

DHVANI IN DHAKA

Indian YouTube sensation eager for Bangladeshi concert



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

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It felt surreal seeing Dhvani Bhanushali in person, as I was used to seeing her on YouTube in a 16:9 ratio. While on the sofa, I noticed how refreshing she looked in her white top and blue jeans. She didn't have any makeup on, nor did she need it. The vibrant singer was recently in Dhaka for a two-day trip, during which she spoke exclusively with The Daily Star about her music and her strong desire to perform a concert in Dhaka.

Dhvani's path to stardom has been swift. Her 2019 hit *Vaaste* brought her immense popularity, with the music video crossing 1.5 billion views on YouTube, making her the youngest and fastest Indian pop star to hit 1 billion views on the platform. However, people in Bangladesh mostly remember her for her girl-next-door vibe in her sweet rendition of *Leja Leja Re*.

Her latest hit track, *Thank You God*, is also trending on YouTube, garnering 14 million views within three months. Besides singing in music videos, she has also voiced numerous Bollywood tracks, including *Psycho Saiyaan* from *Saaho*, *Duniya* from *Luka Chuppi*, and *Kinna Sona* from *Marjaavaan*, among others.

She enjoys massive followings on social media, with 7.5 million on Instagram and 4.7 million on Facebook. With a large number of Indian

youths being inspired by her music, she feels it's her responsibility to reflect the ideas of tradition, love, and culture through her songs.

"While growing up, we all have ideals we want to follow as adults. Now that I am an adult and making my own music, I try to ensure that my music videos are suitable for families to watch together. I have this wholesome, good-girl vibe, and I make sure it is reflected in my music videos as well. It's nice to see that youths, particularly little girls, are inspired by my work. As an artiste, I want to positively influence them," said the singer.

Dhvani's sudden trip to Dhaka was mostly kept under wraps; she came for a private event. However, she would love to do a ticketed event, hopefully within the next year.

The singer was surprised when I told her that she also enjoys a fan base in Bangladesh. She shared an interesting story when asked if she had interacted with fans in our country.

"I did meet some of my fans at the Bangladeshi airport, and when I came to the hotel, they were playing my songs. This is my first time coming to Bangladesh, and I really respect its culture. Although I haven't listened to any Bangladeshi songs yet, as soon as you leave, I will look them up on Spotify and listen to a few Bangladeshi artistes," revealed the singer.

Whenever a song has a catchy tune and hook, you can be sure it will trend on Instagram Reels. When I first heard *Thank You God*, I thought an American artiste might have voiced it. Later on, when I searched for the song on YouTube, I found that many people felt the same and were surprised to discover it was an Indian song.

"One day during the writing process of 'Thank You God,' I went to the washroom. While looking in the mirror, I noticed this one ab line and thought, 'Oh my God, this is amazing! I look so good today.' I went back to my writing room and shared it with my fellow writers. They were like, 'Oh my God! This

is great! Let's make a song out of it.' And that's how I came up with the line 'Every time I look into the mirror, I say thank you God.' At first, I had no idea people would think it wasn't Indian, but when I went back and listened to it, I realised the hook line might sound accented," laughed the singer.

Nowadays, Instagram and TikTok really play a crucial role in opening doors for newcomers who want to expand their careers in music. When asked if this was true for her as well, the singer agreed.

"Fortunately or unfortunately, we all discover music on Instagram or TikTok. Regardless of what we say, I think it is an integral part of marketing, and that's really important. Otherwise, you might as well play your music in your living room.

As musicians, I believe there needs to be a full-term creative effort in terms of visuals and music, and they need to be connected to the whole product. I think a sample fit can be tested on Instagram, and if a person likes the song, they can go to YouTube and listen to it," stated Dhvani.

My personal favourite song by Dhvani is *Mera Yaar*. While talking about it, she revealed that this song is really special to her as she wrote it for a boy whom she had a crush on. "I felt like this song was the cleanest way to describe my feelings to someone you don't know well or would love to know," said the singer, blushing.

When asked whether she sees herself on the silver screen, she replied, "Of course, I see myself working on films. However, I would like to add that it's quite different from acting in music videos. Playing a full-length character is really difficult. I am looking forward to an exciting project that might hit theatres this year," said the singer.

Later on, the doorbell rang, and her crew members arrived. Dhvani's face lit up as she saw them. I bid her goodbye, feeling a little giddy and happy with the whole experience. I hugged her wishing with all my heart that I would be able to see her perform soon.



