

# LOOKING BACK

## Compelling Bangladeshi films of 2024



VISUAL: DOWEL BISWAS

**Amidst a political upheaval lies a decent number of good films this year: be it in genres of action, romance, political satire or historical reimagining. We look back at some of the films that deserve a watch – if not in halls, then from the comfort of your home.**

SAEED KHAN SHAGOR

2024 is nearing its end. Much like every other sphere, the Bangladeshi film industry, too, has been both lauded and criticised throughout this eventful and controversial year. A variety of films have graced the silver screen—some commercially successful, others not quite so. Let's bid adieu to the year, as we look back at some of its film offerings.

**Priyo Maloti**

*Priyo Maloti* marks the theatrical debut of the versatile Mehazabien Chowdhury, directed by Shankha Dasgupta. Released at the tail end of the year, the film recounts the story of a Hindu family reduced to ashes in a fire outbreak in Dhaka. In this catastrophe, Maloti loses her husband. Centering on a widow's arduous quest to retrieve her late husband's documents, the director explores multifaceted aspects of societal structures. Through this narrative, the audience is invited to

confront issues like misogyny, religious bias, and the bureaucratic quagmire of our administrative system.

Maloti's journey is fraught with dilemma, oscillating between staying righteous and succumbing to compromise. In her battle against overwhelming odds, even the traffic signals of Dhaka seem to turn antagonistic—a nuanced metaphor captured brilliantly by Shankha. Mehazabien's poignant and nuanced single-take performance evokes memories of Vidya Balan in *Kahaani*.

**840**

In 2007, Mostofa Sarwar Farooki's *420* chronicled tales of extortion, corruption, and land-grabbing under the previous regime. Characters like Montu and Kisloo became household names. Fast-forward to 2024, following the uprising of August 5, Farooki delivers *840*—the cinematic double-up of *420*.

The director also poses a provocative

question: how might the country have flourished if politicians had adhered to ethical governance? Nasir Uddin Khan's portrayal of Mayor Dablu unveils a hitherto unseen dimension of his acting prowess. The film also features stellar performances by Zakia Bari Mamo, Nader Khan, Marzuk Russell, Zayed Khan, Fazlur Rahman Babu, and Shahriar Nazim Joy.

**Toofan**

When discussing the biggest blockbuster of the year, *Toofan* is the unanimous choice. Released during Eid-ul-Azha, this magnum opus, directed by Raihan Rafi, stars Shakib Khan, Kolkata's Mimi Chakraborty, Masuma Rahman Nabil, Chanchal Chowdhury, and others. Remarkably, this film also marks Shakib's 250th appearance as an actor.

This big-budget extravaganza made its lavish production evident through

Courtney Coffey, alongside Tariq Anam Khan, Mahiya Mahi, and others.

The plot follows Shamsu (Shakib Khan), a young man who dreams of emigrating to America but faces repeated failures. However, the real obstacle emerges with the visa application. Shamsu, being desperate, seeks help from a middleman who proposes a path involving a contractual marriage with an American woman. But why is Shamsu so desperate to go to America? Beneath his fervent determination lies a poignant mystery woven with emotional undertones.

**Kajol Rekha**

Adapted from the timeless *Maimansingha Gitika*, *Kajol Rekha* brings to the screen a 400-year-old tale through the masterful lens of Gias Uddin Selim. This song-driven film, built on a linear storytelling structure, intricately weaves suspense, holding

recreation of Rangoon's 400-year-old marketplace for a scene lasting merely a minute.

**Deyaler Desh**

Directed by the budding filmmaker Mishuk Moni, *Deyaler Desh* debuted during an Eid season crowded with 11 simultaneous releases. Despite lacking a superstar cast, the film resonated with audiences, owing to its gripping storyline and the naturalistic performances of Sariful Razz and Bubly.

The narrative begins in a morgue, where morgue worker Boishakh encounters a corpse bearing a peculiar mark. This discovery sends a chill down his spine, unlocking a floodgate of memories filled with joy, regret, and longing. The specter of an unfulfilled life—a dream of a modest, happy home—haunts Boishakh. In a desperate bid to reclaim what was lost, he clings to a love from eight years prior, wasting not a moment in pursuit of redemption.

Though director Moni struggles to fully establish some pivotal characters, this narrative shortcoming is overshadowed by the potency of the story. The film's emotional depth compensates for its flaws, making *Deyaler Desh* a testament to storytelling over spectacle.

**Fatima**

*Fatima* chronicles the journey of a solitary girl who stands as a lone warrior against the crushing weight of reality. Every step she takes towards self-reliance is met with harsh opposition from the world around her, yet her indomitable spirit refuses to waver.

