



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

FILMS GALORE: 22nd DIFF opens for all, graced by Sharmila Tagore

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Better Film, Better Audience and Better Society – with this slogan the curtains rose on the 22nd Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF) at the Bangladesh National Museum yesterday. The quintessential Bengali beauty and legendary actress Sharmila Tagore graced the stage as a special guest. Audiences and the media eagerly awaited the moment when the renowned actress would share her insights on stage.

The festival kicked off with a vibrant and graceful performance by dance artistes from Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, paying homage to Bangla cinema through captivating performances of iconic songs like *Nil Akasher Niche* and *Karar Oi Louho Kobat*. The standout moment of the dance spectacle was a beautifully choreographed presentation of *Ochin Majhi* from the film *Mujib: The Making of a Nation*.

Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali attended the event as the chief guest, with former State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam presiding over the programme. Festival Director, Ahmed Muztaba Zamal gave the opening speech

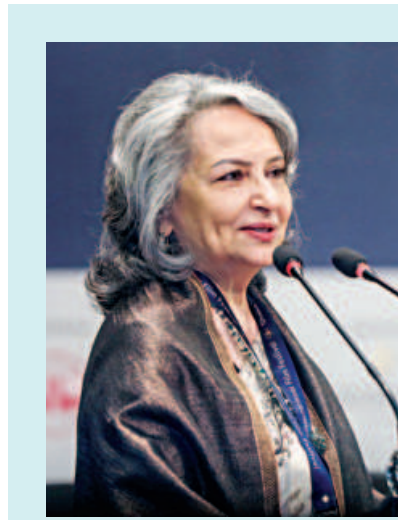
at the event. Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen was also present, as renowned actress Sharmila Tagore took centre stage.

Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, the chief guest at the event, placed emphasis on adding Bangla synopsis in both Bangladeshi and foreign films in future events.

"The festival organisers have chosen the Bengali title '*Dabingsho Dhaka Antorjatrik Cholchitro Uthshob*.' Given the use of a Bengali title, it is only fair that they also incorporate Bengali subtitles in the introductions of films, both Bangladeshi and foreign, featured in the programme. I believe that providing short yet precise Bangla synopsis for films will facilitate a stronger connection between the audience in Bangladesh and the films presented," said Abul Hassan.

Apur Sansar marked the silver-screen debut of Sharmila Tagore, leaving an indelible impact. Tagore delivered an iconic performance as Aparna, a young bride, earning a lasting place in the hearts of the Bengali audience. The veteran artiste exuded elegance in a gorgeous shari, captivating viewers with her wonderful smile.

In recounting her journey to



Sharmila Tagore addressing the audience at the 22nd Dhaka International Film Festival.

"There is nothing better than films that can be communicated to everyone. It doesn't matter what languages films are in, be it English or Chinese, they can easily reach the hearts of audiences. Thank you for the honour of allowing me to be the jury of the Asian Film Competition of your festival"

SHARMILA TAGORE

Dhaka, Sharmila Tagore revealed that she almost couldn't make it to the festival due to the cold weather.

"I am so happy to be here in this vibrant city of Dhaka. However, we almost couldn't make it as yesterday when I went to the airport in cold Delhi. I was told that my flight was

cancelled and nobody informed us. It was freezing and the next flight was today. If I would have taken that flight then I wouldn't be here. I am really happy that Bangladesh Biman graciously waited for us." She continued, "And the next adventure was, that I was told by Ahmed

bhai that it would take us only five minutes to arrive at the venue by car. But for some reason, we took a wrong turn and we arrived about 35 minutes late. While we were waiting to come, I was happy to see quite a bit of Dhaka and the traffic, and it was interesting," said the actress.

Sharmila Tagore was all praises about the wonderful dance performance by the Shilpakala dance artistes, and also talked about her first film *Apur Sansar*.

"The dance performance was really pretty as it showcased the rich history of Bangladeshi cinema. It reminded me of my first film *Apur Sansar*. I could really resonate with the theme this year 'Better Film, Better Audience, Better Society' because through good films you understand the world. There is nothing better than films that can be communicated to everyone. It doesn't matter what languages films are in, be it English or Chinese, they can easily reach the hearts of audiences. Thank you for the honour of allowing me to be on the jury of the Asian Film Competition of your festival. I am looking forward to meeting my colleague and the other jury members. I am sure you are dying to watch Bangladesh-Iranian

film *Fereshteh*. During the closing ceremony, I will speak in Bengali and will dedicate an hour-long speech to you all," added Tagore.

