



When men cook, care, and connect: THE ERA OF NEW MASCULINITY

RBR

The new buzzword in town is 'inclusive.' It doesn't refer only to gender inclusion; rather, from a more relevant and broader point of view, being inclusive makes us learn about disability inclusion, social and workplace inclusion, and parental inclusion, to name a few.

There are social and religious considerations to be taken into cognizance, about how far you are willing to refract from your stereotypical ideas of a society to embrace the modern norms about social inclusion.

From being a caring father to embracing differences to being informed about mental well-being, you are now much more diversified and considerate of accommodating people or ideologies that were not normally common for you earlier on.

Let's not dwell on diverse inclusion that much, but focus on how today's men have redefined masculinity and their role in the societal framework of a family.

One thing I must compliment Dhaka's men (also men from other cities) on is how they are breaking free from the traditional mold of the disciplinarian, strict, reclusive family man to a more friendly, easily approachable, inclusive father and hands-on husband.

Today's men are not shy to change diapers, cook dinners, or communicate with their families. They are not expected to only focus on career



PHOTO COURTESY: SHARARAT ISLAM, COMMUNICATIONS ANALYST, UN WOMEN BANGLADESH



and financial stability, while women concentrate on domestic duties and child-rearing only. Instead, they are encouraged to make a father-inclusive family.

It is exactly to celebrate this "inclusive fatherhood" that the Embassy of Sweden in Bangladesh, in collaboration with UNDP, UNFPA, and UN Women, is launching a photography exhibition titled "Bangladeshi and Swedish Baba" at

Gulshan Lake Park on December 12.

Sumon Jacob D'Costa, school secretary of Sunbeams, Middle School, saw an advert on the Swedish Embassy page about a competition based on the diaspora of bringing the "Swedish Dads" concept to Bangladesh. He was inspired to share his version of "Bangladeshi Baba" stories that resonated with the exhibition's criteria to encourage and exchange views on parenting practices,

gender equality, and work-life balance with Bangladeshi audiences.

"What makes me a role model is my unwavering dedication to my family and my community. I believe that a father's role extends beyond providing financial support. It involves being present, being involved, and being a positive influence. I strive to be a source of strength, guidance and love for my child, and I hope to inspire others to do the same," he said.

By showcasing stories that challenge traditional perceptions of fatherhood and highlight the positive impacts of engaged fathers, D'Costa thinks that his story is one of the everyday hero, the unsung champion of the family, the father who works to build a better future for their children.

"I believe that a father's role is not merely to provide for his family, but to instil values, foster dreams, and empower the next generation. By instilling a sense of empathy, compassion, and responsibility in my child, I hope to contribute to a more humane and just society."

Based on the award-winning work of renowned Swedish photographer Johan B  vman on Swedish Dads, this exhibition showcases powerful visual stories of Bangladeshi fathers that encourage a rethinking of modern fatherhood.

Through a month-long digital competition held by the four agencies, 25 fathers out of 100 submissions were selected based on their photographs and stories of fatherhood.

Edible oil prices up by Tk 8 per litre

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prices came amid a supply crunch. Millers said they reduced imports as costs went up despite tax cuts.

The government had earlier reduced VAT on imports of soybean and palm oil twice to 5 percent from 15 percent since October 17.

A commerce ministry statement yesterday said the National Board of Revenue (NBR) would extend the rate from December 15 to March 31 next year.

It also fully exempted VAT at the production and trading stages of the highly import-based commodity. As a result of the reduction, the import cost of crude edible oil fell from around Tk 18 to Tk 7 per kg, according to market insiders.

But Mustafa Haider, president of the Bangladesh Edible Oil Association, said the government agreed to raise the retail prices

considering the price hike of crude edible oil in the international market, shipping charges and processing fees.

Speaking at a press conference at the commerce ministry in the presence of Commerce Adviser Sheikh Bashiruddin, Haider said the price of crude edible oil has neared \$1200 a tonne.

As of November 2024, the price of soybean oil of any origin was \$1,145.17 per tonne — a 4.59 percent increase from the previous month and a 2.39 percent increase from the previous year, according to YCharts, an investment research organisation.

Importers and refiners said they recently requested the interim government to adjust the price of soybean oil in line with the international market.

The commerce ministry in its statement said the Bangladesh Trade and

Tariff Commission would send recommendations on reviewing edible oil prices to the commerce ministry on the 5th of every month.

Adviser Bashiruddin said the local millers and dealers delayed supply apprehending the price hike.

He also said the market was almost stable except for edible oil and potato. The prices of some other commodities like poultry, sugar, fish, and vegetables were somewhat stable.

Admitting that potato prices were extremely unstable, he hoped the situation would normalise when new potatoes hit the market within four weeks.

Rice and egg prices were also stable now and sugar price is expected to decline further soon, Bashiruddin said.

NBR Chairman Abdur Rahman Khan, however, lamented that prices of

essentials were yet to decrease to expected levels despite significant tax exemptions at the import stage.

