We are yet to build an institution for theatre: Ramendu Majumdar

Theatre icon speaks to The Daily Star on 86th birthday

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Ekushey Padak-winning theatre stalwart Ramendu Majumdar turns 86 today. He is the founding secretary of the renowned theatre troupe Theatre, and has been editor of the Theatre magazine for more than five decades. He also served as President of the International Theatre Institute (ITI).

As a cultural icon, his contribution to stage theatre has been immense. Even at the age of 86, he continues to perform on stage in the productions ***Love Letters*** and ***Meraj Fakirer Ma***. His wife is the celebrated actress Ferdousi Mazumder, and their only daughter is Tropa Majumdar.

Sitting down with The Daily Star at his residence, he reflected on his glorious journey in his career, life and more.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Happy Birthday! If you are told to look back, how beautiful has life been?

As life gradually draws to a close, you realise just how beautiful it truly is. You begin to wonder why you could not have embraced it even more. Even so, I have no regrets. I often say that I have travelled in a bullock cart and travelled by aeroplane as well. In one lifetime, I have journeyed a long way. I consider myself fortunate.

There is a song that goes, "Ami Akriti Odhom Boleo To Kichhu Kom Kore Morey Dao Ni" (which loosely translates to, "Though I am unworthy and insignificant, you have never given me any less").

That sentiment resonates deeply with me. I may have unfulfilled aspirations when it comes to my art, but I have none when it comes to life.

> **Having Abdullah Al Mamun as our playwright was a great strength. He understood the troupe's vision. The Liberation War, youth, and women's empowerment were recurring themes. We have always believed theatre should offer more than entertainment—it should have a message.**

You mentioned having unfulfilled aspirations in your artistic journey. Could you elaborate?

When I look at Bishwa Sahitya Kendra, I see that Abdullah Abu Sayeed has built a permanent institution. We have not. I do, however, believe an artiste's sense of incompleteness never goes away.

What do you consider Theatre's greatest achievement over the past five decades?

We have always tried to stage plays rooted in real life, and I believe we have succeeded. Our productions have reflected contemporary issues.

Having Abdullah Al Mamun as our playwright was a great strength. He understood the troupe's vision. The Liberation War, youth, and women's empowerment were recurring themes. We have always believed theatre should offer more than entertainment—it should have a message.

Since his passing, producing contemporary plays has become more difficult, though we continue to try.

Another achievement is building a wider audience for theatre and helping establish it as a cultural force.

We have also published Theatre magazine for 54 years, and I have edited it throughout. That, too, is a significant achievement.

How important are art and culture to a nation?

No nation, especially the Bengali nation, can move forward without communal harmony. Art and culture are essential to nurturing that spirit. Children should be introduced to them from an early age, both at home and in school.

The government must also encourage this, so that young people grow up with an appreciation for art, literature and communal harmony.

What genuinely brings you joy?

Other people's success brings me joy. I enjoy reading stories of achievement in the newspapers.

For 12 or 13 years, I hosted a programme on Bangladesh Television featuring ordinary people. I interviewed around 400 individuals who had quietly devoted themselves to improving society. They did not seek fame—they simply wanted to do good.

One of them was a rickshaw puller who went on to build a hospital. Sharing stories like these brings me immense joy.

Why have you been less active on television over the course of your career?

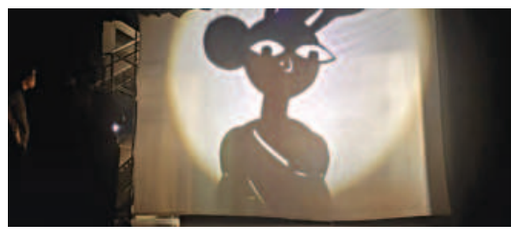
I acted in ***Ektala Dotala***, one of Bangladesh Television's first dramas. I also read the news for many years. At the time, newsreaders were not encouraged to act, so I did fewer television dramas. I was also more involved in organisational work.

I still perform in ***Meraj Fakirer Ma***and ***Love Letters***. Both give me great satisfaction. ***Love Letters*** is directed by my daughter, Tropa Majumdar.

What role has Ferdousi Mazumder played in your life and career?

I could not have done what I have without her. She looked after our home and our daughter's upbringing, allowing me to devote myself to my work.

