

No well-thought-out urban planning in the past 50 years

Says Credence Housing's managing director

SOHEL PARVEZ

Bangladesh is growing horizontally and vertically, with new multistoried complexes being erected on fresh land in suburbs and towns to replace more modest structures.

Demand for homes and commercial spaces is rising hand in hand with the growing population of this land-scarce country, which accommodates over 1,300 people per square kilometre, making it one of the most densely populated nations in the world.

However, the development has not been planned. This is the case not only in the capital Dhaka but also outside the metropolis.

"We saw some plans regarding Dhaka during the Pakistan period. However, no proper planning was done after the independence. We have not had any long-term goal to make Dhaka a livable city," said Zillul Karim, managing director of Credence Housing Ltd.

During the pre-liberation period, areas such as Dhanmondi and Mohammadpur were developed in a planned manner.

Since then, only the Purbachal and Uttara areas have been developed in a planned manner. Of those, Purbachal has yet to become livable. Other than that, no well-thought-out plan has been made in the past 50 years.

"In parallel, we have made Bangladesh totally centralised," Karim added, referring to the overcrowded state of the capital. At the time of the independence in 1971, Dhaka had a population of only 700,000. Now, it is home to nearly 2.5 crore.

"We could not ensure industrialisation in any part of the country except Dhaka. Now, everyone is coming to Dhaka although we have no idea whether the capital can bear the load."

The authorities could have developed cities like Khulna, thereby ensuring facilities and jobs and preventing people

from feeling compelled to move to the capital for better opportunities.

Instead, Khulna, a city blessed with a seaport and the Sundarbans, has become almost lifeless.

Not only do young people flock to Dhaka for career opportunities

Many of our problems could be solved by vertical expansion, but the government has to provide infrastructural support for this, he added.

Karim highlighted that roughly 90 percent of people in Dhaka live in rented houses.

person.

"Is there a reliable public transport that could take him to Dhanmondi in half an hour? If there were such infrastructures, there would have been development in Savar."

Everyone wants to stay in Dhaka, where traffic jams have made all the problems more complicated, he lamented.

One option could be housing developments surrounding the capital. But a lack of good public transport, and the absence of good educational institutions, healthcare, and other amenities there pose major barriers.

"We need a long-term plan, taking the whole country into perspective, not Dhaka only. We must give equal priority to every divisional city, ensuring everything that citizens need, so that no one feels the urgency to come to Dhaka."

"Had all the facilities been available in districts like Khulna or Dinajpur, who would come to Dhaka?" he said. "Just think, a person has to be brought to Dhaka in case of cardiac arrest. There is no good medical facility that treats heart disease in most other areas."

To address these issues, public-private initiatives are needed.

Karim also highlighted policy problems, saying: "The sad part is that we have no proper township planning."

Real estate development in Dhaka slowed after the government framed a detailed area plan (DAP) in 2022. Landowners are not willing to give land for new buildings since the floor area ratio has been reduced, he said.

This has fueled land prices and, in turn, the prices of flats.

He said they have been waiting for a revision in the DAP for nearly six months, but there has been no progress in this regard.

"As a result, we cannot take on new projects, and three or four departments in our office are sitting idle."

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Zillul Karim

after graduation but politicians and businessmen also aim to ultimately reach the capital.

"Everything is centred around Dhaka. But how much load can it bear? Problems will not be solved if you don't think about the whole country."

Karim, who has been engaged in the real estate sector for nearly two decades, said Bangladesh needs to grow vertically in a bid to preserve land, which can be used for farming to ensure food security for the growing population.

"We have no option but to go for vertical growth. Just think about the fact that we have to import green chillies. If we lose our farmland, there will be no crops."

"We are unable to ensure homes for a majority of people in Dhaka."

One of the reasons for that is the high property prices in Dhaka. There is a huge demand for apartments at prices between Tk 50 lakh and Tk 1 crore.

"But we are totally missing this group. This is a big group. They are willing to purchase, but they do not have the capability to buy homes in the capital."

He said they can offer a flat at Tk 50 lakh in Savar.

"But a person whose office is in Karwan Bazar and whose son studies at Dhanmondi Boys' School will not move to Savar because no smooth communication facilities have been ensured for that

Russia sharply raises inflation forecast

AFP, Moscow

Russia's central bank sharply raised its inflation forecast for 2025 on Friday, warning there was no sign rocketing price increases would go into reverse.

Inflation has been rising fast across the Russian economy for months, driven by massive government spending on the Ukraine conflict and deep labour shortages.

Prices are now expected to go up between seven to eight percent this year, compared with an earlier forecast for 2025 of between 4.5 to five percent, the central bank said in a statement.

This is despite a rally in the value of the ruble this week after presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin held a phone call, raising hopes of a thaw in US-Russian relations.

Annual inflation ticked up to 9.9 percent year-on-year in January, compared with 9.5 percent in December, according to the Rosstat statistics service.

The central bank held borrowing costs at a two-decade high of 21 percent on Friday, despite complaints from businesses and banks that the high key rate is hurting economic growth.

"Price pressures remain significant," central bank governor Elvira Nabiullina told a press conference after the rate announcement. Nabiullina cautioned fast price increases would persist, despite a "slight slowdown" in inflation data at the start of the year.

Brazil hints at WTO complaint after Trump steel tariffs



Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva PHOTO: AFP

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on Friday that Brazil would react to US President Donald Trump's decision to issue tariffs on steel imports, suggesting his government could file a complaint at the World Trade Organization, or tax US products.

"I hear they are now going to tax Brazilian steel. If they do it, we will react commercially, either by filing a complaint to the WTO or taxing products we import from them," Lula said in a radio interview.

