

National Assembly Hall, Dacca

Project Data

National Assembly Hall, Sher E Bangla Nagar, Dacca, Bangladesh.

Client: Public Works Department, Government of Bangladesh.

Architect: Louis I. Kahn.

Started: 1962, inaugurated February 1982 (but still incomplete).

The Sher-E-Bangla Nagar, or National Assembly Complex in Dacca, Bangladesh edges slowly towards completion. Louis I. Kahn (1901-1974) the American architect, designed the principal buildings, including the official residences, as well as the Ayub hospital (1963), and supervised construction through regular visits until his death eight years ago. The Public Works of Bangladesh Department has carried on the site work, with unfailing counsel of David Wisdom and Henry Wilcots, architects in Philadelphia and long-time associates of "Professor Kahn" — as he is still affectionately referred to in Dacca.

The assembly chambers were inaugurated and used earlier this year. It was a highly symbolic event after the vicissitudes of war, of political instability and assassinations, not to mention the actual hardships of acquiring adequate supplies of materials in order to achieve the building. Highly controversial in more than one respect, the edifice now must find its place as a stunning statement of architectural excellence within the totality of Kahn's work itself as well.

While the colour of the carpeting that

was put down does not correspond to Kahn's original specifications, nor that of the chairs for the Members of Parliament, the teak of the desks and rostrum lend a warm touch to the atmosphere of the central meeting space. (The carpet will be changed eventually we are told). The prayer hall, the various smaller meeting rooms, interior promenades lit artificially as well as by daylight, and the two major entries on the north and south are practically complete. The lakes have been drained in order to execute the necessary brick works on the banks. Now, for the first time the building can be viewed from the outside without the cranes rising above the 40 metre high structure, perennially testifying to its unfinished character. MIMAR wishes to celebrate the occasion of its inauguration by bringing the following images to its readers.

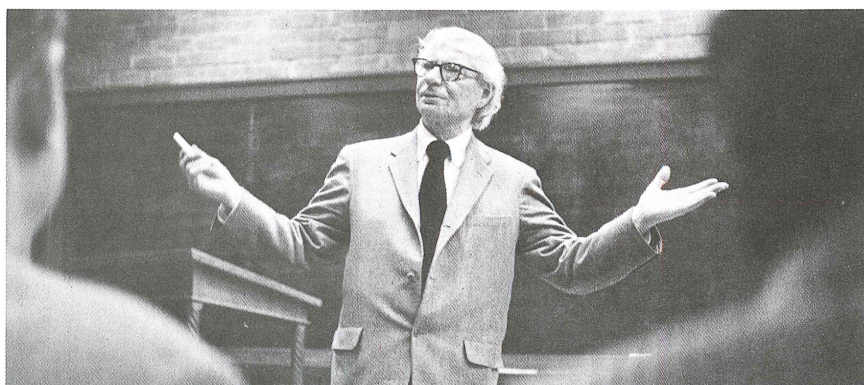
Below: The architect, Louis I. Kahn, lecturing in Dacca in January, 1973.

Photograph: A. Hossain.

