



RUNA LAILA'S 73RD BIRTHDAY

An icon that transcends music

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF COKE STUDIO BANGLA & COLLECTED



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Growing up, I would listen to Runa Laila on loop on BTV, from *Bondhu Tin Din* to *Istishaner Railgarita*. I even tried to mimic her iconic *Dama Dam Mast Qalandar*, fully convinced that if I practiced enough, I might somehow sound like her. So, you can imagine my excitement when I came across a vinyl copy of her *Superuna* album on Record Store Day last year. I wanted it badly, but I didn't have the money at the time. Instead, I spent the day listening to the tracks from *Superuna* that were available on YouTube.

Runa Laila has always been more than a legendary voice. She is an icon of beauty, style and charisma, someone whose influence has never faded. She still holds a special place in the hearts of young listeners. She is also one of the rare artistes who connects Bangladesh, India and Pakistan through her music, and reminds us why art crosses borders.

Fittingly enough, on the occasion of her birthday today, a rendition of her timeless *Dama Dam Mast Qalandar* was released by Coke Studio Bangla. Envisioned and produced by Shayan Chowdhury Arnob and Adit Rahman, this version beautifully fuses the timeless spirit of Qawwali with the unique textures of Bangladesh's musical heritage.

Whenever you listen to her rendition of the

13th-century Sufi poem, her voice becomes hypnotic and lifts you in a way that feels almost spiritual. Before you even realise it, you find yourself moving with the rhythm.

Runa Laila's influence has inspired not only music lovers, but also artistes and designers. Renowned designer Sabyasachi Mukherjee is a diehard fan and has dedicated a plaque in his Mumbai store to his mother and to the legendary singer. The plaque reads, "Across the

border, in Bangladesh, another woman I admire wore a similar black and gold with her own chandbalis, cropped hair and sleeveless blouse. The legendary songstress Runa Laila. I was an obsessive fan. Back then, my very strict father allowed me exactly 10 minutes of Doordarshan, just enough time to watch Runa Laila sing *Dama Dam Mast Qalandar*." In 2023, Six Yards Story also launched a special Eid jewellery collection inspired by her iconic songs, including *Shilpi*, *O Mera Babu Chail Chabila*, and *Bondhu Tin Din*, amongst others.

Her film *Shilpi*, directed by Chashi Nazrul Islam, has aged surprisingly well. The film is loosely based on her life, blending real events with fictional elements, and her on-screen chemistry with her husband Alamgir felt so natural that it is hard to take your eyes off. I was mesmerised by her style, from graceful sarees to chic western outfits, which made her look effortlessly timeless.

Runa Laila has also shared her wisdom as a judge on many musical reality shows, including *Sur Kshetra* and *Sa Re Ga Ma Pa*. She also made a special cameo in the Star Jalsha drama *Ke Apon Ke Por* in 2019. Back then, while flipping through channels, I stumbled upon a promo where the distressed protagonist Joba meets Runa Laila on the street. It was such a delightful surprise and a perfect way to celebrate her 67th birthday at the time.

A picture of Runa Laila with Bappi Lahiri in a recording studio, deep in conversation, is used in her biographies to this day. In the 1970s, a vibrant decade for fashion in the newly independent Bangladesh, Runa Laila stood out as one of the main style icons. Her choices, from bell bottom pants to long unkempt hair and loop earrings, brought global trends into the local fashion scene and inspired a whole generation.

Her influence goes beyond music and fashion. She is now the central figure in a new novel, *Mayar Singhasan*, by the acclaimed fiction writer Abdullah Al Muktadir. The book explores her rise in Bangladesh's musical landscape, her artistic journey, personal struggles, and lasting cultural impact. The novel was released today, on her birthday, by Chandrabindu Prokashan. In a heartfelt video message, Runa Laila herself invited readers, saying, "This novel is written about me. I hope you will like it. Do read it."

As an unparalleled icon of music celebrates another year, she stuns with how gracefully she ages, carrying her charm and confidence effortlessly. Her journey inspires millions to be stronger, bolder and ultimately a better version of themselves.

NEWS

Bhashani a lasting inspiration 3 killed

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name in the nation's history, Tarique said this iconic leader always stood firmly for the oppressed and persecuted and through his fearless and decisive leadership, he continuously inspired the people of this country to stand up for their rights.
"Maulana Bhashani will always be remembered as a guiding force in the nation's liberation. He was a shining luminary in Bangladesh's independence movement, in

democratic struggles, and in the fight for the just rights of farmers, workers, and the toiling masses," he observed.
"His thunderous voice shook the thrones of oppressive rulers and exploitative forces. In the nation's darkest times, he stood firmly for the public interest, earning the trust and confidence of the people," he added.
In another message, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also paid tribute to the late leader.

