

Sustainable construction takes centre stage

KHONDOKER MD SHOYEB

SUSTAINABLE construction aims to meet present day needs for housing, working environments and infrastructure without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs in times to come.

It incorporates elements of economic efficiency, environmental performance, and social responsibility. It has the greatest impact when architectural quality, technical innovation and transferability are included.

This is how the sustainable construction was defined at the Regional LafargeHolcim Awards 2017 for Asia Pacific.

LafargeHolcim Foundation for Sustainable Construction, an independent legal entity supported by LafargeHolcim, organised the awards ceremony at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on November 23.

The fifth edition of the competition for architects, engineers, urban planners and developers attracted 5,085 entries from authors in 121 countries, said Donald Bates, head of the LafargeHolcim Awards Jury for Asia Pacific, at the awards night.

The foundation okayed 1,836 entries after the pre-screening phase, he said.

This year, the foundation honoured three projects with the main award and four projects in each region with acknowledgement prizes and another four with Next Generation prizes.

The International LafargeHolcim Awards is the world's most significant competition in sustainable design, said Edward Schwarz, general manager of LafargeHolcim Foundation for Sustainable Construction.

The foundation, a non-profit organisation, was initiated in 2003 mainly to promote sustainability in construction, Schwarz said.

"Upfront, a set of five target issues for sustainable construction were developed, to make it easier to measure what we are doing in this foundation and to be able to live up to certain standards with regard to innovation, environmental performance, social performance, economic compatibility and also architectural proficiency," he said.

The foundation carries out two main activities. On one hand are the academic symposiums taking place once every three years, dedicated to a specific topic relevant to sustainable construction, he said.

"And on the other hand, the LafargeHolcim awards competition, a series of five regional and global competitions for projects and visions in sustainable construction."

The broad scope of entries in the competition makes it difficult to anticipate much



LAFARGEHOLCIM FOUNDATION

From left, Wolfgang Kessling, a climate engineer from Germany, Jalal Ahmad, principal architect of JA Architects from Bangladesh, Sim Choon Heok and Richard Hassell, architects from WOHA in Singapore—the four members of a team that won the bronze award for Brac University campus project—pose with the gold and silver winners of the Regional LafargeHolcim Awards 2017 for Asia Pacific, held in Kuala Lumpur on November 23.

beyond an exciting array of projects responding to the challenges of sustainability in various local contexts, Schwarz said.

Through its activities, the LafargeHolcim Foundation has developed a close-knit global network of academic and professional experts and acts as an information hub connecting professions, geographies and generations.

To pursue its goals, the foundation collaborates closely with some of the most renowned technical universities worldwide,

with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH Zurich/EPFL Lausanne), Switzerland, as the seat of the academic committee of the foundation.

Projects and visionary concepts in the fields of architecture, building, civil engineering, landscape and urban design, materials, products, and construction technologies that live up to the five "target issues" for sustainable construction are eligible for entry, Schwarz said.



Edward Schwarz

A total of \$2 million in prize money is awarded in each three-year cycle to leading projects of professionals as well as bold ideas from the next generation, he said.

The competition is handled in two stages. In the regional phase, the best projects and concepts are sought in the five world regions: Europe, North America, Latin America, Middle East Africa and the Asia Pacific.

The juries evaluate the projects based on the five "target issues" for sustainable construction set forth by the LafargeHolcim Foundation and its affiliated universities.

In the global phase, the 15 projects that receive the Gold, Silver or Bronze Awards in the regions automatically qualify for the Global Awards.

In the main awards category of the LafargeHolcim Awards 2017 Asia Pacific, a home for marginalised children at Thane in India won the Gold Award.

A home for 30 children, this building replaces their existing facility which tends to flood and lacks ventilation.

The jury was taken with the project's "Alice in Wonderland"-like approach which re-envisions a small urban building through the eyes of children.

The concept of an impressive micro library to be established at Bandung in Indonesia achieved the Silver Award.

Set within a park, the micro library aims to raise literacy by offering attractive spaces for reading. In the words of the authors, "Being situated within a park, having an all-side open pavilion where one can enter from any direction is contextual and relevant."

The floating campus project of Brac University, to be established in Dhaka of Bangladesh, bagged the Bronze Award.

The authors aim to introduce buildings and open space on remediated swampland in Dhaka. They designed a university building that floats on a pond. The jury believes the campus will set a net benchmark for sustainability in Asia.

The most interesting thing is that more than half of all entries were submitted by participants younger than 30 years of age, said Schwarz.

The Asia Pacific competition region is particularly diverse in terms of cultures, countries, and climates, said Marc Angelil, head of



Marc Angelil

LAFARGEHOLCIM AWARDS Recognition for project on Brac University campus

KHONDOKER MD SHOYEB

LA FARGEHOLCIM Foundation for Sustainable

Construction has recently awarded a project on the new 'floating' campus of Brac University in Bangladesh with the Regional LafargeHolcim Awards 2017 for Asia Pacific.

The project was highly appreciated by architects, landscape designers, engineers, urban planners and developers as it won the Bronze Award at the gala event held at Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia on November 23. The university project, located on an urban lake at Merul Badda, is an international effort.

Jalal Ahmad, a Bangladeshi architect and principal architect of JA Architects Ltd, is a part of the team of multinational architects and engineers who are working on the project that started in July 2016.

Richard Hassell and Sim Choon Heok, architects from WOHA in Singapore, and Wolfgang Kessling, climate engineer of Transsolar Energietechnik GmbH of Germany, are the other members of the team.

Speaking about the project, Hassell said something that looks attractive in picture is the water body, but it was actually a kind of black toxic mud.

The team soon realised that the biggest challenge would be how to transform the area into a hassle-free lively university campus.

