

A confluence of melodic offerings

Bangla Utshab begins in Kolkata

ZAHANGIR ALOM, from Kolkata

A three-day Bangla Utshab began at Nazrul Mancha, Rabindra Sarobar in Kolkata yesterday to celebrate the shared musical legacy of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India.

Eminent educationist and National Professor of Bangladesh Dr Anisuzzaman inaugurated the festival as chief guest.

"Tagore took musical essence from the Western Music, Indian Classical Music and Baul melody of Bangladesh and created his own compositions. Kazi Nazrul Islam initiated Bangla Ghazal. Kirtan is the genre that inspired all the five great poets," said Prof Anisuzzaman while opening the festival.

"Adhunik [modern] Bangla songs with Band music took a prominent place in the post-independent Bangladesh. We have to value the musical taste of the generations. I hope

the future of Bangla music will continue to excel with the efforts from the youths," he added.

Dhaka-and Kolkata-based renowned and promising singers together with popular bands have been performing at the festival with the theme "Dui Bangla: Seemana Periyek, Ek Sur-e".

Bengal Group, Bandhan Bank, The Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) and Nothing Beyond Cinema jointly organised the festival.

The visionary of the festival -- Abul Khair, chairman of Bengal Group; Chandra Shekhar Ghosh, MD and CEO Bandhan Bank; Arindam Sil, chairman and MD, Nothing Beyond Cinema; and Indrajit Sen, president, BCCI, spoke at the opening ceremony. Eminent Bangladeshi thespian Ramendu Majumdar also spoke, among others, at the event.

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Eminent singer Sabina Yasmin receives Jibon Kriti Samman (Lifetime Achievement Awards) from Arindam Sil, chairman and MD of Nothing Beyond Cinema, at Bangla Utshab in Kolkata's Nazrul Mancha yesterday. She was given the award for her lifelong contribution to Bangla music.

PHOTO: STAR

'POLLS ANOMALIES' Norway calls for probe

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Expressing concern over alleged harassment, intimidation and electoral irregularities in the December 30 election, Norway has called for a transparent investigation into the allegations.

"Norway is concerned about credible reports of harassment and intimidation, as well as the presence of serious obstacles to a level playing field throughout the election process. We deplore the violence and tragic loss of life during the campaigning period and on election day," said Marianne Hagen, state secretary at foreign affairs ministry.

"Given the significant number of claims of irregularities, it is essential that these are investigated fully and transparently by the proper authorities."

In a statement on Thursday, she said Norway commends the many Bangladeshis who exercised their democratic right to vote on election day, and welcomes the opposition's decision to contest the election for the first time in 10 years.

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DETENTION IN MALAYSIA Bangladeshi files case for RM 1.4 lakh compensation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladeshi migrant has sued the Malaysian immigration police demanding compensation of 1.4 lakh ringgit for two weeks of unlawful detention.

Moajjem Hossain, 30, filed the case with the Malaysian High Court on December 18, arguing that he had applied to the immigration department for legalisation under a rehiring programme.

Abdul Aziz Ismail, a taskforce member of Selangor Anti-Human Trafficking Council that helped Moajjem file the case, says it is unlawful if someone is detained when they have already applied for legalisation.

The migrant, working in Malaysia for the last three years, was charged with offences against Malaysia's immigration regulations and detained on October 1 from his workplace in Kuala Lumpur though his employer

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Never-ending drama in JP

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opposition.... We don't want to sit on the opposition bench ... This is a practical problem for us."

Twenty-two party leaders, except for Ershad, were present at the meeting. Earlier on Thursday, the JP chief couldn't take oath "due to illness" at a ceremony where the rest 21 were sworn in as lawmakers of the 11th parliament.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, several JP lawmakers termed Ershad's decision funny and arbitrary.

"The Jatiya Party Parliamentary Party unanimously decided that the party will remain in the grand alliance government. If the party wants to stay in the opposition, the JP Parliamentary Party will sit again to make a decision in this regard. The party's chairman cannot take the decision arbitrarily. His decision is nothing but funny," a JP lawmaker told this correspondent, wishing anonymity.

The JP lawmaker, who is also the party's presidium member, said according to the party charter, the JP Parliamentary Party, not the chairman, can elect the party leader and deputy leader in parliament.

