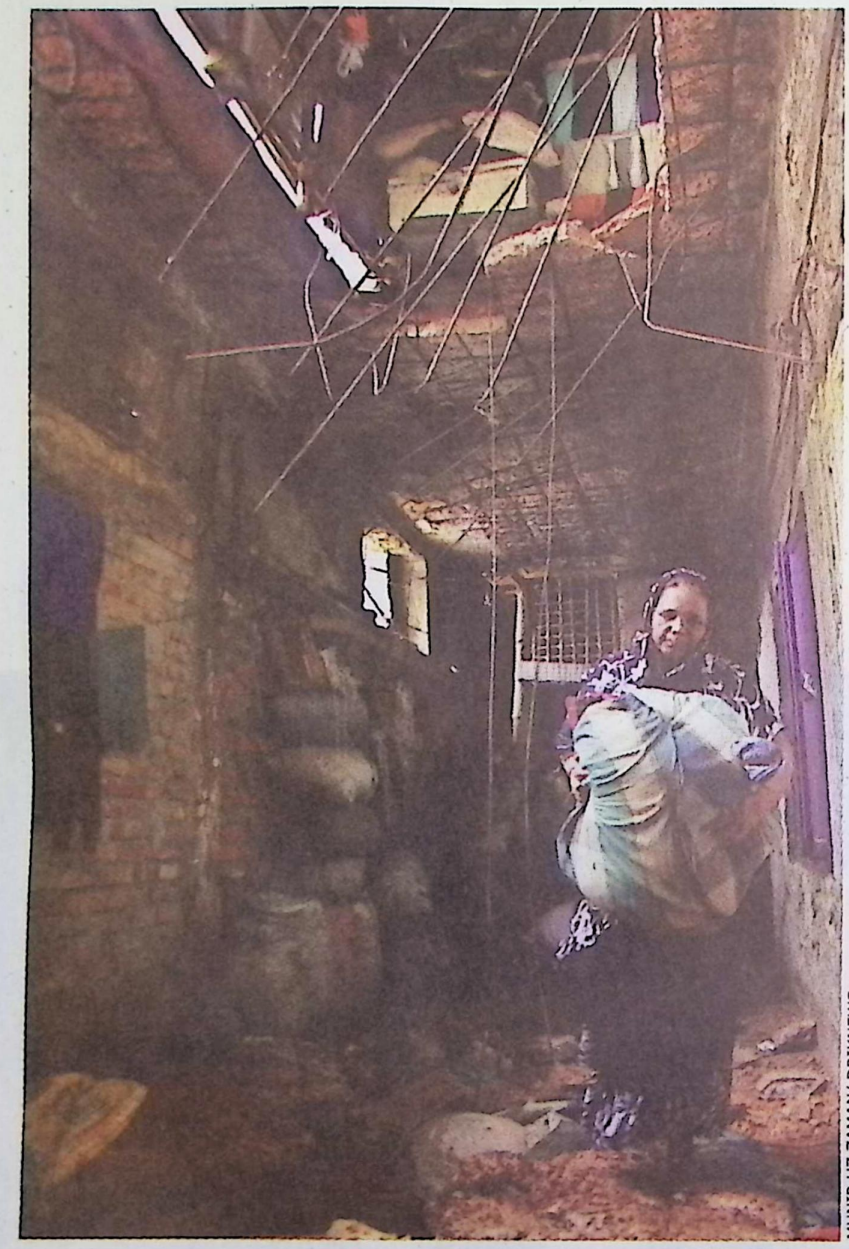


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million; it is projected to grow to 20 million in 2020, making it the world's third largest city.

The 2005 survey of the six City Corporations estimated that 35 percent of the urban population lives in slums, with the figure for Dhaka being 3.42 million (37.4 percent) and for Chittagong 1.47 million (35.4 percent). Information on urban poverty is extremely limited, but available data indicate that 43 percent of urban residents are poor (defined as a food intake of fewer than 2,122 kcal per day) and 23 percent are extremely poor (defined as an intake of fewer than 1,805 kcal per day).

The problems of increasing urban poverty are enormous and thus, identifying a poverty reduction strategy and viable mechanism for implementation presents a daunting challenge for us. As it remains closest to the people, urban local government has a crucial role and responsibility in addressing the sustainable urbanisation agenda including adequate shelter, security of tenure, safe water, clean environment, health, education, nutrition, employment, and public safety. Local urban government can best understand and reflect the needs and priorities, and monitor local trends and emerging issues.

However, the urban local government system in Bangladesh has remained in a very sorry state over the years. There is no denying the fact that in spite of obstacles towards a vibrant local government system, the country has made some considerable progress in rural local government, especially union parishads. The visible side is that elected local councils are demanding a stronger local government system, while civil society, public policy groups and NGOs are working actively to improve local government.

But such activity is mostly limited within rural local government, specifically, around union parishads. Considering current trends of urbanisation , we need a major policy shift to urban local governance.

Present situation and practices

Municipal institutions or pourashavas constitute urban local governance in Bangladesh. Municipal bodies occupy an important place in the overall system of administration and governance in Bangladesh, firstly, as key local government bodies for urban areas of the country, and, secondly, as agencies rendering important public services and facilities to the urban population.

But the present municipalisation process of the country cannot cope effectively with the issues related to rapid urbanisation. Inherently, pourashavas suffer from the acute shortage of resources, which is the root cause for low-level municipal services. For resources, the pourashava depends on government grants. But this causes many problems due to the age-old