

FGD on “Decentralisation & Environmental Welfare of the Capital: Towards a Sustainable Dhaka”

Dhaka, home to nearly 20 million people, is facing mounting challenges of over-centralisation, unplanned urbanisation, and environmental degradation, which threaten the city’s sustainability and overall livability. Issues such as air and water pollution, traffic congestion, encroachment of wetlands, and rising pressure on urban infrastructure are creating systemic risks to public health, environmental welfare, and long-term economic growth. Addressing these challenges requires Decentralisation of economic and administrative activities, alongside integrated and sustainable urban planning.

Against this backdrop, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI) organised a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on “Decentralisation & Environmental Welfare of the Capital: Towards a Sustainable Dhaka” on Saturday, August 23, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. The objective of the FGD was to develop evidence-based policy directions to support Decentralisation, strengthen environmental governance, and build a roadmap for a sustainable Dhaka.

Taskeen Ahmed, President of DCCI, delivered the welcome remarks and also moderate the event, while the Keynote Presentation was delivered by Architect Iqbal Habib, Founder Partner of Vitti Sthapati Brindo Ltd., Vice President of Safety Awareness Foundation (SAF), and a noted environmental activist.

The panel discussion brought together distinguished experts and stakeholders: Dr. Adil Mohammad Khan, President, Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP); Liakat Ali Bhuiyan, Senior Vice President, Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB); Dilbahar Ahmed, Geographer & Urban Planner, Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC); M. Abu Hurairah, Former Vice President, DCCI; Alhaz Abdus Salam, Former Senior Vice President, DCCI; Dr. Md. Shamsul Hoque, Professor, Department of Civil Engineering, BUET; Md. Ashraful Islam, Chief Town Planner, RAJUK; Kazi Golam Nasir, Former Chief Architect, Department of Architecture, Ministry of Housing and Public Affairs; Md. Ziaul Haque, Director, Department of Environment (DOE); and Md. Jahirul Islam, CEO, Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC).

The event was further graced by Engr. Md. Reazul Islam, Chairman, RAJUK, as Special Guest, and Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Honourable Adviser, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, GoB, as the Chief Guest.

Welcome Remarks by Taskeen Ahmed, President, DCCI

- By 2050, nearly 56 percent of Bangladesh’s population will live in urban areas, requiring urgent and sustainable urban planning.

- Dhaka contributes 45 percent of national GDP but loses \$5.6 billion annually due to traffic congestion, with Tk. 180 crore lost daily in working hours.
- Despite billions invested in mega projects, traffic delays persist, keeping Dhaka among the lowest-ranked cities in global livability.
- Relocation of administrative establishments across the country is critical for balanced, equitable, and homogeneous development.

Keynote Presentation by Architect Iqbal Habib, Founder Partner of Vitti Sthapati Brindo Ltd., Vice President of Safety Awareness Foundation (SAF) and a noted environmental activist

- Dhaka occupies only 1 percent of Bangladesh’s land area but houses 32% of the country’s urban population, resulting in dangerous over-centralization and lack of greenery, heat stress, flooding, and waste mismanagement.
- Every year, around half a million people migrate to Dhaka in search of better opportunities, which puts enormous pressure on the city’s limited land, infrastructure, and services.
- Climate change-induced displacement is contributing to an even larger flow of climate refugees heading towards Dhaka, further intensifying the population pressure.
- Empowering the River Commission, balanced urbanisation, and completing proposed ring roads are key Decentralisation measures.
- Centralization has intensified rapid population growth, flooding, global warming, waste mismanagement, pollution, and public health crises.
- Green growth policies, citizen awareness campaigns, and recovery strategies are necessary to reverse environmental degradation.
- At present, Dhaka’s green coverage is less than 8 percent, whereas a sustainable city requires at least 25 percent green space to ensure ecological balance and livability.
- Due to declining greenery and excessive concrete expansion, temperature differences between the inner city and its surrounding rural areas can reach as high as 5 to 7 degrees Celsius.
- Dhaka generates more than 6,000 tons of solid waste every day, but only a portion of this waste is properly collected and managed, leaving large amounts dumped in open areas or water bodies.
- Industrial waste and untreated effluents are routinely discharged into rivers, canals, and wetlands, which worsens water pollution and poses serious risks to public health and aquatic ecosystems.

