

AGAINST FORGETTING

Chobi Mela XI bears witness to worldwide injustices



PHOTOS: ABRAR FAIYAZ NILOY

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As Chobi Mela XI unfolds in the country's capital, cruelty around the world continues without interruption. In the United States, a two-year-old child was detained by ICE. ICU nurse Alex Preti was killed by the same system, his hands trained to mend bodies recast as a threat. Gaza remains under occupation. Across the world, immigrants are detained, ecologies are bulldozed, communities are uprooted from ancestral homes so land can be repackaged for profit. Some of these crises dominate headlines. Others dissolve into silence, not because they lack urgency, but because fatigue has settled into the throat, and pleading begins to feel indistinguishable from being ignored.

In an interview, poet Richard Siken says, "Art doesn't come from trauma, art comes from curiosity." And we are most

curious when the emotions we feel are so intense that even more than tending to them or managing to live through them, understanding them feels as crucial as breathing. Living with grief is painful, but living through meaningless grief is impossible. It is easy to mistake this exhibition as portrayals of trauma, of grieving, but such can't be said when that is the reality people exist within. But it is just an exhibition of resistance, resilience and endurance than of torture and exploitation, sometimes more former than the latter.

It is imperative to understand what it means to live within a wound because what follows is tracing the architecture of violence and in doing so, discover the possibilities within the cracks.

Chobi Mela, in its eleventh year, gathers artists and activists from across the world to chart an atlas of violence and the survival that insists beneath it. Samar Abu Eloul's *Out of Gaza*, the face of the festival, documents survivors evacuated to Qatar for medical treatment. Samaa Emad's *Genocide Kitchen* speaks to the ingenuity of human beings who find ways to sustain



one another within systematic starvation.

The exhibition refuses to locate violence in one geography or one type of body. Karachi LaJamia documents the filling of rivers and canals to produce hegemonic infrastructures, displacing native communities to serve a privileged fraction. Through a Guided Meditation in Urdu, the artist asks the listener to return the body to itself, to sit with the tremor beneath the surface, imagine themselves as one with nature, and of the sea's tides towards the Mazar as someone attempting to reconnect with their lover.

Since the dawn of the world, the atlas has shifted many times. The cartographer has erased and made up demarcations. Through colonial extraction and militarisation, rivers are rerouted. Dams are built for human advantage. But water finds its path. Returning to its course cannot be called destruction when the land is reclaiming what was taken from it.

Toni Morrison describes flood as a way of remembering. The flood that we know now used to hold a different meaning. It was regarded as a blessing, a force that replenished soil and promised harvest. People in their rightful land, who knew how to respect and love the soil that sustains them, stood on mountains and offered gratitude for what the waters carried.



Thao Nguyen Phan's *Becoming Alluvium* tells of two brothers who died in flood and return as an Irrawaddy dolphin and a water hyacinth, speaking of past lives and altered forms. There is tenderness in the idea that their new existence holds less power to harm, as opposed to being humans. Vietnam's rapid commercialisation, driven by tourism and the desire to avoid obsolescence, frames renewal as progress. But the actions of capitalism speak more of what it discards than what it creates: histories of violence, of destruction and injustice. The infrastructure

is a front attempting to hide and erase its recurring impurity, unforgivable sins towards humans, towards nature.

Nature does not forget. Nature does not negotiate. But unfairness exists here too. The burden falls unevenly. The people least responsible remain the most exposed.

The World Bank notes that the seventy-four lowest income countries contribute only a small share of global emissions, yet they face a dramatic rise in climate-related disasters, nearly eight times more in the past decade than in the 1980s. By 2050, unchecked climate change could drive more than 200 million people into internal displacement and push up to 130 million into poverty.

The exhibition continues to widen its lens throughout multiple

geographies. Myriam Boulos documents the Lebanese revolution of 2019, the economic collapse that followed, and the Beirut port explosion in *What's Ours*. Felipe Romero Beltrán traces the suspended lives of nine young men in detention centres, waiting for a verdict while trying to cross a border. Daniel Chatard records infrastructural destruction in Germany. Mosfiqur Rahman Johan holds memories of enforced disappearance. Jannatul Mawa draws attention to the erased contributions of women. Sumi Anjuman documents violence in domestic spaces endured by women who work simply to survive.

