

SAND CITY

সাঁওতাল নগর



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Proxima Competition

World Premiere

World Sales

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Khona Talkies presents
In association with Cinema Cocoon

99 minutes / 2025 / 4K 1.5:1 / DCP / 5.1/ Bangladesh



The Open Doors Locarno Jury awarded project
development prize to SAND CITY

*“for its visual audacity, artistic originality, for its
ambition to portray instable lives in a metropolis...”*



Log line:

Sand an unstable element reveals the life in a ruthless metropolis.



Synopsis

Two parallel stories about two individuals. An ethnic minority woman and a man from the majority population. They are not directly related. The only thing they have in common is SAND.

Emma, the film's female protagonist, collects sand for her cat litter. She sets out on her scooter every week and picks up her litter's fill of sand. One day, she discovers a finger in the sand—a severed finger with a crimson polished nail. Rather than panicking, she gradually develops an unusual attachment with the lone finger.

Hasan, on the other hand, works in a glass manufacturing plant. He steals silica sand and other valuable materials from the plant to make glass at home and dreams of building his own massive glass factory. What begins as a solitary activity, soon leads to a fantasy that gradually destroys him.

Director's Note

I have been photographing this city and the lives within it for almost a decade now. At first, my gaze was romantic and celebratory till I decided to probe even deeper and look beyond the obvious. Then, I realized the inherent claustrophobia of living in the city; the lives of people as if they were all locked inside their own abyss. I witnessed how the passage of time suffocates our daily lives. We all seemed to be locked within a trap where there is a need to hide ourselves and never had the courage to come out as we are, to speak as we feel. There is almost a crisis of faith, wherein the people have stopped trusting and believing in better days.

The anatomy of this city provokes me deeply. There is always some on-going construction with its monstrous machines and always a clamour of noise that makes the everyday life seems like a battlefield. There is always a sense of competition that prevails, always a bid to outdo one another. There is always some war that is being waged in our personal and public lives. It's gotten to a point where our lives are nothing without this rat race, this competition. However, the irony is that no one is certain of their next step. We are all in a battle without a game plan. We take blind chances, leaving our lives to a turn of an invisible dice.

I have been both a subject and an observer of this city all my life. With age and the intervention of my camera, the negotiations and the revelations of the city has changed; through the lens of my camera, the skeleton of the city unfolded before my eyes. As an image maker and storyteller, images and sounds represent the essence of the city to me. When I look at the city through the lens, I become an outsider and insider at the same time, and I cannot escape my city.

With this film, I want to focus my gaze on de-constructing the monolith of this city. I want to join my camera in searching for the spirit of this city and its citizens. In this process, I want to trace the journey of my tormented soul and the roads those take through the metropolis.

This film is my chance to make a journey into my reality and coming face to face with my own story, instead of escaping it. Through this journey, I want to explore the many facets of urban survival, fantasy, and sexuality. I also want to weave a story by exploring my own emotions with the city and depict how this city constantly occupies my thoughts and creations. And throughout the two parallel storyline I want to show that this city doesn't give my characters the time to say hello from their heart. They cross each other but unable to communicate. They live inside their cubicle.

My narrative focuses on the element of sand as a microcosm to reflect city life. Sand is an unstable element, and, to me, it seems like an appropriate metaphor for our wobbly urban existence. My characters end up having their lives intervened with sand, both consciously and unconsciously. For me, it is a duty to collect these stories under one magnifying glass. Sand helps me to unify these two characters in one bowl, put them together on a plane.

Sand holds another significance for me. Business agencies collect sand from the river that flows beside the city. While on the other hand, they fill up rivers with the same sand to construct buildings. This is how the small, insignificant, and unstable sand builds up the new extended city. This film is the story of my characters and how they live out their stories in a desperation to survive in this "sand city."

