

poetry evening

## A Rivetting Poetry Evening

Sudeep Sen, praised by BBC Radio as being one of "the finest contemporary English-language poets in the international literary scene", at a reading of his work in Dhaka, where he reveals his mastery and skill of the global-language, his own improvisation and invention of new formal-structures, rhyme-patterns, and verse-constructions.

by Ziaul Karim

LIKE an uninterrupted, smooth flow of mature whiskey caressing the skin of a thirsty crystal-glass, the visual-pattern and structure of the brilliant poem, 'Single Malt', mimicked the cascading effect of the drink's "flow and glide on the tongue" itself, the very process of how things are whisked away "from the mundane, / what is / absolute / and essential, / and leaves out / what is not." This poem also serves as an excellent insight and entry-point into how Sudeep Sen treats aspects of form, prosody and content of his poetry and its writing. For Sudeep, poetry is a meticulously-knit embroidery-design, one that stitches onto its patterns, only the barest absolute and the very essentials, perhaps alluding to the Zenithian 'naked poetry'.

The capital city's poetry lovers, literati, and glitterati, had a rare toast of the sparkling poems of Sudeep Sen at the bilingual reading programme of his works at The Indian High Commission Cultural Centre in Dhanmondi last Thursday. The evening witnessed the release of Sudeep Sen's first book of Bangla translations (by Aminur Rahman) of his English poems -- *Ekti Khali Chithi* -- A Blank Letter. The overbrimming crowd listened rapturously to Sudeep reading his poems in his deeply seductive, soft, understated baritone -- communicating a lyrical sensibility that his poetry so eloquently holds, one that portrays his imagination's wide palette glowing under the translucent veil of rhyme and rhythm.

Sen's personal insights -- literary, anecdotal, and biographical -- those that form part of his creative process, punctuated his reading, the



Deb Mukherjee presents a copy of Ekti Khali Chithi to Sudeep Sen after releasing the book.

Inter-sessions between different poems. His immaculately and precisely narrated details and context of each piece, provided an anchor and flavour that enriched his truly fine and memorable reading.

He spoke variously about his inspiration and his crisis in creative life -- how he once felt when for about six months or so, he wrote nothing new, a time when nothing new was apparently coming out of his pen's nib. After that painfully dry period, appeared a piece, "a perfectly scanned sonnet" that came "magically from nowhere", as he wrote so succinctly -- "It emerged robed in tethered linen, / just the way I held the sky in my hand / like a piece of crumpled paper." This poem, 'Penumbra', that first appeared in his book, *New York Times* (1993), put faith back again into Sudeep's poetic life.

The opening poem, 'Prayer Flag', in this newly-launched volume, was inspired by an

evocatively surreal photograph of Manas Sarovar in 'Mount Kailash' taken by a friend of the poet. As the poet beautifully read this long 100-line poem, set in four distinct mood-sections, it successfully created an ambience of the actual landscape, a scene that evoked the solemn grandeur of faith, passion, and creativity.

What was most fascinating and refreshing about Sudeep

bral exercise that go behind their actual creation -- however, what we experience in the finished product, is his passion, energy and wisdom.

'During The Street Play', one of Sudeep Sen's earlier poems, is a good example of understated writing. The poem is obliquely political, a reaction, a protest to the violent killing of the young playwright, Safdar Hashmi, on the streets

towards life and living. Everything from nature, love, birth, and death, to desire, passion, politics, and art, intimately co-exists in his poetry. Lucid and accessible, his poems work on the readers as a gentle hum of a perennial mantra. The poem 'Dadu' written just after the poet heard about the news of his grandfather's death, appears at one level like a prose-poem, but its poetic essence unfolds slowly and surely with the ritual power of a hymn.

There are fifteen poems in this well-produced edition of *A Blank Letter*, selected from his previously published books -- most of them from *Postmarked India: New & Selected Poems* (HarperCollins). Translated into Bengali, they brilliantly capture the understated tone of the original poems, and successfully conveys the concealed internal drama of the lines and stanzas, displaying the delicate rhyme-patterns and verse-constructions of the original. Form and structure-conscious poet, Aminur Rahman, who began writing poetry in the late 1980s has done a competent and sensitive job with the Bangla translations.

