



Maqsoodul Haque



Ark vocalist Syed Hasanur Rahman



Avishek Bhattacharjee



Nemesis vocalist Zohad Reza Chowdhury



Meghdol

PHOTOS: THABIT AL BASHAR

# SOLIDARITY IN HARMONY: ‘To Gaza, From Dhaka’ unites hearts

ZARIN TASNIM

The spirit of solidarity through music has been a beacon of hope and activism throughout history. Just as the *To Gaza, from Dhaka – Artists Against Genocide* concert unites Bangladeshi musicians to aid Gaza, it bears a striking resemblance to another historic musical event: *Concert for Bangladesh*.

In 1971, the *Concert for Bangladesh* was organised by George Harrison and Ravi Shankar to raise awareness and funds for the plight of refugees during the Bangladesh Liberation War. Similarly, today's Bangladeshi musicians, driven by compassion and a sense of responsibility, are using their artistic talents to support a humanitarian cause — this time for the suffering people of Gaza.

Both concerts are driven by the ethos of using music as a powerful tool for advocacy and assistance during times of crisis. While the situations in Bangladesh in 1971 and Gaza today may differ, the essence of artistes coming together to amplify a humanitarian message remains unchanged.

In a profound display of national unity and compassion, the *To Gaza, From Dhaka* charity concert illuminated the Hatirjheel Amphitheatre on the 24th of November, 2023. The event, dedicated to advocating for a ceasefire and extending a helping hand to the distressed Palestinian community, resonated with the powerful rhythm of solidarity.

Just as George Harrison and Ravi Shankar enlisted the help of renowned musicians

like Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, and Ringo Starr to raise awareness and funds, *To Gaza, From Dhaka* featured a stellar lineup of artistes, including Maqsood O' Dhaka, Ark, Nemesis, Meghdol, Karnival, Shohojia, Indalo, Bangla Five, Highway, Ahmed Hasan Sunny, Hatirpool Sessions, Black Zang, Masha Islam, Aseer Arman, Muiz Mahfuz, Avishek Bhattacharjee, Firoze Jong, Moruvumi, The Moon Flower Project, and others. These musicians, much like their predecessors, have chosen to forgo their earnings, believing that their music's message of solidarity is more important than personal gain.

Organised as a musical extravaganza transcending geographical boundaries, the overarching objectives were clear: to call for a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, raise funds for humanitarian aid, and foster empathy among attendees.

As the sun bathed the amphitheatre in its Friday afternoon glow, I found myself in a nook surrounded by a mosaic of Palestine and Bangladesh flags dancing together in the breeze. The air pulsed with excitement as the mesmerising musical journey kicked off with the Hatirpool Sessions.

In a magnetic showcase of musical prowess, the stage came alive with a series of captivating performances that resonated with emotion and compassion. The melodies then began with Muiz Mahfuz's lively rendition of *Bhanga Gorar Gaan*, setting the tone for an evening filled with diverse musical expressions. Following suit, the Moon Flower

Project mesmerised the audience with their rendition of John Lennon's iconic anthem, *Imagine*, weaving their unique magic into this timeless classic.

The energy surged as Avishek Bhattacharjee took the stage, channelling the spirit of rebellion with an electrifying performance of *Rage Against the Machine's* powerful tunes. The lineup continued to unfold, each act a gem in its own right.

From Firoze Jong to Moruvumi, Aseer Arman to Black Zang, Highway to Bangla Five, and Karnival to Indalo, the stage bore witness to a symphony of talents, each artiste leaving an indelible mark on the hearts of the audience.

Masha cast a spell over the crowd with enchanting renditions of Michael Jackson's *Heal the World* and *Earth Song*, captivating hearts and minds alike. Ahmed Hasan Sunny and the Revolution delivered an awe-inspiring theatrical performance, with their "Post-capitalist anthem" that transcended the ordinary.

Special guest, Latiful Islam Shibli, added a touch of significance to the event, emphasising the importance of collective action in times of crisis through his poems.

The show reached its pinnacle when Maqsood O' Dhaka stole the spotlight with a commanding performance of *Abar Juddhe Jete Hobe*, leaving the audience in awe of his stage presence. Shohojia's rendition of *Choto Pakhi* and Nemesis' powerful performance of *Gonojowar* further elevated the musical

journey, showcasing depth and diversity.

