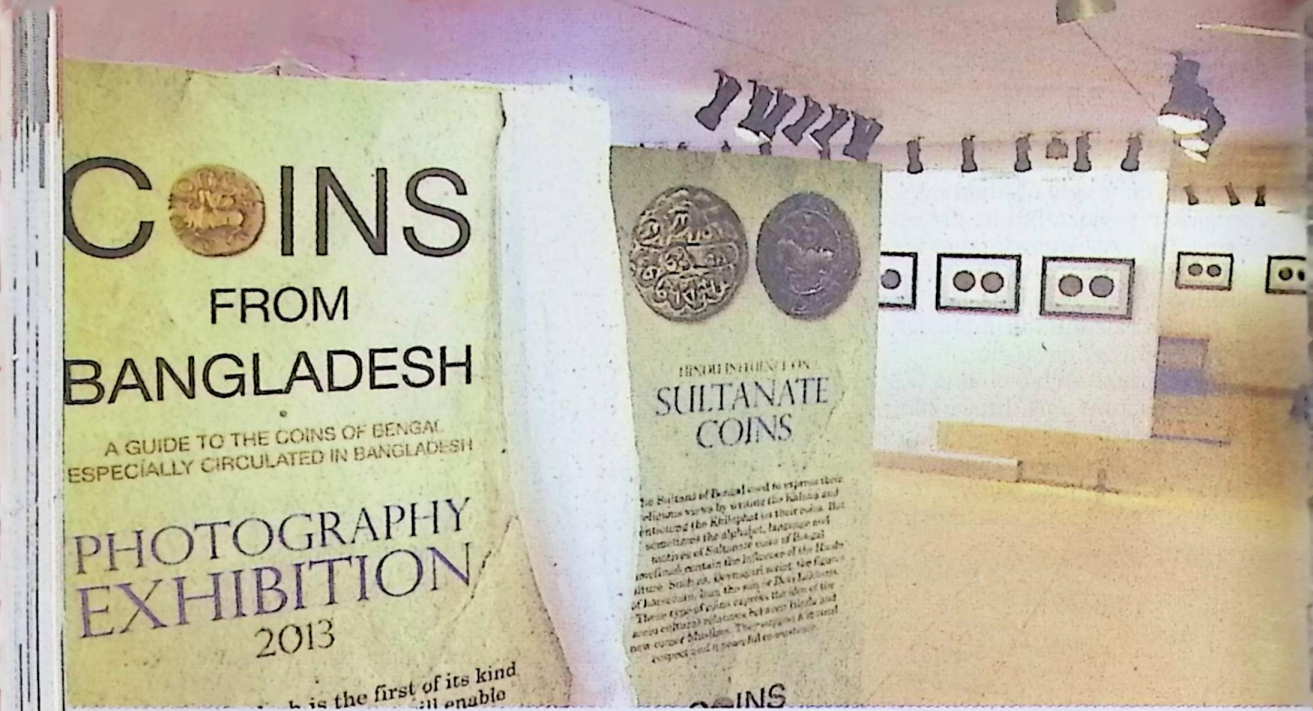


PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The photography exhibition "Coins From Bangladesh" displayed pictures of rare coins dating from the Hindu Dynasties to modern times.

one side and the title of the Sultan issuer on the other. Coins of the Mughal Dynasty displayed at the exhibition, by comparison held the simple inscription of the ruler's name on one side of the coin and the name of the mint house it was created in on the flip side.

The coins of the British Empire were more refined in shape and structure. However, the graceful art of hand-made coins was replaced by the efficiency of coin mints with resourceful machinery. One side of the coin held the bust of Queen Victoria looking up at her subjects while the reverse side showed the denomination of the coin and the year of its issue.

Even though there were around 40 mint towns producing coins in ancient Bengal during 600 BC, Bangladesh no longer manufactures their own coins, preferring to import them from abroad, says archaeologist Bulbul Ahmed, also the main photographer behind the exhibition. Ahmed is also the co-writer of "Coins from Bangladesh" along with AKM Shahnawaz and "The Mahasthan Hoard II of Silver Punch Marked Coins" with Md Noorul Islam.

"There were coin mints in Bengal even before the "civilized" West could have thought of them. The mint towns of the country were not preserved after machines were introduced by the British Empire to create money in united India," says Ahmed.

It makes more sense to import coins from abroad as you'd have to spend more than its worth to create a coin in the country. It also goes to note that the commercial significance and worth of coins is deteriorating everyday. Preserving the ancient mint towns could, however, add to our national heritage and history, says Ahmed.

Novice collectors should have a concerted focus on collecting coins from Bangladesh instead of being attracted to the more refined seeming foreign currencies, says Islam. As Bangladeshis, they should have a deeper interest in preserving the history and legacy of their own country, he adds.

"Most amateur collectors don't understand the value of the coins found in their own country. They are unable to realise the history behind ancient coins of our land and thus, are blind to their worth," Islam says.

Every collector could have a better understanding of coin collection if they have a better understanding of history. Islam inspires collectors to dig through history books and learn about the people, places, and events that existed when the coin was in use. If one doesn't learn history, they won't be able to appreciate or make others appreciate the value of rare coins, says Islam.

Islam's love for his collection has led him to establish a museum of rare coins on one of his lands. But he is worried about the lack of funds that restrict him from going ahead with his pet project.

"This intensive collection could be used by students and scholars of history and archaeology. However, I am having immense difficulty in preserving the coins due to a lack of funding. We all know what happens when we involve the government and so, I don't want their help. I don't want my existence to be obliterated. If no one is ready to help me with the finances, I don't know what will happen to my valuable collection after my death," Islam concludes.