

MY DHAKA

KROMOSHO EXHIBITION

Where past and present collide

RBR

An artistic mind finds inspiration even in the mundane details of life. It makes the ordinary extraordinary. The smell of frying omelettes, the stirring sound of the spoon in a teacup, the sight of a mother oiling her daughter's hair, or an old man reading a newspaper – any of these can spark a fancy in their mind.

All these dull routines of our everyday life, and these intangible fleeting sights and sounds excite an artist, making them want to freeze these moments of magic realism in their art.

Photography is such a visual art form, that frames such creative expressions and ideations through images a photographer takes. And renowned Bangladeshi photographer Munem Wasif is one such artist, who can sniff out an artsy story in the actual moment.

The curator and educator will hold his solo exhibition, after a long hiatus since 2009, titled "Kromosho", loosely translated to "progressively or gradually changing".

The exhibition commences on April 18 at 6:00pm, at Bengal Shilpalay. "Kromosho" exhibits the artist's two decades of work on Puran Dhaka in three phases of timespan – titled "Stereo, Kheyal, and Bare: encircling the past, present, and on to the imagined future".

"Gradually, these timelines cross each other's boundaries. The body of my work has a personal vocabulary and the history and atmosphere of old Dhaka that has always fascinated me. The place has been my muse for the longest time. The moments I have captured are given the colour of my imagination; from intimate memories of my childhood, my relationships, and



PHOTO: MUNEM WASIF

the ether I grew up in. My imagination is more complex than the ordinary because I found streaks of semblance in these flashes from my real-life events," says Munem Wasif.

Wasif has documented multiple layers of time and recorded the exponential growth of old town communities, embracing urbanity through photography, film, and various other media. He celebrated their living without prejudice, and a sense of adapting, which is in constant transformation and is fluid.

"STEREO (2001-2022)" shows the city's casual comfort in dwelling both in the past and present; a refrigerator,

LED lights, digital watch, or baking bakarkhanis in a custom-made oven, shunning the old clay tandoor, to depict how Old Dhaka morphed with time, embracing urbanity yet retaining its core of being chaotic, dramatic, and forever evolving.

"I revisited the places I photographed to witness the changes it went through. There, I again captured the newness and adaptability to changes over time to make a comparison. The deliberate juxtaposition of the latest photographs in the exhibition alongside the earlier black and white works, allows the audience to understand the hybridised realities of Puran Dhaka, and one is left

in a space with a complex impression of contemporary life," explains Wasif.

"KHEYAL (2015-2018)" is primarily fiction or imagination capturing the enigma that is this historic city. Living amid the grandeur of neglected Mughal architecture are dynamic social groups and spontaneous neighbourhoods that inhabit spaces around courtyards, narrow lanes, and bustling bazaars; and the fine line between private and public space is faded.

"I would describe the content as characters who are lost in certain mental states and are found in other magical situations," comments Wasif.

"Shammano", or bare assemblage, is the final part of the exhibition. Here, Wasif reveals how the colour palettes of the chaos surrounding the city, or discarded objects and material triggered the urge to experiment and create something for him.

"Pieces of discarded wood, metal wires, and parts of furniture were given a new lease of life and purpose in my studio. I enjoyed rediscovering something new in the old, placing them in unexpected configurations, embracing the idea of chance in the process," notes Wasif.

A skateboard from broken pieces of cracked wood and, the broken legs of a chair were visualised as a third eye. "You need to have an eye to see and recalibrate the old," he adds.

To Wasif, his career has matured and aged along with this city. From film to digital photography, Wasif's relationship with Old Dhaka gradually deepened.

Photographs are not just realistic document of what is happening around you. It can very well be a poem that allows you to imagine the abstract moment – and that in itself is powerful.

Pakistan foreign secy in Dhaka

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Pakistan Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch arrived in Dhaka yesterday on a two-day visit to attend the Foreign Office Consultation (FOC), the first such diplomatic engagement in 15 years, as Dhaka and Islamabad seek to normalise relations.

Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin will lead the Bangladesh side and Amna Baloch will lead the Pakistan side at the FOC to be held at the State Guest House Padma today.

After the FOC, Amna Baloch will also call on Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain. She will also attend an interaction with the think-tanks and Pakistani diaspora in Dhaka in the evening.

The FOC is being held ahead of Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Bangladesh, expected on April 27-28.

Relations between the countries have been warming since the fall of the Awami League-led government on August 5 last year.

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Bangladesh's future rests on its people

Says US state dept

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US State Department has reiterated that the future of Bangladesh will ultimately be determined by its people.

State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce made the statement during a press briefing in Washington on Tuesday, responding to a question about rising concerns over extremism and political unrest in the country.

A journalist asked for the US government's stance on reports of growing "Islamist extremism" under the Prof Yunus-led government in Bangladesh, with protesters allegedly displaying images of Osama bin Laden and targeting American brands such as KFC and Coca-Cola with antisemitic rhetoric.

