

Mehzeb Chowdhury – pioneer in criminology, savant in films

Mehzeb Chowdhury is best known for his invention of MABMAT, a Mars Rover-like invention that aids crime scene analysis, which modernised the field. However, the Bangladesh-origin prodigy is also a member of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts' (BAFTA's) 'The Connect' programme for his contribution to the British film industry as a cinematographer and screenwriter. Recently, he and two fellow BAFTA members made the South Asian Film, Television and Arts Collective (SAFTAC), a vivid community of South Asian talents who help each other. The multi-talented Mehzeb, who is also a musician, author and painter, talked to The Daily Star over the phone for an interview.

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RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

"In my teens, I idolised Leonardo da Vinci, who was an inventor, painter, sculptor and an engineer. I was fascinated by all his talents, and a few years later, I worked on my repertoire of skills".

Mehzeb came to UK to take the bar exam in 2010, and then went back to Bangladesh to work at a law firm for two years. In 2012, he went to Durham University for his Masters in Criminology and Criminal Justice. Although he had been leading a wonderful life in Bangladesh, pursuing law and sports journalism, his artistic brilliance received 'wings' when he arrived in the UK.

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Mehzeb at the BAFTAs.

growing in my heart," he said. "At that time, the popularity of 'CSI' was at its peak, I was engrossed by the crime scene investigation in the show."

The now 'Doctor' Mehzeb works as a Senior Lecturer of Robotic Crime Scene and Forensics in Northumbria University.

Mehzeb's greatest invention heralded in 2016, when he developed MABMAT. However, he does not actually have any engineering experience at all.

"I was inspired by the Mars Rover, that I saw in one of NASA's channels. It immediately struck me – a similar invention can actually be used in the crime scene!" Mehzeb used acronyms from his parents' initials to make the name 'MABMAT'.

In 2017, Mehzeb worked as a cinematographer for the feature film "Redemption", directed by Edward Collier.

Thanks to his invention, the artist caught the attention of BAFTA, when he became the only cinematographer in the Northeast to be included in the in the 2019/20 Crew directory. Mehzeb has now been accepted into the (BAFTA) Connect programme, for his contribution to British film industry.

"I got into filmmaking when I was doing my PHD at Durham University – we have a strong film society established at the premises. We made a couple of short films which did quite well on the film festival circuit. We managed to get into prestigious

film festivals like Sundance Collab and Sundance TV and thus when I applied to BAFTA crew programme, which gave me the opportunity to be mentored by Linus Sandgren, who was the cinematographer for 'La La Land' and 'First Man'," he said.

"Around 2021, I started doing screenwriting, among which some projects were premiered at Raindance Film Festival. 'Remind me Yesterday' won the best sci-fi film at Berlin Film Festival and also secured the second spot at the Raindance Festival. It was directed by Aleksandra Czenczek. I also worked with director Michaela Moir for 'Downtime', which was showcased in numerous festivals as well. The sort of fanfare around the two movies cemented my portfolio and thus, when the time for BAFTA connect programme came, I was selected. This gave me good recognition for the work that I have been trying to do for last six years," added the young inventor.

Currently, Mehzeb is writing the screenplay for his debut feature film, which focuses on a dystopian, futuristic setting. He wants to hire a South Asian actor to be the main lead for his film, as there is negligible representation of them in Hollywood.

"In the past, I wanted to be an actor but when I got into this industry, I realised that representation really matters. I really want younger people to look at cinemas and think that they could be that person. I started an organisation with two of my fellow BAFTA crew members, Hareesh Patel and Shawn Basheer, called South Asian Film Television and Arts Collective (SAFTAC). We are all founding directors, and we have been able to do some amazing works representing South Asian creative interest in the UK and US," he mentioned. SAFTAC now has over 1,000 members.

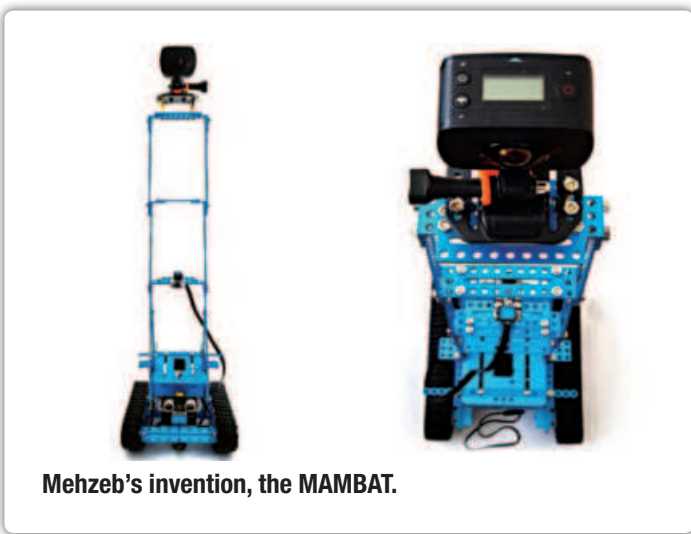
Mehzeb had been recognised for almost everything that he has done, but he has reservations about his own paintings.

