

‘I’ve spoken against fascists for years, I was never afraid of backlash’

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SHARMIN JOYA

“I’ve always advocated for the abolition of censorship from any sort of art, so it was a stark irony to find my name listed as a member of the newly formed censor board,” shared Ashfaque Nipun. “However, with all respect to those who have considered me qualified for the position, I have courteously declined the offer.”

A notification issued on Sunday (September 15) by Saiful Islam, the Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, announced the formation of a new 15-member committee. Ashfaque Nipun was one of the announced members alongside others.

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Then again, just a few hours after the announcement, the *Mohanagar* director took to his social media to announce that he had declined the proposal. In the meantime, after the announcement from the ministry and before Nipun’s clarification, social media buzzed with diverse opinions—some were pleased with this decision. In contrast, others expressed disappointment, labelling it as ‘biased’ of the ministry.

“I was in the middle of recording a podcast when the announcement came through. When I finished the show, my phone was flooded with calls and messages from journalists and colleagues. Honestly, the first thing I did was contact the ministry, which is why it took some time before I made my post. I didn’t want to put

them in a difficult position, so I informed them first before publicly announcing my decision.”

Was Nipun unaware of this decision by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry? On the same day, his name was also added to the list of the board of trustees of the Artistes Welfare Trust. “Artistes Welfare Trust belongs to a separate ministry. It is under the Ministry



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

of Cultural Affairs, and they did contact me before the announcement. I had a clear conversation with them regarding my role, before I agreed to be one of the trustees.”

He however clarified that he was unaware his name had been included on the list of censor board members. “It took some time to reach them, which is why my response was delayed. For those still expressing doubts, you,

as a journalist, can confirm the fact with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting,” he told this reporter during the interview.

Many social media users, along with some of Nipun’s colleagues from the entertainment industry, made critical remarks, pointing out that he had never directed a feature film—a fact that didn’t go unnoticed by him. Some argued that he declined the proposal only after facing public pressure. In response, he stated, “For the last 15 years, I’ve held even more critical positions for being outspoken against a fascist government, so it’s absurd to think that way! As for the feature film argument, the format of productions we create for TV or OTT platforms is essentially the same, so technically, that claim is baseless.”

Nipun also raised a valid question: If the board includes critics, writers, and actors, why are only directors expected to prove their ‘ability’ by directing a full-length feature film?

On September 18, Information Adviser Nahid Islam stated to the media, that a certification board will be formed soon under the Bangladesh Film Certification Act, 2023. “On September 15, I spoke to the ministry and explained to them that the process needs to be implemented faster. Films scheduled for release, such as *Shonibar Bikel* and other productions by the FDC, are also awaiting their debut. These projects need to hit theatres soon.”

Nipun further clarified, “They assured me that the position they offered wasn’t compensation for my involvement in the July movement, nor because I had been oppressed under the Awami League regime. They felt I might be declining for those reasons, but that wasn’t the case either for me or any other member of the board.”

As we came to the end of the conversation, Nipun emphasised the potential changes in the film industry, Nipun uttered his concerns about the need for greater responsibility from exhibitors and the distribution system once the certification process begins. “It’s a chain process, and as the supporting wing, other sectors need to be more cooperative and, above all, take greater responsibility in fulfilling their duties.”

Abul Hayat collaborates with Antik Mahmud



Abul Hayat recently voiced an antagonist in an upcoming untitled animated project — playing a king who seeks to use magical abilities to revive his son.

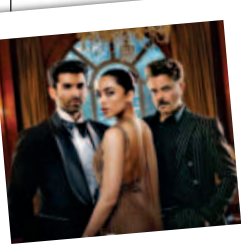
This artistic venture is animator Antik Mahmud’s latest animated project with a story that highlights his unique comedic style, blending fantasy with profound themes.

Antik has built a loyal fan base through collaborations with young celebrities like Pritom Hasan and Chirkutt.

He told The Daily Star that he has long dreamed of working with Abul Hayat, who greatly influenced his childhood.

Antik believes the cartoon piqued the veteran actor’s interest, noting, “I think the hook was the art. He appreciates it—his daughter Bipasha Hayat is a painter, and Tauquir *bhai* is an architect. I could see that admiration.”

‘The Night Manager’ is India’s only nomination at International Emmys



The Indian adaptation of *The Night Manager* was a hit with audiences, showcasing stellar performances by Anil Kapoor, Aditya Roy Kapoor, and Sobhita Dhulipala in an action-packed series that left viewers captivated.

The show recently received a nomination at the 2024 International Emmy Awards, making it India’s only contender across 14 categories, specifically in the competitive drama series category.

The Indian version will compete against strong international titles like France’s *Drops of God*, Australia’s *The Newsreader*, and Argentina’s *Yosi, the Regretful Spy*.

