

Popular American media personality and anti-vaccine activist Jenny McCarthy once said, "Hope is the greatest thing for moms of autism. Hope is what gets us out of bed in the morning. I'm on a mission to tell parents that there is a way".

Jenny knows it well, because she has a son with autism.

Though we have enough compassion and empathy for children with autism, the everyday struggle and suffering that these children and their parents go through are far beyond our knowledge. Those who live with autism and are familiar with the lifestyles of these children know it the best.

As a part of the 9th World Autism Awareness Day celebrations, on April 17, 2016, the Institute of Paediatric Neurodisorder and Autism (IPNA) organised a cultural programme inclusive of children with autism and other neurological diseases, their parents and eminent personalities of the country. The event was held at Shahid Dr. Milon Hall, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU). The entire hall was glimmering with blue light, as the colour represents awareness of autism worldwide.

As part of the event, an essay competition titled "Poran Kotha" (Story of the Soul) was arranged, where parents of children with autism were expected to write about their feelings, experiences and social obstacles of habitual life.

Among the 52 entries, the best 15 were selected by the judges. The winners were handed over awards by the much beloved 'Sisimpur' characters- Halum, Ikri and Tuktki. The surprise attendance of the characters amused the children present in the programme to a great extent.

SHINING BLUE

NILIMA JAHAN

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS



"Portraying these literal feelings into stories or dramas is not very easy," says Anisul Haque, the famous screen-writer and one of the judges of 'Poran Kotha'. "It is very important to bring forward these experiences."

According to Asaduzzaman Noor, MP, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, and the chief guest of the programme, these writings can be transformed into plays in order to create more awareness among people. It is our social responsibility to create an

environment for the children with autism and other neurological diseases where there will be no hurdles for them, he believes.

Syed Monjurul Islam, Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, as the special guest spoke about the government's efforts for the awareness autism and planning for creating a national policy to protect children with autism.

The video of the theme song of IPNA



(launched at the event), was also shown to the attendees which gives a message that we should ensure proper care for children with autism and create an environment, where they can grow and develop themselves, overcoming all the impediments. The song was written by Shankar Shaojal, composed by Bappa Majumder and sung by Bappa Majumder, Elita Karim and Konal.

Presided over by Professor Kamrul Hasan, vice-chancellor of BSMMU,

Professor Shaheen Akhter, Project Director of IPNA, Professor Iqbal Arsalan, Secretary-General of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), Joe Hyun-Gue, Country Director of Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), actor Shankar Shaojal also spoke at the programme.

The event ended with a cultural programme showcasing a play, dance and musical performances by the students and teachers of IPNA. ■

HERITAGE

FROM THE KING'S CARTE

APURBA JAHANGIR

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS



Let's go back to a historical era, the Mughal era for example. Now let's imagine the emperor's den. When we think of the Mughals, we think of lots of things. Maybe a gold-plated turban which goes nicely with his highness's royal moustache or a glass made of gold in which the drink uses to quench his

thirst. Now that we are living in the 21st century, we witness and even live our lives surrounding some of the elements they brought to us. One of the smallest of them is the almond drink or as we all know, the famous 'Badam Sharbat'.

Though this drink was introduced in our land hundreds of years ago, Royal

Restaurant, located in old Dhaka commercialised the drink just a decade back. This popular restaurant has catered to thousands with their mouth-watering Dhakaiya food. During such hot summer days, their almond drink feels like drops of heaven to the customers.

"We introduced the drink around two years after we had started our restaurant. We felt that this was something that should be brought back to our country. The drink was already quite popular in India, and we thought why not we start it here as well," says Abdul Malek, manager at the Royal Restaurant. Since its release, the sharbat has gained immense popularity, especially in the festivals like Eid or Pehela Baishakh.

The drinks are especially made from Kashmiri almonds and made daily in their kitchen. "The chefs are especially trained from Delhi to make this drink. It has its own measurement and little mistakes here and there can ruin the entire batch," says the manager. Royal serves the drinks in three ways- 60 taka per glass while a half-litre bottle costs 150 taka and one litre is 265 taka.

"I have been living in old Dhaka all my life and till now Royal's almond drink has been our weekend speciality," says Shuvro Das, a loyal customer of the restaurant. People also prefer having a chilled glass of sharbat as a sweet ending to their meal. Regulars at Royal say that Royal's Kacchi Biryani isn't complete without the sharbat in the end.

Though a lot of other restaurants have added the Badam Sharbat in their menu; Royal remains as the bon vivant choice. What they have done is beyond the culinary world, they have preserved one of our finest heritage which was once included in the King's carte du jour. ■

