

GRAPE VINE



MIM NOW A DAYS

Bidya Sinha Mim had to postpone her shoot due to COVID-19 restrictions. She was supposed to be shooting the film *Ittefaq*, but with rising COVID-19 rates, the shooting had been put to halt. Mim said, "Due to the pandemic a lot of things had to be stopped. I hope that everything will get better soon. I am also in talks to do some new work as well. I'm also working out and keeping myself fit nowadays." This year, two of Mim's films may be released, *Poran* and *Damal*. Aside from this, Mim's official Facebook page recently crossed over fifty lakh followers.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub

APU BISWAS AND JOY CHOWDHURY TOGETHER



Apu Biswas will be starring alongside actor Joy Chowdhury in the film *Prem Pritir Bondhon*. The film will be directed by Solaiman Ali Lebu. Joy Chowdhury said, "This is the first time I have been paired with Apu Biswas in a movie. I am happy to be able to share the screen with her. The movie is a love story which I hope the audience will enjoy." Alongside Apu Biswas and Joy Chowdhury, the film will also feature Misha Sawdagar, and Amaan Reza, alongside other actors.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub
PHOTO: COLLECTED

BUBLY'S CURRENT TIME



Shabnam Bubby will be seen in the film *Leader Ami Bangladesh*. The first poster for it was recently released. In the film, Shakib Khan will be starring opposite Bubby, and it will be directed by Topu Khan. Bubby said, "The film has an interesting storyline. Most actors wait their whole lives for a role like this. I am happy to be able to be a part of this film." Aside from this, she has finished some shooting for the movie, *Chokh*. She has also signed on to another film called *Revenge*.

Ridwan Intisaar Mahbub

COVER STORY

THE BOND OF FRIENDSHIP AND CULTURE

The Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the People's Republic of Bangladesh, ITO Naoki and the multifaceted artist Tahsan, sat down for an interview with Rafi Hossain. The guests talked about the Japan fest 2021 and how over the years the friendship between Bangladesh and Japan keeps on growing.

Rafi Hossain: Today, we have two guests with us, Honourable Ambassador of Japan, ITO Naoki sir and our beloved singer, songwriter, and actor Tahsan Khan.

Your Excellency, could you tell us more about how Japan Fest first started?

ITO Naoki: Japan Fest first started about ten years ago to showcase Japanese culture. Previously, we would have an in-person event for people to come to the venue and enjoy a hands-on experience of Japanese culture, such as ikebana, bonsai, tea ceremony, or even trying on a kimono. I believe it's a great way to get to know a foreign culture. During in-person events, we would host this at the Shilpakala Academy. A few years ago, we even had around a thousand people taking part in it in one day, and it was a very successful event. Moreover, Bangladeshi and Japanese people also have certain similarities and a natural sense of affinity between themselves. For instance, Japan and Bangladesh love greenery, and both are rice-cultivating nations. Both countries also have strong family values. Additionally, we have industrial, hard-working people. Also, both countries are scarce in natural resources and are prone to natural disasters. So, we have a mutual basis of understanding between ourselves in terms of the cultural front. It is the first time we have held this event virtually, in which Tahsan



of Japan Fest, Mr Ambassador?

ITO Naoki: Bangladesh is an important country for Japan, and we supported Bangladesh's independence. Japan has lent assistance to the development of Bangladesh as well. Nowadays, people are also engaging in economic relations between our countries. So, I believe it is time to uplift this amicable relationship. So, cultural exchange and understanding are really important. This event, therefore, tried to bring Japanese culture to a larger audience, without risking the health of people during a pandemic. We are also grateful for the involvement of Tahsan Khan, who knows a lot about our culture and is loved by Japanese people as well for promoting economic relations by supporting Uniqlo and even Pilot. We also asked him to make a new song this time, which has been titled *Bondhutto Potaka*, or friendship flag. Through the song, he tried to deliver two messages: one about the importance of friendship between Japan and Bangladesh, and the other is about preventative measures during this pandemic. You can also see this in his music video. Similar to *Shima Uta*, his song is beautiful



kindly participated. Thank you very much, Tahsan.

Rafi Hossain: Tahsan, can you tell us how you got associated with the project?

