



Adviser Nahid Islam speaks at the opening ceremony of the 23rd Dhaka International Film Festival.



HE Yao Wen, ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh speaks at the event.



'Joler Gaan' performing at DIFF.

PHOTOS: THABIT AL BASHAR

23rd DIFF commences, imbued with the spirit of July

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

The essence of the July movement was at the heart of the 23rd Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF) yesterday, which officially kicked off at the National Museum's main auditorium.

This year, in honour of the martyrs of July, seven short films will be screened during the festival run across the Sufia Kamal Auditorium of the National Museum, the National Art Gallery of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, the North South University (NSU) Auditorium, and the Green University of Bangladesh (GUB) Auditorium.

The festival kicked off with a melodious performance by Joler Gaan, whose music showcased a vivid portrait of Bangladesh's rich culture. They performed their famous songs *Pakhir Gaan*, *Pitha-Pulir Gaan*, *Emon Jodi Hoto*, and *Bokul Phool*, to which the crowd vibed delightfully.

A minute of silence was observed to remember the martyrs of the anti-fascist movement in July.

Information Adviser Nahid Islam served as the chief guest, with Jalal Ahmed, chairman of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission, presiding over the event. HE Yao Wen, ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh and Xu Yang, director of the International Department of the China



HE Yao Wen, ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Bangladesh and noted actor Ilias Kanchan enjoying the programme.

Film Administration, were present as special guests. Ilias Kanchan, who serves as a juror in the Asian Film Competition section of DIFF, was also present at the programme.

"This is not just a film festival; it serves

as a platform to connect Bangladesh with global cinema, highlighting our culture, creativity, and artistic achievements. Out of the 220 films being showcased, 44 are from Bangladesh, reflecting the growth and talent

of our film industry," stated Nahid Islam.

The information adviser also encouraged young filmmakers to use their art to promote the history of the July Revolution.

"I urge our filmmakers to create films about the historic student and public uprising of the July-August Movement, which played a pivotal role in restoring democracy in our country. This movement exposed the flaws in our political system through the awareness and active participation of the youth, paving the way for democratic structures. I encourage filmmakers to document these events and present them on both national and international platforms. I wish this festival great success and hereby declare the inauguration of the festival," the adviser concluded.

Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen said, "Film is an art form which transcends language and culture barriers. It presents human emotions, dreams and stories in a unique way. This year marks the 50th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Bangladesh. The year also commemorates the 120th anniversary of Chinese cinema."

Ambassador Yao expressed his joy in announcing that the opening ceremony marks the official inauguration of both the diplomatic anniversary celebrations and the Chinese Film Week.

He added, "From today, 20 outstanding

Chinese films will be screened at the Dhaka International Film Festival. 15 Chinese film professionals will engage in in-depth interactions with Bangladeshi audiences."

Xu Yang stated, "We aim to deepen cooperation between the film industries of both countries through film exhibitions."

He expressed gratitude to the Dhaka Film Festival and the Chinese Embassy in Bangladesh for organising this year's China Film Week, where popular Chinese films will be showcased.

"The filmmakers who came to Dhaka will also interact and communicate with the audience after the film screening. I sincerely hope that through this medium the people of China and Bangladesh can enhance mutual understanding," he stated.

China is the country of focus this year, and the inaugural ceremony featured a screening of the Chinese film *Moon Man* (directed by Zhang Chiyu) at 7:00pm. This 2022 sci-fi comedy tells the story of the "last human in the universe," stranded on the moon after an asteroid destroys life on Earth.

The festival, which will run until January 19, will host screenings at various venues, including the National Museum, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Alliance Francaise de Dhaka, Green University of Bangladesh Auditorium, and North South University.



After a three-year ban, Annono Mamun's film 'Makeup' finally hit cinemas last Friday. The Film Certification Board granted it a 'U' rating, making it suitable for audiences of all ages. The movie opened in 23 theatres nationwide. It features Nipa Ahmed Realy and Ziaul Roshan in the lead roles, while veteran actor Tariq Anam Khan also delivers a compelling performance. A day after its release, Realy, who made her silver screen debut with this project shares insights in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star.



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

A 'Realy' promising debut

ZAHID AKBAR

Congratulations on making your silver screen debut. How has the response of the film since so far?

Thank you so much! I feel ecstatic that so many people complimented my work. Many also shared that my performance didn't feel like it was from someone acting in their first film. Even Tariq Anam Khan sir praised my acting. He spoke about it in front of journalists and the media, which is a huge honour for me. Several directors called to congratulate me, and I received bouquets from many people I didn't even know. It has truly been overwhelming.

The film was banned for a long time. Did that upset you?

Of course, it was very upsetting to know that the film was stuck for such a long time. However, as a part of the film, we always knew there was nothing in the story that warranted such a ban. Now that audiences are watching it, they're realising the same thing. The story never had anything controversial to justify being held up like that.

What reactions have you encountered since 'Makeup' was finally released?

Some of my acquaintances went to

watch the film, and they later told me that initially, they had assumed there might be some scenes in the movie that led to its ban. But by the end of the film, they couldn't find anything of the sort. As soon as they came out of theatres, many commented that there was no reason to put a ban on this project for such a long time. However, everyone appreciated the story and the character I portrayed.

Why do you think you were chosen as the lead actress for this film?

The director wanted a fresh face for this story. After auditioning along with many other talented candidates, I was selected. I really wanted to do this role as the story intrigued me, and I was lucky enough that it all happened.

What does the film offer?

It's a romantic story that follows the journey of an ordinary girl who becomes a superstar, with a series of challenges and incidents along the way. The story also shows how she works hard to maintain her stardom. I feel like I've learned a lot from this character's journey. There might even be some parallels with the real-life film industry. My co-actors, Tariq Anam Khan and Ziaul Roshan, have delivered outstanding performances in their roles too.

Bidhan Rebeiro to represent Bangladesh as Berlinale jury member



The 75th Berlin International Film Festival is set to begin in the second week of February, with Bangladeshi film critic Bidhan Rebeiro serving as a Fipresci jury member in the Panorama section.

The Bangladeshi film critic confirmed the news to The Daily Star himself, stating that he is scheduled to leave Dhaka on February 9 for the festival.

Speaking about the importance of such events, Bidhan remarked, "Major festivals showcase the first screenings of new films from renowned directors and classics. As a jury member, I get the opportunity to watch these films before anyone else."

"Attending a festival of this scale is not just a personal achievement; it also serves as a representation of Bangladesh. Since I have an infinite passion for cinema, this opportunity brings me a sense of fulfilment," the film critic concluded.



Disney pledges \$15m for LA wildfire relief

As devastating wildfires sweep through Los Angeles County, destroying over 10,000 buildings and causing damages exceeding \$100 billion, major film studios are stepping up to aid relief efforts.

Disney announced a US \$15 million donation to support organisations like the American Red Cross, Los Angeles Fire Department Foundation, and Los Angeles Regional Food Bank. The establishment's CEO Bob Iger stated, "The Walt Disney Company is dedicated to helping our community recover and rebuild."

Paramount Global is also contributing £800,000, with CBS fundraising for the Red Cross and donating meals to first responders.

With fires burning over 34,000 acres, federal aid is underway after President Biden declared a major disaster on January 8, following Governor Gavin Newsom's state of emergency declaration. FEMA is providing support to affected residents.