



For more than five decades, Abul Hayat has remained a constant presence in Bangladesh's television drama and cinema. An accomplished actor, playwright and director, he continues to act in both television and film. Over the course of his career, he has received numerous accolades, including the Ekushey Padak.

I still write for joy: ABUL HAYAT

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Alongside acting, writing has long been central to his creative life. He has authored short stories, novels and newspaper columns, with several books already published. At the upcoming Amar Ekushey Book Fair, three new titles by Abul Hayat are set to be released.

In a conversation with The Daily Star, the veteran artiste spoke primarily about his journey as a writer.

Recounting how it all began, Abul Hayat recalled his student days at the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, where he served as general secretary of Sher-e-Bangla Hall.

"We were planning to publish a magazine, but no one was submitting any writing. There was simply nothing to print," he said with a smile. "So, I was asked to contribute a story. That put me in real trouble, because I had never written anything before."

He eventually wrote a short love story. When more material was needed, he submitted a travel narrative. The magazine was published with both pieces.

"Unfortunately, I no longer have those first two writings," he

said. "In 1971, the Pakistani army set fire to our hall. Many things were destroyed, including that magazine. Even now, I wonder how I managed to start writing stories at all."

Abul Hayat credits daily newspapers and fortnightly magazines with nurturing his writing career. At one point, Tarkalok was among the country's most popular magazines. Its editor, Arefin Badal, encouraged him to write a column titled *Jibon Khatay Footnote*. "The response from readers was remarkable," he said.

He also wrote for Bichitra. "Arun Chowdhury once asked me to write for Bichitra, and that's how it began," he recalled.

Later, he penned a long-running column titled "Esho Neepobone" for Prothom Alo. His first novel was *Trishnar Shasti*, followed by the short story collection *Ochena Tara*.

Asked what motivates him to write, Abul Hayat replied simply: "I write for the joy of it. Writing gives me pleasure. I've always loved reading stories and novels—this habit goes back to my childhood, and I still haven't lost it."

His earliest reading memories

began with detective novels by Swapan Kumar. "I bought them for six annas," he said. "Later, I started reading Sarat Chandra. Up to my matriculation exams, his books fascinated me deeply."

He then turned to writers such as Banafool, Manik Bandyopadhyay, Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay and Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay. "*Pather Panchali* affected me profoundly," he said. "I cried after reading *Aam Aatir Bhepu*. I couldn't accept Durga's death."

Even as an adult reader, certain works moved him deeply. "Rabindranath Tagore's 'Chhuti' made me cry as well," he admitted.

Meanwhile, preparations are underway for the release of three new books by Abul Hayat at this year's Amar Ekushey Book Fair. Two of the titles are *Elomelo Bhabnay Ashite Ashilam* and *Ghor*. The third, *Jugalbandi*, will be published by a different house and is a joint work by novelist Rabeya Khatun and Abul Hayat.

After decades of artistic achievement, Abul Hayat continues to write; not out of obligation or ambition, but for the enduring joy that words bring him.

'Ekshathe Alada': Yash-Parsa unite for Hoichoi Eid film

Hoichoi is set to introduce a new content format this Eid al-Fitr with the launch of one-hour original films, beginning with *Ekshathe Alada*, starring Yash Rohan and Parsa Evana in the lead roles. Directed by Rezaur Rahman, the romantic comedy explores contemporary urban relationships, focusing on love, misunderstandings, personal space and career-driven tensions.

The film marks Rahman's directorial debut on the streaming platform and brings together Yash and Parsa for their first collaboration on Hoichoi. Alongside the lead pair, the cast includes Tariq Anam Khan, Tuskar Khan, Rosey Siddiqui and Deepa Khandakar. The makers describe the project as a timely story reflecting everyday relationships, designed to offer audiences a compact yet engaging viewing experience this Eid.



Mehazabien, Pritom to lead Shihab Shaheen's new Chorki series

Filmmaker Shihab Shaheen is set to direct a new web series for Chorki, starring Mehazabien Chowdhury and Pritom Hasan in the lead roles. The Chorki original series is currently titled *Cactus*, though the name may be changed later.

Blending dramedy, thriller, and action elements, the series is written entirely by Shihab Shaheen, who has penned

the story, screenplay, and dialogues. The series will portray the journey of an ordinary young man who gradually becomes a spy. It is slated for release later this year.

