

MY DHAKA

# Exploring the richness of Dhakaiya Subbasi dialect

RBR

I thought that Urdu and Hindi were analogous to some extent -- a totally misread perspective, which changed when I did a bit of research on Dhakaiya people's vernacular or street dialect.

"We Dhakaiyas have two styles of speech that we converse in, one is ancholik Dhakaiya Bangla and the other is Dhakai Sukhbas, Subbasi or Khoshbas," says Akter Jahan, a writer who composes stories in her original Dhakai Sukhbas dialect.

The real meaning of Sukhbas, an Urdu word, is well-off or happily settled, and relates to the language spoken between the then locals and the overseas merchants, whose native languages were different. "Thus, Sukhbas or Subbasi is a Bengali-influenced dialect known as Dhakaiya Urdu and Hindi, and is now spoken by the original residents of Dhakaiya community, and it is often mistaken for Urdu," Jahan clarifies.

The dynasty rule of invaders in Bengal led to the amalgamation of their original speaking tongue of Urdu, Sanskrit, a base of Hindi, Persian, Arabic, and Turkic loanwords to the dialect of Bengali. This made Hindustani an Indo-Aryan language, as a lingua franca or communication mode in the streets of old Dhaka.

The 65 year-old energetic, nature-loving matriarch was born and brought up and even married in Amligola Mahalla, near the Kella area. Prior to her retirement, she ran the family business of plastic industry with her husband. However, the retired couple now lives a tranquil life in Kathaltoli Pukur paar in Keraniganj. Surrounded by greenery, and in sync with nature, Akhtar Jahan is honing her writing skills.

Her mother was educated in Urdu and Persian, as was the medium in those years, but she was the first generation Dhakaiya who were schooled in Bangla.

"My buri ma or grandmother always sat us kids down in her courtyard for



have geets in our dialect for every celebration, be it wedding or bathtime," quips Akter's daughter Ishrat Jahan, adding that the stories of her great grandmother were not found in any fairytale books she read.

"I am trying to document our old stories in Subbasi language, or as we say Dhakai jobane boyan. Our kids are teased in school for the way they speak, and as a result, they shy away from the original dialect. I want the golod or mistake that our noya postan or new generations are making to be corrected. They should know their roots and social landscapes. If this

lingua franca is not documented, then it will be lost to time," Jahan shared.

Peheli or dha dha, which are riddles, kohut or proverbs, rhymes, and songs in Dhakaiya Subbasi tongue; were common practice in cultural gatherings at old Dhaka. Now, this sort of ashor or cultural session are lost.

Akhtar Jahan's short stories like "Din Badler Sedma", "Zendeagir Bioscope", "Mohabbater Qissa", and "Fakarer Bolli" were published in reputed dailies and literary magazines.

"Akhtar Jahan's writing in this Dhaka regional language is not only a new addition to Bengali literature, but in her stories, we find a realistic picture of Dhaka society and culture in the post-independence period since the partition of the country," Ishrat adds.

"We as kids sang songs for the rain to stop and the sun to shine. We went around houses knocking on doors singing aloud and our neighbours gave us grains as favours, and we cooked community meals. Everything we did had a fun factor in it. Dhakaiya people are financially well off and love showdowns and celebrations. We took aristocracy from the Mughals and trading as our career choice from the merchants. Being a Dhakaiya is something you cannot copy from TV serials or Bollywood movies. It is in our DNA," Akhtar Jahan says boldly.

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'kejcha kahani ashor' or storytelling sessions. Her vivid description in our Dhakaiya Subbasi language, with the precise tonal emphasis, gave our imagination wings. Our Dhakaiya culture is colourful and rich, we

## Teacher crisis plagues public med colleges

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According to the DGME, the college has 343 teacher posts, of which 206 posts or 60 percent are now vacant.

### NEW INSTITUTIONS

The Awami League government had focused on establishing new medical colleges in various districts, but largely overlooked manpower issues, deepening the crisis, according to the sector insiders.

At least 23 medical colleges were established between 2008 and 2021, and the manpower crisis is particularly acute in the new institutions, DGME data shows.

These colleges have 252 professor posts, out of which 189 or 75 percent are vacant.

Among them, the Netrakona Medical College, Noakhali Medical College, Pabna Medical College, and Shaheed M Monsur Ali Medical College currently have no professors.

Eighteen other medical colleges only have one to five professors.

