

Breaking typecast, Sunerah brings new flair to 'Aatka'

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Chorki has unveiled the first look of its upcoming web series *Aatka*, drawing attention for its vibrant visuals and lively ensemble. At the centre of the series is Sunerah Binte Kamal, who steps into a flamboyant character that marks a noticeable shift from her recent on-screen roles. As curiosity around the project grows, the actress shares what made working on *Aatka* a particularly enjoyable and fulfilling experience.

This marks the second collaboration between Sunerah, Arafat Mohsin Nidhi and Raba Khan, following their work on the Chorki flash fiction film *Khob Kacheri Keu*. Reflecting on the reunion, Sunerah said, "Honestly, my experience is something I could talk about forever. I've worked with Nidhi and Raba before, so they're people I'm very close to. Raba writes brilliantly, Nidhi's direction is excellent, and I felt completely comfortable working with them. There's a lot of mutual understanding."

Speaking about how *Aatka* came together, Sunerah said, "Before anything was finalised, Nidhi told me



we'd do this project and asked me to keep the date free without giving any other details. I agreed. Later, when I heard the story and the planning, I was like, 'Oh my God, I'm so happy!' Finally, someone was considering me for a character like this. Usually, I'm cast in slightly sad or gloomy roles, but

Chumki, the character I'm playing, is fun and very exciting."

Sunerah also shared light-hearted moments from the set. "The shooting location was a little unusual, maybe even a bit eerie. I joked that even if there were supernatural things, we wouldn't get scared. There's one scene with my co-artist where our first scene is a little flirty. That was really funny for me because I'm usually not such a flirty person. During that scene, everyone was laughing and amazed at how I did it."

Sunerah's on-screen pairing with Arosh Khan has already resonated with television audiences, and the two are now collaborating on a larger production. "What excites me even more than working with all these senior artists is that it's not just about Arosh

Khan or me—it's about the whole team. The teamwork is strong, and every character is interesting. Arosh is doing a great job, and our friendship adds to the chemistry."

Speaking about her next project, *The Difficult Bride*, Sunerah said, "Rubaiyat Hossain Apu works very meticulously. I've never done a character like this before. It's a female-centric film with a strong technical team and a good budget. Rubaiyat Apu even texted me to say I looked very beautiful and that my acting was excellent."

Wrapping up, she shared her excitement for *Aatka*: "I had a lot of fun shooting for *Aatka*. I hope

audiences will love it as well. Don't forget to catch it on Chorki on January 15."

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHE



Apurba, Bindu reunite for 'Headline'

Popular small-screen stars Ziaul Faruq Apurba and Afsan Ara Bindu are set to reunite after a long gap in the upcoming web series *Headline*.

The political thriller is directed by Saleh Sobhan Auneeem, based on a screenplay by Syed Ahmed Shawki, best known for acclaimed projects such as *Taqdeer* and *Karagar*. The series is being produced for the OTT platform Hoichoi.

Multiple sources have confirmed to The Daily Star that both Apurba and Bindu will be playing key roles in the series, marking their return as an on-screen pair after years.

Apurba is expected to join the shooting later this month after returning to the country from the United States.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?



'Brushstrokes Across Generations'

This intimate father-daughter exhibition unfolds as a quiet dialogue between two artistic voices. Through layered textures and shared memory, the private viewing offers an early glimpse into how lineage, time, and emotion converge on canvas.

DATE: TODAY | JANUARY 9, 2026

TIME: 4PM ONWARDS

VENUE: SHALA ART SPACE, ALOKI

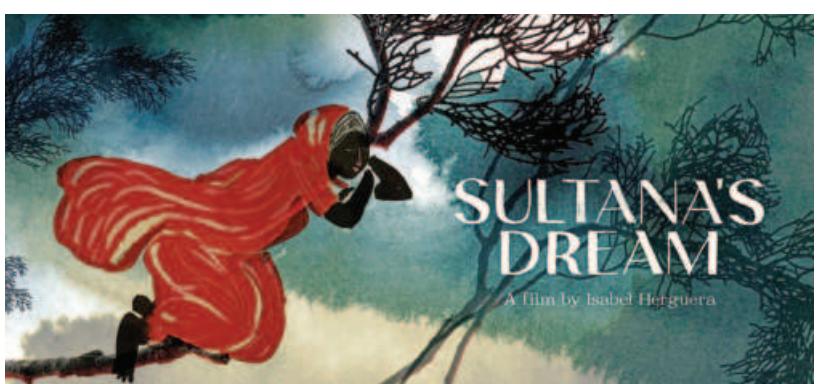
'Sultana's Dream' to hit Bangladeshi theatres this month

An animated feature inspired by Begum Rokeya's groundbreaking feminist novella *Sultana's Dream* is set to be released in Bangladeshi cinemas later this month.

