

Shilpakala Academy's catalytic role against polarisation and extremism

MAHIYA TABASSUM

In the complex dynamics of Bangladesh's sociopolitical landscape, the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) stands as a cultural cornerstone, wielding the soft power of the arts against the hard edges of political polarisation and religious extremism. Established in 1974, shortly after the country's independence, BSA has evolved from a fledgling institution into a robust national academy of fine and performing arts. However, its journey, much like Bangladesh's own, has been marked by periods of turmoil and renaissance.

The past two decades have seen a significant expansion of BSA's activities. In 2009, BSA's cultural initiatives received renewed focus. The academy's budget saw a tenfold increase over 15 years, reaching over Tk 100 crore annually by 2024. Despite corruption and lack of proper implementation, this financial incentive enabled BSA to extend its reach, establishing 486 Upazila Shilpakala Academies across the country—a move that democratised access to cultural resources.

BSA's initiatives in theatre, music, and visual arts have proven to be effective tools for bridging divides in Bangladesh's politically charged environment. The nationwide theatre programme has been particularly impactful. In 2022 alone, the academy sponsored 120 plays across various districts, with a budget of Tk 84 lakh. Critical analysis suggests that while government-centric productions risk alienating opposition supporters, the power of storytelling through universal themes allows BSA to humanise political opponents and foster empathy, countering the dehumanising rhetoric often employed in partisan politics.

BSA's music programmes serve a unifying function by celebrating

Bangladesh's rich musical heritage. The academy regularly organises festivals that showcase both folk and classical traditions, attracting thousands of attendees from diverse backgrounds.

In the realm of visual arts, BSA's crowning achievement is the Asian Art Biennale. The 19th edition in 2022 featured 649 artworks by 493 artists from 114 countries, making it one of the largest art exhibitions in Asia. The biennale's themes are selected every year with an aim to encourage artists to explore complex social and political issues through their work.

As Bangladesh grapples with rising challenges to its secular fabric, BSA's role

in promoting and preserving cultural heritage has taken on new significance. The academy's focus on folk traditions offers a powerful counternarrative to extremist ideologies that seek to impose a monolithic worldview. Previously, BSA has undertaken several initiatives to document and revive endangered folk-art forms.

While BSA's contributions are significant, the academy faces several challenges that limit its effectiveness. The close alignment of BSA's leadership with

the ruling party has sometimes led to accusations of politicisation. The recent transition in leadership following the July mass uprising brought the longstanding issues to the forefront. Liaquat Ali Lucky, who served as director general for 13 years, stepped down on August 12 this year, amid allegations of corruption and mismanagement. A recent report revealed discrepancies in accounts of over Tk 227 crore between 2016 and 2021, raising concerns about resource utilisation and transparency.

Following the resignation of Lucky, the appointment of Syed Jamil Ahmed as the new director general on September 9, marks a pivotal moment for BSA. Ahmed,

schools of thought aims to create a more democratic and dialogical space for art.

To enhance its impact, BSA must address several key challenges. The urban-rural divide in programme quality and frequency limits the academy's ability to counter extremism in vulnerable rural communities. While BSA conducts research, its impact on policymaking remains limited. The academy must balance preserving traditional art forms while encouraging innovation and addressing contemporary issues.

Moving forward, BSA should focus on ensuring political neutrality through structural changes, improving financial transparency through regular external audits, and bridging the urban-rural divide through targeted programmes and digital initiatives.

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy stands at a critical juncture in its history. As Bangladesh navigates the complex terrain of the post-August 5 political landscape, BSA's ability to adapt and respond to changing social dynamics will be crucial. Under new leadership, the academy has the opportunity to transform into a more dynamic and inclusive institution, one that not only preserves culture but actively shapes a national identity embracing both tradition and diversity. By embracing reform, enhancing transparency, and balancing tradition with innovation, BSA can strengthen its role as a cultural bulwark against polarisation and extremism.



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



Dhaka Intl Folk Festival unveils this year's venue and dates



The Dhaka International Folk Festival is all set to return to music lovers with renewed zest and excitement, after a four-year break.

Asifuzzaman Khan, the finance director of the organising company, Sun Communications Limited, has confirmed to local media that the sixth edition of Dhaka International Folk Fest will take place at the Bangladesh Army Stadium.

