

| ENDEAVOUR |

NO LONGER A BURDEN

This is the last of a three-piece series produced by *The Daily Star* in partnership with *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)* and *Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)*

NILIMA JAHAN



PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

In countries like Bangladesh, where people with disabilities often face societal barriers, negative perception and discrimination, 28-year-old Humayun Kabir, who was born with physical malformation in his lower limb, believes quite the opposite. Humayun is a Human Resource (HR) and Compliance Officer at Vintage Denim Ltd., an export-oriented denim bottom woven factory in Sreepur, Gazipur, and he feels that societal attitudes towards the physically challenged are changing day by day, as their skills and aptitudes take them to the centre stage. People's tendency to focus on the disability instead of the individual has reduced to a great extent.

After receiving a one-year sewing training from the National Training and Rehabilitation Centre for persons with disabilities at Tongi, Humayun first got a job at the Finishing and Quality Control section at Vintage Denim Ltd. "Since it was very tough for me to work standing long hours at a stretch and I also had a master's degree, within the very first month, I caught the Managing Director's eye", says Humayun. "Soon, he called me into his office and after going through my academic qualifications, told me to join as an HR and Compliance Officer. I cannot tell you how blessed I felt hearing this!" he expresses with gratitude.

Humayun was quite doubtful about his new duties and responsibilities, and how he could support 2000 workers, in spite of being a person with disability. "I must say, I am the lucky one. My employer, seniors and colleagues, made me feel very welcome. I can still remember our HR manager giving me hands-on training on my responsibilities, and the Assistant HR Manager teaching me how to use different software applications to make my work easy," he says. "Even though I have the option to try for a government job, I have never gone for it." Similarly, his employer and colleagues are also very pleased having a diligent employee like him in their team.

Like Humayun, there are currently more than a 100 workers with disabilities working in Vintage Denim Ltd. The factory hired these workers with support from the professional team of the Inclusive Job Centre (IJC), a unit under the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP). Promotion of Social and Environmental Standards in the Industry (PSES) supported IJC in this initiative. PSES is a joint project of the governments of Bangladesh and Germany, and is being implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

"Besides striving to create harmony among the workers without disabilities and workers with disabilities, we have arranged general meetings and workshops with different staffs of the factory and discussed how to treat the workers with disabilities and communicate with them properly, especially with those who have hearing and speech impairments," says S.M. Ali Has Nain Fatme, Manager of Corporate Affairs at the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD).

In addition, the Vintage team constructed barrier-free

access for persons with disabilities at the factory premises based on universal design, arranged reasonable accommodations in the workplace, revised HR policies, and raised awareness on workers with disabilities among the factory and the management.

Both CRP and CDD are partner organisations of PSES. The most important part of their job is creating harmony between the workers with and without disabilities, notes. Md. Asaduzzaman, Production Director, Vintage Denim Ltd. "Instead of finding negativities, one might surely find a great source of amity and intimacy among the workers", he adds.

During our visit, Md. Al-Amin was seen helping his co-worker Mohidul Islam, a finishing helper, who was experiencing difficulty moving jammed clothes with his artificial lower limb.

On the other floor, while the sewing operator Md. Rozob Hossain, who has hearing and speech

impairment, was using signs to communicate with one of his co-workers, Md Humayun Mia was also trying to reciprocate with gestures.

In the beginning, Humayun Mia also faced difficulty trying to understand what Rozob was trying to communicate. "I started following our HR officer Humayun sir, who trained in sign language, to interact with the workers with hearing and speech impairments at our factory. Within a very short time, I realised that it was not a very tough thing and became able to understand Rozob," he adds. Today, Humayun and Rozob are friends, and support each other in the workplace.

Vintage Denim Ltd. has become a model for our society to work with persons with disabilities. If other organisations can take it as an example and create an inclusive environment, it will greatly alleviate the stigma and discrimination often faced by these workers and create a prouder, better Bangladesh. ■

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Industry insiders identify Eid as the most television-centric festival in the entire country. It is the only time the entire country is on a three-day (or longer) vacation, when audiences spend time on the television along with family to check out what's on offer on the local channels. For a long time there have been complaints from the audience that the TV experience has become insufferable due to the heavy bombardment of advertisements, but in the past couple of years, TV channels have been finding ways to balance that.

working hard together so that people come back to our TV channels," says Amitabh Reza. "We all got our start in television, and we set trends, be it in TV plays or advertisements. The makers on both our teams are extremely talented filmmakers, but they get bogged down by budget and other constraints. So if we can support them as a producer, or from the business end, something great can come out of it."

