

# Dhaka groans under pressure of unplanned growth

M. EMDADUL ISLAM

At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dhaka was the capital of Eastern Bengal and Assam for a brief period (1905-1911), when a few administrative and logistic buildings were constructed (Rifles Regiment was set-up at Pikhana area). In 1917, the British planner Professor Patrick Geddes made few proposals for Dhaka city, following which areas like Dhaka University and its surroundings (Engineering and Medical Colleges), Race Course (Suhrawardi Uddyan, Ramna Park), High Court complex, Ministers' residential complex at Hare-Baily-Mintoo Road, etc. were developed. In the wake of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> World Wars Tejaon Airport and Aerodrome at Kurmitola was built for strategic purposes, when Dhaka Cantonment was also developed.

After the India-Pakistan partition when Dhaka was declared the provincial capital of East Pakistan the first Master Plan was prepared in 1959 for an area of 220 sq.miles that was later on extended to 320 sq.miles. The Plan was prepared for a period of 20 years with certain assumptions. But, the city started its development in accordance with the whim of its rulers, not as per the proposition in the Plan. Areas at the west of Tejaon Airport were proposed to be developed for housing and ancillary uses. Contrary to the proposal, National Assembly Complex of East Pakistan was planned in the area which was termed as the 'Second Capital', later on named as Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. In fact, this specific land-use (Assembly Complex) was opted at Zinjira area across the river Buriganga connecting it by a bridge near the Ahsanullah Monil and linking the area with North-South (English) Road as further expansion of the city. As per the Master Plan, part of Dhaka University was supposed to be shifted to Faidabad in the north of Kurmitola but it did not materialize, rather Race Course, Ramna Park etc. have been squeezed by allowing various projects such as Dhaka Club, Sheraton Hotel, Engineers' Institute, Diabetics Hospital etc.

At that time the planners of the said Master Plan also generated debates on the question of retaining the Dhaka Cantonment and Rifles Headquarter (BDR) in the inner city areas with the recommendations of their further extensions. The Cantonment has now a greater area than in 1959 (6860 acres). Similarly, there was no answer why the BDR forces are kept inside the capital city. There were many other odds between the planning proposals and the reality. Most importantly, not a single zonal plan ever prepared for any urban areas though there were recommendations in the Plan. The problems exacerbated after the independence of Bangladesh when Dhaka was declared as the capital of the country. Many new establishments had to be allowed and many provisions of the Plan had to be ignored to cater to the changed needs.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Master Plan named as 'Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan' (DMDP 1995-2015) was prepared in 1995 for an area of 590 sq. miles. The Plan has got three tiers: Structure Plan, Urban Area Plan and Detailed Area Plans (DAP). Both the Structure and Urban Area Plan of DMDP are basically policy plans. DAP for different Spatial Planning Zones (SPZs) is yet to be completed. In the absence of DAP the entire metropolitan areas are growing spontaneously, except the planned areas like Dhanmondi, Banani, Gulshan, Baridhara, Uttara etc.

Dhaka is now termed as 'Mega-City' where the population bomb has already been exploded. More than a crore people now live in the city with innumerable problems. As earlier, in

many cases, projects have been undertaken not in accordance with the Plan, rather at the whim of rulers for political/economic popularity. Projects conceived without feasibility study, environmental impact assessment and detailed design could not be implemented in full or have fallen idle after so called implementation. It also appears that with the change of government, concept of many projects of past government are changed overnight.

In fact, all these issues relate with the sustainable planning and development policies, investment programmes, and good governance. Unfortunately, the country is yet to finalise any sustainable policy for urbanisation either for its prime city Dhaka or for other cities. More than 30 years since independence have gone by, problems and agonies of inner city residents are rarely paid attention for their remedies. Amidst the scenario, a few real estate developers in the name of housing provision and project extension are rather destroying the city's low-lying areas / water bodies even flood flow zones by their whimsical activities filling canals / khals creating an acute water logging and drainage congestion. Some of them even does not bother about planning provisions nor tries to understand the geo-physical conditions of soil of the area in taking up projects. And by doing so they have been also inviting more and more population in the capital city. If the capital city of a country grows in such an unplanned way, all other city and towns follows it. In developed countries capital cities were built first as per the plans and other cities followed the example taking into account the experiences.

