

The ancient beauty of the Paharpur Monastery, the stark simplicity but monumental elegance of the Shat Gambuj Mosque, the hypnotic arches of the Kamlapur Railway Station and the geometric stylization of the Sangshad Bhaban were all on view in Sydney as part of the *Architectural Excellence in Bangladesh* exhibition. Held within the historic Tusculum building in Potts Point over a week, the exhibition was organised jointly by the Bangladeshi Architects in Australia (BAA) and the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA).

The exhibition showcased, through photographs and detailed write-ups, the diversity of architectural practice in Bangladesh since the 3rd century BC until date. The exhibition also encompassed architects of Bangladeshi origin practicing in Australia.

The event received tremendous

Poetry in architecture



Bangladeshi architects have been designing culturally sensitive, sustainable buildings that integrate with the region's river-dominant landscape, discovers SHIVANGI AMBANI GANDHI

about evolving architecture seen in Bangladesh, beginning with the UNESCO World Heritage listed site of Paharpur Monastery with its massive structure ornate with intricate carvings.

The 60-domed Shat Gambuj Mosque reflects the Sultanate Period, while the Mughal period later brought fewer domed designs of Sat Masjid and Lalbagh Fort. The presentation talked through the highlights of the British, post-British and contemporary developments in

so that it would be inspirational to future generations. He was instrumental in getting Louis I Kahn to visit Dhaka to design the Parliament building. Islam's archival website calls the sacrifice of his own work to Kahn, "his greatest gift to the architects of this region".

Kahn's iconic Sangshad Bhaban (Parliament House) with huge openings of geometric shapes on the exterior, is surrounded by a lake on three sides to reflect Bangladesh's landscape of

Much like Mazarul Islam's organic designs, and Louis I Kahn's references to Bangladesh's natural landscape, Aslam's designs allow for the winter sun, changing seasons, the breeze and the whole cosmos to transform the building. In one three-story home, Aslam created a water pool in the middle of the building. "The water pool refracts and reflects floating clouds, birds and the celestial sky," he said. "Architecture is a presentation of poetry," he added.



Sangshad bhaban



Kamlapur Railway Station

support with the President of the Union of International Architects, Louise Cox inaugurating the opening. Howard Tanner, National President, AIA, Mahboob Saleh, Acting High Commissioner for Bangladesh, Mubasshar Hussain, President, Institute of Architects, Bangladesh and several renowned practicing architects from Bangladesh attended the ceremony.

The BAA organised an insightful talk

architecture in Bangladesh, including renowned architect Mazharul Islam's works.

Among the exhibits was Islam's fascinating design of the College of Arts & Crafts (later named the Institute of Fine Arts), which retained many of the old, large beautiful trees on the site. The BAA presentation depicted through images, the pavilion-like openness of the buildings, pathways, and garden spaces, to create a campus ideal for contemplation and learning. Islam's design not only integrated the building with its existing natural landscape, but also echoed the outhouse and inner house scheme of rural Bangladesh.

Muzharul Islam, initially commissioned to design the National Parliament building, however decided to pass the prestigious project onto a master architect



Sangshad bhaban interior

numerous rivers.

I absolutely enjoyed Rafiq Aslam's presentation on contemporary architecture. Aslam revealed he always wanted to be a painter, but under the influence of his father's ambition of sending him to engineering school, became an architect only "by chance". Yet, his love for painting influences and redefines his work into what he refers to as arTchitecture.

His presentation was strewn with watercolour paintings and he recited rhythmic poetry, when discussing some of his works. "In Bangladesh, with 52 rivers, water is a major element of the landscape," he said. The water and the alluvial soil bursting with paddy after the river has receded – this is his inspiration, he revealed.

His designs for the not-so-wealthy are equally thoughtful. In a dingy lane of Dhaka, an apartment building with each family owning just about 450 sq. ft., Aslam managed to provide a traditional courtyard – a garden. "In old Dhaka, families share many things like salt, sugar, etc. So I thought they could share a garden too," he remarked.

Commenting on unregulated development in Dhaka, common to most other cities in the Indian sub-continent, Aslam said, "Architecture is a responsibility – it has the power to transform society into a healthy community."