

Soma Surovi Jannat: The Bangladeshi artist showcased at Britain's oldest museum



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF SOMA SUROVI JANNAT

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AISHWARYA RAIHAN

Soma Surovi Jannat makes history as the first Bangladeshi artist to showcase her work in a solo exhibition titled *Climate, Culture, Care* at the Ashmolean Museum—the oldest museum in Britain and the world's first university museum. Situated in Oxford, the museum offers residencies to South Asian artists, and for the first time, a Bangladeshi artist was given the opportunity to spend time there expanding her horizons.

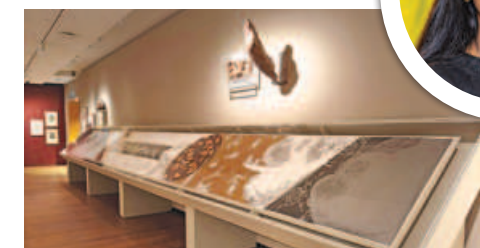
Curated by Mallica Kumbura Landrus, Keeper of Eastern Art at the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford, the exhibition *Ashmolean NOW: Soma Surovi Jannat – Climate, Culture, Care* runs from March 28, 2026 to November 1, 2026.

Soma Surovi Jannat completed her BFA at the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Dhaka, and her MFA at Visva-Bharati University in Santiniketan, India. She was awarded the Samdani Art Award at the 2020 Dhaka Art Summit, which included a residency at the Delfina Foundation in London, among many other recognitions. However, one of her most prestigious opportunities came as the Frere Hall Artist-in-Residence at the Ashmolean Museum.

Before, during, and after her residency, she worked on themes of climate change driven by politics and corruption, resulting in migration. She has also highlighted how the lives of coastal communities are affected by deforestation. The exhibition features 22 of her artworks, predominantly pen on paper, alongside approximately 18 objects from the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology

that inspired her work.

Resensitising the Brown Narrative reflects her creative journey during her Oxford residency in 2023. The work is inspired by clay sculptures from British India depicting South Asian people, which were originally created to introduce Indians to British audiences. However, these collections present professions without capturing the multilayered, multidimensional nature of their lives. The uniformity in skin tone, clothing, and occupation encouraged Surovi to challenge and reinterpret the subcontinental narrative.



In a Timeless Sweet Land, created before her residency, reflects her childhood memories in Lalmonirhat, a northern district of Bangladesh. Through this work, she contemplates climate migrants and the fundamental human right of every child to experience a childhood free from trauma.

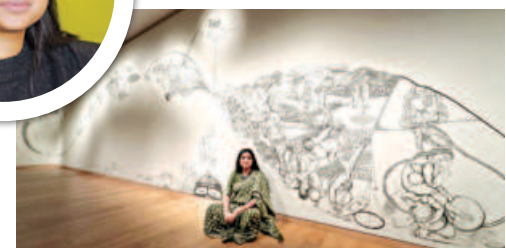
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Between the Sea and the Sky, Who Holds the Ground? a work over 30 feet long,

questions the forces responsible for climate damage and forced migration.

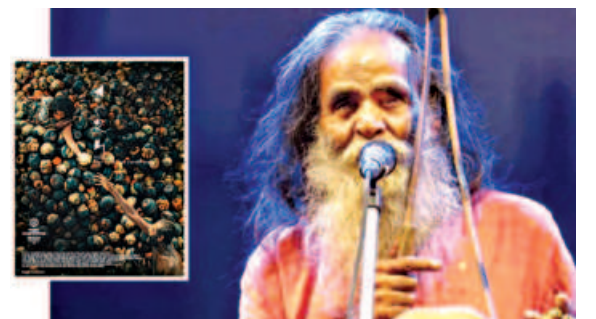
Where Every Leaf Holds a Tale is a series exploring Bangladesh's southern islands, including the mangrove forest of the Sundarbans and surrounding saline lands. Due to deforestation and lack of protection, all living beings—including humans—are at risk. One artwork, inspired by a second-century BCE terracotta Yakshi figure, depicts *Dimer Char* (Egg Island) as Mother Nature, marked with a 'kalo tika' for protection. She cradles a dead bird on her mangrove-covered chest, with a mangrove root sprouting from her navel and a tiger roaring between her legs. The piece reflects both the resilience of nature and the hope to preserve it despite ongoing destruction.

