

Out of a difficult 2020, two Dhaka mayors look ahead to brighter days

The two mayors of Dhaka south and north city corporations -- Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh and Atiqul Islam-- took office in May 2020 with pledges to bring qualitative changes in the lives of city dwellers. Both, however, found themselves constrained with coordination crises among different utility service providers. Amid the pandemic, the two mayors have made some significant changes in city life. In conversations with Helemul Alam and Mathews Chiran respectively, the two mayors reflected on some of their achievements, constraints and future plans.

The Daily Star (DS): 2020 was a difficult year for everyone. As a mayor, what was your biggest challenge and obstacle this year?

Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh: The biggest challenge was that I had to take office during the coronavirus pandemic. Besides, dengue was also a challenge as June was the season of this mosquito-borne disease. So we had to be very careful and vigilant to eradicate mosquitoes and destroy its sources. We had to change the management system and had to initiate a new action plan. Due to our necessary efforts following the action plan, no person died of dengue this season in the DSCC area. We could keep the casualty level at a very minimum stage.

DS: What was the biggest success for you this year?

Taposh: I would say we have been able to make the Dhaka South City Corporation less corrupt. It feels good when I get feedback/response from people that they are getting services from the city corporation without facing any corruption. I received a phone call from a Bangladeshi living in the US. They have expressed their satisfaction that they obtained services from the DSCC without paying anything extra. They were very happy and overwhelmed. This is our biggest success as we were able to bring down corruption at the city corporation and ensured transparency, which was one of our election manifestos.

DS: At the end of 2020, what is the one thing you wish you would do differently, and why?

Taposh: I want civil works to be done in due time. We want to bring all the service providing agencies under one umbrella so that they can do their work in a coordinated way. That way, residents will get to avail services smoothly and fast. And, there will be no overlapping of works and no lapses; works will be done diligently and within the timeframe.

DS: We're sure you have many plans for 2021. Which one of them are you most excited of and why?

Taposh: We have many plans. Of those, we are not most excited but very concerned about how we can eradicate waterlogging from the city. Since we have been successful in recovering all the canals from Wasa, it could be a mammoth task for us to properly look after those. This could be a crucial work for us to ensure that city people will not face waterlogging. It is a huge task. We are preparing our action plan on both short and long term basis. In short term programmes, we will remove all the wastes from the canals and lakes so that water can be removed easily. We will also clean up the box culverts, which had not been cleaned for a long time. Hopefully we will be able to prepare our action plans and we are hopeful that we will be able to provide better services than before. Under the plan, we will prepare a master plan to eradicate the waterlogging problem from Dhaka completely.

DS: What can citizens expect from the mayor's office in the next year?

Taposh: Less corruption and good governance, more online and digital applications -- so that citizens can get services smoothly and without any sort of harassment. Bus route rationalisation (bringing all public buses under a fixed number of companies and bringing public transports under discipline) is also an important task, which will be visible in 2021.



Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh

The Daily Star (DS): You have undertaken multiple development projects like installing buttons for pedestrian crossing, and constructing U-loops and foot-bridges, but urban planners and transport experts have criticised some of the initiatives. Can you comment on how successful your endeavours have been?

Atiqul Islam: Comments, both positive and negative, about such work is expected. I welcome both the praise and criticism, as they help us learn.

Regarding the button system, all developing countries have it. This is a pilot project, and we have not installed buttons here and there. We focused on educational institutions, so the new generation can get familiar with the system. If the system works well for people, we will continue the project, but if they do not want it or abide by it, we will not.

About U-loops, they have already been proven to be successful. Earlier, it took 40-50 minutes to go from Abdullahpur to Tongi, but now, it takes 4-5 minutes. The U-loops were constructed after consulting with experts, and this was late DNCC Mayor Annisul Huq's plan. But during construction, there were obstructions due to the elevated expressway. But the problems were resolved, and we now have four U-loops left to construct out of 10. Once we open all of them, people will enjoy the benefits.

