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International Seminar
Architecture: Overcoming Constraints
12-14 June, 2003, Dhaka

The Department of Architecture at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology hosted an international seminar titled "Architecture: Overcoming Constraints" June 12-14, 2003, in Dhaka. The two-day seminar, which was accompanied by a Building Materials exhibition at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, was widely attended by local and international participants.

It was to address present-day problems and constraints faced during the practice of architecture that the idea of this seminar was conceived. The fact that, architecture, being at a cross-road, is at present faced with innumerable constraints in the fields of urbanism, environment, technology, housing and society, and that proper and creative consideration of these limiting needs can become the platform for newer, innovative, time-relevant and contextual architectural solutions, was one of the key themes of the seminar.

At present, problems faced by the architectural profession differ in focus, magnitude and importance from those encountered in the past, while even within the same time frame, problems of the developing world widely deviate from those in the industrialised world. Rapid urbanisation and accompanying environmental degradation is putting tremendous pressure on the future of the planet. Issues of globalisation, the digital age, the crisis of identity, etc all strive to wipe out differences on the one hand, while increasing economic and social gaps on the other. New kinds of architecture and city planning are evolving as a response to increasing and extreme densities, and to overall changes in the fabric of society and lifestyle. Intelligent and automated buildings, while becoming a definite reality with the development of new technologies, still remain beyond the reach of the general populace, due to the tremendous costs involved, increasing the gap between the haves and the have-nots. While architects alone are not responsible for this state of affairs, they are certainly facing a greater challenge to overcome these constraints and to create a better society despite them.

In the keynote paper "A Question of Architecture", Professor Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed, Chief Coordinator of the Seminar, brought into focus some of the above-mentioned issues and many other relevant ones to set the note for the technical sessions. In an another presentation at the inaugural session, Professor Dr. M. Shahidul Ameen presented key statistics related to housing and development faced by architects at present working in Bangladesh. The next two days consisted of intensive and thought-provoking technical sessions held parallelly in four separate venues all within the BUET premises, chaired by eminent experts in the respective fields.

The technical sessions on "Housing and Society" covered issues ranging from indigenous housing of low income communities to social issues encountered in adapting to local communities like that of the Chittagong Hill Tracks or the problems of legacy and culture in small communities like that of Nagpur in India. Contemporary problems of multi-storey housing in Dhaka, social housing in Oman, adaptation mechanisms of housing and housing and development controls at present used in urban projects were also discussed in the various papers. Purely regarding issues of 'Society' the evolution of Church Architecture in Bangladesh was also presented in a paper.

Discussions on concerns regarding the 'Environment' included papers as diverse as skyscrapers and skylines in the context of the US and question of identity crisis faced in the middle-east. Interesting views were presented on the ecological idea of Confucianism and its significance in city design, while the issue of extremely narrow buildings in Old Dhaka and its impact on the environment were discussed. Climate-responsiveness in tall buildings were discussed and improvement in the quality of living by recycling solid waste to improve the environment was also discussed among the papers presented.

The sessions on 'Technology' included papers on computing used in architecture, and the matter of education was debated through a lively presentation communicating the issues facing architectural education in South Africa. Technicalities of solar shading and issues of safety practiced during the construction of buildings were also discussed through separate technical presentations.

The sessions on 'Urban Issues' drew substantial interest from the delegates. Urban problems of metropolitan areas in Bangladesh were debated thoroughly, while possibilities of child-friendliness within cities, of shopping areas and their impacts on city living, of the impacts of land-use and transport planning were presented by the authors. The needs and possibilities of intervention within the open space system of Dhaka and the issue of spatial continuity by examining the growth of spontaneous retail development in the city were also presented through separate technical papers. The important issue of Dhaka after Kahn's Capital complex was also speculated during one of the sessions.

Globalization as a concept of linking diverse economies and cultures across nations and regions of the world is not a new phenomenon. What is new, are the scale, speed and scope of such interactions. The development of information technology has brought unparalleled prospects for global interaction in every field. It is difficult to perceive of a human activity free from the affect of globalization. Globalization affects architecture and built-environment in more ways than one. While globalization gives architects a better and faster access to materials, technology and concepts it does not offer unfettered opportunity for practice across political frontiers. Despite new opportunities globalization presents, its threat to cultural diversity, identity, local initiatives, and above all environmental sustainability disconcerts professionals and lay persons alike.