Another lawmaker and JP presidium member said a few party leaders

might have misguided Ershad.

"Sir [Ershad] is not in good health as his physical condition deteriorated recently. A few JP leaders took this opportunity to misguide him and persuade him to issue the announcement.

"We took part in the December 30 election under the banner of the AL-led grand alliance. We will have to talk with the partners in the grand alliance if we want to act as the opposition party.

"With 22 seats in parliament, we are not sure whether the government will acknowledge us as the opposition party because at least one-tenth of the total seats are required to be considered as the main opposition party."

He said with 22 MPs, JP may be considered as an opposition group, not the opposition party. "That's why we first need to talk to the government."

In his statement, Ershad yesterday said: "As the chairman of the Jatiya Party, I would like to inform the people of the country and party leaders and activists at all levels that Jatiya Party will act as the main opposition party in the 11th parliament."

He further said, "As the chairman of Jatiya Party Parliamentary Party, I'll be

the leader of the opposition while party co-chairman Golam Quader deputy opposition leader of the House. No Jatiya Party MP will be there in the cabinet. I urge the Speaker of the House to take necessary steps in this regard."

In the December 30 polls, the AL-led grand alliance secured 288 seats. JP, a key component of the alliance, bagged 22. The BNP-led Jatiya Oikyafront managed to win only seven seats while independent candidates got three.

The election in Gaibandha-3 was rescheduled for January 27 following the death of a candidate, and re-polling will take place in three centres in Brahmanbaria-2 on January 9.

The Jatiya Oikyafront has announced that its MPs-elect will not take oath as the alliance rejected the polls results, alleging that the election was rigged by the ruling party.

Against this backdrop, there was a speculation that the JP may sit on the opposition bench.

The JP became the main opposition in the current parliament formed after the 2014 election, which the BNP-led alliance had boycotted.

The JP in that election won 34 seats

and its senior leader Raushan Ershad was recognised as the leader of the opposition with the status of a minister. Three JP MPs were also made ministers.

Their dual role has been criticised. The party could not play its due role as the main opposition in parliament in the last five years.

Ershad, known as an unpredictable character in the political arena, has a record of playing mysterious roles.

In the middle of November, he became unreachable for most of the party ranks over several days as he stayed in a house at Gulshan instead of his residence in Baridhara.

In 2006, he went into hiding facing pressure from the then ruling BNP to join its alliance. On December 18 that year, he suddenly appeared at a Paltan Maidan rally organised by the AL, and announced his decision to join the AL-led alliance.

Ershad led his party to remain in the AL-led grand alliance to contest the 9th parliamentary election in 2008, held two years behind the schedule due to the state of emergency declared amid political turmoil.

Before the 10th national election, Ershad announced that the JP would

not participate in the election and asked his party's candidates to withdraw their nomination papers.

Giving rise to questions and confusions, he was taken to the CMH from his Baridhara residence on December 12, 2013.

However, a section of JP leaders decided to join the polls. The party chairman was elected as a lawmaker in the January 5 polls in 2014 as he could not withdraw his candidacy from Rangpur-3.

From the CMH, where he had been staying for unknown "illness", Ershad directly went to the Bangabhaban to attend the oath-taking ceremony of the prime minister and ministers of the new government on January 12, 2014.

On the same day, he was appointed special envoy of the prime minister with the status of a minister. Three of his party lawmakers were inducted into the council of ministers.

In the wake of criticism against his party for being in the opposition and in the cabinet at the same time, Ershad on several occasions in recent years said he would ask the three party men to step down as ministers, paving the way for the JP to emerge as the real opposition.

BNP discusses election issues with US envoy

Fakhrul hands the diplomat video clips of 'vote fraud'

UNB, Dhaka

A three-member BNP delegation, led by its Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, yesterday met US Ambassador to Bangladesh Earl R Miller and discussed various issues relating to Sunday's national election.

The one and a half hours meeting that began at 10:00am was held at the US envoy's residence.

The two other BNP team members are BNP Standing Committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and Executive Committee member Tabitha Awal.

There was no briefing from either side about the meeting.