The South American country is one of the largest sources of US steel imports. Trump earlier this week substantially raised tariffs on steel and aluminum imports to a flat 25% "without exceptions or exemptions".

Lula's remarks point to a more aggressive approach to the tariffs than his economic team had suggested in previous statements. Both his finance and trade ministers called for dialogue and potential negotiations with the United States.

The White House in a fact sheet on Thursday - when Trump moved to scrap decades-old low tariff rates, raising them to match those of other countries - also pointed to Brazil's ethanol tariffs as an example of unfair trade practices.

Lula said he wants Brazil's relations with the US to be "harmonious" and noted the two countries have balanced trade, but added: "If there is any action against Brazil, there will be reciprocity."

The US has run a trade surplus with Latin America's largest economy since 2008, which reached \$253 million last year on more than \$80 billion of bilateral trade.

The Brazilian leader said he was worried about Trump's "protectionism", saying it goes against the United States' long-standing defense of free markets.

Trump keeps tariffs drumbeat going, with autos targeted next

REUTERS, New York

President Donald Trump on Friday kept alive his drumbeat of tariff threats, saying levies on automobiles would be coming as soon as April 2, the day after members of his cabinet are due to deliver reports to him outlining options for a range of import duties as he seeks to reshape global trade.

"Maybe around April 2," Trump said in response to a question about when auto tariffs might be coming, during an executive-order signing session in the Oval Office. "I would have done them on April 1... But we're going to do it on April 2."

It was the latest in a litany of trade actions Trump has unveiled since taking office for the second time on January 20.

Since his inauguration, he has imposed a 10 percent tariff on all imports from China, on top of existing levies; announced and then delayed for a month 25 percent tariffs on goods from Mexico and non-energy imports from Canada; set a March 12 start date for 25 percent tariffs on all imported steel and aluminum; and on Thursday directed his economics team to devise plans for reciprocal tariffs on every country that taxes U.S. imports.

It has been a blur of orders that Trump has asserted will level the playing field for American goods abroad and reinvigorate a long-declining U.S. manufacturing base but which have also sown confusion among businesses, irked long-standing U.S. allies and stoked worries among consumers and economists about a renewed upswing in inflation.

"We applaud President Trump's idea to look at all vehicle imports to the US, an important step forward," Ford Motor Co Chief Executive Jim Farley said

Trump offered no other details for his auto tariff intentions before heading to his Florida estate for the weekend. But what he views as unfair treatment of US automotive exports in foreign markets has long been a sore spot for him. The European Union, for instance, collects a 10 percent tariff on vehicle imports, four times the US passenger car tariff rate of 2.5 percent.

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Cars are stacked ready to be loaded onto a ship for export at the port in Taicang, in China's eastern Jiangsu province. President Donald Trump said levies on automobiles would be coming as soon as April 2.

Resourcing a resource-hungry country

MAMUN RASHID

Bangladesh's higher education system faces a critical issue: While universities are expanding rapidly, an increasing number of degree-holding graduates are struggling to find meaningful employment because employers cannot find graduates with the necessary skills.

The root of this problem lies in the "skills gap." Universities continue teaching outdated curricula while employers seek graduates with practical, job-specific skills. Graduates often lack soft skills like effective teamwork, problem solving and professional communication. As industries such as digital marketing, IT, and artificial intelligence surge, the gap between academic education and real-world requirements grows. Yet traditional degree programs remain focused on theoretical knowledge, leaving students unprepared for modern fields.

However, this issue is not limited to universities. To fix the broken system, change must begin at schools, where we get to shape young minds. To truly prepare them, we need to rethink teachers are trained. Educators must be trained in effective pedagogies that encourage critical thinking and creativity. For instance, the Montessori method emphasises child-led learning, encouraging independence and problem solving. Our educators should be equipped with such skills to ensure that the foundations of learning are built on strong, practical and adaptable methods.

Demographically, Bangladesh holds an advantage, with nearly 30 percent of its population aged between 15 and 29. This youth bulge could fuel the country's economic growth. However, many graduates remain frustrated by their inability to find jobs, leading to increasing migration. If this trend continues, the country risks losing an entire generation of talent.

Germany offers a useful example through its "dual education system." This model combines academic education with practical work experience, where students split their time between classrooms and businesses. By graduation, they have real-world experience and valuable industry connections. Bangladesh would greatly benefit from such a model. Countries like Vietnam and the Philippines are already investing heavily in skill-oriented education. These countries are also strengthening ties between schools, universities, and industries, ensuring that graduates are better prepared for the evolving job market.

Some Bangladeshi universities are starting to recognise the need for change. Institutions like BRAC and North South University have begun partnerships with businesses to offer research opportunities, internships and mentorship programs. So, considering how these efforts are improving job outcomes for their graduates, a more widespread, national-level transformation is required to see an actual impact.

Despite the growth of inbound remittances, it would be far more sustainable for the country to develop high-quality jobs. By investing in a seamless education-to-industry pipeline, Bangladesh could position itself as a regional talent hub. This would reduce brain drain and cultivate a workforce that is better equipped to meet the demands of the economy.

To address the quality of education, Bangladesh must overhaul its curricula and improve collaboration between educational institutions and industries. This needs to start with schools, ensuring that children are taught by qualified educators skilled in modern teaching methods. Universities should integrate internships into their programs, allowing students to gain practical experience. Also, teachers should get exposure to the private sector to stay informed about industry requirements. Finally, forming university-industry councils would ensure that academic programs are designed with input from employers, ensuring graduates are job-ready.

The success of Bangladesh's economy over the next two decades hinges on whether its education system evolves quickly enough. If reforms are not implemented, a generation of young Bangladeshis may find that their degrees carry little weight, which would be the real crisis.

The author is chairman of Financial Excellence Limited

PHOTO: AFP/FILE