



ABM Sumon.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



Asif Akbar

RAKSHANDA
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Mr-9: Do or Die a Hollywood film that centres on iconic Bangladeshi spy Masud Rana, took almost five years to complete its journey. Masud Rana, a creation of Bangladeshi novelist Qazi Anwar Hossain, will see his biggest portrayal on-screen with this high-budget project.

With a multi-starrer international cast and tantalising teaser, **Mr-9** has been the center of attention globally. In an interview with The Daily Star, both director Asif Akbar and lead ABM Sumon revealed that they are massive fans of Qazi Anwar Hossain, and are obsessed with the character.

"Growing up in the US, I had a stack of Masud Rana novels; Qazi Anwar Hossain was my inspiration. The series inspired me to pursue filmmaking, and he was very much involved with the casting process," said Asif Akbar.

ABM Sumon, who plays Masud Rana, also opened up about his love for the spy-thriller series.

"Masud Rana is a different emotion for us 90's kids, the series was like a part of our life. At that time, we didn't have the internet, and so reading books took us to an imaginary world where we would imagine ourselves as the iconic spy. I can't believe that among so many fans, only 2-3 people had the opportunity to play Masud Rana, and I was one of them," said the actor.

Many people have compared the **MR-9** film to **James Bond** films. When asked what made it unique from the popular franchise, the director replied that the film represented the South Asian populations.

Will 'MR-9' be the next Bangladeshi blockbuster?



The Hollywood crew of "Mr-9: Do or Die"

"The main character is a Bangladeshi spy, which gives us an edge; we have a reality-based, unique storyline that represents people from America, China, India, and Bangladesh, among others, who come together to save the world. This story will represent unity and our minority culture," said the director.

In 2019, Channel i started a reality show called **Ke Hobe Masud Rana**. Although contestant Rasel Rana won the show, it was ABM Sumon who finally got the coveted role.

"At that time, Jaaz Multimedia announced that nobody in the industry was adequate to play Masud Rana. The reality show happened after that, and before the finale, there was a big gap," said ABM Sumon. "One of my senior colleagues, who was involved with the project, asked me, 'Do you want to be Masud Rana?' and my answer was a resounding yes. When the director came with his Hollywood team to Bangladesh, they did a secret audition, and finally selected me for this role," stated ABM Sumon.

Sumon's anti-hero attitude and incredible physique made him the perfect choice for the movie.

"I had Sumon in my mind, but I wanted to give everyone a fair chance. We came to Bangladesh with our

Hollywood crew in 2019, and we auditioned in a secret, closed-door audition, comprised of top contestants from Channel i's reality show. We also had established media artistes who took part in the competition. Among them, we selected Sumon fairly, and Qazi Anwar Hossain also stated that he was the perfect choice," said the director.

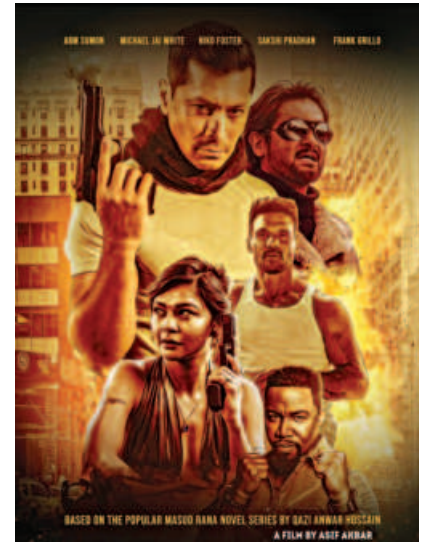
Earlier on, **MR-9** was criticised for not taking more Bangladeshi artistes. The director also clarified his stance on the casting.

"Unfortunately, the first teaser released by Jaaz Multimedia didn't focus on the Bangladeshi part. It was more of an international first-look teaser. We will soon release the official trailer, and there will be tons of Bangladeshi artistes, including Anisur Rahman Milon, Shahidul Alam Sachchu, Sajjad Hossain (contestant from **Ke Hobe Masud Rana**), Robiul Islam, Jessica Islam, and Alisha Islam. We also have one prominent character from the book, which will be a surprise for our audiences. We have tried to portray Bangladesh beautifully and positively through this film. The shooting of the Bangladeshi parts took place in Rayerbazar, Sadarghat, Gulshan and Mirpur, among others," added the director.

Captain America fans were surprised when the makers announced that Frank Grillo would play the antagonist in **MR-9**. The director finally revealed what made Grillo take up the role.

