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# Down to Earth

## Aspects of City Scenario

By A S M Nurunnabi

A city's streets present a kaleidoscopic scenario, the sequences of which may be interesting, funny, strange or poignant. This is perhaps stating the obvious, for life itself is a panorama of endless variety of things.

A few scenes in the city's life may be depicted which are often taken for granted in our day-to-day existence. It is generally thought that our people are fond of political meetings and rallies. This may seem obvious from the large throngs of people who assemble to hear speakers at public meetings. There is another aspect of this interest, though on a much smaller scale. There are some people in the city who consider the price of a newspaper somewhat high for their lean purse. For such avid, yet hard-up people keen to read a newspaper, facilities exist, though at different spots in the city in the form of newspaper pastes pasted on walls.

Their existence may be noticed, among other points, at the junction of New Elephant Road and Mirpur Road, near Science Laboratory, Jigatola bus stand, the place near the typists' shade on Topkhana Road opposite the Press Club, the corner where the erstwhile Dainik Bangla office stood in Motijheel. You will always find a motley crowd of people in front of such places.

Craving their necks over the shoulders of their fellow-readers, they try to satiate their thirst for daily news. This presents a refreshing picture of a section of inquisitive readers, who, though bereft of the means to buy a newspaper, are unflagging in their quest for information. This redeeming feature of some sort in the hectic rush of urban life needs further encouragement from newspaper managements.

Another aspect of city scenario lies in the existence of many so-called community centres in the city. There was a

time when social functions like weddings, birthday parties, wedding anniversaries, akika, etc. used to be held within the four walls of one's house or in pandals set up in close proximity to home. Where the number of guests is small, such functions still continue indoors. But such occasions are fewer now and the invited guests are large in numbers.

This has given rise to the new phenomenon of hiring community centres. The present trend is to choose any of the community centres dotting the city as venues to hold important social functions. This trend originated not many years ago. Now the number of community centres around the city has proliferated on account of the greater demand for such social gatherings. In many parts of the city most of the centres are owned by private individuals.

In some particular localities, Dhanmondi Residential Area, for example, some well-known centres draw business throughout the month. The peak season is, however, winter and the dull time is the month of Ramadan, for obvious reasons. The present trend is to fit the halls of many of the community centres with air-conditioners to attract customers in summer. In a populated city like Dhaka, there is always a steady demand for such places, so much so that it is necessary to book your requirement well in advance particularly in respect of the more popular high-profile venues.

Such places can be booked either for the day or for a night. For functions in the night, the charge is somewhat more because of illuminations. In general, the basic rent for such places range from Tk. 7,000/- to Tk. 10,000/- for a day for the AC-fitted ones. With this is added the charge for hiring furniture, crockery and cutlery, service charge for cooks, bear-

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There are also a good number of community centres established in different wards of the City Corporation. They are limited in space with rather poor facilities and circumscribed parking space. As the rent for the City Corporation's community centres is more affordable for many as compared to the private ones, they are mostly patronised by people of moderate means in surrounding areas.

There are also a number of community centres near residential government colonies in the city. The rent for these places is less than that charged for private community centres and also offers greater facilities. Though these are mostly patronised by residents of government colonies, outsiders also make use of them because of the favourable terms offered.

All in all, leasing of community centres in the private sector for social functions seems to be a steady and lucrative business. Because of the profitability of this business perhaps, many entrepreneurs are in favour of constructing more such places in Dhaka in preference to residential houses.

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