

'BONOLOTA EXPRESS' TAKES OFF: Cast reveal elevates expectations



PHOTOS: COURTESY

Adapted from Humayun Ahmed's novel *Kichukkhon*, director Tanim Noor's *Bonolota Express* is all set for shooting from December 15 onwards.

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

At a private event on Saturday, December 14, the film revealed its lineup of performers, which includes Mosharraf Karim, Chanchal Chowdhury, Azmeri Haque Badhan, Sariful Razz, Sabila Nur, Shamol Mawla, Zakia Bari Mamo, and Intekhab Dinar.

Keeping the mystery around the movie intact, the cast chose not to reveal much about their characters.

For now, audiences only know the names of the passengers boarding this train journey are Aziz, Afia, Ashab, Chitra, Abul Khayer, Surma, Rashid Uddin, and Boro Chacha.

Speaking about the film, Tanim Noor shared his excitement and gratitude. "It's a huge achievement for me to make a film based on Humayun Ahmed's

novel. I am also thrilled to work with such a brilliant cast. For a long time, I had a desire to work with both Chanchal Chowdhury and Mosharraf Karim."

Mosharraf Karim expressed his admiration for the director. "I fell in love with the character. Tanim Noor can tell a melancholic story and still make you smile. Another big reason I agreed to this film was *Utshob*. I have rarely seen such presentation in Bangladeshi cinema. I would also like to give a special shout-out to Shadhin and Samiul, the scriptwriters of the movie. I genuinely loved the script."

Chanchal Chowdhury, who reunites with Tanim Noor after *Utshob*, shared his joy at being part of the project. "It feels great to work with Tanim again. After the success of *Utshob*, he told me he wanted to collaborate once more. What pulled me to this film was Humayun Ahmed's story and my co-artists. It feels like a reunion. Going on this beautiful journey aboard a train—I truly hope we can

take the audience along with us."

Bonolota Express will also introduce a fresh on-screen pairing of Sariful Razz and Sabila Nur.

"The script by Shadhin and Samiul was fantastic, with such beautiful dialogues. I instantly felt this would be an exciting journey, and I'm truly looking forward to it," said Sabila.

After previously acting in a film based on Humayun Ahmed's novel *Daruchini Dwip*, Zakia Bari Mamo is once again returning to the author's literary world. "For me, the ultimate destination is reaching the audience's heart. I feel fortunate to be working with such wonderful co-artists in this film."

An interesting moment from the press conference was Azmeri Haque Badhan recalling how she had once missed working on *Daruchini Dwip* due to her exams.

"Because of my exams, I couldn't work with Mosharraf Karim back then," she said. "When the offer for *Bonolota Express* came, my daughter insisted that I do this film. She told me I often play serious or frustrating characters and that I should do something like *Utshob*. She really likes Tanim, and everyone knows how big a fan I am. It was because of him that I participated in Lux Channel i Superstar.



I'm extremely excited to work with Tanim Noor and such fabulous co-actors."

With a multi-starrer cast aboard and Tanim Noor steering the journey, it's safe to say audiences are in for a beautiful ride filled with love, emotion, nostalgia, and togetherness as *Bonolota Express* prepares to get on board in theatres on Eid.

Mass resistance

FROM PAGE 12 maintained the war was an internal affair.

As the independence struggle reached its climax, West Pakistan decided to internationalise the issue, realising that India might become more actively involved and that defeat was likely.

"So, their view essentially was that Bangladesh was eventually going to be liberated, but it should not be liberated through the Muktiyoddhas, but through the process of a bilateral international war between India and Pakistan."

Pakistan's decision to initiate an open war with India on December 3 by bombing Indian airfields, he said, changed the international dynamics of the conflict.

Prothom Alo Editor Matur Rahman said the Soviet Union was initially non-committal to the war, but later altered its strategic positioning after the crucial mutual defence treaty with

India. "The independence of Bangladesh was a unique event during that time, achieved at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives, the killing of intellectuals, and through the violation of women."

