

imagina el mundo NOBO DIGONTER KOLPONA

تَخَيَّلِ الْعَالَمَ *imagine the world* কল্পনায় জগত

logathe patti chindikyuga *képzeld el a világot*

कल्पना दुनिया की DYCHMYGWCH Y BYD *waza dunia*

FESTIVAL REPORT

HAY FESTIVAL DHAKA 2012



HAYFESTIVAL.ORG

AFRICA AMERICAS ASIA EUROPE MIDDLE EAST

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‘The enthusiasm and energy of the audience gave life to this festival. The passion and excitement of Bengalis for literature and language came through loud and clear at every event.’

Tabmima Anam, novelist and co-producer of Hay Festival Dhaka

The Festival



HAY FESTIVAL DHAKA 2012 WAS AN EXHILARATING MULTILINGUAL FEAST OF LANGUAGE AND IDEAS. IT BROUGHT NOVELISTS AND POETS FROM AROUND THE WORLD TO A RAPTUROUS AUDIENCE HUNGRY FOR THE CELEBRATION OF WRITING AND FREE THINKING THAT IS CHARACTERISTIC OF HAY FESTIVALS INTERNATIONALLY.

HAY FESTIVAL DHAKA, 15–17 NOVEMBER 2012

Hay Festival Dhaka began in 2011 with a small one-day pilot festival on the grounds of the British Council. Over 1,000 people attended, and were mesmerized by the Welsh poet Jon Gower and the hypnotic stories brought to life by Jan Blake. There were some debates about the English language – its universality, but also its tendency to colonize – a theme that has run through both festivals. An outdoor open mike event gave aspiring voices a chance to showcase their new work, surrounded by tea stalls, bookshops and a juice bar. Although Dhaka is host to the Ekushay Boi Mela, one of the biggest annual book fairs in the world, it was the first time audiences had been given an opportunity to interact with in this way – and in some cases challenge – authors who had thus far remained behind the pages of their books. The pilot festival was universally declared a success, and we were determined to return again the following year, bigger and better.

In 2012 we were honoured and thrilled to move the festival to the grounds of the Bangla Academy, where we were warmly welcomed by Director General Shamsuzzaman Khan. At the heart of the Dhaka University campus, and the historic centre of our cultural identity, it is the perfect venue to bring literatures from around the world to play under the Bengali sky. Writers came from the United States, the United Kingdom, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan, and traded stories and ideas with the leading local Bangla and English-language authors.



The festival, which ran for three days in 2012, kicked off with a spectacular homage to Bangla literary greats Rabindranath Tagore, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Jibanananda Das and Lalon Shah, embodying the essence of Bengal in its intimate relationship with words, music and nature. Over the course of the next two days, we hosted 41 panels, almost half of which were in Bangla, including various regional literary forms and languages, from Chakma recitations to KobiLorai, a form of poetry sparring in the oral tradition. Beauty, energy, generosity and inclusiveness were words that kept coming up among those who attended the sessions, book launches and performances.

Taboo breaking was a major theme of this year's festival. The opening event included a transgender lyric poet, who seemed to have set the tone for the weekend, which featured frank discussions about sex and homosexuality. A dramatic reading of the Bengali feminist Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's groundbreaking novella, *Sultana's Dream*, was played to a huge audience. Women outnumbered men on stage, with themes of breaking silences and reimagining histories, in the true spirit of Hay.

Dozens of books were launched at the festival, including a biannual literary journal called *Bengal Lights; Sundarban*, a photo-journalist's sojourn through the mangrove forest; and *Lifelines*, a collection of women's short stories. The need for translations as a means to take Bengali literature beyond Bangladesh's borders featured strongly. On the last day, noted actor and writer Aly Zaker presented a bilingual version of *Hamlet* set in a Bangladeshi village. The previous evening, at the Hay Dhaka MusicFest event, Mr Zaker voiced the festival's aspirations when he said: 'Through the Hay Festival our 40-year struggle for Bangladeshi language and identity has found an international voice.'

