

# Won't be typecast, won't be set aside: SHOHEL MONDOL

SHARMIN JOYA

There's a certain spontaneity to Shohel Mondol's journey, one that mirrors the very characters he gravitates towards. Unconventional, layered, and often quietly transformative, his rise in the industry has been anything but fixed. From making his presence felt through OTT platforms to commanding attention on the big screen with a complex antagonist role as Shayan in *Rakkhosh*, Shohel is steadily redefining himself with each project.

He recalls that the journey to playing the character was anything but straightforward. Initially approached by director Mehedi Hasan Hridoy through mutual acquaintances, he was sent the script but found himself unconvinced. "At that stage, I couldn't quite grasp where my character was heading," he admits. It was only after a detailed sit-down with the director that things began to shift. Hridoy walked him through the entire narrative—scene by scene, emotion by emotion—painting a vivid picture of his vision. "Hearing it from him directly made all the difference," he says. "That's when I was convinced."

The real surprise came after the release. Audiences responded with overwhelming enthusiasm—cheering at his very first screen appearance. "We carefully planned it," he reveals. His presence had been deliberately concealed in promotional material, barely hinted at in the trailer, allowing viewers to discover him organically in theatres. "People didn't know I was in the film. That reveal became an experience in itself," he says.

Reflecting on why the character resonated so strongly, Shohel believes its power lies in its narrative function. "This character is the catalyst. Without him, the story wouldn't move forward. He creates the circumstances that ultimately transform the protagonist into a 'monster'. In a way, if he didn't exist, neither would that transformation."

Speaking about his collaborations with Siam, he points out a crucial difference between their projects. In *Taan*, the antagonist reacted to the protagonist's actions. "This time, the antagonist drives

the story. He provokes the protagonist into action—that's the real difference," he explains.

If the big screen has recently amplified his presence, OTT platforms were where his foundation was built. Shohel speaks candidly about this phase of his career. "In many ways, my journey stands on OTT," he reflects. "It's through these platforms that I've been able to reach audiences as Shohel Mondol." For many actors in Bangladesh, OTT has been more than just an alternative—it has been a



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

breakthrough space.

He is equally convinced that OTT has emboldened filmmakers to think bigger. "Because of OTT, creators now have the confidence to attempt larger-scale projects," he says. This cultural shift—one that television had long struggled to establish despite decades of effort—has clarified what audiences truly respond to.

**"For audiences who truly love cinema, this will be a different kind of experience," he says. "And for those who want to rediscover Jibanananda through another artiste's perspective, it will be something special."**

With growing recognition, however, comes a different kind of challenge—the risk of being typecast.

Following his recent success, audiences are eager to see him return as an antagonist, drawing inevitable comparisons to industry stalwart Misha Sawdagor, whose name has long been synonymous with villainy in Bangladeshi cinema.

Shohel acknowledges the expectation but remains measured. "For me, it always comes down to the story," he says. He has no interest in repeating himself unless the character genuinely serves the narrative in a meaningful way. "I don't want to do another *Musafir* or *Rakkhosh* type role just

for the sake of it."

Instead, he is driven by a desire to explore. "My journey will be my own," he reflects. Open to diverse roles and collaborations, he remains committed to pushing his boundaries as an actor. That commitment is also evident in his on-screen dynamics.

Looking ahead, Shohel is preparing to surprise audiences once again with *Bonolota Sen*, set for release this Eid-ul-Azha. Directed by Masud Hasan Ujjal, the film marks a significant departure from his recent roles. Rather than a conventional narrative, it unfolds as a poetic journey inspired by the life and philosophy of celebrated poet Jibanananda Das.

"It's not a literal biopic," Shohel clarifies. "It's more like walking through his poetry." The film blends elements of the poet's work with cinematic storytelling, creating an immersive big-screen experience. Featuring Khairul Basar, Masuma Rahman Nabila, Rupanty Akid, and Priyontee Urbee alongside Shohel, the project aims to offer something distinctly artistic.

"For audiences who truly love cinema, this will be a different kind of experience," he says. "And for those who want to rediscover Jibanananda through another artiste's perspective, it will be something special."

He also opens up about a passion project he is backing as a creative producer—his first in that role. Describing it as a low-budget yet deeply personal film, he shares that it is directed by Al Mukitil Bari and features performances from Shirin Shila, Afsana Mimi, and Shilpi Sarkar Apu, among others.

"We've completed the shoot, and post-production is currently underway," he says. Initially envisioned with a theatrical release in mind, the team is now leaning towards an OTT platform, though a final decision is yet to be made.

"At its core, it's a film about an artiste's journey," he explains, expressing quiet confidence in the project. "Despite the limited budget, we've tried to create something meaningful. Now it's about finding the right space where it can reach its audience."



