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PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL ● IN-FRAME: ARMEEN MUSA, MITI SANJANA ● WARDROBE: BENARASI BY TANWY KABIR
JEWELLERY: CANVAS BY TANWY KABIR ● MAKEUP: ANEWMAKEOVER BY SHABABA RASHID ● HAIR: AVI RUP

#CHECK IT OUT

EID-UL-ADHA, the old way and the new

Eid is a busy time for everyone. From looking after the sacrificial animal, overseeing the slaughtering, distributing the meat, to cooking to our palate's desires, things can get pretty hectic.

Much of the process has now been made easier.

Avoiding the annual hullabaloo, many people now opt for online Qurbani, where all one needs to do is select a cow, make a payment from their digital wallet, and the meat arrives processed on Eid day. Some pages even offer cash-on-delivery options!

This year, we are getting an extended holiday, which gives people an opportunity to take things slow and get back to doing things the traditional way. Why not revisit the haat and bargain with the bepari to your heart's content?

After the cow is brought home, offer the animal food and water. Take care of it personally until the day of the sacrifice. Haggle with the butcher early in the morning and oversee the matter.

You will also be left with time after the Eid rituals are over. Rather than endlessly scrolling reels on social media, spend time with family. Visit an ice cream parlour with cousins like you used to do in the past, or introduce the new generation to this once celebrated affair.

Rather than lazing away the time after Eid, why not spend it doing something constructive and creative? And this week, Star Lifestyle offers a potpourri of articles for just that.

We look at some of the young trailblazers and how they are shaping the world around us. We also look at social activism and fashion innovation that is promising to change our outlook. We offer a lesson in fashion history by looking at the Tagore family and their contribution to fashion and society at large.

And of course, there is the usual dose of travel and food.

Rather than offering a bouquet of articles on Eid-related topics, we have attempted to keep our outlook diverse. So, this Eid-ul-Adha, rekindle that passion for reading with Star Lifestyle.

Eid Mubarak!

Photo: Collected

#PROFILE

From weddings to warmth: Saimul Karim's interior design shift

For years, Saimul Karim worked in spaces designed to disappear. The wedding stages would be dismantled by morning, and the floral installations existed for a few hours only. Yet, despite their temporary nature, Karim noticed something lasting about them, that people remembered how those spaces made them feel.

That realisation eventually pushed him towards a new direction. Through Eskay Decor's newest venture into interior design and furniture, Karim is now working with permanence instead of performance. The shift from event décor to home interiors may seem dramatic on paper, but at its core, his philosophy remains surprisingly similar.

"Event décor taught me how deeply spaces can affect emotions," Karim says. "A wedding or celebration lasts for a day, but the feeling it creates stays with people forever. Over time, I became fascinated by creating that same emotional connection more permanently through homes and interiors."

FROM CELEBRATION SPACES TO LIVING SPACES

Karim describes the transition as a move from creating moments to shaping routines. Event décor, by nature, depends on visual immediacy. It is designed to impress quickly through scale, lighting, colour, and drama. Interior design demands almost the opposite. Instead of spectacle, it requires patience, functionality, emotional balance, and longevity.

"They are very different in rhythm and responsibility," Karim explains. "Event décor is emotionally intense and designed to create an immediate impression. But a home has to continue feeling comforting and functional every single day."

That difference has significantly shaped the way he now approaches space.

This thinking is visible across his recent projects. The interiors under Eskay Decor avoid excessive styling or overly performative luxury. Instead, the spaces feel layered, soft, and intentionally calm.

DESIGNING FOR EMOTIONAL COMFORT

One of the most noticeable aspects of Karim's work is restraint. Warm whites, muted greys, beige tones, soft wood finishes, textured upholstery, and understated lighting dominate the homes he designs. Even when accent colours appear, they are carefully controlled rather than overwhelming. In one recent project, mustard-yellow chairs introduced warmth to an otherwise neutral dining space without disrupting the room's calm.

"The intention was to create quiet sophistication," Karim explains. "I didn't want the space to feel visually loud or overly styled. The colours were chosen to create warmth, softness, and emotional grounding."

This approach reflects a larger rejection of showroom-like perfection. Many contemporary interiors, especially those shaped heavily by social media trends, prioritise visual impact over emotional experience. Karim consciously moves away from that.

"Sometimes spaces become so focused on perfection that they lose warmth and personality," he says. "For me, true luxury is not about everything looking untouched. It's about creating a home where people can genuinely relax and feel emotionally safe."

That idea of "lived-in elegance" has become central to Eskay Decor's interior identity. Rather than creating spaces that look staged for photographs, Karim wants homes to feel as though they have naturally evolved.

"I wanted the interiors to carry softness, memory, and comfort," he says. "Almost like the home grew into itself gradually."

DESIGNING SPACES THAT STAY

Perhaps what makes Eskay Decor's new direction particularly interesting is that Karim is no longer designing for a single event or fleeting reaction. He is designing for repetition — the kind that defines real life.

