



PHOTO: SHAHREAR KABIR HEEMEL

Ekushey Padak has surpassed all my other awards: BABITA

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SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Babita is an internationally acclaimed film actress. After acting in Satyajit Ray's *Ashani Sanket*, she was honoured in many places around the world. In her own country, she has received the National Film Award many times, including the Lifetime Achievement Award. The Mayor of Dallas also gave her a lifetime honour.

This time, Babita is going to receive the Ekushey Padak. She shared this feeling of joy with The Daily Star.

When asked about her personal feelings on receiving the honour, the actress said, "I am very happy and delighted. Especially, because I am receiving the honour in the Language Month. Thus, I feel that it is the greatest achievement of my life."

Babita also said, "I thank and express my gratitude to the government, to my co-artists and everyone related to the film industry, to my directors too. Throughout my long career, journalists have also played an important role, and I express my love and gratitude to them as well. I also express my love to my parents, brothers, and sisters."

When asked whose thought came to her mind first after hearing the news of receiving the Ekushey Padak, Babita said, "To tell the truth, when I learned the news, I thought first of my only son, Anik. A few days ago, I was with him in Canada for a long time. While I am now back, I miss him deeply."

Speaking about her sister Champa and elder sister Suchanda, Babita said, "They are very happy. Everyone from home and abroad

called to congratulate me. My brother and his family members from outside the country called after hearing the news."

Babita explains why this award feels more special to her. "I have received many awards in life. I have received the National Film Award multiple times in Bangladesh, including the Lifetime Achievement Award. Additionally, I have received honours from Kolkata and many other countries. The Mayor of Dallas gave me a lifetime tribute and declared a day as 'Babita Day' in my honour. But the Ekushey Padak has surpassed all my other awards."

Babita said, "I have spent a whole life acting and dedicated myself fully to the industry. I believe that it is my audience and well-wishers whose love and appreciation brought me this far. I am grateful to each of them."

THE SOUNDTRACK OF DEMOCRACY

Election songs reshaping Bangladesh's 13th Parliamentary Election

ANIKA TAHSIN HAFSA

For the first time in over a decade, election songs have become a genuinely diverse cultural phenomenon. They are no longer simply tools played on loudspeakers at roadside rallies. They have crossed into weddings, social gatherings, reels, and everyday listening. Election Commission data, derived from Al Jazeera, shows that 43.56 percent of voters fall between the ages of 18 and 37, many of them first time voters who carry the memory and energy of the July 2024 uprising. According to the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, the country had roughly 130 million internet users as of November 2025, accounting for nearly 74 percent of its population. In this landscape, a catchy four-line hook can travel faster than any rally speech, and the election songs of 2026 are proof of that.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) official theme song, built around the lyrical hook *Vote dibo kiske? dhaner shishh e (How will I vote? On the sheaf of paddy)*, is a good place to begin. The structure is a question and an answer. The sheaf of paddy is BNP's election symbol, but the song does not simply announce it. It frames the act of choosing BNP as a natural response, as though the listener arrived at the decision on their own. The visuals reinforce this. Rather than showing party leaders or political rallies, the video paints a portrait of Bangladesh itself: its landscapes, its rivers, and its people across many occupations, from farmers and garment workers to students and indigenous communities.

The National Citizen Party, which emerged directly from the July 2024 student movement, has taken a markedly different approach. Its theme song grounds itself in cultural imagery: ox carts, children at play, festivals, and scenes of everyday life. The most telling moment in its lyrical strategy is the self-identification as *moddhoponhi*, meaning middle path or centrist. It tells younger and reform minded voters that NCP is not a continuation of any old party but something genuinely new.

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami's song *Dekhe Dekhe Kete Gelo Bela* has arguably been the most viral of the season. The lyrics are layered in a way that most election songs are not. The line "Nouka,

dhan er shishh, langol dekha shesh; daripalla ebaar gorbe Bangladesh" (The boat, the sheaf of paddy, the plough -- seen enough of them. Now Bangladesh will rise under the banner of the scale) names the election symbols of every major party: the boat for Awami League, the sheaf of paddy for BNP, the plough for Jatiya Party. It then declares that the time for watching these symbols govern is over. The scales, Jamaat's own symbol, are positioned as the new chapter.

