

MY DHAKA

# An ode to Murtaja Baseer and his lifelong passions

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As a painter, he was larger than life. Baseer entered art school not out of a passion for the creative field, but he was on a mission, a role he undertook as a sign of political allegiance to the leftist movement. After finishing art schooling in Dhaka, Murtaja Baseer honed his skills by learning from modern masters in Europe. He was one of the first breed of Bangladeshi artists who ventured beyond the traditional schools of the East and became truly cosmopolitan.

Apart from being one of the most prominent modern painters of Bangladesh, it is common knowledge that Baseer wore a hat with many feathers. He was also a noted novelist, a filmmaker, and nurtured a passion for collecting coins, stamps, bank notes, and matchboxes. Among his great achievements is a book he penned on the numismatics of the Habshi Sultans of Bengal and a thematic stamp collection on the life of Lenin.

It is no surprise that his identity as a painter surpasses all his other accomplishments, but it his perhaps his hobbies that kept him busy all his life, and gave him unmatched personal satisfaction.

The recently inaugurated exhibition at Galleri Kaya reveals to the larger audience, perhaps for the first time, a view into the life of Baseer beyond art.

It showcases stamps and coins from the collection of the eminent artist, which gives us a glimpse into the life of Baseer.

As an exponent of abstraction, he leaves his viewers to make up their own interpretations of what his work stands for. The curated exhibition on Baseer also offers glimpses into his life, not just as a painter but also a human being who had a passion for philately and numismatics.

Baseer was also a novelist of fame, and "Celebrating Murtaja Baseer" adds some of his book titles as exhibits. However,



PHOTO COURTESY: GALLERI KAYA



what remains the most interesting objects at the show are the numerous letters written to him by artists and peers.

Some discuss his hobby, like the fascination for stones (which can also be seen in his iconic series, Epitaph of a Martyr),

others reveal his stand, as a young artist, against anti-imperialism. For the curious onlooker, these personal correspondences will serve as a bridge between his art, ideals, and private world.

Of course, no tribute to Baseer would be complete without his works,

and the exhibition features some of his finest pieces.

Starting from the famed linocuts of his early years, to the academic studies he produced as a student in Florence, the etchings of the 1970s, and culminating in the evocative Wings series, the show presents a concise yet powerful representation of his life's works.

Together, the sequence of artworks traces not only his evolution as a painter, his shifting philosophy, but also his idiosyncrasies regarding the spelling of his name, which changed a few times throughout his career!

Art exhibitions offer more than a chance to acquire paintings. It creates a space where one can learn about artists, their inspirations, and the life s/he led. At times, it gives us snippets into the life of the visual storyteller through artefacts that were close to him. A brush, perhaps. Maybe a colour palette. And, of course, there are the artworks that present a story of their own.

The inauguration of the art exhibition, "Celebrating Murtaja Baseer" at Galleri Kaya, Uttara, gives connoisseurs and art enthusiasts a rare chance to experience just that and more.

The exhibition concludes on August 31. Visit Galleri Kaya at House 20, Road 16, Sector 04, Uttara, Dhaka, between 11:30am and 7:30pm, daily.

## Pakistan foreign minister due today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Pakistan's deputy prime minister and foreign minister, is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on a two-day official visit today at the invitation of Bangladesh.

He will meet with Bangladesh Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain tomorrow and also call on Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus, the Pakistan foreign ministry said in a statement.

They will discuss the whole range of bilateral relations and a number of regional and international issues will be discussed during these meetings, it added.

Earlier on August 21, Pakistan Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan arrived in Dhaka on a four-day visit. He will also join the bilateral meeting at the state guesthouse Padma.

The two countries will sign five MoUs to boost bilateral relationship in the areas of trade, culture, media, training and travel, said a diplomatic source in Islamabad.



Ishaq Dar

## Avijit murder convict Farabi freed on bail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Shafiur Rahman Farabi, who was sentenced to life in prison in a case over the murder of writer-blogger Avijit Roy, has been released on bail.

Farabi walked out of Kashimpur High Security Central Jail in Gazipur at 10:15am yesterday, said Senior Jail Superintendent Abdullah Al Mamun.

"Last night, we received the bail-related documents from the High Court. He was released this morning after verification," Mamun said. The HC granted him bail on July 30.

Avijit, a US-based Bangladeshi writer-blogger, was hacked to death near Dhaka University's TSC on February 26, 2015, as he and his wife Rafida Ahmed Bonya were leaving the Ekushey Book Fair. Bonya was critically injured while trying to shield her husband.

Avijit's father, Prof Ajay Roy, filed a case with Shahbagh Police Station the following day against unidentified assailants. After years of trial, a Dhaka tribunal on February 16, 2021, sentenced five members of banned militant group Ansar al Islam to death.

Farabi was handed a life term at the time on charges related to social media posts threatening to kill Avijit.

Those given the death penalty are Sayed Mohammad Ziaul Haque alias (sacked) Major Zia, Akram Hossain, Abu Siddiq Sohel, Mozammel Hossain, Saimon, and Arifat Rahman Siam. Of them, Major Zia and Akram remain absconding.

