

Published on 12:00 AM, September 14, 2015

# New Dhaka master plan in making

*While existing DAP remains mostly unimplemented; N'ganj Mayor Ivy calls it initiative to legalise acts of land grabbers; professional bodies, previously involved experts not invited; Dhaka South Mayor Khokon critical of realtors; North's Mayor Annisul feels being left in the dark; Rajuk advised to stop promoting plot-based housing*

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The Rajdhani Unnyan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) has to stop promoting plot-based housing in the capital because it encourages massive earth filling of dedicated conservable wetlands by the government and private realtors, recommends a newly proposed master plan for Dhaka city.

Rajuk instead should support apartment housing and develop urban facilities so that private individuals can build their own houses, said Prof Aktar Hossain Chowdhury, deputy leader of the consultants' team for the proposed 20-year master plan, at a national seminar at Rajuk Bhaban yesterday.

With the existing master plan mostly unimplemented and its term expiring this year, Rajuk has embarked on drawing up a new one, the Dhaka Structure Plan 2016-2035, under the "City Region Development" project funded by the Asian Development Bank and Bangladesh's government.

Rajuk organised a two-day national seminar on the draft structure plan on its premises seeking opinions of relevant experts and professionals.

The plan proposes protection of flood flow zones, canals, rivers, ponds and flood water retention areas through land acquisition and proper demarcation to save surface water against contamination, help storm drainage, and ground water percolation, said Chowdhury, while making a presentation.

The proposed plan outlines long-term development of the city's transportation, housing and utility services, land use, conservation of floodplains, water retention areas, farmland, open spaces, industrialisation, disaster management, heritage and culture. It has divided an updated 1,624 sq km area into six regions.

The plan recommends construction of three ring roads around Dhaka city, conservation of open spaces and heritage properties, introduction of aesthetic urban designing in development, advanced acquisition of land for future road construction.

Narayanganj city Mayor Dr Selina Hayat Ivy, however, expressed frustration saying the proposed plan, foiling the existing one, had a deliberate attempt to legalise the acts of land grabbers, who had illegally filled extensive conservable floodplains, canals and retention areas resulting in recurrent urban flooding in Dhaka city.

“How long will we continue making urban plans and leave them unimplemented?” she said, adding that local government bodies like city corporations must be empowered to help implement the urban master plan.

Real estate developers have filled wetlands all around leaving Dhaka's storm drainage system clogged, said Dhaka South City Corporation Mayor Mohammad Sayeed Khokon.

Mayor of Dhaka's north Annisul Huq said, “A new master plan is being made leaving the existing one unimplemented, and we don't know what changes and improvements are being made.”

The area the plan covers includes four city corporations, five municipalities and 70 Union Parishads of Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur districts with over 15 million people.

The population is projected to increase to 26 million by 2035 in the proposed plan.

Gazipur constitutes one-fifth of the master plan area, yet local public representatives were not engaged in the plan preparation process, ignoring local waste management, drainage and disaster management, said Asadur Rahman Kiron, mayor in charge of Gazipur City Corporation.

Housing Minister Mosharraf Hossain said the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) of the existing master plan was drawn up sitting at home and without going to the field.

“Now we have to prepare a pragmatic DAP,” he said.

The present DAP kept 405 sq km of 1,528 sq km area as conservable floodplains, water retention areas, canals, lakes and rivers together, and 330 sq km as agricultural land.

It suggested reclamation of over 2,500 acres of flood flow zones and agricultural land from illegal realtors, relocation of 3,000 factories and scrapping of 16 development projects.

None of the suggestions have been acted upon.

Previous Rajuk high officials told The Daily Star time and again that they could not implement the vital suggestions of DAP as the seven-minister cabinet committee for DAP review did not give them directives.

Meanwhile, in a letter to relevant authorities, three professional and environmental bodies, the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), Institute of Architects Bangladesh and Bangladesh

Poribesh Andolon, said they were not invited as professional groups in making the new master plan.

Md Akter Mahmud, general secretary of BIP, said the authorities had not involved them in any stage of the plan preparation process.

Khondaker M Ansar Hossain, an urban planner, who was coordinator of consultants on the existing DAP, said, “The proposed draft structure plan was sent to us just a couple of days back. How can we make any contribution?”

Prof Ishrat Islam, head of Buet’s urban and regional planning department, said, “Rajuk chose such a way and process that we did not have the chance to make a professional contribution to the proposed plan.”

Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, who headed the review committee on the current DAP, is in no way involved with the process of the proposed plan, nor was he provided with a copy of the draft plan.

Two South Korean consulting firms SAMAN Corporation and Han-A Urban Research Institute and two local firms Sheltech Pvt Ltd and DevConsultants Ltd are preparing the structure plan.

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