

Dhaka Theatre announces Selim Al Deen memorial festivals

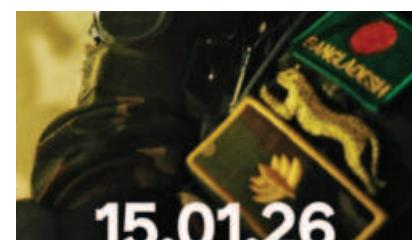
Dhaka Theatre has announced a multi-day programme to mark the 18th death anniversary of Natyacharya Selim Al Deen, one of the most influential figures in Bangla theatre, who passed away on January 14, 2008. Closely associated with Dhaka Theatre as its founding ideologue, Selim Al Deen's creative and theoretical contributions continue to shape modern Bengali theatre. The commemorations will begin on January 14 with floral tributes at his grave at 10am. Later that afternoon, Dhaka Theatre will host a seminar at the National Theatre of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, focusing on Selim Al Deen's ideas on Bengali aesthetics and his dualist-non-dualist theatre theory. The evening will feature a staging of his play *Deyal*, directed by Anik Islam. The programme continues with performances of *Nimajjan* on January 15, directed by Nasir Uddin Yousuff, and *Rangmahal* on January 17, directed by Farul Ahmed, reaffirming Selim Al Deen's enduring legacy on the Bangladeshi stage.

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

When Pritom Hasan recently shared a behind-the-scenes glimpse of himself singing amid army personnel, fans immediately sensed that something special was on the way. The image hinted at a unique and exciting collaboration between the popular singer and the Bangladesh Army. Anticipation grew further yesterday when the first official look was unveiled — a photograph of an army uniform accompanied by the caption, "15.01.26."

Curious to know how this unique project came together, The Daily Star reached out to Pritom Hasan for more insight into the collaboration and the journey behind it.

"We were talking about this project for a long time," Pritom shared. "We probably started discussing it back in December, but due to time constraints,



we couldn't execute it properly then. Still, we were determined to do something meaningful around the idea."

For Pritom, the collaboration holds deep personal significance. "Ever since I was a child, I wanted to join the Army. Unfortunately, that dream never materialised because I was terrible at

studies, especially math. So when this opportunity came, I wanted to give my maximum effort and create something truly meaningful," he said.

That childhood fascination eventually found its expression through art. Pritom explained that after initial discussions, he began shaping the project creatively. "We had several conversations and then created an audio concept. Monzur Anik came on board as the director. Rasel Mahmud *bhai* has penned the lyrics for this song. Previously, I've already worked extensively with Anik and Rasel *bhai* before, so there was a strong understanding between us."

He went on to describe how the project evolved from an idea into a

visual reality. "I created a vision through the audio and showed Anik exactly what I wanted to do. He captured the shoot brilliantly. I'm extremely grateful to the Bangladesh Army for their cooperation. They supported us in every possible way during the shoot."

For Pritom, the goal was clear from the start: to create something exceptional, both visually and sonically. "We definitely wanted to do something that hasn't been done before," he said. "I'm truly happy with the outcome. Hopefully, it will resonate with the younger generation who are often drawn towards Hollywood and different styles. For them, this will be a real treat."



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHEH



Bella Hadid, Pedro Pascal raise \$5.4m for children in Palestine, Sudan

A Los Angeles benefit concert raised \$5.4 million for children's medical aid in Palestine and Sudan, bringing together musicians, poets and activists under the Artists for Aid banner. Organised by Canadian Sudanese artiste Mustafa the Poet and co-hosted by Bella Hadid and Pedro Pascal, the show took place at the Shrine Auditorium on January 10.

Proceeds will support the Palestine Children's Relief Fund and the Sudanese American Physicians Association. Performers included Alex G, Clairo, Daniel Caesar, Jazmine Sullivan, Lucy Dacus, Omar Apollo and Shawn Mendes. Chappell Roan appeared during Dacus's set; Mendes dueted with Maggie Rogers to cheers from fans.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?



'DHET!'

The Bangladeshi premiere of *DHET!* plunges viewers into a chaotic Dhaka night, following a ride-sharing motorcyclist racing against time to reach his next passenger. Written and directed by Ummid Ashraf, the short film captures the pulse of the city, blending suspense, urgency, and the unpredictability of urban life.

Date: Thursday | January 15, 2026

Time: 11am

Venue: Stamford University

NEWS

BNP rolling out centralised system

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10C, Road 90 in Gulshan for that purpose. A research cell is also functioning from the premises, supporting campaign planning and analysis.

Party insiders said many of those working at the office are leaders and organisers affiliated with Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and other associate bodies.

The Election Steering Committee is coordinating logistics and monitoring whether candidates are implementing party instructions at the constituency level.

A central monitoring team is tracking candidates' activities, including voter engagement, compliance with party directives and use of digital platforms.

"The steering committee is closely watching how candidates are campaigning, how they are using social media and whether they are following central guidelines," a senior organiser said on condition of anonymity.

