



THROUGH A GERMAN LENS

When Dhaka posed for Fritz Kapp

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Long before Dhaka became a noisy sprawl of rickshaws, traffic, and concrete, it was a quieter, more graceful place. One posing for a German man with a camera and a keen eye for elegance.

The man's name was Fritz Kapp. At the turn of the 20th century, photography was still a novelty in Bengal. It had arrived in India just a year after its European debut in 1839, brought in by British officials and missionaries eager to document their empire. By the 1860s, Kolkata was already buzzing with studios -- both European and local.

It was a common sight to see the city's elite line up for portraits in formal attire, framed by velvet curtains and classical backdrops.

But Dhaka? It remained largely outside the frame.

That changed when Nawab Ahsanullah, the powerful patriarch of Dhaka's ruling family, decided he didn't need to go to Kolkata to be photographed. Instead, he brought the photographer to him.

Fritz Kapp, already established in Kolkata and Darjeeling, accepted



PHOTOS: FRITZ KAPP

the Nawab's invitation and opened a studio in Wise Ghat, just a stone's throw from Ahsan Manzil.

It wasn't just a business venture -- it was the beginning of a visual archive.

Kapp photographed the Nawabs, their palaces, their gardens, and the very mood of Dhaka before the world

changed. He had a second studio in Nawabpur and produced portraits, architectural shots, and scenes that combined European technique with Eastern grandeur.

Then came February 1904. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India, visited Dhaka. Kapp was summoned once more, this time to document history. The result was "The Curzon Collection" -- an album of 30 photographs, 19 of which featured the Nawab family and their estates. The rest captured Dhaka's landmarks like Chawk Bazar,

Ahsan Manzil, Mitford Hospital, Shahbagh Garden, and even the old iron bridge.

But Kapp wasn't the first to photograph Dhaka. A few images exist from the 1870s, though their creators remain unnamed. In the 1880s, the studio Johnston and Hoffmann published "Architectural Views of Dhaka". Yet those efforts were fleeting.

Kapp, by contrast, immersed himself in the city and, in doing so, left behind more than images -- he left influence.

By 1910, inspired by his presence, Dhaka's own photography scene began to grow. R C Das opened a local studio. Even members of the Nawab family -- Khwaja Afzal and Khwaja Sulaiman Quader -- launched their own. Soon after came names like Charuchandra Guha, Technical Art, Dos & Co, and Musical Mart. They would go on to define Dhaka's visual culture for decades.

Fritz Kapp eventually closed shop after Nawab Ahsanullah's death in 1901, but his impact remained. He showed Dhaka to itself -- stately, composed, and radiant under the gaze of a foreign lens.

In an era before reels and Instagram filters, Kapp gave the city its first real moment of stillness. And in doing so, he helped Dhaka find its photographic soul.

RMG work orders

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certain portion of the additional tariff.

For instance, of the 20 percent reciprocal tariff, the US retailers are asking the fabric suppliers to bear one-third of the amount and the manufacturers another third; the remaining portion will be borne by the retailers and brands themselves, exporters said.

However, the retailers and brands are asking for such a facility for next season as they are planning on purchasing in big volumes, the suppliers said.

The reciprocal tariff by the US has put indirect pressure on the suppliers in their dealings with the European buyers, said Kalpan Hossain, managing director of Dekko Legacy Group, which mainly exports garments to the European markets.

One of the major garment suppliers asking not to be named said a few of his American buyers have already requested for further price cuts to adjust the additional tariff rate.

He is yet to respond as his profit margin is too low as it is.

The volume of work orders for yarn with the spinning mills is on the rise with the increase in work orders from the US buyers, Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, told this correspondent.

The local garment exporters are expecting a good volume of work orders would shift from China, the leading garment supplier worldwide, after it was levied a 55 percent tariff.

Starvation claims

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of at least 600 trucks daily to address the dire situation in Gaza, which has seen more than 200 people die of starvation, reports Al Jazeera online.

Shehata, a senior fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations, said: "complicit countries" are participating in parachuting aid into Gaza, "not to address the hunger, not to end it, but to sustain it [and] cover it up" with "headline grabbing gestures".

