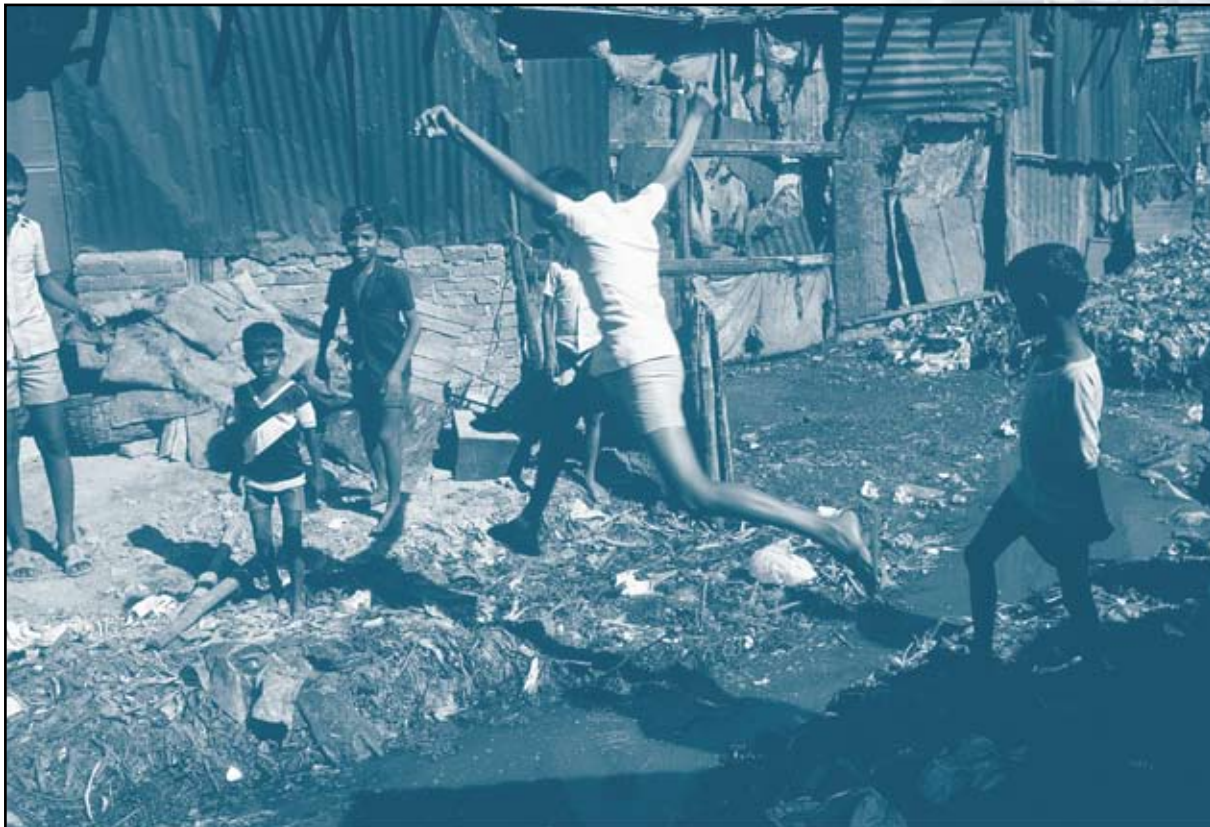




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STATE OF THE WORLD'S CITIES 2006/7

