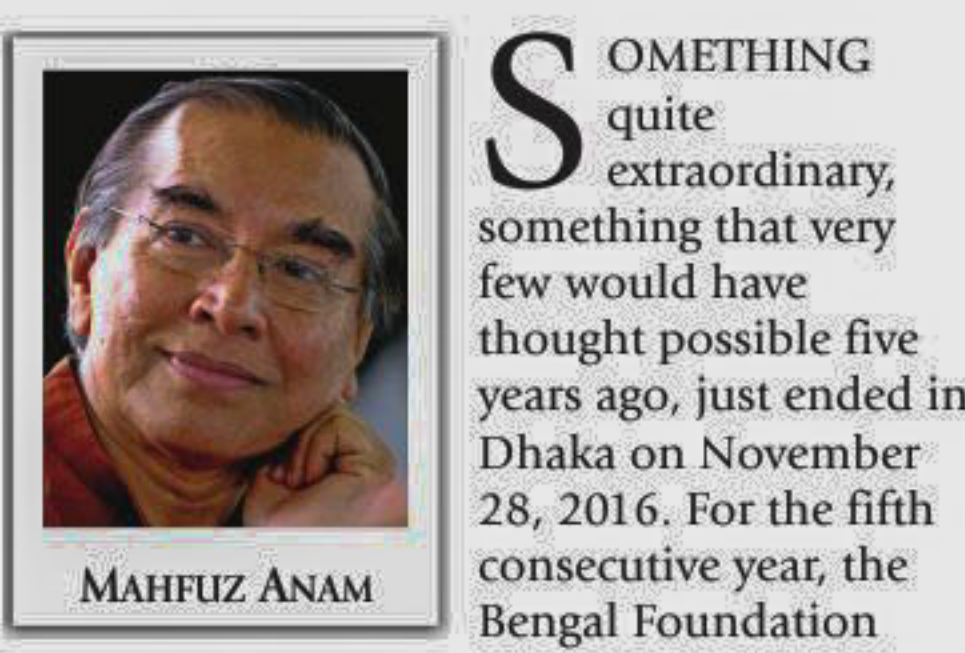


Bengal Foundation's magical music festival: A tribute



MAHFUZ ANAM

SOMETHING quite extraordinary, something that very few would have thought possible five years ago, just ended in Dhaka on November 28, 2016. For the fifth consecutive year, the Bengal Foundation staged the Bengal Classical Music Festival that was termed by Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma, during his latest performance, and by several others, as the biggest classical music festival in the world.

From a practically unknown venue for classical music to become the host of its largest festival, which can only be compared to a near miracle, is what the Bengal Foundation has made possible through its commitment, talented pool of workers and own resources. Conceived by its chairman Abul Khair, popularly known as Litu, and most magnificently implemented by its executive director, Luva Nahid - a very accomplished singer on her own right - the Bengal Classical Music Festival has become an annual event that can be justifiably termed as one that has changed the cultural scene of the country as far as classical music is concerned.

This paper and Prothom Alo had the privilege of being part of this project from the outset. We recall vividly our reaction of utter disbelief when Abul Khair first broached the idea to us. Classical music festival, with the most famous exponents in the world, for five whole nights, in an open stadium, for an audience of 20 to 30 thousand? Is this possible in Dhaka? Has he gone mad? The more he elaborated his thoughts, the more

our jaws dropped, and the more we thought our dear old friend had finally gone bonkers. But he was clear, if we did not help him, he would go ahead with it anyway.

What clinched it for me is when he said he would do all this for free. When someone was willing to spend crores of his own money - he did not have any sponsors then - just so that thousands of music enthusiasts can get to hear the world famous maestros in the various branches of classical music face to face and free of charge, there definitely is something to this man's vision. In an instant, we decided that this venture must be helped. Thus began our collaboration which, after five fruitful years, can be termed as one of the most satisfying partnerships that our two papers ever had.

While I leave it to more qualified people to write on the artistic aspects of the festival, permit me to concentrate on what the event has done to us as a country, as a society and to the lovers of classical music in particular.

The interest, the patience, the discipline, enthusiasm shown by the Dhaka audience and the capacity to understand and appreciate the intricate renditions of a particular raga, displayed by our listeners with instant applause, speaks of the growth of a large number of genuine classical music enthusiasts that we never knew existed.



Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia performing at this year's Bengal Classical Music Fest.

Just imagine, thousands of men and women, young and old, rich and not so rich, from Dhaka and the district towns, from the upper and the middle class thronged to the army stadium early in the evenings and stayed till the early hours of the following mornings, for five consecutive nights, listening to Chaurasia's flute, Kushal Das' sitar, Tejendra Majumdar's sarod, Shiv Kumar Sharma's santoor, Yogesh Samsi's tabla and Rashid Khan's vocal renditions, among many other maestros. Could we have ever imagined that Dhaka would outdo other long standing centres of classical music, not only in sheer size of the audience - and there were between 10-20 thousand people at any one time,

reaching 30-35 thousand on occasions - but also on the quality of listeners, as evidenced by the repeated statements of the artists who said they seldom saw such ardent fans of classical music anywhere.

The interest, the patience, the discipline, enthusiasm shown by the Dhaka audience and the capacity to understand and appreciate the intricate renditions of a particular raga, displayed by our listeners with instant applause, speaks of the growth of a large number of genuine classical music enthusiasts that we never knew existed and whose growth has been made possible by Bengal Foundation's relentless efforts.

This is the game changing contribution

that Bengal Foundation, led by its visionary chair and its highly talented executive director, has made in the music scene of the country. By setting up a special school for our talented youth and bringing highly qualified teachers from India, Bengal Foundation is creating a whole new generation of young classical musicians whose impressive performances we saw during the festival. Abul Khair asserts confidently that within a few years, these artists will be performing all over the world where there is practically none from Bangladesh today.

The Classical Music Festival has given a new image to Bangladesh and to its capacity to hold global standard cultural festivals. Just as one good deed instigates another, inspired by the Bengal Foundation, Blue's Communication, an event management outfit, owned by Abul Khair, held a "Sufi Festival" and a "Jazz Festival" in the past, and plans a mega "Sufi Festival" in the near future. Similarly, Square Group, which is one of the sponsors of the classical festival, has been holding its own "Folk Festival" for the last two years.

We express our profound gratitude and sincere thanks to the Bengal Foundation, to its chair, and to its executive director, for giving us five magical evenings of the highest quality classical music that we could have wished for. Thank you. Thanks also must be given to the government and the Army without whose active support such a huge festival would not have been made possible.

Bengal Foundation has shown the way. We request and expect other big business houses to become similar patron of the Arts and restore to this land some of its old artistic glory and make Bangladesh the future centre of artistic excellence.

The writer is Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star.

Can Trump stifle our growth momentum?

SHARJIL HAQUE

IF you thought Brexit was a fluke, then think again. The new game in town, populism, paved the way for Donald Trump to capitalise on economic and social frustrations of the forgotten blue-collar American, and complete, arguably, the biggest political upset in modern history. Global politics has stepped into alien territory, and it seems to have taken one of its faithful companions along for the ride: the global economy.

The ancient bridge of free trade and unrestricted mobility of labour that connected people, goods, technology and entire nations for decades is finally crumbling. Is this the dawn of a new era where countries abandon economic integration and adopt a destructive doctrine of "every man for himself", or is it just a passing storm? If the success of Mr. Trump's de-globalisation diatribes that propelled him to American presidency is any indication, it might just be the former. The consequent ramifications for countries all over the world, developed and developing, would be massive. Bangladesh is no exception.

Bangladesh is on the cusp of breaking the 6-percent growth trap in a sustainable manner, not just from temporary tailwinds of higher public sector salaries. The political environment is relatively stable, borrowing costs have come down, manufacturing growth remains firm, inflation is easing, public sector investment is rising, foreign direct investment is gradually increasing and finally, exports are as steady as ever but still can do much better.

Now, we are all hoping to see two interconnected engines - private investment and export-led growth - shift into overdrive and carry our economy into the illustrious stage of 7-percent growth and beyond. Yet, export-led prosperity can be maintained only if the current wave of protectionist sentiment sweeping through America (and advanced economies in general) subsides in the near-term.

