

Bangladeshi film 'Saatao' wins Best Int'l Feature in Nepal

Bangladeshi film 'Saatao', directed by Khandaker Sumon, has won the Best International Feature Film award at the 14th Nepal Africa International Film Festival (NAIFF), held in Kathmandu from January 16 to 19.

Among 43 films from 20 countries, other Bangladeshi winners included

Jhara Patar Chithi (Best International Female Film) and **No Dice** (Special Mention, International Short Film).

Set in northern Bangladesh, **Saatao** depicts a poor rural community's resilience through the story of a couple whose lives change after their cow dies, leaving behind a calf they raise like a child.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Veteran Bangladeshi film actor Ilias Javed, one of the most recognisable leading men of Dhallywood's golden era and a revered dance director, passed away on January 21, 2026, at around 12:00pm at his residence in Uttara, Dhaka. He was 81. He had been battling cancer for a prolonged period. His death was confirmed to The Daily Star by Apurba Rana, joint secretary general of the Bangladesh Film Directors' Association.

Javed occupied a singular place in the history of Bangladeshi cinema. Debuting as a hero with the 1964 Urdu-language film *Nai Zindagi*, he rose to wide popularity after *Payel* (1966), opposite Shabana. Over a career spanning nearly three decades, he acted in close to 200 films, remaining a bankable star through the 1990s and leaving an imprint defined by screen presence, discipline and range.

Among his notable films are *Maleka Banu, Nishan, Papi Shatru, Rokto Shopoth, Saheb Bibi Golam, Kajol Rekha, Onek Din Agye, Ajio Bhulini, Koثر, Ma Baba Shontan, Rakhal Raja, Rosher Baidani, Jibon Shongi, and Abdulla*. His portrayal of Kalu in *Nishan* remains one of his most enduring performances.

Beyond acting, Javed was a renowned dance director, trained under legendary subcontinental maestro Birju Maharaj; a lineage that earned him the affectionate honorific "Ustad" among peers. His choreography shaped several iconic songs, including *Malika*

Banur Deshere, Moner Ei Chotto Ghor Agun Legechhe Hayre, and Chakbhom Chakbhom Chandni Rate.

The legendary actor settled in Bangladesh in the early 1960s and remained here throughout his life. His connection with the country extended beyond cinema and was reflected in a rare, community-driven recognition in Old Dhaka's Siddiqbazar, where a neighbourhood came to be known as "Javed Mohalla" through popular usage. The name reflected the affection and respect he earned among local residents with whom

Bangladesh as his home.

Actor Sohel Rana, a lifelong friend and contemporary, remembered him as both an artiste and a companion. "Most of my contemporaries are no longer alive... After losing Javed, I feel terribly lonely," he told The Daily Star, adding that Javed's work as a dance director brought "something exceptional" to films and would keep him alive for generations. Rana also noted Javed's deep love for Bangladesh and the Bangla language, recalling that he rarely spoke Urdu.

Javed is survived by his wife, Dolly Chowdhury.



Industry veterans at the janaza of Ilias Javed

PHOTO: STAR

he shared longstanding personal ties. In a 2020 interview with The Daily Star, he said he visited the area whenever his health allowed. In later years, he lived in Sector 14 of Uttara.

Born in 1944 in Peshawar, Javed's family later moved to Punjab. In

1963, he relocated to what was then East Pakistan, choosing to build his life and career in Bangladesh. Though Pakistani by birth, he remained steadfastly rooted here-speaking Bangla with ease and conviction, and identifying

According to family sources, his first janaza was held at BFDC at 4:30pm yesterday, January 21. A second janaza will be held later in the night, after which he will be laid to rest at the Sector 12 graveyard in Uttara.

Ilias Javed leaves behind a body of work that shaped Dhallywood's golden era, spanning nearly 200 films and a parallel legacy as a pioneering dance director whose influence continues to inform Bangladeshi cinema.

NEWS

Political use of police must end

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transparent recruitment, and establishing an independent police commission to oversee appointments, promotions, training, and benefits.

For years, political influence has plagued policing in Bangladesh, with almost all parties accused of using law enforcement for partisan ends.

During the 15-year Awami League rule, police were often described as acting like a "party force." Law enforcement agencies were involved in enforced disappearances and so-called gunfights, according to a government commission and some rights groups. The 2024 mass uprising saw a brutal crackdown by law enforcement, with nearly 1,400 people killed, according to UN estimates.

