

We invented Bangla Rap: MC MUGZ

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SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

After studying from grades one to four in New York, Syed Mohammad Sohel came back to Bangladesh, carrying a distinct passion for rap in his heart. Aiming to accustom his people with the previously unknown craft, the boy reinvented himself over the years and became Mc Mugz, and went to be part of two of the biggest rap crews in Bangladeshi history: Deshi MCs and Jalali Set. On the brink of releasing his first solo album, we catch up with the pioneer himself.

Does the fact that you're releasing a solo album mean Jalali Set is no more?

Not at all! We are still together. Jalali Set usually seldom announces its internal working process and upcoming projects in advance. You'll see what we have to offer in due time.

When one or more members in a crew gain solo recognition, it usually leads to ego clashes. Are you guys still tight on that front?

I wouldn't say 'tight'. We are admittedly sorting out some issues. I'm just being direct - there are issues in all bands

and rap crews once they get big, it's a normal thing.

Many forget that you were also a part of Deshi MCs. I've always wanted to ask how much of their music was a part of their actual lifestyle?

At that time, *Genjam* from *Kata Tarer Berawas* such a big hit that it acclimated the audience to what Bangla Rap could be. We were just thinking of the ways that we could make people listen to rap. When it comes to lifestyle, we obviously weren't carrying around guns or *Ramda* or 'offing' people in the streets like narrated in our songs. We

played characters and highlighted the realities of the society at that time through our songs.

The craft was elevated further when you founded Jalali Set.

Honestly, what we could achieve with Deshi MCs, Jalali Set just felt like a bonus for me. What I like about my time with this crew is we were able to experiment, a lot. While songs like *Sura Target* and *Dhaka City* were our signature flow, we went fully experimental with *Bonobasher Shadhon*. I am happy to say that I will go all-out with experimentation with my solo album.

Rappers talk a lot about 'keeping it real'. Do you think that current artistes are doing that?

Man, wannabes are everywhere. It's easy to tell the real rappers apart from the ones who are doing 'baby rhymes' (rhyming for the sake of it). One more thing, rappers who are starting out now can just look up YouTube and find out what Bangla Rap sounds like, but back then, we didn't have that option. We had to invent Bangla Rap.

However, there are a lot of great artistes even today, who are taking the craft forward.

Bangla Rap be about anything from talking about inflicting violence to raising your voice against injustice. How much has the craft changed over the years?

Throughout my career, I wouldn't say that I was always technically sound. In order to come up with the quality, you have to practice a lot, and devote yourself to the craft. There is so much to talk about, but if you're not up for it, you'll go completely blank - that's just how it is. Rapping about Bangladesh and lifestyles is surface-level craft - I've done it as well at points in my career, but it's about constantly reinventing yourself.

When can we expect to see songs from the album?

I want to release a music video after this Eid, and another after Eid-ul-Azha. I already have five-six demos ready. Soon enough, I'll compile the songs and offer my fans the album that they're waiting for.

Actress Sujata hospitalised

Widely recognised by her stage name, actress Sujata Azim has been hospitalised.



According to sources close to her family, on Tuesday (February 13) evening, she returned home after finishing shooting for *Operation Jackpot* scheduled for the day in Gazipur and started to feel unwell while climbing up the stairs.

She experienced difficulty in breathing, subsequently, she was hospitalised at a medical facility located in Mirpur.

Fardin Azim, Sujata's grandson, told the media, "At present, my grandmother is under the doctor's care. Please pray for her wellbeing."

The actress is a part of the ensemble cast of the government-funded film *Operation Jackpot*, currently being directed jointly by Indian filmmaker Rajib Kumar and Dhallywood filmmaker Delwar Jahan Jhantu.

Arjun Kapoor unveils sinister first look as 'Singham Again' antagonist

Arjun Kapoor is all set to portray a significant character in *Singham Again*. On Wednesday, he revealed his 'Singham's villain' persona from the Rohit Shetty film, which is depicted as intense and menacing, with a gritty and violent appearance.

The actor took to Instagram to share two photos from *Singham Again* - one featuring himself solo and another with Ranveer Singh in his cop role. Alongside the images, Arjun wrote, "Singham's villain! Feeling on top of the world being a part of hit-machine Rohit Shetty sir's cop universe! I promise you there will be mayhem."



