

# Preface

With increasing urbanization, nearly one-third of the total population of Bangladesh will soon be living in urban areas. The cities and towns of the country will find themselves as places where most economic activity will take place, natural resources will be consumed and pollution will be generated. This inevitability of urban growth, with all its attendant positive and negative features underscores the crucial importance of urban planning and management for sustainable urban development

Planning for the long term has never been the forte of our culture in Bangladesh. In our traditional rural society, preparations for sowing and reaping the next crop, and perhaps stowing something for sustenance during the next lean period, was as far as our future-oriented activities would go. The course of life at the individual, family and social levels, were otherwise charted by fate, fiat, tradition, or decisions taken on the fly. The pace of change in society was slow and future scenarios were easier to predict by today's standards. Life was not exactly easy for the majority, but it was still relatively uncomplicated, and choices were limited. Planning was not a big issue in a situation like that. Unlike Harappa or Mahenjodaro, relics of ancient cities in Bangladesh, like Mahasthangarh, do not indicate any conscious planning efforts. There were few urban settlements in this region when the British East India Company assumed power in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, among which only Dhaka enjoyed some prominence for a brief period after it was made a provincial capital by the Mughals in 1610. Subsequently, with the ascendancy of Murshidabad and eventually Kolkata (Calcutta), Dhaka went through a period of decline. Long term planning did not have a chance to take roots under such circumstances.

Outside Dhaka, urbanization in rudimentary form began to set in as a network of administrative and trade centres during the latter half of British colonial rule; the circumstances emerged gradually where planning—both spatial and aspatial—was relevant. As environmental problems threatened the well being of residents in Dhaka and the newer urban settlements, the British attempted to graft the idea of municipal governance in our local setting. By the turn of the last century, town planning as a separate profession was taking shape in Britain, and one of the pioneers of the profession, Sir Patrick Geddes, was invited to visit a number of cities in British India, including Dhaka, to benefit from his views regarding the planning of these cities. Geddes' 1917 report on Dhaka is interesting reading, revealing probing insights gained by the author during his brief visit. Many of his recommendations still appear to be relevant today.

With the departure of the British in 1947 the territory that is now Bangladesh became a part of Pakistan, a new state carved out of India. The partition of India severed our ties with Kolkata, the largest metropolis in the region, and the graph of urbanization within Bangladesh took an upward course. After independence from Pakistan in 1971, the graph began to traverse an even steeper trajectory. Rapid urbanization, modernization, economic diversification, spatial and social mobility etc. very quickly created the setting where

planning was not just relevant but downright imperative. Unfortunately, our urban growth outpaced by a wide margin the growth of our propensity to plan. As a result, the growth of urban areas was devoid of planning, and unplanned development gave rise to a multitude of problems. To make matters worse, rapid urban growth coupled with chronic shortage of resources led to a rising shortfall of urban services and infrastructure.

There have been attempts to plan, but those attempts have largely been confined to producing plan documents. Monitoring and implementation have received scant attention, although they are integral components of the planning process. In fact, they are the more important parts of the process, since formulating a plan may take planners not more than a couple of years in most cases, but monitoring, reviewing and implementing would continue for many years, even decades, afterwards.

At the turn of the new millennium, urbanization in Bangladesh continues unabated and with very little, if any, planning. The problems that have accumulated in the urban settlements have grown in complexity and magnitude. Planners face an uphill task (if they are given the task) to resolve the issues and chart a course that would lead our cities to a livable environment. With this in mind, the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP) had arranged a National Seminar on Urbanization in Bangladesh: Emerging Challenges. Most of the articles in this book (or some earlier versions of those) were presented in that seminar. The rest were submitted over a drawn out period of time after calls for paper were circulated by the BIP.

The article by Rouf and Jahan presents the trends of urbanization in Bangladesh over the last century and sets the context for the rest of the papers. It shows that immediately after independence from Pakistan, the country experienced the highest rate of growth of urbanization. Urbanization has continued to grow ever since, but at a lower rate. Much of the urbanization has been concentrated in the Dhaka district, which is 61.48 percent urbanized, compared to 42.45 percent in the second most urbanized district, Chittagong.

