

# 'Cultural healing' and 'inclusivity' key in Bangla New Year celebrations as ministry announces plans

## 'Shobhajatra' to display solidarity with Palestine

DOWEL BISWAS

"The upcoming Pahela Baishakh and Chaitra Sankranti celebrations will be a bold affirmation of Bangladesh's cultural inclusivity, with active participation from communities across the country", announced Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, renowned filmmaker and cultural affairs adviser to the government.

In two back-to-back press briefings held yesterday at the National Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) and later at the Foreign Service Academy in Dhaka, the cultural adviser outlined the government's plans for this year's festivities, describing them as a deeper journey into cultural harmony.

He said that the Ministry of Cultural Affairs is prioritising cultural healing and inclusiveness, aiming to restore the unity that once defined the nation's vibrant cultural fabric. He noted that the ministry is working both directly and indirectly to ensure that significant cultural and religious events are celebrated with equal respect by all communities.

Farooki declared that this year's Bengali New Year celebrations would bring together not just Bengali citizens, but also 27 ethnic communities from across the country. "Diversity is our most powerful and beautiful asset," he



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSVED

said. "From the hill tracts to the plains, people of every identity will represent their culture and heritage with pride."

As part of this inclusive initiative, 12 districts will host traditional Sadhu Melas, while Suhrawardy Udyana in Dhaka will stage a grand concert featuring ethnic musical bands such as F Minor (Garo), Larong (Marmia), Iman (Tripura), Unity (Khasi), and Invocation (Chakma), performing alongside Bengali bands including Miles, Warfaze, Lalon, Vikings, AvoidRafa, and Dalchhut.

The capital will also see a range of other events: daylong programmes at Shilpakala Academy, Chhayanaut's

annual musical gathering at Charukola, Shurer Dhara's performance at Rabindra Sarobar, and the iconic Mangal Shobhajatra (newly termed as 'Shobhajatra' at the briefing) by Dhaka University's Faculty of Fine Arts.

This year's Shobhajatra will include a segment dedicated to solidarity with Palestine, where musicians will carry the Palestinian flag and sing songs of resistance, especially the song *From the river to sea, Palestine will be free*. A drone show, financed by the Chinese Embassy, will be held under the theme "New Bangladesh in New Year", and Bangla Academy will host a fair as part of the national celebration.

As for the 27 ethnic communities, for the first time, Biju and other ethnic New Year festivals—celebrated by the people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts—have been declared executive holidays.

Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Adviser Supradip Chakma expressed his gratitude to the government, noting that Rangamati, Khagrachhari, and all upazilas in the region are preparing for the festivities with unprecedented enthusiasm. "No one should doubt the government's commitment to inclusivity," he said.

Farooki added that he will personally attend the Fagua Utsab with tea garden workers in Sylhet to honour their cultural traditions. Emphasising the broader humanitarian message of the celebrations, he urged the nation not to forget about the 1.2 million Rohingyas currently residing in Bangladesh, or the genocide taking place in Palestine. "What you feel and do for the oppressed is a true measure of your culture," he said. "This year, we will celebrate their identities as part of our own."

When questioned about participation from Islamist groups, Farooki stated, "Vilification of Muslims will no longer be tolerated in Bangladesh. This year's New Year celebration is for everyone. However, I don't think any group, political or cultural, will be attending the rally with any banner. This is a people's rally and it will remain as such."

A major concert at Manik Mia Avenue, in collaboration with the Shilpakala Academy and Dhaka North City Corporation, will round off the festivities. With events scheduled from April 10 to 14, this year's Pahela Baishakh celebrations aim not only to welcome the new year with joy but also to reaffirm the country's commitment to cultural unity, diversity, and non-sectarian values.

## 'Borbaad' earns Tk 27cr in 7 days of ticket sales



The Shakib Khan-led *Borbaad* has taken the box office by storm since its Eid-Ul-Fitr premiere.

On its ninth day in theatres, production house Real Energy Production announced that the film raked in Tk 27.43 crore in ticket sales within just seven days—matching the one-month earnings of *Priyotoma* (2023).

The film remains a crowd-puller, with around 65 shows running across Dhaka and strong performance in 112 single-screen cinemas nationwide.