The Hay Dhaka Musicfest, a one-night musical medley of the latest Bangla beats by some of the hottest names on the Dhaka music scene, was hugely enjoyed by thousands of music lovers at the lakeside amphitheatre at Rabindra Sharabar. The atmosphere was mellow and happy, the stage decorated with candles and beautiful paper lanterns, along with typical Bengali *alpona* designs made up of marigold flower petals. Traditional *Dhol* drums, led by maestro Nazrul Islam, made a blazing start to the evening, which featured the thick, mesmerizing melodies of Krishnakoli as well as the trance-like Bangla-classical fusion of singer-songwriter and guitarist Arnob with Shoeb's amazing vocals.

Young readers and writers were also celebrated – there was a session on children’s literature with Welsh Children’s Laureate and poet Eurig Salisbury and storyteller Shameem Azad. Young poets were given a platform to showcase their spontaneous poetry skills fresh from a workshop; and the Commonwealth Writers held a writing ‘surgery’ throughout the two days of the festival.

Vikram Seth’s conversation with his old friend, legendary publisher David Davidar, was an audience favourite. Philip Hensher and Kamila Shamsie discussed the challenges of writing about the Bangladesh war of independence. ‘I can’t think of any event I’ve participated in during my 14 years as a published writer where I’ve felt greater generosity from the audience than the session on writing about 1971. It was a reminder also of what can be so valuable about literary festivals – the opportunities to have conversations across borders which everyone recognises as both difficult and necessary,’ Kamila Shamsie said of the session.



Shehan Karunatilaka and Khamedul Islam were hilarious on the subject of their obsession with cricket, and Nandita Das and Catherine Masud were forthcoming about their experiences as debut directors. Mohammed Hanif was witty and insightful in his mango-exploding session with new talent Kazi Anis Ahmed. The beloved Bangla-language children’s author Mohammad Zafar Iqbal packed the outside tent. As the sun set on the second day, people lingered around the book stalls as a few young men distributed flyers protesting the presence of an English language festival on the hallowed grounds of the Bangla Academy. As usual, in Dhaka, debates around language and literature continue to raise passions. In the words of Welsh poet Gillian Clarke: ‘To be here is a privilege. This is a space where language and writing matters – life and death matters – and that’s an amazing aspiration.’

We were fortunate to have been able to be a part of this conversation. Long may it continue.

Sadaf Saaz Siddiqi & Tahmima Anam, Peter Florence & Lyndy Cooke *Producers, Hay Festival Dhaka*

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO THE DAILY STAR – TITLE SPONSOR, THE BANGLA ACADEMY – HOST, JATRIK – PROJECT PARTNERS, AND BRITISH COUNCIL – GLOBAL PARTNERS

The Festival in words



‘I can’t think of any event I’ve participated in during my 14 years as a published writer where I’ve felt greater generosity from the audience.’

KAMILA SHAMSIE, AUTHOR

‘Through the Hay Festival our 40-year struggle for Bangladeshi language and identity has found an international voice.’

ALY ZAKER, ACTOR AND WRITER

‘The festival’s planners went to great lengths to ensure due homage to local culture and history, as the opening ceremony presented classical Indian dances performed to Bangla poems, and ended with a jatra, a form of folk dance-drama. Out of 41 panels, at least 15 were in Bangla, and the stage was taken by four times as many Bangladeshi writers as foreign ones. The Bangla panels found equal room for new poets, like Trimita Chakma, who writes in the minority Chakma language. And the event marked the time at Hay that women outnumbered men on stage. ... As Bangladesh begins its fifth decade, the embrace of an international festival like Hay by the Bangla Academy marks the maturation and newfound confidence of a culture.’

K. ANIS AHMED, NEWSWEEK INTERNATIONAL

‘Some literary festivals feel only marginal to their countries’ concerns. But this one is carrying on a debate central to the future of this young country. With events both in Bangla and English, it offers the opportunity of dialogue both within and between peoples.’

