



Two hits, several misses in 2024's OTT world

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In early 2024, local OTT platforms saw the emergence of several noteworthy productions, marking a shift in entertainment consumption trends. Viewers prefer the flexibility these platforms offer, allowing them to choose content according to their preferences without any constraints. If a particular content doesn't resonate, viewers swiftly move on to explore other options. Conversely, if they find something they enjoy, they readily subscribe to the platform to access it.

Gone are the days when audiences were limited to cinema halls for new movie releases. OTT platforms have opened up avenues for promising web films that have succeeded in capturing audience attention.

The first two months of 2024 have witnessed a flurry of releases on local OTT platforms. Notable amongst these productions is *Tikit*, a Chorki web-series directed by Vicky Zahed, based on a story by writer Mohammad Nazim Uddin. Despite featuring popular actors like Siam Ahmed, and Safa Kabir, alongside Manoj Pramanik, Abdullah Al Sentu and

AK Azad Setu, the series failed to engage the audience.

Similarly, another Vicky Zahed directorial project, *Ararat*, which premiered on Binge on Valentine's Day, failed to generate significant anticipation

despite featuring Mehazabeen Chowdhury in a central role. The series also features Azizul Hakim, Bijori Barkatullah, Rosy Siddique and Shamol Mawla.

Two years ago, discussions were rife about the web-series *Shaaticup*, directed by Mohammad Touqir Islam. In January this year, a new crime thriller by the director, titled *Sinpaat*, was released on Chorki. While the seven-episode dark crime thriller received praise, it failed to create substantial buzz. However, actors Sohel Sheikh,

Mohammad Rifat Bin Manik, Jinnat Ara, and Shibli Noman received appreciation for their performances. Additionally, notable performances were delivered by Pranab Ghosh, Tanjina Rahman Tasnim, and Raju Ahmed, amongst others.

However, in the past two months, audiences have particularly favoured two productions, with others failing to generate substantial discussion. One such production is *Oshomoy*. Directed by Kajal Arefin Ome, the web film sparked significant discussion upon its release on January 18. Featuring versatile actors,

including Tasnia Farin, Tariq Anam Khan, Monira Mithu, Iresh Zaker, Sharaf Ahmed Jibon, Runa Khan, Intekhab Dinar, Shahed Ali, Shashwat Datta, Shimul Sharma, Lamima Lam,

Ishrat Zaheen Ahmed, and Ziaul Hoque Polash, the film garnered widespread attention.

Another notable release was *Kacher Manush Dure Thuiya*, starring Pritom Hasan and Tasnia Farin. Directed by Shihab Shaheen, the web-film is a part of the anthology film series *Ministry of Love*. Upon its premiere on Chorki on February 22, social media has been flooded with reels and screengrabs of the romantic drama, featuring fresh on screen chemistry between Farin and Pritom.

The story of *Kacher Manush Dure Thuiya* explores the intricacies of long-distance relationships and how an embrace can dissolve the anguish within hearts. The younger generation could easily identify themselves with Farhan and Sharmin, the film's lead characters. The film also featured commendable performances by Rupanty Akid, Samapti Mashuk, Khalilur Rahman Kaderi, Shubhajit Bhownik, and Shahin Shahnewaz, amongst others.

According to the director, the audience perceived its finale as one of the 'greatest climaxes' in Bangladeshi cinematic projects.



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

Richard Lewis, comic and 'Curb Your Enthusiasm' regular, dies at 76

Renowned comedian Richard Lewis, known for his neurotic and self-deprecating humour, passed away at his Los Angeles residence on Tuesday evening following a heart attack.

Lewis spent over two decades showcasing his talents on the popular HBO series *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, alongside Larry David.

The comedian, aged 76, bravely revealed last year that he was fighting Parkinson's disease. He was a regular on late-night talk shows through the 1980s and starred in the ABC TV comedy *Anything But Love*. He made several film appearances in the 1990s, most notably in *Robin Hood: Men in Tights*.

Ryan Gosling to perform 'I'm Just Ken' at Oscars, amidst 'Barbie' snub

As the 96th Academy Awards approaches, anticipation mounts amongst cinema aficionados for their favourite films and artistes vying for the prestigious award.

