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Down to Earth

Changing Urban Fabric of Old Dhaka

By A S M Nurunnabi

The urban fabric of old Dhaka seems to carry some elements of historic times. Some of these elements include narrow passages between contiguous structures, definitive boundary demarcations, separate commercial areas, growth of mohallas, and inward residential quarters. Since the days of the Mughals, for reasons of commerce or other factors, historic Dhaka used to wear a new look every time there had been a change of ruler. As a result, we find still extant a good number of notable monuments. It is true that those who used to live in the sixties and seventies in the old part of the city may find notable changes in this part in the nineties. Yet there are some aspects of civil life which had hardly undergone changes in present times. For examples, the inadequacies in infrastructural facilities pose a serious problem. In the opinion of keen observers, the greatest anomalies in the urban fabric of old Dhaka have been created by the pre-existing road network and the patterns of old housing units. In the absence of forward-looking planning for this part of the city, the existing maladies continue unabated.

The old part of the city, partly on account of its historical legacy, suffers from intricate and vexed problem of traffic congestion. It is understood that Rajdhani Unnayan Karti-paksha (Rajuk) is due to take up a project under which more than 1,000 lanes and by-lanes will be widened. It is the earnest hope of the residents of old Dhaka that a fair proportion of these lanes and by-lanes in that part of the city will be covered under the project. The narrow width of these lanes and by-

lanes was not much of a problem when that area's population was small and the traffic thinner. But now the alleys are far too inadequate to cope with the pressure of mounting traffic. The Dhaka city seems to be gasping for breath with a load of nine million people. Sixty per cent of these people do not belong to old Dhaka; they have come from different areas of the country in pursuit of their various vocations. In the process of rapid urbanisation, old Dhaka has fallen victim to stifling congestion of living space. Open spaces which once met the demands of a low-density population have been gradually shrinking. The once well-known parks of old Dhaka are now under encroachment by anti-social elements.

Some good schools with sound past traditions are located in this area. On account of difficulties in getting easy access to such institutions, their former good image has lately considerably suffered. The same may be said in respect of medicare facilities available in this part of the city. A single government hospital and a municipal clinic can hardly be considered adequate for a large segment of population in this area.

When we proceed along the main streets of old Dhaka, we notice a predominance of commercial buildings. Most of such buildings are more than two-storied high. This gives the impression that the dwellers in this part of the city give greater priority to commercial considerations. As a result, a large number of small factories and manufacturing units have been set up even within limited space available. These manufacturing

'Make Feb 10 demonstration a success'

Book Fair opens today

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campus because of her automatic activities."

Earlier in 1996, when Awami League was in the opposition, the student wing of the AL, Bangladesh Chhatra League, also made the same threat. Begum Khaleda Zia, the then PM, came to the campus to inaugurate the fair despite the BCL's threat.

Police, on January 31, 1996 had attacked Jagnan Hall during a clash with the BCL activists in which more than 200 students were injured, to ensure safe entrance of the then PM.

A tense situation was prevailing on the DU campus yesterday as the activists of JCD and Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student wing of ruling Awami League, organised separate processions and rallies. JCD organised the procession and rally protesting the planned visit of the PM and called to resist the PM from opening the fair while the BCL's procession and rally welcoming the PM's visit.

Additional police forces have been deployed on the cam-

Anup Chetia

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Chetia, said to be the secretary general of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), was arrested along with two others, identified as Lakhi Prasad Goswami and Babul Sharma, from a flat in the city under Mohammadpur thana on December 21, 1997.

Chetia is charged with illegal entry into the country, possessing foreign currency and holding Bangladeshi passports illegally. The two others were charged with illegal entry and stay in Bangladesh.

Indian nationals

From page 1

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They beat up the villagers mercilessly, resulting in 10 injured.

On receiving the news, the other villagers rushed to the spot and launched a counter-attack. They snatched one SLR from one of the BSF members and chased them across the border.

A tense situation prevailed in the area throughout the night.

The villagers of Dior-Khildirup fled their homes with cattle and other belongings and took shelter in Rajshahi city.

A flag meeting was held this morning on the Indian territory of Khildirup. The snatched rifle was returned to the BSF. BDR Battalion Commander Lt Col Joinal Abedin said. The situation at Dior-Khildirup is returning to normal following the flag meeting and both sides decided to maintain peace in the border area, the commander added.

It was also alleged that some vested quarters had illegally took possession of others' lands in the area. They could not produce proper documents before the authority and the compensation would be accounted for the actual owners.

This is why, the vested quarters are resisting the land acquisition process, the sources said. Moreover, those quarters have managed the local politicians to oppose the acquisition of land.

At least 15 persons of the same village were injured in an attack by the Indian nationals on Tuesday last.

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