

GRAPE VINE



PHOTO: COLLECTED

APURBA-NUSRAAT FARIA TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME IN A CINEMA

For the first time, actors Apurba and Nusraat Faria will work together in a cinema. The audiences are eagerly awaiting the release of the web film, *Jodi Kintu Tobu*, which will be released on the first of April. It will be released on the platform, ZEE5. This Shihab Shaheen-directed film will also feature the likes of Tariq Anam Khan, Imtu Ratish, and Naziba Basher, among others. Shihab Shaheen said, "The film is based around romance and comedy. The plot mainly revolves around how both the bride and groom get indecisive and get cold feet a few days before the wedding, and the funny incidents that can happen around that time."

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub



PHOTO: COLLECTED

NIRAB-MITHILA'S AMANUSH

Actor Nirab Hossain will be seen alongside Rafiath Rashid Mithila in the Anonno Mamun directed film, *Amanush*. It will also feature the likes of Rashed Mamun Apu and Naushaba, among others. Nirab said, "I loved the plot for the film, this will be the first time I do a role like this. I am acting opposite Mithila in this and I hope that we can make something amazing." Tabib Mahmud sang the title track for the film.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub



PHOTO: COLLECTED

ARJU IS HIMU

After making a name for himself with films like *Tumi Acho Hridoye*, Kayes Arju will be seen in the film titled, *Himur Boshonto*, to be directed by Mirza Sakhawat Hossain. Kayes Arju said, "This will be the first time I play a role of this magnitude and it will also mark the first time I work with this director. I am very hopeful about it, and I hope the audience will enjoy what we make. Arju Kayes has also appeared in the films, *Bajao Biyer Bajna*, *Mori Tor Jonno Paagol* and *Shei Tumi*, among others."

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub

COVER STORY

A Collaborative Effort

Writer, playwright, director, and actor Leesa Gazi is the co-founder of the company 'Komola Collective' which aims to tell stories from women's perspectives that are often untold. Businessman and investor Abdullah Hil Rakib is the Managing Director of TEAM Group. Together, they join Rafi Hossain for a discussion where they talk about how their professions can support each other to grow and how, as a whole, this collaborative effort can help both the entertainment industry and the domestic economy prosper.

Rafi Hossain: Entertainment is a big part of any country or culture, so I think that investors and businessmen should invest more in the entertainment industry to help it grow. How should we go about that?

Abdullah Hil Rakib: We are trying to take Bangladesh from a low-income country to a middle-income country in many ways. Our goal is to enhance the welfare of our community which translates to increasing economic growth. Bangladesh is investing in many fields such as manufacturing, retail, pharmaceuticals, banking, food, and RMG, and the natural step to take is entertainment. Our mindset is influenced by our culture that makes it so that domestic entertainment does not garner enough attention and, as a result, the industry faces the same lack of attention. However, with the growth of the economy, increase in income per capita and improvement of lifestyles of the people, the attention towards entertainment will only rise. Regardless, the industry is still expanding. However, for investors to come into this industry, industry security, governance and ethics need to be aligned; otherwise, we will be unable to predict the future prospects of this industry. There are always risks attached to investing, so if we coordinate with the government to introduce policies to set parameters, it makes it possible to frame out future goals, and thus, make us want to invest.

Rafi Hossain: Why do you think there lies a gap between the artists and the financiers when creating and exhibiting projects?

Leesa Gazi: As someone living in London, I see that whenever we plan on working on something, the way the Indian community extends their help, be it through supporting, sponsoring, or financing, the Bangladeshi community does not even come close. When I began working on *Rising Silence*, I got many pats on the back, but never much actual help from our community. Even our executive producer is Abbas Nokhasteh, an Iranian. Our film was about the sexual violence against Bangladeshi women from Pakistani perpetrators during our War of Liberation. Still, we were unable to get much support for such an important topic that must be discussed on every platform. I have recently started working on a feature film and am yet to find a co-producer. Despite all of this, films are still being made, web series are on the rise and new directors are emerging. Pointing out what Rakib said, it is generally considered that entertainment comes after all those sectors, but COVID-19 has proven otherwise; in the grave time of a global pandemic, people turned towards art. People find solace in art as it is entwined with our existence and culture, so we should hold it as such. I encourage businessmen and investors to value art and invest in the entertainment industry because it deserves the investments, and also because it will open up the scope for numerous artists, albeit what form, to enhance their crafts and exhibit them.

Rafi Hossain: What do you think will encourage someone to invest in a project?

