

ENTERTAINMENT'S RISING STARS

OLI LOUIS

The Nigerian man who fell in love with Bangla music

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DOWEL BISWAS

In the realm of creative inspiration, few pursuits rival the journey that leads an individual to explore unfamiliar musical territories. Yet, who could have foreseen that the enchanting verses of legendary Bengali musicians Gauri Prasanna Mazumder and Hemanta Mukhopadhyay's *Oliro Kotha Shune Bakul Hase* would ignite a passion for Bangla music in a Nigerian musician?

Oli Louis, a Nigerian garment merchandiser, whose initial visit to Bangladesh was solely for the purpose of business, found himself captivated by Bangla songs through this very melody. "One day, I stumbled upon the song, and it entranced me with its magic. It took me just two days to learn it. As I delved deeper, the profound lyrics, melodious tunes, and sweet harmonies inspired me to delve further into the world of Bangla music," shared Oli, who recently made his mark in Coke Studio Bangla's third season with the debut song *Tati*.

Navigating the bustling streets of Dhaka posed a linguistic challenge for Oli, who didn't speak the language. "Learning Bangla was quite a feat. I picked it up by conversing with rickshaw



PHOTOS: COLLECTED

pullers and garment sellers in Bangabazar," he recalled with a grin.

Having been part of a choir and musical band in Nigeria, Oli recognised a rhythmic kinship between Bangla folk and African music, which piqued his interest in Bangla melodies. "When I began listening to Bangla songs, I sensed a familiar cadence in the improvisational beats and rhythmic patterns. That's what drew me to Bangla music," shared the musician.

His rendition of *Shada Kala Kala* marked a turning point, garnering widespread acclaim and affirming his belief that Bangladeshis would embrace him as one of their own if he pursued Bangla music wholeheartedly.

"Music transcends language; it speaks to the soul. Even though I couldn't grasp the lyrics

initially, I felt a profound connection to the singers and found my own interpretation of the music. That's what fueled my admiration for Bangla music," reflected Oli.

Seeking to bridge cultural divides, Oli endeavoured to blend the rich chronicles of Bangla and African music. His collaboration with Coke Studio Bangla's third season was a testament to this endeavour. "My inclusion in Coke Studio Bangla felt like a divine intervention. A friend approached me about joining the show, and I embraced the opportunity wholeheartedly," shared Oli.

The thematic essence of the song centered around weaving struck a chord with Oli, who perceived it as a metaphor for unity. "Weaving isn't a prevalent theme in Nigerian music. By infusing elements of my culture into the song, I aimed to foster harmony," he emphasised.

Embracing the collaborative spirit, Oli penned verses for the song, contributing his unique perspective to the narrative. "The team entrusted me with writing verses for the song. It was a learning experience, crafting verses that resonated with both cultures," he explained.

Despite minimal rehearsal time, Oli's innate musicality allowed him to adapt swiftly to the song. "The camaraderie amongst the Coke Studio team, especially Arnob *bhai*, Jaya Ahsan, and Adnan *bhai*, was remarkable. Their support was instrumental in the success of the song," acknowledged Oli.

Reflecting his cultural heritage, Oli adorned himself in traditional Igbo attire for the performance, symbolising unity amidst diversity. "My attire, embellished with 'isi agu' (lion-head prints), showcased my Igbo heritage while harmonising with Bengali culture," he explained.

Upon hearing his Bangla song, Oli's mother expressed boundless joy, affirming his decision to pursue Bangla music. "My heartfelt gratitude goes out to my fans, who inspire me to create music. I look forward to crafting more original Bangla songs in the future," concluded Oli, his eyes brimming with hope and enthusiasm for the musical journey ahead.

Amitabh Bachchan to receive Lata Mangeshkar Award; AR Rahman, Randeep Hooda also honoured



Amitabh Bachchan is set to be honoured with the prestigious Lata Deenanath Mangeshkar Puruskar.

The Mangeshkar family announced on Tuesday (April 16) via a press release that the esteemed Lata Deenanath Mangeshkar Award would be conferred upon Amitabh Bachchan on April 24.

Established in memory of Lata Mangeshkar, who passed away in 2022, this award honours individuals for their significant contributions to society.

In addition, AR Rahman will receive the Master Deenanath Mangeshkar Puraskar for contributions to Indian music, while Randeep Hooda will be acknowledged with the Vishesh Puraskar for contributions to the film industry.



Saudi film 'Norah' enters Cannes Film Festival

In a landmark moment for Saudi Arabia's film industry, the film *Norah* has earned a spot in the official selection of the prestigious Cannes Film Festival.

