

‘The more films release, the better it is for the industry’

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SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Shajal Noor starter *Jinn* is doing well in halls, after being released on the occasion of Eid. This marks the actor's third appearance on the big screen.

Speaking with The Daily Star, Shajal shared his Eid experience with *Jinn*.

Your new film is being screened in cinema halls. How are you feeling?

I am feeling extremely happy. Before *Jinn*, only two of my other films were screened in theaters. However, neither was released during Eid. The audience is quite interested in watching films during this time, which is why I am feeling quite jovial today. This will be a memory that I will treasure for the rest of my life.

How was the response from the audience?

People are just loving the horror elements in the film. The response exceeds our expectations. Some shows are also going housefull, and some are returning for a second viewing. I would say this is a good sign for a film.

Do you think the promotional activities prior to the release of the film helped create hype among the audience?

I would go as far as to say that many are coming to watch the film solely because of the promotion. The ‘1 Lakh Taka’ challenge helped create curiosity among the audience.

Usually, stars visit the screening of their newly released films. Did you visit the halls?



Jinn was being released in quite a few theaters around the capital, and I visited a few on the first day. How can I not share this joy with my audience? However, I'll only observe the audience's reaction and won't have a chance to watch the entire film. However, I do have plans to watch *Jinn* in the cinema hall with my family this week.

There are quite a few films that released with yours. Does that make you nervous?

No. The fact that so many films are being theatrically released is great news. I have always respected Bangladeshi cinema. Everyone whose films are being screened with my film have my best wishes with them.

Competition is good, I am not nervous or stressed about this. Instead, it is giving me a good feeling.

Tell us a bit about the project's director and your co-star.

Jinn has been directed by Nader Chowdhury, a renowned actor and director, whose work I grew up watching. He has invested a lot of effort and care into making this film, and did a splendid job. As for Puja, I have really enjoyed acting with her. I must say that, as an artiste, Puja Chery is amazing.



Anirban teases surprises for ‘Mohanagar season 3’

Ashfaque Nipun's *Mohanagar* season 2 ended on a cliffhanger, as the last scene introduced Anirban as 'Rojob Ali'. Fans wondered whether it was a short cameo or if we would see more of the *Mukhosh* actor in the upcoming series.

Fans can rest assured as Anirban Bhattacharya has confirmed on his Instagram account that he is indeed part of *Mohanagar* season 3.

"The story is yet to be finished my friend. I am coming back soon. *Mohanagar* season 3 coming back to Hoichoi," read Anirban's post. He tagged Ashfaque Nipun and Mosharrar Karim in the post as well.



Bubly-Ador starrer ‘Local’ defies expectations

Directed by Saif Chandan, *Local* was released this Eid in 11 cinema halls across the country. The film stars Shobnom Yesmin Bubly and Ador Azad. Since the first day of Eid, the film has been performing well in multiplexes. Even on the second day of Eid tickets for *Local* were in high demand.

Speaking about the situation, the film's director, Saif Chandan told The Daily Star, "The audience loved the trailer and enjoyed the songs that were released before the film. Now, I am also seeing an interest from the audience to go and watch the film. *Local* has been doing well since the first day of its release. So far, around seven screenings of the film have already gone houseful. This is a big achievement for us. Personally, I think the film will do even better next week."

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IMF mission to check

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neighbourhood of \$24 million.

As per the IMF's methodology, GIR calculation does not include the various funds that the Bangladesh Bank has formed from the reserves as well as the loan guarantees provided for Biman, the currency swap with Sri Lanka, the loan to Payra Port Authority, deposits with the Islamic Development Bank and the below-investment-grade securities. At present, these account for about \$6.9 billion.

In the first two months of the year, letters of credit amounting to \$11.4 billion were opened, according to data from the BB. LC opening is an indicator of impending import bills.

There is uncertainty on whether June's NIR target could be met.

The IMF stipulated a minimum NIR of \$24.46 billion on June 30.

"While we have managed to bring down overall imports, there is still pressure on reserves because of the need for petroleum imports for the summer months," said a finance ministry official.