Israel's offensive has killed more than 61,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's health ministry, figures the United Nations says are reliable.

The Israeli military has warned that expanding the offensive could endanger the lives of hostages Hamas is still holding in Gaza, believed to number around 20, and draw its troops into protracted and deadly guerrilla warfare.

Taly said Israel should heed its army's warnings. "The invasion of Gaza risks turning into a Vietnam for Israeli soldiers," Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said in an interview with daily Il Messaggero.

Big win in banking, lost opportunities in investment, jobs Education left behind

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governance, and sectoral reform issues. Over a year later, it revisited those concerns to assess progress, identify gaps, and outline steps for stabilisation, recovery, and institutional improvement.

"We are witnessing some positive developments as efforts are underway to restore stability from a precarious situation," Mustafizur said.

GAINS AND GAPS

The CPD reviewed 38 major challenges faced over the past year, rating nine green for substantial progress, 18 yellow for partial progress, and 11 red for no significant initiative.

Progress was strongest in banking reforms, including reconstituting bank boards, freezing defaulters' assets, and passing the Bank Resolution Ordinance 2025.

Measures to prevent bank plunderers from fleeing, including with travel bans and frozen accounts, curbed capital flight and restored public trust.

Trade facilitation measures included liquidity support and scrapping LC margins for essential imports.

Support for migrant workers, such as collateral-free loans, revised migration rules, and better airport facilities, reflected commitment to remittance growth, though recruitment fraud and high migration costs persist.

A modest rise in agricultural subsidies bolstered food security, yet deeper modernisation is needed, the CPD observed.

Rehabilitation of protest victims through financial aid and health cards was notable, though psychological and vocational support would enhance outcomes.

In healthcare, strengthening the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council is expected to improve accountability, and a permanent commission has been formed to address sectoral challenges.

Honouring deceased labourers through compensation was symbolic, but broader labour rights reforms are overdue.

Stopping technology-enabled fraud by regulating mobile financial services to ensure government funds reach rightful beneficiaries and prevent loot was another good initiative of the interim government, the CPD said.

Among the partial steps, the CPD mentioned central bank reforms, which saw the formation of a task force, but some legal amendments and policies remain pending. Banking data standards improved with global auditors and stricter NPL rules. Bangladesh Bank ordered banks and non-banks to allocate 25 percent of loans to MSMEs by 2025 and 27 percent by 2029, easing loan rules and creating dedicated departments. The Youth Entrepreneurship Policy 2025 offers training and financing, but weak enforcement and limited initiatives persist.

The Export Policy 2024 adds new sectors, revises incentives, promotes 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle) and green tech, and strengthens quality standards via TBT (Technical Barriers to Trade) measures, though implementation is uncertain.

Fair banking practices widened LC access for genuine importers, ending monopolies. Duty cuts stabilised prices and diversified supply before Ramadan, but monitoring is needed to prevent new monopolies.

The government launched the Support

Areas of Concern	CPD Assessment
Create jobs in MSMEs	Partial progress
Freelancing hubs & IT support	No significant progress
Affordable loans for migrant workers	Substantial progress
Modernise trade policy	Partial progress
Improve informal sector governance	No significant progress
Eliminate monopoly in consumer goods	Partial progress
Increase agricultural subsidies	Substantial progress
Ensure energy security	Partial progress
LDC graduation policies	Partial progress
Prepare a white paper on economy	Partial progress
Increase investment in education & health	Partial progress
Education sector reforms	Partial progress
Align madrasa with mainstream education	No significant progress
Merge education ministries	No significant progress
Make universities autonomous	No significant progress
Separate pay-scale for teachers	Partial progress
Assistance for July victims	Substantial progress
Expose healthcare corruption	No significant progress
Improve quality in private hospitals	No significant progress
Introduce universal health insurance	No significant progress
Regulate drug prices & prescriptions	Partial progress
Strengthen BMDC & permanent health commission	Substantial progress
Recognise workers killed during July protests	Substantial progress
Ensure fair wages & financial security	Partial progress
Strengthen labour governance & justice	Partial progress
Improve workplace conditions & social protection	Partial progress
Abolish industrial police	No significant progress
Prevent internet shutdowns & repeal DSA	Partial progress
Restore international reputation & attract FDI	Partial progress
Regulate mobile financial services	Substantial progress
Increase renewable energy use	Partial progress

to Sustainable Graduation Project to guide Bangladesh's graduation from the LDC bracket through inclusive consultations, capacity-building, and research.

