

DHAKA STRUCTURE PLAN 2016-2035

A rush job is not the answer

PROF NAZRUL ISLAM

WE had the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) previously, the duration of which was 20 years, from 1995 till 2015. There were three stages of that plan: Structure Plan for the whole city area, Urban Area Plan, which was for ten years, and Detailed Area Plan (DAP). The structure plan was a generalised plan in which the main categories, mainly transportation network, housing and utility services, commercial and residential areas, wetlands and water retention areas, etc. were outlined. To implement any master plan or structure plan, DAP is a must. But the major weakness of the DMDP was that the DAP was not implemented. The plan was made in 1995 and approved in 1997. Then it took 13 years, from 1997 to 2010, to formulate the DAP. In the last five years, the most significant project was the Hatirjheel project, which was not in the original plan. Some roads and flyovers were constructed. At present, the government is developing some residential towns - for example, Purbachal - which has now been incorporated in the plan. But conservation of the wetlands, the most important part of the plan, was not done. The land developers worked as they wished and ministerial committees also favoured them. Thus, the DAP was not implemented properly.

The new structure plan, now at the final stage, has been prepared where a Korean company worked as a consultant. So now they have shared their draft plan with the experts through a two-day long seminar. There are 10 direct sectors along with two to three background sectors in the plan, which have been reviewed in the



seminar. I think it is a good initiative but there are many shortcomings. The methodology is alright. But the participation of professionals and experts in formulating the plan was not satisfactory. City mayors have said that they were not very involved in the process. There are four city corporations covered by DAP, namely, Dhaka North, Dhaka South, Narayanganj, Gazipur; five municipalities; and 70 union parishads. In order to implement this plan, the involvement of the local stakeholders is necessary. Experts' opinions must be sought in order to make a sustainable structure plan. While developers do not like the proposal of protection of wetlands and conservation of water retention areas, environmental planners and activists are saying that they are not sure whether the flood flow zones and the drainage systems that are in the plan will be maintained in reality. Transportation and communication with other cities were not explained well. It would have been better if they had

followed the Strategic Transport Plan (STP). The social structure sector was totally ignored in the plan. We have to plan keeping in mind which group of people will live in the city areas: rich, middle class, lower middle class, poor, or ultra poor. We have to make sure that special groups, for example aged population, children, physically challenged people, etc., were configured in the plan. Some of the sectors need to be revised while some sectors need to be included. Do they have any provision for the housing of the poor? Sector-wise detailed plans are needed. There is a reference to the informal sector, but it was not integrated properly in the plan.

Dhaka is a city of cultural events. The strength of Dhaka's culture has not been considered. The planners didn't even communicate with cultural personalities or experts. I have seen no historians at the seminar. The cover of the proposal was really misleading. I was wondering whether the picture was of Dhaka or Korea. We could have used the picture of Suhrawardy Uddyan, the Parliament building or the National Mausoleum. Neither the foreign planners nor the local ones had that in mind. I think there must be thorough discussions on all the sectors. We can't just finalise a plan for 20 years based on two-day discussions.

All we need is to identify the weaknesses of the plan and remove them. People should be given a chance to read the plan, so there must be a Bangla version of the plan. What is worrying is that they have started to make the DAP even before the master plan has been approved, which is totally unacceptable. Finally, the government should not rush to approve the plan.

The commentator is Chairman, Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) and former Chairman of UGC.

Prioritise people, not coterries

IQBAL HABIB

WITH the existing Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) 1995-2015 mostly unimplemented, and its term expiring this year, Rajuk has embarked on drawing up a new master plan. The proposed Dhaka Structure Plan 2016-2035 is formulated under the City Region Development project funded by the ADB and Bangladesh government.

Recently, Rajuk has presented the draft master plan in a seminar to seek opinion from experts and practitioners. But they should have done this at the initial stage of preparing the plan. However, I have serious reservations about the proposed draft. Firstly, there is no reflection of people's participation in the document. It has been formulated without taking urban experts and other relevant stakeholders on board. Even the local public representatives are not adequately informed about the plan.

Secondly, I do not find any strong logic behind changing the existing structure plan. It was prepared in 1995 and gazetted in 1997. Later a Detailed Area Plan (DAP), based on the structure plan, came into being in 2010. Initially, a few decisions were implemented under that DAP. But mostly, it has remained unimplemented due to strong protests from real estate owners and various interest groups. The government formed a seven-member review committee, comprising of seven ministers. But it failed to give any directives to carry forward the plan. Against this background, the logic of formulating another structural plan has very little relevance to me.

