

## Filmmaking for a global audience

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 38

strong position in the festival circuit. "We still have a long way to go in terms of making film programmers consider Bangladesh essentially in their line-ups. For that, we have to tell our own stories in our own style," shares filmmaker, producer, and architect Sara Afreen. "For example, Iranian cinema in the festival circuit is branded as realistic socio-political dramas with minimalist storylines. Korea, Japan, and Ecuador have their own brands as well. Whatever little success we have, it's high time that we strategise our presence in the festival circuit in the next ten years. We need to find our own voice and style, without copying others. We need to explore more of what's happening around the globe."

Afreen added that filmmakers from Bangladesh should work very closely as a fraternity and focus on making good cinema, first and foremost.

She warned that each festival has its own agenda, which can sometimes be overwhelming, deviating directors from making their own movies. She suggested that filmmakers should go for festivals when they are mature and thick-skinned enough to tackle the challenges.

In her view, for a lasting footprint, Bangladesh needs to groom more film producers, distributors, funders, critics, teachers, technicians, and actors. For that, there has to be a periodic synchronisation among all film-based bodies, from public and private sectors.

Interestingly, executive producer of "Rehana Maryam Noor" and "Live from Dhaka", Ehsanul Haque, shared that given the accolades "Rehana Maryam Noor" received so far, people often perceive it as a product of foreign funds, which is untrue. "Our team consciously agreed to not involve external funds because what we were offered also had its demands. We did not want our story to get affected," he said.

Entering the festival circuit through co-productions gained us a larger audience and wider recognition, which is

a point of pride for our country. "A lesser known fact is that 'Rehana Maryam Noor' was initially not selected in the section at Cannes that we originally signed up for, but later, through team discussions, we applied for the Un Certain Regard section, and the rest is history," added Babu.

"We tend to get bogged down by the success of a film at any given platform. Although the whole process can be tedious and frustrating at times, if you have a solid story and the right intentions, your work shall bear fruit. As the executive producer and a long time friend of Saad, we, as a team, only wanted to put forward a story that we believed in."

Dhaka-based documentary filmmaker Humaira Bilkis' works have been screened internationally. Her film 'Garden of Memories' went to Viewing Room under the prestigious Film Bazaar Recommends at Goa Film Bazaar in India in 2017, and was selected for the Media Library in the prestigious Visions du Réel, Nyon, 2018. In her view, co-productions offer different possibilities and perspectives.

"When a film is submitted for a festival, as a cultural product, it gets exposed to a larger audience to take notice. When opportunities of co-productions arise in a particular country, it means that some of its previous works must have paved the path," she shared. "It is affirmative for future filmmakers to move forward with goodwill carefully. At film festivals, Bangladesh is not stuck in old narratives of poverty, natural calamities, or development anymore. The artistic concepts and experimental storytelling

offered by the country is getting the due recognition. Investors are also considering Bangladesh as a potential market, which is encouraging."

According to Bilkis, the cross-cultural aspect of festivals is a great teacher. As a film is presented to a global audience, makers come across questions that open possibilities of cross-checking their own ideas. Rezwan Shahriar Sumit believes that interest in Bangladeshi stories has gained traction in the festival circuit. "In recent times, films like 'Made in Bangladesh', 'Rehana Maryam Noor', and 'Nonajoler Kabbo' not only won awards at film festivals, but also got distribution deals in multiple territories. HBO Europe, for example, is showing 'Nonajoler Kabbo' in several European nations," commented the director. He added that while co-productions provide exciting possibilities, they are not the only way to make good films. Co-producers, Sumit shared, should add value to a project.

Although the pandemic has limited travelling, it has made films reachable by the masses through online screenings. Sumit, on the other hand, noted that there seems to be a tendency to skip actual movie screenings in favour of networking events. According to him, watching new films on the big screen helps filmmakers to be informed about the growing cinema cultures and techniques, both locally and worldwide.

Lauded at the 2021 Cannes Film Festival for her performance in "Rehana Maryam Noor", Azmeri Haque Badhon spoke about her experience. "The respect and love ushered for 'Rehana Maryam Noor' at Cannes and other festivals were immense. The film was subjected to critics and reviews from all over the world

and it passed with flying colours. This is a huge source of encouragement not only for the makers, but for the performers as well. It was exciting and challenging to tell the story of a middle-aged female protagonist. This film changed my life," she said.