"I want to explore a design language that feels emotional, timeless, and culturally rooted," he shares. "I'm interested in blending contemporary minimalism with Bengali textures, craftsmanship, and storytelling."

When entering a client's home for the first time, he focuses less on aesthetics and more on behaviour. He studies routines, movement, personality, and emotional energy within the household.

"I try to understand their lifestyle before their aesthetic," he explains. "Some people need calmness and simplicity. Others want warmth, creativity, or social energy. A home should support the personality and routine of the people living there."

And maybe that is the biggest difference between event décor and interior design. One creates moments people remember. The other creates spaces people return to every day.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

#WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Stitching bigger futures: How creativity is shaping a new generation of Bengali women

Bengali culture has upheld its creativity since time immemorial through hand-stitched fabrics and expressive patterns. The designs of our artisans spoke different stories, breathing life into each creation. Needless to say, Bengali women in the fashion sector, over the years, have transformed the industry into a global phenomenon. Yet, creativity as a career remains a battle to conquer.

Across Bangladesh, creative work is often seen as secondary because people are encouraged to pursue it only when they have time away from their "stable" jobs. Women face even major obstacles, like uncertain professional prospects or external discouragement, when they attempt to establish careers in fashion and design. This divide neglects the deep creative roots that Bengali women have practised long before the trends of modern fashion existed.

Think of the beautiful "kathas" your grandmas used to sew to reuse fabrics. Or the bold colours your aunts included in their wardrobe to match their ornaments. For many Bengali women, creativity began not as their professional path but as the need to let their inquisitive nature or ambition create its magic.

Tasnim Ferdous always found solace in her art and designs. Soon, friends became curious about her clothing designs, and once they learned it was hers, they would request custom items for themselves as well. This motivated her to create a Facebook page, which she used to present her designs.

Over the years, the passion project she started as a minor task developed into a full-fledged business venture. She dedicated herself to building Wearhouse, which started as a customer-focused design platform.

In 2021, Tasnim moved to Canada to pursue higher education while continuing to operate in Bangladesh.

"During my time abroad in the creative industry, I used to be the only person of colour in every table and room," she said. "And that motivated me to make sure anyone who comes after me has a slightly easier transition."

Her experience reveals something larger. More women across Bangladesh have started to pursue creative careers, which they view as both an artistic outlet and a means to achieve financial independence. From operating small fashion brands, working as independent designers, to creating Instagram-based businesses and launching online companies, our women are establishing a legacy of creativity.

Yet, creative professions come with financial instability, which makes it difficult to obtain funding, while women in these fields face constant battles for acknowledgement. Even more dire is the fact that as women of colour, Bengalis face further barriers in global creative markets, with the added pressure of representation.

As such, Tasnim wants to achieve more than personal success. "I want to establish myself as an artist, a creative individual without a limiting label, so that someday the brand can be global and Bengali designs can reach beyond borders. I also have hope that it will open more doors for creative Bengali women who want their art to be seen globally," she mused optimistically.

For many Bengali women like Tasnim, creative expression serves as their method to connect two different worlds because they use their artistic work to respect their heritage while they build their future.

This can act as both a reflection and a direction towards the future. This is because for a growing number of Bengali women, creativity is no longer something to be sidelined. It is becoming a way to claim their space in shaping the global creative landscape. Ultimately, women who enter artistic fields not only develop their professional paths but also create new stories which enable them to establish their own forms of artistic expression.

By Samayla Mahjabin Koishy
Photo: Courtesy

#PROFILE

Armeen Musa breaks boundaries with music, theatre, and South Asian art

At the mere age of 14, a time when most of us are wondering how to set aside time for play after studies, Musa had already formed a band with a group of friends. Looking back, she credits her family's encouragement for giving her the freedom to explore music seriously. "It helped to have a very supportive family. Since I had my grades sorted throughout my school life, I was allowed to pursue extracurriculars as I wanted," she says.

By 16, she was attending the underground concerts that once defined a generation of Bangladeshi music lovers, watching performances by bands like Black, and Nemesis. Somewhere between the roaring crowds, dimly lit stages, and the electric admiration surrounding the performers, she realised exactly where she wanted to be — on that stage herself.

Although one would naturally assume that music came easily for someone like Armeen Musa, the reality, she says, was far from it. "I found school easy and music hard," explains Musa, "and I found myself chasing the very thing that's difficult for me."

True to her words, Musa pursued the challenge all the way to the world's largest independent college of contemporary music, Berklee. The D in her first semester, she muses, was the first indication that she's in the right place.

For many of her fans, in fact, their first introduction to Musa was her presence in Berklee College of Music's tribute to and performance with A R Rahman in 2014.

