

## Must we wait for an artiste to pass away to give them their due respect?

DOWEL BISWAS

Art is an innate form of self-expression, and there's no doubt that any kind of art reaches its highest artistic peak when the artiste is celebrated and recognised nationwide for his full immersion in the craft.

As the country's most loved artiste, Rabindra Sangeet legend Sadi Mohammad, took his own life on Wednesday (March 13), around 7 pm, two discussions on this untimely death have resurfaced— an artiste's fight with trauma, and the practice of conferring national awards to artistes posthumously.

Sadi had been introduced to trauma and suffering at a very early age. On the fateful night of March 26, 1971, his father, martyr Salimullah, was brutally murdered by the Pakistani army. The incident also caused his mother Zebunnessa physical disability while she escaped, which confined her to a wheelchair for the last 15 years of her life. With the death of his mother last year, Sadi fell into a bottomless pit of depression.

After everything the artiste had endured all his life, the pain and agony magnified—as if it were the final nail in the coffin—when he was deprived of any national recognition, such as the Ekushey Padak and Swadhinata Padak, till his last breath.

Since its inception in 1977, Ekushey Padak and other national award conferrals have been honouring artistes posthumously. The growing list of posthumous awardees was understandable as well for a country that was just liberated. However, over the years, it became a practice with artistes like Andrew Kishore, Fazal-e-Khuda, Jalal Uddin Khan, Bidit Lal Das, not getting any recognition for their lifelong contribution till they made their journey to the other side.

Sadi's brother, Shibli Mohammad, who has recently been honoured with the Ekushey Padak, said, "If my brother received any national recognition, he would not have been so miserable. Sadi Mohammad is my mentor, my inspiration. He didn't agree to attend the award-giving ceremony when I invited him. He said, 'You

go. I don't want to attend it. Many will question why I didn't receive the award, and this will haunt me.'" However, Shiblee did not want to take the award in the first place, but Sadi Mohammad insisted that he did as recognition for his contribution to the dance arena.

Pointing out Sadi's disappointment and frustration over the matter, his protégé Anima Roy, said, "I met sir [Sadi] at Bangladesh Television's 'Ganer Jhorna' programme. During the recording, we talked for hours. He was frustrated and in despair over not receiving any recognition for his work," she said.

"My sir also said that even if he was awarded the posthumous honour, he would not accept it."

"How is this normal that an artiste of such stature didn't receive any national recognition for his contribution to Bengali music and our cultural arena? The only recognition he received was people's love. Many of his contemporaries got such recognition, then why was he deprived of it? How could the national award-giving committee ignore such a visionary man like him who mentored so many talented artistes in our country?" objected the grief-stricken Anima.

From the inception of these national awards, deceased individuals who have contributed significantly to national history have also been honoured posthumously with living cultural personalities. Often, the number of posthumous recipients exceeds the number of living ones. A glance at the past few years' data makes this evident. In 2002, the Ekushey Padak,

the second highest civilian national award in Bangladesh, was conferred upon 14 individuals, out of which seven were posthumous recipients. Similarly, in 2003, amongst the 12 recipients, five had already passed away.

The scenario hasn't changed much since then. In 2021, amongst 21 Ekushey Padak recipients, five were conferred posthumously. In the following year (2022), the number grew to seven (amongst 19 total recipients). In 2023, six cultural personalities were awarded posthumously among 21 recipients.

The nation has to wait for years to recognise musical and literary legends like Andrew Kishore, and Rudra Mohammad Shahidullah to pay their due respect.

Ekushey Padak-winning singer Farida Parveen told local media, "Sadi Mohammad is a name, who passionately loved his music and also helped to mentor young talents in music industry. Unfortunately, he did not receive the recognition from the state that he rightfully deserved, which was a source of great sorrow for him. There are artistes who are receiving Swadhinata Padak and Ekushey Padak without notable contributions. Personally, I feel like he took his life as he was tired of not getting respect for his work that he deserved. He left this world with a lot of pain and agony."

Singer Farhin Khan Joyita, also a student of Sadi Mohammad, said, "The pain and frustration of not receiving enough recognition were there [in Sadi]. But I saw sir suffering for a long time for another reason as well. You got to understand

that he had witnessed his father getting brutally killed before his eyes. He used to keep himself occupied in teaching and singing, but I think he had undiagnosed PTSD, which worsened after his sister and mother's death. I fully respect his decision to leave and pray that he finds peace."

Esteemed author and filmmaker Humayun Ahmed once penned his disgust over the fact that eminent artiste Humayun Faridee did not receive an Ekushey Padak [till then] in his autobiographical book, "Rong Pencil". The laureate wrote, "How come a person of his calibre had not been recognised with the Ekushey Padak in the field of performing arts? Isn't he the most deserving of this honour?"

Six years after his demise, Humayun Faridee was posthumously bestowed with the award.

