

ENTERTAINMENT’S RISING STARS

SHEIKH NILOY’S
comedy show breaks stereotypes
and bridges cultures

Imagine producing your first project to then accidentally debuting on it by playing the role of a narcissistic Bengali-American character named Sahir. Well, Sheikh Niloy had different plans, but eventually, he succeeded in portraying the charming yet obnoxious Sahir, obsessed with his good looks. The 20-year-old Sahir shares his living space with equally narcissistic roommates – Dante, Gaia, and Aria – all on a quest to discover their elusive self-worth.

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Recently, I stumbled upon a reel of *Narcissists of New York City* (NNYC), and Sahir immediately caught my attention. He impressed a young American girl with the cheesy yet romantic dialogue, “*Ami Ferot Aschhi Tomar Jonno oh Shundori.*” The series is replete with elements of comic relief, but as the story unfolds, we witness a more vulnerable and elusive side of Sahir, endearing us to his innocence.

It was a breath of fresh air to see a Bangladeshi actor in a leading role instead of playing the stereotypical geeky character bullied for his accent. While Hollywood seldom explores stories featuring South Asian characters, Bangladeshi actors and directors are gradually breaking this mould by producing and writing narratives that highlight Bangladeshi culture.

“I had a knack for comedy, and my friend and I were discussing creating something unique and special to us. Thus, we decided to create NYC. Through this project, I aimed to showcase incidents I witnessed of narcissists growing up around me,” said the producer.

Niloy had no initial plans to act in his debut project, but fate had other ideas, and he ended up playing the role of Sahir.

“For the role of Sahir, we received only 13 submissions, and amongst them, only three were of Bangladeshi descent. I played the character myself since no one else was fit for the role. It perplexes me that the significant number of Bangladeshi artistes in showbiz is not visibly evident in New York. I want to change this and shed light on our culture and the Bengali American experience, infusing a unique perspective into the entertainment industry to foster greater inclusivity for our community,” added Niloy.



PHOTOS: COURTESY

While Niloy and Sahir might be polar opposites in real life, their Bengali connection and love for acting create a familiar bridge between the two characters.

“Growing up in a Bangladeshi family, we are constantly urged to pursue an academic career over the love of the arts. When I preferred acting to engineering, they criticised my decision. However, they are now the most supportive people ever. A bit of everyday Bengali family criticism is highlighted in episode five when Sahir receives criticism for acting,” stated the actor.

Discussing his favourite episode, Niloy revealed his bias towards episode 11, as the scene holds a special place in his heart.

“In Episode 11, titled *Drunk Dreams*, Sahir encounters his younger self in a dream. During their conversation, Sahir poses a soul-searching question, inquiring if his younger self ever felt the pressure to become someone else to matter, to be acknowledged,

seen, and heard in the world. The response is a resounding ‘no,’ accompanied by a plea for validation,” said the actor.

“In that pivotal moment, Sahir reassures his younger self that no external validation is necessary, affirming that he is perfect just the way he is,” he added.

Before filming the show, a personal tragedy struck Sheikh Niloy as his father passed away just a day before they were scheduled to start filming.

“Just a day before we were supposed to go into production, my father passed away. I still remember the last thing I told him: I can’t wait to tell him about what happens during the filming. He was my solid rock who supported my dreams and was also one of the producers of my project. Episode 12 is actually dedicated to him. I am grateful to my whole cast and crew for being with me,” expressed the actor.

The 12-episode series is currently accessible on Vimeo worldwide, with select episodes on Dailymotion. For those interested, the series is also available on Amazon Prime in the US and the UK.

Fan digitally
remasters Salman
Shah’s old movies



Evan Mollick, and a few other hard-line fans of late superstar Salman Shah, have taken a massive undertaking of digitally remastering the actor’s old classic films to preserve them and make them available in digital formats for the younger generations to behold.

Since their undertaking, 11 of the star’s films have been digitally remastered and can be watched through digital medium.

