

# In conversation with two Dhaka mayors

Annisul Huq and Sayeed Khokon took oath as mayors of Dhaka north and south city corporations on May 6, 2015. The north and south mayors took office on May 14 and May 7 with pledges to bring qualitative changes in the lives of city dwellers. Both, however, found themselves constrained with coordination crisis among different utility service providers. With two years in office, the mayors have made some positive changes in city life. In conversation with The Daily Star on the completion of two years, the mayors reflected on some of their achievements, constraints and future plans.

(The interview of Annisul Huq was taken by Tawfique Ali and Sayeed Khokon by Mahbubur Rahman Khan)

The Daily Star (TDS): What is your experience working as mayor?  
**Annisul Huq (AH):** Dhaka is a strange city. People throw waste everywhere but in bins. Traffic moves despite a red signal. Pedestrians jaywalk right under a footbridge. The VIPs move in the wrong direction of roads. A mayor's office cannot change the city unless the people are participatory and change their mindset.



Annisul Huq

I am facilitating the introduction of 4,000 new public service buses in the capital. After over one and half years of efforts, bus owners and transport union leaders have agreed to create six holding companies as opposed to the existing system of 200 owners operating 6,000 buses on 170 routes

TDS: What are the mentionable development works that you executed so far?  
**AH:** The north city has 1,350km roads, 1,250km open and piped drains and 325km footpaths. Of those, 176km roads, 242km drains and 69km footpaths have so far been improved to a remarkable quality. We spent over Tk 300 crore for improving these areas. We are going to undertake a Tk 650-crore development project to improve 396km of roads in Mirpur, Mohammadpur and parts of Khilgaon during next one and half years. It is not possible to work simultaneously all over the city, it depends on fund allocation. The government has allocated Tk 1,027 crore to the north city. By the end of 2018, there will hardly be any dilapidated roads, footpaths and drains.

sations. Clinic owners and the NGOs handle the medical waste. We will take control of it soon.

TDS: What actions are you going to take to free the remainder of footpaths that are still being occupied illegally?  
**AH:** It's not a mayor's responsibility to clear the footpaths of illegal occupation. It is easy for journalists to ask questions but it is not easy to face the reality. Those who occupy footpaths earn a living that way. We need to reconcile and compromise so public movement is less hampered. We will rehabilitate the hawkers if possible or arrange holiday markets. Or, we will accommodate the hawkers in a way so the pedestrians are less disturbed.

TDS: What is the progress of your "Clean Dhaka: Green Dhaka" campaign?  
**AH:** People too need to take part in the green campaign. There are 2 lakhs of holdings in north city. We have planted 32,000 tree saplings in Uttara as part of the green city campaign. But according to a survey finding, only 6,840 trees could be planted in

the available public open spaces in Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara. We also set up ten modern public toilets at different places of the city.

TDS: What plans do you have to improve parks and playgrounds?  
**AH:** Next three years will be dedicated to developing 27 parks and nine playgrounds under a master plan.  
**TDA:** What measures have you taken to fight mosquito menace?  
**AH:** We have procured 200 hand spray machines and 110 fogger machines for controlling the mosquito menace.  
**TDS:** What's the progress of installing "U-Loops" to ease traffic congestion?  
**AH:** In the next three to four months, we are going to build 11 U-Loops that will allow making U-turns without disrupting traffic flow along the stretch on the road from Tongi to Satrasta intersection.

Gazipur City Corporation will build 10 of similar U-turn features along the stretch from Tongi to Gazipur. It will help remove 69 traffic crossings.

TDS: What is the progress of introducing new buses to improve city's public transport?  
**AH:** Though not a mayoral mandate, I am facilitating the introduction of 4,000 new public service buses in the capital.

After over one and half years of efforts, bus owners and transport union leaders have agreed to create six holding companies as opposed to the existing system of 200 owners operating 6,000 buses on 170 routes. There is a powerful coterie in the transport sector, but it is great that they have agreed to the idea. The challenge is that Tk 2,000 crores will be needed to buy the new buses that will replace an equal number of buses from the existing fleet. It will also require new terminals, workshops, bus bays and an electronic ticketing system. The companies will own the buses and the owners will get proportionate profits.

TDS: What is the state of city beautification?  
**AH:** Do you have any plan for the

The Daily Star (TDS): You were vocal on cleaning activities during the first year, why don't we see it now?  
**Sayeed Khokon (SK):** On the early morning of January 1 in 2016, I visited different spots and found less than 20 percent cleaners on the street. I took initiatives to ensure their presence. I gave them mobile phones and SIMs. I began tracking their SIMs and increased their facilities. Now, at least 80 percent cleaners are found on the streets. I had taken several initiatives like "clean city", "clean thinking" and "clean clothes". About 5,700 dustbins were installed to encourage city dwellers to throw solid garbage on specific spots. Of those, 220 dustbins have been stolen and 197 broken. We also organised awareness campaign in this regard. We are requesting people to throw garbage on designated spots. We need 30 secondary transfer stations (STS) but yet to get space for those. Our situation will improve, if those are installed.