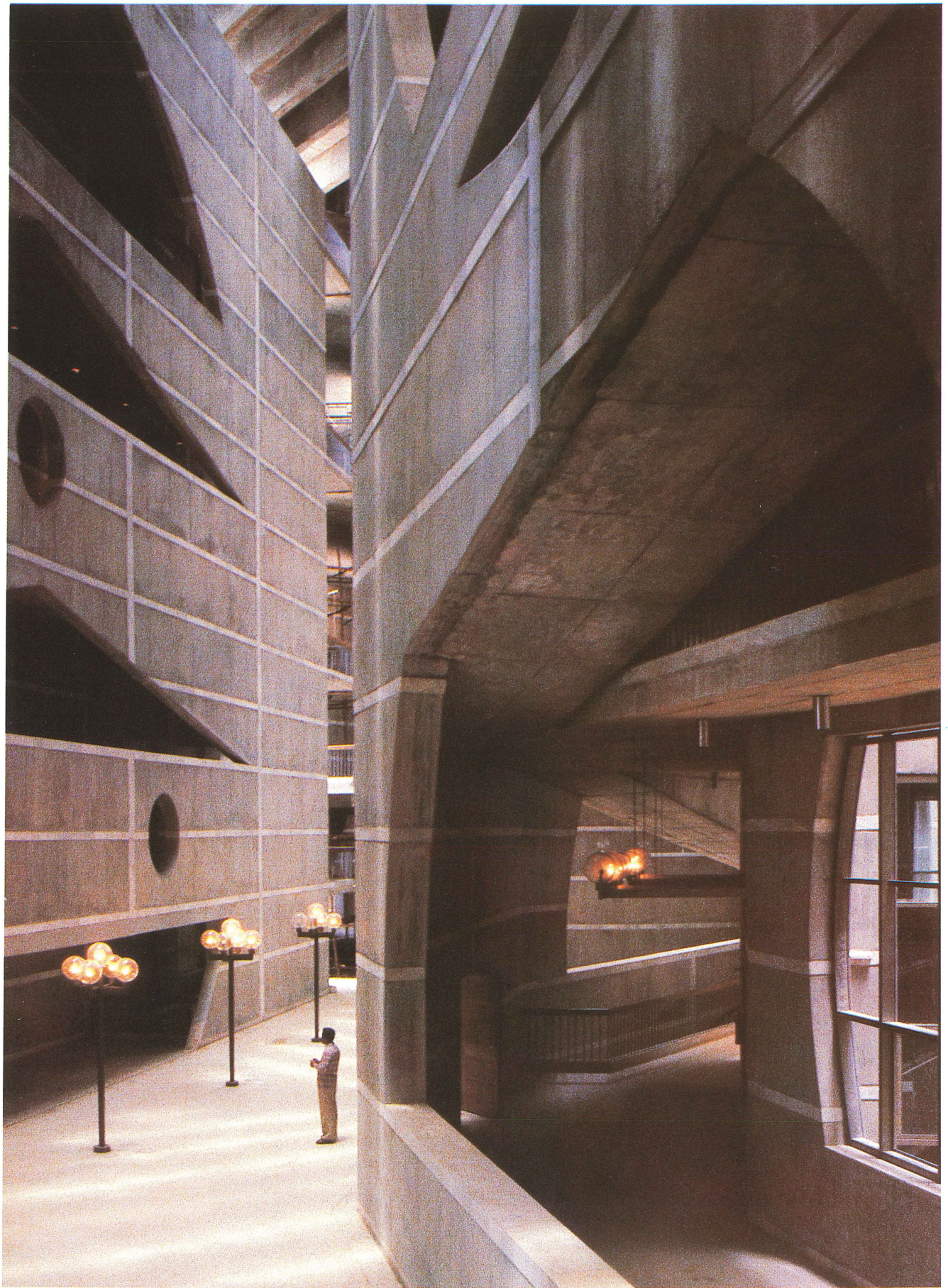
Bottom: The National Assembly Complex, viewed from the west, is set in a rural landscape, away from the centre of Dacca.

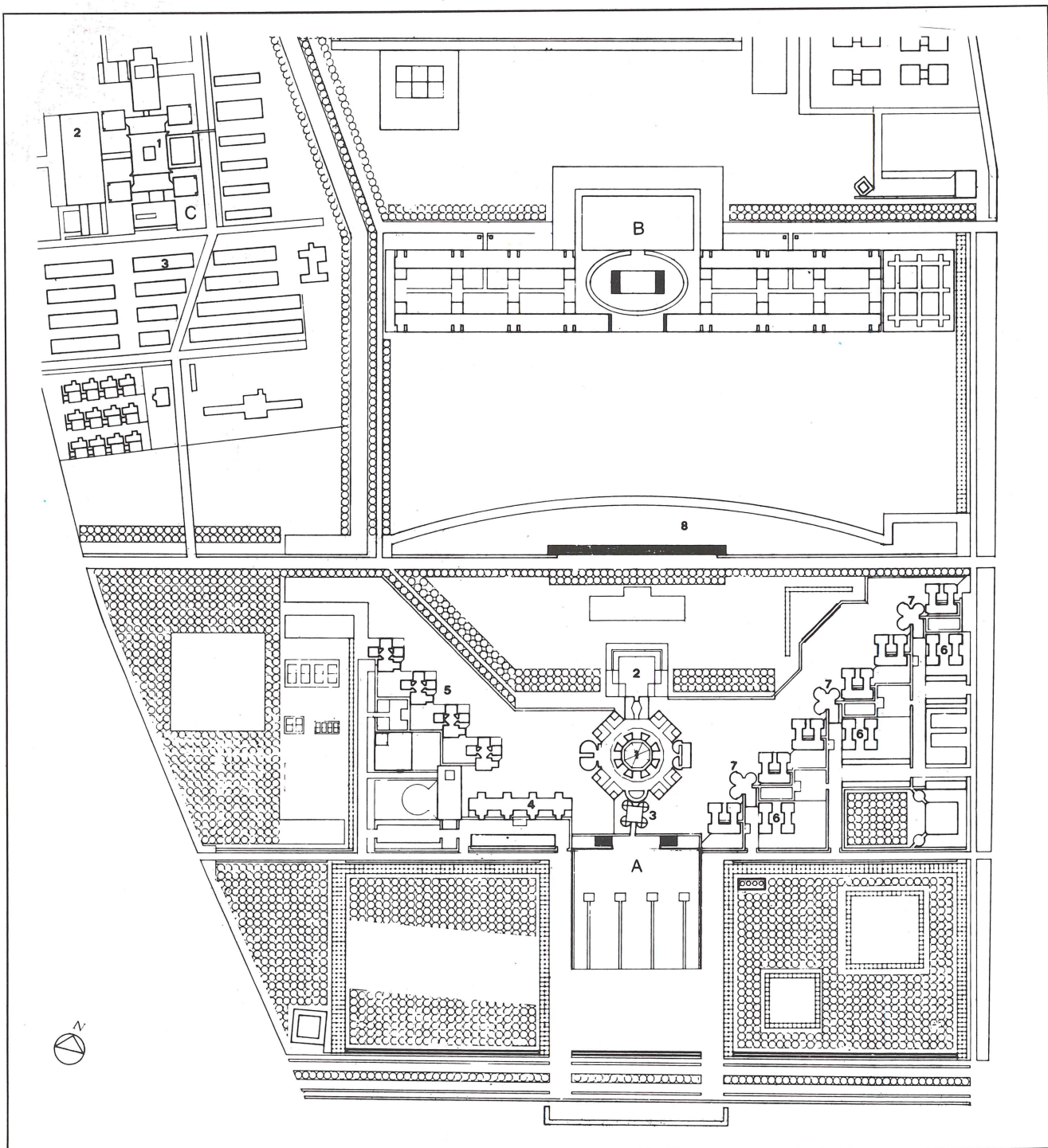
Right: An internal walkway in the Assembly Building.

