

MEMOIRS OF A LEGEND

'AB' through the eyes of
NIAZ AHMED AUNGSHU

In 1995, as Ayub Bachchu's hit album 'Koshto' was released, the album's cover came as a surprise to people—it was an out-of-the-box design for that time. The man behind the cover is Niaz Ahmed Aungshu, who is not just a cover illustrator, but the person behind many successful lyrics during the 90s, including 'Meye', and 'Shechchari', among many others. He is currently an Australian expatriate. Remembering rock legend AB on his death anniversary (October 18), Aungshu reminisces his golden days with Ayub Bachchu, and shares his journey as a musical artiste with The Daily Star.



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SHARMIN JOYA

How did your creative process evolve while collaborating with an iconic artiste like Ayub Bachchu, especially to align with the musical themes and emotions he conveyed during the production of the album 'Koshto' in 1995?

I was an aspiring artiste and a fine arts student with a dream—not to create art for elite buyers at exhibitions, but rather create art that reached the masses. One day, my friend Khaled, who now owns Ajo the Idea Space, and I were asked to design a concert banner for Ayub Bachchu and his band LRB. That was the first time I met him.

At that time, Bachchu bhai had just finished recording his album *Koshto*. It was when I took the opportunity to share some of my lyrics, hoping for a positive outcome.

Sensing my eagerness to work with him, he offered me the chance to design his album cover since I was a fine arts student. Knowing there were no more songs to include, I asked if I could write a message to go along with the album, so people could feel connected.

The creative chemistry between myself and the iconic Ayub Bachchu was a two-way process. He used to respect people for their expertise and expect the same in return. That's why he agreed without hesitation when I suggested using his signature instead of the traditional alphabetical name. His signature became a symbol, and when we both decided to use the photo of him resting in the studio as the album feature photo—it was just a creative spark and looking back after 30 years, I



Photo, taken in 1998, during LRB's double album "Amader Bismoy". Aungshu (third from right) poses with the then LRB line-up.

think it was the most suitable decision.

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Can you walk us through your design process for capturing the essence of Bangladeshi music in the 90s, particularly when working with iconic artistes like Ayub Bachchu, James, Prince Mahmud, and others?

Back then, the design process to capture the essence of an album was very intuitive and connected. I have vivid memories of working with not only Bachchu bhai, but artistes like James, and Prince Mahmud for their notable albums such as *Ferari Mon*, *Swapno*, *Ekhono Du Chokhe Bonna*, *Dukhini Dukkho Korona*, and *Dushtu Chheler Dol*. I always

used to listen to the songs first and paint a watercolour version based on the album cover, then, take it back to them and make adjustments based on our discussions. Ayub Bachchu and James were very open to new ideas and thinking.

Could you share your memories with the maestro?

My first recorded song was *Abeggulo Khoroch Koro Sabdhan*, which was later released in *Capsule 500mg*. Bachchu bhai was recording his mixed album *Tara Bhora Rate* and had composed a tune without lyrics. I was offered to write lyrics for the track. That was the first time I penned a song where the tune was completed before the lyrics. Since then, I have written many songs to pre-composed tracks, as I had great chemistry with Bachchu bhai. He would give me the track while he

was busy recording other songs in the studio, and I would go to the quiet voice room and finish writing a few songs in a couple of hours. People today might be surprised to hear this, but it was very common back then. We often ended up recording more songs than what was initially included in the album.

With your last unreleased collaboration with Ayub Bachchu for the album 'Inbox', how do you feel about the song's current status, and will it ever see the light of day?

Back in 2014, Bachchu bhai and I decided to work on a project more like the album *Endless River* by Pink Floyd. We were not bound to complete the

song in a traditional manner. We even decided to make multiple versions of the same songs. The album title was decided to be *Muhurter Muhurtogulo* to capture the micro-moments in our lives. It is Bachchu bhai's last studio album and probably one of his most experimental and darkest albums, which is way ahead of its time.

