

BHABNA'S journey in the French Riviera

Actress, writer and artist Ashna Habib Bhabna is representing Bangladeshi culture at this year's Cannes Film Festival through her unique designs—from wearing her mother's laal katan saree on the red carpet to giving a unique twist to traditional Benarasi by turning it into a modern gown.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

The actress continued to gain attention at Cannes with her attires created by Bangladeshi designers. Amidst turning heads with her unique outfits, she announced a new project she signed up for at Cannes, with an international executive producer.

Speaking from the beautiful French Riviera about her seventh movie, the actress shared how she agreed to be part of *Zenobia*, directed by Bangladeshi director Zafor Firoze, who currently resides in Malaysia, and British-Chinese executive producer Qiao Li.

"Zafor Firoze and his partner came to Cannes to market their festival, which they are organising in November in Malaysia. They were also planning the film when they heard that I was from Bangladesh. They contacted me, and after listening to the story, I immediately said yes to the film," said the actress.

The director moved to Malaysia 12 years ago, after completing his degree in Bangla Literature from Jagannath University, Dhaka. He earned his Master's in Film and Television from Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, where he is currently pursuing his PhD. *Zenobia* is his first full-length film, featuring Bhabna in the lead role. The director stated that the film will be made in Bangla, English, and Chinese, with plans to release it in Bangladesh, China, and Malaysia.

This was her debut on the glamorous red carpet, and the actress felt proud to attend Cannes as a South Asian artiste. "I came here on my own; I applied, and they sent me the accreditation letter after finding me eligible for the festival. It feels like a dream come true. For me, coming here as an actor makes me prouder

than if I had come with a film," said the actress.

Throughout the film festival, she met many filmmakers and artistes from around the world. "While I was scared at first, I am really happy that my family pushed me to represent myself at such a prestigious event. They told me to overcome my fear, and as a result, I was able to sign a film and expand my network as an artiste all by myself. This in itself is a big achievement for me," revealed Bhabna.

The shooting of *Zenobia* will commence within the next three months, with the entire shooting taking place in Malaysia. The makers have yet to finalise the rest of the cast. They have released an initial poster that exudes an eerie vibe, depicting a wrecked room with broken furnitures and ceiling.



Four veteran figures to receive Nazrul Padak this year

This year, four veteran figures are set to be honoured with the Nazrul Padak, as announced by the Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University.

The recipients of the award include renowned Nazrul Sangeet artistes Dalia Nausheen and Salahuddin Ahmed, alongside esteemed researchers Dr Gulshan Ara Kazi and Anupam Hayat.

The prestigious Nazrul Padak will be awarded on June 2 at the Bangladesh National Museum. Dr Soumitra Sekhar, vice-chancellor of Kazi Nazrul Islam University, will serve as the chief guest and present the awards.

Alongside the Nazrul Padak ceremony, a four-day event from May 24 to 26 will celebrate the 163rd birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore and the 125th of Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Popeye to perform first solo concert in Dhaka

Renowned musician Raffan Imam, known as Popeye, has enchanted audiences for over a century, though rarely seen in his home country due to residing in the United States.



Now, for the first time, Popeye is scheduled to perform in Dhaka for a solo concert, joined by his band Popeye Bangladesh.

A special concert, *Popeye - A Night to Remember*, will be held at the Liberation War Museum in Agargaon, Dhaka, on Friday, May 24. The tickets, priced at Tk 899 for general admission, and Tk 1,499 for VIP access, are available for purchase on organiser Eventholic's website.

NEWS

Over 57pc votes

FROM PAGE 12
The overall voter turnout till 7:00pm was 57.1 percent with West Bengal once again accounting for the highest turnout at 73 percent, followed by Ladakh union territory at 67.15 percent and Jharkhand at 63 percent. Maharashtra has recorded the lowest turnout so far at 49.01 percent.

High-profile candidates in the fray yesterday included Rahul Gandhi in Raebareilly, the second constituency he is contesting after Wayanad last month, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, standing from one of six seats in Mumbai, and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh from Lucknow, both cities where there has been poor voter turnout in the past.

Poor voter turnout became a concern for ruling BJP initially, and analysts believe the low numbers cast doubts on the landslide victory the party and its allies sought. The turnout in the previous fourth phase was 69.15 percent, the highest in this year's elections.

