



Mahtim Shakib



Emon Chowdhury



Sanzida Mahmood Nandita



Sadat Hossain

PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Ministry of Cultural Affairs to stage 'Sharadiya Cultural Festival'

The Ministry of Cultural Affairs will host a two-day *Sharadiya Cultural Festival* on September 30 and October 1, organised by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

The festival will open on September 30 at Suhrawardy Udyan with the jatra *Mahishasura Mardini, Devi Durga*, staged by the Mata Majulika Dharmiyo Natya Sangstha and featuring Palakar Ujjal Kumar Byapari.

The closing day at Shilpakala's Nandan stage will begin with a *Manglik Nritya*, followed by *Shyama Sangeet*, patriotic songs, and solo performances by Anima Rai, Deblina Sur Dola, Ritupratim, and Sinti Saha.

Cultural Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki will inaugurate the event, with closing remarks from cultural figures including Tapan Chandra Majumdar.

All programmes are free and open to the public, celebrating the age-old traditions of Durga Puja.



The song that took home all MUSICAL AWARDS

SHARMIN JOYA

Music often serves as a form of therapy, and when it comes from a film, it carries an even deeper power, bridging the audience with the characters and their stories, enhancing the emotional flow. *Megh Balika* from the Shihab Shaheen directorial web film *Kacher Manush Dure Thuiya* is one such song that beautifully captures this essence.

The track *Megh Balika* stands out as a true musical gem, beautifully penned by Sadat Hossain, enchantingly composed by Emon Chowdhury, and brought to life through the soulful voices of two remarkable contemporary artists, Mahtim Shakib and Sanzida Mahmood Nandita. Its impact was further celebrated at this year's Blender's Choice-The Daily Star OTT & Digital Content Awards, where the entire team behind the track was honoured with wins across four categories.

Sadat Hossain shared, "I have often asked myself—do I really want to write songs? Eventually, I realised, yes, I do. But along with that comes another wish: the emotions with which I write a song must also be reflected through its melody, music, and vocals. Yet, most of the time, I am held back by a sense of hesitation. What if the lyrics—or my emotions—do not receive the proper treatment? As a result, I never really wrote many songs. Even when people encouraged me to, I never showed much interest."

"The truth is, I don't usually write songs—I write poetry. And when a poem transforms into a song that touches people's hearts, that is the greatest reward a writer can receive. The Daily Star OTT Awards felt like the formal recognition of that reward. With both the jury's decision and the audience's votes, when the song was honoured as the Best Song of the Year, it undoubtedly

became a very special achievement."

Emon Chowdhury, the composer behind the song, said, "*Megh Balika* holds a special place in my heart for several reasons. This marked my first collaboration with Shihab *bhai*, and on top of that, Sadat *bhai* is one of my most favourite lyricists and writers—I've always been a huge admirer of his work. I feel incredibly fortunate to have had the chance to set his words to music. It's also quite rare that all the core members of a song—the lyricist, singers, and composer—are recognised at such a prestigious award show."

Sanzida Mahmood Nandita has a bittersweet memory of the song. "I was really devastated at that time, because just two weeks before I recorded the track, my father passed away. I also had a feeling that I couldn't do justice to the song—it's such a beautiful piece. But then again, somehow the outcome brought me so much love from the

people, and that means a lot." want to express my gratitude for considering my voice for the song. And I'd like to mention that Shihab Shaheen *bhai* directed the film amazingly!

Mahtim Shakib has won The Daily Star OTT award twice—last year for *Pakhi Pakhi Mon* from *Unish20* and this year for *Megh Balika*. He said, "The Daily Star OTT awards are the epitome of digital recognition, so receiving it twice is truly special. Although I couldn't be on stage either time, I deeply cherish the honor. *Megh Balika* is very close to my heart, and working with Emon *da* and Shihab *bhai* on such a well-received project was an absolute pleasure. Even in Australia, people praised the song and shared their stories with me, which felt amazing."

While all the participants of the songs are doing an amazing job in their careers, this awards surely will elevate their pathways in the industry.

NEWS

We aim to be a key bridge between Saarc

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The two leaders addressed the protracted Rohingya crisis and the importance of increased international funding to support over one million refugees currently hosted by Bangladesh.

They also discussed regional connectivity, particularly Bangladesh's strategic role in allowing landlocked Nepal and Bhutan, as well as India's northeastern states, access to the Chittagong Port.

During the meeting with Yunus, Pakistan PM Sharif invited the chief adviser to visit his country before the conclusion of the interim government's tenure, said a press release of chief adviser's press wing yesterday.

Yunus shared that Bangladesh is on course to hold its general election in February and expressed hope that the major political reforms proposed by 11 national commissions would lead to meaningful political transformation.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister's Office of Pakistan in a statement said the meeting was held in a cordial and

friendly atmosphere, reflecting the mutual commitment of both countries to work together for the well-being of their people and stability of South Asia.

