

MY DHAKA



PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED, ORCHID CHAKMA

A wishful architect's whimsies on Dhaka city

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A city that never sleeps, a buzzing metropolis sheltering millions grappling with the race against time -- Dhaka might pose as an architect's dizziest dilemma.

When I was in architecture school, the city seemed like an artist's canvas. Beautiful mosques, shiny skyscrapers, and luxe residences: a student of architecture could barely wait to get a license and a chance to design the city!

However, practicing architecture in this chaotic megacity can make a young professional feel as if they are back in the first year of university: constantly learning, unlearning, and relearning.

Dhaka is busy, Dhaka is uncaring, and Dhaka leaves you with too little time to wonder if it could be beautifully planned and strategically designed. Here, spaces grow underneath flyovers and tall trees, tiny balconies desperately seek out a piece of sky, and tight plots define the urban lifestyle. Where is the room for imagination? How can an aspiring architect dream?

Our past is fascinating. Take, for example, Ahsan Manzil by the Buriganga. As a student, I once visited the palace. I saw those column capitals, arched windows, and views of how river life unfolded. The stories of foreign traders on boats, royal Nawabs, zamindars in the grand halls, and



'suited booted' Englishmen came alive from the books.

The grandeur is long gone; shiny palaces are now replaced by a modernist language. From Old Dhaka's Armenian Church, Tara Masjid, or Lalbagh Fort -- the northern part of the city's architecture poses a stark contrast. The newer part is exciting, brimming with youth, and the prime architectural symbol of Bengali modernism, to me, remains the Fine Arts building of Dhaka University by Muzharul Islam.

Charukala draws you in without trying; it does not intimidate. Unlike the rest of the city, Charukala is down-

to earth. You do not walk inside; you wander about and find yourself walking upward with the spiral staircase. The deliberately preserved greenery naturally befriends you and snaps you out of the chaos in your head!

The openness in the main building, a tribute to our tropical climate -- and how the facade is made private with wooden louvres -- draws an iconic image that stays in an architect's head. Moreover, how lucky are we to possess one of the masterworks of architect Louis I Kahn?

Standing at the complex, witnessing the wisdom behind the masterplan of

the National Assembly Building, I once watched the surrounding waterscape, then the sharp cuts of concrete meeting the soft sprawl of the delta, our roots.

Once surrounded by rivers, Dhaka now yearns for water. From dreamy Sher-e-Bangla Nagar to the posh avenues of Kemal Ataturk: architecture seems to grow taller in height and style. Some buildings may read as exaggerated showcases; some appear all too mechanical, and some play with form and space with perfect harmony -- an ode to 21st-century Dhaka.

Commercial high-rises parade, some circular, some twisted or modular, some wrapped in shiny glass facades. Among all the showcases, Ninakabbo, located in Tejgaon, is bound to catch the eye with verses of poems written on concrete walls. Truly, a stunning example of how architecture can depict a perfect marriage between poetry and business!

As Dhaka struggles to provide spaces to live, to slow down: gazing at the sleek towers, the perfectly articulated residences, an aspiring architect can wish to design a beautiful house someday. A quietly luxurious living -- one with a large balcony filled with lush green -- a house where users can hear the birds chirp instead of traffic honks, where monsoon drenches, and a full moon can be found despite the layers of dust in our beloved city!

Dreams of Europe end in saltwater

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In recent weeks, supply constraints have forced Bangladesh to scale back imports under long-term contracts and turn to the spot market, where prices have surged. Efforts to secure adequate volumes are also hampered due to the war.

In this situation, the power sector is also relying on costlier alternatives such as furnace oil, officials said. Meanwhile, refined fuel is being bought at higher prices due to the country's limited refining capacity.

Md Zahurul Islam, member (generation) at the Bangladesh Power Development Board, said Petrobangla has warned that gas supply may decline in the coming months, potentially affecting electricity production.

"But if the recently purchased LNG arrives on schedule, there will be no impact in April," he added.

Tk 6 lakh after Nuruzzaman reached Libya.

"They said he would be sent on a big ship or steamer. But they kept him in the game ghar for 16 days without anything to eat and later put him on the boat without food or water."

Halal urged other families not to let their loved ones fall into the hands of local brokers of trafficking rings, saying they did not do what they promised and were still demanding money even after the failed journey.

Two more men from the same village, Mohammad Sahanur and Rohan Mia, were also on the boat. Sahanur was initially reported dead, but his brother Md Zakaria now believes he may be alive and in critical condition at a hospital.

Elsewhere in Sunamganj, families are grieving Mehedi

Hasan Tayef and Sohanur Rahman.

Sohanur, born after four sisters, had left without informing his family.

His father, Salikur Rahman, said an agency had been processing his son's journey to Serbia under a Tk 13 lakh deal.

The agency had kept his passport, which Sohanur retrieved after leaving home, and later called from Dhaka to say he was heading to Greece via Libya.

Salikur said his son had struck a deal with broker Saleh Ahmed of Jagdal village.

"A month after leaving, my son called and said he had been stranded in the desert and asked us to contact the broker. After we paid some money, they sent him to the game ghar," he said.