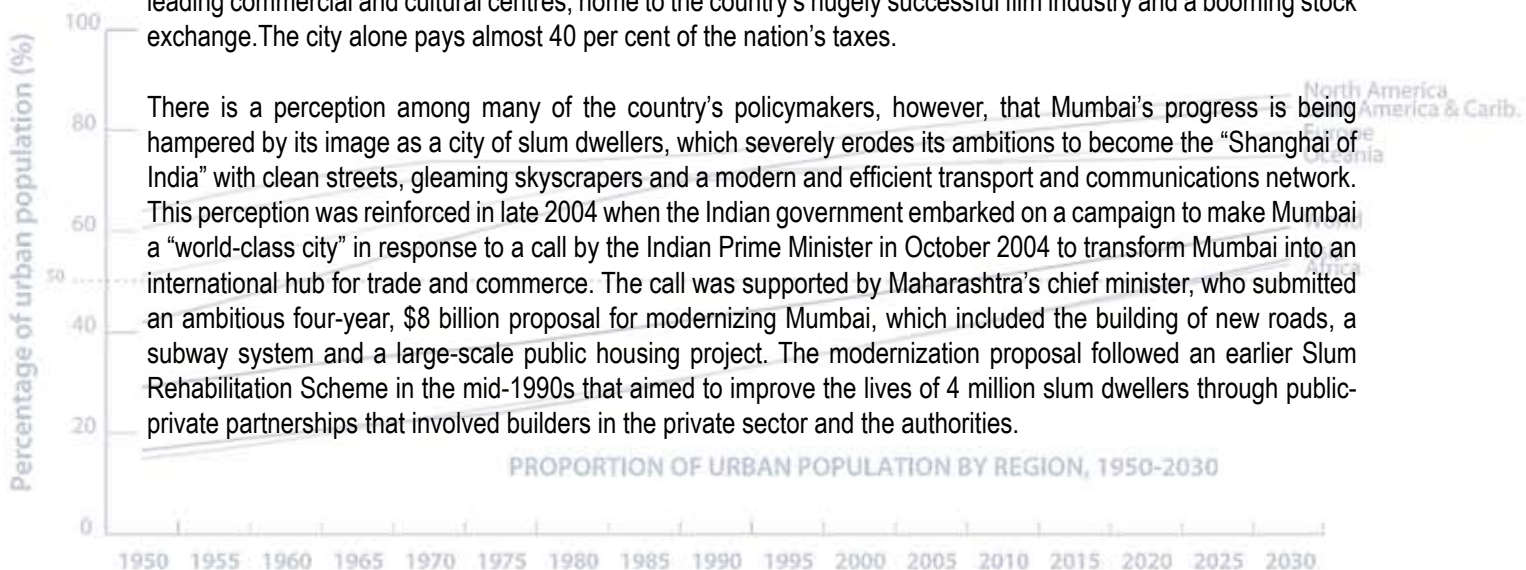


Mumbai's quest for 'world city' status

Mumbai, the capital city of the state of Maharashtra and India's most important financial capital, has a population of 18.3 million people, making it the fourth largest urban agglomeration in the world, after Tokyo, Mexico City and New York-Newark. The city hosts one of the world's largest slum populations: more than 5 million of the city's residents are slum dwellers. More people live in Mumbai's slums than in the entire country of Norway.

Despite its large slum population – or, as some would argue, because of it – Mumbai has emerged as one of India's leading commercial and cultural centres, home to the country's hugely successful film industry and a booming stock exchange. The city alone pays almost 40 per cent of the nation's taxes.

There is a perception among many of the country's policymakers, however, that Mumbai's progress is being hampered by its image as a city of slum dwellers, which severely erodes its ambitions to become the "Shanghai of India" with clean streets, gleaming skyscrapers and a modern and efficient transport and communications network. This perception was reinforced in late 2004 when the Indian government embarked on a campaign to make Mumbai a "world-class city" in response to a call by the Indian Prime Minister in October 2004 to transform Mumbai into an international hub for trade and commerce. The call was supported by Maharashtra's chief minister, who submitted an ambitious four-year, \$8 billion proposal for modernizing Mumbai, which included the building of new roads, a subway system and a large-scale public housing project. The modernization proposal followed an earlier Slum Rehabilitation Scheme in the mid-1990s that aimed to improve the lives of 4 million slum dwellers through public-private partnerships that involved builders in the private sector and the authorities.



Demolition drive

In late 2004, despite progressive slum improvement and tenure regularization policies and programmes, the government of Maharashtra began a slum demolition drive aimed at removing slums and shanty towns in the city. Between December 2004 and March 2005, more than 90,000 shanties were torn down, in violation of poll promises, international covenants to which India is a signatory and a 2001 Slum Areas Act, which protected all slums built prior to 1995. (The Act stipulates that all slum dwellers who could establish that their names were on the electoral roll on 1 January 1995 were protected, to the extent that their homes could not be demolished without rehabilitation.) Amid public outcry and pressure from the ruling Congress party, the demolitions were halted in February 2005, but many believe that the plan to make Mumbai a world-class city is still very much on the cards. "The reality of course is that a new Mumbai cannot be built on the corpses of its poor, the very people who hold up this city," argued journalist Kalpana Sharma of The Hindu newspaper. Jockin Arputham, founder of India's National Slum Dwellers Federation, has consistently argued that it is Mumbai's poor, who allow the city to flourish by providing cheap labour and services. "The poor work as refuse collectors, construction labourers, handcart pullers, vegetable vendors, factory workers, domestic workers and so on. They provide goods and services at rates that most of the city's people can afford. But when it comes to their housing, the city turns its back on them."

Dire slum conditions

Despite the active role played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and slum federations in the city, the situation of slum dwellers in Mumbai remains dire. A recent survey for the Mumbai Sewerage Disposal Project found that 42 per cent of slum dwellings in the city had an area of less than 10 square metres and only 9 per cent had an area of more than 20 square metres. Almost half of the households in slums got their water from shared standpipes and only 5 per cent had direct access to water through individual taps. The city's sanitation situation was even more alarming: 73 per cent of the city's slum households – housing 3.86 million residents – depended exclusively on public toilets. Moreover, overuse and poor maintenance had made public toilets a health hazard, especially in areas where the user group was undefined. Less than one per cent of the slum population had access to individual toilets or to payper-use toilets constructed by private agencies or NGOs.

Despite the daunting conditions in its slums, Mumbai is a magnet for Indians, not only from neighbouring cities and villages, but also from the rest of the country. According to "Vision Mumbai", a 2003 report by the private consultancy firm McKinsey & Co, the city urgently needs to build at least 1.1 million affordable housing units in the next decade for current and future generations of slum dwellers and migrants. (Currently, only 58,000 new low-cost housing units are available for pre-1995 slum dwellers.) The report provides the framework for the city's urban renewal scheme, which, if implemented, will cost upwards of \$40 billion over the next decade. City authorities are already looking into how the funds can be raised from federal and local governments and from international lending institutions.

Author Suketu Mehta feels that Mumbai cannot escape the demands of globalization, including the pressures to become "world class". In many ways, he writes, the city has already parted with the rest of India as the gap between the haves and the have-nots widens: "In the Bayview Bar of the Oberoi Hotel you can order a bottle of Dom Pérignon for one and a half times the average annual income People are still starving to death in other parts of India. In Bombay, there are several hundred slimming clinics." (Bombay was officially renamed Mumbai in 1996, but like many diehard Bombayites, Mehta prefers to call it by its old name.)

Others are cynical about Mumbai's attempts to reach world-class status. "One hardly needs to emphasize that the world over, cities with good and affordable public transport are also the most liveable The best cities in the world are also the ones that have affordable housing for all classes," writes Sharma, who is the author of a book on Dharavi, Mumbai's largest slum. "We need to put aside our obsession with becoming 'world class'. Let us make our cities liveable for all the people. That itself is a big agenda for the future."

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