

MY DHAKA

Rediscovering Rahat Ara Begum: A legacy revived through dance and literature

RBR AND TANZIRAL DISHAD DITAN

For Lubna Marium, acclaimed dancer and choreographer, reviving her grandmother Rahat Ara Begum's literary legacy has been a pilgrimage. The Urdu short story "Dilnawaz" — a dance-drama inspired by Begum's forgotten script — is her ultimate tribute.

Blending Sufi philosophy with classical and contemporary dance, the production explores love, longing, and transcendence. Recently staged at the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in Dhaka, it reintroduces Begum's allegorical tale to modern audiences.

Both a love story and a philosophical meditation, Dilnawaz is not just a romantic tragedy. The dance-drama adaptation has turned the tale into a living cultural experience, entrancing Dhaka's audiences with its courtly world and mystical atmosphere of transcendence.

"She existed in our family consciousness almost as an 'absent presence,'" Lubna recalls. "Her name was spoken with reverence, but her books had disappeared from circulation, and the literary world that once celebrated her had long faded from public memory."

Dilnawaz became the centrepiece of Lubna's choreographic vision. "Dance, like Sufi poetry, can express longing, surrender, and transcendence without words. The greatest challenge was doing justice to both the literary and spiritual dimensions of the story. But when the dancers began to inhabit its emotional landscape, the choreography stopped



being interpretation and became embodiment."

Collaborating with Canadian Iranian dancer Sashar Zarif and choreographer Shabbur Ahmed Khan, Lubna nurtured the project for over a decade. Music by Raatul Shankar Ghosh, inspired by maestro Uday Shankar, and poetry by Imran ibn Niaz were woven into the production, creating a layered performance that merged literature, spirituality, and movement.

Today, Rahat Ara Begum's works are accessible once again, primarily through an anthology published in Dhaka, with original editions preserved in archives, and through Shadhona — a Centre for the Advancement of South Asian Culture, where Lubna continues to weave her grandmother's legacy into performance.

Rahat Ara Begum, widely regarded

as the first woman Urdu fiction writer of Bengal, lived a brief but luminous life in 1940s Calcutta. A prolific contributor to Urdu literary magazines, she wrote with a voice that was "tender, intellectually alert, and spiritually searching."

Her stories explored love, longing, poverty, and the emotional lives of women with remarkable clarity. "Her writing can best be described as quietly radical," Lubna explains. "She illuminated social injustices and gender inequality without overt didacticism. In that sense, her feminism was subtle but powerful."

Beyond her literary achievements, Rahat Ara Begum was deeply rooted in Sufi practice, particularly the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidi tradition. Family memories portray her as austere yet luminous, someone who undertook solitary retreats and infused her

writing with mystical sensibilities.

One family story captures the depth of her spiritual presence even after her passing. Lubna recalls how her grandfather, Sirajul Islam, visited Rahat's grave every day for decades, bringing flowers and sitting in silent contemplation. "When one of us once asked him what he was doing there, he quietly replied that he was 'talking to Rahat.' That moment captures something essential about their lives: love, devotion, and spiritual companionship were inseparable."

The rediscovery of Rahat's works was itself a journey across archives in Lahore, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Dhaka. The eventual publication of "Lost Tales from a Bygone Era" marked a turning point.

"It felt deeply emotional. The book was not simply a literary publication; it was a restoration of memory. To hold it was to reconnect with a voice that had been silent for decades and to bring her back into conversation with contemporary readers." Looking ahead, Lubna envisions further translations, scholarly discussions, and creative adaptations of Rahat's stories.

I believe Lubna Marium, carrying the artistic inheritance of her grandmother, has planted a seed of spiritual reawakening among Dhaka's audiences. Amid the rush of our hurried lives, she offers a poised invitation to pause, reflect, and reconnect. For younger generations especially, her work opens a contemplative space to engage with the seven stages of Sufi devotion, leaving behind a profound resonance.

Trump for taking ties with Bangladesh to next level

Says US ambassador

UNB, Dhaka

US President Donald Trump has set forward a clear vision to take relations with Bangladesh to the next level, said Brent Christensen, the American ambassador to Bangladesh.

"After 100 days, I am even more optimistic about the future of US Bangladesh relations. I can't wait to see what we all accomplish next," he said in a video message released on Wednesday, marking 100 days since his arrival as the US ambassador to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh and the US signed a 'historic trade agreement' that will balance their trade deficit and make both the countries more prosperous.

"I have tirelessly advocated for US businesses across Bangladesh to build those trade ties."

The US envoy said they are working together to combat the illegal migration and securing a 'closer security partnership' for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

"We are combating diseases like tuberculosis and measles through a new health partnership with Bangladesh."

Christensen said they remain the largest donor supporting Bangladesh's hosting of the Rohingya people and they will continue to push for a political solution.

"I came at an important time, just before Bangladesh's historic February election," he said, adding that the US was the first country to recognise the results of the election, and congratulate the new government led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

On January 15, Christensen presented his credentials to President Mohammed Shahabuddin at Banghaban.

