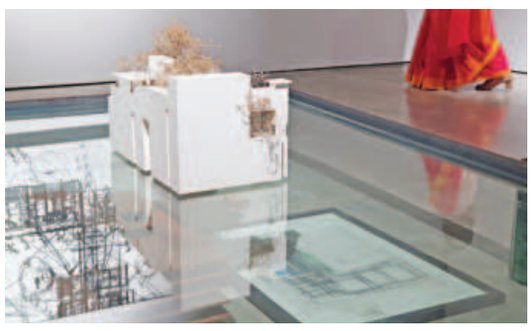






RAFIQ AZAM'S SOLO EXHIBITION

'Threshold' reflects on art, architecture and memory

SHAHBAZ NAHIAN

Rafiq Azam is among the finest architectural minds to have emerged from liberated Bangladesh and the wider region. With a thirty-five-year practice deeply intertwined with spatial experiences and human relationships, his work has continually challenged the conventional ideas of architecture. Yet, his sixth solo exhibition, ***Threshold: Art & Architecture***, falls short of the curatorial standards one might expect from an architect of his stature.

Currently on view at Bengal Shilpalay in Dhaka, the exhibition offers a glimpse into Azam's creative and psychological journey. Open to visitors daily from 4:00pm to 8:00pm, it will continue until December 5.

To an untrained eye, ***Threshold*** may appear fascinating. But beyond its initial visual appeal, the exhibition raises questions about its overall curatorial quality.

The dimly lit Quamrul Hassan Gallery sets the mood. Upon entering, visitors are greeted by a mass model of Old Dhaka, mounted vertically on one of the movable white walls. A mesh of innocence runs through the creative details of the exhibition. A plumb bob and a pencil hang above low-lying, steel-framed, glass-topped tables, where architectural models and archival materials are arranged in carefully composed displays, both above and beneath the glass. Rafiq Azam's two monographs sit at one end of these long, rectangular tables, representing an exceptionally rare achievement: a Bangladeshi practitioner being published by major international publishing houses.



PHOTOS: SHAHBAZ NAHIAN

Rusted steel features prominently in several models, including one placed beside an unrecognisable self-portrait imagining Rafiq in old age. Another installation pairs a photograph of a *nouka* (boat) beside an interior pool with a boat model mounted beneath it.

Yet, the overall curation is difficult to praise. The movable white walls evoke the alleys of Old Dhaka, opening into a larger space. The juxtaposition of watercolours and sketches with photographs of completed projects, alongside recordings of Rafiq speaking in the *Dhakaiya* dialect, are thoughtful touches. However, the arrangement of visual materials along the passage reveals a certain naivety in exhibition design.

In Rafiq's own words, ***Threshold*** is neither a retrospective nor a collection of finished works, but a glimpse into his psychological journey. While the thinking behind the exhibition is evident, its execution often feels like a soliloquy that only he can fully understand.

Architecture is inherently multidisciplinary, but expertise in one creative field does not automatically translate into curatorial expertise. As Dhaka's exhibition scene evolves, collaboration across disciplines becomes increasingly important. Recent architectural exhibitions such as ***Parallels*** and ***Learning Unlearning*** have faced similar shortcomings.

Rafiq Azam is a man of contradictions: an imposing creative mind with a formidable ego, yet someone who laughs like a child and remains open to contrasting perspectives. "I watercolour landscapes. I architecture landscapes as well," he once told me. Growing up in Old Dhaka, surrounded by sunlight, greenery and the then-youthful Buriganga, he developed an early fascination with landscapes that would eventually shape his architectural language.

Over three and a half decades, his journey has been marked by personal struggles, professional reinvention and an unwavering commitment to transforming the spaces we inhabit. His influence extends well beyond the awards in his cabinet. And so, the question remains: does the curation of ***Threshold*** truly reflect the creative mind and complex persona of Rafiq Azam?

Runa Laila receives golden guitar as birthday gift



To mark the legendary singer Runa Laila's birthday tomorrow (November 17), Channel i has produced a special programme titled ***Runa Mahal***, through which a golden guitar was presented to her as a birthday gift.

Hosted by actor Afzal Hossain, the programme features actor Alamgir, eminent singer Rafiqun Nabi and renowned singer Ankhi Alamgir.

