

MITHILA on the performance of a lifetime

SHAH ALAM SHAHU

Rafiath Rashid Mithila is a highly acclaimed figure in the Bangladeshi entertainment industry. Her portrayal of the character Kankon Dasi in the anthological film *Kajol Rekha* has earned her praise akin to winning an award, with some suggesting she has surpassed even her own previous performances.

The *Myself Allen Swapan* famed actress has not only received praise from industry insiders but also from a wide array of audiences. In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star, Mithila shares her heartfelt appreciation, plans, aspirations within Bangla cinema, and more.

Having been a fixture in the Bangladeshi entertainment industry for nearly two decades, Mithila has showcased her talent not only in films but also in web series. Her versatility is evident in projects both in Bangla and English languages, such as the series *Myself Allen Swapan*.

Mithila expressed gratitude for the widespread appreciation, emphasising the significance of recognition from individuals beyond the industry. Encouraging those who haven't yet watched *Kajol Rekha*, she extends an invitation to experience the film firsthand.

Veteran actress Suborna Mustafa recently watched *Kajol Rekha* and took to Facebook to praise Mithila's performance. In response, Mithila expressed her appreciation, highlighting Suborna's stature as a respected artiste and the significance of her praise.

Reflecting on the challenges of portraying Kankon Dasi, Mithila acknowledged the historical context of the character and the responsibility that came with it. "I was initially really apprehensive regarding the portrayal of the character and uncertain about how audiences would perceive Kankon Dasi in the film," said Mithila, who has since received a positive reception for her portrayal.

Mithila's collaboration with director Gias

Uddin Selim in *Kajol Rekha* stemmed from a long standing discussion, with Selim proposing the idea and considering Mithila for the role of Kajol Rekha as well, the actress shared.

Asked about her decision to take on the role of Kankon Dasi, Mithila explained, "After thorough consideration of the script and discussions with the director, I felt compelled to portray the character."

"It was certainly challenging. The story dates back four hundred years. It's a tale that was once heard from generation to generation. A very familiar story. That's why I had to prepare for the character of Kankon Dasi for a long time," Mithila said.

As *Kajol Rekha* approaches its one-month milestone in theatres, Mithila anticipates its continued success, attributing its popularity to the compelling story and Selim's meticulous direction.

On the heels of her recent Best Actress award at the prestigious 14th Dadasaheb Phalke International Film Festival in India for her film *O Abhagi*, Mithila expressed gratitude for the recognition. "I have put in a lot of effort for the film *O Abhagi*. It's been a great project. It feels really good to receive an award in India for this. I am grateful to the jury board," shared the actress.

With audiences eagerly awaiting the release of *Meghla* and *Aramnyer Pracheen Probad*, in Kolkata alongside ongoing screenings of *Jole Jwale Tara* and *Nulachharir Sonar Pahar* in Bangladesh, Mithila acknowledges the diverse offerings available to viewers.

Despite her busy schedule, Mithila is yet to watch *Kajol Rekha*, due to her prior commitments abroad. However, she remains eager to view the film upon her return.



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Xefer, Fuad, Sanjoy coming with 'Spicy' collab



Popular singer Xefer Rahman is teaming up with Bangladeshi-American musician Sanjoy Deb and pop singer Hazel Rose for a new song, composed by renowned music industry figure Fuad Almuqtadir.

Xefer teased a captivating song titled *Spicy* with the release of its teaser and a poster, hinting at its sultry allure.

The poster features Xefer confidently posing in pink and red attire, enhancing the teaser's mysterious allure and complementing its sensual theme with snakes and modern mythology.

The song is scheduled to be released on May 12.

'Punorjonmo' famed producer Masudul Mahmud Ruhan no more



Film producer Masudul Mahmud Ruhan committed suicide at a residence in the Rajabazar area of Dhaka on Wednesday (May 8) night.

Returning home around 11pm, Ruhan's roommate found him deceased and alerted the authorities.

According to Shaon Kumar Biswas, sub-inspector (SI) of Hazaribagh Police Station, Ruhan had divorced his wife a month before the tragic incident. Biswas added that the suicide likely stemmed from depression due to his marital separation and other family issues. The autopsy report will confirm the exact cause of death.

