



WHERE THE SPIRIT MEETS THE BONE

A multisensory exhibition to soothe your soul

TASMIAH RAHMAN

A multisensory exhibition, titled "Where the Spirit Meets the Bone", is currently on display at Satori Academy of Arts in the capital's Banani. This striking exhibit attempts to explore the many layers of human emotions -- from personal wounds to global issues, intimate loss and grief of rediscovering inner self -- through an interplay of sensory cues like touch, sound, or scent.

The showcase is taking place in two parts, with the first chapter commencing on April 25. The event has been organised by LUX and Art South Asia Projects.

The event's curator, Kehkasha Sabah, highlighted how the artists and organisers put together an innovative show where traditional elements have been blended with technology to evoke unexpressed human emotions.

"Hosted at the Satori Foundation, a meditation centre known for its tranquil environment, the exhibition aligns deeply with mindfulness and resilience," reflected Sabah. In her words, the serene setting allows audiences to escape from the chaos of city life and engage fully with the artworks -- offering a space to simply sit down and observe.

The event opened with a live performance by Sharad Das, captivating the audience with his handmade musical instruments crafted from the severed trees near his home, which were once homes to thousands of birds -- now all extinct.



"The performance is inspired by the confrontation between human lust and the very nature he is born into," observed Das. His sculptural series, titled "The Hand that Kills, The Hand that Mourns", resonates the sentiment. "We erase the nature and then weep its loss. It is on us to let it heal," Das explained.

Following the performance, Sabah led the visitors for a curatorial walk. Inside the house, the audience was immediately charmed by various art installations created by Afrah Shafiq, Naeem Mohaiemen, Reetu Sattar,



Sounak Das, and Yasmin Jahan Nupur, among many others. The artworks ranged from interactive video games, soundscapes, video projections, film and mixed media installations.

A sensational work from the show was "Je Dak Kothao Pouche Na" (Calls that Reach Nowhere) by artist and filmmaker Reetu Sattar. The work featured 6 channel videos, with sounds featuring clapping hands, (turi) ulu chants, rhythmic thumping of feet, etc -- each of the tunes coming together as a haunting chant.

"These tunes represent 'shiktkar',

the wailing of 'the other'. The 'besura' [distune] or 'betal' [no rhythm] and the anonymity of the performers resist the politics of erasure, emerging as a unified voice of resistance," suggests the artist.

According to her, this work explores the psyche of marginalised communities whose voices are barely ever heard.

Visitors seemed to be moved by the immersive show. "For me, 'The Last Breath Spoken' was a showstopper," contemplated Fahmida Alam, a fine arts student who was in attendance. "The scent, sounds and the atmosphere were truly soothing," she added.

Sabah, an independent curator, writer, and researcher, remarked that the exhibition emphasises sensory and temporal dimensions, and they are marked by fracture and survival. The show focused on producing narratives of empathy, as she further adds, "Each piece is kinaesthetic and meditative, and they speak of healing and care."

Installations like "Lowlands" by Susan Philipsz, "Don't Look at the Finger" by Hetain Patel, and "The Bride Who Could Not Stop Crying" by Afrah Shafiq, deeply connected with the audience with the creative use of digital media, creating a new dialogue in the contemporary art scene.

The second chapter of the event is set to commence on May 9. The show is taking place in collaboration with the British Council, and is open daily from 11:00am to 8:00pm.

Make primary healthcare free

FROM PAGE 1
problems cannot be solved. It must be ensured that doctors remain in their designated stations."

Following the fall of the Awami League government in the wake of a student-led uprising in August last year, the interim government formed more than a dozen reform commissions across various sectors.

The Health Sector Reform Commission, formed in November, was tasked with making recommendations to ensure health services are more people-oriented, accessible, and universal.

