‘Grateful to have spent a lifetime with music’: RUNA LAILA

Legendary singer celebrates her birthday today





PHOTOS: STAR AND COLLECTED

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

For Runa Laila, music is more than a profession—it is her passion, her lifelong companion, and the source of all her dreams. Despite a career spanning decades, numerous accolades including the Independence Award, and immense popularity at home and abroad, her greatest wish remains simple: to keep singing for as long as she can.

As the icon of Bangla music celebrates her birthday today, November 17, the eminent singer looks back on a remarkable musical journey while cherishing the affection of listeners across generations.

The legend fondly recalled the excitement of her childhood celebrations, when the occasion meant new outfits, birthday cakes, and gatherings with friends – in an interview with The Daily Star.

“My childhood birthdays were incredibly joyful and fun. My mother would make dresses for me, and we would celebrate the day at home. There would be cake-cutting, and my school friends would come over. There was so much excitement, laughter, and celebration. Birthdays felt very special back then,” she said.

Her parents would organise the celebrations, bringing together classmates and family members. Those memories, she admitted, still make her nostalgic.

“My parents would arrange everything. My classmates would always be there, along with family members. We would spend such lovely moments together on those special days. The joy was different. Those days are gone, and things are not quite the same now,” she recalled.

Today, her birthday celebrations are considerably more intimate.

“Now, I don’t organise big celebrations. We have a family get-together and celebrate among ourselves,” she said.

Asked what she wishes for at this stage of her life, Runa Laila’s answer naturally returned to music.

“My wish is to continue singing, by the grace of the Almighty. I want to stay healthy and remain connected to music throughout my life. I want to keep performing, both at home and abroad,” she said.

Her schedule suggests that the passion remains as strong as ever. Having performed in London and Australia this year, she has upcoming stage shows in the United States and Canada. Another major programme featuring her songs is also planned in Bangladesh.

“All my dreams are centred around music. I want to keep singing. That’s what matters to me. I want to keep doing what I love,” she added.

For the singer, however, the greatest reward of an artistic career is not awards or recognition, but the love of her audience.

“An artiste’s greatest achievement is the love of people. That affection means so much. If you receive that kind of love throughout your lifetime, you have received a great deal,” she said.

She finds particular joy in knowing that her songs continue to appeal to listeners of different generations.

“People of all ages listen to my songs—the younger generation and older listeners alike. That is a great blessing in an artiste’s life. It is difficult to put that feeling into words. It makes me very happy,” she said.

Grateful to her fans for their continued support and prayers, she remains committed to creating new music for them. Her collaboration with Bappa Mazumder, she noted, has received an encouraging response.

“People have really loved the song I did with Bappa. I tried to sing it with all my heart, and it feels wonderful that listeners have embraced it so warmly,” she said.

She has also recorded a film song with Pritom Hasan, approaching each new project with the same instinctive connection to music.

“Music comes from within. It is my passion, and I devote myself to it all the time. I want to spend my entire life with music,” she said.

As another birthday arrives, her request to admirers is heartfelt and uncomplicated: “Please keep me in your prayers so that I can stay healthy and continue singing.”

SOME TIMELESS CLASSICS TO REVISIT

Although there are hundreds of memorable songs voiced by Runa Laila, here are some that deserve an immediate replay on this joyous occasion.

Dama Dam Mast Qalandar – Her defining signature song and a landmark in South Asian music.
Bondhu Tin Din Tor Barit Gelam– A playful, evergreen Bengali hit.
Shilpi Ami Tomaderi Gaan Shonabo- An iconic song celebrating Runa Laila’s bond with her audience and her lifelong dedication to music.
Jokhon Thambe Kolahol- A soulful melody highlighting her delicate vocal expression and emotional depth.
Ganeri Khatay Swaralipi Likhe- One of the greatest melodies she has gifted to generations of listeners.
Jejon Premer Bhab Jane Na- A folk song that explores love beyond its conventional romantic meaning.
Amay Gethe Daona Maago - A patriotic track that evokes various emotions within the listener.
Onek Brishti Jhore Tumi Ele-A romantic evergreen showcasing Runa Laila’s expressive vocal charm.
Shadher Lau Banailo More Boiragi– A celebrated Bengali folk rendition.
O Mera Babu Chhail Chhabila– One of her most recognisable Hindi recordings.



NEWS

Help AL

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According to senior party leaders, using a BNP position to press police for the release of an arrested AL member would be treated as a serious breach of party discipline.

Hafizul Islam Khan, general secretary of Munshiganj’s Sreenagar upazila unit BNP, said, “There is a very strict message on this issue. Police stations have also been asked to inform senior BNP leaders immediately if any party leader or activist contacts the police or tries to help secure the release of an arrested Awami League member.”

Sylhet BNP President Abdul Quiyum Choudhury said they already received the PM’s instructions. “It should be investigated whether anyone within our party has any kind of contact with leaders and activists of the party whose political activities are now banned.”

He also raised concerns about coordination among grassroots organisers.

