

# Tropical treat

## A visit to Nogn Nooch Garden

SADYA AFREEN MALICK, back from Bangkok

LONG weekend. Brilliant sun. Seemed like a perfect time to hop on a car and make the three-hour drive from Rangsit to Nong Nooch Tropical Garden near the Pattaya Beach in Bangkok.

At 400 Baht per head, I was still complaining about the entrance ticket. However, at the sight of the 500 acres of the tranquil landscape, such thoughts washed off in the blink of an eye! The open-air bus was ready to take us around the huge reservation, and needless to say, we didn't keep the driver waiting...

Nong Nooch is one of the world's largest private palm collections. With about 1,000 species and a wide variety of globe to spiral shaped cactus there was plenty to see. We learned that there were also over 500 different orchids, bougainvilleas, gingers, cannas and anthuriums. The Japanese tourists were clicking away with their latest digital gadgets, while some craned their necks to breaking point to catch a glimpse of the dazzling greenery all around. But all heads seemed to turn in unison at the sight of the bonsai collection set in a fountain garden besides the lake. It was as if nature had been given a free rein to paint the landscape, and it had mustered all its creati-



Thai dancers decked in traditional costumes

ity into creating this breathtaking landscape.

The Theme Park employs around 900 people and attracts approximately a million people a year, mainly from Asia. Other than the landscaped gardens, there was also a miniature zoo where children and adults watch agape the tigers, chimps, birds and butterflies.

If that wasn't enough, there were also a few inviting restaurants sprinkled around the park. We went for the Thai cuisine at a posh restaurant overlooking the lake (when in Thailand, do as Thai's do I guess...) and then set off to watch an hour-long show. According to the leaflet, the show would depict the centuries old Thai culture...but we were in for a tantalising surprise.

We were treated to a medley of performances from traditional Thai music to regional dances, but what excited my friends most was the exhibition of kick-boxing!

We learned that the 1,000 seat theatre hosts shows three times a day and are staged by a cast of no less than 90 full-time artistes. To be honest, I wasn't surprised at the large number. I could see from the drama, the amount of effort put in to the performance. Bright costumes, traditional Thai village and palatial settings, an effortless precision dance by girls in royal blue, magenta and gold sequined Thai silk with lighted candles, sword fights. The play takes you through how the simple village life is disrupted by the outlaws and the ultimate duel between good and evil.

But no one could have prepared us for the moment when the elephants entered the arena and joined in the victory dance! All the while, accompanied by the thumping drums and traditional music with bamboo instruments.

As the curtains fell on the fascinating cultural show we were herded out to an open air space to watch the spectacular elephant show.

About 20 elephants marched in military precision and turned on their amazing show. We watched in awe as elephants as large as houses, nimbly played pin ball, painted t-shirts, and even gave a massage to some volunteering spectators.

And did I mention they also high-fived and posed like super-stars after they scored goals in the football match? By then, I wouldn't have been surprised if one of them started knitting a scarf...

By the time the sun set, the audience was bone tired but didn't seem willing to leave. It was as if they wanted to re-live the day as long as they could. Busily replacing batteries and clicking away to capture the scenery on their lenses. I didn't carry any of those hi definition cameras or camcorder, but I knew the sights and sound of this stunning Tropical Garden would be locked solid in my mind for as long as I can imagine.

## Event

# International Museum Day celebrated

KHALID-BIN-HABIB

International Museum Day was celebrated on May 18 around the world. A day prior to the event, the Liberation War Museum, Bangladesh (LWM) held a discussion session. Dr Sarwar Ali, one of the LWM's trustees and the member secretary delivered the welcome speech.

At the discussion session, eminent researcher and music exponent professor Karunamoy Goswami presented the keynote paper focused on baul songs, masterpieces of oral and intangible heritage of humanity, as declared by UNESCO.

In his speech, he said, "There was a time, when the musical sce-

nario of the country resonated with the vibrant tunes of the mystical singers, popularly known as bauls. In the passage of time these songs, tunes, instruments and voices have almost faded away. To protect our musical heritage there is no other option but to retrieve that tradition.

"In the past the educated classes were not that enthusiastic about the baul culture. As a result, most documents on the chronological development of the baul culture are lost or undiscovered. Unfortunately, many baul singers have discontinued practice for financial reasons and opted for alternative sources of income. Given this opportunity, we should come forward to preserve their music and culture." He also suggested that an archive be set up,

and the original staff notations be preserved.

"Museums help bridge the cultural divide between nations. The total cultural identity of a nation can be found in a museum. Our museums do their part to increase awareness and promote the diverse heritage of Bangladeshi society, allowing Bangladeshi youth to learn and grow, individually and collectively," he added.

The programme concluded with a touching *Punthi Path* (recital) based on the Baroitola, Kishorganj genocide in 1971. The recital was by rural poet, Laal Mahmud from Kishorganj district.



