

DHAKA AT THE PALAIS

A life lesson guised as a jury board

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ, from Cannes

Walking into the second day of exploring the French Riviera, it is rather telling how you can make random discoveries in little sessions spread around the Croisette. Whether it's Peter Jackson randomly announcing the next *Tintin* film in a Q&A session or Alia Bhatt announcing the 57th IFFI, the festival has no shortage of surprises to offer.

This is why it was all the more surprising that the events of the first day—especially the main jury's press conference—are still lingering in my mind.

The jury table this year felt like a literal map of the “expanding centre” Park Chan-wook described: a collection of voices that refused to be flattened into a singular aesthetic. Presided over by Park, the group brought together a staggering range of perspectives, from the Hollywood resilience of Demi Moore and the Swedish gravity of Stellan Skarsgård to the poetic



(L) Stellan Skarsgård, Diego Céspedes, Laura Wandel, Park Chan-wook, Demi Moore, Chloé Zhao, Isaach De Bankolé, Ruth Negga, and Paul Laverty pose on the red carpet



Jury members at the 79th Cannes Film Festival PHOTOS: COURTESY OF PROTHOM ALO

naturalism of Chloé Zhao and the fierce Irish-Ethiopian presence of Ruth Negga. They were joined by veteran Scottish screenwriter Paul Laverty, known for his unapologetic political edge, along with visionary Belgian director Laura Wandel, Ivorian-American actor Isaach De Bankolé, and young Chilean filmmaker Diego Céspedes.

There is no bypassing the prodigal, eccentric genius of Park Chan-wook. Questions flew in from English, French, and Korean-speaking journalists, bouncing off the walls of a room that felt like the very epicentre of the zeitgeist.

It isn't a new phenomenon by any means; in fact, Cannes has always functioned through the friction of

translation. But this year, Park's deliberate, unhurried pause as he waited for the interpreter to catch up felt like a power move. It was a quiet, staggering reminder that he didn't need to meet the world on its linguistic terms; the world had already met him on his artistic ones. He wasn't rushing to bridge the gap; he let the bridge come to him.

In response to a journalist's question regarding how it feels to lead this Jury, Park answered in a more profound way than expected: “In 2004, when I debuted here with *Oldboy*, barely any South Korean films were seen at Cannes.” Of course, I only understood what he said when his interpreter, neatly ‘tucked’ behind him, explained it in English.

The wonder for me was twofold: first, Bangladesh arguably stands at the precipice of where Park was two decades ago with *Oldboy*. Even as I still argue that we have a minimal presence at Cannes, four young filmmakers are here with their scripts as part of the Cannes Docs.

Secondly, the confidence with which Park stands firm with his mother tongue, instead of ‘apologising’ for his English, is astounding. We are conditioned to believe

that sounding “international” is the same as being internationally relevant. We are trained, from the classroom to the newsroom, to think that a heavy accent is a signal of “lesser” education, and that international spaces belong naturally to others and only conditionally to us.

You see it in our cultural DNA: journalists apologising for their English before asking a question, or filmmakers flattening the jagged edges of their stories to make them “palatable” for a Western gaze.

This sentiment of “identity as power” echoed throughout the jury's remarks.

When Demi Moore addressed the looming shadow of AI, she noted that while technology might mimic the form of art, it can never replicate the soul and spirit of the creator. That soul is rooted in heritage—in the specific rhythm of a language, the unique ghosts of a home, and the “un-translatable” nuances of our own skin.

But what hit like a sledgehammer was Irish screenwriter Paul Laverty breaking the festival bubble to slam the “blacklisting” of actors for their political stances—particularly regarding the bombing of women and children in Gaza—even if he did not explicitly name the conflict in every sentence. “Shame on those who bomb women and children. Shame on those who blacklist actors like Javier Bardem and Mark Ruffalo for speaking up against their misdeeds.”

Laverty dropped a bombshell on his way out of the press conference, which the delegation of international journalists immediately embraced and cheered vehemently.

The idea of separating politics from art, in my opinion, is a grand gesture designed to keep people politically unaware—disconnected so that atrocities can be continued against less-equipped countries. This particular mishmash of industry hopefuls, under the pretense of a simple press conference, gave everyone in the audience a life lesson.



Sadi Mohammad Shahnewaz

Dhaka cafe to premiere Indigenous-language film ‘Return’



The premiere screening of *Return*, also titled as *Phirey Asha*, a short film made in the Tripura indigenous language of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, will be held in Dhaka on May 16.