"We had to fit in a lot of things in the project – a social space, recreational space, nature and an energy generating space. So, there were a lot of programmes to accommodate," Hassell said, adding that the project will set a new benchmark for sustainability in Asia.

Ahmad said: "We have taken inspiration from the Sundarbans, which have separate ecosystems above and below tidal level."

The "club sandwich" approach was adopted to create two distinct programmatic strata by floating the academia



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The design of the Brac University campus project.

above the lake and revealing a campus park below to reflect the synergistic co-existence between mankind and mangrove, according to Ahmad.

All organic waste produced on the campus is composted for maintenance of the landscape. The building uses adaptive thermal comfort using seven modes of cooling/ventilation, fine-tuning the building to the local climate.

The campus is designed to breathe, with cross ventilation and indirect natural day-light making tropical learning spaces without air-conditioning possible.

Using vegetation as a key component of the building's material palette, landscaping is applied both vertically and horizontally throughout its height, Ahmad said.

The design's tactile architectural expression of living green walls upon a pedestal of terracotta brick recalls the ancient Paharpur transposed into a forward-looking, innovative and sustainable 21st century tropical campus, he said.

Upto 44 percent of open spaces are provided as informal break-out areas.

The building section is designed to catch the breezes and direct them to the gathering spaces while providing shelter from the sun and rain, Ahmad said.

"We hope to complete the project by the middle of 2020."

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France sues Amazon over marketplace rules

AFP, Paris

The French finance ministry said Monday it has brought a court case against Amazon for abuse of its dominant position on marketplace, the retail giant's third-party vendor platform.

The ministry said there is "a significant imbalance" in business relations between Amazon and vendors selling products on its platform, saying it was seeking a fine against Amazon of around 10 million euros (\$11.8 million).

The case follows a two-year investigation into third-party vendor platforms, including Amazon's, the ministry said, and will be heard by the Paris commercial court.

"We found that there is a significant imbalance in the clauses that Amazon forces on the companies that sell on its marketplace, a practice that goes against business law," Loic Tanguy, cabinet chief at the ministry's competition, consumer and anti-fraud unit, told AFP.

The unit found several clauses it believes to be illegal in agreements with third-party vendors on Amazon's French marketplace platform which is consulted by some 3.6 million people daily.

According to Le Parisien daily, which first reported the case, Amazon has the power to modify contracts at a moment's notice, demand shorter delivery times or block deliveries while demanding additional corporate information from vendors.

Other platforms, including Cdiscount and Rue du Commerce, had already agreed to bring their rules into line with the ministry's requirements, Tanguy said.

Japan exports boom

REUTERS, Tokyo

JAPANESE exports accelerated sharply in November, yet again pointing to growing momentum in the world's third-biggest economy. There was just one catch: inflation remained stubbornly low and well off the central bank's 2 percent target.

The combination of steady growth and benign consumer prices mean the Bank of Japan will lag other major central banks in exiting crisis-era monetary stimulus, with analysts widely expecting BOJ Governor Haruhiko Kuroda to keep the liquidity tap wide open at a meeting later this week.

"Inflation expectation is in a gradual recovery trend, but a gap between firm economic indicators and weak price indexes remains wide open," said Yuichiro Nagai, economist at Barclays Securities.

Indeed, a BOJ survey on Monday showed companies' inflation expectations heightened only a touch in December from three months ago, despite a tight labour market and business confidence at over a decade high.

The persistently low inflation - with core prices running at an annual pace of 0.8 percent - was also hard to square off with the robust performance of Japan Inc., which has benefited from booming exports thanks to upbeat global demand.

Separate data from the Ministry of Finance showed exports grew 16.2

percent in the year to November, beating a 14.6 percent gain expected by economists in a Reuters poll and accelerating from the prior month's 14.0 percent increase, led by a stellar sales to China and Asia.

Economists expect brisk Asia-bound shipments of electronics and solid capital investment in advanced economies will underpin Japan's export performance in coming months.

"The global economic outlook by IMF and OECD suggests the world economy will remain resilient for the time being, which will provide favourable export conditions," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

That upbeat outlook was highlighted in the BOJ's tankan survey on business sentiment last week, which showed big manufacturers' optimism hit an 11-year high.

All of this has helped Japan's economy score its second-longest run of postwar growth. That marked a feather in the cap of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe whose 'Abenomics' stimulus policies have put the nation on the cusp of vanquishing nearly two decades of deflation.

Many economists, however, are sceptical that consumer price gains will keep up with growth in overall economic activity.

And earlier this month, Kuroda signalled the BOJ may edge away from its crisis-mode stimulus, saying

keeping it for too long could undermine regional banks' health.

"The BOJ will likely be forced into cutting its price projections once again in its quarterly outlook report in January. That will highlight a distance to an exit from the BOJ's monetary stimulus," said Barclays' Nagai.

The BOJ quarterly "tankan" survey on corporate inflation expectations survey showed companies expect consumer prices to rise 0.8 percent a year from now, slightly ahead of their projection for a 0.7 percent increase three months ago.

The marginal nudge up in expectations underscored why inflation is still well off the BOJ's target, with firms expecting consumer prices to rise an annual 1.1 percent three years from now and 1.1 percent five years ahead, unchanged from three months ago, the survey showed.

On the external front, the news continued to look up for Japan, offering hope that a much-anticipated virtual circle of private sector-led growth will boost consumption and prices.

The value of exports to China, Japan's largest trading partner, rose 25.1 percent year-on-year in November to 1.38 trillion yen (\$12.24 billion), the highest monthly amount on record, led by equipment to manufacture liquid crystal displays (LCD).



A worker rides a bicycle in a container area at a port in Tokyo.

REUTERS/FILE