Since I was a passionate critic of Bachchu bhai's work, he eventually recorded almost 14 songs, some of which were extended versions of the same track. *Inbox* was one of these 14 songs. In early 2024, we planned to release it during Eid-ul-Fitr, as part of our announcement to release his unreleased album songs every month starting from January this year. However, we had to pull back our initiative because another agency was preparing to release a song by Ayub Bachchu as part of an AB Foundation initiative to release his uncatagued, unreleased songs. Due to the complexity of various factors, nothing has progressed since.

Now, I am in discussions with Chandhana bhabi (AB's wife) and Masud, who mostly manages Bachchu bhai's creative works and unfinished projects and Zoel Morshed, who manages the digital rights. We're hopeful to release *Inbox* sometime this year as a teaser for the unreleased album *Muhurter Muhurtogulo*. My plan is not just to release the remaining songs, but to engage with a group of talented today's musicians, who will participate in some of the songs or reproduce some of the unfinished tracks, creating a connected experience that transcends generations.



Aungshu with Ayub Bachchu

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF NIAZ AHMED AUNGSHU

lyrics or the song—some will be even simple draft files or demos. The idea was that we would end where we thought it should end and not be forced to finish a

NEWS

Matia Chy laid to rest sans state honour

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League, were in attendance.

Many top party leaders have gone into hiding following the fall of Sheikh Hasina.

After the funeral prayers, members of the AL associate bodies Swachhashebak League and Sramik League paid tribute with flowers on behalf of the party.

Other organisations such as the Liberation War Museum, Bangabandhu Krishibid family, Special Guerrilla Forces, Moni Singh-Forhad Memorial Trust, and her own family also paid their final respects.

Another namaz-e-janaza was held at her residence in Ramna, where political colleagues, followers, and relatives gathered to bid their final farewell.

At the service, Matia's sister, Mahmuda Chowdhury, reflected on

her life, saying, "She spent her entire life in sacrifice and struggle, always working for the people."

Journalist Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury said, "With Matia Chowdhury's passing, a significant chapter of history has come to an end."

Journalist leader Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul was also present to pay his respect.

Despite Matia's significant contributions as a freedom fighter, six-time member of parliament, and three-time cabinet minister, no state arrangements were made for a guard of honour at her funeral, and no government officials were present.

Speaking to The Daily Star, her brother, Masudul Islam Chowdhury, said, "Apa [sister] was a listed freedom fighter. Initially, there were visible preparations for a guard of honour.

But later, no one showed up. After we followed up, they [authorities concerned] said her name [as a freedom fighter] is registered in Pirojpur... nothing happened after that."

Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Tanvir Ahmed said her name was not on the list of gazetted freedom fighters. That was why a guard of honour was not given to her, he added.

Masudul said that an application seeking a spot for burying Matia Chowdhury was submitted to the Dhaka North City Corporation around 11:00am on Wednesday.

In response, the city corporation said this permission had to be taken from the Chief Adviser's Office. As the city corporation authorities did not reply, Matia was laid to rest in the grave of her husband, journalist Bazlur Rahman, he said.

ASM Abdur Rab also criticised the government for cancelling March 7 as a national day, adding that failing to understand or appreciate the importance, significance, and historical value of March 7 would be self-destructive.

In a statement, he said, "Such short-sighted and ill-conceived decisions along with unnecessary actions will not be accepted by the struggling masses."

"While ignoring the fundamental reforms needed in the state, the government's attempts to spark new controversies will create divisions among the forces that participated in the anti-fascist movement."

He added that March 7 is an unforgettable date in the lives of the Bangalees and that Bangabandhu was an unparalleled leader in the struggle for independence and the Bangalee nationalist movement.

345,000 Gazans

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"The risk of famine between November 2024 and April 2025 persists as long as conflict continues, and humanitarian access is restricted," the IPC report said.

"The extreme concentration of population in an ever-shrinking area, living in improvised shelters with intermittent access to humanitarian supplies and services, elevates the risk of epidemic outbreaks and deterioration into a catastrophe of unprecedented magnitude.

Eid vacation

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For Durga Puja, Bijoya Dashami will be a general holiday, and Navami, the day before, will be an executive-order holiday.

In the past, the number of holidays for these religious festivals has been extended by executive order. This year, the government extended the Durga Puja holiday by one day through an executive order.

