

# The World is Blue and Bright: A Swiss Influence

by Gemini Wahhaj

SHAHLA Vinita Karim's paintings are like Christmas cards. The Festival, for example, is an outburst of bright colours and merry details against a dark blue Christmassy night background. An orange moon tops the scenery of red and yellow mountains, multi-coloured hills, cartoonish roof-topped houses, equally high trees and sunflowers, and in the foreground, two boats (Noah's Arks?) crowded with animals. A hot air balloon carries the scene's festive message high up into the air. It's a very celebratory picture.

Most of Shahla's sceneries are painted against a bluish-purple background, bursting into an explosion of bright colours in the foreground. Shahla also likes animals. There seems to be an underlying theme in all these pictures, I say. "I think there is too much harshness, too much war in the world," says Shahla. Therefore she concentrates on what gives her pleasure — the animals, bright coloured mountains and blue, blue rivers. It is almost as if the artist has created her own world in her works.

The paintings might look very similar at first sight. The Reunion, the Festival, and the Journey show the same general scene. But while the Festival focuses on the gaiety of the occasion, the Journey gives a new twist to the same general scene by means of a single long winding plant that disappears into the distant sky, and the Reunion centers around two intertwined reeds, and animals — elephants, reindeer, giraffes and fish — coming together.

Vinita was born in Burma and educated in Sweden.

where she also attended two years of fine arts studies at the Gerlesborg Art School in Stockholm. Married to her Bangladeshi husband Shahla now lives and paints in Switzerland. The mountains, elks and hot air balloons (a favourite pastime in the country) are all part of the Swiss influence.

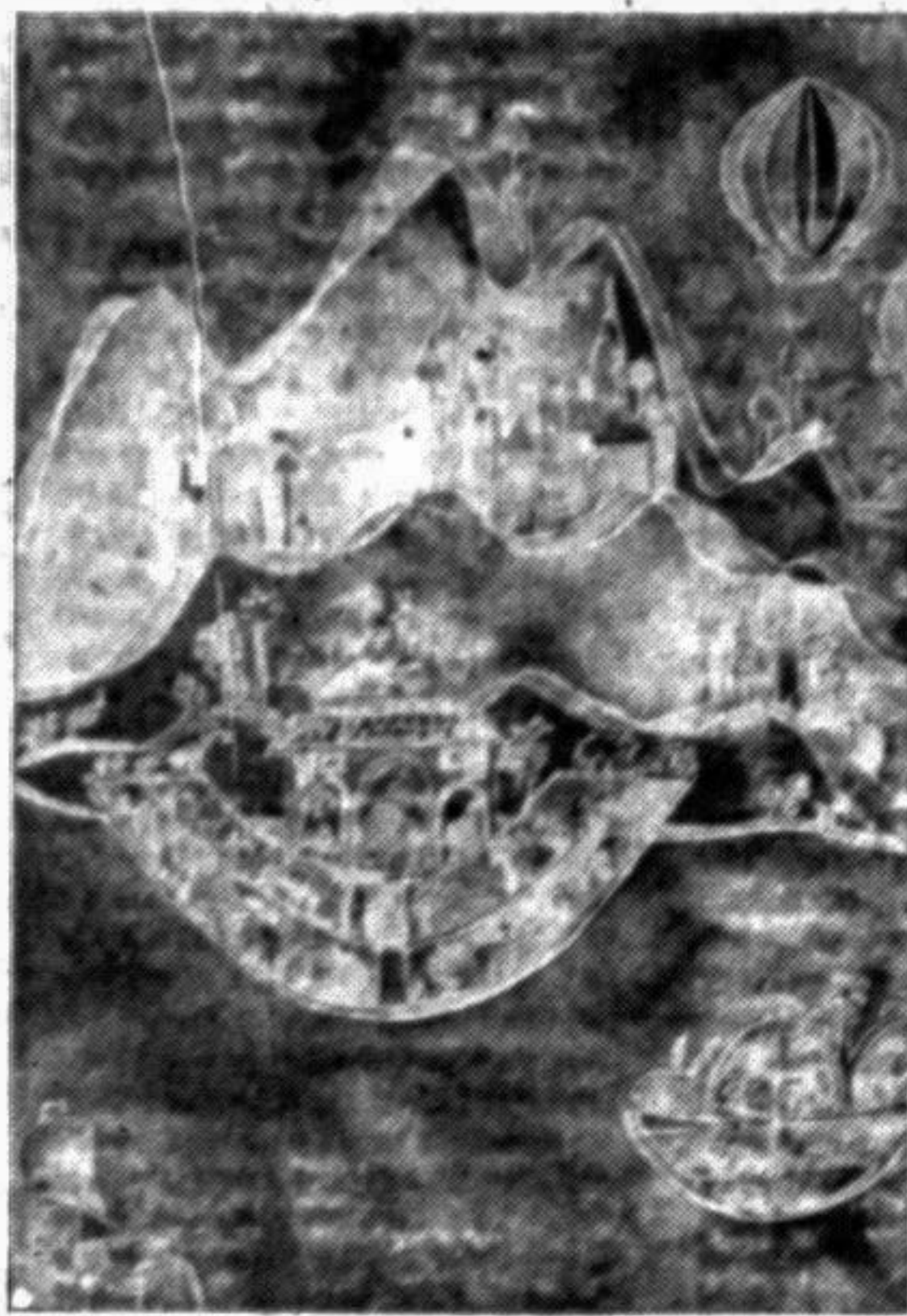
But Europeans find a distinct Indianism in Vinita's paintings, as depicted by the tiny Moghul-like drawing of animals in the Festival. The mountains in the same painting, however, suggest Naive Art.