Speaking at his office yesterday, he said the prices of eggs and sugar have reduced to some extent, but no change is noticed in the prices of other products, including soybean oil.

Mentioning the government's steps to stabilise foreign exchange rates, he sought cooperation from all, including the commerce ministry, consumers' rights body, journalists, and the consumers.

"Market irregularities will increase if existing irregularities are tolerated. Someone has to protest it," he said, noting that the NBR is providing estimates of tax cuts per kg of each product so that the consumers can find any mismatch.

Dhaka, Delhi eager to take ties forward

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This is a major relationship."

In another statement, India's Ministry of External Affairs said Misri expressed New Delhi's desire to increase engagements with Bangladesh's interim government and make "joint and concerted efforts" to boost relationships between the two neighbours.

"There is no second thought about increasing engagements. We see this as beneficial for both countries," Misri said.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, the adviser for environment, forest and climate change, told the media after the meeting between Prof Yunus and Misri that both sides emphasised their eagerness to strengthen bilateral relations.

"They [India] closely monitored the events of July and August and expressed their awareness of the situation," she added. Misri arrived in Dhaka yesterday morning to hold the annual Foreign Office Consultation (FOC) with Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Md Jashim Uddin. Officials from other ministries, including water resources, commerce, and home affairs from both countries were present.

After the FOC at state guest house Padma for over three hours, Misri called on Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain at his office and then met Yunus.

Misri read out a statement after his meeting with Touhid, while Jashim separately briefed the media about the meetings with Misri.

Misri said India wants to see the relationship with Bangladesh as people-centric, which was also reflected in the development projects supported by India and the engagements on trade, commerce, connectivity, power, water, energy, development and cultural cooperation.

"There is no reason why this mutually beneficial relationship should not continue to develop in the interest of our people."

P R O P A G A N D A , MINORITY ISSUE

The visit by the Indian foreign secretary, who flew back to New Delhi last night, came amid strains in relationship after Hasina was toppled and she fled to

India. The arrest of Hindu priest Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari in late November triggered demonstrations in various parts of India, while an attack on the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala sparked protests in Bangladesh.

The chief adviser said the interim government is committed to protecting every citizen and safeguarding their rights irrespective of their creed, colour, ethnicity and gender. "We're a family. We have to work together," Yunus said.

Misri also discussed certain recent developments and issues and conveyed India's concerns, especially those related to the safety and welfare of minorities, Indian foreign ministry said.

He also raised some "regrettable" incidents of attacks on cultural, religious and diplomatic properties.

Dhaka has accused the Indian media of carrying out propaganda on a global scale on alleged attacks on minorities in Bangladesh.

Adviser Rizwana said, "We raised concerns about the ongoing misinformation campaigns aimed at damaging Bangladesh's reputation as a nation of harmony."

She said most incidents were either political or personal, but they were portrayed as communal violence. Bangladesh government is neither involved in such incidents nor does it condone them. "Legal actions have been taken against those responsible," she said.

Secretary Jashim said he requested the Indian side to take steps against false media reports about Bangladesh.

"We emphasised that people of all religions in Bangladesh can freely exercise their faith ...," he said.

"We said this is our internal issue, and it is not appropriate for any other country to interfere in our internal issues. We also asked foreign journalists to visit Bangladesh and see the ground realities."

Asked about Miris's concerns about minorities, Jashim said, "There is a gap in understanding the

ACC, judiciary

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institutions like the ACC and judiciary failed to act independently, especially in cases that we not politically motivated.

"In casual discussions, we would hear about Sheikh Hasina's cashiers, Rehana's cashiers, Salman's cashiers, how Joy's money was transferred, and who managed Palak's funds. The ACC and High Court were there but no trials ever took place [with regard to these]."

"Whose trials did take place? Khaleda Zia's. She had Tk three crore in a bank account — no one embezzled or touched a single penny. Yet, due to procedural errors, the ACC and judiciary sentenced the three-time former prime minister to 10 years in prison."

Nazrul further said, "That thief, [former] prime minister Sheikh Hasina, whose entire family were 'thieves,' accused Khaleda Zia of embezzling funds meant for orphans! No one could speak a word in front of that thief. The ACC and judiciary had become her subservient tools."

The law adviser added, "Corruption became an accepted norm because there were no trials for it.... We witnessed a shameless prime minister laughing in front of the nation while saying her office assistant had Tk 400 crores."

"Awami League leaders would say, 'Apa [Hasina] can't really do anything because of her younger sister'. Such concern for her sister! She couldn't do anything because her sister is a thief!"

Stressing the urgent need for reform, he said, "We cannot leave the ACC dormant. The new commission must be empowered to tackle corruption effectively. Time is of the essence."

Addressing ACC officials, Nazrul said, "The [previous] ACC commissioners, before stepping down, had approved investigations against over a hundred ministers and businesspersons who acquired thousands of crores of taka through the theft enabled by the previous regime. Conduct those investigations now and prove that you can work effectively in a better environment. This is the expectation we and the entire nation have of you."

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "The type of information we are receiving while carrying out our responsibilities in the ACC Reform Commission is extremely embarrassing. It's a thousand times worse than what we've heard before."

