

# The Daily Star WEEKEND MAGAZINE

Dhaka Friday, January 26, 1996



Stills and poster (far right) of Muktir Gaan



## Muktir Gaan — Song of Freedom

**Muktir Gaan** was launched on December 1, 1995 and has since been screened before a full house at the Public Library auditorium and other venues three to four times everyday. **Mogsoodul Haque** narrates how the film came to be made.

**TAREQUE** Masud was a friend of mine when we were students at Notre Dame College. By some strange quirk of fate, which not even the best Hindi film maker with over heated imagination could have conjured as a part of a plot, Tareque Masud, the Director, bumped into Catherine Shapere, an

American visiting Bangladesh, fell madly in love, married, and soon moved off to the USA. I did not hear from them until 1989. I had no mailing address and even if there was one, Tareque was never a letter writer! When I caught up with them in Dhaka in 1992, they had bizarre information to share with me. Tareque's elder cousin Benu Bhai had often referred to an American film maker Lear Levin who travelled with the cultural troupe that he led during the entire duration of the Liberation war. Benu Bhai believed that if there was any way Levin could be tracked down, one might discover a Pandora's box of authentic Liberation War footage. Tariq Ali - a comrade of Benu Bhai in 1971, was then living in New Jersey, again by some coinci-

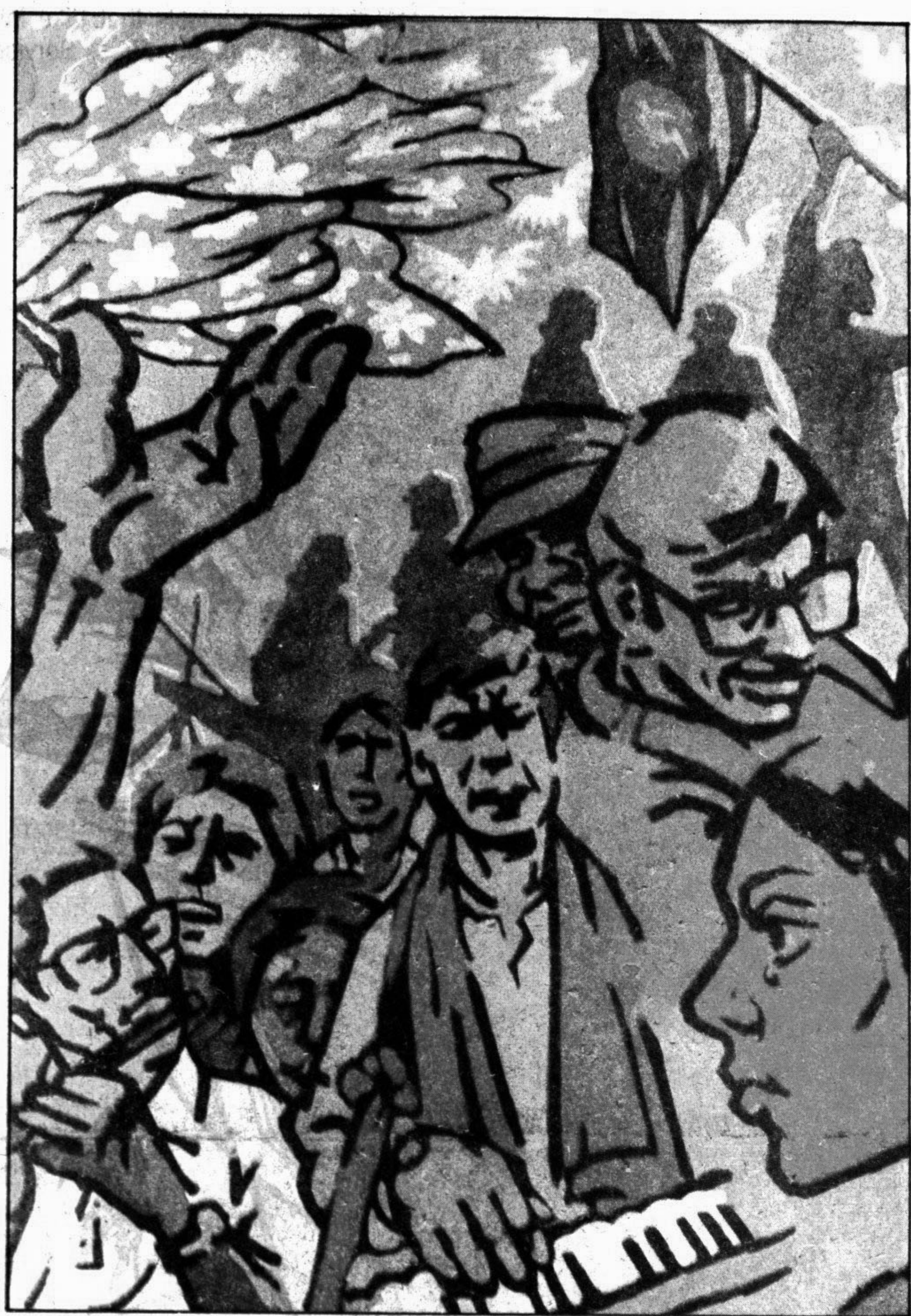
dence, just 10 minutes away from Catherine's brothers place. Tareque and Catherine were invited to Tariq Ali's place for lunch one day and in one emotional moment (Tariq Ali) pleaded with Catherine and Tareque knowing that they were film makers, to try and track down Lear Levin. Catherine, being the go-getter, took very little time to achieve this. The telephone directory was her only point of reference. Lear Levin was there - bang in front - the slickest of slick New York advertising film maker. And sure enough he had over 22 hours of footage of the Liberation war, and it was the same footage that Benu and Tariq Ali were referring to, still preserved in the basement - temperature controlled in mint condition!

