‘Wanted to add something meaningful to my life’
Mithila on joining Columbia



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Rafiath Rashid Mithila has won audiences over through her work in Bangladeshi and Indian Bengali films, as well as with several acclaimed projects on OTT platforms. Her journey began with modelling, followed by television acting, but alongside her career in showbiz, she spent many years working with international development organisation BRAC.

Now, Mithila has embarked on a new chapter in her life — one that is not only significant for her personally but also a source of pride for Bangladesh. Her latest achievement has drawn warm wishes from fellow artistes and colleagues across the country’s showbiz community.

Mithila joined the Columbia University, Irving Institute for Clinical and Translational Research as an Associate Research Scientist. She is currently based in the United States, from where she spoke to The Daily Star about her new journey.

Speaking about her feelings after joining Columbia as a researcher, Mithila said, “I feel really good. It is a very respected profession. I will be doing something that I genuinely love, which makes it even more special.”

“Columbia University is one of the world’s top 10 universities. I also want to do well as a researcher. I want to gain new experiences and add something meaningful to my life,” she added.

Her new achievement has brought immense joy to her parents as well.

“They are really happy and proud. Whatever I have achieved today is because of them. Their contribution to my life has been the greatest. They have always encouraged and inspired me. I have been able to come this far because of their support,” Mithila said.

Reflecting on her first day at Columbia, she described it as a memorable experience, despite not having any formal work on the schedule.

“There was no actual work on the first day. Still, I made some beautiful memories and had some wonderful experiences. I felt a different kind of happiness. I also spoke to the professor I will be working with. That was about it,” she said.

Mithila also looked back fondly on her long association with BRAC.

“To be honest, everyone at BRAC gave me a very warm farewell. I worked there for many years. I developed a deep emotional connection with the organisation through all the work I did there. I travelled to many countries and gained so many experiences,” she said.

“I have worked in many countries, and I will never forget the love I received from the people there,” she added.

As she begins this new chapter, Mithila has one simple request for everyone who has supported her journey.

“Please keep me in your prayers and shower me with your love. I hope I can do something good,” she said.

Rap meets folk as musicians stand against child marriage

National Award-winning musician and composer Emon Chowdhury, rapper Aly Hasan, Maruf and folk singer Aleya Begum have joined forces for ***Koinya***, an experimental folk-fusion track and music video raising awareness against child marriage.

Produced by BBC Media Action as part of its Child, Not Bride campaign, the song combines Bengali folk melodies with hip-hop. The project aims to raise awareness about the devastating consequences of child marriage and encourage families to protect the dreams and futures of young girls.

Emon said music and visuals can communicate social messages emotionally, while praising Aly Hasan for turning local expressions into engaging rhymes.

The music video is available on Facebook and YouTube.



‘Jessore Road’ musical staged at Chhayanaut



Badhonhara Theatre School from Narsingdi staged its musical production ***Jessore Road*** at Chhayanaut auditorium in Dhaka on Friday, revisiting the suffering of Bengali refugees during the 1971 Liberation War.

Directed by Kamruzzaman Tapu, the production draws on American poet and activist Allen Ginsberg’s ***September on Jessore Road***, written after his visit to refugee camps along the Bangladesh-India border.

Around 60 performers, aged four to 70, took part in the presentation. It also featured a shadow performance of the poem, excerpts from the documentaries ***Stop Genocide, Birth of a Nation*** and ***Muktir Gaan***, and Moushumi Bhowmik’s ***Shoto Shoto Chokh***.

The production was first staged in 2012. Friday’s show marked its 71st staging at Chhayanaut.

EVENTS

‘The Song of Agony: ARISHADVARGA’

Alliance Française de Dhaka presents ***The Song of Agony: Arishadvarga***, a solo exhibition by Dr Abu Kalam Shamsuddin. The exhibition explores human nature through six inner enemies: lust, anger, greed, arrogance, addiction and jealousy. Through his paintings, Shamsuddin gives visual form to these emotions and invites viewers to reflect on how they shape our lives and relationships.

Date: Saturday–Tuesday | October 3–13, 2026
Time: 3:00pm–9:00pm
Venue: La Galerie, Alliance Française de Dhaka



NEWS

Leave now or face ‘mortal danger’

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Kyiv has been increasingly under aerial bombardment in recent months, with the attacks and alerts disrupting daily life and sowing traffic chaos.

Long lines of stationary cars and buses clogged major roads on Friday as commuters sought alternate routes, with some forced to continue their journeys on foot.

Air raid sirens warning of approaching threats sound almost round the clock, urging the city’s estimated three million people to seek shelter.

Strikes across the country in recent days have also caused power outages in several regions in the east, north and centre, with grid operator Ukrenergo urging consumers to limit usage even as demand increases with colder weather.

Ukraine braces for another difficult winter. Last year, heating and power were cut for days on end as temperatures plunged to -20C.

