

Slums are forever

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'PUSH' from the village and 'pull' factors from the city have been compelling the Bangladeshi rural poor, depleting by percentage versus urban population, to migrate to urban centres for decades, the upshot being the doubling of the number of slums since independence.

There is also no respite in sight and therefore one has to accept that slums are here to stay.

Living in abject conditions generally no daylight and the first victims of load-shedding if at all served by electricity, no fresh air, no water, no hygiene, no health service, no privacy, no security of tenancy, no facilities for children, no social status or security the sufferings of slum dwellers have to some extent been mitigated by the NGOs working with them.

A dedicated crusader in the cause of slum dwellers Professor Nazrul Islam and his team in today's piece try to draw a clear picture on the state of slums in Bangladesh. It is not an easy task considering that the parameters on slums and slum dwellers are diverse, complicated, intertwined and many. Moreover, the number of slums is also staggering for any researcher.

High (nay highest!) population density, worsened by single story sprawl, adds to the misery of women and children, given that the men folk do go to jobs or job-hunting.

Crime and drugs are associated with slums, either as source for city targets or as the playing field of

criminals. Police raids, labelled as fruitless and gallery show, are not uncommon for various reasons.

Fire has occasionally reduced some slums to ashes, some deliberately lit to evacuate the tenants (?), and some due to carelessness and lack of awareness, but most of them have sprung back to life. The resolve to survive among these poorest of the poor is that much strong.

Those more fortunate should consider them blessed that the slum dwellers have concentrated their housing needs at some self-designated areas in the city, and not at their doorstep or street corner. The fact that more private property is being used for slums is indeed alarming. Our slums on government land may have to be accepted and built multi-level to ease density and related problems unless of course we can conjure up enough factors in the peri-urban and rural areas to pull back the people.

Needless to say, a comprehensive understanding of the pertaining issues shall be required if one is to attempt to bring some relief to the slum dwellers in any of the umpteen facets, mostly negatives, that make slum life unbearable, and yet life goes on.

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Urban slums of Bangladesh

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Background

Though still comparatively rural, Bangladesh has an urban population of about 35 million, or just over 25 percent of its total population. Moreover, the urban population has been growing very rapidly since liberation in 1971 and continues to do so at over 3.5 percent annually. The country will likely have an urban population approaching 50 million by 2015. This rapid growth has been due primarily to migration by the rural poor, particularly to large metropolitan areas. On arrival, these poor migrants routinely turn to slums and squatter settlements for shelter. All major urban centres in Bangladesh have slums and squatter settlements, the largest concentrations being in Dhaka, followed by Chittagong, Khulna, and Rajshahi.

To begin with, there is no difference between a slum and a squatter settlement. The latter are simply slums illegally located on land belonging to the government, semi-governmental units, public organizations and other organizations. Drawing on both international literature attempting to define slums as well as widely accepted definitions or norms applied in the Bangladeshi context, slums are defined as settlements with a minimum of 10 households or a mess unit with a minimum of 25 members and:

- predominantly very poor housing;
- very high population den-

- sity and room crowding;
- very poor environmental services, especially water and sanitation;
- very low socio-economic status;
- lack of security of tenure

The socioeconomic status of the community is defined by low income, with the majority, or over 50 percent, of households having income below the poverty level of Tk. 5,000 per month, the majority of the labour force in informal sector occupations (eg. rickshaw pullers, hawkers, domestic workers, etc.) or very low paying formal sector positions (in organizations ranging from factories to offices) and low levels of rent. Another important dimension is whether the settlement is socially perceived as a slum. Finally, security of tenure is captured by vulnerability to eviction.