As the evening progressed, Meghdol took the stage, delivering an exceptional performance of *Esho Amar Shohore* and *Pathure Debi*, culminating with a poignant dedication of *E Hawa* to the children of Palestine, a heartfelt tribute that resonated deeply.

Ark, the much-awaited act, took the stage almost at 11 pm, with Hasan, draped in a velvety green cape with a Palestine flag adorning his neck. His soul-stirring performances of *Tumi Amar Sure Sure*, *Eto Koshto Keno Bhalobashay*, *Ekaki*, and *Sweetly* captivated the audience, culminating in a stellar rendition of *Proshno*, leaving an indelible mark on the collective memory of all who were present.

There are always sceptics who question the impact of musical events in the face of humanitarian crises. However, history has shown that such concerts serve as more than just fundraisers. They serve as a platform to spread awareness, galvanise support, and shine a spotlight on pressing issues.

Beyond the melodies and rhythms that filled the air, the heart of the evening lay in its objectives. The concert aimed to raise essential funds to provide much-needed humanitarian aid to the Palestinian civilians enduring unimaginable hardships. Every note struck and every lyric sung carried the weight of a heartfelt plea for peace and support.

Transparency and impact were at the forefront of the organisers' intentions. A

total of BDT 1.2 million donation funds raised during the concert will be directly channelled towards humanitarian aid, ensuring that every contribution makes a tangible difference. The selection of NGOs such as the Palestine Children's Relief Fund, Red Crescent, or UNRWA USA as channels for aid showcases the organisers' commitment to reaching those most in need.

Recognising the significance of transparency, the event's spokesperson pledged to release detailed transaction records, ensuring complete openness about the distribution of donations. This commitment exemplifies the integrity and sincerity of the initiative, fostering trust amongst supporters and amplifying the impact of collective generosity.

The *To Gaza, From Dhaka* charity concert transcended the boundaries of music and culture. It became a powerful testament to the potential of unified action for humanitarian causes. It embodied the spirit of solidarity, proving that no distance or barrier can hinder the collective call for peace, empathy, and support for our fellow human beings facing adversity.

As the melodies faded into the night, the reverberation of compassion and unity lingered, leaving an indelible mark on the hearts of all attendees. The legacy of this concert extends far beyond the stage, echoing the unwavering message that together, we stand in solidarity for a better, more compassionate world.

## NEWS

### Janata Bank comes short of BB's targets

FROM PAGE 1

Jabbar, who took charge in April this year.

For Sonali, the ceiling was 38 percent and its large loan portfolio was 48 percent of all loans.

Agrani's large loan portfolio accounted for 34 percent of its total outstanding credit as of June 30 whereas the ceiling was 30 percent.

Agrani Bank has not approved any large loans in the last two years, according to its chairman Zaid Bakht.

"Our large loan concentration is not increasing in recent times, and we are no longer lending to these large borrowers by exceeding the exposure limit," said Md Murshedul Kabir, the MD and CEO of Agrani Bank.

Agrani is strictly monitoring the loans that have already exceeded the exposure limit, he added.

Bakht said Agrani is reducing its large loan concentration as per the instruction of the central bank.

Rupali's large loan portfolio was within the BB-imposed ceiling of 34 percent.

As of June 30, Janata had the highest number of large loan borrowers (67) and the highest proportion of large borrowers that have exceeded the single borrower exposure limit of 25 percent of capital.

Sonali had 21 large borrowers and 13 exceeded the single-borrower exposure limit, according to the BB report published on November 14.

Most of Sonali Bank's large borrowers are state-run companies and agencies, said its MD and CEO Md. Afzal Karim. "And their repayment behaviour is good," he added.

Of Sonali's 21 large borrowers, 17 are public sector borrowers, according to the BB report.

Agrani had 55 large borrowers and 20 of their exposure was over the limit. As of June 30, Rupali had 35 large borrowers and the exposure of 10 of them was above the ceiling set for a single borrower.

Janata had the highest number of its large borrowers defaulting on their loans: 17.

The other three banks together had 17 large borrowers defaulting on their loans at the end of June.

Janata's 17 large borrowers defaulted on Tk 10,841 crore, which is more than the total of three banks'

large borrowers' soured loans.