Vinita started painting as a child. At the art school in Stockholm, she learned the techniques and tools that would equip her to paint what ever she liked. But the two years of formal art training also destroyed much of her creativity. When she began to paint freely again, she drew the Alpine mountains of Switzerland and lots of flowers.

"But people told me, I had something special in my paintings that I should pursue," said Vinita. This is when she started painting in her own unique style.

Vinita paints at night, when her children are asleep. "One is more creative at night," she says. She paints in water colours. "When I first started painting," she says, "I used to do oil paintings. But oil is too heavy, thick. Water colours, on the other hand, are light and airy. It takes the artist 10-14 days to finish a piece."

Vinita exhibited 28 of her paintings in Dhaka. "Were you well received?" I asked. "Yes," the artist said with a laugh. "People bought them, which is the best compliment they can pay you."



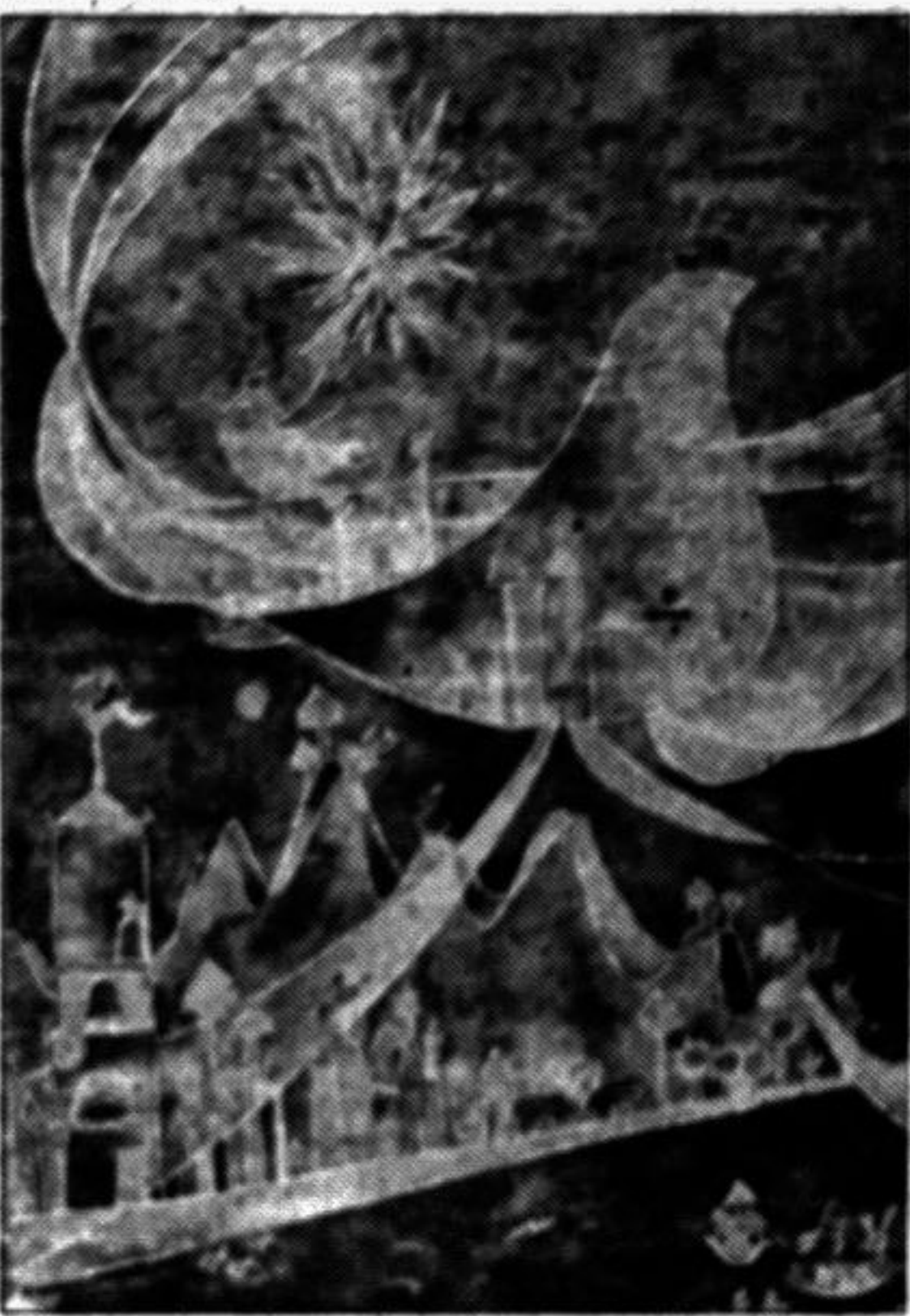
The Festival



The Journey



The Reunion



The Song of the Nightingale

## London Film Festival

# Jesus '71: A Solitary Movie from Bangladesh

by Aminul Haq Badsha

BRETT, Ratan and I were discussing about the London Film Festival. I had only seen six of the films so far and Shahla's 'Bandit Queen' had appeared to me strongly. Now I was eager to see some more. When I suggested that we visit the National Film Theatre, Brett and Ratan readily agreed. A good film would dispel the fatigue of a hard day's work, we thought.

Brett was my colleague at work. He was an archaeologist and had worked on the ruins of Mohenjodaro of Pakistan. He had worked in the historical sites of the Ajantha-Ilora civilisations in India. He had carried out excavations in Egypt. From a middle-class English background, Brett was quite knowledgeable about Asian culture and civilisation. He even understood a smattering of Urdu, Hindi and even Bengali. He had been working at the British Museum but was not very happy there and had finally ended up at Tower Hamlets, working in the administration.

As for Ratan, he was a Bangladeshi young man on one of his frequent trips to London. He was working as the media manager for an advertising firm in Bangladesh. A progressive chap, somewhat of a 'culture-vulture', too. He was quite a film-watcher, that is, if the films were worth watching. Ratan was a rather taciturn fellow, preferring to listen rather than to speak.