Directed by Spanish filmmaker Isabel Herguera, the 86-minute Spanish-German co-production premiered at the San Sebastián International Film Festival in 2023, and released in Spain. It later screened at major

international festivals, winning several awards. Star Cineplex announced the Bangladeshi release on Wednesday by sharing the film's official trailer, though no exact date has been confirmed.

Sultana's Dream imagines a society where women lead public life, and men remain in domestic roles, a radical vision articulated by Rokeya more than a century ago.



NEWS

LPG supply disruption likely to continue

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told the regulator yesterday that it would not be possible for them to sell the standard 12kg LPG cylinder for less than Tk 1,500 after they agreed to call off their indefinite strike.

The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) fixed Tk 1,306 as the retail price for January, up from Tk 1,253 the previous month.

However, since mid-December, the product has been selling at a much higher price than the government-set rate, hitting Tk 2,200 in parts of Dhaka last week.

BERC Chairman Jalal Ahmed is hopeful that the supply will increase in the middle of January.

"LOAB leaders told us that they have opened LCs but are facing problems regarding shipments -- many consignments booked in December are yet to reach the country," he told journalists after a meeting with representatives of LP Gas Traders Cooperative Society, the association that called for an indefinite countrywide strike in the marketing and supply of LPG on Wednesday night.

Importers are arranging alternative measures to bring the fuel amid the vessel shortage, he added.

Meanwhile, to ease the ongoing

supply shortage, the government recommended reducing the value-added tax (VAT) at the import stage for LPG from 15 percent and exempting the 7.5 percent VAT on local bottling, other VATs at the trader level and the advance income tax.

The ministry of power, energy and mineral resources wrote to the National Board of Revenue to take necessary steps in this regard.

Moreover, the ministry wrote to the Bangladesh Bank to ease the procedure of opening letters of credits for LPG and provide loans from the bank's green funds considering the product as "green fuel".

Business leaders welcomed the government steps.

"Now it's up to us how fast we can bring them [LPG] in," said Haque, also the managing director of DeltaLPG.

During the meeting with BERC, the traders, mostly dealers and distributors, placed three demands: an end to ongoing administrative drives across the country, increasing distribution and retailers' charges and assurance of uninterrupted supply of LPG.

Though the importing companies have not been following the fixed rate, the distributors and retailers are being treated as "villains" to consumers

and they are being penalised by the administrative drives.

Ahmed assured them that the commission would discuss the administrative drives with the authorities and take legal steps to revise the charges.

He termed the demands "logical" but said it was unnecessary to call a strike to press home the demands.

Following the meeting, Md Selim Khan, president of the society, withdrew the strike.

But he said the traders cannot sell a 12-kg cylinder for less than Tk 1,500 as they purchase it from operators for more than Tk 1,300. "None of us can get LPG at the fixed rate, then how can we sell them at a fixed rate?"

In response, Ahmed said there is no logic for selling LPG above the commission's fixed January rate of Tk 1,306 per 12-kg cylinder and the traders may sell it at more than that rate once the charges are formally hiked.

As many as 33 companies have taken their licence, but now only nine of them are importing LPG, according to Ahmed.

"We will talk to the companies that are not in operation about whether they will continue their businesses."

Visitors to be hit the hardest

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Another PhD student in California said, "I wanted my parents to attend my graduation, but now that seems almost impossible."

Many Bangladeshi visa applicants, business owners, echoed the same sentiment.

Under the new policy, Bangladeshi citizens applying for US business or tourist visas -- known as B1 and B2 visas -- may require to deposit a refundable bond of \$5,000 to \$15,000.

In Bangladeshi currency, this amounts to roughly Tk 6 lakh to Tk 19 lakh, a sum many say is difficult to arrange.

The US State Department recently expanded its visa bond list from seven countries to 38. Bangladesh was added on January 6, and the new requirement will take effect on January 21.

The visa bond programme began in August last year. The bond applies only to B1 and B2 visas, and the amount -- \$5,000, \$10,000, or \$15,000 -- will be determined during the visa interview.

Consular officers will decide whether a bond is required and, if so, the amount, based on the applicant's personal circumstances and interview assessment. They may also issue a visa without requiring any bond.

Payment must be made through Pay.gov, the official online payment platform of the US Treasury, using a government-issued link. US authorities have warned against using third-party websites. Payments made without official instruction or through unofficial platforms will not be refunded.

The State Department has also clarified that paying a bond does not automatically guarantee a US visa.

WHY DID THE US INTRODUCE THE BOND RULE?

US officials say the bond requirement is intended to reduce visa overstays and illegal immigration, a major focus of the administration of US President Donald Trump.

