

‘Love Letters’: Tropa Majumdar’s ode to war and longing

Veteran theatre couple Ramendu Majumdar and Ferdousi Majumder anchor their daughter’s intimate staging of a story imbued with war, memory, and waiting

FAIZA RAMIM

There is a particular kind of silence that falls over an auditorium when two actors who have shared a life off stage agree, finally, to share one on it. That silence settled once again over the Nilima Ibrahim Milonayoton of Bangladesh Mahila Samity on Friday evening, as veteran theatre couple Ramendu Majumdar and Ferdousi Majumder returned to the stage in *Love Letters*, directed by their daughter Tropa Majumdar, in a fresh staging of Theatre’s production on June 19, 2026.

In a note shared before the performance, Tropa Majumdar



PHOTOS: THABIT AL BASHAR

friendship that could not outlast time.

Love Letters was written by American playwright A R Gurney and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. In its original form, the play follows two childhood friends from wealthy East Coast families, Andrew Makepeace Ladd

do, it is too late.

The play’s staging instructions are almost as well known as its text. Gurney insisted that the actors not memorise their lines but read them from the page, seated side by side, never looking directly at each other.

Professor Abdus Selim’s Bangla adaptation, simply titled *Love Letters*, preserves this architecture almost entirely, except that it has been adjusted to resonate more closely with a Bangladeshi audience. Andrew and Melissa became Anonto Shahed Chowdhury and Maisha Islam, born not into the East Coast gentry but into well-off Bangladeshi families. The boarding schools became cadet college and convent school; Yale and law school became a legal education in London; and crucially, where Gurney’s Andrew goes off to an unspecified American war, Selim’s Anonto returns home from London to join Bangladesh’s Liberation War.

As in Gurney’s original, the production’s two characters are deliberately drawn as opposites. Anonto is disciplined, restrained, dutiful — a son who does what is expected of him and later finds his way into law and public life. Maisha

is impulsive, artistic, and allergic to convention, professing to dislike letter-writing even as she never quite stops doing it.

Their correspondence begins in childhood, with the stilted thank-you notes children are made to write after birthday parties, and only deepens as the distance between their lives grows; cadet college pulling Anonto one way, convent school pulling Maisha another, and adulthood eventually separating them across continents. Tropa Majumdar has organised this arc into five broad movements: the college years, the university years, working life, an unsettled middle passage shaped by both fortune and misfortune, and finally a stage of reckoning and self-realisation.

What struck me most was how little the production relied on spectacle to do its work. The set, designed by Palash Hendry Sen, is built around two simple visual anchors: a bookshelf for the politically minded Anonto, and an artist’s tools for Maisha. Costumes were designed by Gulshan Ara Munni, illustrations were by Pradip Chakraborty, and an original score by Sourendro and Soumyojit added an extra layer of longing to the story.

Tropa Majumdar has said she wanted nothing to compete for the audience’s attention with the actors and the text itself, trusting that two skilled performers reading correspondence aloud could carry an entire evening of theatre without elaborate staging. Given that her own parents anchor the production, the choice carries an added intimacy: a daughter directing her mother and father through a story about a couple who spend a lifetime almost finding each other, performed by two people who have already spent more than five decades doing exactly that.

Runa Laila set for Melbourne’s ‘Legacy Tour’ with Bengal Symphony



Legendary singer Runa Laila is set to perform in Melbourne this August as part of the *Runa Laila Legacy Tour*, a concert celebrating her decades long musical career.

The event will take place on August 8 at the Melbourne Recital Centre, beginning at 5:30 pm local time. Organised by Australia Bangladesh Cultural Exchange (ABCx), the concert will also feature the Bengal Symphony, led by National Film Award-winning composer and musician Emon Chowdhury.

Bengal Symphony manager Sujon Debnath said preparations are underway, with the team expected to travel to Melbourne on July 30.

The programme will feature Runa Laila’s iconic songs alongside Bengal Symphony’s live performances of popular tracks from *Coke Studio Bangla*, including *Shada Shada Kala Kala* and *Kotha Koiso Na*.

‘The Blind Girl and an Elephant’ bags award at SIFF



Bangladeshi film *The Blind Girl and an Elephant* (*Shakota Dulche*) has won the Best Cinematography award in the Asian New Talent competition section at the 28th Shanghai International Film Festival.

The award went to cinematographer Samiul Karim Shuptak and was accepted on his behalf by director Ishtiyak Ahmad Zihad and producer Manoj Pramanik. *Shakota Dulche* marks the feature directorial debut of Ishtiyak Ahmad Zihad and the first full-length production by producer Manoj Pramanik.

Set in rural Bangladesh, the black-and-white drama follows three women seeking freedom from superstition, patriarchy and social oppression. The cast includes Sanzida Akter Swarna, Tahmida Rahman Touthida, Sumaiya Haque, Ashok Bepari, Sabiha Zaman, Pankaj Majumdar, Munsif Mim, and Nishat Tasnim, among others.