Organised by the Zahir Raihan Film Society, the event will begin at 6 pm at Dhaka's Cafe Vintage.

Produced by Dr Mong Usha Thowai and directed by Pradip Ghosh, *Return* explores stories rooted in the lived experiences and cultural identity of the Tripura community in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Researchers, filmmakers, cultural activists and guests from various professional backgrounds are expected to attend the event and share their thoughts on indigenous language cinema and cultural representation in Bangladesh.

WHAT'S THE HAPS?



‘Harmachis Cleopatra’

After a long hiatus, theatre troupe Anuswar returns with its acclaimed production *Harmachis Cleopatra*. Set against the political turbulence of ancient Egypt, the play examines power, manipulation, love and statecraft through a sharply contemporary lens. Blending historical drama with psychological conflict, the production revisits how ambition and survival often reshape morality, loyalty and desire.

DATE: SATURDAY–SUNDAY | MAY 16–17
TIME: 5:30 PM & 7:30 PM
VENUE: EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE HALL & NATIONAL THEATRE HALL, BSA

NEWS

Netanyahu secretly met UAE leader during war

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It traditionally relied on US military for protection, but the 10-week war has left the kingdom vulnerable to attacks that have pierced the US military umbrella.

According to sources, an informal de-escalation took effect in the week before Washington and Tehran agreed to a ceasefire in their broader conflict on April 7.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump said he does not expect to need China's help to end the war in Iran and ease Tehran's grip on the Strait of Hormuz, in remarks made before he arrived in Beijing yesterday for a summit with President Xi Jinping.

“I don't think we need any help with Iran. We'll win it one way or the

other, peacefully or otherwise,” he told reporters.

Iran has appeared to firm up its control over the Strait of Hormuz in recent days, cutting deals with Iraq and Pakistan to ship oil and liquefied natural gas from the region, according to sources with knowledge of the matter.

Iranian officials have signalled they see that control as a long-term strategic goal. An army spokesperson said supervision of the waterway could generate revenue amounting to twice Iran's oil income, while strengthening its foreign policy leverage.

More than one month after a tenuous ceasefire took effect, US and Iranian demands to end the war remain far apart.

Washington has called for Tehran to scrap its nuclear programme and lift its chokehold on the strait, while Iran has demanded compensation for war damage, an end to the US blockade and a halt to fighting on all fronts, including in Lebanon, where Israel is battling Iran-backed Hezbollah. Trump has dismissed those positions as “garbage.”

The Trump administration said on Tuesday that senior US and Chinese officials had agreed last month that no country should be able to charge tolls on traffic through the region, in an effort to project consensus on the issue ahead of the summit.

China, a major buyer of Iranian oil that maintains close ties with Tehran, did not dispute that account.

Case filed over attempted rape of JU

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The unidentified man began following her. Upon reaching the road beside Fazilatunnessa Hall, the man allegedly wrapped a net-like object around her neck and dragged her to an area beside the extended section of Al Beruni Hall.

Students passing through the area on a motorcycle heard the victim screaming for help.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Safikul Islam, a student of the Bangla department and one of those who responded, said they rushed to the scene immediately after hearing the cries.

“When we reached the spot, we found a female student in a distressed state near the bushes.”

The students later informed the university's security officials, after which members of the proctorial body arrived at the scene.

Deputy Registrar Gafrul said students informed him of the incident

around 11:15pm. “We searched the entire area immediately, but could not find the suspect,” he said, adding that the victim was taken to the university medical centre for initial treatment, while authorities began reviewing CCTV footage to identify the accused.

“Footage analysis confirmed that the suspect wrapped a net-like object around the student's neck and dragged her into a wooded area beside the extended part of Al Beruni Hall. Based on the footage, we have been able to make a preliminary identification of the suspect.”

JU Proctor AKM Rashidul Alam said, “After analysing the CCTV footage, we have seen the suspect's face. From what we could assess, the person involved in the incident does not appear to be a student of the university.

“We are deeply distressed by the incident that took place on our campus.”

Six Rab men hurt as ‘drug peddlers’ attack

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The attackers were led by Sohag Mahamud, 30, son of Fazlur Rahman.

They demanded to know the officers' identities. When the Rab members identified themselves

and tried to leave, the group snatched their motorcycle keys, sparking an altercation that led to the assault.