The BNP's campaign strategy places strong emphasis on digital coordination. Party insiders said the digital operation includes an open hotline number, constituency-based committees, dedicated social media teams and legal aid committees to support candidates and activists.

The party's IT cell is preparing responses to what it describes as misinformation campaigns by rival parties, while its wing members have been deployed to district units to coordinate with booth committees, form WhatsApp groups and train local organisers.

Campaign songs have also become a key tool for online mobilisation, party sources said, offering a simple way to spread messages and energise supporters through digital platforms.

Alongside digital efforts, the Election Steering Committee is providing technical and organisational support to

candidates nationwide.

Multiple rounds of training and workshops, both online and in person, have focused on voter outreach, message discipline and campaign coordination.

Social media managers assigned to candidates have received separate training, and coordinators have been appointed to supervise online activities and maintain consistency in messaging.

Specialised sessions have also been organised for polling agents, underlining the party's focus on election day preparedness.

ABNP official familiar with the process said the party is seeking to professionalise its campaign by clearly defining roles and responsibilities at every level.

The party has also launched a call centre to maintain quick contact with grassroots activists and voters, respond to complaints and address election-related issues.

At the same time, the BNP is collecting detailed feedback from constituencies on rival campaign tactics and local voter concerns, including issues related to prices, agriculture, employment and public services.

Party leaders said this information is being fed back to the central office to shape issue-based campaigning and ensure candidates focus on local priorities rather than relying solely on national slogans.

Azharul Islam Mannan, the BNP candidate for Narayanganj-3, said he has been receiving regular instructions and guidance to strengthen public engagement.

"We are getting party instructions and advice to increase public engagement through local outreach," he said, adding that the party has provided training both online and offline.

Mannan said workshops have been organised on working with the proposed

family card programme and engaging with farmers, reflecting the party's emphasis on social protection and rural issues.

"Central leaders are keeping regular contact with us, and clear guidelines have been given for campaigning on social media," he said, adding that a dedicated media cell has been formed to support candidates' digital outreach.

Polling agents have also been identified for each centre, with training set to continue.

Rafiqul Islam Jamal, the BNP candidate for Jhalakathi-1, said the party has placed particular emphasis on grassroots level training.

"In my constituency, the person handling my social media has been receiving training from the BNP," he said, adding that potential polling agents have also been trained.

Faridpur-1 BNP candidate Khandaker Nasirul Islam said the party has already provided posters and other campaign materials, along with training for those managing his social media.

He added that polling agents have been instructed to strictly follow the election code of conduct.

Several candidates said they have not yet raised concerns about neutrality on the ground but noted that any irregularities observed during campaigning are being reported to the central leadership for action.

Party insiders said the level of centralised oversight marks a shift in the BNP's election strategy, reflecting lessons from previous polls.

"The leadership wants discipline, coordination and accountability," a BNP strategist said. "Candidates know they are being monitored, and that creates pressure to follow instructions."

[Our Narayanganj, Faridpur and Pirojpur correspondents contributed to this report.]

82 officers, 13 detention centres identified

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Of them, seven from CTTC, four from Rab, two from DB and one police officer were directly identified by the victims by name.

In the report, at least five accounts from officers and soldiers specifically detailed the actions and orders of Major General Ziaul Ahsan, former director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC).

Brigadier Rashidul Alam, who served as Rab-1 commanding officer from 2009 to 2013, recounted an orientation session conducted by Zia where two victims were shot on a bridge in front of him as part of his initiation into the agency.

Hegave details of Zia's involvement in the enforced disappearance of BNP leader Ilias Ali to an internal inquiry board established by the Bangladesh Army in early September 2024 to investigate alleged crimes by Rab.

A soldier deputed to Rab Intelligence described an incident in which a victim tried to escape by jumping into a river. According to his testimony, Zia retrieved the individual and executed him on the spot.

A witness from the armed forces testified that Zia took a detainee out of a vehicle, stripped him, and shot him twice in the head at close range before dumping the body off a bridge.

Another officer described a pattern of executions in which victims were shot in the head at close range under Zia's supervision. He testified that 11 people were killed in succession, their bodies tied to cement bags and dumped into the Buriganga.

Another Rab Intelligence operative testified that Zia ordered the release of a "bomber terrorist" because the arrest had been witnessed by the public, saying it was not a "clean pickup". The operative added that the individual was later abducted by Rab Intelligence members without witnesses, using interception.

Two security forces members provided direct testimony implicating Major Md Ashraful Abedin Noushad in two cases of execution.

A witness from the armed forces said Noushad, "following Zia's lead", took a target from a vehicle, shot him, and the naked body was seen falling from a bridge into the water.

Another soldier testified that after an execution, Noushad used tissues to clean faeces passed by victims out of extreme fear before being killed.

Brig Gen MH Hafizur Rahman, who was a senior officer of DGFI's Counter Terrorism Intelligence Bureau (CTIB) in 2016, testified that he took part in the abduction of Brig Gen Abdullahil Amaan Azmi, acting on direct orders from then CTIB Colonel GS Col Kamrul.

