

# The 21st Dhaka international film festival

## It was a gathering of souls

The 21st Dhaka International Film Festival ended with the slogan 'Better Film, Better Audience and Better Society'. The festival was held from January 14 to 22, 2023 at various places in Dhaka. The audience response to this biggest international film festival in Bangladesh was extraordinary. The foreign delegates who came to the festival were hopeful and delighted to see the audience. Not only that, but they also appreciated the growth of Bangladeshi films. The audience and film lovers of the country also expressed their excitement and hoped to come again next time.



*21st DIFF opening ceremony performance by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.*

## Bucket of Films

The festival screened 252 films from 71 countries in the different sections: Asian Competition Section, Retrospective Section, Bangladesh Panorama, Wide Angle, Cinema of the World, Children's Film, Spiritual Films, Short and Independent Film and Women's Film Session in this year's festival. Out of 252 in the festival, 129 were feature films (more than 50 minutes), and 123 were short and independent films. In addition, 81 Bangladeshi movies, of which 69 were short and independent, and 12 were full-length. Not only films but more than 80 foreign filmmakers, producers, film selectors, and coordinators (programmers), film critics, and judges joined the festival and performed their designated duties at the festival.

Like the previous festival, this time too, the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Culture, Beximco Group of Companies, IFIC Bank Limited, Root Group of Companies, and European Union Bangladesh have given unique cooperation. The festival partners were Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Bangladesh National Museum, Alliance Française de Dhaka, Dhaka Club Limited, Norwegian International Film Festival in Haugesund, Religion Today Film Festival - Italy, Channel I, Durant TV, Ekatar TV, Sense for Wave and CloudLive.

## The curtain rose, and the lights dimmed

Hon'ble Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, MP. inaugurated the film festival at Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Auditorium of the Bangladesh National Museum at 4:00 pm on 14th January 2023. The event was presided over by Hon'ble State Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Chief Patron, Festival Committee Md. Shahriar Alam, MP. A renowned Indian actor Sabyasachi Chakrabarty and Hon'ble Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Md. Mokammel Hossain were also present as special guests at the inaugural ceremony. Following the inaugural ceremony of the festival, a Fakhrul Arefeen Khan directed film titled 'JK 1971' was screened.



*During the Opening of 21st DIFF*

### Screening Places

The screenings were held at the Alliance Française de Dhaka, Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Auditorium and Poet Sufia Kamal Auditorium of the Bangladesh National Museum, National Art Gallery auditorium and Jatiya Sangeet and Nrityakala Auditorium of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy in the capital.

### Shades of Films

The competition section included the **Asian Cinema Competition**. Comprised of around 24 films from various Asian countries (minimum 70-minute-long fiction film), the competition category had an independent international jury members to determine the best film. Asian Films Competition Section jury board included Iranian film director Pouran Derakhshandeh, Festival Director and filmmaker Mostafa Kamal from UK, and Armenian independent filmmaker Arsen Arakelyan.

The award for the best film was a crest, certificate and cash 1200 USD. Moreover, there was a certificate and crest award for the best director, actor-actress, cinematographer, and screenplay.

**The Retrospective Section** screened four films by François Truffaut, an essential French filmmaker in world cinema. The films were, 'The Four Hundred Blows,' 'Confidentially Yours,' 'Jule A Jim,' and 'The Last Metro'.

**Bangladesh Panorama** had nine full-length pictures of Bangladesh. In addition, short films of 10 minutes were added for the first time in this category. The top three films were selected from among the 20 films in the competition. Among these three, the best short film received TK. 2,50,000 as well the FIPRESCI certificate in the category of 'best short film'. Moreover, the first runner-up received TK 1,50,000, and the second runner-up received TK 1,00,000.

One full-length and one short film of Bangladesh Panorama were awarded the FIPRESCI certificate by the International Federation of Film Critics. Ukrainian Film critic Elena Rubashevskya, Artechock Filmmagazin editor Axel Timo Purr from Germany and film critic from Bangladesh Bidhan Rebeiro were the members of the jury of Bangladesh Panorama Section.

