

Lalbagh Kella in focus

'Laser-light and sound' show at the historic sight



An overview of Lalbagh Kella (L), laser show at the venue

ERSHAD KAMOL

LIGHT and sound shows at historic monuments and forts in many big cities are major attractions to tourists from all corners of the world. Through a 'laser-light and sound' show, the Department of Archaeology under the Ministry of Cultural Affairs is all set to present the history of Lalbagh Kella.

Construction of the fortress started in 1678-79 by Prince Muhammed Azam (third son of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb), and was continued by the next viceroy, Shaista Khan. Located near the Buriganga river, in the south-western part of the old Dhaka, Lalbagh Kella is also known as 'Fort Aurangabad'. The edifice remains an incomplete Mughal

fortress, as the construction stopped abruptly after the death of Shaista Khan's daughter, Iran Dukht -- popularly known as Paribibi. Paribibi's tomb is one of the monuments on the site, which also includes an audience hall with attached *hammam*, a mosque and others.

Four years back Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB) had arranged two 'light and sound' shows at Lalbagh Kella to feature the architectural heritage of Bangladesh for delegates from overseas. Architect Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed had written the script, Aly Zaker gave the voice, Architect Enamul Huq Nirghar and Nasirul Huque Khokon conducted the lighting and sound effect.

On the government initiative, Dr.

M Shafiqul Alam, head of Department of Archaeology, informed that the department has plans to highlight the Kella to the world. To quote him, "On February 17, 1999, we had submitted an official proposal to UNESCO to declare Lalbagh Kella as a 'world heritage site' under cultural category. Since then we have taken initiatives to present the history of the Kella through the 'laser-light and sound' show that should appeal to a broader audience. Currently the constructor, Project Builders Ltd, is implementing the project. Each day there will be three 25-minute-long 'laser-light and sound' shows -- two in Bangla and one in English."

Script for the show is ready. Mamunur Rashid has dramatised

the script based on the historic events narrated by noted historian Dr. Nazimuddin Ahmed. Mamun said, "While working on the script, I've followed the storyline provided by the Department of Archaeology as well as reading books on the history of the Kella." Professor Abdus Selim has translated the script for the English version.

"The script has been submitted to a panel of editors. We will also take opinions from experts. Project Builders Ltd is setting up 'water screen structure' and 'beam house', necessary features in a 'light and sound show'. If everything goes smoothly, we hope to open the Tk 5.9 crore project within next four months," said Dr. Alam.

Thandur Raihan has developed

the concept of the show. He is also the director of the show. According to him: "Internationally acclaimed German laser and light company Lobo Electronics will create the laser animations. All the equipments will be imported from the company. Khaled Khan is directing the sound effect part."

Eminent actors Mamunur Rashid, Aly Zaker, Subarna Mustafa, Jayanto Chattopadhyaya and Khaled Khan will lend their voices to historic characters Mohammad Azam, Shaista Khan, Paribibi, Islam Khan and a singer named Murshidi, respectively. Shafi Kamal is the narrator of the Bangla version and Rahaba Khan is the narrator of the English version of the show.



Shishir Kumar: A mask-maker striving to keep his art alive

AHSAN HABIB, back from Rajshahi

Shishir Kumar Paul, who comes from a long line of mask-makers in Rajshahi, is desperately seeking ways to save his craft, which is currently on the verge of dying out.

Born in Poba upazilla 77 years ago, Shishir recalls how he got involved with the profession. Not so long ago, a mask-maker would make 36 different kinds of masks using tamarind seeds as the medium for mixing raw colours collected from organic materials. "Masks were made for 'mukhush khela', an indigenous theatre based on *Ramayana*," says Shishir. For traditional masks, a dice is made with clay; paper is placed on it later. The complicated patterns are drawn on those faces. These masks were once very fashionable in theatrical performances of *Ramayana*.

Using masks in theatre, depicting the confrontation between Ram and Rabon, has always been

highlighted at social and religious ceremonies in rural areas. "During a performance an actor can assume any name on stage, and the mask shapes his/her identity," Shishir explains the purpose of using masks in 'mukhush khela'.

"If anyone assumes the character 'Hanuman', how could the audience recognise him without the 'Hanuman' mask?" asks Shishir.

In contemporary society, the access to technology and the emergence of television and movies as sources of entertainment, the impact of theatre is not what it used to be. Thus masks used in theatre have ceased to exist as well. Also, these performances suffered a great set back when many Hindus left the country for good following the Partition (1947). Masks have lost their social and economic value.