By 2015, Armeen had founded Ghaashphoring Choir, the first of its kind in Bangladesh. Their take on "Chaina bhabish" and "Aha ki Anondo" was hard to miss by anyone with a taste in music. But with Coke Studio's "Deora" in 2023, their fame skyrocketed across borders.

Interestingly enough, it was also the time when Musa realised that her music had become monotonous. She knew the ordeal, the projects that were likely to follow. It was all fine except that, after seven years of joy of creation, the chase was missing.

Musa decided to step back.

For the first time in her career, Musa found herself drawn toward an entirely different art form — acting. She had applied for training under renowned theatre scholar and director Syed Jamil Ahmed at the Spardha Academy of Performing Arts, and when a spot finally opened up in 2023, it felt like a natural next step in her artistic journey.

That very year, Musa performed the stage adaptation of "Ami Birangona Bolchhi", a collection of heartbreaking interviews of rape victims of the Liberation War of 1971.

"During rehearsals, we used to be on our feet for 6 to 8 hours," she recalls, "starting like that from scratch, feeling like zero again? It was exhilarating for me."

Not only was she among the eleven ladies portraying the characters, but Armeen composed 11 live soundtracks for the play itself.

For aspiring artists romanticising creative careers, Armeen Musa offers a brutally honest reality check. "Everything everyone warned me about before going into this career is absolutely right!" she says candidly. "It's not a steady income. People don't value culture like they used to. You will most probably not make your parents proud."

According to Musa, pursuing art professionally requires letting go of conventional ideas of stability and success. The artistic community may feel small and isolating at times, but to her, it is also one of the most compassionate spaces to exist in.

"This side is generous, happier, kinder, and more empathetic towards each other," she says. "We artistes will never feel the need to leave a nasty comment on someone else's social media platform. We recognise freedom of speech, but don't believe in imposing it."

Still, despite the uncertainty, Musa believes the magic lies in fleeting moments that make the struggle worthwhile. "Your 364 days will probably not feel special," she reflects. "But a moment in a song or theatre going beyond expectations — that's the magic."

That spirit of exploration continues to shape her current work as well. While she has long performed her own music and Bengali arrangements, Musa is now embracing a broader South Asian musical identity through a 90-minute performance set featuring Bangla, Urdu, Tamil, Braj Bhasha, Hindi, and Punjabi music — an attempt, as she describes it, to move beyond "man-made boundaries" and sing whatever feels like home.

By Nusrath Jahan
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel
Wardrobe: Benarasi by Tanwy Kabir
Jewellery: Canvas by Tanwy Kabir
Makeup: AnewMakeover by Shababa Rashid
Hair: Avi Rup

A new chapter for KATAN WEAVING in Bangladesh

The problem began with repetition. For years, Katan and Benarasi saree weaving in Bangladesh have been constrained not only by market demand but by the mechanics of the loom itself. Creating larger motifs, changing placement, or designing fabric beyond the usual saree format was expensive and cumbersome. The old punch-card system relied on graphing, cutting, and hardboard cards, making experimentation difficult.

The result was predictable: the same motifs repeated at the same scale. Now, after a year of research and close collaboration with weavers, a new device is trying to change that.

The innovation, developed through the collaboration of architect and designer Tanwy Kabir of Canvas and Sheikh Saifur Rahman, consultant at Haal Fashion, Prothom Alo and heritage textile expert, does not replace handloom weaving. Instead, it intervenes at one of the most difficult and limiting stages of the process — Jacquard preparation. In doing so, it opens up new design possibilities, reduces material waste, and creates room for handloom Katan to move beyond repetition without ceasing to be handmade. It is a success story of collaboration among a researcher, a designer, and weavers.

Rahman is precise about what this innovation is and is not. "It's not a machine; it's a small device – an innovation," he says. "It's like a hearing aid; it just assists the process." The weaving, he stresses, remains entirely manual. "The weaving is still done by hand, thread by thread, on a pit loom. The loom remains the same."

Rethinking the Jacquard process

Handloom weaving may appear straightforward from the outside, but it involves a long chain of work. As Rahman points out, "There are usually 13 steps involved, from buying the yarn to degumming it." One of the most difficult stages is preparing the Jacquard.

Traditionally, the design has to be drawn, graphed, computerised, and then translated into hardboard cards known as "patti or mala." Those cards are installed into the Jacquard through hooks.

The process is slow, labour-intensive, and restrictive. Under this system, a design usually repeats every 3.5 inches. "That's why you see very repetitive motifs in Katan," Rahman explains. "There are very few unique designs because each one requires a huge investment. A single original design could cost around Tk 1,00,000."

The new device does not remove this stage, but simplifies it. "We have not omitted a step, but we have made it technologically easier," Kabir, adding, "That shift allows much larger motifs. With our designs, you can make a 30-inch or even a 40-inch design if you want."

In practical terms, this breaks the old size barrier and makes it possible to create more varied *anchals*, larger motifs, and custom placements.