Similarly, dramatist and modern playwright Sayeed Ahmed and filmmaker Tareque Masud were posthumously awarded the Ekushey Padak, just a year after they passed away in 2010 and 2011, respectively. Author and writer Humayun Azad passed away in 2004 and was posthumously honoured with the award in 2012. And ironically, the list goes on.

Recently Dolly Zahur, a

recipient of this year's Ekushey Padak, shared that she felt fortunate to have received the award in her lifetime. She said in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star, "It's important to prioritise honouring artistes while they are alive, so they can fully appreciate their achievements."

Sadi Mohammad once said in an interview, "I believe the creator lives in his creation. By loving his creation, we can get closer to God. He who defrauded me defrauded himself."



## NEWS

### A cold welcome to Yahya

**FROM PAGE 12**  
Yahya. [GW Choudhury, The Last Days of United Pakistan, UPL 2011, pg. 163]  
**THE LAST MILITARY CONFERENCE**  
In the evening of March 15, 1971, Yahya summoned the local senior military officials for an on-the-spot situation report. Siddiq Salik reports that the president was not presented with any in-depth study of the complex political situation. He also did not ask for it.

At the end of the briefing, Yahya said, "Don't worry. I will line up Mujib tomorrow... will give him a bit of my mind... shall cold shoulder him and won't even invite him for lunch. Then I will meet him the day after and see how he reacts. If he doesn't behave, I know the answer."

The meeting dispersed, and no recommendations were made. This was the last military conference Yahya held in Dhaka, reports Siddiq Salik. [Siddiq Salik, Witness to Surrender, UPL 1997, pg. 59]

**WHAT WILL MUJIB DEMAND?**  
Archer K Blood, then American consul general in Dhaka, writes in his memoir that just minutes before Yahya's arrival, Alamgir Rahman came by to tell him that Mujib was going to urge Yahya to agree to an immediate handover of power to Awami League in East Pakistan. Now that Bhutto had made similar proposal in his March 14 speech and Mujib held the de facto control of the East Pakistan government, the demand seemed more tenable, comments Blood. Mujib would also demand that the strength of the military in East Pakistan be cut back to the level existing before March 1, 1971. Mujib, according to Alamgir, would then agree to the convening of the National Assembly and would accept any time limit for constitution-making set by Yahya. He further informed that any attempt by Yahya to exert force would be met by an instant declaration of independence. [Archer K Blood, The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh, UPL 2006, pg. 189]

### 5 journos confined

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Contacted, the AC (land) refused to comment on the issue.  
**6 JOURNOS ATTACKED IN PABNA**  
In Pabna, six journalists came under an attack by some locals while covering an incident in Rangamatia village of Santhia upazila around noon yesterday.

The attackers damaged and snatched cameras of the journalists when they were taking photos of a house vandalised over a land dispute in the morning, reports our Pabna correspondent quoting the victims.

Manik Miah Rana, president of Santhia Press Club, said when he along with five local reporters went to the village, some people obstructed

### Saudi crown prince

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He said Saudi Arabia is planning to invest \$1.2 billion in Bangladesh and Saudi company Red Sea Gateway Terminal will start operating the Patenga Bay Terminal in Chattogram next month.

Last year, the Saudi company signed a 22-year concession deal worth \$170 million with the Chattogram Port Authority to develop a container terminal at Bangladesh's primary port.

The Red Sea Gateway Terminal will develop and operate the terminal and will be equipped with new technologies to handle the fast-growing export market.

About the distribution of food baskets, Essa Yousef said a total of

### Shanto's chance to scale

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shambolic campaign by the Tigers. Playing 27 ODIs, the left-handed batter scored a total of 992 runs at a healthy 41.33 average. Also, he scored all eight of his ODI fifties, and both of his centuries—till he scored the third one last Tuesday—in the previous year.

During an interim period as the skipper of Bangladesh towards the end of 2023, Shanto led the Tigers to a few landmark wins as well—maiden ODI and T20I wins over New Zealand in the Kiwis' backyard in December. However, with Bangladesh Cricket

them and snatched their cameras.

The journalists were given back their cameras before being forced to return from the scene, he added.

"After the incident, we lodged a complaint with Santhia Police Station. Law enforcers later detained siblings Nasir Sarder, 42, and Helal Sarder, 45, for interrogation," he said.

According to the complaint, Nasir and Helal had a long-standing dispute with their relative Toib Ali over a piece of land.

The attack on journalists happened when they went to the village to take photos of Toib's house which was vandalised allegedly by Nasir and Helal's men in the morning.

Santhia Police Station OC Anwar Hossain said they were investigating the incident.

15,500 baskets of food items, each containing 24kg of food, will be distributed among the vulnerable people in 32 places across the country. Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar will be among the recipients.

Under the instructions of Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the food items are being provided to the vulnerable people as a symbol of solidarity.

