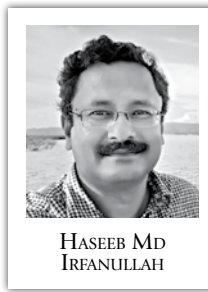


# Nature-based solutions for our towns and cities



HASEEB MD IRFANULLAH

WHEN we talk about nature-based solutions (Nbs)—that is protecting, managing, restoring or creating ecosystems for the benefit of the people and biodiversity—we almost always think of wilderness

or rural areas. We think of famous forests like the Sundarbans, large wetlands like Hakaluki Haor or Chalan Beel, or impressive plantations of the Bangladesh Forest Department, NGOs, and villagers throughout the country.

But what about our cities and towns? Can we have any Nbs for them?

Of course we can. And, in fact, we already have many. If we take Hatirjheel Integrated Development Project in Dhaka—an approximately USD 250 million project which ran for six years—it basically mixed both engineered infrastructure and Nbs. The restored *jheel* (wetland) and Begunbari khal have improved storm-water management of Dhaka and made aquatic biodiversity better. It also increased green and open space in our busy capital.

Unfortunately, a study done in 2012 showed that Dhaka lost 46 percent of its green space between 1975 and 2005. In the last 15 years, Dhaka has expanded a lot—both vertically and horizontally. So, the loss as well as the gain of greenery have happened, especially on the city edges.

The benefits of green, open spaces in our cities are many. These spaces and parks improve mental and physical health of urbanites, create informal networks among the visitors, and offer livelihood opportunities for many fellow city dwellers. Some of these green spaces are landmarks

of our cities: Bell's Park of Barishal, Central Railway Building area of Chittagong, Ramna Park of Dhaka, Shahid Hades Park of Khulna, and Shimla Park of Rajshahi.

But creating biodiversity-rich green spaces is not the only Nbs we can have in urban areas. The Network Nature ([www.networknature.eu](http://www.networknature.eu)) has recently captured some fantastic work done in cities around the world showing diversity in urban Nbs: combining green and blue infrastructure in different European cities to make them biodiverse and healthy; installing green roofs in Basel, Switzerland, for climate change mitigation and adaptation; and creating Yanweizhou Wetland Park in Jinhua, China, as a part of resilient landscape, are a few examples.

Now, let us shift our focus from large cities to our small towns, especially those which are vulnerable to climate change. If we can restore the degraded wetlands outside such towns, storm-water could get stored there without causing waterlogging. Similarly, if we re-excavate the natural drainage networks within these towns, which got encroached or blocked for different reasons, rainwater can easily pass through urban settlements.

A coastal town can also benefit from having a mangrove belt looking over the Bay of Bengal. Such stretches of mangroves can reduce high wind speeds as well as protect a town from coastal floods. Similarly, for a town located by a river, as many of our towns are, especially those with river ports, we can think of Nbs along with concrete blocks, gabion walls or embankments to protect it. We can create riparian vegetation outside these grey infrastructure, which will act as the first line of defence to rising flood water and erosion. Such Nbs will also increase the longevity of engineered infrastructure and reduce its maintenance costs. Some towns like Sirajganj may not be protected exclusively by Nbs from the aggressive Jamuna, but many towns facing lesser aggression from rivers could.



A view of the Hatirjheel lake.

PHOTO: STAR

If we want Nbs to improve the living conditions of our towns and cities, especially under changing climate, we need to remember three key issues.

First, our municipalities, city corporations, and development partners should ensure that Nbs is an integral part of urban development strategies. Urban planning can play a crucial role to support the implementation of Nbs and can synergise the existing and new benefits an Nbs expects to bring in. It can also help to address prevailing conflicts over resources and ensure that social equity is properly attended to with an increase in urban slums. For effective and sustainable impact, local institutions and communities also should be appropriately and sufficiently involved in designing, implementing, and monitoring an Nbs activity in our towns.

