

A Roadmap to

MUSTAFA ZAMAN

THE Rajuk Master Plan defines the well-planned residential areas as 'development areas' and the rest as 'spontaneous growth areas'. Kamal Ahmed, a graduate from the Institute of Fine-Arts, Dhaka University, is the second youngest son of his family that had a plan to build a house of their own in a third zone 'a private development area', which is Adabor. The family inherited a small patch of land from the deceased father and managed to save some money sent by Kamal's two brothers living in the Middle East. Around the year 2000, they thought the dream to have a house of their own would soon be a reality. But it took Kamal, the sibling in charge of building the dream house, two long years to get the plan through Rajuk. The plan first got caught in the official procedural web and was later faced with regulatory barrier as by then a new rule was introduced that required a 12 foot wide entry path for any house. The house that Kamal was set to build the entry road measured only 8.33 feet in width, and it was in accordance with the rule during submission.

If Rajuk is strict in passing a plan of people's dream houses, which cost Kamal Ahmed not only two precious years but also a certain undisclosed amount of money, how come the city's residential areas are turning into concrete jungles unsuitable for living?

Adabor was a flood zone that fell in the hands of the private developers. According to one of the town planners of Rajuk, the government recognises the plans but they are chalked out by the private developers. And the Rajuk planners approve them in accordance with 'Town Improvement Act' of the 50s.

The first Master Plan for Dhaka was put on paper in 1957, when the population was 1,025,000, of which 100,000 lived in Naraynganj. The only congested area was what the planners referred to as 'Old central area' meaning Old Dhaka. After 39 years, in 1992 another plan that set the strategies for the years 1995 to 2015 came into being. Grappling with two sets of policy issues, one of 'rapid urbanisation' and the other of 'effective management of large metropolitan centres', it provided a map for development of urban areas. "A huge amount has been spent to create this plan which is a difficult read, you cannot get a clearly defined set of rules from the text," opines Saif-ul-Haque, an architect who believes that when planning for a city one should also take into account the context of the whole country, as did the planners of the city of Berlin. "If the Bangkok authorities could hire the expertise of the MIT consulting team to plan their city, why did we have to go for a private company that we never even heard of having any experience in planning cities?" argues Haque.



A littered, slimy road of Dhanmondi.



The once pristine roads of Dhanmondi are now virtual garbage dumps.