



EVOLUTION OF DHAKAIYA BANGLA

## Tracing roots of Old Dhaka's unique dialect

RBR

The evolution of language is a continuous progression, flowing with civilisation through the ages. Languages develop and change as big cosmopolitan and metropolitan cities become melting pots of ethnicity, culture, and diversity. This mix of people gives their own accent and dialect to the native language of the city they all migrate to, seeking a living.

Now, this was quite a big thought for me to contemplate. I sat down with scholar and researcher Hashem Sufi, who, among other things, is a life member of Bangla Academy, Asiatic Society, founder trustee of Dhaka Nagar Jadughar, and CEO of Dhaka History Research Centre, to talk about "Dhakaiya Bangla". I wanted to know how this popular accent and dialect came about.

"To know how Bangla evolved in Dhaka, the dateline of its history is very important," he says.

Dhaka is more than 2,000 years old, and was always a hub of trade that attracted many kings and their armies to come and rule. 750AD to 1160AD Dhaka was a Buddhist Janapad or habitation. Then, from 1160AD to 1229 AD, it was under the Sen dynasty.

The Sultanate dynasty, spanning from 1229AD to 1608AD came from Central Asia such as Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Afghanistan and Paktoonkhwa. Persian was their Lingua Franca (common or spoken language) besides their own individual Mother Languages and Arabic was their religious language.

Followed by the Mughal dynasty from 1608AD to 1757AD, however, 1757 to 1857 was a dual period of Mughal rule and the East India Company. So, historians refer to that time frame as company rule. 1857 to 1947 was solely British rule and then, up until 1971, it was under Pakistani rule.

So many conquests and such diversification of religion, linguistics, and background took the

Bangla lingua through a checkered trajectory, as is the nature of any multi-ethnic, multi-cultural urbanisation.

"The Mughals and British royals sponsored Urdu as their spoken and written language, while general people spoke in Bangla and established 'Hindustani' as the Lingua Franca, which was neither Urdu nor Arabic or Persian. Hindustani was colloquial and informal, without any grammar, and it was adopted between speakers whose native languages were different. The East India Company mostly used Hindustani as their trade and travel language.



PHOTO: STAR

"Thus, Mughals introduced Hindi and Urdu languages as Lingua Franca of India. British introduced Hindustani as new Lingua Franca. Dhakaiya Hindustani and not Urdu and Dhakaiya Bangla were the colloquial and dialects of Dhakaiyas, the original inhabitants of Dhaka," Hashem Sufi explains.

Ancholik Dhakaiya Bangla is an impromptu linguistic mix of many languages and sub-languages. Examples of Dhakaiya accent include; "koi gechili?"

(where did you go?), "baith gechilam" (I went home), baith, meaning house, is a pure Arabic word, "ami bi or bhi" (me too) is from Hindustan, "mogor" (but) is "magar" from Persian, and so on. Around 75 percent of people in Dhaka today are outsiders, people from other districts or pocket zones, bringing in their regional language, and adding their accent and pronunciation to the dialect.

The Bangla language was developed during the Sultanate dynasty. Allauddin Hossain Shah sponsored Bangla, though the state language then was Persian.

Now, a clarification is needed regarding the misinformation and wrongly put general perception circling around Dhakaiya Kutti and Dhakaiya Bangla.

Dhakaiya Kutti, as defined generally in texts, was said to be the house help of the Nawabs or brick layers, but from a research aspect, these versions are not true. Kutti were a group of separate professionals.

"In 1770, during the famine caused by the political and administrative failure of East India Company, millions couldn't eat and migrated to Dhaka. However, they could not join the mainstream workforce, which was dominated by local Muslims and Hindus then, who did not want to share or teach their professional expertise or secrecy with these new migrants. Since these people were farmers, the merchants who exported the rice employed them to clean the husk from the grains by using dhakis or rice pounders, and this process is called kuta in Bangla. And so, the term Kutti," Sufi explained.

"While going through East India Company records in the British Library during 1986, I stumbled upon many facts that were known, but distorted or not even known," Sufi added.

And so, one of my most memorable evenings ended with cups of milk tea, crumb chops, and a visit to old publishing houses in Bangla Bazar, dotted with Hashem Sufi's brand of witty sarcasm.

## 'GUNFIGHT' IN MOHAMMADPUR Five suspects placed on remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday placed five people on two-day remand each in connection with a murder case filed over the "gunfight" between crime suspects and the joint forces in the capital's Mohammadpur on Thursday. The incident left two people dead.

