

AZAD ABUL KALAM

going strong amidst 3-decade career



ANTARA RAISA

Azad Abul Kalam is not only a seasoned actor, but also a multi-talented individual. With a career spanning over three decades, he has graced the stage, television and silver screen with his exceptional talent, presenting audiences with unforgettable characters. Recently, he portrayed the titular character in the web-series *Puff Daddy*, which captured everyone's attention.

How did the audience respond to 'Puff Daddy'?

The response has been wonderful. People are talking about my character, 'Muri Baba', and it's quite heartwarming. I usually don't take on such roles, which made this experience even more enjoyable.

Given that this isn't your typical genre, how challenging was it?

It was indeed challenging. We filmed the entire series in scorching heat, and I had to wear cloaks with long sleeves. I also sported matted hair, which wasn't comfortable in the sweltering weather. Moreover, the character 'Puff Daddy' is morally ambiguous. Typically, cult leaders are depicted as deceitful, but in this web series, there's a compelling backstory to his actions. It was challenging to portray this complex character.

You've been a part of this industry for three decades. How do you view the changes in the media landscape over time?

The roles and opportunities have become more diverse now. I began my career in theatre and then transitioned to television. With advancements in technology, budgets, and opportunities, we can now experiment more with our roles.

What's your take on the flourishing OTT platforms?

OTT platforms are thriving, but I've noticed a trend towards crime-thriller genres. It seems like our content has become somewhat limited in terms of variety.

You once mentioned your desire to become a writer. Is that aspiration still alive?

Absolutely. I've been writing long before my acting career took off. Writing has always been a passion of mine, and I've published my storybooks. While I may not be a professional or write regularly, I'm continually engaged in the process. Acting, directing, and writing—all bring me equal joy. Whenever I'm immersed in any of these, I enjoy them the most.

What are your recent ventures?

Lately, I've directed two plays for Prachyanat, *Achalayatan* and *Agunjatra*. I'm also eagerly awaiting the release of two films, *Jole Tara*, directed by Arun Chowdhury, and another directed by Gias Uddin Selim. I have also directed a short film for Projonmo Wave, which will be released soon.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

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International Emmy Awards 2023: Shefali Shah, Vir Das and Jim Sarbh nominated

The nominees for the 2023 International Emmy Awards have been announced, with 56 nominees from 20 countries representing 14 categories. This time, Indian actors Jim Sarbh, Shefali Shah, and Vir Das have made it to the list.

Shefali has been nominated for best actress' performance in the second season of the critically acclaimed series *Delhi Crime* while Jim was nominated for best actor's performance for his role in *Rocket Boys* as nuclear physicist Homi Bhabha. Comedian Vir Das' stand-up special *Landing* has been nominated under the comedy category.

On November 20, the International Emmy Awards will be hosted in New York City. In addition, film producer Ekta R Kapoor will get the Directorate Award for her trailblazing career and impact on the Indian television landscape.

Apurba to debut in Tollywood

Ziaul Faruq Apurba has gained a massive fan base in Kolkata following his popular tele-fictions, including *Boro Chele* and *Batch 27*. Now, the actor is all set to debut in Tollywood with the thriller film, *Chaalchitro*. The film is directed by Pratim D Gupta and has been produced by Friends Communication.



The cast began shooting for the film on Wednesday. The film also stars Tota Roy Choudhury, Shantanu Maheshwari, Raima Sen, and Swastika Dutta, amongst others.

Chaalchitro revolves around the life of four police officers in Kolkata.

NEWS

Some quarters trying to whip up bitterness

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about Bangladesh.

The foreign minister was speaking at a views exchange meeting organised by the Bangabandhu Foundation in New York's Bangladeshi-dominated Jackson Heights on Tuesday.

The foreign minister said, "We have remarkably friendly relations with the United States. America believes in the same principles and values we believe in. Bangladesh is the country where we have fought for democracy. Although we won the popular vote, we were not allowed to form the government in 1971. Rather, genocide was unleashed on us, and then Bangabandhu declared independence."

Momen said Bangladesh declared independence to establish democracy, justice, and human rights.

"Because of this, we had to sacrifice three million lives during the Liberation War. Nowhere in the world have so many people sacrificed themselves for democracy and human rights in such a short period of time. We are the only nation in the world that has made such great sacrifices for democracy and human rights," he added.

Referring to the replacement of the Digital Security Act, he said the government accepted the suggestions provided by the United States as a friendly country.

"The United States expects free

and fair elections, and we are also committed to free and fair elections. But there are some people in our country who want to boycott the elections; they fear elections," the foreign minister said, referring to the opposition, saying that they are trying to thwart the election.

The foreign minister said Bangladesh is now the 35th largest economy in the world.

"If Bangladesh's current economic development continues, we will become the 26th largest economy in a few years. We have 17 crore people, so our own market is huge. That's why many people are interested in our country because our per capita income has increased five times," he said.