Slums of Dhaka city

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is the largest city in the country. It comprises 34 percent of the overall national urban population and is unrivalled among Bangladeshi cities in terms of its economic, social and political opportunities. Dhaka has been growing very rapidly over the last five decades, particularly due to rural to urban migration and urbanization and incorporation of erstwhile outlying areas. Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has an area of 145 sq. kilometres and an estimated population of 7.2 million (2005). Dhaka Metropolitan Area (DMA), with an estimated 2005 population of 9.1 million, comprises DCC and adjoining areas totalling 306 sq. kilo-

metres. Slums have existed in Dhaka City for a long time but their growth accelerated after the liberation of the country in 1971, mainly due to mass migration by the rural poor. The first significant survey of the slums and squatter population in Dhaka was conducted by the Centre for Urban Studies in 1974 at the behest of the Government of Bangladesh and UNCHS. The slum population found in that survey was 275,000. Another survey was conducted by CUS in the Dhaka Metropolitan Area in 1991 for ICDDR,B. This study recovered a slum population of 718,143 in some 2,156 slum and squatter clusters. CUS conducted yet another survey in 1996 in the same area (the DMA) for the Asian Development Bank and found the total slum population to be 1.5 million in 3,007 clusters.

Year of Establishment of Slum Settlements in Existence in 2005

Slums have been a feature of life in the cities of Bangladesh for a long time. Table 2 presents the year of establishment of those slums found in 2005. It shows that there were quite a significant number of slums in the cities even prior to 1971, the year of independence of the country. By a five-year period intervals the data suggest that the highest period for establishment of slums for all six study cities combined was 1976-80, which had a concentration of 15 percent of new slums.

Density of population in slums

The average population density in slums was 831 persons per acre or 205,415 people per

km² (Table 3). This density figure is extraordinary, given that almost all residential structures in slum areas were single storey. Density varied from 272 persons per acre in Rajshahi to 1,032 in Chittagong. Dhaka had the second highest density at 891 persons per acre. In Chittagong, the population density in slum areas was 11 times that of the overall city.

Housing conditions

The quality of housing is one of the most basic indicators characterising slum settlements. The majority of slum houses (56%) in the six cities were of very poor quality (weak and temporary structures or kutcha units), while another 42.4 percent were semi-pucca type. A very small proportion (1.1%) was dilapidated older buildings, while only 0.5 percent was good quality homes. The physical quality of slum housing was generally better in Dhaka and very poor in Khulna and Barisal. However, the fact that slums in Dhaka and some of the other towns showed a relatively high prevalence of semi-pucca structures does not automatically allow one to conclude that the overall housing situation there was good since such houses normally had very high room crowding and very low per capita floor space.

Rental pattern in slums

Almost three-fourths (73.9%) of slum households rented their residence, a figure which varied from 17.7 percent in Rajshahi to 96.3 percent in Sylhet (Table 4). In Rajshahi, a high proportion of slum households (58.9%) were

owner occupied. A significant proportion of households (around 25%) in Barisal, Khulna and Rajshahi did not pay any rent.

Slum land ownership pattern
Most slum clusters (88.6%) were established on privately owned land. Only 9.3 percent were on public land (i.e. on government and semi-government land). A small number (only 195 of the 9,048, or 2.2 percent) were built on land owned by various other organizations. Sylhet revealed a different picture: there were almost no slums on public land. Other studies have suggested that the proportion of slums on private land has been increasing, mainly due to a rapid decline in the availability of public land. Table 5 shows the percentage distribution of slum land ownership in the six cities.

Overall Characteristics of Slums

More than 93% of slums were reported to have very high population density and very poor environmental services, and 85% had very poor housing conditions (Table 7). Interestingly, less than 10% of slums seemed to suffer from lack of tenure security. This can be explained by the fact that most were on private land and run on a commercial basis. Sudden evictions were not very common in such slums.

NGO coverage of slums

Nearly three-fourths of the slums (71.5%) received services from one or more NGOs. Barisal and Rajshahi were the best serviced and while the slums of Chittagong benefited least from the efforts of NGOs.

This survey revealed that slum circumstances vary greatly across the six cities. In many instances, there are two overall prevailing situations: the circumstances in the largest cities (Dhaka and Chittagong) and those in the smaller ones. This realization should lead to the casting of a wider net in future studies focusing on slums: the circumstances of the slums of the largest cities of Bangladesh are

in all likelihood not particularly representative of those in smaller and medium sized cities. Unfortunately, studies into the causes or consequences of slum life to date in Bangladesh have generally focused on a limited number of slums in Dhaka.