The grinding war, which began with Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022, has turned into Europe’s bloodiest conflict since World War II.

Ukraine has appeared to stabilise the front in recent months, but depleted air-defence stocks since the start of the US-Israeli war in Iran have left its cities exposed to Russian barrages.

The US-brokered peace efforts are effectively frozen as Moscow has shown no signs of dropping its maximalist conditions to end the war, including a demand that Ukraine cede territory in the east that Russia’s troops have not captured.

Workers’ skills, migration on separate tracks

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“There is no connection between the technical training centres and the recruitment process,” Shakirul told The Daily Star yesterday.

Recruiters often source workers from remote areas, including people with little education or no skills, and the system gives workers little incentive to train before departure, he said.

A Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) study supports the concern.

It found that 73 percent of 919 outbound workers surveyed had received no training before going abroad.

Only 9.6 percent had been trained at government TTCs and 17.4 percent at non-TTC institutions.

The study examined the capacity of TTCs to prepare workers for overseas employment. It used quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys at 40 TTCs and of around 2,000 TTC graduates, interviews with TTC principals, instructors, private-sector trainers and NGOs, and focus-group discussions with graduates. The preliminary findings were presented in June 2025.

Shakirul said the problem is not only that too few workers are trained, but also that the training does not always match labour-market demand.

Some training modules have been in use for “50 or 60 years” despite rapid technological change, he said, arguing that TTCs need a demand-driven mechanism.

The CPD study found significant mismatches between the courses TTCs offer and the trades they identified as high-demand.

Of the 40 TTCs surveyed, 23 offered consumer electronics training, though only five identified it as high-demand.

By contrast, only two offered mobile servicing, while 11 identified it as high-demand. Similarly, nine offered food and beverage training, against 14 that saw it as high-demand.

The study said the mismatches reflect weak course planning and slow responses to labour-market demand.

Md Sakawat Ali, principal of the Dhaka Technical Teachers’ Training Institute (DTTTI), said the system also places greater emphasis on the number of workers sent abroad than on whether they are placed in skill-specific jobs.

“At present, we are mainly counting heads -- how many people we sent abroad. There is much less emphasis on how many were sent in a skill-based, job-oriented or trade-specific manner,” he told The Daily Star.

Some workers, particularly those heading for helper-level jobs, want to leave as quickly as possible rather than spend time acquiring skills, he said. Middlemen also have an incentive to send more workers because their earnings rise with the numbers they facilitate.

The TTCs also face serious capacity constraints.

Across the 40 surveyed, each centre had an average of 73 approved posts, of which 36 were vacant, including around 21 trainer posts. The study separately put the average number of trainers at 23 per centre.

On average, one trainer handled 423 trainees a year, rising to 1,356 at some centres.

“Our TTCs are well established in terms of infrastructure, but there is an acute manpower shortage. Because of that, the training does not reach the level it should,” said Sakawat.

There are also gaps in training materials and equipment.

Some 57.5 percent of the surveyed TTCs said their training materials were somewhat inadequate, and 52.5 percent lacked sufficient access to up-to-date equipment.

Although 60 percent said their machinery had been updated to industry standards, the study found that outdated technology and equipment were still in use.

Against this backdrop, the government plans to identify industries operating in different regions, determine the skills they require and tailor training accordingly, starting with a pilot programme in Chattogram.

Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Ariful Haque Chowdhury announced the initiative yesterday after visiting the Bangladesh-Korea Technical Training Centre and the Women’s Technical Training Centre in Chattogram.

“If we cannot send skilled workers, there is no real benefit for the country in simply increasing the numbers and sending lakhs and lakhs of workers abroad,” he said.

He also called for greater public-private partnership, saying private institutions in many cases were performing better despite having less infrastructure and fewer facilities than government institutions.

“If they can do it, why can’t we?” he said.

4 teen gang leaders of Cumilla arrested

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gang operations across the district in separate drives from Sunday evening to yesterday morning.

Later, 44 of them were handed over to their guardians after signing bonds, while one, who was accused in a previous violence case, was shown arrested, said the district’s Additional Superintendent of Police Pear Ahmed.

With this, a total of 681 people were detained in the last week for their alleged involvement with teen gangs. Of them, 48 were shown as arrested, while the others were released after signing bonds, according to police.

No one was picked up from their homes or while sitting in restaurants, police said. Rather, those detained were found wandering on roads or outside their homes after evening, “when they were supposed to be studying”.

Police say they are monitoring the activities of teen gang members allegedly involved in drug peddling, drug abuse, illegal motorcycle trading, extortion and other criminal activities.

The intensified operation against teen gangs came after growing concerns over a series of criminal activities by teen gangs, including the murder of 13-year-old Ishayat Shahriar Oprotim.

[Our correspondent from Noakhali also contributed to the report]

Spare parts, equipment shortages

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module; the common motor start controller; and two different faults in motor controllers for the hydraulic spoilers, which help slow the aircraft.