## Pakistan fireworks warehouse blast kills 4, injures more than 30

REUTERS, Karachi

An explosion at a fireworks warehouse in the Pakistani city of Karachi killed four people and injured more than 30 on Thursday, police said.

The warehouse and some nearby shops caught fire after the initial blast, which was followed by several smaller explosions, forcing residents to flee for safety.

"I thought several bombs have exploded," resident Aqib Khan told reporters.

The impact of the blast was strong enough to shatter glass in neighbouring shops, peppering people in the street with shards of glass.

At least 34 injured people were admitted to hospitals, said police official Summaiya Tariq, adding that four of those died overnight.

Smoke billowed from a multi-storey building as firefighters worked to put out a blaze, local news channels showed. There was no indication as to what caused the initial explosion.

Closed-circuit camera footage aired by local television channel Geo News showed people running for safety and motorists turning their vehicles around in haste.

## Sohan, Saif return

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Saif, meanwhile, returned to the side after a nearly four-year hiatus. He, however, featured for Bangladesh in the Asian Games in Hangzhou in 2023 -- a tournament where BCB sent a second-string side.

Saif scored a half-century and played a 45-run knock in the ongoing Top End T20 Series, following a decent showing with the willow in the recent Global Super League, in which his Rangpur Riders side ended as runners-up in Guyana.

Mohammad Naim and all-rounder Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who were part of Bangladesh's last T20 series against Pakistan at home last month, could not retain their places. Naim, who returned to the side in the Sri Lanka series in July after a three-year gap, could not impress the selectors, as he could only make 45 runs in three matches since his return.

Miraz, who took a leave for the Netherlands series due to family reasons, has had similar performance issues in his recent outings. However, he was named as one of the stand-bys alongside Soumya Sarkar, Tanvir Islam and Hasan Mahmud.

Bangladesh have been drawn in Group B in the Asia Cup alongside Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Hong Kong. They will open their campaign against Hong Kong on September 11 in Abu Dhabi.

## No let-up in violent crimes

FROM PAGE 1

and spread on social media, has added to public fear and frustration over law and order.

Data from the Police Headquarters (PHQ) shows violent crimes rose in the first half of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024 across nearly all major categories.

The number of murder cases increased to 1,930, compared to 1,533 in the same period last year, marking an around 26 percent increase. Police, however, clarified that more than 400 of this year's murder cases were filed over incidents that had actually taken place last year, especially during and after the uprising.

Kidnapping incidents rose by a staggering 64.50 percent, the highest year-on-year increase in any category, with 515 reported cases, up from 313 in the same period last year.

Dacoity and robbery jumped 53.4 percent. A total of 1,336 such cases were recorded in the first half of 2025, compared to 871 during the same period of 2024.

Crimes against women and children also rose by 22.29 percent in the first half of 2025, with 11,008 cases compared to 9,002 in the same period last year.

During this period, 2,744 rapes were reported -- just over 15 cases a day -- and 2,159 cases of violence against children were recorded, averaging 12 incidents per day.

According to data from Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), at least 111 women were killed by their husbands between January and June this year. Additionally, 33 women were murdered by in-laws and 29 by other family members.

Meanwhile, 111 people were killed in mob violence during the first eight months of 2025, according to ASK's latest data published on August 12.

### SPATE OF VIOLENT CRIMES

The violent crime spree continued this year despite repeated warnings from law enforcement officials and government advisers.

One incident that sparked nationwide outrage was the killing of

Ruplal Robidas, 40, and his relative Pradeep Lal Robidas, 35, in Rangpur's Taraganj upazila. On August 9, a mob beat them to death, suspecting them of van theft. Ruplal was a cobbler, and Pradeep drove a rickshaw van. Reports said 12 to 14 policemen were present at the scene but left without rescuing the victims.

Exactly a month earlier, on July 9, an Old Dhaka trader, Sohag, also known as Lal Chand, was crushed to death with concrete blocks in front of horrified witnesses, near an Ansar camp by Mitford Hospital.

On Thursday, a woman and her daughter were found dead, their throats slit, at their home in a remote area of Ramgarh upazila in Khagrachhari. Police are investigating but have yet to determine the motive.

On June 10, a man was found dead in Mirpur-11, his hands cuffed and legs tied, his body riddled with hack wounds. His mother, Rozina Begum, said he had survived a similar attack just 10 days prior. Autopsy reports confirmed an older injury on his arm had not yet healed.

Another heartbreaking case is the murder of five-year-old Roza Moni. She went missing on May 12 and was found the next day inside a sack near her home in Tejgaon's Tejgunipara. Her tiny body, wrapped in three layers of bags, was discarded like garbage.

Earlier in May, two masked assailants shot dead Kamrul Ahsan Shadhon, 52, joint convener of BNP's Gulshan unit, in Badda's Gudaraghat area. CCTV footage of the incident went viral.

On May 31, two suspected criminals were beaten to death by a mob in the capital's Darus Salam area in broad daylight.

### GOVT ADMISSION AND AN UNSTABLE SYSTEM

Criminologists say the country is facing a breakdown in governance, where weak state response and lack of accountability are emboldening criminals.

