

Dhaka Day by Day

Pirouettes Enriched by Passion

by Fayza Haq

Veronique Azan recently gave a dance performance at "The American School" at Baridhara, Dhaka. When asked about what was the most important element that results in excellent performances of dancing explained, "It is a combination of various factors. Basically, as is well-known, one must be while one is still young — at least when one is about eight — as in my own case, when I learnt dancing while still at school. In classical dancing or music, I believe that a vital point is in it trained by a 'right teacher'. My own parents came to India from France to do a study of music, when I ventured into 'kathak' as a hobby. I studied in India and continued my pursuit of the dance, for which I have a passion, later on in life."

When asked to elaborate on "kathak" which is also well-known as a "kotha" dance all over the subcontinent, since the Moghul era, Veronique elaborated, "This attitude has changed since the last twenty years, as it has received patronage from important and intelligent people, who have brought it back to a *tres bien* standard, and accepted it as a classical form of dancing. Again there have been a number of dedicated artists who have contributed to its revival and given it the pedestal on which it now stands."

"Kathak" is appreciated world-wide as it is unique in many ways. It has a *magnifique* style of its own, such as the 'bol', which anyone finds unusual in any dance; the breath-taking pirouettes; the subtle and seductive movements which go back to the Moghul steps and its intricate rhythm. It is decisively an unusual blend of Hindu and Muslim cultures. Also, the *dansusee* has a total 'free-

hand' method of improvising within limited rhythmic cycle, and in the Abhinaya facial expressions," Veronique informed. "It is basically a devotional dance that originated in the temples that were erected along the River Ganges, and dealt with Hindu myths and legends," she added. "My 'guru', Birju Maharaj, taught at the Kathak Kendra in Delhi, and is one of the recent pioneers in my particular genre of dance. What one sees in commercial films, is, I believe, a diluted version of 'kathak', she added.

"I have been practising at least every day, over the last eighteen years" on my own. I put in more hours with the musicians that accompany me whether it be in India, Europe, Russia or Japan. I make an endeavour to keep the same group comprising Shaileendra Kumar, Rita Chatterjee, Fateh Singh Gangani and Kamal Ahmad," Veronique continued.

Commenting on the vital factors of any dance — whether it be western or eastern — Veronique said, "one must master the disciplines and study all the important factors going into the heart of each of them. Thus absolute dedication is required. One must concentrate and be single-minded in one's pursuit of the art of mastering the infrastructure of a dance. One must have a passion for it. One cannot do it if one's only aim is to be a good dancer."

Asked as to what she did besides practising and performing, Veronique explained patiently,

in her soft, caressing and lilting voice, "I look through new compositions, arranging them for the future performances that I have in mind. I specialise in 'kathak' and do not verge into any other genre of dancing."

Commenting on where she thought that "kathak" was performed best, Veronique said, "I believe that it is in northern India. However, it is also well performed in other parts of the Subcontinent, if the dancers have been taught by a good teacher, who has guided and trained them sufficiently to come up to a high standard. 'Kathak' originates from northern India, but it is not limited to that area alone."

Speaking of the other members of her troupe Veronique continued, "I have chosen them as I believe that they surpass any other musicians who excel in the playing of musical instruments such as the flute, the 'tabla' and 'sarengi'. I believe that the result of a musical performance such as ours is through united efforts of each individual musician. Each musician should be of an excellent calibre. As 'kathak' most often involves improvisation, so there is the necessity for perfect rapport between the dancer and the accompanying musicians."

Continuing to elaborate on her work she said, "Experiment but I do not compose myself. As a dancer one matures with regular performances and one's horizons broaden. One also gathers knowledge on an art, such as 'kathak', by observation. My own performances over a year may differ. I believe that if an artiste pursues his or her goal devotedly the performance can only improve with time and practice."

Recalling her favourite composers Veronique said, without any hesitation, "I am fond of my own 'guru', Bhim Sen Joshi, and most other composers of classical music of both the east and west — as they inspire one to improve oneself. Musicians and dancers sacrifice everything to achieve excellence in their own particular field. The way to succeed in music and dancing, as I said earlier, is by being passionate about the art. One must be totally involved in it."

Asked to comment on her experiences of her various performances which include the ones held at numerous countries, the gorgeous blonde dancer continued, "Each performance is a new experience as each country differs from the other."