SAMEER RAHIM, THE TELEGRAPH

The Festival in words



‘Hosting the Festival means greater exchange of ideas and new literary perspectives... greater cooperation and increased exposure for writers and Bangla literature.’

SHAMSUZZAMAN KHAN, DIRECTOR GENERAL, BANGLA ACADEMY

‘The Bangla Academy is showing real far sightedness in hosting Hay, because a festival like this can take the riches of a language and share it with the wider world.’

MAHFUZ ANAM, EDITOR OF THE DAILY STAR

‘The three days of this festival happening...brought to the few of us, old hands, who had endeavoured to coax the boat of art and culture through hail and high waters since ’71, a pleasure hitherto unknown in their lives...Hay Festival reminded me of the opportunity that our aspiring litterateurs could have sitting right here at home reaching out to what is happening all over the world. What is more is that the festival brings an opportunity to the already established world figures visiting Bangladesh to be in close contact with our home-grown talent in the field of literature, art and culture. So, at the end of the day, we are in a position to go forward, hand in hand, with better understanding.’

ALY ZAKER, ACTOR AND WRITER

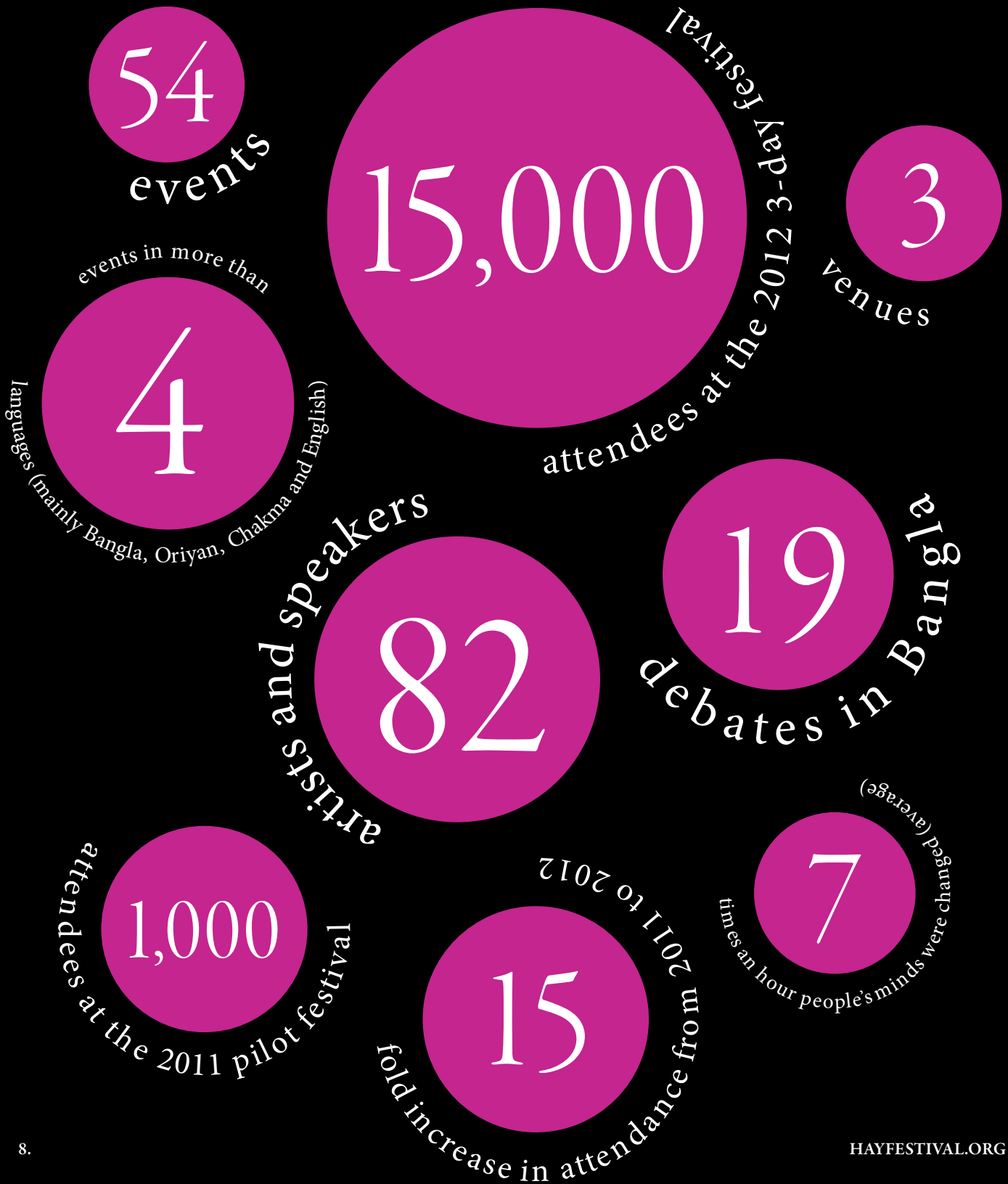
‘Time is a resource that most of us seem to squander on a fairly regular basis. But like others who attended the Hay Festival Dhaka this year, I feel considerably richer for having spent my time doing so.’

