

SUDESHNA SANYAL

The Indian singer who calls Bangladesh 'Maa'

Sudeshna Sanyal Rudra is a Rabindra Sangeet singer, who is also a dancer as well as a priest. She has a deep connection with Dhaka, usually calling Bangladesh her 'Maa'. She has come to Dhaka almost 20 times and every time she leaves the country, she leaves behind a part of her heart.

RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Recently, she visited Dhaka upon the invitation of Bangladesh Rabindra Sangeet Shilpi Shongstha, to celebrate the 34th 'National Rabindranath Music Festival'. She also performed in the two-day-long programme which was organised on May 12 and 13.

This year, her Bangladeshi tour was really special, as she got to visit her idol and legendary Rabindra Sangeet exponent, Sadi Mohammad, for the first time.

In conversation with The Daily Star, the singer opened up about her love for Bangladesh, the Rabindranath Music Festival, and much more.

Hridoy amar prokash holo anonto aakash. The sky that hovers over both countries is the same. We are all Bengalis who are bound together with language, culture and love for music. There is a barbed wire between the two countries, but nobody can separate our love for one another. This love is what pulled me back to this country.

This year, I came to Dhaka upon the invitation of Bangladesh Rabindra Sangeet Shilpi Shongstha. Renowned singers Amina Ahmed (executive president) and Tapan Mahmud (president of the organisation), gracefully welcomed me to their programme and also made me perform in their programme.

I was literally spellbound by all the beautiful performances by the other artists and the crowd's love for Rabindra Sangeet. This is the third time the organisation has invited me and yet every time it feels surreal.

I can honestly say that the people of Bangladesh love Rabindra Sangeet more than West Bengal. These people love Rabindranath from the depths of their heart. The people of Bangladesh know how to show their love, as they always



Sudeshna Sanyal with renowned singer Sadi Mohammad

PHOTOS: COURTESY

call me to their house whenever I come here. My mother inspired me to follow my passion for music and I got my *talim* under my guru and renowned singer, Kanika Bandyopadhyay. I got my official training in music from Shantiniketan and also pursued Monipura dance from the same institution as well.

Growing up, I listened to Bangladeshi artists who have inspired me a lot, particularly songs by Sadi Mohammad, Tapan Mahmud, Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya and Mita Haque, among others.

This time, I had the wonderful opportunity to visit my idol Sadi Mohammad and I was really spellbound by the whole experience. As I got to touch his feet and ask for his blessings, I felt like the happiest soul in the world. He is such a wonderful human being and his principles continue to inspire me.

My love for Rabindra Sangeet inspired me to become part of Shubhamastu, a group of female priests, headed by its founding member and eminent priestess, Dr Nandini Bhowmick. Apart from chanting *vedic* mantras, we also perform Rabindranath's songs while conducting marriages.

I have lots of beautiful memories stored in Bangladesh, but the one that I treasure the most occurred in Shilaidaha, Kushtia. I went there to perform and I met this elderly lady who asked for alms. I told her that I only have Indian rupees and she told me that she didn't need any and gave me BDT 50 taka instead. It's so nice to see such a wonderful soul in this time and age. I took a picture of that lady, which I still keep in my phone. These memories and many more, make my memories in Dhaka truly beautiful.



Habib Wahid releases duet with Shithi Saha

Popular singer Habib Wahid has collaborated with singer Shithi Saha for the second time, to create magic with their latest song, *Pori*. Ali Akbar Zico penned the lyrics, while Habib Wahid himself composed the captivating song.

Pori was recently released and can be enjoyed as a lyric video on Habib's YouTube channel. It has also been shared on Facebook by both artistes, allowing their fans to indulge in the enchanting melody.

Furthermore, *Pori* is available to stream on various audio platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, and Shadhin Music.