Professor Karunamoy Goswami speaking at the event

PHOTO: STAR

## Tania Ahmed

# Doing the balancing act

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Tania Ahmed was in the genre of those models that changed the look of the Bangladeshi modeling scene. She was never interested in a modeling career until one day a friend came over and while going through some plain old photographs of hers asked whether she had thought about a modeling career. This friend took those same photographs to Afzal Hossain who in turn called her for an audition.

However, even though a month had lapsed there was no further news from him which didn't surprise her much. Tanya was convinced she wasn't cut out for modeling. Finally, one day Afzal called her and asked her to model for *Diamond Hair Oil*. Apparently he was mesmerised by her facial expressions. Admits Tania, "Though the quality of my hair wasn't very good, Afzal Bhai's confidence in me encouraged me to go forward." There wasn't a single retake in the advertisement, remembers Tania.

However, for this versatile personality modeling was not enough. At the peak of her career, she left modeling and plunged into the world of acting. She remembers one lazy afternoon when Mou, Pallab, Sweetie, Nobel and a couple of other friends were simply hanging out. Afzal entered the scene and asked them who they thought would be a good TV actress. It was the time when package serials were just round the corner. Laughingly he himself answered, "this monkey will do well," pointing finger at Tania. "Afzal Bhai has always fondly referred to me as the 'monkey'," confides Tania. Lo and behold, the



PHOTO COURTESY: RONG

prophecy came true and since then Tania has acted in innumerable TV serials which we are all familiar with. She went on to act on the big screen and impressed not only Bangladesh but also a section of the western world with her critically acclaimed

movie *Shyamol Chhaya*. She has also acted in Mustafa Sarwar Faruqi's *Mad\_e in Bangladesh* and a short film called *Biswaronner Nodi*.

She further got involved with choreography and has worked in a

number of programmes. Among modeling, acting and choreographing, Tania enjoys choreographing the most as it allows her to express herself creatively. Being a choreographer means deciding and coordinating, not only the movements, but the entire dress code, makeup and stage set up. "It's like a mother nurturing her new born baby. She is in charge of its every little detail. The end feeling is utterly gratifying."

On answering which one of the three she finds most challenging, Tania says, "In an advertisement, one has to explain the whole story in seconds. That is very challenging indeed. In the case of acting, maintaining a certain standard throughout each serial and fulfilling fans' expectation is pretty demanding. As far as choreography is concerned, it requires creative thinking which is equally challenging," elaborates Tania.

Commenting on her husband SI Tutul's (ex guitarist of LRB and famed music composer) opinion of her acting skills, Tania explains "We're both great admirers of each other's work. While he loves my serials and watches each one, I love his music." According to her, it would have been impossible to reach the heights she has, without the support of her family. Her mother-in-law is one of her ardent fans.

Tania believes dedication and self-confidence along with patience is essential to be established and remain at the top. This multi-faceted talent wants to direct music videos someday.

## Ibsen Commemoration '06, Bangladesh

# An Enemy of the People: A Taiwanese production

ERSHAD KAMOL

Several theatre directors have presented Norwegian master playwright Henrik Johan Ibsen's popular play, *An Enemy of the People* in their distinctive styles.

The storyline of the play is very simple, but delivers a strong message Dr Thomas Stockmann discovers that the water of the baths where he is employed is polluted. The doctor believes that it is his duty to inform the public about the danger of infection, which is opposed by the town's mayor who is apprehensive about the financial consequences, since the bath is the cornerstone of the town's economy. Subsequently, a conflict arises between the doctor and the citizens.

In presenting the play, Taiwanese director Joscha Chung has blended narration and realism. A storyteller (Wu Shih-Wei) unfolds the story of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, and he appears repeatedly in between the scenes. The technique is effective as the changes of sequences are smooth.

However a question remains: while the narrator relates the entire story, is it necessary for the director to visualise the whole text of the play including the minor actions? The directorial compositions appear repetitive. As it is a Taiwanese translation, English subtitles were projected at the right corner of the stage during the show. This tended to divert the attention of the audience. It would have been better if the narration had been in English.



PHOTO: SHAWKAT JAMIL

A scene from *An Enemy of the People*

Watching the high-tech and polished design, one remembers Shakespeare's well quoted aphorism 'All that glitters is not gold.' In fact the design of the play is ideal for a TV show, not for a three-dimensional stage.

Wu Shih-Wei as narrator, Chiang Kuo-Sheng as Dr. Stockmann, Yu-Chi Lin as Petra performed spontaneously.

Workshop in Heaven staged *The Enemy of the People* at the National Theatre Stage on May 17 as part of the ongoing theatre festival titled 'Staging Ibsen in Asia.'

At the same time University of Khulna staged *Gonoshotru*, the Bangla adaptation of the same play at the Experimental Theatre Stage. Ahmed Ahsanuzzaman is the director of the play.