Housing Minister Mosharrar Hossain has said, "Now we have to prepare a pragmatic DAP," referring to the existing DAP as a "plan prepared at home". He should keep in mind that the DAP was formulated by a government nominated engineer. We, under the leadership of Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury,



made the government aware of its various loopholes and assisted them to make it pro-people and pragmatic. There was an attempt in the earlier version of the plan to exempt land grabbers and real estates from the crime of grabbing flood flow zones and water bodies. But we insisted on incorporating a provision in the document that no one can be exempted for such unlawful activities after 2000, since the structural plan was gazetted and made public in 1997. So I do not understand what the minister is trying to mean by the word 'pragmatic'.

My third point is related with the protection of flood flow zones, canals, rivers and flood water retention areas. Conservation of these water bodies is vital to prevent urban flooding, help ground percolation, drainage and overall liveability of the city. The way the document was prepared behind closed doors, we have valid reasons to fear whether Rajuk has prioritised people's interest or interest of a coterie since implementation of the existing DAP was stalled by real estate owners and land grabbers. Naryanganj City Mayor Dr. Selina Hayat Ivy has also expressed frustration saying that the proposed plan, foiling the existing one, had a deliberate attempt to legalise the acts of land grabbers.

Another important aspect is ensuring access to open spaces like parks and playgrounds. The proposed plan should have clear directives in this regard. The issue of affordable housing for the poor people should also be clearly addressed in the proposed plan.

I want to request the government to not proceed with the plan hastily. It needs to be critically evaluated by all the stakeholders. The government should incorporate their suggestions as well.

The commentator is an Architect and Member Secretary, Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (BAPA).

NO VAT ON EDUCATION

The possibility for transversal politics

SEUTY SABUR

THE students of private universities have shown their maturity and creativity in leading a peaceful demonstration against the proposed 7.5 percent VAT. They managed to show the nation that transversal politics is possible; unity is possible among diversities. They have set an example for politicians, and given hope to the country that they can rise above petty partisan politics and get their demands met by being logical, consistent and coherent. They were not merely a bunch of Facebook addicts; they used the virtual platform efficiently as their training ground, articulating their desire and coordinating with their compatriots. They were not alienated 'farm chickens' anymore; they proved that they are responsible citizens who know how to voice their demands. This will go down in history as a new kind of student movement - a potential game changer.

What outraged private university students was not just the imposition of the VAT itself but the police brutality against the students of East West University. They stood united against injustice, and critiqued governments' policy, not the state. They managed to convince their respective institutions that they are capable of handling their own fate; they were sensible enough to understand that they were shutting down the city and apologised to the citizens, helping them as much as they could. Students knew they had to take to the streets as that is the only language powerful people understand. But they also understood that politicians could hijack their movement, therefore had to be extra cautious in articulating their demands. And thankfully it worked and government was wise enough to lift the VAT from their tuition fees.

I am supposed to be happy with the outcome. Unfortunately, I cannot get over the discourses dominating the media over the past few days. During the beginning days of the movement, the media was hesitant to cover it with adequate focus on the demands; a lot of attention was given on the crazy traffic situation



PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

on the first day of the protest and many Facebook users also termed these students as "miscreants." In fact, one of my colleagues also commented that students of East West were vandalising public property, forcing the police to use rubber bullets. As if that was the right thing to do - to use brutal force to teach a lesson. Some intellectuals also debated over how private university students were advancing the neoliberal script by "buying certificates and reducing education to a commodity." Some firmly asserted that a hike in tuition fees is nothing for these "rich kids". Clearly, they are not aware of the demographic distribution of private university students.

We could hardly hear anyone asking why the NRB had to intervene when we have a Ministry of Education. Why is there no coordination between the said ministries? Why were these private universities not consulted before the decision to impose VAT

was taken? The staff of private universities and the institutions themselves are paying their taxes, then why burden students with extra VAT?

I am not saying private universities are not making money. Of course, they are. The difference is some are reinvesting a portion of their profits to enhance infrastructural facilities in student and faculty development which is not subsidised by the government. The fact remains that 60 percent of the students (about 1,20,200 to 1,50,000 students) at tertiary level in the country are receiving education in private universities. They are studying in these institutions not necessarily because they want to, but because they had no other choice. Public universities can't offer enough seats for every student of Bangladesh. If they could access affordable public university education, they wouldn't pay for such expensive degrees. It is simple

math.

