

# NO ONE LEFT BEHIND

## Cities enter a new era

JOHN WILLIAM TAYLOR

**P**OVERTY, growing inequality, chaotic traffic and choking smog — this might sound like a description of Dhaka, but it is telling the same story as of a global phenomenon. But it doesn't have to be this way. There is hope that cities can become prosperous centres of opportunity for all, designed with the input of its own citizens.

Cities are often centres of human achievement and aspiration — they are hubs of innovation, culture, learning, and opportunity. But all too often cities are also spaces where people are excluded, unable to access basic services, secure land tenure, and access jobs. Global trends indicate that by 2050, more than 60 percent of the global population will reside in urban areas.

The UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, also known as Habitat 3, laid out a global strategy to guide the development of cities for the next two decades called "New Urban Agenda" — this is a rare opportunity we must seize.

The urban future we hope for, agreed upon by more than 170 countries, is one of sustainability, resilience, and prosperity. The city is entering a new and optimistic era but achieving this vision requires more than hope and the signing of a piece of paper. It requires a critical assessment of how cities are growing and being managed, the adoption of inclusive policies that don't leave out the poor and marginalised, and a strong commitment from governments to bring in the legislation and financial resources needed.

The New Urban Agenda, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), promote the idea that no one should be left behind; meaning that when cities grow and develop, the wealthy should not be the



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only ones who benefit. All people should be involved in decision-making about planning and be consulted on day-to-day city management. To ensure no one is left behind, leaders must put people at the centre of urban development. Some cities have recognised this and are reaping the benefits, even right here in Bangladesh.

where investments and social support are needed. They are not only ensuring that no one be left behind, but that no place will be left behind either. In Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, Brazil, citizens can vote on how their local budgets are planned and used, so they can prioritise urgent investments and monitor their implementation. Cities in the Philippines employ citizen complaint mechanisms to connect people with elected officials, so that leaders can respond directly to people and address problems with

public services. Across Europe, city governments are using social media and open forums to listen to residents' ideas on how to improve their neighbourhoods so they can better respond to what they want. These initiatives give a voice to those who otherwise might not be heard, and allow citizens to advocate for the issues that concern them most. As a result, these cities are finding innovative ways to respond to the needs of the disabled, women, youth, and the urban poor, creating more

liveable and accessible spaces. Think of the issue of mobility, the way that people move around cities to access jobs, education, healthcare and recreation — who should we be planning for? People who live furthest from the centre, for example, often rely on an inefficient and uncomfortable transportation system and spend hours of their day in traffic. The poor who can't afford land and housing closer to their jobs. Yet, year after year, government after government, we continue to build more roads, favouring those who own cars, ignoring the majority who cannot afford to drive.

In Dhaka and other large cities across Bangladesh, a people-centered policy would emphasise improving public transportation, creating more housing opportunities and making public transportation safer and more comfortable for women, who in many cities report harassment and insecurity. This could bring people closer to parks, help them live healthier lives, save time on travel, and spread opportunities further.

To achieve this vision requires strong policy frameworks, regulations, and financial resources. Above all, it requires visionary leadership, and a willingness to work with local communities, including the poor.

If this new agenda fails, cities will only continue to grow in an unplanned and disorderly manner, as they are now. And while urbanisation can bring great social and economic benefits, if not corrected, if not inclusive, or adequately supported, it will only exacerbate poverty and inequality, and cause environmental destruction. Developing inclusive and productive cities will take time — as the saying goes, Rome wasn't built in a day, but its necessary to start working to ensure this new era of the city is a bright one.

The writer is International Project Manager for the National Urban Poverty Reduction Programme of UNDP.

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# Schools we send our children to



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

**C**AN you imagine the horror school children of a government primary school in Sadar upazila faced when debris started to fall on them in the middle of

their studies? Neither can we. The incident injured at least four young children who belonged only to the second grade. As frightening as that is, luckily, no one was killed as that could easily have been the case. Shockingly though, the government school had already been declared unfit for use by the district Primary Education Office. Yet, not only were classes ongoing in that hazardous place, especially for young children, but the school authorities didn't even bat an eye to the warning, let alone attempt to address the issue.