BUSINESS FORUM

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni on Wednesday proposed the establishment of an Italy-Bangladesh Business Forum aimed at promoting Italian investment in Bangladesh, while meeting with Yunus on the sidelines of the UNGA.

Yunus welcomed the initiative.

They also discussed a possible visit by Meloni to Bangladesh in December.

Meloni expressed Italy's willingness to engage constructively with Dhaka to ensure safe migration pathways that would benefit both nations.

She underscored the need for stronger measures to combat human trafficking.

In response, the chief adviser said the interim government has already adopted a zero-tolerance policy towards human trafficking and has implemented several initiatives to ensure safer migration routes for

Bangladeshi citizens. "We need more global efforts to prevent human smuggling."

Yunus urged increased international support for over one million Rohingya refugees currently sheltered in Bangladesh.

In response, Meloni pledged to send a high-level delegation to next week's international conference on the crisis at UN headquarters.

In another development, Kosovo President Vjosa Osmani met Yunus the same day and proposed the signing of several trade and economic agreements with Bangladesh, specifically in the textile sector.

Seeking stronger global cooperation at a programme, Yunus yesterday called for giving the young people their rightful stake, safe space, and role in decision-making.

During a meeting with Dutch PM Dick Schoof, the chief adviser sought the country's cooperation in water management, ocean research, and establishing cold storage facilities to help preserve perishable agricultural products during harvest seasons.

and approving lethal weapons. On July 20, 2024, he allegedly endorsed Hasina's strategies in a phone conversation.

The seventh charge alleged that on August 4, 2024, Inu, during another phone conversation with Hasina, approved curfew and gunfire orders, and instructed his party leaders to execute the plans.

Prosecutor Mizanul Islam read out the charges. The prosecution also played before the tribunal two phone call recordings between Hasina and Inu.

Bangladesh reeling at 29 for three in 5.1 overs, a position from which they never recovered.

Nurul Hasan Sohan, one of three changes in the lineup, hobbled to his 16 off 21, while Jaker Ali made just five off nine and Towhid Hridoy scored five off 10. Shamsim Hossain top-scored with 30 off 25. But the Tigers ultimately faltered, ending their campaign with another painful defeat.

Even so, the batters' collapse while chasing such a small target remains inexcusable. In-form opener Saif Hassan looked steady until a leading edge off Haris Rauf dismissed him for 18 off 15. His departure left

Inu charged with crimes

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Charge 2 stated that an alliance meeting chaired by deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina at the Ganabhaban on July 19, 2024 approved curfew, "shoot-at-sight" orders, and nationwide army deployment to crush the student-led movement. As JSD chief, Inu was accused of endorsing and supporting these measures.

The third and eighth charges involve Kushtia, from where Inu was elected MP. He allegedly instructed the then Kushtia superintendent of

police to prepare a list of protesters, leading to the killing of six people and injuries to many others.

On alleged orders from Hasina, Inu, and AL leader Mahbubul Alam Hanif, ruling party and alliance activists, with police support, opened fire in Kushtia.

The fourth charge said Inu maintained regular contact with Hasina, instigating and assisting her plans to crush the protests. These included surrounding demonstrators, deploying paratroopers, using helicopters for shooting and bombing, and supporting these measures.

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Bangladesh crash out of Asia Cup

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Taskin Ahmed, Mahedi Hasan, Mustafizur Rahman, and Rishad Hossain reducing Pakistan to 49 for five in 10.5 overs.

But Pakistan clawed their way back through Shaheen Shah Afridi, promoted up the order, who hit 19 off 13. Mohammad Haris (31 off 23), Mohammad Nawaz (25 off 15), and Faeem Ashraf (14 off 9) added crucial runs to lift their side to 135 for eight.

What will sting Bangladesh most is the chance they squandered to bowl Pakistan out for far less—three dropped catches allowed their opponents to rebuild and gain momentum.

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No role for Hamas in future state

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delegates watching the video.

He distanced himself from the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas—the deadliest ever on Israel—as well as frequent accusations by Israel's supporters that the Palestinians are denying the rights of Jews.

"Despite all that our people have suffered, we reject what Hamas carried out on October 7—actions that targeted Israeli civilians and took them hostage—because these actions do not represent the Palestinian people, nor do they represent their just struggle for freedom and independence," Abbas said.

"We reject confusing the solidarity with the Palestinian cause and the issue of antisemitism, which is something that we reject based on our values and

principles," he said.

Abbas also called the nearly two-year Israeli assault in Gaza "one of the most horrific chapters of humanitarian tragedy of the 20th and 21st century"—by implication putting it alongside the Holocaust.

