



## Fatema Tuz Zohra to receive Bangla Academy Nazrul Award

Celebrated Nazrul Sangeet artiste Fatema Tuz Zohra has been named a recipient of the Bangla Academy Nazrul Award 2026 for her contribution to the performance, practice, and promotion of the works of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam.

The award was announced ahead of Nazrul's 127th birth anniversary, which will be observed at Bangla Academy on May 23.

Fatema Tuz Zohra has been associated with Nazrul Sangeet for decades, helping popularise the genre through Bangladesh Television, Bangladesh Betar, and stage performances both at home and abroad.

Researcher Rashidun Nabi has also been selected for the award in recognition of his work on Nazrul's life and philosophy.

### DHAKA AT THE PALAIS

## Addressing the ‘Elephants in the Fog’ and how we treat our ‘others’ Nepali film leads hype-train for UN Certain Regard

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ, from Cannes

There was not a single dry eye in the theatre full of international directors, critics, and journalists at the Salle Debussy after the momentous climax of *Elephants in the Fog*, Nepal's first official entry into the Cannes Film Festival.

Abinash Bikram Shah, a mercurial director who formerly worked for Nepal's Tourism Board, broke down completely, as did the rest of his cast and crew. The emotional release came after the audience started mimicking and paying homage to the three-clap cycle synonymous with the Kinnar community, which the film so earnestly portrays. The very instrument often used to mock members of this marginalised community had transformed into a tribute, as the standing ovation lasted for 10 minutes.

*Elephants in the Fog*, set against the mysticism of a rural Nepalese village and a looming elephant threat, acts as a canvas for Shah to tell the story of the Kinnar—referred to as the “third gender” or hijra in Bangladesh and India. While heavy prejudice against this community persists across all these states, the Kinnar use a poetic word for an individual's entry into their community: “Nirvana”. Many in this group are former sex workers, survivors of abuse, or abandoned children. Their entry into the community, at least as portrayed in the film, gives them a higher purpose in life: to serve their deity.

Pushpa Thing Lama, an activist from that very community, stepped onto the silver screen for the first time, carrying the film on her shoulders as Pirati. Pirati acts as a mother figure to Apsara (played by Aziz Ghimire), who serves as the central catalyst for the narrative.

The director takes meticulous care to ensure the audience understands the Kinnar's place within society. While



PHOTO: STAR

Team “Elephants in the Fog” at Cannes’ UN Certain Regard screening

they are given space and reverence by this particular village, it is only because they are believed to bring good luck to marriages and encourage fertility.

The character of Pirati, however, is layered. Even though the Kinnar community is traditionally forbidden from partaking in sexual activities, she does so in secret with her troupe's *dhol* player. Yet, she simultaneously berates Apsara for “showing her bare ass” while dancing in a pub.

Shah's directorial talent shines when Apsara goes missing. Pirati's emotionally taxing journey to find her unfolds against a backdrop of suspicion, where every outsider looks like a suspect. Moreover, the villagers lose their cordiality the moment the police get involved to question them about Apsara's disappearance.

The film demonstrates how easily a harmonious community can pivot to subjugating, harassing, and even assaulting minorities. Yet, it never devolves into a conventional crime thriller, despite that being a tempting impulse for any director. Instead, it highlights the struggle of the community's matriarch simply to be heard.

In Bangladesh, the woes of this community remain the same, if not worse.

It was only in 2013 that the Bangladeshi government officially recognised hijra as a distinct third gender. Even then, the state specifically chose the cultural term hijra rather than a broader umbrella term that could have humanised a wider group of people. This has created a bureaucratic paradox: medical screenings meant to verify individuals for government jobs or benefits often look strictly for intersex biological traits, inadvertently excluding many individuals who socially and culturally live as hijra.

*Elephants in the Fog* serves as a testament to how Nepal's legal fight has historically leaned toward a broader human rights framework, granting an “others” category on citizenship documents based on self-identification. The community in the film reflects a more fluid, local social structure where identity is deeply tied to the *Gharana* (clan) system rather than strict, state-mandated biological checks.

In real life, the Piratis of this world find it extremely difficult to reclaim their rights through sheer mysticism and unity alone. While Shah shows this beautifully in the film, the ultimate responsibility is left to people like those who so diligently clapped after the screening—to carry and spread the message of tolerance throughout the world.

## Channel 9 brings blockbuster films for Eid-ul-Azha

Channel 9 has announced a seven-day special Eid-ul-Azha programme featuring films, premieres and entertainment shows under its **Blockbuster Movie Night** lineup.