Biman’s Boeing fleet issues are concentrated in complex systems, but wear-and-tear issues account for many of the service interruptions across Boeing’s global fleet.

For instance, the top driver of service interruptions for Biman’s 787s was the brake system control unit. Its breakdown rate was 14 times higher than the global fleet.

Brake-system failures do not even feature in the global fleet’s top 10.

The second-highest cause for Biman’s 787s was the spoilers, the panels on the upper surface of the wings that rise to increase drag and help the aircraft slow down.

There were two such occurrences in six months, and Boeing took corrective action in at least one case in August 2017.

The spoiler ranks ninth among the global fleet’s top 10 problems, but Biman’s rate of breakdown is about five times higher.

For the global 787 fleet, the top three causes are related to the general processing module, passenger seats and in-flight entertainment units.

For Biman’s 777s, the leading cause of service interruptions was the temperature control system, which fails six or seven times more often than it does in the global fleet, where it ranks eighth.

The second-highest cause was the cargo door, where Biman experiences about 14 times as many malfunctions as the global average.

Globally, the biggest concerns for 777s are the engine air supply and passenger seats, neither of which is a major problem for Biman.

The report notes a “lack of critical spares in stock at Dhaka base for 787 and 777”.

“Limited availability of parts leaves aircraft vulnerable and adds risk to dispatch situations,” it says.

The shortage has contributed to what Boeing described as a “high minimum equipment list (MEL) count”.

The MEL specifies which components are allowed to remain inoperative while an aircraft continues to fly, so a high count means an aircraft is operating with many inoperative components awaiting maintenance.

“MEL repair interval extensions are common and vastly over-utilised,” the report says, indicating that Biman frequently defers repairs.

It recommends an “urgent need to address MEL issues without waiting for the last minute”.

The report also identified shortages of maintenance tools at Biman’s main base and outstations, along with a shortage of skilled workers.

It recommended a proper succession plan to bridge the gap between the ageing workforce and new hires, career opportunities and incentives to retain talent, more training for mechanics working on newer aircraft models, and apprentice programmes.

Poor coordination was also contributing to delays, according to the report.

The departure ramp is 20 to 40 minutes from the hangar, and engineering staff must print manuals for last-minute technical problems because they do not have tablets with electronic manuals. There are no airside vans and only one high-lift platform in the hangar, the report said.

Biman also has no pool agreement or labour support at international bases, so “people must be dispatched from Dhaka base” to support aircraft on the ground. Visa procedures and travel time can cause further delays, it added.

That was the case in Rome on August 7 this year, when a Biman 787 operating from Toronto to Dhaka was stuck at Fiumicino Airport because of a technical problem.

Biman had to send two engineers and replacement parts from Dhaka, and nearly 260 passengers remained stranded there for more than 40 hours.

Amina Anjum Tonni, a Dhaka-based private-sector employee who was bringing her parents back from Canada on the flight, described the ordeal. “My father has had three bypass surgeries and had no opportunity to sleep during those 40 hours. They were sleeping upright throughout. He did not have his medication with him,” she said.

On August 22 this year, a Biman flight from Dhaka to Toronto via Rome was delayed by six hours, according to the airline’s operational summary.

Over the 24 hours from August 22 to 23, Biman recorded 10 flight delays, at least two of them caused by technical issues.

A Biman internal report recorded 37 delays due to technical issues over five weeks, from July 5, 2025.

The Biman report said recurring problems included wheel replacement or loss of tyre pressure (causing more than six delays), cabin-pressure control faults (causing more than five delays) and engine-related problems (causing more than four), as well as sensor faults, spoiler actuator problems, and cracked windscreens.

The report also cited several incidents.

On July 19, a Biman aircraft returned to Dhaka after developing a crack in its windscreen.

On February 28, 2025, a Dhaka-Bangkok flight was forced to return because of cabin decompression. Oxygen masks were deployed but allegedly did not work because their stated expiry date was June 2001, according to the report.

Air Commodore Mohammad Akhter Jamil, chair of avionics engineering at Aviation and Aerospace University Bangladesh, said the spare-parts shortage could be costly for the airline.

“When a plane is brought in for maintenance, and there are no spare parts, the engineer may refuse to sign it off as fit to fly. It would have to be taken out of the rotation, which would throw off the entire schedule,” he said.

The shortage could point to two possibilities, Jamil said, adding, “Either procurement is not being done on time, or parts are being consumed at a very high rate because of more frequent technical problems.”

The Daily Star contacted Biman’s managing director and CEO multiple times over two weeks but had not received a response as of filing this report yesterday.

Questions were also sent to the MD’s office through Biman’s public relations officer.

Asked whether Biman had acted on any of Boeing’s recommendations in the year since the report was prepared, a Biman official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said it had not.