

A nation without culture can't progress:

KHAIRUL ANAM SHAKIL

SHARMIN JOYA

For Khairul Anam Shakil, celebrating five decades of music is not just a personal milestone; it is a reflection of Bangladesh's cultural heartbeat. As a celebrated Nazrul Sangeet exponent and General Secretary of the Bangladesh Nazrul Sangeet Sangstha (BNSS), Shakil has devoted his life to teaching, performing, and preserving the legacy of Kazi Nazrul Islam.

To celebrate his remarkable musical journey, a musical evening has been arranged, titled *Shur Shadhonar Shonali Abhijatra*. The programme will be held today at 6pm at the Chhayanaut Auditorium. Performances will feature Khairul Anam Shakil himself along with a chorus by his students with Arunranjani.

"Fifty years feels like it passed in a blink," he says with a gentle smile. "Looking back, so much has happened, yet I hardly realised how quickly the years went by. I wouldn't claim that

always there—playing at home, shaping our thoughts and identity. Chhayanaut taught us not just music, but what it means to be Bangali, and those lessons have stayed with me throughout life." In this journey he received lessons from musical maestros including Pandit Narayan Chandra Basak, Ustaad Mohammad Sagiruddin Khan, Sohrab Hossain, Sheikh Lutfar Rahman, Anjali Ray, Sanjeeda Khatun and Waheedul Haq.

His professional journey with music officially began in 1974, when he joined Bangladesh Television's adult music programmes. Yet, fame was never the goal. "I sang because I loved it. Music has always come from the heart. Even while studying abroad, I never stopped practising. Thanks to Benu uncle, who was always with me, even abroad!"

Interestingly, Shakil studied engineering at Leeds Beckett University while continuing his music

there is still confusion about our cultural identity, especially what it means to be Bengali, particularly as a Bengali Muslim. Culture is as important as religion. A nation that does not nurture its culture cannot truly progress."

He stated that the formation of Bangladesh and its identity were shaped not just by politics, but music, alongside our rich culture, has played a leading role throughout. "Alongside religious faith, every Bengali should truly understand and embrace their language, traditions, and way of life. Doing so allows us to take pride in both our culture and religion," he said, admitting that there is still much work to be done.

He voices concern over the recent debate on the discussions on removing music and physical education from the school curriculum. "Music is not just an art; it develops the mind and shapes character. It is scientifically proven that music helps to heal and reduce stress as well. Children grow into better human beings when they experience music. Removing it is a cultural setback."

Sharing his concern, the artiste said, "To my knowledge, music has been part of our curriculum for many years, but it was never practised effectively. I've heard that the decision is due to cost-cutting, which makes me wonder—why target these subjects, which are essential for creating a morally and culturally strong generation? Moreover, students taking higher degrees in music will need a profession, won't they? If the decision remains unchanged, then where will these students work or teach?"

For Shakil, teaching is inseparable from his cultural mission. He believes children must be exposed to music and art to grow as compassionate, well-rounded individuals. "Every school should include cultural education. Parents often worry that art interferes with academics, but this is entirely wrong. Music, poetry, and art enrich the mind—they do not hinder learning."

Reflecting on his fifty-year journey, Shakil emphasises a guiding philosophy—"I can only understand the world if I first understand myself. My Bengali identity, my culture, my music—they shape who I am. If we nurture our culture and pass it to the next generation, we can walk the world proudly, not just as Bangladeshis, but as culturally enriched, globally aware citizens."



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

I always approached music from a place of love. Among the leading performers in Bangladesh today, I would say 60–70 per cent were my students at some point. Seeing them grow gives me immense joy.

I had an intense passion for music. However, there was a musical environment in our family. Music has been a part of my daily life, and that is how the bond grew and turned into love that has kept me going all these years."

The veteran artiste reminisced that his musical journey was destined even before he was born, as he was born in a household where music was a constant presence. His mother, Nilufar Khayer, learnt Rabindra Sangeet and continued her practice quietly after marriage, receiving instruction from esteemed teachers like Ustad Munshi Raisuddin. His maternal uncle, Mahmuder Rahman Benu, a renowned figure in the world of music, became a symbol of musical resistance during the Liberation War, travelling from camp to camp performing patriotic songs, a story captured in the documentary *Muktir Gaan*.

It was through this environment that Shakil and his cousins were introduced to formal training at Chhayanaut. "Even when we were young, music was never forced on us. But it was

training. "It might seem unusual, but music and academics never conflicted. Many great classical musicians were also engineers." He continued, "From a young age, I developed an unusual fondness for classical music, influenced by my family... and began practising seriously at home while training at Chhayanaut. I did work for a couple of years in the UK.

