



The Portuguese were the first among Europeans to step into Dhaka lured by its wealth aiming at only doing business. They set up many Khuthi (structures) here. However, it was the British who stayed in Dhaka for long. There was no relation between the Portuguese in Dhaka and those in Arakan and Swandip. Those in Dhaka came during Shayesta Khan's regime and set up homes at Sripur.

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Diseases make jail a living hell

MIZANUR KHAN

Most inmates at the Dhaka Central Jail (DCJ) are exposed to serious health hazards with its population far exceeding its capacity.

Prisoners at the country's oldest jail often suffer from tuberculosis, jaundice, peptic ulcer, diarrhoea, heart and skin related diseases etc., believed to be consequences of the unhygienic living conditions.

DCJ Superintendent Meer Maksud Hossain acknowledged the health crisis in the jail and said that it was impossible to prevent diseases simply because of the sheer number of excess inmates.

"If five people are crammed into a cell designed for one, diseases are bound to spread," said Hossain.

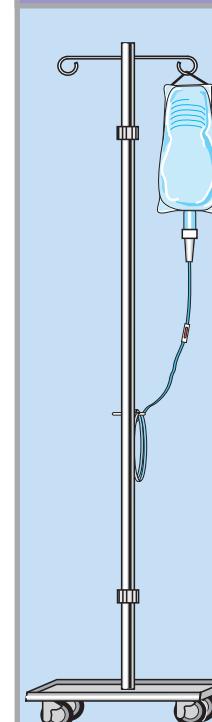
The Dhaka Central Jail has a capacity of 2,650 but at present accommodates more than 11,000 convicted, charged or detained individuals.

A source informed that the health situation inside the prison has become so serious that nearly 500 inmates on an average has to visit the hospital everyday. The hospital is also ill equipped to handle the rush of patients.

There are only four doctors and a single nurse to attend some 150 inpatients and 350 outpatients each day.

There is no gynaecologist for the 300-odd female prisoners.

Health problems in Dhaka Central Jail



Common diseases

- Skin i.e. scabies
- Heart ailments
- Tuberculosis
- Peptic ulcer
- Jaundice
- Diarrhoea

Number of inmates 11000

Number of beds 150	
Daily outpatients	350
Daily inpatients	150

Doctors 4, Nurse 1

Cases of physical injuries not included

STAR GRAPHICS

One DCJ health official said on condition of anonymity, that the lady doctor in charge of the day-care centre usually looks after the sick women inside the prison.

There are 34 children at the day-care centre who have been placed under the Extended

Programme on Immunisation (EPI).

The jail hospital has 150 beds. But according to the superintendent, 300 patients are found admitted there at any given time. "Because of the lack of space, many patients are kept on the

floor. We can not help it," said Hossain.

Insiders allege that doctors are not available round the clock. Drug-addicts are reportedly treated as normal patients as there is no special arrangement for them.

Ujjal, a recently released prisoner claimed that there were no genuine patients at the jail hospital.

"Notorious criminals in connivance with the medical and security officers stay there for the comfort. Anyone who can spend

Tk 2,000 a week can stay in the hospital," said Ujjal.

Doctors denied the allegations. Jail officials say that anyone released from the prison invariably goes home carrying germs in his body.

The state of accommodation has become the topic of sarcastic jokes among inmates. Talking to this correspondent, some claimed that they just didn't have enough space to lie down on the floor.

"We sleep on the floor in the manner in which files are kept on a shelf or Hilsha fishes are left one partially over another on a plate for sale in the market," said one detainee adding that these cells are known as 'Hilsha File' to the inmates.

"For going to the toilet at night, one has to jump over cell-mates. Two persons have to sleep in a space with barely one-foot width. You can't change your lying position before you wake up in the morning," the inmate said.

The blankets that are given to the prisoners to use both as a cover and a pillow are hardly ever washed said inmates. These blankets are believed to be one of the main reasons for almost all the captives suffering from some form of skin disease.

There is acute water scarcity inside the jail. The supply that is available is good enough for only 250 to 300 people to take bath. The wash rooms are always packed with jostling prisoners. Some said that they take shower once a week.

"An elected government cannot be removed unconstitutionally and solely by threats."

 -- Khaleda Zia
Prime Minister

Tells a rally at Chatkhil in an oblique reference to AL's April 30 ultimatum to the government to step down, on April 7.

Source: Prothom Alo.

"It seems that Awami League is out to pick a quarrel. In that case BNP will also throw a counter-programme."

