

# Fighting a war with melody

In conversation with Ekushey Padak awardee Mahmudur Rahman Benu

**He signed up for training for a camp in Betai on April 14 under then Captain Hafiz. "My choice was not driven by romanticism, rather it was purely determined by the urge to survive in a battlefield against a terror that left no choice for us but to learn to fight," shared the emotional musician.**

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

It was the dreadful night in March 25, 1971 that urged a 28-year-old Mahmudur Rahman Benu, a professor of statistics at Institute of Statistical Research & Training (ISRT) and a music teacher at Chhayanaut, to pick up the rifle against the Pakistani army, for the survival of our nation and ideals. Driven by drilling gunshots and chilling uncertainty, 'Benu bhai', as he was lovingly known, set off on his journey to join the Mukti Bahini.

"I heard that Major Khaled Mosharraf and others were forming a band to combat a scary battalion, perfectly trained in warfare," shares Mahmudur Rahman Benu. Following their trails from Narsindgi to Brahmanbaria, to Shingarbil, he finally found them in training camps set in the Wests in Betai, Petrapole, and other neighbouring regions.

He signed up for training for a camp in Betai on April 14 under then Captain Hafiz. "My choice was not driven by romanticism, rather it was purely determined by the urge to survive in a battlefield against a terror that left no choice for us but to learn to fight," shared the emotional musician.

He soon had to leave his camp as his nephew, Mohammad Kazi Iqbal, was captured by the Pakistani army, while fighting in the war. "I had promised my brother to take care of him, so I had to inform him that he might never see his son again," he said. "Thankfully, even though he had to go through brutal torture, he somehow survived the ordeal."

Benu left for home, and could not return camp. However, he was determined to contribute to the cause in the best way he could, with his mellifluous voice. "Rather than shooting and dodging bullets in the battlefield, which I would have been horrible at, I then chose to aid the mental wellbeing of my people with music, the love of my life," he adds.

Travelling through army and refugee camps, Mahmudur Rahman Benu and his Mukti Shagrami Shilpi Sangstha marched with their flutes, tabla, harmonium, and other local instruments, providing much needed motivation for his brethren to march forward.

"We would sing patriotic songs to the fighters, boosting their confidence, while opting for traditional folk, Nazrul sangeet, and Tagore's songs for the common people, who had to leave behind their homes just to live another day," he mentions.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

"Once, we had to sing in a camp at Kolakupa, where thousands of people were stuck in a flooded area for 3 days. They could not even sit down to rest. Upon arrival, we were unsure if they wanted to listen to music while in such inhumane conditions," he shares.

"The people of the camp walked up to us, and said that they have been waiting for us since the morning, as they believed that our music could ease their pain," he recalls from his visits to over 250 such camps during the war. "We had to sing at least 60-70 songs every day, and by the time we

finished, our voices would be hoarse. Still, within a couple of hours of rest, we would set on our paths again."

After the war, Mahmudur Rahman Benu flew to Leeds for a PhD, later travelling to Sheffield, where he taught Bangla and statistics at a school. "Chhayanaut had introduced me to my culture, and also taught me to love it. I wanted to disperse this feeling to others around me. Thus, I opened my music school by the same name (Chhayanaut), where I taught different types of South Asian classical and folk music," says Benu, who later

moved to London, where he currently resides.

Mahmudur Rahman Benu has been honoured with the prestigious Ekushey Padak for his contribution to the Liberation War, and for his attempts to globally raise awareness about it.

"This is a great honour, but when I imagine myself in the same picture as the ones who have sacrificed so much, I find myself to be miniscule. Today, I can sing in Bangla, only because they chose to stand in front of the bullets 50 years ago," concludes the ever-smiling Benu bhai.

## COUNTRYWIDE

### A self-made man

Once day labourer Jamir Uddin finds success in business, returns house given to him by govt for being homeless

AMANUR AMAN

Jamir Uddin, a landless and homeless day labourer, applied for a house at a government shelter project in 2018. Following his application, he was allotted a two-room house built on two decimals of land at Andulbaria Ashrayan Project under Jibannagar upazila of Chuadanga on June 20, 2021.

This was a gift given by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the occasion of Mujib Barsha.

"This house changed my destiny," said Jamir Uddin.

Jamir hails from Shahapur village in the upazila. His father was also a day labourer and landless.

He said he used to live in a shanty in the area. After getting the house at the Ashrayan Project, Jamir planned to change his fate. He left his day labourer job. He started a business of buying and selling bananas.

He collects raw bananas from the area and sells those to different markets. Gradually, he started counting the profits. He bought a van when he could afford it. Using

the van, his business expanded.

"Every month, apart from all expenses, my income rose to Tk 20,000 to Tk 30,000," said Jamir Uddin.

Within six months, Jamir bought eight decimals of land in the same area spending Tk 2.5 lakh. He also built a house there.

"I don't think I'm landless now. The gift given by the prime minister is no longer applicable to me," said Jamir.

Jamir thought of returning the home provided by the government. He expressed his intention to return the land with home by a written application submitted to Jibannagar upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) on January 18 this year.

In the application, Jamir Uddin mentioned that other landless and homeless families should be given the house.

Contacted, UNO Ariful Islam admitted the fact. He said he has accepted the plea of Jamir Uddin.

"We are happy with the improvement of Jamir Uddin. We have thanked him and informed the matter to the deputy

commissioner (DC) in Chuadanga," the UNO said.

