

Shohel gets his elusive 'BLACK LADY'

SHARMIN JOYA

Winning hearts on both sides of the border, actor Shohel Mondol bagged his first Filmfare Award (Bangla) in the Best Debut (Male) category for the film *Mayar Jonjal*.

The actor was unable to attend the award-giving ceremony and receive the honour in person. While sharing his winning experience, the actor also spilled the beans about his upcoming projects and more with The Daily Star.

Congratulations on your first 'Black Lady'! What's the first thing you recalled upon receiving the news of winning the award?

Thank you so much! This award holds much more for me than being a prize. It reminds me of the time when I was a nobody, and I was working only for recognition. Indranil Roychowdhury, the director of *Mayar Jonjal*, believed in me and had



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF SHOHEL MONDOL

the confidence to cast me in this beautiful film. I got nostalgic upon receiving the news and reminisced how he found me through the film *Sheola*, directed by Jaheen Faruque Ameen. It's one of the films from the anthology series *Osthir Shomoy Shosthir Golpo*, which was released in 2017.

After the event, did you have the chance to talk to Indranil Roychowdhury?

Yes, he sent me a text immediately, writing, 'You deserve it!'; I'm not sure if I really do, but all I know is

that I've worked with a director like him, and getting such validation from him makes me proud of myself. The best thing is that we are still connected and he treats me like a young brother, and we share a friendly bond.

You couldn't attend the Filmfare Award in person, what happened?

The announcement of the nomination came just a few days ago, and within such a short time, it was not possible to get the visa.

'Taqdeer' earned you acclaim on

both sides of the border, after that, projects like 'Boli', and 'Pett Kata Shaw' were your career remarks. 'Mayar Jonjal' was released after a while. How was the response to this film?

Certainly, the response was great. By the time *Mayar Jonjal* was released, the audience had already known me for my other OTT projects. I regularly get tokens of appreciations from the Indian audience just the way our Bangladeshi audience loves me. Although the film was released in local theatres as well, it only ran in the halls for a brief period. However, the response from West Bengal was overwhelming.

It's been quite some time since you last appeared on OTT. Why is that?

Actually, it takes time to prepare for a role, for both the silver screen and OTT. I was occupied with two big projects: Badrul Anam Saud's *Shyama Kabbo*, and Masud Hasan Ujjal's *Bonolota Sen*. I only worked in a few television projects in between these two. Now that these films await release, I will be focusing on OTT again. Meanwhile, the audience will find me in a few tele-fictions during this Eid.

Tell us about your upcoming projects.

I am working on an independent film, *Prithibi Nironitor Pandorar Box* directed by Mukit Al-Bari. My co-star in this film is Shirin Akter Shila, and we have completed seventy percent of the shoot. I'm very hopeful about this project. Also, some of my works for upcoming Eid festivities include—Anonno Emon's *Obhab*, Jamal Mallick's *Shariwala Clothing Centre*, Marufer Rahman's *Moner Mondire*, Atif Aslam Babbu's *Switch*, and the DeeptoPlay original web-film *Tribhuj* directed by Alok Hasan.

'Dear Satyajit' wins award at Nepal Cultural Int'l Film fest

Bangladeshi film *Dear Satyajit* has been awarded at the 5th Nepal International Cultural Film Festival in the International Feature Film Director category.



Proshoon Rahmaan, the writer and director of the film, dedicated it to the veteran actor Ahmed Rubel who played the central role in the film. The actor tragically passed away on February 7 this year.

The film has won the prestigious award upon competing with five other international films—*Gift of Fear* (US), *The Dark Girl* (Germany),

Highway 15 (Mexico),

Cage Between Two Battle (Turkey) and *Cake* (India).

The 5th Nepal Cultural International Film Festival kicked off on March 29 and ended on March 31 in Kathmandu, Nepal.



BTRC and 'Sisimpur' to promote safe internet practices for children

The Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has recently teamed up with Sesame Workshop Bangladesh (SWB), the creators of children's educational show *Sisimpur*, in order to foster a safer online environment for children.