Whereas there are various types of propositions for infrastructure, shelter and housing and other provisions, priorities for public sector commitments, private sector proposals and integrated multi-sectoral investment programme in the DMDP policy plans, yet that are not being taken for implementation. In the absence of any overall metropolitan strategy, each individual agency programme is prepared with almost no reference to what is proposed by any other agency.

There is also lack of urban renewal policy. Too often, once the Plan is prepared, it was not reviewed and evaluated for its target period. The 1<sup>st</sup> Master Plan had never been reviewed. Already one-third period (1995-2002) of the DMDP plan has passed off, so it needs urgent attention of the policy makers and various urban actors for implementation. Some assumptions and propositions of the plan have also become imperative to review because they lost their effectiveness by the mean time.

In consideration of the present context of urban pandemonium of Dhaka City, the following establishments/areas may be considered for renewal immediately. In the absence of a renewal policy, considering the gravity of problems and importance, the proposals can be debated in the National Parliament among the policy makers and may thus be finalised.

**Old Airport Area:** The Master Planners of 1959 proposed to shift the airport from Tejaon to Kurmitola and opted the area for planned housing and ancillary developments. Accordingly the Kurmitola airport was established onwards, but vacated land at the Tejaon airport measuring over 500 acres not found the anticipated development.

If the present democratic government is sincere to solve the residential problems in the inner city areas, then it may ask the relevant authority to hand over the abandoned land for its anticipated development. Every corner has appreciated the recent example of closing the 'white elephant' Adamjee Jute Mills by the

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present government. So, we can expect another positive step about the better use of abandoned Tejaon Airport land.

**Dhaka Central Jail:** Dhaka Central Jail is situated in a very much congested part of the old city area on 40 acres land. Considering the manifold problems of the Jail being in the area it was decided in 1984-85 to construct a new jail complex near Tongi. Recently a portion of new jail construction has been completed and shifting of prisoners has begun. But prompt construction of the total complex and re-location of prisoners at the new site shall expedite the much needed renewal of jail area. There is lack of open spaces in the area, so the vacated jail site may be preserved as open space.

**Tejaon and Hazaribagh Industrial Area:** Tejaon Industrial Area is located in the heart of the capital city. It baffles the urbanites as to how the expert Master Planners proposed for continuing the industrial area inside the city. Similarly Tannery Industries on about 100-acre land at Hazaribagh in the western part of the city have continued over the years. Today the urbanites bear the ill effects of these bad planning. Toxic and waste products of tanneries have caused innumerable environmental problems in the entire localities as well as polluted the Buriganga river. Similar problems exist at Tejaon Industrial Area. Solid waste and deposited chemicals from the industries directly fall in the adjoining low land and Begunbari khals polluting the entire area.

A new site was selected at Kanchpur area near Meghna river long before to shift the tannery industries from Hazaribagh but till today there is no remarkable progress. In order to improve the environment, the present government banned the polythene shopping bags and the citizens of the country supported the government in materializing the programme. Thus, for the sake of environmental improvement of Dhaka the present government can take a bold decision to readress the problem by shifting the tannery industries from Hazaribagh area and banning the industrial development at Tejaon area through renewal of the area for better urban living. Tejaon Industrial Area, can better be re-planned as Central Business District (CBD) of Dhaka City with all modern facilities and traffic planning.

**Dhaka University:** The University was established in 1921 on about 175 acres on the fringe of old Dhaka. In those days, Ahsanullah Engineering College and Dhaka Medical College were parts of Dhaka University. When other departments started to be added, the authorities during Dhaka city's 1<sup>st</sup> Master Plan, suggested for shifting the departments to a place called Faidabad, in the north-east part of Kurmitola, keeping only the

medical and engineering colleges at the old premises. For the said purpose, about 1000 acres of land at Faidabad had been earmarked but the proposal did not turn into reality.

Thus, a part of Dhaka University may be considered to be shifted to an appropriate place outside the

cater to the needs of present time.

**Garments Industries:** Because of liberal industrialization policy, hundreds of garment industries have come up within the Dhaka City over the years. Needless to say that these industries and the huge number of workers have become an overburden on the existing infra-

along with other Asian countries has been connected with Fiber Optic facilities through sub-marine cable, which if we properly utilize will bring a new opportunity for our young generation and economy of the country.

**Dhaka Cantonment & BDR Areas:** These areas were planned during the colonial period, perhaps when it was necessary for their strategic reasons. These areas are a sort of 'walled city' within the city. In present democratic culture there is no reason to keep the cantonments inside the city areas.