The five placed on remand are Md Miraz, 25, Al Amin, 24, Mohammad Hossain, 23, Mominul, 20, and Mehedi Hasan, 19.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Mehera Mahbub passed the order after police produced them before the court with a seven day remand prayer, said a court staffer.

In the early hours of Thursday, Miraz Hossain, 25, and Md Junmon, 26, were killed allegedly in a gunfight between suspects and the joint forces.

The two had criminal records, according to police and family members.

Police filed two cases – one for murder and another for possession of arms – with Mohammadpur Police Station that day.

Jewel Rana, additional deputy commissioner of Mohammadpur zone police, said the "shootout" took place when the joint forces raided Chand Udayan.

## BNP activists attack B'baria journo

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

A journalist was assaulted by BNP activists reportedly for filming an attack on a man at the Shaheed Minar in Nasirnagar upazila of Brahmanbaria early yesterday.

The incident occurred around 12:15am in front of the local Shaheed Minar, said Md Khairul Alam, officer-in-charge of Nasirnagar Police Station.

The victim, Abdulla Al Mahmud, a Nasirnagar upazila correspondent for Daily Kalbela and NTV Online, suffered injuries to his face, head, and eyes. He received medical aid at the local upazila health complex.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Abdulla said that political and social figures, including BNP activists, had gathered at the Shaheed Minar to pay tributes. As a group under the banner of the "Nagorik Committee" was about to place a wreath, activists of Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal attacked one of its members, GM Sohel, accusing him of being a member of the banned pro-Awami League student organisation Chhatra League.

Mahmud alleged that as he filmed the incident, a group of 10-12 activists, led by KM Bashir Uddin Tuhin, general secretary of BNP's upazila unit, and his nephews KM Marjan and KM Nasir, attacked him, punching and beating him.

Attempts to reach Bashir Uddin for comment were unsuccessful as he did not respond despite several phone calls.

## Ambitious revenue target in the works

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Proper enforcement of measures can also bump up revenue collection, said Ahmed, also a former NBR chairman.

"However, there is a significant deficit to this end as automation in revenue collection is not functioning properly while the existing laws were not amended adequately."

The advisory committee has made some proposals for major reforms including separation of VAT policy and administration.

"We are hopeful that the government will take a concrete step

to this end by June. However, even if the proposed reform measures are implemented soon, its result may not come overnight," Ahmed added.

Development partners, including the IMF, are pressing for reforms, including the separation of VAT policy and administration, reducing tax exemptions and automation in tax administration and collection.

They have stipulated an ordinance that separates the VAT policy from the administration before releasing budget support or loan tranche.

The NBR's operation of VAT policy and administration under one institution is the main problem.

"They should be separated -- we

see specific steps for reduced tax exemption," he added.

For this, the government has raised the VAT rates to 15 percent on nearly 100 goods and services. However, in the face of criticism, the government later rolled back the VAT rate hike from some of the goods and services.

"Raising the VAT rates suddenly on an ad hoc basis was not the right decision," Ahmed said.

The NBR's operation of VAT policy and administration under one institution is the main problem.

"They should be separated -- we

don't want to see any compromised decision," he added.

According to the IMF's recent documents, the reforms that the lender wants to see in fiscal 2024-25's budget include reducing corporate income tax exemptions and depletion allowances and raising previously reduced VAT rates on several products to the full 15 percent statutory rate.

Besides, it also wants to see the introduction of an additional personal income tax bracket for high income earners and the increase in tax rates on tobacco and select products.

## Myanmar returns 300 more Chinese scam centre workers

AFP, Bangkok

Myanmar handed over 300 Chinese scam centre workers to be repatriated through Thailand yesterday, as authorities intensify a crackdown on the illegal operations.

Thousands of foreigners are expected to be sent home from scam compounds in Myanmar over the coming weeks, with the first batch already flown out on Thursday.

The compounds are run by criminal gangs and staffed by foreigners, many of whom say they were trafficked and forced to work people around the world in protracted internet scams.

Myanmar's junta said in a statement that a second group of 300 Chinese nationals was handed over yesterday via the Thailand-Myanmar Friendship Bridge 2 at the Thai border town of Mae Sot.

