

## There shouldn't be a set standard for 'wife material': Sunerah

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

Thanks to the release of the nationally beloved film *Utshob* on OTT, it has once again found its way into social media discussions. Lauded for its family-friendly, emotional, and evocative script, the film arguably peaks in the scene between Sunerah Binte Kamal and Zahid Hasan. A lighter facet of the emotional reunion of the father-daughter duo is Sunerah screeching, "How come this coffee is Tk 350? Outrageous!", a humorous dialogue which has unexpectedly set off debates on social media.

Memes captioned "wife material" have been circulating for days, owing to her character's stingy nature. "It is honestly flattering and quite funny to see these memes circulating around," said the actress, a recipient of the National Film Award for her very first film, *No Dorai*. "If you think seriously, it's concerning that some men think that a 'wife material' should be someone who thinks that way."

Sunerah further says that such arbitrary standards demean women in general. "Every woman who wants to get married is a wife material."

The actress, on a high from her role in *Daagi* and the subsequent cameo

in *Utshob*, still believes that she is on a learning path as an actress. "From the beginning of my career, I wanted to set an example. There was a weird perception that artists who came from modelling weren't that good at acting – and I wanted to buck that stereotype." That, she did. Her portrayal of the verbally mute Likhon in *Daagi*, especially when she communicated solely through her expressive eyes, was something to behold. "Likhon is among the top three characters I have played, along with Ayesha from *No Dorai* and Esha from *Utshob*. I hold them very dear to me."

Sunerah goes on to insinuate that she was previously ridiculed for 'cameo' appearances in films. "A lot of people would poke fun at me, saying 'when is your next cameo?', but they failed to understand that the screen-time of a role is not necessarily proportional to its impact. I give it my all to whatever I'm doing, and seems like it's paying off!"

What's next for the young star? Unsurprisingly, the hard worker is firing on all cylinders – working on television, films and even YouTube. "I don't subscribe to the notion that a film actress should stay away from other mediums. As I said, it's a learning journey for me and I am cherishing it."



PHOTO: COURTESY



## Deepika Padukone to produce 'The Intern' remake

Deepika Padukone has stepped away from the lead role in the upcoming Hindi adaptation of the 2015 Hollywood film *The Intern* to focus solely on producing it under her KA Productions banner. Initially set to star opposite Rishi Kapoor and later Amitabh Bachchan, her role will now be recast.

According to Mid-Day, this is the first of five projects she plans to launch over the next year, aiming for stories with global relevance. The move follows her exit from Sandeep Reddy Vanga's *Spirit*, citing creative differences and work-hour demands, with Triptii Dimri replacing her. Rumours of her leaving *Kalki 2* were denied by sources. Deepika last appeared in *Singham Again* and welcomed her daughter, Dua, in September 2024.

## Turkish drama 'Kuruluş: Osman' now in Bangla dub on Toffee

Popular Turkish series *Kuruluş: Osman* is now streaming on Toffee in Bangla dubbing, with the first three seasons available and the fourth releasing on August 22. Toffee has partnered with SRK Group to bring all six seasons in Bangla, featuring the voices of 53 Bangladeshi artistes.

The historical drama follows the Kayı tribe of Anatolia, led by Ertuğrul and later his son Osman, as they lay the foundation of the Ottoman Empire. Written by Mehmet Bozdağ and directed

by Metin Günay, the series stars Burak Özçivit, Özge Törer, and Alma Terzić. Broadcast in 73 countries, *Kuruluş: Osman* won Best Series at the International Venice TV Awards in 2020.



## Blackpink's Lisa to release short film for 'Dream'

Blackpink's Lisa will release a short film for her track *Dream* from her debut album *Alter Ego*. Co-starring Japanese actor and model Kentaro Sakaguchi, the film premieres on August 13 at 11pm EST. Lisa announced the project on social media with a poster and the caption: "An emotional, beautiful story that will soon be yours."

*Dream* appears as the 13th track on *Alter Ego*, released on February 28, which debuted at number one on the Billboard Top Album Sales chart.

Lisa is currently on the *Deadline World Tour* with Blackpink, with upcoming shows in London on August 15-16 and in the Philippines on November 22-23.



## WHAT'S THE HAPS?

### 'Troubling Rain'

Renowned photographer Abir Abdullah unveils a compelling solo exhibition portraying the resilience, struggles, and lyrical beauty of life in the monsoon's embrace. Through evocative frames, the collection invites viewers to pause and reflect on the intimate relationship between rain, hardship, and hope in everyday Bangladeshi life.

DATE: THURSDAY-SATURDAY | AUGUST 14-23, 2025

TIME: 3-9 PM

VENUE: LA GALERIE, ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE DE DHAKA

# NEWS

## Graft trial starts against Hasina, others

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According to court sources, the three complainants read out very similar statements.

As all the accused were declared fugitive, there was no scope for any lawyers to cross-examine the witnesses.