NEWS

Deflated Bangladesh clutching

FROM PAGE 12

Zakir and Shadman played their shots, judged the lengths well and attacked with much ease during that little phase of play in the second session after India had declared. Yet, the manner in which they got dismissed in their 30s brought up questions regarding their concentration.

Batting coach David Hemp tried to explain the first innings disaster, when they were bundled out for 149, saying the batters just could not get set.

“I just think that we got tested early on in the innings, in and around the stumps. We are playing against India so they have quality bowling. They are a very confident side playing at home. It was a case of how we match that, so we have to look to score. We asked the batting group to trust their strengths,” Hemp said yesterday.

But even after getting in, the two Bangladesh openers threw it away yesterday, with Zakir pushing at a Jasprit Bumrah delivery that he could have left alone and Shadman chipping a Ravichandran Ashwin delivery to mid-wicket, both guilty of losing their concentration.

“We did it [batters getting in] in patches in Pakistan. We will keep talking about it, and keep working on it in practice. We have to get ourselves in first, as that’s something we haven’t done well enough. If you go back to March [against Sri Lanka], we were not doing well enough. So we are doing that better,” Hemp explained.

The condition remains pretty good for batting, but rough patches have developed on the wicket which would inevitable bring spinners Ashwin, who claimed three wickets on Day 3, and Ravindra Jadeja into the play on the penultimate day.

The disappointing batting in the first innings has put the Tigers permanently in the backfoot and India’s quality has dictated terms for three days.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto scoring some runs with an unbeaten fifty is biggest positive from Day 3 for the Tigers. With six wickets in hand and two days to go, Bangladesh will now have to try and make something positive out of the remainder of the innings.

Touhid to meet Jaishankar in New York

FROM PAGE 12

time Modi would leave the city. Modi left for a three-day visit to New York yesterday.

“So, there is almost no possibility [of a meeting between Modi and Yunus],” he said at a briefing at the foreign ministry.

Touhid has left for New York last night and a 57-member delegation led by Yunus is scheduled to leave Dhaka for New York on September 23 on a commercial flight.

He explained that most of the delegation members were security personnel and journalists. He cited austerity measures amid the economic downturn for the small delegation.

Usually, the number of Bangladesh delegation members to the UNGA is between 340 and 335.

During the pandemic, the UNGA was held virtually. In the 76th UNGA, the delegation had 408 people. There were 138 people in the 77th UNGA and 146 people in the 78th UNGA when Bangladesh was maintaining austerity measures.

WORKING RELATIONS TO BE KEPT

In response to a question, Touhid said, “Acknowledging the problem [tension between Bangladesh and India] is important for addressing it.

“We will definitely try to sort out

the tension and maintain working relations. The relationship will have to be based on mutual respect and fairness. Based on this, we will try to advance the relationship and it is possible.”

There were media reports that Modi was not meeting Yunus as New Delhi did not like the comments made by Bangladeshi political parties and interim government on Dhaka Delhi relations.

Asked about this, Touhid said there were also comments of Indian leaders which Dhaka might not have liked. Similarly, India might not like some comments from Bangladesh.

“However, these are not major issues. We cannot change our neighbours, and we can only coexist with good relationship,” he said.

He said for the sake of Bangladesh and India, they need to talk on bilateral issues.

UNGA SPEECH

Yunus is scheduled to deliver his speech at the high level General Debate of the UNGA on September 27 before leaving for Dhaka the same day.

In his speech, he is expected to highlight the mass uprising and reaffirm his commitment to establishing a pro-people, welfare-oriented, and public interest driven

state mechanism, Touhid said.

He said the chief adviser’s speech would also feature Bangladesh’s strong stance on international peacekeeping, climate change, global conflicts, Rohingya crisis, challenges faced by developing nations in achieving SDGs, preventing illicit flow of resources, and safeguarding migrant rights.

The foreign adviser emphasised that human rights and government’s reform initiatives would be the central theme.

Touhid said the UNGA presents a great opportunity to showcase Bangladesh’s inclusive and justice-oriented vision to the global community.

Yunus is expected to hold bilateral meetings with the prime ministers of the Netherlands, Pakistan, and Nepal.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, president of the European Union, UN secretary general, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, president of the World Bank, and USAID administrator will call on Yunus there.

Bangladesh will host a high-level reception on September 24 to mark the 50th anniversary of its membership in the UN.

Bangladesh will also attend a high-level side event on the Rohingya crisis.

4 US senators urge Yunus

FROM PAGE 2

The senators said when citizens unite, their voices can compel even the most entrenched and authoritarian leaders to relinquish power, but this historic moment did not come without costs.

Instead of engaging the legitimate grievances of the protesters, the Bangladesh security forces responded with brute force, killing hundreds of protesters, and arresting and injuring thousands more, they said.