Ruhan was renowned in the film industry, producing hits like *Redrum*, streamed on Chorki, and serving as executive producer for acclaimed series like *Punorjonmo*, *Chompa House*, *Shuklopokkho*, *The Silence*, and *Ararat*.

NEWS

How dolls brought

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"After I got training on making dolls with fabric in Dhaka, I came back home in 2018 and began making dolls to earn money," she told this correspondent.

Inspired by AB Crusade's initiative and Manisha's consequent success, scores of women and school- and college-going girls decided to join the venture, initially selling their handmade dolls to the company while managing their homes.

When Manisha saw the massive potential in their craft, she began giving them proper training in fabric doll making, expanding her own enterprise.

The number of female doll makers of Abdulpur then kept growing and is well over 600.

Today, Manisha supervises a team of doll makers in her own home. They intricately craft their dolls with the various materials sourced locally and supplied by AB Crusade.

What's remarkable is the diverse workforce involved -- from homemakers to students. This new and empowering source of income proved even more fruitful during the Covid-19 pandemic, when staying home was an obligation.

"Working from home is always an option, while they can also choose to work in groups," Manisha said.

Deepali Roy, an HSC student, has been crafting dolls for the past four years.

"I used the free time I had after classes and also during the pandemic-induced school closure to contribute to the doll making. Our dolls are exported to different countries in Europe and even in America, which helps me earn a decent income to support my education and family expenses."

Sobita Rani Roy joined the venture two years ago. "Doll making has made me financially independent, enabling me to support my family and meet my children's needs. I can earn enough for their education from doll making."

Jhorna Roy, who has been making dolls for five years, said after learning how to make dolls from Manisha, she makes three to four every day, which helps her support her family.

"Each of us can easily earn up to Tk 300-350 per day by crafting three to four dolls," she said, adding, "AB Crusade pays each maker Tk 30 to Tk 100 per doll, depending on the size and style."

Mozammel Hossain Mizu, owner of AB Crusade, expressed his satisfaction with the collaboration of the women in Abdulpur, emphasising that it has not only benefitted the village, but also expanded his market internationally.

"The crafted dolls are exported by 'Hathey Bunano' [a handicraft export company]. We usually get 20,000 and 25,000 doll every three months. Our two main buyers are in the USA and the UK, who then supply the dolls in other countries."

With orders pouring in from across the world, the art of doll making has become a symbol of women empowerment in Abdulpur and their success has inspired surrounding villages to replicate the initiative.

Chirirbandar Upazila Nirbahir Officer AKM Shariful Haque said the "doll village" serves as a beacon of hope for underprivileged women and their families, showing how creativity and entrepreneurship can transform lives and communities, one doll at a time.

Praising the initiative, he said, "The district and upazila administrations are committed to providing comprehensive support to further enhance their work."

A house of representatives!

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opponents, may now go tough against his rivals.

Soon after the announcement of the polls results on Wednesday night, supporters of Ekramul attacked the followers of Khairul in different areas of Subarnachar, leaving at least 15 supporters of the latter injured, said local AL leaders.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Noakhali district AL General Secretary Shahidullah Khan Sobel said, "Ekramul Karim Chowdhury wants to establish a 'political dynasty' in Subarnachar. He did not withdraw his son from the polls despite the Awami League president's instruction in this regard. He does not care about the party's discipline and principles."

Locals said Ekramul gave his loyalists important party posts and those who opposed him became powerless in politics.

Hanif Chowdhury, general

secretary of Subarnachar upazila AL, got the party ticket for chairman in the Charjubilee Union Parishad polls in 2022. But Ekramul backed independent Saifullah Khashru who won that election.

In 2021, the MP had proposed his son be given the post of youth and sports affairs secretary of the Noakhali district AL, but the central AL did not pick Shabab due to opposition from senior local leaders.

"This upazila polls is not the first time Ekramul Karim Chowdhury took a stand against the party. If his favourite was not picked by the party for an election, he would field his loyalist as a rebel candidate," Bahar Uddin Khelou, president of Subarnachar upazila AL, told The Daily Star.

After being denied the AL ticket for Noakhali-4 in the 2001 national polls, Ekramul ran as an independent in Noakhali-5, but he lost that election.

Locals also said that Ekramul started to influence local AL politics soon after being nominated by the party for Noakhali-4 in the ninth parliamentary polls.