For Farooki, it is a question of bringing about a 'new' revolution. "This is a 'reunion'; it is not the first time we

are doing this. We at Chabial did something revolutionary for Bangladeshi television in the early 2000s. We had a Chabial Utshab on Channel 1 in 2005 where we showcased our work together in a similar manner. But we cannot have the same revolution twice. This has to be a new revolution. And all of us at Chabial have grown in the past 12 years, so with this reunion we want to reflect the journey that has shaped our storytelling. And filmmakers worldwide are moving to the platform of television or independent cinema. Right after Barry

for channels, we are given a specific cast and budget. But since Farooki bhai and Amitabh bhai are both directors who are the best in their fields in Bangladesh, for them the content comes first. The cast and budget are all allocated according to what the story demands, and it also gets us out of our comfort zone and pushes the envelope." How is the process of working with these two directors different, I ask? "There is one big similarity: they both trust the directors. They want us to tell our stories the way we want, rather than what they envision

A NEW STIR UP IN EID ENTERTAINMENT

FAHMIM FERDOUS

This year's Eid, however, promises to be a little more exciting for viewers, with two seminal figures of contemporary Bangla TV drama at the helm of two 'collective approach' projects. Amitabh Reza Chowdhury is banking on the groundbreaking success of his directorial big screen debut "Aynabaji" with a seven-episode spinoff TV miniseries called the "Aynabaji Original Series", while Mostofa Sarwar Farooki is leading a group of his creative accomplices of Chabial (a collective of filmmakers) for a series of plays called the "Chabial Eid Reunion". Both projects have strong creators in their lineups, and although not unprecedented, the idea of a concerted effort to bring quality content to TV brings high hopes for the audience.

The "Aynabaji Original Series", which sees Amitabh Reza supervising and also directing one episode, will have seven stand alone episodes directed by seven different directors of repute (Goutam Koiri, Sumon Anwar, and Tanim Rahman Angshu to name a few), which will air simultaneously on three channels on seven consecutive days of Eid. The core premise of the film "Aynabaji" prevails on the series – that a person in his lifetime may live many different peoples' lives.

Chabial's approach is to bring the original members of the trendsetting collective of Bangladeshi television of the mid-2000s, all of whom are established TV directors today, to tell stories that reflect their creative journey. Farooki is overseeing the project, with the likes of Redoan Rony, Ashfaque Nipun, Mostafa Kamal Raz and Adnan Al Rajeev in the lineup.

"We kind of derailed our television industry in the past few years; there are not enough good TV plays, the few there are get lost in the clutter, and the advertisements make it hard for the audience to watch the plays. So, we thought we should all come together to do something about it. And this has been a collaborative effort, from the directors to the actors to the sponsors, everyone is



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Jenkins won the Oscar for 'Moonlight', he started working on a miniseries. Most big movie directors in the West are doing it. And television is a great platform to tell the stories we want to tell. Making a film and releasing it takes two to three years for a filmmaker, but we need a space to tell our stories in the meanwhile," he says.

With two of Bangladeshi television's stalwarts coming back to the field at the same time, is there a sense of competition? Farooki laughs, "Art is not competitive. Every piece of work is unique in its own way. But yes, it is exciting for the audience because they will get a volume of really good work."

Ashfaque Nipun is the only director who is making dramas for both the projects, and is in a position to offer a unique perspective. "The best part of working in these projects is that we get creative liberty. When we make Eid plays

for it. And that is an enormous freedom. In terms of difference, Amitabh bhai is more orthodox and organised in his approach, while Farooki bhai is much more spontaneous. With him the process is more fluid and changing, whereas with Amitabh bhai it is very methodical. And that also reflects who they are as individuals and as filmmakers."

Television is probably the biggest entertainment industry in the country, and Eid is its peak season. To have two pioneers of the industry getting involved in it again and driving a creative project with their next generation is a silver lining and a half. With the other parties of the industry – advertisers, marketing, promotion units and TV channels – backing the initiatives, it is safe to say there is going to be a stir up on the 'idiot box' this festive season.

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ABOUT TOWN

A LEVEL COUNSELLING SESSION, 2017
Organiser: Nerd Community Horizon, Road 6, Dhanmondi

MAKING EID DAY FOR 'THEM' - 17
Organiser: Runner Bangladesh June 23-24, 10 am - 12 pm, Runner Bangladesh, Lalmatia

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF YOGA 2017
Organiser: India in Bangladesh (High Commission of India, Dhaka) June 21, 5.30 - 8 pm, Bangabandhu National Stadium