Bashundhara seeks to invest in Teletalk

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media, this is its second bid to become a strategic investor in an establishment. In September last year, ABG Limited, a subsidiary of Bashundhara Group, became the strategic partner of the Chittagong Stock Exchange by picking up 25 percent stakes for Tk 240 crore.

"We are neither granting consent nor expressing dissent to the proposal at this time — it is now subject to review," said Telecom Secretary Abu Hena Morshed Zaman, who is the chairman of the Teletalk board.

The committee will evaluate whether the proposal would be beneficial for the government and Teletalk, he added.

Contacted, Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar said: "[Bashundhara Group] has sent a letter expressing their interest to invest in Teletalk, but the letter is not a detailed one. Anyone can have interest, but we have to know what exactly they want."

Since its inception in 2004, Teletalk, whose market share stood at 3.4 percent as of August, has received several investment proposals, mainly from abroad, but the government did not give the green light to any of those pitches.

For instance, in April 2008, the

Emirati carrier Etisalat expressed interest in buying a stake in Bangladesh's state-run mobile operator.

In 2019, Vietnam's Viettel also wanted to invest \$250 million in Teletalk. However, nothing came of it.

A year later, Korean company LGU+ offered a \$1.2 billion loan at 3 percent interest for 25 years and without the need for any sovereign guarantee. Once again, nothing came of it.

In recent years, the government has been pumping huge amounts of money into Teletalk — all to keep pace with the nimble private operators, who have cornered 96.5 percent of the market between them.

A Tk 2,204 crore project began last year to take the operator's 4G network to village levels by setting up about 2,500 towers.

A Tk 519 crore project has been running since March last year to expand Teletalk's haor coverage. The project's money comes from a social obligation fund, whose contributions mostly come from Grameenphone, Robi and Banglalink. The three private operators have to contribute 1 percent of their gross revenue to the fund.

Besides, the government has recently implemented a Tk 520 crore project to expand Teletalk's mobile

broadband network services in the coastal hills and other remote areas.

And yet, Teletalk continues to lose subscribers, while private operators continue to add to their numbers. As of August, which is the latest published data by the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, Teletalk's subscriber count stood at 64.5 lakh, down by 2.7 lakh from a year earlier.

At the end of last month, there were about 18.9 crore active mobile connections.

"Any investor can express interest to invest in any company, but Teletalk is not like any other company — it is a state-owned company whose funding comes from the finance ministry," said Abu Saeed Khan, a top telecom expert.

Therefore, before making any decision regarding investment in Teletalk, the parliamentary standing committees for finance and telecom ministries should be consulted.

"Unanimous decisions of the two parliamentary standing committees as well as BIDA should set the guiding principles of such a unique investment proposal in the history of Bangladesh," he added.

Bashundhara Group did not respond to The Daily Star's request for comment.

Records tumble every month since May

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mosquitoes didn't work and thus, we're experiencing higher numbers of cases and deaths every month compared to the last.

"We're now at the mercy of nature. If October doesn't experience as much rainfall [as September], the number of dengue cases will fall."

Asked about a solution, he said, "Our mosquito-control activities need to be successful. However, it's not possible to achieve this overnight."

The monthly death-toll started out with only six in January and the number varied throughout February, April and May, with no deaths recorded in March.

However, in June the number jumped to 34 and then shot up all the way to 204 in July.

According to statistics provided by the Directorate General of Health Services, there has been an average of 2,704 hospitalisations per day this month.

The gravity of the situation is further underscored by recent records. September 26 saw record-

CASES AND DEATHS THIS YEAR

MONTH	CASES	DEATHS
September (Till 27th)	73,023	365
August	71,976	342
July	43,854	204
June	5,956	34
May	1,036	2
April	143	2
March	111	0
February	166	3
January	566	6

SOURCE: DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF HEALTH SERVICES (DGHS)

breaking single-day hospital admissions — 3,123 — across the country, while it was 3,122 on the 17th.

On September 2, the DGHS reported a distressing milestone — the highest number of single-day deaths, which stood at 21.

On September 20, the number was the same.

Meanwhile, at least 15 more people died from dengue in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, with eight of them outside the capital, according to DGHS data.

Around 2,950 dengue patients were hospitalised in the same period. The data also showed 9,697 patients were undergoing treatment at different hospitals across the country, while 1,85,906 people have recovered from the infectious disease so far this year.

Dr Mushtaq Hussain, consultant at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research, told The Daily Star, "Normally, the rainfall decreases around this month, but this time there has been rainfall in September. As a result, Aedes mosquitoes are being able to breed, leading to an increase in dengue cases."

"What we have control over is our healthcare system and we have to strengthen it so that we don't face such a dreadful outbreak in the future."



Migrants from Venezuela make their way through the razor wire after crossing the Rio Grande into the United States in Eagle Pass, Texas, US on Tuesday.