

The state should be more respectful towards filmmakers:

KAMAR AHMAD SIMON



PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL

Internationally acclaimed director Kamar Ahmad Simon is rather well-versed in the art of dealings on the international film festival scale. Over the years, he has accumulated numerous awards. To add to his repertoire, his fourth and much-awaited film 'Shikolbaha' (Silence of the Seashell) has recently been nominated for the prestigious Golden Goblet Award in the main competition of the Shanghai International Film Festival, which is Asia's largest film festival.

SHUCHISMITA TITHI

Following the release of *Shunte Ki Pao!* (*Are you Listening!*), the director patiently has been waiting for censor clearance for a year for *Anyadin...* (*Day After...*), the second film of his *Water* trilogy series. The unfortunate turn of having to wait for clearance came after he had already toured the film at various international festivals, back in 2022.

Kamar Ahmad Simon recently visited The Daily to speak about himself, his water film trilogy, filmmaking techniques, and other related subject matter.

Tell us about the journey of constructing your famed 'water trilogy'.

The water trilogy is made up of *Shunte Ki Pao!*, *Anyadin...*, and *Aro Kichu Jibon*. The first film premiered in 2012, followed by *Anyadin...* Filmed from 2013 to 2019 – it debuted at International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) in 2021 after a two-year post-production. The film received grants from IDFA and Sundance and won awards at Locarno. In 2022, *Anyadin...* was showcased at various festivals, earning a Golden Eye nomination in Zurich and a Harrell Award in Camden.

In our country, viewers often look for stars on movie posters before deciding to watch a film and since my films don't feature any stars, I've always focused on making the film itself the star.

The language of your films has a distinct feature, which in hindsight might make many refer to them as documentaries. Is this language your own, or inspired by someone else's work?

Adwaita Mallabarman's novel, *Titash Ekti Nodir Naam*, inspired by seaside life, feels real yet is celebrated as literature, not non-fiction. Individuals are continually driven, inspired, and influenced by various factors on a subconscious level.

For me, a pure source of inspiration is Bengali literature. I consider myself a dedicated student of Bengali literature since I first began reading novels in the seventh grade, although I can no longer make time for it.

Apart from that, if anything has moved me, it is SM Sultan's paintings. During my time as a Buet student, I visited an exhibition featuring SM Sultan's paintings. Standing before a towering 30-foot canvas of his work remains a vivid memory, leaving an indelible impression on me. Since then, I immersed myself in Sultan's life and art, finding great inspiration.

For instance, the inception of the movie *Shunte Ki Pao!* was sparked

by an image on the front page of The Daily Star, depicting people using their bare hands to block a broken dam—a scene reminiscent of Sultan's paintings.

I craft my films with a specific purpose: to immerse the audience so deeply that they forget they're watching a movie. For example, during the filming of *Shunte Ki Pao!* I experimented with multiple cameramen before picking up the camera myself to create haunting, unsettling frames with a slightly shaky quality. I aimed to evoke unfiltered emotions that viewers couldn't access directly but could experience through the film.

In your film, characters exist under their real names, resembling real individuals on-screen. For example, in 'Shunte Ki Pao!', there's a scene where a mother teaches her child at home. How did you familiarise the people of a region like Sutarkhali with being filmed? How long did it take, and what challenges did you face?

I prefer creating films directly on the location with the people involved, rather than hiring outside actors and

constructing sets. *Shunte Ki Pao!* was a lengthy process of about three and a half years. After exploring various locations, I settled on Sutarkhali. It took around six months to acclimate the locals to the camera, requiring multiple visits back and forth.

Initially, when I arrived, everyone was dressed up, expecting a fancy arrangement. But I'd turn off the camera and engage in conversation instead of filming. After repeating this process several times, they began to think, "He talks about movies but doesn't make them." Once they relaxed and got used to my approach, I began shooting. It demands patience, strategy, and a lot of learning. It's a form of practice.

Is there an update on the clearance situation of 'Anyadin...'? Numerous directors opt to release movies on OTT platforms due to censorship hurdles or prolonged waiting periods. Would you tread that way?

I have directed *Shunte Ki Pao!* and *Anyadin...* on the big screen, not tailored for small screens. I aim to showcase the films in theatres, hence keeping my patience with censorship. Regarding the complexity faced by directors, the state should be more respectful towards filmmakers. This isn't just about me, it's about all directors. Removing a movie from its timely narrative is akin to erasing time itself and, in a way, erasing the filmmaker.

Are our independent and young filmmakers turning more to

festivals?

I think a person only steps out when the local audience fails to appreciate their [filmmakers'] talent and understand their message. If someone wants to express themselves through a film but faces obstacles, they seek alternative avenues. Think about it, attending events organised by the likes of the IDFA Institute might become the reason why someone like me gets noticed by the media. In retrospect, this highlights our cultural issue of neglecting local creatives otherwise. Whenever a Bangladeshi film reaches a globally respected platform, it becomes a representation of Bangladesh itself.