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

NEWS

AL finalises its 48 nominees

FROM PAGE 1
faces and the only one from AL partners.

Aroma Dutta, general secretary of Mahila Awami League, Shabnam Jahan, president of Dhaka (city) north unit Mahila AL, Shahida Tareque Dipti, former president of Jubo Mahila League, Nazma Akhter, Aparajita Haque, Nahid Izhar Khan, and Farida Khanam were lawmakers in reserved seats in the last parliament and they have also been nominated this time.

As many as eight members of the AL's central executive committee have got the party tickets and four of them have been selected for the first time.

In a meeting with nomination seekers on January 25, AL President Sheikh Hasina hinted that the party wants fresh blood to fill the reserved seats and former lawmakers are unlikely to be picked, said party insiders.

Hasina, also the prime minister, during a meeting with independent lawmakers on January 28, said descendants or spouses of veteran and devoted party leaders and some professionals who have contributed to the party would be considered for the reserved seats.

AL leaders and activists believe that the nominations reflect the party's

plan to give priority to new faces.

Sanjida Khanam and Meher Afroze Chumki, who failed to win in the polls from Dhaka-4 and Gazipur-5 constituencies, were picked for reserved seats.

Monnujan Sufian, former state minister for labour and employment, who was denied party nomination in the national polls, got the party ticket for a reserved seat.

Shammi Ahmed, AL international affairs' secretary, whose candidature for Barishal-4 was cancelled due to dual citizenship, has also been selected.

Fazilatunnesa Indira, state minister of women and children affairs of the last cabinet, got the party ticket for the fourth time in a row.

Party's Agriculture and Cooperative Affairs Secretary Faridunnahar Laili, who was initially nominated for Lakshimpur-4 constituency but was made to withdraw her candidature as the AL shared the seat with its alliance Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, was also nominated.

The 32 other new faces on the list are Rezia Islam (Panchagarh), Draupadi Debi Agarwal (Thakurgaon), Ashika Sultana (Nilphamari), Kohli Quddus Mukti (Natore), former vice president of Jubo Mahila League; Zara Jabin

Mahbub (Chapainawabganj), Runu Reza (Khulna), Farida Akhtar Banu (Bagerhat), Farzana Sumi (Barguna), Khaleeda Bahar Beauty (Bhola), Nazneen Nahar Rashid (Patuakhali), Jatiya Press Club President Farida Yasmin (Narsingdi), Ummi Farzana Sattar (Mymensingh), Nadia Binte Amin (Netrakona), Mahfuza Sultana Moli (Joypurhat), Laila Parveen (Satkhira), Bedoura Ahmed Salam (Gopalganj), Parul Akhtar (Dhaka), Sabera Begum (Dhaka), Jharna Hasan (Faridpur), Anima Mukti Gomez (Dhaka), Sheikh Anar Koli Putul (Dhaka), Masuda Siddique Roji (Narsingdi), Hasina Bari Chowdhury (Dhaka), Ruma Chakraborty (Sylhet), Ashrafun Neshia (Laxmipur), Shamima Harun Lubna (Chattogram), Dilowa Yusuf (Chattogram), Gyorvati Tanchangya (Rangamati), Nachima Zaman Bobby (Rangpur), AL Education and Human Resource Affairs Secretary Shamsun Nahar Chapa (Tangail), Health Affairs Secretary Rokeya Sultana (Joypurhat), and Executive member Parvin Zaman Kalpana (Jhenaidah).

The election to the 50 reserved seats is slated for March 14.

At least 15 media personalities bought nomination forms, but any of them could not find their places in the AL nomination list.

Turncoats

FROM PAGE 16
and PPP (53).

In a separate development, Jamaat-i-Islami has declined the PTT's offer to form a coalition government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, saying that the latter changed its position "at the last minute".

In a post on social media platform X, JI's Central Naib Emir Liaqat Baloch said his party had held a meeting with the PTT after the February 8 elections for a consensus on the way forward.

He said the JI had communicated its displeasure at the polls results but welcomed the PTT-backed MNAs who won through the public's mandate.

PML-N Senior Vice President Maryam Nawaz yesterday rebuffed the impression that party supremo Nawaz Sharif quit active politics after he nominated his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif for the post of prime minister.

In a post shared on X, Maryam said Nawaz will not only participate in active politics for the next five years but also oversee the PML-N-led governments in Punjab and Centre.