## Star Cineplex launches new branch in Narayanganj

Star Cineplex is set to open its new branch in Narayanganj today (April 7), marking another step in its expansion beyond Dhaka. The launch, initially planned for Eid-ul-Fitr, was delayed due to unavoidable circumstances.

The multiplex will begin with two daily shows – afternoon and evening – before moving to full operations within a few days. Located at Shimanto Tower in Jalkuri, the branch includes three auditoriums equipped with modern sound systems and advanced facilities.

AGM Mesbah Uddin Ahmed said the expansion reflects growing audience demand for quality cinema experiences.

Star Cineplex currently operates several outlets in Dhaka and Chattogram, with more branches under construction as it plans to expand further across major cities and districts.

## Chorki to celebrate Pahela Baishakh with 'Cha Gorom'



Chorki is set to release its original web-film *Cha Gorom* this Pahela Baishakh on April 14. Directed by Shankha Dasgupta, the film stars Partho Sheikh, Safa Kabir, Rezwan Pervez, and Sarah Jabin Aditi, among others.

The story explores the lives and realities of tea plantation workers, moving beyond their usual portrayal as scenic backdrops. The director said the project aims to highlight both the visible and overlooked

aspects of plantation life. The official poster, released on April 5, has already generated audience interest, with a teaser expected soon.

Actors described the film as a unique and socially relevant project, with challenging roles and a powerful narrative rooted in an often overlooked part of Bangladeshi society.

# NEWS

## Failure of AL, interim govts to blame

FROM PAGE 12

have remained outside vaccination coverage, leaving them vulnerable to infection, he added.

He also said the poor decisions of those governments had caused shortages in stockpiles of measles and six other vaccines.

In his notice, Akhter asked why vaccinations had not been conducted, expressing concern over the rising death of children from the disease and thousands of infections.

He questioned whether the health minister's claim of no measles vaccination in eight years was accurate.

Earlier, on March 29, the minister had told journalists that measles vaccines had not been administered in the country for the past eight years.

Children aged nine months and 15 months receive measles vaccinations twice under the regular immunisation programme. Special campaigns are held every four years to cover those missed by the regular drive, with the last campaign conducted in December 2020. The

2024 campaign could not be carried out due to the political changeover.

Akhter also said measles treatment requires isolation, yet hospitals lack isolation facilities, even in major and district-level hospitals, especially in Rajshahi, where ICU and NICU facilities are absent.

He added that measles vaccines are given starting at nine months of age, but now even six-month-old infants are being infected. He urged an investigation into why epidemiologists failed to identify the cause.

He said the government began an emergency measles rubella vaccination campaign on Sunday in 18 districts and 30 high-risk upazilas, targeting all children aged six months to five years.

Regarding hospital facilities, the minister said isolation wards have been arranged in all government hospitals, with 250 additional isolation beds being prepared in Rajshahi.

"ICU and ventilator facilities are being readied, and a new oxygen flow

system developed by icddr, b -- at a cost of only 300 taka -- is being used to deliver oxygen," he added.

He said vaccines are being procured urgently, with the World Bank promising support through loans and grants.

In a supplementary question, Akhter alleged mismanagement at the grassroots level, saying that despite allocations, ordinary people are not receiving isolation or ICU facilities.

He noted that about 25 percent of the health budget remains unspent, with Tk 11,000 crore unused in FY 2024-25.

In reply, the health minister said that Tk 604 crore of unspent Covid-era funds is being used to procure additional measles vaccines from Unicef.

He assured that the ministry is alert to prevent future shortages, has cancelled all staff leave to strengthen field monitoring, and is coordinating closely with development partners, including the World Bank and Unicef.

## Election to women's seats on May 12

FROM PAGE 12

Akhtar said EVMs were not used in the national election and would not be used in local polls.

He added that a decision on the issue would be made after receiving investigation reports from the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh, and a commission reviewing the last three parliamentary elections.

EC officials said there are 148,401 EVMs in its inventory, while 1,599 cannot be traced. With each costing around Tk 2.35 lakh, the missing machines are worth about Tk 37.5 crore. The EVMs are currently stored at multiple locations, including 86,233 units at Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BTMF), which has asked the EC to pay Tk 70.40 crore in storage charge.

Asked if the EVMs were faulty, he replied, "We will wait for the

investigation reports. The public has lost confidence in EVMs, and questions remain about their lifespan."

Asked about the submission of election expenditure returns to the EC by candidates, Akhtar said the EC has extended the deadline by another month.

According to the Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972, they are required to submit their expenditure returns within 30 days of the gazette notification of election results.

"Several candidates applied for extensions, and we granted them more time," Akhtar said.

When asked how many candidates submitted their election expenditure returns or sought extensions, the secretary said he could not provide figures but confirmed the extension.

Asked whether the EC would take action for violating RPO, the EC secretary said, "We have extended the

deadline further. Once this period expires, we will decide on the next course of action."

Meanwhile, the EC said there is no reason for concern regarding holding of Sherpur-3 general election and Bogura-6 by-polls, both slated for April 9.

