



Traditional windmills in the Netherlands

## The Dutch in Dhaka

PROF. DR SHARIF UDDIN AHMED

### Trade, spices and the Dutch East India Company

In the sixteenth century many European nations entered into trade with Asia. This was facilitated by the discovery of oceanic communications. To the Europeans the Asian trade was generally known as spice trade. But it was more than that. Among the European countries which promptly participated in this trade was the Netherlands or Holland. The people of the Netherlands or Holland are better known as the Dutch.

Allured by the large market in Europe and the high profits of the spice trade, the Hollanders formed the Dutch East India Company in 1602 with the principal object of carrying out trade in Asia.

The trading relation of the Dutch East India Company with Asia began quite early, and by the early 17th century

the Company established contact with the Indian Sub-Continent. In the Indian Sub-Continent, Bengal was one of the richest and well-developed regions. Naturally the Dutch East India Company wanted to have trading relations with Bengal. By the middle of the 17th century the Dutch East India Company became one of the most powerful European companies trading with Bengal, overshadowing the Portuguese and challenging the English.

At the time Bengal was the producer of many internationally exportable commodities especially textiles. It was the largest producer of coarse and cheap calicoes (type of cotton). Bengal silk was famous and was in great demand in Europe. A third lucrative item was saltpeter which was in high demand in Europe. The Dutch East India Company began to trade in all these commodities.

In order to participate in

the Bengal trade they came to Bengal first in 1630 and settled in Pipli. They received trading rights from the Mughal government by paying 3% custom duties on exports. In 1634 they obtained permission from the local governor Azam Khan to establish a factory at Hughli which they eventually built sometime between 1645 and 1647. But the Dutch trade flourished most in Bengal when they established a factory at Chinsura: this place served as their chief settlement in Bengal in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Dhaka, the Capital of the province of Bengal, was also a great centre of trade, commerce and manufactures. It is only natural that the Dutch East India Company would also establish a trade-link with that place. Moreover, at that time Dhaka was the principal producer of the famous Muslin which had a world wide market. Of course the Dutch wanted to have a share in the Muslin or the textile

trade. In this way they opened a factory (a trading centre) in Dhaka in the early 1650s to start their trade in Eastern Bengal what is today Bangladesh. The factory in those days meant a place where various things were manufactured and which served as residence and office.

### The organizational structure of the Dutch East India Company

As an organised group of traders the Dutch factory in Dhaka had a good administrative and trading structure. Undoubtedly, the set ups here were small as the bigger set ups were in the headquarters of the Dutch East India Company in Chinsura, West Bengal.

The Dutch carried on their trade through native agents. In their trade they had to face stiff competition particularly from Asian, merchants and later from the English East India Company. But prior to that they had a prosperous trade. In 1747, the Dutch exported Rs. 100,000/- worth of cotton goods from Dhaka to Europe.

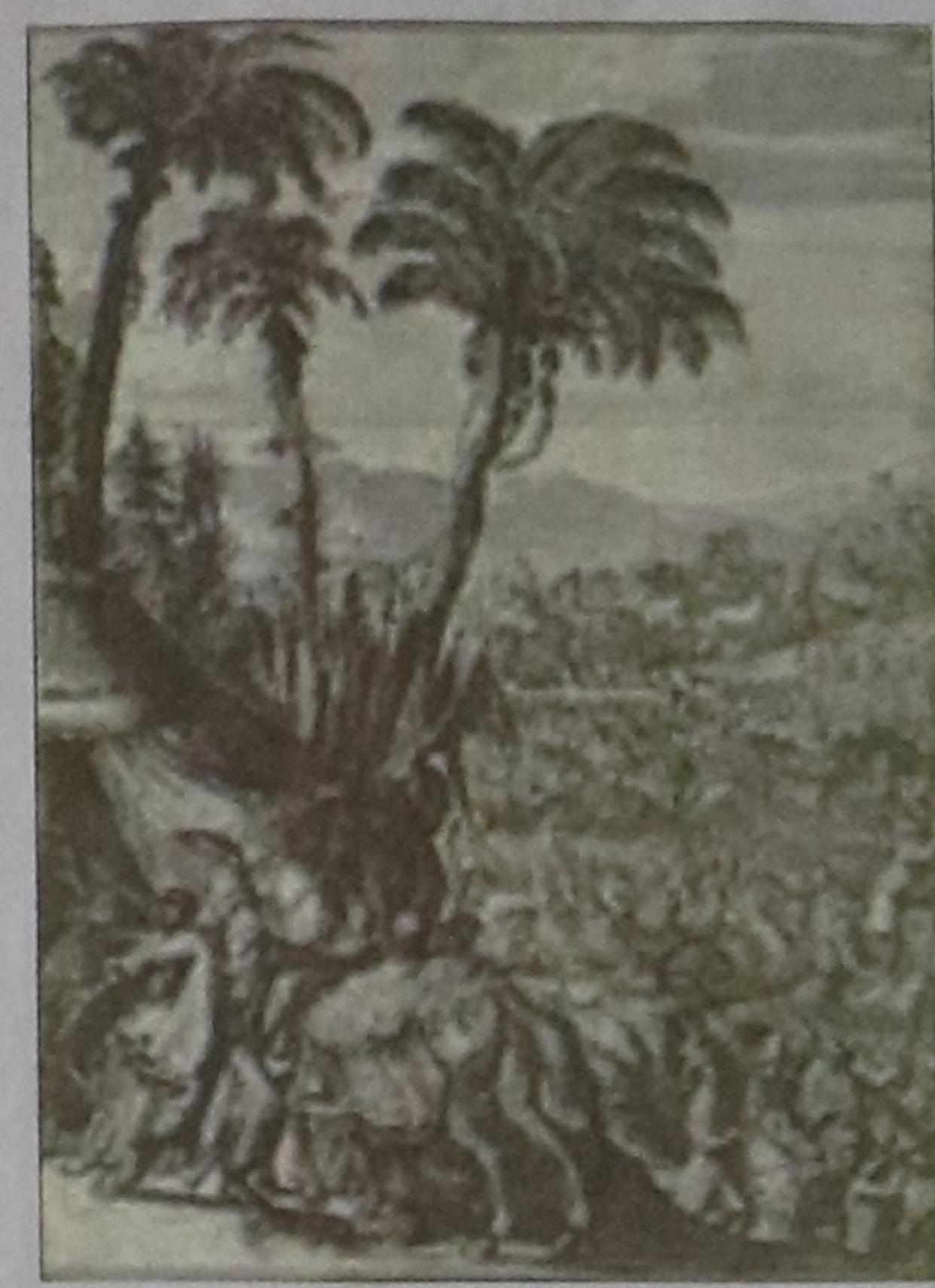
The Dhaka office of the Dutch East India Company was headed by a Chief. He had under him some Dutchmen and a large number of Indians engaged in different jobs. The Chief had to look after various things including diplomatic relation with the local governor. He was not only an administrator or merchant but also acted as an Ambassador of his country. He also acted as the agent of the main Dutch East India Company establishment stationed in Chinsura.

