

A film isn't a race, you don't have to be 'first': RAIHAN RAFI

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN
MISHA

The 'whistle' seems to be blowing loud for Raihan Rafi as he gears up to present what could be one of the most experimental films of his career, with *Pressure Cooker*.

Since the trailer dropped, audiences have been raving about its striking colour-grading, breathtaking cinematography, and bold storytelling. For Rafi, the film is also a personal milestone — it marks the first time he has stepped in as a co-producer, adding a new layer to his creative journey.

After delivering a hat-trick of commercially successful films, the director is now exploring

new territory. With *Pressure Cooker*, he has set out to create a story that doesn't fit neatly into either the art-house or mainstream commercial category.

The trailer immediately caught attention with its unusual title: 'Whistle'. For Rafi, the name is deeply symbolic. "The name connects both to a pressure cooker and to sound," he said. The first whistle heard in the trailer was created entirely through sound editing, reflecting the chaotic rhythm of the city at the heart of the story.

"When you think of Dhaka, the first thing that comes to mind is sound—the streets, the traffic, the constant buzz. We tried to symbolically portray the city through that idea."

The conversation turned to the film's female-led cast. While some might describe it as a "women-centric" film, Rafi is careful with the term. "I don't like calling it that. When you say a film is women-centric, it feels like you're diminishing the women. Do we call films about men 'men-centric'?"

Pressure Cooker follows

a hyperlink narrative, weaving together multiple interconnected storylines. It also presents familiar actors in completely new avatars. Viewers will see different sides of Bubby and Nazifa Tushi, alongside new talents like Snigdha Chowdhury and Mariya Hossain Mehnati.

Preparing the cast took months of rehearsal and planning. Tushi, for instance, underwent extensive training to authentically portray a worker at a message parlour. "This isn't something you can just act out," Rafi said. "She trained with professional beauticians to truly understand the work and environment."

The production itself was ambitious. To create a realistic setting, the team built a full-scale parlour, so convincing that anyone entering it felt like they were stepping into a real establishment. "Anyone who entered the set felt like they were actually in a real parlour," Rafi said.

Rafi continued, "*Pressure Cooker* is a film where I've mixed a r t a n d

commercial elements. You can't call it an art film, nor purely a commercial film—you can just call it a good film. That's what we should call it. You'll see Dhaka in this film; you'll recognise our city. Many filmmakers follow Tamil or Western cinema, but I want to make films for my own people, my own audience."

Visual storytelling was particularly important for him. "If I had shot this in America, every frame would naturally look beautiful. But in Bangladesh, creating strong, beautiful cinematography is a challenge. The first shot is of our country's mustard fields, and I tried to layer a lot of story and depth into it—a child watching women in burqas, leading into the hidden, darker side of Dhaka inside a message parlour."

Rafi described the trailer as a roller-coaster ride. "Through the spa centre and the sounds within it, the trailer tries to show the full feel of the film. The ride ends, and so does the trailer."

He also reflected on the state of local cinema today. "People have grown bored seeing the same things over and over—the same fights, the same conflicts. That's what's trending now: violence, violence, violence. Meanwhile, our original films are losing their place.

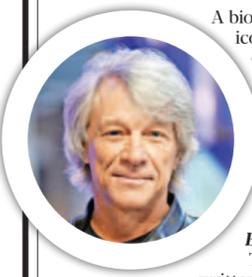
Some people are already saying they're not interested after watching the trailer, but many others realise that this will actually be something different."

"Even if the film gets termed 'experimental' on its budget, it can still recover. But if people like it, it will be a blockbuster. I believe the audience will enjoy it. A film isn't a race—you don't have to be first or second. A film is a director's philosophy, the hunger of his mind. I want to give my audience something new. If they like it, they'll say it's good; if not, they'll say it's bad. That's what cinema is."



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Bon Jovi biopic in development at Universal Pictures



A biographical film based on the iconic rock band Bon Jovi is currently in development at Universal Pictures. The studio secured the project after a competitive bidding process and will produce the film centred on the band behind hits such as *Livin' on a Prayer*, *You Give Love a Bad Name*, and *It's My Life*.

The screenplay is being written by Cody Brotter. A director and cast have not yet been announced. Formed in 1983, Bon Jovi includes vocalist Jon Bon Jovi, keyboardist David Bryan and drummer Tico Torres. The band has been inducted into both the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and the Songwriters Hall of Fame. Producers include Kevin J Walsh and Gotham Chopra.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Art for Hope'

Young voices take colour and form at *Art for Hope*, a children's exhibition where artworks by girls and participants of resilience, imagination and possibility. Each piece reflects lived experience, turning small canvases into quiet declarations of courage, dignity and hope.