The ensemble cast also includes Manosh Bandyopadhyay, Salahuddin Lavlu, Shahadat Hossain, Naziba Basher, among others.



NEWS

Govt salary hike questionable

FROM PAGE 12

is needed to determine where and how the effectiveness of government spending has actually improved. There is little discussion about wasteful government projects and administrative costs, and effective accountability for these expenses is largely absent."

He said although salaries of government officials have increased significantly, there is no clear assessment of whether this has led to better performance, improved service delivery, or higher efficiency in development projects.

Pointing to the government flats for secretaries on the capital's Minto Road, he said they are "more luxurious than many five-star hotels".

"Bangladesh cannot move forward without proper management of public expenditure.... What is more concerning is the absence of strong and effective accountability mechanisms to monitor such spending."

"Several serious inefficiencies have taken root in the state system. One is the funding crisis. Another is the lack of transparency in decision-making. There are also projects driven by the ego of those in power."

Referring to the recent

appointment of three government officials to the Biman Bangladesh Airlines board, Zillur said, "What is the explanation for this? If there were valid reasons for the appointments, what is the problem with making them public? The lack of transparency in decision-making persists in this government as well. It existed before, and we must ensure it does not continue in the future."

He alleged that mega projects lack proper prioritisation and transparency.

"Corruption is a major problem, but no research has so far been able to prove that corruption has decreased. People no longer want to hear promises; they want to see real work. Various reform initiatives, including in the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Media Commission, have not been effective in practice."

Expressing doubt over the upcoming election, he said, "The government is talking about it being the best election in history, but in reality, there is a growing fear that it could become the worst election in history."

Although the country is now moving towards the polls, the important decisions the government is taking every day do not fall under

routine work, he said, adding, "Their real intentions remain unclear."

Zillur said the government has spoken extensively about reforms and held many dialogues but has not been able to create a single visible example. "They have even failed to set an example in a basic area like traffic management."

BNP Vice Chairman Asaduzzaman Ripon said members of parliament should have adequate benefits in principle. "However, being an MP should be a full-time responsibility, not a part-time job."

"Many people become MPs primarily to increase business or professional advantages. They often use their position to easily influence secretariat officials, ministers, or bureaucrats."

Moderated by CGS Executive Director Parvez Karim Abbasi, the event featured speakers including Dhaka University (Administration) Pro-Vice-Chancellor Prof Syma Haque Bidisha; M Abu Yusuf, executive director of RAPID (Research and Policy Integration for Development); and Mahmudul Islam Chowdhury, former mayor of Chittagong City Corporation, among others.

Saraswati Puja today

FROM PAGE 12

appearing when nature is at its most vibrant.

She is depicted as a graceful woman with a crescent moon on her brow, riding a swan or peacock, or seated on a lotus.

The largest celebration will take place at Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University, where thousands of devotees are expected to join rituals and visit pandals set up on the dormitory playground.

According to a press release, 76 puja mandaps have been set up under the supervision of the Jagannath Hall administration.

The programme will feature rituals, cultural events, devotional

music and offerings, reflecting the hall's long-standing Saraswati Puja tradition.

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday issued a message extending his heartfelt greetings and congratulations to members of the Hindu community on this occasion.

In his message, he said Bangladesh is a shining example of communal harmony where, for thousands of years, people of all religions and ethnicities have lived together in mutual respect and amity.

"This country belongs to all of us. Bangladesh is a safe and peaceful homeland for everyone, irrespective of religion or caste," he said.

Airlines cheer

FROM PAGE 12

United Airways, which has ceased operation, owes CAAB Tk 355.37 crore: Tk 56.88 crore is the main amount and the remaining Tk 298.49 crore is accumulated surcharge.

Regent Air, also defunct, owes Tk 283.38 crore: the main amount is Tk 136.18 crore and the remaining Tk 147.20 crore is late fee.

"We have been urging the regulatory authority to reduce the rate for many years, but nobody paid heed to our request to save the industry. Finally, our demand has been met. We are completely satisfied with the government's move which

will be helpful for the country's aviation industry," Mofizur said.

The move will also benefit the passengers, according to aviation experts.

At present, only three private airlines are in operation: US Bangla Airlines, Novoair and Air Astra.

If more airlines enter the market, the price of ticket will reduce due to competitiveness, said Wahidul.

