



# DHAKA'S DISAPPEARING SKYLINE

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Whatever misgivings one may have about the politics and the current status of our country, there can be no doubt that Dhaka and indeed Bangladesh as a whole is on a road to rapid development. Not only are we treading the path of progress, but we are rather hurtling through it at breakneck speeds. You may say that in some ways we remain quite rigid, but this is mostly as a result of our culture. Some things are embedded into the very soul of the people and such things indubitably take far longer to change. Nevertheless, in terms of technology and infrastructure, we are not really slacking. The roads are gradually getting better and the buildings much, much taller.

While development is a certainly a plus point, there is also a growing sense of melancholy for those of us that knew the city as it used to be. I don't mean back in the age of the ancients, there is no need to go back that far; ever since the first of our civilization settled on the banks of the Padma, Meghna and Jamuna River deltas, there has been a stark contrast between the sapling cities and the wild orchids travelled by the nomads, and these differences only continue to grow. Central to this ever expanding dichotomy between the rural and the urban, the beating heart of city life is, of course, people.

It is a fact that we take for granted these days, especially in Bangladesh, that our population is growing larger and



PHOTOS: DARSHAN CHAKMA

larger. As our people grow in number and an increasing number of people migrate to major cities, problems of space and housing inevitably arise. There is no choice but to build upwards, to use the meagre space that we have at greatest efficiency by insuring that people can literally live on top of one another. While this increasing focus on high-rise apartment complexes is a practical necessity, it makes one nostalgic for a time not even a decade past, when apartments were beginning to pop up, yet the majority of people resided in family-owned houses.

It is at the point now where this defin-

itive aspect of our culture has reduced into the minority, and is rapidly reducing further still. Gone are the days when you could walk through the streets of Gulshan with uninterrupted rays of sunshine. Most backyard gardens exist no longer, a swing set reduced to a mere luxury let alone a family mango tree. Of course children prefer video games these days; you no longer have the convenience of just walking outside to run, play and climb. Either you test your luck on the roads or you have the added nuisance of tracking down a park for the young ones.

However, these are simply what we are

losing on the surface. These days most of us are far too busy to look upwards even if we are unafraid to build in that same direction. The evidence is even clearer should you get up on one of the shorter apartments no doubt finished a little earlier than the giants currently under construction. Very recently, this 'short apartment building' would have been the tallest in the neighbourhood. Just a few years in the past, and one would have enjoyed a view from the top reaching out to the very horizon. You could've marvelled at the sprawling city before you, and checked the traffic down below before risking a commute. Alas, all-encompassing, expansive views such as this are disappearing. One by one, I have seen apartments rise up above, and each take a bite out of the clear blue sky. The horizon is now but a memory.

Development may be a necessity, however one rarely thinks of the price that we are paying for it beyond that of money. Among these costs, one of the most intangible and priceless is the sky, where what was once entirely blue with patches of white clouds, is now a domineering concrete grey.

*Nabban Tahsin Haque is a daring explorer brave enough to explore the sick and twisted world of his own imagination. He is also the secret leader of the officially unofficial Manchester United Fan Club, and enjoys the carnage of computer to computer combat. You can reach him at [nabban.haque@gmail.com](mailto:nabban.haque@gmail.com), but you could probably make better use of your time.*

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