- Air pollution in Dhaka is among the worst in the world, with PM2.5 concentrations recorded up to 64 times higher than the World Health Organization's recommended limits.

Speech by the Special Guest: Engr. Md. Reazul Islam, Chairman, RAJUK

- Building a sustainable Dhaka is not possible without sustainable national development, as urban growth, infrastructure, and environmental management are closely linked to the country's overall economic and social progress.
- An integrated development authority is needed to coordinate and manage all urban development projects, ensuring that planning, implementation, and resource allocation are streamlined across sectors.
- A single framework for oversight would provide accountability, allowing for consistent monitoring, evaluation, and regulation of projects to prevent duplication, delays, or inefficiencies.

Speech by Chief Guest: Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Adviser, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, GoB

- Energy-efficient and sustainable design systems are vital components of effective urban planning.
- Effective urban transformation requires collective responsibility from government bodies, the private sector, civil society, and citizens.
- The failed tannery relocation to Savar highlights the risks of poorly executed planning.
- Improvements in road infrastructure, air quality, and public health systems are urgently needed to restore livability.
- Society-wide collective awareness and shared responsibility are foundational to building a value-added, sustainable urban community.
- Development of jobs, education, and healthcare facilities in towns beyond Dhaka is essential to reduce over-dependence on the capital.
- Establishing 8–10 regional capitals and transforming selected upazilas can support effective decentralization.
- Coordinated action from government, private sector, and citizens is needed to address these growing pressures.
- Empowering the River Commission, balanced urbanisation, and completing proposed ring roads as Decentralisation measures.
- Dhaka's excessive centralization must be reduced by developing regional towns and secondary cities with adequate infrastructure, industries, healthcare, and educational facilities so that economic opportunities and population growth are distributed more evenly across the country.
- Dhaka should be divided into three categories - administrative, economic, and population-based—supported by decentralization strategies, rural development, and empowered local governments.
- The city's water and drainage system should be restored through the rehabilitation of canals, rivers, and wetlands, while strict enforcement of laws must prevent further encroachment or filling of natural water bodies.
- Urban design must prioritize greenery and climate resilience by expanding public parks, establishing community green spaces, introducing rooftop gardens, and developing interconnected green corridors to reduce rising urban heat levels.
- Waste management must be strengthened by ensuring that all central effluent treatment plants in industrial zones are fully operational and that industries comply with mandatory waste treatment regulations.
- Pollution control should be reinforced by phasing out or relocating highly polluting industries from the city and encouraging cleaner production technologies that consume less fuel and release fewer emissions.
- Renewable energy sources and energy-efficient transport systems should be expanded, and the use of modern monitoring technologies such as IoT-based air and noise quality sensors should be introduced for real-time management.
- Local governments should be empowered with adequate resources and authority to manage local development, ensuring that rural and regional populations can access quality services without moving to Dhaka.
- Regional economic zones, hi-tech parks, and research and training centers should be established outside Dhaka to attract investment and create jobs, thereby reducing the capital's overdependence as the sole growth hub of the country.
- A multimodal transport network should be developed to ensure fast, smooth, and affordable mobility across cities and regions, reducing congestion and travel delays in Dhaka.
- A polycentric urban system should be developed in Bangladesh, where multiple cities grow as strong centers of governance, economy, and services, thereby ensuring balanced national development and reducing Dhaka's vulnerability.

Summary Recommendation

- An integrated development authority is needed to oversee all urban projects under a single framework for accountability.
- Reducing polythene use, improving industrial compliance, and ensuring functional CETPs and bus replacement are essential.