For instance an Indian audience would understand 'kathak' better, I believe. The audiences overseas are obviously ones who are interested in Indian culture. My performances last from an hour to an hour and a half. Every time I go to a new place to perform, I feel I have discovered new people who share my love for 'kathak'. Moreover, I enjoy travelling, which is an integral part of visiting cultural troupes. I believe the role of promoting and propagating culture is something that cannot be undermined, as in this manner cultural barriers are broken. One opens up and learns new aspects of life. I myself feel that I am representing Indian culture overseas although I am of French origin."



Veronique Azan



Noted economist Rehman Sobhan (R) addressing a day-long dialogue on 'reforming public administration for improved performance and accountability' at city's Sonargaon Hotel yesterday. The Centre for Policy Dialogue organised the programme. — Star photo

Autonomy in administration underscored

By Staff Correspondent

A policy dialogue on "Reforming Public Administration for Improved Performance and Accountability" was held yesterday by the Centre for Policy Dialogue with the participation of policy makers, Members of Parliament, professionals and other interested parties.

The topic is of vital national importance because of the present inefficiency of the civil service and public administration in Bangladesh.

The first session, moderated by Prof Rehman Sobhan, opened with general comments on improving administrative efficiency. Dr ATR Rahman, a United Nations official from New York, called for "strong political leadership, civil service and administrative

autonomy and close collaboration with the private sector," citing Britain and Japan as examples.

There was unanimous consent that delivery of services in sectors such as security, health and education has deteriorated to an unacceptable level. Reasons for this were given by Peter J Fowler, the British High Commissioner in Dhaka, as "rot from the top, of previous regimes," and "the relatively uneducated (general public) who are unable to apply pressure from below."

Khushi Kabir, an NGO representative from the Nijera Kori, said the general public are alienated from the service sector.

The framework of colonial bureaucracy, overly long deliberation and decision processes, and widespread corruption were agreed upon by all as being the major obstacles to effective service delivery and implementation of government policy.

AMA Muhih, a former finance minister, strongly advocated for "a massive contraction of central government and the devolution of service delivery to local government."

Policy clarification and awareness of the needs of the people in terms of public service were also suggested for

administrative reform, as was simultaneous political reform.

The matter of corruption was in the second half of the session. Prof Nurul Islam, former deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, stressed the need for "authority in accordance with the law. According to Nefaur, Rahman, "orders are given by officials regardless of their regularity or irregularity." He further pointed to the lack of adequate resource-management.

Lack of accountability of higher levels was highlighted by Shawkat Ali, MP. He was critical of the parliamentary committees as being casual and inefficient with respect to their investigative function.

The political neutrality of civil servants, adequate training, legitimate incentives and the proper designation of responsibility were suggested as further measures for combating corruption.

Other speakers included Rashed Khan Menon, MP, Zeaur Rahman Khan, SAMS Kibria, Awami League advisory council member, Mujibur Haq, former secretary, Dr Maqsood Ali, former member, Planning Commission, M Muniruzzaman, former secretary, and SH Kabir, former president, MCCI.

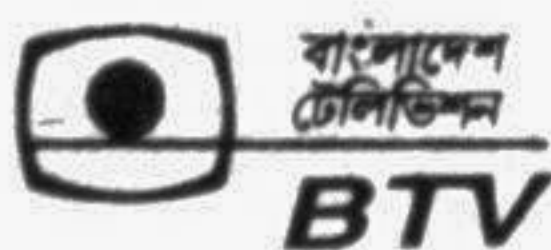
Tk 10 Prize Bonds draw results

The 119th draw of the Tk 10 Prize Bonds was held at Bogra on December 15, says a press release.