"Frank is a close friend of mine, and he was keen on giving a surprise to his Bangladeshi fans by being part of the movie. He has worked in **Captain America** and Marvel movies with a huge fan base. He recognised that Masud Rana has a massive fan base in Bangladesh, and he wanted to be a part of the film," said Asif.

As the release date is coming closer, the makers have devised a promotional strategy to surprise their



Mr-9: Do or Die poster

fans every week before August 25. Jaaz Multimedia and **MR-9** page will unveil the official trailer on July 25. The film will have songs composed by Grammy award-winning singer Ricky Kej.

The director also plans to do a "Meet the Press" and "Meet the Fan" event. There will also be a special premiere for the film. Asif will be coming to Bangladesh, and he is hoping to bring some of the Hollywood cast to the country as well.

NEWS

Runway in the sea to be active by December

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domestic flights to the airport, located 1.5km from Cox's Bazar town and 396km from Dhaka.

In the first phase, the runway was extended to 9,000 feet from 6,775 feet and widened from 120 feet to 200 feet.

In 2019, the government took up a Tk 1,568.86 crore project, aiming to upgrade the airport to international standards and offer foreign holidaymakers a hassle-free trip to the world's longest sea beach.

In February 2021, CAAB signed a deal with the Chinese joint venture firm to expand the runway to 10,700 feet, which will make it the longest runway in the country.

The length of the runway of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka is nearly 10,500 feet.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina laid the foundation stone of the runway extension work in August 2021.

Musharraf Hussain, project coordinator of the contractor, said they had to deal with many challenges including high tide and low tide and Covid-19 situation.

He said many of the construction materials had to import amid the Russia-Ukraine war. Still they are ahead of the schedule, he added.

Musharraf said they had to reclaim around 520m land from the sea for the runway and install lights on further 600 metres to facilitate landing of aircraft.

Boulders and concrete blocks were piled up surrounding the reclaimed land as protection measure. The contractor has built a makeshift jetty for offloading materials for the construction, he said.

Project Director Md Younus Bhuiyan said they were also hopeful of making the 10,700 feet runway operational by December.

He, however, said they were

experiencing some problems in importing construction materials due to dollar crisis.

"But the Bangladesh Bank governor, after our top authority met him, assured us of solving the problem," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked when the airport will be ready for international flights, he said apart from the runway extension work, construction of the terminal building among other work has to be completed.

He said the terminal, being built under a different project, is expected to be ready by June next year.

Replying to another query, Younus said to make the airport a regional hub, the aviation authority has started the process for floating tenders to hire consultants.

Once hired, the consultants will prepare a detailed design and provide estimated cost within nine months, he said.

Police arrest two 'culprits'

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With the latest arrests, the total number of arrests over the attack is now nine.

Talking to reporters at his office yesterday, Detective Branch Chief Muhammad Harun Or Rashid said that the two arrestees who were seen assaulting Alom are workers at the Tejaon Truck Stand.

"We will investigate if they were instigated by someone," he said, adding that they were looking into the case seriously.

Harun said that they were also investigating why they attacked Alom towards the end of voting.

According to sources at the Tejaon Sramik League Mahanagar Thana Committee, the two arrestees are Sramik League activists.

This correspondent visited the spot and talked to at least 50 rikshawvan pullers. Upon looking at their photos, all of them identified them as Sramik League activists.

A police official, requesting anonymity due to the sensitivity of the case, also confirmed their affiliation with Sramik League.

Meanwhile, Alom was called to the DB office yesterday to identify the attackers.

After meeting the DB chief in the afternoon, Alom told reporters that he was grateful that the police had arrested the attackers within a short period of time.

Alom shared his displeasure with the role BGB and police played when he was assaulted. Had they been more vigilant, he said, the incident could have been averted.

Regarding the attackers' political identity, Alom said he noticed some of them wearing badges of the ruling Awami League's electoral symbol.

"If you don't like me, don't vote for me. But no one has the right to beat me up. The way I was assaulted that day, I feel lucky that I am still alive by the will of Allah. The attackers beat me like fanatics. They continued to hit me even after I fell to the ground," Alom said.

Alom said he would not join any polls under the ruling Awami League in the future.

"I became a victim of beating for the third time as an independent candidate under this government. I came under attack for the first time in 2018... I won't take part in any more elections under the AL government," he said.

Asked about the support extended

by 13 embassies and missions, Alom said, "I welcome it. The Election Commission may tolerate this unjust torture... The Election Commission has failed. So, they [foreigners] are talking."

Election Commissioner Md Alamgir said the commission denounces the attack on Alom.

"He [Alom] was a candidate and it was the responsibility of the commission and law enforcers to ensure his safety," Alamgir said while talking to reporters at his EC office yesterday.