Kabir describes it as "a small device" with a screen "much like a mobile phone screen." But its effect reaches beyond design flexibility. Since the old system depends heavily on graph paper and hardboard cards, reducing those materials also lowers waste. "We are reducing the use of this paper," Kabir says.

Rahman adds, "This means we are reducing our carbon footprint." The change does not simply remove labour from the process. It redirects it. He notes that those who once worked on punch cards are also skilled in other areas, such as loom work and Jacquard building. In fact, their system now requires larger Jacquard machines with 2,400 hooks instead of the usual 600 or 1,200.

"That requires a larger machine, which means more man-hours and higher wages for the builders," he elaborates.

Working with weavers, not above them

This innovation did not emerge from design theory alone. It was shaped through direct work with weavers including Abdullah Al Shad, Md Jahangir Hossain, and Abdul Kader, whose practical involvement helped move the experiment from concept to loom.

That collaboration matters because the device is only useful if it can survive contact with actual weaving conditions.

Kabir is open about the fact that the experiment depended on trust from the weaving side. "This experiment would not be possible without the courage of the weavers," she emphasises. "They are the ones who actually make it."

The team also faced scepticism. When Kabir first proposed a larger motif, the response was immediate: "It's not possible. In Katan, everything is 3.5 inches." The challenge was not only technological, but psychological. The loom had been understood in a certain way for so long that design imagination itself had become restricted.

The eventual breakthrough came through working together, testing what the loom could actually do rather than what people assumed it could do.

Tanwy Kabir, SK Saifur Rahman

Designing beyond the saree

A major part of this experiment is not just about making weaving easier, but about rethinking how Katan can be used without distorting the fabric itself.

Kabir and Rahman are both critical of the common design shortcut of buying a finished saree and cutting it into jackets, tops, or gowns. Rahman puts it bluntly: "A saree is a complete dress on its own, as it already has a border, anchal, and a visual structure designed specifically for that form. When it is cut apart, motifs are often misplaced, cropped, or wasted."

Kabir connects this directly to their larger goal of making Katan more relevant to contemporary wearers. "We are working to take this to a global platform," she says. "If you only make sarees, you can't truly reach a global audience."

That is why they are experimenting with "different cuts — jackets, blazers, jumpsuits, and gowns." In her words, they are "breaking the monotony of Katan and Benarasi by creating different patterns."

What comes off the loom, then, is not generic yardage but a woven garment kit. If a dress requires three yards, three yards are woven to the exact width, with motifs placed where they are needed for the front, back, or sleeves. The tailor only has to cut and sew along the intended lines. This makes adaptation more intentional and avoids wasting a completed saree.

Kabir is clear that diversification is not being pursued for novelty alone. "We want to show how diversified these fabrics can be," she says. "Whether it's Indo-Western fusion, Western wear, or traditional ethnic wear, we want to do it all."

Nonetheless, before any global ambition, she stresses a more immediate task: "Our first goal is to make our own people understand the value, and then the rest of the world will follow."

Revival as a practical goal

What Kabir and Rahman are ultimately trying to do is not just diversify design. They are trying to make a revival economically and visually plausible.

Rahman says it plainly: "I want to see a revival." He wants more weavers working, more people wearing Katan and Benarasi, and more looms active in Mirpur. "We want to see the number of looms in Mirpur grow from 100 to 10,000," he says. He wants Mirpur to function as a serious textile village again and eventually see Bangladeshi heritage textiles on global fashion platforms.

But his emphasis remains local before global. "We want to make our own people understand the value, and then the rest of the world will follow."

That ambition explains why the device matters. It is not just a technical fix. It is a way of making handloom weaving more flexible, less wasteful, and more responsive to contemporary design without reducing it to machine logic. It helps Katan remain handmade while giving it room to move.

And that may be the real innovation here: not replacing tradition, but removing one of the obstacles that kept it trapped in repetition.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

#PROFILE

Miti Sanjana on building meaningful changes through awareness

Even after almost two decades as a lawyer, Barrister Miti Sanjana reminisces about a decade-old specific case involving a single mother fighting to keep her child to herself. She lawfully won that case, but what remained with her was not the verdict but the learning that law can change someone's life when enforced effectively.

She has not let go of that lesson to date. The founding partner of Legal Counsel and a Supreme Court advocate, also runs a column known as "Pathoker Proshno" on Prothom Alo, and is a familiar face on television, who explains the legal clauses in simpler terms.

However, Sanjana does not see her media and courtroom personalities as separate careers that conflict with each other. "Law requires precision, while media requires clarity," she explains.

And Sanjana has paid for it. Because when women speak publicly with conviction on property rights of women, leaving a toxic marriage, or turning their backs on an abusive home, the reception is rarely warm. She knows that and expects disagreement from the majority of the room, and has stopped seeking validation long ago.

Her loved ones, on the other hand, call her resilient, patient, and a tough cookie. She laughs at that a little and gladly agrees with the titles. Yet, she still doubts herself sometimes and gets up every time she falls.

