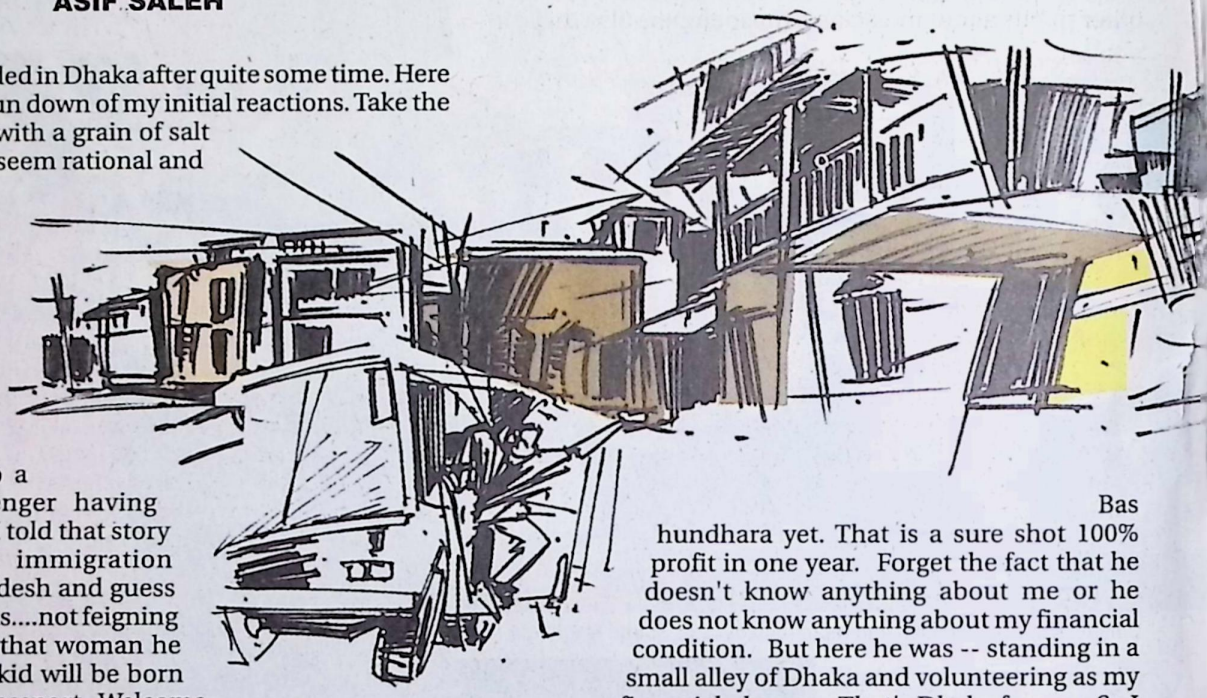
Ode to Dhaka on the Homecoming Day

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Today I landed in Dhaka after quite some time. Here is a brief run down of my initial reactions. Take the reactions with a grain of salt as they may not seem rational and all emotional.

After a brief unexpected stop over in Berlin, I arrived this morning 5 hours delayed. Berlin stop-over was due to a pregnant passenger having complications. I told that story to the curious immigration officer in Bangladesh and guess what his reply was....not feigning any concern for that woman he says...that lucky kid will be born with a German passport. Welcome to Dhaka the city of the passport fetishers! Zia airport was better organised than the Heathrow terminal of British Airways. I am finishing off some shopping for Eeshita (shutir shari) and Anahita(she wanted lal churi ;)) today and then want to jump into business. Dhaka is supposed to be vacation but ever since Drishtipat, the social organisation that I run on my free time, it has never felt like one. But it never feels like work either.

Every one here is complaining about load shedding. Our avid BNP fans in the family my two khalas, has officially declared that they will vote for AL. So I think that there is a general shift in the direction of the wind. I think every 5 years people just get sick of one party and switch to other -- just for the heck of it. Went to new market after ages. Balaka is playing Spielberg's "War of the worlds". I am jealous of these teenagers with tickets. The best we could do in the 90s was James Bond's "Never Say Never Again" -- a good 15 years after its release. War of the worlds came eight months after. So that's progress too. Bangladesh has six TV channels now. Boishakhi, Channel 1, and Bangla Vision being the new additions. From the names, you can tell that they just increased the numbers.

No load shedding yet and no traffic jam for me on the first day. I got an earful from the neighbour on how I am being a complete idiot for not buying a property at Bashundhara yet. That is a sure shot 100% profit in one year. Forget the fact that he doesn't know anything about me or he does not know anything about my financial condition. But here he was -- standing in a small alley of Dhaka and volunteering as my financial planner. That's Dhaka for you. So I am almost sold. I will make a trip to Bashundhara tomorrow with him. He told me that Bashundhara is company that will not cheat you. The sons of the Bashundhara empire drives a Hummer. So may be, just may be, by buying a little piece of land in Bashundhara, I will be able to change my future and graduate from my Honda Civic.

Good or bad though -- things are happening in Dhaka. You can sense it in the air. You can sense it in the streets, you can sense it from the people. Some people would call it a thriving economy, my neighbour would like to say "everyone is hungry and they are looting. Its a free for all." Have things changed for all though? Not quite. The young lady, Noorbanu, who works at our home is from Rangpur. Yes, Rangpur, the land of Monga -- straight out of the headline in Prothom Alo. She came to Dhaka because she did not have anything to eat. She came to Dhaka for the first time leaving her 3 year old daughter. My mother said she used to cry every night for her daughter during the first few weeks. She probably does still. But who is listening? I have a three year old daughter. She is so attached to the mother that she sometimes call me Ma by mistake. Can I imagine her being separated from her mother? Eeshita, my wife and the mother packed a big bag of shoes and clothings for NoorBanu.