Photographs: B. Taylor.



Text and photographs by
Brian Brace Taylor.
Additional photographs by
Anwar Hossain.





Master Plan, Sher-E-Bangla-Nagar

Of the Sher-E-Bangla Nagar (Capital Complex) Master Plan, Louis Kahn said: "I was given an extensive programme of buildings: the Assembly, the Supreme Court, hostels, schools, a stadium, the diplomatic enclave, the living sector, a market, all to be placed on a thousand acres of flat land subject to flood. ... the prevailing idea of the plan came from the realisation that assembly is of a transient nature. Men came to assemble to touch the spirit of community, ... thought that a mosque woven into the space fabric of the assembly would reflect this feeling.

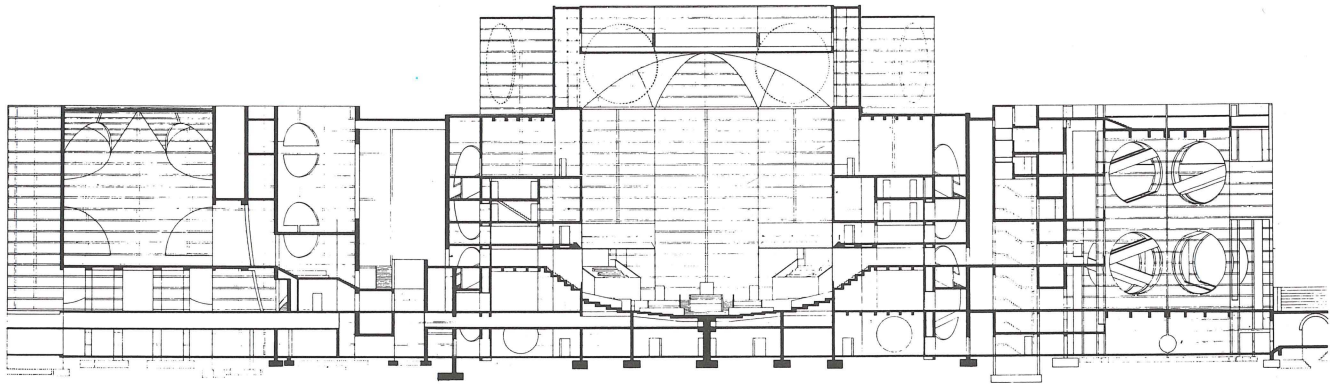
The Supreme Court was the test of the acts of legislation against the philosophic view of the nature of man. The Assembly, Mosque and Supreme Court

became inseparable in thinking of the transient nature of assembly.

