

Honesty in performance, honestly in character: ZILANI

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

From working as a stunt double for Arifin Shuvo in a scene from *Shapludu* to winning hearts as the sniper in *Cactus*, Arifin Zilani has come a long way. His journey has been marked by challenges and setbacks, but his dedication to acting has paid off. Today, he has carved a space for himself across both films and OTT platforms.

In a candid conversation with The Daily Star, Zilani spoke about his struggles, turning points in his career, and more.

Interestingly, he performed all the stunts in *Cactus* himself. Trained in Muay Thai, he said it was difficult to find a suitable double due to his height. "As I'm trained in Muay Thai, my punches, hooks, and jabs naturally look more convincing. The stunt doubles available were around five-seven or five-eight—it would have been obvious on screen. So, I did the stunts myself to maintain believability," he said.

Filming the final action sequence, however, proved particularly challenging. While shooting in Sreemangal, Zilani fell ill with a bacterial infection but continued working through it. "I performed the entire action sequence with a high fever—running along railway tracks, jumping from heights, climbing, shooting—doing everything. I was physically very weak, and on top of that, it was extremely hot. Wearing a leather jacket, a turtleneck, and a sweater under intense sunlight made it even more difficult. But somehow, I managed. Interestingly, whenever the camera rolled, I didn't feel the fever. But the moment they said 'cut,' it would hit me again," he said.

He also recalled performing a physically demanding rope-climbing sequence. "It was my first time doing something like that. I was scared, but I stayed focused on the performance," he added.

Zilani believes that honesty in performance matters more than the size of a role. He pointed to *Cactus*, where he had no dialogue in the first five episodes, yet still connected with viewers.

On the work front, he was recently seen in Tanim Noor's *Utshob* and *Bonolota Express*. Speaking about the director, he said, "I'm a

newcomer and haven't worked with many people yet, but Tanim Noor *bhai* and his team are very organised and clear about what they want."

He also noted that being cast in a comedic role in *Bonolota Express* marked a shift from how he is usually perceived. "Because of my appearance, I'm often seen in action-oriented roles. But as an actor, it's my job to

adapt. Playing Faisal, who is naive and often clueless, was a different experience," he said.

Among his upcoming projects is the web film *Kalo Biral*, where he plays the lead in a biographical role based on a Dhaka University vice-chancellor. Without any family background in the industry, Zilani said he has earned each role through auditions, with his wife remaining his biggest supporter.



PHOTO: COURTESY

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Prangone Mor returns to Shilpakala after two years

Theatre troupe Prangone Mor returned to the National Theatre Hall of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy after nearly two years, marking a significant homecoming. The group staged two productions—*Shesher Kobita* and *Timer Talowar*—over a three-day run from May 1 to 3, with shows beginning at 7:00pm.

Despite its absence from the venue, the troupe had continued regular performances at the Mohila Samity Auditorium. Its return to the National Theatre Hall, a key centre of theatre in Bangladesh, carried symbolic and professional weight.

Shesher Kobita, adapted from Rabindranath Tagore, opened the run, followed by Utpal Dutt's *Timer Talowar* on the next two days. Both productions explored enduring themes of love, art and institutional control.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Photoseum: Life of Poetree'

Nasir Ali Mamun turns his lens toward two towering literary figures—Shamsur Rahman and Al Mahmud—in a striking black and white exhibition that captures the quiet gravitas of their lives. Intimate, austere, and deeply archival, the portraits trace memory, legacy, and the enduring face of Bangla poetry.



DATE: APRIL 3-16, 2026

TIME: 3:00 PM-9:00 PM (OPENING: 6:00 PM)

VENUE: ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE DE DHAKA, DHANMONDI

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Dhaka, Delhi 'move to mend ties'

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of maintaining good relations with neighbouring countries, especially India, she said.

However, foreign policy analysts caution that while the optics are positive, translating them into stable, long-term cooperation will require navigating domestic political pressures, deep-seated distrust, and addressing longstanding structural issues.

DOMESTIC PERCEPTIONS

In Bangladesh, it is widely perceived that India's support helped the ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina hold onto power for long. This perception fuelled anti-India sentiment, and it may persist if India continues to shelter the ousted PM, said Prof Sreeradha Datta of the International Affairs Department at OP Jindal Global University in India.

Besides, issues such as border killings and water sharing have long been sources of public dissatisfaction, she noted.

