



PHOTO: COLLECTED

# Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage: Still a long way to go?

“It’s a long way to go, yes. But with adequate assistance from the government and communities, we will be able to safeguard our cultural heritage,” Lubna concludes with a hopeful smile.

DOWEL BISWAS

Cultural heritage encompasses both tangible and intangible elements that form the bedrock of ethnic or regional practices, connecting the past with the present and future. Bangladesh, with a population of approximately 170 million across 148,460 square kilometres, boasts a rich cultural tapestry comprising unique traditions and practices.

While many countries grapple with challenges to preserve their cultural identities, Bangladeshis are intricately woven into diverse tangible and intangible cultural facets. Grandmothers impart regional fantasy stories, lullabies, and traditional recipes; evenings resonate with the melodic tones of *puithi* and *kirtan*. The concept of ‘*Baro Mashee Tero Parbon*’ remains an integral part of daily life.

However, possessing such a culturally endowed heritage raises a crucial question: is it enough?

Lubna Marium, a renowned dancer, cultural activist, and artistic director of Shadhona, asserts, “Unfortunately, culture has become a primary site for struggle.” Recognising the cultural construct of the state, Marium emphasises that any threat to culture hampers societal progress, national unity, and diversity. To address this, she has spearheaded the establishment of a comprehensive Intangible Cultural Heritage Inventory (ICH) through Shadhona.

Lubna’s non-profit organisation, Shadhona, a centre for the advancement of South Asian culture, has an impressive decade-long history of safeguarding ICH practices.

Over the past 14 years, Lubna Marium, in collaboration with Unesco and the Bangladesh National Museum, has successfully created a national inventory and a web application.

This platform allows individuals to document their intangible cultural heritage and practices exclusive to their communities.

While this achievement is commendable, Saymon Zakaria, a prominent Bangladeshi folk researcher and deputy director of the Department of Culture at the Bangla Academy, raises a pertinent question: “Is it enough?”



Renowned dancer and cultural activist Lubna Marium. PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL

Zakaria emphasises the need to engage communities on a grassroots level, creating awareness and providing training to list their intangible cultural heritage in the inventory.

Lubna Marium underscores the intricate connection between cultural elements and their respective communities, stressing the importance of safeguarding practices that have held significance for thousands of years. She proposes a four-goal approach: documentation, celebration, transmission, and ensuring sustainability through eco-tourism.

Highlighting the importance of cultural heritage as a right, Lubna notes that Bangladesh is a signatory to the *Unesco Convention for Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural*

*Heritage (ICH) 2003*, signed in 2009. The convention encourages member states to empower communities by safeguarding ICH practices and aligning them with efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of 2030.

Despite Shadhona’s Unesco accreditation and successful inventory creation, community-level engagement remains a challenge due to limited government efforts. Saymon Zakaria acknowledges the government’s lack of experience in collaborating with civil society on such projects but emphasises the need for enthusiasm and participation.

“It is what has been happening for the last 14 years. We have the Unesco accreditation; we have the funds; the only thing we need more of is a little enthusiasm and participation from the government’s end to go to the next step of safeguarding,” said the cultural activist Lubna Marium.

“We are planning to divide the project into eight divisions this time. We will divide into teams, reach a community or two in each division, and train them in safeguarding ICH practices. Recently, we concluded our first community-based fair in the National Museum in the capital, and I am really optimistic that we will be able to achieve what we envisioned,” said Lubna.

As Shadhona and The National Museum mark the 20th anniversary of signing the Unesco Convention, a fair titled *Oitijho* was held from November 18 to 19 at The National Museum premises in the capital. Lubna Marium remains optimistic about the future, stating, “It’s a long way to go, but with adequate assistance from the government and communities, we will be able to safeguard our cultural heritage.”

## Anjan Dutt’s masterclass to be held in Dhaka



The 22nd Dhaka International Film Festival is set to commence next year, on January 20. Despite being two months away, the nine-day film festival is already generating anticipation, with organisers making several surprising announcements.

Anjan Dutt, the renowned musician, filmmaker, and actor from West Bengal, will conduct a masterclass on January 27 at the festival, which will be hosted by Bangladeshi film critic Bidhan Rebeiro at the Bangmata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Auditorium of the Bangladesh National Museum.

Additionally, famous Iranian director Majid Majidi and Chinese Film Professor Dr Shi Chuan will also conduct masterclasses at the upcoming film festival.

## Jaya Ahsan shines at IFFI with ‘Kadak Singh’ team, trailer unveiled

Jaya Ahsan graced the stage at the 54th edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI), which kicked off on Monday in Goa.

