

MY DHAKA



PHOTO: COLLECTED

'IN QUEST OF BONO-BIBI'

## When art meets folklore

RBR

Experiencing a "kalbaishakhi jhor" inside the mangrove forest of Sundarbans can be both a spine-chilling experience or a romantic one.

In such a death-defying scenario, one cannot help but call upon the divine powers to keep them safe. Even though this is just a hypothetical scenario, if one found themselves in danger in a forest, at the sea, on the mountains and so on, sometimes the only option left is to call upon the guardian spirit of mother earth when they find themselves in times of trouble.

I am of course talking about Bon Bibi or Bono Bibi, the guardian spirit of the Sundarbans' forest dwelling communities.

The revered lady of the forest, Bon Bibi, is now also in Dhaka.

A mixed-media exhibition by Saidul Haque Juise titled "In Quest of Bono-Bibi", organised by Kalakendra, is currently underway. Located at 9/4, Block-D, Lalmonia, the event will remain open till April 20, operating between the

hours of 4:00pm to 8:00pm.

This is a must-visit exhibition because Juise, who is known for his three-dimensional progressive fine art, impeccable craftwork, and beautiful masks, is holding a solo exhibition after a long hiatus.

"Bono Bibi is simultaneously a Muslim Pirani and a Hindu goddess. As tradition goes, if you chant her name in the face of any calamity in the forest, she will protect you. Folklores of Dhukhey, Bon Bibi Dakkhin Rai, Gazi's folk tales are stories I grew up with. So, when I saw how endangered our Sundarbans have become, I began to work on the 'In Search of Bono-Bibi' series. You can say it is my way of saying sorry or paying homage to mother nature," explains Saidul Haque Juise.

You will always find an underlying tone of his political consciousness and his profound love for nature seeping into his works. In this series, he has described his work through Shlokas or verses taken from Bon Bibi literature, alongside stories written by him.

"These compositions were initially

ideas I penned during the pandemic, when hope was but an elusive thing. I just tried to jot down my fleeting moments of grief, rage, and hopelessness in the pages of my sketch book, and coloured them with black, green, red, and blue inks – the shades that represented our loud traditional colours in Bangladeshi folk pottery," Juise explains, adding that later, when he was working on the exhibition, he simply juxtaposed those sketch book paper drawings on frames.

"The whole range of work dealing with Bono Bibi are 2D artworks. Working with paint, pen and ink drawings, paper and newspaper cuttings, and using local icon symbolism, he tried to portray the mystery of the forest and the profoundness of the lady of the forest. His attempt to integrate all this through the rendering of pen and ink collages and linear drawings comes out successfully in this exhibition," according to the exhibition's foreword, written by Azyz Sharafy, professor of Electronic Arts, Studio & Graphic Design at Washburn University in the US.

"The series also features sculptures

that are composed of twisted and grouped wires assimilated masterfully. At the end of the series, you are left with a lingering melody of the spirit of Bono Bibi," says Shagufta Sharmin Tania, an expatriate poet and storyteller.

"As an iconoclast artist, Juise has continually strived to weave Bangalee art form throughout his series, with figures morphing from familiar female forms to animals, birds, and insects, embodying a fluid, organic energy, challenging our perception and explaining in a language of balanced wrath and restrained sorrow. His contemporary works are simple and unpretentious," says Shagufta while describing Juise.

His artistry lies not just in aesthetics, but in blending the form with the thought, and the style with the soul, she adds.

Juise has worked in various mediums, ranging from canvas to wood, bamboo, paper carving, wire, collage, torn paper, pen and ink, and copper and metal.

Under the scorching sun of Chaitra, Juise's imagination and depiction of Bono Bibi is the much-needed diversion that Dhaka people need right now.

## World gets 90-day pause, except China

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Additional rates kicked in yesterday for many economies, including China and the EU, but also remote islands that barely trade with the United States -- and in one case an uninhabited territory near Antarctica.

Amid stock market panic, Trump earlier urged Americans to "BE COOL" and said that "Everything is going to work out well."

Wall Street stocks rocketed on Trump's pause announcement.

Minutes later, the S&P 500 surged 6.0 percent to 5,281.44, snapping a brutal run of losses over the past week.

European and Asian stock markets had earlier tumbled along with oil and the dollar as the confrontation escalated.

US bond yields had also risen amid a sharp sell-off -- a major economic red light as sovereign government debt is normally seen as a safe haven for investors

in troubled times.

Before his pivot, Trump said world leaders were rushing to negotiate "tailored" deals with the United States, with Japan and South Korea among those sending delegations to Washington.

"I'm telling you, these countries are calling us up kissing my ass," Trump told a dinner with fellow Republicans on Tuesday night.

But China doubled down.

"The tariff escalation against China by the United States simply piles mistakes on top of mistakes," the Chinese finance ministry said.

