



SPOTLIGHT

# THE TRUE TREASURE TROVE

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Bangladesh Bank (BB) had a small currency museum in its Motijheel office, which was initially not for public viewing. To launch it to the public, an initiative was taken by Dr Atiur Rahman, the then Governor of Bangladesh Bank, where he allotted the 2nd floor of Bangladesh Bank Training Academy in Mirpur to use as the currency museum. Along with the BB authority, eminent artist Hashem Khan, historian Muntassir Mamoon and architect Robin Hossain jointly worked on the project. Finally, the expanded museum was inaugurated by Speaker of the National Parliament Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury on October 5, 2013. Currently, the museum has a collection of 9000 local and foreign currencies, but displays only 2000.



that are regarded as the earliest silver coins of Bengal as well as the Indian subcontinent, circulated in Mauryan period of 5th to 4th century BC," he says. "These were mainly found in the Wari Bateshwar of Narsingdi and Mahasthanagarh of Bogra, along with other archaeological sites of Bangladesh." The speciality of these coins is their symbols, for instances—the punch-mark of mountain, river, boat, fish, elephant, tiger and much more.

The museum, the first of its kind in Bangladesh, also displays the Kushan Empire's gold coins. The Kushan emperors were the first to have introduced gold coins to the sub-continent. The imperial images of Kushan Kings -Kanishka, Basiska, Vasudeva, Huvishka and many others – can be noted on the coins. In ancient times, these coins were mainly used for business transactions. Next to these, there are Harikela (7th to 9th century AD) coins.

The cowries (shell money) on display will propel you back to ancient times. Back then, when people still used the barter system, they would have trouble in deciding and matching the value of one item to another. They preferred using cowries to conduct their day-to-day transactions. The women loved the cowries, and the men loved buying necklaces made of cowry for their lovers! Even to this day, there are many women who love to wear cowry jewelries.

In this museum, one can also find the coins issued by the Delhi Sultan during the mediaeval period; the most significant are the 'Tankas' (the word 'Taka' would be derived later from the Sanskrit word 'Tanka'). Tankas were the coins of Bengal's Independent Sultans, on which were inscribed the names of the Sultans, the name



of the *Takshal* of the then Bengal and the date and time of issuing of the coins. Apart from these, there are coins from powerful Mughal empires, along with the coins from Assam, Kuch Bihar, Jaintiapur, Tripura, Arakan and much more.

If you are curious to learn the particulars of the coins, look closely at the descriptions accompanying the collections. If you need additional information, just take the help of the digital kiosks. If you still have questions, don't hesitate to ask the guide, who is always ready to give you a satisfactory answer.

The three dioramas created and designed by eminent artists Hashem Khan and Shyamal Chowdhury depict the evolution of the currency system. The barter method through which people exchanged their domestic animals for rice or other crops is depicted on the first diorama, while the second one portrays the Mahajan, who would give money to the village people in exchange for crops. The last one describes the savings tendency of village women. Not too long ago-even 50-60 years-back, the women would use the bamboo fillers or sometimes pitchers to save money. Gradually, the banking system developed and people began to find alternative and safer means of saving.

"I'm feeling very nostalgic seeing all the versions of the banknotes 1, 5, 10 and 100 here," says 60-year-old Manjurul Hasan, a retired government employee. "Today's notes are quite different from those printed in 1971 and, I believe, one might love this evolution of

the designs of the banknotes," he adds. There are some commemorative souvenir notes – such as taka 25, 40 and 60 – issued by the Government on different occasions. The museum also displays beautiful ornaments made from antique coins used by the ethnic communities; *Ram Tanka* for donating in temples; iron chests; iron bowls; equipment used to collect coins while excavating; and boxes through which the coins were transferred from the production house to the central bank's vault.

The main attraction of the second gallery is the massive collection of the existing foreign currencies. The paper notes and coins of the extinct countries around the world, such as



Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, are also on display.

Another major attraction of the museum is the photo kiosk. As Khandaker Anwar Shahadat, Joint DGM, Bangladesh Currency Museum, informs, "Through this photo kiosk, one can place his/her own photo in a one lac taka souvenir note, and the procedure cost only Tk. 50."

In order to buy coins and souvenir notes, one can always head to the souvenir shops, which are popular mostly to the coin collectors. Similarly, if anyone wants to donate his or her own collected coins to the museum, the museum authority gives due credit to the private collectors. Also, there is a club, called 'Taka Jadugar Donor Club' (Currency Museum Donor Club), which inspires people to come and donate to the museum.

"We already have plans to expand the museum and add another floor," says Mr. Anwar Shahadat. "Currently, we are trying to introduce an art gallery, a children's corner and a research laboratory there," he adds.

Except for Thursdays, the museum is open six days a week, from 11 in the morning to 5 in the afternoon, while on Fridays it opens at 4 pm and closes at 7 pm. Without the hassle of any kind of entry fees, the currency museum can make your weekend a very memorable one.

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS



There is no one who has not heard the words: 'Money does not grow on trees!' Interestingly, you would find a money tree (*taka gachh*) at the entrance of the Bangladesh Currency Museum, where the branches are filled with different coins and notes. Don't be greedy, they are all replicas!

Now let's step into the museum. The 50 showcases are arranged in a row, one after another, sporting a collection of 2000 coins, banknotes, commemorative notes, medals, bonds, numismatic materials and much more. The addition of modern fun features, such as photo kiosks, LED monitors, dioramas and digital kiosks, have given the two galleries a new dimension.

Mohamad Abu Al Hasan, archaeologist and guide (AD), Taka Museum, Bangladesh Bank informs that the museum houses rare collections. "We have a collection of silver punch-marked coins