The highlight is the television premiere of *Domn*, directed by Redoan Rony, airing on Eid night at 9 pm. The film stars Afran Nisho and Puja Chery.

On the second day, *Borbaad* starring Shakib Khan will be aired exclusively. The schedule continues with *Daagi* by Shihab Shaheen, followed by *Toofan* and *Tuandob*, ending with *Peyarar Subash* directed by Nurul Alam Atique and featuring Jaya Ahsan.

Daily programming includes **Golden Hit Movie Hour** at 10 am with classic Bangla films, and **Super Hit Movie Fest** at 2 pm featuring popular titles.

A seven-episode drama *Khel Khotom* will air at 8 pm daily, alongside cooking show *Utsober Ranna* and special talk shows throughout the festive week.



### WHAT'S THE HAPS?

#### ‘Laili Majnu’

Directed by Tanvir Nahid Khan, *Laili Majnu* returns in a University of Dhaka production inspired by Dawlat Wazir Bahram Khan's medieval Bangla retelling. The staging follows Qays and Laili through love, confinement, and loss, where personal devotion collides with social restraint, culminating in a tale of enduring separation.

**Date:** Today | May 22, 2026  
**Time:** 5 pm & 7:30 pm onwards  
**Venue:** Natmandal, University of Dhaka



# NEWS

## BERC mulling 13.9% power price hike

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ask the government how much subsidy support it is willing to provide.

Based on that decision, it will determine wholesale and transmission tariffs before finalising the retail electricity price.

Officials involved in the process said the new electricity tariffs may come into effect from June 1.

Stakeholders can submit written opinions to the commission until May 23.

Yesterday's hearing covered proposals from the Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB), the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board (REB), Dhaka Power Distribution Company (DPDC), Dhaka Electricity Supply (Desco), Northern Electricity Supply (Nesco) and West Zone Power Distribution Company (WZPDC).

The companies sought retail tariff hikes ranging from Tk 0.85 to Tk 2.05 per unit.

During the hearing, distribution utilities also proposed redefining consumer categories, imposing new charges on prepaid meters, bringing private hospitals and educational institutions under commercial tariffs, and restructuring residential slab benefits.

The proposals drew strong criticism

from consumer rights groups and industrialists, who argued that tariff determination based solely on utilities' expenditure burdens consumers without ensuring accountability, efficiency or quality service.

BERC Chairman Jalal Ahmed acknowledged that unplanned and unnecessary projects undertaken by utilities had also contributed to rising electricity prices.

Although these utilities are legally required to obtain BERC approval before taking up development projects, most projects were implemented without the regulator's knowledge, he said.

So far, the commission has given post-approval to only one project, he said.

One of the most debated proposals came from PDB and REB, which sought to abolish slab benefits for residential consumers using between 76 and 200 units a month.

Currently, consumers using up to 200 units receive the lower tariff for the first 75 units.

Under the proposal, consumers using between 76 and 200 units would pay the higher applicable rate for their entire consumption.

The Technical Evaluation Committee did not make any recommendation on the proposal and left the decision to the commission.

If the slab benefit is removed, it said, a consumer who currently pays Tk 415 for 76 units would have to pay Tk 574, an increase of about 38 percent.

Ruhin Hossain Prince, former general secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, said the distribution companies are trying to increase their income by cutting into the pockets of poor and middle-income consumers.

Around 1.54 crore consumers using between 1 and 200 units would be most affected, he said.

He proposed amending the BERC Act to explore ways to provide free electricity for consumers using up to 200 units during the ongoing inflationary pressure and recover the costs from other consumer categories.

The distributors' proposal to classify private hospitals, medical colleges and educational institutions as commercial consumers was also rejected by both consumer representatives and the technical committee.

Industrialists also opposed any tariff increase, saying industries are already struggling with gas and electricity shortages, rising raw material prices and dollar volatility. They warned that further increases in electricity prices would sharply raise production costs and weaken Bangladesh's export competitiveness.

## US, Iran gap widens

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Two senior Iranian sources told Reuters before Trump's comments that Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei has issued a directive that the uranium should not be sent abroad.

Trump also railed against Tehran's intentions to charge fees for use of Hormuz, where a fifth of the world's oil and natural gas transited before the war.

“We want it open, we want it free. We don't want tolls,” he said. “It's an international waterway.”

Trump has said he is ready to resume strikes on Iran, which the US and ally Israel first launched in late February, if he does not get the “right answers” from Iran's leadership.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards have warned that renewed attacks would trigger retaliation beyond its region.

