

# MEET AMIR HAMJA

## Hollywood's Bangladeshi photographer



Amir Hamja PHOTO: SINNA NASSERI

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

The 96th Academy Awards marked a momentous occasion for our country, with Bangladeshi-origin filmmaker Nazrin Choudhury securing her first Oscar nomination for her debut film *Red, White, and Blue*. Additionally, a Bangladeshi photographer, affiliated with the New York Times, captured some of the biggest

moments of the Oscars. Curiously, as I scoured for images of the Oscar winners, my eyes were immediately drawn by The New York Times' coverage, adorned with watermarks bearing the name Amir Hamja. Initially, I thought that he might be a Pakistani freelance photographer. However, the curious old me decided to search him up and I was happy to discover he is one of our own, who was born and brought up in Chattogram.

"It's true that most of the times people get confused by my name. Rest assured," laughs Amir Hamja, in an interview with The Daily Star over the phone. "I am wholeheartedly Bangladeshi. I completed pharmacy at University of Science and Technology Chittagong, but later decided to follow my dreams of becoming a photographer. I was really happy experiencing the Oscars for the first time and also documenting both the pre-Oscar and Award ceremony. Witnessing my favourite filmmakers and actors winning the Oscar for the first time is worth remembering."

Hamja continues, "I was rooting for the Bangladeshi British filmmaker Nazrin

Choudhury for her short film *Red, White, and Blue*. However, even witnessing an individual of Bangladeshi descent receive an Oscar nomination filled me with joy. Additionally, seeing Christopher Nolan and Cillian Murphy secure their first Oscars added to the magic of the moment. However, my ultimate pride will be when Bangladeshi filmmakers not only showcase their work at the Academy Awards but also clinch the coveted Oscar someday soon."

Sometimes it is hard to capture the candid moments at Oscars as the lighting is suboptimal, and celebrities are constantly moving. When asked how he ensures that he gets the perfect click, the photographer explains, "It depends how you define the quality of pictures; you don't necessarily always need 'high quality' photos - it's all about the moments with these important figures in the cinema world during Hollywood's biggest nights. Photography is sometimes about seeing in the shadow, rather than light."

Hamja had the opportunity to work with noted filmmaker Piplu R Khan. As a

to explore photography," says Hamja. "The images I captured during the George Floyd protests served as a breakthrough, landing me my first assignment with The New York Times. After three years of unwavering dedication, I transitioned into a full-time photographer as part of their fellowship programme last year."

Hamja also worked as a freelance photographer for The Guardian, Bloomberg News, Washington Post, amongst others. While working with The Guardian, he got the chance to take pictures of Academy Award winning actor Brendon Fraser, last year.

While collaborating with international platforms, he had the opportunity to take pictures of numerous noted celebrities, including Novak Djokovic, Mira Nair, and Quentin Tarantino. Hamja also worked closely with comedian Hasan Minhaj and Oscar winning actor Riz Ahmed.

"I have worked with Hasan for years in *The Kings Jester* and *Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj*, and he has been a great support for me. I have also photographed Riz Ahmed's



PHOTOS: AMIR HAMJA/ THE NEW YORK TIMES

photographer, he worked on the documentaries "Hasina: A daughter's Tale" and another based on the life of Sir Fazle Hasan Abed. While working on the Prime Minister's biography, he received a scholarship from the International Centre of Photography in New York, United States. Since then, he never had to look back.

"Growing up, I have watched tons of international movies that made me fall in love with cinematography, which led me

concerts once. Both of them are equally talented and sharp minded in their own fields. It takes a lot to reach their heights in the entertainment world. I look up to them as my inspiration, and I am really grateful to know them," adds the photographer.

As we witness the ongoing success of Bangladeshi-origin celebrities in the entertainment industry, there's a profound sense of pride in seeing someone born and raised in Bangladesh excel on the international stage.



## Nipun refutes Sucharita's allegations over BFAA membership cancellation

Amidst high tensions ahead of the Bangladesh Film Artistes Association (BFAA) electoral session (2024-26), veteran actress Sucharita accuses Ilias Kanchan and Nipun Akter of unjustly suspending her and actor Masum Parvez Rubel's BFAA memberships. Sucharita voiced disbelief, labeling the decision emotional and unwarranted.

In response, Nipun refuted Sucharita's claims, labeling them baseless. She reiterated her respect for Sucharita and denied any intention to disrespect her senior colleagues.

Nipun suggested, "If she's unhappy with me taking charge, she should run for the general secretary position herself for the film fraternity's improvement. She's a wonderful person and a capable leader. If she wins, I'll gladly hand over my responsibilities to her."