At least 11 of the dead

were from Sunamganj, with others from Habiganj and Kishoreganj, according to families and law enforcers.

A video circulating online shows a survivor claiming 43 people were on the small boat, including 38 Bangladeshis and five Sudanese.

He alleged the group had been promised passage on a bigger boat but was instead put on a smaller one without a satellite phone, GPS device or any means of communication. He said those who died began decomposing in the salt water and were later thrown into the sea.

The survivor also named several alleged brokers and traffickers, claiming many were from Sylhet.

He said some migrants had spent months in Libyan camps before the crossing.

The boat left Tobruk in eastern Libya on March 21. Late Friday, the Greek coastguard said 26 people, including a woman and a minor, were rescued off Crete by a European border agency vessel.

Bangladesh has long been among the top source countries for irregular migration to Europe, said Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration Programme. The latest deaths are alarming, he added, as thousands more Bangladeshis are believed to be waiting in Libya for the same journey.

He urged stronger government action at home and abroad with Libya, Greece and Italy to stop such crossings.

"These deaths are very sad and unexpected," said state minister Nur, adding that

the Bangladesh mission is contacting Greek authorities. The government, with the International Organisation for Migration, is supporting survivors and exploring ways to bring back bodies.

Those responsible must be punished under domestic or international law, said Shama Obaed Islam, state minister for foreign affairs. Missions have been asked to identify how the trafficking was carried out and who is behind it.

"The perpetrators, whether Libyan or Bangladeshi, must be brought to justice."

She said the immediate priority is treatment of survivors, followed by nationality verification before repatriation. Embassies in Athens, Lebanon and Libya are working on the matter.

ICT prosecutor links

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"There are serious allegations against them. They set up safe houses where many victims were tortured, leaving some permanently disabled," Aminul later told The Daily Star.

He added that many victims taken to such facilities remain unaccounted for.

Describing the abuses as systematic, the chief prosecutor said individuals were reportedly detained, transferred between locations, and killed in an organised manner. In many cases, he said, deaths were later portrayed as outcomes of gunfights or operations to recover firearms.

Earlier, while briefing reporters, the chief prosecutor said the two retired officers were associated with multiple activities that fall under the definition of crimes against humanity.

He made the remarks around half an hour after he filed petitions before International Crimes Tribunal 2 seeking to show Mamun and Masud arrested in two separate cases of crimes against humanity.

Following the prosecution's plea, the tribunal ordered relevant jail authorities to produce both accused before the tribunal on April 7.

A prosecutor told The Daily Star that Masud has been accused in connection with killings during the 2024 July mass uprising, while Mamun faces allegations of enforced disappearances.

Earlier on March 24, police detectives arrested Masud, widely known as one of the key architects of the 1/11 political changeover in 2007,

from his residence in the capital. He is currently on a five-day remand in a human trafficking case filed with Paltan Police Station.

A Dhaka court yesterday placed Masud on a fresh six-day remand in a case over human trafficking and forgery of documents.

The case was filed with Paltan Model Police Station on September 3, 2024, by a proprietor of Afia Overseas against 103 individuals, including former minister Imran Ahmed.

Masud previously served as general officer commanding (GOC) of the 9th Infantry Division in Savar during the state of emergency declared on January 11, 2007. Later, he was appointed chief coordinator of the National Coordination Committee on Serious Crimes and Corruption, promoted to lieutenant general, and posted to the National Defence College on June 2, 2008.

The detectives also arrested former DGFI chief Mamun from his residence in Mirpur DOHS on March 26. He is now being interrogated in custody after a court placed him on a five-day remand in a murder case filed with Mirpur Police Station in connection with the July mass uprising.

Aminul said further details could not be disclosed due to the ongoing investigation but said, "We expect that, based on the investigation findings, the former senior army officers will face trial before the tribunal," he said.

He also expressed hope that, if proven, the accused would receive appropriate punishment to deter future abuses by public servants.

JS discussion

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Chief Whip Nurul Islam Moni, taking the floor, said parliamentary practice requires that such matters be raised only after the starred questions and Rule 71 discussions are completed.

"I would request the leader of the opposition to wait until the rules are finished," he said. Amid desk-thumping from Prime Minister and Leader of the House Tarique Rahman, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed also questioned which provisions of the rules of procedure applied to the matter.

Shafiq again took the floor, saying, "In line with the speaker's instruction, I rose after the question and answer session. This is both my right and my responsibility."

Kayser Kamal, after a debate between treasury bench and opposition members, said a decision on the matter would be announced later in the day's proceedings.

After nearly an hour and a half, Shafiq took the floor and placed the notice, which said that following the referendum's decisive "Yes" vote win, members elected to the 13th parliament are legally obligated to take two oaths -- one as members of parliament and another as members of the Constitution Reform Council.

MPs from the BNP-led alliance refused to take oath as members of the Constitution Reform Council. Meanwhile, 77 MPs from the Jamaat-led 11-party alliance took both oaths.

According to the July National Charter (Constitution Reform) Implementation Order, 2025, the first session of the council should be convened in the same manner as the first session of parliament -- within 30 calendar days of the election results being declared. However, this has not yet been done.