Sreeradha further said the new government faces a complex domestic political landscape, as the Jamaat-e-Islami and the youth-led National Citizen Party (NCP) have emerged as vocal opposition forces, which are likely to monitor India-related issues closely.

Lailufar said the Indian media has spread massive misinformation and disinformation regarding communal issues in Bangladesh. Many Indian politicians make them big issues for political gains in their constituencies.

"Whether this trend will continue or not will largely depend on political engagement. If that is not done, things will not change," she said, suggesting that both countries should make efforts to eliminate radical elements.

Meanwhile, the extradition of Hasina, who has been convicted in Bangladesh for crimes against humanity, remains a sensitive topic.

Sreeradha said LGRD Minister Fakhrul Islam Alamgir's statement that Bangladesh-India relations will not hinge on Hasina's extradition reflects the government's willingness to advance bilateral ties.

Delwar Hossain, a professor of international relations at Dhaka University, said the BNP government's phrases, such as "Bangladesh first" and "mutual respect", reassure domestic audiences while signalling stability in foreign policy.

WATER SHARING

Bangladesh and India share 54 transboundary rivers, but only one formal agreement—the Ganges Water Treaty signed on December 12, 1996—currently regulates water sharing between the two countries.

This treaty, which is set to expire in December this year, needs to be renewed. There have been competing claims over water allocation. West Bengal claims that Bangladesh receives more water through the Farakka Barrage than what was approved, while people in Bangladesh complain of water shortages.

Referring to the treaty, Lailufar said it is a technical matter that requires a close examination of data by experts.

"Bangladesh needs to work on it in a focused way... Renewal of the Ganges treaty will be a litmus test for India."

There are also complications regarding the Teesta water-sharing agreement, which was stalled due to last-minute opposition from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

With no breakthrough on the Teesta deal initially planned for 2011, Bangladesh has explored China's support for river-dredging and water management projects.

China has agreed to implement the project, but India has expressed concerns due to the project's proximity to the sensitive Siliguri Corridor.

While this has geopolitical implications, people in Bangladesh's northern region are suffering from water scarcity in the dry season and flooding during the monsoon. There needs to be a solution; otherwise it could deepen the trust deficit, said Lailufar.

BORDER KILLINGS

Killings of Bangladeshi nationals by the Border Security Force (BSF) along the border continue to be an emotionally charged issue in Bangladesh.

According to Ain O Salish Kendra, a human rights organisation, at least 34 Bangladeshis were killed by the BSF last year, compared to 30 in 2024, 31 in 2023, 23 in 2022, and 18 in 2021.

If the two countries are to have good relations, these border killings must stop, said Lailufar.

On different occasions, India said these killings occur due to crimes like human trafficking and smuggling

at night. The fact is that not only Bangladeshis, but also Indians are involved in such activities, she pointed out.

"There are problems on both sides... It requires cooperation between the two countries to address the problem."

There should be an agreement restricting shoot-on-sight practices, and even if such actions are required, lethal weapons must not be used, Lailufar said.

Echoing her words, Datta noted that India must show sensitivity to issues that carry psychological weight in Bangladesh.

She further said New Delhi wants Dhaka's assurance that Bangladesh's territory will not be used for anti-Indian activities, especially in the Northeast.

The BNP government's commitment that no terrorist activity will be tolerated on Bangladeshi soil is thus helpful, she added.

TRADE GAPS, CONNECTIVITY
India exports around \$12 billion worth of goods to Bangladesh annually, while Bangladesh's exports to India stand at only \$2 billion, reflecting a persistent trade imbalance.

Trade relations between the two countries took a hit during the interim administration's tenure as both sides imposed various restrictions.

Last year, India withdrew transshipment facility for Bangladesh, restricted the entry of certain Bangladeshi goods through land ports in northeastern states, and limited imports of jute products and woven fabrics to a single seaport.

On the other hand, Bangladesh halted the import of Indian yarn through major land ports.

Delwar said that both sides should withdraw these restrictions to normalise trade flows.

Bangladesh must focus on export diversification, and India should avoid non-tariff barriers that undermine trust, he noted.

Meanwhile, many of the projects that Bangladesh took up under Indian lines of credit since 2010 have been delayed due to bureaucratic red tape and conditionalities.

Experts said total commitments from India for these projects, involving mostly road, railway and waterway networks, have exceeded \$7 billion.

Delwar said India benefits

directly from connectivity projects, while Bangladesh's gains are largely indirect, primarily through infrastructure development.