Law enforcement agencies and presiding officers have assured the commission of a normal situation in both constituencies. Sherpur-3 has 129 polling centres and Bogura-6 has 151, he added.

The EC secretary said the commission is also awaiting the High Court verdict for the publication of the gazette containing the results of Chattogram-2, 4.

Akhtar said 50 post-election cases have been filed over the 13th parliamentary polls. "The election materials for these 50 constituencies must be preserved until the court disposes of the cases."

## Bangladeshi

FROM PAGE 12

of the Dhabalsuti BOP camp under BGB-61 Teesta Battalion, said a Bangladeshi man, Mizanur Rahman, 28, was injured in the shoulder by rubber bullets fired by the BSF at Gatiar Vita around 10:00am this morning.

Following the incident, local people became agitated and brought Indian citizen Sahodev Barman along with cattle into Bangladesh.

"The Bangladeshi youth had gone to cut grass for cattle near the border and had mistakenly crossed the zero line, entering about 10 yards into Indian territory," added Badsha.

He said additional BGB personnel were deployed as tension rose along the border from morning until noon. "At the meeting, the Indian citizen along with the cattle was handed over to the BSF. A strong protest was lodged over the shooting incident that injured the Bangladeshi youth."

Patgram Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Nazmul Haque said, "When I spoke to the family members of the youth injured by BSF firing, they informed me that he was undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Rangpur and was currently out of danger."

## Targeting civilian sites 'illegal'

EU chief says after Trump's fresh threat of strikes on Iran

AFP, Brussels

Striking civilian infrastructure installations during war is illegal, EU chief Antonio Costa said in a social media post yesterday.

The warning came after US President Donald Trump threatened to devastate civilian infrastructure in Iran if it did not reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

"Any targeting of civilian infrastructure, namely energy facilities, is illegal and unacceptable," Costa, the president of the European Council, said.

"This applies to Russia's war in Ukraine and it applies everywhere. The Iranian civilian population is the main victim of the Iranian regime. It would also be the main victim of a widening of the military campaign," he said.

## I want to come home immediately

FROM PAGE 12

Canada, with the hope to return to Bangladesh soon.

"After the fall of Hasina regime, I wanted to return but the Yunus government didn't cooperate with me ... didn't issue travel documents [which I] applied [for] with an emergency fee of \$610 for both of us [me and my wife]. The present government is also not responding to my request. I am facing financial restraints here. My pension has also not been paid. Now my mother-in-law is on her deathbed. We want to return to Bangladesh on an emergency basis if our travel documents are issued."

Replying to a question, Sinha said he requested the current government through ruling BNP members to help ensure his and his wife's return to the country. "But it appeared to me the government was killing time for obvious reasons. My health condition is deteriorating; I want to take last breath in my country."

Asked about the status of any case filed against him, he said he has been convicted by a court in Bangladesh in a case which "is a sham" and with "no

evidence at all". "I will face the court. I don't bother about the case. If I start talking about the 'merit' of the case, it will be seen how Hasina's regime used the judiciary for blackmail."

Former chief justice SK Sinha faced a barrage of harsh criticism from Awami League leaders in 2017 following a Supreme Court verdict that scrapped the 16th constitutional amendment, with lawmakers even calling for action against him in parliament. He went on leave in October that year and left the country, later resigning from abroad in November amid the controversy.

The 16th amendment, passed by the parliament on September 17, 2014, would give power to Jatiya Sangsad to remove SC judges if allegations of incapability or misconduct against them are proved.

In 2019, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed a case against him and others on charges including money laundering. A court subsequently convicted him in a graft case and sentenced him in absentia to 11 years in prison.

## Nigeria army kills 65 'bandits' in single operation

AFP, Kano

Nigeria's military has killed more than 60 members of criminal gangs known as bandits, blamed for most of the country's mass kidnappings, said a Sunday security report seen by AFP.

The offensive was carried out in the northwestern Zamfara state where police on Saturday confirmed a mass kidnapping carried out earlier in the week.

Police there confirmed there had been a "mass" abduction of villagers in raids by armed gangs on Thursday night, but gave no figures.

Residents estimate that seven people had been killed and 150 abducted when large numbers of heavily armed men invaded six villages Bukkuyum local government area.

Police said a hunt has been launched for the attackers.

Sunday's security report said at "least 65 bandits" had been killed, in what it called a "major breakthrough".

But the "massive seven-hour ground and air offensive" was in Tsafe, a district around 200 kilometres (125 miles) from where the recent kidnappings occurred.

Zamfara is one of several states in northwest and central Nigeria plagued by the criminal gangs. Known locally as bandits, they carry out deadly raids on communities, kidnap residents for ransom and burn homes after looting them.

Bandit violence started more than decade ago as clashes between herders and farmers in conflict over limited water and land resources impacted by climate change.