Tanvir Hossain, executive creative director of Sun Communications, said, "The Folk Festival is set for January 23 to 25. A press conference to follow soon, will cover details associated with registration, rules, and performing artists."

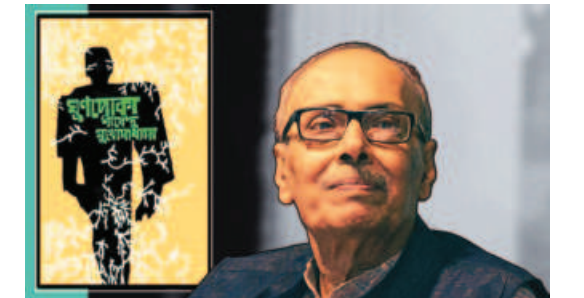
Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's debut novel to come alive on the big screen

Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's debut novel *Ghumpoka* is being adapted for the big screen.

Set in 1960s Kolkata, it follows Shyam, a young man who, after quitting his job over facing humiliation, confronts loneliness and unemployment in the city.

West Bengal-based director Palash Dey has acquired the rights to adapt this popular novel into a film.

In an interview about this upcoming project



with Anandabazar Patrika, Palash highlighted the novel's universal appeal, stating, "Although written in Bengali, it resonates globally, exploring individual journeys and celebrating life. I believe it deserves a cinematic adaptation."

COUNTRYWIDE

Rain damages vegetables on vast land

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Untimely rain since the end of last month has caused severe damage to early varieties of vegetable plants in different districts under Rangpur region.

Farmers said the water from the untimely rain got stagnant at different vegetables and spinaches fields, much to the worry of local growers.

Their vegetable plants may die if the accumulated rainwater cannot be fully drained out from the fields quickly, the farmer said.

Meanwhile, prices of winter vegetables and spinaches have increased at different local markets due to inadequate supply of the items.

Currently, different varieties of vegetables and spinaches are selling for at least 30 percent higher rates, compared to the prices about two weeks ago.

While visiting different local markets this correspondent found most of the consumers disappointed due to increase in vegetables and spinaches prices, especially during this time of the year.

A number of consumers said spinaches they bought at Tk 20 per kg over a week ago are now selling for Tk 30 at local markets.

Majidul Islam, who came to buy daily essentials at Goshala Bazar in Lalmonirhat town, said if prices of

vegetables and spinaches keep increasing like this, it will be very difficult for them to survive.

Vegetable vendor Noor Hossain said supply of different varieties of vegetables and spinaches has fall due to damages of the items, caused by the continuous rain.

Farmer Suren Chandra Sen of Karnapur village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila said he planted different varieties of vegetables and spinaches on four bighas of land this season.

He used to collect 40kg to 50kg of vegetables and spinaches from his field every day only two weeks ago, but the yield has drastically decreased due to the untimely rain.

Another grower Sabur Ali of Naodanga village in Kurigram's Phulbari upazila said vegetables and spinaches on one bigha out of his four bighas land has been completely damaged due to the rain.

Most of the early winter vegetables and spinaches in his locality are getting damaged due to stagnant water caused by the untimely rain, he said.

According to officials at Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), different varieties of vegetables and spinaches have been planted on 9,000 hectares of land in five districts of Rangpur region so far. Besides, DAE have a target to bring 26,000 hectares of land under vegetables and spinaches cultivation.



A farmer tends his vegetable plants damaged by the recent rainfall. The photo was taken from Karnapur village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila. PHOTO: STAR

Illegal migration

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I want to say to the people of West Bengal, make a change (in state government) in 2026 and we will stop the infiltration. There can be peace in Bengal only if this infiltration stops..."

Meanwhile, in Guwahati, Biswa Sarma told a press conference that Indian states bordering Bangladesh must coordinate among themselves and with the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) to foil infiltration bids in the wake of the political turmoil in the neighbouring country.

He said the Assam and Tripura governments are working together with the BSF already, but it will be a "well-orchestrated effort" only if West Bengal also starts

identifying the infiltrators, as those sent back from these two northeastern states may re-enter through it.

"In the last two months, almost every day we have detained foreigners in our state. I feel that due to the porous boundary, in spite of BSF's best efforts, some people are being able to come into India illegally."

The Assam chief minister said 138 infiltrators were identified and sent back from Assam in the last two months by the state police in operations carried out independently and jointly with the BSF.

