

‘DENYING VICTORY DAY IS DENYING OUR OWN EXISTENCE’

# July’s cultural warriors highlight significance of VICTORY DAY



Akram Khan



Khijir Hayat



Azmeri Haque Badhan



Ashfaque Nipun

PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED AND COLLECTED

## RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

After July 2024, Bangladesh discovered a renewed sense of unity as the nation came together to stand against injustice. Over time, however, we began to notice divisions forming among the people. Some started questioning the very essence of our Liberation War itself. To confront this growing apathy and division, some cultural voices of the July movement divulge their take on what is at stake for the soul of our nation.

Director Ashfaque Nipun was never afraid to call a spade a spade. He has consistently spoken out against injustice, and during the July movement, he remained a firm voice, while also condemning ‘mob justice’. When asked about the significance of December 16 and the growing attempts to question it, the director offered a frank and uncompromising response.

“December 16, 1971, is an inseparable part of our national story. It was on that day that the people of Bangladesh fought against the occupying Pakistani army and its collaborators and won their freedom. The once mighty Pakistani forces were forced to surrender and leave this land, and we gained a new country. That is why December 16 will always remain historic.

“If we had not witnessed victory on December 16, 1971, the history of Bangladesh might have been written very differently.”

For Nipun, our Victory Day is more than a historic date; it is the foundation of the nation. “The victory of December 16 must be honoured, along with the sacrifices of the martyrs, the wounded, and the *birangonas* of the nine-month-

long war. Their contributions are an essential part of our birth story.”

He also highlighted the inspiration drawn from ordinary citizens. “The resistance of ordinary people has always been our greatest source of inspiration. Even during the mass uprising in July ‘24, which led to the fall of an authoritarian government, the history of December 16 continued to guide us. The lessons of 1971 have always acted as a compass. If we could defeat one of the most powerful armies in the world then, we can do it again.”

**As long as Bangladesh exists, December 16 will remain part of our history, our celebrations, and our victory narrative. It reminds us that when ordinary people stand united on the side of justice, any victory is possible - Ashfaque Nipun**

He added, “The contribution and historical importance of December 16 can never be denied. No matter how many narratives try to question it, some days become permanently historic and cannot be diminished. That is why us Bangladeshis, once 70 million and now close to 200 million, continue to celebrate December 16 every year and will continue to do so. The history of Bangladesh’s victories begins on December 16, and every victory that

followed draws strength from it.”

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Badhan was a fierce voice when it came to the July uprising; she strongly voiced her opposition to the killings of innocent children and students during the movement. The actress was shocked when she found out that there are certain people who are trying to demean our Liberation War.

Reflecting on the significance of Victory Day, the actress said, “I can say today that I am a free citizen of Bangladesh only because we achieved victory on December 16. Without that victory, I would not be able to say this. There is no alternative to it. At that time, I would not have been a citizen of Bangladesh. I would have been a citizen of some other country. That is why this day is deeply important to me.”

Addressing attempts to undermine the history of 1971, Badhan was blunt. “I do not know where these ideas come from, but trying to distort or deny the Liberation War comes from ignorance and foolishness. It is a result of a lack of education. If people genuinely loved their country and their own identity, they would never deny the Liberation War, 1971, or our Victory Day.”

Filmmaker and actor Khijir Hayat was vocal during the July movement, openly calling out the previous regime through his social media posts. Known for directing the Liberation War-inspired film *Ora 7 Jon*, Hayat has remained

firm in his position on the ongoing debate comparing 1971 with the 2024 movement.

Addressing the comparison, he said, “The first and biggest mistake we can ever make is comparing 2024 with 1971. 1971 marks the birth of our nation. December 16 is when we earned victory. If we deny that, then we are denying our own birth.”

Emphasising the broader political journey of the nation, Hayat noted that a country is not shaped in a single moment. “A nation goes through phases and different kinds of revolutions, but you cannot ignore your birth. December 16 is the birthday of Bangladesh. If you ignore your own birth, nothing really remains. My position is very clear. Do not ignore your birth. At the same time, our revolution cannot be undermined either.”

Filmmaker Akram Khan, known for Liberation War-based films such as *Khacha* and *Nakshi Kathar Jamin*, was among the first to urge artists to speak out against the injustice faced by students during July. As both a July warrior and a filmmaker deeply shaped by the spirit of the Liberation War, Khan sees the recent uprising through a historical and moral lens. “Our Liberation War gave us our sovereignty, our cultural identity, and a moral compass. Whenever the nation feels lost or confused, we must return to the ideals of the Liberation War. There is no comparison between July and the Liberation War. One gave birth to the nation; the other was a people’s uprising to reclaim democracy and challenge repression and inequality. July follows the continuity of the Liberation War, but it can never replace it.”