Despite forming committees and preparing a white paper on the economy, concrete implementation of recommendations remains lacking. Education and health budget increases fall short of international benchmarks.

The rate of RMG workers' wage hike rose from 5 percent to 9 percent, but other sectors saw no hikes. Labour law reforms and an Employment Injury Scheme pilot were launched, yet key laws and fair wage implementation remain lacking.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

The CPD flagged several areas of little or no progress. Among them, the bond market remains prone to fraud despite new guidelines, requiring comprehensive audits and stricter enforcement. The failure to establish freelancing hubs or integrate PayPal represents a missed opportunity for

youth employment and foreign currency earnings.

While the labour information management system registration began for informal workers, the initiative alone cannot meet targeted objectives.

No steps have been taken to merge the two education ministries or grant universities autonomy from the education ministry and UGC. While the pay scale for government primary school head teachers was upgraded, no separate pay scale for teachers was introduced to attract or retain talent.

In healthcare, corruption allegations stalled the High Dependency Unit project at Shishu Hospital, with the World Bank withdrawing.

Despite Health Sector Reform recommendations against patient referrals to private hospitals, no action has been taken. The government lacks focus on introducing universal health insurance. Overall progress remains inadequate, according to the CPD analysis.

Speaking at the CPD event, BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said

remittances rose automatically once money laundering, which flourished under the previous government, stopped. The earnings of the migrant workers were bought at higher rates to facilitate money laundering during the AL regime, he explained.

He, however, criticised the interim government for adopting a budget that mirrored its predecessor's, continuing mega projects instead of focusing on social sectors. "An interim government's role differs from that of an elected government. Elections must be held to ensure accountability," he said.

He added that excessive regulations discourage investment, citing the 19 approvals needed to open a restaurant. "Such over-regulation has created an oligarchy where only a few can do business," he said.

He also pledged that the BNP would invest 5 percent of GDP each in health and education, create one crore jobs in 18 months, and better integrate farmers, artisans, and craftspeople into the economy.

Labour and Employment Adviser Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hussain agreed that development is "not just about metro rails or expressways, it's about creating jobs".

He said entire institutions collapsed after the uprising and has yet to be rebuilt. Even the law enforcement and administration are still unsettled as they were caught in the grip of fascism.

The interim government is trying to establish some kind of structure so that the next government can at least inherit a functioning framework, Hussain said. "A fragile structure will make it impossible for the new government to work effectively."

Emphasising police reform, the adviser said political interference in recruitment to the force will continue unless the police structure changes.

He warned that conflicts of interest persist in the labour sector when business leaders become MPs or ministers, as they stop advocating for workers.

Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association, said that despite an investment of \$75 billion in the textile and ready-made garment sectors, with annual exports of \$41 billion, the government has increased the corporate tax for textile mills and RMG from 15 and 12 percent to 30 percent.

"Besides, we are struggling to survive due to disruptions caused by extortionists. There is also a shortage of gas and electricity. If the government truly values these sectors, it should take action. I have not seen any wizardly steps in the last 365 days," he added.

Mahmud Hasan Khan, president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said garment factories are quietly shutting down every day. A clear indication of this is that BGMEA membership has dropped from 7,200 to only 3,000. The closures are due to unplanned factory expansion, policies of Bangladesh Bank, and the country's overall policy environment.

Referring to the constant policy changes in the country, Khan said, "The budget changes every year. At budget announcements, some policies are made, based on which entrepreneurs invest. But these policies are changed again the very next year."

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It took more than a month for most universities to fully resume academic activities, with political influence continuing to shape university governance.

As appointments to the vacant posts were made, The Daily Star found that at least 30 of the 47 VCs appointed over the past year were affiliated with teachers' organisations linked to BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami.