Top police officials have repeatedly said that "lost morale" in the police

force since last year's mass uprising has affected its ability to tackle crimes effectively.

Last month, after the brutal killing at Mitford, Inspector General of Police Mohammad Baharul Alam admitted that the police were yet to regain full control following last year's traumatic events. "You may say we haven't been 100 percent successful. Maybe not even 50 percent," he said.

On August 18, Home Adviser Lt Gen (ret'd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury acknowledged that mob violence continues in parts of the country despite government efforts. He added that such incidents have decreased in and around the capital but still occur outside it, citing the Rangpur case as an example.

AHM Shahadat Hossain, assistant inspector general (Media and PR) at PHQ, yesterday said that police are responding promptly to violent crimes.

"We are trying our best to tackle the situation. In some cases, we have nabbed culprits within 24 hours," he said, adding that senior officials are monitoring the situation closely.

Omar Faruk, professor at the Department of Criminology and Police Science at Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University, said the country is currently operating under an unstable system where anything can happen, and the state shows little responsibility.

"They are merely carrying out routine tasks, showing no willingness to take accountability. Due to weak governance, criminals feel emboldened, knowing they can often escape consequences. Multiple ideologies are at play -- some former victims now seek retaliation. As a result, both visible and hidden forms of violence may continue," he said.

Faruk added that ideological conflicts also limit the government's ability to act effectively. "The state lacks the capacity and skill to govern properly. Unless it breaks out of this cycle, we may face more serious consequences in the future."

## Youth found dead

Police are conducting raids to arrest the others involved, he said. Mahin's body was sent to Chattogram Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

Anwar Hossain Sumon, uncle of one of the injured, said his nephew is a 10th grader at a local school. He and two of his friends had gone on a trip to Cox's Bazar. Around 2:30am, after getting off a bus in Chattogram city's Oxygen area, they hired a CNG-run autorickshaw to return home.

He added, "The three boys' homes are within a kilometre of the spot. The family of Mahin had a long-standing conflict with the family of detained suspect Azad."

## UN declares famine in Gaza

FROM PAGE 1

UN agencies and aid groups had warned for months of a looming famine in Gaza, where Israel has severely restricted aid and at times completely cut it off during its nearly two-year war with militant group Hamas.

COGAT, an Israeli defence ministry body which oversees civil affairs in the Palestinian territories -- including coordinating aid to Gaza -- argued that the IPC's findings rely on "partial data and unreliable sources".

UN aid chief Tom Fletcher said the famine was entirely preventable, saying food could not get through to Palestinians in need "because of systematic obstruction by Israel".

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for a ceasefire, saying: "We cannot allow this situation to continue with impunity."

UN human rights chief Volker Turk said it was "a war crime to use starvation as a method of warfare" -- a charge for which the International Criminal Court in November issued an arrest warrants for Netanyahu.

In a statement, Netanyahu said "Israel does not have a policy of starvation", citing figures on aid it had allowed into Gaza.

The IPC report said that "over half a million people in the Gaza Strip are facing catastrophic conditions characterised by starvation, destitution and death."

It said the deterioration between July and August was the most severe since it began analysing hunger in Gaza, driven by a sharp escalation in the war and restrictions on supplies.

In early March, Israel completely banned aid from Gaza for two months, leading to severe shortages of food, medicines and fuel. Speaking in Geneva, the UN's Fletcher said: "It is a famine that we could have prevented if we had been allowed. Yet food stacks up at borders because of systematic obstruction by Israel."

The International Committee of the Red Cross said Israel "must ensure that the basic needs of the civilian

population in Gaza are met".

The famine declaration "must serve as a catalyst for immediate and concrete action," it added.

Britain's foreign minister, David Lammy, said that "the Israeli government's refusal to allow sufficient aid into Gaza has caused this man-made catastrophe. This is a moral outrage."

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz earlier warned that "the gates of hell will open upon" Hamas leaders, specifically in Gaza City, "until they agree to Israel's conditions for ending the war, primarily the release of all hostages and their disarmament."

Military chief Eyal Zamir said "we are expanding operations in Gaza in the coming days."

Late Thursday, Netanyahu said he had ordered immediate negotiations aimed at freeing the hostages still held in Gaza -- 49 people, including 27 the Israeli military says are dead.

The Israeli premier said the diplomatic push would accompany the operation to take control of Gaza City.

Mediators have been waiting for an official Israeli response to their latest ceasefire proposal, which Hamas accepted earlier this week.

On the ground, Gaza's civil defence agency said Israeli fire killed at least 46 people yesterday, more than half of them in Gaza City.

Umm Mohammed Nasr, a 42-year-old mother of four from Gaza City, said that "the bombing hasn't stopped since this morning... but we have no idea where to go."

"We are dying," she said.

Media restrictions in Gaza and difficulties in accessing many areas mean AFP is unable to independently verify the tolls and details provided by the civil defence agency or the Israeli military.

Since October 7, 2023, Israel's offensive has killed at least 62,192 Palestinians, most of them civilians, according to figures from the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza that the United Nations considers reliable.