Markets fell further after China retaliated. Oil prices plunged to even deeper four-year lows, and US stock index futures fell sharply.

The World Trade Organization chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala yesterday said the US-China tariff war could reduce trade in goods between the two economic giants

by 80 percent.

Earlier, Bessent warned countries at a banking summit that aligning with Beijing "would be cutting your own throat."

Trump believes his policy will revive America's lost manufacturing base by forcing companies to relocate to the United States.

The billionaire former property tycoon has particularly raged against China, accusing it of excess production and "dumping" inexpensive goods on other economies.

China yesterday warned tourists to "fully assess the risks" before travelling to the United States.

And US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth then warned against Chinese "threats" as he visited Panama, whose canal is at the centre of a row between Beijing and Washington.

## ADB sees a 3.9% growth in FY25

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Besides the impact of higher US tariffs, Bangladesh may face increased inflation and fiscal deficit due to higher election-related spending and subsidies, the ADB said in the report.

It said persistently high inflation and prolonged monetary tightening may dampen household consumption and private investment, weakening growth momentum. Remittance inflows may decline if political uncertainty persists or if the exchange rate regime fails to offer sufficient incentives for using official channels, which may also hit growth.

Finally, unpredictable weather is a perennial risk, the ADB added.

The growth forecasts were finalised before the US announced new tariffs on April 2, meaning the baseline projections account only for previously existing tariffs.

Speaking to journalists at the report's launch in Dhaka yesterday, ADB Country Director Hoe Yun Jeong said that the full impact of the tariffs will be assessed and published in the bank's July update.

The US is a crucial market for Bangladesh, particularly for its readymade garment sector, so these tariffs could have an adverse effect, he noted.

However, Jeong emphasised that it is still too early to determine the precise scale of the impact on Bangladesh.

Beyond the US, other key export markets, including Europe, may also experience a decline in demand. The overall effect will hinge on the extent of trade disruptions and economic slowdown in those regions, he added.

Jeong mentioned that Bangladesh has already started communicating with US authorities, while other RMG exporters are also facing higher tariffs.

"Engaging and negotiating with the US government is important, but this

is a short-term measure. Bangladesh must diversify its products and markets for exports, which is a long term perspective," he said.

The ADB country director also said that the government can take this opportunity to rationalise its own import tariff structure and reform its non-tariff barriers for all other countries, not just the US, as Bangladesh's tariff regime is overly protective.

He pointed out persistently high inflation as the government's most important challenge since it erodes purchasing power and worsens people's hardship. The government should also focus on mitigating supply chain disruptions.

When asked whether the ADB would work on raising a collective voice among Asian countries as the new US tariffs pose a significant risk to Asia, Jeong said the Dhaka office did not receive any message from Manila.

Apart from US tariffs, the ADB report warned that escalation in the Middle East could lead to renewed supply chain disruptions, as well as higher food and energy prices, global economic uncertainty, and risk aversion.

Continued uncertainty over the war in Ukraine also presents downside risks to the global economic environment, it said.

Regarding the recent economic situation, the ADB said Bangladesh's GDP growth sharply declined to 1.8 percent from 6 percent year on year in the July-September quarter of FY25. The decline was driven by political instability, natural disasters, disruptions at factories due to worker protests, and high inflation, all of which dampened demand.

However, growth is expected to improve in the following quarters, driven by manufacturing. Agricultural growth is also expected to moderate following

repeated floods.

GDP growth is expected to recover in FY26 on higher domestic demand while easing inflation and rising remittances are likely to raise private consumption and investment, the ADB said.

Imports are expected to increase with the central bank lifting restrictions on letters of credit, and export growth will accelerate on expected recovery in the European Union, a major destination for Bangladesh's exports. Net exports are thus likely to add marginally to growth.

On the supply side, higher growth in industry and services is expected to contribute to recovery. Industrial output is likely to expand as investor confidence is anticipated to improve ahead of elections scheduled between December 2025 and June 2026, and due to the interim government's implementation of the reforms.

The ADB said enduring inflation remains a significant hurdle due to market inefficiency brought on by regulatory shortcomings, restrained competition in wholesale markets, insufficient market information, supply chain constraints, and depreciation of the taka.

With expected moderation of global fuel and commodity prices, inflation is expected to ease in the remaining months of FY2025, but the fiscal year average is expected to be in double digits.

However, assuming favourable weather, moderating global oil prices, and tighter monetary and fiscal stances, inflation is projected to ease in FY2026.

The ADB hoped that a move toward an exchange rate system fully determined by the market would provide for automatic adjustments to economic imbalances, enhance monetary policy effectiveness, and increase the inflow of remittances, thereby expanding foreign exchange reserves.

## Bangladesh fertile ground for transformative ideas

FROM PAGE 1

"Each of your companies can enjoy that super happiness by expanding and reaching out..." he said.

