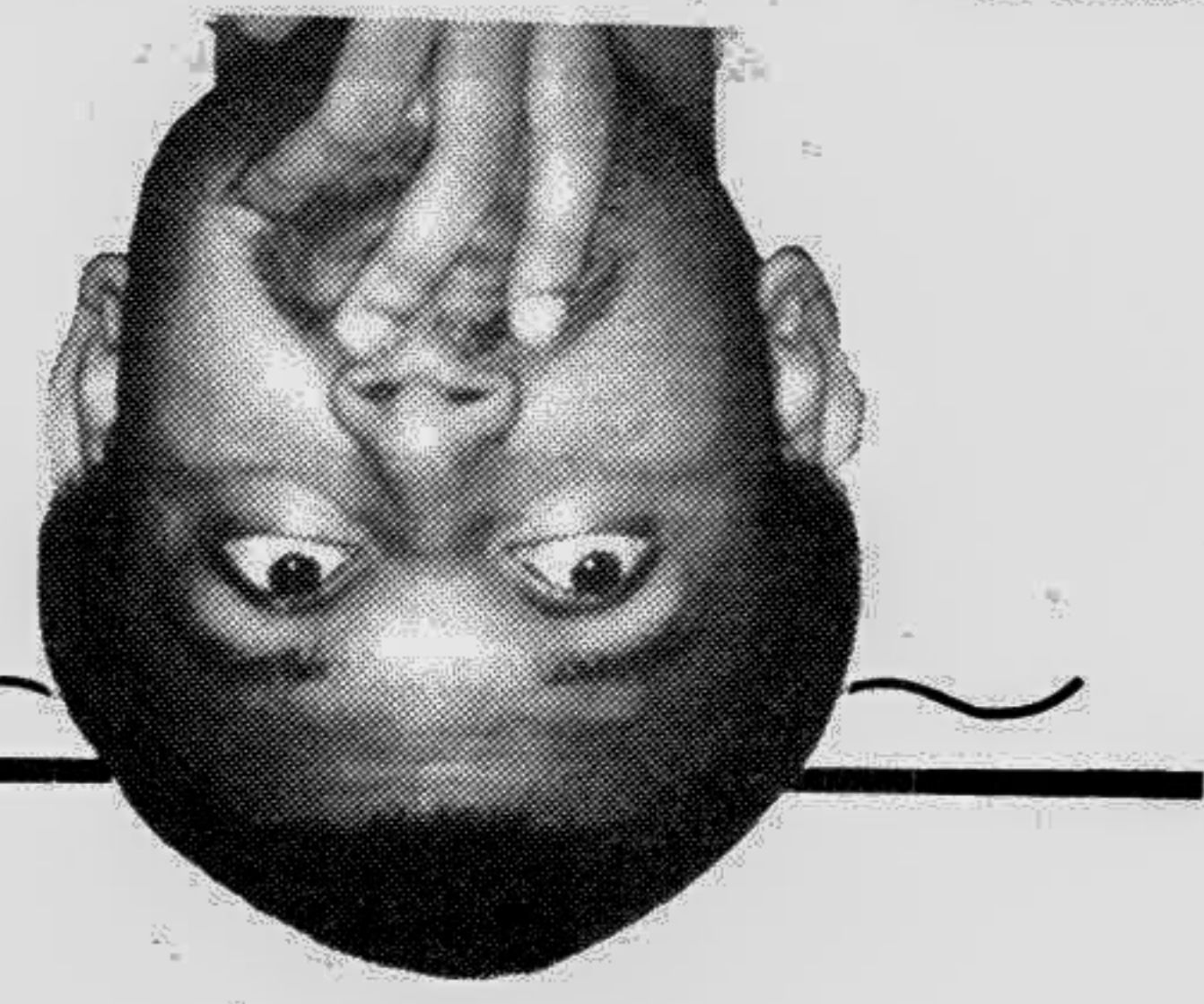


YEP TALK



Two-thirds For Me, One-third For Us

RAJUK should revise the Building Construction Rules for a better environment

Mamnoon Murshed Chowdhury

THE city of mosques is gradually turning into a city of apartments. From the older parts of the city to the newly developed townships in the north, apartment buildings are coming up at a pace that can only be compared to the rate of increase of our population. Steady rise in urban population and exorbitant land prices has forced the landowners to go for larger number of units within a plot. As a result, density has increased manifolds in the last few years with disastrous consequences. Hundreds of trees are being felled each month to make way for new constructions. Also disappearing are the open spaces within and outside the plots. Reality is that the lands have become too costly to have only patches of green on them.