The household monthly income of Tk. 5,000 was estimated as the urban poverty line for May 2005 by the CUS study team on the basis of urban poverty line per capita income of Tk.906 (or Tk.4344 for an average urban household) for May 2004 determined by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and presented in its "Preliminary Report of the Poverty Monitoring Survey, 2004", p.13.

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Study Year: 2005

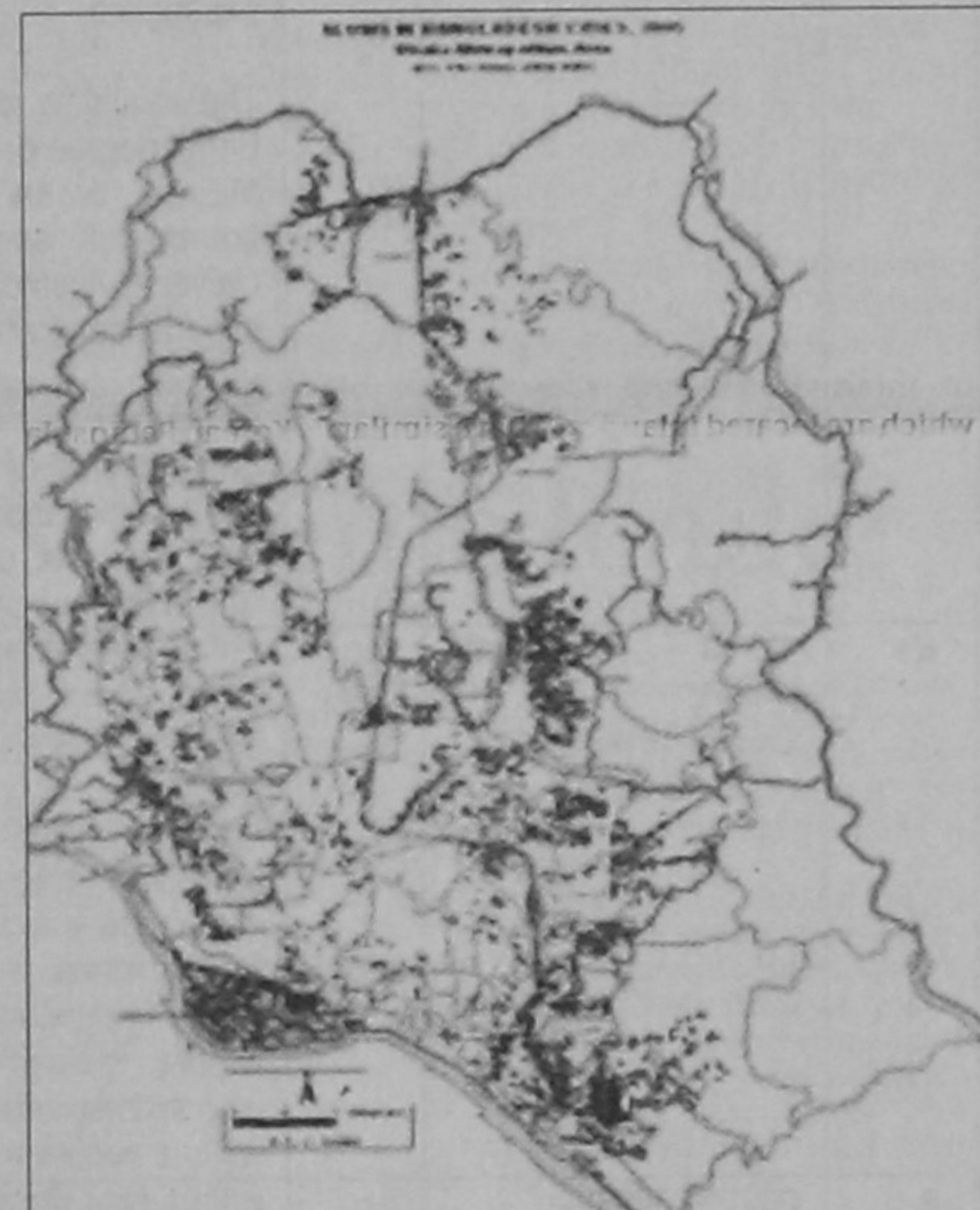


Table 3: Population Density: Slum Area and Overall City

City	Persons per acre		Persons per Km ²	
	Slum Area	City Total	Slum Area	City Total
Dhaka	891	121	220,246	29,857
Chittagong	1,032	94	255,100	23,299
Khulna	538	82	132,988	20,346
Rajshahi	272	39	67,236	9,544
Sylhet	626	52	154,741	12,961
Barisal	541	29	133,730	7,152
All Cities	831	95	205,415	23,378

Table 4: Rental Pattern of Slum Household

City	Owner	Rented	Rent Free	Total	
	%	%	%	%	Number
Dhaka	11.7	77.2	11.1	100	673,883
Chittagong	16.5	73.6	9.9	100	266,182
Khulna	17.5	59.4	23.1	100	37,826