The inaugural ceremony opened with the Jaya Ahsan starrer Iranian film *Fereshteh*, directed by Morteza Atashzamaz, who was also present at the event. The film was screened in the Asian Film Competition. *Mujib: The Making of a Nation* directed by Shyam Benegal was showcased at 7 pm.

The festival's screenings will take place at several venues, including the National Museum's Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Conference Hall, Kabi Sufia Kamal Hall, Shilpakala Academy's National Art Gallery, Dance Theatre Conference Hall, Alliance Française de Dhaka, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Academy Conference Hall.

A total of 252 films from 74 countries will be featured, comprising 129 feature-length films and 123 short and independent films. Of these, 71 films hail from Bangladesh, showcasing the rich diversity of the country's cinematic talent. The Dhaka International Film Festival is scheduled to run from January 20 to 28.

COUNTRYWIDE

City dwellers suffer for delay in drainage work

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The delay in construction of the drainage system in Mymensingh city is causing immense suffering to thousands of commuters and pedestrians for the last couple of months.

The slow-paced work, stretching from Alexandra Castle to Boundary Road area, shows no end to people's misery, making it hard for locals to live or continue their businesses due to construction materials lying scattered in the project site.

Although the work was scheduled to be completed by August last year and later rescheduled till December the same year, it has not been completed so far, multiplying sufferings of the city dwellers, Chief Engineer at Mymensingh City Corporation (MCC) Mohammad Rafiqul Islam Miah said.

Currently, the construction work is going on at Saheb Ali Road in Natun Bazar area, one of the important intersections of the city, leading to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital and Mashkanda Inter District Bus Stand.

As a result, movement of all modes of vehicles is completely suspended through the road, locals said.

Even ambulances have to carry critical patients through alternative Ganginarpar area, which requires more time due to frequent traffic jam, driver Arman Mia said.

The important road also connects several schools, colleges, government offices, Judge Court and two archaeological sites – Shashi Lodge and Alexandra Castle.

As part of the work, the construction firm Faridpur Jannat Construction has now dug up Saheb Ali Road and piled the earth on the street, narrowing the existing road.

Locals said the work for setting up ring culverts at Saheb Ali Road has been going on for over two months now, but a very little progress has been noticed so far.

Lack of proper monitoring by the MCC authorities is one of the major reasons behind the unexpected delay, they alleged.

While talking, a section of local traders said the delay in drainage work has put them in serious trouble as customers cannot even move freely and visit their shops easily.

Advocate Shibir Ahmed Liton, secretary of Mymensingh Paribesh Rokkha O Unnayan Andolon, said as the city has been witnessing an increase in number of populations in the last couple of years, delay in such development work lingers public sufferings, he added.

Denying allegation of negligence in monitoring, MCC Chief Engineer Rafiqul Islam said the work would be completed by March this year.



People struggle to cross the Saheb Ali Road as the street has been dug up for drainage development work, leaving it almost unusable.

PHOTO: STAR

JP to be opposition

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"That's why I think the Jatiyo Party can play an important role as the opposition party. But if the government does not give the Jatiyo Party such a role, the party will criticise the government for the welfare of the country and the nation. We will assist the government by making recommendations and pointing out the wrongs done by the government."

Quader said his party will guide parliament in the right direction.

"The number [of MPs] is not a big deal. We are very hopeful that if we want to play a role sincerely, we will be able to do it successfully in the interest of the country and its people."

Talking about the next leader of the opposition and the deputy leader of the opposition, he said according to a decision of the JP parliamentary party, a letter has been sent to the Speaker informing her about a resolution adopted by the parliamentary party.

The resolution has been endorsed proposing that the JP chairman be made the leader of the opposition, Anisul Islam Mahmud the deputy leader of the opposition and Mujibul Haque Chhunu the opposition chief whip, he added.

About a possible split in the party, Quader said the JP had been a victim of different conspiracies since it quit power in 1990. However, there is no possibility of any split in the party, he claimed.

Rangpur City Corporation Mayor Mostafizar Rahman Mostafa and other senior JP leaders were present.

Gas supply resumes in Ctg, pressure low

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"There is no gas in our stove. We had to buy breakfast from a restaurant," said Sajal Das, a resident of the Hem Sen Lane area.

While gas supply resumed at his home in the morning, Shraban Paul of the Goalpara area said the pressure was too low to cook.

