



BLACK REUNION A one-off?

Scheduled to take place on May 10, 'Rock N Rhythm 4.0' will feature an impressive lineup of renowned artistes and bands, including Oni Hasan, Recall, Popeye Bangladesh, Cryptic Fate, Faruque Bhai Project, and potentially, the original members of Black.

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Music in Bangladesh was never the same after Black launched *Amar Prithibi* in 2002. Taking off the much harder edge brought in by the rock bands of the '90s, it was Black who arguably popularised alternative rock in the country, along with acts like Nemesis and Stentorian.

After a gap of 19 years, a fateful accident that took the life of their sound engineer Ahmed Chowdhury Mobin and crippled their morale – Tahsan Khan, Jon Kabir, Mahmudul Kabir Meraz, Khademul Jahan and Mehmood Afridi



Tony will reunite for a show on May 10, much to the utter ecstasy of their dedicated fanbase.

"We have actually been planning this for five years," said Tahsan Khan over the phone. Tahsan, now a bona fide superstar in Bangladeshi showbiz, currently resides in Bangkok for his mother's treatment. "A few months ago, I was reading Rick Rubin's *A Creative Act: A Way of Being*, and it



PHOTOS: STAR & COLLECTED

motivated me in an unforeseen way – you can say that was the catalyst of me pursuing this at this time."

During the Covid pandemic, the former members came together on a Facebook live, kickstarting speculations about a reunion. "Honestly, I miss all of us together. We all had our differences, but we always had respect for each other. In two decades, we all achieved a lot, but truly, the authenticity we had when we performed together was something that I craved," said Tahsan, who went on to not only solidify himself as a solo musician but as a top actor as well. "I don't want to spoil anything, but there is a huge announcement for the show that is yet to come," concluded the musician.

Jon Kabir, on the other hand, took a divergent route – forming Indalo, a band that sounds nothing like Black. "To be honest, I am sitting in my studio with 10 unfinished Indalo songs, and that is taking up all my

concentration. Of course, I am happy about the reunion, but I can bet the nostalgic feeling will kick in once we all start practising together," he told The Daily Star. In a previous interview, Jon, who also has distinctive success in the fields of acting and specifically podcasting, claimed that he would only do a Black reunion for the money. In response to this, he jests, "I don't know about the others, but I am getting a lot of money!"

When asked about the 'surprise announcement' that might come at the concert, the musician replied, "I don't know about that, I was under the impression that it was a one-off. However, let's see what happens."

Jahan, who was the only founding member in Black's current lineup made of young and brilliant performers, provided some much-needed context to the reunion. "It has been 19 years since we played together, and that horrible accident – it changed our lives. Over the years, priorities changed, and so did everyone's careers. Our current line up is also doing very well, and in fact, we will release a music video on the day of the show."

The guitarist reminisces that the last show that they did was on April 18, 2005. "I remember that the show was sponsored by Dj Juice, held at Sultana Kamal Women's Complex."

After *Amar Prithibi*, Black's discography includes *Utshober Por* in 2003, *Abar* in 2008, the self-titled *Black* in 2011 and *Unomanush* in 2016. After five studio albums and 25 credited mixed album appearances, rock music fans of the new generation will finally see the band in all its glory.

Cancer claims life of Paper Rhyme vocalist Ahmed Saad



Ahmed Saad, the lead vocalist of Paper Rhyme, passed away on Tuesday (April 23), at the age of 52 after a prolonged battle with cancer.

Aninda Kabir Avik, a member of the band and a school friend of Saad's, told the media, "Saad battled cancer for years, showing signs of improvement at one point. But the cancer rapidly spread a few months ago. He suffered a heart attack three days ago, was hospitalised, and experienced another fatal heart attack on Tuesday morning, as declared by the attending physician that night."

The funeral is expected to take place on April 25, with details to be finalised by the family.

'Hawa' sweeps awards at Suchitra Sen Int'l Bengali Film Festival

Director Mejbaur Rahman Sumon's film *Hawa* triumphed at the Suchitra Sen International Bengali Film Festival 2024, held at the Jamaica Performing Arts Centre in New York, showcasing the best of Bengali cinema.

The festival, highlighting filmmakers from Bangladesh, India, and beyond, ran from April 20 to 21.

Chanchal Chowdhury, the lead actor in *Hawa*, clinched the Best Actor award for his remarkable portrayal. Nazifa Tushi was honoured with the Best Actress award, adding another feather to the film's illustrious cap.

Hawa also received accolades for its cinematography while securing the coveted Best Film award.



NEWS

NBR halts export, import

FROM PAGE 1 supply of all kinds of raw sugar brought to the bonded warehouses by the sugar refinery.