Artificial Intelligence has been used while composing many of the songs for some parties and many individual candidates. While this made production faster and cheaper, it has raised serious concerns among musicians and creators in Bangladesh. For professionals in the music industry, AI in composition is not a step forward, but a threat. It bypasses the work of composers, arrangers, and producers who have spent years building their craft.

These individual candidates reveal yet another layer of how political communication is evolving. Ishraque Hossain's song weaves English phrases like "No fear, no lie" and "Power of youth" into Bangla lyrics. In urban Bangladesh, particularly among educated young people, English words have become markers of cosmopolitanism and confidence. The phrases chosen are the shorthand vocabulary of youth politics: truth, courage, and generational power. Tarique Rahman's *TR 17* goes further still, packaging its message inside a DJ banger, a genre associated with club culture and youthful energy. The effect is to make political participation feel less like a duty and more like something exciting. *TR 17* itself functions almost like a brand name, blurring the line between a political campaign and popular culture marketing.

History suggests that the popularity of election songs does not necessarily predict electoral outcomes. Many previous songs continue to circulate among young people even after political shifts. What remains is not the result, but the rhythm, memory and emotional imprint.

This year's election songs underscore how politics increasingly intersects with culture, technology and identity. Whether through folk nostalgia, AI-generated tunes or bilingual DJ anthems, parties are competing not just for votes, but for attention, emotion and cultural relevance.



PHOTOS: COLLECTED | VISUAL: ANIKA TAHSIN HAFSA

WHAT'S THE HAPS?

'Witness to My Own Absence'

Farzana Ahmed Urmī's solo exhibition at Kalakendra features over 50 mixed-media portraits in acrylic, pastel, watercolour, and charcoal. Blurred faces evoke emotion, identity, and memory, shaped by political movements. Curated by Wakilur Rahman, the show invites viewers into a meditative, contemporary portrait experience.

DATE: FRIDAY-MONDAY | FEBRUARY 6-MARCH 2, 2026
TIME: 4:00PM-8:00PM
VENUE: KALAKENDRA, LALMATIA, DHAKA



'University of Chankharpul' wins Hiralal Sen Award at DU

Filmmaker Monirul Haque Akash's *The University of Chankharpul* won the Hiralal Sen Award 1432 and Best Screenplay at the Amar Bhashar Chalachitra festival, organised by the Dhaka University Film Society. The six-day festival ran from February 3 to 8 at Dhaka University's Teachers-Students

Centre, showcasing 20 feature films and three shorts, both classic and contemporary.

The closing ceremony featured critic Bidhan Rebeiro presenting the awards to Akash, joined by Tarek Ahmed of Dhaka Doc Lab and DUES moderator Professor Habiba Rahman. Tamim Noor's

Utshob won Best Director, Cinematography, and Sound Design. The festival screened notable films including Ahmed Hasan Sunny's *Ekhane Rajnoitik Alap Joruri*, Alamgir Kabir's *Surjo Konna*, Tareque Masud's *Muktir Gaan*, and Joybrat Das's *The Academy of Fine Arts*.

Film Certification Board reformed with Prince Mahmud, Rafiqul Anowar Russell

The government has reconstituted the Bangladesh Film Certification Board, appointing songwriter and music director Prince Mahmud and filmmaker-producer Rafiqul Anowar Russell to the 15-member panel.

The move follows controversy over the board's earlier composition, announced on January 14, 2026. Two previously named members, film editor Iqbal Ehsanul Kabir and director Khijir Hayat Khan—who resigned—were omitted from the new board.

The senior secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting will serve

as chair, while the vice chairman of the Bangladesh Film Certification Board acts as member secretary.

Alongside Prince Mahmud and Rafiqul Anowar Russell, the board includes representatives from government ministries, cultural organisations, and the film industry, including Quazi Nawshaba Ahmed and Tasmiah Afrin Mou.

