

Inside the beautiful mind of Misir Ali

Chanchal Chowdhury shares his DEBI experience

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

After the massive success of "Aynabaji" and his groundbreaking performance, it was interesting to see what Chanchal Chowdhury did next. The seasoned actor, arguably at the peak of his career, chose another iconic character to follow up Sharafat Karim Ayna – that of Humayun Ahmed's immortal Misir Ali. Anam Biswas is bringing one of the best stories of the Misir Ali series, "Debi" to the silver screen, produced by Jaya Ahsan's C Te Cinema. Jaya also plays a leading role in the film, along with Iresh Zaker, Sabnam Faria and Animesh Aich. In a recent conversation with The Daily Star, Chanchal shared his motivation behind choosing the role and the kind of work that went into bringing the character to life.

Excerpts:

"After 'Aynabaji', I took a break, because nothing really drew me, from the lots of film offers that came my way. I thought hard about what I wanted to do next."

"I took three months to decide whether to act in 'Debi'. There are two reasons behind acting in the film. Firstly, after the success of 'Aynabaji', I knew my next work had to be spectacular. Humayun Ahmed has taken contemporary Bangla literature to new heights, and Misir Ali and Himu are two of his most famous characters. It eventually made sense to sign the project. Secondly, the audience always has a high expectation from artistes like us. It was also that sense of responsibility that made me sign up for it."

"There were two big challenges for the movie. Firstly, it is a film being made with government funding, so the budget is tight. Everyone has to make sacrifices. Second, the audience's expectations from me now are skyrocketing after 'Aynabaji'. If I fail this, it will seriously affect my career. This is a big challenge."

"Anyone who has read Misir Ali stories has a mental image of him. To make a character matching that image was also a challenge. In 'Aynabaji' they have seen me

in a number of avatars. I also have to shake off those images from the viewer's mind, and that's tricky.

"Now, about the get-up of Misir Ali; I have done over 1500 TV plays, and have played some 1,000 different characters. Of them, at least a hundred are clear in my memory. I have been in five films. In 'Aynabaji' alone I played six different roles. I had to make Misir Ali different from all of those. I had to think hard and deep about this."

"I tried on 10-15 different looks on the first day, but none of them worked. My director liked some of them, but I didn't. And if I don't believe in the look, I can't get into the character. The first day was a waste. The next day, I tried on some more. Put on fake moustaches and beards, but nothing worked."

"I had to try on 30 different pair of spectacles before I could choose one. We took photos with those glasses, saw them on the big screen before selecting one. My director showed me many different looks from famous films, but it did not click for me because in my head Misir Ali is a Bangladeshi character written in the Bangladeshi context, and has to look that way. Eventually I decided to not use any prosthetic hair. Everything would have to be real."

"We went to a specialist Thai hairstylist to bleach my hair. I grew my beard out for about a week and when I put on the glasses, I was convinced that the look was perfect."

"Designing the house of Misir Ali was another mammoth task. Misir Ali is an extraordinary human being. He has a world of his own that is not like the rest of us. We got 5,000 books and about a hundred potted plants to put the room together. And then, there were 13 days just immersed in filming. Jaya is perfect for the character of Ranu. She is one of the best actresses we have right now. I'm also really happy with the director and cinematographer's work. All in all, it was a new experience. I am waiting as excitedly for the film as the audience."



Stage reading of "Marx in Soho" today

A CORRESPONDENT

Marking the 199th birth anniversary of iconic 19th-century socialist philosopher Karl Marx, a stage reading of play "Marx in Soho" will be held today at the Rehearsal Room 1 of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy today.

Eminent thespian Mamunur Rashid will do the stage reading of the play written by American historian Howard Zinn, which is a fictional affair of Karl Marx's return to today's world. In the play, Marx interprets and explains the modern world in his own way, and speaks of the hardships and dreams of his life. Javed Hussain has translated the play.

Mamunur Rashid and Bangla Theatre plan to bring the play to the stage soon.

Karl Marx was a Prussian (German)-born philosopher, economist, sociologist, journalist, and revolutionary socialist, described as one of the most influential figures in human history. As an adult, Marx became stateless and spent much of his life in London, England, where he

continued to develop his thought in collaboration with German thinker Friedrich Engels and published various works, the most well-known being the 1848 pamphlet "The Communist Manifesto". His theories about society, economics and politics – collectively understood as Marxism – have since influenced subsequent intellectual, economic, and political history.

