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Published by the Editor from  
Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon  
Industrial Area, Dhaka on behalf  
of Mediaworld Ltd., 52 Motijheel  
C.A., Dhaka-1000.



PHOTO: AFTAB UZZAMAN

"Because there's nothing more beautiful than the way the ocean refuses to stop kissing the shoreline, no matter how many times it's sent away." — Sarah Kay, Poet

**SNAPSHOT**

**PRECAUTION**

# AN EARTHQUAKE: DHAKA CITY ON THE TIME-BOMB!

ASHRAF AN NOOR

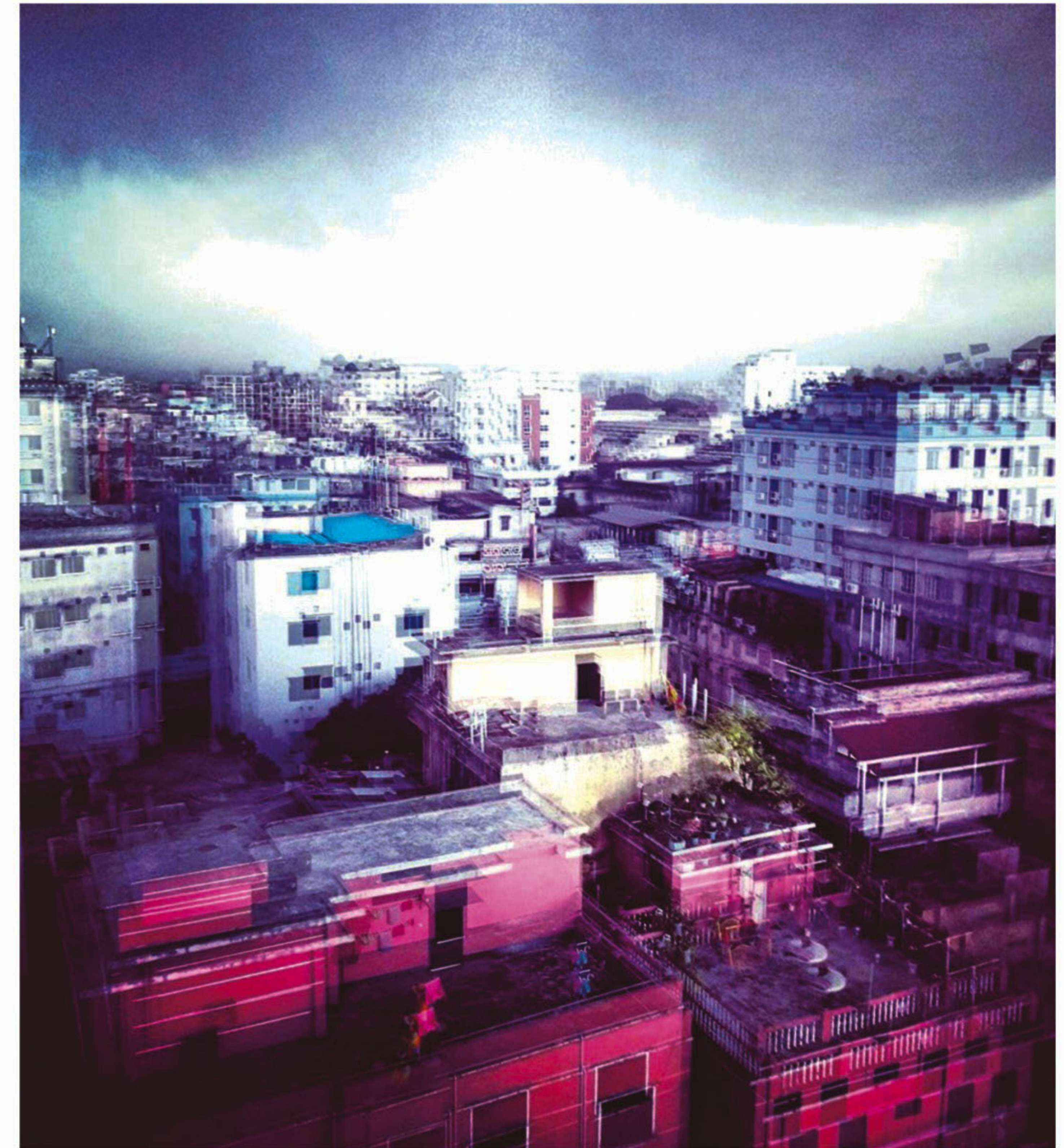
IMAGE: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

Unlike a storm, a flood or a famine, an earthquake never signals or even hints at its arrival. It can happen at any time with an estimated 500,000 earthquakes shaking the Earth to its very foundations each year. Unfortunately for us, Dhaka happens to be one of the most risky zones of Bangladesh when it comes to this calamity. Beneath the hustle and bustle of our very own mega-polis, the plates have begun to shift, building up decades of tension, awaiting release. The impact of the foretold Earthquake is predicted to be worse than the bombing of Hiroshima. It is estimated that a 7.5 magnitude earthquake would kill about 130,000 people and level 72,000 buildings, according to a Bangladesh's government report.

