



PHOTOS: PAHN CHAKMA & TOUKIR AHMED TANVEE

A DOG SEES DHAKA

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SHOUT

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I remember my first day in this strange city vividly. It's hard to forget. I woke up one fine morning and opened my eyes to the gentle light at the break of dawn. It smelled like burnt petrol and piled up trash. Initial impressions aside, I tried to recollect the events that brought me here. A good memory has never been my strong suit. However, after several minutes of hard thinking, I managed to remember where I had been the night before. I remember running through the green pastures of my little town before getting on a giant caterpillar on fire. Did I need to do it? No. But love seldom heeds to logic. When I saw that steel mammoth on rails before me, I knew that scaling it was bound to win the undying admiration of the lady in front of me.

I was wrong.

Sitting up there, defeated and alone, I decided to do what I always do to forget and start anew. I slept. I do not know what sorcery had been involved but my sleep had managed to transfer me to this strange realm where the buildings stretched towards the sky and the humans rushed through the streets like their lives depended on it.

But before getting into all that, let me introduce myself first. I have gathered a great many names over the course of my life. My first human companion called me "Rocky". His father, however, decided on "kukur" instead. I later found out that the last name was fairly popular among the humankind as they reserved it for our kind and used it on themselves as well. For the case of this recollection of events, let us use the name "Pupper".

So, let us get back to the story of me and the city. Dhaka, as I later came to know, was the strange place I found myself in. Now you haven't walked a mile in my paws, so you have no clue how my life in this city was like. Let me tell you right off the bat that I find this city to be very interesting. At times, it's unthinkable to love it. At times, it's unthinkable to hate it. It'll make sense as I tell you more about it. The first thing you are bound to notice is the sheer amount of humans in this city. And each one is somehow different.

As I walked through the street on my first day in Dhaka I saw the sky with a shade of pink through layers of dust. I found one guy trying to take photos of the sky. He was failing miserably since the buildings and electric wires were blocking the view as they always do. But did that make him stop? Nope. He kept trying as I often do when I try to chase

my tail - focused, unrelenting, and tireless. The footpaths were thick with pedestrians. Some were talking to a small rectangular object in their hands, some were just focused on walking and not bumping into anyone. I was walking with the moving cluster of humans. Most of them looked very angry all the time but that was understandable. Walking on two legs is bound to make anyone angry. We have it easier on four. I thought back to how I used to run around my village with my buddies. We had our stride in perfect unison. It amazed me that humans hadn't figured it out as some people walked slowly while some walked fast making them bump into each other followed by random arguments. As I watched two pedestrians argue I realised how much we mean to these humans. They called each other by our names and the names of our puppies. I felt quite overwhelmed by all the love if I'm honest.

After walking for what seemed like an eternity, I came across street. I saw countless steel vehicles zoom past in lightning speed without a hint of stopping. Perplexed by what to do next I decided to follow the human next to me and I sat patiently. To my amusement, a human magician came to my rescue. He raised his hand and every vehicle came to a stop. I moved my way down the road while thanking the human and his magic with gracious barks.

As night fell, the lights of the city's buildings were something to see. They were in full bloom, pleasing to the eyes. The food shops looked noticeable more than ever. They were busy with the flurry of people going in and out. I was walking towards one of these restaurants for two reasons. I was hungry and I had noticed the local dogs go there for food. The second reason was more of an instinctual one. It



happened every time I lurked around people in public places. I would be welcomed by this happy bunch of people. You see, there is this weird group of humans you often come across. Instead of grunting at us or shooing us away, they took a fancy to us. Sometimes the dog people came in herds, sometimes they were solo. They were very enthusiastic about pointing their small rectangular object at me and

having me pose with them. I'm kind of used to it now, can't really complain about this sort of positive attention.

My initial endeavour ended up in abject failure, a somewhat painful one. I strode in front of the restaurant wagging my tail trying to hit the owner up with my signature "puppy dog eyes". I overestimated two things — one, the owner's generosity and two, my charm. My attempts were met with

significant displeasure as the owner proceeded to splash me with a bucket of water. Now, there are a lot of things that I don't like. I don't like it when my brethren fight among each other, I don't like it when I see a kind human in pain, I don't like the abominations known as cats, but of all the things, I despise water the most. Soaked to the bone, with tired feet and a hungry stomach, one could realise how heartbroken I felt. I came to this city by chance and the city had rejected me. I looked at my reflection in a roadside puddle, which there were a lot because half the streets in this city were in ruins, and saw the reflection of dog I barely knew. I walked away with tired steps.

But the city has surprises for you. For every broken street there is a sight that'll take your breath away. And for every rude human, there is a human who'll love you for who you are. I was lucky enough to walk up to one. She saw me whimpering and came to me with some biscuits. She patted my wet fur as I gobbled up the biscuits like my life depended on it. My hunger, both for food and love, was satiated by this kind stranger. I immediately swore a vow to protect this human from any danger for as long as I lived. Unfortunately, my vow was at stake when she waved me goodbye and got on this three-wheeled vehicle pulled by a man.

Speaking of vehicles, Dhaka's roads are full of surprises. They are fast and they are most certainly furious. If the road is ever empty, they hold themselves tight as they speed and turn into blurs to reach their destination timely. I know all of this now being an experienced Dhaka dweller. However, I did not know any better that day. The story of my life could have ended at that moment when I tried to cross the road

trying to follow the vehicle called "rickshaw". It was almost ended when a car, who didn't seem to care much about running me over, proceeded to do that. However, a fellow dog barked me to a spot. And that was how I met my first Dhaka street dog gang.

I learned all about this strange city afterward while roaming with my companions. We barked at each other, we fought, but we survived. We barked together to protect our territory and fend off the rival groups. It really was the best of times, and the worst of times.

This city can be cruel. It hurts you for no reason. I have been kicked and pushed away. I have seen worse being done to my brethren. The city is loud and unforgiving. The roads can be broken and the crowd can be disorienting. But in spite of all this, this city has become my home. Just as there are bad people, cruel people, there are those with hearts of gold. They help us, pet us and treat us with love. Am I romanticising this place? I might be. I blame it on being a dog. We love everything. Except cats.

Now that I told you all about Dhaka and how I see it, you'll have to excuse me. There's friends to be made and pats to be had.

Shah Tazrian Ashrafi wants 2018 to be as smooth as stormtroopers missing easy shots. Send him prayers at tazrian1234@gmail.com

Nuren Iftekhar is your local stray cat in disguise; he interacts with people for food and hates bright light. He got Hufflepuff 3 times straight in Pottermore so no walking around that one. Send him obscure memes at n.iftekar18@gmail.com