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**Padma Bridge:
Giant leap in nation-building**

**Nation expects,
World applauds Hasina**



Sylhet: 'The worst flood in living memory'

Julian Assange's luck runs out?

The Common Hawk-Cuckoo's song

Brihatta's ode to designed objects

CONTENTS

From the Editor

More than a bridge to celebrate

3

Nation this Week

4

World this Week

5

Cover Story

How the third wave got Sylhet

6



Cover Story

12 How nations get built

Padma Bridge

17 Harbinger of economic prosperity of Faridpur



Diplomacy

21 Envoys convey praise for Hasina's courage under pressure

Focus

28 Sins and scenes: Homage to pavements

Reflections

30 A Tale of a Bridge

Feature

34 Brazil's invisible victims of state violence



38 SUSTAIN Ushers in a Decade of the Climate Justice Project
Storytelling with Saris

Opinion

40 Assange extradition is just latest in UK's crackdown on the free press

School Shooting

42 Unlocked doors were 'first line of defense' at Uvalde school

Sri Lanka Crisis

44 Sri Lanka's crisis cripples once burgeoning middle class

Climate

46 Climate Change, Natural Disasters, and Suffering of the Poor

Livelihoods

48 Build, collapse, rebuild: life on the river islands of Bangladesh

Society

52 Polygamous marriages on the rise in Rohingya camps



WildTeam

56 Common Hawk-Cuckoo: An uncommon impersonator and an amazing vocalist

Culture

59 An ode to designed objects: Brihatta opens 'Sthithi: Objects in Conversation'

61 UNHCR, Liberation War Museum launches 'We are Rohingya' photo exhibition

62 'Reminiscence of Dreams': Jogen Chowdhury's solo exhibition goes on

SUSTAIN Ushers in a Decade of the Climate Justice Project Storytelling with Saris

Jumoke Opeyemi

The SUSTAIN public art installation transformed a building's six columns into monumental women clad in saris, holding up the world. Standing outside of Euclid Avenue in Washington DC, I felt the strength of women all over the world when I saw the 24 bright aqua and hot pink saris from Bangladesh adorned with woodblock and writing from two countries. Twelve aquamarine colored saris wrapped the tall grand columns of The LINE DC, a former church that is now a hotel. Another dozen bright pink fuchsia saris fluttered in parallel horizontal bands in Unity Park, creating a pedestrian passage. Our writings and poetry about our connection with the Earth were combined on the saris with artist Monica Jahan Bose's woodblocks on themes of climate, gender, and food justice.

As I stared at the saris hugging the majestic 20-foot columns, I was reminded of women who broke glass ceilings and raised standards. Esther in the bible stood before the king and saved a nation. Queen Cleopatra ruled over her kingdom. Mae Jemison stood proud in her astronaut uniform. Monica told me that she was thinking of the Erechtheum at the Acropolis in Athens, where women are the columns holding up a huge building. On the final day of SUSTAIN, three women joined Monica in a performance where we raised a sari up in the air above our heads and walked up the steps in a powerful gesture. The SUSTAIN installation celebrates a decade of Storytelling with Saris, an art and advocacy project about climate and gender justice led by Monica Jahan Bose in collaboration with women from her ancestral village, Katakhalī on Barobaishdia Island, Patuakhali, Bangladesh and women and people of all genders from Washington DC and around the world.

The poetry painted on the saris was a microphone to everyone who has felt their voice was silenced: an outlet to voice our opinions on how we can address environmental and climate injustice and save our planet from destruction. Residents of Washington DC created poetry during workshops led by Monica Jahan Bose. We recorded the poems and Monica worked with musician and sound designer Sonia Herrero to create a "soundwalk" with seven stations accessed with phones, immersing us in English poetry and Bengali songs overlaid with music and ambient sounds and images from rural Bangladesh



Rice Sari held by women in Katakhalī Village, PC: Poem woodblock on sari (detail), PC: Koli Bennett-Bose



Poem woodblocks on sari (detail). PC: Koli Bennett-Bose



DC participants sewing SUSTAIN saris. PC: Paris Preston



Monica Jahan Bose in onion sari. PC: Paris Preston

and the US. [Link to Soundwalk Station 3.](https://vimeo.com/707587731/25a76157d1)

I wrote a poem based on Monica's prompt to imagine ourselves as plants in communion with the soil. I recited it for the soundwalk and live at the SUSTAIN installation.

[Link to Soundwalk Station 2.](https://vimeo.com/712467703/97d6651800) I felt immense pride to be able to partake in the bigger vision of this collective effort.

I inhaled and allowed my voice to be an instrument in that moment as I read my poem to the crowd, feeling how connected each one of us is to plants, growing, and food. We humans need to connect with plants and growing to understand the impacts of climate change, which is rooted in colonialism and leads to further racial and economic disparity.

SUSTAIN included a film screening of several short films. Monica has worked with filmmakers Leena Jayaswal and Paris Preston to create two new films about the impacts of climate change on farmers in Bangladesh, France, and the US. We learned that the extreme rains at the wrong time of year have led to crop loss in Bangladesh and the US. Women farmers from Katakali Village, an island community in the Bay of Bengal, speak poignantly about the reduction in rice, watermelon, and dal from sudden rains during the traditionally dry winter season. They also showed us the terrible impact of the new Payra Coal Electric Plant that has been built nearby: black soot now covers the coconut and banana plants and the coconuts are deformed. Monica's decade-long project underscores the importance of moving away from fossil fuels to renewable energy as a means of cooling down the planet

and reducing climate change and air pollution.

Joining Storytelling with Saris has given me passion to address food insecurity and climate change and demand a healthier environment. We have engaged in workshops on Zoom and outdoor performances in front of the US Senate and on the street, all to demand environmental justice. I have soaked it all in and felt rejuvenated. I remember when we were all outside under the sun in a workshop in the Hirshhorn Sculpture Garden. The sun each kissing our shoulders as we squinted, smiled and laughed towards each other. Monica shouted out to us take off our shoes and feel the soil, feel the grass, feel nature beneath us. The New Yorker inside of me hesitated, but she had a point. The earth is a part of us and over time with civilization and technological advances we have distanced ourselves from the beauty and authenticity of nature. In that moment, I took off my shoes and felt the brush of grass kiss the soles of my feet. I felt alive and one with nature.

Through Storytelling with Saris, Monica Jahan Bose reminds us we are truly one with nature. She uses the sari, a precolonial sustainable garment, as her vehicle and storyboard to connect women across the world. She weaves the story beautifully, integrating art and poetry and culture with these hand-women Bangladeshi saris that represent women's strength and resilience around the world. Follow the project at storytellingwithsaris.com. □

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