He questioned why Bangladesh, after 54 years of liberation, continues to face coups, killings and the absence of stable democratic governance. He said, "It's high time our young researchers and academics now do the proper research and write a complete history of the Liberation War with a global perspective."

Prof Navine Murshid of North South University's political science department said the West Pakistanis, knowing they were losing the war, killed Bangalee intellectuals. "It has left a damaging legacy of mediocrity in education in Bangladesh."

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam also spoke.

Country pays tribute

FROM PAGE 1 Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus paid tribute by placing a wreath at the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial in Mirpur around 7:20am and observed a minute of silence.

Earlier, around 7:00am, President Mohammed Shahabuddin placed a wreath at the memorial.

After the state observances, the memorial was opened to the public.

BNP leaders, led by Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, laid wreaths at the memorial.

Speaking to reporters, Fakhrul said as the nation strives to build a democratic Bangladesh, hostile forces are once again engaging in violence and killings to obstruct the country's democratic journey.

National Citizen Party leaders, led by its Convener Nahid Islam, also paid

tribute. Nahid said the systematic killing of pro-Liberation War intellectuals on December 14, 1971, was aimed at preventing Bangladesh from standing on its own feet.

Meanwhile, people from all walks of life paid tributes at the Rayerbazar Martyred Intellectuals Memorial in the capital from early morning.

DU ADMIN ERASES WAR CRIMINAL CARICATURES

Dhaka University authorities removed caricatures of war criminals painted on campus roads by students of Jagannath Hall. The artwork, created under a programme titled "Tul'ir Achore Droho" (Defiance Through Brushstrokes) on Saturday night, depicted Matur Rahman Nizami, Ghulam Azam and Abdul Quader Mollah. The caricatures were erased yesterday following instructions from the university administration.

NEWS

Jamaat's spin on intellectual killings in '71

FROM PAGE 2 "However, dialogue was taking place between Jagjit Singh Aurora, the chief of the Bangladesh-India joint command, and the surrendering General Niazi to set the date of surrender. At the will of the Indian army, the date was deferred by two days to December 16," he claimed.

On December 14, university teachers, journalists, artists, writers, and other intellectuals were hunted down and killed one by one.

"Had they lived, they could have played an extraordinary role in building a newly independent Bangladesh with their knowledge," the Jamaat leader said.

Explaining his remarks, he said the question was why they were killed. "To rebuild a war-ravaged Bangladesh after victory, the intellect, thinking, creativity, and innovation required were possessed by the nation's best sons — the intellectuals. They [India] did this so that Bangladesh would remain forever subservient to them and under their dominance."

"Bangladesh would exist in name only, with its borders remaining those of 1947. It would appear to be an independent country, but its economy, politics, foreign policy — everything — would be controlled from Delhi."

Porwar opined that India did not help Bangladesh with good intentions but to avenge its defeat by Pakistan in the 1965 war.

At another event, Muhammad Nazrul Islam, Chattogram city Jamaat ameer, said, "Killing one innocent person is like killing all humanity. There are no words strong enough to condemn such crimes."

Speaking at a discussion in Jamaat's Dewanbazar office, he demanded an inquiry commission to identify the culprits and initiate judicial proceedings to settle the debt of history.

He added that fabricating narratives to hide the killers and shift blame was also a crime. "Over the past decade and a half, false cases were filed, evidence was ignored, and leaders were eliminated through politically motivated judicial killings."

Nazrul also claimed that many of the slain intellectuals supported the then government or Pakistan's unity.

He said neutral researchers and intellectuals have expressed similar views, noting that many of those killed were pro-Pakistan and that none had gone to India.

"Why would Pakistan soldiers kill loyal intellectuals? Anyone with military experience would suspect that someone else used the name of the Pakistan army to carry out the killings. India's name comes up first among the suspects. Those who did not go to India incurred India's wrath."

At another programme, Prof Mohammad Shamim Uddin Khan, pro-VC (academic) of Chattogram University, said it was "absurd" to think Pakistan forces — busy fleeing and surrendering — killed intellectuals at that time.

