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3 Sub-titling

THE purpose of sub-titling is to convey the main idea or theme of each section of a long piece of writing. It helps the reader know at a glance the sub-topics that are being addressed. Giving suitable sub-titles helps break the monotony of reading long passages.

Read the newspaper article given below and do the tasks that follow.

A new deal for old cities

The example of Curitiba in Brazil, which has attracted global attention for innovative urban plans using low-cost technologies, shows that inclusive development models for urban renewal are workable.

Many cities in India accurately mirror Friedrich Engels' description of urban centres in nineteenth century England even today. "Streets that are generally unpaved, rough, dirty, filled with vegetable and animal refuse, without sewers or gutters but supplied with foul, stagnant pools instead," wrote Engels on the living conditions of the working class in that country.

Urban Decay

The depths of urban decay in India came to global notice during the pneumonic plague of 1994 in Surat; it epitomised the failure of governments in the post-Independence era and exposed development policies that ignored fundamental public health issues inherited from colonial rule. There is little evidence to show that policymakers assimilated the lessons from the Surat public health disaster. State and municipal governments did not pursue reform in waste management, though civic conditions in Surat itself underwent change in the plague aftermath. During the past decade, many cities pursued development agendas—often with the help of massive international loans—to project 'modernisation' at the cost of basic civic reform.

There is thus a continuing challenge before the current mission to enable and also compel local governments to abide by the provisions of the Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules by which they are legally bound.

Post-liberalisation policies have tended to largely disregard other key factors that affect the quality of life in cities and towns: poverty, lack of sanitation, water shortages, gross undersupply of affordable housing, and traffic chaos generated by automobile dependence, in turn created by neglect of public transport.

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In the absence of a hygienic environment and safe water supply, chronic water-borne diseases such as cholera and other communicable diseases continue to stalk the poor in the biggest cities.

It must be sobering to the affluent layers of the population that nearly 14 million Indian households (forming 26 per cent of the total) in the urban areas do not have a latrine within the house, as per the Census of India 2001; some 14 per cent have only rudimentary 'pit' facilities. The number of households without a drainage connection stands at 11.8 million (representing 22.1 per cent of households). Migration to cities continues and infrastructure to treat sewage is grossly inadequate to meet the demand even where it exists.

It is unlikely that the quality of the urban environment can be dramatically improved therefore, if such fundamental questions remain unresolved.

Urban transport receives scant attention from policymakers. Policy distortions have led to rising automobile dependency, higher safety risks for road users, and land use plans that are based not on the needs of people, but primarily designed to facilitate use of private motorised vehicles.

It comes as no surprise therefore that pedestrians and bicycle riders, who form 30 to 70 per cent of peak hour traffic in most urban centres, also make up a large proportion of fatalities in road accidents. A paper prepared by the Transport Research and Injury Prevention Programme (TRIPP) of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, says pedestrian fatalities in Mumbai and Delhi were nearly 78 per cent and 53 per cent of the total, according to recent data, compared to 13 per cent and 12 per cent in Germany and the United States.

Such alarming death rates — and an equally high injury rate — should persuade policymakers to revisit their urban planning strategies and correct the distortions. But many cities such as Chennai have actually done the reverse — reduced footpaths and areas for pedestrian use to facilitate unrestricted use of motorised vehicles.

The practice in progressive world cities has been different. Curitiba in Brazil, which has attracted global attention for innovative urban plans using low-cost technologies, has done everything that Indian policymakers would dread to do. Starting in the 1970s, this provincial centre with the highest per capita ownership of cars in Brazil (other than the capital) at the time, banned automobiles from many crowded areas in favour of pedestrians, built an internationally acknowledged bus system that reduced household commuting expenditure to below the national average, and created new housing areas that were provided transport links in a planned manner. Some of the prestigious land development in the city, including a new Opera House, came up in abandoned sites such as quarries.

The bus-way system cut riding time by a third, *Scientific American* noted in a review in the mid-1990s, by providing for advance ticketing, specially-designed boarding areas with wider doors for entry/exit and dedicated lanes for faster transit.

In another low-cost initiative, Curitiba managed floods with a dedication that Mumbai, Bangalore, and Chennai can only marvel at. The city created large artificial lakes in suitable places that filled up in the monsoon, avoiding flooding of residential areas. In the summer, these lakes turned into parks to provide recreational spaces.

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State administrations and urban planning bodies in India follow policies that, ironically, allow filling of existing wetlands by real estate lobbies, leading to flooding. The residents then demand expensive new storm water drains.

Examples such as Curitiba show that inclusive development models for urban renewal are workable. If only the state and local governments can be persuaded to adopt a rights-based approach to affordable housing, sanitation, water supply, mobility and a clean environment, instead of a market-oriented model that lays excessive emphasis on recovery of costs incurred by profit-oriented private sector service provision. Support from a progressive middle class and trade unions is equally critical to bring about genuine urban renewal.

G. ANANTHAKRISHNAN
The Hindu, 13 December 2005

Activity

1. Notice the italicised sentence placed at the top of the article which tells us at a glance what the article is about.
2. Divide the article into four sections based on the shifts in the sub-topics and give a suitable sub-heading for each section. One has been done for you in the article as an example.
3. Look for pictures in newspapers and magazines that depict the urban civic problems discussed in the text. Cut them out and pin them to the text at appropriate places.

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