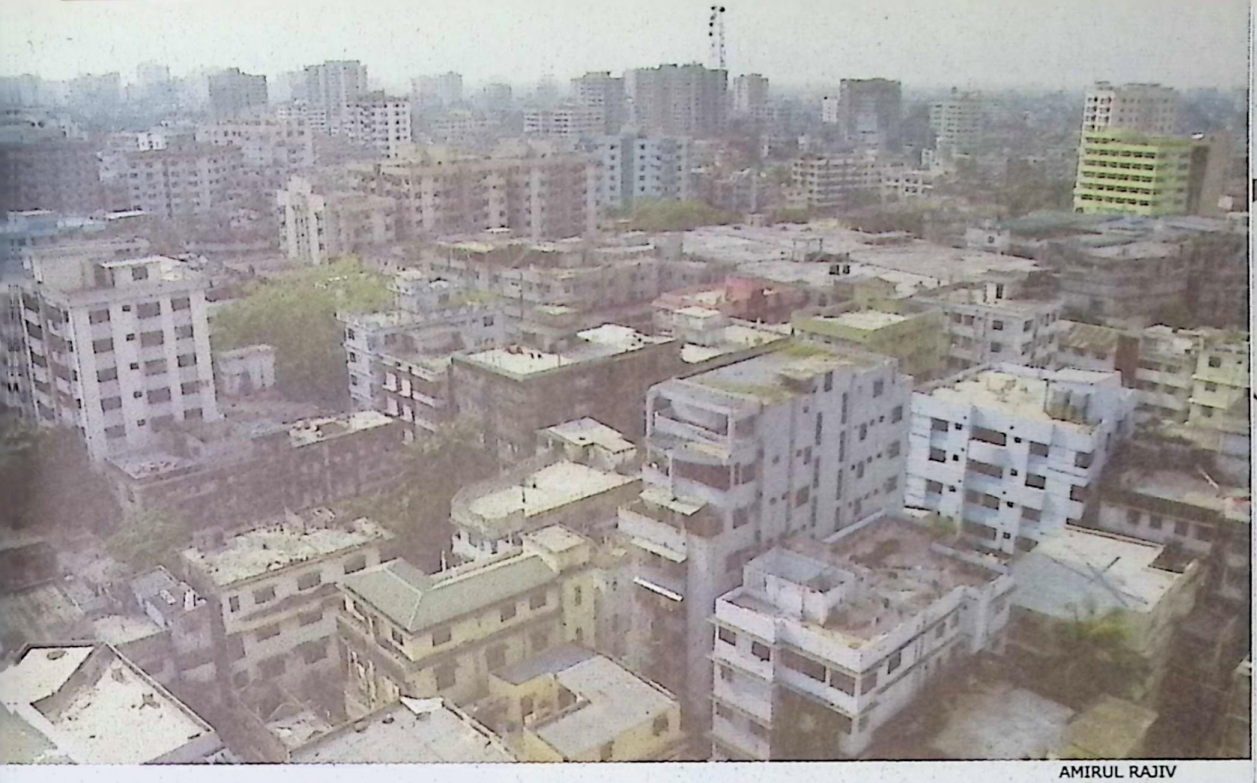


AMIRUL RAJIV

If you could narrow down Dhaka's transportation problems to one source, what would it be?

Well that's a really tough question to start off with since there really isn't one single problem that is ailing Dhaka. But if I had to narrow it down, it would have to be the total lack of any efficient public transport system. Mind you, we do have some sort of public transport, it's just very inefficient.

By an efficient transport system, I mean one that utilises the most street space available, and has an organised system of running and operating. If you only take an hour-long trip around Dhaka, you will see that most of the public buses and transport we have are ancient, and are meant for the Dhaka of old where population and street space were both pretty small.

They also run without any kind of deference to either pedestrians or other forms of transport around them. They are also incapable of existing in the current space as roads are occupied by vehicles that are either slow-moving or faster than them. Hence, there's a total mismatch of transportation modes that exist in the same streets.

And I stressed on the public part and not merely on general transport because even if you are middle class in Dhaka, you already have a car or a motorbike. It's the people from the lower spectrum who are reliant on public transport and who have no other recourse. These are the people who are more in numbers and who need help immediately.

Digital Bangladesh has been the rallying cry of the present government leading up to the elections. To what extent do you think Dhaka's traffic problems could be solved by technology?

I am a firm advocate of mass railway transit (MRT) for some very obvious reasons. One is something that I already spoke about before: efficiency. The MRT can give you higher capacity and much higher speeds that are not available by any other road transport in Dhaka.

Its nearest rival is the underground system which will be much more expensive relatively speaking. Besides, it's structurally very difficult to have an underground system which will use electricity every single minute of the day and also can become a breeding ground for criminal activity.

It's both cost effective and practical to have an above-ground system and this is where the MRT comes in. Compared to an underground system, the MRT will have 2.5 times more capacity: it can involve around 80,000 people per hour per direction. It can also be readily adjustable to suit either the peak hour or holiday traffic by easily adjusting the number of bogeys. JICA has already done a feasibility study on a route from Pallabi to Jatrabari, and the results have been very positive. I am also a big fan of double-decker CNG-run