Anyway, we set off to London's National Film Theatre. The continuous drizzle was reminiscent of the monsoon weather back in Bangladesh. We drove past the

Tower Bridge, along the Thames towards the parliament house. The small hand of Big Ben near six. We crossed over Westminster Bridge and turned left at the roundabout. The former GLC building rose majestically before us. GLC was the Greater London Council. It's a shame that GLC doesn't exist anymore. This had at one time been the centre of cultural activities, particularly for the ethnic minority. All sorts of festivals and functions had been held there. It had been run by the Labour Party government. It had extended all sorts of help to the common people whether for employment, education, transport or whatever. Labour's Ken Livingstone had been GLC's head then. But once the Conservative Margaret Thatcher came to power she readily did away with the Council, despite much public protest. A Japanese entrepreneur owns the building now and is supposed to convert it into a hotel soon.

NFT, the National Film Theatre, is adjacent to the GLC building. When we finally reached the theatre, it was still drizzling. As we entered, I noticed a young couple locked in passionate embrace, oblivious of the rain. Rain never affects romance, no matter where you may be in the world! Brett was quite interested in Bengali culture. He was eager to see a Bengali film having only read a few English translations of Bengali books himself. I was apologetic because Bengali films hardly ever found place in this festival though a feature film had been chosen from Bangladesh this time — 'Jesus '71'. The film had been

made in 1983. This film of one hour and forty minutes was directed by Nasiruddin Yusuf, popularly known to his friends as Bacchu. A polite, modest, well-spoken man, Bacchu had been a freedom fighter during our liberation struggle. He was born in 1950 and had done his MA in Journalism from Dhaka University in 1972.

'Jesus '71' was a film on the Liberation War of Bangladesh, with particular focus on the bloody atrocities of the Pakistan occupational forces. The heroic sacrifices made by the freedom fighters were also highlighted in the film. Unfortunately, the film had already been exhibited towards the beginning of the festival, so we didn't get to see it.

Nasiruddin Yusuf had centred the film on a simple theme to depict the religious hypocrisy of the Pakistan army, how they committed genocide in the name of religion. I asked him, "Why didn't you focus on the fundamentalists of today if you want to expose them, rather than use Jesus as a symbol?" He replied, "The way things are in Bangladesh, these religion-mongers are the ones who hold all the power. They are protected by the government. I had such problems getting this film released as it is. If I had targeted them directly, the film would not have been released at all!"

The first film by a Bangladeshi director to be shown at a London Film Festival was in 1986. The film was written and directed by a Sylhet youth living in London, Rahul Amin. But all the technicians were from Britain. The

film had been named A Kind of English. He had made it for Channel Four television. This wasn't his first film. He had made several documentaries before this and had been praised highly by the British press. Unfortunately, the Bengali community has failed to give him any sort of recognition. Not that this bothers him. "So what?" is his reaction. Meanwhile, Rahul Amin is carving a niche for himself in the world of television and films out there. I was fortunate to have been able to act in the title role in A Kind of English.

No Bengali film came to the festival from India this year. Last year a single film of Mrinal Sen was exhibited. After the death of the film-genius Satyajit Ray, Indian Bengali films no longer poured into London's film festival. Ray was one of the very few who managed to uphold the Bengali culture, literature and tradition to the rest of the world. His film 'Pather Panchali', a piece of art in itself, most poignantly drew the attention of the world and immortalised Ray. The film is included in one of the film courses at international universities and institutions. Ray received the Academy Award in 1952. While in a Calcutta hospital, he was awarded the highest civil award of France, the Legion of Honour, by the French President Mitterrand. He won many, many other awards during his 37-year career in which he produced 27 feature films, quite a few documentaries and a few television films as well. Last year's London Film Festival was dedicated to Satyajit Ray, the first time any Bengali film-maker was thus honoured.

This time the film festival, the 38th London Film Festival, began on November 3 and ended on November 20. Films came from America, China, France, Britain, Algeria, Iran, Vietnam and so many more places. Four hundred films were exhibited in all. For the first time a film from Bangladesh found place in the festival. India had 37 films, none of them Bengali. The Indian film, 'Bandit Queen' attracted crowds. The film is based on the life of the Indian bandit queen Phulan Devi. She had been quite a figure in the Western media. So, the film on her life drew quite a lot of attention.