According to the NBR letter, the company illegally removed 5.25 lakh tonnes of raw sugar from its bonded warehouse without paying customs duties worth Tk 1205.52 crore. Although it was ordered to pay the sum in six installments, the company paid only Tk 533.17 crore. The remaining Tk 674.35 crore has not yet been deposited.

Earlier, a two-member committee headed by the then additional commissioner of Chattogram Customs, Abu Noor Rashed, looked into the bond register and import information of the company from March 2020 to March 2021.

The probe report, seen by The Daily Star, shows the company imported 2.13 lakh tonnes of raw sugar against its entitlement of 1.11 lakh tonnes at the time.

This means, the company imported 1.02 lakh tonnes of surplus raw sugar without paying customs duty worth Tk 217 crore during that period alone, the report said.

Customs officials told The Daily Star yesterday that Abdul Monem Sugar Refinery Limited imports and releases raw sugar under bond (for home consumption) facility without paying any customs duty on condition that the duty will be paid when the items are released from the bonded warehouse.

"But the company imports goods beyond its entitlement and markets them without paying duty. As a result, the government is not getting import duty and VAT on those imports," one official said.

Contacted, Chief Commercial Officer of the Group Kazi Nazmul Hasan said, "We released the goods from the port with prior permission from the customs and bond authorities. However, we failed to pay the duty immediately while releasing the goods from the bonded warehouse. This was a procedural lapse on our part due to various business challenges, but we had no intention to evade duties."

He said the company already paid half the installments and is committed to pay the rest in phases in the coming days.

"We also met the commissioner of the Customs Bond Commissionerate today [yesterday], and offered to pay Tk 100 crore immediately to resolve the issue," he added.

Customs Bond Commissionerate (Dhaka South) Commissioner Khaled

Mohammad Abu Hasan did not pick up the call yesterday.

But one official with direct knowledge of the development said the company was fined Tk 15 crore over duty evasion worth Tk 1190.52 crore following an investigation spanning more than two years.

"But the company did not pay the amount in full, even after the Bond Commissionerate issued several notices," the official said, requesting anonymity as he is not authorised to speak to the media.

Meanwhile, six customs officials at Chattogram, Mongla, Dhaka and Kamalapur ICD Customs houses confirmed that the NBR instructions took effect yesterday.

Officials said they already suspended the release of hundreds of consignments of six companies owned by the Group.

Of them, shipment of about 50,000 tonnes of raw sugar and food products in 10 consignments of Abdul Monem Sugar Refinery Limited at Chattogram port was stopped yesterday.

Officials also suspended at least 10 more shipments of the company's Igloo Dairy, AM Beverage, Igloo Ice Cream, AML Construction and other subsidiary companies.

"All consignments of the company have been suspended. At the same time, there is no scope to release the imported and exported goods as the company's BIN [Business Identification Number] has been locked," Mohammad Fyzur Rahman, commissioner of Chattogram Custom House, told The Daily Star.

Kamalapur ICD Customs Commissioner Akbar Hossain said they relayed the NBR instructions to the officials concerned and to act accordingly.

Israel intensifies

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In one incident, Al Nuseirat residents said an army helicopter landed near the camp and engaged in gun battles with fighters. The area then came under heavy tank fire.

Israeli media suggested Israel would, after weeks of delay, soon send troops into Rafah, on the southern border with Egypt, where more than a million displaced Palestinians are sheltering.

Plans for an attack on the town, where Israel says four intact Hamas battalions are sheltering, has raised widespread international concern, with aid agencies warning of a potential humanitarian catastrophe.

Fearful of flak, RHD won't publish entire reports

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according to the 2023-24 report.

At least 2,152km or 10.48 percent of all surveyed roads were in "poor, bad or very bad" condition, the report said.

After the publication of the media reports, the ministry had asked RHD not to make the report public anymore and also to take down the previous reports from the website, sources said.

The Highway Development and Maintenance Circle of the RHD carries out the survey every year to make a projection of the total maintenance costs for its roads, they said.

The report puts the roads under five categories as per their conditions – good, fair, poor, bad or very bad.

The survey also aims to prioritise the roads needing maintenance because the RHD does not get enough budgetary allocation to repair all roads in a timely manner, they added.

RHD usually completes the report between April and June every year and publishes the full report on its website. This year's report is now being prepared, they said.

RHD Chief Engineer Syed Moinul Hasan told The Daily Star yesterday, "It is not that we won't make the report public anymore. We will make it public partially."

He said some media outlets "misinterpreted" the report on many occasions.

"For example, after our long efforts, the conditions of more than 90 percent roads are now either 'good' or 'fair'. But some media outlets ran reports stressing that 10 percent roads are still in bad shape even after spending thousands of crores of taka. This is not fair," Moinul said.