In over 50 years of partnership, the US ambassador said they have worked together to promote regional stability, economic growth benefiting both the two countries and the sovereignty of their great nations.

For over two decades, Christensen has had the privilege of working closely on US policy toward Bangladesh and the broader region.

23 killed in Nigeria jihadist, bandit attacks: reports

AFP, Kano

At least 23 people, including three children, were killed Tuesday in three separate attacks blamed on jihadists and criminal gangs in northeastern and northwestern Nigeria, according to two security reports.

Suspected Boko Haram jihadists killed 12 people in a raid on a village in northeastern Borno state, while 12 others were killed in attacks on two villages in northwestern Zamfara state, according to two security reports prepared for the United Nations and seen by AFP.

Govt sticks

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Analysts argue the government should raise the procurement price by at least Tk 2.3 per kg, while food and agriculture ministry officials maintain that the current rates ensure a profit margin for farmers.

Abdul Bayes, former vice-chancellor and economics professor at Jahangirnagar University, said the decision to keep the price unchanged was "impulsive" and it fails to account for inflation and rising costs.

While nominal prices remain the same, farmers are worse off in real terms, according to him.

Prof Bayes also said the one-paisa increase in estimated costs is unrealistic and insufficient, warning of further strain on farmers.

"Prices should at least cover production costs and include a reasonable profit margin, typically around 10 percent, especially given higher expenses for diesel, transport, and labour," he added.

Agricultural economist Jahangir Alam Khan said irrigation and fertiliser shortages are likely to reduce output this season, raising per unit costs.

"Even a small increase of two to three taka per kilogram could have helped farmers recover rising costs," he said, urging a review of the pricing decision.

M Asaduzzaman, former research director of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said the government should open purchase points in every union to minimise farmers' transport costs.

He warned that with most paddy purchased by private millers, farmers will not benefit unless the broader market aligns with the government rate.

First arrest made 10yrs after killing

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of Investigation (PBI) produced the suspect before the court.

Investigating Officer Tarikul Islam of PBI Dhaka earlier arrested Hafizur at his home.

On April 6 this year, the seventh investigating officer in the much-discussed case sought permission to cross-match DNA samples of three suspects — retired army personnel sergeant Zahid, warrant officer Hafizur Rahman, and soldier Jahangir Alam.

According to court officials, the case has so far had 80 hearing dates, with seven IOs from four agencies handling the probe over the years.

Nineteen-year-old Tonu, a second-year history student of Cumilla Victoria Government College, was found dead in the Cumilla Cantonment area on the night of March 20, 2016.

'Gupto' graffiti spreads in univs

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JCD activists painted graffiti at Madhur Canteen, Arts Building, Dhaka University Central Students' Union (Ducs), and several other places.

At Jahangirnagar University, a group of JCD activists, led by convening committee member Md Rubel, painted graffiti and slogans at Bottola, Shaheed Salam Barkat Hall, in front of the Faculty of Social Sciences, and on the walls near TSC and Transport area.

Rubel said Chhatra Shibir has long been involved in "covert politics" and urged the organisation to conduct its activities openly.

Jahir Mohammad Babor, convener of the JCD's JU unit, alleged that their activists were attacked with sharp weapons at the Chattogram college over writing "gupto" on walls.

At Rajshahi University, JCD activists, through their graffiti, demanded that Jamaat-Shibir give up "covert politics".

JCD's RU unit President Sultan Ahmed Rahi alleged that Jamaat-Shibir activists operate under concealed identities and attempt to destabilise the academic environment. He also accused them of being involved in campus violence in the past.

At Chittagong University, JCD leaders and activists painted graffiti on the campus roads.

The graffiti, bearing the slogan "Gupto theke panah chai", appeared on important roads on campus, including Zero Point and Suhrawardy Hall intersections.

JCD's CU unit General Secretary Abdullah Al Noman said, "We staged this protest against the incident at city college. We urge the administration to remain vigilant. If anyone tries to exploit general students' emotions to create unrest, JCD will resist it."

JCD activists also wrote slogans on walls inside the Jagannath University campus.

They also demanded exemplary punishment of those involved in the attack at Chattogram City College.

Shahriar Hossain, JCD's JnU unit joint convener, said Chhatra Dal respects all ideologies but a group is operating covertly.

Meanwhile, Ducs VP Abu Shadik Kayem yesterday submitted

memoranda to Hasan Mohammad Shawkat Ali, Chattogram Metropolitan Police commissioner, and Zia Uddin, Chattogram divisional commissioner, demanding immediate arrest of those involved in Tuesday's attacks.

The CMP commissioner told journalists that no case has yet been filed over the incident but assured that legal action would be taken against those involved.

Maimunul Islam Mamun, president of Chattogram south unit Chhatra Shibir, told The Daily Star that JCD activists on Tuesday attacked Ashrafal Islam, the president of Pahartali ward-12 Shibir and a student of a private university in Khulshi, with sharp weapons.

He said Ashrafal's leg was almost severed from the ankle.

Chhatra Shibir claimed that Chhatra Dal carried out an armed and planned attack on its activists.

