

SHORT TAKES

Aishwarya to play royalty

It was a memorable tea party. The ethereal Gayatri Devi, the stunning Aishwarya Rai and the intense filmmaker JP Dutta all together for a very special tete-a-tete.

The meeting took place in London last month to shake hands on JP's proposed biopic on the life of Gayatri Devi, the wife of Man Singh, the last ruler of Jaipur.

The Rajmata's verdict? She absolutely loved Aishwarya Rai and has given her wholehearted support to JP's proposed film.

Aishwarya, in the thick of a hectic start-to-finish schedule of Jagmohan Mundra's *Provoked*, is walking on air.

"I can't believe I'll be playing one of the most beautiful women in the world. To get to enact Gayatri



Maharani Gayatri Devi in her youth

Devi, and that too in a film by J P Dutta ... wait, let me pinch myself," she bursts out laughing.

The jubilant JP adds: "My wife Bindiya (Goswami), Aishwarya and I went to wish Gayatri Devi on her birthday. She was very excited that everything was falling in place.

Research work is on full-throttle. JP and his father, veteran writer-director OP Dutta, are in London working on the script.

JP Dutta, known for his penchant for epic cinema, has taken on the onus of presenting the life and times of one of the most beautiful women in the world. Says the triumphant director: "It's my good fortune that Gayatri Devi is also in London. I'll be meeting her extensively. The insight she'll offer me into her life would be invaluable. I'll also be depending on her autobiography for facts on her extremely rich and rewarding life."

But will the biopic please the supporters and followers of Gayatri Devi? Dutta laughs: "I'm aware that making biopics in our country is a thankless task. No one is fully pleased. And there's always a controversy accompanying a true-life story."

"But in this case I'm ready to take the risk. To film a life so complete and exemplary would be an honour for any filmmaker. I'm ready for the challenge."



Aishwarya Rai

Humayun Ahmed wings his way to Switzerland

Acclaimed writer-director Humayun Ahmed is on his way to Switzerland to shoot his latest telefilm *Rupali Raat*. Tania Ahmed and Si Tutul are playing the lead roles in the telefilm. The usual cast of Humayun's plays, such as Challenger, Dr Ejaz, Faruq Ahmed will be seen in the film, while Shaon is enacting a special role. It also features some Swiss Bangalee expatriates.

The story is a comi-tragedy that will be partly shot in the country and partly abroad. The lifestyles of the expatriates, their identity crisis and their bonds with their relatives at home have been portrayed in the play.

Channel i will soon telecast the play.



Humayun Ahmed



Rumana

Rumana off to the Himalayan kingdom

Popular model turned actress Rumana is bound for Nepal to act in two productions: a yet to be named telefilm and another TV play titled *Din Phurala*. The latter, written and directed by Ahmed Yusuf Saber, also features Tony Dayes, Zahid Hassan, Priya Dayes and Intekhab Dinar. When asked about the story, Rumana answered, "The director is being very tight-lipped about the story line." The yet-to-be-named telefilm is directed by Zahid Hassan and will be telecast on the coming Eid.

Both the projects are about Bangladeshis, living in Nepal.

Cultural Correspondent

Close to the heart

An unplugged folk treat

AFSAR AHMED

THE first beat on the *dhol*, accompanied with the vibrant tunes of *ektara*, *dotara*, *sarinda*, *thamak* and melancholy aria of *bansi*, *behala* and other traditional folk instruments played by the long curly-hair Bauls and Boyatis. All these elements were in evidence at a function on June 15. Organised by the Pally Baul Samaj Unnayan Sangstha (PBSUS), the event at the National Theatre Hall of Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy was a musical treat from rural Bangladesh to an entranced audience.

This colourful evening, jointly organised with the US Embassy, featured an exhibition of the rare and almost extinct folk musical instruments, a discussion session and a splendid performance of the folk tunes. Jonathan Cebra, Director of the American Centre, Guido Genrich, Consul and Cultural Attaché of German Embassy, Baul exponent Sheikh Shahid and *dhol* player Nazrul Islam spoke at the occasion. Ferdoushi Nazma, President of PBSUS presided.

"By preserving Baul heritage and presenting it to the school children, PBSUS is helping to preserve the vibrancy of the rural culture of this country. And we are fortunate enough to be associated with the revival of this tradition," said Jonathan Cebra.

In his speech Guido Genrich asserted, "I firmly believe that eventually the Bangladeshi people and decision makers will have to actively take up the challenge of preserving their culture and heritage in modern times. This will help them realise how precious and unique their music is."

"Enriched with the spiritualism and mysticism, the songs of the Bauls and Boyatis are the life line of the country's cultural heritage. And some traditional instruments bring these songs to life. But consequent to the aggression of modern electronic

instruments, the charm of these acoustic instruments is fading away. So it is high time to revive this

*behala*, *bansi* to *premjora* or *krishna kathi* and others. The orchestration of these low profile

troupe led by Giasuddin Piya, *sarinda* by Mojibur Rahman and *thamak* by Mamta Dasi to the

rendition of Baul songs of famous mystics Lalon Shah, Shah Abdul Karim, Kanailal Sheel and others by



(Top left) Mamta Dasi playing *Thamak* and Mojibur Rahman plays on *Sarinda*, (bottom) Flute presentation by Shahidul Islam and his troupe, (right) Pagla Bablu rendering a song

players was so mind boggling that many in the audience were literally on their toes.