Tahsan Khan: My relationship with Japan first began around 2015 when I became the brand ambassador of a Japanese brand, Uniqlo. During my tenure, I had the opportunity to travel there for the first time. After that, I got involved with JETRO - Japanese External Trade Relations Organisation, and the Japanese Embassy gracefully invited me to Japan to take part in a fellowship. So, I've travelled to Japan quite a few times now, and I've had the opportunity to meet many amazing Japanese people who are illustrious in their fields. At the same time, I got to interact with regular people in Japan as well. So, I've developed a deep sense of respect for them and their culture, and when I got asked to take part in their festival, I gladly agreed to do so. Like the Honourable Ambassador mentioned, the Japan Fest has been going on for ten years now, and this is the first time it has been organised virtually because of the pandemic situation. I am happy that I got to be a part of it and bring my experiences from Japan into it by creating new music for the show. It was quite eye-opening as this was the first time I had to sing in Japanese. The last time I visited Japan, I got to meet Kazufumi Miyazawa. He is an amazing entertainer, and he was part of the band, Boom. We were discussing our favourite and most celebrated songs, and he mentioned that it was *Shima Uta*. When he described the meaning of the song to me, I was very touched. I felt that the message was universal and wished that I could translate it to Bangla, which he gladly encouraged me to do. I did translate a bit of it to Bangla, and the highlight of Japan Fest for me was getting to sing it with him. But I also have to thank his Excellency for singing a *Rabindra sangeet*, *Anondoloke*, with me, with only five minutes of practice. It was an amazing experience for me.

Rafi Hossain: Tell us more about the song, *Shima Uta*, Tahsan.

Tahsan Khan: *Shima Uta* is a song about war and peace. When a country is at war, it loses everything; both the brave men and women who risk their lives and those that they leave behind have to make a big sacrifice. We lose colour and the essence of life when we're at war. The message of the song is that we cannot call ourselves civilised beings if we continue carrying out atrocities in the name of war. The universal message is that we need to make the world leaders and common people realise that we should strive for a peaceful world, and set aside our differences, be it geographic, religious, or economic.

Rafi Hossain: Can you tell us more about the vision

as well. I want to share a story about Japan here as well. I was at the Pilot pen factory, and I asked an employee why they strive so hard to make the best products, and his answer touched me to the core. He said that during the war, they were cut off from the entire world and international trade. Now that they get to produce products for their people and neighbouring countries, they give their best to it as you would never sell something below par to your family. This is true for everyone in Japan, and that's why they have succeeded in making cars, watches, and so on. I think we can achieve this in Bangladesh, as well, if we view each other as a family.

Rafi Hossain: Mr Ambassador, do you have any plans to make Japan Fest a better success?

ITO Naoki: This time, the Japan Fest was supported by Rahat Hayat, better known as DJ Rahat. His company, Blues Communication, did a fantastic job, and I am very thankful to him for that. Deepto TV also helped us tremendously by lending us their studio. In addition, this was initially broadcasted by RTV, thanks to their CEO, Mr Syed Ashik Rahman. Kaushik Hossain Taposh also helped us by using *Gaan Bangla*. Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of Japan Bangladesh diplomatic relations, and everybody is very positive, forthcoming, and supportive. So, the idea and willingness are available, but the planning is yet to start because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ambassador can only play a small part; having such artists and influencers spread the message of cooperation is much more important as they reach many people across borders. In the past 50 years, Bangladesh has achieved great economic growth, and that will perhaps be reflected in next year's Japan Fest.

Rafi Hossain: How do you plan on incorporating people from different areas of the media into this event?

ITO Naoki: I hope that next year influencers, journalists, artists, and even sportspeople from Japan and Bangladesh can visit each other's countries and learn about the new culture. They can also share their experience on social media and help spread their learning. I also want to add that the embassy will organise a singing contest to encourage people of Bangladesh to sing *Bondhutto Potaka* on social media, as it can be important during current times. Perhaps The Daily Star can be a partner in this as well.

Rafi Hossain: What are some things that you found to be unique about Bangladesh?

ITO Naoki: Bengali hospitality is amazing. At dinner tables, the guest is always taken care of, and the food is always delicious. One thing that was interesting to see was the effort that is put into the *Hilsha* fish and how you take care of the bones. Sometimes it can be slightly spicy for us though. I also like Bangladeshi music and art. I find Bangladesh to be a very vibrant country. Dhaka especially is a busy city, which is reminiscent of Tokyo, where I am from. The traffic jam is not very enjoyable, but it is a sign of the rapid economic growth the country is experiencing. I also got to see the metro in Uttara, and I was very moved by the reactions of people there. I believe it was the first electricity run vehicle in the country, and it is a sign of development as well. I'm sure people will enjoy the convenience of public transport without traffic congestion, and I hope it will give them confidence in the economy. I'm glad Japan was able to introduce the Dhaka metro system. The Prime Minister and the leaders of Bangladesh have taken a step in the right direction to show world leaders that Bangladesh is changing.

Rafi Hossain: Thank you for being with us today.

Shreya Shomoyeeta
PHOTO: COLLECTED