In a country like ours, which has acute scarcity of buildable land and which has to think of accommodating a huge population, a control on the density factor should have been one of the major priorities in the policy planning stages, in order to have healthy urban environment. Unfortunately, our Building Construction Rules make no mention of this. On the contrary, laws that once maintained a control on the overall density, have now been abolished and the degree of limits have been reduced to zero.

Designing our own doomsday

In mid-city areas like Shiddheshshori, Shantinogor and Dhamondi, power, water supply, gas and sewerage systems were designed in the sixties for a limited number of inhabitants. Now, with apartments replacing the low-rise single family units, these systems have become totally non-functional, causing a breakdown in the infrastructure and resulting in im-

mense sufferings for the city dwellers. The first question that comes to mind in this regard is why such a density was allowed to develop gradually by the authorities? It is common sense that if you allow twenty housing units in a plot where services were designed for a single family, you are designing a doomsday yourself.

In newer areas and in areas that are being developed now, the factor of density is not being given serious consideration. Take, for example, the numerous so-called housing and land development schemes at the fringes of the city. A detailed study of the master plans of these private-sector initiatives indicates that hardly any consideration has been given so far as service systems are concerned. The schemes are basically street layout plans with plots of different sizes in between them—something for which you hardly need an urban planner's services. Issues like density and green spaces, which are vital for the functioning of any healthy city, are forgotten and as a result, the decaying of our city continues.

The most important tool to maintain a healthy level of control on density is the Floor Area Ratio (FAR), which is put into use worldwide, even in our neighbouring countries. FAR is the ratio between the total area of the plot and the total built area within it. For example, for a ten katha size plot, the total area is 7,200 sq ft. If the permissible FAR is 2.0, then it is implied that

the total built area cannot be more than 14,400 sq ft. With or without restrictions on the height of buildings, FAR can successfully regulate the amount of open and covered spaces in a plot. In the draft of National Building Code of 1993, however, it is stipulated that apartment buildings built with materials of high degree of fire resistance, have 'unlimited' FAR (Part 3 Art. 1.8.3), which in effect means that there is no control on allowable built area. The only regulation that is friendly towards a healthy environment is Article 1.7.4 in the same Part, which says that for a residential construction at least 33% of the plot shall have to be kept as open to sky space.

Up to July 1996, RAJUK used to adhere to this particular recommendation, although it was not a part of the official Building Construction Rules. Another important rule that was maintaining density in residential districts, was the limit on the number of dwelling units one could build on a plot. This particular law stipulated that only one unit would be allowed for each katha of land. In the revised Building Construction Rules, this provision was dropped too. Now, with absolutely no limits on the density levels, the physical environment of the city is continuously worsening, being at the mercy of unscrupulous individuals and real estate developers. The argument put forward by landowners is that they are not committing any crime by building as per government law. And this is exactly the

point from where government should take cue. Moral arguments are not adequate to restrict individuals or real estate developers from taking decisions that are harmful for the city in the long run. Laws that protect the environment have to be enacted and violators should be penalised accordingly.

A win-win situation

For someone who measures the value of land in terms of the square feet only, open to sky spaces mean wasted spaces and wasted money. Leaving out one-third of the land that is worth lakhs may incur loss for some of us. But the law, once established, will bring down the land prices to realistic levels once again. Reduced built area and a strong FAR will also eventually ensure that the pressure on the existing services remains restricted to a certain extent.

As an immediate step, the recommendation of the 1993 National Building Code regarding 33% open to sky space should be incorporated in the Building Construction Rules. It has to be understood that the vacant space is for the collective benefit of all the dwellers of the city. The green spaces that will be created, the natural light and airflow that will be generated shall benefit all the buildings in a locality and the city as a whole. It is a win-win situation if only the immediate financial returns are forgotten. This city has to survive for the sake of present and future generations.