The individual performances of the flute troupe led by Shahidul Islam, *dotara* troupe led by Abinash Chandra Sheel (Son of legendary Kanailal Sheel), *behala*

tunes of very popular folk songs like *Agey janley tor bhanga noukai chartam na*, *Milon hobey koto diney*, *Kandey Hason rajar mon*, *Doyal baba kebla kaba*, *Amar lauer pichhey lagsey bairagi* were the

musical event attracted a large audience. Clearly the time is ripe for the preservation of this soulful music.

Exhibition

Saying it with tapestry

FAYZA HAQ

Tapestry is a hand woven textile, which is used for wall hanging. Rashid Chowdhury (d. 1986) introduced tapestry as a creative modern art form in Bangladesh when he returned from Paris in 1964. This inspired a few talented artists like Tajul Islam, who is now having his third solo at Shilpanjan beginning from 18th June.

Tajul says that he first makes a layout, next a tracing and enlarges that for the final pattern. It is similar to the *satranji* making. He says that he learnt the technique of making knots from a Bihari "ustad", who once worked for Rashid Chowdhury. He had worked about 12 years under his training. In his tapestry he works with abstract forms. In one he uses brown with black and blue and a touch of red. The forms appear like some

human figures or trees, seen in a simplified manner, with geometrical shapes. Another one has a gray background and is in orange, black and blue. Tajul says that his work is different from the tapestry of others like that of Abdus Shakoor, in that loose threads don't hang out in his creations. He always breaks and simplifies his forms.

He does not do the weaving himself as he is short of time. There are four weavers who have worked on the 26 pieces for two years, in the village homes in Sylhet, Chandpur, Shariatpur and in Dhaka. He had, at one time, worked with Rashid Chowdhury, doing the weaving himself. His backgrounds are usually dark while light blues, sap greens and light browns are seen in the foreground.



A Tapestry by Tajul Islam

Tajul went on a six months fellowship to Yugoslavia to learn

carpet weaving in 1979. In 1981 he did a course in Rose Mary Abraham Design Ltd., UK, under a UNDP fellowship. In 1984 he visited UK to participate in the International Carpet Trade Fair for market study as a delegate from Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation. In 1987 he visited USA to participate in the International Carpet and Rug Fair, Atlanta.

It is not easy to reflect one's creative feelings in tapestry. The artist's association with a carpet factory helped him to improve his technical skills. One expects Tajul to produce something remarkable in future as he has now resigned from his government job in the Adamjee Jute Mills, and has more time for creative work.

Sisimpur: Learning can be fun

*Sisimpur*, a pre-school children's entertainment and educational programme begins today with a story on reading and appreciating literature, followed by an animation concert of Bangalee instruments such as *bansi*, *dotara*, *dhol* and *tabla*.

Today's episode, being aired on BTV at 9:05 am (repeat on Saturday, Monday and Wednesday at 2:05 pm), focuses on the Bangla letter 'O'. According to a press release, the episode will depict a

song with friends holding hands, a girl will paint a picture of her experience in a park where she has come across a puppy and other subjects.

Today's number is 9. The viewer will also see a story of breaking a glass window with a baseball and telling the truth to one's mother. The episode will end with a song based on combing hair and looking well turned out.



A scene from the show

Fear factor

The Eye: A chilling vision

KARIM WAHEED

Oriental movies have taken over the world like a forceful tsunami. Movie buffs who are updated with the "what's hot and what's not" in the cine-world, are well aware of the phenomenon. Recent Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean movies are awe inspiring for their original story lines, unorthodox approach and breathtaking special effects. This is particularly evident when it comes to the horror movie genre.

Asian horror movies have changed the definition of "scaring the pants off" the audience; not with exaggerated use of blood, gore or grotesque looking objects but the mood that is created with intricate use of light, shadows and sounds, movements of the subjects and the unusual angles.

In fact, the Oriental horror flicks have become so popular, that even Hollywood took notice and cashed in by making its versions of *Ringu* (*The Ring*) and *Ju-on* (*The Grudge*).