Bruce acknowledged that Bangladesh is facing several internal challenges but declined to comment on specific issues.

She noted that the United States has previously engaged with Bangladesh on these matters.

"All of these, including what you're discussing – protests, et cetera – are ultimately for the Bangladeshi authorities to handle," she said, adding that continued dialogue with Dhaka remains important.

"Democracy matters, and actions by people matter to confront issues that might, as we've seen over the last 20, 25 years, destroy their lives. It's pretty clear what the choices are for many nations on this planet," she added.

"Ultimately, the future of Bangladesh is going to be decided by the Bangladeshi people."

Polls timing tops parties' talks with US officials

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that reforms endorsed by all political parties would be implemented.

"The remaining issues will be brought before the people during the election. Based on the public mandate, parties will enter the next parliament with their respective agendas. After that, no unresolved matters will remain. The Election Commission is prepared and has stated there are no further obstacles. So, the election can take place before December," Khasru said.

He told the US diplomat that without the restoration of democratic order, many decisions—both domestic and international—would remain stalled, impacting key stakeholders.

"Once an elected government is in place, decision-making becomes easier, especially with public support. It's not just about immediate actions—those considering investments, both local and foreign, are evaluating short-, mid-, and long-term prospects. This is not a short-term issue," he added.

Khasru said the US-Bangladesh relationship was the primary topic of the discussion during the meeting.

They also discussed the BNP's policy and its future economic plans as the US delegation was interested in these matters.

"Issues like the economy and tariffs came up, and Bangladesh's position regarding tariffs was also discussed. We said that Bangladesh wants to sit together and collectively address the tariff issue," he said.

He added that the matter needed to be addressed because if the tariff is not brought within a tolerable limit, the country's exports will be at stake.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Organising Secretary Shama Obaid also attended

the meeting.

After their meeting with the US delegation, NCP Convener Nahid Islam told reporters the field-level administration does not appear to be working impartially and that NCP leaders and activists are coming under attack in different parts of the country.



Nicole Chulick



Andrew Herrup

"The administration is playing a silent role in the incidents of extortion in rural areas. We told them [the US delegation] that if such an administration remains in place, it is not possible to hold elections under it. For a level playing field, a neutral administration, bureaucracy, and police must be ensured," added the NCP convener.

NCP Member Secretary Akhter Hossen, Senior Joint Convener Samanta Shermeen and Senior Joint Member Secretary Tasnim Jara were present during the meeting.

Nahid said they also discussed their reform proposals. The party mentioned its three key demands – reform, justice, and the election of a national assembly.

He said the NCP is not advocating for minimal reforms, but fundamental structural reforms of the state, without which, he said, no election would be acceptable. "Whether the National Citizen Party will participate in such an election would also remain under consideration," he added.

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman,

meanwhile, said they informed the US delegation that they wanted elections to be held before next Ramadan.

"If we wait till June, the monsoon season will begin with probabilities of cyclones and flooding, which could make the election uncertain. That is why we believe it must be held before Ramadan," he told reporters.

He said that the US delegation wanted to know about the current political situation in Bangladesh and asked when and how the upcoming election will be held.

"We told them that the chief advisor said the election will be held by December this year or June next year. We want to see if he sticks to his commitment," added the Jamaat chief.

Shafiqur also said they had an open discussion and touched upon the issues of how their economic policy and foreign relations would be if the party was elected.

The US delegation also wanted to know the Jamaat's views on various regional matters and raised the issues of rights of the minorities, women and labour.

"We requested the US delegation to reconsider the 37 percent tariff, as our country is currently at a critical juncture, going through a crucial time. We requested that they relay our concerns," Shafiqur said.

The US delegation stated their commitment to democratic norms, he said. "We said we exercise democracy in the party and are committed to the same at the national level."

He said the US delegation also held a meeting with the vice chancellors of the public and private universities.

Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Parwar accompanied Shafiqur at the meeting.

Yunus among 100 most influential people

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Claudia Sheinbaum, Venezuela's Maria Corina Machado, South Korea's Lee Jae-myung, and Robert F Kennedy Jr, among other leaders, entrepreneurs, and entertainers.

In a tribute published in Time, former US secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton praised the Nobel Peace Prize laureate for stepping into leadership during a critical juncture in the nation's history.

"After a student-led uprising toppled Bangladesh's authoritarian prime minister last year, a known leader stepped up to guide the nation

toward democracy: Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus," Clinton writes.

Highlighting Yunus' legacy, Hillary recalled his work in founding Grameen Bank, which revolutionised microfinance by extending small loans to impoverished communities – 97 percent of them women – enabling millions to start businesses, support their families, and reclaim their dignity.