The following number-holders were declared as the winners of the draw:

First prize of Taka 50,000/00... 445271
Second prize of Taka 10,000/00... 065591
Four prizes of Taka 1,000/00 each 094189, 129496, 254382, 412013.
Four prizes of Taka 500/00 each 040138, 068279, 198056, 219726.
Ninety prizes of Taka 100/00 each:

- 004421 265642
- 010760 274790
- 012431 278170
- 030684 289134
- 030871 293957
- 030940 303266
- 036441 307306
- 036692 311741
- 042362 313689
- 050614 3071
- 061523 313075
- 071984 328514
- 081415 328675
- 085650 333921
- 091388 341383
- 099996 351192
- 115371 354924
- 127910 356457
- 127973 357238
- 147134 370625
- 149944 375201
- 150299 384377
- 165376 387323
- 165648 393353
- 177169 400709
- 179554 401289
- 186401 405883
- 188337 414509
- 190035 416923
- 191846 417444
- 196870 423019
- 200989 430485
- 201499 437007
- 215529 440057
- 217806 444563
- 219801 446625
- 224239 460549
- 227572 479298
- 238524 479764
- 243462 480883
- 244615 480922
- 250965 495571
- 251915 496818
- 261874 497740
- 263241 499793



Thursday

- 4:30 Opening announcement
- 4:45 Esho Osman Shikhi
- 5:10 News in Bangla
- 5:25 National TV School Debate Competition
- 7:25 Nazrul songs
- 8:00 News in Bangla
- 8:30 Weekly drama: Aar Kato Dur
- 10:00 News in English
- 10:30 Film show The Equaliser/Marco Polo
- 11:30 Khabar / The News
- 11:40 Closing

Prize-giving ceremony

By Staff Correspondent

Jute Minister ASM Hannan Shah Tuesday stressed on building the children as patriotic citizens of the country.

He was addressing as chief guest on the annual prize-giving ceremony of the Willes Little Flower School in the city.

The function, chaired by Alhaj Syed Mohammad Hedayetul Islam, chairman of the managing committee of the school, was also addressed by Syed Shawkat Anwar and Mohammad Shah Alam, headmaster of the school.

The chief guest distributed prizes among the meritorious students of the school for the sessions 1993 and 1994.

BRTC profits Tk 1.61 crore

Bangladesh Road and Transport Corporation (BRTC) earned an operating profit of Tk 1.61 crore during the last six months of the current year against the operating loss of Tk 1.81 crore of the corresponding period in the last year, reports UNB.

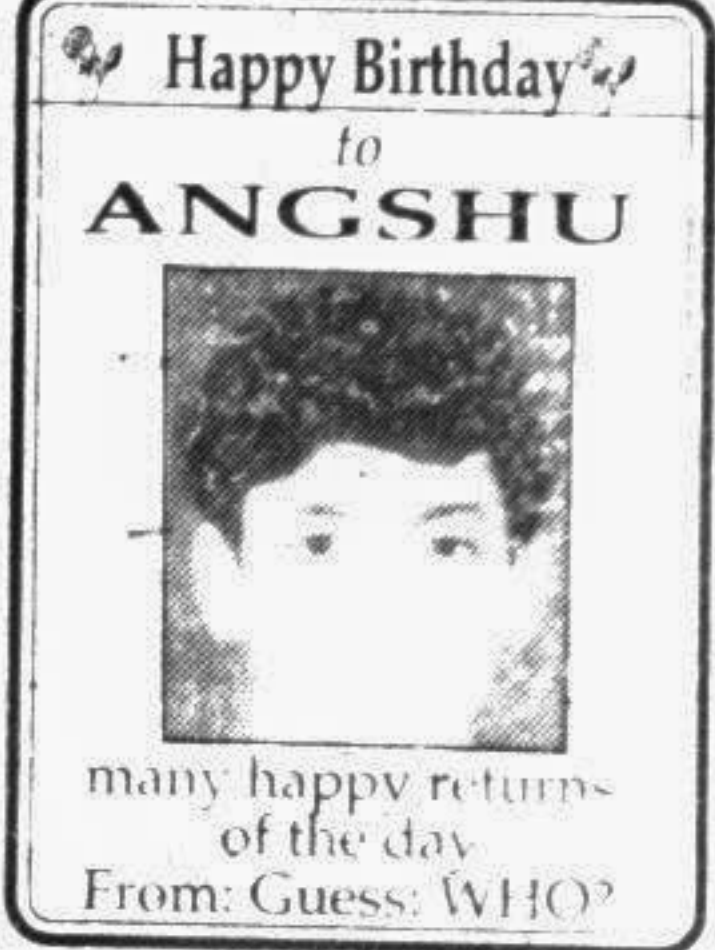
This was revealed at the 209th meeting of the Board of Directors held yesterday with its Chairman AR Khan in the chair.

