

AVOIDING AN URBAN NIGHTMARE: TIME TO GET PLANNING RIGHT

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The future of housing in Bangladesh

What are some common misconceptions about housing? What is the importance of housing in the modern urban fabric? Is housing getting the attention it deserves from our policymakers? Are we suffering from a lack of vision? In this article, Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements addresses all these questions, and more.

In the 1920s, the French-Swiss architect and pioneer of modern housing, Le Corbusier, declared: "Architecture or revolution." Corbusier was warning that if society fails to produce and provide adequate housing to its members, there will be social unrest and agitation. That is one reason why the core activity of early modern

architecture was dedicated so much to housing. Housing is a complex social and economic dynamic whose results are the physical patterns of cities and settlements, the qualities of collective living, and the health and well-being of the people. Housing is thus a social and material fabric of any city and

settlement; it is the key to enhancing the quality of life of the immediate dwellers and the overall city. Yet, housing suffers from many misconceptions and poor practices in Bangladesh. In the rapidly growing economy of Bangladesh, housing should be a significant factor in both maintaining

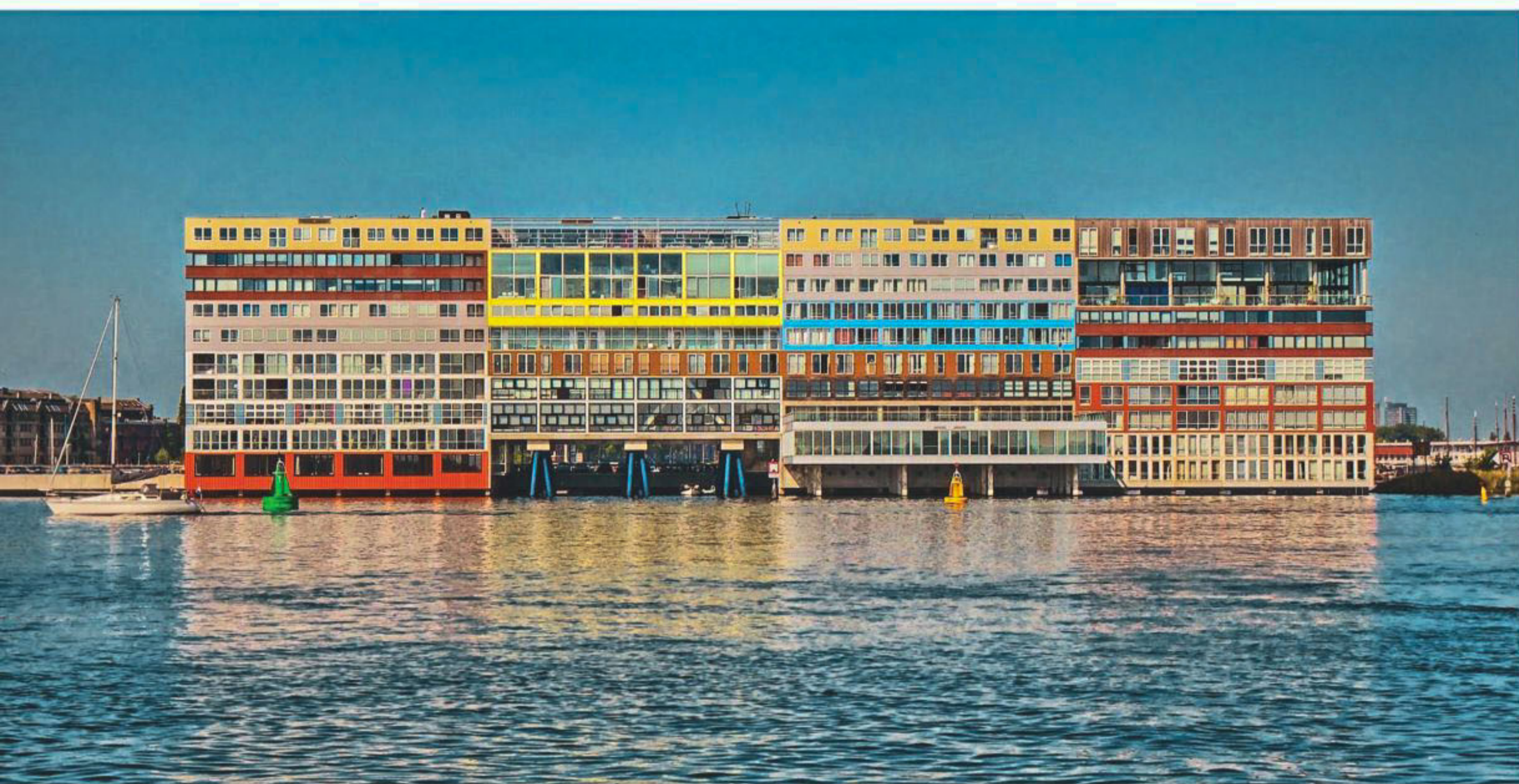
and supporting the economy. While sectors like infrastructure, industry and connectivity enjoy prioritised attention, we feel that housing as a foundational sector of development deserves a much bigger, thoughtful and creative focus. In spite of the fact that there is a national housing policy in place and a vibrant real estate market in the country, we feel that there is an urgency for a renewed attention to housing, and transforming policies into actions for qualitative as well as quantitative changes. Consequently, Bengal Institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements maintains "settlements" as one of the focus areas of its studies and propositions.

disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control."

Historically, housing has come into greater political and social focus since the Second World War in Europe, with the urgent need for reconstruction and rehabilitation of peoples, and in newly decolonised countries for improvement of living standards of its citizens across the economic spectrum. In this case, the vision and actions of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of India, to provide housing and create exemplary models remain an important benchmark. In today's globalised world, housing becomes critical beyond the socio-cultural and economic factors as it intersects with environmental changes. In a developing country as ours, housing is also a geographic challenge, in which housing and architecture can affect vulnerable and precious ecologies in fundamental ways.

FROM HOUSE TO HOUSING
The most important element of housing is its collective nature. There is a major difference between house ("bari") and housing ("boshoti"); the former refers to a single entity involving a household, and the latter begins with an ensemble of houses or units. The ensemble or collective is not simply a matter of quantity; it suggests a social and shared realm that is part and parcel of a larger human habitation.

HOUSING FOR ALL
The constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh entrusts the government in ensuring access to shelter for all citizens. Article 15 of the constitution states that the government has a responsibility to provide access to basic necessities, including shelter. While the government does not have the obligation to immediately provide shelter to all, it implies that a citizen of any strata of the society has the right to have access to shelter. However, since independence, government action has addressed this issue in a negligible manner. In this regard,



Silodam housing project by MVRDV in Amsterdam.

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