Returning home, Shakil committed himself fully to teaching at Chhayanaut from 1986 onwards, a dedication he continues even today. For over forty years, he has trained generations of singers. "I never pursued music, thinking I would become exceptionally successful as an artiste. I always approached it from a place of love. Among the leading performers in Bangladesh today, I would say 60–70 per cent were my students at some point. Seeing them grow gives me immense joy."

Yet Shakil's observation during these five decades is that Bangladesh still struggles with understanding its cultural identity, which often clashes with religious bias. "If I were to speak openly, I would say that in our country,

NEWS

Record high C-section births raise concerns

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observation for 36 hours and struggled for another 45 days. She developed an infection that required medication and injections for more than two weeks.

Five years later, her son is thriving, but she still feels the impact. "I still feel pain in my body. I can't sit for long periods without sudden back pain.... After my delivery, I went through depression for over two years. The pain from the cesarean remains."

While some mothers, like Eti, need caesarean delivery for medical reasons, many others, like Israt, plan for C-sections early in pregnancy.

According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2025, conducted by UNICEF and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the C-section rate in Bangladesh stands at 51.8 percent of all deliveries, raising concerns over medical practices, equity and maternal-newborn health.

The survey tracked 64,405 women aged 15–49 with a live birth in the past two years, and showed that over half of recent deliveries were surgical.

The rate has climbed sharply from 19.1 percent in 2012–13 to 36 percent in 2019, before reaching 51.8 percent in 2025. The MICS report calls these levels "alarming" and a sign of over medicalisation that strains families and health systems.

C-section rates differ widely across demographic groups. Prevalence is higher in urban areas at 56 percent, compared to 50 percent in rural areas. Wealth plays a major role: 68 percent of mothers from the richest households deliver by C-section, followed by 57 percent in the fourth wealth group, 52 percent in the middle group and 34 percent among the poorest.

Education follows a similar pattern, with 75 percent of highly educated women undergoing C-sections, compared to 35 percent among women with primary education and 29 percent among those with no schooling.

The World Health Organization

(WHO) stresses that caesarean sections should be performed only when medically necessary. Globally, C-section rates have risen without corresponding health benefits, increasing risks for both mothers and babies. WHO recommends non-clinical measures such as educating families, following evidence-based guidelines with regular audits, seeking second opinions, and ensuring adequate labour support to reduce unnecessary surgeries. It notes that population-level rates between 10 and 15 percent are considered optimal.

Dr Arefin Islam, country director of Noora Health, described the situation as "deeply alarming" for Bangladesh.

"According to WHO standards, the acceptable rate is between 10 and 15 percent. But Bangladesh is seeing a rate more than three times higher. There may be a major systemic issue driving this trend.

"From what I have observed, most C-sections take place in private hospitals, and financial incentives appear to be a key factor. Normal delivery requires more time, care and monitoring, while C-sections are quicker and more profitable for the facilities. As a result, many mothers are pushed into surgery without medical necessity."

Islam also warned of long-term consequences. "Caesarean delivery is not just a one-day procedure, it can affect a mother's health for the rest of her life. This is why mothers and families must be more aware and cautious before making such a decision."

Dr Monzur-A-Moula, junior consultant at the Maternal and Child Health Hospital, said, "We always prioritise normal delivery. Only when we detect medical complications do we recommend a C-section. One major reason behind the rise is that once a mother delivers her first child through surgery, normal delivery is usually no longer an option for subsequent births."

"Many patients are not fully aware

of when a C-section is medically required and when a normal delivery is safer. Some are afraid of labour pain and request a C-section from the start."

He added that emergency cases complicate matters further. "Sometimes we face life-threatening situations where immediate surgery is necessary. If the family insists on normal delivery despite advice, it can lead to neonatal deaths. So, the situation is extremely challenging for us."

MICS 2025 also links high C-section rates to poorer newborn outcomes. Only 18 percent of babies born by C-section were breastfed within the first hour, compared to 44 percent of babies delivered vaginally.

The report urges clearer governance of maternal health services, calling for clarity on who performs these procedures, where they occur and why. It stresses the need to educate both women and health workers on appropriate medical use of C-sections and associated risks, and recommends stronger obstetric oversight to curb unnecessary surgeries while protecting quality, safety and affordability.

The survey also calls for more data to understand how excessive surgical deliveries shape broader maternal and neonatal health indicators.

No change

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On Thursday, the medical board overseeing her treatment confirmed that she is also undergoing regular dialysis due to kidney dysfunction.

Doctors diagnosed acute pancreatitis on November 27, and it is still being treated.

Her treatment is being carried out based on standard guidelines, according to the recommendations of both local and foreign doctors.

