

# BITS OF HALLOWEEN across Bangladesh's ghostly lore



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Fear, like folklore, is a product of geography. It grows out of the land, shaped by its climate, its rituals, and its silences. In our culture, it lingers in the swamps, in the rustle of banana leaves, in the long shadows beneath a banyan tree. Our ghosts are not foreign phantoms lurking in castles or crypts; they are rooted in soil, memory, and grief. They emerge from social injustices, unfulfilled desires, and forgotten histories, and in their persistence, they remind us that the supernatural is often an allegory for the very real. Long before the Western world assigned October as the season of spirits, we had already built our own mythology of the unseen. The tradition of *Bhoot Er Golpo (Stories of Ghosts and Spirits)* predates colonial literature, passed orally across generations.

Among the most enduring figures of Bengali folklore is the *Petni*, the spirit of a woman who died unmarried or wronged in life. Described as pale and untamed, she lives

near ponds or deserted groves, often preying on men who venture alone at night. Literature often depicts the *Petni* as a symbolic revolt against a patriarchal order that silenced women in life and myth alike. In her spectral freedom lies an inversion of power as the woman who once lacked agency now inspires dread. Closely related to her is the *Shakchunni*, a ghostly figure of a married woman who dies prematurely. Identified by her conch shell bangles and vermilion, she haunts her home or other men's dreams, eternally yearning for the domestic stability denied to her. Unlike the vengeful *Petni*, the *Shakchunni* embodies longing and loss as her tragedy lies not in death but in attachment.

If the *Petni* and *Shakchunni* echo social critique, the *Bhoot* and *Preta* belong to a more metaphysical order. The term *Preta*, borrowed from Hindu and Buddhist cosmologies, refers to the hungry ghost, a soul trapped between worlds, cursed by its own greed or attachment. When adapted into local folklore, the *Preta* evolved into the *Bhoot*; an amorphous, restless

entity haunting fields, rivers, and trees. Its existence speaks less of horror and more of incompleteness as a spirit unable to move on because the living refuse to forget.

The *Daini* holds a fearsome place in Bangladeshi folklore. Unlike restless spirits, she is an active force of malevolence, blamed for curses, illness, and misfortune. Said to haunt village edges and shape-shift at night, her legend reflects communal fears surrounding power, envy, and moral transgression.

During colonial times, ghost stories began migrating from oral tradition to literature. British ethnographers dismissed them as native superstition, but writers recognised their metaphorical richness. Rabindranath Tagore's *Khudito Pashan* reimagined haunting as a psychological experience and an allegory of colonial memory and human desire. Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's spectral tales, often set in forests and riverbanks, portrayed ghosts not as villains but as silent participants in the natural order. Later, Satyajit Ray's *Monihara* and *Goopy Gyn Bagha* Byne adapted these motifs for cinema, fusing rural superstition with human melancholy and wit. Through such retellings, our local *Bhoot Er Golpo* evolved from oral legend to literary art.

In contemporary Bangladesh, these stories have been adapted yet again. The modern urban landscape, filled with abandoned houses, university dormitories, and unlit highways, has produced its own folklore. Stories circulate online about haunted hostels, cursed lifts, and ghostly figures on CCTV footage. The internet has become a new kind of village courtyard where fear travels faster but remains just as communal. What binds all these stories together is their human core. The ghosts of Bengal are rarely symbols of pure evil. They are extensions of unresolved emotion manifested into form. Each spirit, in its own way, speaks to a social truth. Thus, to speak of Bengali ghosts is not to indulge superstition but to acknowledge continuity.

In a world increasingly enamoured with Western symbols of Halloween, our ghosts remain profoundly local. They belong to the ponds and trees, to songs sung in whispers, to the quiet after dusk. And as long as these spaces survive in memory, the *Bhoot Er Golpo* will continue to live; not as frightful tales, but as echoes of a culture that has always known how to turn fear into folklore.

## Ethan Hawke reflects on Robin Williams' improvisational brilliance in 'Dead Poets Society'



Ethan Hawke recently reflected on working with Robin Williams in *Dead Poets Society*, calling it a defining experience of his early career. In a Vanity Fair retrospective, Hawke praised Williams' improvisational genius and director

Peter Weir's openness to spontaneity, which reshaped his view of collaboration.

He recalled how Williams' freedom to deviate from the script taught him that "acting could be play." Hawke admired the balance between Williams' creativity and Weir's direction, describing it as true artistic collaboration. Released in 1989, the film won the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay and earned Williams and Weir Academy Award nominations.

