



# The everlasting charm of DHAKA ART SUMMIT

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February is the month of spring, love, books, and flowers. Along with Ekushey Boi Mela, this month also saw the return of the biggest arena of art and culture—Dhaka Art Summit (DAS) 2023.

Featuring over 160 artists from South Asia and other parts of the world, the 6th DAS was inaugurated at the National Art Gallery of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) on February 3.

After completing the inauguration programme, the summit officially kicked-off with the *Chant of Hope*, a wonderful performance at the building entrance by Miet Warlop.

To the right of the main entry door, was Matt Copson’s *Age of Coming*—a laser show where he portrays his existential conflicts through an infant.

A large symmetric installation showing soldiers circling indigenous figures, on the ground floor lobby left me in awe.

Next, I ventured out to see *Dwaidho* in Gallery 6, a project including works of artists, architects, photographers, researchers, and designers. This initiative was created to aware people about how environmental change is affecting our lives and surroundings using sensory interactionism.

Veteran artist Farida Zaman’s mesmerising painting remained in her signature black, white, and vibrant orange palette. Nazlee Laila Mansur, Kanak Chanpa Chakma, Hamiduzzaman, Shahabuddin and many more renowned artists joined this movement.

The floors contained material such as leather, jute,



Installation and artworks displayed at DAS 2023.

PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED.

straw, sand, and rice husk. The entire gallery was like a tiny version of our motherland, co-produced by Brihatta Art Foundation and Samdani Art Foundation. The marginalised indigenous groups of Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees, and the Transgender community each had their own little stalls for displaying and selling their craft items—the earnings of which would contribute to their sustenance and development.

The Rohingya Cultural Memory Centre (RCMC) along with IOM UN Migration supported three projects: *Very Small Feelings*, *To Enter the Sky*, and *Purposeful Goods*.

Afra Eisma, an artist from The Hague, created a magical wonderland called *Poke Press Squeeze Clasp* using yarn, ceramics, and textiles. The floor tapestry with soft and squishy vertical elements represents a

space where one can spend time with fantasy creatures and have intimate conversations with their loved ones.

*Nobody Knows for Certain* by Afrah Shafiq from Goa, is an interactive fiction and archival game, that creates a surreal experience. I played the game as a Soviet Tsarina and also a tailless kitten, born in India. The game draws inspiration from world history and folklores.

There were several pieces from Ukrainian artists, depicting the current Russian aggression on their struggling homeland.

Ready-made Garments (RMG) workers are one of Bangladesh’s greatest resources. So, they were granted a spot to exhibit their painfully difficult lives—usually filled with injustice—through sewed clothes, and fabrics.

Another installation was an orange balloon-shaped space, dedicated to creating a reading space for the visitors and children.

An entire gallery was gracefully enriched with the twelve art pieces selected for the Samdani Art Award. Among these, the humongous piece with bright colours, called *The Gardener’s Dream* caught my eyes. The artist, Rasel Rana from Dhaka took a metaphorical and technically surrealistic approach on their dream of living in an inclusive world where every human being is treated equally, irrespective of gender.

There is so much to see and learn from every corner of the Dhaka Art Summit. Overall, this event has definitely exceeded all expectations and hopefully the remaining days of the programme will continue to do so.

DAS 2023 is open for all and will run at BSA until February 11.

## NEWS

### Tigers take reins

FROM PAGE 12

but this time it was different. They even stayed around the premises through the night, and were joined by the third big cat.

Quoting Farooq Sheikh, in-charge of Chandeshwar forest patrol post, the ACF said the forest guards were quite alarmed and did not venture outside in this time.

Divisional Forest Officer (East Sundarbans Forest Division) Mohammad Belayet Hossain said movement of tigers have increased in the area but did not comment on whether their numbers had increased.

MA Aziz, professor of Department of Zoology at Jahangirnagar University, who also works on research on prey animals in the Sundarbans, said tigers are very secretive and territorial animals.

