



JAHANARA FOUNDATION MUSEUM

A glimpse into Dhaka's past

MHHAIDER

The building located at 25 Bangshal Road is a treasure trove of history. On one of the floors of the apartment, there are numerous antiques and artefacts that give us a sneak peek into the city's history. Not directly related to political histories we read in textbooks, but something more intimate – glimpses of family and social life in Dhaka of the bygone era.

Established in 2013, Jahanara Foundation Museum is named after Jahanara Khatun (1930-2001), a social worker and cultural activist. Her daughter Zeenat Parveen, president of the museum, along with her family, set up this institution with objects mostly from the households of her parents and grandparents. From kitchen utensils and textiles, to cash boxes, the museum houses many vintage items.

"When our mother passed away, we were left with many old household items. Instead of neglecting or giving them away, we thought of preserving them all in one place so that people can get an idea of family life in Dhaka during the olden times," Parveen shared the idea behind this museum.

To exemplify, there is a vintage toy set or rather a doll house of sorts, a cot including a mosquito net, a chair, etc. which Jahanara Khatun used to play with in her childhood.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Khatun's wedding shoes too, highly intricate and decorative, are kept with a lot of care.

When we think of museums, many of us often imagine something grand or fancy. However, a museum can also be in a relatively small space and offer not only myriad artefacts but a personal touch as well, which at times is overlooked by bigger museums.

Also displayed with not only care but with pride too, is an elegant katan sherwani of Haji Moulvi Allah Baksh Sarker, Parveen's grandfather, who was a politician and social worker. "He was a sardar of 22 panchayats (community-based social systems). He also served as an MLA and was involved in the Tebhaga Movement,"

she narrated.

On the other hand, there is a tiny corner with a few belongings of Hakim Habibur Rahman, Unani physician, close associate of Nawab Sir Salimullah, and the author of one of the best works on Dhaka's history, Dhaka Panchas Baras Pahle. The items include a large glass jar, which, Parveen says, may have been used to store medicines or other such chemicals.

The museum does not only house testaments of Dhaka's history and culture but of Bangladesh's at large. To illustrate, several red halkhatas (traditional accounts books) dated in the early 1970s, which were used by Parveen's father, Mansur Rahman Sarker, are displayed.

You will also come across a table, which has a bullet hole in it. As Parveen explained, the table suffered this damage from an air raid during the Liberation War.

Continuing the tour, you will notice several large containers or motkas as we call them in Bangla. Parveen elaborated, "These were unearthed during construction work of a building near this apartment."

Meanwhile, several dining utensils spark interest as well – a set of cups along with a jar that resembles a barrel that is placed horizontally, a collection of ceramics, etc.

Each item has a story, and the staff or a family member are happy to share it with you, and through that, you can get to know Dhaka a little better. Jahanara Foundation Museum is indeed a space packed with personal items of antiquity – the aforementioned ones are mere examples – that will surely fascinate any Dhaka buff!

The museum is open on Sundays and Thursdays, 10:00am to 5:00pm, and on special/commemorative days.

48-hr heatwave alert for 5 divisions

STAR REPORT

The Bangladesh Meteorological Department's (BMD) issued a fresh 48-hour heatwave alert for five districts at 6:00pm yesterday.

Residents of Dhaka, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Khulna, and Barisal divisions should prepare for the ongoing heatwave, which will persist for the next 48 hours, according to a bulletin issued by the Met office, reports UNB.

After a scorching April, the beginning of May brought some relief. There were rain and thunderstorms accompanied by hail in several parts of the country in the first week.

Three drown in Kurigram, Jamalpur

STAR REPORT

Two children and a teenager drowned in Kurigram and Jamalpur yesterday.

In Kurigram, two children drowned while playing near a pond in the Sarkarpara area under Begumganj union of Ulipur upazila.

The victims are Mehedi Hasan, 8, son of Moidul Islam, and Lipon Islam, 7, son of Rashed Islam, of Sarkarpara village.

Golam Martuza, officer-in-charge of Ulipur Police Station, said an unnatural death case was filed and the bodies were handed over to families.

In Jamalpur, an SSC graduate drowned while taking a bath with his friends in Bakshiganj upazila parishad pond.

The deceased is Rifat Mia, 16, son of Abdul Halim Sarkar, of Digbar Par village.

Quoting locals, Mohammad Abdul Ahad Khan, officer-in-charge of Bakshiganj Police Station said Rifat had passed the SSC exams with a GPA-5 from Sherpur Victoria School two days ago.

He came to his elder brother's house in the village on vacation.

Biden, Trump agree to debate June 27 on CNN

REUTERS, Washington

US President Joe Biden and Republican rival Donald Trump yesterday accepted an invitation from CNN to host the candidates' first 2024 debate on June 27, setting up a high-stakes clash.

"As you said: anywhere, any time, any place," Biden said on social media after the Democrat for the first time laid out his terms for taking on the former president on national television.