"We often run after perfection, but perfection is just a subjective illusion," she remarks.

On the days that are a little too overwhelming, she steps away, resets, and spends quiet time with family. She profoundly enjoys books and movies that explore human dignity, fairness, and moral responsibility.

"Women should take off their superwoman cape once in a while and courageously accept their flaws," she adds.

Of all the areas she has worked in, corporate law, telecom, and commercial disputes, family law is the one she keeps returning to. It deals directly with people's lives in their lowest moments with an immediate, yet deeply humane impact.

However, her greatest mentors were not in courtrooms or law schools. According to Sanjana, her father was a living example of the practice of feminism. He consistently supported her mother in both her personal and professional endeavours. Her mother, meanwhile, handled financial decisions, property, banking, income, and tax returns as seamlessly.

The legal gap starts at home, Sanjana points out. Families that naturally pull sons into conversations about property, finances, and inheritance think nothing of leaving daughters out. And by the time a woman needs to understand her legal and financial rights, she is already prone to deception.

The ignorance costs people money, custody, land, and, most importantly, delays justice. The biggest gap, she insists, is not in the law itself, but in enforcement and access.

Legal Counsel was born to reduce the gap.

"The biggest challenge was building trust while building structure," she recalls of those early years. "A law firm is not just about legal knowledge; it is about credibility, consistency, and teamwork. Starting from scratch meant creating all of that at once."

She pauses when asked what she would have done had the law not called. "I would still choose work that has purpose and impact," she says, "something that includes interaction with people, advocacy, or public service."

When the discussion moves to whether citizens of Bangladesh know their rights, she answers without missing a beat, "Not as much as it is required." She believes being ignorant about information regarding dowry, divorce, land ownership, and inheritance leaves people vulnerable.

And ignorance, she has learned, is something people use against you. Sanjana emphasises that lasting progress requires education, media, and mass awareness, because the rights you are not aware of are futile.

It is not a new argument. Yet, she continues to put it out there in court, in columns, and on air, because someone ultimately has to voice it.

By K T Humaira
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel
Wardrobe: Benarasi by Tanwy Kabir
Jewellery: Canvas by Tanwy Kabir
Makeup: AnewMakeover by Shababa Rashid
Hair: Avi Rup

#FASHION & BEAUTY

Shababa Rashid champions authentic beauty in social media's filter era

At a time when beauty filters are sharpening jawlines, smoothing skin into artificial perfection, and convincing people they need to resemble edited versions of themselves, Rashid's excitement over something as simple as looking natural feels surprisingly radical.

"I can't explain how happy I feel when a client asks for clean girl makeup," shares Shababa Rashid. "What better trend is there than one where you still look like yourself?"

The Dhaka-based freelance makeup artist and stylist has quietly built a reputation around enhancement rather than transformation. Her clients do not come to her to become unrecognisable. Most of them, she says, come with the opposite request: "Please keep me in my own colour."

That philosophy sits at the centre of Rashid's growing presence in Bangladesh's beauty and editorial industry. Known for versatile styling, soft glam, and fashion-forward, yet wearable makeup, she represents a generation of artists reshaping how beauty is approached locally.

Nevertheless, her entry into the profession did not begin inside a salon or beauty academy.

"My makeup journey started during COVID, specifically around Halloween in 2020," she recalls. "I used to create skeleton looks and dramatic character makeup. At that time, I had no idea this would eventually become my career."

Back then, Rashid was between jobs and trying to navigate the strange stillness of lockdown life. Makeup became both experimentation and escape. What began as unconventional artistic expression soon evolved into something more serious, encouraged by family and friends.

"They kept telling me, 'You're good at this. Why don't you try doing it professionally?" she explains. "And honestly, I thought, why not start something new during such a difficult time?"

That idea of reinvention eventually became the foundation of her venture, AnewMakeover by Shababa Rashid. The name itself reflects the emotional context in which it was created.

"It basically means starting afresh," she explains. "COVID felt like a moment where everything had stopped. I wanted to create a new identity for myself."

Unlike many beauty businesses built around large salons or commercial studios, Rashid's operation remains intentionally small and personal. She works primarily from a room in her Dhaka home while also travelling extensively for editorial shoots, bridal appointments, and styling work.

"We're basically a team of two," she says, referring to herself and the hairstylist she regularly collaborates with. "Sometimes clients come to my place, and sometimes we go to theirs, carrying everything with us."

That freelance structure has allowed Rashid to move fluidly across different creative spaces. One day she may be preparing a bride, and the next she may be working on an editorial shoot. Yet, despite the variation, a recurring theme defines her work: resisting sameness in an industry often built around imitation.

"Most clients tell me they want to look like themselves," she says. Instead of masking freckles, texture, or deeper skin tones, Rashid focuses on subtle enhancement. She carefully matches foundation shades through trial and observation rather than defaulting to lighter tones, something still deeply embedded in South Asian beauty culture.