As part of the initiative, *Sisimpur* will focus on educating students and teachers from 100 government primary schools on the importance of safe internet usage under BTRC's latest project, Digitisation of Education in Government Primary Schools in Underserved Areas.

The collaboration aims to raise awareness about the safe use of the internet for educational purposes.

NEWS

NBR freezes bank accounts of 12 pvt univs A paltry 3 paisa cut in bus fare

FROM PAGE 12
Prime University; World University of Bangladesh; and Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology.

On Sunday, the APUB in a statement said this recent tax imposition by the government could lead to the closure of some of the private educational institutions, which would severely limit the access to higher education.

It added that the NBR has begun sending letters to the private universities, demanding tax, even before the full text of the verdict and observations of the apex court are released.

APUB Chairman Kabir said they would respect the verdict of the court.

"But the authorities could have taken the decision once the full text of the verdict is released, so that we could call for a review."

At least, he said, they could have held discussions with the stakeholders of private universities before taking the steps.

In the statement, the APUB demanded that the government intervene immediately for withdrawal of the account suspensions and delaying the tax collection until legal issues are resolved.

It said private universities that rely solely on tuition fees without

government grants are already burdened with various taxes, including VAT on salaries, educational materials, and campus construction.

Despite these challenges, they allocate remaining funds from tuition fees towards activities benefiting students and faculties, such as improving education quality, supporting research, and expanding campus facilities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the financial strains on private universities, with decreased enrolment and operational limitations, the statement read.

The additional 15 percent income tax threatens to push them further into the crisis.

APUB said that according to the section 44(7) of the Private University Act 2010, "the general fund of the university shall not be used for any purpose other than the necessary expenses of the university. These universities are 'non-profit organisations' in line with the law.

"So, the founders and directors of non-profit private universities cannot take any money from the university's general fund. Similarly, using it for income tax or spending it in any other way is a direct violation of the university act," said the

statement.

Furthermore, it said it is important to have discussions with stakeholders to determine the appropriate course of action for private universities and regarding amendments to relevant conflicting sections of the income tax law and private university law.

A top NBR official yesterday said they imposed the income tax according to income tax law.

About the private university authorities saying it should not be levied as the universities are non-profitable, he said, "That is their opinion. The issues have already been settled in court."

In June 2007, the NBR imposed the 15 percent income tax on private universities, to be effective from July 1 of that year.

Following that, 46 separate petitions were filed by 12 private universities and a student, challenging the government's decision.

The HC on September 5, 2016, then delivered a verdict declaring illegal the tax imposition on private universities and private medical, dental, and engineering colleges.

The HC also scrapped three orders on the imposition of tax issued by the government on these private institutions in 2007 and 2010.

within the stipulated timeframe of 15 days, reads the letter.

Asked about the issue of conflict of interest, Moniruzzaman said although the two firms are sister concerns, they took part in the bidding separately.

"By doing this, they actually hid the information and they cannot do this [as per the instruction for bidders]," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Daily Star, however, could not reach the two companies for comment.

Dhaka BRT Company has already cancelled the first bidding process and will initiate a new tender process soon, sources said.

The 20.5km bus corridor, the country's first dedicated rapid bus service, will help people reach Dhaka from Gazipur, the nearby city, in 35-40 minutes. This journey now takes between 1.5 and three hours.

On March 24, Road Transport and

Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said they hoped to launch the BRT service at the end of the year.

The Tk 4,268.38 crore project, formally known as the Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project, was undertaken in November 2012 to build the 20.50km dedicated bus service road from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Gazipur.

It was supposed to be completed at a cost of Tk 2,037.85 crore by December 2016.

However, issues relating to land acquisition, relocation of utility services, design changes, contractors running out of money and the pandemic caused delays. Besides, physical work was suspended twice due to girder collapse.

For the delay, the total project cost rose to Tk 4,268.3 crore and the deadline was revised to December 2024.

FROM PAGE 12

Mohammad Mazumder, held a meeting at the BRTA headquarters yesterday and recommended that fares for intercity and long route buses be Tk 2.12 per km instead of the Tk 2.15 per km.

The fare for city buses will be Tk 2.42 per km instead of Tk 2.45 per km while fare for minibus will be Tk 2.32 per km instead of Tk 2.35 per km.