## Puja Chery joins Nisho and Chanchal in Redoan Rony's 'Domm'



Puja Chery has joined Afran Nisho and Chanchal Chowdhury in Redoan Rony's upcoming survival drama *Domm*. Produced by Alpha i and Chorki, the film will be shot in Kazakhstan and is set for release on Eid ul-Fitr next year.

At the mahurat ceremony in Gulshan, Rony described *Domm* as a physically and emotionally demanding project inspired by real events. Puja called it a

milestone, noting she auditioned for her role and is reuniting with Chanchal after years. This marks Rony's third feature film following his award-winning *Chorabali* and his long-anticipated return to the big screen.

# NEWS

## Bleeding in silence

FROM PAGE 16  
whole day's pay."

A few months ago, she missed two days due to severe menstrual pain. "When I returned, my supervisor was furious. I wasn't paid for the entire week."

Apola and Geeta's stories reflect the daily suffering of women in Bangladesh's tea gardens. With low wages, few toilets, and little awareness, menstrual health remains one of the most neglected issues in the industry. There is no current official data on how many women work in it.

Poor nutrition, unsafe childbirth, and unhygienic living conditions make them vulnerable to reproductive and menstrual complications.

Sayed Shahriar, manager of Nurjahan Tea Estate in Srimangal, disagreed.

"We provide 20 days of medical leave and maternity leave for women. If a female worker reports menstrual discomfort, we try to help," he claimed, adding that all tea estates "follow this practice".

However, studies paint a grim picture.

A 2017 study titled "Socio-Economic Status, Dietary Pattern and Nutritional Status of Female Workers of Fulchhara Tea Garden" found 64.6 percent of the women workers underweight; 68.8 percent suffering from at least one illness; 44.8 without sanitary latrines; and 65 not washing hands with soap.

It added that women tea workers' health remains far below the national standard.

A 2022 Unicef report said 500 million people worldwide lack menstrual hygiene facilities, while Bangladesh's 2018 National Hygiene Survey found only 29 percent of menstruating women use sanitary pads.

Dr Monzur-A-Moula, junior consultant at the Maternal and Child Health Hospital, said, "Most women tea workers still rely on old cloths instead of sanitary napkins. These practices are unhygienic and risky. Using unclean or damp cloths causes frequent infections, reproductive complications, and even infertility."

"Social stigma worsens the problem. Menstruation is rarely discussed in tea communities. Women feel ashamed to seek help and are forced to work through pain without clean toilets or rest."

To change this, he said, "Awareness and education are key. NGOs, local health departments, and estate authorities must ensure clean toilets, affordable sanitary pads, and information to help women menstruate safely."

Dr Arefin Islam, country director of Noora Health, echoed the concern. "Even privileged women often can't afford sanitary napkins. For tea workers, they're a luxury. Old pieces of cloths are unhygienic, but what

alternatives do they have? Many can't even use a toilet when needed."

He called for sustained awareness and government support. "If the government could provide free or reusable sanitary products, it would ease their suffering and restore dignity."

In May 2021, the government introduced the National Menstrual Hygiene Management Strategy to ensure every girl and woman can "menstruate safely and with dignity", which promotes inclusivity, sustainability, and collaboration among government, NGOs, and local communities. However, implementation remains limited.

Kazi Golam Tawsif, additional secretary of the women and children affairs ministry, admitted the challenges. "Tea workers live in restricted areas, making it difficult to reach them. But a new initiative -- the 'Mother and Children Benefit Program' -- will try to include them."

However, until such programmes reach the tea gardens and menstrual health is treated as a basic right, women like Apola will keep suffering in silence.

Standing under the burning sun, sack heavy on her back, she told this correspondent before going back to picking leaves, "We are dying. We live like animals. When you go to Dhaka, please tell your government to do something for us."

## Man held over savings certificate fraud

FROM PAGE 2

the accused group had illegally accessed a Bangladesh Bank user ID issued by the Department of National Savings, altered customer mobile numbers and bank details, and fraudulently encashed multiple savings certificates.

The fraud came to light on October 27 when Audit Officer Manjur Alam of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General noticed an anomaly while preparing the income tax return of his superior, SM Rezvi, said the case statement.

A savings certificate worth Tk 25 lakh, purchased in Rezvi's name on October 13, appeared as encashed in the system, although Rezvi had never applied for encashment.

Officials found that the certificate had actually been encashed on October 23, but no corresponding application existed in the branch records.

During further inquiry, the Savings

and Pension Fund Management System (SPFMS) informed that on October 22, the mobile number and bank account details linked to Rezvi's certificate had been altered. The certificate was then connected to an account at NRB Commercial Bank's Raniganj sub-branch under Arifur's name. The certificate was encashed the next day.