"In the last couple of years, I have got emails and messages about people wanting to buy my art. My target is to create two canvases at the end of the year. The template has always been Leonardo, and I will never be as good a painter as him. I want to share social messages through my paintings, which touch upon themes like racism, and the subjugation of women in Afghanistan," he added.

Mehzeb has also formed a band called 'Megalithic' along with his Irish friend Alex McDonnell. Their music centres around a mixture of genres including indie rock to pop to metal. They were featured on a website called Emerging Indie Bands, and a 50-year-old French Heavy Metal magazine.



Mehzeb with the director and star of Oscar-winning film "Parasite".



Mehzeb's invention, the MABMAT.

NEWS

Naypyidaw

FROM PAGE 1
"They (China) are facilitators, not decision-makers. We are requesting them again and again," Momen said, adding that Dhaka will continue keeping pressure on China to resolve the crisis.

China has been playing a mediator role in the last four years between Bangladesh and Myanmar to find a durable solution to the Rohingya crisis under a tripartite mechanism.

The hour-long meeting between the foreign minister and the Chinese envoy was held at the State Guesthouse Padma while today's discussion was confined to only Rohingya issues.

Ambassador Jiming at a recent event indicated that they are going to formally share the "feedback" with the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry based on what they talked with the Myanmar side.

The foreign minister said Dhaka wants to see a quick and sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis.

"I am always a very optimistic person," Momen said.

Since August 25 in 2017, Bangladesh has been hosting over 1.2 million forcefully displaced Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar district and most of them arrived there after a military crackdown by Myanmar, which the UN called a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing" and other rights groups dubbed as "genocide".

Former trustees

FROM PAGE 12
Analysing the selling price of adjacent pieces of land of the same mouzas, investigators found that the university paid the extra amount of about Tk 304 crore to the company.

According to the Private University Act 2010, the trustee board is the highest authority of a university, which, as per rules and regulations, is a non-profit organisation.

Without the consent of the university's syndicate, University Grants Commission and education ministry, the board of trustees illegally paid Tk 304 crore extra for a campus on the 9096.88 decimals of land.

NSU, the first private university in Bangladesh, was established in 1992 as a charitable, non-profit, non-commercial, and non-political organisation.

Cops, admin saw nothing

FROM PAGE 12
said, "On election day, we visited most of the centres and did not see any problems or irregularities. But when the commission asked us to take action on all the irregularities the commission found, we took steps immediately."

It seems that the commission has developed distrust in the local administration, Waliur replied when asked whether there was any tension between the EC and the field-level administration.

Asked if the administration and the EC having a face off, the DC said they did not think so because they work as per the commission's directives.

Gaibandha SP Touhidul Islam told journalists that they answered all questions asked by the probe committee.

The SP said the DC, the returning officer and he visited several centres but did not see any kind of problems. The EC observed the rest, it is the EC's jurisdiction, adding, "We have discharged our duties properly."

Luxury in the time

FROM PAGE 12
According to the DPP, each of the three-storey building will be built on 18,000 square feet and will cost Tk 21.5 crore.

There will be two swimming pools in each, which would cost another estimated Tk 5.1 crore.

In the project description, the ministry said there were no permanent residences for the cabinet and principal secretaries.

The cabinet secretary currently lives in the official residence in the capital's Minto Road, while the principal secretary's official residence is in Gulshan.

A total of 14 LED televisions will be purchased at Tk 900,000 for the proposed homes.

As many as 32 CCTV systems will be bought for those at the cost of Tk 600,000, while Tk 1.75 crore will be spent for the fire extinguishing systems.

The cost of the 1,000 kg lifts (European Standard) is estimated at Tk 1.55 crore.

Moreover, Tk 18 lakh will be spent to conserve rainwater.

For official purposes, meeting with diplomats and overall security, there will be separate buildings.

Election Commission Additional Secretary Ashok Kumar Debnath, also led the probe body, said so far 622 people out of 685 gave their statements before the committee. "We will submit the investigation report on Monday."

He declined to say anything further.

Meanwhile, the five candidates who participated in the hearing said they submitted their written statements to the probe committee.

Of them, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh candidate Jahangir Alam demanded punishment of the 51 presiding officers "for their involvement in anomalies".

Saying that the by-polls were held in a peaceful manner, Awami League nominee Mahmud Hasan Ripon demanded announcement of results of 94 centres, except the 51 centres where voting was stopped.

Jatiya Party candidate Golam Shahid Ranju said, "We have trust in the Election Commission probe body and it will act according to the probe report."

Shafiqul Islam, additional chief engineer of the public works department, said, "They are the top government officials. If they don't deserve such facilities, then who does?"

"It [the project] will not be implemented right now. By the time it will be, the economic situation will become normal."

Iftakharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said if the government is respectful to its commitment to transparent and accountable governance, it will be impossible to justify the project to the public.

"The approval of the project will send a message to the people that the government itself is ridiculing the pledges of austerity, and it has no qualms in spending public money to fund the disproportionately luxurious lifestyle of public officials, whose salaries and benefits are borne by the already overburdened common people."

