

Art vs Development: Should we erase our rich architectural history?

Developing cities are an inevitability. In many ways, a necessity. There is a population influx in urban settlements in Bangladesh and residents need affordable abodes.

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During my first visit to Asia, many years ago, I landed in Shanghai, China. I was astonished by the futuristic architecture with some of the highest skyscrapers in the world. In Europe, we know of China's incredible economic growth and Shanghai is a symbol of exactly that – a polished, new, and coruscant portrayal of China's achievements.

Then, three years ago, I came to Dhaka. I saw that Bangladesh's rapidly growing economy is being manifested in the architectural transition of its capital. The former 'garden city' has become one large construction site with new apartment buildings popping up in almost every street.

These city-transitions carry the question of whether or not our historic buildings shall be preserved. From an economic viewpoint the answer is simple: there is more financial gain in replacing them with profitable (apartment) buildings. The question now becomes whether the cultural heritage outweighs the financial gain.

As an art historian, I make the point that historic architecture holds a different value



than a monetary one. Architecture teaches us about our history without us even having to pick up a history book. Built heritage, and the awareness of our origins connect us with our past, they define our identities today, and they use a language that isn't just words.

We absorb our cultural heritage by observing the facades, the narrow alleyways, monumental palaces as well as modest dwellings. We learn about past achievements as well as mistakes, and once the historical buildings are gone, that chance of learning is gone as well. Old Dhaka, for example, is still revealing its story, teaching visitors and inhabitants about the history of Dhaka and Bangladesh. It is more than the story of the country – it is about its people, and their identity.

Many of my friends have lived in Dhaka in

the 1980's, when Gulshan consisted of only two-story houses with gardens. They can recollect how different the sleepy suburb was only a few decades back. Those memories are part of their personal story, too.

Developing cities are an inevitability. In many ways, a necessity. There is a population influx in urban settlements in Bangladesh and residents need affordable abodes. Those can and should be provided, but we need to strike a balance.

Bangladesh's stock will continue to rise in the global landscape, and there will be visitors coming from abroad who will want to learn about the country's history. Hopefully architecture will play a role in showing the multifaceted past of a vibrant, modern city.

Poluck second Bangladeshi to be featured by HMV

Famous Bollywood recording company, Saregama Music (HMV) has released a reinterpreted version of "Mera Kuchh Samaan", featuring Bangladeshi recitation artist Samiul Islam Poluck and Priyangkada Banerjee.

The original song was released in 1987, for the movie "Ijaazat", which starred Naseeruddin Shah, Rekha, Anuradha Patel and Shashi Kapoor.

The melodious voice of Asha Bhosle would bring this song to life, winning the artiste a National Film Award for 'Best Singer', while Gulzar would also go on to win 'Best Lyricist'.

Talking about the song, Samiul Islam Poluck said, "This song is a lyrical masterpiece that tugs at your heartstrings. It's a perfect love letter about a painful goodbye, penned by Gulzar saab. It was a great experience to revisit these emotions with a brilliant singer like Priyangkada. I am really honoured that Saregama Music featured me on this song."

BTS Jin will begin military service from December 13

Jin, the oldest member of K-pop supergroup, BTS, will start his military service from December 13, making him the first from the boy band to enlist.

He will begin his mandatory, five-week-long, training at Yeoncheon in Gyeonggi province, after which he will be deployed to a 'front-line unit'.

The news left many fans overwhelmed and emotional, with some expressing their concern for Jin's safety.

The inevitability of mandatory military service has long hovered over BTS, triggering debates over whether they deserved an exemption – normally given to classical musicians and Olympic medallists.

In October, their agency officially announced that all of the band members would carry out their mandatory military service, beginning with Jin.

On the brighter side of things, Seoul's defence minister had mentioned in August that BTS might be allowed to continue performing in international concerts, even during military duty.



PHOTOS: STAR & COLLECTED

NEWS

PM's Japan visit

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[you about] it later."

He added Bangladesh and Japan were still working on preparing a number of agreements and MoUs to be signed during the visit.

Asked why it was postponed, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen in a separate media briefing said there are some political issues in Japan at this moment, with three of the country's ministers tendering resignation in just one month.

Besides, there have been issues of rising Covid-19 infections there in the recent times.

"So, we are observing the situation," he said.

Earlier, Japanese Prime Minister Ito Naoki said Japan wants to take the relationship with Bangladesh to a strategic level.

The two countries were also working on some documents for defence cooperation, officials said.