Sheila Whittaker is the director of the London Film Festival. She has been responsible for the success/failure of the festival over the years. The festival was sponsored this time by American Airlines, Evening Standard, The Guardian, Channel 4, Time Out and 20 other sponsors.

I asked one of the officials of the Festival why Bangladeshi films weren't shown. He replied that films of good

standard weren't available otherwise these would surely be given place in the Festival. It is sad that we don't produce films good enough for such exposure. After Zahir Raihan was killed a tremendous vacuum was created in our film industry. Even Alangir Kabir is no more. He was full of ideas for good films. Persons involved in the film industry today, rising actors and actresses, directors and others, feel that good films can be made if the government was willing to finance these. Most persons are unwilling to invest in good films as these are not commercially viable.

There are certainly several directors in Bangladesh quite capable of making films of international standard. But there is a lack of financiers. With a little boost from the government, these film-makers could produce wonders. Then persons like my friend Brett would be able to get to know a little bit more about us, about our culture.

The writer is a London-based syndicated columnist.

## TELEVISION

# The Crystal Maze

FOR two weeks now, BTV has been offering its weekend morning audience a new movie serial — The Crystal Maze.

Based on the original idea by Jacques Antoine with whom Chatsworth Television has a long established working relationship, The Crystal Maze is reported to be the most innovative adventure entertainment show on British television.

The Crystal Maze is a self-contained world divided into four distinct zones — Medieval, Futuristic, Aztec and Ocean (this last zone replaced the Industrial zone appearing in the first three series). In each zone there are six chambers of varying dimensions and within each chamber is a game.

The object of The Crystal Maze is for a team of six people, with different skills and talents, to attempt and win as many games as possible.

Each game successfully completed, within the individual game time period, will result in the winning of a Crystal.

Each crystal represents a time period of five seconds — the total number of crystals gained totalling the amount of time the team has to enter and spend within the Dome.

The Dome is at the centre of The Crystal Maze and contains the prizes. These are represented by gold tokens mixed among silver tokens that swirl around inside the Dome.

The presenter, who is also the team guide in The Crystal Maze, is introduced to us at the beginning of the programme at the Dome. He explains the game and introduces the competing team. He then reveals to us which of the four zones — Medieval, Futuristic, Aztec or Ocean — the team has elected to start from. He meets them in person at the entrance of the chosen zone and explains that as a team they have only ten minutes to enter and attempt as many games as possible. When this ten minute period is up they must move on to the next zone.

The zone entrance is guarded by an obstacle. Once inside the zone, the team is confronted by six chambers each containing a game with its own specific time period — 1.00, 1.30, 2.00, 2.30, or 3.00.

The games are also divided into categories — Physical, Skill, Mental and Mystery. The presenter knows which games are in which chambers and the time period allowed for each — the team does not.

The captain must first select a game category and a team member to attempt the game. Having done so the presenter takes them to the chamber, starts the individual Chamber Clock and allows the player to enter.

If the player is successful a Crystal will be won — the player literally collects it and exits with it. If the player is unsuccessful no crystal is won — and if the player is unsuccessful and fails to exit the chamber within the game time period he/she will be locked in.

If a team member is locked in, the captain can do one of three things: (a) Immediately

buy the team member back at the cost of one crystal; (b) Defer the decision until later in the game; (c) Leave the team member locked in indefinitely.

If the decision is (b) another team member must find his/her way back through the Maze and release the captive during the game playing time.