"I r r e g u l a r i t i e s , misconduct, inequality, corruption, and a system of plundering.... I am embarrassed. This institution must be dismantled and overhauled with a decisive operation," he said.

"Right now, the ACC is practically non-existent. Three commissioners have resigned.... The ACC is an institution where no decisions can be made without commissioners. It has been over a month since any decisions were made at the commission."

I f t e k h a r u z z a m a n criticised the opportunities provided in the past for legitimising black money. He also lambasted the ACC officials for playing the role of accomplices in corruption, asking why reforms should be necessary for such an institution.

"Could there be a greater humiliation for the ACC than this? The reason is that, on one hand, the ACC has facilitated corruption, and on the other, it has been deeply entrenched in corruption itself."

Yunus hints at announcement this month

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middle of January.

Certain reforms have to be finished before the election, particularly the recommendations that would come from the election reform committee commission, Yunus told the envoys.

Once all the election-related reforms are done, the government will be ready for election.

If all reforms cannot be done now, the government will "ask the nation whether they will wait for further reforms or they will go ahead with the election".

"I can't give you the date now. I can only say that this is the process we are going on.

We can come up with some kind of announcement this month on how the process will go."

Yunus also urged the European countries to relocate their visa centres from Delhi to Dhaka or another neighbouring country as many students are unable to travel to Delhi to get their visas due to India's restrictions on visas for Bangladeshis.

In the two and a half-hour long meeting, he also outlined the oppression, exploitation, forced disappearances and human rights violations that have occurred over the past 15 years to the EU envoys, according to a statement

from the chief adviser's press wing.

He discussed corruption, money laundering and disruption of the banking system during the period, accusing the former prime minister of using laundered money to destabilise the country after she was ousted.

Yunus also sought cooperation from all to prevent the large-scale misinformation that is being spread about Bangladesh. He also urged the EU to provide support for Bangladesh to transform its energy sector.

Issues pertaining to labour rights, trade benefits, climate change, human rights, the International Crimes Tribunal Act,

Rohingya repatriation and mutual commitments toward building a sustainable future were discussed.

Michael Miller, ambassador and head of the EU delegation to Bangladesh, welcomed the interim government's commitment to a "peaceful and inclusive" transition, underpinned by good governance, democratic values and respect for human rights.

"The EU is committed to supporting Bangladesh's democratic transition the best way we can. We ask that the government is mindful of the need to uphold the rule of law and respect due process and fundamental rights."

Moyeen said the BNP also submitted proposals on election observation policies and the media code of conduct during polls.

He added that they do not think the government would need over three-four months to hold elections after completing the necessary reform work in the administration, judiciary, and police.

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BNP places 17-point recommendation

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of 18 crore people in Bangladesh. Door-to-door visits are extremely time-consuming, unnecessary, and prone to errors."

About the delimitation of parliamentary constituencies during the 1/11 caretaker government, the BNP expressed concerns whether there were any political motives behind it.

"Previously, the Election Commission controlled

the NID server. The last government handed its control to the home ministry. We proposed that the control of NID server be returned to the Election Commission immediately," the BNP leader said.

The BNP has also suggested measures to ensure neutrality of government officials during the election process, Moyeen added.

"We have recommended that after investigations,

steps be taken against those responsible for their misdeeds during the July-August uprising and it be ensured that they could not take part in the upcoming election process," said Nazrul Islam Khan, another BNP standing committee member, while speaking at the press briefing.

Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said it would not take more than two-three months to scrutinise fake

spoke of long-term solution to border crimes including drug smuggling," Jashim said.

The FOC highlighted the signing of a deal on Teesta water sharing, renewal of the Ganges treaty ending in 2026 and resolving issues related to other transboundary rivers.

"We sought India's cooperation on flood forecast, sharing of water data and proposed formation of a high-level mechanism on this," Jashim said.

The Indian High Commission in Dhaka has significantly restricted visas for Bangladeshis, which is affecting those seeking treatment in India and doing business.

Jashim said fully-fledged operation of visas and consular services may take some time because of the "deficit of trust".

Misri said India doubled the number of visas for Bangladeshis last month and would increase the number further in the coming days.

Dhaka also stressed removing tariffs and para-tariffs in bilateral trade and sought an uninterrupted supply of commodities from India.

Bangladesh currently imports 2,656 megawatts of electricity from India and this cooperation can be further boosted in the current geopolitical reality, Secretary Jashim said.

"India's cooperation is also needed for us to import hydroelectricity from Nepal via India," he said.

Bangladesh also sought India's cooperation on Rohingya repatriation as its sustainable solution is critical for the peace and stability of this region.

"As our nearest neighbour, we sought to settle all the unsettled issues in our relationship at the quickest possible time," Jashim said.

Prof Yunus called for close bilateral cooperation in floods and water management, urging India to join in his initiative to revive SAARC. "We want to build a prosperous new future for all of us," the chief adviser said.

Misri said that India continues to engage with SAARC, but there are some obstacles.