Buildings are hardly worth a penny, if they are uninhabitable.
Arch. Chowdhury is partner at Metaphor Architects.

IAB Design Awards 1998

The Institute of Architects Bangladesh has announced the IAB Design Awards 1998 recently. The biennial awards are given to recognise and honour creative excellence of architects of Bangladesh. The awards are given in four different categories of Single Family House, Multi Family Housing, Institutional Projects and Industrial/Commercial/Other Projects. This year, no project has been awarded in the Single Family House category for lack of quality entries. For 1998, the Jury of Assessors was Archt. Muzharul Islam, Archt. Bashirul Haq, Archt. Rabiul Husain, Archt. Shamsul Wares and Archt. Haroon-ur-Rashid.

The following projects have been awarded the IAB Design Award for 1998.

Category: Multi Family Housing
Project: Ruparup, 20-unit apartment complex at Gulshan, Dhaka.

Architects: Archt. Mustapha Khalid, Archt. Mohammad Foyezullah, Archt. Shahzia Islam of Vistaara Architects Ltd. (devista@bdmail.net)
Jury Citation: The housing complex based on a group of four units per floor has achieved a strong formal character by the careful interplay of spacious corner balconies. The balconies also demonstrate a possible interpretation and expression of urban dwelling character appropriate for our tropical hot-humid climate.



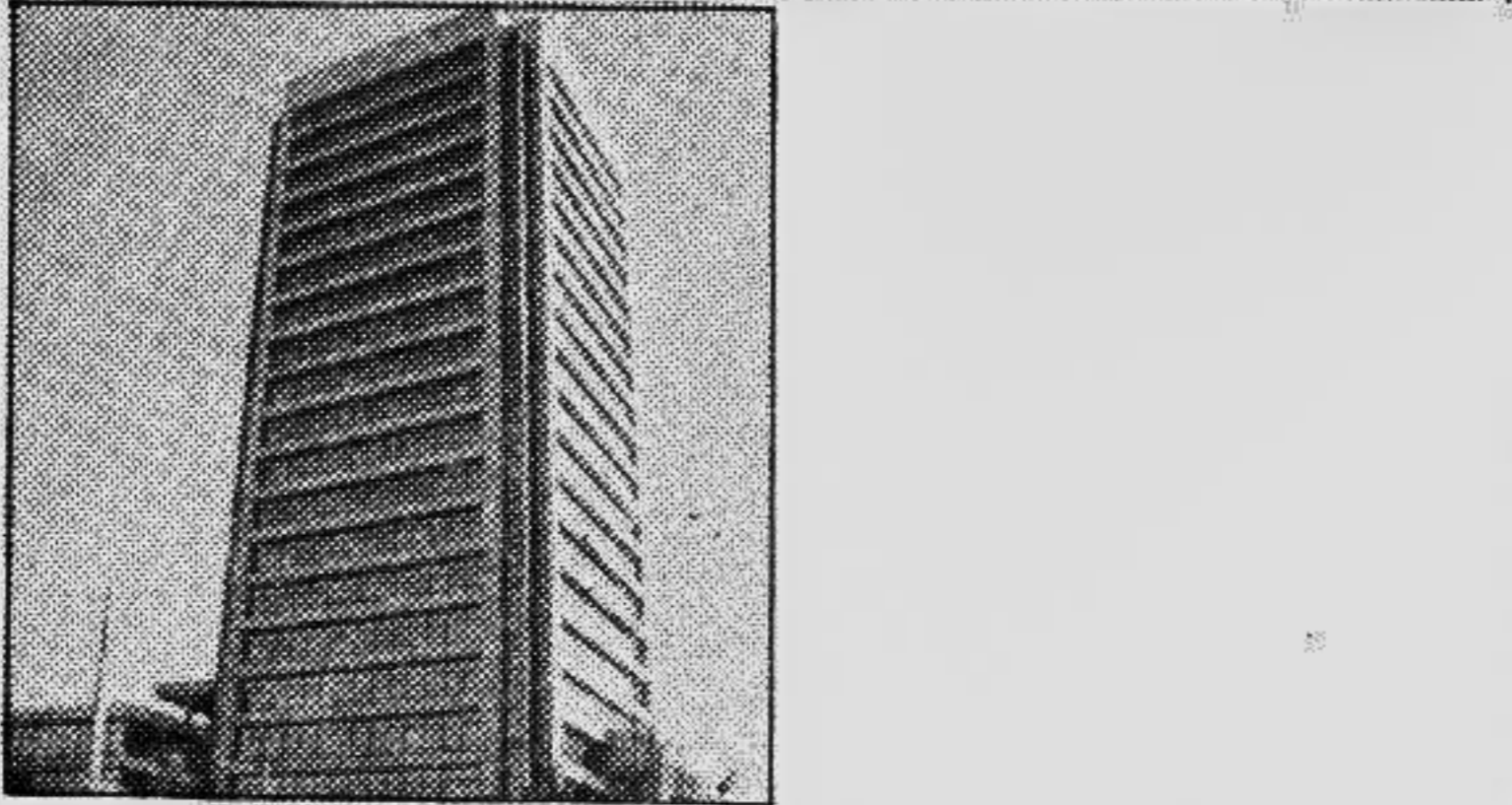
Category: Institutional Project
Project: Jahannara Imam Women's Hostel, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka.