Rashid also speaks openly about the growing pressure created by AI-enhanced beauty imagery and social media aesthetics. Clients frequently arrive with edited reference photos that blur the line between makeup and digital manipulation.

"Sometimes the pictures people show me are not even realistic anymore," she says. "The skin is too smooth; the eyes are too sharp. I never dismiss what they want, but I try to explain that every face is different."

Her approach to beauty is also deeply tied to geography. Rashid believes many Bangladeshi consumers are still trying to replicate Western beauty standards without considering climate, skin texture, or local realities.

"We are a tropical country," she says. "Something that works in Europe or North America might not work here at all. People need to understand their own skin and environment more."

Like many freelance creatives in Bangladesh, Rashid faces challenges that are often practical rather than glamorous. Logistics, she says laughingly, remain one of the most exhausting parts of her profession.

"People think makeup is just a few brushes and lipsticks," she says. "In reality, there are so many products and tools to carry around constantly."

Still, she views freelancing as part of a longer process rather than a limitation. Rashid eventually hopes to open her own studio and grow AnewMakeover by Shababa Rashid into a widely recognised name.

"I don't only want celebrities to know my name," she says. "I equally want ordinary people to think of me naturally when they need makeup. I want to become part of people's lives."

For someone who entered the industry by painting skeleton faces during lockdown, that ambition no longer sounds unrealistic. In many ways, Shababa Rashid represents a new kind of beauty professional emerging in Dhaka today: digitally shaped, self-built, editorially aware, and increasingly interested in authenticity over perfection.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Courtesy

#TRAVEL

Pokhara

5 affordable Asian getaways every Bangladeshi traveller must experience

Most people assume that an international tour means draining their savings account and skipping lunch for the next three months. However, these five destinations, right here in Asia, prove otherwise. They offer stunning landscapes, incredible trekking opportunities, and, last but not least, mouth-watering food.

Not to mention, flights from Bangladesh to all five destinations are reasonably accessible, though some may require a stopover, and ticket prices vary depending on the season and how far in advance you book. Food is a highlight across the board as street food culture keeps eating costs low in there. Accommodation, on the other hand, ranges from budget guesthouses to comfortable hotels, with internal transport adding a worthwhile cost to the overall trip.

Kuala Lumpur

NEPAL

Standing at Poon Hill at sunrise, with Dhaulagiri and Annapurna turning gold in front of you, is one of those experiences that cannot be captured in photos. You have to be there yourself, shivering at 3,200 metres, cocooned in a jacket, and watching the Himalayas slowly waking up.

The Ghoreopani trek takes four days and does not require the skills of a professional trekker, if you walk regularly, you will be fine.

Pokhara deserves a couple of days on its own, featuring Phewa Tal, a lake that sits quietly with a mirror image of Machhapuchhre, the fishtail-shaped peak, on its surface. You can rent a rowboat, and spend that hour saying nothing at all, which is its own kind of luxury.

Kathmandu is chaotic in a way that feels familiar to Dhaka, but the Boudhanath Stupa cuts through all that noise. Rooftop cafés nearby sell butter tea and views of the stupa at dusk, and an evening spent that way, watching monks circle below as the city softens around you, costs almost nothing.

BHUTAN

Bhutan is a kingdom that has deliberately kept itself unhurried. No traffic jams, no queue of tourists, and trekking trails where you might go three days without running into another group. The scenery includes dzongs, those massive fortified monasteries perched over river valleys, with forested ridges and rice terraces cut into the hillsides behind them.

Tiger's Nest clings to a cliff face at 3,120 metres and requires two to three hours to climb. Nearly everyone who has attempted it says the same thing: best hike of their life. The sanctuary keeps appearing and disappearing through pine trees as you ascend, a detail that sounds like exaggeration until it is actually happening to you, and you realise you have stopped walking three times just to look.

All foreign nationals must travel with a licensed local guide, and this turns out to be worth more than people expect. A knowledgeable companion opens conversations with residents that you would never have had otherwise.

Homestays in Bhutan draw some of the warmest feedback of any accommodation in this part of Asia, with evenings spent in mountain houses, and sharing meals.

VIETNAM

Vietnam stretches over 1,600 kilometres from north to south and each region feels different enough to be its own journey. The north is cooler and older. The middle has seaside towns and ancient architecture lying side by side improbably. The south moves faster.

Hanoi is where most people begin, specifically the Old Quarter, a grid of narrow streets each historically dedicated to a single trade: silk, paper, tin. Hoan Kiem Lake occupies the centre of the city, a red bridge leading to a small island temple on its waters.

Ha Long Bay is best experienced on an overnight cruise. You wake up inside a bay of over 1,600 limestone islands with still green water and almost no sound.

