

poetry evening

A Rivetting Poetry Evening

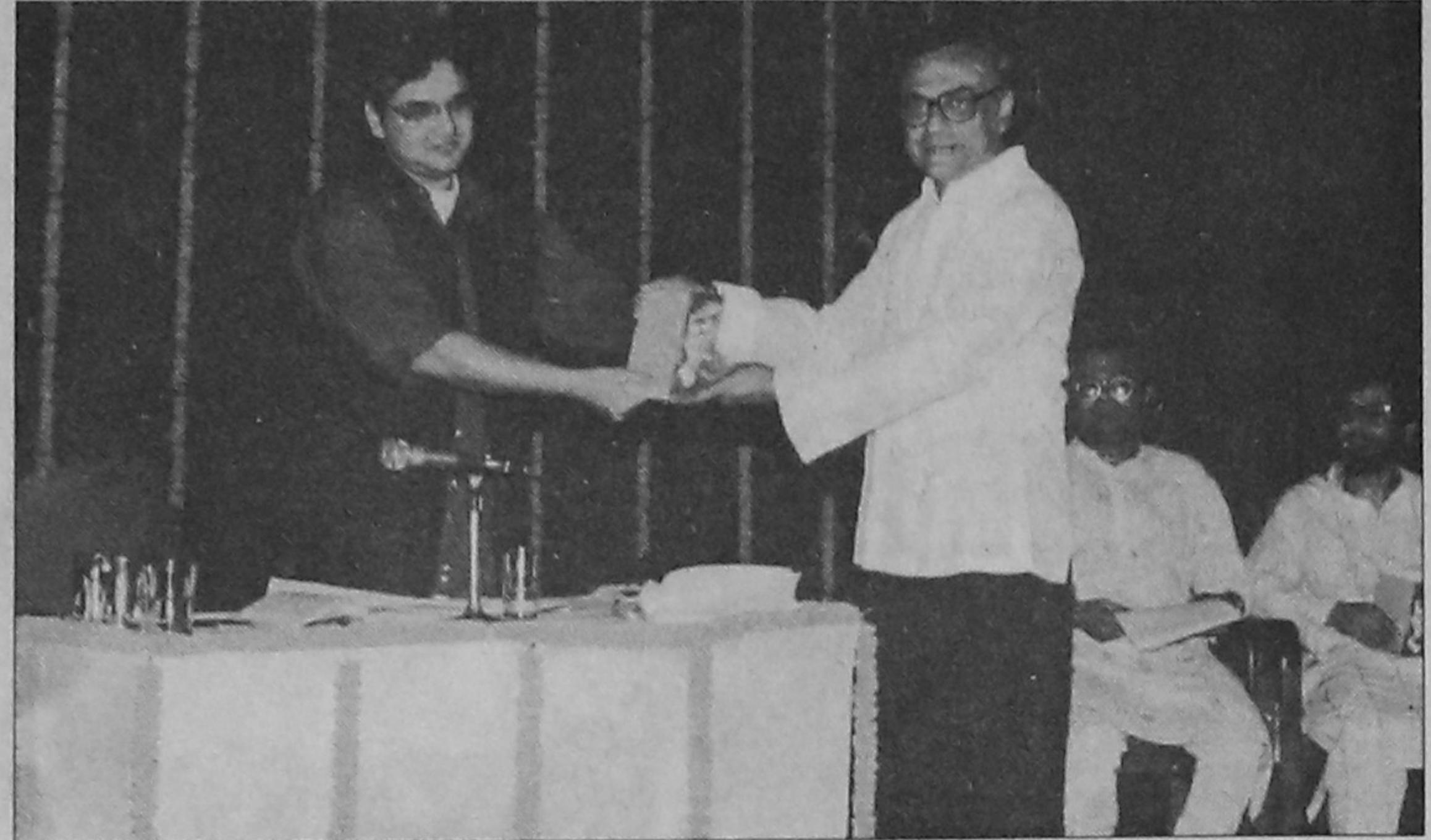
Sudeep Sen, praised by BBC Radio as being one of "the finest contemporary English-language poets in the international literary scene", at a reading of his work in Dhaka, where he reveals his mastery and skill of the global-language, his own improvisation and invention of new formal-structures, rhyme-patterns,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

was his ability to read his poems in a way that made them come alive.