After the opposition leader placed the proposal, Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman said that such an important matter requires debate and requested the speaker to set a time for discussion.

Immediately after the law minister's speech, Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed rose on a point of order.

He said the opposition leader's notice was not in line with Rule 62 of the Rules of Procedure and should instead have been submitted under Rule 68. He added that the speaker could, if he wished, ask the opposition leader to correct it.

His statement prompted opposition MPs to stand up in protest, creating uproar in the House. Opposition members loudly voiced their objections, while the speaker repeatedly requested them to sit down.

Addressing the speaker, the home minister said, "I seek your protection. You may

give the floor to opposition members, no problem. But let me speak. We must not return to the old culture. If you do not give me time, I will sit down; that is the rule."

The speaker then asked him to continue.

Salahuddin said, "If the notice is accepted, it must be accepted in amended form. Under Rule 63, no proposal can be brought for discussion if its remedy can only be through legislation. In this case, the remedy lies in constitutional amendment and legislation. Generally, adjournment motions are brought on issues like price hikes or deterioration of law and order."

The minister then made a proposal: "We want to amend the constitution, and some opposition members also want reforms. In parliamentary language, the constitution may be enacted, repealed, suspended, or amended."

He proposed forming a committee comprising members from both the government and the opposition, aiming to amend the constitution.

He added that the committee could, if it wished, invite constitutional experts, eminent citizens, stakeholders, and newspaper editors to provide opinions. "We want to amend the constitution through consensus."

He clarified that he was not opposing the July charter. "This document has not directly changed the constitution, nor has any provision been altered. According to the July charter, constitutional amendments will be made. Parties that mentioned other issues in their manifestos have received mandates accordingly. BNP can therefore bring forward those manifesto issues that touch the constitution."

After hearing the statements of the opposition leader, the law minister, and the home minister, Deputy Speaker Kayser Kamal made his announcement.

"Under Rule 65(2) of the Rules of Procedure, I am setting aside two hours for discussion on March 31 after the day's agenda is completed."

Salahuddin Ahmed again took the floor despite objections from opposition MPs.

At that point, the deputy speaker said, "I have already given my decision. Please sit down."

The home minister continued speaking even after his microphone was switched off.

Later, the deputy speaker gave the floor to the opposition leader.

He said, "Once you have given your ruling, no further words on the matter are valid. You remain firm in your position, and we are with you."

Austerity

FROM PAGE 1

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US is plotting ground attack

FROM PAGE 1

On Saturday, the US Central Command (CENTCOM) said about 3,500 additional soldiers arrived in the Middle East on board the USS Tripoli. Reports suggest that the US is planning to send thousands of soldiers from the army's 82nd Airborne to the region.

The statement from Ghalibaf came after the Washington Post reported the Pentagon was preparing plans for weeks of ground operations, though US President Donald Trump has yet to approve any deployment.

Officials speaking to The Washington Post on condition of anonymity said discussions within the administration over the past month have touched upon the possible seizure of Kharg Island, a key Iranian oil export hub in the Gulf, and raids into other coastal areas near the Strait of Hormuz to find and destroy weapons that can target commercial and military shipping.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said the US could achieve its aims without ground troops but was deploying forces to the region to give Trump "maximum" flexibility.

It was not clear whether Ghalibaf was responding to the Post report.

On Wednesday, Ghalibaf had warned that intelligence reports suggested that "Iran's enemies" were planning to occupy an Iranian island with support from an unnamed country in the region.

He said any such attempt would be met with targeted attacks on the "vital infrastructure" of the regional country -- which he did not name -- that assists in the operation.

Meanwhile, Iran's navy chief Shahram Irani yesterday said that the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier would be targeted if it came within range.

Trump has repeatedly spoken of diplomatic contacts with Iran, although

these claims have been denied by Tehran.

Pakistan, acting as a go-between for Washington and Tehran, hosted foreign ministers from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt in Islamabad for talks on the crisis.

The four-way meeting between the top diplomats of the Muslim nations was slated to discuss "a range of issues, including efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region", Pakistan's foreign ministry has said.

More talks will be held today.

The US said last week it had offered a 15-point ceasefire plan to Iran, with a proposal to reopen the waterway and restrict Iran's nuclear programme, but Tehran has rejected the list and put forward proposals of its own.

As efforts to find a negotiated end to the war inched forward, Israel's military continued its relentless air assault on

Iran, saying yesterday its forces had targeted Tehran's weapons manufacturing infrastructure, including dozens of storage and production sites.

Five people were killed in a strike on a pier in the southern port city of Bandar-e Khamir that also destroyed two vessels, Iranian state media reported.

Israel also hit targets in Lebanon as part of its campaign against Iran-backed Hezbollah, killing three Lebanese journalists in a strike on a media vehicle, Lebanon's Al Manar TV reported, as well as a Lebanese soldier.

Early yesterday, it said one of its soldiers had been killed during combat in Lebanon.

A building housing Qatar's Al Araby TV in Tehran was struck by Israel yesterday, the semi-official Mehr news agency reported, showing an excavator taking rubble away from a damaged multi-storey block.

Iran also continued its