Rajshahi	58.9	17.7	23.4	100	27,665
Sylhet	0.5	96.3	3.1	100	18,313
Barisal	24.9	49.2	25.9	100	19,460
All Cities	14.5	73.9	11.7	100	1,043,329

Table 5: Land Ownership Pattern in Slums by City (percentage of clusters)

Land Ownership	Dhaka	Chittagong	Khulna	Rajshahi	Sylhet	Barisal	Total
Govt./Semi Govt.	9.0	10.8	12.5	13.4	0.8	11.1	9.3
Private	89.8	85.9	79.2	86.7	98.9	87.2	88.6
Other Types	1.2	3.3	8.3	3.9	0.3	1.7	2.2
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number	4,966	1,814	520	641	756	351	9,048

Table 6: Overall Characteristics of Slum Settlements (percentage of clusters in respective city)

Characteristics	Dhaka	Chittagong	Khulna	Rajshahi	Sylhet	Barisal	All cities
Very poor housing	80.4	96.5	98.8	99.7	56.6	95.1	84.6
Very high pop. density	97.5	99.7	85.0	48.5	97.1	98.9	93.8
Very poor environmental service	99.5	99.6	98.6	98.6	99.1	96.6	99.2
Very low socio-economic status	98.7	98.9	91.3	97.3	98.7	64.1	96.9
Lack of security of tenure	9.4	12.1	8.6	14.5	0.4	6.5	9.4
Number of clusters	4,966	1,814	520	641	756	351	9,048

