

RETHINKING URBAN SPACES DHAKA AND BEYOND



DHAKA THURSDAY
FEBRUARY 22, 2018
FALGUN 10, 1424 BS

22

Render image



New Market

Reimagining urban nodes in Dhaka

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

alternative urban solutions for them: (1) Bahadur Shah Park, (2) Gol Talab in Old Dhaka, (3) Bangla Academy area, (4) New Market, (5) Shahbagh, (6) Mohammadpur Krishi Market, (7) Fargmate, (8) Mohakhali Mor, and (9) Gulshan Circle-2.

The goals for each project varied, depending on the history and urban conditions of each urban node. For example, Bahadur Shah Park and New Market presented two very different sets of urban challenges. While the former was entwined with histories of colonial atrocities, the latter emerged as one of the first urban malls in the country. Therefore, urban solutions for these two nodes were radically different.

Yet, there was one common theme—how to celebrate the primacy of pedestrians and public places that would foster a culture of community building. Some nodes, such as Farmgate and Mohakhali Mor, warranted 21st-century urban transportation solutions, while providing spaces for pedestrians and formal/informal retail activities. The goal for Gol Talab, an oval-shaped pond in Islampur near Ahsan Manzil at the heart of Old Dhaka's wholesale clothing business,



New Market

was how to convert this urban pond into the centerpiece of a pedestrianised zone. The students who were assigned the Bangla

Academy area, the epicentre of the country's glorious language movement, and Shahbagh, endeavoured to transform the

"negative space" under the proposed MRT Line 6 into dynamic pedestrian and activity corridors that connected surrounding areas. Mohammadpur Krishi Market needed new imaginations of *kacha bazar* as a public place with the ambiance of an urban park, while Gulshan Circle-2 demanded a vertical stratification of pedestrian and vehicular movements, facilitated by a network of green spaces as sites of outdoor activities.

In the end, the student projects reminded us that small-scale, targeted, and tactical urban interventions might be the first step toward a lasting solution to Dhaka's myriad urban problems. Perhaps, this is the only way. Most importantly, it is vital that we remain hopeful. We should also reimagine the classroom as a critical forum for real-life problem-solving.

Adnan Morshed is an architect, architectural historian, and urbanist, and currently serving as Chairperson of the Department of Architecture at BRAC University. He is the author of *Impossible Heights: Skyscrapers, Flight, and the Master Builder* (2015) and *Oculus: A Decade of Insights in Bangladeshi Affairs* (2012), and *DAC/Dhaka in 25 Buildings* (2017). He can be reached at amorshed@bracu.ac.bd.



Bangla Academy



Mohakhali

Gol Talab in Old Dhaka