The world is inherently Eurocentric, and for those of us from post-colonial nations, it feels like we're still in a heavily colonised environment. By screening my films in major local theatres, I can connect with audiences within my own country. Once a person receives the appropriate acknowledgement from local audiences, they can never really leave the domain. Even then, my audience still values my international reach.

However, I do hold certain criticisms — directors nowadays are less concerned about the type of film they create, why they create it, or what message they try to convey. Personally, I believe that art has never existed, nor will it ever exist, solely for its own sake. Art always has a purpose.

Translated by Zareen Nawar.

NEWS

US masterclass a lesson for Tigers

FROM PAGE 12
the board for the loss of two wickets.

But then began the Aaron Jones show, as the USA batter along with his partner Andries Gous lit the Grand Prairie Stadium on fire, as the hosts made 120 runs off the next six overs to flip the script on the Canadians.

Jones, especially, wreaked havoc against the Canadians, hitting as many as 10 sixes and remaining unbeaten on 94 off 40 balls, powering the hosts to the target with seven wickets and 14 balls to spare.

The USA-Canada game was a clash between two sides who played the game with the same positive intent, with the Americans outdoing their neighbours, unlike the clash between Bangladesh and India, which was clearly a mismatch.

In the warm-up match, which

took place in the newly built Nassau County Stadium in New York, Bangladesh suffered a 60-run defeat against India, making only 122-8 chasing 183.

Although the match in itself was inconsequential, as it was not recognised as a T20I and both teams fielded more than 11 players, Bangladesh's batting was an eyesore, devoid of any positive intent with the exception of Mahmudullah's 28-ball 40.

After losing three wickets for 10 runs, it never seemed like Bangladesh could get anywhere near the target, even though India captain Rohit Sharma used just two overs of Jasprit Bumrah, didn't complete the quotas of Kuldeep Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja and used three overs of part-timer Shivam Dube, who took 2-13.

The Tigers failed to bat positively

in a match where there were no stakes, while associate teams like the USA, who just last month handed Bangladesh a 2-1 series defeat, and Canada displayed positive intent and fearless cricket that the Bangladesh players and coaches often talk about.

Even after the defeat against India, Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto spoke about having faith in their capabilities in T20s, even though barring some series wins at home and one away series win against the West Indies in 2018, the Tigers have nothing to show for in T20Is. Every metric indicates a clear dearth of ability alongside a lack of intent in the Bangladesh team when it comes to T20s. It's high time for the players and the management to put their heads out of the sand and acknowledge it.

16,970 workers missed deadline

FROM PAGE 12
Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, said the workers who failed to reach Malaysia will be able to file their complaints with the newly formed probe body.

"We also plan to return the money to workers who could not go to Malaysia."

Several migrant workers, who were unable to go to Malaysia as they did not get air tickets despite having all valid documents, said they had mortgaged land, sold cows, and borrowed money from banks

and relatives to pay the recruiting agencies.

"It was my dream to go to Malaysia and get a well-paying job so that I could provide financial stability for my family. My dreams have now been dashed as I failed to arrive in the country within the deadline," said Manikganj's Anisul Islam.

Like Anisul, several thousand others were also devastated after having to return from the Dhaka airport, failing to fly to Malaysia on May 31, the deadline for entering the country.

In March, Malaysia announced May 31 as the deadline to bring in foreign workers from 14 countries, including Bangladesh.

The country resumed hiring Bangladeshi workers in 2022 after a four-year suspension over allegations of irregularities in the recruitment process.

Between August 2022 and April 2024, nearly 4.50 lakh Bangladeshis migrated to Malaysia.

Last year, Malaysia was Bangladesh's second-largest overseas job market after Saudi Arabia.

Man kills wife

FROM PAGE 12
Aziz had rented.

Ashamoni, of Bogura Sadar, married Azizul, of Dhunat upazila, three years ago.

Azizul was stationed in Chattogram and Ashamoni mostly lived with her parents.

Azizul was staying in Bogura on a two-month vacation and was supposed to leave for Chattogram on Saturday night.

Before that, he took his wife and son out for shopping on Saturday afternoon. Later, he took them to the hotel and killed them sometime during the night, police said.

Ashamoni's family has demanded the highest punishment for Azizul.

ACC to make list of those who aided Benazir

FROM PAGE 12
Benazir's properties, like the Bhawal Resort in Gazipur."

These individuals reaped benefits when Benazir was the Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner, director general of Rab, and the IGP.

The ACC investigation team found that Benazir bought many pieces of land at prices much lower than the market value.

