

# An artiste of compassion

Tête-à-tête with Iffat Ara Nargis

NADIA SARWAT

**I**FFAT Ara Nargis is a familiar name in our music arena. Best known as an *adhnik* singer, she is quite comfortable with all kinds of songs including classical, folk and Nazrul Sangeet. She is also an associate professor of Social Work in Begum Badrunnesa Government Girls' College.

The artiste represented Bangladesh at six International Music Competitions held in different countries. She won the 3rd prize in the folk category in 2003 Tashkent International Music Competition. She had also done playback in several films. The seasoned artiste recently shared her views on music and more with *The Daily Star*.

"People know me as an *adhnik* singer, but I think a true artiste can sing anything. I treat a song as an individual entity, not based on some specific genre. Interestingly, my first radio performance was a Rabindra Sangeet. Even Mita Haq refused to believe that I was not a Tagore singer at an informal gathering. I'm enlisted in BTVA as a grade 'A' artist in classical, folk and Nazrul Sangeet. However, I do give priority to *adhnik* songs because the audience finds my voice most suitable for it," says Nargis.

On her initiation in music, the artiste says, "I was fond of music from an early age. My cousin Mazharul Hannan took me to a music school 'Surbani Sangeet



Iffat Ara Nargis

Bidyayi in Rajshahi after hearing me sing when I was 6/7. Ustad

Abdul Aziz was in charge of the Music School. He was more like a

father to me. I took lessons in classical music from him for years. Noted singer Andrew Kishore was also one of his students. It was Andrew who introduced me to noted music director Alam Khan. My first playback was for the film *Bidrohi* (1982)."

Was a career in music difficult for women in those days? Nargis responds, "Not at all. I think the environment then was even friendlier for the girls than it is now. I was a regular artiste at Rajshahi Betar since 1966. Rajshahi was famous for its rich cultural activities at that time. Music was one of my subjects in S.S.C. I wanted to study at Dhaka Music College, but as they didn't have residential facilities for women on campus, my mother didn't allow me to take admission."

"But I always took part in cultural programmes and competitions. I came second in the Inter-ratio Music Competition 1976. Sabina Yasmin and Shammi Akhter won the first and third place respectively in that competition. The then president handed over the prizes but I could not attend that event because of my Honours final exam," a nostalgic Nargis recalls.

Throughout her musical career that spans over four decades, the artiste has released only a few albums. Is there a reason behind it? Says Nargis,

"You see, artistes are treated as commodities these days. I personally could not go with this stream. I consider music a passion, not a money-maker. If you want to get exposure as a musician/singer now, you have to keep connections and entertain the media all the time. My ethics do not allow me to do that."

What does she think of this generation and their attitude towards traditional music? "Folks are so impatient these days. Some 'singers' don't even want to take the time to understand the songs they are about to sing. In addition, the media is not doing anything about it either. I also feel that the music education depends on the guru or ustad; it's a *gurumukhi bidya*. Where are those gurus and those disciples now?"

People forgot that music is associated with devotion and prayer. Hence, some people now have the audacity to involve vulgarity and even, drugs with music," says the singer.

Nargis is also actively involved in several social causes. She is working as a catalyst for the Hunger Project. She also teaches at a private college, which provides education for underprivileged girls. The singer is currently working on her next album featuring folk songs that she will release on her own.

# Eid special TV play "O Bandhu Amar" on Banglavision

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Written By Imdadul Haque Milon and directed by Chayanika Chowdhury, single episode TV play *O Bandhu Amar* will be aired on Banglavision on the fifth day of Eid at 11:20pm.

The story begins with Shubho mesmerised in the middle of the night, hearing a female voice from the next building, rendering a familiar Tagore song, *Tumi rokey nirokey*. Shubho's mother, who has died from cancer, used to sing that song. Next day, Shubho tries to meet the singer named Momo and talks to her. But Momo's brother becomes furious when he finds a stranger talking to his sister. Momo tries to apologise. A relationship develops between the two. A blissful Shubho eventually finds out that the object of his affection has



Anisur Rahman Milan and Sumaiya Shimu in the TV play

Shubho? Casts of the play includes Tauqir Ahmed, Anisur Rahman Milan, Sumaiya Shimu and Sharmilee Ahmed.

## Child Rights Week

### 'Parliament session' for children in Tangail



Children at the mock parliament session

PHOTO: STAR

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A mock parliament session for children was held in Tangail on the occasion of International Child Rights Week.