Abbas called for an interim committee led by the Palestinian Authority to be put in charge temporarily of Gaza, of which Hamas took control in 2007.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a statement on Wednesday, said that the recognition of the State of Palestine by Western countries "does not oblige Israel in any way," reiterating that "there will be no Palestinian state."

US President Donald Trump has

staunly backed Netanyahu in rejecting statehood and has stood by him as Israel expands attacks across the region, including to Qatar and Iran.

But French President Emmanuel Macron, despite his disagreements with Trump on statehood, said Wednesday that the US leader joined him in opposing annexation.

"What President Trump told me yesterday was that the Europeans and Americans have the same position," Macron said in an interview with France 24 and Radio France Internationale.

Steve Witkoff, Trump's golfing friend turned roving global negotiator, said that Trump in a separate meeting with a group of leaders of Arab and Islamic nations presented a 21-point plan for ending the war.

Outrage grows over shaving of fakir's hair

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Halim, a devotee of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) and Hazrat Shah Paran (RA) and follower of the Naqshbandi order, had been keeping his matted hair for 37 years. "Once a farmer, he now leads a quiet spiritual life."

He added that the perpetrators came to Kashiganj Bazar from Dhaka that morning after receiving a tip that "a madman was roaming the market." They chased Halim for a long time before capturing him and cutting his hair, ignoring locals who tried to intervene."

Aslam, who visited Halim's house yesterday, said the incident left the elderly man humiliated and shaken. "Since that day, he lives in constant fear and avoids leaving home."

Halim's son Habibur Rahman said the family remains in deep distress. "We demand proper investigation and strict punishment of those responsible."

Eyewitness Hasibur Rahman Jewel confirmed that he and others saw three men cutting Halim's hair while one of them filmed the incident.

ORGANISED CAMPAIGN

While trying to identify those who forcibly cut Halim's hair, The Daily Star found a Facebook page named "Human Service Bangladesh", which regularly posts videos of similar things being done to people who live outside "the conventional lifestyle".

Journalist Imran Hossain of The Business Standard wrote on Facebook that two of the men involved in the Mymensingh incident are Mufti Shohrab Hossain Ashrafi and Afsar, both residents of Dhaka Udyan in Mohammadpur. This newspaper could not reach the two for comments despite

repeated calls on their listed numbers.

The Daily Star also traced one Mahbubur Rahman of Bishogaon village in Cumilla's Manoharganj upazila, who runs a Facebook page named "Mahbub Creation" and a web portal "Street Humanity", where he regularly posts similar videos, including one showing a woman's hair being cut.

Mahbubur said he was inspired by Indian Facebook content and began cutting people's hair in 2022. He formed a team at the end of 2023 and launched his Facebook page in August 2024.

He claimed to have cut the hair and beards of over 500 "helpless" people to "make them clean and tidy" and to have reunited 25-26 missing people with their families.

Mahbubur added that he self-funds these operations within Dhaka but receives sponsorship from expatriates when travelling outside the capital.

OUTRAGE

Rights body Ain o Salish Kendra termed the act "inhumane, unlawful, and a blatant violation of the constitution and human rights".

In a statement, it said the assault violated articles 31, 32 and 35 of the constitution, which guarantee dignity, liberty and protection against cruel and degrading treatment.

ASK demanded that the perpetrators be identified, arrested and prosecuted swiftly, and urged the government to ensure that no such incident occurs in the future.

The Mymensingh Baul Association and Mymensingh Cultural Society condemned the assault and demanded exemplary punishment, while Khalilur Rahman Chishti, president of

Bangladesh Sufism Unity Council, also called for justice.

Baul singer Shofi Mondol said, "They're catching pedestrians, shaming them, cutting off their hair and beards that took years to grow. I too have long hair and beard, so I understand the pain these ascetics are going through. I don't know what benefit they get from hurting people."

"There are many ascetics in Bangladesh who quietly dedicate themselves to the Creator... Religion should be for serving humanity, never for hurting it. When we see this cruelty, it feels like religion itself no longer exists."

He also questioned why the government has not taken action. "A few people are committing this sinful act in the name of earning reward."

Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Baruah called the act a "serious violation of fundamental rights".

"In the name of social work, they are invading people's personal space. Who gave them that authority? Living as one chooses, so long as one is not breaking the law, is a constitutional right. Even the state cannot dictate how a fakir, a Baul or a Baul should live."

He added that the government has a constitutional duty under Article 27 to protect every citizen equally. "Bauls are having their hair cut off, shrines are being vandalised, and the state is silently watching. The local administration is responsible, and the social welfare ministry has shown no initiative."

The Daily Star Bangla reporter Sharif M Shafique, Mymensingh correspondent Aminul Islam, and Cumilla correspondent Khalid Bin Nazrul contributed to this report.