The film, directed by Dhruvo Hasan, features stellar performances by Tasnia Farin, Yash Rohan, and Manosh Bandopadhyay.

Additionally, *Fatima* won an award at Iran's Fajr International Film Festival.

**The craftsmanship is evident in 'Kajol Rekha,' particularly the recreation of Rangoon's 400-year-old marketplace.**

its craftsmanship, music, and VFX. While questions may arise regarding the storyline's relevance, *Toofan* delivers entertainment in spades. The film's tracks, such as *Laage Ura Dhura* and *Dustu Kokil*, made waves globally upon release.

**Rajkumar**

Directed by Himel Ashraf, *Rajkumar* is another 2024 release that revolves around Shakib Khan. The dynamic duo of Shakib Khan and Himel Ashraf, who previously won audience acclaim with *Priyotoma*, continued their collaboration with this project. The cast also features American actress

the audience's intrigue until the very end.

What sets the film apart is its character arcs; nearly every role experiences dramatic highs and lows, each receiving equal narrative weight. A standout element is Azad Abul Kalam's portrayal of five distinct characters, a performance that is nothing short of riveting. The supporting cast, including Rafath Rashid Mithila, Sadia Ayman, Iresh Zaker, and Sariful Razz, captivates in their myriad looks, offering an entirely novel viewing experience.

The craftsmanship is evident in every frame, particularly the painstaking

## COUNTRYWIDE

BARGUNA'S TIAKHALI COLLEGE

### Two decades old, yet not under MPO

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Even after 24 years of its establishment, Tiakhali College in Barguna's Amtali upazila has not been included under the government's nationalisation scheme due to unknown reason.

As a result, 38 teachers and staffers, who did not opt for any other jobs, have been deprived of their monthly salaries for over two decades now.

While talking, a number of teachers of the college alleged that despite good academic results in public exams, Tiakhali College has not been enlisted under MPO (Monthly Pay Order) system only because of political revenge since the founding principal of the college was a BNP leader.

During a visit to Tiakhali College this correspondent found almost all the teachers and staffers of the college living a subhuman life as they are not getting their salaries since the establishment of the institution.

Moreover, in order to run their families most of them have sold their properties and other valuable belongings and became destitute.

Local educationist Mohammad Delwar Hossain built Tiakhali College on about 2.25 acres of land in 2000. In 2001, the college received recognition from the education board to run its academic activities.

The average pass rate was nearly 72 percent since 2002 till this year, while the institution had a 100 percent pass record in 2019.

Currently, the college has a total of 322

students, but despite implementing all the directives of the ministry concerned the college was not included under the government's MPO scheme due to unknown reasons, teachers and staffers said.

Although, hundreds of non-government educational institutions were nationalised in the last 15 years, Tiakhali College has been deprived of getting the government facilities even after making such good results, they alleged.

However, a four-storey academic building was constructed at the college premises in 2017, but till then its founding principal had already retired.

Boni Amin, an 11th grader, said the number of students will surely increase if the college is nationalised as the quality of education is quite good here.

Shahanur Fakir, a peon at the college, said he cannot run his family anymore due to non payment of the salary.

Sometimes, he and his family members pass their days half-starved as he does not have any alternative.

Mosharof Hossain, a lecturer, said, "I have given all my valuable times in this college and now it is very difficult to return home empty handed."

Retired Principal Delwar Hossain said they established the college in 2001, but failed to enlist it under the government's MPO scheme due to political reason.

"Till now all the teachers and students of the college have been deprived of their rights, but I hope the present government will bring the college under nationalisation scheme soon," Delwar said.

**The four-storey academic building of Tiakhali College in Barguna's Amtali upazila.**



PHOTO: STAR

### Textbook distribution

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awarding contracts, and obtaining approval from the procurement committee as the reasons.

Additionally, as the printing of all the books began almost simultaneously, printing press owners now cite a paper shortage as a challenge, especially at the end of the year when guidebook publishers also go for production.

Prof Riad Choudhury, a member (textbook) of NCTB, said, "It is true that there were national issues that primarily caused the delay, over which we had no control. However, the major reason for the delay is that we first learned that NCTB would print textbooks based on the old curriculum in September."

He said the government later decided to revise the textbooks, which required reviewing a total of 655 books. This revision process was time consuming due to the sensitivity of the task.

Besides, the printing presses are also facing difficulties in securing bank loans to complete all the tasks on time.

"So, all these reasons are causing the delay in the process," Prof Riad added.