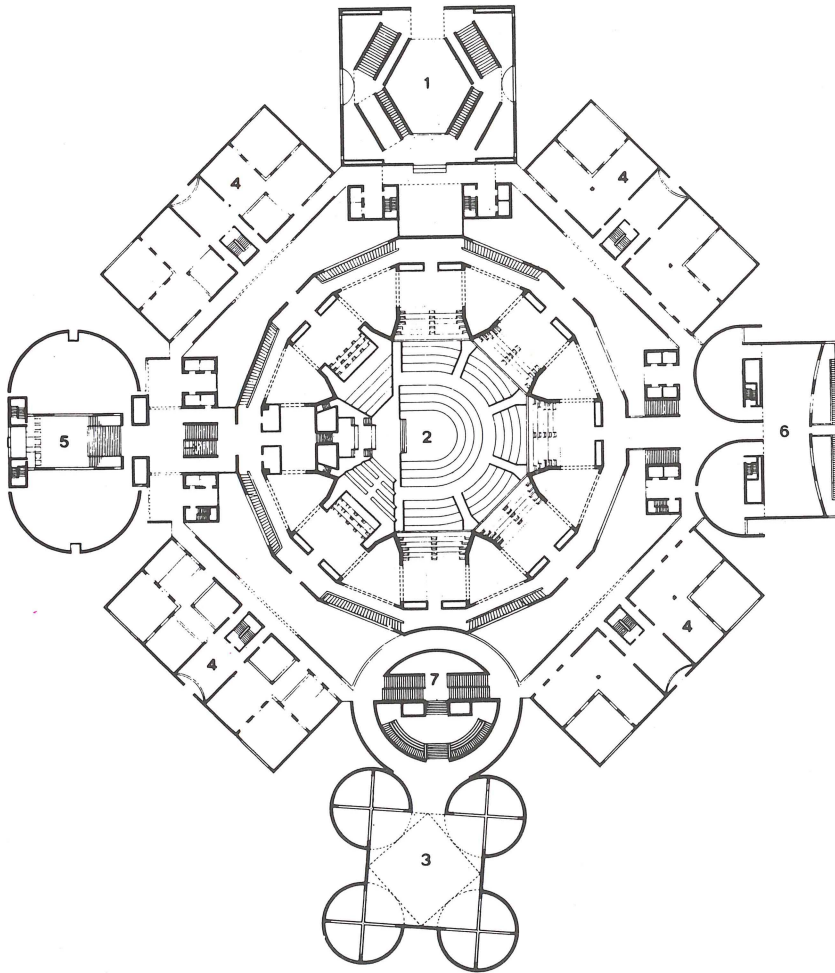
My design at Dacca is inspired, actually, by the Baths of Caracalla (the great Roman public baths), but much extended. The residential spaces ... are an amphitheatre. This is residual space ... a court. Around it are gardens, and in the body of the building are interiors, and in the interiors are levels of gardens and places ... that honour of the knowledge of how you were made. All these are places of well-being and places for rest and places where one gets advice about how to live forever ... and so that is what inspired the design."

Plan

- A. Citadel of the assembly
 - 1. Assembly building
 - 2. Presidential square
 - 3. Prayer hall
 - 4. Hostels for ministers
 - 5. Hostels for secretaries
 - 6. Hostels for members of the assembly
 - 7. Dining halls
- 8. Lake
- B. Secretariat
- C. Hospital complex
 - 1. Hospital
 - 2. Out-Patient department
 - 3. Staff housing