During the programme, Channel i Managing Director and children's author Faridur Reza Sagar presented Runa Laila with the golden guitar as a birthday gift, adding a special touch to the occasion.

Runa Mahal will also reveal many lesser-known facts about the singer's life and career.

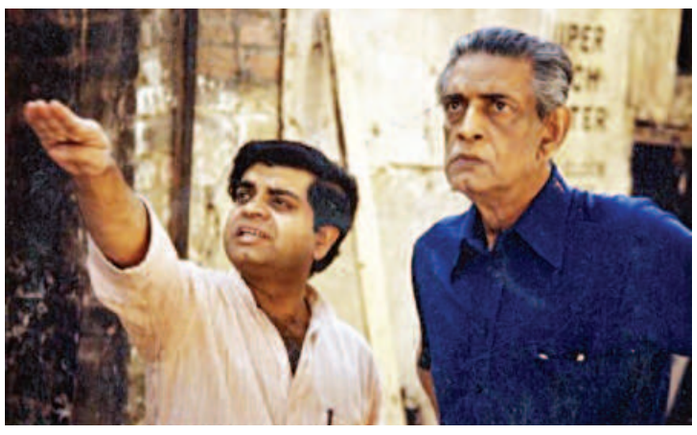
Directed by Arif Khan and produced by Anonna Ruma, the programme will air on Channel i on November 17 at 10:15pm.

Satyajit Ray's son Sandip Ray begins shooting anthology of four Ray classics

Filmmaker Sandip Ray has begun filming an untitled anthology feature adapting four short stories written by his father, the late Satyajit Ray—***Khagam***, ***Batik Babu***, ***Bhuto***, and ***Neel Atanka***. Produced by Pradip Kumar Nandi under the banner of Nandy Movies, the project went on the floor on November 13.

The four segments bring together distinct settings and tones, spanning supernatural horror, psychological suspense, and colonial-era dread.

The ensemble cast features Subhasish Mukhopadhyay, Saswata Chatterjee, Sabyasachi Chakraborty, Supriyo Dutta, Kaushik Ganguly, Ritwick Chakraborty, Shaheb Chattopadhyay, Subhrajit Dutta, Kaushik Banerjee, and Barun Chakraborty.



NEWS

2 killed after being 'pushed off' bus in Rangpur

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30, and Shakil Islam, 28, both construction workers in Cumilla and residents of Charai Khola village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila, police said.

The injured, Atikul Islam, 30, is from the same village.

According to Atikul, witnesses and locals, the three were travelling from Cumilla to Jaldhaka in Nilphamari on a Saimum Paribahan night coach.

Around 8:30am, an argument broke out between the passengers and the bus supervisor and helper over the fare at Jigartal. As the dispute escalated, the two allegedly pushed all three off the moving bus.

Mukul and Shakil died on the spot, while locals rescued Atikul and took him to Taraganj Upazila Health Complex.

Protesting the incident, locals blocked the Rangpur-Saidpur highway, demanding the arrest and exemplary punishment of the bus driver, supervisor and helper.

Around noon, locals detained the driver, Aziz Hossain, 44, and helper Shafiqul Islam Shafik, 35, in Taraganj's Chikli area and handed them over to police. Both are residents of Dimla upazila in Nilphamari.

Taraganj Highway Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mostafizur Rahman said police recovered the bodies from the spot and the injured passenger was receiving treatment.

"The detained bus driver and helper have been handed over to Taraganj Police Station," he said.

Khandaker Mahmud, inspector (investigation) and currently in-charge of Taraganj Police Station, said Kalu Mia, father of one of the deceased, filed a case.

"Two people have been arrested. They are being interrogated," he said.

Tarique, Erdogan talked about defence industry investment: Kobir

FROM PAGE 12

of the most significant meetings on the first day was with our prime minister," he said.

On defence cooperation, Humaiun said the discussions focused on investment opportunities in the defence sector, including the possibility of investment in a defence industrial park and other defence manufacturing initiatives.

"The discussions on moving towards an investment partnership were very fruitful," he said.

Regarding the Rohingya crisis, the state minister said the two sides discussed strengthening cooperation ahead of the International Court of Justice's ruling on the Rohingya genocide case, expected on Thursday, as well as mobilising greater international support for humanitarian assistance.