Long queues snaked out of polling booths in Mumbai and Bolangir in the eastern state of Odisha even after the weather department forecast maximum temperatures to rise between 2 degrees and 4 degrees Celsius.

The election aimed "to ensure stability and security ... plus development of my city and country which ... is happening at a rapid rate," said Mumbai homemaker Jaya Roy Chowdhury, 48.

Govt to launch

FROM PAGE 12
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Peace Award can be given to any individual, organisation, or institution from Bangladesh or anywhere in the world for their contributions to establishing peace.

The award will be launched in 2025, he added. However, Mahbub Hossain said that the members of the jury board for this award have not yet been finalised.

Individuals who have received the Nobel or other international peace awards, governments of any country, heads of state, or members of parliament from those countries can propose names of individuals or organisations for this award.

Voter turnout could be low

FROM PAGE 12
lack of confidence in the electoral process.

"Many voters are worried whether they will even be able to cast their ballots."

Sharmeen Murshid, chief executive officer at Brottee, a non-government organisation and a local election observer, said a lack of quality elections with good governance has eroded voters' trust in the country's electoral system.

"The elections have almost become a farce, with candidates from only one party competing. There is no place in the polls for people from different ideological backgrounds.

"People don't believe they will be able to elect their candidate of choice through the elections... No EC will be able to fix the system in a single tenure, as mismanagement in the elections has turned into a culture."

Meanwhile, Election Commissioner Anisur Rahman said

ICC arrest warrants

FROM PAGE 12
no equivalence — none — between Israel and Hamas."

Hamas in a statement said, "Hamas strongly denounces the attempts of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to equate the victim with the executioner by issuing arrest warrants against a number of Palestinian resistance leaders. "Hamas...demands the cancellation of all arrest warrants issued against leaders of the Palestinian resistance, for violating UN conventions and resolutions."

South Africa welcomed the decision. "The law must be applied equally to all in order to uphold the international rule of law, ensure accountability for those that commit heinous crimes and protect the rights of victims," it said in a statement.

Meanwhile, Israel made a new push in central Gaza yesterday, bombarded towns in the north of the Strip and said it intended to broaden its military operation in Rafah despite US warnings of the risk of mass casualties in the southern city.

Gaza medics said at least 23 people had been killed in the latest fighting,

he thinks the issue of voter turnout is not a matter of concern to the EC.

He added the EC has taken necessary measures to ensure that voters can cast their votes without difficulty, including the usual steps of asking local authorities to run awareness campaigns to encourage people to vote.

The EC primarily decided to hold elections in 161 upazilas in the second phase. But it withheld the elections in three upazilas due to High Court stay orders and deaths of candidates.

Furthermore, there will be no elections in Chattogram's Raozan and Cumilla Adarsha Sadar since all chairman and vice chairman candidates in these two upazilas were elected unopposed.

A total of 1,824 candidates — 603 for chairman, 693 for vice chairman, and 528 for vice chairman reserved for women posts — are contesting in the polls, during which some 3.52 crore voters are expected to vote at 13,016 polling centres.

and residents said battles were intense in Jabalia in the north of the Palestinian enclave.

Israeli tanks also carried out a limited incursion into areas of Wadi Al Salqa and Al-Karara near Deir Al-Balah, a central Gazan city which Israeli forces have not entered during more than seven months of offensive, local residents said.

At least 35,562 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's offensive in Gaza, according to the enclave's health ministry yesterday. The toll includes 106 deaths over the past 24 hours, a ministry statement said.

Israel told civilians to evacuate parts of the city on May 6 and began troop and tank incursions. The UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA estimates that 810,000 people have fled since then, possibly over half Rafah's wartime population.

Talks mediated by Egypt and Qatar have failed to secure an end to the Israeli offensive.

Qatar's Minister of State at the Foreign Ministry, Mohammed Al-Khulafih, said yesterday he saw no political will to reach a ceasefire agreement in Gaza while military operations continued on the ground.

GDP expands at a faster pace in FY24

FROM PAGE 12
5.7 percent for FY24, which is below the average annual growth rate of 6.6 percent the country recorded in the decade preceding the Covid-19 pandemic.

The WB predicted a 5.6 percent growth for the current financial year. The government also cut its growth projection to 6.75 percent from 7.5 percent set at the beginning of the fiscal year in July.