“At the grassroots level, there are some problems with coordination among those who took part in political movements. Although we are responsible for running the party’s organisational activities, in some cases things are not being done properly. These issues must be strictly controlled.”

BNP leaders said their concern had increased as AL activists could try to re-organise around December, following ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina’s announcement that she would return to Bangladesh.

Local BNP units have been asked to report suspicious activities to law enforcement agencies and the party’s central leadership.

Party insiders said they did not want counter-programmes or neighbourhood patrols directed at the AL. Instead, party members should continue peaceful political activities and leave policing to the authorities.

BNP leaders said they learnt that a section of party leaders were taking the law into their own hands by detaining and assaulting people suspected of having links with the AL, instead of informing law enforcement agencies.

They said such actions were against the law and could damage the party’s image.

The leadership has therefore asked leaders and activists to avoid any form of violence or harassment and cooperate with the police by providing information about suspected criminal activities.

They have also been instructed to stay active on social media, check information before sharing it, and avoid statements that could worsen the situation.

Meanwhile, the BNP is preparing a series of events across the country in December on the occasion of Victory Day.

Party sources said the programmes may begin on December 1 and run through December 27.

Separate events marking former prime minister Khaleda Zia’s death anniversary are scheduled to begin on December 28, said party leaders.

‘I’m pregnant, yet he kicked my abdomen’

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the abdomen. Nuruzzaman Khan Putul and five or six others beat me. Around 70 to 80 activists were with them. I am five months pregnant. When I told them they would be responsible if anything happened to my unborn child, they became even more furious,” she said, adding that other teachers and guardians later rescued her.

Nibedita said BNP leaders and activists were holding a meeting elsewhere and asked her to join them. Unaware of its purpose, she instead asked them to come to the school’s office to discuss the matter.

“They subsequently arrived at the school and attacked me,” she alleged.

Her husband, Soumitra Majumder, said they had filed a complaint with the upazila nirbahi officer (UNO) over the incident.

Denying the allegations, Anwar said they were holding a meeting with 20 to 30 party activists at a house near the school. They invited the headteacher to join them, but she ignored the invitation, prompting them to visit the school.

“When we reached the school, we saw the headteacher holding a meeting with people from the Awami League. We told her that we would not accept any meeting at the school involving Awami League people,” he added.

He denied any involvement in the assault.

Meanwhile, Atpara upazila BNP issued show-cause notices to Anwar and Putul over the incident.

The notices, signed by upazila BNP President Masum Chowdhury, asked the two to explain in writing within 72 hours why organisational action should not be taken against them for allegedly violating party discipline while holding responsible positions.

Asked about the notices, Anwar said they had heard about them but did not know why they had been issued. He said they would submit written replies.

Ahsan Ullah Mukul, assistant education officer serving as the upazila primary education officer, said an education enthusiast had been elected to the school’s managing committee, but its president had yet to be elected.

He said he had heard about the alleged attack and asked the headteacher to file a written complaint.

UNO Md Ashraful Kabir confirmed receiving the victim’s complaint and said the upazila education officer had been tasked with investigating the incident.

Public debt hits Tk 23.38 lakh crore

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The government was also ensuring that foreign-funded projects aligned with its objectives of rebuilding and restoring the fragile economy and implementing its election manifesto, he said. Particular caution was being exercised in accepting external loans carrying high interest rates and inflexible short-term conditions.

Responding to a question from NCP MP Hasnat Abdullah, the finance minister said the government remained committed to implementing development projects and ensuring the effective use of foreign project assistance to strengthen the country’s economy.

He said foreign aid disbursement had declined by 60 per cent in the current fiscal year compared with the same period of the previous fiscal year.

One of the main reasons for the decline was the country’s prolonged internal instability over nearly two years, coupled with a challenging global environment. These factors had slowed project implementation, resulting in lower disbursement of foreign assistance, he added.

To address the situation and accelerate aid disbursement, the government had taken several measures, including holding meetings with bilateral and multilateral development partners and urging all stakeholders to expedite project implementation.

RMG wage board

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followed the illness of Anwar Hossain, the board’s permanent workers’ representative, although the owners’ proposal was ready. They demanded a new meeting date.

The Bangladesh Garment Workers Unity Council (BGWUC) protested the postponement, while the Garments Industry Wage Increase Alliance -- Bangladesh submitted a proposal seeking Tk 30,000 as the minimum monthly wage.

UNREST CONTINUES

Meanwhile, 40 garment factories remained closed in Savar and Ashulia yesterday, while 22 in Gazipur district and metropolitan areas were shut indefinitely amid wage-related unrest.

Ashulia Industrial Police-1 SP Mohammad Mominul Islam Bhuiyan said no fresh unrest or work stoppages were reported in Savar and Ashulia, where the situation remained normal and the number of factory closures had declined.

Of the 40, 27 were closed under Section 13(1) of the Bangladesh Labour Act, nine indefinitely and four for general holidays. Discussions were under way to reopen them.