Abdullah Hil Rakib: This industry is a mine that has not been explored fully, so if we are able to show that our investments will be successful, many investors will come in. Personally, we do a lot of research and development in our business, fashion retailing, for example, that gives us insights into the lives of people and their stories. How we choose the materials or design of our products is quite similar to how a film is produced: keeping the consumers in mind. We have to know our target consumers, the gap analysis, social challenges, commercialisation, and expected profits. If there is at least a breakeven, we will want to invest. If we consider India, they have a huge market and many flourishing as well as prominent businesses. Their films acquire revenue both domestically and globally. There are also films that are financed by the government and they should be such that deal with social challenges like drug intake, women empowerment, equality, and racism, among others to facilitate awareness and fill the gaps. There are films that are not commercial successes but have important messages that need to be given out. Those films will generally not be financed by investors because there is not much profit to make. However, there are many investors who have social responsibilities and derive satisfaction from the welfare of the community. The same goes for investors in the entertainment industry. For it to be feasible, there needs to be transparent communication between them and the other parties involved.

Leesa Gazi: Firstly, there is a lack of communication between artists and financiers. Secondly, the consumers do not always know who these financiers are and how they are connected to the art form, so why would they even want to invest without any recognition? We need to bridge the gap between the communication of all the involved parties. If I am to make a film or a teledrama or a web series and there is an investor who wants to help me, the only way for us to collaborate is through proper communication. This can be done in a number of ways, for example by communicating our thoughts, plans, and how we envision our work.

Rafi Hossain: Rakib, if you ever want to invest in the entertainment industry, what kind of projects do



you think will attract you the most?

Abdullah Hil Rakib: There are two ways in which we might grow interested in a project: CSR (Corporate social responsibility) perspective and business perspective. Textile and RMG are two industries that are very profitable in Bangladesh, so investors are quite interested in investing in those industries. However, as time passes, they will want to diversify their investments. One such scope of diversification is entertainment. Some will make such investments due to one, a social responsibility they have undertaken, or two, commercial prospects. It depends on many more factors, like breakeven point, opportunities available, short term and long-term benefits, satisfaction, and sustainability. However, for all that to take place, there needs to be proper communication. There may be numerous artists waiting to

whomever we choose to work with will also have to have similar ideals. We look beyond financial abilities.

Rafi Hossain: Rakib, do you or people from your business fraternity ever see artists, be it filmmakers, musicians, writers, and such, and want to promote them for a certain period of time to help with their projects?

Abdullah Hil Rakib: BGMEA's main aim is to support businesses and the government in policy-making regarding such businesses. From that perspective, BGMEA cannot help in this regard unless it is related to our business. I am going to answer this question as an individual because my thoughts may not align with those of other members of BGMEA. We all want to establish branding. Aside from this, we also want to do something good for society. We have sponsored many initiatives about certain social challenges to attract customers so that they know that we recognise those issues and are standing with them. This both improves brand image and value, while also letting the customers know that we share the same sentiments. In the same light, films portray the stories of the people, so audiences connect to them. If that can go hand in hand with the investors' motives, it is absolutely possible for me to invest in films. Socially responsible investors will finance films dealing with social challenges and profiteering investors will invest in commercial films. Society's needs and industries' needs have to be aligned, possibly through government intervention through encouragement like tax benefits or subsidies.

Rafi Hossain: Can you elaborate on the new project of 'Komola Collective' based on Tahmima Anam's play?

Leesa Gazi: The new project is a play, titled *Shahrazad*, based on the eponymous character from the Arabian tales *One Thousand and One Nights*. Shahrazad is a woman who tells a story to a king every night but does not finish them by sunrise as she is to be killed when she finishes her stories. This play is based on this theme and is about the Shahrazads of now. We know that domestic violence peaked during COVID-19. In the UK, every day, two women are killed due to domestic violence and this only increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the first play written by Tahmima Anam and we are very excited to take it to the stage. However, theatres are not fully accessible now; they are beginning to open slowly from May.

Rafi Hossain: Do you have a final message to the readers?

Abdullah Hil Rakib: The struggle we face for the betterment of the economy and society is facing challenges because our business is connected to the global market. We are all going through a difficult time. Both social and psychological challenges are increasing and people are feeling at a loss of what to do, leading to frustration. However, every challenge is an opportunity, so we must take these opportunities to grow and tell our story, be it through films or other forms. I am sure talented artists will be able to get many opportunities to make brilliant projects, and I hope that we also initiate small opportunities in the form of investments in the entertainment industry because we all want to be socially responsible.

Leesa Gazi: Thank you for giving me this opportunity to have this dynamic discussion today. If we are able to combine art with investment, it would lead to many amazing works to display. When art and art that is profitable combine, something great can emerge. I hope that investors will deem the entertainment industry a profitable and sustainable industry and invest in the works of many artists. We can see that many artists of the younger generations are emerging with talent and brilliant ideas, and we have the responsibility to support them.

Amina Hossain

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