

Japan Week

A rendezvous with kites and tops

Bangladeshi children can now taste the traditional Japanese kites and tops

SAIFUL ISLAM

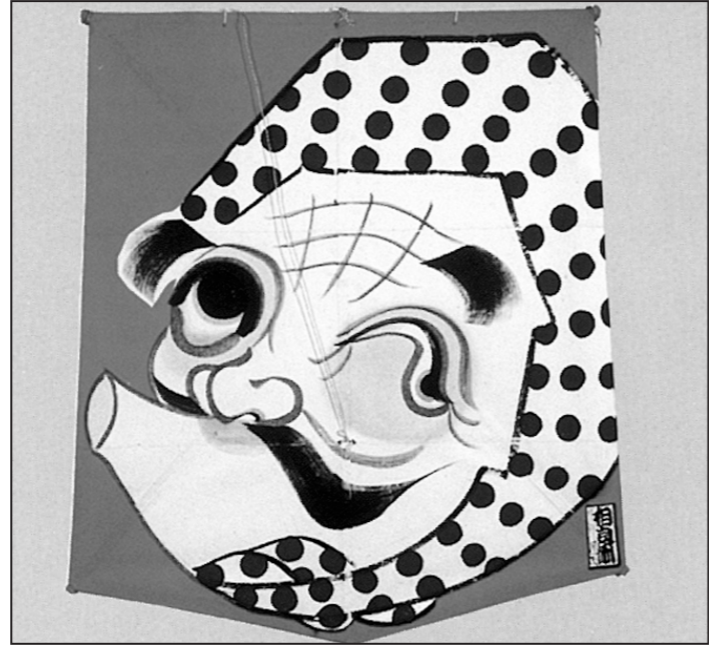
A carnival shades and colourful images of traditional Japanese kites and spinning tops showcased at an exhibition now being held at Bangladesh Shishu Academy will surely catch the imagination of young minds of the city.

The eye-catching exhibition features a number of different varieties and colors of kites and spinning tops clad in excellent decoration are being displayed specially for the children. The exhibition is a part of the *Japan week* the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Bangladesh one of the many cultural programs organized to make the auspicious event memorable.

The size and the shapes of the bold-colored kites are not only alluring for the children but also things of soothing delight for the elderly as they help recalling the innocent mirth of the childhood days. Moreover it is difficult to find a single Bangladeshi who has not been an admirer of spinning tops in that rosy past. A list of the kites in display might be interesting *Bunraku Puppet Kite, Horsefly Kite, Sumo Wrestler Kite, Sunrise Crane Kite*; the names of the spinning tops might be also enjoyable *Pulled String Top, Six Corner top, Double Zuguri Top, Target Top*.

Kites were first invented about 2,000 years ago in China. They first appeared in Japan during Heian period (794-1185), when they were known as 'paper hawks', they were known by the same name in China. So, many believe that the kite was imported into Japan directly from China.

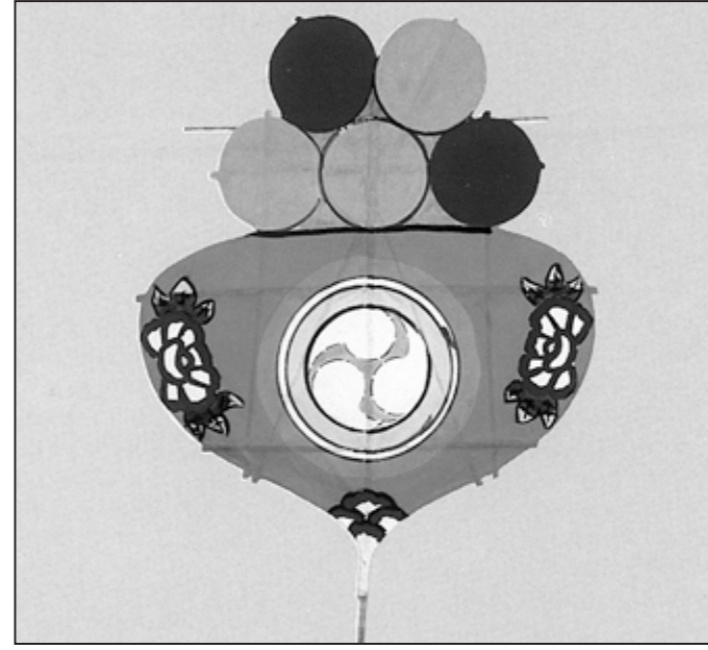
In the Heian period, kites were often used for communicating messages. It is even said that they were used to carry secret messages. In their 1,000-year history in Japan, kites went along the path of amazing improvement. The reasons for this were Japan already had excellent paper, bamboo, and hemp thread for use in kite flying. Kites making became very popular in Japan and Japanese invented different kinds of kites. In fact, kites