The report did not name the large borrowers whose exposure limit was above the permissible limit or those who had defaulted on their loans.

Another performance improvement target was bringing down the credit concentration in the banks' top five branches.

Both Sonali and Agrani managed to bring down the credit concentration in their top five branches by 2 percentage points. Rupali's credit concentration in its top five branches stayed the same as six months earlier.

Janata's credit concentration in its top five branches, however, increased between December 31 last year and June 30 this year, according to the BB report.

As much as 77 percent of its total outstanding credit amounting to Tk 93,371 crore was disbursed from its top five branches: Local Office branch, Janata Bhaban Corporate branch, Sadharan Bima Bhaban Corporate branch in Chattogram, Dilkusha Corporate branch and Motijheel Corporate branch.

The remaining 23 percent of the credit was extended through 917 branches across the country, including its four overseas branches.

The central bank also set individual targets for cash recovery from the top 20 defaulters and the other defaulters and from written-off loans and Janata fared the worst in two of the three categories.

"Cash recovery is very difficult amid the ongoing economic situation," said the Janata MD Jabbar, adding that his bank recovered a good portion of loans through rescheduling.

In the first six months of the year, Janata's cash recovery from its top 20 defaulters was Tk 16 crore, which is just 2 percent of the target. Agrani also managed to recover just 2 percent of its target from its top 20 defaulters.

Sonali retrieved Tk 26 crore, which is 9 percent of its cash recovery target from its top 20 defaulters in the first half of the year.

Rupali recovered Tk 65 crore from its top 20 defaulters, which is 19 percent of its target. It also fared the best when it came to cash recovery from its other defaulters: it retrieved Tk 268 crore, which is 47 percent of

the target.

"We will see a good result by the year-end because a good portion of the loans are in the process of becoming regular through rescheduling," said Mohammad Jahangir, the MD and CEO of Rupali Bank.

The bank is making good loan recovery from its large borrowers, which will also help bring down its large loan concentration, he added.

Janata managed to meet 17 percent of its cash recovery target from its other defaulters, which is the lowest among the four.

The bank, however, fared comparatively better when it came to cash recovery from written-off loans: it recovered Tk 28 crore, which is 8 percent of the target. Sonali also managed just 8 percent of its cash recovery target from written-off loans.

The central bank has called for a reduction in their classified loans and here too, Janata fared the worst.

Let alone bring down the volume, Janata's classified loans went up by 87.8 percent in the first six months of the year, according to the BB report.

At the end of June, as much as 32.6 percent of its total outstanding loans were classified, which is the highest among the four and substantially more than the other three banks.

Both Rupali and Sonali managed to bring down their classified loans by 12.86 percent and 1.37 percent respectively in the first six months of 2023, while Agrani's classified loans increased by 7.11 percent.

As per the agreement with the BB, at least 50 percent of Janata, Agrani and Rupali's new adjusted loans must be disbursed to CMSMEs, retail and other small borrowers. For Sonali, it is 40 percent.

While Sonali met its target comfortably, the other three banks failed.

"We are now trying to balance our loan portfolio by focusing more on SME and agriculture loans," said the Agrani MD Kabir.

Save for Rupali, the other three banks' capital position deteriorated in the first six months of the year, according to the report.

The banks' capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR) was supposed to be at least 10 percent, and Sonali's CRAR barely meets the floor set by the BB. The other three banks' CRAR falls short.

### US takes dig at Russian statement

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Department's response after media enquiry yesterday.

"We want what the Bangladeshi people themselves want: free and fair elections, which are conducted in a peaceful manner."

It said to support that shared goal, US embassy personnel engage and will continue to engage with the Bangladesh government, opposition, civil society, and other stakeholders to urge them to work together for the benefit of the people.

During meetings with Bangladesh officials both in Dhaka and Washington over the past two years, the US has been calling for free and

fair polls.

The State Department also wrote to the three major political parties — Awami League, BNP and Jatiya Party — requesting dialogue amid blockades and strikes being enforced by BNP and Jamaat, calling for a polls-time interim administration.

Earlier, a Facebook post by the Russian embassy in Dhaka carried Zakharova's November 22 statement, which said, "They [participants in Haas's meeting] reportedly discussed plans to organise mass anti-government protests in the country during the meeting."

