



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

## Threads that refuse to fade

Bengal Shilpalay's 'Handloom Tradition of Bangladesh'

DOWEL BISWAS

There was a festive air inside Bengal Shilpalay on Sunday, March 8. Three exhibition halls were adorned with the colourful threads of Bengal. Handloomed majestic yet homelike saris hung everywhere, wrapping the space in warmth and quiet pride. The fabrics were not simply displayed but seemed to breathe history, heritage and ancestral pride.

And this was not merely a gallery of finished garments. The craftsmen themselves were present, seated beside ancestral looms and spinning wheels, showing how thread slowly becomes cloth.

One sari, visitors were told, is so fine it can pass through a ring. Another appears so intricate that fingers hesitate before touching it, as if the slightest movement might disturb its fragile geometry.

For generations, stories about Bengal's Muslim, Jamdani, Baluchari, Tussar, Korial and Tangail fabrics have lived like folklore — tales repeated long after the craft itself seemed to slip into memory.

Inside Bengal Shilpalay this week,

those legends feel less distant.

A faint rustle of fabric greets visitors entering the halls. On one table lies a delicate stretch of Muslin, almost weightless, its threads dissolving in light. Nearby, a spinning wheel turns slowly as cotton fibres are twisted into yarn with a quiet reminder of the technique that once made Bengal's textiles famous across the world.

The exhibition, titled *The Handloom Tradition of Bangladesh*, opened on March 8 at Bengal Shilpalay in Dhanmondi. Organised by the Bangladesh Handloom Board with support from the Bengal Foundation, the nine-day programme combines a curated exhibition with a small fair celebrating the country's weaving heritage.

For curator Shawon Akand, the goal is straightforward. "Many people in the capital have heard about our textile traditions," he said. "But very few have actually seen how these fabrics come to life."

Handloom weaving, he noted, has long been embedded in everyday life across the country. Yet rapid industrialisation and the rise of

power looms have gradually pushed the craft to the margins.

At the Quamrul Hassan Exhibition Gallery, archival photographs, documents and rare textiles trace the long arc of Bangladesh's weaving tradition.



Historians say the region's textile heritage stretches back at least two and a half millennia, when Bengal was often described as the "loom of the world."

One section of the exhibition

focuses on the revival of Dhakai muslin, once considered among the finest cotton textiles ever produced.

At the centre of this revival is Phuti Karpas, a rare cotton plant historically used to produce the thread for muslin. Visitors



can see the plant itself, alongside samples of the raw fibre and the nearly invisible yarn spun from it using hand-operated wheels.

Bundles of dyed yarn, wooden reels and spinning wheels lie arranged

quietly across the room, reminders of a craft that once shaped everyday life across the region.

The exhibition is accompanied by a small fair on the fourth floor, where visitors can purchase handloom textiles directly from producers. Fifteen stalls display Jamdani, Manipuri and Tangail saris, lungis and gamchas from Sirajganj, khadi from Cumilla, bedsheets from Kumarkhali, Rajshahi silk and garments from the hill districts.

Nearly 1.5 million people in Bangladesh are directly or indirectly involved in the handloom sector, according to the Ministry of Textiles and Jute. After agriculture, it remains one of the country's largest sources of rural employment.

Yet for many artisans, the craft remains a difficult profession.

Md Monir Hossain, 65, from Rugganj in Narayanganj, has been weaving Jamdani since he was 12. The skill came from his grandfather, though financial necessity first pushed him into the trade.

"I have spent my whole life doing this," he said quietly. "But I would not

want my children to follow this path. It is hard to provide for a family."

Md Monir Hossain, 65, from Rugganj in Narayanganj, has been weaving Jamdani since he was 12. The craft first came to him through financial necessity, though the knowledge traces back to his paternal grandfather. Over the decades, Monir honed the skill until the Bangladesh Handloom Board recruited him as one of its Jamdani craftsmen.

Around 300 craftsmen work alongside Monir, Hasmat and others within the Handloom Board's network — artisans whose lives remain closely tied to the fragile threads they weave each day.

It is a reminder that Bangladesh's weaving tradition lives not only in museums or markets but in villages, riverbanks and small workshops where knowledge passes quietly from one generation to the next.

Inside Bengal Shilpalay, those scattered threads gather again — if only for a moment.

The exhibition and fair will continue until March 16, open daily from 12:00pm to 9:00pm.

## NEWS

### When dialysis means distress

FROM PAGE 12 households are losing their belongings to pay for costly kidney disease treatment, pushing them deeper into poverty.

A 2024 study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies found that 92 percent of families with kidney patients face financial distress while trying to finance dialysis treatment in Bangladesh.

Patients bear an average monthly expense of Tk 46,426, with costs ranging between Tk 6,690 and Tk 2,10,000, according to the study published in December 2024.

It also revealed that around 90 percent of households face catastrophic health expenditure (CHE) — healthcare spending that is so high it threatens a household's financial stability — to finance dialysis treatment, and about 19.5 percent of patients receive fewer dialysis than the recommended number.

