

# BEYOND STEREOTYPES: Rupert Grey’s ‘Homage to Bangladesh’



PHOTOS: COURTESY

NAVEEN ISLAM TOREE

“Bangladesh is an international basket case!”

The comment, made by former United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in March 1972, reflects a mindset that still lingers in many Western narratives about Bangladesh today.

Rupert Grey, a descendant of Charles Grey and best known professionally as a leading libel and copyright lawyer stood against this statement. “If Bangladesh is a basket case,” Grey tells The Daily Star, “then it is so in the best possible way.” For him, the term collapses under the sheer vitality of the country. A single square metre of a Bangladeshi street, he argues, holds more energy than entire neighbourhoods in London. Where life in England often unfolds in rigid routines, Bangladesh thrives in spontaneity—where a hanging lighter at a tea stall can become a



moment of shared choreography.

For decades, Bangladesh has been framed through a narrow international lens—one shaped largely by narratives of floods, fragility, and poverty. Rarely has the country been viewed by a patient observer willing to look beyond disaster and discover beauty. The stories of everyday resilience, humility, and quiet determination are often overshadowed by inherited prejudices of the Global North. *Homage to Bangladesh* is Grey’s attempt to challenge that perspective.

Grey’s photographic work reveals a deeply personal creative journey—one shaped not by passing curiosity, but by lived experience, long-term engagement, and respect.

These ideas were explored further at a recent *Book Talk* at Justice Shahabuddin Park, where Grey was in conversation with Imran Rahman, Professor of Finance at the University of Liberal Arts

Bangladesh. Sponsored by Securex under its initiative *Voices Shaping Society*, the event positioned the book as more than a visual archive—it became an invitation to rethink how Bangladesh is seen, remembered, and represented.

Grey’s relationship with Bangladesh began in 1992, when he travelled to the Sundarbans with his family. But it was his invitation from the British Council to attend Chobi Mela in 2004 that proved transformative. What began as a professional assignment evolved into a connection spanning nearly two decades.

Rather than foregrounding crisis, *Homage to Bangladesh* documents everyday life—faces caught in thought, labour unfolding at its own rhythm, communities shaped by history yet grounded in the present. In resisting spectacle, the book challenges the reductive stereotypes that have followed Bangladesh since its independence in 1971.

*Homage to Bangladesh* offers something rare: time. Time to look, to listen, and to recognise a country in its full human complexity.

## WHAT’S THE HAPS?

### ‘Rickshaw Art Festival 2026’

Shei Dhaka & NSUAPC are bringing the *Rickshaw Art Festival 2026*, celebrating Bangladesh’s iconic rickshaw art through a contemporary lens. Blending tradition with pop culture and film-banner aesthetics, the festival will feature exhibitions, workshops, film screenings, and panel discussions. It will bring together students, artists, media, and cultural stakeholders in a vibrant creative exchange.



**Date:** Wednesday–Saturday | Jan 28–31  
**Time:** 10:00am–6:00pm  
**Venue:** North South University Exhibition Center

## Vicky Zahed to direct romantic thriller ‘Pulsirat’

Vicky Zahed is set to direct a new romantic thriller titled *Pulsirat*. The director has officially signed an agreement with SVF Alpha-1 Entertainment Limited and the film’s title has already been registered with the Bangladesh Film Directors’ Association.

In addition to directing *Pulsirat*, Zahed is also writing the screenplay, with the first draft already completed.

Speaking to Prothom Alo, Shahriar Shakil, managing director of SVF Alpha-1 Entertainment Limited, said that the makers are considering Afran Nisho and Mehazabien Chowdhury for the two lead roles. Discussions with both actors are currently underway, though the casting has not yet been finalised.

Vicky Zahed has previously worked with the Nisho-Mehazabien pairing on several popular projects including *Chirokal Aaj*, *Punorjonmo* and *Redrum*.



## Apu Biswas returns to OTT with ‘Shikar’

After nearly three years away from regular shooting, Apu Biswas returned to work toward the end of last year. Continuing her comeback, she has now signed a new web film titled *Shikar*, directed by Kamruzzaman Roman, marking her latest venture into web-based content.

Apu previously appeared in the web film *Chayabazi*, directed by Syed Shakil, which

was released in 2023. With *Shikar*, she is once again exploring the digital platform, this time in a thriller set against a border-area backdrop.

In *Shikar*, Apu will star alongside small-screen actor Polash. The story and screenplay have been written by Abdullah Zahir Babu. The cast also includes Rashed Mamun Apu and Mahmudul Islam Mithu, among others.