He said Bangladesh and Türkiye agreed to work closely to raise global awareness of the issue and coordinate diplomatic efforts.

Humaiun quoted Erdoğan as telling the prime minister, "You are my valued brother. You are the leader of the 180 million people of Bangladesh, but beyond that, you are my valued brother and a leader with whom I will work closely."

The Turkish president had also praised recent policy reforms in Bangladesh and expressed his willingness to further strengthen bilateral ties, saying Türkiye stood ready to support Bangladesh in areas of mutual interest, Humaiun said.

8-year-old's body found in madrasa toilet

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The accused are Hafiz Mokarrom Hossain, 30, director of the madrasa in the College Road area of Biral municipality, and his brother-in-law, also a student there.

The court ordered the teen to be sent to the Jessore Child Development Centre.

Biral Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Al Imran said Safayet, son of Solaiman Ali of Thonthonia village in Bhandara union, was admitted to the madrasa around eight months ago.

His grandfather visited him on Saturday afternoon and found him in good health.

The madrasa director initially told police that he noticed a toilet door had remained closed for an unusually long time that night.

After repeated knocks went unanswered, he shone his mobile phone's flashlight through an opening above the door and saw someone lying inside.

He broke open the door with two others around 8:00pm and found Safayet.

The boy was taken to Biral Upazila Health Complex, where an on-duty doctor declared him dead.

Police later prepared an inquest report indicating that the boy might have been strangled.

Safayet's father filed a murder case against the director and his brother-in-law that night. The body was sent to Dinajpur Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy, the OC said.

Freedom fighter named in sabotage case 7 months after death

FROM PAGE 2

the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Explosive Substances Act.

He said the allegation concerning the deceased freedom fighter had yet to be investigated and his name would be dropped if the claim was proven.

Advocate Shahidul Islam Sojib of the Shariatpur District Bar Association said, "He is a freedom fighter who fought for the country. Even after death, he was not spared from being accused in a case. This is deplorable."

The case also named Md Jahangir Hossain, a certificate assistant at the Shariatpur Deputy Commissioner's Office. The Detective Branch arrested him on November 12 on allegations of financing the sabotage.

Hotelier Sultan Kazi was accused of taking an order for 500 packets of khichuri from AL activists.

According to the case statement, 700-800 people gathered near the toll plaza in Zajira's Naodoba area around 1:30am on November 9, blocked the expressway, detonated crude bombs and vandalised two trucks, halting traffic between Dhaka and the southwestern region.

Police have arrested eight people in connection with the incident since November 12.

Nine more RMG units adopt 'no work, no pay'

FROM PAGE 12

Workers at only five factories in the region have not started work and are sitting idle, he said.

"The overall situation in Savar, Ashulia and Dhamrai was calm -- no disorder has been reported anywhere," he added.

Babul Akhter, workers' representative on the wage board, and Amirul Haque Amin, president of National Garment Workers Federation, echoed the same.

Normalcy will return within the next two to three days when the minimum wage is announced, Amin said.

"We are waiting for the proposal from the owners' representative to fix the final amount," Babul said.

The owners' representative is scheduled to submit the proposal of minimum salary for garment workers in today's meeting of the wage board.

Nearly 1,500 garment factory owners have held a view exchange meeting at the BGMEA office in Uttara on the current labour unrest and fixing the monthly salary of the garment workers.

Most of the factory owners have proposed Tk 15,000 as the minimum salary, up from Tk 12,500 fixed in 2023, The Daily Star has learnt from meeting attendants.

The workers' representative has already proposed Tk 32,000 as the minimum monthly salary for the garment workers.

It seems that the situation is turning normal as the intensity of the unrest has come down, said BGMEA President Mahmud Hasan Khan.

And yet, production was disrupted in 60 factories yesterday, he said.

The new factories at Konabari area in Dhaka were affected yesterday, although normalcy is being restored gradually, said BGMEA Vice-President Md. Rezwan Selim, who looks after the labour issues.

Some of the factory owners who had invoked the Section 13(1) clause resumed production yesterday, while some are gearing up to reopen from today, he added.