Aminur is faithful in his translation and at the same time retains the soft powerful resonance of the original English poems.

The Bangla readings were rendered by Asaduzamman Noor, Kazi Arif, Progya Laboni, and the translator Aminur Rahman. Rahman already has a reputation as a reciter, and has produced five audio-cassette/CDs featuring readings from leading contemporary Bengali poets. His reading of 'Night with Lakshmi' is worth mentioning, where he subtly communicated the languid heavy poetic language of the original. While reading 'Dadu', he was equally successful in capturing and conveying the internal drama and emotion of the English poem.

Progya Laboni's reading was clear, resonant and quite dramatic, particularly while reading 'A Fly' and 'Kiss'. But Sudeep's poems do not actually demand the overly theatrical modulation of voice, and there certainly is no place for sentimentalism. Her husband, Kazi Arif read 'Birch', 'Feathers of Snow', 'Scattered Pieces of Quarrel', and 'Single Malt'. He too tried to be dramatic, but not as much as Laboni. The microphone's reverberant effect detracted from what they wanted to achieve rather than helping them. Asaduzamman Noor and Progya Laboni teamed up to read the long poem 'Prayer Flag'. Measured and soft, Noor's cadenced and expertly balanced delivery was closest to the spirit

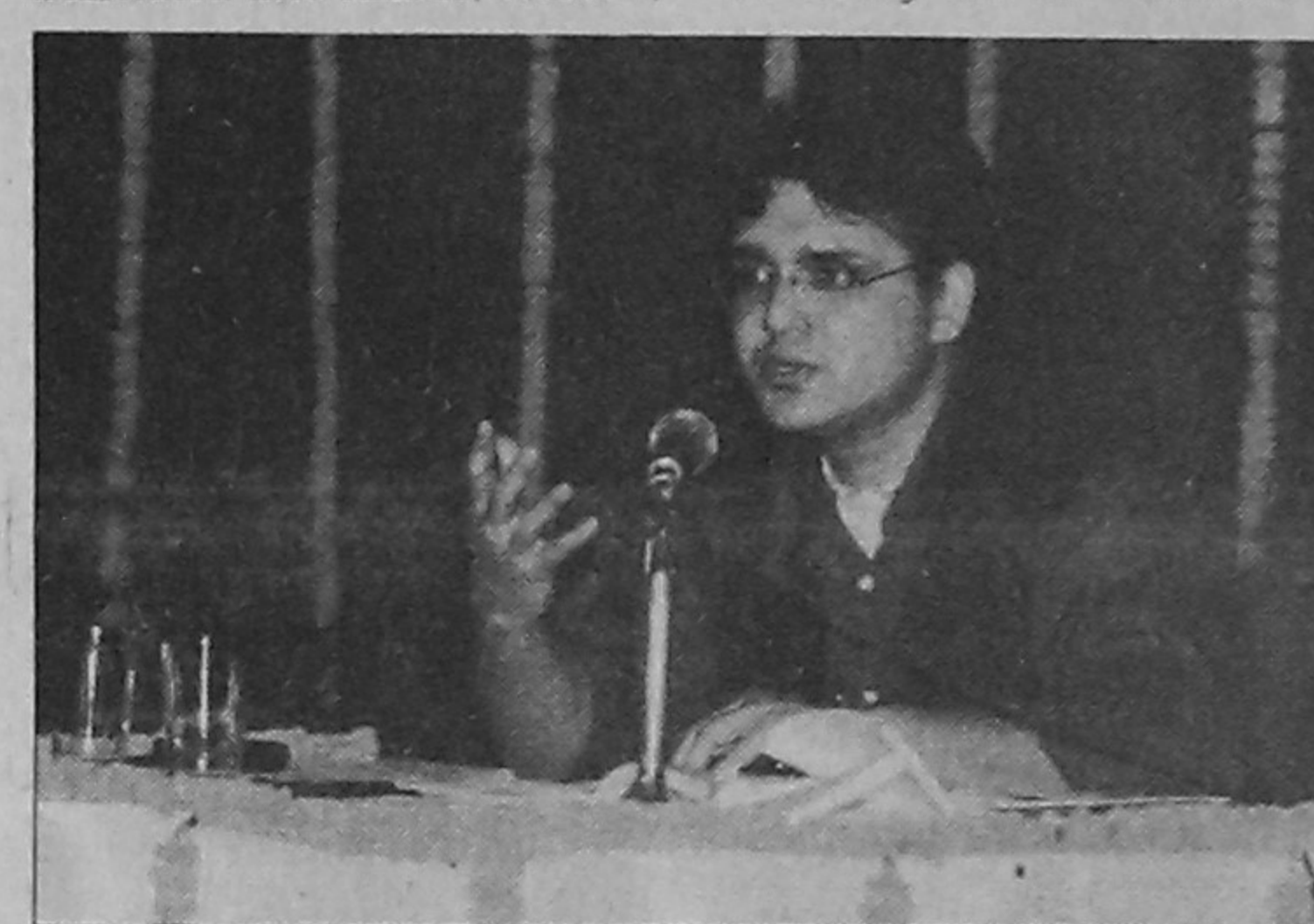


Asaduzamman Noor: Measured and soft

of Sudeep's understated voice and poetic inflections. Samia Zaman, the anchor, who reads the news on Ekushey TV, compared the event with poise and smile.

The Indian High Commissioner, Deb Mukharji, after releasing the book, said, "Sudeep Sen belongs to that group of Indian writers in English who have given contemporary Indian literature prominence in the global literary scene... I do not need to say anything about him as he is already well-known. But I have heard that his poems have been translated into Arabic, Hebrew,

The distinguished and pre-eminent poet of contemporary Bangla literature, Kobi Shamsur Rahman, was present as a special guest. At the end of the reading programme, he said, "I can only express my wonderment. I am completely enraptured and enchanted after hearing this superlative reading by the young Indian poet... what beautiful and mature writing!... The memories of this evening will remain etched in my memory for a long long time." He greeted Sudeep Sen and the other reciters with bouquets and congratulations, as we slowly left the auditorium