The **Cinema of the World section** showcased the best 45 contemporary films from different countries. The best film got selected in the audience poll for this category. Awards for the film were certificates and crests.

Eighteen films for children are screened in the **Children Film Section**. As always, this exhibition has always been open to all children. Specifically, DIFF has arranged the morning children film session for the underprivileged children. One film from this category was nominated for the 'Best Juvenile Audience Badal Rahman Award'. Here too, there were certificates and crests as prizes.

About 14 films were screened in the **Spiritual Films** category. Mainly religious faith, respect for other religions and humanitarian films are included in this category. The images in this category help in creating interfaith and cultural connections. There are Interfaith Jury awards- Best Feature Film and Best Documentary for this category. The award were certificate and a crest. The jury members were Prof. Dr. Lipy Gloria Rozario from Dhaka University, Filmmaker Alexandros Kostopoulos from Greece, Film producer and distributor Ellaheh Tahaei from Iran and activist Maciej Ruciński from Poland.

The **Women Film Makers Section** is organized with films by women filmmakers from all around the world. It included 23 full-length and short films and documentaries, domestic and foreign. The best female producer was also awarded in this category. The award was a certificate and crest. Ms. Anja Strelec Documentary filmmaker from Belgium, independent filmmaker from LA Monalisa Dasgupta, and Bangladeshi actress Naila Azad were the members of the jury of Women Filmmaker Section.



*Chief Patron- Md. Shahriar Alam MP*



*During the Opening Ceremony of 21st DIFF*

The **Short and Independent Films section** showcases documentaries and short documentaries by emerging and independent filmmakers. In 21st DIFF, the section showcased 84 local and international short films.

**Wide-Angle** this year was dedicated to Bangladesh's liberation, freedom, and place in history of the world. Films such as- Ritwik Kumar Ghatak's rare documentary 'Durbar Gati Padma' was screened in the section. Ghatak, the famous director of the subcontinent, produced the film in the context of the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. Apart from Ghatak's film, Masudur Rahman's "Unrecognized" (2022), Nasreen Islam's "Rangtuli Te Muktijudda" (2021), Khizir Hayat Khan's "Ora Satjan" (2022), Shayla Rahman Tithi's "Juddhajay Kishore Nayak" (2022), S Sukhdev's "Nine Months to Freedom" (1975), Vinay Roy and CS Nair's "Refugee 71" (1974), Shanti S Verma's "Sonar Bangla" (1972), Shankar Ganguly's "Born Bangladesh" (1972), Sherin Brandit's "Date-line Bangladesh" (1972) and Evgeny Barkhanov's "Freedom Don't Live on Money" (2021).

#### **A conference by women, for women**

A two daylong 9th conference called 'Conference on Women in Cinema' was organized by Rainbow Film Society in association with the Department of Women and Gender Studies, Dhaka University on Sunday 15 January and Monday 16 January, 2023 at the Dhaka Club during the festival. The inaugurations were held with a very colourful Cultural Program performed by the artists of the Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.

Mr. K. M. Khalid, State Minister of Cultural Affairs of the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh was the Chief Guest and Mr. Masud Bin Momen, Foreign Secretary (Senior Secretary) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh attended as the Special Guest in the opening ceremony. While H.E. Charles Whiteley, Ambassador & Head of Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh and Ms. Anja Strelec is a Documentary filmmaker, TV journalist, Audiovisual artist, Photographer from Brussels, Belgium also speaks in the inaugural ceremony. Dr. Umme Busra Fateha Sultana, Chair, Department of Women and Gender Studies, Dhaka University has presided over the segment.

Bangladeshi independent filmmaker Mehzad Ghalib read the first keynote of the opening day. Indian filmmaker and actress Aparajita Ghosh and Bangladeshi actress Zakia Akhter (Bonna Mirza) discussed her paper 'Hawa: Mythology, Mystery and Magic Realism in Bangladeshi Cinema'. This session was conducted by Kaberi Gayen, Professor of the Mass Communication and Journalism Department of Dhaka University.