Earlier, the Ministry of Public Administration proposed to extend the holidays, which has now been approved by the Advisory Council.

US says no excuse

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has said no cases can be filed against those students and ordinary people who actively participated in the mass uprising in July-August, apparently giving impunity to those who carried out attacks even after August 5.

The home ministry in a statement said that there will be no cases, arrests, or harassment for the events related to the mass uprising that occurred from July 15 to August 8.

Zi Khan Panna, chairperson of human rights organisation Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), told BBC Bangla that there was no chance of impunity for criminal offences.

All the efforts that are being made now are illegal, he said.

Responding to a question on a song sung at a puja mandap during the recent Durga Puja, Miller said the US is committed to religious freedom in Bangladesh and elsewhere.

"With regard to that specific incident, I'll take it back and get you an answer," he said.

Shamsher

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airport. The cops did not allow the couple to board an international flight without clearance from "top-level" authorities.

Shamsher, 74, was the BNP vice-chairman, but he resigned from the party in 2015 citing health reasons.

He joined Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh in 2018 and became the chairperson of Trinamool BNP in September last year.

Trinamool BNP was registered with the Election Commission as a political party ahead of the January 7 national election.

Contesting the polls from Sylhet-6, Shamsher was defeated by Awami League candidate and former minister Nurul Islam Nahid.

Legal experts call it intimidating

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"What evidence do they have to prove that the judges are agents of the Awami League government? There may be allegations of corruption against them, but if their appointment by the Awami League government makes them agents, then the same should apply to judges appointed during the BNP regime."

Lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua said putting pressure on the judiciary should not be allowed.

Referring to the student-led mass uprising that toppled the AL government, he said so many people gave their lives and suffered

life-changing injuries, because they wanted to rid the country of irregularities and corruption.

"They want a just society free of discrimination. If we want to restore the [glory of] judiciary, it must be done while maintaining [the judiciary's] dignity," he said.

Someone must be trying to use the students through instigations and wrong information.

"The [interim] government has been there for two and a half months. What has the law adviser done during this time? Why hadn't the law adviser take steps [about the judges]? They know everything."

Shakib's homecoming

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in Mirpur ahead of the opening Test against South Africa from October 21, which was also set to be his final red-ball game for the Tigers.

However, it was reported on Wednesday midnight that the ace all-rounder might be reconsidering his plan to return home for his Test swansong due to security concerns.

"I am not sure where I am going next, but it is almost sure that I am not going home," Shakib told ESPNcricinfo, a cricket website, yesterday when asked about his plan of action after he reached the UAE on Wednesday from where he was supposed to board a Bangladesh-bound flight.

After a day of speculations of what might have prompted Shakib to decide not to come to Bangladesh, Sports Adviser Asif informed the media in the evening that he had advised the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to discourage Shakib from returning, fearing public anger.

"This decision was made to ensure the safety of players and to protect the country's image," Asif said in a press conference, which put an end to the day-long drama.

Earlier in the day, the news of Shakib not boarding the Bangladesh-bound flight spread like wildfire. The all-rounder also communicated with few media outlets, saying security concerns prompted him to change

his travel plans.

However, when contacted, the BCB could not provide an explanation on what was happening. Top officials like BCB president Faruque Ahmed and CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury were in the UAE and could not be reached but those who are in Bangladesh claimed they have no knowledge on the matter.

Deputy press secretary to the chief adviser Azad Majumder told The Daily Star that there was no restriction on Shakib returning to Bangladesh.

"Shakib can return to Bangladesh anytime. It's his decision whether he will arrive here or not," Majumder informed.

In the meantime, a protest started at the main entrance of the Mirpur stadium where some 100 protesters carrying different banners and boards demanded the BCB to not allow Shakib, a former lawmaker of the ousted Awami League government, to play the South Africa Test and also submitted a memorandum.

However, the issue seems far from over with a conflicting statement coming in from another government official, Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan, on the same day.

"All I know is that he [Shakib] himself has said that he is not coming due to security concerns. I am not aware of any official word from the government for which he will not be able to come to the country."