Sudeep enchants the poetry lovers, literati with his reading

Greek, Macedonian, Italian, etc., and though it has taken a while to have his poems available in Bengali, it is now a matter of great pride and joy for us."

Other special invitees included Carl Reuter, the director of the British Council, as was its deputy director, Simon Kay. Most of country's leading writers, editors, publishers, academics and critics were present -- a high quality *creme-de-la-creme* gathering that one rarely sees together in Dhaka at a single appointed place.

for the reception and the author book-signing in The Art Gallery.

Eventually, we left with a feeling that was powerful -- lingering yet understated, intricate yet moving, evanescent yet indelible -- one that can be experienced but not tangibly touched. And as a final taster, here is a perfectly-constructed haiku titled 'Kiss', from Sudeep Sen's *Ekti Khali Chithi* -- A Blank Letter:

a languorous kiss  
the faintest smell of ocean  
salt-lipped breeze, pleading

## RECOMMENDATIONS

## Nazrulsangeet CDs

Bengal Foundation attempts to launch two Nazrulsangeet albums by renowned Nazrulsangeet singer Ifat Ara Dewan and Sohrab Hossain. The launching ceremony of these two CDs will be held on separate days. The ceremonies will be followed by a musical performance by the artist.

June 9, 2000: Ifat Ara Dewan: *Puratani Bangla Gaan 'He Amar Chiro Chawa'*

June 10, 2000: Sohrab Hossain: *Nazrulsangeet 'A Kon Mayay'*

The ceremonies will be held at the following address:

Bengal Shilpalay  
House No. 275/F, Road No 27 (old)  
Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

## Places and People of North and South

The 1st solo painting exhibition by Dr Mahmudul Hasan (Associate Professor of Khulna University) titled "Places and People of North and South" will be inaugurated at the Alliance Francaise de Dhaka on June 5 at 6.00pm.

M A Jalil, Minister for Commerce will inaugurate the exhibition as chief guest whereas Professor S M Nurul Islam, Vice Chancellor of Khulna University will be present as special guest. Architect Rabiul Hussain will be the keynote speaker at the inaugural ceremony.

