

# Unplanned urbanisation a big barrier

Says Centre for Policy Dialogue, suggests economic plan for every urban area

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unplanned urbanisation is now a recognised structural barrier to all middle-income countries, including Bangladesh, in becoming developed nations, said Centre for Policy Dialogue Distinguished Fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya.

He said this while sharing the research paper on "How Prepared is the Urban Local Government in Bangladesh to Deliver SDGs?" during a dialogue organised by the CPD at a city hotel yesterday.

Debapriya said development experience of the countries which were on the so-called middle-income track, especially some Latin American countries, showed they remained stuck in their middle-income status and could not come out as developed nations largely because of unplanned urbanisation.

The CPD held the dialogue on "Delivering SDGs in Bangladesh through Urban Local Government: An Exploration of Status, Prospects and Challenges".

It said the country's cities should be developed and managed in a planned way, led by urban local government institutions, for sustainable development.

There should be an urban plan or city plan for each urban area as well as individual economic plans, the think tank said in a research paper disseminated during the dialogue.

Debapriya said development activities centring urban local government were very limited in Bangladesh. Most of such activities were done centring rural local government.

Debapriya and CPD Senior Research Associate Umme Shefa

Rezvana jointly presented the research paper.

Debapriya added that global projection suggests that total urban population would be more than the rural population by 2035 after the end of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) period (2016-2030).

In future, this issue will be very crucial and it is also important for Bangladesh, he said.

He pointed out some challenges to the country's urban local government bodies for their proper functioning and proposed establishing a Local Government Commission to overcome those.

The "colonial mindset" of dominant bureaucracy, centralised governance mechanism, and the government's political attitude were the challenges for the urban local government in implementing the SDGs, he said in the research paper.

Chairing and moderating the dialogue, another CPD Distinguished Fellow Prof Mustafizur Rahman said urban issues and areas were important from the SDGs perspective of "Leave No One Behind", as well as for implementing the goals.

Addressing the dialogue, former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hossain said structural change in the local government system was required to function properly.

In the existing system, women municipality councillors of reserved seats and upazila vice-chairmen often do not have any meaningful jobs, he said.

Speaking as the chief guest, Local Government and Rural Development Minister Tajul Islam said the government was committed to strengthening the local government

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina consoles the grieving family members of Awami League leader Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim's grandson Zayan Chowdhury, who was killed in the blasts in Sri Lanka on Sunday. He was laid to rest in the capital's Banani graveyard yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

## Stay alert

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"I don't know what they [terrorists] want to achieve through such killings of innocent people. The children are innocent ... why did they lose their lives?"

In the attacks, Zayan's father Moshul Haque Chowdhury Prince (Selim's son-in-law) was injured. He is now undergoing treatment at a hospital in Sri Lanka.

Prince has not been told about his son's death, said Hasina.

The prime minister prayed for the salvation of the departed soul of Zayan and all others killed in the brutal attacks on April 21.

Meanwhile, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Mohammad Javed Patwary yesterday directed all units of police to step up security measures and intelligence surveillance ahead

of May Day, Buddha Purnima, Ramadan, and Eid-ul-Fitr.

The IGP gave the directives in a video conference with the chiefs of all police units and police high officials at the Police Headquarters (PHQ), Md Sohel Rana, assistant inspector general of police, told The Daily Star.

The two-hour long conference, from 7:00pm, was convened to review the country's security situation in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka, according to sources.

In the meeting, the officials were instructed to be aware of homegrown small militant outfits, said a source who was present.

"We have already gathered intelligence and information from the arrested militants," said the official, requesting anonymity. The police are now following the leads.

AIG Sohel said the law enforcers were directed to work alongside the people, the same method used before to fight militancy and terrorism. The police chief also asked the community police network be used for curbing militancy, he said.

Sri Lankan police have so far arrested 58 people, all Sri Lankans, and security remains heavy, with bomb squads carrying out several controlled explosions of suspected packages yesterday.

The Sri Lankan government yesterday acknowledged "major" lapses for its failure to prevent the attacks despite prior intelligence warnings.

In all, nine people are believed to have blown themselves up, either during the attacks or when police attempted to arrest them.

## Family known for philanthropy gets death threats

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barisal

The family of a former zamindar, who was killed by Razakars after the country's liberation, claims it received death threats from land grabbers in Barisal's Shyampur village.

"We are passing days in anxiety. Some influential land grabbers with political clout are threatening to kill us over a piece of land," said Chhaya Rani Chowdhury, wife of the ex-Zamindar Kumud Bandhu Roy Chowdhury Natubabu.

Kumud was a zamindar before the zamindar system was abolished in that region in the 1940s. He was killed by the anti-liberation forces in 1973 as he tried to testify against some war criminals, said locals, including freedom fighters.