Oxford College founding anniversary

Education Minister Jamiruddin Sircar said, English has been made compulsory from class I to degree level education from the current year, reports UNB.

Teaching and learning of English is an imperative for easy communication with the people of other countries of the world, the minister said while speaking as chief guest at the first founding anniversary of Oxford College in the city yesterday.

Happy Birthday Naya!!!
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Eye!!



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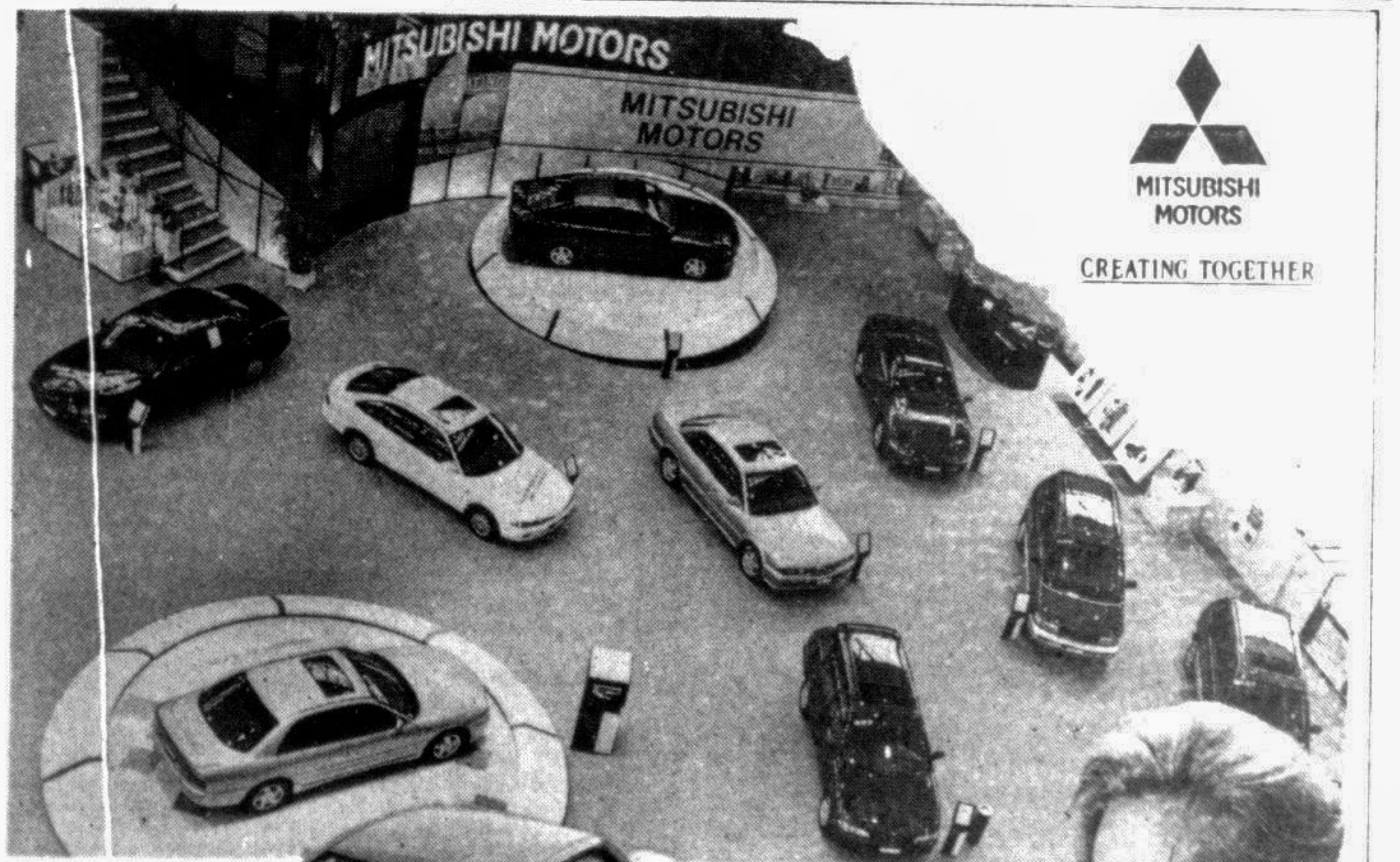
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