In summary, the exhibition reflects Surovi's dedication, compassion, and relentless creative and physical labour. She has expressed deep gratitude to her curator, the Ashmolean Museum team, her



family, and those who supported her in even the smallest ways—including someone who went through 400 Ora flowers to find one with seven petals. She also acknowledges the support of the British Council Bangladesh, Samdani Art Foundation (Seher & Taimur Hasan), Neha & Sumedh Jaiswal via Goldman Sachs Gives, the Charles Wallace Bangladesh Trust, Gallery Espace, and especially the Samdani Art Foundation for their role in her journey.

Surovi, apart from being a source of inspiration for upcoming Bangladeshi artists, is also an exemplary individual bearing the flag of the underrepresented South Asian art and culture.



Late Baul singer Kanai Das' final song to feature in 'Roid'

Baul Kanai Das (82), passed away on April 18, and just two days after his passing, it was announced that his song will feature in the film *Roid*, directed by Mejbaur Rahman Sumon.

It is his final recorded song, marking his first and only playback contribution to cinema.

Kanai Das Baul, a visually impaired folk artist from West Bengal, was known for his spiritually rooted music and humanist philosophy. He spent his life travelling across villages, fairs and *akhras* with his *ektara*, performing songs that reflected devotion and the essence of humanity.

Among his widely recognised songs are *Manush Bhojle Sonar Manush Hobi* and *Ke Bole Manush More, Ami Bujhlam Na Byapar*, which helped cement his place within the Baul tradition.

'Ali' bags Diversity Award in Germany

Anan AlRajeev's acclaimed short film *Ali* received the Diversity Award at Filmfest Bremen, in Germany, powered by Brema and SWB.

The director shared the news on social media, writing, "Thank you so much Filmfest Bremen for listening to our voice." Last year, *Ali* earned a Special Mention from the jury in the Short Film section at the 78th Cannes Film Festival. It also received a Special Mention at the Kyiv International Short Film Festival (KISFF) in 2025. It was selected for the official short film programme at the 70th Valladolid International Film Week (Seminci) in Spain.

Al Amin plays the titular role. Principal photography took place in Sylhet in November 2024.



NEWS

'I thought I would die there'

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when a loud explosion jolted workers around dawn.

"After dinner on February 28, we went to bed as usual. At around 5:00am, a loud explosion shook the entire building.

"We ran out of our rooms. At first, I thought it was a drill. Then from the window I saw missiles flying. I thought I would die," he said.

By morning, rumours of conflict had spread, but access to information was limited due to internet shutdowns, disrupting communication with families.

"A school near our area was hit. Children were killed," he said, adding that a bomb also landed close to their factory.

"We did not get any instructions from authorities."

As the days passed, fear became routine. Banks were closed, and the cost of essentials surged.

"I had no money. Sometimes, I didn't even have enough to eat," Babul said. Despite the risks, workers continued their jobs.

Back home, his family followed the situation on television, growing increasingly anxious.

His 12-year-old daughter, Taslima Akter Maysa, said they were terrified as news of the conflict unfolded.

"I used to feel very scared watching the war on TV. At the same time, my father didn't call us," she said. "Seeing all this, my mother would cry all the time.

When I stayed with her, she would just wipe her tears. Seeing her like that made me want to cry too."

She said they were relieved when he finally managed to contact them.

"One day, suddenly, my father called and said he was safe. He also said he would come home during Eid. Hearing this, I was overwhelmed with joy," she added.

Hope emerged when he learned the Bangladesh embassy had temporarily relocated from Tehran to Saveh and was arranging evacuation for nationals, including undocumented workers.

"Applied immediately," Babul said.

On March 5, when internet services briefly resumed, he managed to contact his family.

"They cried and asked me to come back. They didn't know I had no money even for food," he said.

Violence intensified in mid March. On March 18, a missile strike destroyed a nearby police outpost.