-Mahde Hasan

Cinematographer's Note

The work on the frame and the light turned out to be immediately preponderant, as soon as the script was read. My first talks with Mahde Hasan, the director, only confirmed my feeling: for this film, narration is an integral part of image processing and vice versa. We opted for an unusual ratio, 1.5:1, which is the ratio of 35mm film photography. We wanted the image in general, the light and the frames, fixed for the vast majority of them, to come as close as possible to what could be an open window on this world: on the one hand the most invisible possible (absence of movements-simple shooting devices), and on the other hand quite impactful, with a treatment close to super 16mm, sometimes very saturated colors, strong contrast, negative framing. For this, I chose to shoot with a Sony FX9 in which we cropped the sensor so that the depth of field is more in line with our choices. For the secondary characters, as well as the passers-by, but also the life of the city itself, day and night, we wanted to contrast as much as possible so that it could in some way transform the men and women, buildings, cars... into silhouettes, ghosts, sometimes indiscernible forms. The brighter the headlights, the darker the night.

Mahde and I have often mentioned the cinema of the Portuguese director Pedro Costa, for his particular treatment of shadows and directions of light, but also of the American director David Lynch, who manages so well to interfere with the irrational, even the fantastic, quite simply, without resorting to expensive special effects (which we couldn't afford anyway). So we played on the off-framing, the rhythm of the shots, the actors' movement accidents, the colors. This last notion has always been very important in our discussions and in our choices for staging the image. Until reserving a particular fate for the color Red throughout the film.

In that purpose, I created several LUTs before filming that helped us to visualize the rendering on the sets that we were looking for, in a more artistic aspect of the filming.

-Mathieu Giombini

Conversation with Mahde Hasan (excerpt)

Why Sand?

I tried to see the world through mundane, small, meaningless details. Sometimes I believe that exploring the most little things allows us to see and feel more.

To you, sand is geological or philosophical? Is there any socio-political issue you'd like to explore?

I was philosophical at first, but once we started shooting, I had to focus on the present moment, I mean life. Of course, there are social-political dimensions, but they are most likely submerged beneath the surface, in a subtle way.

You selected the fragmentary form, as we can see. Why does it seem so disjointed? Kaleidoscopic?

I like the word- Kaleidoscopic. For this film, I used a fractured structure and form. The unconnected life and turmoil of the city are explored in a raw manner, which is what I aimed for with this film. Dhaka, the city where I dwell, is like a collage of broken glasses. It doesn't fit properly. It's very difficult to grab. I failed repeatedly, but I tried. To me broken films are poetic, much like dreams.

So you are defying conventions. Are you avoiding current trends?

This film rejects the prescribed structure. That's why it does not fit well. However, its strength is veiled in its failure probably.

Previously, we saw films attempt to shatter conventions and build new vocabularies. But now we hardly see very much. We're conforming. It is quite difficult to say something new; there is a high risk of failure if you attempt something new. I'm afraid, too.

And of course, I am concerned about current trends. But, I am also concerned about the pitfall of the time.

Why don't the two main characters interact more often?

In one version of the film, they crossed paths several times. Then I chose not to show it. I illustrated how they were loosely connected, via the mobile phone and the bunny.