Police rushed to the spot, rescued the Rab members, and brought the situation under control.

Suspected ringleader Sohag was arrested at the scene and sent to jail through a court yesterday.

The Rab later filed a case with Lalpur Police Station. The OC said police drives are underway to arrest the others.

Govt hires 96 more from 27th BCS

FROM PAGE 12
candidates from the 27th BCS following a prolonged legal battle.

The results of the first viva voce examination of the 27th BCS were published on January 21, 2007, during the then BNP-led government, showing that 3,567 candidates had passed.

Later, on June 30 that year, the then military-backed caretaker

government cancelled the results over allegations of irregularities and corruption during the state of emergency.

The successful candidates challenged the cancellation in the High Court, but on July 3, 2008, the court upheld the government's decision.

The petitioners later filed a leave-to-appeal petition with the Appellate

Division against the verdict.

Following a long legal battle, the Appellate Division on February 20 last year ordered the government to restore the jobs of 1,137 deprived candidates.

Following the order, the ministry appointed 673 candidates on December 18 last year, while yesterday's gazette added another 96 candidates to the list.

It'd be ‘reckless step’

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central region and Meghna estuary, affecting rivers like the Arial Khan and allowing salinity intrusion further inland.

And thirdly, implementing the project would undermine Bangladesh's ability to demand its fair share of Ganges water from India during the dry season, the statement said.

Bapa urged the government to

ratify the 1997 UN Watercourses Convention and intensify diplomatic efforts to secure Ganges water instead of pursuing new mega structures.

It also called for removing obstacles such as sluice gates at distributary mouths to restore natural river flows.

The Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) yesterday approved the (Padma Barrage (First Phase) project at an

estimated cost of Tk 34,497.25 crore. Prime Minister Tarique Rahman presided over the meeting at the Secretariat.

The WDB, under the water resources ministry, will implement the project following Planning Commission recommendations. Fully funded by the government, the mega project is scheduled for completion by June 2033.

213 assaults on law enforcers

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Many of the incidents were linked to clashes during protests and rallies, analysis of news reports and documents of the cases show.

After the fall of the Awami League government amid the July uprising, some attacks on law enforcers were reported.

One of the worst incidents occurred in January this year, when a Rab officer was beaten to death and several others were injured during an operation in Jungle Salimpur, a remote hilly area of Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila.

According to a criminologist, such attacks reflect a combination of weakened law enforcement capacity after the uprising and growing confidence of organised criminals.

Police data shows that among metropolitan police units, the highest number of attacks occurred in the Dhaka Metropolitan Police area. At least 112 incidents were recorded since January 2025. Among police ranges, Dhaka Range logged the highest, 176 attacks.

Talking to The Daily Star, Omar Faruk, professor at the Department of Criminology and Police Science at the Mawlana Bhashani Science and

Technology University in Tangail, said criminals were becoming stronger because they were operating in organised groups under economic or political patronage.

He said such groups were assuming that law enforcement agencies are still in a vulnerable or transitional phase.

For months after the July uprising, activities of police slowed significantly.

Prof Faruk also pointed to a rise in “mob culture”, where groups openly challenge state authority, which law enforcers faced after the uprising.

He called for firm action alongside more disciplined and accountable law enforcement.

Prof Faruk said a lack of institutional accountability has eroded public trust in the police, while weak community policing and internal issues such as low morale and uncertainty over postings have undermined operational confidence within the force.

He recommended broader use of specialised units, including Rab, APBN and PBI, in joint operations against organised criminal groups.

He also urged the government,

particularly the home ministry, to send a clear message that attacks on law enforcement personnel would face strict consequences.

AHM Shahadat Hossain, assistant inspector general (media) at Police Headquarters, told this correspondent that they would not show any leniency in incidents that undermine law and order.

“Whether you call it a mob attack or an attack on law enforcers, we take action. Many of these incidents are under investigation.”

Palestinians say West Bank teen killed by Israeli fire

AFP, Ramallah

Palestinian health officials said a teenager was killed by Israeli fire in a West Bank village yesterday, the latest in a series of violent incidents shaking the Israeli-occupied territory.

The health ministry in Ramallah identified the victim as 16-year-old Yusef Ali Kaabnah, saying he was “killed by occupation bullets” near the town of Jiljilya, north of Ramallah.