For Bangladesh, it is important to have access to markets in India's northeast region and achieve the broader goal of linking the country with South and Southeast Asia, he pointed out.

He further said Bangladesh needs to negotiate better revenue mechanisms and conduct in-depth studies to maximise benefits from transit use and connectivity.

THE WAY FORWARD

Experts highlighted the importance of sustained, high-level engagement between the two countries not only for bilateral relations but also for regional cooperation.

Modi's invitation to Tarique is a positive signal, Datta said, adding that a high-level meeting between the two neighbours would be a good start.

Lailufar said there should be at least a foreign-secretary-level meeting to start with.

Prof Delwar said that in the current global context, economic and security interdependence matters far more than ideological alignment.

"Both sides must focus on concrete steps to ensure that their relationship benefits citizens directly and helps build long-term trust," he added.

Former DGFI

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On July 6 last year, the victim's wife, Liza, 34, filed a case with Mirpur Model Police Station, accusing 74 individuals, most of whom are leaders and activists of the Awami League.

According to the case statement, Delwar was shot in the Mirpur-10 area on July 19, 2024, during the quota reform protests. He later died while undergoing treatment at City Care General Hospital in Dhaka's Shyamoli area two days later.

Earlier, DB arrested Lt Gen (ret'd) Masud Uddin Chowdhury and Sheikh Mamun Khaled in connection with the case. Both are currently on remand.

Afzal served as a DGFI director from March 2006 to March 2008. During that time, he was allegedly involved in the torture of political leaders and businessmen while they were in custody.

He was later dismissed from service on November 5, 2009.

Bangladesh ready to stand by Qatar

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Qatar's arrangement of special air ambulances for his late mother and former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia's emergency medical travel to London last year, the statement added.

During the meeting, Kobir praised Qatar's constructive role in regional peace, dialogue, and humanitarian diplomacy. Both sides discussed ways to deepen bilateral cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

The adviser also met Qatar's Minister of Labour Ali bin Saeed bin Samikh Al Marri, conveying condolences on behalf of the prime minister following the recent military helicopter crash that claimed the life of the minister's relative.

Kobir later visited the Bangladesh embassy in Doha, reviewing welfare issues concerning expatriates and bilateral cooperation matters.

He is scheduled to visit several

other Gulf states in the coming days.

The conflict in the Middle East that erupted on February 28 with US-Israeli strikes on Iran has quickly spread across the region, sending global energy markets into turmoil.

Qatar's economy has been among the hardest hit, facing retaliatory missile and drone attacks by Iran on US assets and energy facilities.

Earlier this month, an attack on Qatar's Ras Laffan liquefied natural gas hub knocked out 17 percent of the country's LNG export capacity, equivalent to 3-4 percent of global supplies, causing an estimated annual revenue loss of \$20 billion, projected to persist for three to five years.

With fuel supplies from Gulf countries disrupted and the Strait of Hormuz, the key route for one-fifth of the world's crude oil, under blockade, Bangladesh too is grappling with a mounting fuel crisis.

Govt to borrow extra Tk 5,000cr

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Government borrowing from domestic sources has been rising since this fiscal year.

In the first seven months of the fiscal year, net government borrowing from domestic sources, including the banking system, stood at Tk 80,251 crore, up from Tk 35,306 crore a year earlier, central bank data showed.

Of the total domestic borrowing during the seven-month period, Tk 73,035 crore was borrowed from the banking system.

As per the fiscal 2025-26's budget, targets for government borrowing from the banking system, non-banking system and foreign sources have been set at Tk 104,000 crore, Tk 21,000 crore and Tk 96,000 crore respectively.

The government's demand for funds is increasing due to a revenue shortfall, said Mohammed Nurul Amin, a former chairman of the Association of Bankers, Bangladesh, a former banks' chief executives and managing directors.

At the same time, it needs money

to meet day-to-day expenditures, while the expected funding from the International Monetary Fund has yet to arrive.

Apart from remittance inflows, there is little positive news on the external front, he said.

As a result, the government may need to borrow even more in the coming months.

If the US-Israel war on Iran does not end soon, financial strain could emerge by June.

Funds are also being required for measures such as agricultural loan waivers and the introduction of various cards, said Amin, also the former managing director of Meghna Bank.

On the other hand, with credit growth in the private sector remaining weak, banks are feeling comfortable lending to the government.

Private sector credit growth hit a decade-low of 6.03 percent in January, data showed.

"This is not a positive sign for the economy, as production is not expanding," Amin added.