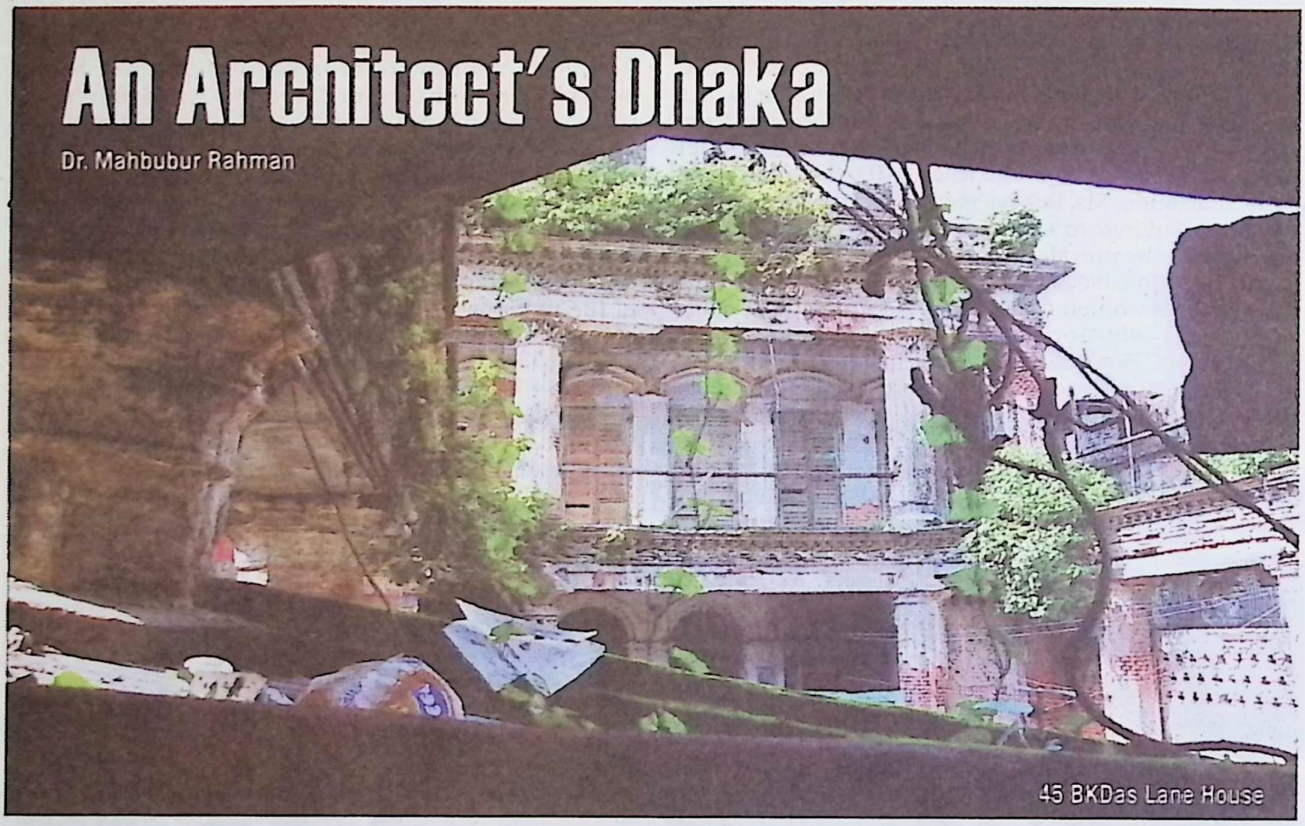
An Architect's Dhaka

Dr. Mahbubur Rahman



45 BKDas Lane House

Part Nineteen

VAGUE, ambiguous, rigid and inflexible rules, planning without citizens' input, and uncoordinated activities of different agencies rendered Dhaka non-functional. Violation of rules and non-compliance with the plan was a norm rather than an exception. Rapid urbanisation and economic pressure continued to degrade environment. Destruction of historical and heritage structures was rampant. In such a backdrop the Dhaka Metropolitan Area Building Construction Rules were first gazetted in April 2006; its enforcement was hindered by vested quarters. It came into force in January 2007 after a six-month transition from the old rules. Meanwhile it underwent a revision to clear ambiguities, detail some provisions for clarity, and remove conflicts with prevailing rules/acts especially with the Building Code. The revision was published in August 2007 as the Dhaka Metropolitan Area Building Construction Rules 2007.

No Rule in the past covered heritage conservation; nobody sought permission for demolishing building. Otherwise Rajuk could detect demolition of heritage buildings. Absence of conservation initiatives, awareness on heritage and maintenance has resulted in buildings of aesthetic and architectural value, cultural or archaeological significance deteriorating, collapsing or falling victim to real estate developers. Many such incidents have been highlighted in the media through the effort of Urban Study Group led by two architects. Further demolition of 45 BK Das lane was deferred as the prospect of saving the rest of it applying the FAR rule brightened. As the duo talked to the Tantibazaar Jagannath Temple committee to suspend its planned demolition so that they could raise the fund for its repair that could stop the destruction, it obliged, but not for long.

We noted Prasanna Babu's house in Farashganj first in 1992. A narrow long house with three distinct courtyards, two unusual colonnades around the front court, an ornate pediment and curvilinear balcony, and elaborate capital and foliage would attract anybody passing by. The partly three storied building had terraces at several levels, and also a semi basement at the rear end. Monkeys would roam around all over the building. Many tenements shared the house, to be entered through a double storey gatehouse; some would be suspicious of visitors, others would be curious. Few years later I had a student doing her thesis that included this house as one of the case studies; she prepared a measured drawing and we analysed the spaces. But documents got misplaced due to our movement through various countries. I did send another group of students two years back; they could document the house before demolition started.