

More to a mosque than meets the eye

Shahidul Alam's photo exhibit "Embracing the Other" at Bait Ur Rouf

FAHMIM FERDOUS

Shahidul Alam, one of Bangladesh's leading artistic voices, held a bold yet sincere exhibition yesterday on the outskirts of Dhaka that attempted to break new grounds -- literally and figuratively. The daylong photography exhibit -- "Embracing the Other" -- was held along the outer walls of the Bait Ur Rouf mosque in Fayedabad near Abdullahpur.

The mosque, recipient of the world's richest architecture prize -- the Aga Khan Award for Architecture (to architect Marina Tabassum) -- was the focal element of the exhibition. Unique in its design and for its simplicity, use of natural light and ventilation, the mosque built in the Sultanate mosque architecture is more than just a prayer space -- it can be used as a school, an informal playground and as a place for spiritual contemplation. And that is exactly what Shahidul Alam portrays in his photos. "The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) introduced mosques in Madinah as a multi-dimensional space -- as administrative office, shelter, educational institute

and even as a nursing space. He even opened the doors to mosques to non-Muslims," says Alam. "The concept of mosques has moved quite far away from that, and my target with this exhibition was to debunk the wave of Islamophobia in the world, and portray Islam as the religion it is -- a religion of openness and welcoming nature."

The exhibition was initially supposed to take place inside the mosque, as agreed upon by the mosque committee and the architect, but some "pressure" prompted a slight change of plan -- to host it outside the walls.

"I came here over a long time and took photos here, and I saw that this mosque is not just for prayers; I have seen people in deep contemplation, and even resting. I have seen children play cricket outside the mosque, and even birds knitting their nests. If a ball flew in to the mosque, someone at the mosque would go and send the ball outside, without scolding the children. It gave me the feeling that this mosque is unique -- it has a life of its own, that is forgiving, open and receptive, just as

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Acclaimed photographer Shahidul Alam, in a purple panjabi, along with a group of madrasa children listen to Munir M Merali, resident diplomatic representative at Aga Khan Development Network in Bangladesh, middle, during Alam's photography exhibition along the outer walls of the Bait Ur Rouf mosque in the capital's Fayedabad yesterday. Inset, a boy looks at photographs.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Quader hints at cabinet reshuffle

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said there might be a reshuffle of the cabinet soon.

"Cabinet reshuffle is a regular process. There might be a reshuffle of the cabinet...but we don't know who would remain and who wouldn't.... It's completely under the jurisdiction of the prime minister," Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, told reporters at his ministry.

About Jatiya Party's decision on quitting the government, he said it was the JP's own matter whether they would leave the government. "But I think they won't quit the government anytime soon."

In 2014, the AL formed its second

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EU hopeful all parties will take part in polls

Says its envoy in Dhaka

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

European Union envoy in Dhaka Pierre Mayaudon yesterday expressed optimism that all political parties would take part in the next general election scheduled for early 2019.

He said the EU has a universal agenda to promote free, fair and inclusive elections, and "it is their wish to see Bangladesh responds to that pillar."

The EU ambassador was talking to a select group of journalists at the office of the EU Delegation in the capital ahead of the Europe Day today.

Ambassador Mayaudon said some lessons were learnt from the last general election held on January 5, 2014.

"There have been some lessons

learnt already that will lead to proper approach."

He hoped the next parliamentary election would be an occasion of all Bangladeshi citizens.

Responding to a question on Hefajat-e Islam and a recently formed electoral alliance led by Jatiya Party, the diplomat said he found the developments positive.

The government's move to engage with the Hefajat was positive in the sense of having an "inclusive society," he added.

"If initiatives are taken to engage with some components of the society who otherwise would have been left aside...I think it's positive."

Mayaudon said it is important to

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Pierre Mayaudon

Banks to go in family grips

FROM PAGE 1

About the amendments approved yesterday, Mirza Azizul Islam, a former adviser to a caretaker government, told The Daily Star, "This is definitely not desirable from the point of good governance in the banking sector."

"I think the government has surrendered to the pressure exerted by the business lobby. Other than this, I don't find any justification for the amendment."

The former adviser said if four directors were from the same family, their interest would be reflected in the bank's policies.

Ibrahim Khaled, a former deputy governor of the central bank, said, "It will go against the interest of the depositors and it will establish family domination in banks."

He said as banks were run with the depositors' money, the sheer control of a single family was not desirable.

"The proposed change may bring very bad results to the governance of banks. Already, the governance in the sector has come under challenge."

He said instead of increasing the number of directors from the same family and extending their tenure, the government should have given more power to the central bank and brought diversity to the banks' boards.

Khaled thinks the owners of private banks give money to the government for various purposes, particularly for relief work during natural calamities. "As a result, the owners of the banks have been able to exert pressure on the government to make the changes."

Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB), a platform of owners of private banks, in October last year demanded various amendments to the Act.

A BAB team led by its Chairman Nazrul Islam Mazumder placed the

demands before Finance Minister AMA Muhith.

The finance ministry took the initiative to amend the law and sought opinion from the central bank.

Bangladesh Bank has opposed the amendment demands, saying, "The governance of the private banks will be affected if the law is amended, as the banks do business with a huge amount of money from depositors."

The BAB said the tenure could be applicable to the directors coming from outside, like independent directors, appointed directors or ex-officio directors.

Since the sponsors have invested their money to set up banks, it would not be judicious to deprive them of their position and wealth, said the association, adding that the term for the share-holding directors should not be fixed.

Don't lease out water bodies

Flood-affected haor people urge govt



First, they lost paddy. Then fish and ducks started dying in the haors of Sunamganj. People of the haor areas now demand that the vast water bodies not be leased out at least for this year so that they can survive. This photo of fishermen at work in Sunamganj's Tanguar Haor was taken a few days ago.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

MINTU DESHWARA, back from Sunamganj

Jahangir Alam lives off Boro farming in Sunamganj for around seven months. For the rest of the year, he and his family subsist on fishing from the haors.

This year however will not be the same. Floods in late March and April inundated the croplands, destroying the Boro right before harvests. Afterwards, fish and ducks died in huge numbers.

For Jahangir, the only way to make ends meet now is to catch and sell whatever fish is left in the waters. But it is no easy task considering the fact that there are around six lakh people in the same quagmire as his, as per the district council chairman.

This has led Jahangir and most of the residents of Chagtia village to demand a stop to leasing out of water bodies, at least for this year, considering the adversities they are facing.

A platform advocating for saving the haors, Haor Bachao Sunamganj Bachao Andolan, and Sunamganj District Lawyers Association support them. There are reports of some organisations sending a memorandum in this regard to the prime minister.

Sources in the district administration say there are 1,119 water bodies.

The size of each of 418 of these water bodies is above 20 acres and they are leased out by the district administration and land ministry for three and six years respectively usually around the Bangla month of Chaitra.

The sources say most of these 418 water bodies have been leased out,

leading to the government getting around Tk 17 crore in revenue, and the land ministry is processing papers for the remaining 44.

The current state of 625 of the water bodies, which are each below 20 acres in size and leased out by the upazila administrations, could not be known.

The remaining 76 of the 1,119, small in size and adjoining riverbanks, are open for all. Jahangir says the 76 are not stocked enough to meet the demand.

Moreover another villager of Bishambharpur upazila, Mubarak Hossain, accuses some of the leaseholders of forcibly occupying those they took lease of.

"Leaseholders will soon be appointing armed guards. What will we do?" Jahangir told this correspondent.

Samsul Mia of the same village says people in haor regions do not have food in their homes and at intervals passing days on empty stomachs. He says they would have nothing to turn to if the leases are not cancelled for the year.

Nirmal Bhattacharya, a local leader of the farmers, says the demand was not new and that the rights of the fishermen existed only on paper. He too demanded opening the haors for those affected by the floods.

Deputy Commissioner Sheikh Rafiqul Islam believes the 76 open-for-all water bodies were enough to meet demands. The decision on continuing leasing out water bodies was for the highest level of the government to take, he added.

Meals get pricier in a week

FROM PAGE 1

Gul Mahfuza, a university student, was surprised at the prices of most of the vegetables at Hatirpool market in the capital.

"I bought a kg of bitter gourd for Tk 60 a week ago, but I had to buy it for Tk 80 today [Sunday]."

"If the prices continue to rise before the Ramadan, I don't know what will happen during the holy month," she said.

Wishing anonymity, a private college teacher said she bought okra and eggplant for Tk 60 a kg each at a bazaar in Mirpur on Saturday whereas she had bought the same for less than Tk 50 a kg two weeks ago.

"The prices are too high for many." Asked whether she inquired the sellers about the reason behind the price hike, she said, "What's the point of asking them the reasons behind the price spiral?"

Traders in the city blamed supply shortage for the price hike. They said excessive rain and hailstorm damaged crops and vegetables in many parts of the country, leading to a drop in supply and the price spike.

Growers and traders in Savar and Bogra echoed their words.

Jahangir Alam, a vegetable grower in Savar, said heavy rain damaged bitter gourd and wax

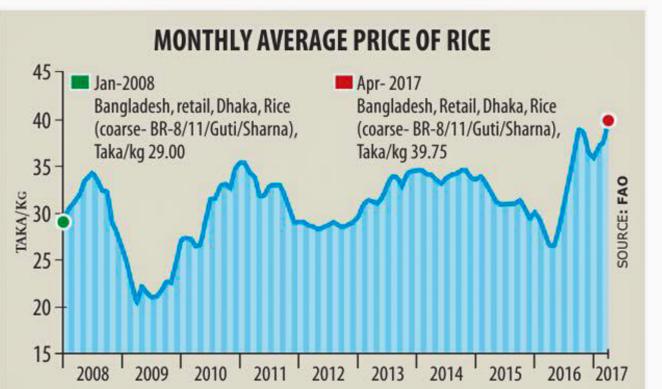
gourd on four-fifths of his one-acre cropland.