The Mehedi Hassan Hridoy directorial *Borbaad* stars Idhika Paul opposite Shakib Khan, alongside Mamunur Rashid, Shahiduzzaman Selim, Intekhab Dinar, Misha Sawdagar, and Jissu Sengupta.

## Adviser Mahfuj Alam proposes turning BFDC into a hybrid film city



Adviser to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Mahfuj Alam, has proposed transforming the Bangladesh Film Development Corporation (BFDC) into a hybrid film city, aiming to bring all filmmaking processes—shooting, editing, dubbing, and post-production—under one roof.

During his visit to BFDC on April 8 (Tuesday), he toured shooting floors, met staff, and addressed a gathering at the Zahir Raihan Auditorium. He also visited the Directors' Guild and Bangladesh Film Artiste Association, where veteran actress Anwara Begum welcomed him.

The adviser highlighted the underutilised potential of BFDC, citing its prime location and existing infrastructure. He also referenced ongoing developments at both BFDC and Kabirpur Film City, expressing hopes to resolve challenges and ensure resource efficiency.

BFDC Managing Director Masuma Rahman and actor Nayem also spoke during the programme.

# NEWS

## 23 killed in political violence in March

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Meanwhile, the alarming 40 incidents of "mob beating" include torturing of a 28-year-old man to death on suspicion of stealing a mobile phone in Habiganj's Bahubal.

At one point, the mob set him on fire.

In another development, 30 women and girls were gang raped, and 102 were subjected to sexual harassment.

Besides, 20 women were killed in

domestic violence, while 207 children were tortured and 18 of them were killed.

Five workers also died in workplace accidents last month, while an underage domestic help died due to torture by the employer.

Also last month, two Bangladeshis were killed and two more injured as India's Border Security Force (BSF) personnel opened fire along the Bangladesh-India border.

Besides, 41 journalists faced

torture and harassment last month in at least 29 incidents that left at least 23 of them injured.

A female journalist was gang-raped in the capital while collecting information.

Also, four inmates died in prison, and at least three attacks on minority communities left two injured.

In various "political cases", police arrested at least 1,665 people, including at least 1,644 AL leaders and activists.

times more electricity in 2030. And the electricity we use from the grid is not clean. That is why we are planning for alternative energy," he said.

He said there are around 22,000 Grameenphone base stations and some data centres across the country. "It's not possible to install solar plants in all those locations. That is why we need a concentrated location where green energy would be produced."

"When the adviser said the MPP is allowed, it comes as a music to my ear. Now I am thinking it is possible to achieve our targets," he added.

"Only the rooftop solar options wouldn't meet our [suppliers] electricity demand. We will need 2,500MW solar just to cover the present use of electricity in our suppliers [garment factories]. Today's MoU wouldn't be able to meet our demand, it is only a start," she said.

Ahsan Khan Chowdhury, chairman and CEO of Pran RFL Group, said they have 300 acres of water body in Moulvibazar, which would be used for aquaculture and a floating solar power plant.

"I figured that it is a very good business for us as there was no problem with fundings. The IFC and the European Investment Bank were there and there were customers like H&M," he said, adding that the pricing of the electricity from the plant would be cheaper than that of the grid.

Tanveer Mohammad, chief corporate affairs officer of Grameenphone, said they had taken a very aggressive target to reduce the carbon footprints to 50 percent level in 2030 of what they had in 2019, but did not find a way forward.

"The challenge is in our mobile phones. We are using more and more data, and will be consuming three

times more electricity in 2030. And the electricity we use from the grid is not clean. That is why we are planning for alternative energy," he said.

Youngone made history as the first investor in Bangladesh's textile and apparel export sector in May 1980. The company also played a key role in promoting female employment in the industry, contributing to Bangladesh's evolution into a global garment production hub.

Youngone's factories, located in Dhaka and Chattogram's export processing zones, produce high-quality jackets, trousers, sports shoes, and leather goods for international markets.

Currently, the company employs about 73,000 people across Bangladesh, making it one of the country's largest employers. In total, Youngone has approximately 95,000 employees globally. The company has invested \$650 million and has annual exports worth \$1 billion.

Sung served as president of the International Textile Manufacturers Federation (ITMF) for the 2018-2020 term.