In the second session of the first day, Dr. Debjani Halder, professor of R.V. University, Bangalore, India, read the paper titled "Hazar Churasika Ma to Kalbela: Political Construction of Love Affection and Intimacy in Naxalite Movement: A Feminist Contemplation". Action Aid Bangladesh Country Director Farah Kabir and Sri Lankan, women's rights activist Anoma Rajakaruna were the speakers in the session conducted by Dhaka University Professor Dr Sadeka Halim.

Hannah Fisher, former director of Vancouver Film Festival, read the essay in the last session of the first day. She presented "Who Are We? How do we move forward?" Anja Strelek, a journalist from Belgium and Dr Ipsita Barat, a teacher at St. Xavier's College, India, discussed the article in this session, moderated by art-enthusiast Naima Chowdhury.

On January 16, the conference's second day, Sidney Levine, an American film industry personality, read the article titled "From Dhaka to Hollywood?: Tookie the Tiger Takes a Trip: An Unusual Project". Anja Strelec, a Documentary filmmaker from Brussels and Monalisa Dasgupta, an Indian independent producer based in California, were the speakers, this time under the direction of Shamim Akhtar, an independent producer from Bangladesh.

The second paper of the second day, "The Eye Behind the Cinema: Reflections on the Women Workforce of Contemporary Bengali Cinema in India", was read by Dr Ipsita Bharat. Bangladeshi film director Syed Salahuddin Zaki moderated the session. In addition, as discussants, there were Dhaka University's Professor of Mass Communication and Journalism, Dr Geetiara Nasreen and Counseling Psychologist Dr Lippi Gloria Rozario.



*Festival Crowd*



*Saatao Crowd*

In the last session of the second day, “Objectification of Women: South Asian Context” keynote presented by Samarah Jannati Zamal, the deputy editor of Celluloid and the Executive Member of Rainbow Film Society, Bangladesh. The session was discussed by Indian journalist and film critic Farhana Ahmed and producer and film festival programmer Neha Jain. Professor Dr. Sayed Saikh Imtiaz, Women and Gender Studies of Dhaka University conducted this session. The two-day conference ended with this session.

There was a declaration at the end of the two-day long program by the Conference participants Ms. Anja Strelec from Brussels, Dr. Ipsita Barat, India and Dr Ishrat Khan Barsha University of Dhaka.

### **Screenwriting Competition**

As part of the 21st International Film Festival, 'West Meets East: Screenplay Competition', an interactive four-day filmmakers' seminar and workshop, was held at the Alliance Francaise Gallery on 15 – 18 January, 2023. At the end of the four-day workshop, the screenplay 'Song of Jhinuk', written by Afroza Hossain of Bangladesh, won the first prize. The second prize went to Nepal's Nigam Bhandari's 'Messenger of the God' screenplay. The third prize went to India's Ritvik Goswami's screenplay 'Svarnapushari'. The best screenplay received USD 5,000 in cash, the second-placed script received USD 3,000, and the third-placed screenplay received USD 2,000 as prize money. Filmmaker Aka Reza Ghalib and screenwriter Sadia Khalid Riti were the convenors of this event.

### **Masterclass**

The festival authority added the masterclass for the first time this year. In the day-long masterclass on January 21, Norwegian producer Gyda Velvin Myklebast, Bangladeshi filmmaker Tasmia Afrin Mou, Belgian filmmaker Anja Strelec and Ukrainian programmer Elena Rubashevskaya talked about film production, fundraising for film production, screenplay presentation, documentary filmmaking techniques and film submission to the festival, respectively. Bangladeshi film critic and writer Bidhan Rebeiro moderated the masterclasses.

## Winners

The 21st edition of the Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF) concluded on January 22, awarding Seyyed Morteza Fatemi-directed Iranian film 'Bi Madar' (Motherless) as the Best Film this year.

As for Bangladeshi films, the 2022 blockbuster 'Hawa' received the Audience Award in the Cinema of the World section, while Fakhrul Arefeen Khan-directed film 'J.K. 1971' got the Special Audience Award, Kazi Arefin Ahmed-directed short film 'Could You Be Free Yet Locked In?' won the Best Short Film and Khandaker Sumon-directed 'Saatao' (Memories of Gloomy Monsoons) won the Best Film Award from FIPRESCI Jury in the Bangladesh Panorama category.