Bangladesh has a long experience of engaging local communities and institutions in natural resource management, climate

change adaptation, and ecosystem-based adaptation following participatory approaches. Therefore, we can indeed adopt and implement Nbs effectively and efficiently in the urban context.

Second, our funding and implementing agencies should follow available standards and guidelines for Nbs while designing and implementing Nbs projects in urban areas. We should remember that, to call an intervention Nbs, it must benefit both humans and the biodiversity, not just one or the other. A single-row roadside plantation with one type of exotic tree species, therefore, is not an Nbs.

The IUCN Global Standard for Nbs (2020) brings together experiences from 100 countries gathered over two years. This standard questions us if we sufficiently understand our urban problems and helps us to design an Nbs at appropriate scale matching the depth of the problems. Among others, this standard guides us to check if

an Nbs is economically viable, offering sufficient biodiversity and ecosystem benefits, and involving all stakeholders effectively, who understand and agree on the potential benefits to be received from an Nbs.

Third, it is crucial that an Nbs management system is embedded within our urban local governments to follow up on the urban Nbs beyond the project tenure. Unlike an engineering solution, an Nbs takes time to show its full potential. We therefore need to manage the Nbs based on evidence gathered through regular monitoring and evaluation under the ever-changing socio-economic and climatic conditions. We also need to measure the effectiveness of an Nbs: how it is contributing to improve urban resilience to climate change, for example. These post-project lessons will not only help an implemented Nbs to work better, but also help us to replicate the same elsewhere as a good practice.

Bangladesh has started 2021 with new opportunities for urban Nbs. The government's 8th Five Year Plan (2020–2025) has incorporated elements of nature-based approaches and interventions in its Urban Development Strategy, especially keeping in mind the need for improving urban environment and building resilience to disasters and climate change. To transform Bangladesh into a "climate resilient delta nation", the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021–2041—a plan to make Bangladesh a high-income country—also realises the need for synergising interventions in urban and environmental sectors.

Both these national plans were approved last year—the year troubled by the on-going covid pandemic. Now it is time to see how these strategies and plans support urban Nbs on the ground, especially in our climate-vulnerable cities and towns.

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## Apparel business is tough, but the worst may be over



RMG NOTES

MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

IT'S not all doom and gloom. The past 12 months have seen one bad news after another, and it has often felt like we

are taking two steps forwards and three steps back. This has been reflected in much of what I have written; it has been difficult to find a chink of light amid the ongoing negative news cycle at times.

Yet a few things I have read about lately have given me cause for optimism. Could we be seeing the "green shoots" of recovery? I think so, although my optimism is naturally cloaked with an element of caution.

First of all there have been a raft of news stories which suggest that many of our customers in the fashion and retail world are on the road to recovery. The online segment, which we as manufacturers must now be giving serious thought to, is growing rapidly.

One of the world's fastest growing online fashion brands is German online giant Zalando. In its annual report, the business recently said it is targeting at least 30bn Euro in e-commerce sales by 2025. The company made the statement in its annual report after a strong financial year 2020 when it achieved 10.7bn Euro in sales, despite the global pandemic. The company also says it has had an "extraordinarily strong start" to 2021 with expected growth of around 50 percent in the first quarter.

50 percent! That's a remarkable rate of growth and illustrates the extent to which parts of the market are bouncing back into life in dramatic style.

Likewise, the world's largest apparel retailer Inditex recently told investors its online sales had increased by 77 percent in local currencies to 6.6bn Euro over a 12-month period.

Many industries around the world have slowed right down or come to a complete standstill—aviation and live events and exhibitions spring to mind. Fashion, somehow, has evolved and adapted, shifting to indoor and leisurewear and—somehow—keeping a lid on losses. The resilience and ingenuity showed by many leading players in adapting to the new circumstances of the past 12-months has shown the ability of our industry to weather pretty much any storm. In short, if our customers can survive this, they can survive anything.

The two businesses above have plans for growth and there are many more like them. This year will be far easier for business than

2020. Remember also that many orders began being cancelled as far back as January/February 2020 as retailers looked down the road and didn't like what they saw coming; fashion and textiles has had more than a year of this, which shows the strength it has displayed in the face of adversity.

