

AVOIDING AN URBAN NIGHTMARE: TIME TO GET PLANNING RIGHT

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The situation of public toilets has gotten slightly better in the last few years as the two Dhaka City Corporations have taken initiatives to build modern public toilets.

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Without proper urban facilities, quality life is unachievable

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these modern toilets, with separate facilities for male and female users and equipped with CCTV, are managed by professional cleaning companies. Even committees comprising of stakeholders from government agencies, NGOs and local civil society representatives oversee the management of the facilities. A user has to pay Tk 5 to Tk 10 depending on the location and type of use. The money received from toilet users is deposited in a bank account opened in the name of the toilet. This money is being utilised for paying staff salary, utility bills and for repair work with the approval of the Finance Committee of the toilet management.

Even an app named "Dhaka Public Toilet" was devised by Preneur Lab, with all kinds of information available on about 2,000 toilet facilities. The app even won a World Summit Award this year. It tells the locations of toilets in your vicinity. This app covers all types of toilets, such as purely public ones for use by all citizens, toilets in shopping malls for use by shoppers during work hours, and toilets which are of restricted use, in offices, company buildings, stadiums, etc.

When it comes to electricity supply, city dwellers enjoy better standards than the rest of the country. Overall, more than 90 percent of urban dwellers enjoy electricity, against a country-wide average of 70 percent. The city of Dhaka inhabited by less than 10 percent of the country's population consumes about half of total electricity generated in the country, the largest share of which is claimed by its domestic sector (according to DPDC). The high-density building blocks without the provision of open space, water bodies and greenery are deprived of natural ventilation, natural airflow and sunlight and suffer from the heat island effect resulting in higher dependency on artificial lighting and air conditioning. Obviously, land zoning and land use planning with well-designed building codes for residential areas in Dhaka city should guide the provision of these elements. Also education, awareness-raising and incentives for behavioural change to use efficient technology are vital to



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improve energy efficiency. Such improvements have huge potential for energy conservation.

The brief discussion above shows that basic urban facilities available in Dhaka city are in no way up to the mark. Other amenities like greenery, open space and water bodies/waterways are in serious deficit for nurturing healthy minds of citizens. This is the reason why Dhaka city does not go up in the yearly global survey of liveable cities. In a city with the highest density of population in the world, where over half a million people move each year in search of livelihood opportunities, it is extremely

difficult to live a quality life with a minimum level of facilities and amenities. Conditions of water supply and the electricity sector have improved than before, but the challenges of efficiency and conservation continue to persist. For example, water pricing can have a spatially differential approach, where rich neighbourhoods can pay a higher price, in order to subsidise the low-income communities. In a similar manner, incentives/disincentives can be applied to effect behavioural changes in electricity consumption. Also, the public toilet system can be built and managed on a public-private partnership basis.

However, the ultimate solution of the mess in different areas of Dhaka city lies in a policy shift away from the Dhaka-centric life.

Sustainable Development Goal 11 is to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable." This requires urbanisation in a planned manner. A city like Dhaka facing so much biotic pressure with extremely limited space and other infrastructures could have been managed better by ensuring transparency and accountability of the governance system. This is where we have some serious lacking. So many departments and agencies in the city do not work

in coordination with each other. Naturally, there is a huge wastage of resources and a lot of inefficiency. With full autonomy of the two city corporations and by establishing a culture of stakeholder-inclusive open dialogues, the governance system can be improved a lot, which can compensate for inadequacy of resources to an extent. The government this time sounds more determined about establishing a better governance process. Let's hope for the better.

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