The judge set August 26 for the next hearing.

Meanwhile, the trial of another three graft cases against Hasina, Sheikh Rehana, her son Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby, and daughters, British MP Tulip Siddiq and Azmina Siddiq, and 18 others, including several current and former officials of the Ministry of Housing and Public

Works and Rajuk, is pending with the Special Judge's Court-4 in Dhaka.

The anti-graft body – between January 12 to 14 – lodged six cases with its Dhaka Integrated District Office-1 over alleged irregularities in the allocation of plots under the Purbachal New Town project.

The ACC alleged that Hasina, in connivance with senior Rajuk officials, unlawfully secured six plots – each measuring 10 kathas – in the diplomatic zone of Sector 27 of the Purbachal New Town project for herself, Joy, Putul, Rehana, Bobby, and Azmina, despite their ineligibility under existing regulations.

On March 25 this year, the ACC

filed six charge sheets with the Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court in Dhaka where Hasina was a common accused in all six cases.

On April 10, 13, and 15, the court issued arrest warrants against Hasina, Rehana, Joy, Putul, Tulip, Azmina, and Radwan, along with others, after taking cognisance of the charges.

The same court on July 1 ordered the relevant authorities to issue six gazette notifications summoning the 29 individuals to appear before the court in the cases.

On July 31, charges were framed against 29 people, including Hasina, Rehana, Joy, Putul, Bobby, Tulip, and Azmina, in the six cases.

## CID clears ex-minister, secy after KL's request

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Under a memorandum of understanding between Bangladesh and Malaysia, about 480,000 Bangladeshis went to Malaysia for work between August 2022 and May 2024 through 101 recruiting agents.

All their recruitment documents were processed by a web-based system named Foreign Workers Centralised Management System, which, industry insiders said, was a tool to manipulate the recruitment process.

As per the MoU, the recruitment cost has been agreed to be Tk 78,990.

However, on March 28 last year, four UN experts wrote a letter to the Bangladesh and Malaysia governments detailing labour exploitation in Malaysia.

They mentioned that each migrant spent between \$4,500 and \$6,000 (Tk 5-6 lakh).

It said the whole process reportedly begins with bribery within Malaysia's human resources and home affairs ministries to obtain "fake quotas for bogus employers".

"Subsequently, bribery extends to the Bangladesh High Commission in Malaysia and Bangladeshi syndicated agents to facilitate recruitment approval," the letter said.

In response, Bangladesh's mission to the UN in Geneva on May 29 last year said Dhaka wanted to allow all its 1,520 licensed recruitment agencies to send workers to Malaysia but Kuala Lumpur selected only 101 agents.

In March, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed 12 separate cases against 12 recruiting agency owners including former Finance Minister

AHM Mustafa Kamal and his family, former MP Nizam Uddin Hazari, Masud Uddin Chowdhury and former MP Benzir Ahmed for allegedly embezzling Tk 1,128 crore in human trafficking in different times.

Meanwhile, Khan, proprietor of recruiting agency Afia Overseas, had filed a human trafficking case with Paltan Model Police Station on September 3 last year against former state minister for expatriates' welfare Imran Ahmad, secretary Ahmed Munirur Saleheen and 101 recruiting agencies including the above-mentioned MPs and Kamal's family members Kashmiri Kamal and Nafisa Kamal.

The case accused them of embezzling Tk 24,000 crore through an organised syndicate.

Ahmad was arrested in October last year in connection with the case.

"Many of the Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia were exploited, confined, jobless and their passports confiscated – these are all signs of human trafficking," Khan told The Daily Star.

Many recruiting agencies in Bangladesh, including Afia Overseas, also faced losses because of the syndicate that extorted huge amounts of money, he said.

The complainant in the case was not a direct victim as the alleged victims were the workers who paid the money, the CID inspector Rasel told The Daily Star.

About 4.76 lakh passengers were involved, many of whom paid through 3,000 agencies rather than directly to the so-called 103 processing agency,

he said.

"These agencies collected varying amounts – Tk 4 lakh, Tk 4.5 lakh, Tk 5 lakh – but passengers only signed documents acknowledging Tk 78,900. If they paid more, they themselves must lodge complaints. So far, not a single victim has done so."

The case lacked proper evidence, Rasel added.

In his no-confidence petition against the report, Khan said the accused, as part of the syndicate, influenced the police to transfer the investigation to a preferred CID unit without consulting him or seeking his input.

"During the investigation, the officer had no contact with me and was clearly influenced by the accused. Out of hostility and malice, he submitted a false and fabricated report, prepared or dictated by the accused," the petition said.

Khan said Interpol's National Central Bureau in Dhaka on October 24 last year requested assistance from Malaysian police to arrest two alleged masterminds – Bangladeshi-origin Malaysian citizen Md Aminul Islam (Amin Nur) and former Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies secretary general Mohammed Ruhul Amin – on charges of human trafficking and extortion.