The Daily Star could not reach Ekramul for comments yesterday as he did not pick up calls.

18 conditions for AL, 19

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This is for the second time the ruling party is organising a rally to counter that of the BNP since the January 7 national election.

On January 30, the BNP held black-flag processions, calling for the termination of the 12th parliament. The same day, the AL organised processions protesting the "undemocratic activities" of BNP and its ally Jamaat-e-Islami.

This April deadliest

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realising fines is not enough to make roads safer, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The issue of road crashes and fatalities came to the fore after back-to-back road crashes killed at least 29 people last month.

On April 16, a head-on collision between a bus and a pickup in Faridpur left 15 people dead. The bus had no route permit, fitness certificate, or tax token and the pickup carried people illegally.

The following day, a truck ploughed into several vehicles in Jhalakathi, killing 14 people and injuring 12 others. The man at the wheel did not have a heavy vehicle driving licence.

Those organisations, however, regularly published data based on media reports. They have termed the BRTA data "a very conservative estimation".

According to BRTA data, at least 632 people were killed in 658 road crashes in April this year. The numbers are the highest in any of the 16 months.

The figures of the previous three months show that the numbers of road crashes and deaths have been gradually rising since January.

Hadiuzzman said although the authorities concerned often said that they will take action against unfit vehicles, the number of such vehicles hit a record recently.

Driving tests inside the BRTA compound, instead of on the road tests, is not enough to evaluate a person's skill, the transport expert said.

Speed of vehicles has increased due to improvement of roads but a lack of scientific intervention is resulting in the rise in road crashes and deaths, he said.

Replying to a question, Hadiuzzman said the number of road crashes increased in April due to the Eid rush.

Unfit vehicles and unskilled drivers ruled the road during Eid thanks to scarcity of vehicles and drivers, he added.

DRIVES INTENSIFIED

According to BRTA data, its executive magistrates conducted 234 mobile courts in April, up from only 34 in March.

The courts filed 1,359 cases against errant vehicles and drivers in April against the previous month's figure of 181. They realised fines of Tk 32.55 lakh in April, up from Tk 3.30 lakh in the previous month.

Apart from BRTA, executive magistrates of the district administrations also conducted mobile courts in their respective districts.

Hadiuzzman, however, said although enforcement of law is a must to ensure road safety, only filing cases and realising fines are not enough.

Because many errant drivers and vehicles hit the streets even after facing several cases, he added.

Apart from enforcement, the authorities concerned have to make road users aware of traffic rules, rectify engineering problems on roads, and ensure post-crash management to make roads safer.

Contacted, Road Transport and Highways Division Secretary ABM Amin Ullah Nuri said huge pressure of passengers during Eid was the reason behind the rise in road crashes in April.

Replying to a question, he said, "Transport experts have often advised us to strictly enforce the related laws. Once we begin strict enforcement, they start talking about creating public awareness and other issues."

"We are trying our level best... Everybody has some role to play here. They should carry out their duties too to make roads safer," he added.

	DEATHS, INJURIES IN 2023		
	ROAD CRASHES	DEATHS	INJURIES
December	483	433	641
November	559	470	581
October	437	394	492
September	454	410	609
August	458	376	659
July	566	533	934
June	562	504	785
May	483	394	649
April	476	459	705
March	387	415	688
February	308	303	416
January	322	333	336

SOURCE: BRTA

Probes into road crashes found either the vehicles involved had no fitness clearances, the drivers had no valid licences, or the roads had issues.

GRADUAL RISE

BRTA started publishing accident data in January last year based on road crashes statistics collected by its divisional offices.

The state transport regulator started collecting the data after top officials of the road transport and bridges ministry on several occasions blasted different non-government organisations for publishing "fabricated" reports on road accidents and fatalities.

Some 6.17 lakh registered vehicles did not go through the mandatory annual fitness test till April 15 this year, shows BRTA data.

Besides, there are 35,782 registered buses older than 20 years and 37,275 trucks and lorries more than 25 years old. The authorities had fixed 20 years and 25 years as economic life of buses and trucks respectively but they halted the implementation of the decision following the demand of transport associations.

Hadiuzzman said the number of unskilled drivers also increased as the BRTA's licence issuance process is questionable.