"We can create a world of 'Three Zeros'. It can be done by the business, not the government. The government cannot achieve that."

The new civilisation will be such a civilisation where there will be no carbon emission, he said.

Carbon emission is a self-destructive system, he said, adding that making money was fun, but concentration of wealth was the most dangerous thing to the human race.

He also focused on the need for zero unemployment, saying the young generation can change the world as they have technology and innovative ideas.

Commenting on how the readymade garment industry flourished, he said Bangladesh was a country of farmers many of whom were landless.

"Bangladesh's ground is very fertile. Put a little bit of seed, it becomes global."

He remembered Bangladesh's independence in 1971 and said 1974 was a year "we cannot forget" as about 1.5 million people died in a famine.

At the time, most of the people of the country were farmers who used to grow a single crop a year.

Bangladesh has come a long way from there, he said.

"It's an amazing journey...that Bangladesh came a long way in a very short time."

He also focused on the contribution of Grameen Bank and Grameenphone to eradicating poverty in Bangladesh. About 100,000 poor women were selling mobile phone services using Grameenphone, which helped them overcome poverty. At the formal inaugural session, four Bangladeshi businesses were honoured with the first Excellence in Investment Award. The winners are Fabric Lagbe, Walton, bKash, and Square Pharmaceuticals. Baroness Rosie Winterton, UK's Trade Envoy to Bangladesh; Oscar Garca Maceiras, CEO of Inditex; and Apex Footwear Limited Managing Director Syed Nasim Manzur spoke at the event. BIDA Executive Chairman Chowdhury Ashik Mahmud Bin Harun made a presentation on the business and investment potential of Bangladesh. The summit also aims to highlight the economic reforms following the July uprising, and create long-term investment pipelines for sustainable economic growth.

ABU SAYED KILLING

ICT investigators find evidence against 26  
Investigation agency gets another 2 months to submit report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal's investigators have found the involvement of 26 people so far in the killing of student Abu Sayed in Rangpur during the 2024 uprising.

They included police personnel and members of Juba League, Chhata League, and other groups, prosecutor Mizanul Islam told the tribunal yesterday.

Although the prosecution was scheduled to submit the probe report on the killing yesterday, it requested more time to complete the investigation, noting that evidence against 26 people had been collected.

Later, the three-member tribunal, led by its Chairman Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mozumder, granted a two month extension and ordered the investigation agency to submit the report on June 16.

Four of the accused were produced before the court during the proceedings.

They are former assistant sub-inspector Amir Hossain, constable Sujan Chandra Roy, Begum Rokeya University proctor Shariful Islam, and Chhata League activist Emran Chowdhury.

## Court freezes Bangabandhu trust's bank account

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday ordered the authorities to freeze a bank account of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, her children Sajeeb Wazed Joy and Saima Wazed Putul, and her sister Sheikh Rehana, and their affiliated organisations over allegations of corruption.

Hasina and the others are accused of depositing Tk 16,12,50,000 to an account of NCC Bank PLC in the name of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Trust.

Judge Zakir Hossain of the Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court of Dhaka passed the order after Anti-Corruption Commission Deputy Director Monirul Islam submitted an application in this regard.

The ACC official said he came to know from credible sources that Hasina and the others were attempting to transfer the money elsewhere and an order was needed to prevent them from doing so.

ACC Prosecutor Mohammad Rafiqul Islam Jewel moved the application.

On March 18, the same court ordered the ACC

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"This is going to affect us. Our opportunity for shipment will shrink, and our costs will go up," said Faruque Hassan, a former president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). He mentioned that the volume

of garments shipped via India is not significant. "But it is a setback for the industry. India should not have made this decision." On February 15, 2025, India's Apparel Export Promotion Council (APEC) requested the CBIC to revoke the transshipment facility for third-country exports from Bangladesh. APEC Chairman Sudhir Sekhri had said at the time that allowing Bangladeshi export cargo from Delhi Air Cargo Terminal will further increase the logistical challenges and increase the transport cost for Indian apparel exporters. "Almost 20-30 loaded trucks come to Delhi every day which slows down smooth cargo flow... This has led to an excessive increase in air freight rates, delay in handling and processing of export cargo and severe congestion at the cargo terminal at the IGI Airport, Delhi," he said, adding that it affects Indian RMG exports through Benapole and Petrapole. The tariff at HSIA is so high that buyers remain competitive even when their goods travel a distance of nearly 1,900 kilometres in trucks from Bangladesh to Delhi via Benapole and Petrapole. For example, it costs \$3 to transport one kilogramme of garment items from the HSIA to destinations in Europe. The charge is \$1.2 if the goods are sent via Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport. Currently, 1,000-1,500 tonnes of Bangladeshi products, mostly RMG items, are shipped to western markets through this airport, according to airport sources.

Selim Raihan, executive director of South Asian Network on Economic

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