in Bangladesh and when I see satellite towns like Gazipur and Tangail, which have so much potential, being really mismanaged, it really hurts me. What city planning in Dhaka totally lacks is a better idea of what satellite cities can offer.

Take Gazipur, for instance. It can easily be the home of so many garment factories that are popping up all over Dhaka. Yet our planners provide no incentive for factories to move out of Dhaka and into Gazipur. Yet again, everything revolves around public transport. If workers had access to efficient public transport to and from Dhaka, they would easily be induced to live in the outskirts of Dhaka, and not in Dhaka. That alone accounts for at least 10 per cent of Dhaka's population. Once the factories begin to realise that they have the same access to cheap and skilled labour outside of Dhaka, they have a serious incentive to move out of Dhaka.

All the tax breaks in the world will not budge factories out of Dhaka if labour costs rise up or access to labour becomes difficult, since it is ultimately labour that gives our garment factories comparative advantage. Thus, this is a perfect example of growth not being stopped, but merely redirected.

I don't have to be a pessimist to think the future looking bleak for Dhaka in the next decade or so. Briefly, what would be some good short- and long-term solutions that could be adapted by the various stakeholders?

The simple fact is congestion and traffic problems haven't been declared a national priority. For decades, politicians have come and gone promising many things, but there have been no delivery. There have been solutions aplenty.

The long-term solutions would be to actually make a plan that includes all the stakeholders and not just a cross-section, with donors and government involved. I don't think any government has actually sat down with Dhaka residents themselves and asked them what they want, or what kind of solutions they envisage. Instead, a coterie of "planners" meets with donors and hash out their own solutions. This has to stop.

Short-term solutions are also many. The biggest need is to place priority on everyday pedestrians who actually use the city streets. There are absolutely no proper pavements in the city. What kind of message does that send to people? That the only people who can commute in Dhaka are people who have cars?

Cars, in fact, have become a problem too. Car parking around the city is atrocious: you can park anywhere in the city as long as you spot a space. Drivers drive and park with impunity, knowing there is no one to stop them. Again, this behaviour is tied in with total lack of competition as far as public transport is concerned. We need more radio taxis, a system of restricted car parking, and effective traffic management. These are all doable in the short run.

Dhaka residents are often blamed for not feeling a sense of ownership or pride for their city. How do we cultivate a change in behavioral trends and establish a different mindset that would gear residents towards feeling a sense of kinship and personal accountability towards their city?

I don't blame Dhaka residents for feeling apathy. When was the last time anyone in power had a consultation with the common person? We do not feel empowered in the city, nor de we feel we are part of the city. There is a clear gap between those who decide and those who follow and unless this is resolved, there will never be any sense of community within Dhaka.

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