Shishir says that though the design of the masks remains unchanged, he no longer uses

natural colours and tamarind seeds as the medium.

Shishir represents the plight of traditional mask-makers in the country. "Nowadays, the craft alone does not guarantee a decent meal," says the mask-maker. Which explains why Shishir's son has lost interest in the ancestral profession.

Shishir is fighting to preserve this dying craft by finding new ways to market the products. Though his son has participated in *Boishakhi mela* arranged by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, he believes that it is not enough. There have been conscious efforts on his part to appeal to modern taste by combining traditional designs with more contemporary colours/ patterns when making masks. "Extending support to traditional crafts and treating them with respect is crucial for preserving these works of art from fading away," Shishir reaffirms.



Shishir Kumar (C) with children putting on masks made by him

Buzzworthy 'Swapnodanay': Dreams, deception and disconnect ...



Mahmuduzzaman Babu and Rokeya Prachy with a child artiste (C) in the film

KARIM WAHEED

Cine-club activist and film festival organiser Golam Rabbany's debut film *Swapnodanay* (*On the Wings of Dreams*) is ready for release. Rabbany -- founder, director of International Film Festival Bangladesh and secretary general of International Federation of Film Societies -- has been involved with film societies from early '90s. Since then he had aspired to become a filmmaker. However, due to frustrating circumstances that ambition was not realised.

Rabbany did get his shot at filmmaking eventually. Hope emerged as Faridur Reza Shagor (managing director of Impress Telefilm Ltd) encouraged Rabbany to make films for individuals.

Swapnodanay follows the lives of a few immigrants living in a remote village in the Northern part of the country. The protagonist Fazlu (played by

singer Mahmuduzzaman Babu) is a peddler -- pushing items like ointments and herbal remedies. One evening he returns home with a used trouser for his son. While washing the trouser, Fazlu's wife (Rokeya Prachy) finds some foreign currency in the pockets. The family gets over-excited at the possibility of acquiring a sizeable amount of cash. Fazlu and his pal Siraj (Fazlur Rahman Babu) roam around the rugged locales of 'Barendrabhumi' on a beat-up motorbike, trying to exchange the foreign currency for Taka. Greed surfaces and the central characters -- Fazlu, his wife and Siraj -- start weaving their individual dreams. Desire and deception change the relationships forever.

According to Rabbany, he came up with the story when several people from his village came up to him for suggestions after finding foreign currency in second-hand clothes. Rabbany

developed the screenplay as well.

The film boasts an ace crew. Noted author Anisul Huq elaborated the story and wrote the dialogues. Mahfooz Ur Rahman Khan is the cinematographer. Bappa Majumder is the music director. Special attention has been given to sound. Renowned sound designer Anup Mukherji, who has worked with Satyajit Ray, Aparna Sen, Rituporno Ghosh and other celebrated filmmakers, has worked extensively on *Swapnodanay*.

Choice of actors is quite interesting too. Rabbany cast singer Mahmuduzzaman Babu as Fazlu (this is his first experience in acting), along with skilled thespians Fazlur Rahman Babu and Rokeya Prachy. On the casting Rabbany says, "Initially I talked to a few actors. But I always believe that we need non-actors in films. I felt Babu (Mahmuduzzaman) fit the requirements of the character and I was thoroughly impressed with his determination and commitment to deliver what I wanted from him as an actor."

About her character, Rokeya Prachy says, "My character in the film is a hard working rural woman who has her vulnerable moments. Following an event that she and her husband perceive as unprecedented, she starts to dream of a better tomorrow. At one point she becomes desperate and does something shocking which is sure to leave the audience stunned."

The film had its world premier at the 36th Rotterdam International Film Festival (Netherlands) on January 29 this year and took part in the 11th Sofia International Film Festival (Bulgaria) held last month. *Swapnodanay* was also screened at a small film festival in Surinam (the country has no functional film industry) on 19th, this month.

After the world premier of the film, leading international entertainment magazine *Variety* had this to say: "A clever twist on a hoary tale is but one of the reasons to see *On the Wings of Dreams*, a genuine charmer from newcomer Golam Rabbany. Simply told with sensitivity and respect for characters, the pic has occasional problems integrating tone, but Rabbany is a new Bengali talent on the rise..."

Rabbany hopes the film will have its release in July at selected theatres in the country.



