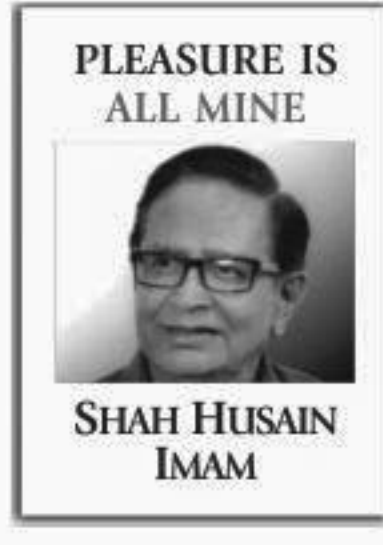


Dhaka: Where will it go from here?



PLEASURE IS ALL MINE
SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

DHAKA, once the Venice of the East by virtue of being surrounded by four ebullient rivers, is now an urban behemoth. In our university days, going home

on a long vacation, we would be literally pining for Dhaka after a couple of weeks of sojourn with parents. I remember having once treated my parents, exuding warmth to an absentee son in their midst, "Now that I have seen you, and my heart is filled and refreshed, might I return to Dhaka earlier than scheduled?"

Why did we gravitate towards Dhaka then? The *krishnachura*-clad and tall rain tree-paved campus? Yes, that pristine charm was there but elementally Dhaka's water was among the best in the province and its unpolluted air brightened the skin. And it was a friendly city on top of everything.

But all that is history now. Even Uttara, supposed to be a model town, is a chaotic jungle of concrete where commercial buildings and residential high-rise apartments are an optical pain, let alone vitiating the atmosphere. And all this is devoid of a stipulated number of parks; and no patches of green breathing fresh air into the alleys.

The ledges, shoulder belts and sideways to the streets have been so broadened and encroached upon that the main thoroughfares have narrowed down, not to be serviceable as before. All this has happened in prime areas like Gulshan and Uttara!

Now talks are going on to develop East Dhaka like Pudong, or East Shanghai, which in 26 years has transformed from marshy outback into the "New York of China"—a vibrant financial and business hub of Shanghai. Similarities are being drawn between the Pudong of the old and present-day East Dhaka.

Qimiao Fan, country director of the



Experts are proposing for expansion towards East Dhaka for the city's urban transformation, by following China's example of Pudong or East Shanghai.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

World Bank for Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan says, "Go East". The parallels are striking: "To cross between East and West in Shanghai, one had to put a bicycle on the ferry." Fan is graphic when he says, "I would rather have a bed in West Shanghai than a house in East Shanghai."

In the case of Dhaka, the East is just six kilometres away from the western part; two parallel roads need to be bisected for connectivity. East Dhaka comprising 166 unions has an area comparable to that of some large European cities.

The World Bank's country director who beckons us to follow Shanghai's example adds that at the international conference on development options for Dhaka, they presented a discussion paper, an invitational one, to debate

and come out with solutions tailor-made to our conditions. It will require careful planning, proper implementation and close coordination, the generalised prerequisites, so to speak. We may have to take a cue from the urban journeys of New Delhi and Shanghai. But we think, nearer home is Kolkata's remarkable bounce back from a "decadent" city to a mellowing, aesthetic and free-flowing mega urban habitat!

To rivet on to the old world charm, this has, in fact, been retained in Bund, the old part of Shanghai. There you see the cobblestone roads, delectable gardens, seating arrangements topped up with privacy and tranquility, tucked away restaurants amid green pastures. Even in London cobblestone roads

and lake-laced and wooded retreats have been conserved and maintained as spruced up recreational spots.

There is no mistaking the fact, however, that the success of the Pudong project rested on central command (political will), single-minded pursuit, strict unified municipalities and an irrevocable timeline. We have to muster those strengths before we embark on such a mega project. Besides, digitalisation of land administration is imperative for fail-safe land acquisition and use.

Do we only pontificate and quarrel over upsides and downsides of a strategic plan with a "touch of novelty" to modernise Dhaka, trying to halt its progress even to the drawing board? Or do we give it a fair consideration based on the fact that acceptability of an idea

lies in its merit and has little to do with the person who pronounces it or the institution he represents?

In the present case, Qimiao Fan, Yue Li and Martin Rama, country director for Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, chief economist for South Asia region, and senior economist, respectively, of the World Bank have, out of a sense of urgency, followed up on a WB report on Dhaka's urbanisation challenge. They underscored an idea clothed in the novelty of an analogy between what is now the potential for Dhaka to grow in a balanced way and that which is already a reality for Shanghai.

It is common knowledge that the western part of Dhaka has no room for horizontal expansion so that a "look East" development policy may have been under consideration, if not on the anvil. With the big, concerning difference that the harmful pattern of development through land-grabbing, hauling up of sand from canals and choking of the water bodies that had inexorably degraded the environment in the West is going to be replicated on the eastern side, if left unguarded. The time is now to apply the brakes on no-holds-barred construction activities; lest they cross the critical threshold where prohibitive retrofitting costs would be entailed.

The World Bank experts' catchphrase is: unlock the potential of East Dhaka to ease the intense pressure off West Dhaka making Dhaka great just as a well-developed Pudong has propelled the greatness of Shanghai.

Forty-seven years since national independence, Dhaka's development plans galore has been stuck with the drawing boards or amended umpteenth time to suit influential quarters beyond redemption. How long shall we walk around with blueprints under our arms?

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Is the Bangladesh Labour Act only for factory workers?

NAFIZ AHMED

WHILE shopping in or passing by your neighbourhood grocery store, have you ever thought about the working hours of the shopkeepers? You have probably seen them opening the shops early in the morning and then closing the shops late at night.