"We are least bothered about the religion of the infiltrators. If someone comes illegally, they must be pushed back."

Ex-minister

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Mosharrar was elected lawmaker from the Chattogram-1 constituency several times. In the last general election, Mosharrar did not run and his son Mahboob Rahman Rubel was elected MP from the constituency.

In a statement, the family of Mosharrar, 82, said they were worried over his health. The former minister underwent hip surgery two

years ago, which made it difficult for him to move without a wheelchair.

Mosharrar, who needs daily physiotherapy, is also diabetic and a heart patient.

The detectives went to his house and put him in the police van without a wheelchair, it added.

Meanwhile, ex-DMP commissioner Khandker Golam Faruq was barred

Trump holds rally

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Election Day. More than 38 million votes have already been cast.

Trump has been seeking to tie Harris to the Biden administration's handling of immigration and the economy. Last week, Trump debuted a new attack line: "She broke it, and I promise you I will fix it."

The U.S. economy has outperformed the rest of the developed world since the COVID crisis, and stock markets hit record highs this year. But high prices of food, utilities and housing have roiled voters, who believe the economy is headed in the wrong direction.

Harris, who held a rally with Bruce Springsteen in

Atlanta on Thursday, will hold another high-profile event with a speech on Tuesday on the National Mall in Washington, where she will highlight contrasts between herself and Trump.

"He is full of grievance. He is full of dark language that is about retribution and revenge," Harris said in response to questions from reporters on Sunday in Philadelphia.

Trump, who held a rally in Long Island, New York, in September, has said he is making a play for the state. Ronald Reagan's reelection was the last time New York backed a Republican for president; Democrat Joe Biden won the state in 2020 by 23 percentage points.

Mother, daughter

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The men also threatened to kill the women unless they kept mum about what had happened, it adds.

Inspector Abdus told The Daily Star that police were looking for the other suspects.

AK Fazlul Haq

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For his outstanding contributions to Bangla literature, Kashem was awarded the Bangla Academy Literary Award in 1981.

Novelist Selina Hossain was the last president of Bangla Academy. She had been the president of the academy since February 3, 2022, before resigning on October 17, this year.

No plan to lift ban

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recent decades," the notification added.

On October 23, writer Taslima wrote on X, "Mr Yunus is getting mad. He lifted the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami, and its student wing Shibir, but banned Chhatra League, the student wing of the Awami League, the oldest political party in Bangladesh. He lifted the ban on Islamic terrorist organisations like Hizb ut-Tahrir, Ansarullah Bangla Team, etc."

Besides Hizb ut-Tahrir and Ansarullah Bangla Team, seven extremist outfits in Bangladesh are currently banned. They are Ansar Al Islam, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh, Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami Bangladesh, Allahr Dal, Shahadat E al-Hikma and Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hind al-Sharqiya.

Jubo League man

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the city around 7:30pm on Saturday.

The assailants accused him of attacking a student-led procession in Rajshahi on August 5 during the mass uprising against the Awami League government.

The attackers forcibly took Mim to the Panchavati area by an autorickshaw around 7:50pm, the witnesses said.

He was left in front of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in a critical condition around 10:10pm.

Sankar K Biswas, in charge of the hospital's emergency department, said Mim was brought dead at 10:15pm.

There were several marks of severe injury on the body, including extreme beating and stabbing, according to Sankar.

Mehedi Masud, officer-in-charge of Boalia Police Station, said a team of the police station rushed to the spot on Saturday night upon getting information about the attack, but could not locate the place where Mim was taken.

He said police arrested two named accused in the case and were trying to arrest the others.

Mehedi also said that Mim was involved in Awami League politics.

However, Mim's mother Keya said that his son was not involved in any kind of politics and used to work as a day labourer.

Locals said Mim was close to Jubo League leader Zahurul Haque Rubel, who was spotted attacking student protesters with two firearms in his hands

during the uprising. Rubel was arrested and placed on remand several times after the fall of the Awami League government.

Requesting anonymity, a neighbour of Mim said Mim used to reside in the personal chamber of Rajib Mahin, a former finance secretary of Jubo League's Rajshahi city unit. Mim went into hiding after the fall of the Awami League regime.

"Mim returned to the area on Saturday and came under the attack in the evening," the neighbour said.



Golam Faruq