

It feels good to get back in the game

FS NAYEEM



COLLAGE: REMNANT GLIMPSE

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ANTARA RAISA

MD Faruk Sobhan, popularly known as F S Nayeem, has been a staple of the television industry for quite a while now. He began his acting career with the drama “Nijhum Oronyo”, which was aired back in 2007. Recently, He made a comeback with the web series “Karagar”, with his brilliant performance as a headstrong detective. In a candid conversation with The Daily Star, Nayeem has shared the experience of working in “Karagar”, and his recent ventures.

You are making headlines for your work in “Karagar”. How are you feeling?

I have been getting response not just from Bangladesh, but also from Kolkata. It feels good to get back in the game. However, I want give all the credits to my director and whole crew, who helped create this magic called “Karagar”. It couldn't be done by one person alone. To rediscover myself in a new way in this web series, among all other senior actors, was the most amazing part for me. I'm grateful to my director and the screenwriters for making my character so multidimensional and interesting.

How was your overall shooting experience?

The entire team of Film Noir makes the artistes very comfortable in the shooting set. Every department of their team – art, light, editing and production crew – know what they are doing, and execute it to perfection.

We have shot the series in the actual central

jail. The officials were cooperative and friendly. Shooting in an actual jail helped us to get in the character more quickly.

How did you prepare for your role in “Karagar”?

I just read the script and tried to feel the character within myself. I feel like you don't have to take extra preparation for the character. If you could just do as per the script, that's enough. I was fully director's child here – I did exactly what he told me to do.

What's the update on your film “Jole jole Tara” with Ralith Rashid Mithila?

The post-production of the film is already finished. The film will be released soon in theatres.

You have been in this industry for a while now. So, what are your thoughts/opinions on this recent surge in OTT productions that are bringing back many veteran actors/familiar old faces?

Now, there are a lot of young filmmakers who are telling new stories. They want to work with the actors who are experienced, and open to experiments. They want to work with real performers, and don't care for popularity per se. They want actors who have grasped the art of making any character believable on the screen. At least, now OTT platforms are coming forward to make it happen. We are also noticing a positive change in our film industry.



PHOTO: COURTESY



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Jaya's 'Beauty Circus' to release soon?

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Popular actress Jaya Ahsan's upcoming project, “Beauty Circus” has been in the pipeline for 5 years, but there was still no update of its release date. Finally, the makers released a promotional video, where they addressed the fans, “Beauty Circus Ashbe Kobe”?

The promotional video was released on the official Facebook page of Channel i and Jaya Ahsan. The video gives a hint that the release date of the film will be announced soon.

Jaya is playing “Beauty”, the central character of the film.

Directed by Mahmud Didar, the film will highlight the women's struggle in the circus. Jaya performs amazing acrobatics in this film – with feats including walking over a tightrope.

Its star-studded cast includes Ferdous, Tauquir Ahmed, Shatabdi Wadud, ABM Sumon and Mamunur Rashid.

'House of the Dragon' renewed for second season

The highly anticipated “Game of Thrones” prequel, “House of the Dragon” has now been renewed for a second season. This is after the first episode of the show became a massive hit, earning nearly 10 million viewers on TV and HBO Max, the largest audience for any new original series on HBO, according to the network.

Based on the George R.R. Martin book, “Fire & Blood”, the show's events are set 200 years prior to that of “Game of Thrones”.



PHOTO: REUTERS/MAJA SMIEJKOWSKA

NEWS

Ministers are the boss, bureaucrats real boss

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organise their prayer congregations,” he told a discussion on April 5, 2020, weeks after the pandemic hit the country.

As the country is currently facing an economic crisis in the fallout from the Russia-Ukraine war, all policy decisions, such as the ongoing austerity measures, were taken by civil servants. Even the senior Awami League leaders were in the dark when the government raised the fuel prices to a record high.

“Such a move, which was made without any discussions at the party forum, has put Awami League leaders under tremendous pressure,” AL Presidium Member Kazi Zafarullah told this newspaper after the hike.

In fact, the government over the years has placed incumbent and former bureaucrats at the helm of almost all state bodies, though some of those posts should have been filled by professionals with expertise.

Governance experts see this as the government's lack of confidence in public representatives or in professionals outside the civil service.