Sayeed Khokon

We've taken an initiative to modernise 31 playgrounds meeting international standards. Drawing and designing of some 25 fields have already been completed and those are now under the tender process. Our target is to launch all of those by June 2018. The city corporation has already freed the occupied parks and playgrounds

TDS: Rain creates waterlogging. But you are blaming Dhaka Wasa (Water Supply and Sewerage Authority) for it.  
**SK:** I talked with the locals and at every wards people made countless allegations against Wasa. Either there is a scarcity of water or stench in it. There is no storm sewerage line. They don't respond to people's sufferings. But they are the authorised body to look after the matter. It is not difficult to change the pipeline of an area. It only requires cordial efforts but without showing it they are taking big projects ignoring public sufferings. But I have to face the criticism. For this reason, I will lose voters and Awami League will lose votes -- we cannot accept that.

TDS: There is no improvement in Moghbazar-Mouchak area. There is no end to public sufferings.  
**SK:** There is mismanagement in the construction of the flyover. About 85 percent work to fix waterlogging in Shantinagar area has been finished. From next August there will not be any waterlogging there.

TDS: Do you have any plan for the city's sewerage system to address waterlogging problems?  
**SK:** It's Wasa's responsibility to install storm sewerage. To meet people's expectation, we're carrying out work in Shantinagar area. I hope there will not be any trouble in the upcoming rainy season. Steps have already been taken to address waterlogging problems in many parts of the city. But we're yet to begin work on the Old Dhaka's Nazimuddin Road where waterlogging is an age-old problem. We'll finish the work by the next rainy season.

TDS: The city corporation has given task to coordinate 26 organisations. Even after that, the city dwellers are undergoing immense sufferings due to unorganised road digging.  
**SK:** We've held meetings with the representatives of service providing agencies. Besides, we are trying to solve problems through discussions with the respective agencies from time to time. The lack of coordination has reduced.

TDS: What is your thought on the development of the eight unions, recently included to DSCC?  
**SK:** A project on the development of four out of eight unions has already been approved. Its activities will begin from next week. LED lights will be imported. Another project for the rest four unions is awaiting approval of the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Co-operatives (LGRD).

TDS: How successful mayor you are?  
**SK:** Thirty percent of the finance in the development work comes from DSCC. We are struggling to bear the expense because DSCC's annual income is not adequate enough. We need Tk 3,000 crore for the development work. The National Board of Revenue pockets the tax from a product bought by a citizen. We've requested the NBR chairman to give us one or two percent from the tax. But they did not agree.

TDS: On holidays, many children are seen on the streets playing cricket due to a scarcity of playgrounds. Setting up playgrounds and parks as well as freeing the already occupied ones were among your electoral pledges. What is your plan in the upcoming years?  
**SK:** In our "Jol-Shobujer Dhaka Project", we've taken an initiative to modernise 31 playgrounds meeting international standards. Drawing and designing of some 25 fields have already been completed and those are now under the tender process. Our target is to launch all of those by June 2018. The city corporation has already freed the occupied parks and playgrounds.

TDS: City dwellers are still reeling from mosquito menace. What is your plan?  
**SK:** Mosquito nuisance is relatively less in the old town. In areas like Sutrapur, Kotwali and others, you won't find mosquito. But you'll find it in Dhanmondi, Maniknagar and Manda areas due to the water bodies in the respective areas. We're continuing our efforts to control the menace.

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People from all walks of life, including students, teachers, journalists and cultural and rights activists, bring out a procession in the capital's Shahbagh area yesterday, protesting the recent spate of rape and violence in the country. They also demanded exemplary punishment for the perpetrators. PHOTO: STAR

## JESSORE LEVEL CROSSING 2 killed, 30 hurt as train hits bus

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole  
 Two female workers of Akij Jute Mill were killed and 30 more workers injured as a Jessore-bound train rammed into a bus at Nawapara Taltala level crossing in Abhaynagar upazila of Jessore on Tuesday night.

Kadbanu, 50, wife of Akbor Gyen, and Nur Jahan Bagum, 52, wife of Ala Sikder, both of Monoharpur village in Monirampur upazila, died on the spot. Mohsin Ali, station master of Nawapara Railway Station, said the accident occurred as the gateman was not present there. But, he refused to

disclose the gateman's name. The injured were admitted to Abhaynagar Upazila Health Complex and Khulna Medical College Hospital. The mill authorities removed the bus within an hour. Rail communications with the northern region remained suspended till 3:30am.

# RICHARD MARX

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