

Some Basic Fundamentals for Preparation of the Bhopal Development Plan

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Under section 14 of the Madhya Pradesh Town and Country Planning Act the Director, Town and Country Planning is required to prepare a development plan for every city. Under this dispensation the plan for Bhopal is under preparation.

It is necessary to understand the topography and geography of Bhopal city before a plan is prepared. Bhopal is located towards the northern end of the Vindhyan Plateau and within the city there are seven major hill features. To the west of the city along Kerwan is a continuous hill range which girdles Bhopal and gives to the outskirts of the city afforested hills which are a part of the reserve forests. A spur runs into Ratanpani Sanctuary and, therefore, the forests of this area have a reasonable presence of wildlife. The city itself is divided into two parts by the Upper Lake and Lower Lake. Broadly speaking south of these two lakes lies New Bhopal, though Jehangirabad and Malviya Nagar of the original Bhopal city also are south of the lakes. The lakes and the hills segment the city into sub cities such as Bairagarh, Shahjahanabad, Jehangirabad, the walled city and the New Capital. South of the capital along the Kolar Road and Hoshangabad Road axes there is a great deal of city expansion taking place. The Bhopal bypass is subject to linear development. There is a great deal of construction work going on along the bypass, Narsinghpur Road and Sehore Road. In other words, there is both in northward and southward expansion of the city. The Rajiv Gandhi Technical University, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, School of Planning and Architecture, the National Institute of Fashion Technology and two major All India Police Training Establishments have been located either on the bypass or in village Bhauri to the north. Despite this enormous spatial expansion of the city the basic segmentation into sub cities continues because of the numerous lakes and hill features which have largely been taken over by government, particularly Arera Hills, Shahpura Hills and the hill on which the Indian Institute of Forest Management is located. Hills to the west of the city are reasonably well protected by the Forest Department.

The topographical and geographical features of Bhopal are emphasised because all planning has to be centred around these natural features. Obviously the water bodies such as Upper Lake, Lower Lake, Motia Talab, Shahpura Lake and Kerwan itself require special protection and they must form the core of the plan, with even greater protection being given to the hill features. The spatial spread which is taking place must be controlled through the infrastructure plan, which means that the road system must be in place to ensure easy movement of traffic, the physical infrastructure of water supply, sewerage and storm water drainage must be planned and put in place and land use designed in such a way that it is not wasteful of land as a resource but which still retains the openness of Bhopal. The present mad rush for taking over all agricultural land around Bhopal and converting it into a kind of urban mess one finds in Delhi or Indore must be very carefully guarded against. In other words, we need to identify areas of expansion, determine the land use so that housing, employment and social infrastructure are taken care of and crass commercialisation does not destroy the city. In particular care needs to be taken to bring the mushrooming educational institutions under control so that their present location at distant places in the city does not distort the land use plan and the infrastructure plan.

One of the major problems is the linkage between the city north of the lakes and that portion which is to the south. At present all traffic from the south to the north, including the airport, the Indore Road, the highway to Delhi runs the gauntlet of Kamala Park and Retghat. Some traffic goes through Pul Pukhta but that is, generally speaking, the railway station traffic. Kamala Park is a twelve hundred years old rock filled earthen dam and has twice suffered heavy damage. It cannot sustain any more traffic and if it collapses North Bhopal will be cut off from South Bhopal. Therefore, an alternative crossing of the Upper Lake has to be designed. In fact without going into detail one could safely state that the traffic plan of Bhopal needs very careful review from a technical point of view, but with a concerted effort to explain to the citizens whatever technical alternatives are suggested.

The citizens' forum has to play a lead role in ensuring that the new development plan of Bhopal is sensible, environment friendly and people friendly. For this purpose it has to address both government agencies and citizens at large. This would ensure that whatever plan is made becomes readily acceptable to the citizens and, therefore, is implemented with their support.