Table 7: Percentage of Slums Covered NGO Programs

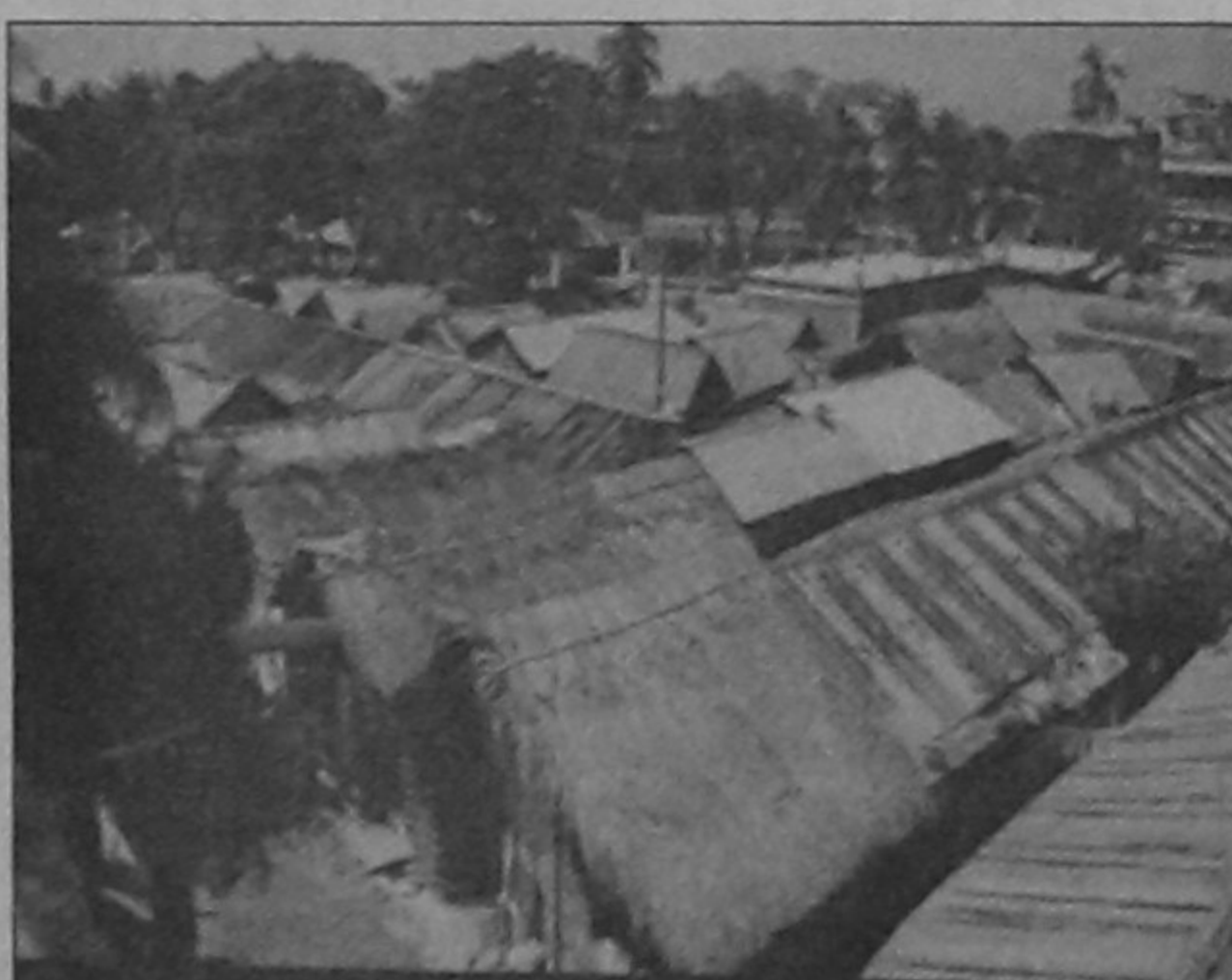
NGO Coverage	Dhaka	Chittagong	Khulna	Rajshahi	Sylhet	Barisal	All Cities
One NGO	11.3	7.2	27.1	7.0	34.8	13.1	13.1
More than one	58.5	50.4	61.3	86.0	40.7	81.2	58.4
None	30.2	42.4	11.5	7.0	24.5	5.7	28.5
Don't know	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number	4,966	1,814	520	641	756	351	9,048