Architect: Archt. Faisal Mahbub of Design Innovations Group (die@ctechco.net)
Jury Citation: This four storeyed Women's Hostel based on two interlocking square courts, primarily to achieve privacy and security, has strong consistency with the original master plan and with the basic character of the campus. The building complex with series of exposed brick walls on the exterior, created to protect the interior spaces from the sun and to allow air movement, has a strong visual character. The interplay of the interior circulation spaces, on the other hand, has effectively reduced the rigidity of imposed geometry.



Category: Industrial/Commercial/Other
Project: BRAC Centre 21-storey office building at 75, Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka.

Architects: Archt. Mazharul Quader, Archt. Mohammad Shamsul Haque of Index Architects (index@bdmail.net)
Jury Citation: The BRAC Centre has been developed on two planes. The lower blocks of different shapes and sizes up to fourth floor height, are intelligently grouped to create intimate scale at the entry/street level and are carefully adjusted with the irregular shape of the site. Whereas the 21-storey main tower, based on a square plan, has achieved simplicity and elegance and has created an inspiring civic scale. The proportions, corner details and the fair face concrete finish are of excellent standards.



Source: Institute of Architects Bangladesh (iab@letter-box.com)

Young Architects Speak Out

First years are hard years. For the young professionals, problems come in many ways. To find out, YEP Talk approached some Dhaka-based young architects with the following question—
"What is the most serious problem that you are facing in your practice?"
Here are their replies...



Asrar Ahmed Nagarkanti
I would rate interference and impositions on the design from client's end as the number one problem. An architect, after solving the functional requirements, may try to work with a particular philosophy in his designs. Starting from the approach to problem solving and up to the choice of materials, the continuation of a particular philosophy or theme is very precious for a successful architect. However, it is extremely difficult to communicate at this level with the client. So at a higher plane, the finer aspects, the details and the richness of a design suffer.

different from the anticipated one. Our practice has suffered because of this. I think an all-encompassing licencing act is the need of the hour.



Naushad E Haq
I am finding it extremely difficult to reconcile the conflict between architecture (in terms of business) and architecture as a form of art. So often in our practice one has to face the moment of truth and has to choose between two. I guess our society, generally speaking, have not developed appreciation of architecture as a form of art. The act of building is so often limited to its literary meanings concerned with land, materials, costs and monetary returns. Just look at our city, and one will agree that it has little to offer for someone who wants to look deeper.

ically ensures the growth of arts, thereby ensuring that the operators in the different fields of arts also maintain their own standards.

Manun ur Rashid
Dept. of Architecture, BUET
Everyday I encounter people who still confuse architects with engineers.

