

# I promise I won't go missing again: Balam

For those growing up in the 2000's, Balam was the name of an emotion. The former Warfaze frontman was thrust into superstardom with his first self-titled album. How is he doing now? The Daily Star catches up.

AAQIB HASIB

In recent times, your music has seen a resurgence. Now, more people than ever have been showering your songs with love. Have you noticed this?

I have not been active on social media for many years, particularly because I am a bit of an introvert. When I finally noticed how my fans would contact me, I thought maybe I should be more active in the music scene. That is when I started being more active on social media. Getting used to the new transformations in social media and music streaming, all of this was completely new to me.

After seeing the renewed love for my music from fans, I started sharing some of my old music. I put one of my old songs on YouTube, and saw how in just five days, it got over one million views. I felt goosebumps seeing this. I felt the love my fans have for me. Maybe I have been negligent to them, but now I want to remind them about my music. I am overjoyed, overwhelmed and emotional at their response.

After being associated with Bangla rock for years, your pop career elevated you to a different level of fame. What made you disappear from the scene for a while?

After we got married, my wife Sadeya fell sick. It was a very serious life-or-death situation. Within a few months, she was

diagnosed with a brain TB. Following this, there were a lot of after-effects. She was paralyzed on one side. It was a very tough time and this is why I was absent for three to four years. This is right after the time that *Balam 3* was released. As a result of this break, I was not able to



PHOTOS: SHAGUFTA FAROOQ SADEYA

concentrate on music, even after all of this settled down. I was confused about how to start again. In 2019, I even released a single called *Hothaat*. I launched an album *Bhubon* (Balam 4). However, none of these received a great commercial response, and I will be the first to admit it.

After this album I decided to take a break as an artiste. I decided to go with the flow temporarily. At the same time, I really wanted to make music which combined our own cultural touch. I was still making music and was still learning, but was not releasing music.

Now, however, I am once again hungry to make music.

From the new generation of musicians in Bangladesh, which bands or performers do you enjoy listening to?

I really enjoyed Muza's *Beni Khuley* with Habib. Armeen Musa is also very talented. From a vocalist standpoint, Oyshee is also incredibly gifted. She has something special in her voice. I saw that Arekta Rock Band is also doing very well. There are many that I cannot remember off the top of my head. However, this new generation of musicians needs the right platform and the proper opportunities to flourish.

When can we expect new music from you?

I have a lot of songs in the pipeline. I have worked with a new artiste called Tanim, that song will be coming out soon. My commitment is that I will release something each month, even if it is just a concept. And I promise I won't go missing again.



## Audience will choose local films over 'Pathaan': Dipjol

Renowned actor and producer Monowar Hossain Dipjol has been steadfast against screening Indian films in Bangladesh. The actor has firmly protested against the decision to import films from India, as he previously stated that screening Indian movies in Bangladeshi cinema halls would destroy Bangladesh's cinema industry.

Now, as the Shah Rukh Khan starrer film *Pathaan* is set to have its theatrical release in Bangladesh this May 12, the *Dulayai Zindabad* actor is preparing to give *Pathaan* a run for its money.

According to media outlets, a film which is produced and starred by Dipjol himself will also be releasing around the same timeframe. The actor with all his heart believes that the audience of Bangladesh will prefer watching his film over *Pathaan*.

## Masha has performed in King Charles' coronation choir



Bangladeshi musical sensation Masha Islam is a part of the King Charles III's coronation choir.

This is a huge achievement for the young singer, who has gained widespread fame for her recent song, *Teka Pakhi*.

Masha was a part of the choir virtually, as a part of various performances of the Commonwealth. The video of the performance was shown during the coronation today.

The news was confirmed by British Council Bangladesh, who in their post wrote, "We are delighted to let you all know that Masha Islam, the celebrated young music icon from Bangladesh has performed in the royal coronation choir held in the honour of His Majesty The King Charles III."

# COUNTRYWIDE

## Permanent structures on govt land

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Two local influential men have continued building separate permanent structures on leased out government khas land at Balarhat Bazar in Kurigram's Phulbari upazila, thanks to the negligence of the authorities concerned.

Local people alleged that Jahedul Islam and Bulbul Ahmed have been constructing separate concrete structures near the Naoganga Union Parishad for the last few weeks.

Although villagers informed the local land office about matter, they are yet to take any legal action in this regard due to unknown reason.

A number of villagers said they fears that if the authorities concerned fail to take legal action against the perpetrators immediately, many others would follow the culprits' footsteps in future.

Jahedul Islam, who is constructing a permanent shop on the government property, said he took lease of four decimals of khas land on a temporary basis recently.

Now he is enjoying the benefit of the government land by paying its annual DCR (duplicate copy of revenue) rent, he said, adding that he has no objection if

the authorities concerned demolish the establishment.

Another temporary lease Bulbul Ahmed said he is constructing the concrete structure on the leased land after having talks with the authorities concerned.

He is enjoying the four decimal government land by paying it annual rent through the DCR, Bulbul added.

Naodanga Union Sub Assistant Land Officer Masud Rana said he had repeatedly warned Jahedul and Bulbul not to construct the permanent structures on government property, but they did not pay any heed.