Table 1: City-wise Distribution of Slum Clusters with population size

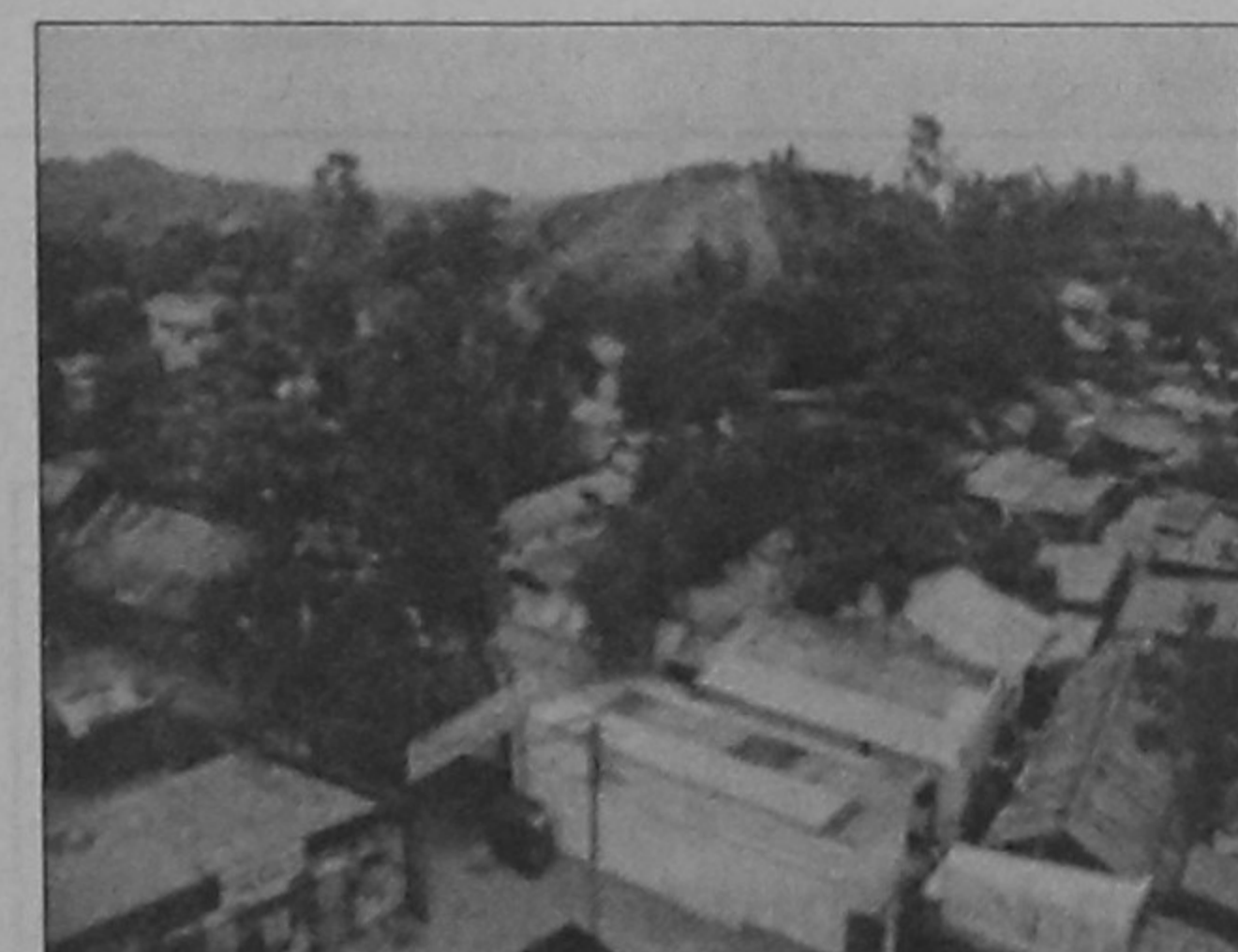
City	Clusters		Mean Population Size	Median Population Size
	Number	Percent		
Dhaka	4,966	54.9	689	150
Chittagong	1,814	20.0	808	250
Khulna	520	5.7	362	110
Rajshahi	641	7.1	245	110
Sylhet	756	8.3	129	90
Barisal	351	3.9	312	130
All Cities	9,048	100.0	601	145

Table 2: Year of Establishment of Slum Settlements in Existence in 2005, by City (percentage of clusters)