They are Cox's Bazar Medical College, Jashore Medical College, Sakhira Medical College, Shaheed Syed Nazrul Islam Medical College in Kishoreganj, Kushtia Medical College, Gopalganj Medical College, Shaheed Tajuddin Medical College in Gazipur, Tangail Medical College, Jamalpur Medical College, Manikganj Medical College, Patuakhali Medical College, Rangamati Medical College, Habiganj Medical College, Nilphamari Medical College, Naogaon Medical College, Magura Medical College, Chandpur Medical College, and Sunamganj Medical College.

Only Mugda Medical College in Dhaka has 13 professors against 15 posts.

All these medical colleges, except Noakhali, Cox's Bazar and Pabna medical college, were established

during the Awami League's rule. Three medical colleges were established in 2008 during the then caretaker government.

### PROMOTIONS 'OVERDUE'

Ex-BMA president Prof Rashid said the government does not regularly promote teachers, which led to a massive backlog.

"They [authorities] don't hold meetings [for promotions] unless they are under pressure. As a result, teachers lose interest, and new doctors do not feel encouraged to take up teaching jobs," he said.

He recommended establishing a separate system to handle the recruitment and promotion of medical teachers.

The BCS Health Cadre Specialists Doctors Forum, a platform representing government doctors, including teachers at government medical colleges, has been protesting the delays in promotions.

On February 25, they announced a two-hour work abstention every day from March 8 if the government did not promote them. They threatened to go for an indefinite work abstention if their demands are not met by March 11.

Mirza Md Asaduzzaman, convener of the platform, said around 7,500 doctors across different grades, including medical college teachers, are awaiting promotions. There have been no promotions in some departments since 2017, according to him.

He pointed out that the number of seats for students at government medical colleges increased over the years, but not the number of teachers.

According to insiders, the teacher shortage is particularly severe on some basic subjects. In many cases, teachers from other departments or non-teacher doctors are called in to

teach these.

Anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, pharmacology, microbiology, pathology, forensic medicine and community medicine are considered less attractive due to limited financial prospects and fewer job opportunities, they said.

**POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS 'SOON'** Prof Nazmul Hosain, director general of the DGME, said the process of promotion was already slow before the uprising, but it came to a complete halt for some time.

The main reason behind the problem in promotions, he explained, is the complexity in determining seniority between cadre and non-cadre doctors.

Doctors are recruited under the cadre service and also under various projects and on an ad hoc basis, he noted.

"As this issue remains unresolved, meetings of the two committees responsible for promotions cannot be held," Prof Nazmul said.

However, a committee, led by the secretary of Health Education Division, is working to address the issue, said Prof Nazmul.

He said the process for promotion of teachers of around 20 subjects, which do not involve such complexities, has resumed. Efforts are being made to mitigate the teacher shortage by appointing teachers under "current charges".

Prof Nazmul said the authorities were identifying doctors with postgraduate degrees and are currently posted at upazila-level hospitals so that they can be reassigned to medical colleges to help address the teacher shortage.

"We look forward to some positive developments within a month or two," he told The Daily Star.

## Yunus likely to visit China on March 26-29

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bilateral agreements," a diplomatic source in Dhaka told The Daily Star yesterday.

The BFA conference, known as the Asian Davos, is held in Boao, southern Hainan province. Prof Yunus was invited by the BFA Secretary General Zhang Jun.

The chief adviser may fly to Hainan in the evening of March 26 in a special flight provided by the Chinese authorities.

The Chinese side extended the invitation to the chief adviser in early January, but he was initially unwilling, given the Independence Day celebrations in Bangladesh.

However, later he told the Chinese side he could visit China if there could be a bilateral meeting with Xi Jinping.

"Last week, the Chinese embassy in Dhaka informed the foreign ministry of the bilateral meeting. Accordingly, the chief adviser expressed his willingness to visit China," a foreign ministry official said.

The BFA, initiated by 25 Asian countries and Australia (increased to 28 in 2006), is a nonprofit that hosts high-level forums for leaders from government, business, and academia in Asia and other continents to share their

vision on the most pressing issues in this region and the world at large.

Many heads of international and regional organisations, ministerial-level officials, entrepreneurs of Fortune Global 500, and renowned experts and scholars have already confirmed their participation in the annual conference.

With the theme "Asia in the Changing World: Towards a Shared Future", this year's BFA event will focus on development, foster dialogue, explore innovative formats, and value tangible outcomes, all aimed at promoting international development and cooperation, according to Chinese state news agency Xinhua.

The BFA is intended to reinvigorate multilateralism, promote openness and development, jointly respond to global challenges, and carry out the commitments of the UN Summit of the Future while focusing on the development of Asia.

