

'Not willing to compromise humanity for commercial gain'

Mejbaur Rahman Sumon on 'Hawa'

We all seek commercial success at the end of the day, but we were not willing to compromise our humane side to fund our commercial gains. Thus, we decided to wait a while longer to release the trailer when our audience would be ready to enjoy it.

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

Mejbaur Rahman Sumon took time off from fiction after spending four intense years working in television. The director went on to try his luck in advertising, and earned much fame in the commercial arena over the following 10 years. The maker finally decided to return to the world of fiction, this time on the silver screen, with his much-awaited multi-starrer production "Hawa".

We caught up with Sumon to learn more about his silver screen debut and other upcoming projects.

The trailer release of "Hawa" was postponed by a couple of days, following the Sitakunda blast. What caused you to change the decision at the last moment?

I was on my way back home after a long tedious day, finalising the trailer and wrapping up any other last-minute changes, when I heard about the deadly incident at Sitakunda. It was indeed very sad and we did not want to put forward the trailer while the people of this country were undergoing this crisis.

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The journey of "Hawa" has been longer than you had expected. How has your run with this production been so far?

We wrapped up shooting for this film in November, 2019. However, the pandemic soon broke out and the post production was



PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL

made lengthier than we had expected. When we began shooting for this film, many of the actors we had cast were new, but by the time everything was back to normal, they had already been well-received by our audience.

I want to put forward a production that comes as a treat to cine-lovers. Hence, I am willing to wait if that's what it going to take to reach my goal.

When are you planning to release the film?

We have already submitted the film to the censor board and are waiting for the green light from their end. The sooner the film clears the censor board, the faster we will be able to start promotions and present it to the audience in theatres.

You are also looking forward to "Ei Muhurte", an anthology series which will release on Chorki.

Yes! Through "Ei Muhurte", me, Piplu R Khan and Abrar Athar look to deliver our personal commentary on contemporary

issues that are already known to our viewers.

One specific incident can stir up varying emotions in different individuals. While one might find an incident irritating or triggering, others might accept its course of actions and add it as a reminder for their conscience.

How is your music coming along?

I am very glad that my band Meghdol is doing the promotional song for my film "Hawa". The original song "E Hawa", crafted by Meghdol, will be the only song in the film.

Music is something I can never forget or leave behind.

What else are you looking forward to?

I received a government grant for a film. I plan to start the shooting for it soon. The name of the project is not finalised yet, but the working title for now is "Roid" (sunlight), a regional dialect for the standard Bangla word 'Roud'. I look forward to crafting fiction, if the audience keeps expecting that from me.



'Mayar Jonjal' wins Best Picture at Rainbow Film Festival in London

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Aupe Karim starrer "Mayar Jonjal" (Debris of Desire) won the Best Picture award at the 23rd Rainbow Film Festival in London. The news was confirmed through the festival's official website.

The festival kicked off on May 29 and was inaugurated by Rushanara Ali, the first Bengali MP from UK. The ceremony came to an end on June 5.

N Rashed Chowdhury's "Chandrabati Kotha" received a special Rainbow Film Society Mention. The festival also screened various Bangladeshi movies alongside Asian films in different categories at this year's event.

Joaquin Phoenix to return in 'Joker' sequel

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Director Todd Phillips has confirmed that Joaquin Phoenix will be returning as the supervillain in the "Joker" sequel.



Todd shared a picture of the sequel's script on his Instagram account along with the title "Joker: Folie à Deux". The same post consisted of another black and white photo of Joaquin Phoenix reading the script of the film. Phillips and Scott Silver wrote the screenplay for "Joker: Folie à Deux".

Joaquin Phoenix won an Oscar as Best Actor for his powerful performance in "Joker". The 2019 blockbuster film garnered a whopping USD 1 billion worldwide.

NEWS

'A campaign to malign the government'

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maligning the government and its achievements."

It went on to say that when victims return, it "proves the allegation of so-called enforced disappearance unreliable".

"Upon investigation of the alleged enforced disappearance cases, the findings reveal that people often disappear voluntarily to avoid legal action for cases lodged against them."

"Sometimes they choose to disappear due to family feud or to avoid business liability, and some often willingly disappear with the intention of embarrassing the government," the letter continued.

