

RUNA LAILA

reflects on her glorious 58-year journey with music

Runa Laila, a legendary figure in the Bangladeshi music industry, has earned acclaim not only within Bangladesh but throughout the Indian subcontinent with her timeless hits that have captured the hearts of millions.

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Today, on her 71st birthday, The Daily Star had the opportunity to engage in a conversation with this iconic artiste about her life, aspirations, and more.

On this special occasion, reflecting on your glorious 58-year journey in the music industry, what are your sentiments about it now?

I consider myself a very optimistic and positive individual. Being an innate musician, I believe my musical journey is an ongoing process. Even today, I am dedicated to creating new songs and compositions. Music has brought me this far, and I anticipate the rest of my days will revolve around it. As a musician, I couldn't ask for a better life, and I am content with it.

While you are celebrated nationally and internationally, especially in the Indian subcontinent, do you harbour any regrets or unfulfilled aspirations?

Absolutely not. I feel I have achieved more than I ever asked for. I am deeply content with my life and express gratitude to the Almighty for the love, honour, and respect I receive from the people of my country and admirers. I still sing and perform in concerts; what more could I ask for?

Your advocacy for the betterment of new musicians is well-known. How do you view your role in supporting and mentoring emerging talents in the music industry?

I have always believed that the new generation of musicians are crucial for the advancement of our music industry. Blessed with innate musical talents, our musicians deserve our guidance and support as mentors to help pave the way for their successful careers. I greatly admire them and strive to assist them in any way possible.

What is your experience like working with aspiring musicians?

Working with new musicians is a pleasure

for me, as they bring fresh perspectives and compositions. Collaborating with them is truly enjoyable.

Having worked in three music industries in three countries, how do you view this unique accomplishment?

I consider it a tremendous privilege that the people of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan have embraced my music by accepting me as their own. As for singing in three languages, I am grateful for the same level of acceptance and love in all three countries, marking a significant achievement in my musical career.

As someone whose songs are listened to by thousands, are there specific musicians you, as a listener, admire?

I am an avid admirer of all musicians, especially young singers and composers. I believe there is always more to learn, and I draw inspiration from both young and senior musicians, recognising that each learning experience is unique.

Jimmy Kimmel chosen to host Oscars for fourth time

The 96th Academy Awards will be hosted by comedian Jimmy Kimmel for the fourth time next year, according to an announcement by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences on Wednesday.

"I've always dreamed of hosting the Oscars exactly four times," Kimmel stated in a statement released by the Academy.

The 96th Academy Awards will telecast on ABC and other global broadcast networks on March 10, 2024.

Warner Music set to make Edith Piaf's animated biopic via AI

Warner Music Entertainment and Seriously Happy are collaborating on a groundbreaking AI-animated biopic about Edith Piaf, with approval from her estate. This project, named *Edith*, aims to depict Piaf's rise to fame, showcasing her as a symbol of female empowerment.

The film aims to utilise advanced AI technology to recreate Piaf's voice and image, drawing from extensive voice clips and images to bring authenticity to the storytelling.

The 90-minute film, set in Paris and New York from the 1920s to the 1960s, will uncover previously unknown aspects of Piaf's life, highlighting her spirit, achievements, and performances. Recordings of her original songs, like *La Vie en rose* and *Non, je ne regrette rien* will be used, with archival footage of Piaf.



NEWS

Bangladesh to face growing pressure

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likely indirectly signaling that such a Bangladesh is more viable without BNP in power. This is of course AL's view as well. There are notable ideological convergences between AL and BJP, which is one reason why the two parties and their governments are so close now. It is also why New Delhi worries about US policy in Bangladesh: US criticism of Bangladesh under the AL government for democratic backsliding and rights concerns risks undermining AL, which New Delhi doesn't want.

DS: Has Washington softened its position on Bangladesh in the midst of the Israel-Hamas war that put the US in an awkward situation?

MK: I'm not aware of it, but it would not be a bad idea to tone down US public messaging about rights and democracy in Bangladesh -- less so because of US support for Israel and more so because of key considerations in Bangladesh itself. With the election drawing closer in Bangladesh, the political moment is becoming increasingly volatile. The more the US talks publicly about politics in Bangladesh, the more those comments will be scrutinised and the higher the risk that such messaging will be politicised or spun a certain way by a particular faction

for political benefit.

DS: BNP's blockade and violence have already affected its reputation. Will the US consider visa restrictions against those involved in violence now?

MK: The US has pledged taking action against anyone that hinders free and fair elections, regardless of party or political affiliation. This suggests BNP could well come under the crosshairs of the US visa policy. In theory, new visa restrictions placed on BNP members could help push back against critics of US policy in Bangladesh who allege the US has something against the AL and is focusing its criticism on that party alone. But because the administration has chosen not to make public who it has targeted for visa restrictions, that potential benefit for Washington is unlikely to materialise.

DS: How can Bangladesh deal with the geopolitical challenges it faces now?

MK: Bangladesh has become a regional economic success story and is becoming a global player to be reckoned with economically. But the question is if Bangladesh could become a geopolitical player. I would argue that Bangladesh is not as present in the global stage as India. It doesn't have the luxury of a large

military. Economic power is critical and an initial springboard for greater global influence. So, Bangladesh could well be on its way, but one of the big questions is if its economic success story is sustainable. If it is, it could be one to do bigger and better things.