 -- Abdus Salam
General Secretary of City BNP

Reacting to AL programme to lay a siege to Hawa Bhaban, on April 9.

Source: Prothom Alo.

"A single announcement has shaken the foundation of the government. This is unprecedented."

 -- Sheikh Hasina
AL president and Leader of the Opposition

Tells newsmen at Mawa replying to queries on Awami League's April 30 ultimatum to the government, on April 6.

Source: Prothom Alo.



"If the government sacks workers in the name of golden handshake, then they will also bid farewell to this government with a golden handshake."

 -- Sajeda Chowdhury
AL presidium member

Tells protest meeting of the Jatiya Sramik League, on April 5. Source: Prothom Alo.

"The situation is such that gold turns copper when it comes in contact with this government."

 -- Badiul Alam Majumder
Country Director, Bangladesh Hunger Project

Remarks while talking to Borer Kagoj, on April 8.

"There are so many plainclothes policemen here that you cannot separate them from the people."

 -- Salauddin
Assistant Police Commissioner

Tells Borer Kagoj while on duty at Bangabandhu Avenue, on April 7.



City fathers sleep as streetlights burn at dawn

The excess lighting of 1,000 streetlights needs 40,000kw an hour and costs Tk 90,000

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Streetlights that should be put off at dawn are often seen on even an hour after daybreak and are switched on almost an hour before dusk in apparent neglect of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

The DCC is not concerned about the electricity waste, although more than 300 DCC workers have been assigned to monitor the street lighting.

Atiar Rahman, the executive engineer for Azimpur region of Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (Desa), said the excess lighting of 1,000 streetlights needs 40,000kw an hour and costs Tk 90,000. The DCC has installed 84,000 streetlights across the city and the excess lighting brings about a loss of Tk 75.6 lakh an hour.

On the other hand, there are no streetlights at some important residential spots, which makes daily life insecure amid law and order downside.

"The DCC does not care about this. We live in fear when there is no elec-

tricity. Residents are scared of dark street corners. Agang assaulted a man down our lane last week," said Sharafat Ali, an NGO worker, who lives close to the Iraqi graveyard in Old Dhaka.

The residents of Shahjahan Road in Mohammadpur and some parts of Lalmatia are facing the same problem without street lighting.

"Electricity waste shows the sheer irresponsibility of the DCC. It's a waste of public funds. Authorities have to be careful about it," said Professor Kazi Abdul Mannan of the mass communication and journalism department at Dhaka University.

People suffer for lack of electricity in summer. While the Power Development Board (PDB) cannot ensure electricity for all the systems loss in the sector is intolerable, said a student.

"Only 15 percent of the population have electricity and we cannot afford to waste electricity day after day," said Sirajus Salekin of Bangladesh University of Engineering and