Lear Levin having finished school, spent US \$ 50,000, a whole lot of money in 1971, got his wife pregnant, and was on the way to film a Revolution in what was geographically East Pakistan. Most of his money was spent, buying top line cameras and 35 mm celluloid. He also assembled an all-American crew of six, three men and three women! They had the best team and essentially the best equipment in the world then to film a Revolution. Levin teamed up with Benu and his group - officially the Bangladesh Mukti Shangkami Shilpi Shangkami - meaning Free Bangladesh Organisation of Cultural Activists - and shooting commenced.

This is the background to the movie *Muktir Gaan* - that everybody ought to go and have a look. It is a musical. An 80-minute capsule to let you know, all that you need to know about the spirit behind our War of Independence and the birth of our nation. The characters portrayed in the movie were not acting. They were being captured on celluloid wherever work carried them. Work for them meant traveling on this little truck that have JOY BANGLA and Long Live Bangladesh written in English. The name of Bangladesh, Mukti Shangkami Shilpi Shangkami with its banner was always there. It was a mobile stage that held impromptu concerts and went from refugee camps, to make-shift hospitals as well as the guerrilla camps where the Mukti Bahini trained. Those guns and mortars that you will hear exploding, those determined fighters for

Independence were not like in the movies. They were REAL and were being filmed LIVE! This was before the video age when moving about with cameras and equipment was as daunting a task as going on a mountainous expedition - and these guys were filming a Revolution. What is interesting was that Lear Levin and his crew were from the United States of America a country that was supporting Pakistan! The hero is Mahmoodur Rahman (Benu), who now lives in the UK, having failed to obtain his Phd degree in Statistics, mainly because of his obsession with Indian classical music. During the war of Liberation, he was a music teacher - a guru for the young in those days -

Continued on page 11



cinema

## 53rd Golden Globe Awards

**SENSE and Sensibility**, Emma Thompson's adaptation of the 19th-century Jane Austen novel, won best dramatic picture honours at Sunday night's Golden Globes.

Nicolas Cage, the death-wish alcoholic of *Leaving Las Vegas*, and Sharon Stone, the treacherous wife in *Casino*, won best dramatic acting awards.

"And no one is more surprised than me. OK!" Stone said. "OK, it's a miracle."

Cage won his Golden Globe for another story about love and loss in *Las Vegas*. "For me, it's a storybook dream come true," Cage said. In an interview later Cage

told Dick Clark what attracted him to the film: "I thought it's the most non-judgmental love story I had ever read. And I think it's bit-sweet and not totally tragic."

A movie about a talking pig

called *Babe* won best picture honours for comedy or musical. Its producer, George Miller, accepted the honour for his animal cast and 400 crew members, declaring, "A lot of people helped bring this little pig to life, including Universal, who said, 'A talking pig? Sure, why not?'"

Miller concluded his remarks by putting a toy pig snout. Mel Gibson won best director honours for his Scottish independence epic

*Braveheart* and John Travolta and Nicole Kidman won Globes for acting in a comedy or musical. In his acceptance speech, Gibson said: "I didn't expect to get this."

Many in the audience

were also surprised because of an expected swell of support for Ron Howard of *Apollo 13* and Ang Lee of *Sense and Sensibility*, who were considered favourites. Howard's film as well as Rob Reiner's *The American*

*President*, which garnered five nominations, did not receive any awards.