## Old Dhaka still dangerous as before

FROM PAGE 1

Conservation Rules-1997, no industrial units using hazardous chemicals or goods can operate in and around a residential area.

The DSCC stopped issuing new licences or renewing old ones for chemical businesses in Old Dhaka after the Nimtoli fire. Then after the Churihatta fire in 2019, the DSCC stopped issuing or renewing chemical trade under the city corporation area.

These measures, however, had little impact on the ground.

Chemical traders argue they cannot relocate unless the government ensures their resettlement, as per a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2017.

Shafiqul Islam Milon, general secretary of the Chemical and Perfumery Merchant Association, told The Daily Star, "We are ready to move and have submitted all relevant documents to the government. We will relocate as soon as the project is complete."

Echoing a similar view, KM Iqbal Hossain, senior vice president of Bangladesh Plastic Goods Manufacturers & Exporters Association, said, "We have been ready since the initiative began in 2015. But the delay means relocation may not even happen by 2030."

Land acquisition is yet to be finalised, and rising costs could make relocation impossible, he said.

In a meeting last year, a high official from Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) mentioned that each plot might cost Tk 12 lakh, even though the actual market price and development costs would be "far lower", according to Iqbal.

"The government must set rational prices for eligible relocation," he added.

CHEMICAL INDUSTRIAL PARK

The construction of Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation's (BSCIC) Chemical Industrial Park in Munshiganj's Sirajdikhan made 73 percent

progress.

Project Director Hafizur Rahman said its new deadline is December 2025 after a one-year extension. "Though 73 percent of the project has been completed, the construction of roads and drains remains incomplete. The tender process for these works is ongoing."

Started in 2018, the project, spanning 308.33 acres, will have 1,843 plots for chemical godowns.

"We aim to start relocation by 2026," Hafizur said, adding that 1,500 stakeholders signed the MoU for the project.

**SLOW RELOCATION**

A temporary project in the capital's Shyampur was completed in June 2024 for 54 warehouses, but it has made little progress in relocating the chemical warehouses and factories from Old Dhaka.

So far, only two warehouses have been rented, according to Nazrul Islam, head of Estate Department at Bangladesh Chemical Industry Corporation (BCIC).

"Traders are reluctant to relocate despite monthly rents being reduced from Tk 100 to Tk 15 per square feet," he said.

Each warehouse is 2,056 square feet, and the authorities plan to invite fresh applications for the remaining space.

**PLASTIC INDUSTRY**

The BSCIC Plastic Industry Estate Project, meant to relocate around 300 plastic factories from Old Dhaka to a 95-acre site in Munshiganj's Sirajdikhan, also faced slow progress.

The project was initially approved in 2015 with a completion target of 2020, but delays in land acquisition have pushed the deadline to 2025, said Project Director Anis Uddin.

The project was implemented at a cost of Tk 297.84 crore, though the initial allocation was Tk 309.59 crore.

The plot sizes range from 3,000 to 6,000 square feet, and allotments are made based on the size of the applicant's industry. Entrepreneurs requiring multiple plots are also eligible to apply.

Among the four relocation projects, the one for the electric goods industry has been completed on a 50-acre land at Betkabazar in Tongibari, Munshiganj. BCIC's estate department received the project on June 30, 2022.

Once completed, the estate will house approximately 357 small and large industrial units, Rakibul said.

**ELECTRIC GOODS**

Among the four relocation projects, the one for the electric goods industry has been completed on a 50-acre land at Betkabazar in Tongibari, Munshiganj. BCIC's estate department received the project on June 30, 2022.

Locals claimed that Babul had an ongoing dispute with Afzar, Arshad, and Monir over the ownership of a pond, which might have led to his killing.

When contacted, Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Dhamrai Police Station, said primary investigations suggest that Babul was killed over a previous dispute. "Preparations are underway to recover the body from the hospital and send it to the morgue."

Efforts are ongoing to arrest those responsible for the murder, he added.

The victim's wife Yasmin said she would file a case over the incident as soon as she is able.

Meanwhile, this correspondent

visited the homes of those she alleged were involved but did not find them there, and their family members were unwilling to provide their contact numbers or make any comments on their behalf.

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In another development, Dhananjay Das, joint secretary to

the Public Security Division, was

suspended on Thursday on charges of opposing the July uprising and spreading falsehood about the interim government.

Earlier, six trainee ASPs from the 40th BCS have also been dismissed through a notification from the Public Security Division.