Meanwhile, there is good news at the government level. In many of our biggest markets, governments appear cautiously optimistic that economies can bounce back from the economic shock of the past year. Germany, a key market and the largest economy in Europe, is forecasted to grow by 3.7 percent in 2021. In Britain, the Bank of England believes economic growth will accelerate next year at the fastest rate since official records began as the economy rebounds by 7.3 percent.

In the US, the Federal Reserve



Garment workers working in the sewing section of a factory in Gazipur, Bangladesh, February 7, 2021.

PHOTO: REUTERS

has raised its growth forecast for the economy in the past two weeks and now expects its GDP to grow by 6.5 percent this year, up from 4.2 percent forecasted back in December.

In all these cases, we are seeing a "rebound" in growth on the back of 2020—that is, a sharp uptake in economic growth to partly offset the contraction of the previous year. Likewise, all are saying that growth will stabilise beyond 2021 and revert to its previous trajectory.

All of this is positive news for Bangladesh and provides an incentive for our ready-made garment manufacturers to keep fighting and "stay in the game" as there is clearly light at the end of what has been a long, dark tunnel. The news that our partners are bouncing back should also send a message to policymakers: let's support ailing businesses with the financial packages they need to tide them over until the good times return. There is no point in

letting good businesses hit the wall for the sake of a lack of orders and cashflow—not when a return to growth is just around the corner. When orders do pick up, we need to ensure our garment makers are best placed to fulfil them.

What is stimulating this positive news? It is, of course, vaccines. I keep a close eye on our target markets and the signs are extremely positive. The United Kingdom is one of our largest export markets—it is third behind the US (1st) and Germany (2nd). In the UK, more than 25 million people—around a third of the country's population—have now been vaccinated for the coronavirus. The UK will soon be reopening for business and, with so many people having been vaccinated, the hope is that this time it will be for good.

All in all, I see reason to look to the coming months with far more

optimism than at any time since February 2020.

One note I would add to this is the talk I keep hearing of a "new normal". If by a new normal we mean a more sustainable post-Covid future, then clearly that is something we can and should all get behind.

But in some circles there is talk of this new normal meaning less travel, people wearing masks all the time and a generally more fearful and cautious world. Is this really what we want? I am not so sure. If the past 12 months have taught us anything, it is that we should be grateful for what we have and never take things for granted.

This period has also taught us, as a country, that without business, we have big problems. It's our lifeblood—it puts roofs over our heads and food on our tables.

The "new normal"? I will stick with the old normal, thank you.

Mostafiz Uddin is the Managing Director of Denim Expert Limited. He is also the Founder and CEO of Bangladesh Apparel Exchange (BAE).

## Sultana Zaman's legacy to educate special children

HELEN MCCONACHIE

I have so many fond memories of Sultana (Professor Emeritus Sultana Sarwatara Zaman) who passed away on March 22, 2020, that it is hard to put them in order. I think we first met in Dublin in 1988 at the Congress of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Mental Deficiency (as it was then known). Her daughter, Naila Khan, had put us in touch. Conversation with Sultana was like being caught up in a whirlwind; she was so full of ideas, and had just asked, "What do you think?", when she was on to the next idea before I could work out my thoughts. Which is not to say that she did not listen—not at all—she would later come back to the conversation and come up with a more developed version of the idea.

My first visit to Bangladesh was in 1993, to visit the newly established Child Development Centre at Dhaka Shishu Hospital and to explore possibilities for an ongoing training and research relationship with the Neuro-disability Service at Great Ormond Street Hospital, London. I visited several projects of the Bangladesh Protibondhi Foundation (BPF) founded by Sultana—a special integrated school, assessment clinic, slum school. Established in 1984, it was a not for profit organisation with the aim of providing opportunities and inclusive education to children with intellectual disabilities. All the projects were fascinating and



Helen with Sultana Zaman and family during one of her visits to Dhaka.