Members of the commission include Prof Mohammad Zahir Hossain, chairman of Community Clinic Health Assistance Trust; Prof Liaquat Ali, chairman of Pothikrit Foundation; Prof Sayeba Akhter, chairman of Bangladesh Medical Research Council; Prof Naila Zaman Khan, a paediatric neurologist; MM Reza, former health secretary; Prof M Muzaherul Huq, former regional adviser of World Health Organization for South-East Asia Region; Azharul Islam Khan, consultant of icddr,b; Prof Syed Md Akram Hussain, senior consultant of Square Cancer Centre of Square Hospital; Prof Syed Atiqul Haq, chief consultant of Green Life Center for Rheumatic Care and Research; Ahmed Ehsanur Rahman, a scientist at icddr,b; and Umayer Afif, a student of Dhaka Medical College.

Besides holding 51 regular meetings and 32 consultation meetings with stakeholders in Dhaka and other regions, it also visited hospitals over the past five and a half months to prepare the report. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics conducted a survey to assist the commission.

FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

After submitting the report yesterday, Prof AK Azad Khan and his team briefed reporters at the Foreign Service Academy.

"No matter how much we say 'health is my right', it currently has no legal mandate ... Primary Health Care [PHC] will be a constitutional obligation for the government," said Prof AK Azad.

Accordingly, the commission recommended

amending the constitution to enshrine PHC as a basic right.

The commission also said the structure of PHC must be strengthened by integrating union-level health and family planning centres and transforming them into primary healthcare centres.

In urban areas, such centres should be established under ward-level management. To this end, support from other relevant government and non-government sectors must be mobilised.

The commission further recommended establishing an autonomous Bangladesh Health Service by restructuring the current health cadre to promote professionalism, skills, and accountability -- modelled on the judicial service.

It also suggested forming a dedicated Public Service Commission to recruit healthcare professionals.

Any kind of attempt to influence doctors by pharmaceutical companies giving gifts or samples of medicines is prohibited, commission said.

It recommend that pharmaceutical companies inform doctors about their products through mail or post office, and that representatives should not be allowed to meet doctors directly for regular product promotion.

A separate secretariat led by a principal secretary, who would be a doctor, should be established to manage three divisions: clinical services, public health, and medical education.

To decentralise the system, the commission proposed establishing 11 regional health authorities at the divisional level.

It also recommended bringing several government agencies, including the Directorate General of Family Planning and the Health Economics Unit, under the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

At present, two cadres -- health and family planning -- operate under the health ministry.

The commission proposed dissolving the family planning cadre, which includes both general and technical roles.

It called for merging the general cadre with the administration cadre, and the technical cadre with the health cadre, adding that

field-level workers would come under the DGHS.

It proposed forming an independent and autonomous Bangladesh Health Commission to implement a "Health in All Policies" approach. The commission, comprising 17 wings, would ensure a transparent, accountable, and effective health system.

The commission recommended forming a high-level search committee for appointments to key positions, including the chief and deputy chiefs of the health service; director generals of various directorates; vice chancellors, pro vice chancellors and treasurers of medical universities; and principals of medical colleges.

It recommended allocating 15 percent of the national budget or five percent of the country's gross annual income to the health sector. It also called for the enactment of a special law to guarantee sufficient and sustained funding.

One percent of the national budget, it said, should be allocated for medical research.

Additionally, it called for exempting medicines for cancer, diabetes, hypertension, and certain antibiotics from taxes to lower their prices.

It also recommended establishing a network of pharmacies to distribute essential medicines either free of charge or at subsidised rates, while also updating the list of essential drugs every two years.

It suggested that doctors initially prescribe 25 percent of medicines using their generic names, with the goal of prescribing all medicines generically within five years.

The commission further recommended enacting at least 11 new laws and amending several existing ones to facilitate the reforms.

Additionally, it recommended establishing a National Institute of Women's Health to ensure appropriate treatment and care for women.

It proposed the creation of a structured referral system and, where necessary, mandatory referrals to ensure patients receive timely and appropriate care. This, the commission said, would help reduce

overcrowding at tertiary-level health facilities.

The commission advised that health facilities run by government, autonomous, or semi-government bodies be kept free from politicisation. It further recommended that no individual directly involved in politics should hold executive positions in such institutions.