Hoi An is the lantern-lit town everyone has already seen in travel magazines, and it holds up in person. Sapa, up in the northern highlands near the Chinese border, is where the famous rice terraces are. The Hmong and Dao communities carved them onto hillsides over generations. They look extraordinary in late September when the paddies turn gold before harvest.

MALAYSIA

In 2026, Malaysia recorded a significant increase in visitor numbers, and frequent travellers to the country are not surprised. Malaysia has quietly been building its appeal for years.

Kuala Lumpur is a functioning, modern city with metro for travelling, neighbourhoods that are distinct, and exceptional food at every price level. Petaling Street in Chinatown fills up at night with hawker stalls. Brickfields, the Indian quarter, smells of jasmine garlands and filter coffee

But Penang is the reason food travellers come to Malaysia. Georgetown, the old colonial town, is a UNESCO Heritage Site and the most serious hawker food city in Southeast Asia. Assam laksa, a sour, fishy, deeply layered noodle soup, has appeared on multiple world's best dishes.

Hanoi

Phuket

Langkawi is the island that people keep returning to. Duty-free status makes restaurants and resorts noticeably cheaper. The beaches are wide, white, and less crowded. Cable cars up Gunung Mat Chinchang give views over the Andaman Sea and the Indonesian islands on clear days, the kind of view that makes you feel both very small and very glad to be alive.

The Perhentian Islands, off the northeast coast, are for anyone wanting to spend four days watching reef sharks in shallow water and sea turtles drifting past on the way to dive sites.

THAILAND

Thailand is easy to travel in, with inexpensive, good quality food including flavourful Pad Thai, mango sticky rice, and fresh Som Tam, and overflowing cheap tropical fruits and snacks, and guesthouses that cost very little, tuk-tuks, and overnight buses covering vast distances for next to nothing.

Bangkok earns its reputation. Chatuchak Weekend Market has stalls selling everything from vintage clothing to live fish to ceramics. Chiang Mai has a different pace here. The old city is surrounded by a moat and still has its original walls. Sunday Walking Street runs through the old city with food and craft stalls.

For beaches, Koh Lanta and Koh Kood are quieter and better for anyone who wants the sea without the noise. Koh Phangan delivers exactly what it promises for those who want the full moon party, which is a different kind of trip entirely, and also a valid one.

Now, at some point, planning has to stop, and the booking has to start. These five countries are not going anywhere, but your free weeks are. Nepal's sunrise will unfold endlessly; the pho stall in Hanoi opens at six in the morning regardless, and somewhere on a cliff in Bhutan, there is a monastery that has been standing for 600 years. Go while you can, and I can guarantee you will come back with memories and souvenirs worth talking about.

By K T Humaira
Photo: Collected

#FOOD & RECIPES

Kachchi biriyani and the changing grammar of Bangladeshi weddings

Truth be told, kachchi biriyani is not my favourite dish. However, I do get a yearning for it every time I attend a wedding. After all, it has now emerged as the quintessential wedding dish.

Even three decades ago, it was reserved as the ceremonial food for the rich and was famous, and solely associated with elite weddings of Dhaka.

Today, it is served at functions across all strata of society.

Back in the day, weddings had a different culinary grammar altogether. A proper wedding feast called for steaming fragrant pulao, chicken roasts with their signature sweet richness, and a generous serving of delectable mutton rezala. At pre-wedding festivities like engagement or gaye holud, occasions which were considered lesser events, tehari was served. Often, the matter concluded with a generous serving of beef and porota.

That older, homely tradition has simply faded away and has been completely replaced with culinary reinterpretations.

Without a doubt, the ultimate wedding staple now reflects more than changing tastes and mirrors social aspirations. Kachchi was primarily favoured over other items, despite its elaborate cooking process, because of its practicality. Unlike wedding menus of the previous generations, where multiple elaborate items were deemed necessary, it came as a self-contained, "one dish wonder!" With a delicious mix of fragrant rice, richly marinated meat, and perfectly done potatoes, it was, and still is, a complete feast in itself.

However, times have changed and practicality alone cannot explain the biriyani's dominance today. It has somewhat become a marker of prestige, and perhaps that is why modern wedding menus often seem unable to stop at kachchi alone.

For reasons beyond epicurean reasoning, it now comes with additional meat courses, vegetables, various kebabs, and occasionally, even fish. These side dishes are less driven by appetite and more by the constant need to appear lavish, as wedding celebrations have quietly shifted from hospitality to spectacle.

Despite all the "culinary inflation," kachchi still holds an emotional position at all Dhaka weddings. The aroma of the spices and fragrance of the slow-cooked meat, the richness of the saffron and kewra drifting across a banquet hall still spell celebration in the city.

And perhaps, that is the triumph of good kachchi. It is not only a food served at weddings, but a part and parcel of the weddings themselves. So much so that they have become a part of the way weddings are remembered. That's why even for people like myself, who are not great fans of the kachchi, there is a yearning for it.

