

‘Why should art face censorship where the constitution ensures freedom of speech?’

Artistes’ demand explanation on recent attacks on film

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

As soon as the film industry faced a wind of change and people started coming back to cinema halls, one of the leading films, Mejbaur Rahman Sumon’s “Hawa”, faced allegations from the Forest Department’s Wildlife Crime Prevention Unit for violating the Wildlife Conservation and Safety Act in the movie.

Further aggravating the artistes, Mostofa Sarwar Farooki’s much anticipated “Shonibar Bikel” is still not getting a clearance from the censor board.

Artistes organised a press conference yesterday, demanding an explanation for these alleged ‘attacks on art’.

The press conference, titled “Golpo Bolar Shadhinota Chai” was held at Dhaka Reporters’ Unit yesterday. The artistes put forward a five-



Jaya Ahsan at the conference.

point demand at the event.

Artistes Nasir Uddin Yousuff, Morshedul Islam, Tariq Anam Khan, Shampa Reza, Chanchal Chowdhury, Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, Zahid Hasan, Jaya Ahsan, Afsana Mimi, Nurul Alam Atique, Masum Reza, Amitabh Reza Chowdhury, Mejbaur Rahman Sumon, Azmeri Haque Badhan and Nazifa Tushi, among others, were present.

Eminent director and media personality Nasir Uddin Yousuff said, “The moment people started coming back to the halls, it



PHOTOS: STAR

THEIR FIVE-POINT DEMAND

1. The case against “Hawa” under the wildlife conservation laws should be withdrawn immediately, without further allegations.
2. The censor board should give a clear explanation as to why “Saturday Afternoon” is stuck at the censor board, and has been denied from getting a clearance certificate.
3. The censor board should be abolished and an updated and inclusive film certification law should be formulated, subject to consultation with all stakeholders regarding the proposed film certification law.
4. An updated and inclusive OTT policy needs to be formulated in consultation with all stakeholders, regarding the proposed OTT policy.
5. Before filing any case related to film or content, it must be discussed with the relevant authority (For example, the draft OTT policy proposes to create a separate commission board for the platforms).

is not a good indication that a leading film is facing charges. Also, why did ‘Saturday Afternoon’ not get a clearance from the censor board? Where our constitution gives us right to free speech, why should art get no freedom?

“We thought we will tell the story of flowers, birds and the river”, said Mejbaur Rahman Sumon. “Now, we have to cross off birds from the list – how can I tell the full story? I feel like I’ve entered a cage myself. Films should not be in the crosshairs for real-life acts.”

“Should we stop making films?” said Jaya Ahsan, continuing, “In this world where deforestation is a major issue and animals are being treated inhumanely, what is the Forest Department doing in this regard? This is my question. Why are they targeting films and creative art?”

Mostofa Sarwar Farooki remarked that he still does not know why his film did not get clearance from the censor board. “Any form of art is like a headlight – if you shut it off, you won’t see ahead.”

Tom Holland ahead in the race to be James Bond

As Daniel Craig bids adieu to the role of Agent 007, it seems the casting crew of the franchise has finally found the ‘Ironrunner’ for the role of James Bond, in Marvel star Tom Holland.

According to “The Today Show”, Idris Elba and Tom Hardy are no longer in the race for the role of James Bond. This is because the filmmakers, who are currently working on the franchise, are looking for someone in their 30’s to fill their boots of Bond. Thus, favourite contenders, Idris Elba (49) and Hardy (39) do not fit the bill for the role.

In an earlier interview on “Late Night with Seth Meyers”, Tom Holland confirmed that he is a diehard fan of Daniel Craig’s version of James Bond.

After Holland, another actor being considered for the role is Bridgetton star, Regé-Jean Page, who is only 34 years old.



‘Art of Rock’ at Liberation War Museum today

After a break of 2 years, “The Art of Rock” concert is back this year with 2 days of rock performances by 14 noted bands. The fourth edition of this concert will be held at the Liberation War Museum, in Agargaon on August 26 (today) and tomorrow.

The performances will start from 3pm, however, the gates will be open from 2pm onwards.

The Art of Rock is a concert series initiated with few rock bands from Bangladesh to outspread the legacy of purest, raw and unfiltered rock music.

The initiative started in 2018, with bands like Aftermath, Conclusion, Crunch, Implicit, Karnival, Liquid State Drive, Owned, Porah, Rockaphobic, and Sin.

Along with the existing bands, Level Five, Dads In The Park, Unmaad, Fused, and Shepherds will also be performing at the event.

NEWS

Owners of tea

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“We cannot buy two kgs of rice with our daily wage. How can we bear our living expenses with such poor pay? We will not be able to survive without our wages hiked,” said Mohan Urang, a tea worker in Moulvibazar Sadar upazila.

“We are victims of discrimination. We are not paid just wages. We will not resume work until our demand is fulfilled,” said Bishwajit Robidas, a worker in Moulvibazar’s Kulaura upazila.