It takes a lot of explaining to clarify the distinctions between these two different professions and about the exact role that an architect play as the leader in a multi-disciplinary design team. When a client expects the architect to play the role of an engineer and vice versa, it is bad news for both the professions.

Riad Rouf
Rachona Consultants
The financial uncertainty is the most serious problem that I have to face all the time. Recovering the fee from the client is the hardest task of all. I guess because of this uncertainty, many architects have shifted from their role as design consultants and turned themselves to real estate developers, contractors and traders. Our clients expect professional services from our end, but are seldom professional in their own behavior. If you have failed to recover the fee in a project where you have worked very sincerely, you sure to go to experience a lack of motivation in the future projects.



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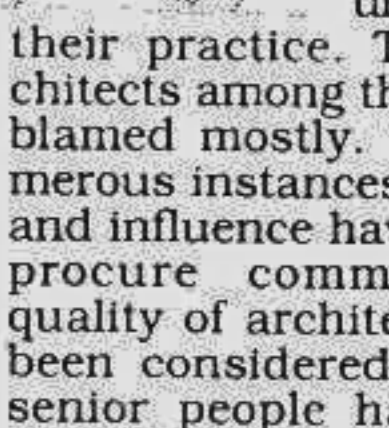
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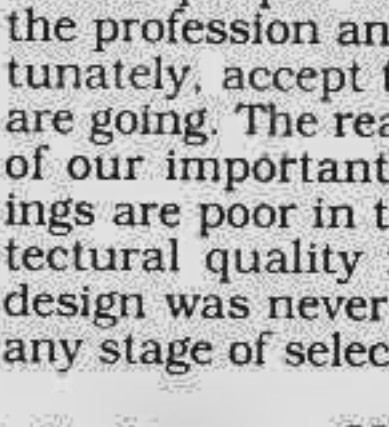
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Mark Rana Rozario
Metaphor Architects
The number one problem in our profession is the presence of architects who are unethical in their practice. The senior architects among this lot are to be blamed mostly. There are numerous instances where money and influence have been able to procure commissions, and quality of architecture has not been considered at all. These senior people have corrupted the profession and, more unfortunately, accept the way things are going. The reason why most of our important public buildings are poor in terms of architectural quality is simply that design was never the criteria in any stage of selection.



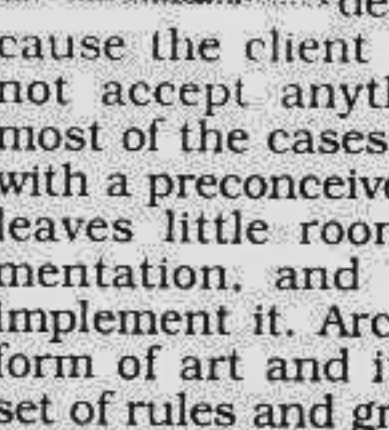
Marina Tabassum
Urbana
The most serious problem in the practice is the fact that I have to make compromises in designs, just because the client simply would not accept anything new. In most of the cases, clients come with a preconceived idea, which leaves little room for experimentation. Architecture is a form of art and it has its own set of rules and grammars. Very often, this cannot be communicated to the clients and problems start because the architect and the client are not thinking in the same lines. Practicing architecture is also a commitment, and I feel very disturbed that one has to compromise with it.



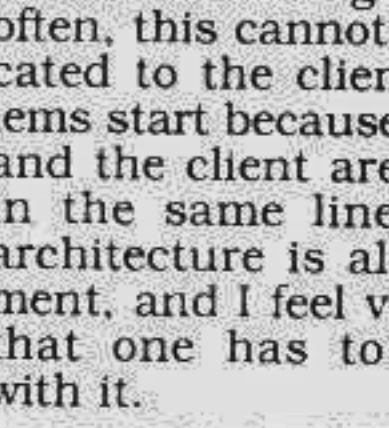
Ehsan Khan
Vitti Sthapati Brinda Ltd.
The most serious problem in the practice according to me is one that is manifested in two ways.