Witnesses told the commission that Hafizur played a key role in CTIB's operations during a period marked by numerous abductions.

Maj Gen Kabir Ahmed, CTIB director between 2020 and 2022, told the commission he discussed Brig Gen Azmi's captivity with DGFI directors general Lt Gen Saiful Alam and Lt Gen Ahmed Tabrez Shams Chowdhury.

Meanwhile, Maj Gen AKM Aminul Haque said the abduction order for Azmi came directly from Lt Gen Md Akbar Hussain, who served as the DGFI director general from 2013 to 2017.

The 2024 Army Court of Inquiry also recorded that Akbar authorised the initial abduction and detention of Azmi in 2016.

Akbar admitted to the commission that he discussed Humman Quader Chowdhury's disappearance and his family's release demand directly with then prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

The report also had a list of those involved with the enforced disappearance of Barrister Mir Ahmad Bin Quasem Arman between 2016 and 2024.

These include former Rab directors general Benazir Ahmed, Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, M Khurshid Hossain, and Md Harun Or Rashid; former additional directors general (operations) Md Anwar Latif Khan, Md Jahangir Alam, Tofayel Mostofa Sorwar, KM Azad, Md Kamrul Hasan, Md Mahbub Alam, and Abdullah Al Momen; and former intelligence directors Mohammad Abul Kalam Azad, Md Mahbub Alam, Md Sarwar Bin Kasem, Muhammad

Khairul Islam, Md Moshiur Rahman Jewel, and Saiful Islam Sumon.

Former Rab DG Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun stated in his Section 164 testimony before the ICT that both he and the senior Rab leadership were fully aware that Arman was in their custody, stated the report.

Benazir Ahmed reportedly briefed his successor Mamun about Arman's detention at the TFI. Director Md Sarwar Bin Kasem also informed Mamun, while Saiful Islam Sumon was found to have had the key to the detention site as late as October 2024.

Additionally, Sheikh Hasina's security and military adviser Maj Gen Tariq Siddiqi was allegedly informed of Arman's detention and instructed the Rab DG to "keep him there".

A soldier stationed at the TFI centre also testified against colonels Abdur Razzak and Mahbub, and intelligence directors general Md Moshiur Rahman and Saiful Islam Sumon, stating that they visited the site, with the team alerted days in advance. He specifically recalled Jewel inspecting every cell on Eid ul-Fitr in 2023.

"Interviews of security force personnel across multiple years indicate that such inspections were routine, not exceptional. Taken together, the testimonies demonstrate senior-level knowledge, oversight and engagement with detention sites across the years," the report stated.

The commission also found prima facie evidence against ADC Ahmedul Islam of the CTTC, stating that he is accused in several complaints of enforced disappearance.

Meanwhile, a 56-year-old man, abducted by Rab-11 in 2017, testified that former Rab officer Alep Uddin tortured him severely. He said he was hung from cell bars by handcuffs for hours, during which he lost a fingernail from the abuse.

The report stated that all senior Rab leadership are culpable for the enforced disappearance of Arman, who was secretly detained at the TFI centre from 2016 to 2024.

"The assertion that the military lacked awareness of the conduct of its officers while on deputation cannot be sustained," argued the commission.

Verdict in case against Hasina

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Miah and former members -- Mohammad Khurshid Alam, Tamoy Das, Mohammad Nasir Uddin, Shamsuddin Ahmad Chowdhury and Nurul Islam -- as well as incumbent director Kamrul Islam, former deputy director Nayeb Ali Sharif and former assistant director Mazharul Islam, and Prime Minister's Office former secretary Mohammad Salahuddin are among the other accused.

The court also set January 18 for arguments in another graft case against 18 people, including Hasina, Tulip and Hasina's nephew Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby.

The prosecution said the verdict in the case would be scheduled for delivery after the arguments.

Earlier, Hasina was sentenced to 26 years' rigorous imprisonment in four graft cases between November 27 and December 1 last year. Her daughter Saima Wazed Putul, son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, sister Sheikh Rehana and niece Tulip were also convicted in one of the four cases each.

Between January 12 and 14 last year, the ACC filed six separate cases with its Dhaka Integrated District Office-1 over alleged irregularities in the allocation of plots under the Purbachal New Town project.

The anti graft body alleged that Hasina, in collusion with senior Rajuk officials, unlawfully secured six plots -- each measuring 10 kathas -- in the diplomatic zone of Sector-27 of the project for herself, Putul, Joy, Rehana, Bobby and Azmina, despite their illegibility under existing regulations.

On March 25 last year, the ACC filed six charge sheets with the Metropolitan Special Judge's Court in Dhaka. Hasina was named as a common accused in all six cases.

On July 31, charges were framed against 29 people, including Hasina, Tulip and Rehana, Joy, Putul, Bobby, Tulip and Azmina, in their respective cases.

Two security forces members provided direct testimony implicating Major Md Ashraful Abedin Noushad in two cases of execution.