Most of the film’s shooting is scheduled to take place in Nepal, with the team set to depart in early March. If all goes as planned, the web film will be released on a local OTT platform. The platform name and release date will be announced officially soon.



# NEWS

## Onslaught of AI content aims to sway voters

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apply their content moderation tools and policies effectively to fight disinformation, especially during elections.

### ATTACKER, TARGET, NARRATIVE

More than half the content spread by these actors were classified as manipulative content, followed by disinformation (39.18 percent). The remaining 9 percent were categorised as hate speech, religious provocation, character assassination, and sexual and gender-based violence.

Of them, 50 deepfakes and cheapfakes came from pages or profiles that appear to support Jamaat. BNP-aligned pages contributed 30 contents,

Awami League political landscape, has largely focused on attacking one another on social media as the ground campaign also heats up.

Most of the pro-Jamaat posts targeting BNP centred on allegations of extortion and corruption. For example, a video posted on January 13 by a page called Haque Television depicted a fruit seller claiming that the BNP was planning to steal votes in the same way as the Awami League. He ended with a call to resist “terrorists and extortionists.”

Beyond efforts to delegitimise the BNP, many posts from Jamaat-aligned pages and profiles targeted the general public by promoting

highlighting alleged violations of Islamic principles that turn people away from Jamaat.

In one reel, an AI figure references BNP’s nomination of four individuals from Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam Bangladesh party, portraying the party as the true pro-Islamic one and urging viewers to vote for BNP.

On the other hand, the highest share of Jamaat-aligned AI videos were designed to project broad-based support for the party by attributing endorsements to diverse social groups, including supposed Hindu individuals, rickshaw pullers and other working class people.

In one video, a man speaking in Bangla is shown standing in a desert environment, claiming that, as a migrant, he has “seen everything” and would vote for Jamaat in the upcoming election.

Two more videos explicitly equated voting for and supporting Jamaat and its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir, with supporting Islam itself. One urged viewers to “Let your vote be in favour of Islam,” while another framed Shibir’s recent victories in student council elections as a victory for Islam.

Overall, 50 of the 97 AI contents analysed appeared manipulative. Jamaat-aligned pages and profiles accounted for the largest share of these posts (34), followed by BNP-affiliated actors with 14, while Awami League-aligned sources contributed two.

For this investigation, manipulation was defined as content that seeks to generate fear, bias, or false binaries without presenting verifiable or falsifiable evidence, relying instead on insinuation or rhetorical framing.

### VOTERS FALL FOR IT

Comment sections show that many users are falling for this manipulation trap, taking the content to be true, although some flagged the content as AI-made.

For instance, in an AI-generated video, which received 2,700 comments, a supposedly Hindu individual was depicted saying that this time the Hindus would vote for Jamaat. Commenting on the post, one user said, “Alhamdulillah Bhalo.”

The majority of comments below the same post appear to be positive, although many seem to be coming from bots.

Some users were also quick to call out the deception to alert other users. Md Reazul Hassan, a verified user, commented, “AI Video.”

This pattern of positive comments

and calling out the deception is evident across the AI-generated content from other pages and profiles.

However, the engagement (1.6 million for these 97 contents) is distributed unevenly across parties, with Jamaat-aligned profiles and pages dominating both volume and reach, potentially influencing many of them.

For example, Jamaat-aligned Uttorbongo Television, with 14 videos, alone attracted over 1.06 million engagements, roughly 64 percent of all engagements across all posts. Other Jamaat-aligned pages include Akhi’s Story, Haque Television, and Jamaat Shibir Supporters.

Together, these four pages account for 44.33 percent of the 97 posts analysed, but about 78.37 percent of total engagement, revealing pro-Jamaat actors’ dominance in generating engagement.

Similar to Jamaat-aligned pages, where one or two pages accounted for a disproportionately large share of total engagement, the same pattern was observed among BNP-aligned entities. Of the total engagement attracted by pro-BNP AI content analysed, 97% came from Next Insight Network.

In contrast, Awami League-affiliated pages had a limited reach.

From 17 posts coming from 10 profiles and pages, they generated 11,800 engagements. Although AL-aligned pages produced 17.53 percent of the AI content analysed for this investigation, they accounted for less than 1 percent of engagement, suggesting a weaker circulation network.

The most prominent pro-AL actor was Shipon Islam, who disseminated six AI contents and accounted for 59.15 percent of the total engagement generated by Awami League-aligned actors.