Helmed by pioneering director Tawfik Alzaidi, *Norah* tells the story of a young woman in 1990s Saudi Arabia, a time when artistic expression was heavily restricted.

The film first captured local attention at the Red Sea Film Festival in Jeddah and is now set to make its international debut in Cannes' Un Certain Regard section.

NEWS

Chuadanga logs

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Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Dhaka, Barishal, Chattogram and Sylhet divisions, along with parts of Khulna.

The severity may ease in some other places, according to a Met office forecast issued for 72 hours from 9:00am yesterday.

Rain or thunder showers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely to occur at one or two places over Chattogram and Sylhet divisions, with hails at isolated places, said a regular bulletin of the Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

Closely monitor

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taken initiatives to set up an economic zone on 55,968 acres in Maheshkhali of Cox's Bazar.

"The government has decided to form a new authority to provide necessary assistance to the local and foreign entrepreneurs who will work there," he said, adding that MIDA will be an institution under the Prime Minister's Office, with the premier as chairman of its board of directors. A chief executive officer will be appointed to run MIDA.

Mahub said the main task of MIDA will be to ensure the use of the land in a planned way for the entrepreneurs after formulating a master plan and also to ensure compliance with the rules and regulations.

He said the proposed law will provide protection to local produce such as salt, shrimp, and betel leaf.

The cabinet also approved in principle the draft of The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners (Remuneration and Special Rights) Act 2024.

Regarding the proposed law, Mahub said the ordinances enacted during the previous military regimes are gradually being converted into laws from English to Bangla as per court orders.

He said that only 16 ordinances are left to be converted into laws.

"The prime minister is aware of which ministries are related to these ordinances. She has directed the ministers and secretaries concerned to take prompt steps in this regard," the cabinet secretary said.

Australia unveils new defence strategy, with eye on China

AFP, Sydney

Australia unveiled its first National Defence Strategy yesterday, signalling a new focus on deterring China's "coercive tactics" in a region seen as lurching towards conflict.

The 80-page document offers a gloomy assessment of Pacific security and sets out a massive increase in defence spending to retool Australia's military to cope.

"The optimistic assumptions that guided defence planning after the end of the Cold War are long gone," said Defence Minister Richard Marles, presenting the new strategy.

Warning that "China has employed coercive tactics in pursuit

of its strategic objectives," the text describes an Australia vulnerable to foes strangling trade or preventing access to vital air and sea routes.

"We are a maritime trading island nation," Marles said.

"The invasion of Australia is an unlikely prospect in any scenario, precisely because so much damage can be done to our country by an adversary without ever having to step foot on Australian soil," he said.

So instead of focusing on maintaining a military that can do a range of tasks almost anywhere in the world, Marles said there would be a laser focus on building a deterrent force that can protect Australia's interests in its immediate region.

Congress, CPI-M pursue

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Later in the day, the TMC released its manifesto for the upcoming elections in which it has promised to repeal the CAA, and stop the NRC, reports Times of India.

It also vowed that the Uniform Civil Code "will not be implemented across India".

In the manifesto titled 'Didir Shlopoth (Didi's pledges), the party pledged to "uplift every Indian with guaranteed employment, universal housing, free LPG cylinders, assured MSP for farmers, scholarships for SC,

ST, OBC students and much more".

Releasing the manifesto at the party headquarters, TMC's Rajya Sabha party leader Derek O'Brien said, "These are the promises which we will fulfill as part of INDIA bloc, when it forms the next government."

The TMC walked out of the INDIA bloc in January over disagreements regarding seat-sharing with the Congress in Bengal.

However, the Mamata Banerjee-led party had said it continues to be part of the INDIA bloc at the national level.

Dubai reels from floods

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are working hard to recover operations as quickly as possible in very challenging conditions," a Dubai Airports spokesperson said.

Dubai's flagship Emirates airline cancelled all check-ins yesterday as staff and passengers struggled to arrive and leave, with access roads flooded and some metro services suspended.

At the airport, long taxi queues formed and delayed passengers milled around. Scores of flights were also delayed, cancelled and diverted during Tuesday's

torrential rain.

The storms hit the UAE and Bahrain overnight Monday and on Tuesday after lashing Oman, where 18 people were killed, including several children.

Climatologist Friederike Otto, a specialist in assessing the role of climate change on extreme weather events, told AFP it was "highly likely" that global warming had worsened the storms.

Official media said it was the highest rainfall since records began in 1949, before the formation of the UAE in 1971.