The foreign ministry official said after attending the BFA, Prof Muhammad Yunus will fly to Beijing for the bilateral meeting with Xi Jinping, who visited Bangladesh in 2016.

The bilateral trade between Bangladesh and China is \$24 billion, with Bangladesh exporting less than \$1 billion a year. China is also a major

source of foreign loans for Bangladesh's infrastructure development.

China and Bangladesh are celebrating 50 years of diplomatic relations this year, and China wants to boost the relationship through various events.

Bangladesh joined China's Belt and Road Initiative, a global initiative of China to connect Asia, Europe, and Africa and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI).

On several occasions, China has proposed Bangladesh join the Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative. Bangladesh, however, has yet to respond to the offers.

During the visit of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to China in early July last year, Bangladesh had sought Chinese support in the development of Bangladesh's southern region as the Padma Bridge has connected it to the rest of Bangladesh.

With the political changeover here, that initiative remains dormant.

Asked about Bangladesh's priorities during the bilateral meeting between Prof Yunus and Xi Jinping, a foreign ministry official said an inter-ministerial meeting would be held next week to finalise the meeting agenda.

### MOB VIOLENCE

## Govt taking action against perpetrators

Says home adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury yesterday said the government was taking legal action against mob violence whenever and wherever it occurred.

He urged citizens to remain calm, emphasising that law enforcement alone could not control every situation.

"Even the police have become victims of attacks. If people become agitated, it creates problems. It is not possible to control everything solely by force," he told

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## Holding polls this year

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months, we all expected the policing system, law and order to be restored through short-term reforms. It has happened to an extent, but not up to our expectations," said Nahid.

"In the current law and order situation and policing system, I don't think it is possible to hold a national election," the 26-year-old said in his first interview as NCP head at his government-provided villa in Dhaka.

Nahid, who was until recently an adviser to the interim government, is the first politician of significance to cast doubt on Yunus' timeframe for an election.

Political analysts believe his youth-led party could significantly reshape national politics, dominated for decades by Hasina's Awami League party and her rival, former prime minister Khaleda Zia's BNP.

Those parties have demanded early elections, arguing that power should be returned to a democratically elected government.

Nahid said the NCP, which was formed just last week, would be ready for the polls whenever they are held.

However, he added that before elections can be held, it would be crucial to reach a consensus on the so-called "Proclamation of the July Revolution" -- a charter that the interim government plans to prepare in consultations with political parties and student activists.

The document is intended to reflect the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people and honour the people who died in last year's violence. Student protestors dropped calls for changes to the constitution after the interim government said it would prepare the proclamation.

"If we can reach that consensus within a month, we can call for elections immediately. But if it takes more time, the election should be deferred," he added.

Many affluent people across Bangladesh are helping finance the party, said Nahid, adding that it will soon look to crowdfunding for a new office and creating a fund for the election.

## 'A speech more notable for what wasn't said'

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and protests by the time March had arrived. A non-cooperation movement was on in full swing and the army could not subdue it despite firing upon protesters. Bangabandhu was proving to be the de facto ruler of Bangladesh.

In this context, Mujib was set to take the podium at Dhaka's Race Course Maidan (currently Suhrawardy Udyan) on the 7th. Yahya Khan, the military chief and Pakistani president, had announced he would address the people the day before, on the 6th. The entire country was taut with tension. The diplomatic corps were abuzz with speculations while the army was on alert, ready to step in if Mujib went out of line.

A declassified memo of March 4, 1971, addressed to US President Nixon's national security adviser Henry Kissinger, said the situation in East Pakistan was "deteriorating".

Mujib seems to have virtually slammed the door on the possibility of East-West accommodation by categorically rejecting President Yahya's plan to hold a conference of the major political leaders on March 10, the cable reads.

Mujib has admitted to several foreign correspondents "off the record" that he will announce the equivalent to independence for East Pakistan on Sunday (March 7), said the memo which also noted that there were reports of forces being flown into Dhaka. There was also troop movement from the West via ship.

All eyes were on the March 7 programme set to be addressed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Millions held their breath, waiting to see if Mujib would declare independence, breaking all ties with West Pakistan once and for all. Would this be the moment?

Then US consul general, Archer K Blood writes that it was common knowledge Mujib would outline his future course of action at the rally. Noting that Yahya's address was scheduled on the 6th, Blood writes in his book "The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh: Memoirs of an American Diplomat" that this "conjunction gave rise to much anxiety, hope and speculation in East Pakistan".