The senators urged the interim government to create a credible process to conduct an independent and impartial investigation into the security services’ human rights violations.

“This will be vital both as a demonstration of your commitment to respecting the rights of the protesters and signal your interim government’s intention to work in good faith to address their grievances.”

They said this transition presents a historic opportunity to reform institutions in Bangladesh, to ensure that human rights, such as freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly, are protected; to allow

for inclusive participation in government representative of the diversity of the country.

“This is also an opportunity to support civil society and independent media; and to hold individuals accountable for the violence committed against the citizens of Bangladesh.

“The people of Bangladesh deserve a government that honours their voices, safeguards their rights, and upholds their dignity.”

The senators also said while many celebrate this new chapter in Bangladesh, a concerning volume of those celebrations have turned violent, with documented reports of reprisals targeting police as well as minority Hindu communities and those perceived to be supporters of Sheikh Hasina’s former government.

“As a result, the country has witnessed gaps in law enforcement and lack of protections for those facing violent attacks.

“We urge you to take these threats and incidents of violence seriously, just as we applaud your recent promise

to continue supporting the million-plus Rohingya people sheltered in Bangladesh,” the letter reads.

The US legislators said it is only by ensuring that all communities residing in Bangladesh are protected under the law that Bangladesh can meet its promising future.

Now, more than ever, it is important for Bangladeshis to unify -- by coming together and by rebuilding an inclusive government that fully harnesses Bangladesh’s tremendous potential, they said.

In a world that has recently witnessed repeated assaults on democratic ideals, Bangladesh has a rare opportunity to respond by delivering on the “second liberation” many protesters have called for through the formulation of a government that respects democratic values and institutions, the senators said.

“We stand ready to assist Bangladesh during this critical period to ensure a successful transition to a democracy truly representative of the will of the Bangladeshi people.”

Dual rule in judiciary must end

FROM PAGE 12

judiciary is essential for restoring public trust, which has been eroded due to years of interference, Ahmed said.

The judiciary’s independence is not only a constitutional requirement but a cornerstone for upholding the rule of law in Bangladesh.

He highlighted several systemic issues plaguing the judiciary, including a lack of clear policies for the appointment and promotion of judges, severe shortages of judges relative to caseloads and infrastructural inadequacies.

He called for immediate government action to implement reforms aimed at strengthening the judiciary and restoring faith among the populace.

Moreover, he mentioned the necessity of implementing the full ruling in the Masdar Hossain case, which emphasises the independence of subordinate court judges.

Law Affairs Adviser Asif Nazrul said they want to establish true justice and get out of the culture of filing blanket cases.

“We want to establish true justice.

We want to get out of the culture of filing blanket cases, using the judiciary to harass people, destroying people’s livelihoods, and creating continuous grievances, anger, and discord among people.”

Major reforms

FROM PAGE 12

timeframe and will not do so in the future. But delays will harm the country, society and politics.

Responding to a question, he termed Dhaka University’s decision to suspend student politics a “bad move”.

“Depoliticisation is not the answer,” he said.

Fakhrul agrees that student bodies should not be directly affiliated with political parties.

This issue cannot be resolved by force or restrictions. “If that happens, what is the difference between a military government and this government?”

National leaders emerge from student politics, he said. “If we ban student politics again, who will benefit? It will benefit those who operate underground.”

The immediate past government started the culture of false and blanket cases, Nazrul added.

Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman expressed deep concerns over the continued presence of judges who have allegedly acted as accomplices of fascism in significant positions within the judiciary.

He emphasised that the judges, known for their roles in undermining citizens’ rights, remain in critical postings.

Asaduzzaman highlighted the urgent need for vigilance from both the legal advisory offices and the Chief Justice’s office, warning that the ongoing situation could tarnish public trust in the judicial system.

He recalled a dark period over the last decade and a half, where citizens’ basic human rights and voting rights were reportedly stripped away through violence, enforced disappearances and repression.

Millions were falsely accused in cases designed to suppress dissent, leading to a significant erosion of fundamental rights such as freedom of speech and assembly.

Reflecting on the judiciary’s role during the turbulent times, Asaduzzaman lamented its failure to uphold justice, asserting that many judges acted as passive observers or adopted submissive stances.

Speaking about the racial tension in the hills, he said, “I believe this part of a strategy to destabilise the government and the political landscape of Bangladesh. I do not consider the recent incidents in the Chittagong Hill Tracts as isolated ones

“The events can be viewed as an attempt to instigate a counter-revolution, undermining the benefits we have achieved through an uprising.”

He said Sheikh Hasina’s remarks from India had an impact in Bangladesh. “Overall, the situation is not comfortable... there are real causes for concern.”

On BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia’s health, Fakhrul said doctors do not deem her fit for flying, which is delaying her travel abroad for medical care.