Bangladesh Shishu Shangbadik Parishad (BSSP) organised the event at Tangail Municipality Auditorium last Wednesday.

Founder chairman of BSSP Topu Ahmed attended at the session as the Speaker while BSSP's finance secretary Lipi Akhter played the role of Deputy Speaker.

Tangail Deputy Commissioner's representatives, assistant commissioner and magistrate Nasima Khatun and Ishita Rony,

and organiser of Bangladesh Shishu Academy's Tangail unit and district child officer Saidur Rahman Bhuyan attended and addressed the programme.

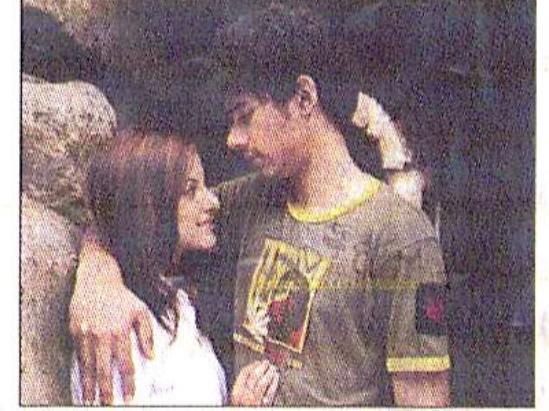
During their speeches, the child parliament members debated on banning violent video games and vulgar posters as their current issue.

## "Dil Dosti Etc": A film inspired by Ray's legendary Apu trilogy

BY PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

development strategy, choose the subject once again for his debut film? The answer he gives is that he wanted to be different from run-of-the-mill Bollywood directors.

The film was extensively shot in Delhi University where both Tewary and Imaad had spent some time studying. This is the second film for Imaad who had earlier featured in his father's production *Yin Hota To Kya Hota*.



A scene from the film

## Traditions and heritage of the Garos becoming sidelined

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

The age-old tradition and culture of the Garo, a large indigenous community of Mymensingh region, are becoming sidelined day by day. The Mymensingh region was once renowned for its ethnic diversity and harmony among people of different faith and cultures and vibrant display of their respective heritage. Among the indigenous groups living in this area are: Garo, Dhalu, Cooch, Khatriya and Hajong.

Haluaghata, a frontier upazila of Mymensingh district is known for its varied traditions. A large number of Garo people have been living here for centuries.

There are various reasons behind the indigenous cultures becoming marginal. A major reason would be mass conversion to Christianity. Another reason is the financial constraint that had forced many of the community to migrate to the capital city or other major urban areas in search of work. Sources of substantial income is not sufficient for this indigenous community in Haluaghata. Outside the district, mainly in Dhaka, the younger members of this indigenous group work in garments factories, beauty parlours and at times as domestic help to make a living. Then there is the land issue: loss of fertility and legal disputes regarding the land they own.

The Garos being simple and not familiar with the fraudulent ways, often become easy baits to land-grabbers. As they often trust others without questioning, they eventually



Traditional Garo dance marking the Wangala Festival

PHOTO: STAR

ally become victims, said Humayun Kabir Mainik, a young journalist working in Haluaghata.

Currently the number of Garos living in the area is 18,000 but this number is decreasing gradually. The Adibashi Shangskritik Kendra, the only cultural organisation for the Garos in Rangrapara, Haluaghata, is about to be closed down. Now the once familiar tunes and beats of traditional Garo songs and dances are not heard in Rangrapara and Birodakuni, two areas acknowledged for Garo festivities.

There was a time when the Garos

used to arrange several traditional festivals. Some of these festivals being 'Wangala' or 'Wanna', a festival celebrating the harvest in Aghrahayan; 'Rangshugala', on the occasion of sowing grains in Falgun and Chaitra; another festival on the occasion of 'Jhum' in Chaitra and Baisakh, and 'Habaghrata'.

Talking to this correspondent, Badhra Mrong, of Haluaghata, vice president of the Tribal Welfare Association Central Unit said that as more or less 100 percent of the Garo people have now converted to Christianity, they do not practice their ancestral ways any more. As a

result, young Garos are more inclined towards contemporary Western and Bengali cultures. "Who will uphold the Garo traditions and heritage then?" -- he asked. Mrong also held poverty and illiteracy responsible for the lack of interest in their own culture among the indigenous people.

To safeguard the diversity of the combined culture of a country, traditions of all castes and communities should be maintained. Many countries are even trying to revive their extinct traditions," said Promod Chirang, another Garo leader in Haluaghata.

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