However, the minimum fares for bus and minibus will remain the same at Tk 10 and Tk 8 respectively in city services.

In the evening, the Road Transport and Highways Division approved it

and issued the circular.

On August 31, 2022, the government reduced the bus fare by 5 paise per kilometre, four weeks after it raised the fare by 22 percent.

Meanwhile, Jatri Kalyan Samity in a statement yesterday said when different bus operators have been overcharging people ahead of Eid, the government decided to reduce the bus fare by only 3 paise even after reduction of fuel prices twice.

"This is a mockery with travellers ... The decision is no way implementable," read the statement sent by Samity's Secretary General Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury.

The organisation said the

government in 2016 also reduced the bus fare by 3 paise, but the travellers did not get any benefit. "Like the previous incident, people will not benefit this time," it reads.

Wishing anonymity, an owner of a major private bus operator said they already sold all advance Eid tickets.

He said they would try to implement the new fare once they get the chart.

Contacted, BRTA Chairman Nur Mohammad told this correspondent that they will implement the new fare like they did earlier.

"We will prepare a chart on the basis of the decision and implement it."

Israeli troops leave Al Shifa Hospital

FROM PAGE 12

Footage circulated on social media and not yet verified by Reuters showed the bodies of dead Palestinians, some covered in dirty blankets, scattered on the ground around the charred hulk of the hospital building, many of whose outer walls were missing.

It showed the grounds heavily ploughed up, and numerous buildings outside the facility either flattened or burned down.

A doctor told AFP more than 20 bodies had been recovered, some crushed by withdrawing vehicles.

Battles have also flared around other Gaza hospitals almost six months into the offensive that began on October 7.

The Hamas government press office said the army had blown up more than 20 houses within 24 hours in the main southern city of Khan Yunis, where battles have raged

around the Nasser and Al-Amal hospitals.

Meanwhile, in Egypt, mediators held talks with Israeli officials in a bid to bridge gaps between the positions of Hamas and Israel over reaching a ceasefire.

But a Palestinian official close to

Israel's campaign has killed at least 32,845 people so far, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

the mediation effort told Reuters: "There has been no sign of a breakthrough."

Israel's campaign has killed at least 32,845 people so far, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

The United States and Israel were due to hold a virtual meeting

yesterday on the planned offensive in Gaza's Rafah, a week after Israel called off a delegation's visit to Washington.

Deadly air strikes again pounded Gaza early yesterday, and battles raged in Gaza City and Khan Yunis, as the health ministry said at least 60 people had died during the night.

A second ship carrying relief goods via the Mediterranean was just off Gaza's coast yesterday, according to website Vesselfinder.com, days after leaving Cyprus.

Israeli police meanwhile said they had arrested the sister of Qatar-based Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, as part of a terror probe, in the southern Israel town of Tel Sheva.

Police told AFP that Sabah Abdel Salam Haniyeh, 57, who is an Israeli citizen, was taken into custody as part of investigation also involving Israel's security agency Shin Bet.

ACC sues Ron, Rick Sikder

FROM PAGE 12
additional MDs MA Wadud and ASM Bulbul.

ACC Director Benjir Ahmed filed two separate cases with its integrated district office in Dhaka-1 under the Prevention of Corruption Act and Money Laundering Prevention Act.

According to the case statements,

Ron and Rick laundered a total of Tk 71 crore abroad.

ACC Public Relations Officer Md Akhtarul Islam confirmed this information to the media.

The allegation against Ron shows that between 2017 and 2021, he spent around Tk 50 crore abroad using seven credit cards, which is beyond

his credit limit. Later, he cleared this debt, when he returned to the country, thus committing money laundering.

Similarly, Rick also laundered Tk 21.53 crore abroad during the same period.

The other five accused aided the Sikder brothers in this crime.

“
Actually, it takes time to prepare for a role, for both the silver screen and OTT. I was occupied with two big projects: Badrul Anam Saud's 'Shyama Kabbo' and Masud Hasan Ujjal's 'Bonolota Sen'. I only worked in a few television projects in between these two.