TV Watch

Bangla movie *Noyontara* will be aired today at 2:30pm on Channel-i. The movie features the quintessential love story between rich and poor. The film was directed by Kazi Zahir. Lead roles were played by Suchonda and Azim.

A mélange of paintings and sculptures Exhibition features two upcoming artists

FAYZA HAQ

Abdul Gaffar Babu and Shamira Khanum, young artists from the Institute of Fine Arts (IFA), DU, are currently having an exhibition at Zainul Gallery. Professors Abul Barq Alvi and Hamiduzzaman Khan, who attended the inauguration, had words of praise and encouragement for Babu and Shamira's efforts.

Babu brought in oil, watercolour, acrylic, mixed media and graphics in his display. In the woodcut media he presented a series of images of owls in black and vermilion, depicting

truth and fib. Roman soldiers with sword in hand, riding horses representing the prevalence of warfare throughout the years, are the subjects of a print. The overwhelming whirling image in black against red stands for the moving element of time.

In acrylic is a presentation of a city, done in geometric shapes in shades of orange, gold and yellow. There is an electric pole and torn wires to indicate the passage of time. There are six delightful presentations of the full moon in various mediums, ranging from watercolour to acrylic. These contain the pristine white

moon and lit up sky, seen through dark hedges and branches of trees. The sky is a bewildering swirl of blue and white.

Paintings of boats afloat on the river bring in harmony and tranquility. The grey in the work is touched up with maroon. A lot of the space has been left empty. *The lonely bird*, in watercolour reflects the artist's own life as he is from Old Dhaka. A pigeon sits on a window-sill, and gazes at the city with its numerous houses. Another delightful painting of birds sitting on walls and electric poles, recalls the cityscapes of more senior artists.

More views of old Dhaka, with their narrow lanes, shutters, walls, windows and passers-by are brought in two other paintings. Bold dark strokes in the works complete the composition.

Babu says that he has been inspired by his teachers Anisuzzaman, Rokeya Sultana, Abul Barq Alvi and Shishir Bhattayacharya.

Shamira says that she has gone in for sculpture, as it is a field where few women venture in. She says that she enjoys doing something three-dimensional and realistic from mediums like clay, wax, wood, metal and cement. "I enjoy the metal casting as it is long lasting. The cement casting carries more risk and is more difficult to handle. I've done all the work in the department itself using the facilities provided here," says Shamira.

In *The couple*, done in clay and painted over, brings in a couple who face away from each other and imply disagreement. A cement piece presents a woman sitting pensively. A wood creation also has a seated woman, lost in thoughts. Some of the pieces are done with sand-casting. One composition has nine tiny figures seated in different positions. Different from the rest is a modern composition with circles, on the mother and child theme. "Most of my work reflect women," Shamira says, "I deal with women as I want to bring to light their surroundings and their problems."

In another part of the exhibition which is called "Art, Craft and Lifestyle", were clothes, bags, costume jewellery and other accessories done by the two artists.



A collage of works done by the duo



Drew Barrymore is People's 'most beautiful'

AP, New York

She was born with her acting family's classic beauty, but Drew Barrymore credits her fun-loving approach to life for her No. 1 spot on *People* magazine's annual "100 Most Beautiful People" list.

"I just think happiness is what makes you pretty. Period," she tells the magazine. "Happy people are beautiful. They become like a mirror and they reflect that happiness."

Barrymore, 32, graces the cover of the issue that hits newsstands Friday. It's her fourth time on the list, but first as the cover girl.

Making the cover "made my peacock feathers shine in the golden-hour light and extend to the heavens," says Barrymore, who stars in the upcoming Warner Bros. film *Lucky You*, opposite

Eric Bana. Inside, she weighs in on a host of beauty-related topics. Her beauty rules for dating? "The only fundamental rule for me is to just be myself," she says. "Let your freak-flag fly, and if someone doesn't get you, move on."

Barrymore is one of 11 celebrities -- including Eva Longoria and the three Jessicas (Simpson, Alba and Biel) -- photographed for the issue without makeup.

"I find that men, in my past, have preferred me without it," Biel, 25, says of makeup.

Among others on the "Beautiful People" list: Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, George Clooney, Oprah Winfrey, Alicia Keys, Leonardo DiCaprio, Nicole Kidman, Jennifer Garner, Scarlett Johansson, Matthew McConaughey, Jennifer Aniston, Reese Witherspoon, Halle Berry, Julia Roberts and Jennifer Lopez.