Former bureaucrats are now leading many constitutional bodies like Bangladesh Public Service Commission (PSC), National Human Rights Commission, Election Commission, Information Commission, and Anti-Corruption Commission. Professionals having solid backgrounds headed those organisations previously.

Sadly, many of the measures failed to yield desired results while for some the government had to backtrack in the face of severe criticism.

But how has this all come into practice?

Experts say politicians do not even acknowledge the problem in the first place, which only make matters worse. They also observe that many politicians have little governance skills needed to make decisions that would help the country ride out the crisis.

“Politicians themselves have handed politics to bureaucrats. Under the present electoral system, the victory of public representatives in elections depends on public servants. As a result, bureaucrats are dictating the public representatives whereas it should have been the opposite,” said Dr Tofail Ahmed, a local government expert.

He opined that in both AL and BNP,

one person takes all the decisions and others just follow those.

“Political parties of this nature can't make decisions to lead the nation towards a solution.”

Badiul Alam Majumdar, secretary of Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan), a civil society platform, said that in a democracy, people's representatives are supposed to take every decision, but it is being proved that Bangladesh has become “a republic of bureaucrats” as they are making all the crucial decisions.

The bureaucrats' sway over politicians is now one of the most discussed issues among the ruling party leaders. The leaders, however, would not speak out about it.

The Daily Star talked to some AL leaders to know why the ministers often cave in to bureaucrats with regard to major decisions taken in their respective ministries.

According to them, the trend started in 2009 when AL formed the government and most of the party's veteran and experienced leaders were not included in the cabinet, and instead, young and district-level leaders were brought in.

With the ministers relatively new to the workings of the government, bureaucrats took full advantage. Many of the cabinet members started accepting the tutelage of the bureaucrats, AL leaders observed.

They said all bureaucrats in key ministries are politically influential and they are more known for their political identities rather than for their roles as civil servants.

The leaders blamed the absence of career politicians both in parliament and cabinet for the present situation. According to them, businesspeople-turned MPs are more interested in expanding their businesses than in focusing on national issues.

According to a report by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), 61 percent members of the current Jatiya Sangsad are businesspeople, 13 percent lawyers, 5 percent politicians and 21 percent are from other professions.

In the first parliamentary election in 1973, only 15 percent winners were in business. But the scenario started to change after 1990 and the businesspeople outnumbered the politicians in the national polls afterwards. In the 1996 parliament,

48 percent of the MPs were businesspeople. The figure was 51 percent in 2001, 63 percent in 2008 and 59 percent in 2014.

Recent remarks by Planning Minister MA Mannan, who joined the ruling party in 2005 after retiring from government service, aptly summarise the politicians' helplessness.

On June 27, he told a programme that bureaucrats are keeping local representatives – who seek allocation for rural development – on a tight leash.

“A local representative has to struggle to meet even a petty officer at the Secretariat. A union parishad chairman has to wait days to meet a senior assistant secretary.

“To get an allocation of Tk 100, local representatives have to show Tk 20 [in their pocket] first. As a result, local representatives opt for a tortuous path instead of a direct route.”

Asked why such a situation emerged, local government expert Tofail said it was bound to be like this. “When the politicians' popularity, their probability of getting elected and picking of party candidates are determined by intelligence agencies, and when public servants have to play a role in their elections, such situation was inevitable.”

Last year, the government formed committees headed by secretaries in 64 districts to oversee relief operations. It angered some senior politicians who vented their frustrations in parliament at that time.

On June 28 last year, veteran AL leader Tofail Ahmed said in parliament, “I am sorry, I don't know whether I should say it here or not. An administrative officer has been given the responsibility in our district [Bhola]. We, the politicians, help people but they think all that help is being provided by administrative officials. This needs to be noticed. We need officials from the administration, but not with the exclusion of politicians.”

Expressing a similar view, Jatiya Party leader Kazi Firoz Rashid said, “There is no politics in the country now. Secretaries are given charges of districts ... bureaucrats run the country.”

“Sometimes, MPs need to request the DCs to let them talk to the prime minister. When such things happen, it weakens the importance of lawmakers.”

He also said businesspeople and bureaucrats are running the country. “We, the politicians, are now standing in the third line. This is our bad luck. But this country was liberated by politicians.”