# A touch of Nepalese theatre

## In conversation with Sunil Pokharel

Nepalese director-actor-designer Sunil Pokharel is in town to participate in the Ibsen Commemoration '06, Bangladesh. His Nepalese production *Putlika Ghar*, an adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, directed and designed by him has won appreciation. He is the key person of the troupe Arohan Theatre, which staged the play.

Talking about the ongoing theatre festival, Sunil said, "It's a well organised function, which has given me the opportunity to exchange views."

So far Sunil has directed 35 stage plays, most of them written by modern Nepalese and Indian playwrights. He has also directed western classics, including plays by Sophocles, Moliere, Jean Paul Sartre, Camus and others.

He has his own interpretations of the classics. In his words, "I present the classics according to the contemporary socio-political scenario. In course of that, I like to deal with democracy, social justice and pluralism."

"I like to see the classics through the eyes of the new generation. I fuse indigenous performing art forms of Nepal, which are ritualistic in presentation, with the western theatre style. In my design, I use traditional Nepalese motifs. And during directorial composition as well as design I prefer simplicity."



PHOTO: STAR

Since 1978, Sunil's active involvement with theatre has had a great impact on the resurgence of Nepalese theatre. General Secretary of Nepal Centre of International Theatre Institute, Sunil said, "Arohan Theatre is the only professional troupe in Nepal. We stage 25 shows a month at our own hall, which is the source of bread and butter of the troupe members. But, I'm optimistic. Nepal has rich traditional indigenous performing art forms. And nowadays the younger generation is also interested in theatre, which is a positive sign for the Nepalese performing art form."

He went on to add that there is not much scope for theatre training in Nepal. His troupe is the only one to have introduced a two-year diploma course on theatre, where graduates from the Delhi-based National School of Drama (NSD) teach.

A graduate from NSD in 1987, he was the winner of the prestigious 'Best All Rounder Student Award' of the drama school in the same year. Besides staging theatre in the subcontinent, Sunil and his troupe have staged plays in Denmark, Norway and Russia.

## Shei Tumi on ntv

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

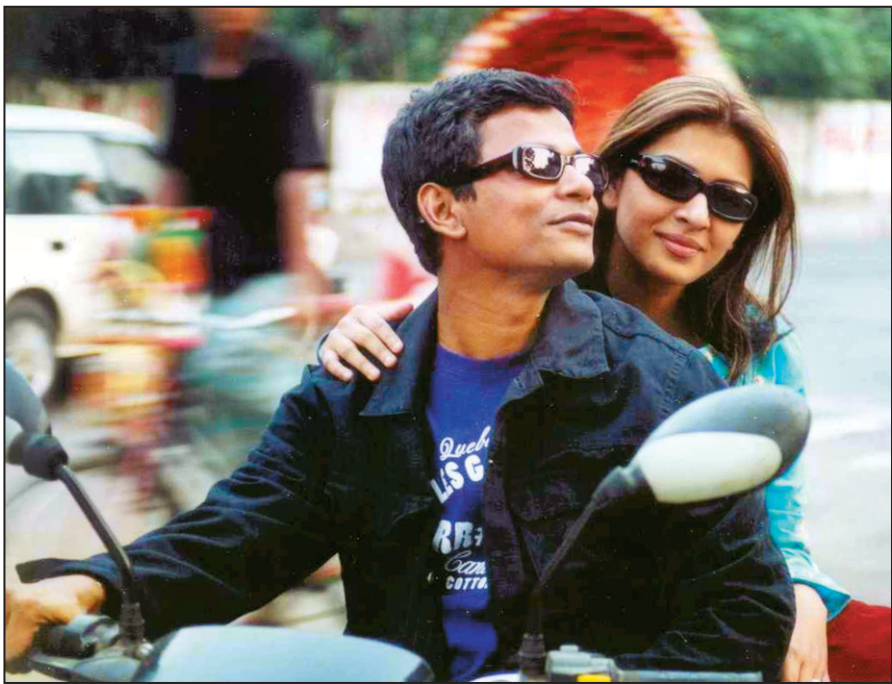
TV play *Shei Tumi* will be aired on ntv on May 20 at 9:00 pm. Written by Dewan Shamsur Rakib and directed by Kaushik Shankar Das, the single-episode play revolves around a young couple.

Ranjan and Hrishita recently got married without approval of their parents. Ranjan is a businessman and Hrishita is a newspaper reporter. Their days go by amidst laughter, tiffs and sharing each other's stress.

One day, Hrishita doesn't return home. Ranjan finds the main door locked and starts calling Hrishita on the phone; only to find the phone has been turned off.

It's late at night and Ranjan has no idea where his wife is. While frantically looking for Hrishita, Ranjan recalls the intense argument they had the night before. Is Hrishita still mad at him? Has she been in an accident? The story unfolds and Hrishita's whereabouts are revealed.

Srabosti Dutta Tinni and Mamunul Haq are in the lead roles. Abul Kashem, Chitralekha Guho and Elita Karim are in other roles.



Mamun and Tinni in *Shei Tumi*