"By morning, it was nothing but dust and smoke. I cried the whole night," he said.

The same day, he received a travel pass from the Bangladesh mission.

Within hours, he and other Bangladeshis travelled to Saveh before boarding a convoy of nine buses to the Astara border in Azerbaijan. They reached around 2:00am in cold conditions on March 19.

"There were no blankets. Some stayed

in a rest room, others outside. No one slept," he said.

After completing border formalities, they were received by Bangladeshi officials and taken to Azerbaijan's Baku airport. A special flight brought them home later that day.

"When I finally stepped on Bangladeshi soil, I felt like I got my life back," Babul said.

Babul said he is the sole earning member of his six-member family and has exhausted his savings during the crisis.

"I had some savings, but almost all of it was used up during the war. The remaining money is also gone," he said.

He is now working in agriculture to support his family.

He also said officials collected his contact details and documents upon his return, assuring assistance.

"They said they would provide support, but I haven't received any response so far. It would be a great help if I received assistance," he added.

He claimed that around 186 Bangladeshi nationals travelled with him during the evacuation.

While Babul described repeated missile strikes and civilian casualties, independent verification of specific incidents was not immediately available. Authorities have also not detailed the scale of Bangladeshi nationals affected in the area or the total number evacuated.

BNP walks back on its tobacco control promises

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promote, endorse, market, distribute, buy, sell or transport their components or parts (such as e-cigarettes, vapes, vaping devices, vaporisers, e-liquids, etc.), heated tobacco products, or emerging tobacco products, whatever name they may be called, nor shall they cause or allow anyone else to do so.

An offender may face imprisonment for up to three months or a fine of up to Tk 2 lakh or both.

If a person commits the same type of offence a second time or repeatedly, the penalty shall be imposed at double the rate progressively.

Any person may face a fine of up to Tk 5,000 for using any of these products.

An e-cigarette (electronic cigarette) is a battery-operated device that heats a liquid—usually containing nicotine and other chemicals—to produce a vapour that can be inhaled by a user, an act known as 'vaping'.

However, following recommendations from a parliamentary special committee formed to review 133 ordinances issued during the interim government, the health ministry dropped the entire provision from the ordinance before placing it before the parliament.

After the move became public, various anti-tobacco organisations urged the government to reconsider the decision.

As many as 41 countries, including India, have banned e-cigarettes for their adverse health impact.

Representatives of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF in Bangladesh jointly wrote to the health ministry on April 9 expressing deep concern over reports that the ban on the import, production, distribution and use of e-cigarettes might be withdrawn and called for maintaining the ban.

They said that e-cigarettes are aggressively marketed to young people through flavoured products and targeted promotion, raising concerns about creating a new generation dependent on nicotine.

Nicotine is highly addictive and particularly harmful to children and adolescents, affecting brain development and increasing the risk of long-term cognitive and mental health consequences.

WHO does not recommend e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation tool, they said.

Bangladesh already faces a significant tobacco burden, with more than 1,30,000 deaths a year related to tobacco use, and substantial economic and social costs.

"Introducing or expanding access to new nicotine products risks compounding this burden," reads the letter.

The parliament, however, passed the act lifting the ban and a gazette was issued on April 10.

Separately, in January, the interim government enacted the Land Use Control and Agricultural Land Protection Ordinance to regulate land use and safeguard agricultural land.

Section 7(5) of the ordinance says tobacco cultivation that undermines food security will not be allowed on triple-crop or higher-yield agricultural land, and it must also be gradually restricted on single- and double-crop farmland.

However, this provision was dropped when the amended act was approved earlier this month.

In its election manifesto, the BNP outlined 22 health-related commitments, including controlling tobacco-related non-communicable diseases.

Emphasis will be placed on controlling non-communicable diseases caused by tobacco use (such as cancer, stroke, heart disease, lung disorders, etc.) to protect public health, and necessary legal measures and other initiatives will be undertaken to regulate tobacco use, read the BNP manifesto.

"This is a step backwards. What signal does this send? It suggests the emergence of an unethical, backdoor influence in policymaking," said Hossain Zillur Rahman, also the executive chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre, which does tobacco control advocacy.