Khudey Gaanraaj Season-6 grand finale today

A CORRESPONDENT

Grand finale of the reality show "Khudey Gaanraaj 2016" will take place at 6:30pm today at Hall of Fame of Bangabandhu International Convention Centre, Dhaka. Seven contestants are vying for the crown. Noted singer Ferdous Ara and vocalist of the band Dhrubotara SI Tutul are judges of the competition.

Hosted by Meem Chowdhury, the programme has been planned and directed by Ijaj Khan Swapan.



A CORRESPONDENT

Acclaimed TV director and scriptwriter Badrul Anam Saud has just helmed his first film titled "Gohin Baluchor" which will go to the censor board soon. Having stepped away from the small screen during the course of filming the movie, the director is back with a six-episode TV play titled "Idur Biraaler Golpo." Scripted by Saud himself, the main cast includes Suborna Mustafa in the role of Rabu and

Fazlur Rahman Babu as Anis. Other actors appearing in various characters in the play are Shazu Khadem, Runa Khan, Irfan Sazzad and Naziba Basher.

"I loved the concept of the play. This is my first time appearance in a play aired by Deepto TV, and my character is quite the disciplinarian who struggles to have everyone around her fall in line. Her efforts are in vain, and this creates funny situations. I know that viewers will enjoy watching our antics on screen," said

Suborna Mustafa regarding her role.

Fazlur Rahman Babu described his experiences on set: "When you have a talented cast to work with, everything goes smoothly and the work becomes quite enjoyable. There is no need to spare words for Suborna's talent as her reputation is testament to her success, and I always look forward to working with her."

The mini-series is slated to air on Deepto TV next month from Saturday to Thursday on 6:00pm and 9:20pm.

Millions invested to thwart terror attacks at Cannes

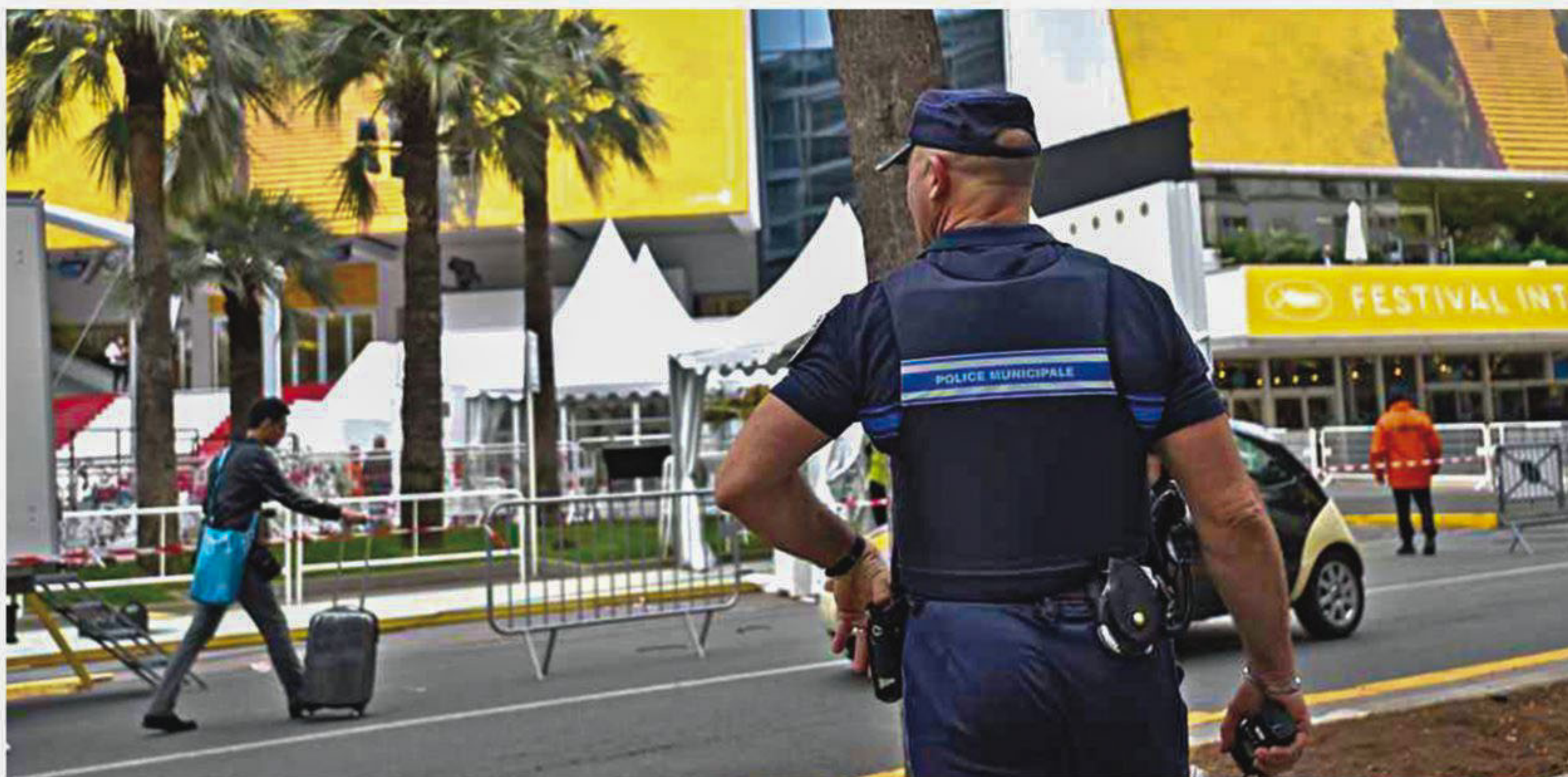
Set to unspool just 10 days after France's fateful presidential election, the Cannes Film Festival is ramping up security measures more than ever before.