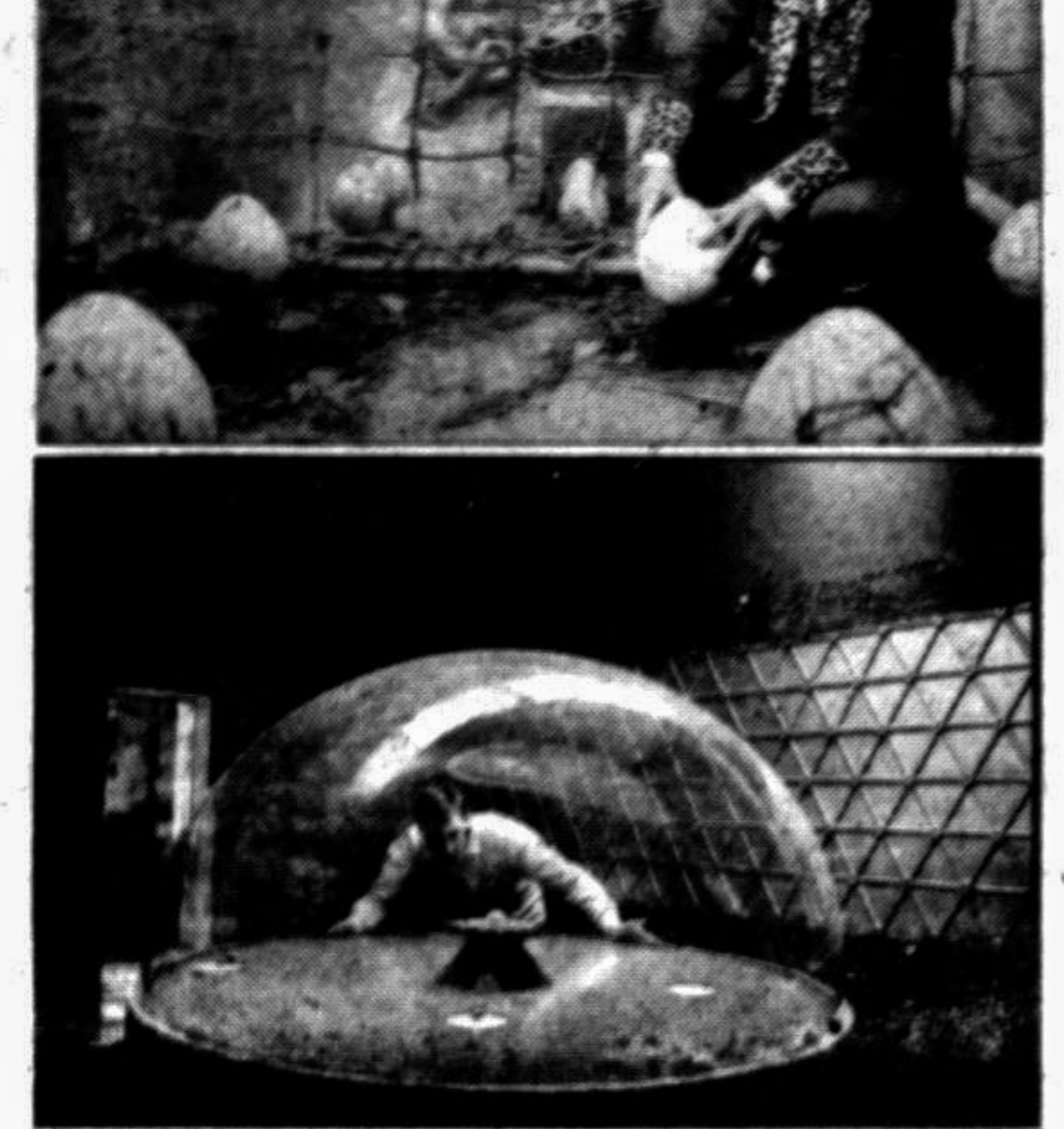
Once the ten minutes have elapsed in a zone, the team must move to the next. Each zone is screened off from its neighbour, there is only one route of access and this will be guarded by an obstacle.

The ten minutes allowed in the next zone will begin when the team starts to negotiate this protecting obstacle. Once across, they continue as described until finally and on completion of the final zone.

