

Green, clean, healthy

Pledges mayor aspirant Annisul for Dhaka north



Annisul Huq, Awami League-backed mayoral hopeful for Dhaka North City Corporation, talks to a vendor on the first day of his campaign yesterday. Photo: Star

Life is plagued by problems in Dhaka and Chittagong -- our two major cities going to polls on April 28. What will a mayoral hopeful do to solve those problems, if elected? How all the modern amenities will be ensured? What is his vision for the future of the city? Looking for the answers, The Daily Star has talked to a

mayoral candidate. Here is the full interview, exclusively for its readers.

From an ordinary middleclass man, he has turned himself into one of the leading businesspersons of the country. From a little known struggler, he has risen to the zenith of prominence, to a household name.

And now, with such a fairytale-like success story to his name, Annisul Huq has set out on a new journey. But this time, his mission involves the fate of an entire city.

He is out to give Dhaka city a complete facelift, to make it green, clean and healthy. And to make this happen, he is contesting the mayor election to Dhaka North City Corporation.

"I believe that all of us can play our parts in serving the nation. The opportunity of running for a public office was something that led me to believe that I too can directly contribute to public welfare instead of just being a sideline critic," Annisul told The Daily Star while explaining the reasons for his decision to contest the election.

"It's only the chance of being a part of public service that prompted my decision," he added.

In the exclusive interview, he set out his priorities and promises to win voters' confidence.

"There are multiple problems that plague our city. Lack of substantial and efficient transportation, road jams, food contamination, lack of healthy public space and low cost housing, mosquitoes, clean city and waste management weigh heavily on my list.

"If elected, I will concentrate on waste management and recycling, introduce special transportation and public toilets for women, introduce Wi-Fi in public spaces, enhance urban healthcare programmes which will also offer primary healthcare for school going children, ... control noise, air, water pollution and food contamination in markets."

"Problems are all known; it's time to begin the journey to solve the problems now," he said in a written reply to a set of questions sent by The Daily Star.

And how is he planning to do all these? Annisul has a rather simple solution: "The people have to be consulted and have to own the changes they want to make in North

Dhaka (DNCC)."

As for the major obstacles, he said, "The corporation has 28 responsibilities and effectively can directly deliver in five areas. For the rest of the areas, intense bridging, [and] coordination are required."

"Unfortunately currently DNCC does not have many powers to exercise except to bridge and coordinate amongst ministries, agencies, service providers etc. But if one is sincere in one's intent, one can turn things around by raising community awareness and by including communities to participate in bettering Dhaka."

Annisul also laid out his plans to deal with the resource constraints.

"... I have listed a number of projects in my manifesto which will set up multiple sustainable methods and generate revenue. 50% of the corporation's budget comprises of grants from donors and other agencies. With time, we can try and change that and build up our own resources," said the former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

He has been doing numerous businesses for around three decades without ever having any visible ties to any political party. Yet, he managed to secure the blessing of the ruling Awami League. How?

"Neutrality and acceptability are things I have earned through hard work in my life and I guess these are the two elements that were considered when I was asked to contest," said Annisul, who in 1986 had started a small business with Tk 84,000 borrowed from his pensioner father. His Mohammadi Group now employs over 12,000 people in as many as 22 fields of business.

And his meteoric rise in life is what he thinks will be the key factor to win votes for him.

"I believe that given my track record and history of rising from the scratch, the citizens will believe me and vote for me so that I can, as I have done in my life, lived to fulfil my promises," he wrote.

"I hope voters will vote for me, as I stand for hard work and objectivity. I also believe that the time has come to acknowledge people like me who have risen from middle class backgrounds ... and reached a certain level in life through sheer perseverance and honesty.

"My positions as a people's man and an anchor, and then my gradual journey of starting a business, growing it and then finally becoming a business leader will only make people believe in me," Annisul, who once used to be a popular TV anchor, said.

On his wealth statement, in which he mentioned he didn't have any car or house, Annisul said that he had given his house to his three children as heba (gift). And the cars that he uses actually belong to the companies he owns.