A list of sub registrars who helped Benazir is being prepared, sources said.

ACC Chairman Mohammad Moinuddin Abdullah told The Daily Star yesterday, "Our investigation team is completely independent.

"They will investigate the way they

think fit. The team will also interrogate individuals, whose names will come up for aiding and abetting Benazir."

The ACC team suspects that some bank officials might have helped Benazir withdraw Tk 70-80 crore from 33 bank accounts before they were frozen.

On April 25, the ACC wrote to the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU) seeking information on Benazir's bank accounts. The ACC received a response on May 20.

The accounts were frozen three days later, but during this period, Benazir withdrew the money.

The ACC will investigate whether the banks submitted Cash Transaction Reports and Suspicious Transaction

Reports to the Bangladesh Bank.

Banks and other financial institutions have to report to the BFIU about cash transactions of Tk 10 lakhs and above. They have to file a Suspicious Transaction Report if they feel something is off.

On April 18, the ACC decided to launch an inquiry into the allegations of amassing illegal wealth by the former police chief after a Bangla daily ran reports on this.

It also formed a three-member committee to probe the allegations.

On May 23 and May 26, Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court ordered authorities to confiscate his assets under 202 deeds and freeze his bank accounts.

The agencies picked by KL to blame

FROM PAGE 1
The issue of recruiting foreign workers in Malaysia came to the fore again as there have been numerous reports of joblessness, indebtedness and other forms of exploitation in Malaysia, which halted the foreign workers recruitment on May 31.

Between August 2022 and May 2024, about five lakh Bangladeshi workers went to Malaysia. UN experts in their letter to Bangladesh and Malaysia said the Bangladeshi migrants had to pay \$4,500 to \$6,000 as recruitment fees.

They even wrote about the bribes in recruitment process involving the Malaysian government officials, agents, and even Bangladesh high commission in Malaysia.

They called for measures to protect the thousands of Bangladeshi workers who face destitution and risk detention. They also enquired about the measures both the countries were taking regarding bilateral cooperation, policies, and investigations to improve the migrants' situation.

With none of the countries responding in 60 days, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights made public the letters on May 27. Later, Malaysia's Permanent Mission to the UN in Geneva replied on May 28 and the Bangladesh mission the next day.

Among other things, Bangladesh mentioned how Malaysia played the role in selecting the 101 Bangladeshi recruiting agencies.

Recruitment industry insiders alleged that those who could pay hefty sums to leaders of the syndicate

of 101 agencies were selected for the recruitment job.

The Bangladesh mission said the recruitment process and procedures had been agreed upon centred on an online-based system — Foreign Workers Centralised Management System (FWCMS), which is developed and operated by the Malaysian government.

"As a result, there should be no scope for sending any Bangladeshi workers to Malaysia using false employment visas," the letter said.

According to Malaysian media, controversial IT company Bestinet is contracted by the Malaysian government to maintain the FWCMS. Industry insiders said Bestinet President Aminul Islam Abdul Nor is a key figure behind the foreign workers' recruitment syndicate and manipulation.

The letter of Bangladesh to the UN experts says in the initial stage of the labour recruitment in August 2022, Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia used to inspect the employer companies before attesting the job demand letters — an exercise meant to verify the genuineness of the jobs.

Later, the high commission suspended the process as the Malaysian foreign ministry officially requested the Bangladesh mission not to conduct such company inspection saying the matter fell under the jurisdiction of the competent Malaysian authorities, the letter mentions.

In joint working group meetings, Bangladesh raised the issue of non-placement of newly migrated

Bangladeshi workers and requested the Malaysian authorities to take necessary remedial actions.

The letter added that Malaysia's Department of Labour (DoL) has prohibited 48 employers from recruiting foreign workers, including from Bangladesh.

In the letter, Nadzirah Osman, Malaysian permanent representative to the UN in Geneva, said the DoL relocated 1,664 foreign workers in 2023 and 910 workers this year to new employers.

It said Malaysia restricted the entry of foreign workers in the formal sector since May 31 to close the loopholes of exploitation and allow the government to reassess the country's foreign workers' needs.

She reaffirmed Kuala Lumpur's commitment to protect the rights of migrant workers in the country.

Israel accepts

FROM PAGE 12
opened fire on targets in central Rafah, a jet fired a missile at a house in the western Tel at Sultan district and artillery shelling targeted the southern Brazil neighbourhood, witnesses said.

In the occupied West Bank, two Palestinian teenagers were killed by Israeli gunfire, the Palestinian health ministry said.

Elsewhere in Gaza, Israeli helicopters fired at targets in Gaza City's Zeitun and Sabra areas, and an air strike hit a house in the city's east, AFP reporters said.

Three people were killed including a woman and a child, when an air strike hit a family apartment in Gaza City's Daraj neighbourhood.