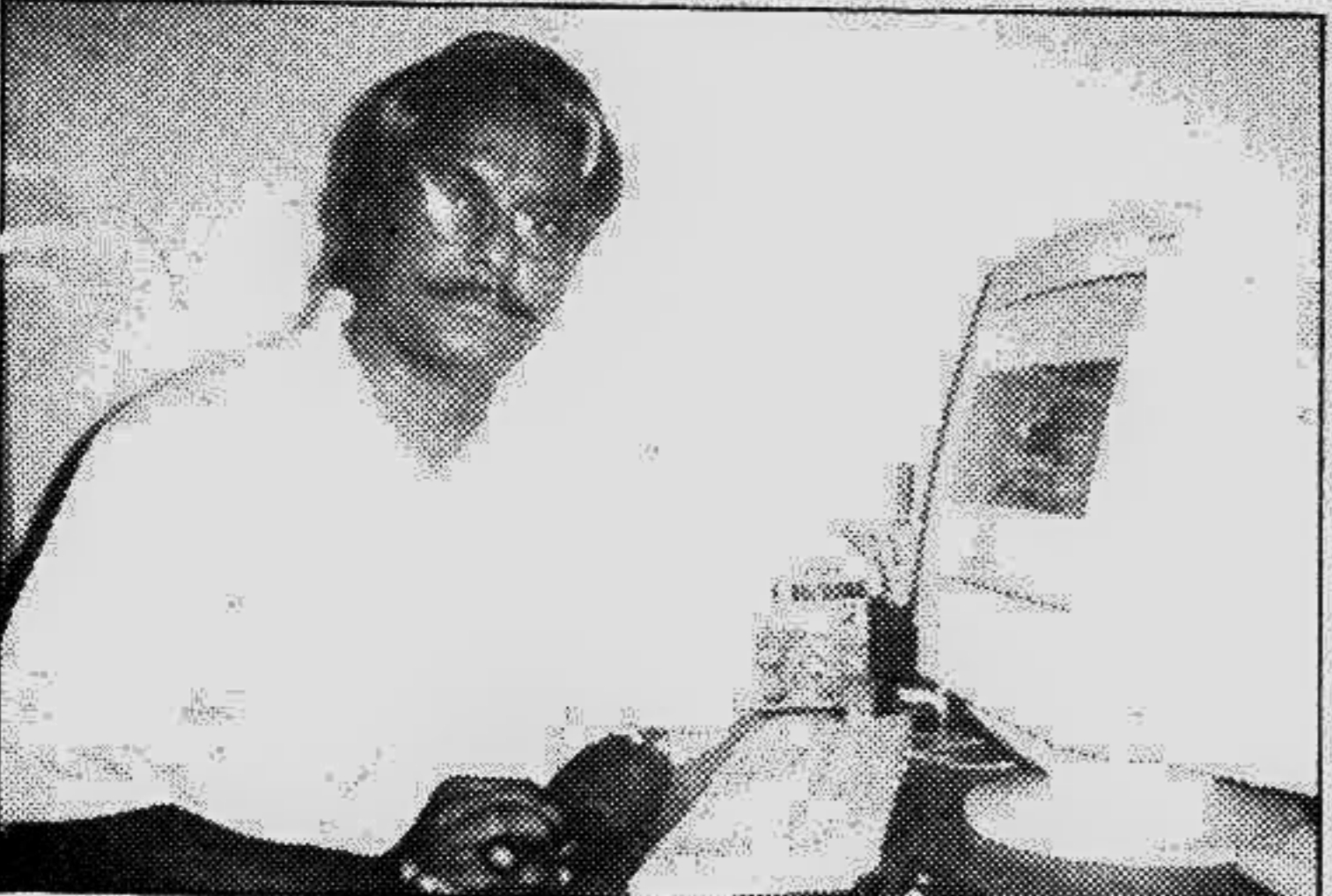
Bikash Saud
Sthapatik
The absence of a licencing act seems to be the most serious problem in our practice today. Society, environment and the profession of architecture equally need a standard code of conduct for architects enacted by law. In this regard, I would like to mention the present trend of setting up independent practice immediately after graduating. We ourselves have done this, but in retrospect, I realise that it was not a proper thing to do. There are exceptions, but realistically, most of us need a couple of years of professional training before setting up own practices. Many of us have started practicing right after coming out of the schools, quite unprepared, and have faced and found the real world to be very