The government is banking on

budget support from the other multilateral lenders to get within a touching distance of the IMF floor on NIR for June.

"Hopefully, if the other targets are met, the IMF will excuse this," the official added.

The NIR floor is one of the three mandatory conditions tagged by the Washington-based lender for the loan programme.

BB Governor Abdur Rouf Talukder remains confident.

"They [IMF] are happy with how we are progressing with the programme -- there has been no problem so far," he told reporters earlier this month in Washington DC on the sidelines of the IMF-World Bank spring meetings.

He went on to express hope about meeting all of June's conditions.

Asked when the uniform exchange rate would be implemented, which is one of the programme requirements, he said: "There will be no single exchange rate. There will be separate rates with a deviation of 2 percent. We will gradually move towards a market-based exchange rate."

The government though has

committed to adopting a market-determined exchange rate for all official foreign exchange transactions by the end of June.

Asked about the subsidy cuts for fuel and energy, Talukder denied that the IMF has tagged it as a condition in the loan programme.

"We are bringing it down on our own volition as we feel the bill is becoming too high. There is no subsidy on fuel but there is some subsidy on electricity. We raised the electricity tariffs thrice this year -- this was necessary to bring down the subsidy burden."

However, in their letter of intent to the IMF, Talukder and Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal committed to containing spending on subsidies.

"Going forward, we plan to eliminate all structural subsidies for petroleum products and, to this end, will move to a periodic formula-based price adjustment mechanism (end-December 2023). Furthermore, we will aim at adjusting electricity prices further to reduce subsidies," they said.

Trade, defence co-op to top the agenda

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scope for discussions on elevating the relationship to a strategic level."

Bangladesh expects to expand economic and trade cooperation with a new framework, Momen said.

Japan is implementing big projects in Bangladesh, including Matarbari deep sea port, Araihaazar special economic zone, the third terminal of Dhaka Airport, and metro rail.

The country also wants to create an industrial hub here and develop connectivity to northeast India.

Bangladesh further wants to extend connectivity beyond India's northeast to Bhutan and Nepal in a bid to improve regional connectivity.

Asked why defence cooperation with Japan was necessary, Momen said the protection of Bangladesh's maritime assets is important.

"There are reports of illegal fishing in the Bay of Bengal and Japan

expressed willingness to support Bangladesh [in this regard]."

Asked about global or regional implications, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam said defence cooperation is purely bilateral.

"Its purpose is to promote and strengthen cooperation in the fields of defence dialogue, visits, courses, technology transfer ... Bangladesh's capacity has developed. We want to strengthen our defence force."

Hasina, who is scheduled to leave Dhaka at 7:45am, will pay a courtesy call on the emperor of Japan on April 26. She will hold a bilateral meeting with her Japanese counterpart, Fumio Kishida, followed by a dinner.

She is scheduled to attend an investment summit and a community reception in Tokyo, and also hand over the "Friends of Liberation War Honour" to four Japanese nationals for their contribution to Bangladesh's

1971 Liberation War.

Hasina will leave Tokyo on April 28 and reach Washington the next day to attend an event marking a 50-year partnership between Bangladesh and the World Bank on May 1.

Senior officials of the US-Bangladesh Business Council of the US Chamber of Commerce will hold meetings with her.

Besides, the PM will participate in a high-level executive roundtable of the US Bangladesh Business Council at the invitation of council president.

Momen said there will not be any bilateral meeting between Hasina or any high-level US official.

"We did not try for it, as only recently I held a meeting with the US secretary of state," he said.

PM Hasina will leave Washington for London on May 4 to attend the coronation of Charles III.

She will leave London for Dhaka on May 8.

No new pay scale now for govt employees

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subsidy expenditure, they added. A proposal for a special allowance has been prepared, taking into account the price hike of essentials.

Officials directly involved in the budget formulation have confirmed that there will be no new pay scale.

The officials said that government employees had been expecting a new pay scale for a long time, but the prime minister rejected it.

