



Preserving the past, one tour at a time

Heritage group marks 100 tours across country

JAWWAD SAMI NEOGI

There's something magical about old buildings. You walk through the halls, and it feels like the walls are trying to tell you something. I have heard somewhere that every old brick holds a story. The tours of "Save the Heritages of Bangladesh" can take you close to those historic architecture, where you can experience the stories these old structures have to tell.

On April 5, the Facebook-based group dedicated to raising awareness about the rich heritages of Bangladesh reached a beautiful milestone: their 100th heritage tour, which took place at Pura Dhaka.

From morning till evening, members explored a line-up of historic gems: Lalkuthi, Ruplal House, Mongalalaya, Basanta Bari, Boro Bari, Bibi Ka Rauza, Sri Bihari Lal Jiu Mondir, Sutrapur Zamindar Palace, Jalsa Ghar, the Dhaka residence of Murapara Zamindar, Rishikesh Babur Bari, and lastly, Qazi Bari Heritage Estate, where they had their lunch. The walk started around 8:30am from Lalkuthi and wrapped up at Qazi Bari.

The Facebook group was created by Tony Angel back in 2008. While he's no longer active, the group officially



PHOTO: COURTESY

started its journey in 2011 with a renewed version of the group led by Sazzadur Rasheed, a passionate heritage explorer and an architect by profession. Rasheed shared photos and stories from his solo trips until group members and his close ones began requesting to join.

"They said, 'You're roaming solo — take us too!' That's when I thought, why not?" he recalls. The group had between 10,000 and 12,000 members back then, now it has grown to nearly 134,000!

The first official tour took place on 1 May, 2014, at Savar and Kaliakair.

Since then, they have conducted tours almost every month, with only a few unfortunate gaps. Now, more than ten years later, they've reached 100 tours, and still counting.

Along with general visitors, the event also saw participation from some prominent names, including Professor Abu Sayeed M Ahmed, former president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB); Hashem Sufi, a historian, researcher, and writer; Shakoor Majid, an architect, writer, filmmaker, and photographer; and Bayejid Mahub Khondker, a recipient of two gold medals at the ARCASIA Awards for Architecture.

The history of our heritage must be

preserved across generations. So, when asked whether the younger generation is passionate about it, Rasheed shares, "Honestly, not many youngsters show up. As a teacher, many of my students have participated in several tours. In the recent 100th event, we saw a few young participants alongside people from various disciplines, ages, and professions. I hope to see more young people joining in the future."

With their first-ever tour held on May 1, the group plans to mark that day every year. This year's tour on May 1, the 101st one, is expected to take place in Pirojpur and Jhalakathi.

Is the group and the tours really serving their purpose? "Definitely. When people visit a heritage site, they don't just look at it — they take the time to learn about the history, interact with locals, and maybe even buy some souvenirs from the local shops. With cameras so accessible, they often share their experiences or photos in the group, which sparks interest and encourages others to visit. That's how the stories stay alive, and so do the places," Rasheed explains.

"Recently, someone shared a post about a theft at a heritage house. The response was intense, and that post alone raised awareness. That's exactly what we aim to do, creating awareness," Rasheed adds.

Above all, things that are our responsibility — our history, our architecture — should never fade away. The group has come a long way, and after 100 successful tours, it is safe to say "The tours must go on!"

Three of a family found dead in Narayanganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Police yesterday recovered the bodies of two women and a child from a pile of debris in Siddhirganj of Narayanganj.

The deceased are Lamia Akhter, 22, her son Rafsan Labib, 3, and her elder sister Swapna Akhter, 35. They were residents of Mizmizi Paschimpara area, said police. Lamia's husband Md Yasin, 23, was arrested in this regard.

Locals spotted a severed hand near a pile of debris on the side of the road in the area around 1:15pm and informed police.

Later, police went to the spot and recovered several body parts buried in the pile, said Md Hasinuzzaman, additional superintendent of Narayanganj police.

Several body parts of Lamia and Swapna were found in sacks. But the child's body was not dismembered, he said.

"After primary investigation and interrogation, we suspect that Yasin was involved in the killing," he said. Lamia's another sister Munmun said Lamia used to work in a garments factory and Yasin is an auto-rickshaw driver. They got married in 2022 after being in a relationship.

Swapna lived with Lamia's family, said Munmun. "Yasin often demanded money from Lamia. Whenever Lamia refused, Yasin used to physically torture her," said Munmun.

Police suspect that the killing took place around four days ago, said the additional SP, adding however, no evidence was found in the rented house. No case was filed till filing of the report around 8:00pm last night.

