

Homage

# Selim Al Deen: A legend

ERSHAD KAMOL

JANUARY 14 evening: A news that sent a wave of shock among the people -- the untimely demise of Selim Al Deen, a legendary dramatist in the post-colonial Bangla literature. He passed away at the age of 59; many believe he could contribute more.

People from every corner of the country, in particular the theatre activists, gathered at the Central Shaheed Minar on January 16 morning to pay their tribute to the deceased intellectual. His coffin was covered with the National Flag of Bangladesh. He was later buried on Jahangirnagar University Campus, the place he loved most.

Al Deen, a pioneer of neo-theatre movement in Bangladesh, a theoretician of drama, a scholar, an organiser and a professor of Department of Drama and Dramatics at Jahangirnagar University, developed a 'new drama form' based on the narratives of traditional indigenous theatre.

The playwright had his unique style. His narratives are lyrical and nature appears spontaneously in his plays. The structure of his plays is innovative too.

Al Deen was a founder member of Dhaka Theatre. He, along with Nasiruddin Yousuff, formed Bangladesh Gram Theatre in 1981-82 and Al Deen was its chief adviser.

In the early 1980s Selim Al Deen and his friends of Dhaka Theatre began their search for the roots of Bangla theatre. The question that always ran through Al Deen's mind -- was Bangla theatre only 300 years old? He began his research to trace the origin of Bangla theatre and developed his own style of writing plays based on the (thousands of years old) traditional performing art forms. *Shakuntala*, *Kittonkhola*, *Keramat Mongol*, *Hat Hadai*, *Chaka*, *Joiboti Koinnar Mon*, *Horgoj*, *Bonopangshul*, *Nimiojon* and many other plays by Al Deen are remarkable examples of the narrative style he popularised. His play *Horgoj* has been translated in the Swedish language.

In 1995, Al Deen completed his PhD from Jahangirnagar University on Medieval Bangla Drama. He also compiled *Bangla Natyakash* -- the only anthology of Bangla drama-related terms and forms of traditional theatre. Al Deen's plays are included in the curriculum of University of Dhaka, Jahangirnagar University, Jadavpur University and Rabindra Bharati University in India.



Selim Al Deen

Eminent director Nasiruddin Yousuff, who directed most of Al Deen's plays, said, "For the last 35 years, Selim and I have worked together, travelling all over of the country, in search of traditional theatre forms. I've lost my best friend. We established a national theatre form. And Selim Al Deen was its theoretician. He is the first modern playwright in Bangla literature, who went past the colonial mindset and developed a new form of Bangla theatre."

Yousuff further added that he believes those who share Al Deen's views and values would work to set up a 'World Cultural Centre' -- the playwright's dream.

Eminent poet-playwright Syed Shamsul Haq said, "This is an irreparable loss. He was younger to

me and had several queries related to the identity of our culture. He successfully demonstrated our cultural identity through his plays."

Claiming Selim Al Deen as one of the most prominent playwrights in Bangla literature, playwright-director-organiser Mamunur Rashid said, "Al Deen revived and developed many traditional theatre forms that were on the verge of extinction. I do admit I was intimidated by his superior skills as a playwright and each time I tried my best to compete with him. I've lost the one who challenged and encouraged my creativity."

Eminent TV play director Atiqul Haque Chowdhury, the producer of Al Deen's first TV play *Ghum Nei*, aired in 1970, said, "All stage plays are not considered 'literature'. Al

Deen's plays have enriched our literature in more ways than one. He was a world-class playwright."

Not only in Bangladesh, Al Deen is equally popular in Kolkata. Kolkata-based theatre personalities including Rudraprasad Sengupta and Usha Ganguli were great admirers of Al Deen's works. Nowadays many Kolkata-based theatre troupes stage plays written by him.

Upon receiving the news of Al Deen's death, in an email to Nasiruddin Yousuff, Rudraprasad Sengupta wrote, "Al Deen was a remarkable playwright by any standard, be it national or international. So many times, both here (Kolkata) and in Dhaka, we all leapt with joy or drowned in despair as we experienced the magic and mystique of his words."

Several actors consider their roles in Al Deen's plays unforgettable. Actor Shahiduzzaman Selim said, "I had known him since I was a student of Jahangirnagar University. Acting in his plays -- *Kittonkhola*, *Keramat Mongol*, *Bonopangshul*, *Hat Hadai* and *Prachya* -- groomed me as an artiste. I acted in Al Deen's play *Shakuntala* and later directed it for Jahangirnagar Theatre. Moreover, I've directed a mega-serial, *Protonari*, written by Al Deen. Since then I haven't directed any new TV serial, as I haven't come across a script like that."

Al Deen's demise is not only a loss for our theatre, but also for the academicians. His colleague at the Department of Drama and Dramatics, Professor Afsar Ahmed, said, "We worked together for three decades. He was a wonderful teacher, theoretician, researcher and scholar. We've lost a guardian. But, I believe, our department would be able to establish his theories."

Theatre actor-director Aly Zaker believes that we can realise Al Deen's vision. He said, "Selim worked tirelessly to give a distinct identity to Bangladeshi theatre, but he could not see the anthology of his works. Many of his plays are yet to be staged. What is also encouraging is that he has created a good number of talented disciples who can continue Al Deen's legacy."

The drama legend was honoured with several prestigious national and international awards, including the Bangla Academy Literature Award, National Film Award, Ekushey Padak and Oloko Shahitya Puroshkar.

# Poignancy and philosophy from a prince of paints

Monirul Islam discusses his past and present

FAYZA HAQ

Monirul Islam, who was here on a visit to Bangladesh from Spain, recently received an award from *Prothom Alo* to add to his nonpareil local and international feats. Gentle, yet outspoken he speaks without pause over coffee at his residence in Dhanmandi.