Establishments of Dhaka Cantonment may be shifted to nearby Mirpur, Savar and Rajendrapur Cantonments. BDR establishments may be taken away to the border areas, where it was supposed to be. The vacated spaces can thus be re-planned to meet our growing requirements of future population. It may be mentioned here that RAJUK is contemplating to acquire more low-lying lands to the northwest of Dhaka Cantonment close to the existing Uttara within the flood protection embankment, for future housing expansion. The proposals for removing the cantonments outside Dhaka City can save these wetlands, which may then be planned for environmental and recreational purposes. The present democratic government may seriously think on these proposals for a sustainable and eco-friendly Dhaka City.

**Re-planning old Dhaka:** Old Dhaka hemmed by the river Buriganga and Dholaikhal (later filled in for road), which once called a town of 'Baunna Bazar Teppuna Gal' had spontaneously grown. Most of the houses in the area are old and 100% plot coverage that are under gradual physical

deterioration creating unhealthy conditions; roads are narrow and in dilapidated condition; poor drainage, shortage of water, gas and electricity are characteristics of the whole area; squatter settlements and slums are spreading without adequate access and infrastructure facilities and services; serious shortage of open spaces, and growing presence of fire hazards etc. now virtually made the old Dhaka a non-livable area. It is over more than 400 years since the settlements started here, but no urban renewal has ever been occurred in the area during this long period.

The DMDP plans recommended urban renewal schemes for old Dhaka because its high land value and good geo-physical conditions for high rise development. So, the re-planning and a mass renewal of the area has become essential to avoid catastrophes and thus for a healthy old Dhaka.

**Limiting the population:** Every family / place / town / city has an enduring capacity in terms of population size, development and management. The city with its present configurations, infrastructure,



PHOTO: STAR

Unplanned growth intensify problems for Dhaka city

city. If this proposal is found acceptable, all other institutes, which are engaged in research work including the Science Faculties of Dhaka University, Engineering University (BUET), P.G Hospital (Bangabandhu Medical University) and Dhaka Medical College and Hospital can be brought under an unified management. This would also ensure improvement of law and order situation and peace and tranquility and technical competence of the country would also be enhanced.

**Banani (T&T) Land:** In between Banani and Gulshan across the lake there is about 170 acres land under Karail Mouza, which was acquired by T&T long before for multipurpose uses. But until recently a small chunk of this land is being used for a VHF Satellite Station and the rest has been occupied by slum dwellers others due to which the total environment in the area has become polluted.

This is a prime land in the middle of Dhaka City, which can not be left in such an underutilized condition. Earlier RAJUK prepared a layout plan for the land, which can be re-planned for housing extension to

structure, urban services and amenities. Immediate measures should be taken to shift these garment factories gradually to various sites outside the city limits. Already a few entrepreneurs have relocated their garment industries at Savar, Gazipur and Narsingdi. Some industries may be shifted towards Dhaka-Chittagong Road and Dhaka-Mawa Road sites or by creating a planned garments village.

It may be mentioned here that at the height of severe environmental problems, the present government very recently has banned the two-stroke three-wheelers from the city area, which has been supported by mass urbanites despite their problems in transportation. Thus, the garments industries from the city area need to be shifted to reduce the pressure on existing urban infrastructure and make the city habitable.

The vacated buildings of garment industries, thus, in the inner city areas may be re-used for various Information Communication and Technological (ICT) activities/projects. It may be mentioned here that very recently Bangladesh

services and amenities cannot contain a population of one crore. Uncontrolled migration to the capital city and scattered establishment of slums and structures gives a negative feeling to the visitors and the obvious question that comes to mind is that whether there is any administration working in the country and whether the visitor himself is safe. His investment plan then becomes a secondary issue. Seeing our uncontrolled situation, disorder and lawlessness many enthusiastic investors did not invest here earlier. Thus, time has come to put an embargo for limiting the population in Dhaka City.

**Planning Frameworks and Coordination Cell:** The Town Improvement Act, 1953 (as amended upto 1987) is the prime tool for the urban planning, development and control of Dhaka. The Act was drafted in the backdrop of India-Pakistan, which was prepared in the series of Delhi, Calcutta and Karachi Improvement Act. Although amended several times many provisions in the Act have become obsolete and non-functional.