Evan Mollick recently organised a screening of the remastered films where almost 250 fans attended and applauded the initiative.

Evan and his team realised they wanted to preserve the actor’s films when they attended a film screening of Salman Shah, titled *Salman Shah Utsab* in 2019.

Mahiya Mahi,
Shakil Khan run
as independent
candidates



In the wake of their unsuccessful attempts to secure nominations, Mahiya Mahi and Shakil Khan have chosen to participate in the election as independent candidates.

Actress Mahiya Mahi has chosen to run as an independent candidate in the Rajshahi-1 (Tanor-Godagari) constituency.

Meanwhile, Shakil Khan, a former popular actor, submitted a nomination form for the Bagerhat-3 seat but was unsuccessful in securing the party’s nomination. He plans on running as an independent candidate, after a discussion with the Prime Minister.

NEWS

BB goes shopping to private banks

FROM PAGE 1

Islami Bank sold \$70 million to the central bank at a time when it is struggling to settle LCs for its importers, according to people familiar with the events, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Between November 1 and 24, Islami Bank received \$280 million as remittance.

The Shariah-based bank, which often fails to maintain the minimum level of liquidity with the central bank, collected remittances at about Tk 116 a dollar.

That is the maximum permissible rate by the Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers Association and the Association of Bankers, Bankers – the two associations that decide on the dollar rate on unofficial directive from the BB.

Subsequently, the bank faced a loss of Tk 38.5 crore on the sale of dollars at Tk 110.5 to the BB – a hefty blow for a cash-strapped bank, which has the highest volume of credit disbursed among the 61 scheduled banks in Bangladesh.

Mohammed Monirul Moula, the managing director and chief executive officer of Islami Bank, could not be reached for comment.

The BB has started to buy dollars from commercial banks in an attempt to stem the tide of depleting foreign exchange reserves, said BB officials.

“People will get a negative message before the national election if the forex reserve falls so fast,” said one of the officials seeking anonymity.

As of November, gross foreign reserves stood at \$19.5 billion, down about 15.7 percent over the past three months. The dollar stockpile is sufficient to cover import bills of a little over three months, as per the latest data published by the BB.

Talking to this newspaper, Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said dollar purchase from commercial banks is part of reserve building and this is not a bad practice per se.

“But the question is why Islami Bank sold \$70 million to BB at Tk

110.5 per dollar when they collect remittance at the BAFEDA-ABB permitted rate of Tk 116 per dollar. This is a problem of multiple exchange rates in existence,” he added.

Although the BB is trying to buy dollars from banks, it has not slowed down on its greenback sales to the market after the record \$13.6 billion sales last fiscal year.

Between July 1 and November 28, the BB sold upwards of \$5 billion to banks, as per the central bank officials. On every working day, the BB sells about \$60 million to banks from its reserve, they said.

The dollar sales are mostly to the state banks to settle import payments of government agencies like the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation and the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation, among others.

For instance, Sonali Bank last week made a payment request of \$240 million to the central bank, as per the BB officials.

All 41 workers rescued after

FROM PAGE 12

Dhami and Singh.

“I want to say to the friends who were trapped in the tunnel that your courage and patience are inspiring everyone,” Prime Minister Narendra Modi posted on social media platform X.

Modi later spoke to the rescued men by phone and enquired about their condition, TV channels reported.

Federal road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari thanked rescue workers and said a safety audit of the tunnel would now be done.

Raushan, son won’t join polls

FROM PAGE 12

Raushan and “hijacked” his parliament seat.

“We have decided not to participate in the election under his control,” he said.

Saad also said the manner in which GM Quader and JP Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnu had been talking about his mother was tantamount to showing disrespect to the chief patron.

“If GM Quader had respect for HM Ershad, he wouldn’t have tried to run from my father’s constituency, Rangpur-3, where I am the MP,” he said.

The party will not survive long at the hands of Quader, he added.