Chairman of Andulbaria Union Parishad Sheikh Shafiqul Islam Muktar also echoed the same when contacted.

He said Jamir Uddin is an example of his area. The homeless man has become successful on his own. At the same time, he returned the house and showed magnanimity.

Shahar Ali, who took shelter in the project at the same time as Jamir, also thinks that Jamir Uddin's success is his own.

Jamir said success can come easily and quickly if one works with the right thinking and decision. He thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

He said the gift of the prime minister was the first step towards a change of his fortune.

When contacted, DC Aminul Islam Khan told The Daily Star that no doubt Jamir has set an example for others.

"We will consider the matter and initiate the process soon," the DC said.

### HC seeks

FROM PAGE 2

asking the government to explain why the relevant rules on the usage of Hindu inheritance law's Dayabhaga School of Thought, which deprives Hindu women of inheriting their deceased fathers' properties, should not be declared unconstitutional.

In the rule, the court asked the government authorities concerned why they should not be directed to take measures to remove inequality and discrimination between Hindu males and females in property inheritance.

The HC bench issued the rule following a writ petition filed by one Anannya Das Gupta challenging the constitutionality of the customary law.

Lawyer Khairul Alam Chowdhury said his client was deprived of her father's property by her brother Anirban Das Gupta due to the customary law.

Dayabhaga and Mitakshara are two schools of Hindu inheritance law. Hindus in India's West Bengal, Assam, and Bangladesh mainly follow the Dayabhaga school.

### The news of students

FROM PAGE 12

in it. How can so many lies be printed. Nurul Amin then agreed with me and called the chief secretary and home secretary. They then agreed to accept the death and sent another press note to that effect.

While I was at Burdwan House, journalists of other newspapers telephoned and forbade me to go out. According to them, my life might be in danger because people were talking about it.

I, however, did not pay much attention to their words and came back to the Sangbad office at night and saw that about two hundred students and other people were shouting in the office

and wanted to know what would be reported in the Sangbad. Some people hurled abusive words at me. I talked to them. I said that I would not accept censorship from the government or anyone else. We will publish the news as per our consideration.

On the night of February 21, I was requested by the underground Communist Party and others to handle Nurul Amin. They suggested that Nurul Amin should be persuaded (1) to visit the injured in the hospital and (2) to meet the students. If he does that, students will have a good idea about him. I and most probably Nuruddin or

Zahur Hossain went to him and told him these things. But despite his somewhat agreeing, we didn't succeed due to the opposition of Monem Khan and a few other Muslim League leaders.

Khairul Kabir was the editor of the Daily Sangbad during the Language Movement in 1952.

Source: This is an abridged version of Khairul Kabir's interview published in *Bhasha Andolon* (Prasanga: Katipay Dalil (Ed. Badruddin Umar, Bangla Academy, 1995).)

Translated by Shamsuddoza Sajen

### Kishore, six others indicted

FROM PAGE 12

Among the accused, Sami, Tasneem, Ashik and Shapan are absconding.

On June 13 last year, Sub-inspector Afchar Ahmed of the Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of police submitted the supplementary

charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka.

Names of the late writer Mushtaq Ahmed, US-based journalist Shahed Alam; Germany-based bloggers Asif Mohiuddin and Philip Schuhmacher were dropped from the charge sheet.

Mushtaq died at Kashimpur High Security Jail on February 25 last year.

On May 6 of 2020, Rab Assistant Director Abu Bakar Siddique filed the case against 11 people with Ramna Police Station under the DSA.

### Transnational nexus bringing

FROM PAGE 12

The eight arrestees include Fatema Akter Opy and Sheik Md Abu Taleb. Both are allegedly involved in smuggling the fake notes from Pakistan.

DB officials said Opy's husband Danesh, a Pakistani national, got her involved in the racket. Danesh had come to Bangladesh in early 2008 and married Opy. After he had a heart attack, he could no longer work for the racket, so he handed the responsibility to Opy.

Taleb is also an importer and has allegedly been in the fake note trade since

2001. He was in Pakistan between 1995 and 2000 and had good relations with Fazlur, according to officials involved in the investigation.

Mashiur said the smugglers use Bangladesh as a transit route due to its geographical position. Initially, fake notes' consignments used to come in people's luggage, but it stopped after vigilance was stepped up, he said, adding that the smugglers switched to the sea route recently.

"Once the fake notes reach the Chattogram port, they are smuggled into

India using different border points in Chapainawabganj, Benapole, Sunamganj, Rangpur and Rajshahi," he added.

Audio clips of conversations between syndicate members show that they use code words for communication. They use code words like "100 deposited" or "500 deposited". Here 100 means one lakh, say DB officials.

The criminals shared screenshots of fake 10-rupee notes among each other. Besides, the carriers need to tell the dealers serial numbers of the fake notes for taking

them along, according to the conversations and investigators.

Detectives say they found the involvement of two families in leading the fake notes racket for decades.

Fazlur Rahman, who is from Munshiganj, dragged his two brothers into the illegal business.

The other family is of one Aman Ullah, who is from Chapainawabganj. He is a driver working at the Department of Narcotics Control. Recently, he gave confessional statements before a court, investigators said.



Jamir Uddin poses for a photo with his family at Andulbaria Ashrayan Project under Jibannagar upazila of Chuadanga.

PHOTO: STAR