

UNB Report

It is not possible to make Dhaka a livable city again unless a comprehensive plan is put in place to divert the huge population influx to it, observed experts and city planners.

They proposed building alternative cities with facilities equal to that of capital Dhaka as well as relocating its industrial units, particularly the readymade garment (RMG) factories and tanneries, to reduce the population pressure the capital has been enduring for decades.

Besides, they stressed the implementation of the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) as early as possible.

Local government expert Dr Tofail Ahmed said some major planning initiatives are needed to develop alternative cities outside Dhaka for making it livable. "If the government can develop modern cities ensuring education, jobs, health service and civic amenities outside Dhaka, the pressure of population on the capital city will come down," he said.

More importantly, Dr Tofail said, the nagging traffic congestions in the city cannot be eased without making its footpath suitable for pedestrians. "Only building a number of flyovers will not work."

The government should first free the footpaths from hawkers, illegal occupation and establishments, which will reduce 30 percent pressure of transports on roads of the capital, the local government expert suggested.

He noted that only eight percent of transports will use flyovers, while the percentage of commuters using the facility will stand at one percent only. "So, there is no alternative to making the city's footpaths suitable for pedestrians."

Dr Tofail advocated for the relocation of RMG factories of the city elsewhere in close proximity to the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway saying that it will create jobs outside capital Dhaka, too. Transportation costs and tailbacks on highways may come down as most of RMG products are exported through Chittagong seaport, he added.

About water accumulation in Dhaka city, Tofail Ahmed said if the natural canals can be recovered from illegal occupation, 50 percent of water-logging of the capital will decrease automatically.

He also stressed the need for immediate implementation of the DAP for the proper development and management of lands in the city. "It's tough to save Dhaka as almost 10 percent of the country's population is now cooped in the city," former chairman of the University Grants Commission (UGC) Prof Nazrul Islam, who is also a city planner, told UNB.

He observed that the political leadership as well as the administration are least bothered about the growing pressure of population on Dhaka. "Well-thought-out plans need to be taken to save Dhaka. Monitoring is also essentials to ensure proper implementation. Frequent changes in planning must be stopped," he said.

Noting that Dhaka's population is expected to increase three-fold over the next 20 years, the urban expert said there is no alternative to decentralization to save the capital from this population influx.

He stressed implementing the Strategic Transport Plan for the city. "Building too many flyovers is not a good solution. Many give emphasis on building flyovers as more investment is involved here. Rather, it's important to give emphasis on traffic management of the capital," he said.

Architect Iqbal Habib said, "We've made Dhaka a centre of everything for no reason."

The architect suggested taking three steps - reducing the population flow from across the country to Dhaka, introducing city government and creating cities surrounding Dhaka -- to resolve the problem.

Meanwhile, at a meeting recently with the officials of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Ministry, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stressed the need for undertaking a master plan in each upazila to ensure planned urbanization and thus render better services to people.

According to a recent United Nations report, Dhaka is the 11th most populous city of the world with a population just under 1.7 crore.

Dhaka was the 24th in 1990 with only 66.21 lakh people and saw a 3.6 percent annual rise in its population between 2010 and 2015. The report projected that Dhaka would become the 6th most crowded city by 2030 with a population of over 2.7 crore.