TUESDAY'S CLASH
As per footage and photos from the scene, activists from various areas, including Madarbari, New Market-Tamakumundi Lane, Nandankanan, Terribazar, and Sadarghat, took part in the clash at the city college.

Leaders and activists from different wards, educational institutions, and markets also joined.

Video clips and images show Mirza Faruk, general secretary of Omargani MES College JCD in Khulshi, carrying a sharp weapon. His party confirmed his identity to this paper.

Mohammad Sadek Hossain, publicity affairs secretary of the Tamakumundi Lane Traders' Association of New Market, was seen with cricket stumps. Sources in Chhatra Shibir confirmed that he is involved in Jamaat politics.

Saiful Alam, convener of the port city unit JCD, told reporters, "None of our leaders or activists had sharp weapons. When Shibir activists brought the weapons, general students chased them, forcing them to flee and leave the weapons behind on the road. Our people then removed them from the road when journalists took photos."

[Our staff correspondent in Chattogram and our correspondents in DU, JU, RU, CU, and JnU contributed to this report.]

Soybean oil imports plunge

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imports, according to data from the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission.

Recently, market shortages have pushed cooking oil prices up in some areas, with availability shrinking.

Mostafa Kamal, chairman of Meghna Group of Industries, one of the country's leading importers of edible oil, blamed unresolved pricing challenges for the decline.

He said the issue was discussed in government meetings where prices were set in October and November last year, but implementation was delayed and no effective resolution has yet been reached.

"The industry is operating under a loss, and no company is willing to incur sustained losses," he claimed, warning of future supply concerns.

World Bank Commodities Price Data showed that soybean oil was sold in the international market at \$1,154 per tonne in January this year. The price increased to \$1,282 in February and further to

\$1,482 in March.

A senior official of a major importer, requesting anonymity, claimed that the sector is under severe strain, with companies unable to maintain normal stock levels due to continuous losses of up to Tk 20 per litre.

He claimed that a single shipment can result in losses of Tk 15-20 crore. Companies are maintaining limited supply only to keep operations running, support dealers, and meet bank obligations, though dealers themselves face high monthly expenses with little profit, the official added.

Commerce Minister Khandakar Abdul Muktedir addressed the issue at a press conference after a meeting of the 11th taskforce review committee on price and supply of basic commodities on Tuesday.

"Certain products, because of their sheer volume, cannot be handled by all traders. Each import requires a large amount of capital, and that level of equity is only available to large-scale businesses.

Hormuz crisis further deepens

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Hours after Trump's unilateral announcement, as Tehran decided not to join the second round of talks in Islamabad, Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency said the Revolutionary Guards had seized two vessels for maritime violations and escorted them to Iranian shores. It is the first time Iran has seized ships since the war began at the end of February.

The Revolutionary Guards also warned that any disruption to order and safety in the strait would be considered a "red line", Tasnim said.

In a show of defiance, Iran also showcased some of its ballistic weapons at a parade in Tehran on Tuesday evening, with images on state TV showing large crowds waving Iranian flags and a banner in the background with a fist choking off the strait.

Captions read: "Indefinitely under Iran's Control" and "Trump could not do a damn thing", referring to the war.

Pakistan, which has acted as a mediator, was still trying to bring the sides together for negotiations after both failed to show up for last ditch talks on Tuesday before the two-week-old ceasefire had been prepared to expire.

"We were all prepared for the talks, the stage was set," a Pakistani official briefed on the preparations told Reuters. "If you ask me honestly, it was a setback we were not expecting, because the Iranians never refused, they were up to come and join, and they still are."

Despite the latest series of attacks on maritime traffic in the Gulf, a second round of US-Iran talks could take place within the next three days, the New York Post reported, citing Trump and unnamed Pakistani sources.

who had told the newspaper that a second round could happen within two to three days.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian yesterday accused the US of breaching commitments by continuing its blockade of Iranian ports.

"[The] world sees your endless hypocritical rhetoric and contradiction between claims and actions," he said, one day after Trump's ceasefire extension.

Throughout the war, Iran has effectively shut the strait to ships other than its own by attacking vessels that attempt to transit without its permission. Around a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas normally passes through the waterway.

The Revolutionary Guards accused the seized ships, the Panama-flagged MSC Francesca and Liberia-flagged Epaninondas, of operating without required permits and tampering with their navigation systems.

The Greek-operated Epaninondas reported being fired upon about 20 nautical miles off Oman. It said it had sustained damage to its bridge after being hit by gunfire and that no one was hurt in the incident.

Greece and the company have not confirmed the seizure of the vessel. MSC, the world's biggest container shipping group, did not respond to a Reuters request for immediate comment.

A third, Liberia-flagged container ship was fired upon in the same area but was not damaged and had resumed sailing, according to maritime security sources.

With his announcement on Tuesday, Trump again pulled back at the last moment from warnings to bomb Iran's power plants and bridges, a threat condemned by the United Nations and others as potentially constituting war crimes. Iran had said it would



Brent Christensen