

AVOIDING AN URBAN NIGHTMARE: TIME TO GET PLANNING RIGHT

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Without proper urban facilities, quality life is unachievable

The state of basic civic amenities in Dhaka city leaves much to be desired



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The word "city" comes from the Latin root "civis/civitas", meaning citizen/citizenship. The expressions "civil/civic/civilisation" owe their pedigree to this Latin origin. Eventually, it came to correspond with the French "urbs", meaning city in a more physical sense. The reason of tracing this etymology is to say that a city as a large town must be civil, have basic civic facilities and amenities for its citizens so that they can live a quality life.

From this perspective, can we argue for Dhaka city as a "civic/civil" space? Only the readers may judge this, but the purpose of this writing is to lay bare some facts about the basic facilities of Dhaka city. In an earlier piece published in this daily, I briefly touched upon the provisions of open space, roads and footpaths, air quality and noise pollution, housing and state of ponds/canals, etc. This piece will focus on provisions of water, drainage system, electricity, toilet facilities, etc.

First, let us look at the provision of clean water supply in Dhaka city. It can be seen from the perspectives of demand/supply, its quality, access to citizens and the pricing of water. In recent years, water supply from WASA has increased to almost 2.2 billion litres a day (BLD), against a demand of almost 2.5 BLD. Against the WASA-projected

demand of 150l/d/person, about half of Dhaka residents living in low-income areas suffer from scarcity of water despite piped connections. The quality of water is not up to the mark, often supplying unusable, smelly water. So, most of the pipe-connected households either drink boiled water or machine-purified water. In terms of access, there is again huge

The sustainability of groundwater is challenged because of an imbalance between extraction and rechargeability. The result is gradual subsidence of land, which is reported to be over 20 metres during the last two decades.

inequity depending on the area. More than a quarter of Dhaka citizens live in about 4,000 informal settlements/slums where residents do not have a proper piped supply of water.

However, over 80 percent of Dhaka's water supply comes from groundwater,

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One of the greatest contradictions of Dhaka is that despite being surrounded by rivers, over 80 percent of its water supply comes from groundwater. The rivers around it have become extremely polluted. PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ



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