A total of 477 hospitalised patients from public, private, and NGO healthcare facilities participated in the cross-sectional hospital-based study.

Some 35 government hospitals offer kidney dialysis at a relatively low cost compared to private healthcare facilities that provide the same treatment. Besides, most private facilities are located in towns and cities, leaving many rural patients deprived of healthcare services.

Meanwhile, the government does not have comprehensive data on the number of kidney patients in the country, but records from the nation's largest public kidney hospital indicate that cases of kidney complications are increasing.

A total of 2.06 lakh patients received treatment at NIKDU in 2024, an 8.42 percent increase from 2023, when 1.90 lakh patients were treated at the 500-bed facility, according to the Health Bulletin 2024, published earlier this month.

The number of patients in 2022 was 1.78 lakh.

Against this backdrop, Bangladesh, along with the rest of the world, will observe World Kidney Day tomorrow under the theme "Kidney Health for All — Caring for People, Protecting the Planet".

Contacted by The Daily Star last evening, Farhad Hasan Chowdhury, member secretary of the Bangladesh Renal Association, said that as the treatment of kidney diseases — particularly dialysis — is expensive, greater emphasis should be placed on prevention.

"We are putting emphasis on how to keep the kidneys healthy and on raising

public awareness about its importance.

"Although the government is working to expand dialysis services, that is not the best long term option. Instead, cadaveric kidney transplants could be a better alternative."

**'SOLD MY EARRINGS AS LAST RESORT'**

Khadiza Begum said when her husband Shahabuddin was admitted to Faridpur General Hospital around October last year, he stayed there for 12 days, during which the family spent around Tk 20,000 on treatment — money villagers helped collect.

"Doctors later advised three injections costing Tk 11,000 each, but we couldn't afford them. After staying home for four days, he became seriously ill again and was readmitted for another 12 days. Relatives helped with money, and trees worth Tk 40,000 had to be sold to cover treatment."

The family later consulted other doctors and continued medicines at home, but Shahabuddin's condition did not improve. On February 10 this year, he was admitted to the same hospital again as his condition deteriorated.

"On February 12, the day of the national election, doctors advised dialysis, but services were unavailable that day. He later underwent dialysis at a private clinic in Faridpur town at a cost of Tk 17,000," Khadiza said.

They later returned to the general hospital, where dialysis cost Tk 420 per session. "After some improvement, doctors advised dialysis twice a week and discharged him. Outside the hospital, each session costs around Tk 3,500, with transport costing another Tk 1,500."

Shahabuddin was later admitted again for four more dialysis sessions. "Meanwhile, we had to sell his auto-rickshaw for Tk 26,000."

Doctors then advised inserting a permanent dialysis access (fistula) in his hand, which Faridpur hospital could not provide, so the family came to Dhaka last Thursday (March 5).

"However, the procedure could not be done because his hand was swollen, and the hospital also refused admission. Despite pleading and crying, he could not get admitted to hospital [NIKDU]."

Meanwhile, Shahabuddin has been receiving dialysis as an outpatient at Tk 3,400 per session. "An inpatient receives dialysis at Tk 600..."

The dialysis services at NIKDU are provided by an Indian company under a public-private partnership with the Directorate General of Health Services.

"To continue his treatment, I sold my earrings for Tk 26,000 as a last resort," Khadiza said, adding that three more dialysis sessions are needed to

normalise his hand for the fistula. "Then we will return to Faridpur Hospital."

She concluded, "One of my sisters-in-law previously died from kidney disease. Because of that, many people believe he will not survive either and are reluctant to help. But as a wife, I can no longer bear to see my husband suffer like this. So, I am trying everything I can."

NIKDU Director Syed Alfa Sani could not be reached for comments.

### Eleven countries

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"No one in the world has the expertise and experience that we do. We use combined systems, acoustic detectors and sensors. We use early warning systems, different types of radars," he told AFP.

According to Ukraine air force data, the military has been consistently intercepting or shooting down more than 80 percent of all incoming Russian drones — hundreds of which are fired every night.

Kyiv uses a mix of cheap drone interceptors, electronic jamming tools, anti-aircraft guns, fighter jets and helicopters to defend its skies from the Russian attacks.

### JS to deal with 133 ordinances

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first and only did so after the election attaching certain conditions.

"There is no scope to attach conditions to the July National Charter. One must either sign it as it is or clearly explain why it cannot be signed," he said.

On constitutional matters, Salahuddin said the government had so far acted in accordance with the constitution and would continue to do so.

If the verdict of a referendum is to be honoured, parliament must first take up the issue, hold discussions, enact the necessary law, and incorporate it into the constitution, he said.

He added that if members of a constitutional reform council are to take oath, the matter must also follow due constitutional process.

"It would have to be determined formally, incorporated into the Third Schedule of the constitution, and the authority to administer the oath would have to be specified," he said. Referring to what he described as a forced oath administered to some MPs, the minister said it was the responsibility of the Supreme Court to determine whether the constitution had been upheld, as judges had taken an oath to protect it.

