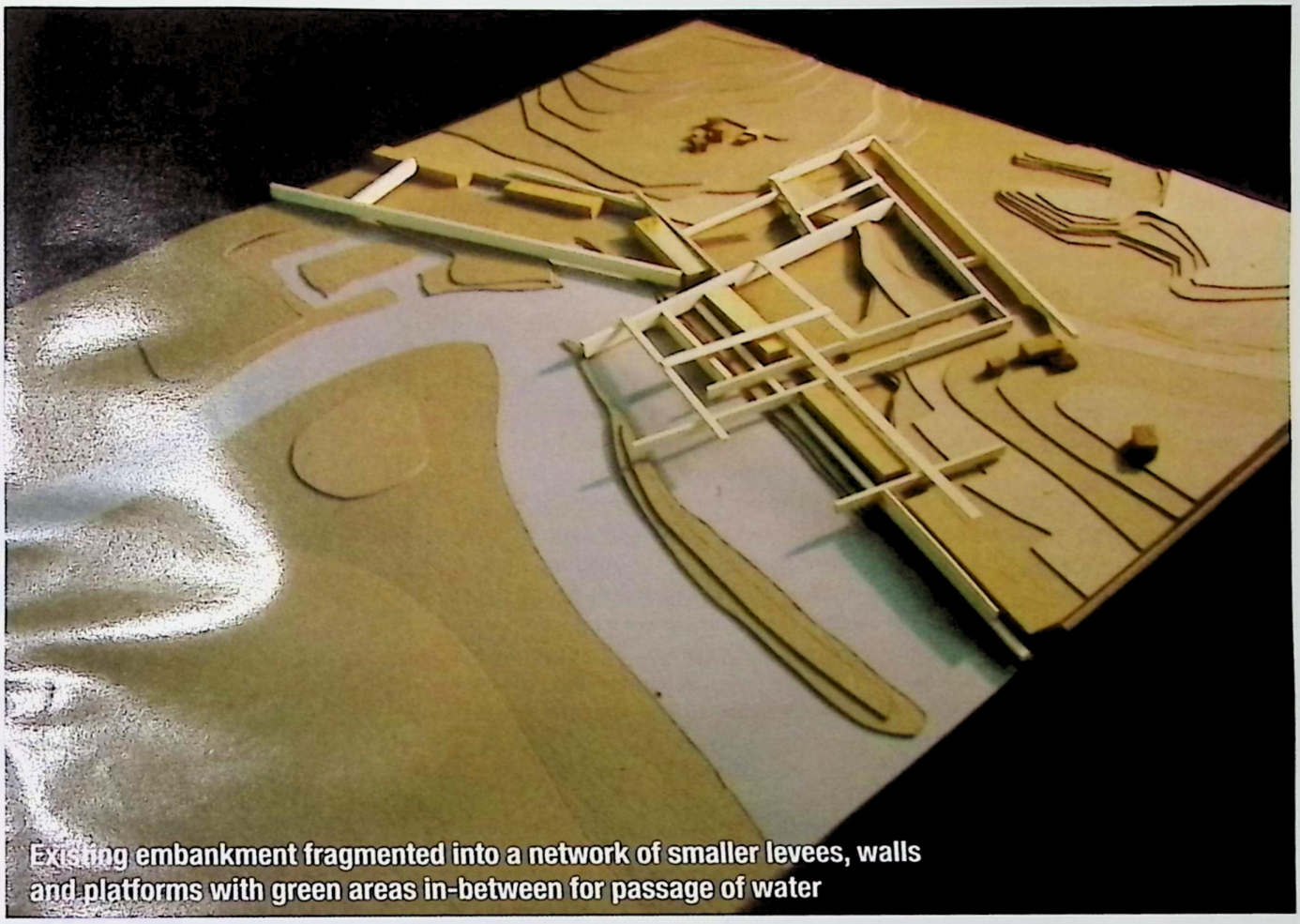


Existing embankment fragmented into a network of smaller levees, walls and platforms with green areas in-between for passage of water

That model also spawned the third one with a tincture of modernist rationale, that of rows and rows of plots upon which were built isolated, independent buildings, that became known as the planned areas of the city, starting from Dhanmandi to Purbachal (the form of the former has now been transformed beyond recognition).

The fourth morphology characterizes the half-planned, quasi-planned but mostly unplanned parts of the city, vast, amorphous areas often with inadequate or ineffective infrastructure.

The fifth one is an invisible and unrecognized morphology, and yet vital to the visible city, one that spreads out across Dhaka, weaving in and out of the other morphologies, along the railways tracks, on the sidewalks and between buildings, inhabited by fresh migrants, vagrants, and generally by people at the periphery of planning.

I have now come to realize that there is perhaps a sixth morphology, areas along the edge of a transforming city ringed by rivers, a dynamic edge that is constantly shifting where there is a constant tussle between urban culture and agriculture, between a proto-urbanism and a flood-washed landscape.

It is that area that the Philadelphia studio targeted, an area that has come into greater focus due to the creation of a heightened and constructed edge: the flood embankments.

The visions for Dhaka presented in the *Daily Star* anniversary issue were based on the following premise: "Dhaka is a child of the Buriganga, and yet it turns its back to the fundamental reality of being part of the world's most dynamic hydrological system. An audacious vision for Dhaka has to begin from where Dhaka began -- at the edge of the water.

"How many of us realize Dhaka is almost like an island framed by three rivers, the Buriganga, the Turag, and the Balu? How many remember that canals used to crisscross older Dhaka? A ten-minute ride outside Dhaka still shows the aquatic reality of the land where flood plains and canals completely girdle the city.

"A radical reclamation of Buriganga river and its banks on both sides is crucial for an economic, transport, and cultural reinvigoration of Dhaka. The river can become a sustainable lifeblood, and the riverfront a much more organized area, providing renewed recreational, civic, economic, and transport facilities for the whole city in a way never witnessed before.

"Instead of being fated as a third-world reality, Dhaka can be a very special city, a place by the river that works with water and vegetation to be a truly tropical city, one that is economically and ecologically sustainable, a unique, green and highly livable city. And all that despite the growing urban needs."