

ONGOING UNREST AT BSA: Theatre activists commit to continue protests



PHOTO: KAZI RAKIB

KAZIRAKIB

Yesterday, Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation (BGTF) activists organised and participated at a press conference that took place at the National Theatre Hall seminar room, in response to the unwarranted attack on activists during a protest at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy's (BSA) National Theater Hall last Friday. The meeting highlighted the urgent need for the protection of the nation's cultural sector so that theatre activities can resume without fear.

According to reports, those who attacked the activists' gathering at BSA on Friday returned yesterday as well. This time, they were protesting in front of the Shilpakala Academy gate, chanting various slogans. During this time, the police and army took two individuals into custody.

A police official, who wished to remain anonymous, stated, "We detained two individuals, associated with the incident, for questioning. They are not linked to the theatre community and are believed to be outsiders. Depending on the investigation, they may be arrested or released. Further updates will be provided later."

Last Friday (November 8), the BGTF organised a protest over the November 2 cancellation of the play *Nityapurana*. During the demonstration when playwright Mamunur Rashid was addressing the audience to deliver a speech, unidentified attackers hurled eggs at him and fled when theatre activists pursued them.

Following the attack, Rashid, visibly unfazed, addressed the crowd from the stage, saying, "Those who took part in this disgraceful act—why did you run away? Come forward, let us perform theatre, together!"

Despite the presence of security forces, Mamunur Rashid expressed frustration with their lack of

intervention, saying, "What kind of security are we being provided if this incident could happen right before the authorities without consequences? Those responsible must face exemplary punishment."

During yesterday's press conference, several leading figures from the theatre community, including playwright and director Masum Reza, BGTF General Secretary Kamal Bayezid, actor-director Tapan Hafiz, actor Kamal Ahmed, and former Federation General Secretary Akhtaruzzaman, called for the implementation of strict security measures for the protection of performers.

General Secretary Kamal Bayezid delivered a statement on behalf of BGTF, stating, "Why did the security forces fail to arrest the miscreants immediately after they were notified? We view the attack on Mamunur Rashid as a direct threat and conspiracy against the nation's cultural practices, and it must be condemned without delay."

"We urge the authorities to take swift action and ensure strict punitive measures against all threats targeting the cultural sector. No free cultural practices can thrive without guaranteeing the safety and security of cultural activists," Bayezid added.

Notably, Kamal Bayezid also announced from the protest stage that all theatre practitioners, across the country, would wear black badges for the next seven days. A nationwide protest is planned for November 15 to condemn the incident, with further

actions to be announced if the situation deteriorates

Theatre personality Masum Reza condemned the attack, saying, "A few miscreants threw eggs and ran away. We, as theatre activists, strongly denounce this cowardly act. The perpetrators must be arrested. We should not have to stop performing plays out of fear. We need to continue to perform every day."

Khandaker Shah Alam, the Group Theatre Federation's program secretary, emphasised there was no conflict between theatre activists and the ongoing student protests against inequality. "We believe that those who attacked our peaceful protest were not part of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement," he said. "But what did theatre activists do to deserve such an attack? We are simply protesting against injustice."

He called on the interim government to confirm whether theatre practitioners would be allowed to continue cultural activities across the country going forward.

In a written statement, theatre practitioners under the Group Theatre Federation questioned why the attackers had not been arrested despite law enforcement officers being present at the scene. "The authorities need to explain why the attackers have not been apprehended yet. We have photos and videos of the attack. There is enough evidence to identify and arrest them."

During the conference Tapan Hafiz added, "The police contacted us, asking if we recognised the attackers

or suspected anyone. We have already told them that there are pictures and videos of the incident in the media, so they can investigate and take action accordingly."

Actor Kamal Ahmed echoed these sentiments, pointing out that the incident took place, was responsible for providing security. "Our job is simply to perform and orchestrate events on the Shilpakala premises, so the responsibility of taking legal action against security breaches naturally falls on the BSA. We have photos and videos of the attackers breaking the gates and assaulting the premises. We are ready to cooperate with law enforcement to obtain due justice."

Renowned theatre activist Jhuna Chowdhury reflected on the post-July period, stating that a faction has long attempted to destroy Bengali culture. "They are a coordinated group, continuously opposing our history and traditions. Many cultural activists participated in the July-August uprisings, and several were injured. Those who label us as anti-revolutionary are simply trying to hinder our cultural movements. They must not be allowed to do so again."

Previously, on November 2, an unexpected disturbance at the National Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) led to the sudden cancellation of the play *Nityapurana*.

A group of protesters assembled outside the venue, leading Shilpakala Academy Director General Syed Jamil Ahmed, in coordination with the play's theatre troupe *Desh Natok*, to stop the performance.

Ahmed later addressed the decision in a virtual press conference, stating the show was cancelled to ensure the safety of the audience, performers, and property. The cancellation sparked public debate and criticism.



Zendaya and Anne Hathaway cast in Christopher Nolan's next

Zendaya and Anne Hathaway are officially on board for Christopher Nolan's next big project under the banner of Universal Studios, joining a stellar cast that already includes some of the A-list Hollywood celebrities.

Nolan, known for his blockbuster films, will write and direct this new movie, set to premiere in theatres and on Imax on July 17, 2026.