Sagara Kite

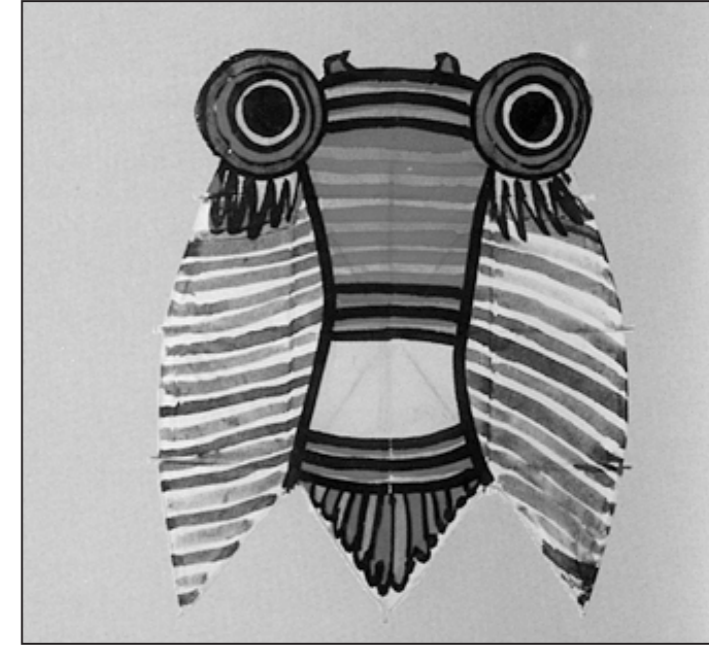
were bestowed with the great improvement during the *Edo* period (1603-1868). Until that time the cost of paper was so high that only the nobility of Japan could afford to play with kites but they gradually spread among the mass. With the refinement of art of woodblock printmaking and with the use of

various shades of colors in the art of *ukiyo-e* prints the number of kites featuring beautiful characters and themes became available and popular. So popular did kites become that the common folk would often fly them on the states of the samurai. The popularity of this pastime even



Five Ring Kite

had to undergo the ban of the *shogun* authority. Perhaps today Japan excels in the verity of kites and spinning tops any other country. They are flown today mostly on festive occasions. If the kite flies very high blessing is believed to be certain. One example of this custom is the event of flying



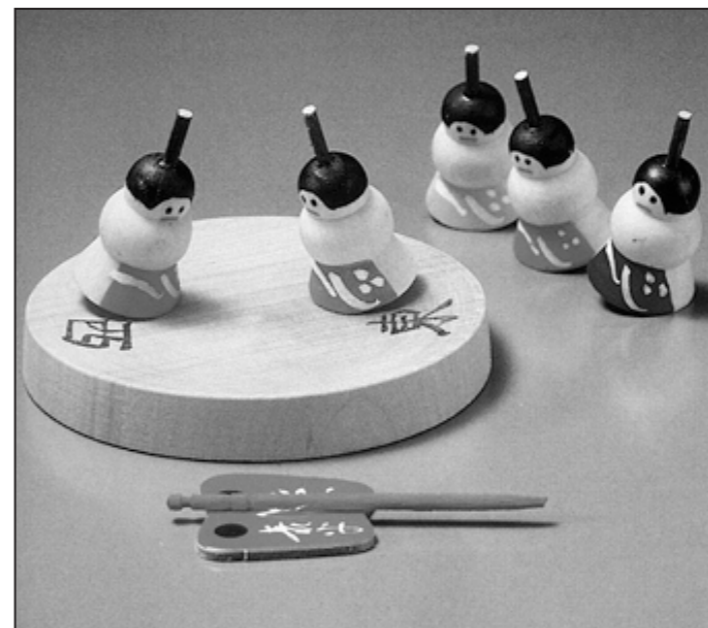
Cicada Kite

are portrayed in the kites with tongues hanging out from the mouth deep colored in zeal. They look were frantic gesture to frighten away the evil. Thus, kites focus on the very deep rooted interesting superstition of the Japanese people. The graphic portrayal of tortoise and cranes on a kite symbolize long

life; and thus the picture of a hero of the fairytales symbolizes the assurance of the healthy growth of a baby. Tops were introduced into Japan from China and Korea about 1,200 years ago. Like many other imports, they were enjoyed first by aristocrats.