### 'Nirbhaya' salutes five for courage

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with many urging her to run for the Union Parishad.

Asma's journey was one of five inspiring stories highlighted yesterday at the IDB Bhaban in Dhaka's Agargaon. She, along with four other changemakers, was honoured with the "Nirbhaya" (The Fearless) Award, a recognition celebrating women who have shown exceptional courage and leadership.

The award is a joint initiative of UNDP Bangladesh and The Daily Star, introduced to mark International Women's Day and to spotlight women whose work is driving meaningful change in their communities.

This sixth edition of the awards celebrated women who transformed personal tragedy and hardship into triumph in remote areas of Bangladesh.

The 2026 Nirbhaya awardees represent a diverse spectrum of courage.

Joining Asma on stage were Jaita Rani Shil from Bandarban, who has become a fierce advocate against child marriage and harassment in her

community; Konkolata Mondal from Khulna, who shattered gender norms by becoming the first woman in her village to sell her agricultural produce directly in the local market; Khushi Chakma from Rangamati, who transformed her life through papaya cultivation; and Trinalom Rong, a Union Parishad member from Sherpur, who is ensuring legal justice for indigenous women through village courts.

Addressing the event, The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam reflected on the subtle ways gender discrimination persists even in educated households.

Sharing a personal anecdote about the birth of his daughter, he noted how relatives discussed her marriage prospects while celebrating the career potential of his nephews.

"I feel small standing before these women."

"They are the true giants. They are fighting against centuries of prejudice, against culture and social values to pave their own way."

### Seven-minister committee

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The finance ministry will provide secretarial support to the committee, which may co-opt additional members if necessary and hold meetings as required, said the gazette notification.

At a meeting on Monday, it was decided that the finance ministry will collect feedback from relevant ministries and submit a draft report to the cabinet committee outlining the short-, medium- and long-term effects of the war. The committee will then work further on it, officials added.

The meeting also discussed that there would be no immediate impact on fertiliser supply and irrigation in Bangladesh, as the cultivation of Boro paddy, the country's single largest rice crop, is already over, said meeting sources.

However, if the war prolongs, industries, electricity generation, and the transport sector could face disruptions, as these sectors rely heavily on fuel.

The meeting discussed that the power and energy ministry would take steps to ensure coal-based power plants continue operating at full capacity. "If there is any disruption in power generation from the plants, immediate measures will be taken," a meeting source said.

To facilitate the smooth operation of coal-based power plants, the

meeting underscored the need to clear arrears to the plants. A portion of the arrears has already been paid.

The meeting also reviewed the possible impact of the war on foreign exchange reserves and inflation, as well as potential austerity measures. However, given the uncertainty over how long the war may continue, officials said the government would take steps in line with how the situation evolves.

Asked about the government's preparations in the wake of the war, Finance Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said the government was moving ahead by anticipating possible impacts.

"We cannot avoid it [the war]. So, we will set our future projections taking its potential effects into account. We are aware of the risks and working accordingly," he told reporters on Monday at a press conference.

Comparing the potential shock of the war to an earthquake, Zahid Hussain, former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office, told this newspaper that the scale of the impact would depend on both the intensity and duration of the war.

"The key question is not only the magnitude of the shock, but also how long it lasts. The longer it continues, the greater the damage," he said.

He also suggested a follow-up programme to track the progress of the 30 Nirbhaya awardees honoured over the last six years.

UNDP Bangladesh Resident Representative Stefan Liller described the awardees as "everyday heroes".

He also emphasised that despite Bangladesh's progress in education and economic empowerment, the shrinking space for women in political leadership — evidenced by the low number of women in the recent national election — remains a concern.

The ceremony also saw the unveiling of a special photo book titled "SWAPNO: Women Leading Their Own Future", which documents the transformative journey of women under UNDP's SWAPNO project focused on the economic empowerment of ultra-poor rural women.

According to UNDP Bangladesh, the Nirbhaya initiative this year is supported by the project Gender-Responsive Coastal Adaptation, which is funded by the Green Climate Fund.

### Ameer's adviser

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countries in Asia, Africa, Oceania, America, and Europe efficiently.

The appointment of the opposition leader's foreign affairs adviser at the foreign ministry as an adviser, equivalent to the foreign minister, which is new and innovative, the letter said.

"Through this posting, the position of the opposition in the parliament on foreign affairs can be presented to the ministry and thus maintain balance in the international relations," it added.

The letter suggested that Khalilur give special consideration to appointing Prof Mahmudul as an adviser at the foreign ministry for navigating, together with the government, the geopolitical dynamics and Bangladesh's foreign ministry.

Top foreign ministry officials have expressed surprise over such proposal by the opposition.

"There is no precedence of appointing an adviser at the foreign ministry from the opposition in the parliament," said an official, seeking anonymity.

In the Facebook post, Porwar said as soon as the party became aware of the matter, the Jamaat chief removed Prof Mahmudul.

He emphasised that the party believes in responsible, transparent, and accountable political conduct, and maintains a policy of promptly correcting any misunderstandings or errors.