Rooppur, Matarbari

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A unit of Matarbari 1200MW Ultra Super Critical Coal Fired Power Plant was formally inaugurated in November last year and it has been generating power without hiccups. The other unit is set to begin operation by July.

An official of the power division said a substation needed for the plant is being built.

Project Director Abul Kalam Azad told The Daily Star that the work related to power transmission will hopefully be complete by June.

"The existing lines are able to

supply up to 900MW. When the work is done, it will be able to handle 1,200MW," he said.

As per the proposed ADP, construction of the power plant will get Tk 6,105 crore. The power transmission system costs Tk 1,024 crore, and Tk 656 crore of it has been spent.

Three projects related to Matarbari port are worth Tk 35,614 crore. In the next fiscal year, they will get Tk 8,758 crore, up from Tk 2,666 crore in 2023-24.

Three metro rail projects worth Tk 1,28,687 crore, are going to get Tk 6,537 crore.

The Uttara-Motijheel part of MRT line 6 is complete, and the ADP proposes Tk 1,975 crore to build the part from Motijheel to Kamalapur.

Two other metro rail projects – MRT Line 1 (Airport-Purbachal-Kamalapur) and MRT Line 5 (Hemayetpur-Bhatara) – are making progress. The initial activities are done. The main construction work will begin in the upcoming fiscal year.

The MRT-1 would cost Tk 53,977 crore, and MRT-5 Tk 41,238 crore. The proposed ADP allocates Tk 3,594 crore and Tk 968 crore for them respectively.

Major admin reforms shelved for 27 years

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The last time a reform commission was formed was in 1997. Led by AIM Shamsul Huq, a former secretary, the commission came up with several important short, medium and long-term recommendations, but most of those were never implemented.

Nearly 22 years later, the public administration ministry in October 2019 proposed forming another commission to create an administrative structure focused on service and development.

Shaikh Yusuf Harun, then senior secretary of the ministry, led the initiative and placed the proposal before a meeting of the secretaries' committee on administrative development that year. But the committee, the highest decision-making body of the civil bureaucrats led by the cabinet secretary, did not agree to form a new commission.

In 2021, then public administration secretary KM Ali Azam again sent the proposals to the secretaries' committee, but did not receive a positive response.

Former secretary Badiur Rahman said he does not see any prospect of reforming civil service anytime soon.

"Most of the high-ranking officials are now more interested in extending their job tenure by securing contractual appointments. The majority of those officials lack professional competence. It is highly unlikely that they will take any measures to reform the administration," he told The Daily Star recently.

Badiur, also a former NBR chairman, said only the political leaders can take measures now to reform the administration.

However, they do not take any such initiatives out of concern that the government would be in an uncomfortable position if the administration becomes stronger, he said.

"My faith in the political leaders has diminished after seeing and observing the last two general elections," he added.

Firoz Mia, a civil service expert and also a former additional secretary, said Bangladesh's socio-economic reality has changed significantly over the last two and a half decades, but its civil bureaucracy is still being run under the rules and regulations that are not up-to-date.

"Major administrative reforms should have been made a long ago," he told this correspondent recently.

The administration is still mainly run under the structure recommended by the Enam Commission in 1982, led by then Brigadier Enamul Huq Khan, an appointee of military dictator HM Ershad.

The Pay and Service Commission,

led by Mohammad Farshuddin, in 2015 recommended a comprehensive reform of the civil administration, keeping in mind the international practices back then.

Officials who favour reforms argue that since the government is changing the laws and regulations framed during the army regimes, it should also go ahead with the plans to overhaul the civil administration.

This newspaper talked to at least 10 high officials of different ministries to know the reasons for the continued resistance to administrative reforms by a section of top bureaucrats.

Experts say a large number of "in situ" posts in the administration is a glaring example of the bureaucrats taking wholesale advantage.

"In situ" posts are filled up by officials who hold the same office and perform the same duties after being promoted. Those officials, however, get higher salaries and benefits. This happens because of a lack of posts at the top tier of the civil administration.

Such promotions have now become a regular practice in the country's civil bureaucracy and this is growing at the top tier. On the contrary, the lower tier has a less number of officials than required. This leads to an imbalance and subsequently affects the performance of the field-level officials, say public administration ministry officials.

They said most of the ministries do not follow its Table of Organisation and Equipment (TO&E), which details the number and facilities of the staffers and what resources, including vehicles, they would use.

"Most of the ministries have more top-level officials than they are entitled to. This will become evident if an administrative reform is carried out," said a public administration ministry official, wishing not to be named.

Firoz said the administration should follow a proper system so the officials do not get any chance to satisfy the whims of the leaders of particular political parties.

He said political interests, personal choices and opinions get high priority in Bangladesh's administrative system. "This is not a good practice at all," said a civil service expert.

According to sources, some top bureaucrats are reluctant to set up a commission that would work independently to bring changes in the civil administration as they fear they will hardly have any chance to influence the preparation of the commission's recommendations.

