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NEELADRI NAVIYA NOVELI

The air crackled with quiet intensity as AKM Itmam, the rising star of *Boli (The Wrestler)*, settled into a chair at The Daily Star’s premises. He was a whirlwind of energy, a man with a flight to catch in less than 24 hours, yet he exuded a calm focus that belied his hurried schedule.

“I have always aspired to be an actor,” Itmam began, “after my father, who worked in the theatres for three decades.” The story of his father, a college professor who used theatre to inject life into economics pedagogy, resonated deeply. Itmam, a Chatgaya by blood, carried that flame.

His journey began in his hometown, but the pull of the capital, with its vibrant cultural scene, proved irresistible. He pursued his passion alongside his studies, eventually graduating with a degree in Computer Science and Engineering. “To keep my mother happy,” he admitted with a wry smile, “and to keep myself happy, I pursued what I love: acting.”

The international success of *Boli*, showcased at prestigious festivals like Busan, Shanghai, and Barcelona, didn’t happen overnight. Itmam’s path was paved with rejections, a testament to his unwavering spirit. “I was rejected many more times than I auditioned,” he revealed, his eyes reflecting the resilience forged in those trials.

He also confronted the preconceptions that came with his background as a fashion model. “They might have thought I was nothing more than my brawn,” he joked, acknowledging the challenge of being seen beyond his physical

appearance. But Itmam was more than just a physique. He was a storyteller, a chameleon capable of inhabiting diverse roles.

His Chatgaya dialect may have provided a starting point for *Boli*, but it was his complete immersion into the character that truly captivated audiences. “I broke myself for the role,” he explained, “to become exactly what my director, Iqbal Chowdhury, envisioned.” The transformation was radical. The model’s sculpted physique, meticulously crafted for TVCs and ramp shows, had to go. He gained eight kilograms in two months, fuelled by a diet that would make any foodie envious – a dozen eggs, twenty dates, watermelon, peanut butter milkshakes, and cheeseburgers, all on top of his regular meals.

Beyond the physical transformation, Itmam delved into the psychological depths of his character. “Did you know I had lived with an imaginary hedgehog and counted its thorns, because my *Boli* director demanded it?” he asked, a playful glint in his eyes. He embraced the absurdity and the unconventional methods that brought his character to life.

His journey has taken him beyond the borders of Bangladesh. He’s graced the stages of the Czech Republic, playing the titular character

in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. “What an exhilarating experience it was to be chosen among the many natives and then perform live on stage,” he recalled, his voice filled with wonder. The language barrier in Europe remains a challenge, but Itmam embraces the experience. He finds artistic inspiration in the streets of Brno, but he remains a wayfarer, ready to move on when the city loses its allure. “Every nook and cranny of this city is an artistic respite for me,” he said, before adding, “but the moment I find it monotonous I will leave for someplace else.”

His journey began with Prachyanat, where he learned by observing seasoned actors. Landing the role of Dewan Gazi in *Dewan Gazir Kissa*, previously played by the legendary Aly Zaker, was a pivotal moment. “It boosted my confidence like never before,” he explained, “that meant I had something and I am on the right track.”

AKM Itmam is a juggler, balancing his passion, profession, and higher studies with remarkable dexterity. He’s a rising star, but he remains grounded, aware that his journey has just begun. As he prepared to leave, a sense of anticipation filled the room. We couldn’t agree more: this is a star in the making, and the world is waiting to see what he does next.

TRENDY STREAMS

Netflix  
The Residence



Apple TV+  
The Studio



HBO Max  
When No One Sees Us



Prime Video  
The Wheel of Time



Chorki  
Amalnama



STYLE STATEMENT

Ariana Grande

Ariana Grande was visibly seen embracing glamorous, fairytale-inspired gowns at award shows this year, inspire by her film *Wicked*. A standout red carpet moment was when she donned a structured baby pink Schiaparelli gown. She made slight modifications to the design, specifically enhancing its sparkling tulle skirt.

To complement the look, Grande accessorised with De Beers jewellery, including a diamond tennis necklace with drop details and elegant yet sizeable diamond studs. Her sleek ballerina bun ensured the dazzling pieces took centre stage.

For makeup, she opted for a soft and romantic aesthetic, featuring baby pink lipstick, a cool-toned blush, and her signature winged-out liner.



WHAT’S PLAYING

‘ExtraL’ by Jennie (feat Doechii)

*ExtraL*, a powerful and empowering anthem for women from Blackpink’s Jennie on her album *Ruby*, also features the incredible Swamp Princess, Doechii, and is undoubtedly a track that has been on repeat for many people, as proved by musical charts worldwide.

Right from the opening note, the song exudes confidence, starting with a minimalist instrumental intro that transitions into a rich, bass-heavy beat.



Jennie’s strong presence sets the mood, while Doechii’s rap injects a sharp edge, creating a bold, unapologetic energy. The chemistry between the two artists is undeniable, making *ExtraL* a highlight of the album.

This track is a prime example of Jennie’s growth as an artiste, highlighting her skill in merging various genres. Doechii blends playful cat imagery with strong calls for asserting rights, strength, and claiming resources.

The music video video incorporating in sync dance steps, a familiar troupe of the K-pop genre, flexes Jennie’s sharp yet poised moves that depict the lyrics of the song decisively.

TV TALKIES

‘Adolescence’ breaks new ground in coming-of-age dramas



*Adolescence*, a limited series on Netflix from the UK, stands apart from traditional coming-of-age narratives.

The show’s four episodes are filmed in a continuous take, a style perfected by co-creator and lead actor Graham, director Philip Barantini, and writer Jack Thorne.

Set in real-time, it follows the Miller family from the police’s arrival at their home to the devastating reveal of

key evidence against Jamie Miller (Owen Cooper), arrested for the suspected murder of a classmate, all in under an hour.

The first episode shows his dramatic arrest and interrogation with his family present. In the second, detectives interview staff and students at Jamie’s school. The third features a conversation between Jamie and a psychologist while he’s in custody. The final episode

follows Jamie’s family months later, still grappling with his incarceration.

Although it delves into the challenges of growing up in a social media-centric society, the show addresses topics such as masculinity and teenage self-esteem with subtlety, avoiding exaggeration or preachy messages. Drawing inspiration from actual knife attacks, it provides a thoughtful exploration of adolescence.

OUT AND ABOUT IN DHAKA



Play: ‘12 Angry Men’  
March 24 | 4-5:30pm and 7:15-8:45pm  
Natmandal, Dhaka University



‘Legacy of Underground’  
April 11 | 2pm onwards  
National Library Auditorium



Rishka Festival  
April 11-14 | 11am-10pm  
Aloki, Gulshan Tejgaon Link Road