To illustrate its point, the government presented four cases where convicts sentenced to death had been absconding for years and were later arrested by the Rapid Action Battalion.

It said that Ashraf Hussain of Savar had been absconding after being convicted of murdering his wife 17 years ago, Sayed Ahmed of Chattogram had been absconding for 20 years following conviction, Abdul Kalil of Jamalpur had been absconding for 22 years, while Mohammad Ishak had been on the run for six.

Rab arrested all of these

individuals early this year.

On February 21, 2022, the Working Group had written to the government saying, "Following the announcement of the sanctions imposed by the United States of America on top Rab officials, on December 10, 2021, Bangladeshi authorities have launched a campaign of threats, intimidation, and harassment against relatives of disappeared persons, victims of illegal detention, human rights defenders, and civil society actors."

The Group said it had information from 10 families whose homes were raided by authorities in the middle of the night between December 2021 and February 2022. The families also said they were threatened and forced to either sign blank sheets of paper or pre-written statements indicating that their family member was not forcibly disappeared and they deliberately misled the police.

In December 2021, families of enforced disappearance victims had organised press conferences iterating the above.

The government responded to this in the May 12 letter by stating it was trying to "trace the

missing persons" since many of the cases did not have any record with the police stations concerned.

"However, instead of co-operating with the enquiry process by providing information, some of the relatives and a few civil society organisations brought false, exaggerated, and fabricated information against the process," the letter further said.

"All such instances of raising false allegations and spreading misinformation by the sources and feeding those to the international mechanism strongly denote that the campaign is 'deliberate', 'purposeful' and 'motivated'."

It also addressed the fact that most of the cases of enforced disappearance have no legal record, like filed cases.

"The absence of such record or the victim's family's [in]voluntariness [of] filing a case reporting the disappearance gives [raises] strong indication [questions] as to whether the disappearance was by the alleged victim's choice," said the government.

Media reports and human rights activists have routinely documented how families were unable to lodge police complaints when a victim

is disappeared -- a fact that was also mentioned in a Working Group's report in September last year.

"Police officers would allegedly refuse to register complaints concerning enforced disappearances or only accept them upon the removal of any allegation of law enforcers' involvement," the Group stated.

The government's letter also said, "Odhikar is widely known for its disproportionate bias and prejudice against Bangladesh, in particular the ruling Awami league, which is evident in its various reports," it said.

Odhikar's registration as an NGO was scrapped on June 5, due to "publishing of misleading information about various extrajudicial killings, alleged disappearances and murders", according to a notice by the NGO Affairs Bureau.

The May 12 letter by the Bangladeshi authorities is a rare instance of the Bangladeshi government communicating with the Working Group regarding enforced disappearances, although the Group has constantly dispatched letters asking for information.

The first time the

government responded was after the disappearance of Kalpana Chakma in 1996.

The second and third times were earlier this year on January 10 and February 5, when the government finally gave information about 76 victims of enforced disappearances -- information the Working Group had been asking for for two and half decades.

In response, The Group had said the information provided for 66 of those cases was "insufficient".

Padma Bridge

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Hasina is scheduled to open the bridge at 10:00am on June 25.

Addressing the meeting, Quader, also the general secretary of ruling AL, said many were hatching plots ahead of the inauguration, reports BSS.

He said, "We all must stay vigilant so that enemies cannot enter and sabotage the event. I have come before you especially to say this. Everyone must maintain discipline on that day."

About the World Bank's fund withdrawal for the Padma Bridge project, Quader said the bridge was a vindication for insulting the Bangalee nation.

Fire scare grips Ctg port

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chemical products and at least 4,876 kgs of chemicals were destroyed in Lafarge Holcim Cement Factory in Sunamganj in December 2020.

The drive, however, lost momentum last December. The Chattogram Port has been storing all chemical and inflammable cargoes in the P-shed as per the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code and The Dangerous Cargo Act 1953.

According to the customs law, the importers have to take delivery of goods within 30 days of those reaching the port, in default of which the

authorities will auction off the goods.

However, most importers do not comply. At times, importers block the auction attempt by filing writ petition in the court and at least 10 auctions could not be completed due to this, according to auction documents.