Pulled String Top



Sumo Wrestler Tops



Edo Tops

RECOMMENDATIONS

International Womens' Day

A two-day long art exhibition by leading female artists of the country starts from today at the Jaynul art gallery of National Fine Arts Institutes in the city. The display event, organised by Bangladesh Mohila Parishad on the occasion of International Womens' Day, will be inaugurated at 10:00 a.m. by eminent cartoonist and artist Rafiqunnabi.

Painting exhibition

Art works of Bangladeshi landscape done by an American artist, Sarah Suro, will be exhibited at Divine Art Gallery at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel in the city. Karl Fritz, US Public Affairs Director, will inaugurate the event at 5:30 this evening and the exhibition is open for all from 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. everyday till March 18.

Film Festival

A Japanese film festival will begin at the Institute of Modern Languages in the city from today and will continue till March 11. Four films will be screened during the period with two shows, from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m., every day. The films are Tsuru, Faraway Sunset, Wild Daisy, Hearts and flowers for Tora.

Art Exhibition

Japan and Bangladesh are holding a joint art exhibition at the National Museum art gallery in the city. The exhibition will continue till March 20 that is featuring works of renowned Bangladeshi artist Mohammad Kibria, those of Noriko Yanagisawa, a Japanese contemporary artist and works of Kazi Ghiyasuddin, a Bangladeshi artist who is presently based in Japan.

Festival

A 3-day long prize-giving festival of Bishwa Shahitya Kendra will take place at Shawkat Osman auditorium of Central Public Library in the city from today till March 10. Meritorious students in book reading campaign of the organisation will be awarded by reputed personalities of the country. Programs of the first day will start from 10:00 a.m. while those of the other two days will begin from 3:00 p.m.

Solo exhibition

A solo art exhibition of Abdus Shakoor will be inaugurated at Bengal Art Gallery at Dhanmondi in the city on March 9 at 6:30 p.m. The exhibition will feature recent works of the artist who is inclined to pause and look back, to lift the fraying mantle and enervate a wilting legacy. The exhibition will remain open for all from 12 p.m. to 8p.m. till March 29, 2002.

In memoriam

Remembering Syed Ahsan Ali Sydney

A tribute to a thespian

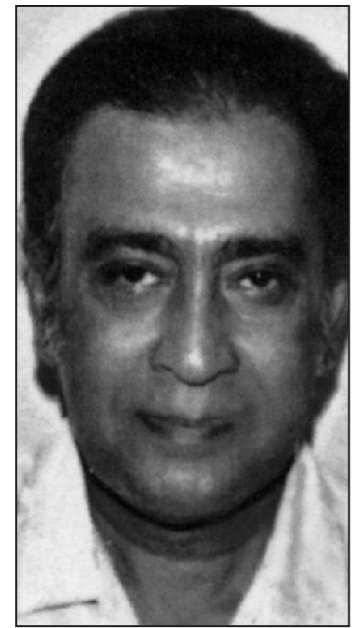
NAEEM MOHAIEEM

ONE day last week, an e-mail arrived. My father had sent a group e-mail to two dozen members of our extended family who lived abroad. The subject header was stark: "SYED AHSAN ALI". Before I opened the e-mail, I already anticipated the contents. A "regret to inform", followed by news that the family had been dreading for some time-- Syed Ahsan Ali, or "Sydney" fufa to me, had passed away.

I saw "Sydney" fufa two months ago in December when I went to Dhaka for my cousin Nadia's wedding. This was a trip that almost didn't happen. Every December, many Bangladeshis return home-- to see family, catch up with old friends, attend the inevitable weddings, and recharge their batteries. But last year, there was an anxiety surrounding this annual ritual. Paranoia about plane hijacking was high in the post September 11 environment, and some Bangladeshis chose to postpone their Dhaka flights. As most of our cousins had cancelled their trips, my cousin Nadia insisted quite strongly that I come. In retrospect, I'm glad she prevailed as it gave me a last chance to meet Sydney fufa.