PHOTO: COURTESY

established in a thorough and evidence-based way—the quality of work was obviously because of Sultana's meticulous attention to detail and her inspiring leadership.

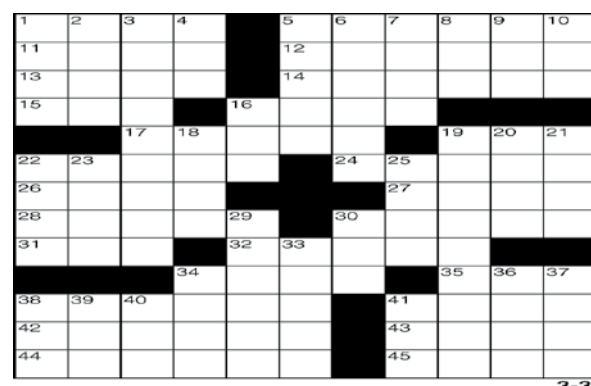
She was constantly searching, communicating with people around the world, to find out what new ideas had support (and which did not) and how to bring good practices to Bangladesh and adapt it. The BPF adopted community-based rehabilitation methods early on—our first research project together was an evaluation of the effectiveness of picture-based methods of training parents in handling their children who had cerebral palsy. Similarly, Sultana was aware of the additional poverty that affects families of disabled children, and BPF introduced micro-loans to help families develop income-generation. BPF became a pioneer in introducing state of the art testing, screening

and procedures for early diagnosis and prevention of intellectual disabilities in children.

In 1993 she founded the Department of Special Education at the Institute of Education and Research (IER) Dhaka University to develop the teachers required for special education. This was an invaluable contribution of Sultana's and it continues to train hundreds of young people to join this profession and expand knowledge on this field through research work.

In all my visits to Bangladesh, I looked forward to seeing Sultana for her warmth, and vivacity. And even in her last years, when her faculties were much reduced, I was honoured that she remembered me. Her energy, determination, intelligence, leadership, courage and warmth are an enduring inspiration.

Helen McConachie is a Professor at Newcastle University, UK.



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

B A B A S E A L S  
O Z A W A P U P I L  
W O R L D W A R O N E  
E R R H O T L E D  
D E E P E R S L U G  
S N A R L H O P E  
P E D R O  
S E E P T A R P S  
E N V Y O T T A W A  
A C E O U T R E D  
W O R L D R E C O R D  
A R T I E D E L V E  
Y E S E S L E E R

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

#### ACROSS

- 1 Garden sections
- 5 Chinese boat
- 11 Symmetry lines
- 12 New York borough
- 13 Green gem
- 14 Kenya neighbor
- 15 Paris pal
- 16 Satyr's kin
- 17 Black suit
- 19 Periodical, for short
- 22 Once more
- 24 Movie music
- 26 White House power
- 27 Freshener target
- 28 Without break
- 30 Piton, for one
- 31 Tie the knot
- 32 Early Mexican

#### DOWN

- 34 Deuce topper
- 35 Clay, later
- 38 Hearts, e.g.
- 41 Agitate
- 42 Sartre play
- 43 Quick look
- 44 Hatred
- 45 Says further
- 1 Mexican peninsula
- 2 Final, for one
- 3 Wholly committed
- 4 Toronto-to-D.C. dir.
- 5 Young pigeon
- 6 Summer's end
- 7 Nasty
- 8 Farm sight
- 9 What's more

- 10 Top-secret gov't. org.
- 16 Amusement
- 18 Serengeti sight
- 19 Like some cough drops
- 20 In a frenzy
- 21 "American Gigolo" star
- 22 State frankly
- 23 Heredity unit
- 25 Aspiration
- 29 "Shoot!"
- 30 Farm sight
- 33 Piquant
- 34 Car for hire
- 36 Told tales
- 37 Annoys
- 38 Common bill
- 39 Harry's friend
- 40 Opal or onyx
- 41 Hotel offering

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