Seventy-five-year old Chhaya, who has a son and two daughters, has about seven acres of land. Alongside agricultural land, there is a pond and three places in the area. Two of the palaces are on the verge of collapse.

"We opted to put up a boundary wall but a group of people obstructed the work. They are claiming ownership

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## A commission may be formed to find Aug 15 masterminds

PM tells JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in parliament yesterday said her government was considering the formation of a commission to identify the masterminds of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's murder.

Hasina said a great deal of information about the conspiracies, hatched before the killing of Bangabandhu, had been revealed after the Awami League formed the government for the fourth time.

In a scripted answer, she said, "As per the information, a good number of local and foreign individuals, and agencies, were involved in the killing. So, the government is actively considering the formation of a commission to identify other plotters..."

"We're firmly determined to bring not only those who were directly involved in this heinous act, but also the cohorts and conspirators."

The government is making all-out efforts to have the killers deported

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## No electricity

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posting a Tk 1,000 bail. The farmer, however, had to suffer in jail for three days.

Jalal said he was jailed without any reason. After his release, he went to the office of the Palli Bidyut but did not get a copy of the case from the officials.

Md Zahirul Islam, managing director of the samity, claimed they had lodged a case with a Mymensingh court against Jamal Uddin but police arrested Jalal Mandol.

He said the samity had nothing to do with the mistake.

"I visited Jalal's house on Tuesday and there is no power connection in the residence," he said, adding that work for electricity connection in the area was going on but Jalal had not applied for a connection.

Locals said Jalal still felt the humiliation of the arrest. They

demand an investigation into the matter.

Contacted, UP Chairman Rezwan Sarwar Robbani said it was a grievous mistake and police should be more careful before arresting someone.

Md Mazharul Islam, officer-in-charge (investigation) of Bhaluka Police Station, claimed they had just followed the arrest warrant issued by the court so they could not be the ones at fault.

This correspondent did not see a copy of the warrant.

Although there are laws against such wrongful confinement, which come with fines and prison sentences, Jalal did not express any desire to pursue the matter further.

In a similar incident earlier this month, a day labourer was sent to jail in Cumilla for not paying electricity bills, even though his house had no electricity supply.

## Bomber studied

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told a briefing yesterday.

"Right now we are asking people to be vigilant but I think within a couple of days, within the next few days, we will have the situation totally under control."

Wijewardene told parliament on Tuesday that two Sri Lankan Islamist groups - the National Thawheed Jama'ut and Jammiyathul

Millathu Ibrahim - were responsible for the blasts, reported Reuters.

He said yesterday the leader of one of those groups blew himself up in the attack on the luxury Shangri-La Hotel in Colombo.

A total of 60 people had been detained for questioning across Colombo since Sunday, Wijewardene said. That total includes a Syrian, according to security sources.

Islamic State released a statement claiming responsibility for the attacks, but its propaganda channels did not substantiate the claim with evidence.

Most of those killed and wounded were Sri Lankans, although officials said 38 foreigners were also killed. That included British, US, Australian, Turkish, Indian, Chinese, Danish, Dutch and Portuguese nationals. Forty-five children were among the dead.

## Govt failure writ large

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The laws were also not the first step.

In 2010, the government mulled banning begging and making it a punishable offence but backtracked after the move was considered a human rights violation. Afterwards, they turned their focus towards rehabilitation.

But going by the scores of beggars visible all over the country, it looks like neither the law nor the plans are being enforced properly.

According to an estimate gathered by representatives under the Department of Social Services (DSS) last year, the city had about 22,000 beggars, or 10 percent of all beggars across the country.

GOVT REHABILITATION PROGRAMME

With the promise of an inclusive growth, the government in 2010 launched a programme on rehabilitation and alternative employment under the DSS of the social welfare ministry for rehabilitation and alternative employment for people engaged in begging.

Almost a decade later, little progress has been made.

Until 2015, the programme for rehabilitation and alternative employment for the people engaged in begging was limited to conducting surveys and a pilot project, which rehabilitated 37 people in Mymensingh and 29 in Jamalpur.

Ten NGOs were engaged in making lists of beggars across Dhaka back in 2010, but according to those involved the surveys were not completed properly.

Since 2010, about Tk 24 crore has been allocated for the programme in yearly budgets, with 80 percent of the funds left unused.

Shah Jahan, who joined as head of the programme last year, could not explain why this was so.

Earlier, according to Shah Jahan, the rehabilitation programme was Dhaka-focused. But DSS data shows that no rehabilitation work has been done in the capital.

As more people poured into the capital in migrations triggered by climate change, and social and financial shocks, the government realised it had to support poor people in their areas to prevent them from coming to cities and beg.

The idea was to create employment for the vulnerable people in the areas

they were in, so as to prevent the migration.