### Settling down

When the Dutch first came to Dhaka they chose the Tejgaon area in the north of the Capital Dhaka for their settlement and built their Agency Building or Factory there. They also started vegetable garden there and cultivated European vegetables.

Tejgaon being a bit away from the main city, soon the Dutch authority decided to shift their office in the city and on the bank of the river Buriganga. The place was also more suitable for communication. The site where the

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Shipwrecked sailors from the ship Terschelling in the army procession of the Nabab [viceroy] of Dhaka.

## Dutch shipwreck on a sandbank off the coast of Bengal

FRANS Jansz. van der Heiden was a sailor for the VOC in 1661. He was engaged on the Ship 'The Terschelling' and in 1661 the ship was on its home journey from Batavia (Jakarta) and ran onto a sandbank off the coast of Bengal. From the remains of the ship, some men managed to build a raft and half of the crew struggled to safety on an island off the coast of Bengal. After months of suffering and hunger (rumors are that they even resorted to eating from the dead bodies from their fellow sailors, who died during the stay on the island) a quarter of the original crew was saved by a ship and brought to the

mainland. After some wandering they ended up in the army of the Nabab of Decca, who was a field marshal of the Great Mogul. They were pressed to fight against the kingdom of Assam (an ally of the VOC), but the monsoon turned out to be an invincible enemy and the army ended up losing the battle without seeing a human enemy. Frans Jansz. van der Heiden survived it all and returned to the Netherlands in 1674. He published his adventures in 1675 and it was an immediate success. In 2006, a new modernized reprint came out, revised by Okke de Jong. An English translation is written by Glanius and is also still available.

Heartiest Felicitations to the Government and the People of the Netherlands on the occasion of Queen's Day and The National Day of The Netherlands



ROYAL HASKONING

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A project of BWDB of the Ministry of Water Resources funded by The Netherlands Government

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- Construction of cross-dams to accelerate natural process of land accretion to develop new land for a bigger Bangladesh. Construction of the first cross-dam will start in 2009 and, two more will be completed by the end of 2011.
- Creation of opportunities for poverty reduction and sustainable development
- Mitigation of natural disasters as a result of storm surges caused by cyclones with specific aim to reduce risk of loss of life and damage to property;
- Improved management of natural resources in the coastal zone and mitigation against the negative effects of human induced natural resources degradation, biodiversity and habitat loss, climate change, sea level rise and environmental pollution.

No country in the world can claim to have more reclaimed land than The Netherlands. Today, two-fifths of The Netherlands is made up of polder or polder land which was once covered by the sea. They represent the most productive lands for industry, agriculture, wild life habitats and urban development.

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Heart-felt felicitations  
to Her Majesty Queen Beatrix  
and  
to the people of the Netherlands  
On the occasion of Queen's Day and National Day  
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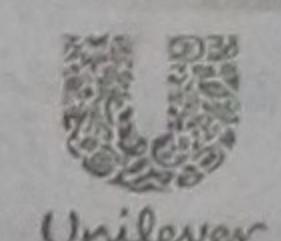
Our warmest felicitations to Her Majesty Queen Beatrix and to the friendly people of the Netherlands on their National Day

## Dutch-Bangla Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DBCCI)

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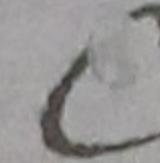
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