

SHAYAN

Of music and defiance

DOWEL BISWAS

“Bhoy Banglay, Bhoy Banglay, Bhoy Banglay Bhoy, Ei Bangla Shudhu Tader Ar Onno Karo Noy.”

These simple yet powerful lines reflect the essence of many songs penned by Farzana Wahid Shayan.

For her, what started as a way to hold onto connections evolved into a unique musical journey. Rejecting commercial norms, the musician describes her work as “life songs”—raw and spontaneous expressions of her experiences.

Shayan’s work is a blend of personal reflection and sharp social commentary, involving themes from lost relationships to biting political critiques. In songs like *Jonotar Bevadobi*, *Bhoy Banglay Bhoy*, *Ei Meye Shon*, and *O Neta Bhai*, she speaks not just of struggles, but of hope for a better world, calling for collective action against injustice.

In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star, Shayan shared insights into her creative process,

inspirations, and her plans for the future.

What messages do you hope to convey at your upcoming concert, ‘Gaane Gaane Shayan’, and how does it reflect your growth as an artiste?

For *Gaane Gaane Shayan*, I feel both excitement and nervousness. Performing solo again after a long break is challenging but thrilling. I can’t pre-plan my emotions—everything will unfold naturally. My main goal is to reconnect with the audience. As for my growth as an artiste, it’s a continuous process and I’m eager to share this experience with the audience.

Why did you choose music as your medium of protest, from songs like ‘Abrar Fahad’ to ‘Aamar Naam Palestine’?

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Can you share your creative process for songwriting and composition?

My songwriting often starts with raw emotions

“The most rewarding part of my career has been connecting with people, daily. The biggest challenge has been sustaining myself through music, especially without mainstream success.”

What drives you to participate in protests despite concerns about being politically labelled?

I don’t mind being politically labelled because I consider myself a political person. I know my values and the kind of world I want to live in. Joining protests has allowed me to connect with others and find solidarity. Labels are inevitable, and I’ve accepted that people will interpret my actions in their own way.

How do you balance being an artiste and an activist, and how do you choose the issues to highlight in your music?

For me, there’s no separation between social, political, and personal issues. If something doesn’t feel personal, I won’t engage with it. When I sing about

derived from painful events, like the death of Abrar Fahad, for instance. It’s an ache that forces me to look away from the world and confront my grief. Music is how I cope with the chaos—writing, composing, and performing help ease the burden.

My music is deeply personal, shaped by my raw emotions. I don’t create for commercial success. Whether a song becomes popular doesn’t matter as long as it reflects my experiences and emotions.

issues like Palestine, it’s because I feel deeply affected. While some may label me an activist, I see myself simply expressing my reality through music.

How important is it for artistes to defy expectations, and what impact do you think this has on listeners and society?

My goal isn’t to challenge societal norms but to remain true to myself in a world that imposes expectations. By doing so, I hope to inspire others to embrace their individuality. By defying these norms, I aim to live authentically. The impact on listeners is subjective—they’re free to interpret my work however they wish.

How has your career evolved, and what challenges have you faced?

The most rewarding part of my career has been connecting with people daily. The biggest challenge has been sustaining myself through music, especially without mainstream success. Balancing music with my legal job was tough, as were societal judgments. Societal labelling and slander were difficult, but they’re part of everyone’s journey. Despite these struggles, I’m grateful for the opportunities I’ve had.

How do you compare today’s political climate to the era of the fascist regime?

There’s no comparison. A fascist regime suppresses expression and instils fear, whereas today’s political chaos stems from people’s mistakes and inexperience. While I’m not content with the current situation, I’d still choose it over the repression of a fascist regime.

What projects are you currently working on, and what are your future plans?

I’m focused on recording and publishing both old and new songs, as well as some poetry. Moving forward, I’ll continue making music and cherishing time with loved ones. Whether through songs of joy, protest, or satire, I’ll keep responding to the world around me.

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Job scarcity key reason

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marginalisation and at the end of the day does not have enough money to support not only investment but also public expenditure for health, education and social security.

“That’s exactly what has happened in Bangladesh. We tried to fill up our democratic deficit with visible indicators of development,” he said, adding that there was infrastructural development but the countrymen have to pay through the nose for it for long.

