

Environment Adviser Rizwana Hasan Calls for Modern Planning for Transitioning Dhaka Toward a Livable Future:

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Adviser to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the Ministry of Water Resources, stressed the urgent need for a transition in Dhaka's development mindset. She noted that excessive concrete-based development has already made the city unsafe and unmanageable. "We talk about problems year after year but hesitate to solve them. Solving them requires bold changes in our thinking. We must move outside the box – because the box has clearly failed us," she said.

Environment Advisor said this in the 4th seminar of the "Project for Development of Policy and Guidelines for Transit-Oriented Development along Mass Transit Corridors", implemented by Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (RAJUK) with technical assistance from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), held today at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Highlighting the resistance faced whenever meaningful reform is proposed, the Adviser called for restructuring institutional setups to ensure empowered agencies, better coordination, and effective decision-making. Referring to Dhaka's fragile transport system, she pointed out that public transportation remains disorganised and environmentally damaging. "Every day, buses emitting black smoke are on the roads. We cannot make Dhaka livable without replacing these vehicles and redesigning our transport operations. A smart

public transport system is not a luxury – it is a necessity.”

She emphasised that transit-oriented development (TOD) can be a vital component of a smart transport strategy, but must not come at the cost of environmental integrity. “You do not solve one problem by creating another. Open spaces and ecological buffers must not be compromised for metro stations or commercial structures. People in Dhaka desperately need breathing spaces,” she said.

Reflecting on recurring urban disasters and slow progress in relocating chemical warehouses from Old Dhaka, she underscored how entrenched interest groups hinder reforms. She also called for community involvement in greening initiatives, noting, “The entire city looks dusty. If communities are engaged, with government providing technical support, they will become the guardians of the greenery we create.”

The Adviser expressed optimism about the TOD initiative for its focus on public spaces, parks, and greener neighbourhoods, while urging caution regarding unnecessary commercial market development. “Dhaka already has enough markets. What it lacks is open, safe, accessible space.”

Special Guests included Md. Nazrul Islam, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Public Works; Faruque Ahmed, Managing Director, Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited; and Mr. Ichiguchi Tomohide, Chief Representative, JICA Bangladesh.