She, in particular, claimed that the American ambassador promised his

interlocutor to provide information support in the event that the authorities used force against participants in "peaceful demonstrations". These assurances were purportedly made on behalf of the embassies of the United States, Britain, Australia and several other countries.

"How can these actions of the American ambassador to Bangladesh be regarded? They can be seen as nothing less than gross interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state on the part of Washington and its satellites, demonstrating open disregard for the norms and rules enshrined in the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations."

### AL sticks to mostly incumbents

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get nomination. Faridpur district AL President Shamim Haque has been chosen for Faridpur-3 instead.

Former MP and AL central committee member Sanjida Khanom was picked for Dhaka-4. Current Dhaka-11 lawmaker AKM Rahmatullah got dropped. City AL leader Wakil Uddin will vie for the post, said sources.

Motuir Rahman Molla Sajal, son of former MP Habibur Rahman Mollah, was chosen over current MP Kazi Monirul Islam for Dhaka-5.

For the constituencies in Tangail, three incumbent MPs have been dropped.

Kamrul Hasan Khan, former Vice-chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, was chosen over incumbent lawmaker Ataur Rahman Khan for Tangail-3; Khalihati upazila AL president Mujahirul Islam over incumbent lawmaker Mohammad Hasan Imam Khan for Tangail-4; and Central Jubo League leader Mamunur Rashid over incumbent lawmaker Sanowar Hossain for Tangail-5, said sources.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has been picked for Sylhet-1 and district AL president Shahiq Rahman for Sylhet-2. The current MP from Sylhet-2 is Gono Forum leader Mukabbir Khan.

AL leader Habibur Rahman, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad and former minister Nurul Islam Nahid got the nominations again for Sylhet-3, -4 and -6.

Since Sylhet-5 MP Hafiz Ahmed Majumder is not willing to run

again, the party picked Sylhet city AL President Masuk Uddin Ahmed.

Moulvibazar AL Organising Secretary Shafiqul Alam Chowdhury Nadel was picked for Moulvibazar-2, where former AL leader Sultan Muhammed Mansur Ahmed was elected in 2018 election from Gono Forum, said AL sources.

Sylhet district AL Organising Secretary Ranjit Chandra Sarkar was chosen over current MP Mouazzam Hossain Ratan for Sunamganj-1 and former lawmaker Amatul Kibria Keya Chowdhury over current MP Gazi Mohammad Shahinawaz for Habiganj-1.

Chattogram-1 MP and presidium member Mosharraf Hossain did not try to get nominated. His son Mahbub Rahman Ruhel did and got nominated.

Khadizatul Anwar, MP for a seat reserved for women, was chosen for Chattogram-2 where AL partner Bangladesh Tarikat Federation's Chairman Syed Nazibul Bashar Maizvandary is the current MP. SM Al Mamun was chosen over lawmaker Didarul Alam for Chattogram-4.

Current MPs Mahfuzur Rahman of Chattogram-3, ABM Fazle Karim Chowdhury of Chattogram-6, Information Minister Mohammed Hasan Mahmud of Chattogram-7, Deputy Minister for education Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury of Chattogram-9, Mohiuddin Bachchu of Chattogram-10, M Abdul Latif of Chattogram-11, Saifuzzaman Chowdhury of Chattogram-13 and Asheq Ullah Rafiq of Cox's Bazar-2 have been picked again.

In the hill tracts, lawmakers Kujendra Lal Tripura, Dipankar Talukdar and Bir Bahadur U Shwe Sing got the nominations again for Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban districts.

Correction: In yesterday's paper, we mistakenly said Irfan Selim got picked for Dhaka-7. Actually, Irfan's brother Sulaiman Selim got nominated.

### We'll keep

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Schedule has been announced by the election commission which is independent and the government also committed to hold free and fair elections.

"Hopefully, with people's participation we will have free and fair elections and we're also open to welcoming foreign observers so they can come and observe elections and see how free and fair they are."

Yesterday during a press briefing at the Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi, Masud also said he does not see any prospect of a dialogue among the political parties to break the impasse over the national election, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

Asked about the arrest of opposition activists and human rights activists since October 28, Masud said, "No human rights activist has been arrested."

About the participation of the BNP in the election, he said, "The Election Commission met with political parties who expressed their views."