The art extends beyond photography across multiple mediums. Short films, bioscopes, interactive pixel games, flipbooks, television screens, guided meditations. The exhibition does not allow distance. It pulls the viewer into the grain of other lives until engagement becomes unavoidable. It demands introspection, to open your eyes and unbrand liberation. The outrage that you inevitably feel is its own form of clarity.

Chobi Mela is taking place across multiple locations: DrikPath Bhubon, Shilpakala Academy, the National Museum, Alliance Française Dhanmondi, and the Joyeeta Foundation. Artist talks are scheduled at the Joyeeta Foundation, while workshops and portfolio reviews take place at the Pathshala South Asian Media Institute in DrikPath Bhubon. Shilpakala Academy is also arranging art and education programmes for school children from 25 to 29 January. The opening rally was held on 16 January, and the festival is scheduled to continue until 30 January.

NEWS

EC ready to deliver free, fair polls

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constitutional responsibility, Nasir Uddin said the government was providing all necessary support to the EC, with security, law and order, and election-related matters receiving the highest priority.

"Law enforcement agencies and relevant government institutions are working to ensure a peaceful, orderly, and secure voting environment," he said.

The CEC expressed hope for continued cooperation from diplomats in advancing the electoral process.

He said the upcoming referendum and parliamentary election were key milestones for strengthening democratic solidarity and restoring public confidence in state institutions, as the country stood at a democratic crossroads.

He said the commission was working to make the entire electoral process independent, fair, neutral, and credible. Preparations have been completed through a coordinated and multi-dimensional approach,

including legal reforms, institutional readiness, stakeholder consultations, and effective planning.

Nasir noted that UN agencies had provided significant technical assistance to the voter registration process, contributing to its success.

The CEC also said the boundaries of the country's 300 parliamentary constituencies had been reviewed based on citizens' demands, legal principles, and fairness, and that constituency boundaries had been redrawn where justified.

On postal voting, he announced that for the first time the EC has introduced an information technology-based postal ballot system for Bangladeshis living abroad under the "Out of Country Voting" framework.

About 800,000 expatriate voters have registered under this system. Postal voting has also been introduced domestically, allowing government officials, election staff working outside their constituencies, and registered voters in legal custody to cast their ballots.

After presenting election-related statistics, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) Abul Fazal Md Sanaullah took questions from the diplomats.

Election commissioners Abdur Rahmani Mashud, Begum Tahmida Ahmed, and Md Anwarul Islam Sarkar were also present. The briefing was moderated by EC Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed.

Speaking to reporters after the briefing, CEC Nasir said foreign diplomats in Bangladesh had expressed full confidence in the EC's ability to hold a free, fair, neutral, and credible election.

"They expressed satisfaction with our overall readiness and appreciated our efforts. They also conveyed their full confidence in the commission regarding a free and fair election," he said.

On law enforcement deployment during the polls, he said the commission had informed the diplomats that the army and Ansar forces would assist the police in ensuring security.

Three candidates omit UK assets

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However, UK corporate filings show that the net assets of the chamber are worth Tk 3.5 crore, and that he owns 95 percent of its shares.

Quamruzzaman said he forfeited his British citizenship on December 22, 2025.

His case was among those deliberated by the EC, which ultimately declared his candidacy valid on January 21.

Quamruzzaman told this newspaper that he does not earn anything from Coombe Hill Development and therefore did not mention it in his affidavit.

"Lawyers are often appointed as directors in companies. I was similarly made a director there," he said.

The nationality of Mohammed Koyor Ahmed, BNP's candidate for

Sunamganj-3, is listed as "British" in UK corporate filings.

However, in his affidavit, Koyor stated that he neither holds dual citizenship nor has held any foreign citizenship in the past.

British corporate records show that Koyor was the director of a company called Sonargaon Indian Cuisine Limited for 14 years until it was dissolved in October 2022.

When the company was incorporated in 2008, Koyor was a Bangladeshi national.

From 2009 onwards, however, corporate documents list him as British. The records were duly authenticated.

The company went bankrupt and was liquidated in 2014.

At the time of liquidation, it owed £303,132 to its creditors, most of

which was owed to the UK's income tax authority.

