UNESCO and Our Cultural Heritage

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The richness of Bangladesh's culture, tangible as well as intangible, is a reality you cannot turn away from. And it goes back thousands of years.

This heritage, a vital component of the generational evolution of life in our part of the world, has been a cementing factor in linking Bangladesh's people across historical time. And yet there is the other side of the truth, which is that owing to negligence or indifference or both as well as the relentless infiltration of the putatively modern, this heritage has been under assault for a long time. A sense of history is what a nation lives by, indeed thrives on. Once history, the sense of it, goes missing, it is an entirety of cultural tradition which comes under threat, to a point where the story of a nation, of a society, faces the stark possibility of losing itself in the detritus of time. It is especially intangible heritage that is rendered vulnerable to the ravages of time and man-made negligence.





PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

But that is precisely where the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) comes in. Over the decades, the organization has swept across the globe in its endeavour to preserve history through identifying tangible and intangible heritage, those instances of it under clear threat of extinction or of being pushed to the marginal. UNESCO has come forth in raising awareness about the danger to heritage and the requirement of why such danger needs to be rolled back both among government circles and the broad masses of citizens. The simple message going out from UNESCO is: preserve your heritage, conserve everything of it that looks about to pass into history, indeed into a zone where little or nothing can be reclaimed.

In recent times, UNESCO has, on a worldwide basis, focused proactively on a promotion and preservation of intangible cultural heritage in line with the provisions of a convention adopted in 2003 for the safeguarding of what was formally defined as Intangible Cultural Heritage. Member nations of UNESCO were asked to ratify the convention, a job Bangladesh duly did in 2009. However, although the convention was ratified by Dhaka, there was hardly any effort made to high-