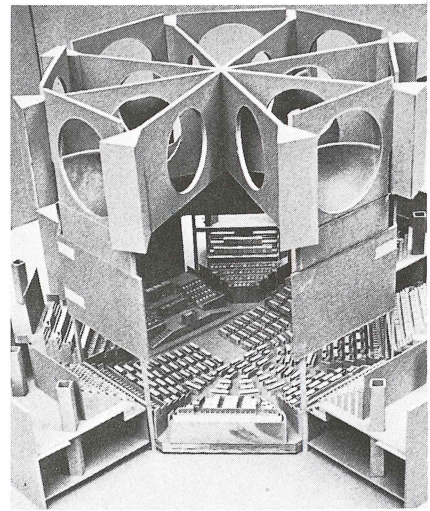


Section



Plan

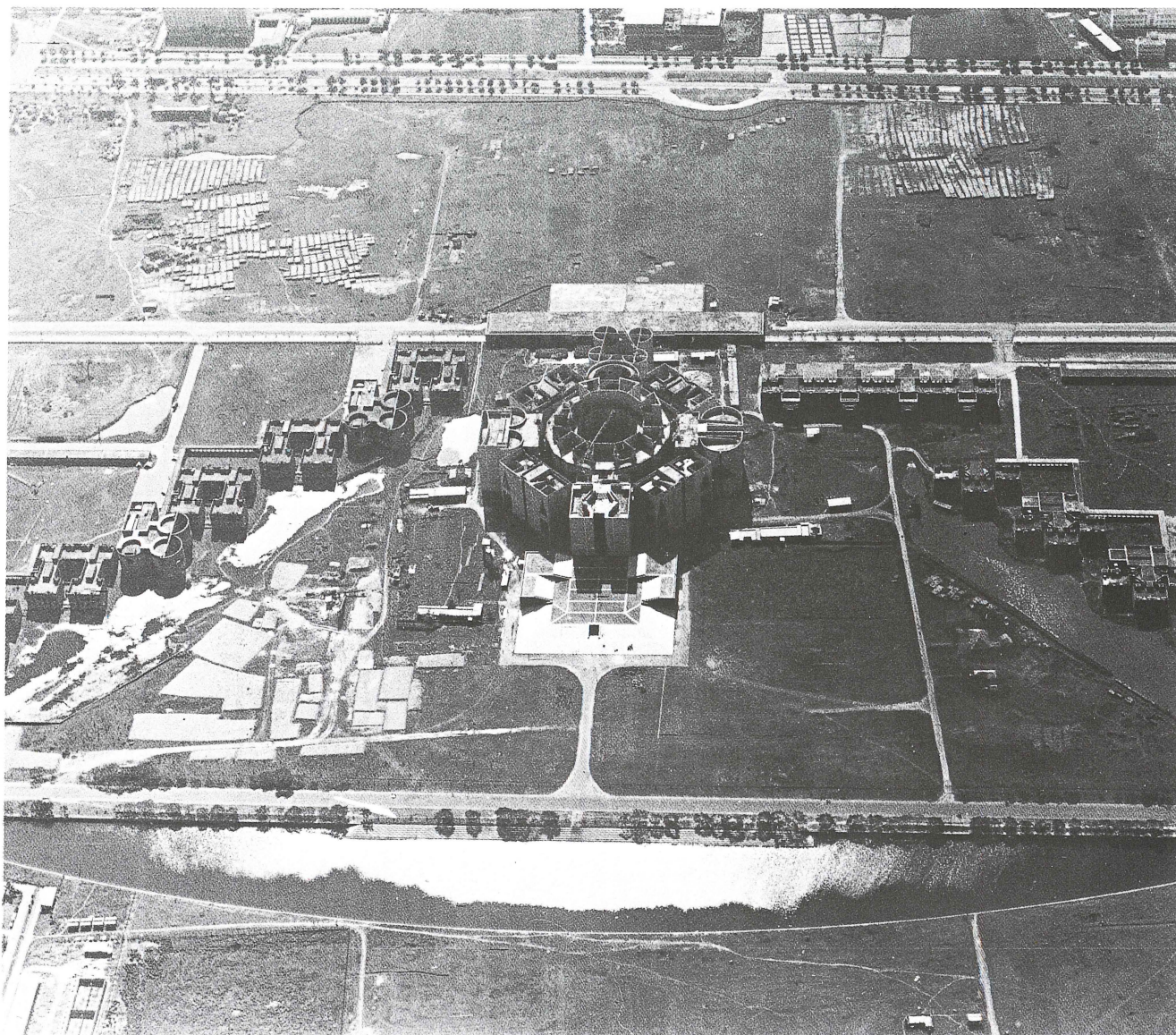
1. Entrance hall
2. Assembly chamber
3. Prayer hall
4. Offices
5. Ministers' lounge
6. Dining and recreation
7. Ablution court



Above: A great hall is the centre of the National Assembly Building. The roof structure has large openings which bring in natural light into the complex. Overleaf: The strong sculptural structure creates a sequence of planes, the surfaces of which are concrete banded with marble. Photograph: B. Taylor.