We have shared the same artistic journey, and our daughter, Tropa, has followed it too. She is deeply committed to theatre. I feel our lives have been fulfilled.



'SULTANA'S DREAM' reimagined 121 years later in 'Project Ladyland 2026'

More than a century after Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain imagined a feminist utopia in ***Sultana's Dream***, HerStory Foundation is returning to Ladyland with a question: what might that imagined society look like today?

Inspired by Rokeya's landmark 1905 work, ***Project Ladyland 2026*** is a participatory theatrical production that reimagines Ladyland 121 years later, exploring how ideas surrounding gender, equality and social progress have evolved since Rokeya first conceived her utopian world.

The production is set to be staged in Dhaka on August 13 and 14 at Bangladesh Mahila Samity, before travelling to Chattogram for performances on August 24 and 25 at Theatre Institute, Chattogram.

'Malik' begins streaming on OTT after Eid release



After its theatrical release during Eid-ul-Azha, Arifin Shuvoo and Bidya Sinha Mim-starrer ***Malik*** has now made its way to streaming.

Directed by Saif Chandan, the film became available on the OTT platform Utshob from midnight on Thursday, August 6.

Centred on love, revenge and the power struggle, ***Malik*** follows a story driven by a son's fight to defend his mother's dignity and claim her rights. The film had generated considerable audience interest following its theatrical release earlier this year.

Alongside Shuvoo and Mim, the ensemble cast includes Dipjol, Misha Sawdagor, Shipon Mitra, Elina Shammi, Don, Kazi Hayat and AJ Rana, among others.

With its OTT release, ***Malik*** is now available to audiences who missed its run in theatres.

NEWS

174 Bangladeshis stranded for over 33hrs

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the aircraft for around eight hours, during which the air-conditioning was not running, and were served only one meal. They were later taken to a waiting area.

"At one point, those with passports from Canada and the United States were taken to a hotel. Meanwhile, as night fell in Rome, the Bangladeshi passengers were taken to a lounge where they could get some food, but there were no facilities for them to rest. They were taken back to the waiting area at dawn and have been there ever since."

She said some passengers were travelling with babies but had no access to diapers or baby food.

The Toronto-Rome-Dhaka flight BG306, carrying 259 passengers, landed at Fiumicino on Friday morning for a scheduled refuelling stop when the technical fault was detected.

According to passengers, those holding Canadian, US or other foreign passports or relevant visas were allowed to clear Italian immigration and accommodated in hotels, while 174 Bangladeshi passport holders were unable to enter Italy and had to remain inside the airport.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Bushra Islam, general manager of public relations at Biman, said the airline had been unable to arrange hotels for the stranded passengers because they could not clear immigration. "We have managed to provide hotel accommodation to those who have foreign passports, but not to those who were travelling with Bangladeshi passports."

She added that there was no hotel inside Rome airport, unlike at airports in some other cities, such as Dubai. "We have kept the passengers in a holding lounge and provided all kinds of facilities. One of the female passengers fell sick, and our country manager there arranged medicine for her."

Passengers, however, alleged that the arrangements were inadequate.

In a video obtained by The Daily Star, Md Abu Sayeed, a senior lecturer in the Department of Computer Science at Independent University, Bangladesh, said elderly passengers, children and others had fallen ill during the prolonged wait.

He said the Bangladeshi passport holders had to spend the night on the floor or on chairs before being moved to a lounge.

Another passenger, Mohammad Rokonur Rahman, said elderly people, diabetic patients and children were particularly vulnerable, as some did not have access to their regular medication. He alleged that passengers were not receiving adequate information or assistance.

In a statement on Friday night, Biman said hotels had been arranged for all passengers. Its subsequent explanation, however, said accommodation could only be provided to passengers permitted to clear Italian immigration.

In an update yesterday, Biman said aircraft S2-AJY remained "AOG" (Aircraft on Ground) in Rome and that an engineering team carrying spare parts and equipment had left Dhaka at 1:53pm (Dhaka time) and was expected to reach Rome at 7:17pm (Rome time) to begin repairs immediately.

Subject to successful repairs, BG306 was scheduled to leave Rome at 11:00pm (Rome time) yesterday and arrive in Dhaka at 11:30am (Dhaka time) today.