How about your barber? More often than not, we see barbers working 12 hours, seven days a week. How about chefs and other workers working in restaurants? Bangladesh has recently seen considerable development in the restaurant business and as a result it has created quite a large job market. But most of these restaurants have workers working from around 9am to 11pm, a 14-hour work shift. Of course, they get breaks but they are still very long working hours.

The Labour Act, 2006 of Bangladesh expressly prohibits working for or forcing workers to work for more than eight hours under normal circumstances and 10 hours including overtime (proviso to section 108 of the said Act).

Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006 defines all persons working in any establishment or industry, other than those working in managerial or administrative capacity, as labourers (except for specified cases). This means anyone working in a non-managerial post is protected as a labourer under the Labour Act unless they are in specific sectors



which are excluded from the ambit of the Act. Since the persons I mentioned above without a doubt fall within the scope of the provided definition, the Labour Act shall apply for them as well. Because of the influence of the media, high number of jobs being created and events of recent years, only workers working in the factories come to our mind when we hear about "labour rights". After considering the current conditions of workers

working in shops and comparatively small businesses, I cannot help but ask: is the Labour Act only applicable for factory workers?

Due to our economy being heavily dependent on RMG export and concomitant international pressure on labour conditions' standards in the sector, most of our efforts of ensuring labour rights seem to have been directed towards the readymade garment

factory workers. Protests, powerful trade unions and other factors also play a role in securing the rights of the workers working in the factories. Different organs of the government like the Department of Labour and Department of Inspection of Factories and Establishments are working for the rights of the workers and executing the provisions provided by the Labour Act with some help received from foreign agencies.

The extreme disregard towards the rights of the workers in other sectors can be illustrated with a few examples. According to the Labour Act, the workers shall be provided with an appointment letter and an ID card upon joining the establishment. Have you ever seen a shopkeeper or a barber or a waiter wearing an ID card? I certainly have not. Big stores like Agora, Shwapno, etc., are of course an exception in this case. Asking about appointment letters for shopkeepers, barbers or restaurant staff in most cases will assuredly lead to confusion or laughter.

There are also many serious provisions in the Labour Act which are not being followed by many business owners. Not following the procedures applying to firing or discharging a worker is a major example of such disregard. While the Act expressly states the procedures that have to be followed in case of firing, discharging, suspending or laying off the worker in order to ensure natural justice, in most cases this is done in an informal, ad hoc manner. This greatly violates the rights of the

workers. The matter might be small to the business owners but it is of utmost importance to the workers because their livelihoods are at stake.

This disregard for the rights of the workers working in comparatively small businesses should not be taken lightly since it is a fundamental principle to honour the work of our workers. Article 20(1) of the Constitution of Bangladesh provides, "Work is a right, a duty and a matter of honour for every citizen who is capable of working, and everyone shall be paid for his work on the basis of the principle 'from each according to his abilities, to each according to his work'." So we must pledge to honour workers' rights in all sectors.

The reason for such disregard can be traced back to the lack of knowledge, advocacy and the absence of powerful and influential trade unions in many sectors. Workers must know that their rights and trade unions can play a vital role in this regard as previously witnessed in RMG factory worker unions.

There are thousands of workers employed in numerous sectors who contribute significantly to our economy. It's time the regulators and entrepreneurs realised this and fulfilled their responsibility to protect and honour the rights of those who work for them.

Nafiz Ahmed is a final year law student at North South University.

QUOTABLE Quote

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE (1820-1910)
English social reformer and founder of modern nursing

Were there none who were discontented with what they have, the world would never reach anything better.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Eat loudly
- 6 Director Lang
- 11 The Montague boy
- 12 "C'est --!"
- 13 Concurring
- 15 Dramatist Jonson
- 16 Price addition
- 17 Yacht spot
- 18 Pool fill
- 20 Match in value
- 23 "Wheel of Fortune" host
- 27 With 8-Down, "A Holly Jolly Christmas" singer
- 28 Cipher
- 29 Cotton pods
- 31 Squalid
- 32 Roof overhangs

DOWN

- 1 Steal
- 2 Sharpen
- 3 Yemen neighbor
- 4 Actress Ryan
- 5 Doorway
- 6 Bends
- 7 Lamb's father
- 8 See 27-Across
- 9 Fork feature
- 10 Letter after epsilon
- 14 Have lunch

34 Farrow of films
37 Drill part
38 Conk out
41 Gabriel Byrne TV series
44 Scrub
45 Slow tempo
46 Domesticates
47 Pop star John

18 2008 Pixar movie
19 Track events
20 Subside
21 Status --
22 Online address
24 Coffee, in slang
25 Tack on
26 Lock opener
30 Fencing swords
31 End a lawsuit
33 By way of
34 Fog
35 Cuzco native
36 Bond component
38 Auto ding
39 A fan of
40 School near Windsor
42 Regret
43 Singer Torme

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

M	U	M	S	A	S	A	P		
S	O	N	I	C	D	I	N	A	H
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S	E	N	D	S	E	E	D		

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

MY JEEP HAS BEEN MAKING FUNNY NOISES
START IT UP SO I CAN HEAR IT

BY MORT WALKER

RUMBLE GURGLE BURP
THAT'S YOUR STOMACH!

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WHY ARE YOU RUBBING MOM'S BACK?
BECAUSE SHE LIKES IT.

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

BACK RUBS ARE JUST SOMETHING I DO FOR MOM.
ESPECIALLY WHEN I LIE ON THE REMOTE AND REFUSE TO GET OFF UNTIL I GET ONE.