DATE: TODAY (THURSDAY) | MARCH 12, 2026
TIME: 3 PM – 8 PM
VENUE: ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE DE DHAKA, DHANMONDI

NEWS

'Take oath for Constitution Reform Council'

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Jamaat-led 11-party electoral alliance were present at the meeting, which was chaired by the Jamaat ameer.

He said the meeting openly discussed what role the opposition MPs should play in fulfilling the expectations of the people ahead of the inaugural session of parliament.

"We want the Jatiya Sangsad to play an effective and meaningful role in meeting the expectations of the country and its people. We have already said that we want to play a responsible role as the opposition."

According to him, the opposition's stance is neither to oppose for the sake of opposition nor to cooperate blindly. The opposition will support and cooperate with any positive decision made by the government for the welfare of the country.

However, if decisions that harm the country or its people are made, the opposition will first point out the mistakes, allow room for correction, and protest if necessary.

"If protest does not work, we will stand firm in defence of the people's rights. But we want problems to be resolved at the earliest stage."

The Jamaat chief said many parliaments in Bangladesh's history could not complete their full terms. This parliament, he said, was formed following a long political struggle and

sacrifices.

"The movement of '24 took place through immense sacrifice and endurance. Many people lost their lives, many were injured, and many were imprisoned. In honour of those sacrifices, we must establish justice and a society free from discrimination."

The Jamaat ameer added that his party accepted the outcomes of the parliamentary election and the reform-related referendum held on the same day in the greater interest of the country.

Urging the ruling party MPs to take oath of the "Constitutional Reform Council", he said, "We call on them to honour July... Ignoring '24 will not bring any good news for the nation in 2026."

He said his party would work to ensure what the people chose in the referendum and extend full cooperation to the government in this regard.

Responding to a question about the deputy speaker's post, Shahiqur said the BNP had informally contacted them on the matter.

"We thank them for that. But we don't want anything in fragments. The July reform proposal should be fully implemented. That proposal states that one deputy speaker will come from the opposition," he said.

At the briefing, the Jamaat ameer said the opposition wants to play its role in parliament through democratic

means and does not favour going to court unless absolutely necessary.

"We want problems to be resolved within parliament through discussion and debate. If the speaker gives adequate opportunity to all sides, the beauty of democracy will emerge, and a sustainable democratic system can be established."

Earlier, while speaking to reporters in parliament, Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Syed Abdullah Mohammed Taher described President Mohammed Shahabuddin as an "ally of authoritarianism".

"We believe the president has no right to deliver a speech in parliament," he said, adding, "Why the BNP is allowing him to speak is not clear to us. We have made some decisions on this issue, and you will know about them tomorrow [today]."

Regarding the issues discussed at the parliamentary committee meeting, Taher said some guidance had been given to the party's MPs about how they should act in parliament. "Since most of the MPs are new, we briefed them on parliamentary formalities, criteria, character, and language."

Asked whether the opposition MPs decided to stage a walkout during the president's speech, a Jamaat MP, who attended the meeting, told The Daily Star, "We will not decide hastily on any matter."

High chicken price hurting low-income families

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president of the Bangladesh Poultry Association, a platform for marginal farmers.

This situation is harming both small farmers, who cannot get fair prices for their produce, and consumers, who face inflated costs, he added.

Egg production is not constant, as supply changes when farmers sell old hens or when young chickens mature and begin laying eggs, said Kazi Zahin Hasan, a director of Kazi Farms.

Consumer demand also fluctuates, with preferences shifting among foods. In winter, people spend more on seasonal vegetables and less on eggs.

The egg prices were low for months due to higher supply, while the recent increase may reflect lower production or rising demand, Hasan added.

But for day labourers like Sourav Mia, the sharp rise in chicken prices in just a week is a huge blow.

"I urge the government to make prompt intervention," he said.

'Careful what you say'

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Among the initiatives he highlighted was the BNP's election pledge known as the "Family Card" programme, a social assistance scheme aimed at supporting poor households across the country.

"Our Family Card programme was criticised by many. But even before the ink on the voters' fingers faded, we started implementing our promise. This is BNP. This is the BNP people want to see," Tarique told lawmakers at the meeting.

The programme would be rolled out in the near future. The government was also preparing to launch a nationwide canal excavation initiative aimed at improving water management.

Tarique also urged the ministers and lawmakers to take steps to improve public cleanliness as the country approaches the dengue season, a recurring health concern during the warmer months.

The prime minister also touched upon the July National Charter, a framework for political reforms that has drawn differing responses from various parties.

Some parties have submitted formal notes of dissent on parts of the charter, but the government would proceed with the sections that are considered implementable, he said.

A total of 133 ordinances were issued during the tenure of the interim government, and under the constitution, they must be placed before parliament at its first session, scheduled to start today.

During the meeting, Tarique also emphasised the importance of discipline within the cabinet, particularly among younger ministers.