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Firstly, I think we have not been properly trained by the schools to become professional architects of class. Secondly, our society is also not ready to accept or acknowledge the services of professionals. Which means that society itself needs training to foster the growth of a healthy practice. This is a much harder task than the first one. A cultured, educated, rational society automat-



Meet the Young Architect

YEP Talk interviews award winning architect **Mustapha Khalid** of Vistaara Architects. Khalid and his colleagues recently won the IAB Design Award 1998 for their design of Ruparup apartments at Gulshan, Dhaka. Archt. **Mahmudul Anwar Riyad** talks to Khalid about his practice and philosophy.

YEP: Your career spanning over a decade was never on a single track. Was it a deliberate search or was it out of any frustration?

Mustapha Khalid: Probably it was a bit of both. But my search was always limited within the world of architecture. In the first few years before joining Prosthapona, a relatively larger and more established firm, I was a bit frustrated and bored by all my unimplemented and partially implemented works. With Prosthapona, I took part in and won some major design competitions and the projects I designed were being built quickly.

YEP: If you can go back ten years, would you start your practice differently?

MK: Not really. I always wanted to live in a creative world and work independently. But given a chance, at the beginning of my career, I would like to work under a good architect, for example architect Shamsul Wares.

YEP: At Vistaara you usually work in a team of two or three designers. How do you deal with the creative ego and what in your opinion makes a creative partnership click?

MK: I would like to compare such a partnership with an affair followed by a marriage. This affair probably takes care of the 'ego'. In our case, we formed the partnership after working for over four years. Over these years we have developed a sort of common language which is very important.

YEP: Talent, Hard work, Management Skills, Connections—how do you react to these four words as prerequisites for the success of an architectural design firm?

MK: I think Hard work and professionalism is the most important criteria. Then comes Talent. I never had important connections when I started. In some occasion, for example for government jobs, Connections can play a role. You can always keep Management out of the design team, so even though it is very important, it is not an essential part.

YEP: How did the architectural schooling prepare you for the

profession?
MK: Days in school certainly show creative talent, if no professional commitment.

I grew up in an artistic family environment and I myself was an artist before going to architecture school. But for me, as well as for others in general, school definitely helps to develop the knack towards the creative world of art and architecture. About architectural schools in our country, I must say that they should be more serious about the philosophical input of design. At least twenty per cent of our students should be able to develop strong philosophical basis about their work. We also seriously need our design teachers to be involved in good practice.

YEP: How do you educate yourself these days?
MK: Well, seventy per cent of my work is intuitive, for the rest I depend on books and case studies. These days I do care a lot about technical knowledge.

YEP: How do you evaluate your experiences as a teacher?
MK: Students always enjoy creative freedom in academic design and can come up with new experimental proposals. This was inspiring for me. I always tried to enrich myself by experiencing the tension between their imagination and my real world experience.

YEP: How do you evaluate our social environment in fostering the growth of a good architect?
MK: By definition, architecture is the most interactive art. It is in fact intertwined with almost every facet of the society—

with its people, tradition, culture, economy & lifestyle. This interactivity is a wonderful aspect, only if it is not taken over by interference. For example, someone who sells cars in a show room, does not really have any scope to interfere in an automobile designer's work. Our work is sometimes very much hampered by the interference of the people operating between the designer and the end users. Such middlemen, for example the real estate developers, are primarily profit motivated, so their interference is not at all positive. But then, I am certainly not talking against the interaction.

YEP: Do you agree that client is a big impediment to good architecture?

MK: I don't think client is a big impediment. Isn't it true that without clients there will hardly be any architecture? For me communication and professionalism is very important in this respect. My work today is 100% computer based and extensively work on 3D geometric models from the beginning, which helps a lot in terms of communication between the designer and the client.

YEP: Do you face any problem being young?

MK: I am very hard working, I am very keen to update myself and we operate through a very professional teamwork. I think our clients understand that well. I really have no problem in this respect.

