



During a planning session for Chobi Mela.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF CHOBIMELA

## Raisal Islam Asad on receiving the Ekushey Padak

SHAH ALAM SHAZI

Freedom fighter and six-time National Film Award winner Raisal Islam Asad is one of the recipients of the Ekushey Padak this year. He has entertained audiences for decades with his brilliant performances on the stage and television. He has also played notable roles in films. Currently, the actor is busy shooting for Shyam Benegal's film on Bangabandhu, a joint venture from Bangladesh and India. In a candid chat with *The Daily Star*, he talks about his hopes, experiences and more.

**How do you feel about receiving the Ekushey Padak this year?**

As a freedom fighter, receiving the Ekushey Padak is truly prestigious for me. Our fight for liberation was spearheaded by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. I feel blessed to be receiving this award at a time when his daughter, Sheikh Hasina, is the Prime Minister of our country.

**Receiving such an award brings about a sense of responsibility for any artiste. What are your views in this regard?**

I have always tried my best to fulfill my responsibilities towards not only acting, but also other forms of art. It is not just my achievements that motivate me to be devoted to my work. I love and respect my job with all my heart, and I hope that I continue to do so, for as long as I can.

**You are currently working with renowned director Shyam Benegal for his upcoming film on Bangabandhu. Tell us a bit about your experience of working in this project.**

I am playing the character of Maulana Bhashani in this film. We have already finished our first schedule in Mumbai. So far, it has been a wonderful experience. This is the only project that I have taken up, since the start of the pandemic.

**How else have you been spending your time, since the coronavirus outbreak?**

I have been listening to music, reading my favourite books, and watching shows and movies. Other than that, I have been talking to my friends and loved ones over the phone regularly.

**You have been involved with theatre since 1972. Do you miss being on the stage?**

I certainly do. Being one of the founding members of Dhaka Theatre, I have worked in musicals, dramas, and other kinds of plays. I was also an active member of different drama clubs and circles. At the time, we had the Guide House Auditorium for plays. There were very few female actors. Now, I see Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy providing a platform for theatre troupes. I came across many new and promising actors, both male and female. I wish them all the best for their future.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDIMORSHED

## What to expect from this year's Chobi Mela

PRIYANKA CHOWDHURY

*This year's iteration of the much-anticipated Chobi Mela, mounts a self-reflective display of innovation, at the time of a global pandemic. The socio-political discourses of our neighbours are connected to our own existence -- as defined by this year's theme.*



A temporary studio was set up for 'Baba Betar', to be hosted by Arfun Ahmed.



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Titled 'Chobi Mela Shunno', the festival can be interpreted as an amorphous infinite space, or a home that runs parallel with all others.

This special edition will offer a range of narratives from different parts of home and neighboring states, bringing in 'performative democracy' to the present time -- to understand its value and experience its intensity

in an art space. With three in-house and three guest curators, this is also the very first time that Chobi Mela is curating all their projects.

In its limited arrangement, curators and artists took the opportunity to explore the 'non-spaces' for exhibitions, working in and around the premises of DrikPath Bhubon. The opening rally that usually goes around the city will limit its circumference within the building.

Artist and curator Najmun Nahar Keya, with five multigenerational artists from varied art practices, will explore the diversity of material and transformation of the DrikPath building, designed by one of the most critically acclaimed contemporary architects of South Asia, Bashirul Haq. The artists will engage in historical memories, light, space, and the visionary language of modern architecture.

Cheragi Art Show, a celebrated street exhibition from Cheragi Pahar, Chattogram, will re-imagine its elevated space within the stairways

of the DrikPath building. Fourteen homegrown practitioners from varied disciplines under Chobi Mela Fellow section curated by artist Zihan Karim, will present their works in re-reading Jibonananda Das's poem "Bodh", in an attempt to explore the multitude of its meaning.

Some fascinating works addressing language and voices will be presented in this year's Chobi Mela.

Samari Chakma, a lawyer and advocate for Bangladesh's indigenous Chakma community who was forced into exile in Australia and Naem Mohaiemen, who makes films, installations, and essays about socialist utopia, unstable borders, will collaborate.

