

Editor and Publisher

(The Daily Star)

Mahfuz Anam

Editor (Star Weekend)

Sushmita S Preetha

Staff Writers

Naimul Karim

Md Shahnawaz Khan Chandan

Zyma Islam

Nilima Jahan

Amiya Halder

Maliha Khan

Staff Photographer

Kazi Tahsin Agaz Apurbo

Graphics & Illustrations

Manan Morshed

Make-up

Md Saiful Islam

Production

Shamim Chowdhury

Published by the Editor from

Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon

Industrial Area, Dhaka on

behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52

Motijheel C.A., Dhaka-1000.



PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

"Here they learned to Wait. To Watch.
To think thoughts and not voice them."
— Arundhati Roy

SNAPSHOT

MAILBOX

thestarmagazine@gmail.com

A tourist in Saha's political world

Confusion between media, message, and personal bias abound in Zyma Islam's article, "Whimsical, political, subversive: A review of 'Tasher Desh.'" By curating a political exhibition in an active, factory/residential building, outside of Dhaka's main cultural district, Atish Saha is challenging basic assumptions about what art is and who it benefits.

To her credit, the writer allowed herself to go on an adventure in Dhaka: she took the invitation to explore a place she'd never been and gave honest, descriptive accounts of the print district and many of the exhibition's art pieces. However, her writing exposes her class bias and casts her as a tourist in Saha's political world.

The purpose of art cannot be to "humanise" any group of people, a phrase that Islam uses repeatedly in her article. Workers, labourers, artists, men, women, children... we're already human, and frankly, it's the personal responsibility of each individual to learn to recognise the person-hood of others, rather than locate humanity in artworks.

The purpose of contemporary art is to incite new thoughts and feelings in its viewers. When a space or a medium is also alive and changing the presence of real life becomes a part of how we experience the art. What does it mean to live and work with art? What does it mean to encounter art in your daily life?



When art is displayed in a gallery it's meant for upper-class people to see and ultimately possess. Atish challenged this assumption when he divorced his exhibition from a traditional gallery space and the expected social order. He expanded the dialog beyond artist and viewer, encompassing art vs space, and expectations vs perceived reality.

Islam's description of Juneer Kibria's video work, displayed on cellphones, was particularly confused. She writes just three sentences on her encounter with the piece, then continues to impress her concern that the phones are valuable property and could be stolen over three paragraphs, where the exasperated curator insists the art is about video not theft. I must repeat: Kibria's piece was not concerned with the phones

themselves, and he does not wish to test or showcase the morality of the building's inhabitants. The videos are a series of bold, graphic images where quiet moments from the artist's personal archives are invaded by totalitarian imagery, and absurd textual responses to his loss of personal power in the face of larger social powers. The phones were just a populous tool to convey his critique of current, systemic, global oppression which the artist observes in his home country of Bangladesh and in the USA where he currently resides. I cannot express how sad it makes me that the press failed to see a critique of oppression in favour of baseless judgement of working people.

Atish Saha has created a behemoth exhibition, giving platform and

supporting the voices of 25 Bangladeshi artists who unflinchingly comment on topics that are truly important to the political character of Dhaka right now. I would encourage the author of this article and those who share her views to take a second look—a very close look—at the show and their own preconceived opinions. Consider what art, spaces, and ideas make you uncomfortable and why, and allow yourself to be immersed in Saha's worldview.

Betsy Zacek is an independent artist and curator working out of Chicago. Zacek has followed the careers of Atish Saha and Juneer Kibria for many years. She has not seen the exhibition in Dhaka but has been an integral part of the team of Tasher Desh.

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Star Weekend.

| ENDEAVOUR |

Dr Samanta Lal Sen was going through a difficult Saturday. His peon had conveniently extended his Eid holidays, and Dr Sen had come to know of this only at 9 am that day after he reached his workplace.

As a result, the National Coordinator of the Dhaka Medical College's Burn Unit spent the first hour struggling to explain to the patients, flocking in into his unguarded chamber, that it was not him who they needed to meet but the doctors who were on duty.

Now retired, Dr Sen is responsible for the overall coordination of the Burn Unit, rather than conducting surgeries. However, trying to explain that to the pouring number of people was next to impossible.

From the request of a septuagenarian woman from Sylhet—who had tried to get to the doctor's good side with three



Abul Bajandar



Muktamoni

AGAINST THE ODDS

The Dhaka Medical College Hospital has successfully conducted some of the rarest surgeries in the world this year. Doctors believe that they can achieve a lot more if they are given the right facilities.

NAIMUL KARIM

home-grown mangoes—to oversee her son's operation (which had nothing to do with the Burn Unit), to a youngster in his mid-20s, who attempted to start a freewheeling conversation, without an appointment, regarding a surgery which he may require in the near future, the queue seemed endless.

The situation eventually came under control after a replacement was found to occupy the peon's desk outside. "A number of these patients aren't even in the right department," says Dr Sen after taking a breather. "Many of them come



Tofa and Tohura

PHOTO: STAR FILE

to me, not because of my expertise, but because my father was a famous doctor in Sylhet. And they think that the doctor's son can cure everything," he adds with a smile.

The scenario witnessed, in a way, reflects the great deal of pressure that the Dhaka Medical College Hospital has to

undergo throughout the year. Often the only hope for patients who can't afford expensive treatment, you find people from all over the country desperately seeking appointments here. Take for instance, the case of the Burn Unit. While the hospital has 100 beds, they are currently treating around 500 patients.

Every time there is a major accident, the number of patients goes up exponentially.

When you place the rare operations that have taken place recently at the DMCH against this backdrop of enormous pressure and sub-par facilities, you can only marvel at the achievement.

This year alone has witnessed the DMCH successfully perform three rare surgeries.

The first one was conducted in January on 27-year-old Abul Bajandar, who was dubbed the tree man because of the large, wood-like warts on his body, caused by the rare genetic condition epidermodysplasia verruciformis. In fact, it was so rare that he was one of the first three cases in the world, as per records.

Dr Sen, who was a part of the team that conducted the surgery, recalls the first time Bajandar set foot at the DMCH.

"When he first came to us, we were all surprised because we had never seen such a patient. It was a risky surgery because we did not want to cut his blood vessels. There were these wart-like things on his hands and if we would have cut a blood vessel, his fingers wouldn't function.

"The first 10 to 12 operations were quite risky. But eventually it became easier. Based on blood tests we know that this is something that can grow again. It can recur. So we have to be in touch with Abul for at least a year and observe him," explains Dr Sen.

Continued to page 15

JUST A HOOK TO SOME LOVED ONES' SAFETY TO US

BSRM
building a safer nation