## Folk Art Exhibition

A month-long exhibition on traditional folk art and crafts began at the National Museum, Shahbagh. State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed inaugurated the exhibition on May 21 and will continue up to June 22.



## A Blank Letter

Ekti Khali Chithi or A Blank Letter is the first bilingual English-Bengali book of poems by Sudeep Sen, one of the front-ranking poets in the international contemporary English poetry. The slim volume contains 15 poems in all culled from his ten books from the early *Leaning Against the Lamp-Post* (1983) to the recent *Leaning* (2000). Published by the High Commission of India in Dhaka this bilingual edition

-- is available at Aranya Crafts Ltd. (60 Kemal Ataturk Avenue, Banani, Tel: 9882542), and, Pathak Samabesh Bookshop (17/A & 21 Aziz Market, Shahbagh; Tel: 9662766).

## Folk delights

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy has begun a week-long folk theatre festival at the Shawkat Osman Memorial auditorium at the Begum Sufia Kamal Library Directorate at Shahbagh today.

The festival is being held with a view to help save and popularise folk theatre forms. The festival will present little known amateur theatre groups from different parts of the country.

The festival will be inaugurated by

Date	Name of Theatre Group	Drama
8.6.2000	Adamee, Kisan, Nityagoshthi, Narayanganj	Sabuj Sapan
9.6.2000	Shawkhat, Getimayya, Gazipur	Bermaner Chokrant
10.6.2000	Akankha, Nityadali, Mirpur	Beeth Kanya
11.6.2000	Nagni, Shawkhat, Jhumur, Shripokshi, Gazipur	Gouri Mala
12.6.2000	Bhodon, Jhumur, Jatra, Murshidganj	Sat Keno Kalankani
13.6.2000	Jhumur Tongi, Gazipur	Rahim Badsha O Rupan Kanya

## TV Guide

Thursday 8th June  
(All programmes are in local time. The Daily Star will not be responsible for any change in the programme)

## BTV

3:00 Opening Announcement, Recitation From The Holy Quran And Programme Outline 3:15 Patriotic Song 3:20 Open University Prog 4:00 Bangla News 4:05 Cartoon: Barne And Friends 4:30 Dance 5:00 National School Debate Competition 5:50 Dhaka O-Jiban 6:00 Bangla News 6:30 Transmission From Chittagong Center 7:00 News For Weather 7:05 Jiban-O-Jibika 7:25 Sandhya Maioti (Nazrul Songs) 8:00 Bangla News At 8:30 Serial: Raong #10 (\*K. S. Firoz, Afroza Banu, Nousher Alam, Tonima Hamid, Shirin Bakul, Mahbub Salim) 9:00 Geetibichitra (Songs) 9:30 Janataar Aadalat 10:00 News At Ten (English) 10:30 Chitra Jagat (Film Based) 11:00 English Series: The Light Wind-All Woman Police Squad 11:30 Bangla News 11:35 English News 11:40 A) Programme Outline For Friday B) National Song 11:45 Closing

## ETV

2:00 Circus! Circus! 2:20 Drama serial: Choto Choto Oheo 2:50 Pop Show Romo 6:00 Drishti Public View 7:00 Classic Cartoons 7:20 Bubuner Baba 7:45 Ekshey News 8:00 Bauliana 8:30 Hercules 9:30 Shofol Jara Kemon Tara 10:00 BTV News 10:20 Budget 2000 11:00 Bangla Chayachibi

## Star Sport

6:30 Pepsi Asia Cup 2000 Dhaka BANGLADESH- 7th Odi Final 1st Session (Rept.) 11:30 Max Power 12:30 Pepsi Asia Cup 2000 Dhaka BANGLADESH- 7th Odi Final Highlights 1:30 Uk Domestic Cricket- Benson & Hedges Cup Semifinal #1 7:30 Anz Sportsline 7:35 World Wrestling Federation Raw 9:30 Pepsi Asia Cup 2000 Dhaka BANGLADESH- 7th Odi Final Highlights 10:30 Cricket Magazine Stumped- Australia Vs India 11:30 Inside Cricket: 1st Session 11:30 Anz Sportsline 11:35 Pga Tour Highlights Kemper Open Potomac MD USA 12:30 World Wrestling Federation Raw