Bangladesh is smack in the middle of US-China, India-China and increasingly US-Russia competition. It will find itself under growing pressure in the coming days. If Dhaka can play the balancing role, it will be better. I see that India has been able to play that role very well, maintain strong relationship with the US and Russia throughout the difficult moments. So, there is a lot of potential for Bangladesh in this regard as well, but it will depend on how it does on the economic front. The key challenge for Bangladesh is the democracy factor for the US and the West. Clearly, the reactions from Dhaka have not been very diplomatic. This does not help diplomatic clout. Dhaka does feel the heat from the key Western governments and trade partners. That's where I think Bangladesh's diplomacy will be put to the test.

(READ FULL INTERVIEW ON OUR WEBSITE)

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Won't join polls under Hasina-led government

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declaration of the polls schedule".

The six Islamist parties were components of the BNP-led 20-party alliance. But they severed their ties with the BNP several years ago alleging that they were not "properly evaluated".

The Awami League is reportedly trying to woo several Islamist parties, including the six, to get them into taking part in the polls to show off that most political parties are taking part in the election.

The EC on Wednesday announced that the 12th parliamentary polls will be held on January 7. Unveiling the polls schedule, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal urged all political parties to take part in the election.

Speaking to The Daily Star, leaders

of several Islamist parties said the government was putting pressure on them to run in the polls.

Monjurul Islam, secretary general of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, said they have decided unanimously to reject the polls schedule as people's expectations were not reflected in EC's decision.

"We will not join the polls unless a conducive atmosphere is created," he told The Daily Star.

Monjurul also said they demand the government creates a consensus among the political parties through dialogues for holding the election under a neutral polls-time government.

Shakhawat Hossain, nayeb-e-ameer of Khelafat Majlis, said they will run in the general election only if it is held in a free and fair manner under an election-time government.

A total of 12 Islamist parties are registered with the EC. Five of them, who have good ties with the AL, will participate in the election. They are Jaker Party, Torikot Federation, Islamic Front Bangladesh, Bangladesh Muslim League and Bangladesh Supreme Party (BSP).

Sayed Saifuddin Ahmed, chairman of the BSP, said five other parties would join the polls under the BSP banner as the party is the only EC-registered party among them.

AL Joint Secretary General Mahbubul Alam Hanif told this correspondent on Monday that their party was not putting pressure on any political party to take part in the polls.

Khadija to be freed from jail

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Enayetur Rahim, Justice Md Ashfaqul Islam, Justice Md Abu Zafor Siddique and Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim.

On February 16 this year, the High Court had granted permanent bail to Khadija but the state then filed two petitions with the SC challenging the HC order.

Following the petitions, an SC chamber judge stayed the HC order.

Khadija then submitted two petitions before the Appellate Division, praying that the chamber judge's stay order be vacated, said her lawyer BM Elias Kachi.

The SC chamber judge then sent all the four petitions to its full bench for a hearing.

On July 10, 2023, the bench, led by the former chief justice Hasan Foez Siddique, adjourned and stood over all four petitions for four months.

This automatically stayed the bail order that Khadija had obtained from the HC.

She has been denied bail as many as six times, three of which were by a lower court, said her family.

A student of political science at Jagannath University, Khadija was arrested on August 27 last year after police pressed charges against her in the two cases, filed by Kalabagan and New Market police themselves on October 11 and October 19, 2020.

The student was sued at the age of 17 for hosting a Facebook webinar, where a guest speaker, Delwar Hossain, a retired army officer, made contentious remarks.

Delwar, who is abroad at the moment, was also accused in these cases.

On July 10, the judges had said, "Why would you not take

responsibility for what is being said by the guest of the talk show?"

This correspondent had verified her age from her birth certificate.

Although Khadija was sued as a minor, she had to undergo a full adult trial and incarceration.

She also had to spend a week in solitary confinement due to what jail authorities termed "misbehaviour".

According to them, she refused to cooperate with doctors when she was taken to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital for a health checkup, and that is why she was placed in solitary confinement.

Her sister on the other hand had said that she was fasting and had not eaten or been hydrated since dawn that day, for which she was unable to give medical samples.

Israel takes Gaza port

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lives of hundreds of patients and medical staff at the hospital.

The UN Security Council on Wednesday set aside deep divisions over the conflict to agree a resolution calling for "urgent and extended humanitarian pauses" in fighting.

The resolution -- which passed with abstentions from the United States, Britain and Russia -- called on Hamas and Israel to protect civilians, "especially children".

US President Joe Biden said

on Wednesday that he had made it clear to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that a two-state solution was the only way to resolve the Israel-Palestinian conflict, reports Reuters.

The UN human rights chief yesterday decried allegations of serious rights violations in the Israel-Hamas war and suggested an international investigation was needed.

Volker Turk said "extremely serious allegations of multiple and

profound breaches of international humanitarian law, whoever commits them, demand rigorous investigation and full accountability".

Meanwhile, Israeli fighter jets have struck the house of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Gaza, the Israeli military said.

In a separate incident, three gunmen who attacked a checkpoint near Jerusalem yesterday, wounding six security forces, were killed as Israeli police fended them off, police said.

Take steps to create conducive environment

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International Criminal Court.

The member states have also been urged to continue the humanitarian support for the Rohingya refugees living in Bangladesh in the spirit of responsibility and burden sharing.

"Bangladesh is a small country with a high density of population and very limited resources. The protracted

presence of the Rohingyas in our territory is not an option. They must have to return to their homeland, Myanmar," said Muhammad Abdul Muhith, representative of the Bangladesh permanent mission to the UN.

Underscoring the need for improving the situation in Rakhine for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Rohingyas, he urged the international community, including

the Asean, to continue their support in this regard.

Given the intensive political polarisation amid various global conflicts, the adoption of this year's resolution, with an unprecedented level of co-sponsorship, sends a powerful signal of global solidarity and the renewed commitment to addressing the Rohingya crisis, Muhith said.