At a discussion on Martyred Intellectuals Day at the Vice-Chancellor's office, he described the killings as part of an international conspiracy to subjugate Bangladesh. "To this day, we have not found Zahir Raihan. If he had been traced, we would have known the true history."

Speaking on the number of Liberation War martyrs, Prof Shamim said, "We do not want to hear rhetorical statements before the nation. We truly want to know what happened in Bangladesh in 1971, who were martyred, and who carried out the killings. That is still unknown to us."

He said, "In Bangladesh, the blame for killings is first placed on one group, but years later the real culprit emerges.

One narrative replaces another..."

Shamim also called for the formation of an independent and neutral commission to find out what happened on December 14, 1971.

For perspective, it is widely documented that Al-Badr Bahini, formed with members of Islami Chhatra Sangha — the then student wing of Jamaat — is responsible for the intellectual killings.

How Al-Badr, an auxiliary force of the Pakistan occupation army, was formed and its links with Chhatra Sangha were detailed in a report of Dainik Sangram, Jamaat's mouthpiece.

The report, published on September 14, 1971, says the Al-Badr force was formed under the leadership of Mohammad Ashraf Hossain, the then president of Momenshahi (Mymensingh) Islami Chhatra Sangha, immediately after the Pakistan army entered Jamalpur on April 22, 1971.

The report was presented as evidence at the International Crimes Tribunal.

The International Crimes Tribunal 2, in its verdict in a case filed against Chowdhury Mueen Uddin and Ashrafuzzaman Khan in 2013, said Jamaat played "a culpable role in liquidating the notable pro-liberation intellectuals, the best sons and daughters of the soil, by providing express and active approval to the killing squad formed of Al-Badr men who in fact belonged to ICS [Islami Chhatra Sangha]."

The tribunal handed down the death penalty to Mueen Uddin and Ashrafuzzaman for their role in the intellectual killings in 1971.

Terming Al-Badr a brainchild of Jamaat, the tribunal observed, "It is now settled that the Al-Badr, the 'action section' of JEI [Jamaat-e-Islami], was formed of the workers of ICS [Islami Chhatra Sangha]."

The funding network of 1971

FROM PAGE 12 Between March and May, freedom fighters carried out planned operations to collect funds from treasuries and banks across districts and subdivisions, most of which were sent to the Mujibnagar fund.

Details of these operations appear in "Purono Shei Diner Kotha", the autobiography of former adviser Akbar Ali Khan, who served as the subdivisional officer of Habiganj in early 1971.

According to his account, Sub-Divisional Police Officer Mahub Uddin Ahmed of Jhenaidah and Sub-Divisional Officer Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury of Meherpur collected Tk 4 crore 40 lakh from their respective treasuries. Nurul Kader Khan, deputy commissioner of Pabna, deposited Tk 2 crore, while Captain Ainuddin deposited Tk 1 crore 14 lakh obtained from banks in Brahmanbaria. Akbar himself also contributed a large sum.

On April 18, freedom fighters led by Kurigram Provincial Council member Abul Hossain recovered Tk 1 crore 40 lakh and 29 boxes of gold from the local treasury, which were sent to India and later deposited into the Mujibnagar fund.

Akbar estimated that roughly Tk 20-25 crore was transferred to the Mujibnagar treasury through the BSF.

According to "Bangladesh Sarkar 1971", Cabinet Secretary Colonel M A G Osman presented a plan at the April 16 cabinet meeting on swiftly collecting treasury funds.

Initially, currency was exchanged in India. Later, most funds were sent through Marwari traders to Afghanistan, converted to Indian currency and returned. At least three officials oversaw each exchange.

The book also notes that the Pakistan government announced the demonetisation of Tk 100 and 500 notes on June 8. Anticipating the move, the Mujibnagar authorities managed to exchange most notes beforehand.

According to "Bangladesher Shadhinota Juddho Dolil Potro Volume III", the government in May 1971 issued a seven-point directive urging people to deposit rents, taxes and duties into government treasuries. That same month, an Industrial and Commerce Board was established to facilitate the export of jute, tea and hides.