No renovation or repair work had been done to the building since being constructed 20 years ago. And no alternative arrangement has been thought of since the Primary Education Office issued its warning. Worse still, the school where this recent accident occurred happens only to be one out of a whole list of 'hazardous schools' according to the Primary Education Office. Having come to know about just this one, one can only wonder what the situation is in the rest. According to reports last year, for example, the Education Minister had said in the Parliament that "the number of educational institutions with buildings needed to be renovated is 10,960".

Meanwhile, it is true that the school authorities, having failed to heed the warning themselves were gravely irresponsible and that their negligence had criminally endangered the lives of a young children. But is it fair to blame them only? Having issued the warning, what steps did the state authorities take? Is it not the responsibility of the state, especially when the school is government run, to go that extra mile to ensure a safe environment for children? Article 17 of our Constitution says that all children in our country are supposed to receive full free education up to the secondary level. We regularly harp on the fact that many children are still being denied that right. But what I want to ask is what type of education do we plan on providing in school buildings that are unfit for use by anyone for anything, let alone for school children to study in? Because by the looks of things, clearly we have not asked ourselves that question before sending our children to the rickety schools all across the country.

Furthermore, what are we trying to instil in young children when the roof above their heads in their schoolrooms fall and injure them? Is it fear? If it is that, then we are undoubtedly succeeding. Down the path we are pursuing, however, what we will fail to achieve is build schools where children can expand their horizon in a 'safe' environment. A failure particularly exemplified by the state.

And it is precisely this nonchalant attitude of the state authorities that is allowing schools across the country to function under such atrocious conditions. As *The Daily Star* had only

recently reported, 38 government primary schools in Nilphamari were found to be in such decrepit conditions, that some had even lacked the most basic necessities, including walls. And without walls to prevent nearby animals from entering

preparing students for their lives. And the biggest problem with our primary education is that it "lacks imagination and the joy of learning" (Are we running out of thought leaders?, *The Daily Star*, October 3). Well, amidst urine and excrement,

also badly need to have), we must take a long and hard look at the environment in which we are seeking to provide that education in. Because if we do, we will, at the very least, be shocked, if not horrified. And perhaps it is that jolt of shock and



Students of Gabrol Deeperpar Dolapara Government Primary School in Jaldhaka upazila of Nilphamari attend classes under the open sky. PHOTO: STAR

classrooms as they pleased, children of very young age had to study in the midst of urine and excrement.

According to Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam of Dhaka University, "The base [primary education] is the most important in

one can only imagine why there is a lack of joy in learning.

And there are plenty more examples which show that before we can even begin to discuss what type of education we are indeed providing to our children (a discussion that we

disgust which is needed for us to change our disgraceful ways and for the children to have some semblance of safety in their own schools.

The writer is a member of the Editorial team at *The Daily Star*.

### QUOTABLE Quote

**LEONARDO DA VINCI**

All great acts of genius began with the same consideration: Do not be constrained by your present reality.

### BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

### BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Editor's spot
- 5 Motel worker
- 9 Perot or Bush
- 10 Dance's de Mille
- 12 Plentiful
- 13 Narrow shelf
- 14 Least bold
- 16 Smeltery supply
- 17 Birdie beater
- 18 Roped
- 20 Patriot's tune
- 22 Deuce topper
- 23 Resort off Venezuela
- 25 Barbecue treat
- 28 Cleaning tool
- 32 Moscow native
- 34 Music's Yoko
- 36 Penna. neighbor
- 35 In pristine condition
- 38 Like some communities
- 40 Escalante of "Stand and Deliver"
- 41 Chosen few
- 42 Film trophy
- 43 Fight memento

44 Noggin

DOWN

- 1 Humiliate
- 2 Pro
- 3 Vaccine pioneer
- 4 Prayer aid
- 5 Fountain of history
- 6 Period of history
- 7 Like some pools
- 8 Arc unit
- 9 Buccaneers' base
- 11 Squalid
- 15 Eastern warrior
- 19 Unescorted
- 21 Diner dish
- 24 Heist
- 25 Roof feature
- 26 Standards
- 27 Sea off Estonia
- 29 Friend of Phoebé and Rachel
- 30 Kind of band or show
- 31 DVR button
- 33 Senior
- 37 Comfort
- 39 Greek vowel

### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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|---------|---------|
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| IMEAN   | AREAS   |
| RETRO   | NITRO   |
| ELS     | TAKESON |
| REMAINS | MON     |
| TAFFY   | TINY    |
| KAY     | BUS     |
| DEER    | GARBS   |
| EPA     | MARKETS |
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