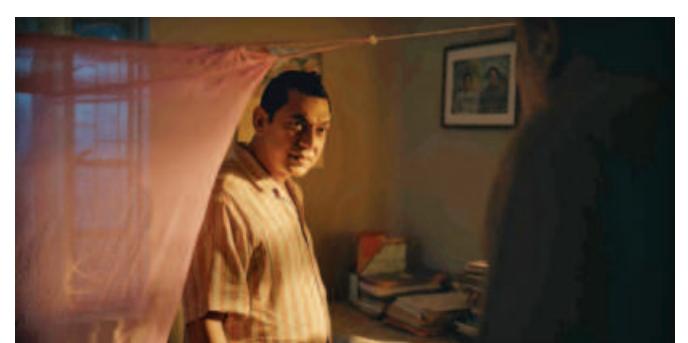


'Utshob' and the art of tenderness

When was the last time you had a smile plastered across your face throughout the entirety of a film? In this instance, getting into the cinema hall was an event in itself.

Crowds huddled near the elevator to get to Star Cineplex in Shimanto Shambhar, waiting for over an hour just to make it in on time for the films they'd booked. I've rarely seen this kind of eagerness for Eid films, let alone such a scramble for seats.

By the time my family and I made it to the screening of *Utshob* by Tanim Noor, the hall was nearly full -- even a full week after its release.



NAZIBA BASHER

People of all ages and backgrounds had gathered, waiting for something they already sensed would be different -- from the trailer, the posters, the songs. These glimpses alone promised something new, something free from the tropes we have come to expect in our films. They promised joy; and we were desperate for it.

For anyone who grew up reading or watching *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, *Utshob* is a warm wave of nostalgia. For those raised in 1990s Bangladesh -- whether or not they're familiar with Dickens -- the film offers a loving nod to the dramas and films of that era. And even for viewers with no emotional ties to either Dickens or the 90s, this film still feels like a two-hour-long hug, a very warm one.

The acting was tender and restrained. Zahid Hasan and Shommo Jyoti as the dual versions of Abu Nizar Jahangir (our Eid-time Ebenezer Scrooge), Sadia Ayman and Afsana Mimi as Jesmin, and the delightful trio of Christmases, or in our case, Eid spirits played by Chanchal Chowdhury, Jaya Ahsan, and Aupree Karim (appearing as themselves), were all perfectly cast. None of these characters were overwrought or unnecessarily complex. Writers Ahsab Ahmed Shadhin and Samiul Bhuiyan chose simplicity -- and that was where they struck gold.

Jahangir is a cranky, miserly man -- affectionately hated in his neighbourhood and mockingly called "khaishtha [obnoxious] Jahangir". No one really knows what turned him sour, only that he complains about everything and everyone. In contrast, his cousin Mobarak was beloved and known for his iconic *Chaand Raat* gatherings. When Mobarak dies mid-celebration one *Chaand Raat*, it sparks a reckoning in Jahangir that becomes the heart of the story.

Mobarak's ghost visits Jahangir that night, warning him of three spirits who will come. Jahangir brushes it off -- until he's woken again by the sound of *Shada Shada Kala Kala* and greeted by a ghost who has taken the form of Chanchal Chowdhury.

What follows is a journey into Jahangir's past, present and future -- into the fractures that shaped his life.

The humour was gentle and well timed, the moral reflection poignant but never preachy. It shows how even the smallest missed moment -- a decision deferred, a word unsaid -- can alter the course of a life.

The music elevated the experience, with no gaudy item numbers or melodrama -- just well-placed songs that served the story. The inclusion of Artcell's *Dhushor Shomoy* was a stroke of genius for every 2000's teen in the room. It was 'Kaiser'-era Tanim Noor at his best -- evocative, grounded, and intimately nostalgic.

Sunehra Binte Kamal's surprise appearance as Jahangir's long-lost daughter was the final emotional crescendo. One particular moment drew an audible gasp from the audience, followed by collective laughter and an outburst of "baap ka beti! (a father's daughter)" in unison. It was the kind of audience-film synergy that is hard to forget.

Despite it being 2025, most of our filmmakers believe a specific format needs to be followed when it comes to making a film: a hero, a heroine, a villain, multiple songs, including an "item" one; and nowadays, rape has also become staple.

Utshob had none of that. The story itself was the hero, the heroine and all else. And most of all, what it had was heart. A pure and full heart.

As the credits rolled, not a single person left with a dry eye or an empty heart. We all emerged smiling -- strangers who had cried, laughed, and healed together for two short hours.

Utshob, to me, is not just any "good film", it is profoundly human, and magically so. It felt like sipping on a warm mug of hot chocolate with marshmallows on a cold winter night.

In a cinematic landscape often saturated with noise and spectacle, *Utshob* offered something radical: tenderness.

And in doing so, it reminded us that the best stories are not the loudest ones; but the ones that sit with you long after the lights come on.



NEWS

Aging population, urban surge

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Fifty-seven percent of the population was of working age in 2021, up from 41 percent in 1990. Projections show this group will peak at 64 percent by 2040.