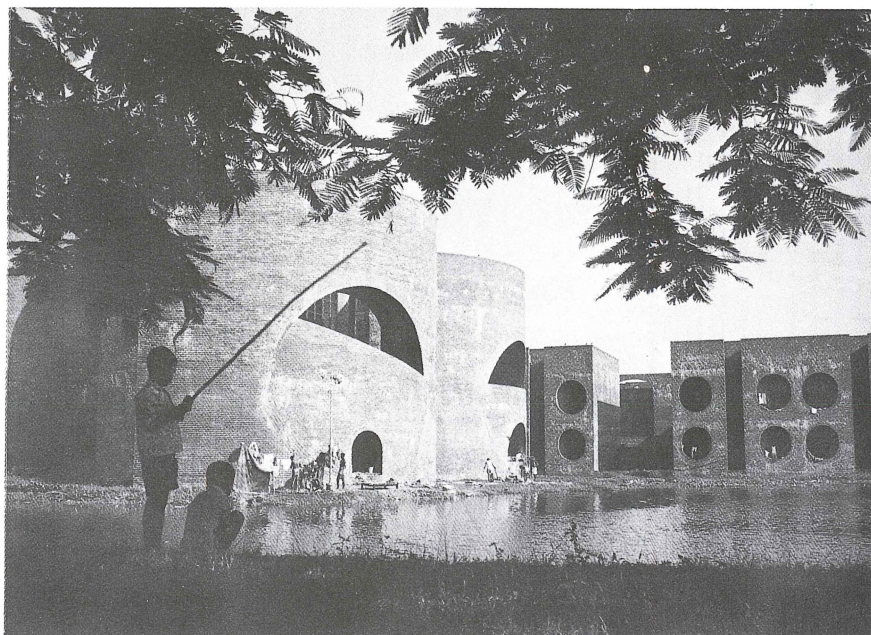


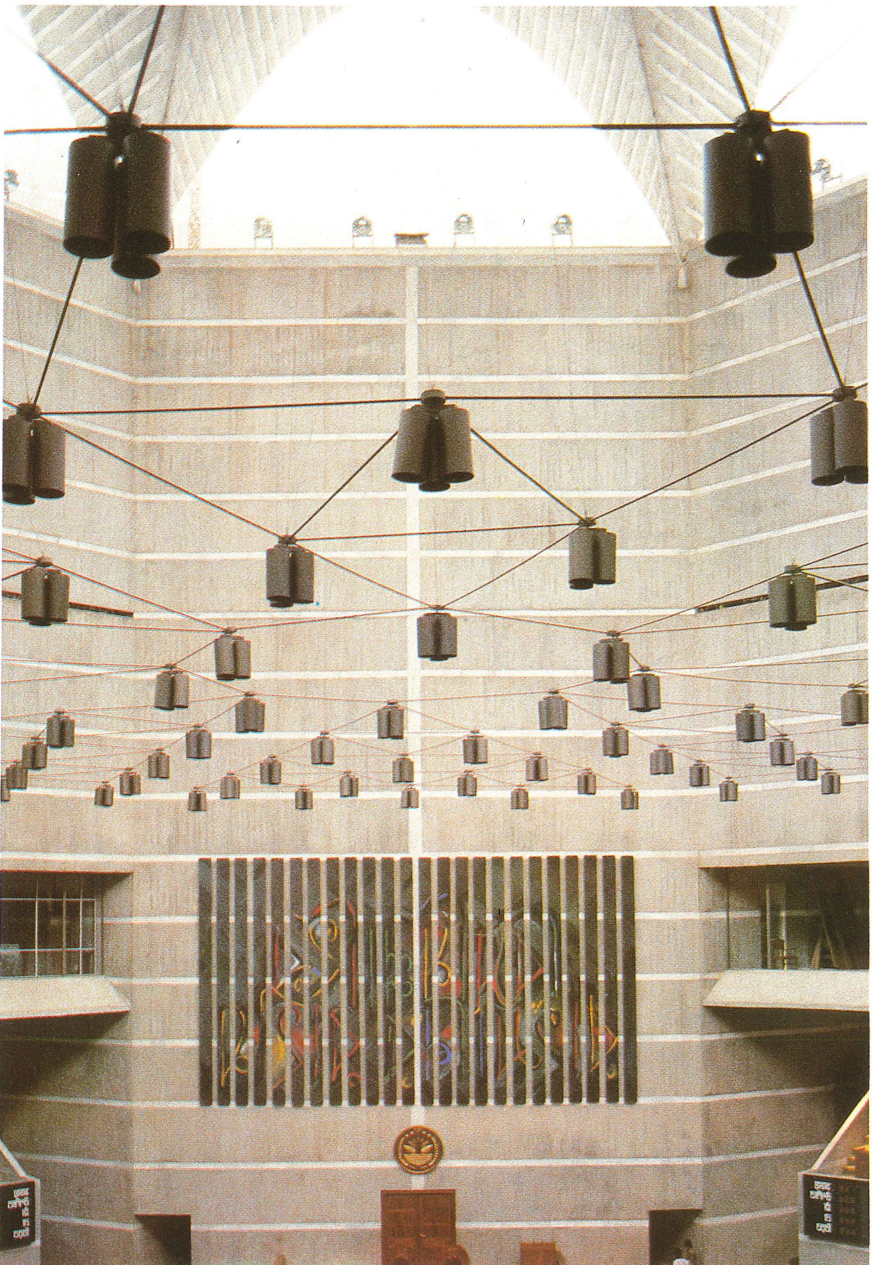
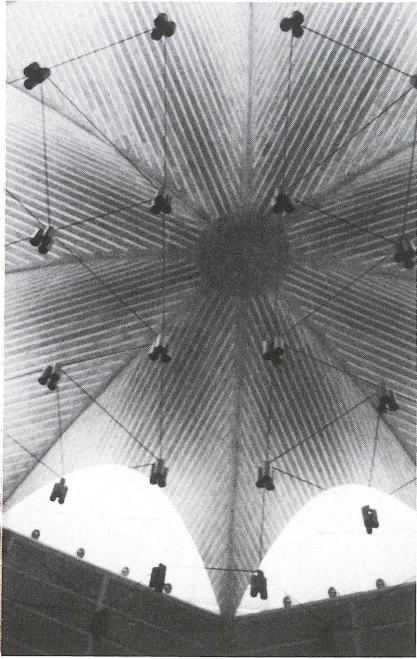