The law and-order situation remained unsatisfactory during the interim government's one and a half-year tenure, with frequent incidents of murder, robbery, mugging, abduction, and rising public safety concerns.

Mob violence remains a major concern.

In 2025, at least 197 people were killed in mob attacks, up from 128 in 2024, according to AIN's Salish Kendra. During the interim government's tenure, the total reached 293 deaths.

Corruption within law enforcement agencies is also a longstanding issue; a Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics survey in June 2025 found that 61.94 percent of respondents reported bribery and corruption, making police the second most corrupt public service in 2024.

The interim government pledged

police reform and issued a gazette in December 2025 to establish a police commission. Experts, however, criticised the ordinance as flawed, undermining the goal of an independent body.

Amid this situation, the major political parties are going to unveil their election pledges soon.

Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said, "If the influence of political parties over the police cannot be controlled, it will not be possible to establish a people-centric force. This cannot be achieved by just writing it on paper; there must be clear plans on how to implement it."

He described the police commission ordinance as "completely unsuitable" and urged the next elected government to form an independent, neutral, and effective commission. Its main role, he said, should be to probe complaints against police personnel independently and impartially, both from the public and within the force.

He emphasised two key points -- keeping police free from political influence and ensuring professionalism through stronger institutional capacity.

Odhikar Director ASM Nasiruddin Elan said the public's high expectations stem from serious rights violations over the past 15 years. "Political parties must clearly promise to stop using law enforcement agencies for political purposes. This is the first and most important commitment," he said.

He added that the next government must also prevent enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, torture, and other abuses, ensuring prompt investigations and accountability.

Addressing existing law-and-order problems is also crucial to ensure public safety and a peaceful environment, he said.

Rights activist Nur Khan stressed that political parties must refrain from interfering in police work, recruitment, promotions, training, or operations. "In the past, police were often used for political interests and treated like a party force," he said.

Former IGP Ashraf Huda highlighted the need to increase police manpower, noting that the police-population ratio is among the lowest worldwide.

"The idea of an independent police commission has been discussed but remains unresolved," he said, adding that such a commission could oversee recruitment, training, promotions, and benefits.

Huda also called for better logistical support, stronger training, and improved pay and housing conditions to boost morale. "Many officers live away from their families for long periods, which affects their performances," he said.

While not excusing wrongdoing, he added, police officers struggle to support their families with current salaries. "If they have a minimum standard of living, corruption might decrease."

He downplayed the issue as a "small ask" over a "piece of ice" and that an acquisition would be no threat to the Nato alliance that includes Denmark and the United States.

"The fact is, no nation or group of nations is in any position to be able to secure Greenland other than the United States. We're a great power, much greater than people even understand," Trump said, adding: "I'm seeking immediate negotiations to once again to discuss the acquisition of Greenland by the United States."

The United States detained Salvadoran journalist Mario Guevara in June after he covered a protest against President Donald Trump, but he was deported over his immigration status before the December 1 CPJ census was taken.

These record-setting numbers reflect growing authoritarianism and

escalating numbers of armed conflicts worldwide," the CPJ said in its report.

The New York-based NGO said that almost half of the imprisoned journalists had not been convicted of a crime. Of those who had been, more than a third were serving prison sentences of over five years.

Nearly a third of the detained journalists had experienced "mistrreatment," the CPJ said, including 20 percent with claims of torture or beatings. Since 1992, Iran has had the greatest incidence of torture and beatings, followed by Israel and Egypt.

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the press conference, speakers protested the termination of Layeqa Bashir, an assistant professor in the Department of Basic Sciences and Humanities, and ASM Mohsin, an associate professor and former director of the Directorate of Student Welfare.

The platform placed a four-point demand, calling for the immediate reinstatement of the two teachers, an end to the harassment of those protesting the decision, punishment of those involved in intimidation, and enforcement of policies to ensure job security. Speakers also criticised the silence of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the education ministry.

Addressing the press conference, economist Prof Anu Muhammad described the situation in universities as a "new kind of fascist aggression".

"Fascism means everyone must think,

ICT-2 orders to provide Azad documents

FROM PAGE 12
Tribunal (ICT) yesterday after more than a decade as a fugitive.

The three-member ICT-2, led by Justice Md Nozrul Islam Chowdhury, ordered that Azad shall be "at liberty to remain as he is" until the appellate forum passes an appropriate order.