## ALPHA TV

6:30 Aalap 7:00 Monihaar 8:00 Serial: Din Protidin 9:00 Serial: Plabon 9:30 Serial: Bhowani Purer Chattujia 10:00 Serial: Jhankar 10:30 Serial: Kono Ek Din 11:00 Serial: Samay Sur #11 11:30 Ek Akasher Niche 12:00 Serial: Mitir Bari #15 12:30 Serial: Shani Robi Majar Chobi 1:00 Aamar Tumi 1:30 Bahari Aahar 2:00 Serial: Abishasya #13 2:30 Bangla Movie- 5:00 Ek Akasher Niche 5:30 Asian Sky Shop 6:30 Serial: Din Protidin 7:00 Bharat Shromon 7:30 News In Banglali 8:00 Serial: Jiban Jiban 8:30 Serial: Ek Akasher Niche 9:00 Serial: Hiya Majhe 9:30 Serial: Daag 10:00 News In Banglali 10:30 Serial: Din Pro-



How are they? The successful and the achievers. They don't narrate the secrets of their success but join in lots of fun and games in the show 'Safal Yara Kemon Tara' on Ekushey Television, tonight at 9:30.

Serial: Bhowani Purer Chattujia 12:00 Serial: Samay Sur #11 12:30 Gugli 1:00 Grihosajja 1:30 Bangla Movie-

7:30 Film Show: Zameen Ke Taare 10:30 Film Show: Dulhan Ek Raat Ki 1:30 Chartbusters 2:00 Music Mantra 2:30 Film Show: Diwana 5:30 Film Show: Farz Ki Jung (\*Jeetendra, Govinda) 8:30 Chartbusters 9:00 Music Mantra 9:30 Maximum Thrillers Film Show: Dhund (\*Mithun, Ranjeeta) 12:30 Film Show: Bhool (\*Jeetendra, Reekha) 3:30 Film Show: Tarzan

ATN  
5:30 Islamic Program 6:32 Health Prog 7:10 Musical Prog 7:50 Drama Serial 8:25 Musical Prog 9:00 Drama Serial 9:35 Magazine Prog 10:10 Drama Serial 10:45 Bangla Film-Anubhab 6:32 Islamic Program 7:10 Drama

Serial 7:50 Musical Prog 8:25 Drama Serial 9:00 Musical Prog 9:35 Special Prog 10:10 Drama Serial 10:45 Bangla Film-Mitthar Raja

## ESPN

7:00 Live- Nba Finals Game #1 9:30 Lpga Golf Kathy Ireland Greens- Com Lpga Classic Murrells Inlet, SC USA Final Round 11:30 Motorsport Asia 12:00 Live- Sportscenter Bristol, CT USA 1:00 Espn's Wednesday Night Baseball- Kansas City Royals Vs St. Louis Cardinals 4:00 International Ladies Wrestling Women's National Wrestling Alliance 5:00 Western Union World Football 5:30 Boxing Series Espn2 Friday Night Fights Miami, FL USA 7:30 Uefa Champions League Highlights 9:00 Weekly #30 Season Review 8:30 Nba Finals Game #1 11:00 Pepsi Asia Cup 2000 Dhaka BANGLADESH- Sri Lanka Vs Bangladesh 1st Odi, Highlights 12:00 Pool Motolite Int'l 9-Ball Open 2000 Manila, PHILIPPINES Day 3

## DD Intl

7:00 Classical Music 7:15 Nishan 7:45 Subah Aaj Tak 8:30 Center Stage 9:00 The First Edition 9:32 Medicinal Alternative 10:00 India News 10:15 Light Music 10:32 Musical Programme On Basant Panchmi 11:00 Hit Show 11:32 Geluvina (Serial In Kamada) 12:00 Bharat Samachar (News In Hindi) 12:15 Hindi Film Show 2:30 Samachar 2:40 The News 3:00 Classical Music 3:15 Nishan 3:45 Subah Aaj Tak

