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# What's on

## INTERVIEW

War of independence has been largely forgotten despite its significant impact

Simon Hayes  
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A first-time film-maker from east London is hoping his movie will shed new light on a bloody episode of Asian history.

Munsur Ali is about to start shooting his debut film *Shongram* set against the backdrop of the brutal Bangladeshi war of independence in 1971. *Shongram*, the Bengali word for "struggle", is the tale of a British Bengali on his deathbed, reflecting on his youth, lost love and the war that shaped his future.

December marked the 40th anniversary of the end of a war between West Pakistan and East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. According to the Bangladeshi government around three million people, mostly innocent civilians, were massacred by the Pakistani army, while some 10million people fled the country, many to Britain. It's a war that still has resonance today.

Ali said: "The US State Department reported that one in every 50 people on the planet is a Bangladeshi. They are in all corners of the world now because of the massive emigration that happened. Despite that this is still a war that very few people know much about."

"My family came to the UK in 1980 and the knock-on effect of that emigration was the poverty in Bangladesh that's still there today."

"The Pakistani government has never apologised for what happened. This is my attempt to do some justice to the era as a Bangladeshi film-maker, but my aim is for a mainstream cinema release to get the message to a wider audience."

"The film is a work of fiction based on fact. It's set around a village occupied by the Pakistani army. It's representative of the whole of Bangladesh, and what happens there reflects the experience of the whole country. There were terrible killing fields there."

Ali, 33, is the founder of the Limelight Film Awards. He wrote the script and will direct the film in the UK and Bangladesh, where around 80 per cent of shooting will take place.

## Shedding light on a bloody conflict



Munsur Ali wants to tell a story set against the Bangladeshi war of independence, top

With a budget of just £200,000 the cast will be largely made up of unknowns.

"It's low budget but it's easier to make films like this," said Ali. "£200,000 in film terms is a pittance. We need to raise more, so there are opportunities for investment. This story is deep with a lot of issues, but people should not shy away from telling it."

Go to *shongram.com*.

## My tribute to golden age of the Britcom

### STAGE

The Sword And The Dope  
Greenwich Playhouse

MONTY Python meets *The Fast Show* in the latest production coming to the Greenwich Playhouse.

Michael Horspool's *The Sword And The Dope* is a comedy re-telling the story of King Arthur. It's making the move across the river after a successful stint at the King's Head Theatre in Islington.

For writer Michael the project is all about revisiting the British comedy gold of yesteryear.

"I tend to write in two different styles," he said. "Sometimes Pinteresque serious pieces but this one is inspired by all my favourites. Tommy Cooper, Morecambe

and Wise, Monty Python and The Fast Show.

"Typical British humour that speaks through all generations. There isn't too much about these days which is a shame. There are re-runs but no modern Christmas specials of that kind. So I thought I would put this together."

The production has received rave reviews from performances at the King's Head.

As well as writing the script, Michael also put together the lyrics and music despite admitting to being "a bad musician". Computer programmes were used for the creation of 12 songs.

Bermondsey-born Michael has written a series of shows and recently *The Greater Game* – a story about a team of footballers during the First World War – has attracted

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