The public administration ministry in August 2021 asked all ministries to update their organograms. Subsequently, different ministries started creating new posts – from

assistant secretary to additional secretary – in an unplanned manner.

Giving an example of the manpower of the textiles and jute ministry, an official of the ministry said the ministry's workload came down drastically following the closure of 25 state-run jute mills in 2020. But the ministry made a move to create new posts of additional secretaries and joint secretaries.

Mohammed Mezbah Uddin Chowdhury, senior secretary of the public administration ministry, said they have already started working on developing a "smart administrative system".

"We are making necessary changes to the organogram of different ministries for this purpose. We are reforming and restructuring the ministries internally so that it obviates the need for a reform commission."

Secondary

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based on a letter from the finance ministry to the education ministry regarding the matter.

"We have issued the notice following the directives from the education ministry," said DSHE Director Syed Zafar Ali.

He, however, did not give the reason for the ministry's instruction.

A top DSHE official, however, said non-government schools do not deposit their incomes from students' admission fees with the government's treasury.

"The government now wants those schools to deposit their incomes from admission fees with its treasury as it has a plan to increase the benefits of the MPO-listed teachers," the official said wishing not to be named.

The MPO is part of the government's share in the payroll of non-government educational institutions.

Leaders of teachers' platforms have expressed concern over the government's move.

Alauddin Bhuiya, secretary general of Bangladesh Teachers Association, told The Daily Star that MPO-listed schools bear a large part of their expenses with the money collected from students' admission fees.

"The government has made the decision without any consultation with us. Such a decision in the middle of an academic year would make running of non-government schools difficult," he added.

There are around 30,000 non-government MPO-listed schools and colleges in the country, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics.

'Will rebuild trust, won't look back'

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In the lead-up to the polls last year, the Biden administration announced a visa policy – a second blow after sanctions on Rab and some of its officials in December 2021.

After the election, US President Joe Biden, however, had written a letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, committing to advance the ties.

About his meeting with Hasan Mahmud, Lu said he discussed working on the sanctions against Rab, labour reforms, human rights and business climate reforms – issues that had created rifts in the relationship.

"But in order to work on the hard issues, we want to build up the cooperation we have on positive issues," he said, adding that they are talking about new investments, ability of more Bangladeshi students to study in the US, and clean energy.

He also discussed working together to fight corruption and support widening the tax base. Currently, only around 27 lakh people pay tax, which can be largely expanded.

"We want to promote transparency of governments, to promote accountability of officials who may have committed acts of corruption," he said.

Speaking separately to reporters, Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud said they held a cordial discussion on deepening the US-Bangladesh relationship as Lu came here with a positive attitude.

He recognised the US's contribution to the development of Bangladesh, as well as the fact that the US is the single largest destination of Bangladesh's export and single largest source of foreign direct investment. It is also the

biggest donor for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

Hasan Mahmud said Washington wants to provide funding to Bangladesh under the US International Finance Corporation to strengthen Bangladesh's foreign currency reserve, which has been depleting.

Lu told him that Washington wants to restore the GSP facility, which was suspended in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013, when the GSP was introduced, he said.

But the labour policy has to be reviewed for that, he added. "We are doing just that."

He said he requested Lu to invest in some of the 40 IT villages that Bangladesh is developing and the special economic zones, and the US has expressed willingness to do so.

Hasan Mahmud also requested Washington's support for trade facility until 2032 for the successful transition to a middle-income country after the LDC graduation in 2026.

He said the US universities can establish exchange programmes with Bangladeshi universities.

According to US officials and analysts, the US has a huge stake in Bangladesh for the former's Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Washington wants Dhaka to sign two agreements – Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement on logistics and the General Security of Military Information Agreement – to advance their security and defense relationship.

Hasan Mahmud said there was no discussion on that, but on strengthening the security cooperation.

About withdrawal of the visa policy, the minister said, "The visa

policy is dormant now."

While meeting Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Donald Lu highlighted the US's intention to offer free real-time satellite data for South Asia.

"This data will serve as a vital tool in monitoring the impact of climate change, including natural disasters, floods, pollution, and rising sea levels," said the environment minister in a statement after the meeting at the secretariat.

He sought US collaboration in technology transfer, capacity building, smart agriculture, and green and climate technologies.

"To facilitate these endeavors, both parties agreed to establish a bilateral working group," the statement said.

Japan, US sign deal to develop hypersonic missile interceptor

AFP, Tokyo

Japan and the United States are planning to develop interceptors to shoot down hypersonic missiles by the 2030s under a contract signed by the two countries yesterday.

The plan, which will reportedly cost more than \$3 billion, was first announced in August when the nations' leaders met at a summit with South Korea in Camp David outside Washington.

"In recent years, around Japan, missile-related technologies such as hypersonic weapons have improved dramatically," the defence ministry said in a statement about the agreement to jointly develop the so-called Glide Phase Interceptor (GPI).