In a press release, the Police Headquarters said the land was leased in the name of former IGP Benazir Ahmed's wife after evicting the Tripura communities, and a rubber plantation was established there.

It also mentioned that 16 houses were burnt, causing damage worth Tk 4.8 lakh.

Drives are going on to arrest the other accused.

Meanwhile, expressing deep concern and condemnation over the arson attack, the CHT Peace Accord Implementation Movement and Human Rights Forum Bangladesh

"Considering the situation, we won't be able to print and send all the textbooks in the first week of January. But we expect all primary-level books and three secondary-level books—Bangla, English, and mathematics—to be delivered by the end of this year."

The rest of the textbooks are expected to be handed over by mid-January, Prof Riad added.

However, there is uncertainty regarding the secondary-level books, as the process for printing these books started late.

"We will try our best to deliver a maximum of three secondary-level books by the end of this year," he added.

Last year, the government printed around 31 crore textbooks for the current academic year. However, due to changes in the curriculum, the number of books has increased to 40 crore for 2025.

Distributing the books on time had been a challenge for the then Awami League government for the past three years.

It failed to deliver over 3 crore textbooks for classes 8 and 9 on time this academic year, as well as in 2022 and 2023, causing students to wait until March for all their textbooks. In 2021, the pandemic caused delays in the textbook distribution process.

Primary and secondary students have been getting free textbooks at the start of each academic session since 2010.

They called for bringing those involved to justice after conducting a proper investigation.

The two organisations, in separate statements, also demanded compensation for the affected people and their prompt rehabilitation.

Due to the lack of proper implementation of the peace treaty, indigenous people have been continuously subjected to land grabbing and plundering by various criminal groups, said a statement, signed by two joint coordinators Zakir Hossain and Prof Khairul Islam Chowdhury of the

Movement.

### Law and order

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control but at a tolerable level."

When asked about the fire at the Secretariat, Col Intekhab said, "The incident just happened. An investigation will be conducted, and then it can be said whether it was an accident or there was someone behind the fire."

Responding to another query, Col Intekhab said the army is working to maintain discipline as per the government's decision and it depends on the government how long the army will serve on the field. "Therefore, the army will be withdrawn at the decision of the government."

Responding to a question about whether there is a security risk in Cox's Bazar due to instability in Myanmar, he said, "There is no risk to the security or sovereignty at the moment. The army is always on alert in the area. If there is ever a security risk, the army is ready to take action accordingly."

"Besides, the BGB, the Coast Guard, and other law enforcement agencies, and the RRRC (Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner) are working on Rohingya infiltration and other security matters," he said.

Referring to an arson attack on houses of the Tripura community in Bandarban, he said, "It was a land dispute. There was no other reason."

At the beginning of the briefing, Col Intekhab highlighted the activities of the army in maintaining law and order over the last four weeks since November 28.

He said that the army recovered 28 illegal weapons and 424 rounds of ammunition during this period.

The army also played an active role in bringing under control blockades to main roads on 13 occasions arising from 67 unstable situations, and similar situations in different industrial areas of the country. It took steps in coordination with the owners, workers, concerned ministries, Industrial Police, and

the BGMEA and all concerned to keep the factories open.

As a result, of the 2,093 garment factories in the industrial areas, all but one are currently in operation.

In addition to the industrial areas, army personnel brought under control 45 different types of chaotic situations, of which, five were related to educational institutions, three to government agencies or offices, seven to political conflicts and 30 other various types of incidents.

Notable among them was to control the clash between two groups of Tabligh Jamaat at the Jitenna ground in Tongi on December 18.

From there, the army rescued 92 children and 66 affected people.

In addition, members of the army provided direct assistance to the police in the incident of a robbery attempt at a Rupali Bank branch in Keraniganj on December 19.

In the last month, 200 drug dealers or drug-related individuals have been arrested in joint drives while a significant amount of illegal drugs, such as yaba, phenyzedil, illegal liquor, etc. were recovered.

A total of 1,405 people were arrested from different parts of the country for their involvement in various crimes.

### 4 of a family

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at around 5:00pm after receiving the news of the accident.

Moslem Uddin, the younger brother of Bidya Miya, said the family had travelled from Gazipur to Mymensingh in a lorry and then boarded two separate CNGs. When the other CNG carrying his sibling failed to arrive, they grew concerned. "The news of the accident and the deaths of their family members proved too much for my already frail father."

The truck driver fled the scene after the accident, said OC Shafiqul, adding that a case has been filed over the incident at Kotwali Police Station.