

Why landscape-based knowledge is critical for Bangladesh

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What happens when a land that thrives on water starts drowning in mismanagement? How can a country, built on the blessings of rivers, fail to protect them? The Bengal Delta, recognised as one of the most dynamic and complex landscapes in the world, has been shaped over thousands of years by the convergence of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Meghna and other rivers. This intricate network of rivers, wetlands, and floodplains is fundamental for Bangladesh, whose geography and development are closely linked to its deltaic origins.

Despite its significant natural resources and ecological importance, the Bengal Delta is highly vulnerable. It faces the impacts of unsustainable urbanisation, inappropriate water management, and a lack of a comprehensive knowledge system regarding the landscape. It is ironic that a riverine delta, with its geographical and climatic advantages, faces a water crisis and biodiversity loss. The solution lies in efficient management and a shift of mindset from land-based development to landscape-based development for inclusive habitat co-creation—in our context, with and by our people. Is this ever-shifting and ever-increasing delta “lands in waters” or “waters in lands”? Shouldn’t we let the waters flow and the lands grow here? The challenge lies in the disconnect between landscape management and the perception of development. There is a pressing need for a shift in educational priorities and governance structures to promote a resilient and sustainable future.

The Bengal Delta is not just a geographical area; it is a living system that sustains the livelihoods of millions. The seasonal rise and fall of water shape the landscape, influencing agricultural cycles, fisheries, and settlements. People in this region have historically adapted to the delta's rhythms, developing indigenous knowledge systems that work in harmony with nature. The traditional dig and mound

process, stilt houses, floating agriculture, and water-centric urban designs are evidence of an intrinsic understanding of the relationship between land and water. However, modern development trends often overlook this deep-rooted connection, favouring rigid infrastructure that disrupts natural processes, instead of complementing them.

Bangladesh has experienced rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. However, this growth often lacks sensitivity to the landscape. Cities like Dhaka, Chattogram and Khulna are expanding without a cohesive plan to integrate the natural water network into the urban environment. Rivers are being encroached, wetlands are being filled, and green spaces are being diminished, all of which exacerbate flooding and environmental degradation. The lack of landscape-based urban planning has resulted in a decline in ecological resilience, leading to urban areas struggling with waterlogging, pollution, and loss of biodiversity. Without adopting a landscape-oriented approach, the country risks losing the very environmental assets that have historically sustained it.

It is time for Bangladesh to learn from the traditional good practices adopted in this deltaic land. We have borrowed knowledge and technologies from other countries regarding water management, agriculture, and urbanisation, which are not appropriate for our land and have created long-term problems both for the landscape and the psyche of the people. Building embankments in a top-down process has had disastrous consequences in the southern part of Bangladesh, so have “green revolution” and the underground water extraction in a top-down process in the northwestern region. Road development has led to the death of waterscapes, especially rivers and ponds.

However, we should still be open to exchanges of appropriate knowledge

and experience. Bangladesh should draw inspiration from appropriate global examples for integrating water-sensitive urban development. The Netherlands, for instance, has implemented measures such as floating neighbourhoods, stormwater retention parks, and an extensive network of dikes and canals. Their “Room for the River” programme, which allows floodplains to absorb excess water instead of obstructing it, serves as an

as architecture, engineering, and urban planning receive institutional support, landscape architecture has not yet gained full recognition. There is no widespread integration of landscape knowledge in primary or secondary education, leaving young people unaware of the essential relationship among land, water, and human settlements. How will we build our country without this knowledge?

ecological thinking, architects encounter challenges in large-scale landscape design. Landscape architects can help fill these gaps within the design community.

It is very important to understand that the problem is too big and complex to be solved only by professionals and relevant research expertise. People are designing and building their habitats in a co-creation process. The experts' role would be to understand people's processes and engage with them by exchanging visions, knowledge, and experiences to co-create better habitats for human and non-human communities. People's engagement is crucial to addressing these issues efficiently and scaling up this landscape-mindset nationwide.

A strong academic framework focused on sustainable land management, ecological restoration, and climate responsive design will equip graduates to implement landscape-based solutions in both urban and rural settings. Bangladesh needs a new generation of architects, landscape architects, planners, and policymakers who can integrate natural processes into development strategies rather than working against them.

A robust institutional framework is essential for successfully implementing landscape-based planning and policies. The formation of a ministry for landscape would establish a dedicated governmental body responsible for overseeing sustainable land and water management initiatives. This ministry could coordinate efforts among urban planning authorities, environmental agencies, and local governments to promote a comprehensive approach to development. Furthermore, an institute for landscape architects in Bangladesh could regulate the field, set industry standards, and encourage research in landscape architecture.