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

of Delhi in 1989 while he and his troupe were performing 'Hulla Bol'. What could have turned into a mere ventilation of outrage and reduced to firing salvos of condemnation at the authorities, turned into a poem that is soft in tone and measured in controlled-emotion. In fact, most his poems of this kind, he has chosen the middle-path between over-intellectualism and blatant-politicisation.

The wide variety of subject matter in his poems point to the unbiased attitude he has

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 Asaduzzaman 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 overtly 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 reverb-effect detracted from what they wanted to achieve rather than helping them. Asaduzzaman 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

of Delhi in 1989 while he and his troupe were performing 'Hulla Bol'. What could have turned into a mere ventilation of outrage and reduced to firing salvos of condemnation at the authorities, turned into a poem that is soft in tone and measured in controlled-emotion. In fact, most his poems of this kind, he has chosen the middle-path between over-intellectualism and blatant-politicisation.

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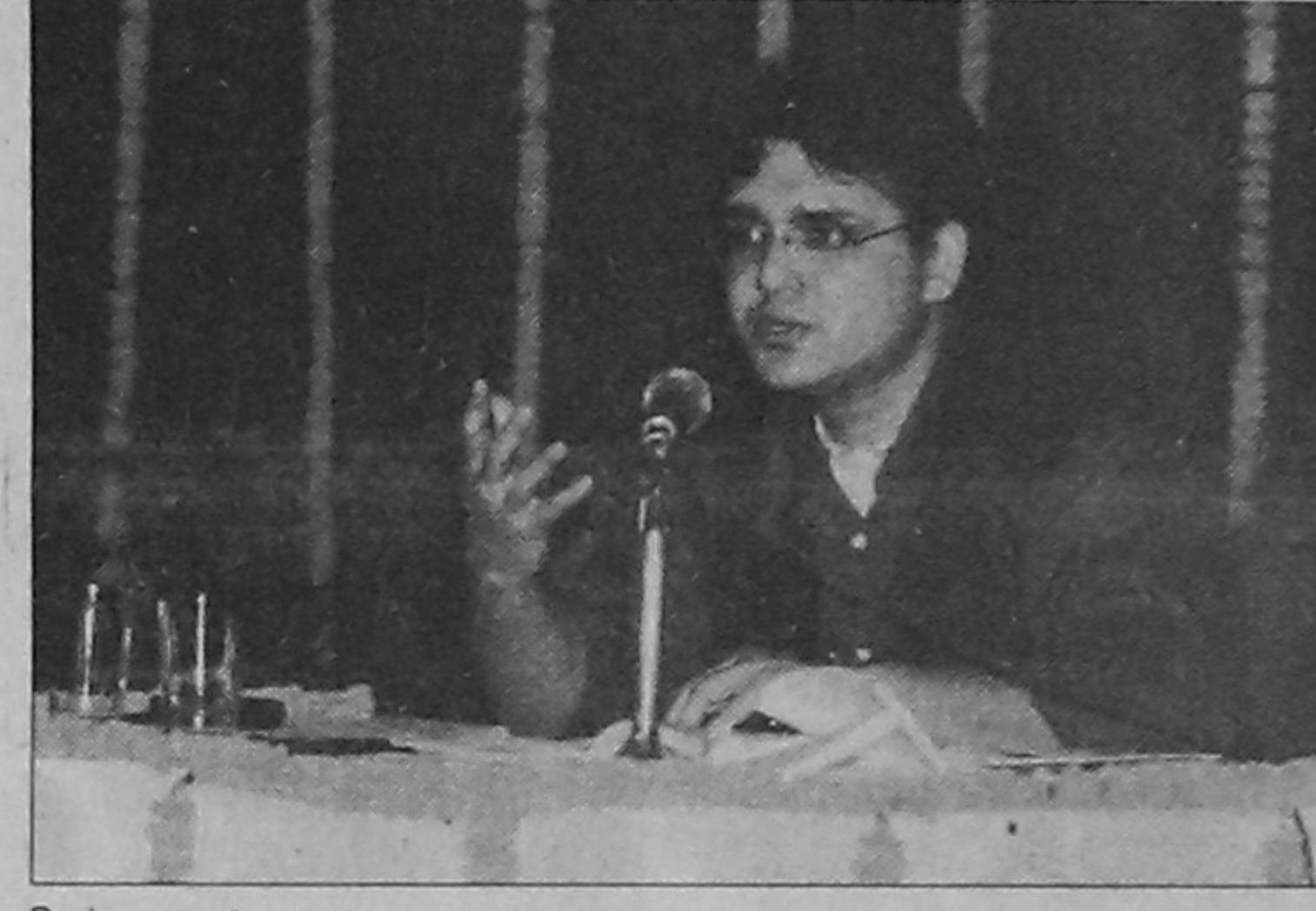


Asaduzzaman Noor: Measured and soft of Sudeep's understated voice and poetic inflections.

