

'THE WAR IS NOT OVER YET'

Mashruk Ahmed tells of 1971's unsung heroines

Everyone who will see, listen, and read about these stories will be overcome with several questions in silence. This experience will prove to be thought-provoking for all, while also helping to give a voice to the unheard.

MOFIDUL HUQ,
Bangladesh Liberation War Museum trustee

FAHIN RAHMAN AUNGKITA

"If only they knew how we fought, with our life and with our youth, with weapons and in life later on... I will fight more wars. I will keep fighting till death."

Halima Parvin, Jessore

Entering the photo exhibition's gallery, white curtains gently swayed, displaying cyanotype prints of the portraits of *Birangonas* (Bangladeshi female freedom fighters), much like how their valiant stories have been hidden behind the curtains for far too long.

The aforesaid arrangement is regarding Mashruk Ahmed's exhibition, *The War Is Not Over Yet*, which was inaugurated on June 21 at La Galerie, Alliance Française de Dhaka (AFD). It not only attempts to bring the war heroines' stories to the forefront but also enables an exploration of the places where each of their stories culminated. The exhibition, the photographer's first major work, tells the tale of 30 female freedom fighters of Bangladesh's Liberation War of 1971.

In monochrome photos, there is an intrinsic sadness juxtaposed with utmost dignity on each face of the women who lost everything during the Liberation War. Jubilant in portraits, prominently hued in blue, these photos of 30 brave women are accompanied by their oral testimonies, video footage, and written statements. A space at the heart of the gallery also features handwritten notes, letters, and photographs collected from the freedom fighters. Through their



Mashruk Ahmed during his speech at the exhibition.



PHOTOS: RATUL CHOWDHURY

aching voices, one can hear the fearless accounts of many who are with us no more today.

Mashruk Ahmed, the Bangladesh-based documentary photographer, completed this project in seven years for which he reached out to the female freedom fighters in person and visited each of the sites that the war heroines described in their stories. His objective was to take photographs of those places where it all happened in an attempt to reconstruct the memories for the audience. In the photo exhibition, colourful photos of those sites paint the walls beside the accounts of the incidents that took place at the locations Mashruk visited. He said, "After taking the photos, I realised each of these is a large story in itself. I, therefore, tried to make sure every individual's story is presented in the way they wished."

The inauguration ceremony of the exhibition was graced by numerous distinguished guests including Mofidul Hoque, writer, researcher, and trustee of Bangladesh Liberation War Museum; Navine Murshid, writer and associate professor of the Department of Political Science at Colgate University;

Saiful Huq Omi, photographer and founder of Counter Foto; Durjoy Rahman, art collector and founder of Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation (DBF); and curator ASM Rezaur Rahman. Also present throughout the event was Francois Grosjean, director of Alliance Française de Dhaka.

Saiful Huq Omi of Counter Foto, stated with pride, "Mashruk's courageous work is an example of how stories of past events can be told, especially those that people do not like to discuss." Durjoy Rahman also spoke on the need to inspire platform providers to enable artistes to inspire a wider audience through their art.

The voice of history has characteristically been told by men, about men, and rarely have women been brought up in mainstream discussions with due recognition. The title of *Birangona* or war heroines is one that was stigmatised and taken advantage of as well. Their war continues to this day; it is not over yet.

Navine Murshid, the only female guest on the panel, hence stressed the masculine narrative throughout the course of history. In a discomfiting yet necessary conversation between

rape victims and the patriarchy, a male curator has presented a male photographer's research on many women. She thereafter asked, "Would it have been a slightly different story if these were said to a female artiste? Most of these stories are told in a certain way to a certain person. What Mashruk has done is put forward everything for the rest of the world to participate in and be a part of the interpretations that emerge from here."

Mofidul Huq, Bangladesh Liberation War Museum trustee, described the exhibition as a silent experience for every spectator. He said, "Everyone who will see, listen, and read about these stories will be overcome with several questions in silence. This experience will prove to be thought-provoking for all, while also helping to give a voice to the unheard."

The exhibition was attended by a diverse crowd of all ages, including nationals, foreigners, and well-known personalities such as photojournalist Shahidul Alam. However, the center of all attraction were the stories themselves — the stories of women who endured inhumane torture and, as victims, were inspired to continue

to liberate this country.

