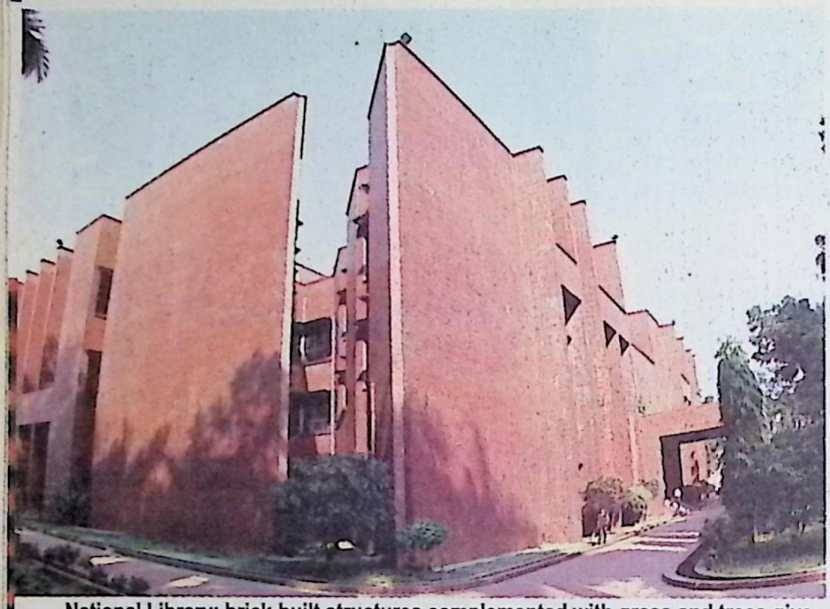
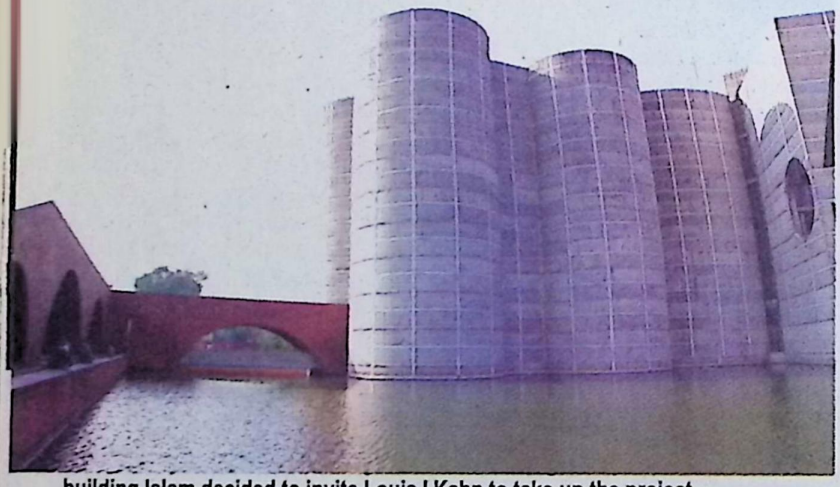


National Library: brick-built structures complemented with grass and trees give an impression of connectedness between civilisation and nature.



building Islam decided to invite Louis I Kahn to take up the project.

PHOTOS: ZAHEDUL I KHAN

a sense of cheer and freshness. As a result, day and night, sunsets, seasons, rain, starry skies of the autumn, the colour of flowers in the spring, music of birds, all penetrate the building. This metaphor naturally demands technical application not only in matters of climate control but also problems of security. Islam provided ample light and cross ventilation with lockable doors to each of the rooms leaving the corridor and lobby spaces as transition between the interior and the exterior and fulfilled his desire for light, transparency and openness without creating any security problem. After all the matter of security is a moral and cultural issue. Islam obviously had faith in people. Record shows that in last sixty years of existence, the college never faced any security threat.

Islam had deference towards local material, craft work and subtleties of local sub-tropical light, a deference which is sustained without falling into the sentimentality of excluding rational form and modern technique. He used burnt brick in walls without plaster to provide a non-mechanical look of the form, used perforated walls/screens, teak wood for brise-soleil and a sculptural curvilinear stair case to accentuate the tactile and tectonic quality of his architecture and as well to create a potential place-form. To him modernism demands a respect for inherent qualities of building materials.

Muzharul Islam did not only consider architecture as a utilitarian art. He understood architecture as a vehicle to achieve better life. He rejected all feudal contents in architecture and avoided traditional ornamentation and decoration as these were useless and expensive and instead created an open and straight forward architecture revealing expressive value of locally available materials without prejudice and in doing so he took a position in favour of the common man. Although he used simple means, due to his genius and creative power he was able to create a thoughtful architecture expressing a sense of victory of the educated middle class. His architecture as exemplified in the Art College was, as though a declaration of the middle class which is achievable by the poor and where the rich would come down to embrace it for its beauty and reason.

Muzharul Islam was a philosopher, mentor and a great architect. Although with endless effort for three decades he bestowed greatness to the contemporary architecture of Bangladesh, he was almost jobless for the last three decades of his life. Muzharul Islam was a lonely tragic hero, pursuing a lonely quest. He was immortal long before his death, most of us realise it now long after his death.

Muzharul Islam was born on December 25, 1923 and died on July 15, 2012. I express with humility my respect to this noble man on his 90th birthday. ■