A review of Arifur's transaction profile revealed that his withdrawal and deposit limits, originally set at Tk 2 lakh, had been illegally raised to Tk 10 lakh.

Following the discovery, Rezvi submitted a written complaint with the central bank on October 29.

Meanwhile, prompt action by the Savings Certificate Branch and Bangladesh Bank's Computer Cell led to the recovery of Tk 50 lakh -- transferred through two electronic fund transfers -- from Dutch Bangla Bank on October 28, which was returned to the government account, according to the

case statement.

SPFMS later verified their system records and confirmed that similar fraudulent transactions had taken place.

Two additional certificates, linked to a Dutch-Bangla Bank account under Maruf's name, were encashed on October 27. The Computer Cell and Dutch-Bangla Bank froze the transactions and informed the Bangladesh Bank, the case statement said.

Contacted for comments, Aref Hossain Khan, executive director and spokesperson of Bangladesh Bank, told The Daily Star that the central bank formed a committee to investigate the issue.

He added that officials responsible for maintaining the server passwords have been transferred, and the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit is also probing the matter.

## NCP wants Yunus to issue order

FROM PAGE 16

have not signed the charter. "We hope they will sign within the commission's tenure."

On October 28, the consensus commission submitted its recommendations for the implementation of the July charter.

The commission recommended

that the government first issue the implementation order, followed by a referendum seeking public approval.

So far, 25 of the 30 parties that took part in the dialogues on state reforms signed the charter. The signing ceremony took place on October 17.

## Israel tests Gaza's fragile truce

FROM PAGE 16

guarantor of the recent Gaza ceasefire will give it some leverage and allow it to participate in the international peacekeeping mission currently being put together, reports Reuters.

Israel has banned the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) from visiting Palestinian prisoners detained under a law targeting

"unlawful combatants", the country's defence minister said later on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun yesterday instructed the commander of the army to confront any Israeli incursion into southern Lebanon, after Israeli forces crossed the border overnight and killed one person in Blida, reports Al Jazeera

Five parties -- including the NCP and four left-leaning parties -- sat out the ceremony. The four left-leaning parties are the Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Basod), Bangladesh JSD, and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Marxist).

online.

Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam condemned the incident, calling it "a blatant attack on the institutions and sovereignty of the Lebanese state".

Israel's violations of the airspace above Beirut are common, and over the past week have become an almost daily occurrence.

## Minimum score required to take MBBS

FROM PAGE 2

15 for English, and 15 for General Knowledge, Tendencies, and Human Qualities.

The authorities have also increased the number of seats for foreign students by eight, all of which have been designated for students from Bhutan.

BMDC acting registrar Liaquat

Hossain said the minimum score was reduced due to this year's poor HSC results. The pass rate dropped to 57.12 percent, the lowest in 21 years.

"If we remained rigid, many private medical college seats would go vacant," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked whether the decision followed any appeal or demand, he

said: "No. We decided on our own."

Explaining the longer exam duration, Liaquat said the change was made due to structural revisions in the test.

Officials said the two exams, previously held separately in January and February, were brought forward and merged as the national election is expected in February 2026.

## NCP rejects water lily bud as symbol

FROM PAGE 16

and proposed three symbols: "shapla", "kalam [pen]", and mobile phone.

The party later wrote to the EC on August 3 and September 24, stating that it wanted white or red water lily.

On September 24, the EC issued a gazette with a list of 115 electoral symbols. It sent a letter to NCP on September 30, asking it to choose one symbol from the approved list and submit its choice by October 7.

Another letter extended the deadline to October 19.

On that day, NCP wrote to the EC, seeking clarification on the criteria used to include or exclude symbols from the list.

Asked under which rule the EC

amended the symbol list to include shapla koli (water lily bud), EC Secretary Akhtar Ahmed yesterday said, "The Election Commission has considered that water lily bud can be included. It is not directly related to anyone's demand. NCP wanted the water lily symbol. But there is a difference between water lily bud and water lily."

The secretary said the commission included the water lily bud on its own, not in response to any party's demand.

Regarding the changing of electoral symbols, Akhtar said some symbols had drawn negative remarks, and the commission amended the list when it was deemed necessary.

He avoided giving a direct answer while responding to the query of reporters about the reason for adding symbols like "handshake".

The commission yesterday held a meeting with chief of 31 government offices.

Speaking about the meeting, Akhtar said a panel of polling officials is being prepared.

The foreign ministry would ensure that foreign observers face no difficulties in obtaining visas, he said.

He added that the meeting discussed maintaining law and order during the election, and the Power Division was instructed to ensure an uninterrupted electricity supply throughout the election period.