Prabowo claims victory after vote counts

FROM PAGE 16

A preliminary count by the election commission was far slower and showed Prabowo securing 57.7 percent of votes with about 6 percent of ballots recorded.

The contest pitted the two popular former governors against the pre-election frontrunner Prabowo, who was feared in the 1990s as a

top lieutenant of Indonesia's late strongman ruler Suharto.

Crucially, Prabowo has the tacit backing of the wildly popular incumbent Joko Widodo, who is betting on his former rival as a continuity candidate to preserve his legacy, including a role for his son Gibran Rakabuming Raka as the defence minister's running mate.

Anies and Ganjar urged the public not to draw conclusions on the outcome and to await the official result, which is expected by March 20 at the latest.

The campaign teams of Ganjar and Anies said they were investigating reports of electoral violations, both calling it "structural, systematic and massive fraud". They did not provide evidence.

Members of Myanmar forces

FROM PAGE 16

across the border at Bandarban and Cox's Bazar.

The BGB members disarmed them and took them in their custody.

At least 68 of them -- of which 15 were bullet-hit -- took refuge in Bandarban on February 4 and the rest entered on different other dates until February 7. The injured were given treatment under the BGB.

Amid the ongoing fighting, a

Bangladeshi woman and a Rohingya man were killed when a mortar shell fired from Myanmar exploded in Bandarban's Ghumdhum union.

Bullets and mortar shells also came across the border, forcing many Bangladesh citizens living along the border to move to safe shelters.

The situation along the Myanmar border stretching from Tumburu in Ghumdhum union of Naikhongchhari

to Balukhali area under Whykong union in Teknaf of Cox Bazar was much more peaceful yesterday than the previous day, according to public representative and locals.

However, the farmers and fishers in Palangkhali in Ukhiya and Whykhon are the worst sufferers as they cannot go to their field or water body or Naf river along the border for the last few days due to the ongoing conflict.

Food prices hiked even

FROM PAGE 16

import market as only a handful of traders are involved in process of importing goods. As a result, the prices of imported goods are being controlled by them.

Due to scarce competition, they get the opportunity to increase the prices by syndicating among themselves for illegal profit, the report stated.

Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager at Meghna Group of Industries, one of the biggest commodity importers and processors, said "We are trying to open the LC according to the demand... If the government can stop the extortion in transporting goods, consumers will be able to buy goods at lower prices."

If uninterrupted gas and electricity supply is provided, consumers will also be able to enjoy the benefits, he added.

An official of another major importing company, preferring anonymity, said that due to the dollar shortage, they are facing difficulties in opening LCs as per the requirement.

Abul Hashem, president of Bangladesh Sugar Traders' Association, said the government has to verify the demand, import and pipeline information of essential

commodities.

"A few days ago, in a meeting with the government, I said that if the statistics are correct, then there is no reason to increase the prices of commodities around Ramadan."

Hashem, also the general secretary of the Bangladesh Edible Oil Wholesalers Association, said the government has reduced VAT and duty on some products centring Ramadan a few days ago.

He, however, believes the rates were not as reduced as they should have been. "The reduction will not benefit the consumers much."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report recommended involving more importers in the import process to prevent the syndication among certain business groups in the import of essentials.

"Initiatives should be taken to remove complexities related to opening LCs to ensure uninterrupted import of goods."

It added that extortion in the transport of goods must be stopped, while uninterrupted gas and electricity supply in goods-producing industries must be ensured.

The report further suggested

strengthening the market monitoring system and conducting regular drives by the authorities concerned to prevent illegal hoarding during Ramadan.

The Daily Star contacted ministers and secretaries of commerce, food and agriculture for their comments. Only Wahida Akter, secretary to the agriculture ministry, responded.

She acknowledged getting the report and said, "We are surprised to see the surge in the prices. They were not supposed to be high given the number of essential commodities produced in the country and the current supply situation we have."

"Small, large, medium and corporate businesspersons are hoarding and selling essentials at a higher price at their convenience."

Wahida, however, stressed that the government is now more active than before in terms of keeping the prices of essentials stable.

Earlier on Sunday, State Minister for Commerce Ahasanul Islam in parliament said, "If any hoarding or manipulation is attempted, appropriate action will be taken... I hope to be able to ensure the supply of food during the month of Ramadan."