## Apurba, suer come to mutual agreement

Litigations against Ziaul Faruq Apurba, including breach of contract and embezzlement, were resolved after a meeting with the Television and Digital Programme Producers Association of Bangladesh (Telepab) and the Actors Equity Bangladesh on Saturday (March 16) at the Telepab office in Niketan, Gulshan.

The six-hour meeting saw attendance from key figures including Alpha i Managing Director Shahriar Karim Bhuiyan (Shahriar Shakil), actor Ziaul Faruq Apurba, Actors Equity President Ahsan Habib Nasim, Telepab President Monowar Pathan, and others.

Both parties have not fully performed the work according to the agreement, read the notification issued after the meeting.

# NEWS

## PPP projects caught up in myriad problems

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The projects for the improvement of Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway, building an outer ring road around Dhaka and MRT Line-2 were discussed in the fifth platform meeting held in Japan in October 2022.

An RHD representative told the fifth platform meeting that JICA will provide a loan for a separate project undertaken to remove bottlenecks at five points on the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway, read the meeting minutes.

Implementation of the highway improvement project will be faster if it is done with a JICA loan instead of PPP. Besides, it would eliminate the risk of design uniformity and synchronisation, it read.

At the meeting, a representative of Road Transport and Highways Division said they disagreed with the recommendation of the preliminary study carried out by the selected Japanese companies on MRT Line-2.

The study said a major portion of the cost should be borne by the Bangladesh government, the minutes read.

Both sides agreed to drop the project from the PPP scheme, according to the minutes.

Regarding the improvement of an outer ring road, the Japanese side said they were interested in developing one of the three segments of the road.

But the Bangladesh side said all three segments are under one PPP project and it is not possible to exclude one part and make a separate PPP project because it would not be viable, the minutes mentioned.

In this situation, this project is also likely to be dropped from the list at the sixth platform meeting, an official said.

Another project for upgrading the Nabinagar-Manikganj-Paturia highway into an expressway also came up for discussion in the fifth platform meeting.

But after the opening of Padma Bridge, passenger traffic on the route has decreased by 30 percent and freight traffic by 10 percent, an RHD representative said at the meeting.

The project is not likely to be considered a PPP scheme for now, said the official wishing not to be named.

Asked about the reasons, an RHD official said most of the projects were included in the list without carrying out any studies. So, when studies were done, the projects were found not to be viable for PPP projects, leading to their exclusion from the list, he said.

Two officials from BR and PPPA echoed the same.

Referring to the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway project, the RHD official said a change in government decision is another reason behind the poor show.

Besides, some Japanese companies involved in the process need more engagement, he added.

The PPPA official said some implementing agencies are not interested in executing their projects under PPP scheme as it takes more time at the planning level than a regular project.

"It is not true that we could not make significant progress regarding the projects," said Mushfiqur Rahman, chief executive officer of PPPA.

They have been holding platform meetings to discuss the projects.

Detailed studies are being carried out on the projects.

"We are on track. As detailed studies are being carried out by both sides, it takes time," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

In reply to a query about the delay in starting the physical work, he said: "These are all mega projects. So, it's taking time. But we are very much optimistic about the projects."

Among the first six projects, the project for building a multi-modal transport hub at Kamalapur Station has made progress.

BR has already appointed an Indian joint venture company as a consultant for carrying out technical and feasibility studies and preparing documents for financial negotiation with Japanese companies, said Al Fattah Md Masudur Rahman, the BR official responsible for the project.

Besides, the Japanese sub-working group led by Kajima Corporation will place the pre-masterplan of the project at today's meeting, he told The Daily Star.

Although the project for operation and maintenance of the third terminal of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport was not discussed in the last meeting, the issue would come up in this meeting, the PPP official said.

Another project titled "Chattogram Metropolitan Sewerage Project for Patenga Catchment" that was discussed in the last meeting will also be talked over there, he added.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Bridge Authority will place more than one project at today's meeting for consideration, Bridges Secretary Monjur Hossain told this newspaper.

BBA sources said they will put forward four to five projects, including a tunnel or bridge on Cox's Bazar-Maheshkhali route and several subway routes in Dhaka.

RHD will also place a project for building two bridges: the Tora Bridge on the Dhaka-Aricha highway and the second Bhairab Bridge.

## Tigers hope

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Meanwhile, the series-deciding third ODI will begin at 10:00 am, neutralising the dew factor which played a huge role in the outcomes of the previous two matches of the series.

In both the first and second ODI, the side winning the toss and opting to field first came out victorious, with Bangladesh winning the series-opener by six wickets and Sri Lanka bouncing back with a three-wicket in the following match.

Interestingly, in both matches, the side chasing lost three wickets inside the first Powerplay, but once the dew settled on the outfield of the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, batting got easier and they recovered from the early stutter to come out victorious.

But in the third ODI, the toss is unlikely to play too much of a role, a prospect that excited Bangladesh's Mehedi Hasan Miraz.