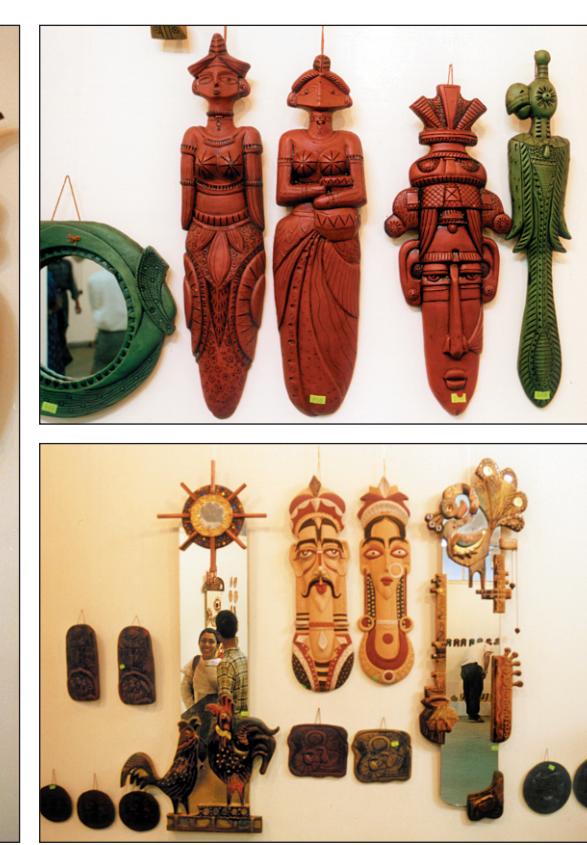
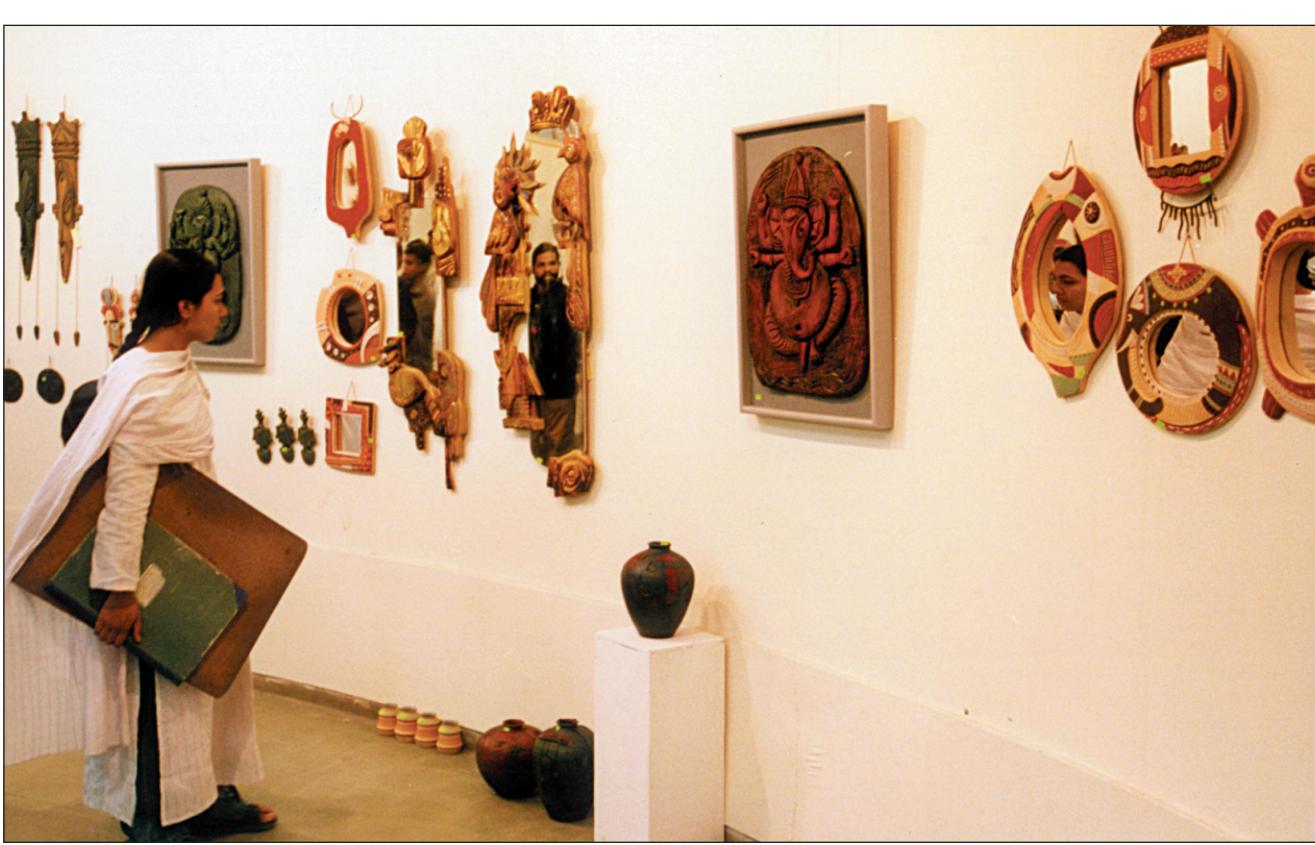
Technology.

"The stretch of roads from Gabtali to the Science Laboratory crossing remain lit with streetlights until late morning," said a resident of Gabtali. "Streetlights in all areas are more or less kept on until morning," he added.

"The lack of manpower to handle switch boxes is another problem. Each person has to handle around 40-50 switch boxes and each box controls 30 to 35 streetlights. So they cannot complete their duty before late morning," Executive Engineer (electricity) Zafar Ahmed reasoned out.

"Another reason is the shortage of inspectors. So the monitoring cannot be done appropriately. But when we receive complaints about streetlights, we take proper action," Ahmed said.

On the shortage, DCC Superintendent Engineer Aminul Huq said: "I cannot talk about it without the permission of authorities."



CERAMICS AND
WOOD WORKS
ON SHOW

The fourth ceramics and wood art exhibition, organised by Vertical, is being held at the Zainul Gallery of the Institute of Fine Arts. The two-week long show will continue till April 22 and remain open to public from 12 noon to 8 pm everyday.