It also proposed introducing a non-practising allowance for full-time medical teachers, as well as special allowances and residential facilities for doctors serving in remote areas.

It recommended that all medical colleges and universities undergo regular evaluation in accordance with standards set by the World Federation for Medical Education. Additionally, it suggested reorganising educational institutions and restructuring seat capacities, even proposing the closure of substandard institutions if necessary.

To improve access and ease the burden on medical colleges and national institutes, the commission recommended establishing secondary- and tertiary-level hospitals in phases at the district level. It also proposed setting up regional referral hospitals at the divisional level.

The commission urged the development of a digital platform to handle complaints from service seekers and the formation of a medical police force to prevent violence at hospitals and clinics.

It also suggested introducing a unique health identity card and a smart health card for every citizen, enabling better health tracking and record management.

A separate pay structure should be devised for intern doctors, postgraduate medical students, non-government doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers, the report added.

To reduce the number of patients seeking treatment abroad and to conserve foreign currency, the commission emphasised the need to establish centres of excellence for organ transplants, heart and kidney diseases, fertility treatments, and diagnostics, particularly through public-private partnerships.

FROM PAGE 1
"appalling, disgraceful, and shocking to the entire female community".

It mentioned that while 11 reform commissions have been formed by this interim government, and 10 have already submitted their reports without any resistance, only the Women's Affairs Reform Commission's report has been met with such "violent and regressive backlash" from certain quarters.

"The misogynistic and undemocratic campaigns are not only unconstitutional but also pose a direct threat to gender equality and human rights," said Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, speaking on behalf of the platform.

The Samajik Protirodh Committee also criticised

the government's silence and inaction in the face of what it termed "grave injustices and barbarism" against half of the country's population.

It urged the government to take immediate and effective steps to build a gender-equal, secular, democratic, and humane state.

The statement concluded with a call for all democratic and progressive forces in the country to unite in resisting anti-women, fundamentalist activities and upholding the principles of equality and justice.

The statement was made by Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Steps Towards Development, BRAC, Bangladesh Nari Pragati Sangha, Women for Women, CARE Bangladesh, Karmojibi Nari, National

Workers Alliance, Concern Worldwide, IED, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, Nijera Kori, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Dhaka YWCA, Palli Daridro Bimochon Foundation, Oxfam GB, ActionAid Bangladesh, The Hunger Project Bangladesh, Aawaj Foundation, PRIP Trust, ADD Bangladesh, World Vision, Campaign for Popular Education, Nagarik Uddoyog, National Council of Disabled Women, SARI, BAWSE, Fortnightly Anannya, ACD Rajshahi, Brottee, Nari Maitree, WAVE Foundation, Equity and Justice Working Group, Bangladesh Nari Sangbadik Kendra (Women Journalists' Center), Nari Uddoyog Kendra (Women's Initiative Center), National Women Workers Alliance, Sammilito Samajik Andolon, Bangladesh Trade Union Centre, National Women's Alliance, Shakti Foundation, BPW Club, Udichi Shilpigosthi, Acid Survivors Foundation, Nari Mukti Sangsad, Seba Nari o Shishu Kallyan Kendra, DRRA, Amrai Pari, Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, Soroptimist International Club, BILS, ADAB, FPAB (Family Planning Association of Bangladesh), YWCA of Bangladesh, Dalit Women Forum, Deopro: A Foundation for Development, Aparajeyo Bangladesh, BLAST (Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust), Turning Point Center for Men and Masculinities Studies, Save the Children, Abhijan, Indigenous Women Network, Disabled Welfare Society, Nari Oikya (Women's Unity), Pallima Mahila Parishad, Pragrasor.

Be open to constructive

FROM PAGE 1

"It has pitted society against the state, and religion against women. We believe it is essential to keep the door open for constructive dialogue with all representative stakeholders on issues where disagreements have arisen."

In the statement, NCP led by organisers of the

July uprising, said it does not believe the members of the commission represent women from all segments of society and the body failed to be all-inclusive.

