Kahn's greatest creation, regarded as the monument of the 20C, the National Parliament Building that put Dhaka on the map of world architecture, is at the core of the Nagar.

To its west was erected the Ayub Gate, connecting the mainly Urdu-speaking settlers of Mohammedpur with the Capitol complex, appropriately titled 'Citadel of Democracy'. The name of the gate was spontaneously changed to Asad Gate during the 1969 mass uprising in memory of Shahid Asad. There was a small memorial structure erected at the spot where Shahid Asad was killed which I found missing last week while trying to locate that.

Though the parliament building has a vast expand of raised plaza and green lawn mainly on the south, blending with the surrounding through wooded areas and water bodies, and one of the widest road running parallel to it, it still lacks that ceremonial approach we see with most such buildings worldwide. Jinjira across the River Buriganga on the south of Dhaka, made infamous by the cursed palace that we wrote about before, was once considered as the site for the Parliament. Many cities of the world developed equally on either side of a river; Budapest is actually two cities named Buda and Pest on two opposite banks of Danube. London, Paris or Moscow grew around rivers Thames, Seine or Volga. But despite the fact that Jinjira is just across the river from Dhaka city, it did not develop much and was not integrated with the main city. The Snell's Committee report in 1968 emphatically advocated its integration into the city, but nothing happened.

Jinjira was to be connected to the English Road/Nawab Yusuf Road through a bridge near the Ahsan Manjil, creating a tree-lined boulevard axis that could have changed the old city. In fact the same axis (North-South) would have been extended through the Paltan and Shantinagar to become a major attraction of the city. Another east-west axis could have been created connecting the Bahadur Shah Park, which in deed would have been along the oldest known pre-Mughal city path. Alas, vested quarters with petty interests stopped much of it, and the chance to connect the old and the new city with the south of the river through the historic quarters. Except for the Dholai Khal road built in phases, we have made successful incursion only twice the North South Road built during the second half of the 1980s and Dayaganj-Gandaria Road early this decade, right through the middle of old Dhaka. Both their positive and negative impacts on the life and economy, society and spaces of the indigenous city have yet to be studied.

The Jinjira axis, the North-South Road and Nawab Yusuf Road were supposed to meet at Nayabazaar an area familiar to almost all the architects because it had a large market of various papers and boards and a junkyard where architecture students found various materials that could be used to prepare models. However, I find many current specially private university students oblivious of such treasure trove at Nayabazaar.

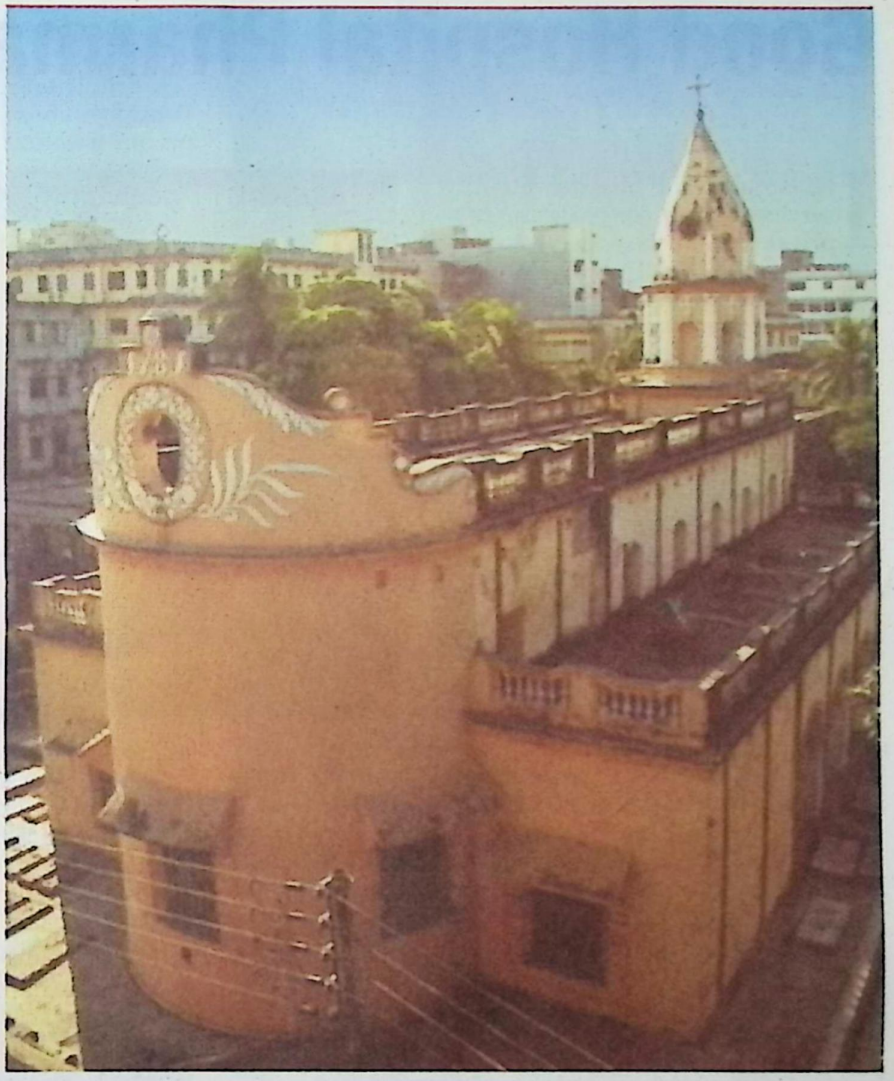


Photo on page 18: view of the ruined Nawabaatkhana at the mouth of Dholai Khal.

Photo on page 19: Armenian Church amidst the hustle and bustle of old Dhaka

(Read next week the last part of this article)