Besides, making projections of road maintenance costs public is causing some other problems, he said. "That's why we will not make the report public fully."

Asked about the matter, Road Transport and Highways Division Secretary ABM Amin Ullah Nuri said he was not aware of it.

There are 22,476km of road under the RHD network. Of this, 3,991km are national highways, 4,897km regional highways and 13,558km district roads, according to the RHD's 2022-23 annual report.

Foreign airlines' \$323m stuck in Bangladesh

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were mainly due to a shortage of US dollars.

It urged the Bangladesh Bank and all authorised banks in Bangladesh to prioritise the remittance of the airlines' funds.

Officials of foreign carriers that serve Bangladesh told The Daily Star that they were not selling tickets to local travel agencies as they could not repatriate a large chunk of their earnings.

Aviation experts said the carriers were instead selling tickets to overseas online travel agencies (OTA) who then sell tickets to local travel agents, forcing the passengers including the migrant workers, to buy tickets at a higher price.

The IATA in June last year rated Bangladesh as the second worst in

the world, after Nigeria, in terms of blocking funds.

Names of countries, except Bangladesh and Pakistan, were not mentioned in the IATA's latest statement.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh, 32 foreign carriers are operating around 160 flights every day to and from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

Kazi Wahidul Alam, a leading aviation expert in Bangladesh, said foreign airlines' failure to remit their earnings has been going on for a long time but it has now turned serious as the amount has increased a great deal.

"This may destabilise the country's aviation sector," he warned.

He said a few carriers were able to remit some of their stuck funds

but it was not enough. This is why most airlines are not selling low-fare tickets in Bangladesh, he added.

"As a result, Bangladeshi passengers and local travel agents are losing out," he said, adding that the situation will also discourage carriers interested in serving Bangladesh.

ATM Nazrul Islam, another aviation expert, said the country's image was being sullied.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh Chairman Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman recently told The Daily Star that they have requested Bangladesh Bank through the civil aviation ministry to take necessary measures in this regard.

Despite repeated attempts, Mezbahul Haque, spokesperson for Bangladesh Bank, could not be reached for comments.

Just a slap on the wrist?

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compensation cheques dated back to June 30, 2021, his final working day in Madaripur, despite the power of attorney documents being dated July 11, 2021. It stated he knowingly aided in unlawful withdrawal of Tk 7.35 crore from the government treasury by granting compensation for government land with corrupt intentions.

Currently, Promatha is working as the deputy chief (hydrologist) at the National River Conservation Commission.

He was demoted from grade 6 to grade 9 for three years. This action entails that he will not receive any annual increments or promotions during this period.

Contacted, Promatha declined to comment on this matter.

Many senior government officials at the Secretariat are surprised to see Promatha still with a job after being proven corrupt in such an important project.

They said he has only been punished for "misconduct" despite clear evidence of "corruption".

"After three years, this officer will get back to his previous senior rank," according to the gazette notification.

Senior officials said the ministry has been too lenient.

Under the civil service rules, there are four types of major penalties – forced retirement, removal from the job, suspension, and demotion to a lower rank. Demotion is considered the lightest punishment.

Speaking to The Daily Star, a joint secretary said, "Corruption is not rare in the administration. But in some cases, even when investigations prove it, exemplary punishment is not meted out. This is making the administration weaker day by day. The corrupt officials now think they can get away without serious consequences."

Firoz Mia, former additional secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration, said, "If corrupt officials are punished like this, they will be further encouraged to engage in corruption."

He said the government servants (discipline and appeal) rules in 1985 were quite strict about corruption. There were provisions to force corrupt employees into retirement.

"Since the rules were eased in 2018, corrupt officials have not been subjected to significant penalties for their involvement in corruption. This lack of stringent consequences will not yield positive results for the administration," he added.

Biden signs bill

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to make the world safer and it continues American leadership in the world and everyone knows it," Biden said of the legislation.

"It gives vital support to America's partners so they can defend themselves against threats to their sovereignty and to the lives and freedoms of their citizens."

The aid legislation only passed the House of Representatives after months of acrimonious debate among lawmakers over how or even whether to help Ukraine – which Russia invaded in February 2022 – defend itself.

A similar aid package passed the Senate in February, but had been stalled in the House while Republican Speaker Mike Johnson – heeding calls from ex-president Donald Trump and his hardline allies – demanded concessions from Biden on immigration policies, before a sudden reversal.

The United States has been a key military backer of Ukraine, but Congress had not approved large-scale funding for Kyiv for nearly a year and a half, and the financing of the war has become a point of contention ahead of a presidential election in November.

Ukraine's military is facing a severe shortage of weapons and recruits as Moscow exerts constant pressure from the east, with frontline circumstances are expected to worsen in the coming weeks.