"Interrogating them will uncover the true picture of the human trafficking," he said, adding that the request to Malaysia was based on the accounts of former minister Ahmad.

Khan said he will pursue the case until he is satisfied.

## No reforms in foreign ministry amid

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key stakeholder in the Bay of Bengal has grown significantly, as the US, China and India are seeking to expand influence in the region.

"As competition between the US and China escalates to near Cold War levels, Bangladesh must exercise heightened caution and pursue skillful diplomacy," said former ambassador M Humayun Kabir.

Bangladesh's youth, who played a pivotal role in ending an authoritarian regime, aspire to a country that maintains foreign relations with mutual respect and independence, Humayun said.

Reality, however, paints a different picture.

The foreign ministry remains institutionally weak, owing to both internal and external factors that have influenced its direction over the past few months.

The resignation of Jashim Uddin as foreign secretary on May 21 was one of several developments that raised questions about the ministry's institutional stability and integrity.

He stepped down under pressure following a social media campaign targeting him. Certain quarters within the ministry and also the government acted against him, according to several foreign ministry officials.

Also, the government cancelled the appointment of Khorshed Alam Khastagir, deputy high commissioner at the Bangladesh mission in Malaysia, as ambassador to Poland on October 6 last year following a social media campaign.

The campaigners alleged that he sued Bangladeshi migrants for demonstrating in support of the July mass uprising. Later, Malaysian authorities clarified that he had not filed any cases.

On May 22, the government scrapped a transfer order for

Shabab Bin Ahmed, who was posted at Bangladesh Embassy in the Netherlands at that time, and asked him to return home instead of joining as deputy high commissioner at the Kolkata mission.

The order was issued after a social media campaign claimed that he had "barred sacrifice of animals" during Eid-ul-Azha on the consulate premises.

The ministry has not yet provided any explanation as to why these changes were made.

Several foreign ministry officials said these developments created a sense of insecurity among them. Besides, multiple emails and WhatsApp conversations were leaked over the past year, fuelling mistrust among the staff.

Seeking anonymity, one of the officials said that any action must be backed by law, logic and proof, or else it creates chaos and promotes inefficiency.

### COORDINATION NEEDED

Over the last few months, Khalilur Rahman, national security adviser, and Lutfe Siddiqi, chief adviser's envoy for international affairs, have played prominent roles in dealing with international issues, including the Rohingya crisis.

"On many occasions, the foreign ministry appeared to be taking a backseat when the Chief Adviser's Office took the front stage," said a foreign policy analyst, adding that this could lead to problems in coordination.

"This was reflected during the chief adviser's visit to the UK on June 10-13, which was declared an official tour. But no meeting between Yunus and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer took place," said the analyst, preferring not to be named.

Prof Sk Tawfique M Haque, director of the South Asian Institute

of Policy and Governance at North South University, said that if there is any gap in coordination, the foreign ministry should bring it up and address that.

In a report on governance over the past year, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) said the government lacked clarity regarding its position on providing a "humanitarian corridor" to Rakhine and didn't communicate the issue transparently to the public.

On April 27, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hossain said that Dhaka in principle agreed to the UN proposal for providing humanitarian passage to Rakhine, prompting widespread criticism from political parties and cross sections of people.

About a month later, Khalilur said the interim government had not discussed "humanitarian corridor" with any party and would not do so in the future. The issue has remained shelved since then.

The TIB pointed out that Bangladesh's relations with India strained after ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled to the neighbouring country. India drastically restricted visas for Bangladeshis, imposed certain trade restrictions and continued push-ins of Bangla-speaking people.

As Bangladesh's ties with Pakistan improved over the past year, Beijing initiated a trilateral mechanism involving Dhaka and Islamabad – a move that experts believe could upset New Delhi and Washington.

Experts say Bangladesh needs to have national consensus on key foreign policy issues and ensure strong coordination among relevant ministries to efficiently deal with foreign powers. Otherwise, it will be difficult to maintain strategic autonomy and protect national interests.

## Plots afoot to obstruct return

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If the BNP comes to power, leaders and activists must remain vigilant to prevent opportunists from joining the party.

"Colleagues, if Allah wills, you will run the country. You may form the government with the support of the people. But right now, many opportunists are circling around you. You must watch out for these opportunists – they belong to no

one."

These opportunists only care about their own interests, he said.

"They will come. They will use you. They will damage your reputation. They will take their own benefit. They will damage the party's reputation. They will take their own benefit. And when they see hard times, they will run away. These vultures must not be allowed to come."

If the BNP comes to power, it will face numerous challenges, including creating jobs for the unemployed, addressing water management issues by re-excavating dried-up rivers and canals and reforming the education system.

"We must all stay alert. We must not do anything that could harm the party or destroy the people's trust and confidence. Pledge that you will keep the party united."