



How Saira Akhter Jahan became Bangladesh's rising screen star

As an actress, she does not take lightly, her responsibility to her audiences. However, she does not take too much pressure trying to uphold a fake persona either. Valuing authentic public presence over manufactured image, she acknowledges the need to maintain presentation and communication skills for modern media while remaining true to herself.

Saira Akhter Jahan's entry into the spotlight was neither straightforward nor conventional. A Dhaka University graduate, she began by uploading photographs to Facebook as a hobby. A chance discovery by a casting director of Runout Production House catapulted her existence into instant fame. And nothing was the same again.

"I used to upload lots of pics on FB and one of my favourite casting directors, who was not known to me at the time, from Runout production house, knocked me and offered me a lot of projects," she recalls. That unexpected message opened the door to modelling, TV commercials, music videos and, eventually, her dream, films.

Her first major assignment came from advertising: a TVC for Robi.

"I was not aware of the TVC industry at all. I used to search up the production houses to see if they were genuine," Saira explains. However, she learned quickly on the job — camera angles, presence, and the practical craft that formal training had not provided. Still, she supplemented on-set learning with theatre training at an open-space troupe to enhance her acting skills.

One of her earliest and fondest breakthrough moments was the music video, "Cheep Nouko", sung by Kona and Tahsan, released in 2016. "My first work and within a minute, I was famous. The story was so simple and it really resonated with the audience," she remembers.

From commercials to music videos and short films like Leguna and Closeup's Kache Ashar Golpo, Saira grew in versatility and

craft. She even took on darker territory: in the web series Ararat she played a villain, an experience that broadened her range and one she tremendously enjoyed.

Her film debut, Jonmobhumi (The Birthplace), marked a significant artistic and personal milestone. Focussed on Rohingya migration to Bangladesh, the movie demanded intensive research and immersion.

"I had to go to the Rohingya camps and learn the work and research the characters. This was difficult. I think I grew a lot and discovered new talents within myself through this work," Saira reflects.

The film's international journey, screenings at the Toronto International Film Festival, the United Nations Headquarters and the UK House of Commons, brought unexpected recognition and pride, reinforcing again, how good, local stories can connect to audiences.

Despite these successes, Saira's career faced interruptions and hard lessons. During the COVID years she stepped away, taking a job in product development at a skincare company and keeping distance from the industry because of personal issues.

"A lot of people who bumped into me. Asked me why I was not doing more of acting or modelling. I know I too enjoyed the work but I had moved on," she says. However, the pull of performance endured. Yielding to her calling, she finally returned to the screens again, at the end of 2024.

Re-entering the field proved challenging. The industry had evolved rapidly with new creators, genres and

audiences. Saira's latest film, Tribunal, is a Bangladeshi courtroom drama highlighting themes of justice, political clout and morality.

"I took some time to get back into the groove, as during the gap, a lot of new people had entered the industry and started working," Saira notes. However, her previous network, many of whom are now established professionals, helped secure good roles and pull her back to her former glory. As she concentrates on her newest project, Saira remains optimistic despite ongoing obstacles.

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Saira is an actor who studies character work, a model who embraces physical training, and a storyteller committed to meaningful projects. Her call to the industry is straightforward- "More fair chances, properly announced opportunities and transparent auditions," she urges.

From Facebook photos to film festivals and international forums speaks of Saira Akhter Jahan's perseverance and adaptability. Not merely seeking stardom, she insists she wants to be known "not as not simply a heroine, but an actress." With the momentum she's gathered, that ambition feels well within reach.

By Munira Fidai
Photo: Sourav Kabir

