

I FEEL LIKE I'M 19: Mamunur Rashid on his leap-year birthday



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SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Eminent cultural personality and Ekushey Padak winner Mamunur Rashid is a stalwart of the Bangladeshi media, simultaneously contributing as a playwright, director, and actor, and improving the cultural sector in the country. He is also the founder of Aranyak Natyadal.

The evergreen actor has the misfortune of having his birthday on February 29, and he can only celebrate it once every four years. We talk to the legend on this auspicious day.

Don't you feel upset for the fact that your birthday comes every leap year? Absolutely not! In fact, I like to take this positively. Since my birthday comes every four

years, people eagerly wait for it. I wonder if it was yearly, whether anyone would celebrate it with this amount of excitement.

How old did you turn this year?

I feel like I am 19! In reality, I turned 77 today. I remember that many years ago I went to Kerala, India, to attend a programme, and it was my birthday. I told them that I turned 17 that day (*laughs*). I enjoy this feeling.

Aranyak Natyadal and many other cultural organisations have planned quite a few activities to celebrate your birthday.

This brings me a lot of joy! Gratitude to those who are involved with Aranyak and others in this endeavour. Love to them. I owe them.

Getting well wishes from various places a few days before my birthday is also very pleasant.

What is your philosophy of life?

I believe in humanity, above everything else. My father used to say, 'You have so many friends!' It is still true, and I love being surrounded by them. The philosophy of my life is to love people, to be among people, to do something for the people.

Even at this age, you are actively participating in the media and art arena.

I love to think new every day. I still write columns regularly for newspapers, write plays, act, and also direct for the stage. Every birthday, I try to write a new play, and I did so this time as well.

What makes me worry is when I read in newspapers that the hills are being cut down, sand is being dredged, nature is being destroyed. This makes me think a lot, and I try to write about all of it. I don't even know if it helps, I don't even know if anything will change. However, we won't be here one day. Maybe a 100 years from today, people will remember us as a group who spoke up, when no one else did.

What more do you desire from life?

There's nothing to desire. I think about all that I can give to the people, the country and the world. I never ran after money or wealth. We have an ancestral house in Tangail city. My mother still lives there, and the fact that my mother is still with me is the epitome of hope. As long as I live, I want to give - be it through writing, acting, or protesting.

How much do you contemplate the various uncertainties in the surroundings?

It bothers me a lot. Sometimes the inhumanity of humans puts me in deep sorrow. Yet, I am an optimist. I bind my heart with hope. I dream that the world will be beautiful someday!



PHOTOS: SHEKH MEHEDI MORSHED

'Euphoria' actress Hunter Schafer arrested for pro- Palestine protest



During a pro-Palestine protest on Tuesday at NBC's 30 Rockefeller Centre in New York, Hunter Schafer, known for the teen drama series *Euphoria*, was detained along with 50 activists from the Jewish Voice for Peace, amid calls for an Israel-Hamas ceasefire, according to reports by BNN Breaking.

The demonstration reportedly intended to disrupt US President Joe Biden's appearance on Late Night with Seth Meyers, highlighted the pressing calls for a ceasefire in the Israel Palestine conflict. Hunter Schafer's arrest underscored the mounting pressure on the Biden administration to reassess its position and advocate for a ceasefire.

Nipun and Barshon reunite as husband- wife for 'Ajan'

Last year, Imtiaz Barshon and Nipun Akter acted together for the first time. They were seen in the web film *Opolap* and their pairing was well-received by the audience. Nipun herself was mesmerised by Barshon's acting.

Now, in the Zahid Hossain directorial *Ajan*, they have worked together again for the second time.

Barshon expressed his experience of working with Nipun, saying, "In *Ajan*, Nipun portrayed a village girl, while I played a farmer. It was enjoyable and we had a great time bringing these characters to life."

The plot explores the political turmoil of the '80s, rise of war criminals, and the struggles of a woman dealing with infertility.



NEWS

US working to ease conflict in Myanmar

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from February 24-26.

However, it remains unclear with whom the US is engaging in dialogue to promote stability in Myanmar.

Earlier on February 15, US Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu said the situation in Myanmar could deepen security risks for Bangladesh and neighbouring regions including India in the coming days.