The presenter counts the number of crystals the team has won, converts this to seconds, and allows the team across the bridge into the Dome. The clock starts and the team (however many are left) must catch and retain as many tokens as possible and exit the Dome within the calculated time period.

Finally, after collecting all the tokens from the team and deducting the silver tokens from the gold, the presenter announces whether the team has won the prize.

E/P No 3 will be shown on BTV today (Friday) at 9.05 am.



## Viewing Video

by Lenin Gani

ON a scale of one to ten Dumb & Dumber would not score a high rating. Okay, it combines the charisma of Jim Carrey, star of Mask and Ace Ventura with Jeff Daniels, but barring a few typical Carrey quips, the film falls woefully short of expectations.

Briefly, the story goes: Carrey and Daniels are a pair of imbeciles whose lives have been nothing but a sad joke.

The two regarded as misfits by the society for their outrageous behaviour and sometimes repugnant mannerisms decide to return a briefcase to woman after Carrey witnesses what he thinks is a crime being committed. In fact, the woman (seen on the TV series Pickin' Fences) was delivering ransom money for the abductors of her husband.

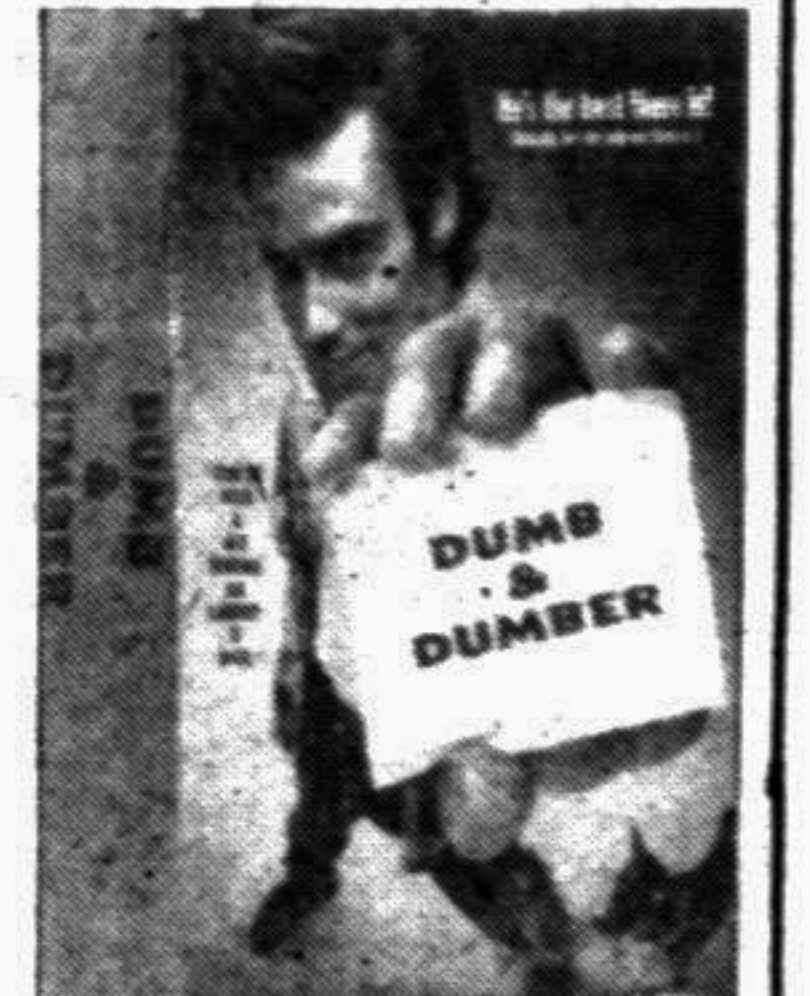
After travelling a great distance and having a few close calls on the way, they finally reach their port of call.

During the whole time the case is not opened. That is,

until they have a brief tiff. When it is unlocked they are awestruck.

