



Mostafa
Sarwar

Farooki's leap from the cinematic world to the corridors of power hasn't been the smooth transition many may have imagined.

Appointed as the Cultural Adviser to the interim government, the acclaimed filmmaker has found himself navigating a terrain riddled with scrutiny, expectations, and ideological fault lines.

In this exclusive interview, the Cultural Adviser opens up about the journey so far—the personal deliberations that preceded his appointment, the professional risks he knowingly took, and the vision he holds for Bangladesh's cultural future. Yet, behind the sharp public figure, we find a man who still misses the intimacy of the film set—where the only politics involved were those of plots and characters.

How challenging has your journey been so far?

During 17 years of past bureaucracy, there have been many weak appointments and a great deal of nepotism. I'm having to work within a horribly designed system. Within this bureaucracy, we have both capable employees and incompetent ones.

Some are genuinely committed to change and improvement, while others actively slow down our progress. That in itself is a huge challenge.

In addition, there are undeniable challenges that come from differing social opinions post uprising. July uprising saw many differing groups come together with one goal. When that goal was achieved, quite understandably, the ideological differences of these groups have started to come to the surface. Everyone who participated in the uprising, in any capacity, believes the country should run ONLY the way they want it to. So, we needed to be extremely aware of the sensitivity. At the same time, we needed to be absolutely resolute about what we want to achieve. It's a tough act of keeping things balanced.

You're only the second person from showbiz in Bangladesh's history to lead the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to date. Do you think it's genuinely beneficial for someone from the cultural field to head this ministry?

It is undoubtedly important for someone from the cultural sphere to be in charge of this ministry, as such a person is more likely to be aware of what is happening in that sector. They understand the existing challenges and are better positioned to address them.

However, I also believe that this doesn't always guarantee success. Much depends on the individual in charge — their depth of understanding, both at the macro and micro levels, and their vision about the nation's cultural identity and goals. The person also needs to have a clear idea about creative economy and the growth of cultural industry.

You previously brought up 'a broader responsibility' within the cultural sector. Could you elaborate on that?

The common idea about the Ministry of Culture is, "Oh, it's about entertainment industry." But in reality, its responsibilities stretch far broader. Of course, cultural industry is our prime focus although our ministerial allocation of business makes it difficult to take proper care of our cultural industry which I will discuss later.

On the macro level, the ministry has a vital role to play in shaping ideas of inclusion and exclusion within society. It carries an enormous responsibility. When this ministry is misdirected, it can give rise to political tensions. The depth of such cultural mismanagement has contributed to 16 years of oppression, culminating in the uprising we saw in July.

That's why I believe the July movement was primarily a cultural phenomenon, a manifestation of cultural rage.

With the national budget approaching, the cultural community is calling for at least one percent of the total allocation to go to the cultural sector. In your view, is this a realistic and justified demand?

To me, the minimum allocation should be four percent. I also think the entire scope of the Ministry of Culture's work needs to be completely redefined. The country's entire cultural industry — film, television, OTT platforms, music, theatre, photography, and new media — all of it should fall under one unified industry. The entire gamut of art education should also come under the ministry like they have in Korea and many countries who are doing brilliant with their creative economy. Only then, we will be able to formulate a proper action plan for the creative industry and people related to the industry.

If you were granted a portion of the national budget, how would you prioritise its use?

Music is Bangladesh's biggest cultural asset. If we have to brand Bangladesh globally, it has to be with music.