76th Cannes kicks-off with Johnny Depp's 'Jeanne du Barry'

The 76th Cannes Film Festival kicked-off yesterday, with the highly anticipated premiere of the Louis XV period drama *Jeanne du Barry*, starring Johnny Depp, bringing the iconic Cannes red carpet back to life.

The first day's festivities included an opening ceremony where Michael Douglas was honored with an honorary Palme d'Or, followed by the presentation of another Palme d'Or to *Indiana Jones* star Harrison Ford.

Screening today, on the second day of festival, are *Occupied City*, *Anselm*, *Le Mépris*, *Monster*, *Le Règne Animal*, *Caligula: The Ultimate Cut*, *C'est la vie! (Le Sens de la fête)* and *Le Retour*. Along with a re-screening of *Jeanne du Barry*, there will also be a rendezvous with Palm d'Or recipient, Michael Douglas.



COUNTRYWIDE

GROUP FARMING

Cultivation of maize, pumpkin brings joy to char farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Members of Agamir Sanchay Samobay Samity, a social organisation in Lalmonirhat, have a huge success in crops cultivation by bringing unused sandy land in the Teesta river basin areas under group farming, also known as community farming.

Besides, 16 out of the 24 members of the organisation are higher educated, while most of them are involved in various other professions.

They have set-up an example by cultivating pumpkin and maize at Jamirbari Char in Kaliganj upazila, during their leisure time, with an aim to encourage the char farmers to produce crops by utilizing the unused sandy land in the Teesta river basin.

Rabiul Islam, president of the organisation, said they started their journey in November last year.

At the beginning, they planted pumpkin on about 16 bighas of sandy land and maize on another 20 bighas land.

Though they have started harvesting pumpkins a few days ago, it will take

another three to four weeks to harvest the maize, Rabiul said, adding that every year vast tracts of char lands remain uncultivated during the dry season.

One of the members of the organisation Tapas Kumar said, 16 highly educated local youths along with eight farmers of the village formed the organisation with an aim to bring the sandy char land under crops cultivation.

Farmer Abdul Wahab said usually the char lands along the Teesta river used to remain abandoned during the dry season, but some educated men in cooperation with local farmers set the example by growing pumpkin and maize on the sandy land.

Another member Popy Begum said local farmers are highly encouraged, seeing pumpkin and maize farming on the unused sandy land.

Kaliganj Upazila Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officer Faridul Islam said the char farmers are hugely inspired by the group farming initiative.

Local farmers will be benefited if the char lands are brought under various crop cultivation.



Once an abandoned char land has now turned into a pumpkin field. The photo was taken from Jamirbari village in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila. PHOTO: STAR

10-year-old boy found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Police recovered the body of an unidentified 10-year-old boy in Narayanganj's Rugganj upazila yesterday.

Locals found the body on a sand field in Pitalganj area. On information, police recovered it around 10:00am and sent it to Narayanganj General

Hospital for autopsy, said Ataur Rahman, inspector of Rugganj Police Station.

The boy was wearing black pants and black and white stripe t-shirt. Police are trying to identify the child, he added.

"Police found injury marks on the child's neck and eyes," he said.

A case will be filed soon in connection with the death.

Int'l community

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was formed on their advice in 2004. They arranged for its training and logistics. The way they wanted it to be formed and the way they wanted it to function, it has been working accordingly. Then why did they slap the sanctions?"

Pressed further, she said maybe they don't want her to stay in power, or maybe they don't want the progress her government has made to continue.

Hasina claimed that Bangladesh has made outstanding strides during her rule in the last 14 years.

In a statement in parliament last month, she stated that the United States wants a regime change in Bangladesh.

Asked if there is any evidence to back up the statement, the prime minister said, "It's a question to me as well. Why did they slap the sanctions? When the law enforcement agencies are working to tackle terrorism ... when measures are being taken against the human rights abusers and in support of the victims, they have sided with the abusers, not with the victims."

When the interviewer cited the concerns voiced by the Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, the UN and others over human rights abuses, Hasina said, "They could not

prove anything. I don't know what conspiracy is afoot internationally."