The other major concern is coordination. According to a statistics, there are some 17 ministries and 55 departments involved with the development and management of the capital that often results in duplicity of many works. There needs to be an effective coordination among the agencies. A coordination cell may be established at the Prime Minister's Office for an effective monitoring. As a matter of fact, without a top-level coordination and monitoring the above or such proposals would not get importance and weightage for their consideration. Decentralisation of planning and development control activities in the Metro Dhaka area, by setting up zonal offices with the representatives from all agencies concerned may be arranged for good governance. In this regard, a 'think-tank' may be formed comprising visionaries, professionals and experts to help the proposed cell.

**Purbachal New Town: A new capital city:** As we discussed, the existing capital city is now plagued with multifarious problems: haphazard urban growth, shortage of buildable land, diminishing open spaces/play grounds, acute shortage of other urban facilities like graveyards, horrendous traffic jams, crisis of drinking water, load-shedding, polluted environment, poor law and order situation etc. Vis-a-vis the vast tract of water bodies and natural canals surrounding the city are being indiscriminately filled-

up by a section of developers ignoring the recommendations of Flood Action Plan and NMDP policy plans.

A planned New Capital is the only answer to these problems. RAJUK has already acquired more than 4500 acres of land for building this proposed new town at Ruggan area across the Balu river and another 1500 acres are now under process of acquisition. The entire area can be planned to be future new capital of Bangladesh with all ICT supports, modern utility services and amenities. At the height of similar problems, many countries in the Asia and Pacific region shifted their capitals to new places contiguous to the historic cities, where they relocated all their important establishments.

In view of that our policy makers can unanimously decide to develop the Purbachal New Town as the new capital of the country. The President's Office, the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministers' Offices and their residences, the Secretariat Complex, Diplomatic Enclaves and all other important public establishments can be considered for priority shifting to the proposed new capital site, which would help to develop the New Town at a faster rate.

Meanwhile, RAJUK has advertised residential plots in the Township. It needs a well thought out planning of the township before the distribution of plots for making the township 'self-contained' and 'balanced' in all aspect. For which, a 'Commission for New Capital City' comprising experts, professionals and policy makers may be formed to study the matters and draw recommendations and modus operandi towards materializing the project.

**Vision for future:** The DMDP Master Plan envisages the city planning upto 2015. The World Bank and Bangladesh Centre for Urban Studies authorities recently in a joint Perspective Study commented that a number of Asian countries, with lesser or equivalent GDP growth rate, have achieved remarkable progress transforming themselves from largely agrarian and underdeveloped economies into dynamic industrial and export powerhouses. The experience of these high-performing economies provides many useful lessons for Bangladesh in identifying the right policies and strategies to adopt, while reversing / renewing or shunning what has proved to be wrong.

M. Emdadul Islam is an engineer and planner.

# Martin Luther: Remembering a reformer

REV. MARTIN ADHIKARY

The Reformation of the Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was sparked off as Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on to the door of Wittenburg Castle Church on the eve of All Souls Day, 31 October, 1517 thus inviting the ecclesiastical authority for a debate on Indulgence in the light of the errors and abuses that had grown up over the centuries. The Theses struck at the root of the old and deep-seated abuse from which the Church had been suffering since centuries before Luther. Groups of mystics and monks were seeking for renewal of the Church through their personal piety and holiness.

"Only a good tree can bring forth good fruit" was the cardinal principle in all what Martin Luther thought best for the renewal and reformation of the Church of his time. One of his oft-quoted sayings is, "Good works do not make a man good, but a good man does good work." From what he saw around him in the Church he had the conviction that the faith of the Church in God and the way that God was viewed needed to be reformed. The Church was no help for people to personally relate to God, who is gracious yet just, a God who loved sinner, yet hating sin. Christians of Medieval Europe had a real fear of the "Purgatory" and the length of the period of its punishment depicted by the Church. People were taught that before reaching heaven one had to be cleansed from every sin and that Indulgence assured them of the

shortening of the period of punishment.

Luther criticized the Church's teaching about the sale of the Note of Indulgence - the so-called 'Holy trade', and Church's undue love for worldly power and possessions. Luther believed that if the faith of the Church were set right other things would automatically follow. So, 'How to picture God' received priority in his teaching. Is God only a ruthlessly punishing God, or is God merciful too? He studied the Bible intensely and came to establish a vital personal relationship with God, who is merciful and gracious, faithful and just.

