

Dhaka should no longer be capital

Suggests a task force report, says it’s crucial for the city’s survival

ASIFUR RAHMAN

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has long been a vibrant cultural and economic hub. As one of the world’s largest megacities, it never sleeps, embracing millions from diverse backgrounds.

However, in doing so, it has gradually lost its charm and liveability over time due to urban sprawl, and is now facing challenges that threaten its ability to function as a modern, sustainable capital.

A task force report recently suggested relocating the capital, arguing that the issue is no longer about feasibility but survival – socially, economically, and environmentally.

The report, titled “Re-strategising the Economy and Mobilising Resources for Equitable and Sustainable Development,” warns that without immediate action, Dhaka’s function as a sustainable capital will continue to erode, posing a serious threat to national stability and growth.

Among its many issues, Dhaka has a poorly designed road network that covers only seven percent of the city, with no clear hierarchy between primary, secondary, and tertiary roads, said the report.

The report highlights outdated traffic management systems, the absence of modern solutions like one-way flows and tidal traffic management, and the lack of efficient mass transit infrastructure, like terminals or multimodal hubs.

The current chaotic and dysfunctional situation is worsened by the addition of new railway tracks and

multiple flyovers, which have caused irreversible damage, limiting future transit improvements, it added.

The report argues that these structural weaknesses prevent Dhaka from functioning as a smart, investment-friendly capital. Despite these challenges, there is no strategic plan to decentralise or relocate the capital, even though countries like India, Pakistan, Brazil, Nigeria, Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt, and South Korea have successfully done so.

Historically, capital relocations have been driven by overcrowding, congestion, environmental concerns like groundwater depletion, and the need for better national accessibility.

Most importantly, such moves aim

to create modern, smart cities that are resilient, sustainable, less demanding, and investment-friendly, the report said.

While shifting Dhaka is a long-term goal, the report urges immediate governance and service delivery reforms in line with global best practices.

The report mentioned that Dhaka lacks reliable access to essential services such as hospitals, offices, and schools, further exacerbated by chronic drainage issues and groundwater depletion.

The Central Business District is eccentrically located in the south, forcing high travel demand from residential areas in the north.

Alarming, 85 percent of urban development is unauthorised, failing to meet firefighting standards, while restricted zones around airports and cantonments have stifled urban expansion, the report added.

Meanwhile, unplanned development is rapidly destroying wetlands, causing severe environmental damage, it said.

The report said Dhaka is officially the slowest city in the world. The city’s traffic operating speed has seen a dramatic decline over the years, dropping from 25 kmph in 1997 to 6.7 kmph in 2015 and worsening further since then.

Dhaka is also among the least livable cities globally, with the highest air pollution level, poor water quality, and a vulnerable drainage system. It also ranks low in economic competitiveness, it added.

The report highlights the lack of space for footpaths, bikeways, or public transport facilities. The railway system is tangled with road infrastructure, and

bridges have constricted waterways, limiting their potential, it said.

Uncontrolled urban sprawl along rivers further reduces the feasibility of planned expansion. Additionally, immovable restricted zones spanning 11.5km from Tejgaon to Dhaka airport severely constrain mobility and growth.

To address these challenges, the task force recommends unified city governance under an elected mayor, merging Dhaka’s two city corporations.

Agencies such as WASA, DPDC, DESCO, RAJUK, and DMP should operate under the single authority to eliminate overlapping responsibilities and inefficiencies, it suggested.

The current bifurcation of Dhaka, which intended to promote decentralisation, has led to resource disparities, coordination gaps, and administrative inefficiencies, necessitating reintegration under a unitary administration, argued the report.

Similarly, the report suggests creating a Single Mass Transit Regulatory Authority under the Mayor’s Office to coordinate among BRTC, BRTA, DTCA, DMTCL, and DBRTCL.

“A unified city government under an elected mayor, consolidating all infrastructure development and service providers, is essential for integrated urban planning, efficient resource allocation, and sustainable growth,” the report said.

The recommendations are outlined in the chapter “Infrastructure and Connectivity: A Pathway to Economic Prosperity,” prepared by Buet Professor Md Shamsul Hoque.



ISSUES PLAGUING DHAKA

➔

Severe liveability challenges

➔

Poorly designed road network

➔

Outdated, inefficient traffic systems

➔

Worsening congestion

➔

No strategic plan for decentralisation

➔

Unauthorised urban development

RECOMMENDATIONS

➔

Unified city governance under an elected mayor

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Merging city corporations to eliminate inefficiencies

➔

Single mass transit authority for coordination

➔

Integrated urban planning for sustainable growth

Enam Ahmed Chaudhury’s janaza Friday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The namaz-e-janaza of former Privatization Commission chairman Enam Ahmed Chaudhury will be held at Gulshan Azad Mosque on February 7, after the Juma prayers, confirmed his family.

The retired secretary passed away on Monday afternoon at the age of 88.

He is survived by his wife, a son who is a businessman in Dhaka, and a daughter who is an environmentalist in New York.

Chaudhury will be laid to rest at the New Azimpur Graveyard in the capital, his son, Nadeem A Chaudhury, told The Daily Star.

“My father had been suffering for a while... and suddenly fell ill. He was taken to a nearby hospital around 4:30pm on Monday, where doctors declared him dead,” said Nadeem.

Born in 1937 in Golapganj, Sylhet, Enam Ahmed Chaudhury had a distinguished career in public service, holding key positions in civil administration, diplomatic missions, and international organisations.

He was active in student politics and played a role in the Language Movement, for which he was expelled from Dhaka College in 1952.

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MOTIJHEEL TO KAMALAPUR MRT-6 extension unlikely this year

Say authorities; considering expanding metro services on Fridays

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The extension of the country’s first metro rail line, from Motijheel to Kamalapur, is unlikely to open this year, officials said.

Although 46 percent of the 1.16km extended line has been completed, authorities have yet to hire a contractor for track installation and signalling

work, raising doubts about meeting the December 2025 deadline.

Meanwhile, the metro rail authority is working to increase train frequency and expand service hours on Fridays as ridership steadily grows.

On Monday, metro rail recorded its highest-ever daily ridership, transporting 3.82 lakh passengers, surpassing the previous record of 3.81 lakh on January 23 this year, they said.

Metro rail officials shared this

information during a discussion with members of Reporters for Rail and Road (RRR), a platform for journalists covering transportation infrastructure, at DMTCL’s headquarters in Uttara’s Diabari yesterday.

The country’s first metro rail – Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Line-6 – has been operating from Uttara to Motijheel since November 2023.

MRT Line-6 was initially designed as an elevated line from Uttara to Motijheel. Later, a skywalk was planned to connect the line with Kamalapur Railway Station.

In 2019, DMTCL extended the plan to take the 20.10km line directly to Kamalapur following a directive from the then-prime minister.

Construction of the extended section was 46.07 percent complete

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