The gorgeous actress, along with the *Kadak Singh* team – director Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury, Pankaj Tripathi, and Sanjana Sanghi, attended the gala premiere to unveil the trailer for their upcoming movie at the opening ceremony of the festival.

The trailer hints at a narrative focused on Kadak Singh/AK Srivastav, portrayed by Pankaj Tripathi, a joint director at the Department of Financial Crimes grappling with retrograde amnesia. Jaya Ahsan portrays Kadak Singh’s girlfriend, attempting to jog his memory about past experiences.



# NEWS

## Sitting idle at times of crisis

FROM PAGE 12

On August 21, the committee approved a direct purchase method for releasing and circulating the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman’s biopic ‘Mujib: The Making of a Nation’ in all movie theatres. The agenda also includes two proposals from the energy and housing and public works ministries.

“I never saw any discussion on the overall economic situation in the meetings of this committee that I attended in the last several years,” Planning Minister MA Mannan told The Daily Star.

The committee addressed the issues that are mentioned in the agenda, he said.

Asked whether the committee has failed to live up to its mandate, Mannan said: “It would have been better if they could do it. However, that

does not mean we have suffered a lot due to their inactivity.”

The committee mainly discusses important government purchases, said Farhad Hossain, the state minister for public administration, while failing to recall the last time the committee assessed and evaluated Bangladesh’s economic situation.

“The finance ministry and the Bangladesh Bank regularly review the country’s economic situation – the committee does not discuss these things,” he added.

“The committee is headed by political leaders. If they are not interested in doing their jobs properly, the bureaucrats and officials do not want to take much responsibility,” said an additional secretary who works closely with the committee. He asked not to be named to speak candidly on

the issue.

The head of the committee – Kamal – is very irregular with his office attendance, he said. “His officials hardly find him in the ministry. How can we expect something creative and constructive from this committee?”

Kamal did not attend the Executive Committee of National Economic Affairs meetings regularly and he missed more than half of the sessions in this parliament.

“It is not that these issues were not discussed in the meetings of the committee. If needed, we sometimes discuss various economic issues on an ad hoc basis by going beyond the scheduled topics,” Kamal told The Daily Star.

He suggested the correspondent talk to the cabinet division, which sets the agendas of the committee’s meetings.

## Another spell of 48-hr blockade begins today

FROM PAGE 12

committee member Mirza Abbas in the capital’s Shahjahanpur area around 8:00am, said his wife, Afroza Abbas.

Afroza, also the president of Jatiyatabadi Mohila Dal, told reporters, “Following the explosions, the house got engulfed in smoke.”

Contacted, Hayatul Islam Khan, deputy commissioner of (Motijheel Division) police, said, “There was an incident of a crude bomb blast in the Shahjahanpur area. On information, police went to the spot to investigate.”

A bus was set on fire by unidentified criminals in Dhaka’s Jatrabari around 8:35pm yesterday.

On information, two fire engines of Postogola Fire Station went to the spot and doused the blaze, said Rafi Al

Faruk, duty officer of Fire Service and Civil Defence Headquarters.

Besides, unidentified arsonists set a truck on fire when it was parked near a market in the Seroil Colony area of Rajshahi city yesterday around 4:00am.

The cockpit of the truck was damaged in the fire, said Abu Sama, senior station officer of Rajshahi Fire Service and Civil Defence.

Informed, firefighters rushed to the spot and doused the blaze.

The Mirpur area in Dhaka witnessed the highest number of arson attacks between October 28 and November 20, according to statistics from Fire Service and Civil Defence.

A total of 197 arson attacks were reported across the country during this period. Of those, 95 attacks were

carried out in Dhaka and 17 of them were reported in Mirpur alone, it said.

Meanwhile, Rab arrested BNP chairperson’s advisors Habibur Rahman Habib and Ataur Rahman Dhali in the capital over different charges.

Later in the day, Rizvi, at a virtual press conference, said the government had been setting fire to vehicles to foil the democratic movement and to falsely implicate BNP men.

“The government is isolated from the people and has been carrying out planned arson across the country,” he said.

He claimed 14,675 party leaders and activists, including the 475 yesterday, were arrested since October 28. During this period, 346 cases were filed against party leaders and workers, he added.

in Bangladesh as the ruling Awami League dismissed the US call for dialogue, Miller said the US does not take a position in favour of one party or the other, rather it wants what the Bangladeshi people themselves want: free and fair elections which are conducted in a peaceful manner.