Conversely, the proportion of children under the age of five decreased to just 8 percent in 2021 from 17 percent in 1990. If this trend continues, it is likely to fall further to 4 percent by 2050.

In the 2030s, the number of elderly people (aged 65 and above) will surpass that of children under five for the first time. The elderly are projected to make up 18 percent of the population in 2050. Moreover, life expectancy has been on the rise -- it went up to 72 years in 2021 from 60 years in 1990.

This means Bangladesh now needs to start building a well-organised elderly care system and a robust social protection framework, said the report.

Every stage of life -- childhood, adolescence, working age, and old age -- must be supported with appropriate healthcare services, taking gender and social context into account, it added.

CHANGES IN DISEASE BURDEN

Referring to the 2021 report, the commission said both the number and rate of age-specific deaths and Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) in the country have changed dramatically over the past decade.

DALY is a widely used public health metric that quantifies the total burden of disease by measuring the number of years lost due to ill-health, or early death.

Individuals aged 65 and above account for more than half of all deaths and also have the highest mortality and DALY rates, said the commission.

Though mortality among older adults has decreased slightly, their quality of life is worsening due to chronic conditions and decline in their ability to perform everyday activities, it mentioned.

"This clearly indicates a growing need for long-term and integrated healthcare services as the population ages."

Among the working-age population, mortality rate remains relatively low, but this group carries the largest share of the total disease

burden.

The growing DALY burden in this age group is mainly driven by non-communicable diseases, accidents, and mental health issues, most of which are preventable. "Yet, the existing healthcare system has not been effective in addressing these challenges," the commission noted.

The analysis shows that the primary challenge for the healthcare system is no longer just saving lives but also ensuring that people stay healthy."

According to the 2021 Global Burden of Disease report, cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death, accounting for 36 percent of all deaths in the country.

It is followed by respiratory infections and tuberculosis (19 percent), chronic respiratory diseases (11 percent), and cancer (8 percent). Various non-communicable diseases also account for a major share of the total DALYs.

For both the working-age population and the elderly, prevention and early diagnosis of these diseases, rehabilitation, and long-term care are vital to help them not only live longer but live well, added the report.

had detailed knowledge of Nagad's cash distribution process.

Abdur Rahman, a local distributor for Nagad, filed a case on Saturday night with Uttara West Police Station, accusing 8-10 unidentified people over the robbery.

Nine individuals -- including the Nagad distributor, two managers, a salesman, and a security guard -- have already been questioned.

"Preliminary evidence suggests that the robbers had prior knowledge of the cash transport. It is possible that an [Nagad] employee passed on

this information," said a police official involved in the investigation.

Zahidul Islam Sajal, vice-president and head of media and communications at Nagad, said, "We are relying on police investigation."

Regarding reports of crimes committed by individuals donning Rab uniforms, Home Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury on Sunday said, "We are very concerned about the recent incident. We are making every effort to bring those involved to justice as quickly as possible."

Police yet to ID suspects, hint at inside job

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internal conflicts or irregularities within the organisation [Nagad]. We have interrogated Nagad staffers and asked them not to leave the stations until the end of investigation."

Regarding the incident, he said that the CCTV footage points to a well-planned operation.

Mahidul Islam said that multiple detective teams, including cyber and surveillance units, are working to identify the suspects and determine how they obtained Rab uniforms and

had detailed knowledge of Nagad's cash distribution process.

Israel says it has had to crack down on distribution because Hamas fighters were diverting food aid. Hamas members deny this and say Israel is using hunger as a weapon.

Lazzarini said Israel had not lifted restrictions on UN agencies including UNRWA bringing in aid, despite an abundance of assistance ready to be moved into the enclave.

the breadth of the enclave.

Israel says it has had to crack down on distribution because Hamas fighters were diverting food aid. Hamas members deny this and say Israel is using hunger as a weapon.

"We have initiated a primary inquiry based on the initial information. Legal action will be taken if evidence is found," Akhtiarul Islam, public relations officer of the ACC, told The Daily Star.

Israeli gunfire kills 40 across Gaza

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Women and children wept beside bodies wrapped in white shrouds.

"We went there thinking we would get aid to feed our children, but it turned out to be a trap, a killing. I advise everyone: don't go there," said Ahmed Fayad, one of those who tried to reach aid yesterday.

Philippe Lazzarini, the head of the United Nations Palestinian refugees

agency UNRWA, said in a post on X: "Scores of people have been killed & injured in the past days, including some starving people trying to get some food from a lethal distribution system."

Before the new system was set up, aid had been distributed to Gaza's 2.3 million residents mainly by UN agencies such as UNRWA, which employ thousands of staff inside Gaza and operate hundreds of sites across

ACC asks UK

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optimistic about recovering the assets allegedly laundered by Saifuzzaman, provided the allegations are proven.

He confirmed that UK authorities have already seized assets worth approximately Tk 1,025 crore (around £70 million), believed to be owned by the former minister.

