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The journey from a migrant worker to being an actor

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From migrant worker to actor in South Korea: Mahbub Lee's journey

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Arts & Entertainment Desk



Mahbub Lee

Mahbub Alam from Bangladesh, popularly known as Mahbub Lee, is a prominent face in the South Korean film industry. He went from being a migrant worker to becoming a revered actor, through his sheer determination.

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Caption Photo: Collected

Photo: Collected

Mahbub is currently the CEO of the South Korean production and distribution company, M and M International.

He migrated to South Korea in 1999, and started working in an RMG factory, where the employees worked in horrible and hazardous conditions.



Soon, he joined trade unions in South Korea to raise awareness among migrant workers about their rights. He participated in various seminars and social movements with the workers.

In order to gain media coverage for the movements, Mahbub made documentaries to expose the unhygienic conditions of South Korean RMG factories. The documentaries were broadcast on several national media outlets of South Korea.

The first documentary that Mahbub directed is called "Deported". It is about the deportation of migrant workers. "More often than not, workers who protested against discrimination, horrible working conditions, and different policies, were sent back to their home countries, from South Korea. Many of them were my close friends, and I wanted to uphold their hardships through the documentary," Mahbub told The Daily Star.

He debuted in acting in South Korea with the short film, "The Road of the Revenge" (2005), a black comedy about migrant workers who take a stand against their boss. Mahbub was lauded for his performance in the film, after its premiere at an international festival in Seoul.

Soon, he gained international recognition with his performance in "Bandhobi" (2009), his first feature film.

However, Mahbub insisted that his first experience with acting was, in fact, in Bangladesh.

"During a visit to the BFDC, a friend of mine asked me to play an extra in a film starring Moushumi and Omar Sani. I was a bus passenger," he smiled.

When he is not acting, Mahbub, who thoroughly enjoys his work in South Korea, is busy with the production and distribution of films, releasing eight to ten projects yearly.

"South Koreans are very hardworking. They do not turn their nose up at any job, be it big or small. They value teamwork immensely. From the scriptwriter to the director, everyone in a team works with passion and care — This is why the content they put out is so creative and well-received," he added.

That being said, Mahbub has come across discrimination and negativity on different occasions because of the colour of his skin. He hopes to combat such issues through the media.

Upon being asked about his thoughts about the Bangladeshi film industry, Mahbub had a rather critical take.

"I believe the procedures of the Bangladesh Film Censor Board are back-dated. There is also a general lack of interest in films," he said.

He further added, "I hope more people support filmmakers by watching movies in theatres, and refraining from piracy."

In the future, Mahbub hopes to produce films and creative projects for Bangladesh.

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