The Papal attempt to create Christendom by taking the place of the Roman Emperor as the political head of Europe lay at the root of many problems. Spiritual power got muddled with politics. The Church became too autocratic and powerful. Rulers in Europe started to dislike that the Church hierarchy interferes with the internal administration of the states. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the modern nations of Europe had begun to grow strong and to unify their peoples. Many nations were eager to see that their national leaders, and not the Pope, govern their Church life. Their national languages were coming to prominence in place of "the ecclesiastical" language, Latin. Literary works as well as Bible translations were carried on in English, German, Spanish French, Italian and various other vernaculars with unprecedented enthusiasm.

With the New humanistic Learn-



Martin Luther

ing of the Renaissance the University scholars found that not all of the Church's teaching was based on the Bible. Many became concerned at the state of the Church, which proved to them to be far removed from what is taught about it in the New Testament. The greatest scholar to point this out was the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus. But the man who actually triggered off the movement for change was Martin Luther. Son of a rich coal miner Martin Luther was born at Eisleben in Saxony, Germany on 10<sup>th</sup> October, 1483. His parents sent him to the University of Leipzig to study law. While on a journey Luther had a very terrible experience in a thunderstorm when he made a vow to the patron Saint of

the mining people of his village St Anne that he would dedicate his life in the service of Christ if she would bless him for safety. This dramatic vow led him to enter into the Augustinian Monastery of Erfurt in 1505, led his initial years to a rigorous life of piety and extreme asceticism to save his soul from sins. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1507, studied theology and was sent to teach moral theology and the Scriptures at the University of Wittenberg. In 1511 he became a doctor of theology and a professor of Biblical studies. During this time Luther experienced a spiritual vacuum that any work on the part of a man would not lead him to a right relationship with God. Rather he felt he needed to see a merciful and righteous God to whom one needs to come in true faith and repentance for an internal positive transformation.

People were contemplating for change, which was the cry of the time, and were working for it but they did not agree about what to be done. But they found one man by the name Martin Luther, himself an Augustinian Monk, a university professor, a sound theologian with profound Biblical knowledge and courage to lead and bring all thoughts to a coalition-course.

Church had become the center of all attention and led people away from the vitally important concept of the righting of personal relationship of the believer in God and His attributes of mercy, forgiveness and righteousness. So the Church of that time boldly declared "No salva-

tion outside the Church" to emphasize the primacy, the inviolability and infallibility of the earthly leaders of the Church.

Luther explained what is known as 'the doctrine of the Justification by Faith in the light of God's faithfulness producing in the heart of the believer faith and trust in God which result in a life of spontaneous love and devotion to God and to people. So it is not man's unquestioned obedience to whatever mortal and fallible man teaches on behalf of the Church, but his spontaneous response to God's justice and mercy in living a forgiven life of vital personal relationship with God that makes one's life full of meaning and purpose. Luther criticized all the teaching of the Church behind the sale of the Note of Indulgences and Church's undue attention to material possession at the neglect of spiritual values.

Luther wanted to declare what he believed to the public and invited the clerics and theologians for a disputation. The Reformation was set on. In 1520 Luther was condemned by the Church as a heretic.

Luther's attempt was primarily to reform the Church from theological perspective. This he effected by his prolific writings and ceaseless efforts and teachings: the nobles and princes, the clergy and theologians, and the ordinary and the laity. He was excommunicated by the Pope in 1520, and in 1521 outlawed by the Emperor Charles V. Frederick III, the Ruler of Saxony and an Elector for the Holy Roman Emperor

and a friend of Luther believed in what he had to teach the Church. It was he who gave Luther all protection from being killed. Luther wrote and printed books after books during the next 25 years. Luther's teaching spread all over Europe.

Many of the nationalist states including several North German states accepted his doctrines and started to effect reformation of the Church. But there were disputes and confusion in many places about Luther's teachings. Then in 1529 an Imperial Diet of Speyer was convened to resolve the situation. It was at this assembly where the rulers of five German states and fourteen free cities subscribing to Luther's teachings signed a 'Protestatio' (in Latin) or Protest document. That's how the name 'Protestant' came to be in use in churches.

It needs to be mentioned that however rich the spiritual and theological dimension that the Protestant Reformation Movement brought to the Church in general it has also brought schism in the same because the principal events concerning the reformation caused the Church to be divided and subdivided in course of time though the basic tenets of the Christian faith remains the same in all the churches. Things have witnessed phenomenal changes in the Church as a whole all over the world since the time of Luther, and the changes continue with the march of human civilisation, but keeping the eternal message of Christ.