According to the Fiscal Year 2024

Entry/Exit Overstay Report by US Customs and Border Protection, Bangladesh recorded a total overstay rate of 5.73 percent. Of this, 5.60 percent were suspected in country overstays, meaning more than 2,200 of 38,590 expected departures either overstayed their visas or were suspected of doing so. The report said India's overstay rate was 1.28 percent, Nepal's 3.12 percent, and Pakistan's 3.46 percent.

Immigration experts say countries with overstay rates significantly above the global average of 2.33 percent for non-visa waiver countries are more likely to face stricter entry controls.

Meanwhile, Bangladeshi business leaders have warned that the new US visa restrictions could disrupt trade and export activities.

AK Azad, chairman and managing director of Ha Mela Group, one of the largest apparel exporters to the US, said the company could face serious challenges due to changes in visa regulations.

He explained that many staff members travel to the US frequently to carry samples, meet clients, and perform other business critical tasks at customers' request.

"If our staff cannot travel as required, this will significantly affect us," he said.

Ashraf Ahmed, former president of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), said the restrictions could affect smaller businesses in particular.

Mir Nasir Hossain, former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), urged the government to seek clarification from US authorities.

Anwar ul Alam Chowdhury, president of the Bangladesh Chamber of Industries, echoed his peers and said any curb on travel would negatively affect exports.

Rizwan Rahman, another former DCCI president, said Bangladesh's weak standing in global reports had led to the move, though he said it would not affect large entrepreneurs.

Experts also say the US move may hit travel agencies, airlines, and tour operators badly, and it could damage the country's international image, potentially prompting other countries to tighten visa rules for Bangladeshis.

Abdus Salam Aref, former president of the Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB), said the new visa bond rule would sharply reduce travel from Bangladesh.

If flights are not increased to the three airports designated for Bangladeshi travellers -- Boston Logan International Airport, New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, and Washington Dulles International Airport -- ticket prices may soar.

Using other airports would violate bond conditions and complicate refunds, he said.

According to Aref, the bond may be forfeited if a visitor overstays, applies for asylum, seeks a change of visa status, or violates the approved duration of stay. If the traveller leaves the US within the permitted time or does not travel at all, the bond will be refunded, he said, adding that it is not clear how it will be done.

Prof Tasneem Siddiqui, acting executive director of Refugee and Migratory Movements, said the policy could disrupt overall migration to the US.

"While major businesses may not be affected, small business owners will face the greatest difficulty because they cannot block such large sums as bonds for a fixed period."

Foreign Ministry Adviser Touhid Hossain described the decision as "unfortunate, but not abnormal." "It is not imposed on Bangladesh alone... To me, it is nothing abnormal, but certainly unfortunate," he told reporters yesterday.

He added that the government has been working to prevent illegal migration and crack down on brokers facilitating irregular travel.

"Dhaka will, in a natural way, reach out to Washington to have Bangladesh removed from the list," he said.

Bangladesh suspends visa services

Meanwhile, visa services in the other two Deputy High Commissions in Chennai and Mumbai remain operational.

In recent weeks, there have been large-scale protests near Bangladesh missions in several Indian cities, with demonstrators citing alleged violence against minorities in Bangladesh.

July warriors to get immunity

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right to immunity," he wrote on his verified Facebook account.

Asif Nazrul said there is also a need to enact a law granting them immunity for the preventive actions they carried out against the killers of the fascist regime of Sheikh Hasina during the uprising.

The law adviser said Article 46 of the Constitution of Bangladesh allows such laws and noted that, in 1973, after the Liberation War,

"Such laws are completely legal," he

said, adding that similar indemnity laws were enacted in different countries after the fall of unpopular governments during the Arab Spring or in other contemporary revolutions or mass uprisings.

The law adviser said Article 46 of the Constitution of Bangladesh allows such laws and noted that, in 1973, after the Liberation War,

"It is our sacred duty to keep the July warriors safe," the adviser added.

Meanwhile, to ease the ongoing

immunity law was enacted for freedom fighters.

"In light of these precedents, the law ministry has prepared a draft of the indemnity ordinance. God willing, it will be placed for approval at the next meeting of the advisory council," he said.

He said Manjurul's company, MAM Power Limited, took a loan from the bank in 2005, and the outstanding amount now stands at Tk 89 crore.

Manjurul's lawyer, Muhammad Saifullah Mamun, said the HC had earlier issued an injunction preventing his client's company from being listed as a loan defaulter in the Credit Information Bureau.

He said Premier Bank and IDLC

later filed leave to appeal petitions against that order, following which the chamber judge stayed the HC ruling.

Responding to a query, Mamun said the issue of whether Manjurul can contest the election is a separate matter, as there was no specific prayer or order barring him from doing so.

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