Barbie, an audience-favourite last year, has been overlooked for major awards at prestigious events like SAG, Bafta, and the Golden Globes this year. However, Ryan Gosling's fans can rejoice as he'll perform the pop power ballad, *I'm Just Ken* at the March 10 show.

Billie Eilish, Finneas O'Connell, Jon Batiste, Scott George and The Osage Singers, and Becky G, all nominated for their songs, will also perform at the show.



NEWS

Malaysia to repatriate workers

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Several hundred Bangladeshis are also estimated to be among those arrested, sources from Malaysia told The Daily Star yesterday.

Besides, 139 employers were also arrested on various charges, including employing and harbouring the undocumented migrants.

The MRP, which will continue until Dec 31, is significant for Bangladesh as there are nearly 800,000 Bangladeshis working in Malaysia, but a sizable number of them is estimated to be undocumented for reasons related to unscrupulous labour agents and employers.

Jusoh further told The Star that the foreigners without a valid travel pass or who have overstayed will

only be fined RM500 for returning to their home countries under the MRP.

Those who violated their travel passes or permits will only be charged RM300 to return to their country of origin, he said. "No one under the programme will be prosecuted."

They need to surrender to the Immigration department, he said, adding that the department is not appointing any agent to manage the repatriation process as the foreigners can do it themselves.

"We will not take action against those who surrender," he said.

Jusoh also said the foreigners must possess a passport or valid travel document, issued by their country of origin, and also have a one-way ticket back to their country

with a departure date within 14 days of applying for the MRP.

"They must also have sufficient money to pay the fine. The payment term is cashless as the department no longer conducts cash transactions."

Those aged 18 years and under will not be fined, which will allow undocumented adults to return home with their children without any extra burden.

"The department will also carry out engagement sessions with foreign missions, particularly of the labour source countries, to explain the new programme.

"We also want to seek their assistance to inform their people here of this latest repatriation initiative and encourage those who have overstayed to return home."

Police find proof against Viqarunnisa teacher

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Murad's laptop and mobile phone were seized for forensic examination.

"The student was sexually abused in November last year. The police have got the preliminary evidence," Mahid said without elaborating.

The victim, who is now a class VIII student, did not disclose the incident for long fearing that if the incident is known, her parents will lose face and she will be expelled from the school.

"Criminal offences never become old. And medical examination is not required to prove sexual harassment. Evidence of crime has to be found through investigation of the

circumstances and other things. The police are trying to do that," Mahid said.

Murad often shared dirty jokes with the victim and other students at his private coaching centre.

The victim used to perform dances at school and Murad often told her that he used to watch her dance videos before going to sleep, according to Mahid.

In the first information report of the case, the victim's mother stated that her daughter started going to the teacher's private coaching centre in 2023.

On March 10, 2023, Murad kept

her daughter, who was then a student of class VII, at the centre after classes ended. He groped her and forcibly kissed her. He also groped and sexually abused her on several other occasions, the FIR read.

On November 16, 2023, he followed the girl to the prayer room after class and attempted to rape her there, the FIR read.

The school authorities got wind of the allegations and called several parents on February 3 this year.

Following the incident, the teachers of Viqarunnisa Noon School and College have been barred from providing private coaching or tuition.

Digital finance can ensure

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inclusion, said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of PRI.

"We are saying that our financial inclusion will increase. But what we are noticing is that it is happening from a micro angle. But when you look at the macro angle, we are seeing the financial deepening is reducing."

Financial inclusion from the macro angle is now 45 percent, down from 56 percent.

"So we have to think about why we are missing the macro part of it. That means, how the banking system, our regulators, our government work together to inject sufficient liquidity without creating inflationary pressure,

without creating exchange rate pressures," he added.

It is unclear how much the digital banks will be effective in bringing in the unbanked people, said Lila Rashid, former executive director of BB.

The operational cost of a personal account with bKash is zero, said Moinuddin Mohammed Rahgir, chief financial officer of bKash.

"This discussion generated new ideas – our job is to create ideas and disseminate them to the public," said Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star.