His office has already sent a report to the assistant commissioner (AC Land) in this regard, urging him to cancel the DCR lease of the government land in the name of Jahedul and Bulbul and demolish the under-construction illegal structures, he said.

He hopes that the upazila land office will take necessary action in this regard very soon, Masud added.

Phulbari Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), also AC Land, Suman Das said he was aware of the matter, but he take necessary action soon after receiving the relevant documents.

## Zahangir challenges cancellation

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earlier scrapped Zahangir's nomination papers, saying that he had defaulted on bank loans.

Zahangir was elected Gazipur mayor in 2018 on Awami League ticket. He was the general secretary of Gazipur city AL at the time.

His influence on party activities in the city consolidated after he became the mayor.

But he was expelled from the AL on November 25, 2022, for making derogatory remarks about Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and expressing doubts about the number of martyrs in the Liberation War.

Soon after his expulsion, the government suspended him as mayor. The ruling party, however, granted him amnesty on January 21 this year after he wrote a letter

to AL President Sheikh Hasina seeking pardon.

Only four months after he was pardoned, Zahangir became a "rebel" by trying to run for mayor as an independent in the election to be held on May 25. He collected nomination form on April 27, after the AL nominated Gazipur city unit AL President Azmat Ullah Khan for mayor.

His supporters submitted his and his mother Zaida Khatun's nomination papers on April 27 to run as independents.

Meanwhile, The Election Commission is satisfied with the explanation given by the AL nominee Azmat about allegations that he violated the electoral code of conduct.

"We have yet to make a decision... But we are satisfied with

his explanations," Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal told reporters at his office yesterday.

Azmat came to the EC office and gave his explanation earlier in the day.

The EC summoned Azmat to explain why his candidacy should not be cancelled following repeated violations of the electoral code of conduct.

The EC on May 4 said that State Minister for Youth and Sports Md Zahid Ahsan Russel at a rally asked people to vote for Azmat when the latter was present there.

It is a violation of the electoral code of conduct, the EC added.

On April 30, the EC summoned Azmat for violating the electoral code while submitting his nomination papers on April 27.

## Forex reserves, revenue measures lacking

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reserves will come down to less than \$30 billion.

This means NIR would be even less.

NIR is calculated as gross international reserves (GIR) minus short-term foreign currency drains. Short-term foreign currency drains include impending import bills and loan repayments.

The GIR as per the BB's methodology on March 30 were \$31.14 billion, while going by the IMF's methodology, it is in the neighbourhood of \$24 million.

As per the IMF's methodology, GIR calculation does not include the various funds that the Bangladesh Bank has formed from the reserves as well as the loan guarantees provided for Biman, the currency swap with Sri Lanka, the loan to Payra Port Authority, deposits with the Islamic Development Bank and the

below-investment-grade securities. At present, these account for about \$6.7 billion.

The BB team though expressed hope that come the end of June, the NIR would be within touching distance of the IMF set floor.

The forthcoming budget support of about \$2 billion along with the project aid mobilised will shore up reserves in the coming days.

The central bank also plans on slashing the existing \$5 billion Export Development Fund even more.

"We have some time in hand before June 30 – the initiatives we are taking now will get us close to the mark," Md Mezbaul Haque, BB spokesman, told The Daily Star.

When asked if the BB's failure to meet the reserves requirement could lead to a halt in the IMF programme mid-way, he said: "There

are 50 conditions. I don't think the programme will be stalled if we miss one condition."

Meanwhile, the IMF mission also expressed reservations about the National Board of Revenue's tax revenue measures yielding an additional 0.5 percent of GDP in the next fiscal year's budget.

This is one of the eight reform actions agreed along with six specific, measurable conditions for June.

The staff mission was unconvinced by the simulations presented by the NBR during their meeting.

Subsequently, after wrapping up their official engagements for the day, the IMF team went back to the NBR headquarters in the evening yesterday for a second crack at evaluating the NBR simulations.

In their meeting with the finance division, the IMF staff team raised the

topic of increased subsidy allocation in the revised budget and in the next budget too.

In the original budget for this fiscal year, Tk 81,000 crore was kept for subsidy expenditure; it was topped up by Tk 21,000 in the revised budget.

In fiscal 2023-24, subsidy expenses would take up Tk 100,134 crore.

In response, the finance ministry officials said the need for more subsidy arose this fiscal year as the government is clearing the arrears.

There would be another tariff hike of 5 percent by June, so there would not be any need for more electricity subsidy this fiscal year.

About the next fiscal year's higher allocation, they said that the amount was just earmarked and might not be spent eventually.

Besides, the government is planning on rolling

out a periodic formula-based price adjustment mechanism for petroleum products in the last quarter of 2023, as per the commitment made under the loan programme. So the need for subsidy would be less then, they added.

"We also took stock of the progress made toward meeting key commitments under the Fund-supported programme. This will be formally assessed in the first review of the Extended Credit Facility (ECF)/Extended Fund Facility (EFF)/Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) arrangements, which is expected to be undertaken later this year," Anand said.

The staff mission would next call in October for the first review of the programme that would decide whether the next instalment is authorised. The review would be based on the numbers on June 30.



Construction of this illegal establishment on government khas land at Balarhat Bazar in Phulbari upazila of Kurigram has been continuing due to alleged negligence of the authorities concerned.

PHOTO: STAR