Given that Dhaka is a little far, nearly 5 to 500 km, from the Myanmar micro-plate, even if a 7 magnitude earthquake hits Assam, India, then Dhaka will teeter on the possibility of being ruined, according to a seismologist. Approximately 20 tremors happened last year and among them 18 hit magnitudes of over four. Experts fear they may just have been warnings for Dhaka.

The most destructive quake in recorded history was the 1556 Shaanxi earthquake in China where more than 830,000 people died. Moreover, the 7.5 earthquake near Beijing in 1976 killed 240,000 but the magnitude of 7.0 in Haiti in 2010 led to the loss of lives of 316,000. Then there was the strong earthquake of 8.6 magnitudes which occurred in Assam on August 15 in 1950, killing 1,526 people preceded by another 8.1 magnitude quake which hit Assam on June 12 in 1897 killing 1,500 people. The comparatively lower level of casualties was because of the low density of the population and the few concrete structures present at the time. Given this context, we can observe from the estimate above, that Bangladesh is in grave danger.

Dhaka is a megacity boasting one of the highest population densities in the world. This city lies in the moderate risk zone due to some other factors such as the



high population density, unplanned urbanisation, and lack of open spaces making the capital all the more vulnerable. Because of this, most of the people in this city perceive that Dhaka is sitting on a rapidly ticking time-bomb.

To put things further into context, an understanding of the strength of the possible earthquake needs to be developed. In August of 1945, The United States of America cast down a ruinous atomic bomb on Nagasaki in Japan. The result was a loss of 40,000 lives. The power of 'Fatman', as the bomb was known, was 20,000 TNT (Tri Nitro Toluene). If 5 thousand such bombs were to blow up together, it will be equivalent of ten core ton TNT. It now seems that thousands of atomic bombs lie beneath this city. It has now become a natural curse for us. We are largely afraid that, if more powerful tremors

begin to hit our city, then it must lose its habitability overtime. We have a brutal history of collapsing buildings owing to lax building codes. This does not bode well for us. Our response teams are also ill-equipped, as demonstrated by the fall of Rana Plaza and the 21 day rescue effort it took.

Now we are worried that if Dhaka is flattened by a terrible quake then how much time will be taken to defend or even conduct the rescue operations. This is the time for us to make important decisions and formulate policies keeping such disasters in mind. There are thousands of powerful ticking time bombs underneath our beautiful city. We can no longer close our eyes and ears and continue to ignore this matter.

*The writer is a student of University of Dhaka, and a policy maker at Social awareness forum of Bangladesh (SAF).*

## MAILBOX

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### Let's Not Forget Her Cry

How long do we have to wait for justice for Tonu? Tonu is our sister, we are Tonu's brothers. We have been demanding justice for Tonu for a long time, but we have gotten nothing. Autopsy after autopsy has been performed, but the result was zero. Even Tonu's body was exhumed to perform another autopsy due to doctor's negligence in the first one. For a deceased person and the person's loved ones, such kind of act is painful. Despite that, we could at least get some consolation through justice. As there is no progress in the investigation, it seems that we, Bangladeshis, are going to forget Tonu and her helpless family's heart wrenching cry. I totally agree with the writer that if we cannot ensure justice for Tonu, it would be a historic shame for our entire nation.

Enam Hasan  
Madaniganar, Narayanganj

### Withdraw Tax on Meditation

In the newly placed budget in the parliament for the Fiscal year 2016-17, the government has proposed tax on meditation courses which is not only illogical but also an immoral decision. meditation is a form of self development, and it is treated as an alternative treatment technique in the western world. By learning meditation,

techniques, people can get rid of 70 percent psychosomatic diseases. The Government's guidelines for hypertension titled "National guidelines for management of hypertension in Bangladesh" page 18 encourages people to do meditation to curb hypertension. Moreover, the government has to spend less on healthcare facilities if people are encouraged to learn meditation techniques. In the western world people who do practice meditation,

yoga and relaxation techniques enjoy special concessions in many areas, whereas, in our country, the government intends to impose tax on meditation! We hope that the government will realise the importance of meditation and withdraw imposition of tax on meditation so that people get peace physically, mentally and spiritually with affordable costs.

Mohammad Zanaed Emran  
Banasree, Rampura, Dhaka

### The Good Old Days of Printing

Reading the article titled "The Good Old Days of Printing" published in the *Star Weekend* on July 1, 2016, I came to know of the process of printing in the old days. Simultaneously, I was astonished to think about how Nurjahan Begum, being a woman, managed to publish the Begum Magazine at that time. How difficult a task it must have been! I salute her for her courage, tolerance and patience. I would like to thank Nilima Jahan for writing about the topic which gave us a chance to look back at the past and recall the efforts of our predecessors in the field of printing.

Fareed Uddeen  
Keraniganj, Dhaka



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the *Star Weekend*.



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**Earthquakes Don't Kill People.  
Buildings Do! Build Safe!**