"At the risk of sounding cliched, 'Look at me, I'm the one telling you that I won the Golden Globe,'" Travolta said, reprising his buzz phrase from *Get Shorty*, the comedy about gangsters in Hollywood. Travolta, who ended a long career drought last year with *Pulp Fiction*, — com-

Continued on page 11



Nicolas Cage : Best Actor (Drama)



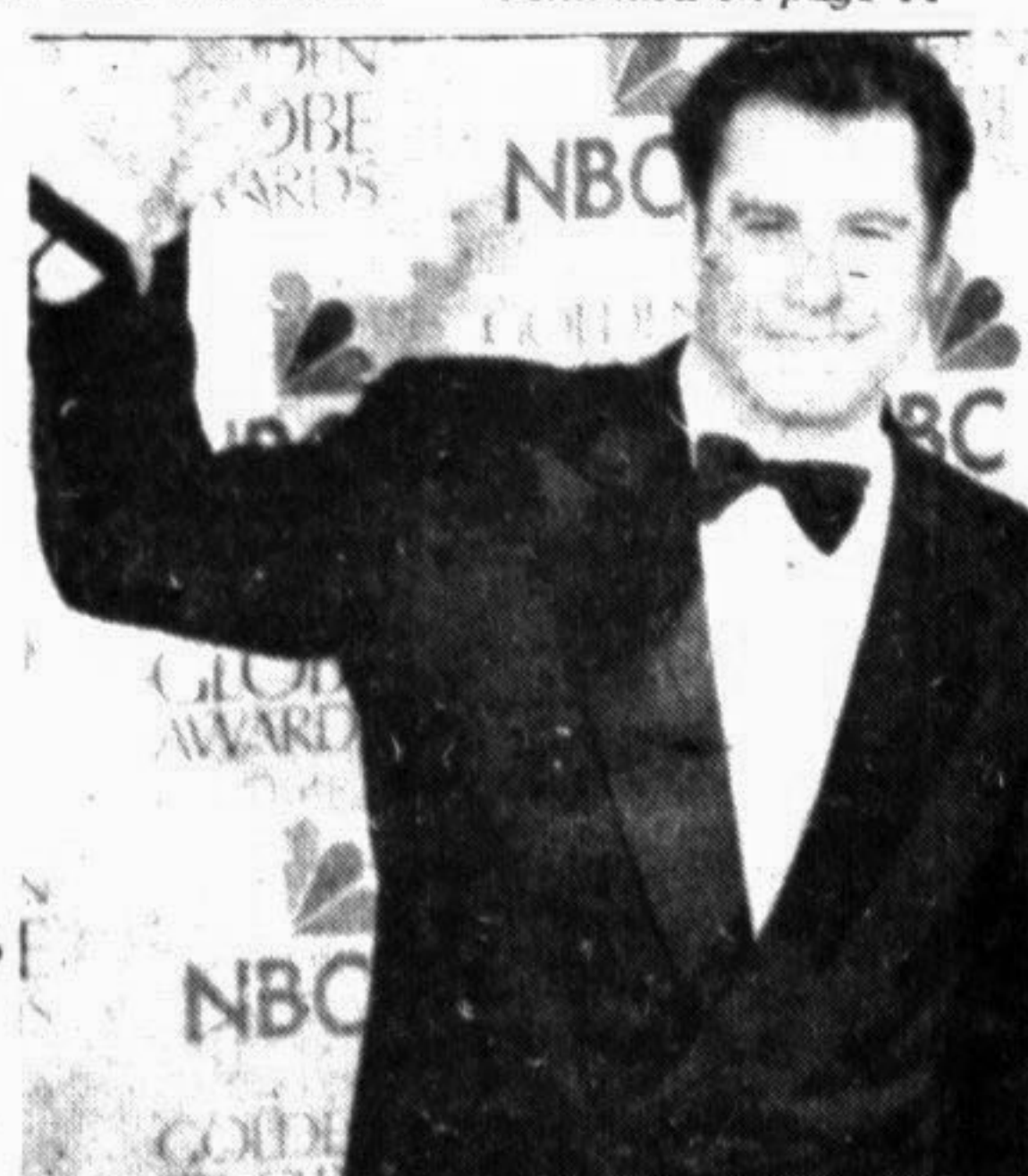
Sharon Stone : Best Actress (Cinema)



Jane Seymour : Best Actress (TV)



Emma Thompson : Best Screenplay



John Travolta : Best Actor (Comedy)