A BNP leader close to Fakhrul said the BNP delegation informed the US envoy about their party's observations over the election and various "irregularities".

He said the BNP team also provided Miller with documents, including paper cuttings and video clips, on "election irregularities and vote fraud".

The BNP and its alliance partners faced a serious debacle in Sunday's general election as they got only seven seats out of 298.

Mentally

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victim's father said quoting her.

The auto-rickshaw driver called his two cohorts and raped the woman throughout the night, he added.

Locals found her unconscious in the abandoned house and admitted her to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital the next evening, he said.

The woman started crying when she regained consciousness. She then described the incident, he added.

The victim's father said he would file a case with the local police station after her treatment.

Zahangir Hosain Sarder, officer-in-charge of Juri Police Station, said they visited the victim at the hospital and would take actions against the culprits after receiving a formal complaint.



With no let-up in stone extraction, Bichhanakandi village and its surrounding areas in Sylhet's Gowainghat upazila is under threat of land subsidence. The topography of the village is changing drastically and houses, mosques, temples and roads there face the risk of collapse. The photo was taken on Wednesday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

UN rights body voice concern

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polling day alone. There are worrying indications that reprisals have continued to take place, notably against the political opposition,

including physical attacks and ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests, harassment, disappearances and filing of criminal cases, the statement said.

"Reports suggest that violent attacks and intimidation, including against minorities, have been disproportionately carried out by ruling party activists, at times with complicity or involvement of law enforcement officers."

Shamdasani added that there are troubling reports of media profes-

sionals being intimidated, injured and having their property damaged, as well as other constraints that have hindered free and public reporting on the election.

At least two journalists have been arrested under the Digital Security Act in relation to their reporting on the election. The blocking of at least 54 news and other websites since 10 December and temporary internet restrictions around the election day have constrained freedom of expression, reads the statement.

The space for human rights defenders and organisations, political opposition members and interested members of the public seeking

to speak out about the election is being restricted. There are reports of police breaking up recent peaceful public protests calling for a re-election, and reports of arrests and cases filed under laws like the Digital Security Act.

Restrictive legislation, including this act, should be reformed so that human rights defenders, civil society, journalists and all members of the public are protected in their exercise of the freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association and engage freely in debating the election and Bangladesh's democratic and development processes, the statement said.

"We urge the authorities to carry out prompt, independent, impartial and effective investigations into all alleged acts of violence and human rights violations related to the elections with a view to holding accountable those responsible, regardless of their political affiliations."

"We call on the authorities to take urgent measures to prevent further reprisals, and to ensure that law enforcement authorities exercise their powers strictly in accordance with the rule of law and principles of legality and proportionality. We also call on the national Human Rights Commission to play an independent and proactive role."

Selfie addicts

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between the ages of 16 and 25.

The posters feature six soldiers labeled with stereotypes of younger people, before listing a positive value for each that would be welcomed by the army.

"Selfie addicts" have confidence, "snowflakes" have compassion, "phone zombies" have focus, "binge gamers" have drive, "class clowns" have spirit, and "me me me millennials" have self-belief, according to the posters.

The army says the campaign shows young people who are ambitious and feel undervalued have the potential to work for a job with "real purpose" and "do meaningful work."

It also released several ads featuring young people being labeled a stereotype before portraying them in army roles working abroad in war zones and providing humanitarian relief.

Portrayed is a late-night video gamer who the army claims has "stamina," and a slow supermarket worker who is bullied by her colleagues but who is described by the campaign as a "perfectionist" who's "resilient." Another video portrays a worker fooling around in the office, followed by the line: "there's always room for people with a bit of spirit."

The campaign was intended to show that "the army sees people differently" and that they "look beyond the stereotypes and spot the potential in young people," Major General Paul Nanson said in a statement.

"We understand the drive they have to succeed and recognize their need for a bigger sense of purpose in a job where they can do something meaningful."

British Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson said in a statement that the campaign was "a powerful call to action that appeals to those seeking to make a difference as part of an innovative and inclusive team."

He said joining the army "provides comradeship, adventure and opportunity like no other job does."

The campaign comes after it was revealed last year that the British Army failed to meet recruitment targets, with only 77,000 fully trained troops compared to its 82,500 target.