A recent investigation by Dismislab, a fact-checking organisation, identified him as the third-largest spreader of disinformation in 2025, responsible for 62 such content.

Shipon Islam (AL-aligned), Engr. Jahirul Islam Tom (BNP-aligned), and Next Insight Network (BNP-aligned) did not respond to multiple text messages.

Uttorbongo Television and Haque Television (Jamaat-affiliated) replied, denying any political ties and claiming their videos aim to present the “truth” to society.

Both pages avoided direct questions regarding the authenticity of their content or whether their AI-generated videos were misleading the public with disinformation.

Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury, managing director of Digitally Right, said the influence of synthetic media depends entirely on a voter’s individual digital literacy, making public awareness far more effective than police enforcement in preventing deception.

“While some can easily spot AI, others may be deeply misled by the ‘realism’ of the persona presented. This issue cannot be tackled by the police; it requires widespread awareness so that voters understand that what they see online isn’t always real,” he told The Daily Star.

Asked about the role of social media platforms in preventing manipulative AI content and disinformation, he said, “Platforms have the technical capacity to detect coordinated inauthentic behaviour and bot-driven engagement, but there are questions about their will to enforce these policies effectively. We need more transparency from platforms to act as watchdogs, and to share exactly why and under whose directive content is being moderated or removed.”

[Authors are interns at The Daily Star. See online for a more detailed version and full methodology.]

Additional reporting and research: Nourin Sultana Toma, Mir Rownak and Tarek Hossain

while pro-Awami League (AL) pages spread 17 such items during the one month period.

However, none of these pages and profiles monitored for this investigation are official handles of any political parties.

Their political affiliation was determined through a review of the 30 most recent posts from each page or profile at the start of the monitoring period in mid-December last year.

Classification was based on the consistency of narratives, including sustained promotion of a particular political party, repeated opposition to specific actors, the nature of interventions in ongoing political debates as well as visual and symbolic cues.

Analysis shows the BNP was the most frequently targeted political actor, with 27 posts directed against the party, all originating from pro-Jamaat entities. Jamaat closely followed, facing 26 posts, 24 of which came from pro-BNP actors, which is 80 percent of the total pro-BNP content analysed.

This pattern indicates that online political activity between the two parties, now the most prominent contenders in Bangladesh’s post-

pro-Jamaat narratives intended to shape public opinion. These included false endorsements from AI-made characters, fabricated achievements, and portrayals of Jamaat as morally upright and superior to BNP.

By contrast, Awami League-aligned pages and profiles have been targeting the interim government that replaced them, the individuals leading the new administration, and actors associated with the removal of the AL regime. These targets included student coordinators, interim government advisers, and leaders of the National Citizen Party (NCP).

The pro-AL entities also attacked prominent female politicians such as Tasnim Jara, DUCSU leader Fatima Zuma, and July uprising frontliner Tahrira Jannat Surovi. These posts, often suggesting moral laxity and sexual corruption, placed female leaders, sometimes alongside their male counterparts, into fabricated or compromising scenarios.

### MANUFACTURING CONSENT

Majority of BNP-aligned manipulative content sought to undermine Jamaat’s Islamic credentials, calling out its role in the 1971 Liberation War, suggesting covert affiliations with India, and

## স্থান পরিবর্তন

### ব্র্যাক ব্যাংক বিজয়নগর শাখা এখন নতুন ঠিকানায় আরও বড় পরিসরে

#### পুরাতন ঠিকানা

ডবনের নাম: টেপা কমপ্লেক্স হোল্ডিং নং: ১৬৯ (১/১ সাবেক)  
সড়ক: সৈয়দ নজরুল ইসলাম সরণি, ওয়ার্ড নম্বর: ১৩  
সিটি কর্পো/পৌরসভা: ঢাকা দক্ষিণ সিটি কর্পো.  
থানা: পল্টন, জেলা: ঢাকা

#### নতুন ঠিকানা

ডবনের নাম: আকরাম টাওয়ার (২য় তলা)  
হোল্ডিং নং: ১৯৯ (বিজয়নগর), সড়ক: সৈয়দ নজরুল  
ইসলাম সরণি, ওয়ার্ড নম্বর: ২০  
সিটি কর্পো/পৌরসভা: ঢাকা দক্ষিণ সিটি কর্পো.  
থানা: রমনা, জেলা: ঢাকা।

২৪ ঘণ্টা কল সেন্টার: ১৬২২১

