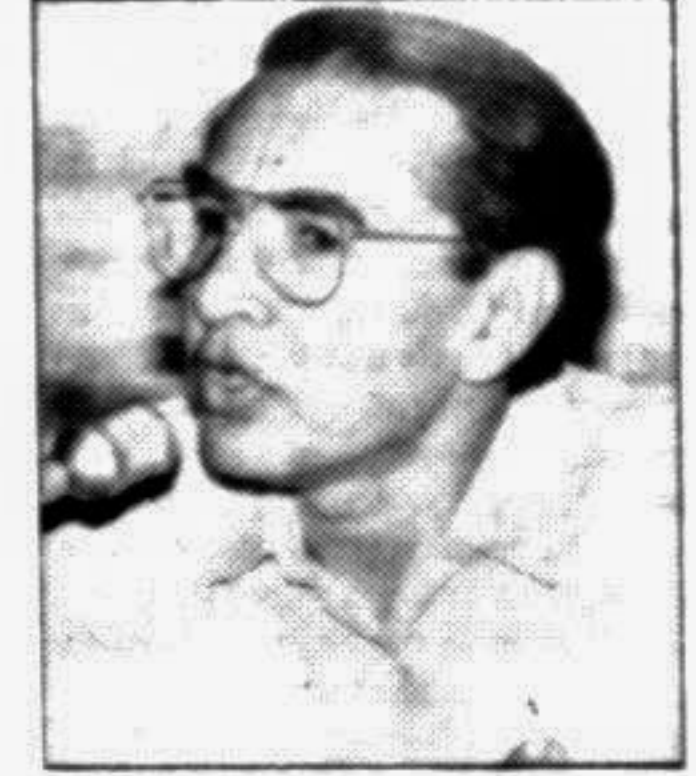
Industries are sporadically sprouting up, particularly in Hazaribagh, discharging highly polluted elements into the water. The municipality is giving permission for these tanneries, pharmaceuticals along the rivers Balu and Turag. Our drinking water being sold in bottles is collected from these rivers. Where industrial development is taking place in the cities, there should be legislative and other motivational aspects so that these industries build their own waste water treatment facilities. Then our river water quality can be controlled. The Saidabad Treatment Plant being planned will have significantly increased expenses if the water pollution increases.

Air pollution is bad too. Tests show the air is only at an acceptable point in Lalmatia area. Checks should be run. Then there is the drainage problem. Natural drainage must be maintained for which the low lands have to be protected. The urban poor must be brought into consideration.

AL-AMIN, PLANNER, DMD PROJECT: The discussion shows that Dhaka is proceeding towards an alarming situation. Planned urbanisation is needed to save Dhaka. We must admit that town planning is not our cultural practice. Naturally we tend to ignore this, we block our drainage channels and so on. We must ensure that the public is aware of what developments in the city are taking place. Then the people will be more conscious and town planning will be gradually a part of our culture.

AN OBSERVER: The municipality is a colonial process, formed first in 1848 as Dhaka City Council and later the city corporation. The responsibility of this body was to clean the roads and keep the roads lit. No modern municipality can run this way. It has literally no power. The British government did not give this power because they did not want to give power to the elected body. I think institutional development is the most important. We need a city government with all powers. This exists in other capital cities, in Delhi, in Washington. Dhaka should have a city government with full power so that all other agencies are under it. WASA should be under the city government, electric supply should be under city government.

As for RAJUK, it is no organisation at all. It is another colonial prod-

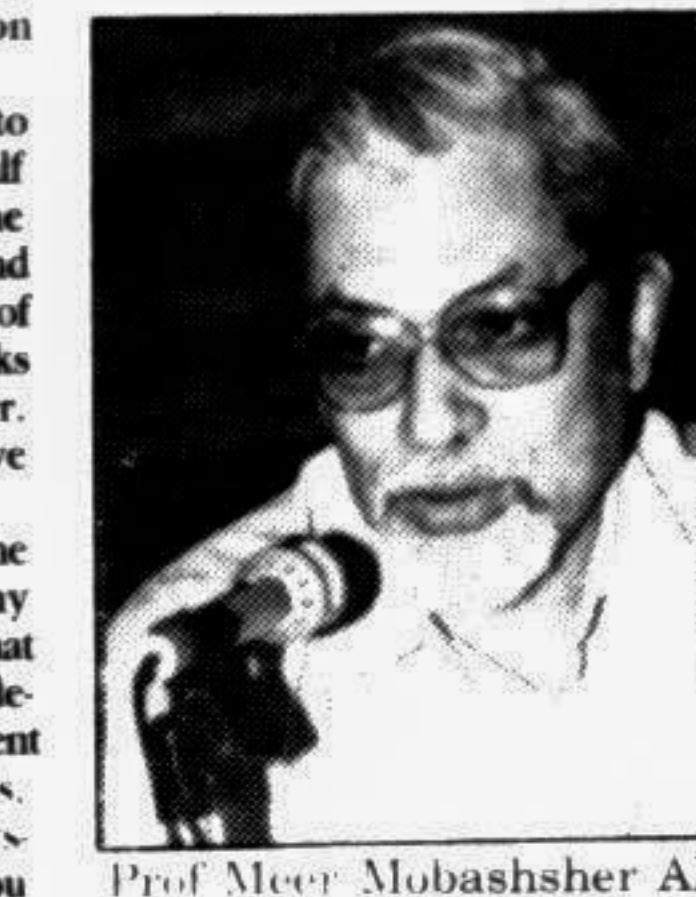


Mahfuz Anam

Many people have expressed the fear that nothing follows the many seminars and discussions. Now, what will happen after this discussion depends on us. This is not a government organisation, you are intellectuals, professionals, we are a private newspaper. If nothing else happens, you and The Daily Star can make a coalition and do something. We can keep on writing and making suggestions, making waves. Some people ask, what do you mean by Save Dhaka. Is Dhaka on the verge of destruction? Here you will have to give us a bit of a journalistic license. Dhaka is not on the verge of destruction yet, though Dhaka is in a serious crisis. But we can immediately start talking about the problems. When people like you write articles in The Daily Star, and we publish photographs and we interview people on the problems, then this gradually becomes a national agenda. We focus a whole session on RAJUK, one whole session on DESA, one whole session on WASA. We can draw alternative plans bringing the poor inside, their problems, their possibilities. I think that some very important suggestions have been floated here. Talking about environmental issues in primary education. The responsibilities of the citizens. Are the poor the problem or the solution? Rickshaws are always identified as a problem but I think they are really doing a magnificent service to the citizens.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Let me assure you that this is our first step, we want to carry this on throughout 1995. Till the end of 1995 we want to raise as much noise on this issue as possible. We want to keep our elected leaders accountable, and this being an election year in a sense, I think we can force a lot of commitment. We can make Awami League, BNP, say something about the urban situation. Let them have it in the election manifestos. We can create some sort of a pressure. Activism I think is the answer to everything. Thank you very much.



Prof. Meer Mobashsher Ali