While acknowledging the presence of many senior figures in the government, he said newer members of the cabinet must set an example by maintaining regular office hours.

"Younger ministers must reach the office by nine in the morning," he said, according to attendees.

He also urged ministers to follow traffic rules while travelling to and from work, he said, adding that he himself observes those regulations.

Beyond administrative matters, Tarique called for austerity in daily life, warning that global economic pressures could affect Bangladesh in the coming months.

He pointed specifically to tensions

in the Middle East, including the situation involving Iran, the US and Israel, which could cause upheaval in the global economy.

The parliamentary meeting also addressed procedural matters inside the legislature.

Lawmakers agreed to assign Tarique as the leader of the House and the responsibility of selecting the new speaker and deputy speaker of parliament.

Hafiz Uddin Ahmad, the Liberation War Affairs minister, is being preferred for the post of speaker, The Daily Star has learned from people involved with the deliberations.

For the post of deputy speaker, the party is considering Andaleve Rahman Partho, Muhammad Nawshad Zamir and Mahbub Uddin Khokon if the opposition declines the BNP's offer to take the position.

Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain and Salahuddin Ahmed are in the running for the position of deputy leader of the House.

The formal activities of this parliamentary session will begin with an opening or welcome speech by Tarique. In that speech, he will invite a senior BNP lawmaker to preside over the opening session as per rules given that the speaker and deputy speaker are unavailable. Then, the process of electing the new speaker and deputy speaker will be completed, said BNP Standing Committee Member Salahuddin.

The newly elected speaker and deputy speaker will take the oath before President Mohammed Shahabuddin.

The parliamentary sitting will then resume. During that sitting, the House is expected to elect members to the panel of chairpersons and form key parliamentary bodies, including the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) and other standing committees.

"This session is important and historic for national life — several historic decisions will be taken," Salahuddin told journalists after the meeting.

The law minister will place several ordinances promulgated during the tenure of the interim government before the House.

President Shahabuddin will deliver a speech before the House. The BAC will determine the duration and agenda of the session.

Migrants' woes mount in war-hit Lebanon

FROM PAGE 1

stopped," he told The Daily Star by phone from Dahi, a suburb of the Lebanese capital Beirut that has been under intense Israeli attack.

"Now I'm stuck here without work or money. I'm buying food on credit," Ripon said, adding that five other Bangladeshis in his neighbourhood are facing the same situation.

On March 3, Israel's military began striking Hezbollah targets in Lebanon after the Iranian-backed Shia group launched rockets and drones at the Israeli city of Haifa to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Since then, Israeli forces have intensified and expanded their attacks. UN agencies report massive displacement across the region, along with soaring food and fuel prices that threaten to deepen hunger and suffering among the most vulnerable.

According to Unicef, the attacks have forced nearly 800,000 people — including around 200,000 children

— from their homes, in addition to tens of thousands already displaced in previous escalations.

Around 100,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers — men and women — are employed in Lebanon, according to sources.

Abdul Karim, president of the Lebanon Probashi Sramik Union, a group representing Bangladeshi migrants, said the latest fighting has already left an estimated 5,000 Bangladeshis in the country displaced and jobless.

"Every day, bombings target Hezbollah and Shia dominated areas. Even civilian places where Shias live or move are also being targeted," he said.

National and international NGOs are providing some assistance — food, medicine and shelter — but many people are still not receiving support, he added.

Karim said many migrants are fleeing their neighbourhoods for safer areas and staying away from work, while fear and uncertainty

are spreading through migrant communities.

Fatima Akhter, who works as a peon at a company, has not gone to work for the past five days after bombings destroyed many buildings nearby.

"Many people are sleeping on the streets, hungry," she said.

"I would like to go home now and return to Lebanon when the situation stabilises," Fatima added, noting that no one knows when the war will end.

Anwar Hossain, first secretary (labour) at the Bangladesh embassy in Lebanon, said they are using social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp groups, along with community organisations, to urge migrants to move to safer locations.

"Our migrants who face risks are now living in groups and families in safer places. No Bangladeshi has been killed or injured so far," he told this correspondent yesterday, adding that the embassy has not set up any shelter centres yet.

"We will do so in a worst-case

scenario. At this moment, there is also no plan for evacuation. We will take that step, if necessary," he said.

He added that the embassy is in contact with Lebanese and international NGOs to help ensure access to food, water and medicine to the workers. "We are urging our people to contact us in any emergency."

Neyamat Ullah Bhuiyan, senior secretary of the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry, said the government is working to identify Bangladeshi workers stranded in conflict-hit areas abroad.

"Steps are being taken to determine the exact number of workers and to ensure food for them," he said while speaking at a training event at the ministry yesterday.

He added that Bangladeshis currently in Bahrain cannot be brought back immediately because flights from Bahrain to Bangladesh remain suspended due to the ongoing Middle East crisis.