"When we took the move to revive the operation of United Airways, foreign investors declined to invest when they came to know about the black law of high rate of surcharge," said ATM Nazrul Islam, another aviation expert.

Woman burnt to death

FROM PAGE 12

attacked the house of Abdul Wahab, a local shop owner, the OC said.

Most of the residents managed to flee, but Wahab's mother, Sabiha Begum, was burnt alive inside the house, he added.

According to Prothom Alo, Wahab is nephew of Alauddin Munshi, former general secretary of Kalom union unit Awami League.

Rejaul's nephew Haider Rashid, former general secretary of the union unit BNP, told Prothom Alo that supporters of Alauddin Munshi killed Rejaul.

However, police are yet to say anything about the motive behind

the killings.

The OC said no case had been filed in connection with the incidents as of 8:30pm last night. Both bodies were handed over to their respective families after autopsies.

Additional law enforcement personnel have been deployed in the area to prevent further untoward incidents, he added.

Contacted, BNP Natore district unit member secretary Md Asaduzzaman confirmed that Rejaul was a supporter of BNP, but held no party post.

"We cannot yet confirm whether the incident occurred due to political rivalry or personal enmity," he said.

'Things are really calming down'

FROM PAGE 12

said yesterday it was not joining at present. China has not yet said whether it will join, reports Reuters.

However, around 35 countries have committed to join including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Turkey.

Permanent members must also pay \$1 billion to join, leading to criticisms that the board could become a "pay to play" version of the UN Security Council.

The board's creation was endorsed by a United Nations Security Council resolution as part of Trump's Gaza peace plan, and UN spokesperson Rolando Gomez said yesterday that UN engagement with the board would only be in that context.

US urges Syria to support jihadist transfer to Iraq

AFP, Damascus

The commander of US forces in the Middle East has called on Syria's president to support the transfer of thousands of jihadist prisoners from Syria to Iraq, the US military said.

In a phone call on Wednesday, Admiral Brad Cooper urged Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa to "avoid any actions that could interfere" with the process.

The United States said Wednesday it was launching an operation to move up to 7,000 Islamic State group jihadists across the border.

The announcement came after the withdrawal of Kurdish-led forces who had long secured the detention camps, as Syrian government troops took control of Kurdish territory in the north and northeast.

Iraqi and US authorities have already announced the transfer of a first group of 150 prisoners, a mix of Iraqis and foreigners.

Sharaa and Cooper also discussed "the importance of Syrian government forces adhering to a ceasefire" with the Kurdish forces, the statement by the US military's Central Command added.

What may cash aid actually mean?

FROM PAGE 12

it does not cannibalise long-term development spending on health and education.

The dilemma becomes starker when viewed alongside other major fiscal proposals.

A pay commission recommendation to raise salaries for government employees by as much as 142 percent would, if fully implemented, add an estimated Tk 1.06 lakh crore a year to the budget.

The state already spends about Tk 1.31 lakh crore on salaries and pensions; the proposal would effectively double the public-sector wage bill.

Such an expansion would place severe strain on public finances and risk fuelling inflation — disproportionately hurting the very groups social protection programmes are meant to shield.

The BNP's broader roadmap also includes "farmer cards" to provide

digital identities and "seasonal credit", aimed at reducing dependence on middlemen.

Although Jamaat has yet to unveil detailed welfare plans, the deeper anxiety surrounding social safety nets is less about the availability of funds, but more about the mechanism of delivery.

Bangladesh's history with social protection is riddled with "inclusion and exclusion errors" — a polite term for patronage and graft.

Prof AK Enamul Haque, director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said social safety nets suffer from longstanding structural flaws.

"The right people often don't receive the benefits. It's not just that. Sometimes one person gets support while another, who should, gets nothing. In past regimes, we faced these issues," he said.

Haque noted that even attempts to modernise delivery through digital

payments have failed to resolve these problems.

"Our governments have tried digital payments, but the problems remained unresolved," he said, adding that accurate physical delivery to the right people remains crucial.

Without a clear plan to prevent political interference, these proposed family or social welfare cards risk becoming another set of symbolic gestures.

"The key point is that it must not follow political patterns; it should actually reach the intended beneficiaries," he said.

There are at least two challenges ahead: support must be sufficient — far exceeding the current Tk 600–850 monthly payments for the elderly and people with disabilities — and it must be designed to avoid work disincentives or political patronage.

"Both parties need to pay attention to this," Haque said.