By Mannan Mashhur Zarif
Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

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#PERSPECTIVE

Women of Thakurbari shaped Bengal's culture beyond RABINDRANATH TAGORE

At "Nabo Anande Jaago: The Legacy of Thakurbari," arranged by the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre, High Commission of India, Dhaka, in collaboration with the Fashion Design Council of Bangladesh, Rabindranath Tagore's 165th birth anniversary was marked through a wider lens. Instead of focusing only on the poet himself, the event used music, recitation, archival material, and fashion to also bring the women of the Tagore family into view.

That shift mattered.

Rabindranath Tagore is so central to Bengali cultural memory that everyone around him risks becoming mere mentions in the annals of history. The women, especially, become portraits, names, or passing footnotes.

However, as Maheen Khan, founder and president of the Fashion Design Council of Bangladesh, made clear, this project was never meant to be only about homage. It was also about retrieval.

"For quite some time, for several years actually, we have been thinking about doing a project where we can bring the iconic women of Bengal to light," she informed. For her, the women of Thakurbari represented something larger than literary prestige.

"They were the landed gentry; they were an intellectually profound family," she noted, adding that their progressive way of life gave the women of the household a distinct cultural position.

The event reflected that idea not only through speech, but through design.

Beyond literary pedigree

It is tempting to remember Swarnakumari Devi simply as Rabindranath's sister. That would be the simplest possible reading of her. She belonged to one of Bengal's most intellectually vibrant families, yes, but she also justified her place in it through her own labour.

Maheen Khan drew attention to one of the most practical aspects of Swarnakumari's legacy. "Her lifestyle was a bit different," she said, before pointing to Sakhi Samiti, the women's association Swarnakumari founded.

The organisation worked to develop skills among widows and deprived women at a time when such work was far from fashionable philanthropy.

"This was back in the 1870s-1880s," Khan noted. "This is something we are still struggling with today, providing people with skills to generate income."

That observation does two things at once. It places Swarnakumari inside the reformist energy of her time, and it also makes her feel unexpectedly contemporary. In current conversations, women's empowerment is often framed as a modern agenda. Yet, here was a woman in the Tagore family thinking institutionally about women's economic capacity more than a century ago.

Swarnakumari's significance lies not only in authorship or social status, but in usefulness. She did not simply inhabit a household where ideas circulated. She translated ideas into structure.

Education, elegance, and exposure

If Swarnakumari reveals one side of Thakurbari's female legacy, Indira Devi Chaudhurani reveals another: education shaped by exposure.

Khan described Indira Devi as a standout figure, not only because of her family background but because of what she represented historically. She was, as Maheen Khan pointed out, one of the first female graduates of the Tagore family.

"They had much more exposure to the world than an ordinary person," Khan said of the women in this branch of the family. That exposure matters when one thinks about the women of Thakurbari not as secluded cultural symbols, but as participants in a larger transnational modernity.

There is also something aesthetically important about figures like Indira Devi. They complicate any simplistic notion of Bengali femininity as rooted solely in domesticity and restraint. These were women who were shaped by Bengali culture, yes, but also by travel, languages, social reform, and global contact. They carried Bengal outward, and brought the world back with them.

The architect of a visual language

Among the women Maheen Khan highlighted in her own line, Protima Devi received special attention. The choice was deliberate. Often remembered simply as Rabindranath Tagore's daughter-in-law or as part of the Santiniketan circle, Protima is usually framed through relation. Khan's reading was fuller.

"She was very close to Rabindranath," she said. "Even though her husband eventually left her, she remained a pillar of the family." For Khan, Protima's significance lies in work rather than proximity. She was involved in the art department at Visva-Bharati, worked closely with Nandalal Bose, and contributed significantly to dance dramas.

She was not simply within Tagore's orbit; she helped shape its visual and performative language.

From Thakurbari to Bombay Talkies

If Protima Devi represents one kind of cultural labour, Devika Rani represents another.

Khan described her as Rabindranath's grand-niece and one of the most progressive women of her time. Sent to England at a young age, Devika studied music, architecture, and textile design, travelled widely across Europe with Rabindranath, and later studied filmmaking in Germany with Himanshu Rai. Together, they would go on to found Bombay Talkies, one of early Indian cinema's defining studios.

Khan's decision to place Devika alongside Protima was telling. One remained rooted in Santiniketan and its artistic world; the other moved into film and modern industry. Yet both, in Khan's view, represented "the incredible cultural synthesis of early 20th-century India," bridging Indian aesthetics and global modernity.

Maheen Khan's broader point was that the women of the Tagore family were not marginal to Bengal's awakening. They embodied its tensions and possibilities. "We want their stories to reach the people," she said. "People should know how they dressed and what their manners and lifestyles were like."

And together, they make one thing clear: Thakurbari was never built by Rabindranath alone.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Silvia Mahjabeen/Courtesy