Major reshuffle

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office Chitralikha Naznen was posted as the DC of Rangpur.

Mostafizur Rahman was transferred from the MoPA as the DC of Mymensingh.

Besides, DCs were also appointed in Cumilla, Patuakhali, Tangail, Sunamganj, Gopalganj, Kurigram, Sirajganj, Jhalakathi, Faridpur, Khagrachhari, Bogura, Kishoreganj, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Cox's Bazar, Joypurhat and Magura.

In August, SPs in 40 districts were transferred.

Edging closer

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-- ineffectiveness of Azithromycin fell to 53 percent from 55 percent while Ciprofloxacin remained at 66 percent.

But Carbapenem -- considered a last-resort antibiotic -- is now 60 percent ineffective, up from 44 percent last year, according to the report.

Addressing yesterday's event as the chief guest, Prof Ahmedul Kabir, additional director general (administration) of the DGHS, said, "At first, physicians should be made aware of the perils of prescribing antibiotics indiscriminately."

Shahriar Alam said he briefed the Japanese state minister about the deteriorating law and order situation in Myanmar and sought greater support from Japan on Rohingya repatriation, as well as the funding gap for the humanitarian activities for the refugees.

He said Japan is a very trusted friend of Bangladesh and the relationship is growing further.

The Japanese Economic Zone in Araihaazar will be inaugurated soon, he said.

Besides, Shahriar said Shunsuke told him that they would support a new power plant of alternative fuel in Matarbari, as an earlier plan for a coal based power plant to be built there was cancelled.

Asked if he discussed anything about the recent remarks made by Japanese Ambassador Ito Naoki on the 2018 elections, Shahriar said he softly mentioned that "elections were internal matters".

Since it is customary for SPs and DCs to work in a district for around three years, the reshuffle has significance as many of the officials will play a vital role during the national election which is likely to be held in late December 2023 or early January 2024.

Contacted, former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder said the transfers were part of a regular process.

Some of those officials were promoted and had to be transferred to higher posts, he said.

Prof Nitish Debnath, team lead of the Fleming Fund Country Grant, said, "This is a crisis for all of us and we can overcome it if we work together."

At the beginning of the event, prizes were given among university and medical college students who won an AMR awareness competition.

Daniel Novak, first secretary of the Embassy of Sweden in Dhaka; Mohamed Ramzy Ismail, representative of WHO Bangladesh; and Prof Mushtuq Hussain, consultant of the IEDCR attended the event presided over by IEDCR Director Tahmina Shirin.

JP braced

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lifting of the injunction, First Joint District Judge's Court of Dhaka on November 16 said the JP chief could not take any political decision regarding the party as the injunction order was in force.

Raushan will return home after receiving treatment in Bangkok for about five months. The opposition leader travelled to the Thai capital for treatment on July 5 after attending the budget session of parliament.

Aggrieved over Quader's recent sharp criticism of the government, AL high-ups are backing Raushan to put pressure on the JP chairman, said JP insiders.

Raushan all of a sudden on August 31 convened the party's 10th national council on November 26, creating a fresh rift between the two top JP leaders.

The opposition leader, however, later postponed the event.

Pro-Raushan leaders said they will again start working for holding the party council after her return.

Sources in the JP told this newspaper that pro-Raushan faction has planned to remove Quader from the party's helm in the council and take control of the organisation.

The rift between the two factions intensified after the Jatiya Party Parliamentary Party at a meeting on September 1 decided to remove Raushan from the post of the leader of the opposition and replace her with Quader.

The JP chief is now the deputy leader of the opposition.

Differences developed between Raushan and Quader over taking control of JP when party founder HM Ershad became sick in early 2019. The rift grew following the demise of Ershad in July that year.

Ancient Roman

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over a long period of time.

Deposits on the coins also suggested they were buried for a prolonged period before being exhumed.

"Scientific analysis of these ultra-rare coins rescues the emperor Sponsian from obscurity," study lead author Paul N Pearson said in a statement.

"Our evidence suggests he ruled Roman Dacia, an isolated gold mining outpost, at a time when the empire was beset by civil wars and the borderlands were overrun by plundering invaders," Dr Pearson said.

Women paint a grim picture of workplaces

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and financial institutions, media houses and corporations between October 26 and November 14.

The interviews, conducted both online and in person, revealed some horrific realities.

Of the interviewees, 28 women said either they or their female colleagues faced physical, verbal, mental or cyber abuse in their existing or former workplace at the hands of their bosses, supervisors or colleagues.