Dhaka is the most important and pivotal urban centre in the country where around 40 percent of the urban population reside. Consequently, many of the articles in this book focus on issues concerning Dhaka. Islam *et al.* have reported their findings regarding the trend and pattern of land price in Dhaka. Land is a scarce resource in Bangladesh as a whole, and in Dhaka City in particular, where land-man ratio is among the lowest in the world. As urbanization and economic development continue, the price of land in urban areas has increased by 60-80 folds between 1966 and 1983. The level of price rise, however, varies with the area and depends on a number of local factors, such as the level of services available. It is difficult to conduct research on the trends of land value, however, since the recorded land price in land transfer documents vary from the actual amount that change hands during the transaction. This has been pointed out the level of discrepancy has been assessed. The actual figures are at least two to three times higher than the recorded price.

Some of the earliest studies in urban growth in the industrial era borrowed ecological concepts such as invasion and succession to explain the changing pattern of land use in an urban area. The Concentric Zone model put forward by Ernest W. Burgess in 1920 was

one such idea. Nabi and Hashem have made a detailed study of how residential use has been replaced with commercial use, and how remaining residential use has intensified in the Dhanmondi Residential Area in Dhaka. This area was developed in the 1950s as a purely residential area but has since been invaded by a host of commercial and institutional uses. The authors recommend revised control mechanisms to filter out incompatible land uses in the area.

Mahmud provides a case study of the pitfalls and problems that arise from lax and inadequate enforcement of development control in an environment where urban growth and land use change is rapid and aggressive.

The restricted supply of buildable urban land results in an inelastic market, intense development and soaring land prices. The poorer sections of society find themselves driven out of the land market; in fact, they find themselves out of the land and over the water, a process that has been aptly described by Hafiz. Neither the public agencies, nor the private real estate companies cater to the need for shelter of this group of citizens.

The pressure on limited land in Dhaka City has not only intensified the utilization of land, it has also led to indiscriminate filling of low-lying land in the deltaic flood plains to make way for urban development. This has created serious environmental problems including flooding and water logging. The government has promulgated legislation to prevent the filling up of water bodies and the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan schematically indicates areas for retention ponds where no development should take place. However, these control measures have their weaknesses and loopholes as indicated in the article by Seraj.

Further environmental problems for the city are created by the transport sector. Pollution generated by fossil fuel burning motor vehicles in the city is a major health hazard in Dhaka City. Kiwan and Khan have advocated the promotion of pedestrianization as means of improving and managing the environment of the city. They have assessed the level of services of some selected pedestrian paths of the city and have suggested measures for improving the level of service and safety for pedestrians.

Neaz Rahman has dealt with another issue related to transport—that of parking. Dhaka has a limited quantum of roads which is very unlikely to rise substantially, given the critical land-man ratio of the country. It is imperative therefore that whatever limited road space we have is utilized efficiently and not misused. In Dhaka City many of the thoroughfares are reduced in capacity due to parking on both sides along the road. Rahman recommends a set of policies and guidelines for regulating parking in city.

Uncontrolled land use and growth in Dhaka City has led to a situation where the balance between the different uses in terms of quantity and spatial distribution has been disturbed. Das and Ahmed discuss in their article how unauthorized kitchen markets (*kutchha bazaars*) have sprung up as a response to inadequate planned markets and the problems engendered by these markets.

The high density of people and property in urban areas aggravate the risk of those areas due to natural or technological hazards. Bangladesh has earned international recognition for its success stories in disaster management such as the Cyclone Preparedness Project.