The chief election commissioner has already instructed police to probe the case and take actions against the culprits involved in the attack, he said.

Meanwhile, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said the attack on Alom is unacceptable but it has not put the government in an uncomfortable position.

"The government has taken steps, so there is no question of facing an uncomfortable situation," Quader told reporters after the British high commissioner in Dhaka met him at the Setu Bhaban.

The incident was condemned by the US, the European Union, and the United Nations.

UK envoy holds talks with AL, BNP

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the general secretary of the ruling party, I have given my comments," Quader told reporters.

He said that she told the British envoy what they have already told the US and EU diplomats earlier.

"As per the constitution, the Election Commission will conduct the election and the polls-time government will carry out routine work and that the government will not take any major decision," he said, citing his conversation with the British High Commissioner.

Replying to a question, he said that he made it clear to the British diplomat that the ruling party's one-point demand is the election will be held under Sheikh Hasina.

On BNP's demand for restoration of the caretaker government system, Quader said during the meeting he asked the British envoy whether his prime minister has to resign, parliament dissolved and a caretaker government is formed before their election.

"No one replied in the affirmative," he said

He termed the BNP's demand for restoration of caretaker government system "weird and irrational".

BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khoshru Mahmud Chowdhury briefed reporters about their meeting with the British High Commissioner at BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office.

He said they told the envoy that a fair election is not possible without a neutral government, reports UNB.

Though the election is six months away, the AL is actively plotting to steal votes, he said.

"That's why it's not possible to have a fair election in Bangladesh without an impartial government," he said.

The BNP leader said that the only way to stop vote rigging is holding the election under a non-partisan government.

Amir Khoshru said the international community too has its concerns whether a credible, participatory and impartial election will be held in Bangladesh so the people can freely elect the government.

"The British government has

always had this concern as we follow Westminster system of democracy. This issue was also discussed in the meeting," he said.

Asked whether the UK supports BNP's demand for a non-partisan government, he said not only the UK but also many other countries support this.

Adviser of IMED

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plants a "model of robbery" and is a reflection of ill-motivated contracts.

After a few media outlets ran reports on the IMED report -- titled "Research Report on Implementation Progress of Projects in Power Sector" -- the planning ministry division quietly revised the paper, deleting the section that was critical of the power sector's business model.

A three-member probe body led by Additional Secretary Gazi Md Saifuzzaman was formed on July 11 to investigate the matter.

The committee was asked to submit the report in seven working days.

BNP-Jamaat won't face obstruction

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properties again, they won't be spared," she said, referring to the violence unleashed by the BNP-Jamaat during the 2013-2015 period.

The premier said this while inaugurating the newly constructed 72-km dual-gauge double rail line, built under the Akhaura-Laksam Double Track Project.

She joined the inaugural function at Laksam in Cumilla through a virtual platform from the Gono Bhaban.

With this, the entire 321km Dhaka-Chatogram corridor has turned into a double lined one increasing its operational capacity, which will save travel time by 30 minutes to one hour on this route.

Speaking on the occasion, the PM said there will be cameras everywhere and the culprits will be identified and punished in case of any destructive activity.

Hasina said BNP-Jamaat set fire to railways in 29 places during their arson violence unleashed to thwart

the 2014 general election.

While this sector suffered during the BNP regime, the PM said her government has taken massive initiatives to improve it.

Hasina said her government formed a separate ministry for railways to increase allocation for the sector.

"In the last 14 and a half years, we constructed 740km new rail lines, converted 280km metre-gauge rail tracks into dual-gauge ones, and reinstalled or reconstructed 1,308km rail lines."

Besides, the AL government constructed 126 new station buildings, reconstructed 223 station buildings, constructed 732 new railway bridges, reinstalled or reconstructed 774 railway bridges during the period, she added.

Hasina said her government has added 111 locomotives, 588 passenger carriages and 516 wagons (for carrying goods) since 2009. "We've commissioned 143 new trains on different routes."

She said the government is implementing several mega projects to improve the regional and local railway communications and networks.

"We've taken an initiative to add 46 new broad-gauge locomotives, 460 new broad-gauge passenger carriages, 150 new metre-gauge passenger carriages, 125 new modern luggage vans and 1,310 new wagons."

Nur faction

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about 16 months and even raised questions about my ownership of the building," said Moshuazzaman.

Moshuazzaman refuted the allegation of evicting the Nur-led faction forcibly. "They broke the lock and took their belongings in the evening. We're not present there."

Salauddin Mia, officer-in-charge of Paltan Police Station, dismissed the allegation of charging truncheons on supporters of Nur.