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will be no Palestinian state," Katz said on X, adding that Gaza would be "demilitarised down to the last tunnel", and Hamas disarmed by the Israeli military in parts of Gaza under its control and by the international stabilisation force or the Israeli military in the rest of the enclave.
The UN Security Council will vote later on Monday on a resolution endorsing US President Donald Trump's Gaza peace plan, reports Reuters.

49th death anniversary of Bhashani today

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Yesterday, a seminar titled "Morality in the Language of Protest: Maulana Bhashani and Contemporary Bangladesh" was held at MBSTU, chaired by its Vice-Chancellor Prof Anwarul Azim Akand. Prof Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan, a member of the University Grants Commission, was the chief guest at the seminar.
Meanwhile, a seven-day (November 11 to 17) fair, known as the Bhashani fair, was organised in Tangail's Santosh, with thousands of visitors, from children to the elderly, attending.

Born in 1880 at Dhangara village in Sirajganj, Bhashani dedicated his entire life to establishing the rights of the oppressed and downtrodden.
He was immensely influential throughout his political career and played a key role in winning many general and local government elections since 1946.
He fought against the imperialism and oppression of Pakistani rulers and led the historic Farakka Long March in 1976.
Bhashani was the founder of the Pakistan Awami Muslim League in 1949. He also formed a progressive political organisation called the

National Awami Party in 1957, and played a significant role in the 1969 movement against Ayub Khan's autocratic rule.
The brave and devoted leader worked relentlessly and spent almost his entire life for the oppressed masses, which earned him the title "Mazlum Jana Neta", meaning the leader of the oppressed.
His belief in the secular struggle for Bangladesh was unequivocal.
During the 1971 Liberation War, he worked as the chairman of the All Party Action Committee under the Bangladesh government in exile in India.

Shoot anyone attempting arson

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Meanwhile, leaders and activists of Jatiya Chhatra Shakti at Dhaka University and Jahangirnagar University brought out separate torch processions last night, demanding the maximum punishment for Hasina.
SECURITY DEPLOYMENT
Security presence has been increased at major intersections, gateways to the city, important establishments, and other key point installations.
Border Guard Bangladesh teams have been stationed in Dhaka, Gopalganj, Faridpur, and Madaripur to assist in maintaining order.
Talebur Rahman, deputy commissioner of DMP's media wing, told The Daily Star that sufficient forces are deployed across Dhaka to deter sabotage and ensure public safety.
Both uniformed and plainclothes personnel from the police, Rab, BGB, and the army are currently on the ground. All agencies have been instructed to focus on advanced intelligence.
Home Adviser Lt Gen (ret'd) Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, at a programme in Barishal yesterday, said all state forces were on high alert ahead of the verdict.
On the overall situation, he said, "I won't say law and order is very good or very bad. What we have now is satisfactory ... The minor unrest seen in a few places over the last few days will be brought under control with everyone's cooperation."
Contacted, Bangladesh Police spokesperson AHM Sahadat Hossaine said the highest level of security alert has been activated nationwide.
"Additional personnel have been assigned to strategic locations,

including Dhaka, while special teams are on standby. Surveillance has been stepped up in sensitive areas, checkpoints set up at key points, and patrols further intensified."
He added that legal action would be taken against any provocation, vandalism, or sabotage.
During visits to several neighbourhoods in Dhaka yesterday, heavier patrols were visible, and additional checkpoints were screening incoming vehicles.
ARSON, BLASTS
Between 9:00 and 9:30pm last night, miscreants hurled crude bombs near the residence of Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan on Central Road and in front of the National Citizen Party office in Banglamotor.
DMP Deputy Commissioner (Ramna Division) Masud Alam confirmed the incidents, adding that no injuries were reported.
From around 10:00pm onwards, a series of arson attacks on vehicles and crude bomb explosions were reported in Dhaka's Keraniganj, Dhamrai, Gabtoli, Mohakhali and Segunbagicha areas. No casualties were reported in any of the incidents, according to law enforcers.
Around 7:20pm, one Mehedi, 22, was detained by locals while fleeing after allegedly hurling two crude bombs at the Jurain Setu Market.
A Shyampur Police Station official said, "He was later handed over to police and is now in custody."
Around 20 minutes later, a crude bomb exploded near the SAARC fountain close to Hotel Sonargaon in the capital's Karwan Bazar area.
Earlier around 8:30am, a crude bomb exploded in Eskaton, injuring