"It's something we've to watch out for and enable our partners in the region, in this case, Bangladesh and India, to cope with those stresses without it boiling over into instability in their countries as well," he had said at an event in Washington.

Afreen Akhter was part of a three-member US delegation which paid a three-day visit to Bangladesh. The delegation was led by President Biden's Special Assistant and National Security Council's Senior Director Rear Admiral Eileen Laubacher. USAID Assistant Administrator Michael Schiffer was also in the team.

In the interview that aired yesterday,

Afreen said Bangladesh leads in the UN peacekeeping operations and the US wants to play a role in its further success.

She said the conflict in Myanmar is very unfortunate, and that the US will support Bangladesh in solving the Rohingya crisis.

On defence cooperation, Afreen said Dhaka and Washington have already worked quite a lot on joint military exercises, training and technology transfers. The US also provided Bangladesh with more than \$100 million. The two countries are also working to conclude a defence deal - "General Security of Military Information Agreement [GSOMIA]".

"Concluding GSOMIA and some other defence agreements will further improve our defence and security relations."

She said during their engagements with the government, members of the civil society, businesspersons and labour leaders, the US delegation highlighted the importance of a prosperous, secure and democratic

Bangladesh.

On labour rights, Afreen said the US's global policy is to promote labour rights everywhere, and Bangladesh has no reason to worry about it. Instead must focus and work to improve the labour situation, including their right to trade unions, bargaining and better wages.

Instead, Dhaka should focus on improving the labour situation, and recognise their rights such as the formation of trade unions, and negotiation capabilities for better conditions, and wages.

About the hurdles that US companies face regarding investing in Bangladesh, she said there are already many US companies operating here. However, she recommended that the government address regulatory hurdles and streamline profit repatriation processes to create a more conducive environment for foreign investment.

US companies are eager to invest in the blue economy, energy exploration, renewable energy etc, she said.

Ekushey Boi Mela likely to get new venue

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The sites of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's March 7 speech and Pakistan army's surrender will also be preserved.

Writers, publishers and book lovers expressed frustrations upon learning about the possible relocation of the book fair.

"Since my school days, we have been coming to this fair. We can't even imagine this fair taking place anywhere other than this premises," Hasnat Shahin told The Daily Star at the book fair ground yesterday.

Publishers and writers also expressed their dismay.

"They are planning to establish a cultural zone, that's fine. But isn't the Amar Ekushey book fair an integral part of our culture? How do they even conceive such a plan?" said publisher and Agami Prakashani owner Osman Goni.

Mazharul Islam, CEO of Anya Prakash, echoed this view, saying, "Amar Ekushey Boi Mela is intertwined with our Language Movement, our culture. Writers, publishers and book lovers wait for the fair throughout the year. All of this would lose its essence, would be destroyed, wherever they relocate the fair."

Writer Imdadul Haq Milan urged the authorities to hold the fair near Bangla Academy premises in case it is not possible to hold it at Suhrawardy Udyan.

However, given the decision to relocate the book fair has not been finalised, organisers are still hopeful that the next book fair will be held at the same venue.

"We requested the prime minister to arrange for holding the fair at its traditional venue," AKM Muzahhidul Islam, a member secretary of the

book fair management committee, told this newspaper.

The history of the book fair goes back to 1972, when Chittaranjan Saha, owner of publication house Muktohdara, started putting some books on display on a mat under a tree in front of Bangla Academy.

The number of book lovers visiting the stalls grew over time, and Bangla Academy officially took charge of the fair in 1978.

In 1979, a book fair was held at Bangla Academy premises in collaboration with publishers and book sellers. Five years later, the first ever Amar Ekushe Grantha Mela was held at Bangla Academy.

Since 2013, the fair is being organised on the premises of Bangla Academy and Suhrawardy Udyan.

Of the 937 stalls this year, Suhrawardy Udyan is hosting 764 and Bangla Academy 173 stalls.

100 injured as rival groups clash in B'baria

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where Kawsar won.

The enmity deepened when Aruna Begum, daughter of Kawsar Mia fled with Mohsin Mia, son of Abdul Ahad from Joynal Mia's side, and got married three months ago, they added.

Locals said Kawsar filed a case against nine people which subsequently put Mohsin and his uncle Mozammel Haque in jail for one and a half months.

Locals said the hostilities led to yesterday's clash when hundreds of supporters from both sides attacked each

other with locally-made sharp weapons.