Asked about the logic behind the project at a time like this, an additional secretary of the housing ministry said, "We don't do anything on our own. We only execute plans that come from the top level."

RU student's death an accident

FROM PAGE 12
fearing chaos, as there was a huge number of students waiting on the hospital premises," said RMCH Director Brig Gen Shamim Yazdani.

Thus, the duty doctor referred Shahriar to a senior doctor for the declaration of his death, he added.

The hospital authorities found no evidence of negligence in duty or delay in treating Shahriar, he further added.

Earlier, RU students alleged that Shahriar died because of the hospital authorities' negligence. They also locked into a seven-hour-long clash with the hospital staffers on Wednesday.

They observed a strike at the campus yesterday.

On the other hand, the intern doctors of the RMCH began a wildcat strike from zero hours at the night demanding their security and punishment of the attackers.

They observed a strike yesterday.

After a meeting with hospital officials in the afternoon, they reduced the strike and some of them returned to emergency duties.

Imran Hossain, convener of RMCH Intern doctors' council said they would withdraw the strike completely and join duties from 6:00am today.

The body of Shahriar was handed over to his family members early yesterday without conducting an autopsy as per the recommendation of RU authorities and family members.

His namaj-e-janaja was held at RU central mosque and his body was sent to his native village in Dinajpur's Birol upazila.

Meanwhile, Anwar Hossain, acting administrative officer of RMCH, filed a complaint with Rajpara Police Station alleging that an uncountable number of RU students clashed with the hospital staffers and vandalised the hospital.

RMP commissioner said they were yet to record the case.

Shahriar, a fourth-year student of RU's marketing department, was a residential student of Habibur Rahman hall at the university.

Owners take buses off streets

FROM PAGE 1
Khulna District Bus, Minibus, Coach, Microbus Owners Association and also a former AL MP from Khulna-2, yesterday said the decision to enforce the bus strike was made without consulting him as he was away.

Asked whether they put pressure on bus owners to enforce the strike, he told The Daily Star that their programme had nothing to do with the BNP's rally.

'PRESSURE ON HOTELIERS'
Authorities of several hotels in Khulna city yesterday alleged that they were verbally instructed by local AL leaders not to take in any new guests from outside Khulna.

"We are not receiving any new guest as renovation work is going on," said a receptionist at Hotel Royal.

However, this correspondent found that a small renovation work was going on and the hotel didn't suspend its operations.

Masudur Rahman Bhuiyan, police commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police, said they did not issue any directives to hotel owners regarding receiving new guests.

He said they check names and addresses of hotel guests as part of their routine work to make sure that no criminal hides there.

Amid such a situation, local BNP leaders have asked the party leaders and activists from the 10 districts in Khulna division to reach the city by today and stay with relatives.

"As bus services will remain suspended, we have asked the party men to travel to Khulna by trucks, pickups, minibuses and cars," said Mizanur Rahman, member of the convening committee of Khulna Metropolitan BNP.

Bridge over Lohalia river

FROM PAGE 12
bridge has been completed, except the 107-metre-long steel structure over the middle of the river.

Patuakhali LGED Executive Engineer Mohammad Latif Hossain said construction of the concrete infrastructure of the bridge has already been completed and the installation of the steel structure is going to start soon.

According to a decision at a recent inter-ministerial meeting, all the waterway routes of the Lohalia river will remain closed from November 1 to January 31 due to the installation work, he said,

He said BNP men have also been advised to use river routes to join the rally. They have also been asked to travel to the venue in groups to avoid any possible harassment by police.

Shamsuzzaman Dudu, coordinator of the rally and also a vice chairman of the BNP, said they would hold the rally on time no matter what the situation might be.

Speaking at a press conference at the BNP office in the city, he alleged that police were raiding the houses of the party leaders and activists.

Responding to a query, the BNP leader said the party men were instructed not to carry any sticks.

Many senior BNP leaders, who were relieved from party posts earlier, have started working for the rally.

Speaking at a press conference at Khulna Press Club yesterday, former Khulna City BNP president Nazrul Islam Manju, who was relieved from the post, said, "The party has called for making the rally a success and we all are working ignoring all differences and divisions."

RECRUITMENT TEST
A recruitment test of the Department of Social Services is scheduled for today. Many candidates are uncertain about making it to the exam.

About 13,376 candidates from Khulna are seeking the post of Grade III social worker.

Khan Motahar Hossain, deputy director of Khulna District Social Service Office, said the announcement for the recruitment test was made much earlier.

"Nothing can be done at this stage if bus services remain suspended in Khulna. I would advise the candidates to come to the city at least a day before the exam," he said.

He added that the bridge is expected to be fully functional by June next year. Once the bridge is opened to traffic, it will connect Baufal, Galachipa and Dashmina upazilas with the district headquarters, locals said.

Private firm China Harzone Industry Corporation Limited got the work order to construct the steel structure, with a cost of Tk 21.17 crore.

Dashmina's Betagi Sankipur Union Parishad Chairman Moshirur Rahman Jhantu said in the absence of a bridge, thousands of people of nearby areas have to go to the district town by crossing the Lohalia on boats.