It is quite unusual for them to roam around and stay for such a long time in one place. This matter should be looked into, he said.

“If there were three tigers together, it is likely two of them are cubs and one is the mother because [adult] males are generally solitary beings and only roam with a female during mating season – that too not for long,” he added.

Professor Aziz further noted that tigers sometimes venture into forest offices to drink freshwater from the pond but generally shy away from humans. As such he urged that the matter should be looked into to determine whether there was any disturbance within their habitat inside the forest.

### DU BCL men

FROM PAGE 12

month. When the businessmen refused, Imdadul and the others forced the owners to shut shop for at least a week.

Contacted yesterday, Imdadul denied the allegation. “The businessman wronged some students of our hall. I called him to know about that matter and requested him to meet me. This issue has already been solved.”

Chhatra League General Secretary Sheikh Wali Asif Enan said, “We started an investigation into the allegations. We will take necessary actions against him if we find proof.”

### ‘Not a smart deal’

FROM PAGE 1

deal and it certainly needs to be reworked,” Sobhan said at a session of the sixth Sanem Annual Economists’ Conference held at the Brac Centre Inn in Dhaka.

Since the electricity generated by the Godda power plant would be exported, it must run on coal imported and not coal from Indian mines.

And as per the power purchase agreement signed in November 2017, PDB, which would be buying all the power generated by the plant, would be paying for the coal as well as its transport costs at the market rate, reports The Washington Post.

The Post has obtained the confidential 163-page document and got three industry analysts to review it.

The coal will most likely come from Adani’s mines in Indonesia or Australia on Adani ships to an Adani-owned port in eastern India, then arrive at the plant on a stretch of Adani-built rail, The Post said.

The electricity generated will be sent to the border over an Adani-built high-voltage line. Under the contract, shipping and transmission costs will be passed on to Bangladesh, it said, adding that the 25-year deal is “hardly favourable for Bangladesh”.

“I remember the original transaction with Adani. He was going to construct a plant inside Bangladesh and bring in coal from

his coal mines in India. This was supposed to be growth-enhancing for the Bangladesh economy because the development would have been in the country,” Sobhan said.

The deal signed ended up being “a very peculiar contract” as Bangladesh is paying for the coal he is bringing from his mine in Australia and also for its shipment.

So the cost of coal is turning out to be disproportionately high, said Sobhan, the chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

Adani Power has recently sent a request to PDB to issue a demand note that it can present to Indian authorities to open letters of credit for the coal import. In the letter, the coal price was quoted at \$400 per metric ton, reports UNB.

This prompted the government to seek a review of the power purchase agreement.

“In our view, the coal price they have quoted is excessive – it should be less than \$250 per metric ton, which is what we are paying for the imported coal at our other thermal power plants,” a PDB official told UNB.

The Adani power plant’s coal price will be \$346 per metric ton, which is much higher than the amount paid by the local coal-fired power plants, according to a report prepared by the Power Cell in January.

“We have already not negotiated a very smart deal, and for a country that

is aspiring to be Smart Bangladesh, we can try to be a lot smarter when we enter into a transaction,” Sobhan said.

The groundwork for the power purchase agreement was laid by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 2015 state visit to Bangladesh, reports The Post.

Modi asked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to “facilitate the entry of Indian companies in the power generation, transmission and distribution sector of Bangladesh,” according to an Indian foreign ministry readout of their meeting.

“After Modi’s trip to Bangladesh, that country’s power authority contracted with Adani to build a \$1.7 billion, 1,600-megawatt coal power plant,” said the report published in December last year.

For Modi, it was an opportunity to bolster his “Neighbourhood First” foreign policy and promote Indian business, the report said.

“Mr Adani got more than just his business acumen to support him in the deals that he makes, so what elements of the transaction are driven by political variables and what are driven by public interest, we do not really know,” Sobhan added.