NEWS

Bangladesh to get \$1.5b from WB

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percent of its ongoing portfolio in the event of an unexpected natural or man-made emergency under the RRO window. Bangladesh applied to the WB on April 5 to receive assistance through the RRO.

Assistance under the RRO can be accessed in two ways. One is through the creation of a Contingent Emergency Response Project (CERP), which allows financing of emergency expenses such as food and other essential imports.

Bangladesh is set to repurpose \$785 million from 12 projects through this CERP mechanism, which will be taken as budget support. Another \$300 million will be taken as budget support to ensure food security.

And \$400 million will be taken under the Financial Sector Support Programme for banking sector reforms. As part of the conditions, the government has agreed to scrap the much-criticised Bank Resolution Act, 2026.

The WB has also advised stricter enforcement of related party lending rules, full supervisory powers for the BB and corporate governance aligned with international norms.

Relevant draft amendments prepared during the interim government were shelved due to opposition from bank owners, The Daily Star has learnt from finance ministry officials involved with the proceedings.

The Financial Institutions Division has now sent them back to the BB for review and consultation.

The other reforms include amending the Deposit Protection Act, enacting laws on distressed asset management and insolvency, and licensing small companies to recover bad loans under the BB regulation.

Two new laws, the Distressed Asset Management Act (DAMA) and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Act, will be enacted.

Under DAMA, small companies will be licensed to recover bad loans with legal authority similar to banks, regulated by the BB.

The law will establish a framework for recovery, management, securitisation and trading of defaulted loans.

The World Bank Group’s

International Finance Corporation will provide technical support.

The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Act will align with international best practices to strengthen insolvent banks and financial institutions.

State-owned banks will also undergo asset quality reviews (AQR). The interim government conducted AQR in nine private banks, after which five were merged into Sommilito Islami Bank.

The WB’s programme documents noted structural weaknesses, including poor corporate governance, regulatory capture and politically influenced related-party lending.

Loopholes in definitions allowed complex inter-family relationships to obscure the scale of related-party lending, leading to fraudulent and willful defaults, and embezzlement by banks’ shareholders and management.

“A few big business groups siphoned off billions of dollars from the banking sector. In addition, the lack of proper enforcement and regulatory forbearance has exacerbated the problems, encouraging risky behavior, impacting market discipline and delaying necessary reforms,” the WB said.

State-owned banks are the most vulnerable, holding 27 percent of total assets, over \$50 billion or 12 percent of GDP. Three state-owned commercial banks are systemically important.

In this context, the Financial Sector Support Project II is seen as critical for stabilising the sector.

It aims to strengthen deposit protection, improve supervisory capacity, and support resolution and restructuring, including reforms of state-owned banks.

“These interventions will address longstanding issues, improve authorities’ preparedness for and management of the current banking sector turmoil, paving the way for resolution and restructuring of weaker banks, including possible recapitalisation of the reformed SOBs.”

The programme is expected to restore stability, strengthen intermediation, and support long-term growth, the WB said.

Infantino’s frequent flights spark backlash

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meaning a jump from 64 to 104 matches – has magnified the impact of Infantino’s flying habit.

“Just one hour in this plane emits roughly what an average human being emits in an entire year,” Greenly, a French company specializing in carbon footprint assessments, said this week.

If Infantino strings together two cities a day until the end of the round of 16, then attends the last eight matches, Greenly estimates he will rack up “a defensible range of 300 to 500 tons of CO2 for his plane alone” over the course of the tournament.

That is the equivalent, they say, of “the annual footprint of around 35 to 55 French people”.

FIFA defends the president’s travel by stressing that its executives choose between commercial and private flights “based on what is most efficient and cost-effective” and that in all cases the organization covers travel costs.

David Gogishvili, a geographer at the University of Lausanne, told AFP that FIFA had created a “sustainability paradox”. “By reusing existing but geographically dispersed NFL stadiums across a continent, FIFA has created a model that is structurally dependent on high-emission air travel,” he said.

“When leadership sets a precedent by hopping between matches via private jet, it perfectly reflects the broader systemic issue/approach.”

The way FIFA has organised this World Cup “normalises hyper-mobility while simultaneously shifting transport costs and carbon burdens onto the host regions and fans.”

John Hocevar, who is Oceans Campaign Director of Greenpeace USA, is equally crack about Infantino’s stadium-hopping.

“Having executives take daily flights on highly polluting private jets doesn’t exactly send the message that FIFA recognizes either the cause or its responsibility to be part of the solution to climate change,” he posted on Instagram.