A total of 18 awards were given in different categories at the closing ceremony of the 21st Dhaka International Film Festival, organized by the Rainbow Film Society at the Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Auditorium of Bangladesh National Museum in the capital.

### **The rest of the winners' names are given below:**

In the Asian Cinema Competition Section, the Best Director award went to Ali Ghavitan for the film 'Zendegi va Zendegi' (Life & Life)

The Best Actor went to Ikkei Watanabe for Naoki Maeda-directed film 'Nakodo-Matchmakers' (Marriage Counselor)

The Best Actress went to Ketaki Narayan for Krishnendu Kalesh-directed film 'Prappeda' (Hawk's Muffin).



*During the Opening of 9th Dhaka International Conference on Women in Cinema.*



*During the Opening of 9th Dhaka International Conference on Women in Cinema.*

The award for Best Script Writer went to Anik Dutta for 'Aparajito' (The Undeafated)

The Best Cinematography award went to Artyom Anisimov for Evgeny Grigorev-directed Russian film 'Podelniki' (the Riot).

As for the Women Filmmakers Section, Maria Douza-directed Greek film 'Akouse Me' (Listen) received the award for Best Feature Film.

The Best Documentary Award went to Sri Lanka's Anomaa Rajakaruna-directed 'Our Mother, Grandmother, Prime Minister: Sirimavo'.



*The three winners during the West Meets East Screenplay Lab.*





*21st DIFC Closing ceremony performance by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy.*



*The General Secretary of Rainbow Film Society Receiving Award on HAWA's Behalf*



*Saataa being awarded FIPRESCI award by Chief Patron*

The Best Director award went to Katharina Woll for the German film 'Alle Wollen Geliebt Werden' (Everybody Wants To Be Loved).

The Spiritual Films Section recognized this year's submission with two special awards: the Best Documentary award went to Galina Evtushenko and Anna Evtushenko's 'Mahatma Haffkine' (Russia). In contrast, the award for Best Fiction Film went to Kamrul Ahsan Lenin's directed film 'Ghore Fera' (Home Coming).

The Best Children Film Badal Rahman Award went to Petr Oukropec-directed film 'Mazel a tajemství lesa' (Martin and the Magical Forest), a joint production of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Germany.

### **Closing ceremony**

21st Dhaka International Film Festival ended its nine-day celebration on the evening of 22nd January 2023. In the main auditorium of the National Museum, the names of the winning films, documentaries, producers, actors, actresses and cinematographers were announced by the festival director in presence of guests, judges, and producers from different countries and a hall full of audience and press.

Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, DIFF's Chief Patron, Md. Shahriar Alam MP., delivered the closing speech. Awami League praesidium member and parliament deputy leader, member of parliament, Matia Chowdhury MP. was also present at the event as chief guest. Besides the chief guest Hon'ble Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Md. Mokammel Hossain, the Hon'ble Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Md. Humayun Kabir Khandakar, Director General of Bangladesh National Museum (Additional Secretary) Md. Kamruzzaman, DIFF Festival Committee Chairperson Kishwar Kamal, among others, distributed the awards and delivered their speeches.



*All the awardees together after the Closing Ceremony of 21st DIFF.*

### Daily Bulletin

In addition to the publication of an informative brochure on the listed film of the festival, a bulletin with daily news was published during the festival. Here the introductions, interviews, reports and columns of domestic and foreign representatives, including filmmakers, producers, and actors, are published. Mashurul Amin Milon was in charge of the bulletin resources.

### Aims and objectives of the organizers

Since 1992, the Rainbow Film Society has been organizing regular film festivals. This society was established in 1977. Rainbow Film Society is a non-profit social and cultural organization. Through the normal activities of the organization and film festivals, and by screening advanced films and gathering internationally renowned films, the filmmakers, producers, distributors, exhibitors and crews associated with the film industry of Bangladesh are interested in healthy cine-culture in Bangladesh is one of the essential goals.