When the country is facing volatility in forex reserves caused by the pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war, bureaucrats are at the forefront again, making decisions and executing them too.

A series of meetings were held under the directives of Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam, while PM Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus played a key role in taking many decisions. Of the decisions, some did not yield expected results while some others were not pro-people, according to ruling AL leaders.

The decision of hiking fuel prices at the beginning of this month irked many AL leaders. Since then, no meeting of the AL central working committee, the highest decision-making body of the party, and the presidium, highest policy-making body, was held to make political decisions to face the crisis.

Politicians not only have failed to take national policy decisions, but also went on to make tone-deaf statements, irking the ordinary people.

An incident that took place in Barguna on August 15 could be cited here as an example of a politician's helplessness.

That day, police used batons against Chhatra League men during a National Mourning Day programme, injuring at least 50 leaders and activists of the pro-AL student front.

It occurred in the presence of local AL lawmaker Dharendra Debnath Shambhu, who was seen repeatedly asking police not to beat Chhatra League men.

In a video clip that went viral on social media, some police officials were seen having an altercation with the five-time lawmaker, who was also a former state minister.

Later, the additional superintendent of Barguna police was withdrawn from the district.

But how can the politicians play their due role amid such crises?

Badiul Alam Majumdar opined that establishing a real democratic system and ensuring a fair system to elect people's representatives could bring changes to this situation.

Bangladesh's gains feared

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shocks, in part because of its successful export sector. But Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government in July approached the IMF for a loan to try and shore up its foreign currency reserves and help the low-lying country build resilience against climate change. The country is seeking about \$4.5 billion from the fund, and as much as \$4 billion more from other lenders, including the World Bank and Asian Development Bank.

In addition to raising fuel prices, which triggered protests, the Bangladesh government has cut school and office hours to conserve energy and introduced import restrictions on luxury goods to protect its foreign reserves.

Bangladesh Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal insists that “everybody is under pressure”, and his country is not in danger of falling into the deep financial distress of its neighbours. “Bangladesh is in no way connected to what is happening in countries like Sri Lanka.”

The IMF said with a debt-to-GDP ratio of 39 percent – lower than its neighbours – Bangladesh is “not in a crisis situation”, but the country is vulnerable to the “huge uncertainty surrounding global economic developments”.

The garments sector helped shield Bangladesh during the pandemic, with exports rising to a record as locked-down consumers overseas shopped for clothes online. But it is now starting to feel the strain.

The IMF said demand for Bangladesh's cornerstone industry's products will suffer due to slowing growth in major buyers in the US and European countries.

David Hasanat, chair of Dhaka-based manufacturer Viyellatex Group, said the price of cotton had increased more than 50 percent, but that his company was only able to pass on about 10 percent of that cost to buyers. “Eventually [the higher costs] will give us more pain.”

Also, the rising import bill has taken a toll on Bangladesh's foreign reserves, which have fallen to less than \$40 billion, from more than \$45 billion last year.

While this remains enough for about five months' worth of imports, Dhaka University economics Professor Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir said he expects it to fall below three months' import cover – the level economists often consider critical – by the end of the year.

“The situation is laying bare cracks in the economy, from Bangladesh's slowing poverty reduction to its stagnating wages and rising debt. This has exposed the [success] story that we hear as a kind of a mirage,” he added.

Malloch Brown said the experience of South Asian countries shows how the pressures on emerging markets are part of a wider “systemic crisis which really endangers the global economy”.

He called for an international policy response akin to the Marshall Plan extended to war-ruined countries after the second world war.

Pope creates new cardinals who may choose successor

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Francis will create 20 new cardinals picked from the four corners of the world, most of whom could one day end up choosing the pontiff's successor.

Francis has raised the possibility of retiring due to his declining health, a path taken by his predecessor Benedict XVI. If he were to do so, a conclave involving all cardinals aged under 80 would be called to pick a successor.

Sixteen of the 20 cardinals created Saturday would be eligible for that conclave based on their ages.

The ceremony at St. Peter's Basilica is the 85-year-old pope's eighth since being elected in 2013 and includes clergy known for their pastoral work and, in some cases, progressive views.

All parts of the globe are represented, including new cardinals from Brazil and Nigeria, Singapore and East Timor, among others.

After this weekend, Francis will have chosen 83 out of the 132 cardinals currently qualified to elect a new pope.