NEWS

Transport sector projects fare poorly

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Tk 34,989 crore. The project was supposed to be completed within June 2022.

But the loan agreement with China was delayed. In April 2018, the ERD inked a Tk 21,036 crore loan agreement with Exim Bank of China, and the physical work of the project finally started in October 2018.

As the project deadline was deferred to June 2025, the cost went up to Tk 39,246 crore.

The Dhaka Bhangra section of the line was opened in October last year while the Bhangra-Jashore section is expected to be inaugurated within a month or two.

The Joydebpur-Ishwardi double line project, taken up in November 2018, was supposed to be implemented within December 2024.

But China in March 2021 refused to finance the Tk 14,250.61 crore project citing "a lack of in-depth preliminary work and insufficient feasibility study".

China's decision came four months after the Prime Minister's Office in November 2020 directed the BR to cut the negotiation price of three projects, including the Joydebpur-Ishwardi double line scheme, as the cost review committee found that the costs were relatively high.

The two other projects involve converting the Akhaura to Sylhet and Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur

sections into dual gauge from metre-gauge.

The government decided to implement the Joydebpur-Ishwardi double line project with Japanese loan and the PMO directed the railway authorities to look for other financiers for the Tk 16,780.95 crore Akhaura-Sylhet project.

The Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur project has not been approved by Ecneq yet and the railways authorities are continuing negotiation with the selected Chinese contractor for the last three years without any visible progress, officials said.

TUNNEL, ROAD, FLYOVER PROJECTS

Construction of the Bangabandhu Tunnel under the Karnaphuli river in Chattogram is the only transport sector project completed so far under the Chinese loan facility.

The tunnel was opened to traffic in October last year after the Tk 10,690 crore project was implemented by Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA).

The BBA is now implementing the Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway Project with Chinese loan.

The project, which was supposed to be completed within June 2022 at a cost of Tk 16,901 crore, was delayed as the Chinese authorities took time to approve the loan. The project cost has now gone up to Tk 17,553 crore and deadline has been deferred to June 2026.

Another project, which was supposed to be implemented with Chinese loan, was to convert the Dhaka-Sylhet Highway into four-lane one.

A Chinese contractor was selected for the work and the government signed a primary deal in this regard.

But the Chinese firm then allegedly offered bribes to then newly appointed secretary of the Road Transport and Highways Division to give the go-ahead to the work at an inflated cost.

Speaking at a programme in January 2018, then finance minister AMA Muhih said the company was blacklisted for trying to bribe the government official.

Roads and Highways Department is now implementing the project with the Asian Development Bank's loan.

MONGLA PORT PROJECT

Another transport project was supposed to be implemented for expansion and modernisation of the Mongla port facilities with Chinese loan.

The Mongla Port Authority submitted a Development Project Proposal (DPP) long ago but and Planning Commission in November last year sent back the DPP, involving around Tk 4,500 crore, recommending more scrutiny, a port authority official said.

"We have already sent back the DPP to the shipping ministry after scrutiny," the official said wishing not to be named.

Students go

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The protests intensified on Thursday after the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court decided to uphold until further orders the June 5 High Court verdict that reinstated the 30 percent quotas for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren.

University students demand formation of a commission to remove "irrational and discriminatory" quotas; some quotas for underprivileged communities; and regular recruitment when there is no job seeker from such communities.

They also demand an individual be allowed to use the quota privilege only once in recruitment tests.

In 2018, the government abolished quotas amid widespread student protests.

Before that, there were 30 percent quotas for children and grandchildren of freedom fighters; 10 percent for women; 10 for underdeveloped

districts; five percent for indigenous communities; and one percent for people with disabilities.

Thousands marched on DU, BUET, and Eden College campuses around 3:00pm yesterday while Jagannath University students blocked Tanti Bazar intersection.

At a rally there, Rakibul Hasan, a student, said, "The government forced us to take to the streets."

There were also demonstrations on campuses of Chitragong University, Rajshahi University, Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University and Begum Rokeya University.

Chattogram Khagrachhari, Dhaka-Rajshahi, Dhaka-Tangail, and Dhaka-Rangpur highways were blocked for a while.

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday announced his party's support for the protesters.

England into Euro semis

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A dreary encounter for the first 75 minutes came to life after Breel Embolo put Switzerland in front.

Saka's fine strike from outside the box levelled with England's first shot on target five minutes later.

Manchester City defender Akanji was then the unfortunate penalty villain as Switzerland's horrible record in major tournament quarter-finals goes on.