According to Deadline, the two actresses are set to join the previously announced lineup, which includes Matt Damon, Tom Holland, and Lupita Nyong'o.

While details of the project remain tightly guarded, sources revealed to The Hollywood Reporter that the story will take place in a historical setting rather than the present day.

Aranyak Natyadal cancels show following BSA Attack

During a protest held by theatre activists at the National Theatre Hall in Dhaka last Friday, unidentified individuals threw eggs at the stage while the well-known playwright and director Mamunur Rashid was delivering a speech. The attackers quickly fled the scene when the activists attempted to apprehend them, evading capture.

Following the attack, yesterday the theatre group Aranyak Natyadal decided to cancel the scheduled 7:00pm

performance of their play *Company*, at the main auditorium of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. This decision was taken as a direct response to the unwarranted incident, underscoring the group's concerns for safety and security in light of recent events.

The news about the play cancellation was confirmed by Mamunur Rashid. They stated that the cancellation was a protest against the attack that took place during the gathering of activists held to oppose the suspension of theatre productions at Shilpakala. *Company* has been written and directed by Mamunur Rashid.

Regarding the cancellation of the play's performance, Aranyak Natyadal's acting chief secretary, actress, and director Shamima Shawkat Lovely, said, "All these years, we have protested against injustice by performing plays; today, we are being compelled to protest by cancelling a performance."



The Beatles score Grammy nominations after nearly 30 years

The Beatles' final release, *Now and Then*, has earned two Grammy nominations, bringing the iconic band back into Grammy contention after nearly three decades.

This track, recognised with nominations for Record of the Year and Best Rock Performance, positions the Fab Four alongside modern legends like Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, and Billie Eilish.

The Grammy nomination nods for *Now and Then* are The Beatles' first since 1997 — when they won three awards in the late '90s for *Free as a Bird* and *Anthology*.

Considered the "last Beatles song," *Now and Then* includes original vocals by John Lennon, recorded in 1970 and preserved through artificial intelligence (AI) to maintain his unique voice.

'Can't solely rely on acting anymore'

SHARMIN JOYA

In times of national crisis, Bangladesh's entertainment industry is often among the hardest hit. From artistes to crew members, everyone faces hardship due to a lack of work and opportunities. Actor Ziaul Roshan has recently expressed concerns about the struggle to maintain a stable livelihood in such uncertain times, highlighting the challenges when work for artistes dries up.

"For many, it becomes increasingly difficult to uphold their usual standards of living," revealing the broader impact a crisis can have on those in the entertainment sector, he shared with The Daily Star.

One of the shining stars of his generation, Roshan made his debut in 2016 with Wazed Ali Sumon's *Rokto*, where he starred alongside Pori Moni. Since then, he has featured in numerous films, including Shamim Ahmed Roni's *Dhyatteriki* (2017), sharing the screen with Nusraat Faria and Arifin Shuvo, and Kamalshwar Mukherjee's Indian Bengali film *Cockpit* (2017), where he appeared opposite Tollywood actor Dev.

He went on to star in Indian director Raja Chanda's *Beporowa* (2019), alongside Eamin Haque Bobby, Ittekkar Shuvo's *Mukhosh* (2021) with Mosharraf Karim, Dipankar Dipon's *Operation Sundarbans* (2022), and Nader Chowdhury's *Jinn* (2023), starring opposite Puja Chery, among

many other projects. In addition to his film career, Roshan has also worked on several OTT productions.

Despite his busy schedule in normal times, Roshan is now cautious to make acting his sole profession, as the entertainment industry faces a downturn. He is now considering other options to secure a livelihood.

He shared, "During the Covid pandemic, we faced a similar situation. For at least two years, we had to wait for new projects, sitting idle and hoping things would return to normal. In such circumstances, it becomes difficult to maintain our living standards. As artistes, we must uphold a certain image, and maintaining such a lifestyle is expensive, especially when the audience expects it. At the same time, why should our families suffer?"

Roshan continued, "Whenever there's a crisis, the media industry also takes the hit for it. With the recent political shifts, productions have again reduced. Every two or three years, pressure mounts on the media industry, and those of us who rely solely on acting as a profession find ourselves cornered."

He explained that good projects often take a long time to complete, and in the past, he has been a victim of this, with some of his feature projects being halted due to the pandemic. Now, with the current uncertainty in the nation and a lack of investors, there are no new projects.

Regarding his decision to venture

into business, the actor added, "I can't rely solely on acting anymore; I need to secure a good future for my family. So, I've decided to explore other avenues, alongside acting, and have chosen to initiate a new startup."

When asked about his plans, he replied, "For now, I'm in the early stages of figuring out what market I can pursue. I'm not even sure if it will be related to the media industry, but I promise I'll share it with everyone once the planning is complete."

The actor spent his birthday, on November 8, with his family and shared that, despite the tumultuous situation in his profession, he feels blessed personally in getting to enjoy time with his loving wife and two children.

Some of his completed projects are yet to see the light, which includes *Jamdani*, *Pulsirat* and *Makeup*.

He has also worked in the Deepto Play web-film *Hide and Seek*, directed by Mahmudur Rahman Hime, alongside Prarthana Fardin Dighi, and Tanjin Tisha. This film also awaits release.



PHOTO: SHEKH MEHEDI MORSHED