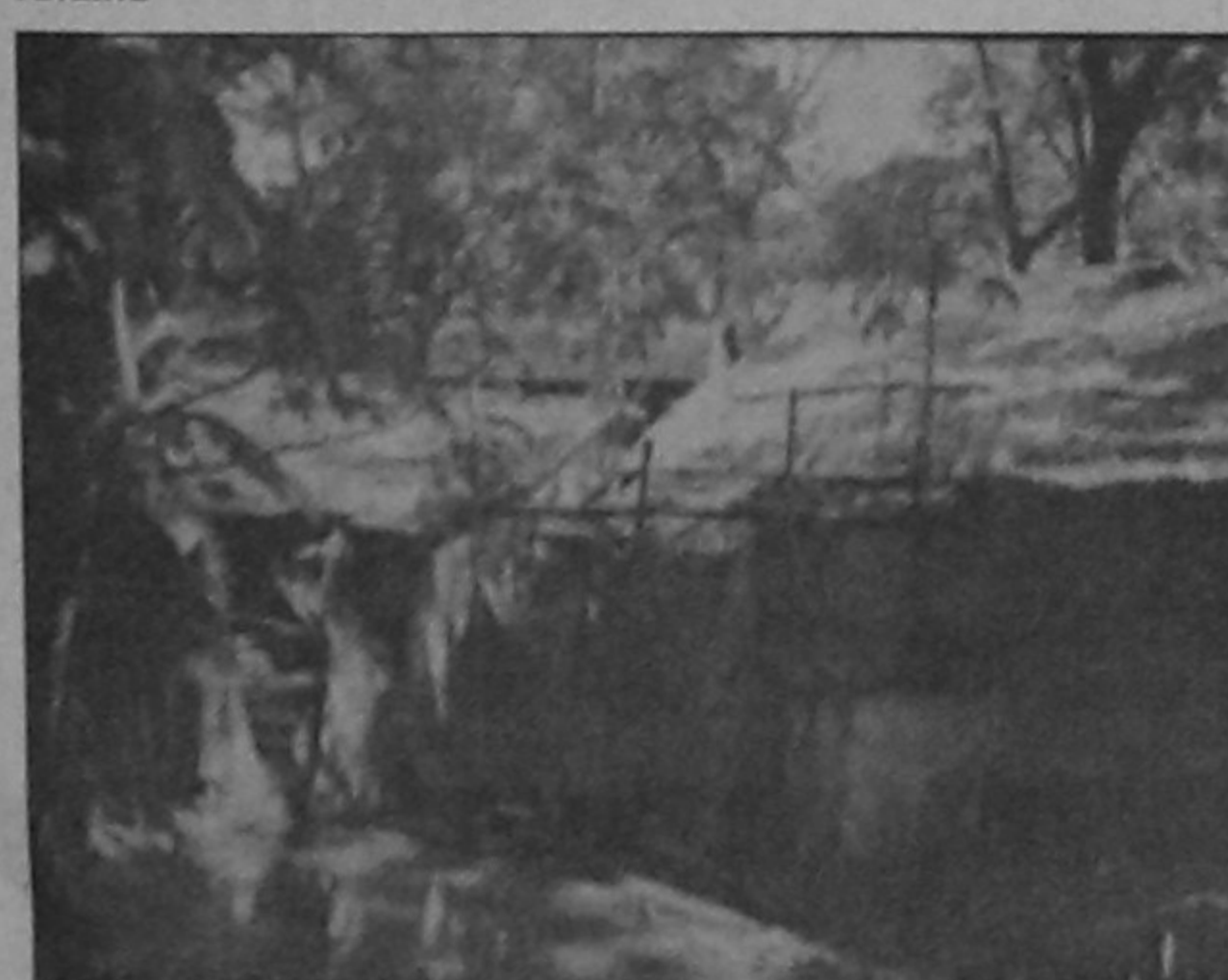
Year of establishment	Dhaka	Chittagong	Khulna	Rajshahi	Sylhet	Barisal	Total
Prior to 1970	12.5	16.3	27.3	47.3	1.8	47.6	17.0
1971-75	9.1	7.4	15.2	16.5	2.8	10.8	9.2
1976-80	14.9	17.9	15.8	17.2	7.7	13.4	15.0
1981-85	12.8	11.7	12.9	7.6	7.7	13.4	11.8
1986-90	17.9	13.4	10.2	8.2	13.9	6.0	14.8
1991-95	13.1	13.3	8.3	2.6	15.1	5.4	12.0
1996-2000	12.3	14.3	8.3	1.7	34.3	2.0	13.1
2001-05	7.3	5.1	3.4	0.8	16.8	1.1	6.7
Don't know	0.0	0.8	0.6	—	—	0.3	0.2
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Number	4,966	1,814	520	641	756	351	9,048



Khulna



Slums on hill slopes, Chittagong



Palashpur Baste, Barisal



Rajshahi