I visited fufa, and his wife "Jharna" fufa, on Eid day. He looked visibly frail. I had not seen him in two years and the change was dramatic. Fufa was holding a walking stick and there was an oxygen tank next to his chair. I noticed that it was the first time I was seeing him with a prayer cap perpetually on his head (possibly a sign of concern about impending mortality). In past years, fufa was a flurry of activity and good cheer during our visits. This time he remained seated during the entire time, and spoke in a low voice.

All these changes I noticed with some shock. Although I receive regular news about the health status of elderly relatives (my father is a doctor), from a distance none of it seems real. As I sat and listened to fufa, it all came back to me-- my father's various e-mails about fufa's health problems, his trip to India for treatment and more. At the time, I had not put everything together to understand how serious his health problems were. During past visits, fufa was always very curious about my life in



Syed Ahsan Ali Sydney

America. His curiosity extended from the practical (what exactly was my job-- something that was a mystery to my boss as well) to the humorous (was I paid to bombard people with e-mails, a reference to my internet mailing list), from the political (American foreign policy) to the affectionate (why wasn't I eating enough as I looked thinner, which he scarcely thought possible).

This time, although he talked a little about Afghanistan, his conversation and curiosity was much more limited. Most of his fragile energy was directed towards giving my father the latest updates of his health condition. My camera was a constant presence around my shoulder, and it was a welcome distraction during these sad moments. On that day, I took several photographs of fufa. At the time, it was not with the conscious thought that I would never see him again. Unfortunately, as I write this in Peru, those photographs are inside a storage locker in New York-- out of reach and not much use.

After eating the unavoidable Eid sweets, I walked around fufa's living room. Almost everything was as I remembered. The antique phone with a curved handle and rotary dial which never seemed to work. The always-polished silverware (something fufa had found someone reliable to do this in Dhaka). The vari-

ous acting awards on the walls. This time, I also noticed two new photographs. The first was a photo of the historical meeting in Dhaka where the Muslim League was established. I had seen it many times before-- the difference here was that the caption identified one of the participants as Sydney fufa's father. I knew that his father was an old-style zamindar, but had never made this historical connection! There was also a silver-tinted portrait of Sydney fufa in his young days, when he was a matinee idol of the television screen. He had a full head of hair with curly locks in the back (what used to be called "babri chool") and long sideburns. Looking at that picture, it was easy to see why he was a natural to play dashing heroes who always won the heart of the heroine and vanquished the villain.

Jhorna fufa (Syed Ahsan Ali's wife) was a part of the extended family that looked after me when I was growing up. I remember falling asleep next to her on many nights as she read a story to me. Later, when we lived in Libya, we received news that Jhorna fufa was getting married to Sydney fufa. The state of international mail was such that it was not until a month after the wedding that we received a photo of the radiant bride and groom. In the 1970's, Syed Ahsan Ali was in his prime-- starting with early films like "Shurjo Konnya" (with Bulbul Ahmed and featuring the hit song "Chena Chena Lage") and going on to starring roles in numerous television plays. These were still the days when heroes had flowing locks, shirt collars that stretched to the shoulders, flared-bottom pants, and big-buckled belts.

When we returned from Libya in 1979, Sydney fufa was still acting and playing young heroes. The first Eid play I saw after returning to Bangladesh was an adaptation of a Nazrul piece with him in the starring role. For a period in the '80s he appeared less frequently on the television screen as he was getting eclipsed by the "young Turks". Then he re-surfaced in the hit serial drama "Ami Thumi She (I You He)". For the first time, he played a nefarious villain, much to the dismay of some fans. At the time, we would come into class at St Joseph, the morning after the weekly airing, and breathlessly discuss the latest plot

twists. Such was the hold of "Ami Thumi She" on the imagination of teenagers (this was before the advent of satellite television's plethora of bad choices!) I don't remember much of the plot any more, but I dimly recall there was some pushing of people down stairs, accompanied by evil laughter (or was that another play?). Whatever the plot twists, fufa was chillingly effective as a villain. His handsome head of hair now had flecks of gray, which suited the role well (Bangla heroes have good bouffant hairdos, and villains have greasy hair or evil white streaks).