Trump's rise to commander-in-chief throws such hope into an acute state of uncertainty. His pledge to bring back jobs by writing the

obituary on free trade from day one in office could push global economic recovery off the cliff. A re-cooked concoction of the 23-year old North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that puts "America first", if combined with a withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and tariffs on China, could well mark the beginning of the end of a world economy led by trade.

Trade analysts will remind us that China could come to global trade's rescue if Trump turns his back on globalisation. But the extent to which Beijing can take the helm remains uncertain if we agree that America still holds the key to the technological expertise and innovation that underpin world trade. The upshot is stymied demand from advanced and big emerging economies, hurting economic activity in developing countries like Bangladesh which count on the exuberance of external markets.

The trade factor aside, Trump's promise of rejuvenating growth by showering America with tax cuts and infrastructure spending is another red flag, albeit not one for the near-term.

The ensuing economic boom from a Keynesian-flavoured fiscal tonic will appear alluring at first. But it will engorge American debt (already over 100 percent of GDP) and over time strangle productive investment. As unlikely as it may seem right now, a recession might well be in the offing when fiscal cracks widen in the medium-term. Such shocks typically spill-over to other big economies and inevitably hit the coasts of developing countries like ours through stifled external demand.

Meanwhile, with the rules of the game changing, one of the first players to react is the US dollar. Electrified by colossal amounts of capital inflows amid expectations of a Trump-powered rise in growth, inflation and interest rates, the greenback recently touched a 13-year high against a basket of currencies which includes the Euro, the British pound and Malaysian ringgit, to name a few.

Considering that the taka is tightly fastened to the dollar, our exchange rate is undeniably appreciating vis-à-vis major non-dollar currencies, home to enormous volumes of

Bangladeshi exports. So a textbook loss of external competitiveness looks the most likely outcome from the dollar's current surge. All the more reason for Bangladesh to peg the taka to a currency basket instead of just the dollar (for details, see "Dollar-peg is a double-edged sword", The Daily Star).

That brings us to financial risks. Trump's promise of making America great again by igniting fiscally-fuelled growth and inflation could tempt the US Federal Reserve to hike interest rates faster than what markets previously anticipated.

To be sure, Bangladesh will not have to worry about portfolio flows gushing back to America lured by higher rate of return. We never had deep capital markets to attract that kind of money to begin with. But we still have private foreign loans to keep track of. Borrowing rate on these loans are tied to a benchmark rate, known as the London Interbank Offered Rate (plus a risk premium) which is likely to rise as the Federal Reserve responds to Trump's fiscal easing with monetary tightening to keep prices under control, raising our debt-servicing cost.

From our end, higher interest payments will swallow funds for business expansion, at a time when these big corporate borrowers need to take the lead role in re-engendering private investment in Bangladesh.

Critics of financial openness will try to convince our leadership to pull the plug on private sector's foreign borrowing. But shutting the door on external lenders cannot be the response to a source of capital utilised so extensively by other developing countries. Interest rates will always come with a cold touch of uncertainty and even more so during Trump's presidency. The call here is to build better shields with appropriate hedging instruments as borrowers do worldwide.

Analysts concerned more about bilateral aid flows have little reason to lose sleep. America's role in Bangladesh's development funding has diminished considerably over the years relative to Japan, the United Kingdom and Canada. That, put together with China's recent USD 20+ billion buffet salted with new contributions from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank,

will offset any risk Trump might pose to bilateral aid flows from the US.

The less said about immigration the better. America's pristine image of being a safe haven for immigrants is fading fast, taking with it the ideas and skills brought by people from all over the globe. To what extent immigrants are 'stealing' American jobs, I leave for readers to decide. But tightening regulations on work permits, or even worse, deporting thousands of Bangladeshis will unquestionably stifle remittance inflows from America which stood at USD 2.4 billion last fiscal year. Third only to Saudi Arabia and UAE for the

record.

And so at the end of the day, we can only hope that common sense will prevail and the man who takes office will be different from the man who ran for president. Or that Congress can act as a handy check-and-balance against outlandish policies. If not, Bangladesh's growth momentum might fall prey to a new world order characterised by Trumpism.