Meanwhile, workers demanding higher wages blocked the Dhaka-Tangail Highway in Gazipur's Kaliakair upazila for around 30 minutes yesterday morning, disrupting traffic before police intervention brought the situation under control.

The protest took place in the Mouchak area between 8:30am and 9:00am yesterday.

Traffic resumed after police persuaded the workers to leave the road, said Manzur Morshed, inspector of Naojor Highway Police.

However, traffic between Tongi and Mawna on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway remained normal, with no reports of worker protests along the stretch.

Govt vows debt transparency

FROM PAGE 1

Public debt, however, is projected to remain just below 39 percent of GDP.

The government attributes much of the pressure to borrowing and financial liabilities accumulated under the previous administration.

Public debt rose by Tk 5.4 lakh crore in the two years to June 2024, reaching Tk 18.9 lakh crore ($163 billion), or 36 percent of GDP.

Over the same period, government borrowing from the central bank to finance the budget deficit surged from Tk 730 crore to Tk 56,750 crore, effectively creating money and helping push inflation close to 10 percent.

The previous government also left around Tk 40,000 crore in unpaid power and fertiliser subsidies and about $2.5 billion (Tk 31,100 crore) in overdue fuel import bills.

Officials say the economy has since stabilised.

Central bank lending to the government fell to Tk 482 crore by June 2026, foreign currency reserves recovered to above $30 billion, and the yield on 91-day Treasury bills declined from around 12 percent in June 2025 to 8-9 percent.

But the pressure on public finances remains significant.

Qingfeng Zhang, Bangladesh country director of the Asian Development Bank, which co-organised the conference, said debt servicing had risen from 2.3 percent of GDP in FY2020-21 to 3 percent in FY2024-25.

Although the budget deficit narrowed to 3.5 percent of GDP last fiscal year, the improvement was largely driven by lower spending on development projects, he said.

"Rising debt service is constraining development expenditure and reinforcing reliance on domestic financing," Zhang said.

The conflict in the Middle East is adding to the strain through higher energy prices, trade disruptions and tighter global financing conditions. Better recording and reporting of public debt, including government guarantees, would help identify risks early, he added.

Speaking to reporters after the sessions, Khosru identified weak revenue collection, rather than the overall size of public debt, as the country's main fiscal challenge.

He said the government plans to widen the tax net, reduce tax exemptions, and digitise VAT and income tax administration to tackle these challenges.

BUILDING THE BOND MARKET

The government is also looking to deepen the domestic bond market and attract foreign investors to broaden its financing options.

Bangladesh's local-currency government bonds have been included in JPMorgan's GBI-EM Edge index, while the government is exploring links with international securities settlement platforms Euroclear and Clearstream.

Tanvir Shahriar Ghani, special assistant to the prime minister, said attracting foreign investors would require sound economic fundamentals, transparent trading and reliable mechanisms for repatriating investment proceeds.

Khosru said Bangladesh was also considering its first international sovereign bond, but any issuance would have to be "carefully sequenced".

Tanvir said the country should explore dollar-denominated Eurobonds and sukuk, or Islamic bonds, while carefully assessing how much it could afford to borrow.

However, Bangladesh's credit ratings could make such borrowing expensive. Moody's rates the country B2, while S&P and Fitch assign it B+. Both S&P and Fitch downgraded their outlooks to negative this year, citing weaknesses in the banking sector and the fallout from the Middle East conflict.

Prasad Ananthakrishnan, an ADB consultant, told delegates that bond issuance by B-rated countries had fallen to about a third of its 2017 level, while average maturities had shortened from 16 years to eight.

He urged Bangladesh to prioritise developing its domestic bond market and publish comprehensive information on government guarantees and the liabilities of state-owned enterprises.

"In today's market, transparency is cheaper than credit enhancement," he said.

The UN General Assembly recently extended Bangladesh's preparation period for LDC graduation to November 24, 2029, giving the country more time to prepare for the loss of trade benefits and concessional financing.

Ananthakrishnan said the era of cheap borrowing was over and every taka borrowed would now have to generate returns exceeding its cost.

He offered debt managers a simple test for assessing financing plans, using "r" for interest rates and "g" for economic growth: "If r rises by a point and g falls by a point, will your plan still work? If the answer is yes, you borrow. If not, you need to fix the plan first."