More Sudanese refugees fleeing as far as Europe

Says UN refugee agency

REUTERS, Geneva

Over a thousand Sudanese refugees have reached or attempted to reach Europe in early 2025, the United Nations' refugee agency said yesterday, citing growing desperation in part due to reduced aid in the region.

Some 12 million people have been displaced by the two-year conflict between the Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces that has fuelled what UN officials call the world's most devastating aid crisis.

While some have recently returned home to Khartoum, millions of others in neighbouring countries like Egypt and Chad face tough choices as services for refugees are being cut, including by the United States as part of an aid review.

Caught in toxic grip of a landfill

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was found in areas closest to the site, showing how pollutants are infiltrating groundwater."

He said the researchers had collected samples of leachate, surface water, groundwater, soil, and leaves of plants from areas within a 1.5km radius of the landfill.

"The detection of cadmium and nickel in surface water indicates high levels of toxicity," he told The Daily Star.

"In groundwater, the highest concentration of heavy metals was found in areas near the landfill, indicating that these toxic metals are coming from it." Soil near the landfill has also been polluted, with chromium, a harmful heavy metal, detected at 108.5 milligrams per kg, exceeding the permissible limit of 100 milligrams per kg, said Mostafizur.

"This study provides a picture of how Amin Bazar landfill has become a source of multiple types of pollution," he added.

Prof Shafi Mohammad Tareq, a researcher and teacher of environmental sciences at Jahangirnagar University, said that a properly engineered sanitary landfill must have mechanisms to prevent leachate leakage. However, the Amin Bazar site lacks that and doesn't meet the required standards.

"Though there is a leachate treatment pond at the landfill, it doesn't appear to be functioning properly. Untreated leachate may be spreading across a radius of up to five kilometers."

The nearby Turag River, already contaminated with untreated industrial waste, is further poisoned by the landfill's runoff.

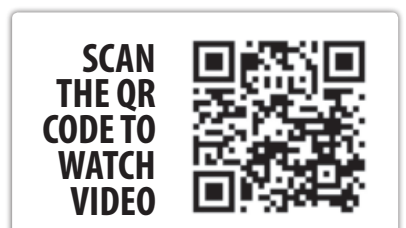
"If river water, contaminated by leachate from the landfill, is used for irrigation, it may jeopardise public

health through the food chain." People who consume crops from these fields over an extended period are at a high risk of developing cancer or long-term health issues, Tareq pointed out.

LIVES IN PERIL

The residents of Konda, Baliarpur, and Beraith villages have been struggling to cultivate land for more than a decade. During the monsoon, rainwater carries waste into nearby fields, scattering plastics, broken glass, and medical debris across the area.

Recounting his ordeal, Mohammad Nazim Uddin, a farmer from Baliarpur,



said, "Once the water recedes, we find syringes, shards of ceramics, and scrap metal in our fields. Farmers even get hurt while working the land."

Shahidul Islam, a resident of Konda village, said, "Smoke from burning waste fills the air... My six-month-old daughter has been suffering from asthma. I'm also having respiratory problems."

Even water from many tubewells, once a source of fresh groundwater, turned foul. "We had to dig 350 feet deep to get clean water," he lamented.

Saiful Islam, former chairman of Bongaon union parishad, said that around 50,000 people are directly affected by the landfill.

"Around 40 percent of farmland

in low-lying areas has already been damaged. Farmers find it hard to cultivate land... Diarrhea, skin diseases, and respiratory problems have become prevalent among the villagers," he added.

Vegetables and crops grown on contaminated soil are making their way to markets in Mirpur-1, Hemayetpur, Karwan Bazar and other areas, posing health risks to many.

Mohammad Ali, a vegetable seller at Nagar Kunda Bazar of Baliarpur, said he buys vegetables from areas near the landfill. Vegetables from these areas are also sold to traders in Mirpur-1, Karwan Bazar and Hemayetpur.

Contacted, DNCC Administrator Mohammad Azaz said that a waste-to-energy plant is being constructed in Amin Bazar, which will help tackle pollution in the area. The project is expected to be completed by next year.

"Garbage from the northern part of Dhaka city will be used to generate power, reducing landfill waste by up to 90 percent. Besides, leachate will be managed properly," he told The Daily Star.

In 2021, the DNCC and Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPPDB) signed an agreement with Beijing-based China Machinery Engineering Corporation to build the country's first waste-based power plant. It'll generate 42.5 megawatts of electricity from 3,000 tonnes of waste per day, with the BPPDB purchasing the power.

While the waste-to-energy plant promises long-term relief, environmental experts emphasise the need for immediate measures, such as leachate containment and regular monitoring of groundwater and soil quality, to safeguard the villagers.