By adopting comparable landscape strategies, Bangladesh can develop flood-resilient, ecologically sustainable, and socially vibrant cities. Many challenges faced by the Bengal Delta arise from the neglect of its landscape and the knowledge of its people. It is time to re-evaluate development through the lens of landscape architecture, integrating education, policy, and planning into a cohesive vision. Doing so will help mitigate environmental degradation and improve the quality of life for millions, ensuring that the Bengal Delta continues to thrive as a resilient homeland for our future generations.



FILE PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

The polluted Buriganga River with unplanned urban growth on its banks.

excellent model for Bangladesh's flood-prone cities.

One of the most pressing needs is the incorporation of landscape-oriented urban and town planning. The existing planning frameworks must be revised to include nature-based solutions, flood-adaptive designs, and green infrastructure. Riverbanks should be protected as public spaces rather than being commercialised, wetlands must be preserved for their ecological functions, and green corridors should be integrated into cityscapes to enhance resilience. Local governments and planning bodies should collaborate closely with landscape architects and urban planners to develop master plans that prioritise environmental sustainability and economic growth.

In Bangladesh, while disciplines such

To address this issue, Bangladesh must incorporate landscape-based education at all levels, starting from early childhood through higher education. The curricula for primary and secondary schools should include modules on landscape ecology, hydrology, and sustainable land-use practices. Early exposure to this knowledge will help foster a sense of environmental stewardship, creating a generation that understands the importance of preserving and adapting to the deltaic environment. This foundational education will serve as a stepping stone for more specialised studies at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Urban planners and architects are striving to improve the conditions in Bangladesh in the face of ongoing urbanisation and the climate crisis. While there is a movement towards

is continually deferred, and their suffering prolonged.

The ongoing crisis in Palestine exposes the UNSC's failure to protect human life. If the council is to remain relevant, it must undergo significant reform. The current veto system should either be restructured or abolished, and economic sanctions should be imposed on violators of international law through majority votes among UN member states.

Another reform proposal involves selecting UNSC members based on their contributions to global peace, rather than their nuclear capabilities. A more inclusive and representative structure could foster a fairer and more just approach to international issues. Some advocate for proportional representation based on population or religious affiliation, arguing that this could help prevent conflicts driven by religious divides.

Would the world remain silent if Palestinians were Christians instead of Muslims? Some may argue not.

Despite Muslims comprising the world's second-largest religious group and the existence of 57 Muslim-majority countries, there is currently no Muslim representation on the UNSC. This glaring omission highlights the urgency for Muslim states to take a more active role in pushing for UNSC reform. With Muslim representation, the plight of Palestinians—and other oppressed Muslim communities—might have received more meaningful international attention.

The political fragmentation of the Arab world

Without reform of the UNSC, what alternatives remain? One potential solution is the strengthening of regional coalitions, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). To apply greater diplomatic pressure on Israel and its allies. While the OIC's track record on Palestine has been limited, it represents a significant bloc that could unite to demand international sanctions against Israel.

On April 12, 2025, millions in Bangladesh took part in the March for Gaza, where one of the key demands was for OIC member states to sever diplomatic ties with Israel and impose trade embargoes on it and its supporters.

Despite wielding considerable economic leverage through oil, many Muslim-majority countries, such as Saudi Arabia, have not used these resources strategically. An oil embargo could severely disrupt the economies of countries that support Israel, potentially impeding weapons manufacturing and imposing other costs. While such a measure might be seen as a last resort, the question remains: do Muslim leaders possess the courage, strategic vision, and unity needed to impose such sanctions and to gain support from influential nations in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America?

Long-standing rivalries within the Muslim world, such as the tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, have hindered unified action. Overcoming these divisions is crucial if a coordinated response to Israel's actions is to be achieved.

As the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, “The entire Muslim community is like one body. If one part of it feels pain, the whole body feels the pain.” If the Ummah truly believes in this, it must take decisive action to end the violence and support Palestinian independence.

Western hypocrisy and the 'self-defence' narrative

For too long, Western nations have prioritised geopolitical interests over human lives in the

Israel-Palestine conflict. They are quick to condemn human rights abuses elsewhere, yet remain silent or supportive when it comes to Israel. The widely accepted narrative of “self-defence” masks the reality: this is not defence, but occupation, displacement, and the forced refugee status of Palestinians within their own land.

The power of public opinion

The international community can no longer ignore the atrocities occurring in Palestine. Global public opinion, especially through grassroots movements, has the power to influence policy. Protests, social media campaigns, and petitions can place pressure on governments to reconsider their support for Israel. In extreme cases, citizens may feel compelled to hold their own governments accountable if they continue to endorse actions viewed as crimes against humanity.

While humanitarian aid is crucial, it must not be seen as a substitute for political advocacy. It should instead work alongside efforts to pursue justice for Palestinian victims of aggression.

