

Nightmare of the Monster Cities

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It is a sweltering afternoon in the year 2020, in the biggest city ever seen on earth. Twenty-eight million people swarm about an 80-mile-wide mass of smoky slums, surrounding high-rise islands of power and wealth.

One-third of the city's work-force is unemployed. Many of the poor have never seen the city centre. In a nameless, open-sewer shanty town, the victims of yet another cholera epidemic are dying slowly, without any medical attention. And from the parched countryside a thousand more hungry peasants a day pour into what they think is their city of hope.

That nightmare of the not-too-distant future could be Cairo or Jakarta or any of a dozen other urban monsters that loom just over the demographic horizon.

Already Mexico City, Sao Paulo, and Shanghai are among the largest, most congested cities on earth. Over the next two decades, they — and many others — are expected almost to double in size, generating economic and social problems that will far outstrip all previous experience.

Just 30 years ago some 700 million people lived in cities. Today the number stands at 1,800 million, and by the end of the century it will top 3,000 million — more than half the world's estimated population.

The flood of 'urbanites' is engulfing not the richest countries, but the poorest. By the year 2020 an estimated 650 million people will crowd into 60 cities of five million or more — three-quarters of them in the developing world. Only a single First World city — metropolitan Tokyo, which will have 24 million people — is expected to be among the global top five; London, ranked second in 1950 with ten million people, will not even make 2020's top 25*

1 The introduction refers to the shanty town as 'nameless'. Why?

2 What are some of the problems facing this imaginary city?

3 What is meant by 'high-rise islands of power and wealth'?

4 In what parts of the world might this city be?

2. In places where rates of natural population increase exceed three per cent annually

— meaning much of the Third World — that alone is enough to double a city's population within 20 years. But equally powerful are the streams of hopeful migrants from the countryside. More often so than not, even the most appalling urban living conditions are an improvement on whatever those who suffer them have left behind.

What confronts and confounds urban planners is the enormity of these trends. There

have never been cities of 30 million people, let alone ones dependent on roads, sewer and water supplies barely adequate for urban areas a tenth that size.

The great urban industrial booms of Europe and America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries sustained the cities that they helped to spawn. But in today's swelling Third World cities, the flood of new arrivals far outstrips the supply of jobs — particularly as modern industries put a premium on technology rather than manpower. So it will be virtually impossible to find permanent employment for 30 to 40 per cent of the 1,000 million new city dwellers.

Optimists maintain that runaway urban growth can be stemmed by making rural or small-town life more attractive. Some say that the trend is self-correcting, since conditions will eventually get bad enough to convince people that city life is no improvement after all. But pessimists see a gloomier correction: epidemics, so starvation and revolution. In the end, both sides agree that the world's biggest cities are mushrooming into the unknown.

Survival Course. Yet some cities still manage to cope.

Seoul, riding the crest of South Korea's economic boom, is currently building a £2,500 million underground railway 90 system that should ease some of the worst traffic problems in the world. Over the last decade Tokyo has cleared up much of its legendary smog.

Hong Kong has rehoused 1.3 million 95 people in new high-rise towns such as Sha Tin. Built on land reclaimed from the sea arid paddyfields, Sha Tin and its sister towns are totally self-contained, down to playgrounds, industrial areas and a railway line into its main business district.

The essence of the larger problem is that despite the dreadful conditions that urban squatters face, their numbers are growing at rates as much as twice that of the cities themselves — and every step taken to improve living conditions in the slums only attracts more migrants.

One solution is to ban migration into the no cities. Some countries use internal passports or residence permits to try to control urban growth.

Task 1. *Find and explain the meaning of the underlined words and expressions.*

Task 2. *What do you think?*

1. The article refers to First World countries and Third World (or developing) countries.

Give some examples of both.

2 Why isn't urban growth such a problem for many First World countries?

3'Modern industries put a premium on technology rather than manpower.' What is meant by this? Give some examples of industries that no longer need a large work force.

4Explain the idea in the last line of the article.

5What are the problems facing the capital cities that you know? What is being done about these problems?

Task 3. *Describe the problems of your city/town.*