"Some of the commission's proposals have raised concerns among various religious and social communities. It is the responsibility of the state

to formulate policies that respect the religious, social, and cultural integrity of all communities, and to uphold the beliefs and values of all citizens."

The party also pointed out that the Women's Affairs Reform Commission was not under the purview of the National Consensus Commission, unlike six other

reform commissions.

"As a result, political parties were not given the opportunity to engage in prior discussions or contribute their views. The recommendations have sparked widespread debate and disagreements in the country's political landscape," the statement said.

Italy wants

FROM PAGE 12
before September, as Rome was keen to "renew" and "re-launch" its bilateral cooperation with Dhaka.

"The reason I am here is to share with you that many Bangladeshi migrants rely on illegal means to reach Italy, which is dangerous. We want the ones who follow the legal framework."

The minister said that the uncontrolled arrival of migrants by sea is "very problematic" for the European nation and sought Bangladesh's cooperation to eliminate "illegal migration and organised crime."

"We are here to propose a new way of cooperation policy."

In response, Prof Yunus said that Bangladesh is eager to work with Italy to stop illegal migration and human trafficking.

"Bangladeshis living in Italy are very grateful to the host country and appreciative of the way they are treated in Italy."

Debt servicing costs

FROM PAGE 1
taka, both interest payments and principal repayments are set to rise.

In the current fiscal year, Tk 1,13,500 crore was allocated for interest payments and debt servicing. Officials say the upcoming budget will add another Tk 20,000 crore solely for interest payments.

Taka devaluation will also raise the cost of repaying foreign loan principals. At the time of this fiscal year's budget in June, the exchange rate was Tk 110 per dollar; it now stands at Tk 120.

According to the Economic Relations Division, debt servicing

on foreign loans rose by 24 percent in dollar terms during the first nine months of the fiscal year, and by 37 percent in taka terms.

Additionally, the government plans to allocate Tk 800 crore to support families of those killed and injured during the 2024 uprising, under the Directorate of July Mass Uprising.

Meanwhile, the development budget is likely to be reduced by Tk 35,000 crore and set at Tk 2,30,000 crore, a proposal expected to be presented at the upcoming National Economic Council meeting within a couple of days.

Israel cabinet

FROM PAGE 12
collapse of a US-backed ceasefire that had halted fighting for two months. It has since imposed a total blockade of aid into the enclave, reports Reuters.

Elkin said that rather than launching raids in specific areas and then leaving them as the military had done so far, the Israeli forces will now hold the territories they seize, until Hamas is defeated or agrees to disarm and leave Gaza. Hamas has ruled out such calls.

The Israeli official said that the newly approved offensive plan would move Gaza's civilian population southward and keep humanitarian aid from falling into Hamas hands, though the blockade will not be lifted yet.

The United Nations rejected what it said was a new plan for aid to be distributed in what it

described as Israeli hubs. Yesterday, Jan Egeland, Secretary-General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said on X that Israel was demanding that the UN and non-governmental organisations shut down their aid distribution system in Gaza.

Hamas said yesterday the new Israeli framework for aid delivery in Gaza amounted to "political blackmail" and blamed Israel for the war-ravaged territory's "humanitarian catastrophe".

"We reject the use of aid as a tool of political blackmail and support the UN's stance against any arrangements that violate humanitarian principles," Hamas said in a statement, adding Israel's "continued obstruction of aid entry" since March 2 made it "fully responsible" for the "humanitarian catastrophe" in Gaza.

6 women serve legal notice on

FROM PAGE 1

Nilima Dola, Dyuti Aranya Chowdhury and Neela Afroze.

In a statement, the complainants said such gender-based verbal abuse has no place in the "New Bangladesh", particularly given the crucial role women played in the July uprising.

They asserted that the country's evolving democratic framework must be inclusive and uphold the dignity of all women.

The complainants described the verbal abuse of individuals involved in drafting and supporting the government's Women's Reform Commission as "deeply alarming for women across the nation".

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