In the current fiscal year, as part of cost-cutting measures, over Tk 1,000 crore has been saved from

salaries and allowances (foreign travel) of government employees.

The total allocation for salaries and allowances in the revised budget was Tk 73,173 crore.

However, the finance department has estimated an allocation of Tk 77,000 crore for salaries and allowances in the upcoming fiscal.

The government usually announces a new pay scale every five years. After implementing the seventh pay scale in 2009, the government implemented a new pay scale in 2015 by increasing the salary by almost

100 percent. Since then, government employees are getting a 5 percent increment every year in July.

Eight years have passed since then and different organisations of government employees are demanding a new pay scale, citing the price hike of essentials.

As per the PM's direction, the ministry has set a total budget of Tk 759,955 crore for 2023-24.

Hasina will finalise the budget proposal in a meeting to be held in the second week of May, finance ministry sources said.

Buriganga's

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Engineers involved said that a consultancy firm was appointed in October last year at a cost of approximately Tk 4.5 crore to develop a plan for transforming the channel into a Hatirjheel-style establishment for entertainment and leisure activities.

The planning work is expected to be completed by May. Once done, the plan will be submitted to the government ministry concerned for approval.

If approved, it may take up to four years to beautify and transform the original Buriganga channel.

The cost of the entire project will be determined once the Development Project Proposal has been prepared.

In the meantime, with illegal structures being demolished, a new boundary is being installed for the channel.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Md Khairul Baker, DSCC superintendent engineer, said the channel used to serve as a dumping ground and was filled with garbage.

"Significant progress has been

made and the water flow is now visible, although the water's colour remains black and highly polluted," he said, adding that efforts are being made to decrease the level of pollution.

"We are currently conducting a survey for the Development Project Proposal."

Elaborating on their vision for the channel, Baker explained that they intend to create visually appealing bridges, walkways, and recreational parks surrounding the area.

"Our plan is to make the channel a hub for recreational activity."

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Planned murder

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Mohammad Mir Kashem, chairman of Hoanak Union Parishad of Moheshkhali, said he came to know from locals that Shamsul Alam and several others sailed on his mid-sized trawler for fishing on April 7.

"A few days later, relatives of some of those people informed me that there has been no trace of the trawler and the fishermen," he said, adding that he asked them to inform the police.

Mohammad Anwar Hossain, deputy inspector general of Chattogram range of police, told journalists after visiting the morgue that different units, including the PBI and the CID, have started probing the incident.

Usually, any fishing trawler that

goes to sea bears a name, but the trawler from which the bodies were recovered did not have any.

Asked about it, Anwar said they will talk to other trawler owners and fishermen.

The Cox's Bazar police chief said they were suspecting that a gang of robbers may have committed the murders. Police are yet to arrest or detain anyone in this connection.

Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman, DIG of Chattogram zone of CID, that samples from all bodies were collected and will be sent to the lab for DNA test.

Police have not yet decided whether the identified bodies will be handed over to families, he said, replying to a query.

Lightning strikes kill 9

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Milon Miah, 14, of Fatepur village in Dwarabazar upazila; and Ramzan Ali, 16, of Kukurkandi village in Tahirpur upazila.

The injured are Mukid Miah, 25, of Tahirpur and Nizam Uddin, 30, of Dwarabazar. They were sent to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Two others were killed similarly

in Moulvibazar's Sreemangal and Kamalganj upazilas.

The deceased were identified as Riaz Uddin, 22 of Lalbag village in Sreemangal upazila and Shom Shabdakar, 42, of Uttar Tilakpur village in Kamalganj upazila, confirmed Jahangir Sarder, officer-in-charge of Sreemangal Police Station and Sanjay Debnath, officer-in-charge of Kamalganj Police

Station.

Ansar Ali of Mohammadpur village in Balaganj upazila also died after being struck by lightning in Sylhet, confirmed Ramaprashad Chakrobarty, officer-in-charge of Balaganj Police Station.

Our Sylhet and Moulvibazar correspondents contributed to this report