At least 10 women said they were harassed by their bosses, while 16 others were targeted by colleagues.

The complaints include asking for sexual favours, forcible kissing, hugging, ogling, sending inappropriate web links, making objectionable comments on attire, sending indecent text messages, and perverse forms of flattery in the workplace.

Women often refrain from reporting these incidents due to the associated social stigma, a lack of action and feared negative repercussions on their careers.

Of the 28 women subjected to harassment in the workplace, 20 said they did not report the incident to authorities, 18 said they did not have a sexual harassment committee, and four said they did not know about the existence of any such committee.

At least 13 women said they faced physical abuse, 18 said they faced verbal and mental harassment, and 10 said they were subjected to cyber abuse.

One of the interviewees, a widow with a child, said her colleague first proposed forming an "unconditional friendship" with her but soon started sending romantic songs.

"He is quite shrewd. If someone in the office notices, that's a problem, right? So, he would suggest that I meet him outside the office. I would refuse. And then one day after work, he started to physically harass me. I somehow managed to save myself," she said.

The woman said she informed the head of the department, who remained silent regarding the matter.

"The person also did the same thing with two of my colleagues, but he held an important position. As such, no action was taken against him."

Another interviewee said her harasser was the head of a section in her workplace.

"He used to try and hold my waist,

grab me by the arm. He once tried to lift me, and, on one occasion, he barged into the women's washroom to try and forcefully kiss me. I was married at the time and so was he. I screamed and pushed him until he left."

She, however, did not complain to anyone as the harasser was close to the chief of the organisation, and the woman was quite young and feared dire consequences if she complained.

The interviews also revealed that many women had to leave their jobs following such incidents.

One interviewee recounted her experience saying her harasser first resorted to "sexual" flattery, manipulation and trying to spend private time with her.

"One day, he suddenly told me his wife is old and is unable to have sex with him, and he wants me to participate. Upon repeated refusals, his verbal abuse got worse. He tried to pressure me more and more. I was not allowed to talk to my colleagues about this and if I did, they were singled out and unjustly reprimanded, abused verbally with wrongful accusations ...," she wrote.

"My seating arrangement was changed to ensure I was away from my friends [especially male colleagues]. I was placed in a position from where I could not talk to anybody. I was also demoted. He gaslighted me into believing that I would not get any other job and my skills were not enough."

"The situation became so dire that I had to quit my job abruptly."

She added, "He held a position just one rank below the head of the organisation. So, there really wasn't anyone to complain to, and the head himself was accused of sexually harassing his colleagues, so I didn't think there was any scope for justice."

An overwhelming majority said they didn't think complaining would bring any change, as the hierarchy of the harasser mattered. Many others said they could not risk losing their jobs.

"I didn't file a complaint because our HR is inefficient and people have gotten away with illicit conduct before," one woman wrote about her reluctance to complain.

What was gathered from the survey was that if someone did complain, the authorities concerned made ridiculous suggestions.

"The authorities told me that

some people simply have a 'habit' of talking to people while looking at their breasts or chest area. So, [they suggested that] I should, before complaining, check if staring at people's breasts is a matter of habit for the particular person."

UPDATE ON HC GUIDELINE

On October 21 last year, advocates Md Shahinuzzaman and Sayeda Nasrin filed a writ petition on behalf of Ain O Salish Kendra, seeking implementation of the decade-old High Court order to prevent sexual harassment of women and children in the workplace and educational institutions.

"The secretaries of 40 ministries, including public administration, registrar general of the Supreme Court, the Bar Council and the University Grants Commission were made respondents in the petition," said Nasrin.

So far, only the Supreme Court and the securities and exchange commission responded, saying they formed a committee based on the HC guidelines.

The other respondents were silent.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

Different ministries, under which organisations operate, have an important role in implementing this guideline, said Nasrin. "The cabinet secretary, especially, could play the most vital role here."

She added, "Although international NGOs have done a great job in terms of forming [sexual harassment prevention] committees, the government organisations are lagging behind. There is a negative perception about establishing one as they think having such a committee means admitting to the occurrence of sexual harassment in the workplace."

They fail to understand that a committee can help create a harassment-free environment, where employees get to their jobs without fear, she added.

Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said the number of women in the labour force has increased over the years, but there has been no proportionate change or improvement in men's attitudes, which is why incidents of sexual harassment continue to occur.

"We have to formulate a law, and must have a local authority responsible for this. Otherwise the guidelines will never be implemented properly."