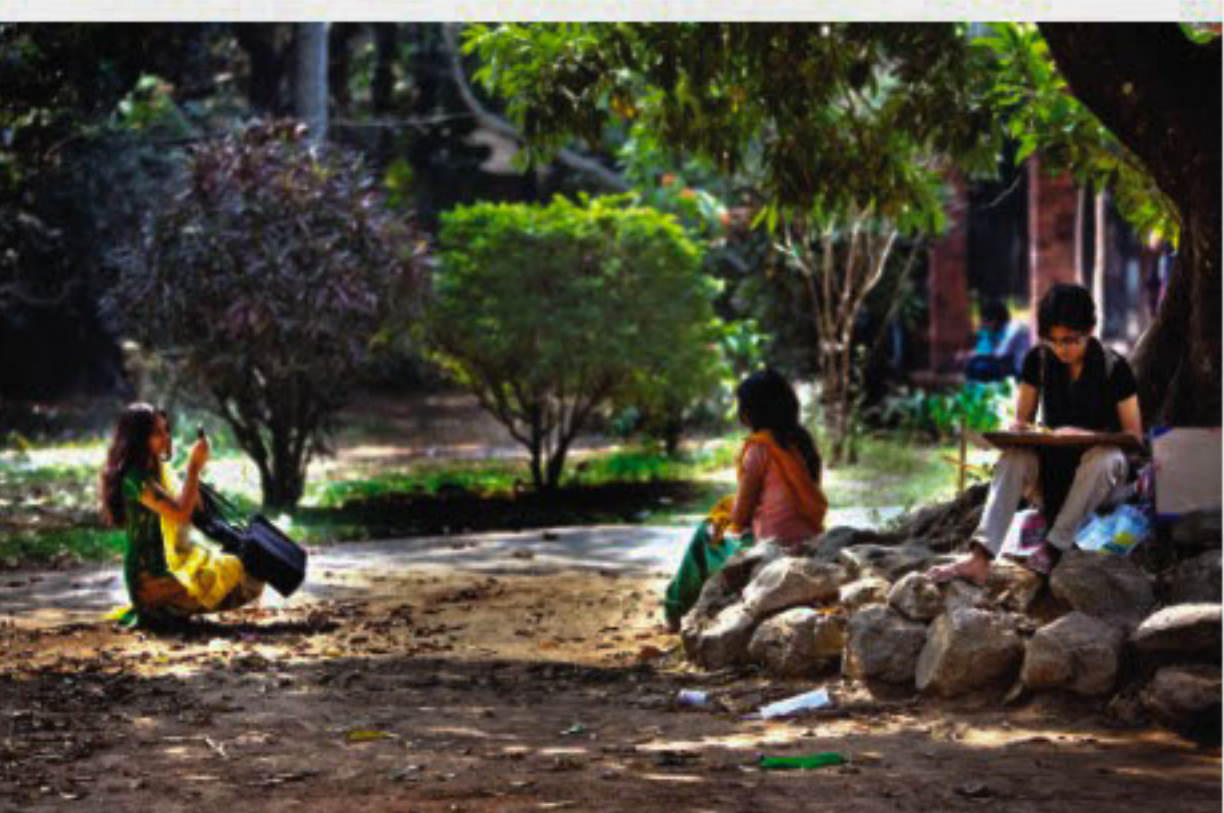


# Dhaka Safe and Sound

Goethe-Institut Bangladesh (German Culture Center) promotes art approaches on environmental issues and invites for a festival to present the results of 2010

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only the food, apparel or power industry are responding to the very serious environmental problems such as pollution, deforestation, water scarcity, traffic or the increase of natural disasters. Environmental issues are very much reflected in social and cultural life as well. 'Green' became the label of a hip life style. Germany's "creative elite" is innovatively contributing to a clean and ecologically sustainable future. An exchange between art and environment bears the opportunity to experience new ways of perception



Photograph from the workshop "Urban Mutations" by Hasan Saifuddin Chandam.



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# Germany reunited--in the eyes of an ambassador

A.H. MAHMOOD ALI

I arrived in Bonn on a wintry day in October, 1992 to take up my duties as Ambassador of Bangladesh to Germany. I was earlier posted in Dhaka at our Foreign Ministry and had followed the historic developments in Germany leading up to reunification in the news media and through dispatches sent by our embassies in Bonn and East Berlin. I was therefore quite ready to meet a reunited, vibrant and confident Germany.

My introduction to Bonn, Berlin and Frankfurt was mainly through the writings of Syed Mujtaba Ali, a Bengali writer and I was looking forward to meeting Germany now for the first time. I of course had read about the poet Rabindranath Tagore's fascination with Goethe and Germany. Tagore had visited Germany many times and had been received with great honour, love and affection by the German people.

Bonn was just as I had expected but its efficiency and small-town charm were breathtaking. As I started my work I was waiting for the day when I would visit Berlin. The opportunity soon came in the summer of 1993 in the form of the World Tourism Festival. I took a train to Berlin from Bonn. As the train started, I asked the lady-conductor if she would let me know when the train crossed into former East Germany. The conductor said I would know myself but she would come anyway, perhaps a minute later. And lo and behold our train slowed down and we started our journey through former eastern Germany. The railway stations were dilapidated and in shambles- the countryside in disarray- quite a far-cry from the picturesque Western Germany. I learnt that the German Railway was laying a new track so that the high-speed trains could continue at the same speed as in the western part.

