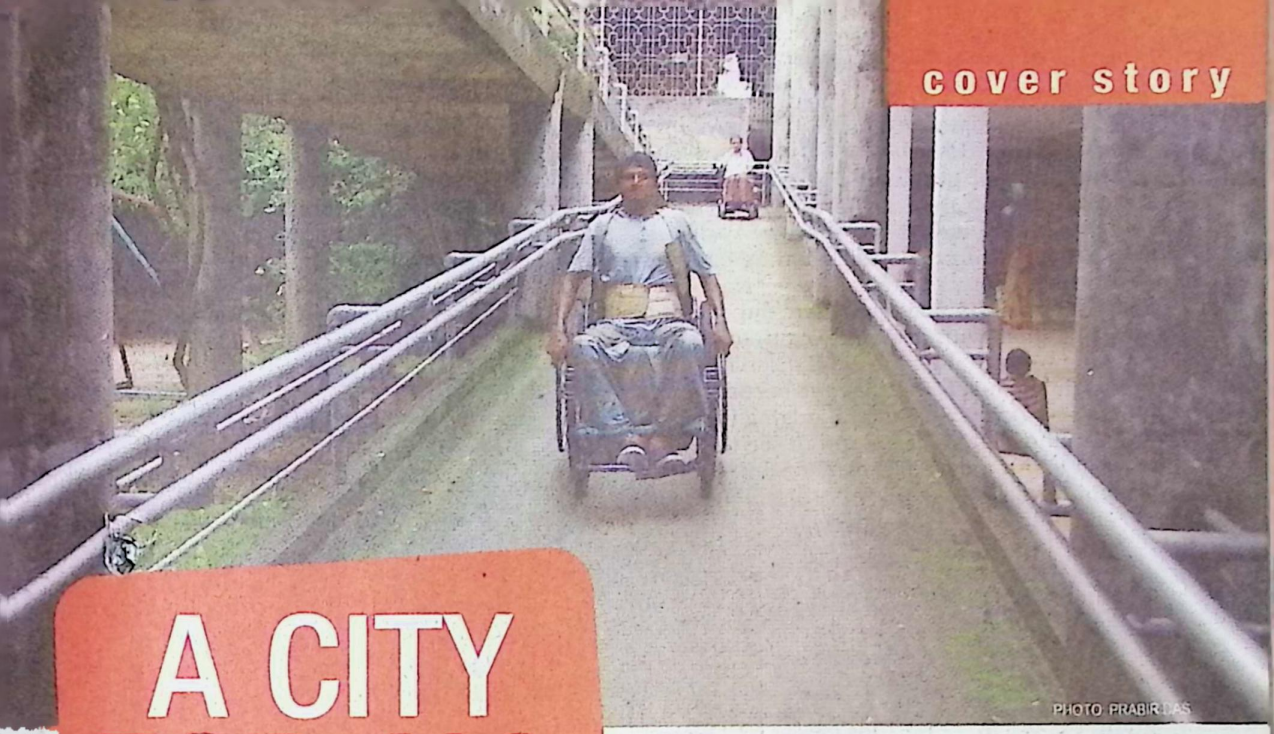


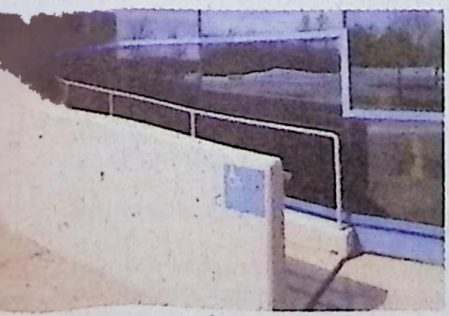
PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

A CITY FOR ALL

AMITAVA KAR

Imagine you are a on a wheel chair. Or you cannot see. What can you do with your life if you live in Dhaka or any Bangladeshi city for that matter? The short answer is; nothing. You seldom go outdoors—when you do, you are at the mercy of others. None of the public spaces in our cities has been designed with your needs in mind. Be it bus stops, railway stations, shopping complexes, public buildings or toilets, you feel short-changed by the poorly planned infrastructure and public spaces. Mosques, temples, churches and pagodas that are, by principle, supposed to welcome all are not accessible to you. Barriers to free movement include uneven access to buildings, poor signage, narrow doorways, inadequate bathroom facilities, narrow and poorly maintained pavements and lack of traffic control, among others. Such built environments are full of uncertainties, anxieties and dangers for you. Dr Roxana Hafiz, professor, Department of Urban and Regional Planning at BUET, says, "Due to lack of facilities and accessibilities, a lot of disabled people cannot get out and have to remain at home; they are condemned for life."

Historically, people with disabilities in this country have been provided for through solutions that segregate them, such as residential institutions and special schools. Developed countries have taken a more interactive approach recognising that people are often disabled by environmental factors as well as their bodies. Cittaranjan Das, Additional Chief Engineer of Public Works Department says, "We have to widen doors in buildings and install ramps and disability-friendly toilets. In some disabled rehabilitation centres, we are already doing it."







Most modern cities in developed countries create Barrier Free environments to meet the needs of people of all ages, sizes and abilities.