Of Nagad's 45 million active accounts, 53 percent are operated by women, said Muhammad Zahidul

Islam, head of media at Nagad.

An account is considered active if there has been a transaction in the last 90 days.

Sayama Haque Bidisha, research director of Sanem; Khondokar Shakhawat Ali, visiting research fellow at BRAC Institute of Governance and Development; Ashikur Rahman, senior economist at PRI; Syed Yusuf Saadat, research fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue; Shariful Islam Chowdhury, project officer at the UN Capital Development Fund; Ananya Raihan, chief executive officer at iSocial; and Ayushi Misra, senior manager at MicroSave Global Consulting, also spoke.

UN closely following

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they do.

On January 1, the Third Labour Court of Dhaka sentenced Muhammad Yunus and three other top officials of Grameen Telecom to six months' jail in a case filed by the government over labour law violations.

Prof Yunus is the chairman of Grameen Telecom, while the three others are its directors Ashraful Hassan, Nurjahan Begum and M Shahjahan. Soon after the verdict, the same court

granted bail to all four for one month, following separate bail pleas.

The Nobel laureate alleged that he and his colleagues are living in fear because of the "unlawful" takeover of offices at the Grameen Telecom Bhaban by a group of outsiders.

On February 12, some people, claiming to be affiliated with Grameen Bank, barged into the Grameen Telecom Bhaban. They said the current board of Grameen Bank appointed seven directors, including

the chairman, for Grameen Kalyan and Grameen Telecom – two social business ventures established by Yunus.

Stéphane was also asked if the UN will call for the release of the thousands of opposition party members arrested ahead of the national elections on January 7, to which he said, "The UN has been very consistent and continues to call for the release of all those who may have been detained for merely expressing themselves peacefully."

104 Palestinians massacred

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Nabulsi roundabout. He called it a "massacre".

"Life is draining out of Gaza at terrifying speed," the UN humanitarian chief said following the shooting.

"Even after close to five months of brutal hostilities, Gaza still has the ability to shock us," UN aid chief Martin Griffiths said on X.

President Joe Biden said the United States was checking "competing versions" of a shooting incident at a Gaza aid point.

A spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office, however, said many of the dead were crushed by the trucks themselves, after "aid trucks were overwhelmed by people trying to loot".

The Gaza City shooting adds to a Palestinian death toll from the war which the health ministry earlier yesterday said had topped 30,000.

It came after mediators said a truce deal between Israel and Hamas could be just days away.

In a reflection of increased concern at the White House, Biden's administration is considering air-dropping aid into Gaza, US news site Axios reported early yesterday.

Since October 7, Israel's relentless military campaign has killed 30,035 people including more than 13,000 children, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

Israel's military says 242 soldiers have died in Gaza since ground operations began in late October.

Meanwhile, mediators from Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been seeking a six-week pause in the war.

Negotiators hope a truce can begin by around March 10 or 11 when the Muslim holy month of Ramadan begins, depending on the lunar calendar.

Teacher suspended for forcibly cutting hair of 9 students

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principal to take action against the teacher. We visited the school this morning [Thursday] and spoke to the authorities concerned. We issued her temporary suspension after we found the allegation to be true.

"As the teacher is appointed by the NTRCA [Non-Government Teachers Registration and Certification Authority], we'll also report them about it and urge them take legal action."

Mia Farid Ahmed, the school's principal, confirmed the teacher's suspension.

This correspondent tried reaching Runia Sarker for comments but found her phone switched off.

Khadija gets cleared

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science, was accused in two cases filed by Kalabagan and New Market police on October 11 and October 19 in 2020.

She was arrested on August 27, 2022. On January 28 this year, she was discharged from one of the cases.

Khadija suffered over 14 months in jail, including a week in solitary confinement on death row.

She walked out on November 20, 2023, after securing bail from the Supreme Court.

She was denied bail seven times, said her family members.

She was sued at the age of 17 for hosting a Facebook webinar, where a guest speaker, Delwar Hossain, a retired army officer, made contentious remarks.

Delwar, an expatriate, was also accused in these cases. He has not been discharged from the cases.