Above: Aerial view from the north, of the presidential plaza and National Assembly, flanked by ministers' housing (right) and legislators' housing (left) and the man-made reflecting lakes.

Right: Legislators' residences, with the circular dining/lobby sections viewed from the north.

Photographs: A. Hossain

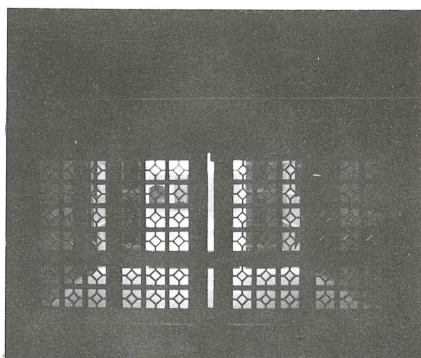
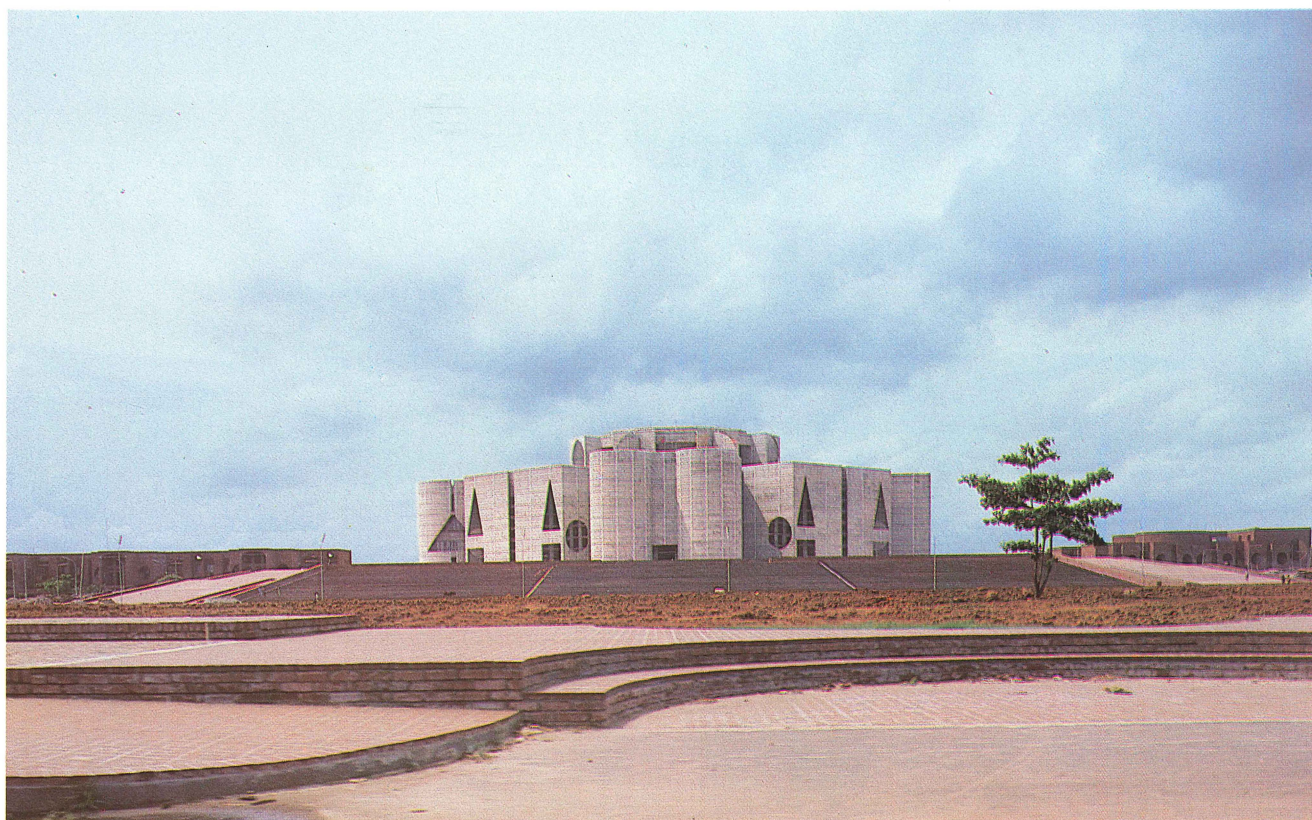