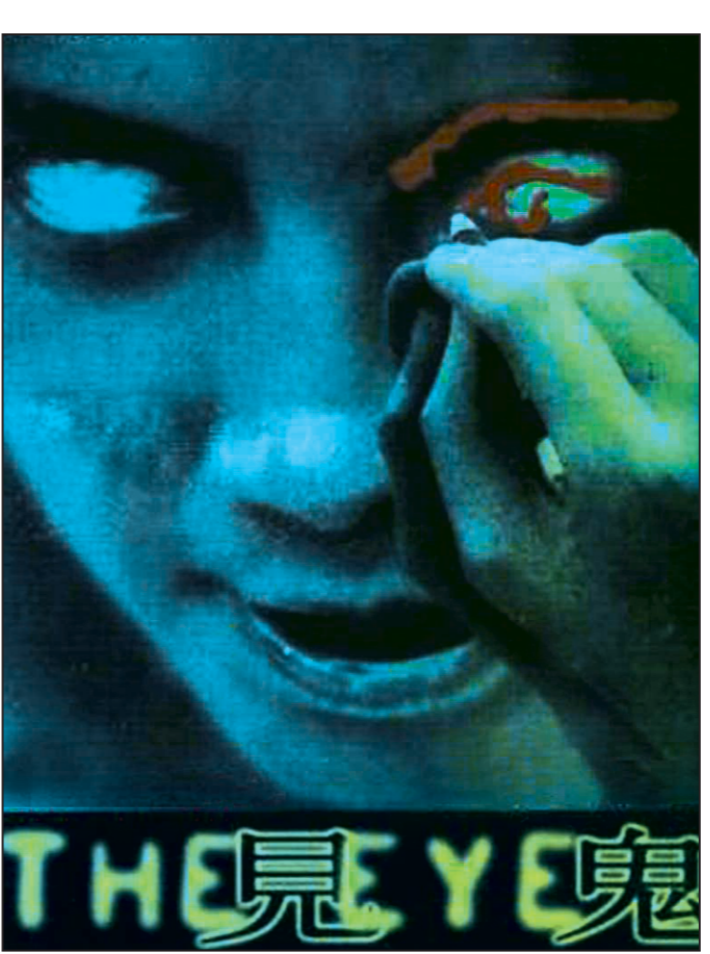
Following that tradition, Thailand-based directors, Pang brothers don't let the horror movie aficionados down with their imaginative and chilling, *The Eye* (*Gian Gui*). This time Bollywood got bitten by the Oriental horror flick bug and made the much hyped, Urmila Matondkar starrer, 'xerox' version of *The Eye*, *Naina*. This has generated a new

wave of interest in the original version.

While Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* introduced the "I see dead people" fright, *The Eye* takes the idea to a whole new level. The movie introduces us to Mun, a young woman who had been blind since she was two. She undergoes a corneal transplant. However, within a few hours of having the bandages removed, Mun starts getting visions of bizarre shadows. Though at first she doesn't suspect much, but eventually to her horror, she realises that she can see the spirits of the recently departed. Terrified by the horrors she is subjected to, Mun takes refuge in her familiar world of pitch-black darkness.

The first half of the movie is the film's ace card. The directors use Mun's post-operative blurry sight to create a truly creepy atmosphere and scary shapes are seen lurking in the background. But her brain needs to get used to the flood of visions. Mun, along with the audience, are left puzzled by the shadowy characters, as the fact remains that after having spent almost her entire life in darkness, one cannot be certain if the brain is interpreting correctly, what the eyes are telling her.

However, as her vision slowly comes into focus, the shadows become more intense and eerie, for



instance, the spirit of the restless little boy, who wanders around Mun's apartment looking for his lost report card. It seems that in Hong Kong, a city of seven million people, there is almost a restless spirit lurking around every corner.

Regrettably though, the Pangs were not consistent in maintaining the momentum as the film moves into the latter half. Mun discovers a very cliched explanation behind the unwanted supernatural abilities she had inherited with the eyes. Another flaw, which might make any movie connoisseur giggle is the sounds the audience hear through Mun. Its understandable that she can see ghosts after the corneal transplant but did she have her ears replaced as well?

Fortunately, the directors make up for the shortcomings with a remarkable 'big bang' finale. The road accident, the explosion and the after effects are mind blowing.

Taiwanese singer-actress, Angelica Lee gets two thumbs up for her portrayal of Mun. She takes the audience to her scary world of shadows and makes one feel the range of emotions she goes through. The supporting actors were just passable.

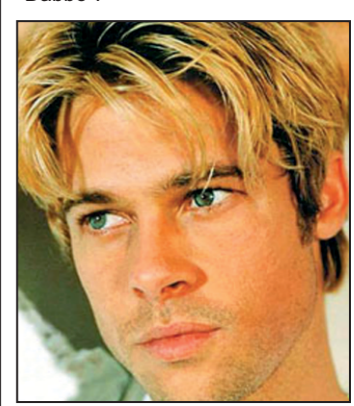
If scary movies are your thing, dim or turn out the lights, get yourself some goodies and enjoy getting spooked. For the chicken hearted, company is suggested.

'Dabbo' Pitt, a father figure...

Brad Pitt is known as 'Dabbo' in an Ethiopian village where he's become a father figure to kids. Pitt explains: "Brad sounds like 'Bread', and in Ethiopian, 'dabbo' means bread."

The movie star has pumped his own cash into the village for humanitarian causes.

While walking down one of the makeshift streets in the shantytown, kids ran up to greet their American hero, unaware of his superstar status and started chanting "Dabbo".



Rocker Bono, who encouraged the movie star to get personally involved in the effort to help raise awareness about Africa's crippling problems, said, "Brad Pitt is a gigantic movie star but he's very modest. He made a commitment to go to Africa. People say things to you but they don't follow through. He's following through."

Source: Internet