"Meeting Anurag Kashyap and getting to audition for Vishal Bhardwaj's 'Khufiya' all started from Cannes. I have done films across borders before, but now, I can sense a positive shift in attitude towards performers."

Badhon expects filmmakers, especially women, to step forward and be unapologetic about telling their stories.

Many filmmakers have interpreted events of the real world in their work. Aung Rakhine's film, "Mor Thengari" (My Bicycle), presents a metaphorical narration about the ongoing plight of indigenous people. The Bangladesh Film Censor Board blocked its commercial release. The film, however, garnered praise at a number of international festivals. Rakhine's short film, "The Last Post Office", premiered at Locarno Film Festival in 2018 and later, took a final spot with 76 others among 9,000 films at France's Klehmo Ferrow International Film Festival.

"I do not self-censor my films. Filmmakers with strong stories must be fearless and focused. Censoring can come from various spaces, but self-censorship is detrimental for an artiste," Rakhine expressed.

Overall, film festivals are for audiences to explore and to dive into and discover new filmmakers and new voices, as much as they are for the industry to come and look at the films that are in the marketplace. As suggested by Hasan, filmmakers who intend to explore the festival circuit must watch movies that are well-received on prominent global platforms.

The author is an art researcher and writer in the making. Email: priyanka.chowdhury@gmail.com.



▲ AZMERI HAQUE BADHON

**"It was exciting and challenging to tell the story of a middle-aged female protagonist. 'Rehana Maryam Noor' changed my life." – Badhon**

**মুজিব বর্ষে শুভ দিন শূন্য সুদে কৃষি ঋণ**

“দেশের পাহাড় জাগলো বলে বাংলাদেশ আজ প্রত্য আদা-হলুদ করবে আবাদ সারাদেশের জন্য”

মধু মাসে বাড়ুক মধু ফলাও বেশী আম মুকুল থেকেই সকল স্তরে পারে সঠিক দাম

করোনা কালে দুধ না ফেলে ঘি বামান দুগ্ধ খাতে জাগুক প্রাণ

**রূপালী ব্যাংক লিমিটেড**  
উত্তম সেবার নিশ্চয়তা  
বঙ্গবন্ধুর স্বপ্নপূরণে নিবেদিত একটি লাল সবুজ ব্যাংক

www.rupalibank.org

**বীমা শিল্পে ন্যাশনাল লাইফের গৌরবময় অর্জন**

ইমার্জিং এশিয়া ইনস্যুরেন্স অ্যাওয়ার্ড-২০১৮  
ইমার্জিং এশিয়া ইনস্যুরেন্স অ্যাওয়ার্ড-২০১৯  
আইসিএসবি ন্যাশনাল অ্যাওয়ার্ড-২০২০  
সাইথ এশিয়ান বিজনেস এক্সিলেন্স অ্যাওয়ার্ড-২০২১  
বীমা খাতে সাইথ এশিয়ার শ্রেষ্ঠ সিইও অ্যাওয়ার্ড-২০২১

১০ ডিসেম্বর ২০২১ কসভায়েক শীল্ডের সাবেক রাষ্ট্রপতি মাইথ্রিপালা সিরিসেনা থেকে 'সাইথ এশিয়ান বিজনেস এক্সিলেন্স অ্যাওয়ার্ড' গ্রহণ করেন সিইও মোঃ কাছিম উদ্দিন। পাশে বাংলাদেশের হাইকমিশনার মোঃ রিয়াজ হোসেন।

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকারের বাণিজ্য মন্ত্রী জনাব টিপু মুন্সি এমপি থেকে আইসিএসবি ন্যাশনাল অ্যাওয়ার্ড-২০২০ গ্রহণ করেন সিইও মোঃ কাছিম উদ্দিন।

আমরা গর্বিত, আমরা অনুপ্রাণিত

**ন্যাশনাল লাইফ ইনস্যুরেন্স কোম্পানী লিঃ**  
নিশ্চিত ভবিষ্যতের সুস্থ সাথী

www.nlibd.com