They have now lost five without ever reaching a semi-final.

By contrast, England march on despite another in a string of underwhelming performances from Gareth Southgate's men.

In his 100th match in charge of his country, Southgate again resisted calls for mass changes in personnel but did alter his system.

Zia was devoted to chess till his last day

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much greater than mine. He had a degree in anthropology from Dhaka University but his true love had always been chess. He trained his son as a chess player as well.

Zia took chess as a profession, which is a really challenging thing to do. I was never a fully professional chess player. I dabbled in many things but Zia was completely devoted to chess till his last day.

People remember me, because I was the first to get GM norm in South Asia, but in terms of quality, Zia was better than me.

No player from Bangladesh has ever made it to the Super GM level in chess. But the only one who came close to doing it was Zia. He was on path to reaching that level when he peaked in 2007-8, but eventually couldn't break through.

He coached professionally in India. He also taught chess to players from other countries as well through online coaching.

I wasn't there at the Chess

Federation hall room when he fell down. I had left at around 5:00 pm. I had spoken to him the day before yesterday. We spoke for a long time about many things in good humour.

To me, he looked very tired. His hair was scuffed up and looked dishevelled. I asked him why he was wearing a muffler in the heat. He said he was feeling cold. I found that a bit strange. He didn't look too well. But he was speaking normally.

I had told him to go to a doctor many times before, but he never listened. In the Chennai Olympiad in 2022, he fell sick after the opening ceremony. He vomited a few times, I told him it could be a cardiac issue. But he said it was nothing like that, it was just some indigestion. He couldn't get it checked for free over there, but he didn't do it. He always ignored his health, he thought his condition wasn't that serious. But he couldn't play for three days in that Olympiad.

He led the life of a school headmaster. He was dedicated to chess like how a headmaster looks

after a school. He lived a simple life. Whenever we would approach him saying, 'Zia, let's go to this place,' he would say, 'No, Niaz bhai, I don't want to go'. He wasn't outgoing, only obsessing over chess.

Zia hardly got anything in return for his dedication to chess. We need to ensure that his family doesn't suffer and that his wife and son are fine. The federation needs to take that initiative and the government also needs to take some steps.

I still can't believe that I won't get to hear Zia's deep voice, his jokes and laughter anymore. His death has left a huge gap. He had become an inseparable part of our chess community. Whether it was the World Cup or the Olympiad or the National Championship, he was everywhere. He was the heart and soul of our chess, and now, he will no longer be here, this realisation is hurting me the most.

The writer Niaz Murshed is Bangladesh's first chess Grandmaster

Three out of 5 still going straight to tertiary hospitals

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with patients with minor problems. They will treat only patients referred by the smaller facilities.

The system creates a link between the primary, secondary and tertiary hospitals.

A recent study published in the peer-reviewed journal BMC Health Services Research said three out of five patients in the country go to tertiary-level hospitals without being referred there.

It also found that 58 percent of the 822 respondents were unaware of the referral system.

The study was conducted at two tertiary hospitals' outpatient and inpatient sections.

It found that only 41 percent of the patients were referred by other facilities.

In 2014, then health minister Mohammad Nasim introduced a patient referral system in Rangpur.

But it did not work because of a lack of facilities, expert physicians,

and staff at primary healthcare centres, officials said.

In 2016, National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM), conducted a feasibility study in Rangpur, Kurigram, Panchagarh and Nilphamari for a referral system.

Prof Samiul Islam, director of the institute, said, "An effective referral system guideline should be formulated.

"Doctors have to be motivated and trained. People's trust has to be earned for the system to work."

He added that decentralising specialised health services will also reduce the pressure of patients in secondary- and tertiary-level hospitals.

Unless primary healthcare facilities are improved and there are more specialists, a referral system will frustrate people, he said.

The health directorate took an initiative to introduce a system in Manikganj and Chapainawabganj in

2019. But that too failed.

Syed Abdul Hamid, professor at the Institute of Health Economics (IHE) at Dhaka University, said that the lack of a proper referral system leads patients to often bypass primary care and head straight to specialists, creating a long queue.

Dr Supriya Sarkar, deputy programme manager (hospital) at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said a directive for the community clinics was made in 2019, but it was not fully implemented.

The health directorate will soon introduce a guideline, he said.

Prof Ahmedul Kabir, additional director general (administration) at DGHS, said, "We are working on creating an effective referral system. The work on digitising patient data is underway."

Ahmedul said poor services in primary facilities were major barriers to the referral system.