Public university education is subsidised to accelerate the number of qualified professionals to run state machineries. And we often forget that it is subsidised with public tax. While spectators were busy generalising the quality of education in private universities, they remained silent about the corruption and political appointments of teachers in public universities. It is unfortunate that our intellectuals seemed to have lost their moral high ground and the opportunity of critical engagement on the issue of broad based education. We have a University Grants Commission to regulate both public and private universities. It is high time they start standardising the curricula both in public and private universities. I know for the fact that World Bank has funded projects which are supposed to assure the quality of universities. I sincerely hope that UGC will continue the work

even when the funds dry up. I would also like to propose a fair evaluation of both public and private universities and make the grants available according to their performances.

We don't dare ask for subsidies but demand minimum recognition that we are no lesser than any public university in terms of training future citizens. Some of us have left well-paid jobs in foreign terrains and returned to our country to give back. Some of us were trained in private universities and attained our MS and PhDs from respected universities abroad. Some private universities and faculties are investing their resources in building a space for critical engagement.

This movement, like any other movement, did not happen overnight. I want the state and its intellectual commune to recognise that they are alienating private universities and their students with their discriminatory attitude. These students are able-bodied citizens who are about to join the workforce; so it's imperative that they are not reduced to mere consumers.

My colleagues and I stood by our students as we know their stories and we know what they are fighting for. In my teaching career, I have taught hundreds of students and got the chance to know them better. A huge chunk of my students at BRAC University hail from cities or villages outside Dhaka and less than 5 percent are from elite or upper-middle class households. When I spoke to some of the parents, I understood that they had to keep account of every penny they spend on their children's education. I have met students who study on scholarships or some sort of financial assistance semester after semester; students deferring their education as they couldn't manage their tuition fees. I know a single mother who is struggling to finish her education by tutoring four students, raising her children all alone as her husband is working in another town. When I saw all these faces in the demonstrations against VAT, I could smell the change in air. VAT or no VAT, they have finally learned to claim what is rightfully theirs. Victory is theirs!

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A WORD A DAY

EIDETIC

[ai'detik]

VIVID MEMORY OR MENTAL IMAGE

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

Across	40 Fix
1 Chair wheel	Down
7 Successful songs	1 Gamut unit
11 Refer	2 Crockett's last stand
12 Skip	3 Snail trail
13 Came down	4 Deli order
14 Painter Cassatt	5 Perfect place
15 Jordan's capital	6 Danger signal
16 Permitted	7 Abodes
17 Low digits	8 John Lennon song
18 Live	9 Diatribes
19 Previously owned	10 Did salon work
21 Outlaw Kelly	16 Enticed
22 Online shows	18 Amber, originally
25 Tennis star Shriver	20 Miserly Marner
26 Script unit	22 Medal recipient
27 Annie, for one	23 Dominions
29 Ailurophobe's fear	24 Propriety
33 Recoils	25 Mall-related
34 Tycoon	28 Bank job
35 Gaur of "Tootsie"	30 Like tumblers
36 Yacht spot	31 Ready to play
37 Aphrodite's love	32 Grayish
38 Lucky charm	34 Jerry Herman musical
39 Misplaced	36 Impair

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

T	E	S	T	S	D	E	S	K	S
E	L	I	O	T	I	R	I	N	A
S	A	L	M	O	C	A	L	I	F
L	I	E	I	C	E	E	V	E	
A	N	N	O	D	N	E	T		
S	E	T	T	E	R	I	T	S	Y
P	E	R	S	O	N	A			
S	C	A	N	A	N	N	A	L	
T	A	R	A	G	E	C	P	A	
A	M	T	L	E	S	T	O	T	
R	E	N	A	L	P	A	I	G	E
C	R	E	A	M	E	O	B	O	E
H	A	R	P	Y	T	E	N	E	T

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

9-28

I'M THINKING OF RETIRING

OH, IT'S TOO EARLY FOR YOU TO RETIRE

THERE'S SO MUCH MORE WAITING FOR YOU TO SCREW UP

GREGG MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

ASK MOM.

MOM! LOOK WHAT I DREW!

WOW! A HORSE!

I GUESS IT'S A HORSE.