However, the postponement angered workers. “The meeting should not have been postponed under any circumstances. This reflects a kind of indifference,” he said.

A BGMEA vice-president, speaking on condition of anonymity, said 90 factories enforced the “no work, no pay” provision under Section 13(1) yesterday, although the number was declining as operations gradually resumed.

In Gazipur, 22 factories were closed for various reasons, including labour unrest, said Industrial Police SP Amjad Hossain. Of them, 13 were shut yesterday.

During visits to Gachha, Board Bazar, Borobari, Tongi and Chandana Chowrasta along the Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway, this correspondent found no closure notices outside at least five factories, although residents said production had been suspended.

Our Narayanganj correspondent reports that workers at Metro Garments in Fatullah’s Ramarbagh stopped work around 11:00am on Monday after learning of the postponement.

Industrial Police-4 inspector Anwarul Haque said workers at Metro Knitting and Dyeing in Katharpul, Fatullah, also stopped work but remained inside the factory. A worker said operations had continued normally until news of the postponement, with no untoward incidents reported.

Security was tightened following last week’s protests, with seven platoons of BGB, Ansar Battalion, SRB and police personnel deployed, alongside increased surveillance and patrols.

Workers reported to factories as usual in Shibu Market, Katharpul, BSCIC Industrial Estate, Adamjee Export Processing Zone, Sonargaon, Rupganj and Bandar.

Police said no factory had announced a shutdown over the unrest. Industrial Police-4 SP Abdullah Al Mahmud said Narayanganj’s 1,680 garment factories employed around six lakh workers, with production generally normal except for the reported stoppages.

Murder suspect

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The additional SP said the mob attacked Mehdi following the killing of Swechchhasebak Dal activist Md Suruj Jaman, 35, who was stabbed by unidentified assailants near Barera Masjid Market on Sunday evening.

Quoting locals and family members, he said Jaman, of Madhya Barera, was riding his motorcycle from home when he slowed down near an intersection beside the market.

“Several assailants, including Mehdi, allegedly intercepted him. At one stage, they stabbed Jaman in the chest before fleeing,” he said.

Jaman was rushed to MMCH, where doctors declared him dead.

“The bodies have been sent to the hospital morgue for autopsies. Police operations are underway to identify and arrest those involved in the killings and determine the motive.

“No case has been filed, and no one has been detained over the incidents so far,” he added.

Additional police have been deployed in the area to prevent further violence.

50th death anniversary of Bhashani today

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include doa and milad mahfils, food distribution, and discussions on his life and contributions.

In a message marking the occasion, President Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday paid deep tribute to Bhashani, recalling his lifelong struggle against exploitation, deprivation, discrimination, and injustice.

The president described Bhashani as an unforgettable figure in the politics and liberation struggles of the subcontinent, saying he worked tirelessly to establish the rights of farmers, workers, and ordinary people.

His uncompromising struggle and deep compassion for the ordinary people earned him the title “Mazlum Jana Neta”, meaning the leader of the oppressed, the president said.

Recalling Bhashani’s contributions to the anti-colonial movement, peasant struggles, the Language Movement, the United Front election, and the movements for autonomy and independence, the president said his role remained an important part of the country’s history.

Bhashani was the founding president of the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League, established on June 23, 1949. He later founded the National Awami Party (NAP), also known as Bhashani NAP, on July 25, 1957.

The president also recalled that Bhashani first spoke about Bangladesh’s independence at the historic Kagmari Conference in 1957. During the 1971 Liberation War, he firmly supported Bangladesh’s independence and served as an adviser to the government-in-exile.

After independence, he remained active in various movements to protect national interests and people’s rights.

The president particularly highlighted the historic Farakka Long March in 1976, led by Bhashani to demand Bangladesh’s fair share of the Ganges waters, describing it as a courageous example of political and diplomatic wisdom in the struggle to secure the country’s rights.

He expressed hope that Bhashani’s ideals and work would continue to inspire the nation to uphold patriotism, social justice and the goal of building a democratic and discrimination-free society.

Born in 1880 in Dhangara village of Sirajganj, Bhashani dedicated his life to fighting for the rights of the oppressed and downtrodden.

He also played a significant role in the 1969 mass uprising against Ayub Khan’s autocratic rule.

His lifelong struggle against imperialism, exploitation, and injustice, and his commitment to the rights of ordinary people, made him one of the most memorable figures in Bangladesh’s political history.

Mexican journalist found dead in Acapulco

AFP, *Mexico City*

Prosecutors have opened an investigation into the death of journalist Eduardo Flores, a reporter for the outlet Enfoque Informativo who was found dead Saturday at an Acapulco resort.

Flores’ death marks the tenth death of a journalist this year in Mexico, one of the most dangerous places in the world for the profession.

Flores’ employer said in a statement that the attack “not only takes the life of a colleague, friend and valuable human being. It is also a direct assault on freedom of expression and on society’s right to be informed.”

“They will not silence us. We will continue to report with the same determination,” the publication added.