Colombians vote in presidential runoff

AFP, Bogotá

Colombians began voting in a presidential runoff yesterday, choosing between a hard-right, White House-backed lawyer and a leftist senator to decide the fate of a stumbling peace process and strained ties with Washington.

Up to 41 million voters will choose between frontrunner Abelardo de la Espriella and his leftist rival Ivan Cepeda – the latest in a series of hyper-polarized Latin American elections.

Security issues dominated a campaign marred by guerrilla bomb attacks and the murder of a leading conservative presidential candidate.

“I have to say, there is a certain fear,” 59-year-old Alex Vizcaino told AFP while voting in the Caribbean coast city of Barranquilla. “It’s the first election where you feel this bit of fear.”

“There are a lot of fanatics. You see a lot of violence,” he said. “I think everyone’s hope, regardless of

political color, is that things change.”

De la Espriella, a dual US-Colombian national who calls himself “The Tiger,” won May’s first-round vote by promising to wage war on drug-running guerrilla groups who refused to sign a 2016 peace accord.

He has won President Donald Trump’s “complete and total endorsement” and hopes to ride a right-wing wave that has swept rightist candidates to power in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Honduras.

From behind bulletproof glass and with a military salute, he has rallied support with a cry of “stand firm for the homeland!”

He told AFP that if elected, he wants US backing for a 90-day campaign of airstrikes against armed groups producing coca, the raw material of cocaine.

He advocates the right to carry arms, construction of mega-prisons, fracking, cutting the size of the state, and has said that it would be “ideal” to dollarize Colombia’s economy.

Cepeda is a 63-year-old philosopher-turned-senator and human rights defender and has been a key figure behind the current government’s policy of negotiating “total peace” with armed groups.

He is the son of a communist senator killed by right-wing paramilitaries and is the political heir to outgoing President Gustavo Petro – who is constitutionally barred from running.

Critics say Petro’s leftist government has allowed armed groups to grow richer from trafficking, expand their territory and gain power.

Cepeda recently told AFP that he would “take stock” of peace talks and “make the necessary changes.” He has long favored dialogue over an iron fist security approach.

Cepeda’s support comes mainly from progressives and the poor – who have benefited from a reduction in poverty, higher wages, and lower unemployment in what is still one of the most unequal countries in the world.

Faridpur law student dies in DB custody

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any political party, but no one has the right to kill him for his ideology.”

The family said they spent the night searching for him through Madhukhali Police Station and the Faridpur DB office, only learning of his death when Faridpur Medical College Hospital contacted them yesterday morning.

His mother, Khadija Akter, said no narcotics were found during the search, though police later claimed cannabis was recovered.

“My innocent and healthy son was taken away and tortured to death in DB custody. I want justice,” she said. Faridpur DB Officer-in-Charge (OC) Md Alamgir Hossain rejected the allegation, saying Ishtiaq was detained with 100 grams of cannabis and brought to the DB office around 3:00am yesterday.

“He offered Fajr prayers, had breakfast, and soon after fell ill. He was first taken to Faridpur General Hospital and then to Faridpur Medical College Hospital, where he died around 8:00am while undergoing treatment.”

He said officers treated Ishtiaq

“politely and cordially”.

Faridpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Md Nazrul Islam gave a similar account. “We have initially learned that he may have died due to a brain haemorrhage. We have also confirmed that there were no injury marks on his body. No assault or mistreatment took place while he was in police custody.”

The SP added that an internal inquiry would be conducted into the incident.

Faridpur Medical College Hospital Ward Master Md Atiar Rahman said that members of the DB police brought Ishtiaq to the hospital around 6:00am yesterday. “He died while undergoing treatment at 7:57am. A CT scan of his head revealed a cerebral haemorrhage.”

Asked whether there were any injury marks on Ishtiaq’s body, Atiar Rahman said, “I personally saw the body and found no visible signs of injury.”

Madhukhali Police Station OC Sukdeb Roy said a case under the Narcotics Control Act was filed against Ishtiaq by DB Sub-Inspector Ahaduzzaman.

Police sources said the DB

operation was led by Sub-Inspector (SI) Md Ahaduzzaman and SI Md Motahar Ali, with Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Md Hajikul Islam, constables Moniruzzaman, Farhad Hossain Mia, Rakibul Islam and female constable Champa Halder also participating. The vehicle was driven by Md Sabuj Molla.

ASK CONDEMS
Meanwhile, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) in a statement yesterday expressed deep concern and said the death of a young man in state custody raises serious questions in the public mind.

“State custody must never become a place that endangers life. Rather, protecting the right to life is a fundamental responsibility of the state,” said the rights organisation.

It added that, as a signatory to various international human rights instruments, Bangladesh is responsible for ensuring the safety and lives of people in custody.

ASK called for an impartial judicial investigation to determine the actual cause of death and demanded the release of CCTV footage, security for the victim’s family, legal assistance, and accountability for those responsible.