None is calling for the elimination of the tobacco industry overnight or for tobacco cultivation to stop immediately.

But tobacco has a significant negative impact on public health, particularly on the younger generation.

"In this context, we need to take steps through both legal measures and taxation to control tobacco use."

These changes can still be reversed, and the government should do so, he added.

"I think the restriction [on e-cigarette] for research has been

lifted—it is not for mass marketing of e-cigarette," Hyder said.

When the correspondent said the entire section has been dropped, he said that if someone wants to conduct research to see how harmful it is, they should be able to do so.

"If it is banned, then no form of research or knowledge generation is possible. That is why the ban has been withdrawn. It does not mean that the door has been opened for e-cigarette marketing."

Asked about the apprehension that tobacco cultivation will increase after the dropping of the ban on tobacco cultivation on triple-crop land, he said: "This is not about encouraging tobacco cultivation."

"Our country is overly regulated. Why is so much regulation needed? Leave it to the farmers. If they can make a profit, what is your problem? If it reduces soil fertility or decreases income, the farmers themselves will stop producing tobacco. Then why is regulation needed?"

Tobacco will enter the market anyway and it is not possible to control it through law alone unless people's behaviour changes.

What is needed is massive campaigns promoting healthy lifestyles and the negative effects of tobacco, Hyder said, adding that they would do that.

Home boss's

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mob attacks" over the past year and a half, and again in the last two months.

She cited examples such as the removal of the Bangladesh Bank governor through "mob pressure"; attacks on the head of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha; mob incidents in Barishal court premises and the Supreme Court lawyers' room; arson attacks on The Daily Star and Prothom Alo offices; and the killing of a suspected thief in Chattogram through mob beating accompanied by singing and dancing. She also mentioned the recent killing of a pir in Kustia.

Drawing the home minister's attention, Rumeen said even the prime minister had spoken in similar terms. "The prime minister argued that when people are denied justice, such cultures grow and spread. Frustration, anger, deep inequality, and above all the absence of exemplary punishment fuel this trend," she added.

New radar system at HSIA covers entire

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began in 2019 and was completed in December 2025 with costs of Tk 942 crore, said sources at the CAAB.

Air Commodore Noor-e-Alam, member (ATM) of CAAB, said ATM works 24/7 to ensure the safe landing and takeoff of all flights every moment and to ensure the safe and reliable movement in the airspace.

Talking to The Daily Star, he said that the previous air traffic control system was about 40 years old and the radar was also about 35 years old.

He highlighted the significance of the new system, which can detect planes up to 350NM (650km) from Dhaka. "Our Chattagram radar is now integrated with the system. And we can communicate with flights in the Bay of Bengal up to a distance of 450NM [833km]."

"This has opened up an opportunity for us to establish control over deep sea and generate more revenues for the

country in future," said Noor-e-Alam, adding, "Complications in managing traffic has gone with the new system. As it is a complete digital solution with lots of interfaces, we can now work faster, smoother, and safer."

The ATM will not only benefit the country but also play a positive role in regional and global aviation, said the top CAAB official.

For decades, the aviation sector had been reliant on antiquated technology. The previous radar system lacked the capability to cover the country's entire airspace, particularly over the Bay.

This technological gap resulted in significant financial losses, as Bangladesh was unable to effectively track all flights and consequently failed to collect mandatory "flying over charges" from international airlines traversing the region.

Speaking at the inaugural event, Civil Aviation Minister Afroza Khanam

expressed pride in the new automated system, stating that it elevates the nation's airspace capacity to global benchmarks.

She reaffirmed the government's commitment to transforming HSIA into a global aviation hub.

State Minister Millat described the installation as the beginning of a technology-driven era for the country's airspace management.

CAAB chief Mostafa said the modernised ATM-CNS system successfully overcomes long-standing technical limitations, thereby ensuring that Bangladesh's aviation sector maintains a stronger position at regional and global levels.

French Ambassador Jean-Marc Séré Charlet, who attended the event alongside Thales Vice-President Nicolas Bouverot, described the collaboration as a shining example of mutual trust and friendship between the two nations.