Hundreds of workers held a meeting at Sreemangal’s Kalighat Tea Garden around yesterday noon and vowed to continue their demonstration until their demand for Tk 300 daily wage is met.

“We, all the workers, have no alternative to continuing the movement as the tea garden owners are not increasing our wage as per our demand,” said Pankaj Kondo, vice president of the Bangladesh Tea Labour Union.

Around 125,000 workers in the country’s 241 tea estates have been holding protests demanding their daily wages be raised to Tk 300 from Tk 120.

JS body slams

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The price of sugar is stable in the international market and the import cost has also remained normal, said Biswajit Saha, director for corporate and regulatory affairs of City Group, one of the leading commodities players.

“But we are buying dollars by paying 20 to 22 percent more.”

“The amount paid to the export merchant is at the current dollar rate and not the rate when the letter of credit for the import was opened.

“Due to this reason, the prices of all kinds of imported products including sugar are increasing.”

The price of the product has increased in the last month although the supply of the product is normal, said Mamunul Haque, a wholesale trader at the port city’s Khatunganj market.

Data from the National Board of Revenue Board does support Saha and Haque.

In June, 1.46 lakh tonnes of sugar were imported for Tk 584 crore, meaning each tonne cost Tk 40,000.

The following month, 1.81 lakh tonnes were brought in for Tk 672 crore, with each tonne coming in at about Tk 37,127.

In the first 24 days of August, about 2.37 lakh tonnes of sugar worth Tk 1,039 crore were imported. This means each tonne cost about Tk 43,840.

Rab probing ‘false’ case

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They said Rab-4 members took Bappy’s father Abdul Berek to its office and recorded his statement to “their liking” after The Daily Star on July 25 ran a report headlined “Bike accident turned into extortion case”.

On that very day, Rab-4 received the case documents from Pallabi Police Station.

On March 7 evening, Berek, 60, was injured after being hit by a teenager’s motorcycle in the capital’s Mirpur-12. However, the statement of a case, drafted by Rab-4 three days later, tells a very different story. There is no mention of the accident or the biker.

The Rab accused five college students and three more teenagers, including two schoolchildren, from the same neighbourhood of beating and injuring Berek, a tea vendor, and extorting Tk 40,500 from him.

Berek, his family members and witnesses told The Daily Star that they had no idea about the alleged assault and extortion.

Rab-4 in June applied to the home ministry’s Public Security Division, seeking to take the responsibility of the case investigation.

On July 3, the Crime Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police wrote to the deputy commissioner (Mirpur division) to transfer the investigation from Pallabi Police Station to Rab-4, according to case documents submitted to the court.

Asked about this, Rab-4 Commanding Officer Mozammel Haque said they received the case documents.

“We will now investigate this case. We have talked to the plaintiff,” he told The Daily Star earlier this month.

On July 31, Rab-4 Sub-Inspector Monirul Islam, investigation officer of the case, applied to a Dhaka court for permission to record Berek’s statement under section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure as a “neutral witness”.

The IO in his prayer said, “Berek was run over by a recklessly driven motorbike of five college students and the five then hit him with locally made weapons, breaking his arm.”

However, Berek earlier told this newspaper that he fainted after the motorbike hit him that day and locals took him to a nearby hospital. Several witnesses also gave the same description of the incident.

Bappi, the plaintiff of the case, said he wanted to file a case over

the accident, seeking compensation, and that he only signed the case statement drawn up by Rab.

He alleged that the elite force kept him and five of the accused in the Rab-4 office in Mirpur’s Paikpara for about 24 hours before they were all taken to Pallabi Police Station for filing the already drafted case and handover of the five accused to police.

The police station recorded the case on March 10.

Hours after filing of the case, Bappi filed an affidavit with a Dhaka court, saying, “The case was filed following a misunderstanding with the five college students. Later, the plaintiffs and the accused reached a settlement, mediated by some locally respectable persons. The plaintiff will have no objection if the accused are freed on bail and subsequently acquitted of the charges.”

Speaking to this correspondent recently, Bappi said Rab-4 had been putting pressure on him ever since The Daily Star published the report.

“They have already recorded a statement of my father to their liking. Officials of Rab-4 came to our house looking for me in plainclothes,” he alleged.

Monirul Islam, who is now investigating the case, told The Daily Star yesterday that there is no such pressure on the plaintiff or his family. “The allegation is baseless.”

He added, “We are investigating the case. Recently, we took a statement from the plaintiff’s father under section 161 of CrPC.”

Meanwhile, sources said the Rab Headquarters has launched an “internal enquiry” into the allegations. Investigators from the Rab’s intelligence unit have talked to the plaintiff, his father, witnesses, accused and their family members recently.

Ex-Pak PM Imran

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immediately available, but officials from Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party said he had been granted “interim bail” until September 1.

The latest allegations against Khan stem from a weekend rally when he criticised a magistrate responsible for keeping a PTI official in police custody, after party leaders said he was “tortured”.