"I first met Yunus when he travelled to Arkansas to help then-governor Bill Clinton and me set up similar programs in the US," she said.

"Since then, wherever I've travelled in the world, I have witnessed the extraordinary impact of his work – lives transformed, communities lifted, and hope reborn."

Hillary noted that Yunus has once again responded to his country's call by leading the post-uprising transitional government as chief adviser.

"As he shepherds Bangladesh out of the shadows of oppression, he is restoring human rights, demanding accountability, and laying the foundations for a just and free society," she added.

BNP unhappy as Yunus gives no specific timeline

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with the Consensus Commission.

"We have made it very clear that we are willing to draft a charter on the issues where all parties reach a consensus and based on that... we can proceed towards the election. As for the remaining reforms, the political party that comes to power will take steps to implement them."

At the meeting, Fakhrul submitted a four-page letter to the chief adviser outlining its immediate actions and suggestions on the current situation.

In the letter, the party proposed keeping the responsibility of national identity cards to the Election Commission and swiftly resolving the legal complexities over redrawing the boundaries of the electoral constituencies.

"We have supported you and would like to have faith in you," the letter reads.

BNP believed that a free, fair, and neutral national parliamentary election can be held by December after completing necessary reforms to laws, rules, and provisions, and making changes to the relevant institutions.

"We reaffirm our decision to

continue supporting all positive initiatives undertaken by your government. We urge the swift completion of necessary reforms and quick announcement of a clear roadmap for holding the national parliamentary election by December to bring an end to all confusion among the public," read the letter.

It said that in recent times, those who are frequently discussing reforms are attempting to label the BNP as an anti-reform force.

"BNP thinks all changes are not reforms, the purpose of reforms is positive and constructive changes," it said.

The party said democracy is the only way to protect people's rights and improve their lives in the long run.

It said that just like the past fascist government used to take away people's rights through its narrative "development first, democracy later", some people are now saying "reform first then democracy".

The BNP urged the interim government to immediately initiate trials against the "fascist party and its associates".

The party further called for prompt

and effective measures to ensure compensation and proper medical treatment for those killed and injured during the July-August movement.

It stressed the need for stronger initiatives to control commodity prices, improve the law and order situation, and boost economic activities.

BNP reiterated its demand for the immediate withdrawal of all "false and harassing" cases filed during the "illegal 1/11 government and the fallen fascist regime".

Meeting sources said BNP leaders told the meeting that some within the government are trying to portray the party as being against reforms and attempting to label the BNP as an anti-reform party.

They criticised two advisers who had participated in the July-August movement, saying they are now using state power to benefit a certain political party, said a source.

In his briefing, Prof Asif said, "They [BNP leaders] seemed content to me. When our meeting ended, I thought they had received answers to many of the questions on their minds. That's how I felt. Fakhrul Bhai might have felt differently.

Novoair may be grounded from May

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Currently, Novoair operates daily domestic flights connecting Dhaka to Chattogram, Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, Jashore, Saidpur and Rajshahi.

Flights on its lone international route of Kolkata have been suspended since September last year due to a shortage of passengers.

Although on paper Bangladesh has all the ingredients to be a money-spinner with a unique geographical location that allows it to serve as a transit hub for passengers coming from the Middle East and Europe to the Asia Pacific, a constantly growing pie of upwardly mobile population and an economy that is staking its claim in the global scheme of things, country's airlines industry remains in a sorry state.

At least eight private airlines were

forced to shut down their operations in the last 25 years, according to aviation experts.

The aviation industry in Bangladesh could not grow due to regulatory malfunction, excessive tariffs, high jet fuel prices, undue patronisation of the state-carrier Biman Bangladesh Airlines, said Kazi Wahidul Alam, editor of the Bangladesh Monitor.

"If the situation remains the same, airlines will come and go. They may sustain for 10 to 15 years but they will have to exit ultimately," he added.

There are regulatory roadblocks such as the high rates of surcharges, aeronautical, landing and parking fees and prohibitive jet fuel prices. About 40 to 46 percent of the operating costs of an airline are comprised of jet fuel, according to

Rahman.

GMG Airlines, United Airways and Regent Airways are vivid examples of private operators that had to ground their fleets as the surcharge dues piled up, according to aviation analysts.

Regent Airways, the latest private airline to cease operations, owes Tk 283 crore in surcharge, United Airways Tk 355 crore and GMG Airlines Tk 368 crore, according to data from the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh.

"Once you fall into a backlog with the surcharge payments, there is no chance for you to turn around. The surcharge is a major reason why the airlines are struggling," Alam said.

The aeronautical, landing and parking charges are very high compared with other countries in the region.

continue to perform the same way as they did during Ramadan, there should be no problem in holding the next national elections, he said.

"In fact, the law and order situation during Ramadan was better than before. We believe it is gradually improving, and if they have another six to eight months, it will further improve."