As not enough money was spent on health, education and social safety, education quality declined, which led to the young people being unprepared for the job market, said Debapriya, a distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

Thus, the student leaders who fought against the quota system were eager for government jobs because there were not enough jobs in the private sector.

“Whatever jobs there were, the government jobs were chosen for the party cadres and not for the university graduates,” he added.

At a separate session, panellists said civil society, trade unions and media have an important role to play in democracy and holding accountable the governments.

Building strong institutions is crucial towards this end.

The government policies need to be designed in a way that is sustainable and inclusive, and not complying with them would lead to political and social instability.

Only between May and October, 18 million people were affected by the variety of disasters and many of them suffered unspeakable losses, said UN Resident Coordinator Gwyn Lewis.

Ensuring equitable access to health and education, social protection, living wages and gender equality can greatly contribute to inclusive and sustainable development, she said.

South Asia is the least integrated region, with only 5 percent of the region’s trade taking place within it, said Pakistan High Commissioner Syed Ahmed Maroof.

There is ample potential for intra-regional trade that needs to be harnessed, he said, while calling for putting aside the political differences and boosting regional trade that can improve the lives of common people.

BNP upset at the absence of polls roadmap

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somewhat disappointed. We had hoped that with all his wisdom, the chief adviser would identify the problems and outline an election roadmap,” he said at a discussion marking the 48th death anniversary of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani.

“Why am I talking about the election time and again? It’s because half of our problems will be resolved once the polls are held, regardless of whether the BNP comes to power.”

Fakhru said there should not be any distance between the BNP and the students. “Students have the right to voice their opinions. We are growing older. We now assess which actions are feasible and which are not.

“That’s why we think holding elections soon will be good for the country and its people. The more time this type of government stays in power, the more problems will arise. Because it lacks the mandate [to govern]. So, where would the government’s strength come from?”

Fakhru said his party wants the interim government to carry out

reforms within a reasonable time.

“The interim government should not take such a long time for reforms, as this may lead to the perception that it is trying to hold onto power. We had such experiences in the past.”

He said the then caretaker government in 2007 had tried to form a so-called “King’s Party”, but it failed. “People rejected the move and they [high-ups of the government] soon fled the country.”

The BNP leader said his party had not blocked any reform initiatives by the incumbent government.

“If an election roadmap was declared, those trying to harm and destabilise the country would back off as the people would rally behind the government. We have to consider this.”

Speaking at another programme at the Jatiya Press Club, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday said that the interim government might try to prolong its rule, citing reforms.

Rizvi said that the chief adviser’s remarks during an interview with an international media outlet about

taking four years to carry out reforms was a matter of concern.

“There seems to be some complication somewhere; why is he [chief adviser] talking about a long period of time? There seems to be some issue within the government, and this has raised concerns for us.

“People want to know why four years will be needed for the reforms and the elections,” he said.

Addressing the same event virtually as the chief guest, BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman called upon the people to extend their hand to those affected by the July uprising.

Speaking at a wheelchair distribution programme, he said if the BNP could form a government, different institutions and establishments would be named after the martyrs of the mass uprising.

“I call upon all to come forward to help those affected by the mass uprising,” he said.

Amra BNP Poribar arranged the event to distribute wheelchairs among 10 people who were injured and maimed during the uprising that toppled Sheikh Hasina’s government.

Farewell to captain courageous

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While the Brazilian icon dazzled with goals, Pintoo led a team that fought for a nation’s freedom.

“There is no other football team in the world like the Swadhin Bangla football team. In that sense, I am luckier than Pele,” Pintoo had said in interviews with local media.

From July 25 in 1971 until the war’s end, the Swadhin Bangla football team played across India to rally support for Bangladesh’s liberation, using football as their weapon in the struggle for independence.

As captain of the team, Pintoo had the distinction of being the first to raise Bangladesh’s flag on foreign soil, a powerful act of defiance against oppression. Under his leadership, the

team played 16 matches, winning 12, drawing three, and losing just one.

Their victories were not just on the field; they raised fund for the government-in-exile and garnered international attention for Bangladesh’s freedom struggle through newspaper and radio coverage.

Pintoo’s influence reached beyond 1971.

Born in Naogaon in 1943, he was a distinguished footballer before independence, representing the Pakistan national team and captaining East Pakistan’s side. His leadership skills earned him the National Sports Award in 1978 and the Independence Award in 1995, cementing his status as a national

icon.