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e-mail: eefar@rhd.gov.bd

RHD Quotation for Toll Collection

Sealed Quotations are hereby invited for the following work:

- Leasing Quotation Notice No. FRD/01 of 2016-2017 (5th Call)
- Name of work : Leasing out for collection of Toll from different Vehicular Traffic crossing the **GORAI BRIDGE** at 66th km of Daulatdia-Faridpur (Goalchamat)-Magura-Jhenaidah-Jessore-Khulna-Mongla (Degraji) N-7 Road under Road Division, Faridpur during the year 2016-17. (For 1 (one) year or 365 days from the date of agreement).
- Price of quotation : Highest quoted price.
- Earnest money : 10% of quoted rate (except VAT & IT) in the form of BD/PO from any schedule bank of Bangladesh in favour of the Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Faridpur.
- Eligibility of quotationer : Contractors in RHD or in any department/any persons/firm in Bangladesh (Who possess nationality, VAT, up-to-date trade licence & income tax certificate).
- Name of offices where leasing quotation will be available : a) Divisional Commissioner, Dhaka Division, Dhaka.
b) Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Faridpur/Madaripur/Shariatpur/Rajbari/Gopalganj/Magura/Planning Division-1, Sarak Bhaban, Tejgaon, Dhaka.
c) Sub-Divisional Engineer, RHD, Road Sub-Division-1/2/1st Line Workshop, Faridpur.
- Name of offices where leasing quotation will be received : a) Office of the Additional Chief Engineer, RHD, Gopalganj Zone, Gopalganj.
b) Office of the Superintending Engineer, RHD, Road Circle, Faridpur.
c) Office of the Deputy Commissioner, Faridpur/Superintendent of Police, Faridpur (SP Office).
d) Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Faridpur/Rajbari/Magura.
- Last date & time for selling leasing quotation document : 26-12-2016 up to office hour.
- Last date & time for receiving the quotation : 27-12-2016 up to 12:00 noon.
- Date, time & place for opening the quotation : 27-12-2016 at 4:00pm in the Office of the Executive Engineer, RHD, Road Division, Faridpur.
- Price of quotation : Tk 5,000.00 per set (non-refundable) document
- The undersigned reserves the right to accept or reject any/all quotations without assigning any reason thereof.

Md. Omar Ali
ID No. 101214
Assistant Engineer, RHD
Road Division, Faridpur

Md. Jahangir Alam
ID No. 601929
Executive Engineer (CC), RHD
Road Division, Faridpur

GD-2491

QUOTABLE Quote

It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.

ARISTOTLE, GREEK PHILOSOPHER

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Storybook elephant

6 Gem side

11 "Aida," for one

12 Really impressed

13 Gerald Ford's wife

14 Bewildered

15 Barracks beds

17 Slalom maneuver

18 Picasso painting

22 Opposed to

23 Fable ends

27 Baseball card numbers

29 Sipping aid

30 Wizard's concoction

32 Wife of Zeus

33 Sight on a cloudless day

35 Tree fluid

38 Moore of movies

39 Suspect's story

41 Book of maps

45 Wish granter

46 Prolonged attack

47 Cast member

48 "Skedaddle!" DOWN

1 Hope of comedy

DOWN

2 Gorilla, for example

3 Wager

4 Gallery reviewer

5 Manmade fiber

6 Humiliating failures

7 Termite's kin

8 Lawyer's job

9 Flock females

10 Brewed drinks

16 Singer McGraw

18 Shocked sound

19 "Do -- others..."

20 Coup d' --

21 Suffering from stiff joints

24 God of war

25 Escapade

26 Bend in the breeze

28 Army member

31 Maiden name label

34 Accumulate

35 Long story

36 Guinness of film

37 Milk buy

40 Life story, for short

42 Zodiac cat

43 In the past

44 Determined

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

P	A	C	E	S	T	E	N	O	R
A	D	U	L	T	E	L	U	D	E
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E	R	R	O	P	P	R	E	S	S
L	E	O	P	E	O	R	I	A	
R	E	C	O	I	L	S	O	S	
C	A	N	D	L	E	S	I	C	E
R	I	G		S	H	I	N	E	D
A	D	I	O	S	A	N	G	L	E
M	E	N	L	O	R	A	T	O	R
P	R	E	E	N		K	N	O	T