

Novera eager to shed 'Rickshaw Girl' moniker

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

You may know Novera Rahman as the *Rickshaw Girl*, the titular character of the Amitabh Reza Chowdhury directorial, but she is more than that. She is a painter, actress and a producer who yearns to play rebellious characters on-screen. Although the award-winning film was finished years ago and was initially set to release in 2020, the global pandemic delayed its premiere in country. It finally released in Bangladeshi halls yesterday.

Rickshaw Girl was originally made to cater to international audiences—so the characters had to speak in English, which came pretty easily for Novera.

drama. Novera faced the same thing when a project, also titled *Rickshaw Girl*, was featured on television, starring Tanjin Tisha.

"A few years ago, I woke up to a message from someone who sent me a newspaper interview. It featured Tanjin Tisha as the 'Rickshaw Girl.' At first, I thought it was a mistake—maybe they had printed an unrecognisable photo of me. However, it turned out to be Tanjin Tisha in 'brownface', intentionally exhibiting a 'darker' face through makeup, portraying a character who turned out to be a TV ripoff of my film. They even copied the exact color and style of my costume for it!" exclaimed Novera.

I can speak all kinds of Bangla—from posh to street. The difficulty arose when I had to speak English in a way that felt natural to native English speakers while also making it sound like English spoken by a Bangladeshi.

"I was raised in Dhaka, so I can speak all kinds of Bangla—from posh to street," said the actress, who had dropped by for an interview with The Daily Star. "The challenge, however, was toning down my American accent. Having spent some time in America, the difficulty arose when I had to speak English throughout the film in a way that felt natural to native English speakers while also making it sound like English spoken by a Bangladeshi." To achieve this, Novera listened to 1970s footage to capture the unique Bangladeshi accent of that time, which isn't fully British or American. "I further added a hint of street lingo to it, as well."

It's rare to catch glimpse of female rickshaw pullers on the streets of Dhaka, and so when we asked Novera whether she could refer to one while shooting. She shared the inspiring story of *Shimu apa*, a female rickshaw puller who lives on her own.

"Believe it or not, there are female rickshaw pullers in Dhaka, particularly in the outskirts of the city. I spent a day with *Shimu apa*, observing her life and walking around her neighborhood as though she owned it. Watching her confidently navigate her world really inspired me and gave me the strength to play Naima," revealed the artiste.

Novera deeply immersed herself in her character by studying the history of rickshaws and Bangladeshi folk art. She explored the ties between folk art, cinema posters, and rickshaws, uncovering how rickshaws once served as mobile billboards for film advertisements. For *Rickshaw Girl*, she worked with Solaibam Hossain, one of the most well-known rickshaw artists in Bangladesh.

When you put in so much effort and time into a project, it's only natural to feel disheartened you're your work is being replicated for a television

"It felt like someone had not only done 'brownface' to represent me, but also stolen my artwork before it could reach its audience. It broke my heart. Unfortunately, I don't think Bangladesh has strong copyright laws to protect artists and creators. It seems anyone can take someone's idea, replicate it, and move forward without facing any consequences," added the artiste.

Many female-oriented films are being made recently, but while they receive critical acclaim, they often lack commercial success.

"I think this happens because the characters aren't complex enough—audiences enjoy watching layered, multidimensional characters, regardless of gender. These films often focus heavily on struggles, but don't include enough entertainment value to draw viewers. I believe this will improve as more female screenwriters and directors emerge to share stories from our own perspective," she asserted.

The release of *Rickshaw Girl* in Bangladesh marks the end of an era for young Novera Rahman, after being called that for the better part of a decade. "It's a relief, a huge one, for me. I am now ready to move on to better things. Here's to hoping!"



PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEML

OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



'It's in Our Nature'
January 26 | 6 pm-9 pm
DrikPath Bhabon, Panthapath



Exhibition 'Nalini'
January 21-27 | 3 pm-9 pm
Alliance Française de Dhaka,
Dhanmondi



Kaaktaal Live on Dhaka Sessions
February 1 | 10:30 am- 1 pm
Epicure Bistro, Gulshan 2

WHAT'S PLAYING

'Die with a Smile' by Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars

Die with a Smile, an indisputably hit collaboration between Lady Gaga and Bruno Mars, is a powerful anthem of love, loss, and bittersweet acceptance. With Gaga's signature powerhouse vocals and Bruno's velvety tones, the duo crafts a soundscape with a playful melody.

Lyrically, the song explores the transient nature of happiness, offering both a melancholic and optimistic perspective. *Die with a Smile* reminds listeners to embrace life's fleeting joys and make the most of every moment, even when faced with inevitable setbacks. The message is wrapped in a funky, danceable rhythm that makes it hard not to sway along.

The accompanying music video portrays the highs and lows of a relationship. Set in a neon-lit metropolis, the story follows a couple navigating through moments of bliss and heartbreak.

Gaga's choreography and Bruno's effortless charm infuse the visuals to mark the song with energy, while the final scene—the pair parting ways with a smile—shows them cherishing life's ephemeral beauty.



1-MINUTE REVIEW

'Didi': A semi-autobiographical look at identity and belonging

The state of being emotionally unsure, fraught, and haphazard, all while inadvertently undertaking the reigns of growing just a bit older as a 13-year-old, is what the understated yet riveting film *Didi* (Chinese word for younger brother) touches upon.

Directed by Sean Wang, this semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story of Taiwanese-American Chris Wang (played by Izaac Wang) is a beautifully fresh take on the genre since Richard Linklater's *Boyhood*.

Set in Fremont, California, in



2008, Chris, or Didi (as called by his mother) is fleshed out to be a prime example of a boy making space for himself online during the advent of Facebook surpassing Myspace. The actually cool teenager, thrust with the perpetual desire to be seen by

individuals he thinks highly of, doubts his self-worth.

Didi feels weighed down by his Taiwanese heritage, referring to himself as "half-Asian" and hiding behind oversized hoodies. Amid navigating his distinctly Asian family challenges, he emerges from the loneliest point in his life and finds the footing he needs to move forward.

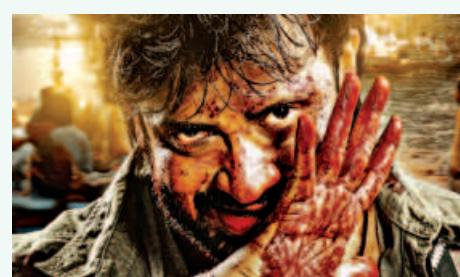
Wang's understated and restrained performance is the icing on the cake of this smooth, somber, and rewarding piece of work.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix
The Night Agent



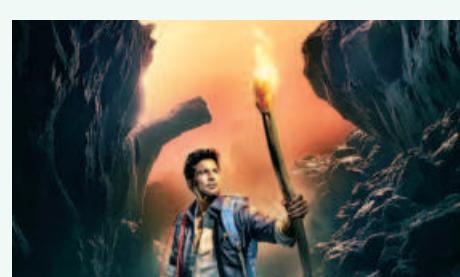
iScreen
Dorod



Hulu
Paradise



Disney+ Hotstar
The Secrets of the Shiledars



Apple TV+
Prime Target



STYLE STATEMENT

Sang Heon Lee

The second season of *XO, Kitty* has arrived, and fans are swooning over the irresistible chemistry between Kitty and Min Ho, portrayed by the charismatic Sang Heon Lee. To celebrate the season, the cast and crew participated in an exclusive photo session with Timid fashion magazine, showcasing their impeccable style in glamorous ensembles.

However, it's Sang Heon Lee who steals the spotlight, exuding timeless elegance in an old Hollywood inspired look. Styled by Anamika Khanna, his tailored grey suit is perfectly complemented by a crisp white shirt and sleek black tie from YSL, with a Ferragamo belt adding a touch of refinement. Lee's long, flowing hair enhances the suave and handsome allure of his ensemble, leaving fans captivated by his striking appearance.