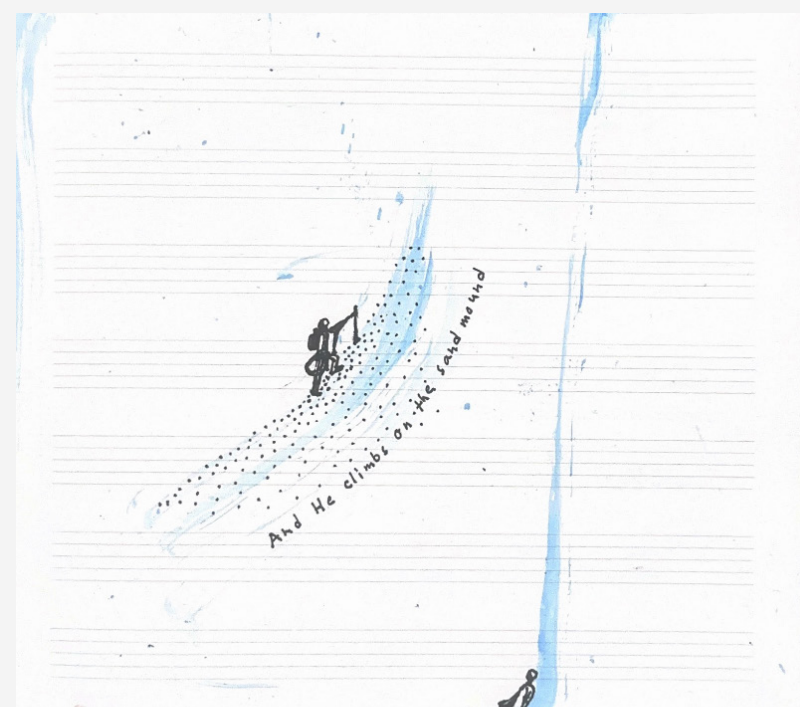
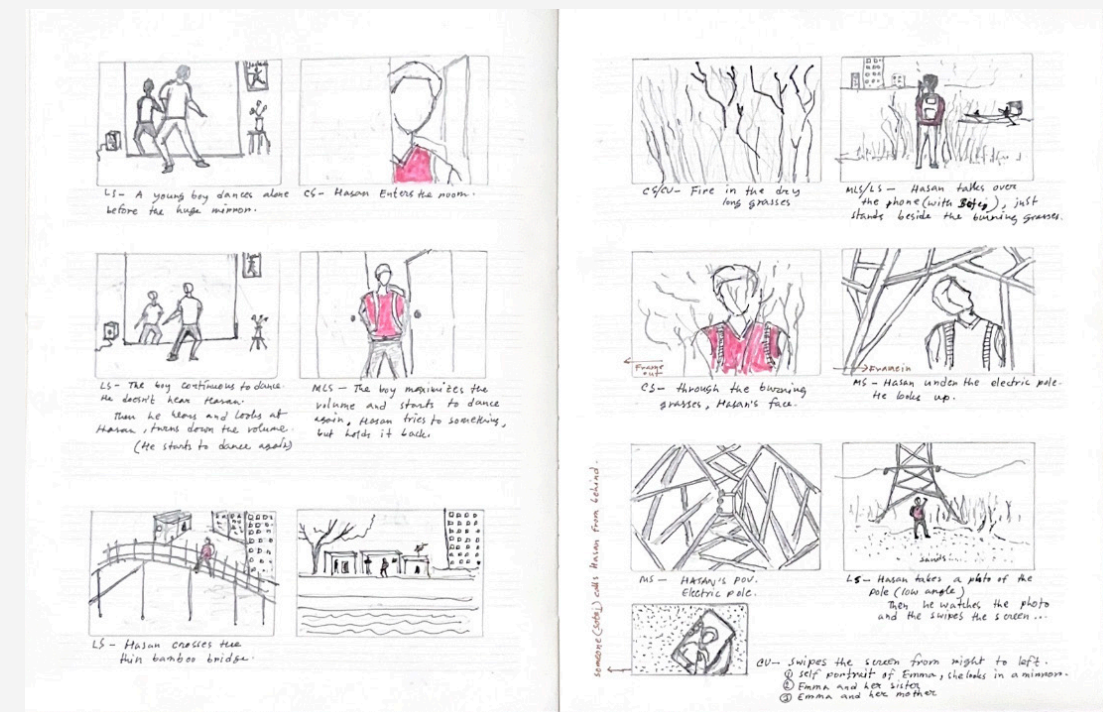
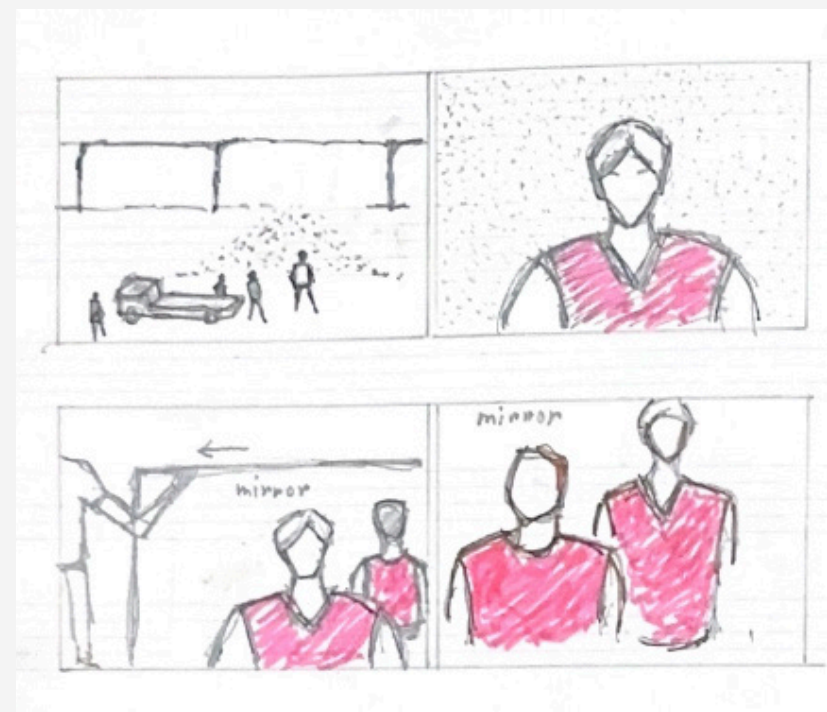
They cross the same geography and have the same sound scape. That's how I attempted to connect them. We occasionally witness films with characters crossing paths, events occurring simultaneously, and climaxes. But I figured we could try something new. There is not much connectivity at the surface level. There are no dramatic relationships.