It also directed the authorities to provide him with certified copies of all case documents to enable him to file an appeal against his death sentence.

After the hearing, Azad left the tribunal premises in a car.

Azad was convicted in absentia in a case filed in 2012. The tribunal found him guilty of abduction, torture, rape, and mass killing of unarmed civilians, particularly members of the Hindu community, during the Liberation War, as well as of collaborating with the Pakistani occupation forces and local auxiliary forces.

Before proceedings resumed in a separate case linked to the July uprising against former minister Hasanol Haq Inu, Prosecutor Gazi Monawar Hossain Tamim sought permission to place Azad's petition before the tribunal. The chairman said the matter would be

taken up later.

When the hearing began around 3:30pm, Azad appeared before the tribunal and sat in the dock.

His lawyer, Md Mosiul Alam, said the home ministry had suspended Azad's death sentence for one year in October last year, prompting the tribunal chairman to question whether the government had the authority to issue such an order.

The defence cited section 401(l) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), but the tribunal noted that the CrPC does not apply to proceedings under the International Crimes Tribunal Act, 1973, as per section 23 of the act.

Prosecutor Tamim said the government may not be bound to execute a tribunal order.

The tribunal then stated categorically that the government does not have the authority to suspend a sentence passed by the tribunal, noting that such powers rest with the president and the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

Seeking clarity, the tribunal chairman asked what relief the defence was seeking.

He also criticised university

administrations for lacking a "backbone" and accused them of compromising with those "engaging in bullying and terrorist activities" to protect their positions.

Warning that such an environment undermines the purpose of education, he said, "If there is no space for critical thinking or questioning in history, sociology, or philosophy, then the purpose of education ceases to exist. If we must only follow a scripted narrative, there remains no difference between a human and a robot."

According to the teachers' network, the UAP administration pressured Bashir to resign over a Facebook post without verifying the complaints against her. An inquiry committee was formed only after she filed a General Diary with Tejgaon Police Station, citing concerns for her safety.

Speakers criticised the inquiry process, noting that the committee sought complaints through a Google Form and received around 34 anonymous submissions, making verification impossible. They also said Bashir was given until January 22 to respond but was terminated before the deadline.

Regarding Dr Mohsin, the network said he was dismissed without any investigation, reportedly after being labelled a supporter of the previous regime, despite his active role in standing with students during the July

Jatra festival finale returns to Shilpkala

The month-long jatra festival is ending in Dhaka from January 21 to 23 at the Bangladesh Shilpkala Academy, after a short pause for a state mourning period.

Organised by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and run by Shilpkala Academy, the festival began on December 1 as part of the Victory Month programme.

The finale opened yesterday, January 21, at 6:30pm at the Experimental Theatre Hall. Urmia Opera of Magura staged *Premier Somadhi Tire*, written by Nirmal Mukhopadhyay and directed by Shamim Khandakar. On Thursday, January 22, Tisha Opera of Dinajpur will present *Daini Bodhu*.

The festival will close on Friday, January 23, with a ceremony attended by Cultural Affairs Adviser Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, followed by *General Osmani*.

A city procession of artists will begin at 2:00pm. In total, 37 productions were staged.



DATE: FRIDAY | JANUARY 23, 2026
TIME: 5:00PM AND 7:00PM ONWARDS
VENUE: STUDIO THEATER HALL, BSA

CORPORATE BOOKING

Fantasy Kingdom and Water Kingdom will be reserved on 22nd January (Thursday), 2026 for Corporate Booking.

From 23rd January (Friday), 2026 Fantasy Kingdom and Water Kingdom will remain open for all.

Contact: 01969-910100



CONCORD

330 journos behind bars

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then Israel, which detained 29 Palestinian journalists, the press freedom watchdog said in its annual report.

Next was Russia with 27 prisoners, of which five were Ukrainian, then Belarus with 25 and Azerbaijan with 24, the CPJ said.

In 2025, Asia remained the region with the highest number of imprisoned journalists at 110. Beyond China and Myanmar, Vietnam held at least 16, Bangladesh four, India three, and the Philippines one.

It is the third highest total recorded by the CPJ since its census began in 1992 and just short of the record 384 journalists in prison for their work at the end of 2024.

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"Fascism means everyone must think,

speak, and understand the truth exactly the way I do..." he said, attributing the rise of reactionary forces to a