The BNP has urged people not to spread misinformation and has requested everyone to pray for Khaleda's swift recovery.

Parties outraged

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Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman also voiced their concern.

Fakhrul, in a Facebook post, wished Hadi a swift recovery and urged the government to take decisive action against those responsible.

"No matter what our beliefs are, anyone who uses fear or force should be rejected," he wrote.

At a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club, Fakhrul called upon the government to ensure the safety of all candidates ahead of the polls. "We demand the immediate arrest of those responsible for the shooting."

Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur, in a Facebook post, said he was deeply concerned about the incident.

"Any violence arising from political rivalry or differences of opinion is never acceptable. I demand a quick, impartial, and transparent investigation into this incident, and I pray that Allah grants him a full recovery," he added.

National Citizen Party Convener Nahid Islam accused the government of "failing to ensure public security," saying it has consistently taken a weak stance on protecting citizens.

Speaking to reporters at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, he said: "If the government fails to provide security or bring the perpetrators to justice, we will have to take action against it."

"We demand that the perpetrators behind this conspiracy, this attack, and the shooting be arrested within the next 24 hours."

"The home adviser must be held accountable, and the Election Commission must answer for its failure," he added, stressing that the government must ensure the safety of not just Hadi but every citizen and the veterans of the July uprising.

In a statement, the NCP said it was not only an attack on a single candidate but also a direct blow to the democratic progress restored through the people's uprising. It said the incident raises serious questions about the deterioration of law and order and the fragility of the electoral environment. Despite Hadi publicly reporting threats prior to the attack, neither the government nor law enforcement agencies took effective measures to ensure his safety, it said.

The NCP demanded a full investigation into the attack, the immediate arrest of the assailants, and effective measures to ensure the security of all candidates and citizens.

Tarique to return home December 25

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he planned to return to Bangladesh. He replied, "Very soon, Inshallah."

On November 29, in a Facebook post, Tarique said he longs to be with his ailing mother, Khaleda Zia, who had been hospitalised with multiple complications.

"At such a moment of crisis, like any child, I too have a strong longing to feel my mother's loving touch. But unlike others, the opportunity for me to make an independent decision in this regard [returning] is neither unrestricted nor fully within my control."

During Awami League's tenure, Tarique was convicted in absentia in five cases and faced around 100 lawsuits. Following the fall of the AL government, all charges against him were dropped. There are currently no pending cases against him.

On June 12, Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (ret'd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury said there is no government bar on Tarique's return.

On November 30, Foreign Affairs Adviser Md Touhid Hossain said the government can issue a "one-time" travel pass within a day, facilitating Tarique's return to the country if he wishes.

GULSHAN HOUSES READY

According to party sources, Tarique will stay at both House 79 and House 196 in Gulshan.

The house on plot 196, built on 32 kathas of land and given to Khaleda Zia by the government in 1981, is now being prepared for her elder son, they added.

After the assassination of former president Ziaur Rahman, Tarique's father and founder of BNP, on May 31, 1981, Khaleda was allotted the house.

On June 5, the interim government officially registered the house in her name.

Party insiders said the BNP has received assurance from the government that security arrangements will be provided to Tarique upon his return.

The BNP, which is maintaining constant contact with the government, is also taking its own steps to address and secure Tarique's safety ahead of his arrival.

POLITICAL CAREER

At the age of 22, Tarique became a member of the Gabtali upazila BNP in Bogura district in 1988. He had been involved in politics even before formally joining the organisation.

He took part in the nationwide election campaign alongside his mother during the 1991 election.

In 2002, Tarique was appointed senior joint secretary general of the party.

He lost his brother, Arafat Rahman Koko, while in exile in London. During his time abroad, he was elected senior vice-chairman at the BNP's Fifth National Council in 2009 and re-elected to the position at the Sixth National Council in 2016.

Since the imprisonment of Khaleda in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case on February 8, 2018, Tarique has been serving as the acting chairman of the BNP.

Tarique is set to run in the 13th national parliamentary election from the Bogura-6 (Sadar) constituency.

US plan

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before Ukraine negotiates any territorial concessions, the French presidency said yesterday.

Kyiv has long strived for EU membership and has been implementing reforms since a pro-European 2014 revolution but has struggled to eradicate endemic corruption -- a core prerequisite for joining the bloc.

After completing a diplomatic tour across Europe last week, Zelensky is due in Berlin on Monday for more talks on the plan, full details of which have not been released.

Moscow on Friday indicated it was suspicious about the efforts to amend the US plan, which it has largely been supportive of and heeded to most of its core demands.

"We have an impression that this version, which is being put forward for discussion, will be worsened," Kremlin foreign policy aide Yuri Ushakov told the Kommersant business daily.