However, the country is less prepared to face a possible urban disaster. Natural and technological hazards can trigger disasters in both rural and urban areas, but the concentration of built structures, infrastructure, resources and people in the cities means managing urban disasters is a very different and complex task compared to managing disasters in a rural setting. Maniruzzaman and Haque have analyzed records from the Fire Service and Civil Defence to assess the pattern of fire incidents and performance of the Fire Service in the area under the jurisdiction of the Mohammadpur Fire Station.

While fire and different natural hazards pose periodic threats for the wellbeing of the city dwellers, poverty is a constant hazard that looms large in the cities of Bangladesh. Alamgir and Watanabe discuss the effectiveness of NGO-operated savings and credit schemes in alleviating poverty and elevating the quality of life for the urban poor. Provision of micro-credit is another area where Bangladesh has attained international recognition. However, such programmes have been traditionally geared to cater rural beneficiaries. The authors find that the existing schemes do not adequately benefit the poorest of the poor in the study areas. Separate schemes need to be devised for these poorest urban residents.

Murtaza, on the other hand, shows how City Development Strategies (CDS) address the issue of urban poverty in Khulna City, the divisional headquarter in the southwest of the country. A CDS is devised and owned by the stakeholders to promote urban development. The author emphasizes the need for political commitment if CDS is to have an effective role in poverty alleviation.

Khan, who was the Team Leader of the consultants that prepared the Metropolitan Development Plan for Rajshahi, another divisional headquarter in the northwest of the country, has described the provisions in that plan to control land use in the city. Only the zoning aspects are discussed in this article.

Ashraf has picked up the demand for a city government enunciated by the Mayor of Chittagong in the southeast of the country, and elaborated the concept to show how it can overcome some of the problems of coordination and efficiency of the metropolises of Bangladesh.

Concerned at the environmental degradation of Dhaka City due to its growth, development and motorization, Quim identifies the limitations of the conventional approaches to urban planning and proposes some actions to ensure a sustainable future for the city.

Ghosh also finds the traditional 'anglo-saxon' concept of urban planning irrelevant for megacities, particularly those in South Asia. In his provocatively titled article, the author advocates a different approach focused on micro-level projects and regional ecological plans.

Finally, planning, in whatever form and under whatever institutional framework, requires planners. Planning is a taught discipline in both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in three public universities in Bangladesh. Graduates from these institutions are manning the profession. Golam Rahman has delivered his ideas, based on decades of

academic experience, on the issues that planning education must incorporate for effective planning in Bangladesh.

The articles in this book were written at different points over a long period of time. Some of the data presented in the articles may be dated. No attempt was made to update the data. The editors express their deep gratitude towards Planner Prof. Golam Rahman, erstwhile President and current Advisor of the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP) for his continuous encouragement to bring out this volume. Planner Al Ameen, former General Secretary and current Executive Board Member of BIP took a lot of trouble in publishing this book as he acted as a bridge between the contributors, editors and printers. Planner Suman Mitra also played a similar role from time to time. Planner Shamima Huda and her staff at Themograph worked tirelessly and patiently to publish the book with as few flaws as possible. We appreciate their efforts. Finally we thank all the contributors for their cooperation and patience.

**Sarwar Jahan and K.M. Maniruzzaman**

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## Glossary of Indigenous Terms

<i>Char</i>	: Strip of sandy land arising out of a river bed.
<i>Jaladhar (Songrokkhon) Aain</i>	: Waterbodies (Conservation) Ordinance.
<i>Kalshi</i>	: Pitcher.
<i>Katha</i>	: A measure of land amounting to 720 sft.
<i>Khal</i>	: Canal.
<i>Kutcha bazaar</i>	: Kitchen market.
<i>Kutcha latrine</i>	: Unsanitary latrine.
<i>(1) Lac</i>	: (One) hundred thousand.
<i>Mauza</i>	: Revenue village (unit of revenue collection).
<i>Mudidokan</i>	: Grocery store.
<i>Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha</i>	: Capital Development Authority
<i>Sari</i>	: Garment worn by South Asian women.
<i>Thana</i>	: Administrative area under the jurisdiction of a police station

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