“His contributions to our nation’s independence and football legacy will never be forgotten,” Bangladesh Football Federation said in its tribute to Pintoo’s enduring legacy.

Suffering from heart, kidney, and liver complications, Pintoo was admitted to Ibn Sina Hospital on Sunday, the day before he breathed his last in the ICU at 11:45 am. Survived by a son and three daughters, his legacy will continue to inspire generations.

Zakaria Pintoo’s story — a tale of courage, leadership, and an unwavering belief in freedom — shows that football, and sports in general, are forces capable of shaping history, with the power to unite and inspire during the darkest of times.

Moody’s goes negative

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strain the country’s already weak fiscal position and exacerbate external vulnerabilities.

“These risks stem from weaker domestic demand and supply disruptions due to recent protests and disruptions to law and order that cloud the export outlook and lower prospects for the ready-made garments sector,” the agency said.

Inflation will also remain elevated and weigh on consumption even though the Bangladesh Bank has hiked the policy rate several times to curb demand.

“Given that inflationary pressures are largely driven by supply-side factors, such as supply chain disruptions and high domestic food prices, we expect monetary policy effectiveness to be limited. This is further compounded by the structurally weak policy transmission mechanism in Bangladesh.”

While the interim government remains committed to a broad reform agenda, its capacity to execute remains uncertain, Moody’s said.

Execution risk for reforms under the current IMF programme has increased, while the lack of a

clear election roadmap introduces uncertainty around the longer-term commitment to reform.

“Furthermore, political capital to push through challenging reforms could diminish if the interim government cannot swiftly meet social demands, including taming inflation and addressing high unemployment.”

Despite improving remittance flows, import restrictions and loan disbursements from development partners, pressure on the country’s external position persists due to a sustained decline in its reserve buffer.

As of November 13, foreign exchange reserves stood at \$18.4 billion, enough to cover about 3.2 months’ import bills, as per the latest published data from the central bank.

“We now expect reserves to reach approximately \$20 billion by the end of 2024 and only improve in 2025 with disbursements from the IMF and other development partners.”

Consequently, Bangladesh’s external vulnerability indicator — the ratio of external debt payments and foreign currency deposits to foreign exchange reserves — has weakened to 91 percent at the end of 2024 from

63 percent at the end of 2023, albeit remaining at moderate levels.

“Heightened political risk and payment delays to energy suppliers will continue to exert pressure on the reserve buffers.”

Vulnerabilities in the banking sector have also increased because of the expectation for higher problem loans due to the political and economic disruptions.

A portion of loans to politically connected borrowers under the Sheikh Hasina regime will default through the year, adding to existing structural weaknesses in the banking system.

“This is likely to increase the fiscal cost of banking sector reform, which the government is currently reviewing with the IMF.”

Moody’s also lowered Bangladesh’s local-currency and foreign-currency ceilings to Ba3 and B2 from Ba2 and B1, respectively, reflecting weak predictability and reliability of government institutions and high external imbalances.

Going forward, Bangladesh’s credit rating will depend on maintaining political stability and the interim government committing to structural reforms, the agency said.

3,930 examinees of 44th BCS have to face

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decided to send all answer scripts from the written tests of the 45th BCS to a third examiner for additional evaluation.

The evaluation of the written answer scripts for the 45th BCS is ongoing, and the work of the second examiner is nearly complete, the press release noted.

The PSC is also reviewing and assessing the written exam for the post of sub-assistant engineer in Bangladesh Railway, with a decision on this examination expected soon.

The commission decided to republish

the results of the 46th BCS preliminary test by selecting an additional 10,638 candidates — equal to the number of candidates who had already passed the prelims and been selected for the written tests in the previously published results on May 9, 2024.

This decision was taken to “eliminate any potential disparities”, the PSC said.

The 46th BCS notification was published on November 30 last year, and the preliminary exam was held on April 26 this year.

A private TV station aired a report in July this year, alleging that

question papers of 30 recruitment exams under the PSC, including for cadre and non-cadre posts, had been leaked by a racket.

The High Court yesterday ordered the Criminal Investigation Department of police to investigate allegations of question paper leaks in the 46th BCS preliminary examination and submit a report within 60 days.

The HC bench of Justice Farah Mahbub and Justice Debasish Roy Chowdhury also issued a rule, asking the authorities why their failure to cancel the preliminary exam should not be declared illegal.