“And we will continue to engage with the government, opposition, civil society, other stakeholders to urge them to work together for the benefit of the Bangladeshi people to ensure that outcome.”

## SC to decide on Ashiyan City’s fate today

FROM PAGE 12

project covering 43.11 acres (some 130 Bighas) of land.

Under the Private Land Development Projects Act 2004 (amended in 2012), any housing projects covering more than 100 Bighas of land must be approved by the deputy commissioner.

When the petition was filed in 2012, Ashiyan had obtained all the required permissions from relevant government authorities, except for the DC’s approval. That permission was under process then, according to court documents.

However, since the company did not get the final approval from the DC, two judges of the three-member High Court bench in a majority decision ruled on January 16, 2014, that Rajuk’s permission was without lawful authority and that the project cannot

go ahead.

In and around the same area, many other private and public entities, including Rajuk, have already established their projects on hundreds of bighas of land, but the petitioners challenged only the Ashiyan project, court documents show.

When the HC asked why, the petitioners said they were concerned only about the Ashiyan and not any other in this case.

In a dissenting order, one HC judge dismissed the PIL, saying it was not “maintainable on point of maintainability.”

Incidentally, the DC approved the Ashiyan project on January 16, 2014, the same day the HC pronounced the verdict.

Other developers had not yet applied for the DC’s approval when Ashiyan got the No-Objection

Certificate from the DC, according to the HC verdict.

After obtaining the DC’s permission, Ashiyan filed for a review of the HC judgment, which was granted in August 2016. In this judgement, the HC also set aside the previous HC verdict that asked the Ashiyan City authorities to stop land development activities.

The writ petitioners, who also include Association for Land Reforms and Development, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, the Institute of Architects Bangladesh, and Poribesh Bachao Andolon, challenged the HC judgment granting the review petition.

The Appellate Division held three hearings on the matter in October and November this year, and fixed today for its judgment.

## A quarter out to grab state power

FROM PAGE 12

and killed? I still don’t understand why buses are being torched and state properties are being destroyed.”

At another event earlier, she said nothing can be achieved through arson violence, expressing her hope that the BNP Jamaat alliance will come back to its senses to put an end to the anarchy.

“Nothing can be achieved through burning people to death. This is wrong. Something can be gained by the power of the general people. Working for the people’s welfare and staying by them are other requirements to achieve something,” the PM said while speaking at a reception at the Army Multipurpose Complex.

At Senakunja, Hasina said the government is facing one challenge after another including Covid-19.

“We dealt with that,” she said, adding that the government has to deal with various kinds of troubles, particularly arson violence.

Expressing her desire to bring peace, the premier said, “We want peace not only within the country but also in the region and across the globe.”

Mentioning that Bangladesh is a country of peace, she said, “When people are in peace, they get relief, see a ray of hope and they are

moving forward. At that time, arson, terrorism, hartal, and blockade disrupt people’s lives again and create panic among people.”

Hasina said she wants those involved in such acts would come to their senses. “Instead of doing these destructive activities, they should join the democratic trend, and put their trust in people.”

Praising the armed forces, Hasina said, “Our armed forces stand by the people at the time of any natural disaster or state of emergency.”

The BNP and Jamaat started the recurrence of arson terrorism like they did in 2013 and 2014 in the name of a movement to dislodge the government, she said while addressing the reception accorded to the gallantry award-winning freedom fighters of the armed forces and their heirs at the Army Multipurpose Complex.

The PM also presented peacetime awards to the selected members of the armed forces for their outstanding contributions to their respective fields during 2022-23.

“We had seen the incidents of burning people to death by the Pakistani occupation forces during the Liberation War in 1971. BNP-Jamaat has started the same thing. I don’t know how a man can burn people to death.”

Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq, PM’s Security Adviser Major General (ret’d) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, Army chief General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, Navy chief M Nazmul Hassan, and Air Force chief Air Chief Marshal Shaikh Abdul Hannan were present.

Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division Lt Gen Waker-Uz-Zaman gave the welcome address.

## BCL activist killed

FROM PAGE 12

when she was going to the spot after hearing of the attack.

“On the way to the hospital, my son told me that Hiron, Roni, Mamun, Helal and some 15-20 others attacked him,” she said.

Contacted, BCL President Nazmul also alleged that followers of Nipu attacked Arif over establishing supremacy in the area.

This correspondent, however, could not communicate with Hiron for comments as his mobile phone was switched off.

Azbahar Ali Sheikh, deputy commissioner of Sylhet Metropolitan Police, said, “We have detained two people for quizzing.”

No case was filed as of 8:00pm yesterday, he said.