The city is spending millions to bolster security as plans are being finalized for the world's biggest festival, starting May 17, which is expecting stars like Nicole Kidman, Marion Cotillard, Isabelle Huppert, Kristen Stewart, Joaquin Phoenix, Jake Gyllenhaal, and director Sofia Coppola.

But the question, for many fest-goers, is how safe is Cannes going to be this year?

Between high-profile thieves, last year's terror attack in Nice, rising far-right politics, and ongoing tensions with the local French-Arab community, the French Riviera has gone through a rough patch over the past few years. The pressure-cooker atmosphere has led the city of Cannes, which hosts numerous industry events such as Mipcom, MipTV, and the Cannes Lions, to ramp up its security standards to make international visitors feel secure.

The upcoming 70th edition will be the first Cannes Film Festival since the tragic attack in Nice when an Islamist terrorist ran a cargo truck through a crowd watching fireworks on Bastille Day, killing 85 people, just 18 miles away from Cannes.



A policeman on alert in front of the main festival grounds.

Since the attack last July, the region has been more on edge than ever. The French Riviera has become a stronghold of the far right, which has stirred tensions with the French-Arab popu-

lation in the region. Controversial presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, who is running against Emmanuel Macron, gathered 30% of votes in the region, the country's highest score for

her political party.

Cannes mayor David Lisnard, who commissioned an audit from Israeli counter-terrorism expert Nitzan Nuriel following the Paris attacks in

November 2015, has taken strong measures to prevent a similar truck attack. Substantial barriers, most in the form of huge concrete planters, were installed along the sidewalk

which leads to the Palais, the headquarters for most Cannes premieres and festivities.

The city will also spend \$6 million to place automatic retractable bollards at every entry point to the town, said Yves Darros, who heads up Cannes police.

Despite having some of France's tightest security standards, Cannes has become notorious for its high-profile heists. In 2015, as much as \$19 million worth of jewelry and watches were stolen from Cartier boutiques in the city just before the festival. Aiming to prevent such thefts, the number of surveillance cameras was increased from 400 to 550 across the city's tourist and festival venues in the last two years.

Cannes has also recruited a wide network of 500 local volunteers plus 80 "vigilant neighbors" who are in charge of patrolling across the city to watch out for suspicious activity and report it to authorities.

France, which has been under a State of Emergency since the Paris attacks of November 2015, was just listed in the travel alert issued by the US State Department on Monday, which mentioned the continued threat of terrorist attacks throughout Europe.

Source: Variety