Ensure fair treatment for my son

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negligence) and "the unjust media speculation, spread of falsehoods, distortion of facts and far fetched misinterpretation" during the ongoing investigation of the case.

On February 6, Preeti, an irregular domestic help, fell to her death from the flat of Ashfaque and his wife, Tania Khondoker, located on Shahjahan Road in Dhaka's Mohammadpur.

The death came as a huge shock for the couple, who were asleep at the time of the accident, and they both surrendered to law, Anowara said.

Ashfaque phoned and informed the police immediately and the couple was later accused of death by negligence under Section 304A of the Penal Code-1860, and the investigation into the incident is going on.

Ashfaque and Tania have been behind bars for the last 71 days, she said.

Referring to the statement by 117 citizens on April 2, Anowara said issuing such a statement is tantamount to contempt of court because the matter is sub judice.

"The statement condemned what it called the 'police inaction' in relation to the case.

"About the so-called police inaction, I would like to say: my son and his wife were taken into police custody within hours of the incident; they were interrogated by police multiple times during their about 28-hour custody at Mohammadpur Police Station before being produced at a court around 2:00pm the next day. The court sent them to jail," she said.

The couple was subsequently interrogated at jail gates and again interrogated for four days while on police remand.

Later, the case was handed over to the Detective Branch of police. Detectives questioned Ashfaque and Tania in their custody and produced before a court which sent them to jail.

"As Ashfaque's mother, I categorically deny the claim made in the said statement that Ashfaque and Tania physically assaulted

their house help. The competent authorities and the investigators didn't make such a claim, let alone the case filed by Preeti Urang's family. Hence, it is not clear who made such an accusation to the said citizens and based on what evidence," Anowara said.

"I wonder what proof the said 117 citizens have in their possession to ascertain that she was hanging from the grill for about 13 minutes," she said.

It is also not clear on what basis the said statement claimed that the CCTV footage at Ashfaque's home "went missing", Anowara said.

Ashfaque and Tania only used a Chinese camera for streaming live video footage from their home to their mobile phones like many other households and businesses do these days, she said.

"Since this was a live camera and no footage was stored on any device or memory cards ever, the question of footage going missing does not arise," she added.

Regarding the injury from the fall of Ferdausi from Ashfaque's home in August 2023, the said statement made a number of "fictitious claims", said Anowara.

"The statement falsely claims that she suffered a '3cmX3cmX3cm wounds from deep inside her reproductive organ leading up to the opening of anus'. It is an outrageous claim."

Doctors at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where Ferdausi was taken after the accident on August 4, 2023, recorded her injury saying: "A lacerated wound from labia minora up to anal sphincter in midline measuring 3cmX2cmX2cm."

Anyone familiar with the medical term "labia minora" would know that labia minora are two small and thin skin tissues located outside the female reproductive organ, not deep inside it, Anowara said.

"I am shocked that the 117 citizens, many of whom are highly respected and accomplished in the fields of academia, journalism, research, criminal investigation and law, would make such uninformed claims in a matter as sensitive as this one, especially when it is under

investigation by police," she added.

Citing a "spot visit," the said statement claimed that Ferdausi suffered the wounds before the fall which led her to make an attempt on her own life.

"Can such serious claims be established simply by visiting a scene and without any material evidence? After months-long investigation, Mohammadpur police did not find any foul play by my son and submitted the final report, and both the family and the CMM court in Dhaka accepted it. Ashfaque and Tania were acquitted by the court," Anowara said.

About the financial assistance for Ferdausi and her family, Anowara said it was never an out-of-court settlement. "As instructed by the court, an amount agreed upon by all parties was deposited through Treasury Challan No-310 on November 1, 2023, in the judicial account with Bangladesh Bank."

Rejecting all the "false claims and the insinuations" made in the said statement, Ashfaque's mother said carrying out this type of propaganda not only tarnishes the society, but also infames the institutions tasked with the investigation of the incident.

She said that Tania also comes from a respected Muslim family. Tania draws strength from Bangladesh's Liberation War as a granddaughter of late Khondoker Abdul Mannan, a Language Movement veteran and an organiser of the Liberation War from Bhola district.

"I am a recipient of the President's Award in 1980's for my special contribution to agriculture. My son Ashfaque, much like his freedom fighter father, has always been principled, ethical, and respectful in life," Anowara said.

Due to Ashfaque's bold and fearless journalism over the last 33 years, many have become "resentful and hostile towards him", she said. She said both the families are suffering socially, mentally, and physically due to this "vicious propaganda".

"I am old now. At 85, I can no longer tolerate this injustice towards my son and his wife," she said.