Samaia Zaman, the anchor, who reads the news on Ekushey TV, con-

tinued 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,



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 Iffat 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: Iffat Ara Dewan: *Puratani Bangla Gaan 'He Amar Chitra 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 Rabiu 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 *New Poem 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	Adamjee, Kiran	Sabuj Sapan
9/6/2000	Showkhin Geetinata, Gazipur	Bermaner Chokranto
10/6/2000	Akhantha Natyadal, Mirpur	Bedh Konya
11/6/2000	Nagni Showkhin, Jhumer	Gouri Mala
12/6/2000	Bindon Jhumur Jatra, Munshiganj	Sati Keno Kalankini
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 News 4:05 Cartoon: Bangla News 4:45 Dance 5:00 National School Debate Competition 5:50 Dharmo O-Jibita 6:00 Bangla News 6:30 Transmission From Chittagong Center 7:00 News For Weather 7:05 Jibon-O-Jibita 7:25 Sandhya Maloti (Nazrul Songs) 8:00 Bangla News At 8:30 Serial: Raona #10 (*K. S. Firoz, Afroza Banu, Nousher Alam, Tonima Hamid, Shirin Bakul, Mahbub Salim) 9:00 Geetibichitra (Songs) 9:30 Janatara Aadat 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 Dheu 2:50 Pop Show Romo 6:00 Drishti Public View 7:00 Classic Cartoons 7:20 Bubuner Baba 7:45 Ekushey 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 1st 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 11:00 Inside Cricket: 1st Session 11:30 Anz Sportsline 11:35 Pga Tour Highlights Kemper Open Potomac MD USA 12:30 World Wrestling Federation Raw



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 'Safai Yara Kemon Tara' on Ekushey Television, tonight at 9:30.

ALPHA TV

6:30 Alaap 7:00 Monihaar 8:00 Serial: Din Protidin 9:00 Serial: Plabon 9:30 Serial: Bhawani Purer Chattuja 10:00 Serial: Jhankar 10:30 Serial: Kono Ek Din 11:00 Serial: Samay Sur #1 11:30 Ek Akasher Niche 12:00 Serial: Mitir Bar #15 12:30 Serial: Shani Robi Major Chobi 1:00 Aamar Tumi 1:30 Bahari Aahar 2:00 Serial: Abishaya #13 2:30 Bangla Movie 5:00 Ek Akasher Niche 5:30 Asian Sky Shop 6:30 Serial: Din Protidin 7:00 Bharat Bhroman 7:30 News In Bangla 8:00 Serial: Jibon Jeban 8:30 Serial: Ek Akasher Niche 9:00 Serial: Hiyer Majhe 9:30 Serial: Daag 10:00 News In Bangla 10:30 Serial: Din Pro-

Sony Max

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: Dwanya 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, Rekha) 3:00 Film Show: Tarzan

DISCOVERY CHANNEL

6:30 Ushuaia 7:30 Travelers 8:30 Lonely Planet 9:30 Eyewitness 10:30 Danger Zone 11:00 Outer Bounds 11:30 Shark Files 12:30 Wild Discovery 1:30 Medical Detectives 2:30 Discover Magazine 3:30 Travelers 4:30 Ushuaia 5:30 Lonely Planet 6:30 Pop Sci 7:00 Splat 7:30 Untamed Amazonia 8:30 Wild Discovery 9:30 Beyond 2000 10:00 Discover News 10:30 Portraits 11:30 Discovery Profile Series 12:30 Wild Discovery 1:30 Beyond 2000

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 Special Prog 10:10 Drama Serial 10:45 Bangla Film-Mittitar Raja

ZEE MOVIES

8:30 OST 9:00 Film: Damage 11:00 Specials 11:30 Film: Beast Master-2 1:30 OST 2:00 Film: Gleaming 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 9:00 clock Show: Just Like a Woman 11:30 Film: Mannequin 1:30 Film: Body Language 9:00 Film: Nba Finals Game #1 11:00 Pepsi Cup 2000 Dhaka, BANGLADESH- Sri Lanka Vs Bangladesh 1st Od, Highlights 12:00 Pool Motolite Int'l 9-Ball Open 2000 Manila, PHILIPPINES Day 3

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 1