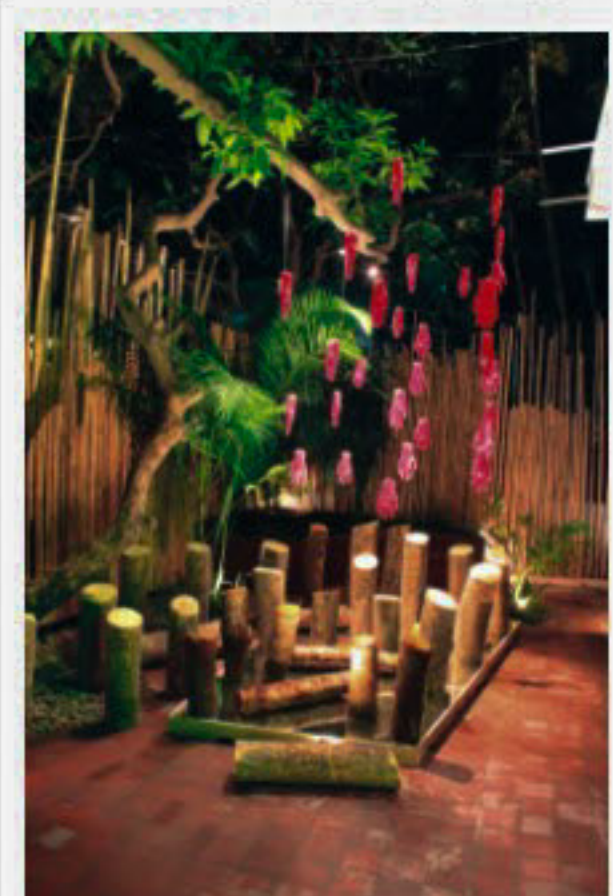
In Berlin I booked into a hotel in the western part of Berlin and went on a sight-seeing tour of the eastern part of Berlin afterwards. The story was the same again. There were a lot of match-box towers built during the Soviet era. A year later the seat of the German presidency was shifted to Berlin and the President started holding the New Year reception for the Diplomatic Corps in Berlin. The German Foreign Office took all the Ambassadors to Berlin in a jumbo airbus for the occasion for a day trip. We were told by the Mayor of Berlin that all the buildings built after 1945 which were not in the German tradition would be pulled down and new structures in accordance with German architectural heritage would be built.



Berlin. In fact by the time I left Germany towards the end of 1995 the dividing line of Berlin had started to become blurred and Berlin once again was becoming the capital of the great German people.

I recall with gratitude the support and sympathy of Chancellor Willy Brandt and the people of the Federal Republic of Germany during our

Liberation War in 1971. Similarly I recall the support of the people of the German Democratic Republic for our Liberation War as well as for the treatment of our injured freedom fighters in 1972. Today, I am so happy to find that a reunited Germany is working relentlessly to establish the place that it deserves in Europe and the democracy, human rights and development in the whole world.



Gulshan Hossain's installation "Stop deforestation"

and knowledge in regard to sustainability, resource-efficiency or provision for coming generations. On the basis of that background Goethe-Institut Bangladesh, the Cultural Wing of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, called in 2010 for a year long programme on "Culture and Environment". Within this framework local as well as international artists from various fields were invited to share their reflections on environment related issues. One of these reflections was raised by Murshida Arzu Alpana, an internationally acclaimed painter born in Dhaka and for 15 years based in Berlin. Alpana is deeply concerned about the exploitation of Bangladeshi rivers. Her painting and installation exhibition called "Drinking bottle water and breathing dust only" provides just one out of many million perspectives on Bangladesh's contemporary ecological face.

Goethe-Institut Bangladesh has invited Alpana's works to Dhaka and displayed it here. The exhibition took place in the framework of a programme called "Artistic Environment", a proactive art initiative in cooperation with local artists. "Artistic Environment" is just one part of a whole year's 'green' programme at Goethe-Institut. Further highlights have been the painting and installation exhibition on deforestation by Gulshan Hossain and two workshops with renowned photographers from Germany on the topics "Urban Mutations" and on "Recycling". Furthermore the Goethe-Institut run the launching of the German Academic Exchange Service - Alumni book publication "Man and Water", as well as different film screenings of international and Bangladeshi environmental documentaries among many other programmes focused on environmental issues.

Through an inter- and transdisciplinary perspective on important environmental issues, Goethe-Institut Bangladesh provides a creative approach to at least one sustainable solution: Awareness through cultural mediation! Art, science, literature, film, architecture and photography are not only supposed to dismantle the gravity of the environmental problems of our times. They should rather initiate a change.

In cooperation with Dhaka Art Centre, Britto Arts Trust, CRAC and others, Goethe-Institut Bangladesh will present all the results of 'green' art at the festival "Dhaka safe and sound". Artistic approaches for a better future. The fortnight festival will be hosted simultaneously at the Dhaka Art Club and Goethe-Institut in Dhanmondi. Paintings, installations, photographs and architectural projects combined with lectures, workshops, film, literature and music events will generate an open platform for discussions as well as cultural and artistic reflections. Goethe-Institut Bangladesh supports a transregional shared approach: A cultural alliance which raises its many voices against ignorance and indifference towards a fragile future of Bangladesh.

Festival: Dhaka safe and sound Artistic approaches for a better future at Goethe-Institut Bangladesh (House 10, Road 9 [new], Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1205; Opening Hours: 10 AM - 8PM) and Dhaka Art Centre (Road 7a, House 60, Dhanmondi, Dhaka 1205, Opening Hours: 3 - 8 PM).

Melanie Fiergolla is from Germany an intern at Goethe-Institut Bangladesh. For further information: http://www.goethe.de/dhaka

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