"The key question debated was whether or not Mujib would use the occasion to declare the independence of Bangladesh, and, if so, how would the army react," he writes.

In his address, Yahya vowed to preserve the unity of Pakistan and announced that the national assembly would now meet on March 25.

Declassified minutes of a crucial meeting chaired by Kissinger in Washington on March 6 show it was agreed to discuss the situation with the British to see if they would take the lead to discourage Pakistan

from using force, if it should become necessary.

The meeting also instructed the Dhaka mission to say nothing and refer it to Washington if they were approached by Mujib to recognise a separate East Pakistan regime, according to the minutes of the meeting.

Meanwhile, Indian historian Srinath Raghavan in his book "1971: a global history of the creation of Bangladesh," writes that on March 6 evening, Yahya sent a telex for Mujib. "Please do not take any hasty decision. I will soon come to Dhaka and discuss the details with you. I assure you that your aspirations and commitments to the people can be fully honoured. I have a scheme in mind which will more than satisfy your Six Points."

Yahya's immediate concern was to forestall a unilateral declaration of independence by Mujib, as rumours about it had flitted like bats in the press and political circles for several days. Such a declaration would be problematic both internally and externally, Raghavan writes. "On the one hand, the military was not yet fully geared up to quash dissent in the East. The troop reinforcement [that] begun in late February was progressing slowly."

The option of declaring independence was discussed by the Awami League's working committee on March 6. The party's leaders knew that the students and younger cadre "strongly favoured such a declaration". Indeed, there was "little doubt" that anything short of independence would "not be acceptable" to the bulk of the following. Yet the leadership wanted to move cautiously. For one thing, such a declaration would provide the military just the "pretext" to use force, Raghavan observes.

Then commander of the 14th division in East Pakistan, Major General Khadim Hussain Raja, recounts his version of those tumultuous days in his book "A Stranger In My Own Country".

He wrote that on the eve of March 7, two East Pakistani gentlemen met him, introducing themselves as Mujib's emissaries whom he cautioned strongly.

"I told the emissaries to inform Sheikh Mujib that, during his speech, I would have the army -- armed with guns and tanks -- standing by in the cantonment, ready to move immediately," he wrote.

In case Sheikh Mujib attacked the integrity of the country and proclaimed the unilateral declaration of independence, he would discharge his duty without hesitation and with all the power at his command. "I would have the army march in immediately with orders to wreck the meeting and, if necessary, raze Dhaka to the ground. I impressed upon the

emissaries that they should inform Sheikh Mujib that the consequences of indiscretion would be disastrous and the onus would be entirely on him. I advised Sheikh Mujib to keep the door open for further negotiations and avoid unnecessary bloodshed."

On the morning of March 7, the US ambassador to Pakistan, Joseph S Farland, called on Mujib, writes Siddiq Salik who was then public relations officer of the Pakistan Army in Dhaka in his book "Witness to Surrender".

"GW Choudhury [former member of Pakistan cabinet from April 1969 to February 1971] tells us more about Farland's call on Mujib. He says, 'The US policy was made clear to Mujib by Ambassador Farland who advised him not to look towards Washington for any help for his secessionist game', Siddiq Salik writes.

The Dhaka station of Radio Pakistan had made arrangements to broadcast the March 7 address live on its own initiative. The radio announcers were already speaking from the Race Course, telling the listeners about the unprecedented enthusiasm of the million-strong audience.

The headquarters of the chief martial law administrator intervened and directed Dhacca to stop this "nonsense", remembers Salik. "I conveyed the orders to the radio station. The Bengali friend at the receiving end reacted sharply to the order. He said, 'If we can't broadcast the voice of seventy-five million people, we refuse to work.' With that, the station went off the air."

And it was against this backdrop that Mujib pronounced those immortal words in his booming baritone: "The struggle this time is a struggle for emancipation. The struggle this time is a struggle for independence. Joy Bangla."

"Mujib's speech on March 7 was more notable for what he did not say than for what he actually said. He did not, as some feared and some hoped, declare an independent Bangla Desh. Instead, he called for a peaceful, non-cooperation movement to continue the struggle for independence and emancipation of Bengalis," Blood writes.

Another declassified memo from Kissinger to Nixon from March 13 noted that while Mujib had stepped back a bit from a declaration of independence, the full text of his March 7 speech conveys a harsher tone than the initial summary reports, and it seems apparent that his retreat was tactical.

"He made clear that something very close to independence, i.e., 'emancipation,' is his goal and that his movement will not be deflected until that is achieved," Kissinger wrote.