Following the AL government's ouster, calls for a uniform policy for VC appointments gained momentum. Yet, the University Grants Commission has not introduced any such framework.

Disruptions to academic activities were not limited to universities only. Students staged protests at dozens of schools and colleges, demanding resignation of institutional heads.

According to a count by The Daily Star, at least 150 teachers across the country were forced to resign between August 5 and August 31 last year. Many were humiliated and harassed.

In some cases, teachers and officials were assaulted, with video clips of the incidents circulating on social media. The education ministry issued directives repeatedly to bring the situation under control but failed.

Throughout the year, both students and teachers staged demonstrations over their distinct demands -- from salary hikes and pay scale revisions to exam deferrals and auto-pass for students.

Many of these protests turned violent. The education ministry could neither maintain order nor negotiate meaningful resolutions.

Student groups on August 20 stormed the Secretariat and carried out vandalism, demanding cancellation of HSC and equivalent examinations postponed during the July mass uprising.

The authorities eventually scrapped the exams and published results through subject mapping, drawing criticism from academicians.

The then education adviser, Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud, later admitted that the decision was a mistake.

Another controversial move was the sudden reversion to the 2012 curriculum for class 6 to 12 amid pressure from a section of guardians and teachers. Students who had just begun adapting to the new curriculum were forced to shift back, resulting in widespread confusion.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) was tasked with revising and reprinting 50 textbooks to align them with the previous curriculum. A coordination committee was formed to facilitate the process but was disbanded following backlash over its composition.

The NCTB promised to deliver the revised textbooks by December, 2024, but missed the deadline. New targets were set for January and February. However, nationwide distribution could not be completed until April this year.

School students in multiple districts began the academic year without full sets of textbooks, leading to significant learning loss, especially for those with limited access to digital tools.

In March this year, the government made a change in the top leadership of the sector, with Prof Chowdhury Rafiqul Abrar replacing Prof Wahiduddin as

education adviser.

"A LOST OPPORTUNITY"

In October last year, the primary and mass education ministry formed a consultation committee to recommend ways to improve primary and non-formal education.

Headed by BRAC University Professor Emeritus Manzoor Ahmed, the committee submitted its report to Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus on February 10 this year.

On implementation of the committee's recommendations, Prof Manzoor said, "As of now, we've only seen piecemeal steps, not a comprehensive or systematic response."

Despite time constraints, the interim government could still establish a similar body for the education sector with a six-month tenure, he said.

"This could give the next government a strong foundation for much-needed reforms," he told The Daily Star recently.

Termining the past year a lost opportunity for the sector, he said, "The shortcomings inherited by the interim government were significant, but the response has been largely ad hoc. No substantive reform initiative has been taken. There has been no education commission, unlike in other sectors."

"It can be fairly described as a disappointing record," he said.

Criticising the government's approach as fragmented and uncoordinated, he said, "There was no holistic planning and no mechanism for short, medium, or long-term reform."

Prof Anu Mohammad, a former teacher at Jahangirnagar University, said it's true that everything cannot be changed in a year, but the government failed to do even what was possible.

"Why education was not given due importance under this government remains a pressing question."

Questioning why no education reform commission was formed, he said the government could at least introduce a uniform framework for teacher recruitment in universities.

Contacted, Education Adviser Prof CR Abrar said, "For those who expected a miracle within a year, their expectation is misplaced."

The education sector has been plagued with problems for years. "Can a government just assume power and change everything, especially in a situation where the youth who brought about this transition have a major stake in the outcome?"

"In such a context, decisions that affect them must be made with great care," he said.

About partisan appointments at universities, he said, "Perhaps it was the circumstances that led to the decisions made at a certain point of time... We have learnt from that process... It was not ideal."

"Not all the decisions were necessarily good. Perhaps the role of the state -- what it should have been and what was expected -- was not delivered."

On the formation of a commission for the education sector, the adviser said that commissions often operate on very short terms -- some for six months. Such short term bodies, he argued, are not suitable for something as complex as education.

"We hope to see some meaningful and visible results within the next five to six months as we complete our tenure," he added.