This is further reflected in the corporate filings of another company he registered in 2016, where his nationality is again listed as British.

In his affidavit, Koyor stated that he earns around Tk 15 lakh annually from the UK.

However, he did not disclose any overseas income of his wife, Taslima Akhter Lima.

Lima, a British national, owns four active companies in the UK, according to the affidavit. The annual returns of these companies show that all are currently loss-making ventures.

This newspaper made multiple attempts over several days to reach Koyor by phone, but he did not respond.

Police probing

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Defence in Narisingdi, said, "We got information about the fire from highway police around 3:20am. We went to the spot and brought the fire under control within 15 minutes."

Although he claimed that primary investigation suggested the fire had originated from an electric short circuit, a CCTV camera footage that went viral on social media showed a man was loitering in front of the workshop before it caught fire.

SI Ishaq said an analysis of the footage showed that the man stayed for around one hour and 20 minutes near the workshop that night.

"He had bread, sitting near the workshop. We saw the man collecting dry waste and setting them on fire to warm himself."

"We suspect that the waste in front of the workshop was mixed with flammable substances like petrol or kerosene. When the fire spread quickly, the man left the scene," he said.

"It appears to us that he was a vagabond. We are trying to identify and arrest him," said the police officer.

Asked about the fire service official's claim that the fire originated from an electric short circuit, Ishaq said, "I don't know how he [fire official] said this."

Rubel on Sunday evening filed a case over Chanchal's death, accusing unnamed persons. The body was handed over to family members after autopsy, he said.

"We want the police to find out the truth... We want justice," said Rubel.

Contacted, the police station's Officer-in-Charge ARM Al Mamun said, "We are investigating the reason behind the incident."

Bagerhat BCL leader's wife, child laid to rest

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jail gate instead.

Speaking to this newspaper, Bagerhat Deputy Commissioner Golam Md Baten said Saddam's family had applied for his release on parole and added that as Saddam was at Jashore jail, the authority to grant parole rested with the Jashore deputy commissioner.

"I could not act on the application directly, but I advised the family to approach the Jashore DC. I also contacted the Jashore jail superintendent to ensure they received assistance."

Contacted, Jashore Deputy Commissioner Ashek Hasan said he had not received any parole application from Saddam's family seeking his release.

Earlier on Saturday, police recovered the bodies of Swarnali and her child from their residence in Sabekdanga village. After post-mortem examinations at Bagerhat 250-bed District Hospital, the bodies were handed over to the family.

Speaking to reporters, Swarnali's brother Shubho said his sister had married Saddam around five years ago. She had been under severe

mental distress since her husband's arrest following the fall of the Awami League regime on August 5, 2024, and his subsequent implication in several cases.

"My sister had been mentally distressed since her husband's imprisonment. She tried in many ways to secure his release. This caused severe mental stress and depression," he claimed.

Subarna's father, local Jatiya Party leader Ruhul Amin Howlader, said, "My daughter died by suicide. We do not want to blame anyone. We applied to receive the bodies of my daughter and grandson without delay. Now we will follow whatever decision the administration takes."

Officer-in-Charge of Bagerhat Sadar Police Station Mohammad Masum Khan said a murder case had been filed over the death of the child.

"At this stage, whether the death of Subarna was a murder or a suicide will be determined after the official autopsy report is received," he said yesterday, adding that further legal steps would depend on the findings.

A RIGHTS VIOLATION: ASK
Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) yesterday said that denying parole to Saddam

was a violation of the constitution and international human rights law.

"Despite an application from the family amid the extreme humanitarian circumstances arising from the deaths of his wife and child, denying parole release and refusing him the opportunity to participate in the janaza and burial has, in effect, subjected him to inhuman and degrading treatment."

"This constitutes a direct violation of article 35(5) of the constitution," said a statement signed by ASK Chairperson and Supreme Court lawyer ZI Khan Panna.

Citing international law, ASK said Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) prohibits cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, while Article 10(I) requires that all persons deprived of liberty be treated with humanity and with respect for their inherent dignity.

Allowing a grieving prisoner to see the faces of his deceased wife and child for five minutes at the jail gate and depriving him of the opportunity to attend the janaza and burial are wholly inconsistent with these provisions of the ICCPR, the statement said.