Suddenly, life has a completely new meaning. To celebrate their good fortune they buy clothes. Next they try to see who can win the dapsel in distress.

Unfortunately they learn she is already married and leave empty-handed but still best of friends.



## A Shopping List

Continued from page 11

Dhaka metropolis (aerobics and slimming projects); dacoity (bust the boom); decentralization exercises (too complex); dehydration (political, study); Environmental studies (atmosphere, political, civil service, academic); Efficiency (examine in all sectors, including political); 'Empowerment' (delegate); Fertilizer (encourage inorganic production); discourage human); Farakka (separate issues and non-issues; act on former); Food (match growth rate will that of the population); Ghorasal (more than one problem); the gyroscopic effect in political stability (how to attain); goondalsm (1995 fashion trends); geriatrics (national welfare).

Under 'H', national debate on Hartals. A white (or coloured) paper on Hartals may be produced for worldwide circulation (and sale) — how to employ this powerful weapon in other countries.

Industrialisation (mass recycling/disposal of garbage); Internal security measures (curb foreign treatment/migration); infrastructural studies (political fractures: first, second, and third — aid methods); implementation of projects (distribution of field manuals — a sore issue with the donor agencies); Individual styles in politics (study of); Jute (manufacture of umbrella cloth); jetties (design of floating, mobile models for quick shifting). A few sessions on Jamdani (no models); the future of jagirdars, and export possibilities of jack fruit/jute. Kapital (more power);

kabaddi (plan for possible Olympic title); krishnachura (export). Longevity studies (include average life of each Parliament); Lashkars (better working conditions, international maritime contracts).

Moderation — guiding principles, for balancing. Mechanically propelled vehicles (land and water) — safety rules. Muslin (re-export). Narcotics (use the anti-smoking squad). Oil (profit diversification policy). Petroleum (derivative policy). Price de-control mechanisms (Opposition contribution). Quick disposal and dispersal programmes (including hartals).

Railway (red to black; Jamuna track width, decide). Rationalization of allotment procedures (all sectors excluding nepotism). Study of System Loss in political activities (the other sectors are going steady). Traffic congestion (issue of bicycles to the staff, and sharing of private cars). Transparency (in political intercourse). Tolerance factor of Bangladeshi (define).

Unity (national theme on: concurrence). Verification of Identity Cards. Wild life preservation (in the cities). X-ray machines: local assembly/production, for the rural health scheme; and development of a special model for X-raying politicians. Youth (re-orientation; 5-Year Project). Zirconium (extraction); zero-growth sectors (identify; encourage or discourage, as necessary).

There are too many issues for our hard working MPs. For rest and recreation, perhaps some hartal days may be approved by the Parliament.

## Touching the Hearts of the Listeners

TARGET TOUCH is a relatively newcomer in the arena of band music in Bangladesh. This group was initiated in August, 1991. In the beginning of its journey, this band faced a great challenge with its limited resources — manpower and instrument wise. With the band leader Mintu and the band manager and drummer Palash, it made its shy appearance in the world of music.

As the band members put it, the name of the band — Target Touch — is self-explanatory. It has, therefore, been the sole objective of the band from its very inception to touch the hearts of its target listeners — the common people. This group, like most other band groups, is not limited to performing in Dhaka alone. It has performed in many places outside Dhaka and even in foreign lands where it has been highly praised.

Recently it has brought out its audio cassette 'Ochena Yuvak' (Unknown Youth) which has been very enthusiastically received by the listeners of band music. The songs in this collection has dealt with a wide range of subjects — from love to politics. Its major emphasis has been laid on the frustrations of youth in a turbulent social and political situation. So, the theme of the songs carried in this audio collection is very much conscious of the social evils that play-havoc with a youth's life in our country.

The leader of this band is Mintu, assisted by manager/drummer Palash, key-board/vocal Fayez, Munna, lead guitarist Parvez, vocal/base Raju and Jashim in guitar.

ASIA VOICE Presents

# TARGET TOUCH

অচেনা যুবক