According to the BBS, Bangladesh's GDP size stood at US\$459 billion in FY24. As such, per capita gross national income increased slightly to \$2,784 this fiscal year from \$2,749 a year earlier.

Bangladeshi

FROM PAGE 12
"We are trying to ensure that our students can sit for the exams online while at home," Dr Jerit Islam said.

He said the university authorities are facilitating the students' travel to the airport with security details.

Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan President Sadyr Japarov visited the university campuses and hostels that came under attack on May 17 evening after video of a brawl between Egyptian students and locals on May 13 went viral.

According to the Kyrgyz Ministry of Health, 41 victims sought medical help as a result of the mass brawl with foreigners in Bishkek since May 17.

President Japarov assured security to the international students and urged all to be patient, embrace multilateralism, and welcome foreigners, as hundreds of Kyrgyz people also study and work abroad and would also seek to be welcome there.

Kyrgyzstan State Medical Academy Rector Indira Kudaibergenova also appealed to the Kyrgyz people to be more attentive and patient with the foreign students who bring prestige to the Central Asian country.

Dr Jerit Islam said there were no reports of any violence after the May 17 mob attack, but the video footages of that day were still being shared, so some believe that the attacks are still going on.

"So, students still have a sense of insecurity. So, they are flying home earlier than scheduled," he said.

How NGO ship

FROM PAGE 2
Dawn began to break as the teams, also from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, distributed water, food, and blankets.

The men had a shower, were given black tracksuits and a food kit including water, dried fruit and two meals to heat up.

"The priority is to ensure that they feel good, that they know that they are safe on board and we will not take them back to Libya," said Sara Mancinelli, operations manager of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

"Often, they ask us: 'Are you going to take us back to Libya?' They don't immediately identify who we are, they are under shock."

After being registered, the men are moved to a container on the deck

of the ship where previous survivors have left their mark with messages in Arabic, Farsi or Bangla.

"God works slowly but never late," says one message in blue marker.

Sana, another IFRC crew member, told them how they would be dealt with. Only one of the Bangladeshis spoke enough English to translate for the others.

Many soon fell asleep, as the Ocean Viking was told to head for Ortona, a port on Italy's Adriatic coast.

The journey to Ortona will take more than two days. Then the men will be processed.

Bangladesh was designed as a "safe country" by Rome this month, meaning any claims to asylum they make may be difficult.

(The news agency AFP released this story yesterday but did not provide mention when the event took place.)

Indian agencies keep looking

FROM PAGE 12
regarding the three-time lawmaker going missing.

In the GD, Biswas said Azim was his family friend of over 20 years and that he went to his Kolkata home around 7:00pm on May 12. The next day, he left his home at 1:41pm saying he was going to visit a doctor and that he would return in the evening.

Biswas said Azim got on a taxi in front of the Calcutta Public School at Bidhanpark.

However, he did not return in the evening. Instead, Biswas received a text from Azim's phone saying he was going to New Delhi and would call him when he reached there.

According to the GD, in the text, Biswas was told that he did not need to call him.

On May 15, Biswas got another text from Azim's phone saying he had reached New Delhi and was with VIPs. The text again mentioned there was no need to call him.

The same text was forwarded to his personal assistant, the GD read.

The GD said a call was made to the personal assistant on May 16 from Azim's phone, but it was not answered.

When his personal assistant called back, he could not reach Azim's phone, read the GD.

On May 17, Azim's daughter, Mumtaz, called Biswas, saying that she could not get in touch with her father.

Since then, Azim has been unreachable, the GD read.

THE CASES
According to the affidavits submitted to the Election Commission before the 2023 election, 21 cases were filed against Azim between 2000 and 2008, but he was cleared in all 21 cases.

Of the 21 cases, 17 were filed with Kaliganj Police Station, while two were filed with Kotchandpur Police Station in Jhenaidah. Two more cases were filed with Damurhuda Police Station in Chuadanga.

In three cases, Azim, also president of Kaliganj upazila unit Awami League, was accused of murder. Ten other cases were filed under the Explosive Substances Act, while three other cases were filed under the Special Powers Act. Five cases were filed under different sections of the Penal Code.

The lawmaker was acquitted in the verdicts of 14 cases. The courts discharged him in three other cases.

The investigators submitted final reports in four cases in which he was accused.

Azim was elected MP with the AL ticket in 2014, 2018, and 2024.