In fiscal 2017-18, the government rehabilitated 2,710 people in 58 districts at a cost of Tk 3 crore.

The number, however, was not even a drop in the ocean.

A 2017 Unicef data puts the yearly influx of urban migrants at five to seven lakh people.

Last year, deputy commissioners and district-level officers of the DSS were asked to estimate expenditure for rehabilitating beggars in their areas. They came up with a figure of over 2 lakh beggars and rehabilitation cost of Tk 422 crore.

Meanwhile, as part of the Dhaka city corporations' efforts to show the beggar menace is being dealt with, it declared places such as diplomatic zones, VIP areas and luxury hotels as "beggar-free".

Some 212 "professional beggars" have so far been detained from such zones in the city during drives by mobile courts, according to the DSS.

Driving beggars out of some areas in the capital that the government considers its "drawing room" is not a solution, says Debashish Kundu, of Dhaka University's sociology department. Their socio-economic condition and geographical areas where they are coming from should be analysed to prepare short-, mid- and long-term rehabilitation plan.

Issues related to begging may vary from place to place. Noted economist Hossain Zillur Rahman says the problem has to be seen from the humanitarian perspectives. Employment should be generated under social safety net for this most disadvantaged group, not focusing on skills, rather on the financial need of them, he added.

A problem with focusing on skills and employment generation has been the absence of children from being part of any rehabilitation programme ALL CHILDREN LEFT BEHIND

Asked about the support provided to children in this regard, Shah Jahan says there are six shelter homes run by the government for vagabonds, where children stay until their families are traced.

During anti-vagrancy drives, police detain them and then place them before court that sends them to shelter homes.

After handing them over to their families, guardians or relatives, there

is no follow-up to ensure that they get proper care and don't return to the streets.

"It [follow-up] is not possible," Shah Jahan says.

Forhad Hossain, executive director of LEEDO (Local Education and Development Organisation), says it rescued about 2,000 children from the streets over the last four years.

Most of them were between 5 and 12 and had left home to escape abuse or an environment where they were uncared for, resulting from separation between parents.

Some of them were abandoned.

Around 700 of them were reintegrated into their families. Others were sent to shelter homes run by the government and NGOs. Fifty-two children were accommodated in the Peace Home.

A comprehensive, holistic approach is needed for rehabilitating child beggars, Forhad says. If they are rescued within days after they get separated from home, it is easy to get them off the streets and discipline them.

"But when they live on the streets for quite long, they get used to that life even if they have to beg, work under local thugs."

LEEDO runs open schools at Sadarghat launch terminals to connect with street children. Social workers working there have noticed that children get sucked into thuggish cartels who offer them food and money.

With time, unscrupulous people gain their trust and engage them in begging and other exploitative environment.

The 2011 Disadvantaged Act and the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act 2012 define engaging someone in begging as punishable offence.

Asked if anyone has been punished for engaging children or adults in begging, Shah Jahan, director of the government programme on rehabilitation and alternative employment for the people engaged in begging, says there were several instances pointing to commissioning of beggars but mobile courts could never find information in this regard.

A PROMISING SOLUTION

When the state is still working out how best it can wipe out begging menace across the country, Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), a financial institution founded by

the government to support rural development, set an example of success.

A programme launched in 2013 has rehabilitated 1,032 beggars prioritising elderly people with disabilities.

Each beneficiary got Tk 1 lakh. The programme is implemented in partnership with 116 organisations that help spend the money in training, building homes and creating opportunities for self-employment -- for example by setting up a stall, giving a rickshaw or livestock to rear.

"PKSF is working in a limited number of areas...the government can take lessons from our programme and can launch similar interventions in a focused way all over the country," Jashim Uddin, deputy managing director of the PKSF, said in an e-mailed response.

A similar initiative in Narail district also showed promise. The district social services office in 2015 sought advice from people of all professions to rehabilitate beggars following surveys that estimated the vagrants' number to be 800. The fund was created accumulating money from government allocation, one-day pay from all government and non-government employees and donations from elites, civil society members and businessmen.

A beggars' rehabilitation association was also formed to help sustain the programme. Each beneficiary is closely monitored by one person to support him in situations of need, said Ratan Kumar Haldar, deputy director of the social services office.

His office also contacted relatives of those who could not work and provided them with means to income to support back the beneficiaries.

Until more such programmes are initiated, not much progress can be expected.

Back in Mazhar gate, Feroz is compelled to accompany Habib, who has to fund his two sons' education apart from making ends meet.

Habib says he earns Tk 15,000 a month and lives with his family in Chankharpool in a rented house for Tk 7,000.

"I am all good with the blessings of Allah," he says, adding that Feroz's family is very poor and were living in the remotest part of Barisal. So, when and if Feroz goes back, his family will have money to buy tin sheets for a roof overhead.