## Victory Day being marked with aerial display, concerts and nationwide events

### ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

The nation will mark the 54th Victory Day with a comprehensive programme that combines spectacle and remembrance, featuring parachute displays, live music, theatre, television broadcasts, and community-led cultural events, all coordinated by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy and different national TV channels.

On December 16, 54 paratroopers carrying national flags will descend over Dhaka, marking each year of independence. Spectators can view the air show from Taltala Gate, opposite the IDB Bhaban.



The two-day *Bijoy Utsab* begins on December 15 at Suhrawardy Udyan, opening with an acrobatic show and followed by the folk-theatre production *General Osmani*. Written by Riju Lakshmi Oborodh and directed by Shamim Khandakar, the play explores the life of *Mukti Bahini* commander-in-chief General M A G Osmani, highlighting a pivotal chapter of the Liberation War.

Victory Day itself will feature a large concert at Suhrawardy Udyan, with performances by Shayan, Shironamhin, Lalon, Bangla Five, Tonger Gaan, Aftermath, Firoye Jong, and F Minor. Songs from Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra will also be



performed simultaneously across all 64 districts.

Television networks are dedicating extensive programming to the day. Boishakhi Television will air patriotic music, Liberation War-era film songs, the feature films *Hangor Nodi Grenade* and *Alor Michil*, and the drama *Birangana*. Maasranga Television will broadcast *Shesh Prohor*, while RTV will run special coverage on December 17. Deepto TV will feature *Deepto Probhati*, *Amar Bangla*, and the documentary *Swadhinotar Shesh Juddho*, and Duroto TV will highlight children’s programmes including *Lal Shobujer Bijoy* and *Amader Muktir Gaan*.

Public participation is central to the commemorations. On the afternoon of December 16, Udichi, Bangladesh Students’ Union, and Bangladesh Youth Union will organise a flag procession, women’s march-past, and performances of freedom songs, beginning at the Engineering Institute gate and concluding at the Central Shaheed Minar. The Liberation War Museum will host a children’s cultural programme, with performances from schools, music academies, and youth organisations.

The programmes reflect a national effort to honour 1971 while passing the legacy of independence to new generations – on the ground, on stage, and across the country’s screens.

## BIDYA SINHA MIM to make Chorki original debut

Actress Bidya Sinha Mim is set to make her Chorki original debut with an upcoming untitled film, scheduled to go on the floors later this month. The project will be directed by Kazi Asad, known for the Chorki series *Adhunik Bangla Hotel*, and promises to present Mim in a role distinct from her usual glamorous image.

Chorki chief executive officer Redoan Rony welcomed the actress to the platform during the contract signing held on December 13. Mim said she was drawn to the project’s emotional storyline, written by Mahamudul Hasan Tipu, Kazi Asad and Asaduzzaman Abir, and hopes audiences will respond positively.



## SHAHID MAHMUD JANGI honoured at 70 through songs and memory

Lyricist Shahid Mahmud Jangi was honoured on his 70th birthday through a music-led tribute at Dhaka’s Russian House, organised by Ajob Karkhana. Titled *Apon Aloy Shahid Mahmud Jangi: Gaaney Gaaney Sottor*, the programme brought together musicians, writers and cultural figures to reflect on his enduring influence on

Bangladeshi music.

The evening marked the launch of a book of the same name, edited by Joy Shahriar, documenting Jangi’s career and lyrical legacy. The celebration also featured performances of his songs by artistes across generations, highlighting the continued relevance of his work.

## Director Rob Reiner and wife found dead iwwn LA home

Filmmaker and actor Rob Reiner, 78, and his wife, photographer Michele Singer Reiner, 68, were found dead at their Brentwood home in Los Angeles, with authorities investigating the incident as an apparent homicide. The bodies were discovered on Sunday, December 14 afternoon, and the family later confirmed the deaths, requesting privacy.

US media reported injuries consistent with a knife attack, though the official cause of death has not been disclosed. Best known for directing classics such as *When Harry Met Sally*, *Misery* and *Stand by Me*, Reiner also co-founded Castle Rock Entertainment. He is survived by his children from his two marriages.

