

The costs and risks associated with rapid, unplanned urbanisation

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poor educational opportunities and mostly work in the informal sector. Therefore, there is a case for building affordable housing schemes for the low-income households which should include necessary utility facilities. In some European countries, laws make it mandatory for the city authorities to build a certain portion of housing units for the low-income population. In India, the National Urban Housing and Habitat Policy, 2007, requires building of affordable houses for the vulnerable and economically weaker sections of society. For ensuring higher productivity of the workers, better health and improved living conditions of the urban poor must be ensured.

Our urban planning philosophy has so far been tied to the 75-year-old Town and Country Planning Act, 1947 of the United Kingdom which has a focus on land-use zoning within the city limits and is not giving much attention to the unfolding regional and national development scenario and not building a physical-economic development nexus. Many countries have moved away from this type of planning practice, taking a more flexible and strategic look at the future and accommodating rapid changes as per the requirements of the economy.

In future, since an increasingly larger percentage of the country's population will be residing in the urban areas, all facilities required by the people including green spaces and water bodies must be retained by the government. Decentralised urbanisation should be given the highest priority so that a handful of cities does not dictate the affairs of the entire country. Dhaka city, for example, became too large and so the surrounding urban centres like Gazipur, Narayanganj, Joydevpur, Munshiganj, Manikganj and Narshangdi should be planned well and developed properly to take the burden off of Dhaka.

We know that the market force is an important indicator for determining public investment in the physical space. But it

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has to be regulated by joint decisions of economists and physical planners so that the private sector is not only swayed by the short-term incentives of the current urban form but keeps in view the future locational advantages which should be deliberately created by the government to ensure cheaper alternatives to remain globally competitive. Unlocking future physical potentials rest mainly with the locational decisions made by the government in discussion with local governments, service providers for electricity, roads, water, etc.

The city planning authorities, instead of taking decisions in isolation, should forge a link with the economic planning process to more accurately project demands for urban services, and arrange planned investment agreed in the five-year and perspective plans. For this, necessary institutional and human capacity should be enhanced within the government.

The total urban population of Bangladesh is likely to reach 80-90 percent of the total population of the country in 2071.

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The traditional mind-set of investing a huge amount of resources on rural roads should be revisited and funds should be freed up for building inter-city metro rail and bus rapid transport systems where it makes more sense to invest, keeping in view the future concentration of population in the country. In a planned city with all amenities and having efficient transport system, private investors will be attracted to establish industries and businesses, and create more employment opportunities. The role of urban local government bodies and planning authorities is to make a city liveable and functional. Nationally, a study on future growth potentials of all cities and major towns should be conducted, based on which city-to-city transport plans should be drawn up.

Bangladesh is on track to graduate from the UN's list of Least Developed Countries (LDC) in 2026 and become a middle-income country. The urban areas

offer the opportunities for faster GDP growth and help transform the economy from agricultural to non-agricultural sectors. In Bangladesh today, about 75 percent of GDP is produced in urban areas which is expected to go up in the coming years. However, we should be conscious about the distributional consequences of rapid transformation of the economy.

The process of urbanisation has negative consequences, which are expansion of the informal economy, increase in the number of slum dwellers, exclusion of the poor from decision-making process, use of child labour, increased rate of school drop-out, etc. In Bangladesh and elsewhere, higher GDP growth rates and increased urbanisation have been found to bring down poverty rates but increase inequality. Urbanisation, as a natural phenomenon, is expected to continue and reach between 80 and 90 percent of Bangladesh's population in the next 50 years. The SDG II, which is expressed as "Make cities inclusive, safe and resilient", calls for planned development of urban areas keeping in mind the needs of all people living there.

Cities that are seen as "engines of growth" should now be seen as "engines of inclusive growth". The urban planning, financing, governance, coordination and management functions should all be taken up consciously to achieve SDG II included in the Agenda for Sustainable Development. The urban local bodies must optimise tax revenue income by properly assessing the resources and mobilise them so that they can spend a good part of it for the disadvantaged population. Finally, the government should think about developing a national policy for urban and regional development to ensure balanced development of the country with rational distribution of budgetary resources. We have to start rearticulating our vision of planning, administration and budget making for maximising the benefits of a highly urbanised Bangladesh in the next 50 years.

Supercrete

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