While talks to end the war have appeared to make little progress in the six weeks since a fragile ceasefire took effect, a main mediator, Pakistan's Army Chief Asim Munir, was expected to head to Tehran for more talks yesterday, three sources told Reuters.

Trump faces domestic pressure ahead of November midterm elections, with his approval rating near its lowest since he returned to the White House last year, and fuel price hikes are a big

factor in that.

Tehran submitted its latest offer to the US this week.

Tehran's descriptions suggest it largely repeats terms Trump previously rejected, including demands for control of the Strait of Hormuz, compensation for war damage, lifting of sanctions, release of frozen assets and the withdrawal of US troops from Gulf bases.

The International Energy Agency says the conflict has produced the world's worst energy shock.

It yesterday warned that the peak of summer fuel demand coupled with a lack of new Middle East supply means the market could enter the “red zone” in July and August.

Some ships are managing to transit the strait, but only a trickle compared with the 125-140 daily passages before the war.

Iran's IRNA news agency said 31 ships had passed in the last 24 hours in coordination with the Iranian navy.

Iran said it aimed to reopen the strait to friendly countries that abide by its terms, which could potentially include fees.

“It would make a diplomatic deal unfeasible if they were to continue to pursue that. So it's a threat to the world if they were trying to do that, and it's completely illegal,” Rubio said.

## Harvard unveils reform to fight grade inflation

AFP, New York

Harvard announced Wednesday it will limit how many top marks professors can give undergraduate students, moving to fight grade inflation at one of America's most storied universities.

Grade inflation is a problem across American higher education, amid worries that an A, meant to reward outstanding work, loses meaning if most students get one as a matter of course.

With this kind of inflation, A grades say less to employers and graduate school admissions officers as indicators that a student is an appealing prospect.

The new grading system -- voted on by professors in recent days and announced Wednesday -- works like this: in a given course a teacher can award an A to no more than 20 percent of the students, with an allowance for up to four extra A's.

There is no limit to scores of A minus or lower in the new system, which is scheduled to take effect in the academic year starting in the autumn of 2027, Harvard said.

## Clashes erupt as crowd tries to snatch suspect

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(public relations) of Chattogram Metropolitan Police.

“The suspect has been taken into custody, but I cannot disclose his location for security reasons,” he told The Daily Star.

Aminur acknowledged that there was a clash between locals and police.

The detainee, Monir Hossain, 35, works at a shop that rents out supplies for events, locally known as a “decorator shop”.

Videos circulating on social media last night appeared to show Monir, while in police custody, admitting to sexually assaulting the child when questioned by a local journalist. However, The Daily Star could not independently verify the authenticity of the clip.

Quoting the child's family, Bakalia Police Station Officer-in-Charge Mohammad Solaiman said Monir



sexually abused the four-year-old girl after taking her inside the shop near her house. After the child

complained to her parents, the family apprehended Monir and confined him to their home.

After the news spread in the area, hundreds gathered in front of the house. On information, a team from Bakalia Police Station went to the spot, detained the suspect and sent the child to a hospital for medical attention.

Journalist Iftekhar Tishan, present at the scene, said as the crowd became furious and tried to snatch the accused, police fired shots, while protesters hurled bricks and stones, leading to chases and counter-chases between police and the mob around 6:00pm, which continued for some time.

A photojournalist reported from the spot that a police truck was set on fire after the suspect was removed from the scene.

When contacted, the CMP assistant commissioner was unable to confirm the matter, saying he had yet to receive reports of the fire.

## Measles shots campaign to continue

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deaths rose to 83, while suspected deaths increased to 405.

A total of 208 confirmed cases were logged in the 24 hours, bringing the number to 8, 275. Besides, 1,423 suspected cases were recorded during the period, taking the toll to 59,279.

A total of 1,279 patients were hospitalised in the 24 hours, while 1,216 left hospitals, DGHS said.

On April 5, the government launched a special vaccination campaign in 30 high-burden upazilas across 18 districts amid a rise in measles cases and deaths.

The programme was later extended to four city corporations on April 12, before a nationwide campaign was launched on April 20.

The DGHS data shows it has achieved over 100 percent target in all divisions, except Sylhet where the coverage rate is 99 percent. Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Rangpur divisions obtained 103 percent coverage.

Explaining the matter, Prof Zahid said the campaign target of 1.8 crore children had been set on the basis of estimates, but the actual number of children requiring vaccination turned out to be higher.

In addition, some children above the age bracket of five may have received the shots this time, he told this correspondent earlier. “Together, these reasons may explain why vaccination coverage exceeded 100 percent in certain divisions.”