Asked why they would want to unseat her, she said, "They have killed my father. Those plotters, who killed my family, even my 10-year-old brother, don't want anyone from this family to come to power."

The BBC also wanted to know about the allegations made by the opposition that she wants to stay in power without election. To that, Hasina said, "Of course, not. I have fought for election and the people's right to vote. I have fought against the military rulers all my life. Only we have enacted laws to form an election commission. We always want a fair and free election."

About a Transparency International Bangladesh report that found irregularities in 47 out of 50 constituencies surveyed during the last election, the premier said, "Could they prove that? Where is the evidence? I want to see it."

"I am frankly saying that I have doubts over their [TIB] transparency." About the Rohingya repatriation, Hasina said, "At meetings, they say they [Rohingyas] should go back. But they are actually not doing anything positive to that end. Why? This is my question too."

Gas price may rise by up to Tk 512

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connections use more gas than last year's estimated 60 cubic metres by a dual burner and 55 cubic metres by a single burner stove each month.

The estimated average consumption should be 88.44 cubic metres and 76.65 cubic metres for dual and single burner stoves, reads the letter.

Titas cited a 2003 estimation based on a study Titas conducted in 2000-01 on 100 consumers in Gulshan and Banani areas.

The data on average consumption is not based on a recent study on non-metered consumers who represent 95 percent of its household users, according to energy expert Maqbul E-Elahi Chowdhury.

The current gas tariff fixed in June last year is based on an analysis of 3.70 lakh metered connections to households, he said.

"No consumer was found to be using more than 45 cubic metres a month. How are they claiming that the average non-metered

consumer is using over 70 cubic metres a month? This is absurd," said the former member of BERC.

Titas simply wants to put the burden of system loss on subscribers of non-metered connections, he said.

The Titas letter also cited consumption data from October 2022 to March 2023 of around 53,000 "post-paid metered connection subscribers".

It says the average consumption of those users was 97 cubic metres a month.

But multiple Titas officials requesting anonymity said metered connections are mostly subscribed by dormitories of educational institutes, madrasas, police barracks, and hospitals where the consumption is significantly higher.

Contacted, BERC Secretary Khalilur Rahman Khan said, "We will hold a meeting with the distributor companies [today] and ask for the rationale behind their

[Titas] claims."

Before fixing the non-metered gas price in 2022, the BERC conducted a study in collaboration with Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

The study found that the distribution companies have no recognised method of measuring the consumption by subscribers of non-metered gas.

As a result, the fixed tariff paid by subscribers of non-metered connections is higher than the monetary value of the gas used by them, said the study conducted on 688 non-metered and 365 metered gas connections in 13 districts.

Titas Managing Director Harunur Rashid Mollah refused to make comments on the issue.

Alamin, manager (public relations) at Titas, said the estimated average gas usage needed revision because of Titas' rising system loss. This revision is not directly linked to gas prices, he added.

Withdrawal of addl security

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The authorities in Dhaka recently decided to stop providing additional police escort. Ansar members will escort the diplomats instead.

The ministry officials are likely to meet the director general of Ansar today to know about the services the force has to offer.

"We will then let the missions know officially," Masud Bin Momen said, adding that the government is aware of the responsibilities under the Vienna Convention, and regular security measures

for the foreign missions and their personnel remain unchanged.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Monday said there was a shortage of police personnel, and there was no lack of security in the country because "militancy and the law-and-order were under control".

The foreign diplomats will be able to avail the service if they pay for it, he added.

Patel during his regular briefing said that Washington looks forward to deepening

its relationship and cooperation with Bangladesh on a number of key issues "regardless of political parties or candidates or anything like that".

He said Washington hopes for any election around the world to be free, fair and accessible.

He said this when asked about US Deputy Assistant Secretary Afireen Akhter's recent comment that it was for the political parties to decide whether to participate in the coming national election in Bangladesh.