

# Draft law aims to rein in unplanned urbanisation

Shohel Mamun

The Cabinet has approved the draft of Urban and Regional Plan Act 2017 in a move to stop unplanned urbanisation.

The draft, if passed into a law, will prevent land owners across Bangladesh from building structures as they please. They will require approval from the government authorities concerned before using their lands for any construction.

The Cabinet approved the draft in its regular meeting at Bangladesh Secretariat yesterday, chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shaful Alam said land owners, especially in the rural areas, currently do not require government approval before building permanent structures on their lands.

“But under this law, anyone who tries to procure agricultural land or moorland for construction, or any land owner who tries to do so by changing the category of the land, will be subject to punishment.”

He said the new law recommended minimum one year to maximum five years of imprisonment and up to Tk50 lakh fine as punishment.

He also said a high-powered

advisory council will be formed to implement the law around the country.

The council will consist of 27 members, headed by Housing and Public Works Minister Engr Mosharraf Hossain, and will be in charge of policy-making, he added.

“The draft also recommends forming an executive body, led by the housing and public works secretary, to aid the advisory council,” he added.

**‘Both the bodies will consist of more bureaucrats and not enough experts’**

If the law is passed and executed, it may reduce misuse of land, Shaful told reporters.

“It will also establish a coordination mechanism among the city corporations, development authorities like Rajuk, municipalities, upazila and district councils,” he added.

“The goal of the act is to prevent unplanned urbanisation. A new council and an executive body as well as a department on urban and regional development will be formed under the new act,” Hous-

ing and Public Works Secretary Md Shahid Ullah Khandaker told the Dhaka Tribune yesterday.

Urban experts have applauded the draft law.

Iqbal Habib, a prominent architect and joint secretary of pro-environment organisation Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, said: “Every year, we lose around 50,000 hectares of agricultural land or wetlands because of unplanned urbanisation. This act will help to prevent that.”

However, he said the proposed model for the advisory council as well as the executive body was not appropriately formulated.

“Both the bodies will consist of more bureaucrats and not enough experts, as per the clauses in the draft. But the bureaucrats cannot make decisions without expert input,” he told the Dhaka Tribune.

But he appreciated the fact that the new law would ensure coordination among different government agencies.

“The government is working on urbanisation plans at upazila level. But currently there is no coordination among upazila administrations, Urban Development Directorate and Local Government Department. That is causing delay in the planning process,” he said. ●