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Views

Some Aspects Of Planning-education In Bangladesh

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THIS article begins with defining 'Planning' which has broader meaning and scope than that of conventional definition of planning. Here the term planning denotes either physical planning or urban and regional planning or city/down and country planning or urban and rural planning. Planning is commonly defined as a process of ordering and systematizing economic, cultural and social activities of human beings on the land to establish a perfect relation between man and the land with a view to achieving a balanced environment. This process of planned interaction between land and man reflects the geographical expression of a country's economic and social developmental policies and relates directly to planning of land; physical structure and various construction activities at national, regional and local levels. Thus planning refers to better use of land and resources.

Now let us discuss why we need planning in Bangladesh, in the context of the above definition. Bangladesh emerged from the War of Liberation in 1971. Historically, this country experiencing poverty stricken economy is characterized by an unfavourable man-land ratio, marked skewness in income distribution, increasing landlessness, low level of technology, undeveloped infrastructure and increasing population. Agriculture is the most important sector of the economy employing 65 per cent of labour force. This sector directly contributes around 36 per cent to the Gross Domestic Products (GDP) in 1991-92 and there has been no significant structural change in the contribution of agriculture of GDP over the last few years. Bangladesh has got one of the most fertile lands but due to paucity of capital, modern agricultural inputs and low technology its per capita yield per acre is one of the lowest in the world. Bangladesh has a few proven mineral resources apart from natural gas. The share of manufacturing sector in GDP has progressed a little (from 8.7 per cent in 1989-90 to 9.1 per cent in 1991-92). The increasing pressure of population on land is acutely felt in respect of availability of per capita arable land. The per capita availability of cultivable land has come down to only 0.28 acre. The pressure on agricultural land has given rise to the landless and the unemployment in rural areas. Continuously the additional lands are being used for uncontrolled and mushroom growth of new settlements and construction of infrastructure such as roads, bridges, culverts, embankments, markets,

mosques, schools, colleges and so on, as a result there is unnecessary loss in availability of agricultural land in our country. Consequently, there will be less available land for agricultural purposes. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of United Nations, per capita land requirement in a country practicing traditional method of cultivation should be around 3 acres and in a country practicing mechanized method of cultivation be around 1 acre. Land extensification and intensification have their own limitations in the long run. However, policies and measures have to be evolved so that land used for non-agricultural purposes is to be minimized in order to save the best land for agriculture.

Another aspect to be considered why we need planning in Bangladesh is that our cities and towns are growing in most unplanned manner. Notably the metropolitan cities of Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna are characterised by swelling informal sector, acute housing shortage, traffic congestion, over-crowding slums and squatter dwellings, inadequate water and sanitation facilities, and lack of other basic civic amenities. However, all these are the consequential effects of dysfunctional urbanisation in Bangladesh. It has been experiencing rapid urbanisation in recent decades. About 13 years ago, in 1981, the urban population was 13.6 million or 15.6 per cent of the total population of the country. According to the results of 1991 Census, 23 million people lived in the urban areas and they constituted 20 per cent of the national population. By the year 2000 AD, it is projected that urban population is likely to reach 37 million representing 26 per cent of the national population 140 million (Planning Commission, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1991). Push and pull are factors for increase in urban population in Bangladesh. If the above mentioned projection of urban population holds good, obviously there is urgent need for planning to deal with the emerging problems in our urban areas. Further, our limited resources at the regional level, for example forests, are not being effectively exploited. As result, there will be less resources for our future economic development. The foregoing discussions clearly highlight the need for planning at national, regional and

local levels.

Let us now concern ourselves with the people who do planning i.e., the planners. The Canadian Dictionary of Occupation defines a planner as someone who (Yadav, 1987):

★ develops programmes, plans for controlled utilization of land urban areas

★ compiles, analyzes and reports data on economics, legal, political, sociological and physical factors affecting land use.

★ confers with local authorities, civic leaders, social scientists, lawyers and planning and development specialists to devise and recommend zoning arrangements for land

★ prepares and presents narrative and graphic programme plans to civic and industry authorities

★ recommends measures affecting land-use, public utilities, community facilities, housing and transportation to control and guide community development and renewal

★ supervises and co-ordinates the work of technologists and technicians

Now, to perform all these activities by a planner he or she must have specialised education and training.

The planner can play a leading role in achieving an efficient system of land use and ensuring a congenial environment for today and tomorrow. To do this important job, a number of planners are required but there is acute shortage of planners in Bangladesh. In United Kingdom, the ratio of planners and population is 1:1000 (James, 1973). However, the total number of planners required in Bangladesh is to be determined in view of visualizing our planning needs at national, regional and local levels.

Let us discuss the system of planning education we have within the country in terms of institutional capability of producing required planners, if not what are the problems and opportunities, and what measures are to be taken in this direction.

For the first time in the country, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), Dhaka, established Urban and Regional Planning Department (formerly Physical Planning) in 1961 under the Faculty of Architecture. The Urban and Regional Planning Department started its academic programme from January 1969 through offering two

years' graduate course leading to Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning (MURP). The syllabus of this graduate course was prepared by a group of experts following the syllabuses of other international repute planning schools. The entry qualifications to this course are — either Bachelor's degree in Engineering and Architecture or Master's degree in Economics, Geography and Sociology. The course is broad-based and inter-disciplinary in nature. This graduate course covers history of the theory of planning, principles of human settlements, aesthetics of physical environment, planning and social sciences, traffic and transportation planning, quantitative methods of planning analyses, graphic techniques and representation, urban planning techniques, resource development planning, rural planning and development, planning administration and laws, regional planning techniques, landscape and urban design and other elective subjects. Compulsorily, the students are also required to do research work and submit a thesis to obtain MURP Degree. However, the average number of passed out graduates in an academic year from Urban and Regional Planning Department of BUET is not at all satisfactory in view of requirements of planners for the country. Less than 3 planners are produced a year by the BUET. The reasons for this low rate of completion of the graduation course by the students from BUET are as follows:

★ Since the students have basic degree to compete in Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) and other services, they become interested to compete the same and eventually they leave the Urban and Regional Planning Department of BUET without completing the course.

★ The salary of the planners i.e., after completing 2 years' course a planner will be getting same salary as he or she would be getting after having Master's Degree or Bachelor's Degree in the above mentioned subjects eligible for the entry into the graduation course of the Urban and Regional Planning of BUET. This means that the salary for the planners is not lucrative enough for the enrolled students to complete the course.

★ At present, the scope for employing the planners is limited after completion of the degree and eventually the students get discouraged to complete the course.

(To be continued)