a pedestrian in front of the Waqf Building, said Sazzad Hossain, inspector (investigation) of Hatirjheel Police Station.
Meanwhile, the Detective Branch of police arrested 10 leaders and activists of the Awami League and its affiliated organisations in 24 hours till yesterday morning for allegedly planning and financing flash processions aimed at stirring unrest in the capital.
A Rab-2 team arrested a man in Mohammadpur with six petrol bombs, a machete, and a gas lighter on charges of preparing for sabotage.
Meanwhile in Gazipur, three petrol bombs were hurled at the Grameen Bank Maona branch in Bartoba Bazar of Sreepur upazila early yesterday.
Several branches of the bank -- an institution linked to Chief Adviser Prof Yunus -- including its Dhaka headquarters, were targeted recently.
Witnesses said seven to eight unidentified youths detonated the bombs around 2:30am before fleeing. One exploded inside the compound and two outside, damaging the gate.
In Feni, helmet-wearing youths poured petrol over and set ablaze the July Memorial in Muktabazar area around 3:30am.
In Kushtia, a parked truck was set on fire in Aruapara around the same time. A 51-second video shows two youths setting fire to the truck's rear wheel; one shouted "Joy Bangla" seconds after igniting it.
In Chattogram, several crude bombs exploded in the city's Sholoshahar Gate No-2 area in the evening.
However, police claimed they were not crude bombs but firecrackers hurled to create panic among pedestrians and commuters.

'Crossfire would have been an act of mercy'

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said Bulbul.
Instead, he felt cold metal on his right knee and the sound of a trigger being pulled -- 11 years on, the man still remembers which of his knees was capped at first.
"I heard the sound of a shot being fired, and felt my leg jumping up and then crashing on the ground. Then the same thing happened with my other leg. Then I felt a wetness -- blood -- creeping up my back all the way to my head," recalled Bulbul.
Police then admitted Bulbul to a government hospital in Satkhira. "The doctors just wrapped up my legs with gauze and dumped me on the floor of a ward. I implored them to treat me, I told them I was in pain, but it was to no avail."
It was only after his family found him -- a full day after he was shot -- that he was shifted to Khulna Medical College Hospital, and he received the first dressing of his wounds.
"My family had to bribe a doctor to get me discharged from Satkhira. I received my first treatment on the night of the second day after getting shot."
"When doctors came to see me, they found that my legs were literally bending up from the knee to the front, totally opposite to how legs are supposed to bend towards the back. A huge portion of my legs just did not have any bones."
The first dressing was excruciating, said Bulbul. "Not even the pain of being beaten up for over two hours compares to the pain of being cut into and cleaned."
Bulbul was referred to the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation in Dhaka

for follow-up surgeries. He was legally under arrest the entire time, so he used to travel between Dhaka Central Jail and the hospital.
He spent 10 months incarcerated in a case filed over his shooting before securing bail. "The first information report said that I was with a gang of criminals. The police were trying to arrest us, when the gang shot back, I was injured in the legs," he said. Each time he went to court, he had to be taken in a stretcher, because he could not bend his legs.
"I slept on my back for eight months inside the prison. I could not turn on my sides by myself, and so I developed bedsores," said Bulbul. "Inside the prison, I had to learn how to change my own dressing myself."
He could finally access proper medical care and had 14 surgeries in six months after his release on bail.
Another victim, Limon Hossain, a youth who lost his leg after being kneecapped by Rab-8 members in 2011, also spoke at the event.
Now a lecturer of law at Gono Bishwabidyalay, Limon remembered the moment he was shot when he was only 16.
"The officer first held a gun to the side of my head. He called me a criminal while I tried to explain to him that I was only herding cattle. Then I felt the gun sliding down my leg and heard a shot being fired," said Limon.
Limon too was denied even first aid, or treatment and sent to Jhalakathi jail, where his leg developed necrosis and had to be ultimately amputated. "I remember showing up to court with an oozing leg."
After shooting him, the Rab filed two cases against Limon, branding him

a criminal.
Limon -- whose case has received a lot of media attention -- had repeatedly tried to receive justice and been repeatedly denied.
"The first investigation by Rajapur Police Station said they could not find who shot me. The second investigation by the Rab found me to be a criminal. The third probe report by the home ministry was never published. The fourth by the Police Bureau of Investigation said that I am not a criminal but said that Rab never shot me. Currently, the Criminal Investigation Department is conducting a fifth probe," said Limon.
Human rights activist Moshfiqur Rahman Johan shared photographs of kneecapping victims and illustrated his experiences.
At the event, Sapran researcher Nusrat Jahan Nisu said, "What were once scattered, isolated incidents became a systemic and widespread method of repression post 2014."
"When a government does not have legitimacy, then instilling fear is a method of controlling the population. Maiming is far more effective than killing dissidents," said Prof Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman of Dhaka University's law department.
He added that since independence, political leaders have cultivated hatred instead of collective nation-building.
Faruk Wasif, director general of Press Institute of Bangladesh, explained how the Awami League deepened divisions within society through politics of vengeance and with the help of opportunistic intellectuals and servile media, dehumanised political opponents -- creating conditions in which grave human rights violations like kneecapping became possible.