The research and dissemination are because of these women: Aklima Begum, who took her favourite dog Bhulu with her to listen to Sheikh Mujibur Rahman speak on March 7; Halima Parvin, who fled her home at 17 to take up arms; Maimuna Khatun, whose husband left while the Pakistani army raped her; Shamsun Nahar, who lived in the woods, helped freedom fighters with food, and punched a soldier in the face when attacked; Kakon Bibi, who spied as a beggar to gather intel and misled the military to save the MuktiBahini; Kanchanmala, who returned to her house after independence to only be tortured and humiliated by her husband; Razia Khatun, accused of giving birth to a Pakistani child; Ferdousi Priyabhashini, the first woman to publicly take on the mantle of a *Birangona*; and many others whose stories remain unsung.

The exhibition, currently underway at La Galerie, Alliance Française de Dhaka (AFD), is supported by Durjoy Bangladesh Foundation, Counter Foto, and Alliance Française Dhaka. It will run until June 26 from 3pm to 9pm every day, except Sundays.

NEWS

BPSA statement a moral support

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misleading reports for the sake of "public safety and public order". It also requested the media to be "more cautious and follow the principles of journalism properly" while publishing any report about the police force.

The NOAB yesterday said the media publish reports regarding the achievements and positive works of the police force.

The media with due professionalism also run investigative reports on the accumulation of illegal wealth through abuse of power by government officials, it added.

"In case of any errors in reporting on these issues, the responsibility lies with the respective media outlet. In this regard, the institution or the individual concerned, if necessary, may take the issue to the Press Council following the relevant

rules and regulations," said the statement.

Instead of doing so, the BPSA resorted to "blame game" by protesting the reports and threatening the media in the name of asking it "to be extra cautious" while reporting on the police force, said NOAB.

The association expressed optimism that the police force will continue its support for the media's efforts to implement the government's anti-corruption policies.

'WITHDRAW STATEMENT'
Crime Reporters' Association of Bangladesh (CRAB) in a statement yesterday demanded withdrawal of the BPSA statement, saying it is detrimental to independent journalism.

Expressing grave concern, the CRAB said such a statement may encourage corrupt officials.

The journalists' platform said investigating corruption and irregularities and exposing the abuse of power is part of responsible journalism.

"Recently, some reports were published on the amassing of unusual assets by some former and current officials. We don't think those reports were run with any specific intent," said the statement.

The CRAB said the language of the BPSA statement is against independent journalism.

The organisation sought cooperation from all quarters to implement the government's "zero tolerance" policy against corruption.

Earlier, the Editors' Council, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ), Dhaka Reporters' Unity and Broadcast Journalists' Centre issued separate statements protesting the BPSA statement.

Once a victim himself, Noyon now fights

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According to the State Department report, Noyon is a welcoming first face to trafficking survivors and migrants as they return to Bangladesh.

In his capacity as manager of BRAC Migration Welfare Center onsite at Dhaka airport, Noyon has supported more than 34,000 Bangladeshi trafficking survivors and migrants over the last 15 years.

"As a fellow trafficking survivor, he is uniquely qualified and motivated to help them rebuild their lives."

Born to a family of modest means, his dream of a better life turned into a nightmare when he fell victim to trafficking in Malaysia in 2007.

"But, as he now shared, that is not how his story ends. His motivation to support fellow survivors has long motivated him to serve as a member of ANIRBAN, a trafficking support platform made up of survivors who raise awareness about human trafficking and advocate for survivors and their rights," says the report.

Noyon believes education is one of the best ways to insulate Bangladesh's next generation from the perils of human trafficking.

In a reaction to the recognition, Noyon said he understands the pain of those who fall victim to trafficking.

"Upon return, I started working for the migrants and trafficking

survivors. I try to stand beside such victims at home and abroad as a manager of BRAC Migration Welfare Centre.

"I also got in trouble while working to support them. I was imprisoned for working for the trafficking victims."

Others who received the award include lawyer Sonia Marcela Cecilia Martínez Sempertegui of Bolivia; Brig Mustafa Ridha Mustafa Al Yasiri of Iraq; Edith Wairimu Murogo of Kenya; Oumou Elkhairou Niare of Mali; Samson JR Inocencio of the Philippines; Majijana Savic of Serbia; Rosa Maria Cendon Leris of Spain and Letitia Agnes Pinas of Suriname.

56 state entities owe Tk 51,391cr to banks

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In reply to a query from ruling Awami League MP Ali Azam from Bhola-2, Ali said the per capita income of Bangladesh in fiscal 2023-24 is \$2,784 as per the temporary account of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Replying to another query of Jatiya Party MP ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader from Patuakhali-1, Ali said the gross foreign reserves stood at \$24.2 billion as of May and \$18.63 billion as per the BPM6 methodology of the International Monetary Fund.