Outside the court, Khan repeated his criticism of the judge and said the government was running scared because of his popularity.

A family forced into never-ending distress

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newspaper’s findings that they framed some innocent teenagers.

A FAMILY IN DISTRESS

Describing the April 10 arrest incident, Raju said the Rab members went to their house around 11:30pm in a microbus, a car and two motorbikes. Seven to eight men in plainclothes first entered the house with several others waiting outside.

They introduced themselves as Rab men and asked him to go with them in connection with a narcotics case filed eight years back.

The family, still in shock over the disappearance of Mohon four years ago, thought the men, who were in plainclothes, were bluffing. Jamsher even told them that some Rab members picked up his elder son in a similar fashion.

About half an hour later, some Rab members in uniform went there and insisted that Raju go with them.

The family members wanted to see the warrant, but the officers did not show it. At one point, they “grabbed Raju by his collar” and forced him onto a vehicle.

“Inside the vehicle, they slapped me thrice,” Raju said, adding that his mother and wife followed the vehicles and saw them enter the Rab-4 office.

In the courtroom, court officials said the case was summarily dismissed in January 2019 as there was no witness, he said.

“My brother went missing three months after I flew to Malaysia. Then I myself was about to become a victim of enforced disappearance,” Raju told this newspaper.

Mohon was picked up in front of a crowd on the night of June 10, 2018, and three CCTV cameras captured parts of the incident.

One clip seen by The Daily Star shows five to six men in civilian clothes near the house in Mirpur 2. Two others came on a motorcycle, forced Mohon to sit between them and sped away.

About 10 days later, a man named Hafizur Rahman, claiming to be a Rab-4 member, went to Jamsher’s house and told him that Mohon was in the Rab custody. The desperate father gave Hafizur some money and

medicines for his son.

The next day, Hafizur returned, this time with a letter apparently written by Mohon to his wife. It read Mohon was in confinement and was being tortured in custody, Jamsher said.

Jamsher held a press conference about the incident on August 28, 2018, where he provided journalists with what he said was the call history showing about a hundred calls were made from Hafizur’s number to his phone between June 13 and 24.

Ninety-four of the calls were made from Mirpur-Paikpara area where the Rab-4 office is located. Of the remaining six calls, one was from Rajarbagh Police Lines. Several calls were made to three official numbers of Rab-4, according to the Call Detail Record that Jamsher obtained from a law enforcer.

Jamsher also showed journalists what he said was the registration form of Hafizur’s SIM card, which had a photo of the man in police uniform.

While investigating Mohon’s disappearance, The Daily Star in May 2019 talked to Hafizur. He said he had served in Rab-4 earlier but was now posted in Meherpur police.

The same month, the then Rab-4 Commanding Officer Chowdhury Manjurul Kabir denied that his unit abducted Mohon.

The current commanding officer, Mozammel Haque, talking to The Daily Star on August 1 declined to comment on this, saying he was not posted in the unit at the time.

About picking up Raju, he said Rab often acts upon arrest warrants issued by the court. He has to look into whether the warrant was recalled in this case.

LAND DISPUTE LINKED?

Jamsher links all his “troubles” to a dispute over a piece of land with a local named Azizul Hossain Khan, and said some Rab members may have turned against him having been influenced by that man, a claim this newspaper could not independently verify.

Azizul obtained the power of attorney over the disputed 0.75 katha plot in Mirpur in 2007 after signing a deed with one Faruk, according to

documents.

But Jamsher claims the plot is within their ancestral land where they had built their house and the matter is pending with the court.

“He [Azizul] has long been trying to evict us. I filed two general diaries after he had threatened me. Then several cases were filed against my family members one after another. We have been cleared from all charges. Now they have filed a fresh case against my grandson and nephew,” he added.

Azizul refuted all the allegations and said, “There was a dispute over the land in the past. That does not mean I have influenced [Rab] to do all these.”

Locals, including a councillor in Mirpur, wishing anonymity said Azizul is linked to the ruling Awami League and has a number of close relatives in the police.

Azizul declined to comment on this.

Jamsher also points to a man named Joy Ahmed, an “informant for Rab” who spent time in prison in a case he filed for allegedly taking Tk 2 lakh from him, promising to have Mohon Mia released from Rab custody.

Joy, however, denied his involvement in all this.

Meanwhile, the extortion case has been handed over to the Rab upon its application to the home ministry, documents show, though Mirpur police had been investigating it.

Anwar Hossain, sub-inspector of Pallabi Police Station, who investigated the case earlier, said Rab received the case documents on July 25, the day The Daily Star published a story on it.

The plaintiff, Nazmul Hossain Bappi, told The Daily Star that it was in fact an incident of a motorbike accident in Mirpur on March 7, when his father was injured as a teenager boy hit him with a speedy motorbike.

The next day, when five college students known to the biker went to their house to settle the matter, some Rab-4 members picked them up.

Jamsher’s grandson and nephew were later named in the case without the knowledge of the plaintiff.