Why did you choose one character from an ethnic minority? What are your intentions here?

When someone referenced 'Bangladesh' or 'Bangladeshi', we did so based on preconceptions. Even when we mention "Bangladeshi people", we only see the majority's appearance and culture. We point out some stereotypes. But Bangladesh, or Bangladeshi, is more complex than that. There are many faces and cultural elements in it. It is not linear and simple.

In general, I attempted to portray the marginalised people and their life. Those who are attempting to overcome 'normal' existence. They are the rebels in a society where life and dreams are stifled by so-called rules and restrictions. They try even if they fail, and they dream beyond their capabilities.

From storyboard to film



Mahde Hasan

DIRECTOR, EDITOR, SCREENWRITER

Mahde Hasan is an introspective and visually keen filmmaker from Bangladesh. His short films I Am Time and Death of a Reader were presented at the 69th and 71st Locarno Festival. With Where is the Friend's Home, he came first in the 'movieofmylife' digital competition at the 70th Locarno Festival. In 2018, he participated in the Locarno Film Festival's Open Doors Hub and received the CNC development grant for his debut feature Sand City. It was selected to NANTES PRODUIRE AU SUD 2018 and also chosen to participate in La Fabrique Cinéma de l'Institut français 2019 at Cannes. In 2021, Sand City got the production grant from the Swiss fund Visions sud est. His another short film, A Boring Film, was selected in the Pardi di Domani section at Locarno Film Festival 2020. His background also includes participation in two film residency programs: a two-month residency in Switzerland in 2018 and a five-week residency in Los Angeles in 2023, initiated by Film Independent

Sand City is his first feature film and premieres in Proxima Competition in 59th Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.

FILMOGRAPHY

Sand City (feature, 2025)
A Boring Film (Short, 2020)
Death of a Reader (Short, 2017)
Where is the Friend's Home? (Short, 2017)
I Am Time (Short, 2013)
Photographs of a School Teacher (Short, 2012)

Mathieu Giombini

CINEMATOGRAPHER

Mathieu Giombini is one of the department heads of cinematography at La Fémis. He has worked with notable directors such as Francois Ozon, Michel Piccoli, Mahamat-Saleh Haroun, and Manoel de Oliveira. In 2021, he was credited as the cinematographer on the Palme d'Or-nominated film Lingui, directed by Mahamat-Saleh Haroun. He also did the cinematography for the BAFTA-nominated television series Natural World and the Primetime Emmy Award-winning television series Nature.