Last Tuesday, the customs again issued a public notice requesting the importers to clear the goods within 30 days. They also said the goods, otherwise, would be auctioned off.

Customs Commissioner Fakhru Alam said, "The

auction process did not accelerate due to shortage of manpower and equipment, but in the last few months we took several initiatives such as monthly auctions. We also have dedicated customs officials for the inventory of goods that can be auctioned off."

The P-shed has lacked modern management for the storing of hazardous goods for a long time, said Khairul Alam Sujan, director of Bangladesh Shipping Agents' Association, adding that the port should not be treated as a warehouse of unclaimed or abandoned goods.

Owners not sued by cops

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investigation officer for the case.

"We did not include the owners in the first information report of the case because they were not present at the spot [when the fire broke out]. These officials were present. They did not let the firefighters know that the containers contained explosive chemicals," said SI Siddique.

All day, police refused to disclose the names of the named accused "for the sake of fair investigation". This paper, however, obtained a copy of the case statement.

The eight named are: Deputy General Manger (admin) Md Nurul Akter, DGM (sales and marketing) Nazmul Akter Khan, Manager Khaledur Rahman, Assistant Admin Officer Md Abbas Ullah, Senior Executive Md Nasir Uddin, Assistant Manager Md Abdul Aziz, in-charges Saiful Islam and Nazrul Islam.

Saiful Islam suffered injuries to his eyes and

burns to his arms, legs and ear, his younger brother Monirul Islam said.

Saiful is currently receiving treatment at the National Institute of Ophthalmology and Hospital, Monirul added.

Contacted, Sitakunda Circle Additional Superintendent of Police Ashraf Karim said the names of owners would be included in the list of accused if the police found their involvement after a probe.

According to the case statement, the deaths and casualties were the results of the "deliberate negligence" of the accused in taking proper precautionary measures for storing hazardous chemicals, failing to disseminate information regarding the chemicals, and not equipping the depot with proper firefighting gear and people.

Meanwhile, the fire was completely doused yesterday noon, around 86 hours after it broke out. "After dousing the fire

completely, we inspected the entire depot and could not find any more bodies," said Lt Col Ariful Islam, commander of the 18th Brigade of Bangladesh Army's 24th Infantry Division, yesterday.

There is a lot of rubble in the area. It is not possible right now to say whether anything remains under the debris, he said.

"There were around 4,400 containers in the depot. Initially, we have come to know that 400 containers were destroyed," he said. Meanwhile, Masud Rana, 35, a victim of the Sitakunda fire, died of his injuries at the ICU of Chattogram Medical College Hospital.

The firefighters also recovered the remains of "a person" from the depot around 6:30am yesterday. "The remains have been sent to Chattogram Medical College Hospital for DNA tests and identification. It appears that the body parts might be of a single person," said police officer Ashraf Karim.

US wants free, fair nat'l polls

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the latter's office.

"I will repeat again... the United States doesn't care who wins the election. We just want an election where the people of Bangladesh can choose who their leaders are," Haas told reporters.

The ambassador said he talked to the CEC about the tremendous importance of the Election Commission in ensuring a free and fair

election.

"And in order to have a free and fair election consistent with international standards, it requires participation not only from the election commission but the government and political parties, media and NGOs and, most importantly, the Bangladeshi people."

Asked whether the US would make any recommendations about

holding a credible election, Haas said, "Absolutely not, that's not our role. That is the job of the election commission and the entire Bangladeshi society."

EC Habibul later told reporters that there was not much discussion regarding the election with Haas.

The CEC told him that elections in Bangladesh were not as smooth as they are in the US. "In

Bangladesh, there was turbulence in the past, it still exists..." Habibul said he told the ambassador.

The EC is prepared to hold a more fair and transparent election during which more observers and media people will be allowed. "If possible, we will set up CCTV cameras to bring everything under supervision."

Asked whether there was any discussion on

participatory election as many political parties maintain that they would not take part in the election, Habibul said, "He [Haas] wished that there could be an understanding among the political parties."

The US wants a free, fair and participatory election and the EC will discuss with political parties to seek their opinion and there will be a way out regarding the matter, the CEC said.