Curator Anushka Rajendran will present "Anatomies of Tongues", a congregation of testimonies that become critical assertions of inherently plural flows and voices encompassed by the category that is citizenship and have been lost to collective amnesia imposed by parochial attitudes and majoritarian decrees.

Mostly captured on mobile phone, Chobi Mela will exhibit the works of Kolkata-based photographer Ronny Sen's "Portrait of a Protest", images of anti-government street demonstrations in India from 2006 to 2020 that have become a vital document of history.

The programme will also incorporate sound and web-radio show 'Baba Betar', featuring open and intimate conversations with contemporary thinkers and artistes. Exclusive interviews are lined up in the Chobi Mela podcast series. Celebrated and rare works of Bashirul Haq and Sayeeda Khanum will be on display in the 'Tribute' section.

With informal *addas* addressing issues such as workplace safety for female journalists and freelance photographers, concerts, recreation of Bihari Camp's Pappu studio, 'Chobi Mela Shunno' will be a culmination of physical and digital public festival to kick start 2021 amid the pandemic.

## Solo exhibition 'Voice of Colors' organised virtually

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

"Voice of Colors", a virtual exhibition by artist Nur Munjerin Rimjhim, is currently available to viewers on EMK Center's website.

Rimjhim, the champion of Berger Young Painters' Art Competition 2019, intends to capture architectural and scenic beauty through her work. The 42 featured artworks from "Voice of Colors" revolve around gender norms and societal roles, among other thought-provoking themes. The exhibition, which started on February 6, will be available online till December 31, 2021.

Rimjhim is a student of Faculty of Fine Art, Dhaka University (DU), fondly known as Charukola. The inauguration ceremony was attended by her professors from the Department of Drawing and Painting, Faculty of Fine Art, DU. "Rimjhim uses a remarkable tone while working with pencil sketches and that has paved the way towards her academic success," said Abdus Sattar Toufiq, Assistant Professor, Department of Drawing and Painting, Faculty of Fine Art, DU.

Art is a way of preserving memories for Rimjhim. "I started working on a painting, titled 'Renaissance', when my brother was diagnosed with cancer, and went to India for his treatment," she shared. The acrylic painting summarises the valiant journey of her brother, who is seen to be sitting on a throne. The crabs at his feet denote the astrological sign of cancer. "Since his treatment was completed in India, I used their national flower, Lotus, as a way of acknowledging the country," she added. Another painting, called 'Internal Existence', is also dedicated to her brother and highlights his journey of defeating the disease.

Her painting, "Blockage", is a part of a series that intends to address the everyday lives and struggles of women. "I have used my experiences as a Bangladeshi woman in



Artworks featured in the exhibition.

this painting. The male gaze signifies the invisible vigilante faced by women in this country," she said. Her work also shows how people often use religion as a tool to discriminate against women.

During Inktober 2019, she worked on various sketches revolving around the architecture of Charukola. The 31 pictures of this series are done on a mount board with black and white gel pens.

Rimjhim's pen sketches cover Dhaka University extensively, from the entrance gate to the Raju Memorial Monument. Metro rail authorities cut down trees near the adjacent area to the TSC boundary from the Raju Memorial Monument to Doyel Square to widen the road for construction of a station. Several students of Dhaka University protested this move. "Development is necessary, but it should never compromise the cultural heritage of a country. Although the monument will never be the same again, it will remain eternal through my art," Rimjhim said.

Be it the bylanes of Old Dhaka or moments from her India tour, the artist tries to hold on to things that are close to her heart. "My art has helped me share my stories and express my opinions. It is a part of who I am," she added. She also appreciated the efforts of EMK Center in encouraging young artists.

"Voice of Colors" is EMK Center's fourth virtual exhibition. The organisation aims to explore the scope of augmented reality and spread the technology to educational institutions, for students to participate in virtual science and art fairs. "Creativity is a blend of art and science, and it must be encouraged at all levels," said Asif Uddin Ahmed, Acting Director, EMK Center.

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