### Investigate

FROM PAGE 12

since it was passed a decade ago, the HRW said citing Bangladesh media reports.

Bangladesh has ignored repeated requests from the UN Committee Against Torture to follow up its recommendations, as required, the rights organisation said, adding that the committee’s recommendations included independent monitoring of all detention sites and investigation of all allegations of torture or ill-treatment by law enforcement officials.

Bangladesh security forces are under increased scrutiny following the designation of human rights sanctions by the US government and in the lead-up to the general elections slated for early 2024, the HRW said.

The Bangladesh authorities should implement the recommendations by the Committee Against Torture, investigate allegations, and hold perpetrators to account, it added.

### The poor have their back

FROM PAGE 12

and personal hygiene items, and transport costs.

The latest data of the state-run Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) shows that prices of almost all essentials have increased by between 1 percent and 151 percent year-on-year on average.

The price of potatoes usually remains low in winter, but things are different this winter as the price of the vegetable has shot up by 83.33 percent year-on-year. The price of both fine and medium-quality rice has soared by 3.77 percent and 5.47 percent during the same period.

The average prices of per kg wheat and flour have soared by 66.2 and 40.63 percent in the last one year, reads the TCB’s January 31 market price report.

Shamim Ahmed, a resident of Hatirpool, said a medium-sized gourd used to sell for Tk 50 in winter a couple of years ago, but the same vegetable now costs Tk 80-90. A bundle of spinach was sold for less than Tk 10 back then against the current price of over Tk 15.

“People had hoped the prices of vegetables would drop in winter, but the prices didn’t come down as expected,” he said.

Nayeem Shahriar, an official of a public bank, said he has changed his breakfast menu.

“I used to have bread for breakfast every day. To reduce the consumption of flour, I now eat bread only on weekends.”

He said doctors advised him to take bread at breakfast, but he couldn’t afford to have it any more. Instead, he is now eating rice at breakfast on weekdays.

The inflation rate started rising in February last year due to the Russia-Ukraine war.

After coming down slightly in May,

the inflation rate started rising again in June. It surged in August after the fresh hike in fuel prices. The rate continued increasing for two months before coming down slightly in December, said the CAB report.

The food inflation rate in the capital showed a declining trend up to April last year, but the rates for both food and non-food items started rising from May, it added.

The non-food inflation rate went all the way up to 18.86 percent in July last year.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Deputy Director of Department of Agriculture Marketing Mohammad Emdadul Haque said the rise in transport and production costs has contributed to the increase in vegetable prices.

“The price of diesel has gone up, leading to rise in both transport and production costs,” he said.

He hoped the prices of some vegetables, including potato, would start to drop in the coming weeks.

Last month, CAB Chairman Ghulam Rahman said once the price of a product increases in the country, it cannot be expected that the price would come down quickly.

He urged the government to take special measures to increase the income of the general people to reduce income disparity as the earnings of the high-income people have been much higher than those of the lower- and middle-income people.

There was no relief for the general people last year in terms of commodity prices. The Russia-Ukraine War also had an impact on the country’s economy, the CAB chief said.

He expressed concern that non-food inflation might go up further this year due to the increase in house rent and electricity and gas prices.

### It’s an example

FROM PAGE 2

The envoy yesterday visited the Maitree Super Thermal Power Plant in Bagerhat’s Rampal, being built with funding from the Indian government’s concessional financing scheme with an outlay of around \$2 billion.

The majority of the amount is being provided by India’s EXIM Bank. The plant uses ultra-supercritical technology and is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities.

Phase-I of the 1,320MW power

plant was inaugurated by the prime ministers of India and Bangladesh in September 2022 and has already started supplying electricity to the national grid.

Phase-II of the project is expected to be completed shortly, officials said.

During his two-day visit (Friday-Saturday) to the Khulna division, Pranay visited some of the important connectivity projects which are being developed under the Bangladesh-India development partnership.