The country can meet the import bills of four-and-a-half months with

the gross foreign currency reserves, he added.

About the volatile situation in the foreign exchange market, he said if a country has an import cover of three months, it is not considered a crisis.

"Bangladesh's current reserve amount is about \$24.40 billion, which is enough to pay about five months of import liabilities. This means the foreign exchange market is stable," Ali said.

In his question, AL MP Afzal Hossain from Kishorganj-5 asked whether it is true that two-thirds of the businessmen think that

corruption, bureaucracy and the volatile situation in the foreign exchange market are the biggest obstacles to doing business in Bangladesh.

The ruling party MP also wanted to know whether the government had taken any effective initiative to stop corruption in business.

In response to a query from Laxmipur-2 MP Nur Uddin Chowdhury Nayan, Ali said a total of \$10.57 billion came as remittance between January and May, with the highest amount coming from the UAE.

ADC suspended for 'disciplinary rules violation'

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Jisanul the information over his official WhatsApp number.

The PHQ made the move after GMP Deputy Commissioner (south) Mohammad Nazir Ahmed Khan submitted a probe report, read the letter.

The GMP initiated the probe after a journalist made a social media post regarding Asaduzzaman. In the post, the journalist posted a Telegram channel link where NTMC-verified information of Asaduzzaman was

available.

It was found that the information was downloaded using the ID of the assistant sub-inspector, read the PHQ letter signed by Mohammad Anwar Hossain, additional DIG of the PHQ.

Former DMP commissioner Asaduzzaman recently hogged headlines for alleged corruption.

The action against Jisanul was taken days after the Bangladesh Police Service Association (BPSA) in a letter on Friday urged journalists

to be "more cautious and follow the principles of journalism properly" while publishing any report about the police force.

The association described recent media reports, mainly on graft allegations against some former and current officials, as a "smear campaign". It claimed that the reports being run by print, electronic, and social media outlets were "partial, motivated, exaggerated, and misleading".

Rampaging Rohit leads India into semis

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throw Group 1 wide open.

Josh Hazlewood drew first blood as he bounced out Virat Kohli for a duck after Australia elected to field.

Rohit has not been in the best of form but the India captain threw Starc out of the attack by hitting the fast bowler for four sixes in a 29-run over.

Pat Cummins, who claimed back-to-back hat-tricks in his last two games, was pressed into service to end the batting carnage.

Rohit greeted him by depositing

the seamer's first ball on the roof of the stadium for a monster six en route to a 19-ball fifty, his first of the tournament.

India raced to the 100 mark in the ninth over but Starc returned to deny Rohit what could have been the first hundred by a batter in this tournament.

Suryakumar Yadav (31) and Shivam Dube (28) produced breezy cameos and Hardik Pandya made 27 not out to propel India to their first 200-plus total of the tournament.

Arshdeep Singh rattled Australia

by removing David Warner in the first over in what could be the opener's last game in an Australia shirt.

Mitchell Marsh (37) joined Head and they counter-attacked to put Australia's chase back on track.

Axar Patel leapt to take a stunning one-handed catch at deep square leg to dismiss Marsh but Head raced to a 24-ball fifty.

Kuldeep Yadav castled the dangerous Glenn Maxwell (20) and Jasprit Bumrah effectively sealed India's victory when he dismissed Head with a clever change of pace.

Form special commission to stop rampant corruption

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of a tribunal to try loan defaulters and embezzlers.

He said the US Financial Intelligence Institution has shown that \$7 billion is being smuggled out of Bangladesh every year and being invested in "Begum Para" in Canada, second homes in Malaysia, modern shopping malls in Singapore and Dubai, and real estate and hundi businesses.

There is no initiative to bring back the laundered money, but the expatriates are being taxed on the income they send home, he added.

"One of the means of earning

illegal wealth is taking a loan from the bank and not returning it."

Menon opposed the provision of whitening black money in the proposed budget, saying, "All the arguments being given in its favour are not only baseless but also contrary to the previous position of the government in this regard."

"I hope the finance minister will withdraw this proposal and rid the parliament of this burden."

Referring to the murder of ruling AL MP Anwarul Azim, he said the image of the parliament and its members are in question because

of the media publishing stories about gold and drug smuggling, and the criminal underworld in the southwestern part of the country.

"This matter needs to be further looked into. Self-criticism is needed."

He said rising commodity prices, corruption, money laundering, embezzling, anarchy in the banking sector and defaulted loans have left the country's economy in a fragile state.

"It's necessary to restore the economy, to bring back relief to the public and state life. But no effective measures are seen in the budget for that purpose."