"The condition of crops doesn't look good," he said.

Seeking anonymity, a senior official of the Department of Agricultural Marketing said many parts of the country saw excessive rain last month when

northwestern districts last month, leading to a further rise in prices of the staple.

Around a week ago, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina warned of tough action against hoarding of food grains and increasing food prices artificially on the plea of sudden flood in the haor



summer vegetables just started coming to markets.

The blow to vegetable growers comes after flood hit haor areas and some northwestern parts of the country. Moreover, blast attack caused loss of paddy in several

region.

"There is no shortage of food in the country," she said at a rally during her visit to Sunamganj.

Talking to this newspaper, some consumers demanded increased monitoring by the authorities for ensuring

fair prices of the essentials in the markets.

Aklima Yeasmin, a housewife who went to the New Market to buy groceries, said heavy rain may have an impact on prices of rice and vegetables. "But I don't find any relations between it and rising prices of garlic, potato and onion."

Mohammad Amir Ali, a garment worker at Ashulia, said he had to pay Tk 2,550 for a 50-kg sack of rice on May 4, up from Tk 2,120 a month ago.

He also paid more than the usual price for pointed gourd and eggplant. "My wages have not gone up. It's hard to keep up with the soaring prices of rice and other essentials," said the 26-year-old worker, who can earn a maximum of Tk 10,000 a month, including overtime.

"We have to work hard. But we cannot get the required amount of nutrition... The price spike has worsened the situation further... It hurts," said Ali.

Mizanur Rahman, who runs a 22-member mess at Tejturi Bazar, said he had to spend Tk 3,500 daily for buying foods for the members, up from Tk 3,000 seven to 10 days ago.

[Our correspondents from Savar, Bogra and Rajshahi contributed to this report.]

Rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 1

checking the bill, marketing division found some discrepancies among the documents. Regarding the discrepancies, Shahjalal Fertiliser Factory investigated the matter by an inquiry committee and BCIC did not pay the concerned carrying bill.

In the meantime, South Delta Shipping and Trading Ltd submitted another bill of the same godown. Marketing division found same discrepancies. So BCIC formed a high powered committee headed by Director (planning and Implementation) to investigate the matter. If it is proved that anybody involved in misappropriation fertiliser, criminal and departmental actions will be lodged against them and the losses will be realised as compensation.

Allegation of fund misappropriation in 2015 against Mr Mohammad

Shaheen Kamal, then Controller of Accounts presently working as Director (production and research) is not absolutely true. The amount was around Tk 60-62 thousand which was paid as reimbursement as such this is not misappropriation. This has done as per the delegation of financial power of BCIC and same have example in the previous year.

Momtaz Begum and Shaheen Kamal were rewarded instead of getting punished because they have blessing of BCIC's chairman in not true at all. They have been promoted by the virtue of their own merit after observing all formalities.

OUR REPLY

The BCIC's own investigation, not The Daily Star's, found two of its officers and two fertiliser transporters misappropriated over 5,400 tonnes of ferti-

liser worth approximately Tk 17.57 crore in two separate incidents.

In one case, the BCIC on January 15 wrote to the two officers -- Nabir Uddin Khan, former in-charge of Shantahar buffer warehouse, now on post-retirement leave, and Masudur Rahman, an accounts official of Shahjalal Fertiliser Company Ltd, who was posted at the Shantahar warehouse earlier, -- and transporter Bulk Trade International Ltd asking them to return Tk 3.94 crore within 15 days or face legal actions.

No action was taken against the officials or the carrier, even though they did not pay a penny back.

In the other case, the BCIC's own probe found the same officials and another transporter -- South Delta Shipping and Trading Ltd -- were involved in the misappropriation of around 3,890 tonnes of fertiliser worth

Tk 13.63 crore.

It took no action against them apart from forming another probe body, which the BCIC has claimed.

Again allegations of fund misappropriations against the BCIC Director (Production & Research) Shaheen Kamal were proved in an internal probe in 2015.

It was the industries ministry that asked the BCIC to file a departmental case against CoP Momtaz Begum, the then deputy-CoP, for "corruption, nepotism, taking financial benefits and leaking recruitment exam's question paper in 2009".

Both Momtaz and Shaheen were promoted without facing actions recommended by the probe body. So the BCIC's claims in the rejoinder about them are not based on facts.

We stand by our report.