Locals said gas supply resumed properly only after 10:00pm in Haliashahar, Tiger Pass, Khulshi, Askar Dighir Par, Jamal Khan, Anderkilla, Raja Pukur Lane, Rahamatganj, Dewanji Pukur Par, and Joy Nagar areas.

As most CNG-run vehicles could not refuel, city streets remained relatively empty compared to other days.

"I waited in a line before a filling station for about

six hours but failed to refuel my vehicle last [Friday] morning. I returned to the filling station at 9:00am sharp today [Saturday], but found there was no gas yet," Md Manik, a CNG-run autorickshaw driver, told this reporter in front of a filling station at Kadamtali around 2:00pm.

"I had no income yesterday, and I probably won't be able to drive today," he said, adding, "I live hand to mouth. How will I cover my family's daily expenses?"

With a few public vehicles plying the streets, commuters also struggled to reach their destinations.

"I was late to work as I waited for more than an hour at Chawkbazar intersection to get a CNG-run autorickshaw. Finally, I had to hire a battery-run

autorickshaw for double the regular fare."

Omar Hazzaz, president of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the gas crisis severely impacted practically all industries, including readymade garments, food processing, and steel manufacturing.

"At many industries, production was little or nothing over the past two days. The cost of products will increase due to this disruption in production, and consumers will have to bear the brunt of the price hike."

According to sources at Petrobangla, the gas supply snapped on Thursday night due to a technical glitch that occurred during the recommissioning of an LNG terminal, which had been under maintenance

for over two months.

Two floating LNG terminals in Moheshkhali, each with a capacity of 500 million standard cubic feet per day (mmcf/d), are run by Summit Group and Excelsite Energy of the United States.

Gas was being supplied to Chattogram city and its adjoining areas from the floating terminal operated by Summit Group since November 1, last year, when maintenance work on the other terminal began. This led to a reduction in supply, leaving the city dwellers in dismay.

This suffering intensified when the supply from the floating LNG terminals stopped fully on Thursday night.

Gas supply to the port city started to resume slowly last morning.

Dhaka, Delhi ties deepening

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and Uganda, among others, are accompanying the foreign minister.

Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud is scheduled to leave for New Delhi, India, on February 7 – the first bilateral visit by the minister after his appointment – to further strengthen Bangladesh-India relations.

"It's likely to be a three-day visit," he told reporters

at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on January 18, noting that the agenda of the visit is yet to be finalised.

The foreign minister said he will be visiting the country at the invitation of Indian External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar.

Asked whether he would have a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the visit, Mahmud said, "It is too

early to say."

Jaishankar, earlier, invited his Bangladesh counterpart to visit New Delhi at a mutually convenient time.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma extended the invitation on behalf of the Indian External Affairs Minister on Monday.

The foreign minister accepted the invitation and told him that he would visit Delhi soon.

Iran intel official among 10 killed

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When asked about the strike, the Israeli army told AFP: "We do not comment on reports from the foreign media".

During more than a decade of civil war in Syria, Israel has launched hundreds of air strikes on its territory, primarily targeting Iran-backed forces as well as Syrian army positions. But it has intensified

attacks since Israel's offensive on Gaza began on October 7.

The Observatory said an Israeli strike on a four-storey building killed 10 people after four more bodies were recovered from the rubble, of the destroyed building "where Iran-aligned leaders were meeting" in Damascus.

Among the dead were Iranians and other Tehran-

backed fighters, its director, Rami Abdel Rahman, told AFP.

The British-based war monitor with a network of sources inside Syria said the targeted building belonged to the IRGC and that the neighbourhood is known to be a high-security zone home to leaders of the IRGC and pro-Iran Palestinian factions.

Nasa laser

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space agencies said in separate statements.

The distance between LRO and Vikram lander of ISRO's Chandrayaan-3 was 100 km away, near Manzinus crater in the moon's South Pole region.

The successful experiment paves the way for accurately locating targets on the lunar surface. Nasa's Laser Retroreflector Array (LRA) was fitted on the Vikram lander in collaboration with ISRO.

The LRA, which has no electronics, does not need power or maintenance and thus can remain useful for years.

"We have shown that we can locate our retroreflector on the surface from the moon's orbit. The next step is to improve the technique so that it can become routine for missions that want to use these retroreflectors in future," a Nasa statement quoted Xiaoli Sun, the leader of the team that developed the LRA instrument, as saying.