'Mangal Shobhajatra' renamed

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He argued that during the first rally in 1989, the name "Anondo Shobhajatra" was adopted spontaneously. However, when it was later renamed Mangal Shobhajatra, that change did not occur in the same "organic manner".

He said the decision was not made under any external pressure.

"The word Mangal was used by fascist regimes in a way that left negative connotations in society. That's why we want to return to the original spirit, a time of spontaneous participation by all people, free from political aggression disguised as cultural practice," he said.

Mentionable, UNESCO recognised the Mangal Shobhajatra as a World Cultural Heritage on November 30, 2016.

Prof AAM Kaoser Hassan, member secretary of the Nababarsa 1432 Celebration Committee, said this year's procession would feature seven large motifs: a face symbolising fascism, a wooden tiger, a hilsa fish, a dove, a palanquin, a water bottle as a symbolic representation of Mugdho — the young student killed during the July uprising last year — and a watermelon slice in solidarity with the people of Palestine.

In Palestine, the watermelon is a symbol of diligence and resistance. He also said this year, 410 artists from 26 indigenous communities will participate in the celebrations. Among them are communities such as the Mro,

Marma, Lusai, Bom, Khiyang, Chakma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Pankhwa, Rajoar, Santal, Mahali, Kol, Malpaharia, Hajong, and others.

DU Proctor Prof Saifuddin Ahmed said law enforcement will not be positioned at the front of the procession this year, although they will be present on both sides to ensure overall security.

Saifuddin said at the time of the rally, only Palashi and Nilkhet road will be kept open for people, while the road from Banglamotor, Matshya Bhaban to the Shahabagh intersection will remain closed.

For security and crowd control, the Shahbag and TSC metro stations will also remain closed from morning until afternoon. The stations will reopen after the procession ends.

After 5:00pm, no one will be allowed to enter the campus, as entry gates will not remain open. However, exit gates will remain open after 5:00pm.

BACKLASH OVER NAME CHANGE
The decision to rename the procession has stirred criticism from various quarters, with some left-leaning student organisations and public intellectuals rejecting the new name.

Prof Anu Muhammad, a former teacher at Jahangirnagar University, said that the decision lacked transparency and public consensus.

"This change did not occur spontaneously or for a well-reasoned

cause. It appears to be the result of pressure from groups that have long opposed such cultural expressions," he told The Daily Star.

"There was already a level of government control in cultural affairs, and now we are witnessing new forms of intervention — both from state institutions and certain ideological groups. This raises concerns about the space for inclusive cultural practices," Prof Muhammad said.

Zunayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganasamhati Andolon, said, "There is politics and bias surrounding the use of language, but such national festivals should be kept above controversy."

Mahir Reza Shahriar, president of Chhatra Union, said, "If the change has been made due to pressure from extremist religious groups, it risks harming a tradition that holds non-communal significance for the country."

Besides, the 26th batch of DU's Faculty of Fine Arts boycotted the Baisakh celebrations, alleging that this year's organising committee had sidelined the batch that was supposed to organise the event.

Abdullah A Zaidi, a student of the 26th batch, said, "To us, this feels like hypocrisy. Suddenly, excluding students, the teachers are now organising the Baisakh celebrations as part of academic activities. This is one of the main reasons we are boycotting this year's event."

Model Meghna Alam's arrest sparks outcry

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Dhaka sent her to jail around 10:30pm, over 24 hours after she was picked up from her home in the capital's Bashundhara on Wednesday.

Amid criticism on social media, Dhaka Metropolitan Police issued a statement yesterday, refuting allegations that officers had abducted the woman.

The statement said Meghna was held in accordance with the law, but made no mention of the time of her detention.

The statement added that she was out to deteriorate the relations between countries and was involved in a conspiracy to damage the country's economy.

Meghna's father Badrul Alam told The Daily Star that his daughter was in a relationship with a foreign diplomat, with whom she got engaged several months ago.

But she recently learned that the man already had a wife, he said, adding that Meghna contacted his wife and ended the engagement.

"I have heard that the diplomat contacted the home ministry. On Thursday night, the Detective Branch told me that the home ministry instructed law enforcers to take action under the Special Powers Act."

He added it was unfortunate that the government formed through a mass uprising used a draconian law, and it was reminiscent of the way people used to be detained and imprisoned under the previous regime.

Lawyers and rights activists raised concerns over the way she was picked up from home, the late-night hearing, and the state of civil liberties.

Firoz Ahmed, member of a constitution reform commission formed by the interim government, wrote on Facebook, "The police statement regarding Meghna is depressing. I have repeatedly called for police reform, and I am doing so

again. The use of the police to serve the interests of the powerful must stop."

Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua wrote on Facebook that Meghna's detention and imprisonment involved legal violations at every step.

Amnesty International South Asia wrote on X that it was deeply concerned about the use of the Special Powers Act for the arrest.

"The draconian legislation, with vague, overbroad provisions, has historically been used to arbitrarily detain people for long periods of time, without charge, and without judicial oversight. These all constitute gross violations of due process safeguards and international human rights standards and best practices," Amnesty said.

"As per media reports, Meghna's detention was shrouded in secrecy, and was allegedly carried out without a warrant, which are considered to be an alarming violation of procedural safeguards."

"We call on the authorities to either charge Meghna with an internationally recognizable crime or release her. They must also end the use of and repeal the Special Powers Act."

Former economics teacher Prof Anu Muhammad wrote on Facebook that the individual who detained her from her apartment should be punished for criminal conduct.

Muhammad Talebur Rahman, deputy commissioner of the DMP's media and public relations division, said, "Meghna retains her right to seek legal assistance."

Additional Commissioner Rezaul Karim Mallik said law enforcers also detained a man named Sameer "in this connection".

On Wednesday around 5:00pm, Meghna went live on her verified Facebook page, saying that individuals identifying themselves as law enforcers from the Bhatara Police Station were trying to break into her flat without a warrant.

A visibly distressed Meghna is heard in the video requesting the men "carrying firearms" to leave and telling them that she would go to the police station.

The 12-minute footage shows the individuals breaking into her flat and forcibly taking her phone. The video and some of her previous posts were removed from her profile soon afterwards.

However, the footage was downloaded by social media users who posted it again.

An officer from Bhatara Police Station, requesting anonymity, said officers took her to the Detective Branch (DB) office on Minto Road after detaining her.

Public Prosecutor Omar Faruq Faruqi told The Daily Star that Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Sefatullah sent her to jail for 30 days, following a directive from the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Later, Meghna, also winner of Miss Earth Bangladesh 2020, was taken to Kashimpur jail in Gazipur.

The section 3(1) of the Special Powers Act, 1974, allows authorities to detain individuals to prevent them from committing a prejudicial act.

Under Section 3(2), a district magistrate or additional district magistrate can issue a detention order to prevent actions that threaten national security, public safety, or public order; incite hatred between communities or groups; interfere with law enforcement; disrupt essential supplies or services; spread fear or alarm; or harm the country's economic or financial interests.

Lawyer Jyotirmoy said, "By detaining her under the draconian Special Powers Act of 1974, a dangerous new precedent has been set. Under what law was a magistrate made to sit in court at night? The Code of Criminal Procedure clearly outlines when, where, and how a magistrate can hold court."

Turmoil rings recession alarm

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hope of a deal with China, the world's No.2 economy.

But the uncertainty in the meantime extended some of the most volatile trading since the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Asian indices mostly followed Wall Street lower yesterday. In Europe, China's latest tariff hike sent stocks lower, leaving the STOXX 600 down more than 1 percent on the day and set for another drop this week, one of its most volatile on record.

The EU's trade chief will hold new talks with US counterparts in Washington on Monday, a spokesperson said.

Bessent shrugged off the renewed market turmoil on Thursday and said striking deals with other countries would bring certainty.

The US and Vietnam have agreed to begin formal trade talks, the White House said. The Southeast Asian manufacturing hub is prepared to

crack down on Chinese goods being shipped to the United States via its territory in the hope of avoiding tariffs, Reuters exclusively reported.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, meanwhile, has set up a trade task force that hopes to visit Washington next week.

As Trump suddenly paused his 'reciprocal' tariffs on other countries hours after they came into effect earlier this week, he ratcheted up duties on Chinese imports as punishment for Beijing's initial move to retaliate.

He has now imposed new tariffs on Chinese goods of 145 percent since taking office, a White House official said.

China hit back with new tariffs yesterday. "The US imposition of abnormally high tariffs on China seriously violates international and economic trade rules, basic economic laws and common sense and is completely unilateral bullying and coercion," China's finance ministry

said in a statement.

Trump told reporters at the White House on Thursday that he thought the United States could make a deal with China and said he respected Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"In a true sense he's been a friend of mine for a long period of time, and I think that we'll end up working out something that's very good for both countries," he said.

Xi, in his first public remarks on Trump's tariffs, told Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez during a meeting in Beijing yesterday that China and the European Union should "jointly oppose unilateral acts of bullying." China's state news agency Xinhua reported.

"There are no winners in a trade war," the Chinese leader told his guest, adding that by acting together, the world's second-largest economy and the 27-strong European trade bloc could help uphold "the global rules-based order."