

This honour belongs to the people: Runa Laila

Legendary singer wins 'Minar-E-Dilli' Award

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Legendary singer Runa Laila, one of the subcontinent's most celebrated voices, continues to command admiration across generations. With a career that has taken Bangla music to international audiences, she remains an enduring cultural figure for Bangladesh.

The artiste has announced two new developments in her career. A new song, titled *Anayash*, is set for release on May 16, accompanied by a music video. In addition, she is to be honoured at the Delhi International Film Festival with the Minar-E-Dilli award.

The festival will open on May 4 at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Ambedkar International Centre in Delhi, concluding on May 8, where the award will be presented.

Reflecting on the recognition, Runa Laila said, "I feel this is not only an honour for me, but a great honour for the country as well. I am proud to receive this as a Bangladeshi artiste." She also expressed gratitude to the organisers and said she was informed of the honour through a letter from festival chairman Ram Kishore.

Speaking about her upcoming release, the singer noted that the song was initially planned as a solo, but later evolved into a duet with Bappa Mazumder. "At first, Bappa was hesitant and asked if he could sing with me," she said, adding that she encouraged him, leading to the collaboration.

Describing the track, she said it carries a fresh musical tone with elements of ghazal. "This is the first time I have sung something in this style. The composition and lyrics have come together beautifully," she said. The song has been written by Galib Hasan, with composition and music direction by Bappa Mazumder.

Runa Laila also reflected on her continued engagement with music. "It is by the grace of the Almighty that I am still able to sing," she said, expressing her desire to continue performing for as long as possible.

Recently, she performed in Sylhet, where she sang on stage for nearly an hour and a half. "It was a fulfilling experience. Being able to perform like this is also a blessing," she added.



PHOTO: STAR



Meril-Prothom Alo awards to air today on Maasranga TV

The 27th Meril-Prothom Alo Awards 2025 was held on April 24 at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka. The grand award ceremony will be broadcast today at 8:20 pm on Maasranga Television.

Ahead of the main event, the red carpet segment will be aired separately today at 6:35 pm. The segment was hosted by Rumman Rashid Khan and Mousumi Mou. It features the stars' stylish appearances, candid reactions, excitement, and light-hearted moments.

The ceremony officially opened with a welcome speech from Anisul Hoque, managing editor of Prothom Alo, followed by remarks from Malik Mohammed Sayeed, CEO of Square Toiletries Ltd, the event's long-standing partner.

MAY DAY SPECIAL

When music remembers the worker

DOWEL BISWAS

"Do engines get rewarded for their steam?"

The line travels from 19th-century ballads of the steel-driving man, later crystallised in Johnny Cash's *The Legend of John Henry's Hammer* from *Blood, Sweat and Tears*. It is not merely lyric memory, rather it is an unsettled question that keeps returning to labour itself: what is a human body worth when only output is measured, and endurance is taken for granted?

"With a machine, we maintain output through rest, repair, and controlled limits. With people, the demand only expands until they are reduced to the work," said Tanim Ahmed, a journalist. The logic is not theoretical. It is structural, lived, and repeated.

In Bangladesh, labour history is often narrated as chronology—laws, uprisings, collapses, reforms. From the 1881 Factories Act to Swadeshi in 1905, through 1971 and beyond, the working class appears in political history. But rarely does it appear as a cultural system that sustains its own memory.

Yet, expectations rarely remain intact. What survives instead are fragments of what once carried belief. Among those fragments, songs persist in ways institutions do not.

There is a visible gap here—between labour songs as archive and labour songs as lived recognition. The elite imagination often keeps labour at distance, even when it acknowledges its existence. The worker is seen, but not sustained in sound. The songs that were meant to bridge that distance do not always complete the journey. This absence matters because these songs were never only expression. They were translation systems—turning labour into something repeatable, socially legible,

and emotionally transferable.

"I have a personal distance from many of these older labour songs nowadays. Whereas we used to celebrate May Day in our locality in childhood. I can recall the idea of them more than their presence. The emotional recognition does not fully activate through them in the way it perhaps should," said journalist Bishwajit Roy. The admission is not about forgetting alone. It is about uneven transmission—how cultural memory weakens when it is no longer collectively rehearsed.

And yet, labour songs continue to exist, but in compressed form.

These songs were not designed to remain static texts. They were meant to circulate—through unions, gatherings, repetition, oral transmission. That system has weakened. What remains is compression.

A full composition becomes a line. A line becomes a reference. A reference becomes a vague recognition that may or may not reconnect to origin. This is not disappearance. It is survival under pressure.

Songs like *Gahi Shammer Gaan* still carry the idea of equality, even when detached from performance. *Aj May Din, Happy May Day*, and *Rokto Bheja May Tomay Salam* shift increasingly toward commemoration rather than mobilisation. The tone changes from instruction to memory, from movement to remembrance.

Renowned singer and political activist Farzana Wahid Shayan complicates this inherited archive. She states that even these historically iconic songs no longer fully articulate the present condition of labour. For her, the language feels distanced from the

immediacy of workers' lives.

Her new song, *Shunchi Tader Mojuri Ekhono Daoni*, attempts a more direct register—less metaphor, more address, where wage becomes absence and consumption becomes contrast.

But the deeper tension is not stylistic. It is structural.

"I couldn't really connect with existing songs in a personal way. Not because they don't exist, but because the relationship between labour, struggle, and representation feels divided. Especially in elite perception, workers are observed from a distance rather than understood through lived emotional language," said Shayan.

Across this tension, labour songs function less like fixed memory and more like a system under constant strain. They store ideology in compressed form. They survive partial recall. They reappear in fragments during rupture—factory fires, wage disputes, industrial collapse—without requiring full reconstruction.

And this return behaves almost as if the songs themselves understand what they have to do—to stay alive in whatever reduced form is possible. They carry the memory of labour even when the workers themselves are not consciously holding it at that moment. They acknowledge peril, exhaustion, collapse, even when it is no longer fully spoken. They keep playing through fracture, through silence, through forgetting.

Like John Henry's hammer, they do not stop at recognition. They continue as if endurance itself is their logic. Self-aware in rhythm, persistent in repetition, they press against the physical world that tries to exhaust them out of existence. They do not merely describe labour—they enact its refusal to disappear.

So, the question is no longer whether labour songs represent workers.

It is whether they are still working—carrying memory forward, absorbing loss, and surviving the systems that try to outlast them.



RELEASING ON MAY 07

Gias Uddin Selim's 'Pother Pechal' to premiere on Chorki

Director Gias Uddin Selim is set to release his new flash fiction *Pother Pechal* on Chorki. The production premieres at 12 am on May 7, exclusively on the platform.

The cast includes Yash Rohan, Bonne Hasan, Monir Hasan Khan Shimul, Ashok Bepari, Pronab Ghosh, and Sanjida Yasmin Snigdha. The poster was released on Chorki's verified Facebook page on April 29.

The story follows Bayezid, an auto-rickshaw driver whose life revolves around his daily work. His life changes when Uma enters

unexpectedly. Uma is a young novelist trying to publish her first book. The story develops through their interaction and conversations, as two people from very different social backgrounds come together.

The screenplay and dialogues are written by Selim, based on a story by Shipra Debnath. The project is jointly produced by Alpha-i and Chorki.



VISUAL: DOWEL BISWAS