YEP: What do you think are the most positive/negative aspects of practice in our country?
MK: We are almost at a zero level, so we still have the scope of doing a lot and that to me, is a very positive side. I don't really see any major negative side of the practice today. But I must say that the government agencies responsible for the rules and bylaws are not sensitive enough. For example, we still do not have a Bulk Area Ratio or FAR for Dhaka city, which is a must for better architecture and overall urban environment.

YEP: If you are given a chance to alter or introduce one RAJUK law, what would it be and why?
MK: I would definitely introduce a strong Bulk Area Ratio (BAR) or Floor Area Ratio (FAR) to restrict the rapid loss of open spaces in the city. It will certainly give us scope to enhance visual and sculptural quality of architecture. In fact, it does not make any sense to live in a tropical climate without taking the advantage of having trees around you. We are getting too good at cutting trees. An effective FAR can leave sufficient space for greenery, while offering the same amount of built area. I just do not see why we cannot have such a law.

YEP: Globally real estate development is not known as a generator of good architecture, but unfortunately or unfortunately architectural practice in Dhaka depends on real estate to a great extent. What do you think about its prospect?
MK: Real estate certainly has its limitations, but in our context it is giving us some scope. In terms of architectural excellence, public buildings definitely have greater potentials. I am not involved in government projects now, and in present condition we are not looking forward to it either. I think government authorities should arrange fair competitions for all the land mark projects. Over the years we have seen that young architects have clearly dominated all the major competitions, where they were allowed, so the experience based criteria for prequalification can be questioned. For prestigious national projects, we can also have international competitions, which is a standard practice all over the world.

YEP: Recently large-scale architectural projects are being initiated in Dhaka. The number of foreign consultants has also increased; in fact, you are also working with a foreign technical team. Does it anyhow indicate our incompetence or are you ready to see it as an invasion of some sort?
MK: Socio-cultural considerations are very important in architecture. It is certainly not all about technology, so I do not

see it as a potential threat to our community. I agree that we have deficiency in technical field, but an open market may introduce a positive competition where we will be learning as well. We must also remember that foreign architects had done some excellent work in our country and we have learned a lot from them.

YEP: Do you have any comment on the architect-engineer conflict as far as their teamwork is concerned?
MK: If we are talking about structural engineers who update themselves with new technology, who are not afraid of taking challenge and whom I can call structural designers, then I must say we are not supposed to have conflicts. I am rather concerned about our deficiencies in electro-mechanical engineering.

YEP: A good architecture always goes beyond its functional requirements. What exactly motivates you to take your work beyond the client's requirement?
MK: After a certain level, I work only for my own satisfaction. Fee is important; it gives some inspiration probably, but only up to a certain level. After that it is a fight within myself. Once the contract has been signed, I do not like to spend time thinking about the fees. Our effort has no relationship with the amount of the fee. I always consider that I am giving a permanent object to the city, which will last longer than both the client and the designer.

YEP: Do you agree that our architectural firms are overloaded and undermanned?
MK: Almost in every case we are not even 50% equipped. We are over loaded as well. Fee is of great importance here. It is not only that the fee is inadequate but also it is also not guaranteed. If some protection was there for consultant's fee, we could take lesser projects and concentrate more.

YEP: How would you like to rate our current architectural practice?
MK: Working environment is developing, but mostly in private sector. Government laws should be improved. In this respect, we should take lessons from our immediate neighboring countries.

YEP: Who are your favourite architects?
MK: In Bangladesh, both as an architect and as a teacher, I must say Shamsul Wares is my idol. In fact, he is only teacher at BUET who has left a lasting impression on many others and me. Among the younger practitioners, I like Architect Uttam Shaha's work a lot. In international context, Japanese Architect Tadao Ando is my favourite. Among the masters, Louis Kahn and Le Corbusier.

YEP: Would you like to say a few words about the core of your design philosophy?
MK: I'm always intrigued by the power of excellent spaces in provoking human emotions. In my designs, I always try to enhance the quality of spatial experience. Sculptural quality of a building is also very important, but I am not at all interested in cosmetic work on the surface. I still believe in the words of Keats—Truth is beauty, Beauty is truth.

YEP: Thank you for your time.