A global moral responsibility

The struggle for Palestinian rights is not merely a regional issue; it is a global moral imperative. The time to act is now, before yet another generation is lost to conflict and suffering. Continued inaction represents a failure of leadership, of humanity, and of justice.

Nations, particularly those with global influence, must demand accountability, support Palestinian self-determination, and work towards a just and lasting peace. There can be no lasting peace in the Middle East without an independent, sovereign Palestine. The world must act to stop this cycle of violence.

Palestine's plight: A global failure of justice and humanity



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The atrocities endured by Palestinians at the hands of Israeli forces have reached alarming proportions, culminating in a global humanitarian crisis that demands urgent international attention. The central questions are: how can the world put an end to these atrocities, and why do Israel's actions persist with the backing of the US and many Western countries? Why does the UN, tasked with upholding human rights, remain so ineffective in safeguarding innocent lives?

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols (1977) form the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, specifically designed to protect civilians during armed conflict, including those in occupied territories. In light of these conventions, the actions of the Israeli government could be classified as “state terrorism.”

It is shameful that the UN, despite its mandate to protect human rights, has failed to act decisively. Even more troubling is the hypocrisy of Western countries that proclaim democratic values and human rights, yet continue to support Israel despite its repeated violations of international law. For over half a century, Muslim-majority countries have offered little more than rhetorical condemnation—remaining divided and failing

to take substantive action against Israel's crimes against humanity.

The role of the US and Western countries

The support of the US and other Western nations is key to understanding why Israel has not been held accountable. Despite recurring human rights violations, Israel has been shielded from international scrutiny and sanctions, particularly within the UN. The US, a long-standing ally of Israel, frequently exercises its veto power to block resolutions that could impose pressure or sanctions. This protection has enabled Israel to operate with impunity, while the suffering of the Palestinian people continues to be neglected.

Western media coverage is often skewed, failing to adequately highlight the plight of Palestinians or to critically examine Israel's actions—thereby perpetuating a one-sided narrative.

The need for reform in the UNSC

The UN Security Council (UNSC), designed to maintain global peace and security, has failed to effectively address the Palestinian issue. Its paralysis, primarily due to the veto power held by its five permanent members, including the US, renders it unable to take meaningful action. For Palestinians, this means justice

is continually deferred, and their suffering prolonged.

The ongoing crisis in Palestine exposes the UNSC's failure to protect human life. If the council is to remain relevant, it must undergo significant reform. The current veto system should either be restructured or abolished, and economic sanctions should be imposed on violators of international law through majority votes among UN member states.

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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

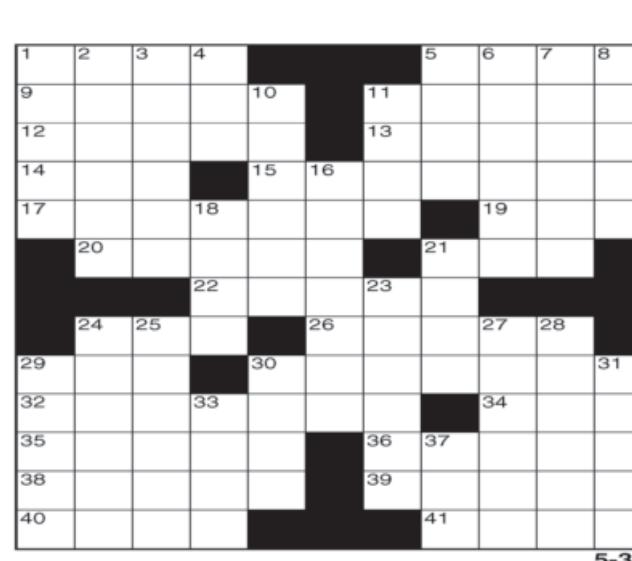
ACROSS

1 Farm crops
5 Poky
9 Justice Kagan
11 Incline
12 Permit
13 Like some roofs
14 Up to, briefly
15 Furnace work
17 Curative
19 Casual shirt
20 Motionless
21 Misbehaving
22 Knightley of “The

24 Tiny
26 Words of action
29 Cowboy
nickname
30 Chapter start
32 Senate event
34 Rawls or Reed
35 Harbor
36 Dote on
38 Solemn
ceremonies
39 Vetoos
40 Editor's base

41 Rainbow maker
14 Moor growth
2 Axis foes
3 Harangue
4 Start for cone or
Caps
5 Narrow cut
6 Nabokov novel
7 Started the bidding
8 Cheese buy
10 Some time
11 Antlered animal

16 Pep up
18 Similar
21 Poet-singer
23 Carter's successor
24 Hot dog
25 Glorifies
27 Mississippi port
28 Saws wood
29 One of the bases
30 Top 10 records
31 Hotel patron
33 Smell awful
37 Poorly lit



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

S	T	R	A	I	T	H	A	N	D
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