Azad Majumder, deputy press secretary to the chief adviser, highlighted Sung's unparalleled contribution in a Facebook post:

"Sung has done something for Bangladesh that very few foreign investors do. He not only created jobs for 72,000 Bangladeshis in KEPZ in Chattogram but also reinvested all of Youngone Corporation's earnings back into Bangladesh."

With the honorary citizenship, Kihak Sung joins an esteemed group of dignitaries, including Kazi Nazrul Islam, Mohammad Ali, Father Richard Marino, Valerie Ann Taylor, and Gordon Greenidge, wrote Azad.

ACC Public Prosecutor Ruhul Islam Khan moved the application on behalf of the anti graft body.

## Kihak Sung

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Expressing his gratitude, Sung said, "I am truly honoured to receive this honorary citizenship."

Sung's rise in the textile industry is closely linked to the success of Youngone Corporation, which he established in 1974. He has been a pioneering force in the RMG sector, with his investments spanning Chattogram, Dhaka EPZs, and, more recently, the Korean EPZ.

Born in 1947 in Seoul, Sung pursued a degree in international economics from Seoul National University. He then began his career in international trade through Seoul Trading. This experience laid the groundwork for his entrepreneurial journey and the founding of Youngone.

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He stood first class first in MA examinations in Economics at Dhaka University in 1977. During 1980-83, he attended the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University and the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, and earned the degrees of MA in Law and Diplomacy and PhD in Economics.

The information was also shared in a statement posted by Shafiqul Alam, press secretary at the Chief Adviser's Office, on his verified Facebook profile yesterday.

## Delhi wants positive ties

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He also said, "In Bangkok, the issue of violence against minorities in Bangladesh was raised. The incidents of atrocities and violence have happened with them and they cannot be wished away or just dismissed as due to political reasons or media exaggeration."

Asked about media reports about Bangladesh's plan to have a Chinese air base in north western Bangladesh near India's "Chicken's Neck," a narrow landmass connecting mainland India with its north eastern states, Jaiswal reiterated "we keep a close watch on all developments near our border that impinge on our security and take appropriate action."

On a question about Yunus' Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam's claim a day after Modi Yunus talks in Bangkok that India "did not appear negative" to Bangladesh's request for Sheikh Hasina's extradition from India, Jaiswal said "we have conveyed our position earlier. I have nothing more to add."

## SSC exams start today

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Expected to sit for the exams, which is, on average, over one lakh fewer than that of the last four years.

When asked about the low number of examinees, Prof SM Kamal Uddin Hyder, convener of the Inter Education Board Examination Control Committee, explained that usually a significant number of unsuccessful candidates of the previous year usually sit for the exams.

But this year, the number is notably lower because last year's pass rate was significantly higher. This was the main reason behind the lower number of examinees, Prof Hyder added.

To prevent malpractice, the

Asked about Yunus' comment on Teesta during his China visit, Jaiswal made it clear that the Teesta water-sharing issue was a bilateral one.

India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers, including Teesta, and there are bilateral mechanisms like the Joint River Commission and technical committees to address the issues, he said.

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Special directives for students include arrival at exam centres at least 30 minutes before the scheduled time. Only scientific calculators will be allowed in the exam halls, and carrying or using mobile phones is strictly prohibited for everyone except the centre secretary. All coaching centres will remain closed until the exams end.

Following the publication of results, students will have the option to apply for re-evaluation within seven days.

## Khalilur new nat'l security

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aware of the gravity of my responsibilities and will do my utmost to uphold and advance our national interest," said Khalilur.

Khalilur joined BCS (foreign affairs) in 1979 after securing the first position in the first regular civil service examination after independence held in 1977.

He served in various capacities in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations in New York.

In 1991, he joined the UN secretariat as a special adviser and served in different senior UN positions during the next 25 years. In November

With the competitive procurement process, he said, it is possible to provide solar power at a price below the average electricity prices the customers have been paying, he said.

"We have used most of our proven gas reserves... With the current rate of gas extraction, the reserve will last for another eight to 10 years only," he said.

He urged investors to participate in the bidding process for establishing around 5,000 megawatts (MW) solar power plants across the country.

Michael Miller, ambassador and head of delegation of the European Union in Bangladesh, said, "We are committed to helping the interim