The envoy said about 2.8 million Bangladeshis working in Saudi Arabia are also making significant contributions to Saudi and Bangladesh economies.

"These are clear signs of our relations developing day by day," he said.

Board (BCB) deciding to put Shanto in charge in all three formats at the beginning of this year, the expectations from the 25-year-old have only compounded.

As things stand, Shanto managed to start on a positive note despite a 2-1 loss to the Lankans in the prior T20I series. And surely, fans, the management, and Shanto himself will only want to continue his purple patch with the bat all the while helping Bangladesh scale new heights in a year filled with important assignments, including the T20 World Cup in June.

### Plan revived to lay 214km track

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The three met the premier to get her consent about the alignment of proposed chord line from Dhaka to Cumilla via Narayanganj. They placed the proposal before Hasina with four options for building the line, but the premier is yet to give her decision, sources said.

Currently, the BR is carrying out a feasibility study for building the chord line which will reduce the distance between Dhaka and Chattogram by 90 kilometers and travel time by one-and-a-half hours.

**BHANGA-PAYRA RAILLINE**

Aiming to bring Payra Sea Port in Patuakhali and Barishal under the rail network, the BR in 2021 completed a feasibility study and detailed design of the proposed Bhangra-Kuakata rail line.

The railway authorities expect that the direct link between the sea port and the capital would boost their revenue through operation of

freight trains.

Building the broad-gauge single line, with 19 stations between Bhangra and Kuakata, will cost around Tk 41,797.60 crore (\$4.93 billion), reads the feasibility study report.

The estimate was made when the US dollar exchange rate against taka was Tk 84.80. If the current exchange rate (Tk 110 per US dollar) is taken into consideration, the project cost would rise to Tk 54,218.5 crore.

The proposed deadline of the project is June 2029. The BR has already sent the Pre-Development Project Proposal (DPP) to the Planning Commission.

However, some experts have raised questions about the commercial viability of the project.

The government has decided to build a sea port in Payra pulling back from its previous plan to build a deep-sea port there.

Different companies had

expressed their interest in financing the Bhangra-Kuakata rail line project on several occasions but the BR did not find those proposals viable, sources said.

The government also sought investments from Russia and Saudi Arabia for the project but no progress in this regard is visible, said BR sources.

Speaking at a programme on Wednesday, Railways Minister Zillul Hakim said the prime minister directed them to expedite the process of building the Bhangra-Payra rail line.

A top ministry official said the project might cost Tk 65,000 crore to 70,000 crore and arranging such a huge amount of money is a big challenge.

Once the BR manage the fund, it will submit the DPP of the project to the Planning Commission for approval, the official said wishing not to be named.

### Aid efforts intensify for famine-stalked Gaza

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the temporary pier which, it said, could enable the provision of more than two million meals a day.

Since October 7, Israel has carried out a relentless campaign of bombardment and ground operations in Gaza, killing at least 31,341 people, most of them civilians, according to the territory's health ministry.

The United Nations has reported difficulty in accessing Gaza's north with aid.

On Tuesday the Israeli military said the UN's World Food Programme had sent an initial six aid trucks directly into northern Gaza as part of a pilot project.

While efforts continue to get more assistance to the territory's 2.4 million people, the main United Nations aid agency in Gaza, UNRWA, said on Wednesday that an Israeli strike hit one of its food distribution warehouses in Rafah, killing an employee and wounding 22.

The agency's chief, Philippe

Lazzarini, said the attack "comes as food supplies are running out, hunger is widespread and, in some areas, turning into famine".

It is the latest point of tension between Israel and UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, since Israel accused several UNRWA employees—out of around 30,000 it employs in the Middle East—of involvement in the attack that started the war.

Cypriot Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos hosted a virtual meeting on Wednesday with United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other foreign officials to discuss the maritime corridor.

"The ministers agreed that there is no meaningful substitute to land routes via Egypt and Jordan and entry points from Israel into Gaza for aid delivery at scale," they said in a joint statement.

They also called on Israel to open Ashdod port, north of Gaza, to complement the Mediterranean

corridor.

Senior officials would gather in Cyprus on Monday for "in-depth" briefings on the sea route, and would also discuss a possible "common fund" to support it, the statement said.

The Spanish charity vessel Open Arms left Cyprus for Gaza on Tuesday. It is towing a barge with 200 tonnes of aid, marking the first voyage along the sea corridor.

Open Arms is a partner of the American charity World Central Kitchen founded by Jose Andres. He wrote on X, formerly Twitter, that a jetty to receive the aid had reached nearly 60 metres (yards) in length.

His post included images of a bulldozer working on a promontory whose location was not given.

Israel's army said the Open Arms vessel "underwent a comprehensive security check and was accompanied by Israeli officials to ensure that humanitarian aid alone reaches the Gaza Strip".