NATIONAL JUBILATION

Ambulances that had lined up with lights flashing at the mouth of the tunnel transported the workers to a hospital about 30 km (18 miles) away. They are expected to travel to their home states after doctors clear them.

The 41 men have been getting food, water, light, oxygen and medicines through a pipe, but efforts to dig a tunnel to rescue them with high-powered drilling machines were frustrated by a series of snags.

Government agencies managing the crisis had on Monday turned

to “rat miners” to drill through the rocks and gravel by hand from inside the evacuation pipe pushed through the debris after machinery failed.

The miners are experts at a primitive, hazardous and controversial method used mostly to get at coal deposits through narrow passages, and get their name because they resemble burrowing rats.

The miners, brought from central India, worked through Monday night and finally broke through the estimated 60-metres of rocks, earth and metal on Tuesday afternoon.

BNP man kept in fetters, handcuffs

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was taken to a local hospital, they added.

As his condition deteriorated, doctors referred him to Dhaka for better treatment, his family said.

He was then shifted to Dhaka Central Jail and admitted to the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases and Hospital in the capital on November 13, said his elder brother Mizanur Rahman.

Madhu was treated on the floor as there was no empty bed at the hospital,

he said, adding that the hospital released him yesterday “without completing his treatment”.

Contacted, Mahbubur Rahman, jailor of Dhaka Central Jail, said Madhu was sent back to Jashore so that he could attend a court hearing.

About the handcuffs and chains, he said police would have taken off the cuffs and chains if the doctors asked them to.

Shariful Alam, jailor of Jashore Central Jail, said the measures had to

be taken for security reasons.

The High Court on January 30 issued a rule asking the government to explain in four weeks why it should not be directed to formulate a guideline through a committee about using bar fetters and handcuffs on suspects.

Court officials say there has been no development regarding the matter since then.

[Our Benapole and Cox’s Bazar correspondents contributed to the report.]

Another ‘staged polls’ in the offing

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process in the name of election,” he said, adding, “It means you [the government] are scared of facing the people.”

Faruq Faisel, executive director of Ain o Salish Kendra, said the country is headed back to the dark ages – a result of the government’s arrogance.

“Most of the people don’t belong to any party here. An election must

be festive to all. But in the current situation, why would people cast votes if they have any love for their lives and families?”

Sharmeen Morshed, CEO of Brotee, said, “Dialogues [among the parties] shouldn’t be stopped as democracy needs discussions. We don’t want an election without national consensus.”

Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary of Shujan, who also presided over

the discussion, said the legality of this government is questionable as “it has come to power through forgery”.

“The government even appointed the election commissioners in illegal ways.”

The discussion, attended by rights activists, lawyers, educators, students and civil society members, was moderated by photojournalist and social activist Shahidul Alam.

imprisonment each in a case filed in the capital’s Dakshin Khan over political violence in September 2018.

Montaj Uddin, president of Uttarkhan BNP; Harun-Or-Rashid, the general secretary of the unit; and Sarkar Rafiqul Islam Mukul, the organising secretary, are among the convicts.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Mainul Islam also acquitted 81 other accused as the charges against them were not proven.

In September 2018, a case was lodged with Dakshinkhan Police Station against 118 people, mostly BNP leaders and activists, in connection with illegal assembly and obstructing police personnel from carrying out their duties.

On April 30, 2019, police pressed

charges against 119 accused.

The court recorded statements of eight prosecution witnesses after framing charges on August 1 last year.

Conviction warrants were issued against fugitive convicts, the prosecution said.

According to the judgment, the punishment of the fugitives will be effective from the day of their arrest or surrender.

Defence lawyer Kamruzzaman Sumon told The Daily Star that his client, Kamal, did not get justice.

Prosecution witnesses, who made statements before the court, failed to narrate the incident clearly. So, all the accused were deprived of justice, the lawyer said, adding that they would challenge the verdict in the higher courts.