In India, more than 15 organisations raised funds and deposited them into the freedom fighters' fund. The Swadhin Bangla Football Team played

16 exhibition matches and donated over Tk 5 lakh. Indian artists, writers, intellectuals, doctors and industrialists also contributed, Fayequzzaman wrote in "Mujibnagar Government 1971".

FOREIGN AID Foreign support, particularly from expatriate Bangalees, foreign citizens and international charities, became a major funding source.

According to "Spring: 1971", around 30 organisations were formed in New York and Chicago in the United States to raise funds.

"Muktijuddher Chikitsa Itihash" notes that in the United Kingdom, over 450 Bangalee doctors and medical students formed the Bangladesh Medical Association UK, each contributing at least £10 per month.

"Bangladesh Sarkar 1971" states that between April and June, Action

charitable organisations operating in different countries, although there were major obstacles even in those cases. Overall, it was a very difficult situation, but through collective efforts we were able to cope with it."

EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET

According to "Bangladesher Shadhinota Juddho Dolil Potro Volume III", the finance department on June 18 issued a salary directive for regional administrators and staff. On July 19, Finance Minister M Mansur Ali announced a three-month budget for July-September, proposing an expenditure of Tk 2 crore 15 lakh 64 thousand against projected annual revenue of Tk 7.74,18,998.

The budget note stated, "We now need a budget to meet the necessary and unavoidable expenses required for the war of independence. This budget



Meeting of the Mujibnagar Government's all-party advisory committee during the Liberation War.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Bangladesh sent Tk 58 lakh 40 thousand to the provisional government. Proceeds from global concerts, including the Concert for Bangladesh held in New York on August 1, also flowed into the fund. UNICEF transferred USD 243,418 from ticket sales.

During the war, Professor Rehman Sobhan served as a special envoy for the Mujibnagar Government's financial affairs, working to mobilise international support.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, he said, "Raising funds for the Mujibnagar Government was always a challenge. Apart from India, no foreign country came forward to provide us with financial assistance. Expatriate Bangalees were our greatest source of hope; they contributed a significant portion to the Mujibnagar Government's fund."

"We also received some funds from

is prepared for the three months of July to September."

In this first wartime budget, Tk 1.93 crore was allocated for defence, with additional allocations for health, youth camps, administration and information.

According to "Mujibnagar Government 1971", the monthly salary for acting president Syed Nazrul Islam was fixed at Tk 2,000, for Prime Minister Tajuddin Ahmad at Tk 1,500, and for other cabinet members at Tk 1,200.

"Muktijuddher Purbapor Kothopokothon" says that P N Haksar, principal secretary to the Indian prime minister, informed Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1972 that Tk 17 crore of the funds sent to the Mujibnagar Government during the war remained in Indian banks. The money was later handed over to the Government of Bangladesh the same year.

12 killed, 29 hurt in Australia beach shooting

FROM PAGE 12 on synagogues, buildings and cars in Australia since the beginning of Israel's war in Gaza in October 2023.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese convened a meeting of the country's national security council and condemned the attack, saying the evil that was unleashed was "beyond comprehension".

"These acts of violence and crimes have no place in our society. Those responsible must be held fully accountable and face the full force of the law," the Australian National Imams

Council, the Council of Imams NSW and the Australian Muslim community said in a statement.

"Our hearts, thoughts and prayers are with the victims, their families, and all those who witnessed or were affected by this deeply traumatic attack."

Witnesses said the shooting at the famed beach on a hot summer's evening lasted about 10 minutes, sending hundreds of people scattering along the sand and into nearby streets and parks. Police said around 1,000 people had attended the Hanukkah

event alone.

"I was just getting ready to go home, and, like, I was packing my bag, got my flip-flops, was ready to catch my bus, and then I started hearing the shots," said Bondi Junction resident Marcos Carvalho, 38.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog said Jewish people who had gone to light the first candle of the Hanukkah holiday on the beach had been attacked by "vile terrorists".

One of the world's most famous beaches, Bondi is typically crowded with locals and tourists.