As for foot-bridges, students demanded them after Abrar died in a tragic road accident. The incident occurred only nine days after I assumed office. I think we need to move to the underpass system instead of foot-bridges for the city's beautification. Unfortunately, that requires more space, and we all know that Dhaka is an unplanned city. Yet, if there is space, we will construct underpasses.

Also, I would like to inform everyone that we are going to install 16 foot-bridges with escalators, so everyone, especially people with disability, can use them.

DS: When will residents of new wards start seeing development under the mega project?

Atiqul: Ecneec has approved the Tk 4,200 crore plan to develop new wards, which were neglected for years. Most of the money will be used for land requisition. The narrow roads will be widened and will consist of four lanes. Also, the money will be used for managing canals. Covid-19 has slowed us down, but we will soon start working. We do not want future generations to suffer due to such issues.

DS: What were your biggest successes and failures this year?

Atiqul: Among the successes, I would say that during the pandemic, all of us (DNCC officials) worked in the field; we had little time to spend at home. In March, April, May and June, many lost their jobs, but we have been able to help them.

I personally have been able to help 76,000 families under the platform "Sobai Mile Sobar Dhaka". During the dengue outbreak, our DNCC officials worked hard and were able to overcome the crisis together, which we consider as our success.

An issue that worries me is whenever we try to evict illegal occupants, like hawkers on footpaths, from the streets, it becomes occupied again. We still cannot do anything about it.

However, we were able to remove and fine building developers,



Atiqul Islam



The branches that were once home to hundreds of birds are now on the ground, and the large tree stands with half of its canopy missing in front of RMCH emergency unit.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

RMCH TREE BRANCHES CHOPPED TO SHOO BIRDS Director admits mistake, says no more destruction

MOSTAFA SHABUI, BOGURA

The authorities of Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital recently cut off the branches of some trees that were home to a huge number of different species of birds. Amid protests from local environmental activists and conservationists, the director of RMCH admitted to the mistake and said he will refrain from such acts of environmental destruction in the future.

This reporter during a visit to RMCH

earlier this year found thousands of birds at the premises, with Asian openbill storks, cormorants and night herons making nests on the trees in the RMCH compound and adjacent areas including Rajshahi Central Jail, Technical Training Centre (TTC) and Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Science (INMAS) - Rajshahi.

According to local birders, the birds have been nesting at RMCH premises for the past 4-5 years.

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MONGLA PORT Tk 754cr deal signed for dredging

UNB, BAGERHAT

Mongla Port Authority on Wednesday signed a deal with a Chinese company to dredge the inner bar of Mongla Port channel to allow the anchoring of container ships with 10-metre draught.

Rear Admiral M Shahjahan, chairman of the Mongla Port Authority, and Yang Zhijun, representative of the contractor Jianshu Haihong Construction Engineering Company and China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation signed the agreement.

The Tk 754.08 crore project will begin in January 2021 and end in July 2022.

State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, who joined the programme online,

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WRONGFUL IMPRISONMENT OF ARMAN Give him Tk 20 lakh as compensation

High Court directs police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the inspector general of police to give Tk 20 lakh as compensation to Md Arman, a technician at a Benarasi Palli in Mirpur, in 30 days as police personnel have wrongly arrested him and kept him in jail for around five years instead of the original accused in a drug case.

Declaring the arrest and detention of Arman illegal and contradictory to his fundamental and human rights, the court also asked the authorities concerned of the government to immediately release him from Dhaka central jail.

Delivering verdict on a writ petition, the HC ordered the IGP and DMP commissioner to withdraw four police officers, who were discharging duties under Pallabi Police Station during the incident, from their present workplaces.

The four police officers are then OC Dadan Fakir, now inspector under DMP; then SI Md Nazrul Islam, now court inspector under DMP; SI Md Sirajul Islam Khan, now inspector at the Sports and Culture department under Police Headquarters, and Md Russell, now SI of Mirpur Model Police station, court sources said.

The IGP and DMP commissioner have been asked to submit separate reports to the HC by February 14, 2021.

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PHILIPS

We congratulate DNCC on taking a major step towards making Dhaka a smart city and are honoured to be part of this initiative



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