"The seizure was carried out with the cooperation of the British government," Momen said, adding that documents related to properties allegedly tied to Adnan, an associate of Saifuzzaman, would soon be forwarded to the UK to pursue further recovery of assets.

Regarding British MP Tulip Siddiq, Momen said, "No matter how much Tulip claims she is a British citizen, our documents show she is a Bangladeshi national. We are proceeding under our laws against our citizens... If she was innocent, why did she step down? Why did she lose her ministerial post?"

ACC TO PROBE SAIDA MUNA

The ACC has launched an investigation into allegations of large-scale bank fraud and money laundering against Bangladesh's former high commissioner to the UK Saida Muna Tasneem, her husband Tawhidul Islam Chowdhury, and 15 others.

According to the complaint, Tawhidul, also the chairman of Generation Next Fashions Ltd, in collusion with officials of several banks and financial institutions, allegedly embezzled around Tk 2,000 crore in loans taken under the names of at least 12 companies. The funds were reportedly laundered abroad.

The complaint further alleges that the loans were obtained from at least nine financial institutions, including United Commercial Bank, Bank Asia, Eastern Bank, City Bank, BRAC Bank, National Bank Limited, Trust Bank, Southeast Bank, and AB Bank, using the names of non-existent businesses. Authorities are currently verifying the legitimacy of the entities.

The ACC's Money Laundering Unit is leading the probe, with Deputy Director Md Jahangir Alam and Assistant Director Saifur Rahman heading the investigation.

"We have initiated a primary inquiry based on the initial information. Legal action will be taken if evidence is found," Akhtiarul Islam, public relations officer of the ACC, told The Daily Star.

Inform EC of Yunus-Tarique

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at a programme organised by Nagorik Oikya at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

The BNP standing committee member's comment comes as the Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin on Sunday said the Election Commission was not aware of the agreed timing of the election at the closed-door London meeting.

"I can't comment on that -- I don't know what was discussed behind closed doors," he told reporters.

The EC will learn the government's stance on election timing after holding formal discussions with it, he added.

"We call on the interim government, on behalf of the people and in support of democracy, to take the necessary steps so that we can move quickly towards a democratic transformation," Salahuddin said at the event yesterday.

There was no discussion about anyone's immunity at the London meeting.

The advisory council was formed under Article 106 of the Constitution and the government is functioning in line with it.

The interim government would require ratification from the next elected parliament as per

constitutional obligations.

"This is something the interim government should keep in mind. If ratification is required, we will consider where and how this legitimacy will be granted," he said.

As per the Constitution, the advisers are to hold the status of ministers.

"According to Article 66, a minister must have the qualifications of a member of parliament. I would remind the advisers to be mindful of this. Foreign citizenship is also not allowed there, and there are several other matters," Salahuddin added.

In another development, British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Sarah Cooke called on BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir at the party's Gulshan office.

BNP Standing Committee Member Abdul Moyeen Khan was also present at the hour-long meeting.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Moyeen said detailed discussions were held on various issues, including the overall political situation in Bangladesh, the outcome of the discussions held in London, the subsequent reaction and situation, the existing bilateral relations between the two countries and further areas of cooperation.

Türk criticises legal changes

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effect until the International Crimes Tribunal completes the trial of the party and its top leaders.

Last October, the Bangladesh Chhatra League, the student wing of the AL, was declared a terrorist organisation and subsequently banned. Several affiliated bodies also fell under the current ban.

The 2009 Anti-Terrorism Act allowed authorities to ban entities identified as terrorist organisations, but did not include provisions for banning their activities. However, the newly enacted Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025, expands that scope, authorising the government to "ban all activities of any entity."

Türk also spoke about the global implications of ongoing trade wars, citing the aftermath of high tariffs introduced by the Trump administration on countries including Bangladesh.

"Many of the poorest people in the world are falling even further behind, with their rights to food, health and an adequate standard of living

more than half of low-income countries are currently in, or at high risk of, debt distress. Many are also on the frontlines of the climate crisis. And the development finance they desperately need is dwindling, as major economies shift their priorities, expand defence budgets, and cut development finance."

"The recent imposition of soaring tariffs may seem like a high stakes poker game, with the global economy as the bank. But the shockwaves of a trade war will hit Least Developed Countries with the force of a tsunami."

He warned that small island states, Caribbean nations, and countries with large export sectors -- including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Vietnam -- could face severe consequences. "Higher tariffs could put healthcare, education and a nutritious diet out of reach for many."

Brad Pitt's racing drama 'F1' set for June 2025 release



Brad Pitt returns to the big screen in *F1*, a high-speed Formula 1 drama from *Top Gun: Maverick* director Joseph Kosinski.

Set for release on June 27, 2025, the film will hit theatres across the US and Canada, including IMAX screens.

Pitt plays Sonny Hayes, a former F1 driver pulled out of retirement to join the fictional underdog team APXGP, alongside Javier Bardem.

Shot during actual F1 race weekends at Silver