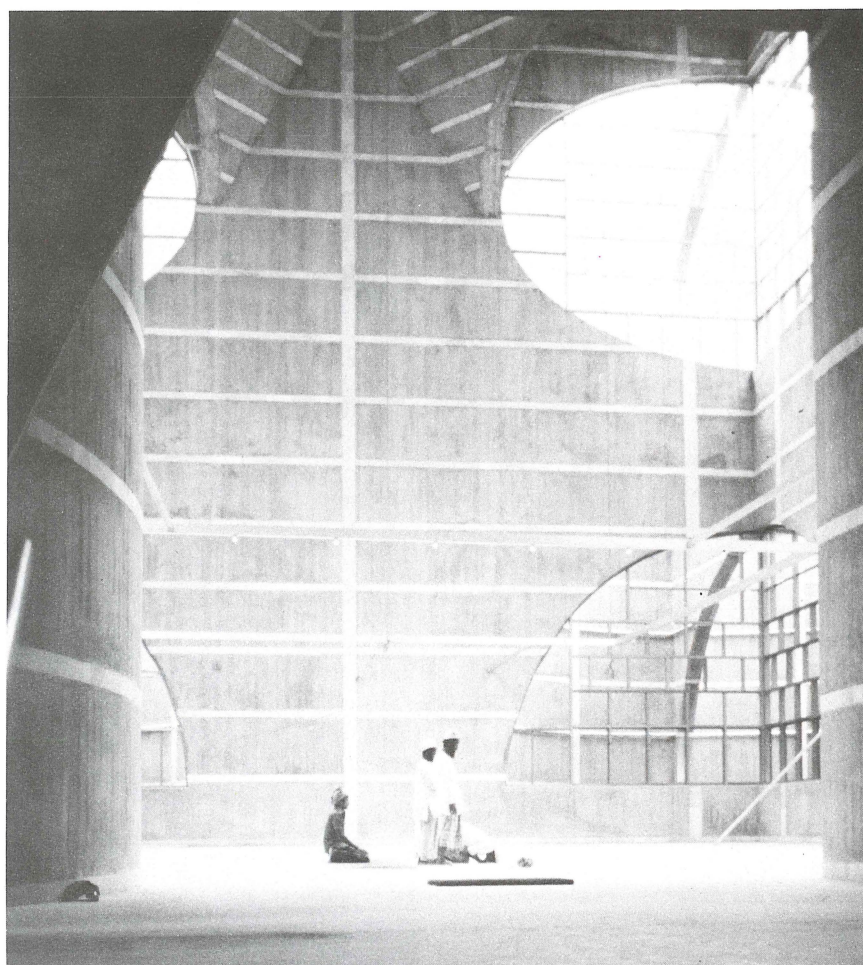
Above: Roof of the Assembly Hall viewed from below.

Above, right: Interior of the National Assembly Hall. Right: Podium and focal wall of the Assembly. The hyperbolic roof meets the walls to create a recess which allows for indirect natural lighting.

Photographs: B. Taylor.



Top: South facade of the Assembly Building.
 Above: Typical window is recessed for shade.
 Right: The building interior is made up of tall volumes
 which intersect the several floors.
 Photographs: B. Taylor





*Left: Teak panelling lines the corridors and offices.
Left, below: Wall facing an internal courtyard of the Legislator's residences.
Photographs: B. Taylor.*