On information, police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control, said the OC.

Police in the afternoon raided Brahmanbaria General Hospital and detained 23 people. Ten more were arrested from Bulla village, he added.

Kawsar Mia, who is undergoing treatment at the hospital, refused to talk to this correspondent.

However, HM Sumon, Kawsar's nephew and president of Harashpur Union Chhatra League, claimed that Joynal attacked them due to animosity

stemming from losing the UP election.

Joynal Mia could not be reached over the phone despite several attempts.

Contacted, Sarwar Rahman, chairman of Harashpur Union Parishad, said he tried to calm the situation in the morning but failed.

Additional police have been deployed to avoid further clashes, said Md Billal Hossain, additional superintendent of police (Brahmanbaria Sadar and Bijoyagar Circle).

Normalcy has returned in the area, he claimed.

Stern action if anyone raises prices artificially: PM

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launching mobile courts, against the dishonest traders.

"If anyone intentionally increases the price of any product, strict action will be taken against them," she said.

Replying to lawmakers' queries, she also assured that there would be no problem of electricity supply during tarabi prayers and Sehri time in the holy month.

The leader of the House said there would be relief in the lives of the poor, elderly persons, widows, and people of the low-income group as a result of the government's various steps.

"The government is continuing its activities to maintain usual prices of essential goods. We have already managed to contain the abnormal price hike to a large extent," she said.

Hasina pointed out that inflationary pressure is being felt as the prices of imported items such as fuel, edible oil, wheat, fertilisers, various food products, consumer goods, and industrial raw materials have gone up in the world market.

She said duty exemptions are being

applied to reduce the prices here.

In response to the query from AL MP Nurunnabi Chowdhury, she said the quality of people's lives has improved.

"As a result, the demand for natural gas, the main driving force of the economy, is also increasing gradually. It is not possible to maintain the gas supply according to demand."

The premier highlighted the steps taken by her government for the development of the energy sector.

She said it was not possible to ensure the overall development of the country due to corruption.

"It is not possible to prevent corruption only through law enforcement and punishment. Corruption will be eradicated from the society and the state through a coordinated initiative by forging a social movement," she noted.

In reply to a query from independent lawmaker Abdul Kamal, Hasina said, "If necessary, load shedding can be done for two or three hours at a time of the day when the demand is low and it will

be at a tolerable level ... There will be no crisis, especially during tarabi and Sehri."

The PM said the government spent a lot of money to produce electricity and distribute it at subsidised prices.

"Now the price of everything, including oil, LNG and transportation, has gone up globally. Still, we are making efforts for the uninterrupted power supply," she said.

She said production of electricity can be hindered or reduced as the country has a shortage of fuel.

ON RUMOURS

In response to a query from AL MP Ali Azam, Hasina urged all not to listen to rumours regarding price hike of essentials.

"I will request everyone not to pay heed to the rumours. If everyone is aware and does not pay heed to rumours, then no one can create problems by spreading rumours," she said.

She said the government is ensuring that unscrupulous traders cannot play with the prices of any kind of essentials.

Court asks CID to probe Limon's case afresh

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decided to withdraw both cases following a request by then chairman of National Human Rights Commission Mizanur Rahman.

Limon's mother lodged an attempt-to-murder case with Jhalakathi Judges Court on April 10 in 2011 against six Rab personnel.

After investigation, police filed a final report before the court on August 14, 2012, recommending dropping the names of the accused from the case.

The six are then deputy assistant director of Rab-8 Md Lutfor Rahman, corporal Md Majaharul Islam, constable Md Abdul Aziz, nayeks Moktadir Hossain and Prahlad Chandra, and soldier Kartik Kumar Biswas.

On August 30, 2012, Henoara submitted a no-confidence petition against the report before the Senior Judicial Magistrate Court in Jhalakathi. But the court rejected it.

She then submitted a revision petition before the District and

Sessions Judge court on March 18 in 2013 and it was accepted by additional district and sessions judge on April 1, 2018.

On 22 April, 2018, Md Selim Reza, senior judicial magistrate in Jhalakathi, ordered the PBI to investigate the case. Supporting the police report, the PBI submitted a final report before the court on September 17, 2022.

Rejecting the PBI report, Henoara again filed a no-confidence petition before the court.