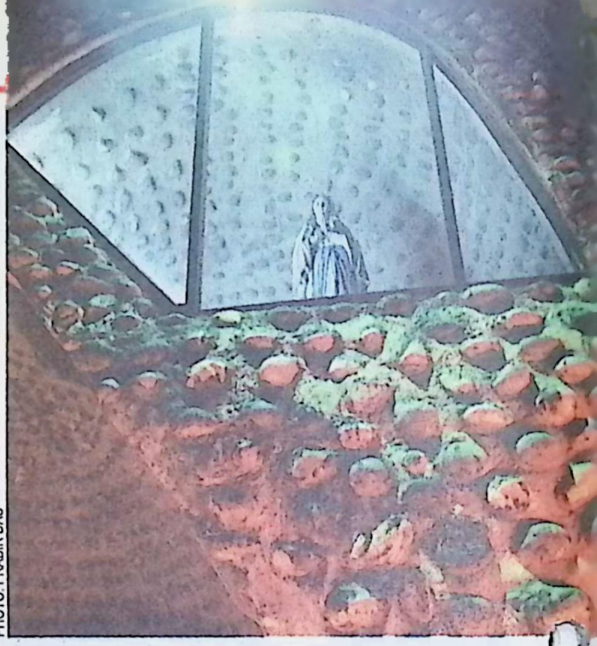


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

History Revisited

Dhaka is home to countless churches, many of which have a glorious history behind them. This week *the Star* brings you a brief history of three of the oldest churches in the city.

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Do you know that our country, which has a predominantly Muslim population, owns a number of significant age-old structures built by the Catholic and Augustinian Missionaries and Portuguese traders? It is believed that Christianity arrived in Bangladesh during the 16th century holding the hands of the Portuguese traders and Catholic missionaries who built churches in various parts of the country including Dhaka. At present Bangladesh has a Christian population of around one million where the Roman Catholics are around 40 percent and the different Protestant denominations namely Baptists, Anglicans, Lutheran, Pentecostals and Prebyterians, etc. are 60 percent of the total number. The country has a number of churches; interestingly many of these churches are the oldest standing buildings of their respective areas, first opened to worshippers more than three to four centuries back.

Tejgaon boasts of having the city's oldest church, The Church of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. As the inscription on the west façade of the church suggests, it was built in 1677 by the Portuguese Augustinian missionaries. As the Mughal capital, Dhaka started flourishing in trade and commerce, which attracted many foreign traders. The city became the main centre for muslin trade that made Dutch, French, English, Armenian, and Greek traders flock to Dhaka for business purposes and for establishing their own trading houses. With the traders also came the Christian missionaries. Sixty-nine years after Dhaka was named as the Mughal capital by Subadar Islam Khan, a small chapel was set by the Portuguese Jesuit Missionary at Tejgaon, then a tiny suburb of Dhaka, to meet the increasing need of Christian community in 1677. With time and the growing need of the Christian community, the chapel was promoted as a church in 1714, and the structure was expanded to include an East wing in 1940.

After the Holy Rosary Church, the Armenian Church (also known as the Armenian Apostolic Church of the Holy Resurrection) is the oldest



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