## ZEE MOVIES

8:30 OST 9:00 Film: Damage 11:00 Specials 11:30 Film: Beast Master-2 1:30 OST 2:00 Film: Gleaning the Cube 4:00 Total Recall 4:30 Film: Fear Is the Key 6:30 Specials 7:00 Film: Body Language 9:00 Hollywood Remembers 9:30 The 90 clock Show: Just Like a Woman 11:30 Film: Mannequin 1:30 Film: Body Language

## ZEE ENGLISH

8:00 Late Show With David Letterman 9:00 Too Close For Comfort 9:30 Evening Shade 10:00 Music Zone 10:30 The Roseanne Show 11:30 The Lifestyle Show 12:00 The Academy Awards Winners 1:00 The Roseanne Show 2:00 Music Zone 2:30 Friends 3:00 Evening Shade 3:30 The Academy Awards Winners 4:30 The Roseanne Show



Children drama serial 'Bubuner Baba' on Ekushey Television tonight at 7:20. Written by Mohammad Zafar Iqbal, the serial is directed by Morshedul Islam.

5:30 The Music Show 6:00 Too Close For Comfort 6:30 The Lifestyle Show 7:00 The Roseanne Show 8:00 Mixed Doubles 8:30 Friends 9:00 Three's Company 9:30 Can't Hurry Love 10:00 E.R. 11:00 News 11:30 Late Show With David Letterman 12:30 Friends 1:00 News 1:30 The Roseanne Show

## MUSIC ASIA

7:30 Aalaap 8:00 Ta Ra Rum 9:00 Brake Fail 10:00 Music Mag 10:30 Hit Mix 11:00 Brake Fail 11:30 Ponds All Time Romantic Hits 12:00 Bajaj Music Box 12:30 Saare Ga Ma Classic 1:00 Himani Gold T Jharokha 2:00 Nexgen 2:30 Ta Ra Rum 3:30 Brake Fail 4:30 Bajaj Music Box 5:00 Just Jammin 5:30 Hit Mix 6:00 Saare Ga Ma Classic 7:00 Brake Fail 8:00 India Pop Ka Baap Kaun 8:30 Artist of The Fortnight 9:00 Music Quiz 9:30 Bajaj Music Box 10:00 Sizzlers 10:30 Himani Gold T Jharokha 11:00 Stars

Day Out 11:30 Shabbab 12:00 Music Zone 1:00 Brake Fail 1:30 Himani Gold T Jharokha 2:00 Bajaj Music Box 2:30 Stars Day Out 3:00 Ta Ra Rum 4:00 Music Zone 4:30 Brake Fail 6:00 Sizzlers

## DD 7

8:40 Khas Khabar 10:30 Janmadin (Birth Day Greetings) 10:35 Daily Soap: Shree Ram Krishna 11:00 Daily Soap: Dropadi (Rupa Ganguly, Suneetra, Kushal, Sankar) 11:15 Classical/Folk Songs- 11:30 Parliament Hour/Musical 12:30 Bengali Movie 3:00 Daily Soap: Maha Prabhu 3:30 Daily Soap: Mohini 3:55 Daily Soap: Bhul Thikanay 4:20 Nepali Programme/Rabindra Sangeet 5:05 Shilpa Jagat 5:30 News 5:50 Bigan Prasanga 6:10 Gaan Sudhu Gaan 6:40 Khas Khabar 6:50 Daily Soap: Janmabhumi 7:20 Tarunder Jannay Darsaker Darbare Ghare Baire 7:30 Bangla Sambad 8:00 Aanya Sader Galpo (Serial) 8:30 Serial-Boxer Ratan 9:00 Daily Soap: Janmabhumi 9:30 Daily Soap: Shree Ram Krishna 10:00 Khas Khabar 10:20 Mokho Mukhi 10:50 Sambad 10:20 Bengali Movie

## ZEE INDIA TV

7:30 Zee News: Hindi 8:00 Zee Morning Show 8:30 News In English 9:00 News Outlook 7:00 Business News 7:30 Zee News: Hindi 8:30 Business News 9:00 News In English 10:00 Zee Prime Time Show 11:30 News In English 12:00 Business News 12:30 Am to 6:30 AM Every Half Hour - Zee News: Hindi