If the flight left at the scheduled time, the passengers would have spent around 39 hours and 40 minutes in Rome since the aircraft landed there.

Md Ohidul Haque, whose mother is among the stranded passengers, wrote in a Facebook post around 6:50pm yesterday that the passengers had suffered severe physical and mental distress.

He alleged that adequate food, water and regular updates were not available and said his mother had been left exhausted by the prolonged wait.

Riyadh turns to Muslim powers

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must manage its sizeable Shia population and its sensitive relationship with Tehran, while Turkey and Iran share concerns over Kurdish separatism despite competing elsewhere in the region.

Tehran repeatedly struck targets in Saudi Arabia during the war, including civilian infrastructure, energy facilities and US interests. Direct Iranian attacks on Saudi Arabia largely subsided after an April 8 ceasefire took hold, but Iran-backed groups in Yemen and Iraq continued targeting the kingdom.

Riyadh has been one of the war's most vocal opponents and has worked to restrain US President Donald Trump from escalating against the Islamic Republic. Yet the attacks Saudi Arabia continues to face from multiple fronts have left officials increasingly alarmed and frustrated.

A Saudi official told CNN on Thursday that the kingdom was bracing for a major, coordinated assault by Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Yemen, supported by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. CNN has also reported that Tehran warned Gulf nations that renewed US attacks would trigger retaliation against energy or desalination facilities across the region.

The treaty signed on Friday therefore serves as a warning to Tehran: another major attack on Saudi Arabia could invoke the pact, draw Pakistan and Turkey into the conflict and dramatically widen the war.

Reaction emerging from Tehran indicated their dissatisfaction toward the agreement, as a senior Iranian official warned that it will not guarantee Saudi Arabia's security.

Infantino bins claims

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said any suggestion of inappropriate conduct or a breach of regulations was defamatory.

"No employee at UEFA and FIFA has ever raised a complaint regarding Mr Infantino's behaviour because there never was an incident where he was involved," the spokesperson told the newspaper.

UEFA confirmed that a departure payment had been made to the woman but rejected any suggestion that it violated the organisation's rules. It said the payment also included fees for her to complete an MBA at a local business school.

The governing body said the payments complied with the regulations in force at the time, although those rules have since been tightened.

"[The regulations] reflect those found in a modern, high-profile organisation," UEFA said.

Aynaghar bears signs of brutal torture

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regime," Aminul said.

Many of the cells were windowless, fitted with heavy exhaust fans designed to isolate detainees and prevent sounds from escaping. "Through this inspection, we could somewhat feel the brutal reality of how detainees were kept here," Aminul observed.

Earlier on August 1, ICT-1 judges inspected another secret detention site -- the Rab-run Task Force for Interrogation (TFI) cell in Uttara, which has 29 cells.

Aminul said two other facilities remain to be inspected: a Rab-2 site where investigators found an electric chair and a Detective Branch facility that has since been sealed.

He added that the JIC inspection revealed signs of evidence being erased after August 5, 2024. Despite subsequent plastering, writing linked to BNP leader Humam Quader Chowdhury remained visible in one cell.

The inspections come as the tribunal hears two major cases filed over crimes against humanity, including charges of enforced disappearance, secret detention and torture.

In one case, prosecutors accuse ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and 12 others over the disappearance and torture of at least 24 people at the JIC between 2016 and August 2024.

The second case concerns the Rab-run TFI cell, where 17 people, including Hasina and senior military officials, face charges over the disappearance and torture of 14 people during the same period.

Former detainees have described harrowing conditions. Humam testified he was held at the JIC, marking days of confinement by scratching the wall. Another witness, Iqbal Chowdhury, said he was picked up in May 2018 and spent nearly a year in a cell lit constantly by a bulb and filled with the noise of an exhaust fan.

Defence lawyers argued that some witness accounts did not match what was observed during inspection. Aminul rejected the claim, accusing the defence of misleading arguments.

Aminul stressed that inspections would allow judges to compare testimony with physical evidence and strengthen the process.

The former government and those responsible for running the state would ultimately have to explain why citizens were held outside the normal legal process, he said.

"If a citizen commits a crime, he must face trial under the law. But no citizen should be subjected to extrajudicial killing or harassment. No one should be kept in such a detention facility for days, months or years," he added.