FARAH GHUZZAVI, ACTIVIST AND WRITER

‘The map of the known world has changed for me forever.’

GILLIAN CLARKE, POET

Festival in numbers



The authors



Vikram Seth

Tahmima Anam

Philip Hensher

Syed Shamsul Haq

Fakrul Alam

Kaiser Haq

Anisul Haque

David Davidar

Kamila Shamsie

Nandita Das

Shehan Karunatilaka

Selina Hossain

Gillian Clarke

Mohammed Hanif

Muhammed Zafar Iqbal

Arundhati Subramaniam

Eurig Salisbury

Shaheen Akter

Media coverage



‘SOME LITERARY FESTIVALS FEEL ONLY MARGINAL TO THEIR COUNTRIES’ CONCERNS. BUT THIS ONE IS CARRYING ON A DEBATE CENTRAL TO THE FUTURE OF THIS YOUNG COUNTRY. WITH EVENTS BOTH IN BANGLA AND ENGLISH, IT OFFERS THE OPPORTUNITY OF DIALOGUE BOTH WITHIN AND BETWEEN PEOPLES.’

Sameer Rahim, *The Telegraph*



NEWSPAPER & ONLINE COVERAGE

The Daily Star, Bangladesh

Hay Festival Dhaka dedicated portal featuring editorial, programme, and all festival info

The Star Weekend Magazine, Bangladesh – Cover story and full coverage

The Star Weekend Magazine, Bangladesh – Article

Newsweek International – Article

The Telegraph, UK – 2 articles

The Huffington Post, US – Article

First Post, India – Article

bdnews24.com, Bangladesh – 2 articles

Hay Festival Writers Blog, International – 6 blog entries by festival writers and participants

Amar Desh, Bangladesh – Article

The Times of India, India – Article

Global Voices, International – Article

The News Today, Bangladesh – 2 articles

The Daily Star, Bangladesh – 3 articles

The New Age, Bangladesh – Article

Daily Prothom Alo, Bangladesh – 2 articles

Daily Ittefaq, Bangladesh – 2 articles

The Manabkanta, Bangladesh – Article

Daily Noya Diganta, Bangladesh – Article

RADIO & TV COVERAGE

ABC Radio – Official radio partner: coverage throughout festival

Desh TV – Official TV partner: showed clips from the festival throughout and covered

Hay Dhaka Musicfest in its entirety

BTV (principal national news channel in Bangladesh) – Interview with festival producer, aired just before the festival started

Various other channels in Bangladesh – TV coverage of the festival inauguration

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Host



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Associate Sponsor



Media Partner



Panel Sponsors



Institutional Partners



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