How should the Asian architects face this challenge? How best can the Asian architects reconcile the dialectic interdependence of the global and local dimensions of architecture? To discuss these and

In the closing session with the Rapporteurs' report summing up presentations from each of the four categories, recommendations were discussed.

The proceedings, published by the Department of Architecture, contain eight papers each under the sections 'Housing and Society', 'Technology' and 'Urban Issues' and seven papers on 'Environment', from ten countries around the world. Editors of the proceedings were Professor Dr. Zebun Nasreen Ahmed, Dr. K. M. Maniruzzaman and Dr. Roxana Hafiz.

As part of the seminar activities, a design competition was also held among students from all the architecture educational institutions of the country. The students were asked to design a street of the future. All the submissions were judged by a jury, comprising of notable architects of the country. BUET won first prize, while Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology and Khulna University won second and third prizes respectively.

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International Seminar
Globalization and the Asian Architecture
9-10 December 2003, Dhaka, Bangladesh

other moot questions and generate debate on the globalization-architecture nexus the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB) hosted an International Seminar in Dhaka on Globalization and Asian Architecture in January 2004. The Seminar was a part of the ARCA-SIA Forum-12, the biggest event IAB ever hosted without external assistance.

To capture the spread and scope of influence of Globalization and bring in a multi-disciplinary perspective the organizers decided early to structure the presentations under five sub-themes and open the seminar to professionals from other disciplines as well. Among the paper presenters were architects, sociologist, economist, planners and litterateur. Each of the sub-themes had two invited speakers - a Bangladeshi and an expatriate. The invited speakers included famous architects and academicians like Ar. B. V. Doshi from India, Ar. Tay Kheng Soon from Singapore, Ar. Shigeru Ban from Japan Ar. Alex Schultes from Germany and Dr. Suha Ozkan from

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Switzerland. Professor Anthony Vidler, Head of the School of Architecture, Coopers Union, New York, was the key note speaker. The invited speakers from Bangladesh were, Professor Muzaffar Ahmad, Ar. Khadem Ali, Ar. Bashirul Haq and Ar. Khaled Ashraf.

The number and variety of abstracts received both from home and abroad presented a paradox for the organizers. On the one hand, the organizers were elated at the overwhelming response to the Call for Papers, on the other it was possible to include only a limited number of papers. Maintaining a balance between number of presenters from Bangladesh and abroad also became imperative. The organizers went through a grueling process of reviewing the abstracts and selecting only papers that most closely match the sub-themes and are likely to provoke thought and generate debate.

The Seminar was ordered into six sessions covering the five sub-themes. Architects and academicians of international and national repute chaired each of the sessions. There were two sessions on Culture and Identity; one each on Materials and Technology; Social Divide and Responsive Design; City and its Context; and Practice and Pedagogy. The chairpersons for the sessions were Ar. Patrick Lau Sau-Shing from Hong Kong, Ar. Bashirul Haq and Ar. Shamsul

Wares from Bangladesh, Ar. Yolanda D. Reyes from the Philippines, Ar. Zaigham Zaffrey from Pakistan and Ar. Llewellyn Van Wyk, the President of CAA, from South Africa.

In the interest of time-management presentations and interactive discussions followed in succession. Lively discussion and debate bringing out the essence of the papers and relevant contentious issues were the hallmark of every session. More often than not seminars turn into a race against time. The Seminar in Dhaka was no exception. Even relevant and interesting discussions had to end to give way to subsequent sessions or other events planned for the day.

Seminars especially on architecture and built-environment can seldom, if ever, provide definitive answers to pressing questions or achieve a conclusive resolution of issues. This was not the intent and nor is possible in a seminar on a subjective discipline that architecture is. In Architecture asking the right question is perhaps more important than the answer. The presentations of architects and non-architects and the subsequent discussions and comments in every sessions created a rich palette for participants to take back, reflect and contemplate on the future of Asian Architecture in a globalizing world. From such a perspective the Seminar was a success. The organizers deserve laurels for a job well-done!

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