In recent times, fufa's youngest son Jeetu had also started acting. His debut was in a television play, playing fufa's son. I recall the play was called "Pearl" and was an existentialist musing on how a valuable pearl found in the sea was worth nothing if it brought turmoil and tragedy. These days, Sydney fufa's son is a strapping young man and has graduated to playing heroes like his father. This last Eid day, I had a long chat with Jeetu who was really excited about his new life. He also educated me about the economics of the television business. Now that the monopoly of BTV is broken by the package dramas of ETV, ATN and other Bangla channels, there are apparently real financial rewards in acting! In fufa's day, television acting was primarily a "shokh" (hobby), very few got into it to make a serious living.

Hindsight is 20-20. Now I wish I had spent more time talking to fufa on Eid day. It is harder when many of us live abroad, and our return visits are infrequent. Every time we see an elderly relative, it might be the last time. Globalization and economic necessity has caused many of our extended family to scatter around the world. Even Jhorna fufa's eldest son Jami lives in South Africa and couldn't come back for the funeral. The Internet keeps our extended family connected, but it is little comfort at a time like this.

Still, I am grateful for the little time I had in December. Sydney Fufa's fans will remember him for his performances. Our family will remember him as a generous and jovial man with a ready smile and kind heart.

Event

A special day for the specially-abled

Fine performance of art and culture from a large group of differently-abled youth mesmerises audience in the city

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

AN art competition for the Extension Scouts of Bangladesh Scouts was held at the National Scout Bhawan on March 6.

A total of sixty-eight differently-abled male and female scouts participated in the painting contest. Scouts Ainina Aziz and S.M. Safiqul Bari captured top positions in respective specially-abled groups

of A and B.

Faizur Razzaque, Extension Commissioner, Bangladesh Scouts, was present as chief guest and distributed prizes among the winners. Professor Sultana S. Zaman, National Commissioner (Girl-in-Scouting), artist Sayeeda Kamal, Abul Husain Sikder, Executive Secretary of Bangladesh Scouts also delivered speech on the prize giving ceremony.



Art competition in progress

mony. The event was presided over by Afzal Hossain, National Commissioner (Extension Scouting). Specially-abled scouts presented a fine cultural evening at the end of the eventful day.

Exhibition

Art for friendship

The High Commission of India hosts a fifteen-day long art exhibition of local artists at its cultural center in the city from March 10

CULTURE DESK

THE High Commission of India is presenting a fifteen day long two-part art exhibition titled "Contemporary Art of Bangladesh Trends 3 & 4" from March 10-24, 2002 at the High Commission of India Cultural Centre, 754 Satmasjid Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

Renowned artist Mohammed Kibria will inaugurate the exhibition on March 10, 2002 at 06:00 p.m. Mr. Mani Lal Tripathi, High Commissioner of India in Bangladesh, will also be present at the inaugural ceremony.

The exhibition is the third and fourth part of a series of exhibitions conceived by the High Commission to pay tribute to contemporary artists of Bangladesh and features works of twenty-seven prominent artists of Bangladesh. The participating artists in the first part of the exhibition Trends 3 -

will be Ahmed Nazir, Dhali Al-Mamoon, Dilara Begum Jolly, Enamul Huq Enam, Dr. Farida Zaman, Faruk Ahmad, G S Kabir, Ifikhar Uddin Ahmed, Jamal Ahmed, Kanak Champa Chakma, Khalid Mahmood Mithu, Mahbubur Rahman and Mohammed Anisuzzaman. The participating artists in the second part of the exhibition Trends 4 will be Mohammad Eunus, Mohammad Fokhrul Islam, Mohammed Jashim Uddin, Mostafizul Haque, Naima Haque, Nasim Ahmed Nadvi, Nasreen Begum, Nisar Hossain, Ranjit Das, Rokeya Sultana, Sayeed Talukder, Sheikh Afzal, Shishir Bhattacharjee and Tarun Ghosh.

The first part of the exhibition "Trends 3" will open from March 10-16, 2002 and the second part "Trends 4" will be open from March 18-24, 2002 daily from 12 noon to 8 p.m.