Oronnok Prithibi

SOUND DESIGNER

Oronnok Prithibi is a Sound Designer based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Oronnok's journey into the world of sound design began with a passion for translating emotions into auditory craftsmanship. He worked on "A Boring Film" in 2020, which was officially selected for Pardi di Domani at Locarno Film Festival. In 2021, he worked on "Shabnam", which was selected for International South Asian Film Festival Canada and Arthouse Asia Film Festival. In 2024, he was invited to attend the Berlinale Talents program under the Berlin International Film Festival.



Rubaiyat Hossain

PRODUCER

Rubaiyat Hossain is one of Bangladesh's handful of female filmmakers, known for her critically acclaimed debut feature film *Meherjaan* (2011) which faced political and cultural wrath in Bangladesh for its anti war narrative, and its critic of masculine nationalism from a feminine point of view. Her second feature film *Under Construction* (2015) premiered at New Directors Showcase at Seattle International Film festival and was theatrically released and well received in Bangladesh. Her third feature film *Made in Bangladesh* (2019), premiered at Toronto International Film Festival and distributed by Pyramide Films. Rubaiyat uses a feminist lens to deconstruct the otherwise phallocentric institution of cinema. Rubaiyat has completed her B.A. in Women Studies from Smith College, USA and M.A. in South Asian Studies from University of Pennsylvania.

Aadnan Imtiaz Ahmed

PRODUCER

Aadnan Imtiaz Ahmed is a Bangladeshi producer working across fiction, documentary, and experimental cinema. His latest feature *Sand City* is having its world premiere at the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival.

His films have been presented at major international festivals such as Toronto, Locarno, Rotterdam, BFI London, Clermont-Ferrand, Tampere, and Hong Kong, along with other acclaimed showcases worldwide.

He is an alumnus of Locarno Open Doors Lab, Produire au Sud Nantes, DPC II Athens, EAVE Producers Workshop, and the Rotterdam Lab at IFFR.



Mostafa Monwar *as Hasan*

CAST

Mostafa Monwar is a Bangladeshi actor. He makes regular appearances in web series and films. In 2016, he received best performance at the Singapore International Film Festival.



Victoria Chakma *as Emma*

CAST

Victoria Chakma is a non-professional performer. Sand City marks her screen debut.



Cast

Victoria Chakma
Mostafa Monwar
Javed Kaiser
Satej Chowdhury
Hasan Shahriar Rahman
Mashrawi Muhammadi
Ahsan Aziz Sarker
Apel Pavel
Sajeeb Khan
Sazzad Chowdhury
Piyetraa Chakma
Golam Zilani
Raju Khan
Oronnok Prithibi
Sharif
Maruf
Redwan, Mriganka, Arko
Dharmaranta Bhikkhu
MD Kamal

Crew

Mahde Hasan *Director, Editor, Writer*
Mathieu Giombini *Cinematographer*
Rubaiyat Hossain *Producer*
Aadnan Imtiaz Ahmed *Producer*
Mahajabin Khan *Co-producer*
Mahde Hasan *Co-producer*
Shah Tusar *First Assistant Director*
Tayran Razzak *Assistant Director*
Robin Shams *Location Manager & Supervisor*
Rainirr Borshon *Art Director*
Sworna Bhowmick *Prosthetic Artist*
Oronnok Prithibi *Sound Designer*
Uttam Neupane, CAS *Re-recording Mixer*



Production company Khona Talkies
In association with Cinema Cocoon
Technical support Studio Lonthon

With the support of Open Doors Locarno
With the participation of Visions sud est

Participated in

Open Doors Locarno

PRODUIRE AU SUD

LA FABRIQUE CINÉMA DE L'INSTITUT FRANÇAIS - LES CINÉMAS DU MONDE

Film Independent

Film Bazaar

Ekadeshma Film Lab



CINEMA COCOON  INSTITUT FRANÇAIS visions est  

 PRODUIRE SUD  Studio Lonthon  GLOBAL MEDIA MAKERS 