"We know our conditions really well. As it will be a day match, it will definitely benefit us. Toss becomes a huge factor in day-night matches. Whoever wins the toss gets the advantage," Miraz told reporters at the pre-match press conference yesterday.

## Let Khaleda

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of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

One of the conditions for the suspension was she would not leave the country. The ministry at the time said Khaleda's conditional release must be revoked before the terms of her release can be changed.

The BNP chief has been suffering from liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, and diseases in the kidneys, lungs, heart, and eyes. On February 8, 2018, Khaleda landed in jail after a court sentenced her to five years in prison on charges of corruption.

Amid the coronavirus pandemic, the government on March 25, 2020, temporarily freed Khaleda Zia from jail, suspending her sentence. Since then, her release term has been extended every six months.

## 'The military solution' inked

**FROM PAGE 12**  
the deception involving the president.

The deception plan was overruled as President Yahya had his own plan - to flee from Dhaka ahead of the military action.

[Khadim Hussain Raja, A Stranger in My Own Country: East Pakistan (1969-1971), UPL, 2012, 71]

**MUJIB REJECTS PROBE BODY**  
Bangabandhu rejected the commission of inquiry set up by the martial law authority "to investigate the circumstances which led to the calling of the Army in aid of civil power in various parts of East Pakistan

between March 2 and March 9".

According to Mujib, the fundamental issue was whether the deployment and use of force were in aid of ulterior political purposes.

The commission was further prevented from inquiring into the actual atrocities reported from various parts of East Pakistan, involving hundreds of casualties, he added.

Bangabandhu further argued that the commission would be incapable of conducting an unbiased inquiry because no representation was provided for the aggrieved. It was yet another demonstration of

West Pakistan's insensitivity to the concerns and rights of Bangalis.

Yahya was under immense pressure from army officers and the civil service and defended the proposed composition of the commission.

[Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, War and Secession: Pakistan, India, and the Creation of Bangladesh, UCP, 1990, pg. 115]

The negotiation between Sheikh Mujib and Yahya rolled into its third day.

Shamsuddoza Sajen is a journalist and researcher. He can be contacted at sajen1986@gmail.com

## Rail staffers picked up for checking ticket

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Shah Sufi said.

The Rab authorities could have informed the rail authorities about the matter and resolved it then and there, he added.

Lt Col Md Munim Ferdous, commanding officer of Rab-5, said Rab members did not torture the two; rather the RNB sepoy confined the Rab member to a room at the station and tortured him.

"They dragged him (the Rab member), hit him on the head and beat him with belts in the room. They also abused him verbally," he said.

A Rab patrol team picked up the two RNB personnel for taking legal action, he said, adding that the railway director

general was informed of the matter.

Moktar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Santahar Railway Police Station, said Rab handed over the two RNB sepoy to them and Mamun filed a written complaint against them.

Since it is a matter between two forces, further actions will be taken based on the decision of higher authorities, he said.

Meanwhile, police yesterday handed the two RNB sepoy to the railway authorities.

Debdas Bhattacharya, additional inspector general of Railway Police, said, "An investigation will be conducted and action will be taken accordingly."

## 3.77cr suffered food insecurity last year

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The survey measured food security based on answers to different questions from the participants.

The respondents were asked if they went without food for a whole day, ran out of food, ate less than they should have, ate healthy and nutritious food, and were worried about not having enough to eat.

Almost 70 percent of the poorest households suffered moderate or severe food insecurity.

"This is definitely something to worry about," says Prof Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

A large number of people who are not considered poor are in a vulnerable condition, according to him.

Elevated levels of inflation in the last two years have badly impacted

the people's food intake, he adds.

"It is unacceptable that one fifth of the population experience food insecurity at a time when Bangladesh is preparing for LDC graduation and becoming a developing country."

Food insecurity is typically associated with the inability to regularly eat healthy, balanced diets.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, "High prevalence of food insecurity at moderate levels can be considered a predictor of various forms of diet-related health conditions in the population with micronutrient deficiency and unbalanced diets."

As per the survey, 29.41 percent individuals in Rangpur division witnessed moderate food insecurity and 17.45 percent in Dhaka.

It adds that 1.189 percent suffered

severe food insecurity in Chattogram division and 1.417 percent in Sylhet.

Rural areas saw higher food insecurity than urban areas: 24.12 percent and 20.77 percent respectively.

In rural areas, 0.91 percent of the households reported that they were severely food insecure.

Around 11.45 percent of the households in the city corporation area suffered from moderate or severe food insecurity, according to the survey.

In August last year, a World Food Programme report said 24 percent people in Bangladesh were food insecure.

Prof Mustafizur recommends that the government revisit its social safety net programmes and midday meal programmes at schools.