Expert in both prints and painting he took the country by storm when he first returned from Spain in the mid-'70s. Always shuttling to and fro, to keep in touch with his family in Chandpur, he discusses his forte in pithy words.

Debonair, dramatic and driven, Monir says, "I've been making prints for 30 years and that's the beginning of my stay in Spain. I've had the opportunity of knowing some great artists in print. Now I've stopped my printmaking as the print media can make you bored over the decades, as it has its limitations."

Monir believes that an artist who works even in charcoal has value. Rembrandt is great even though his oils weren't always large. His etchings on small plates were miracles, the artist comments. Goya too made etchings of the civil war of his country and bull fights; and used aqua tint to heighten the effect of his 80 prints in his numerous portfolios. Picasso excelled in prints, he says.

To relieve the mental block and monotony, Monir now indulges in the brush on paper both in Spain and Bangladesh. Working by day and night, as the mood and passion takes him, he makes preliminary sketches on paper with paints. However, for him, each day is a new



Monirul Islam

event for an artist, and it should bring in three paintings at least for him. Monir works on his memories, dreams and pitfalls. Life

should have its poignancy too, he believes. Too much of sunshine and unrelieved joy would inspire him on, he says. The different

stages in man's life, he says, bring in different visions and ideas. Stress and sorrow lend different hues to his work although they are replete with vibrant tints ranging from vermilion to ultramarine.

Planning work for Monir means designing for interior space. The lines are filled with colours, he says. His sketches are vital for him, and he always refers to them. Monir says that he depicts nature and all its bounty has to offer. In his academic life at the Art College in Dhaka, he learnt to bring in the outdoor scenes, which he says are "the treasures of our lives". The artist has departed from the realistic and picturesque, as he has progressed with time into his world of the contemporary.

"The ambience of the artists, the socio-economic and political atmosphere, has a natural impact on the creative person. Thus Zainul Abedin's famine sketches in 1943 were stark. After 40 years his work was lyrical. The Liberation War touched the filmmakers, painters, writers and musicians in Bangladesh; the two World Wars had their impact on artists' images in Europe. Thinkers, painters and litterateurs were muzzled by Franco, Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini. Earlier the Mughal, Tudor, French, Russian and German courts had their patronised painters, and other creative writers. "In fact, from the beginning of history -- both in the east and west -- artists have always reflected their lifestyles," Monir reminds us. "Art is the mirror of life and society," says the artist.



## 10th Dhaka International Film Festival



### Unsatisfactory turnout: Observations by local participants



Tareque Masud

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

A total of nine Bangladeshi movies have participated at the 10th Dhaka International Film Festival. Four Bangladeshi movies -- *Ghani* directed by Kazi Morshed, *Rupkatha Galpo* directed by Tauquir Ahmed, *Mad\_e in Bangladesh* directed by Mostafa Sarwar Farooki and *Nacholer Rani* directed by Wahiduzzaman Diamond -- were screened in the 'Australasian Competition' section. Four were screened in the 'Bangladesh Panorama' section. The films are: *Ontorjatra* directed by Tareque Masud, *Rani Kutbir Baki Itihash* by Samia Zaman, *Ek*



Tauquir Ahmed

*Khando Jomi* by Shahjahan Chowdhury and *Shyamal Chhaya* by Humayun Ahmed. Moreover, Badal Rahman's movie *Emile-er Goenda Bahini* will be screened today at the 'Children Film' section.

Most of these directors have attended the festival several times. But, many of them are not satisfied with the arrangement of the 10th Dhaka International Film Festival.

Director-actor Tauquir Ahmed said, "I attended at the inaugural programme. I've also attended a 'meet the press' session and watched movies from other countries. But, I did not like this year's arrangement."

Why did the film festival fail to attract a larger audience? Director of *Rani Kutbir Baki Itihash*, Samia Zaman, who also attended the festival several times, said that this year's festival was not like the previous arrangements. She said, "I was excited when I was introduced at an international film festival as a director but was later disappointed by the small turnout. I believe there are two major reasons behind this: restrictions created by the Bangladesh Film Censor Board and lack of interest among the university students, who form a major share of the audience at film festivals. I think the students are preoccupied with the ongoing movement at the

Dhaka University campus." Director of *Ontorjatra*, Tareque Masud analysed the issue from a different angle. He said, "Bureaucratic non-cooperation in cultural activities is a familiar phenomenon in Bangladesh. These bureaucratic tangles would not be imposed if the film activists were united. I see a strong division amongst the film activists. If it continues no festival in Bangladesh will be able to get international recognition. I think the film activists should work together and the government should play a supportive role in arranging an international standard festival, which will help create a positive image of the country."

## grameenphone Zainul-Quamrul International Children's Painting Competition-'07



Group A gold medal: Awohona Rahman (Bangladesh)

JAMIL MAHMUD

The prize giving ceremony of "grameenphone Zainul-Quamrul International Children's Painting Competition-2007" was held at the National Theatre Stage, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) on January 16. Gandaria Kisholoy Kochi-Kachar Mela arranged the competition, which started from June 12, 2007.

Prior to the ceremony a discussion was held at the venue. Shaidur Rahman Swapon, organiser of the competition, gave the welcome speech. Barrister Mainul Hossain was the chief guest at the programme. Khalid Hasan, Director

of Regulatory and Corporate Affairs of Grameenphone and Kamrul Hasan ndc, DG of BSA were the special guests. Mohammad Shafiqur Rahman Dulu, Director of Gandaria Kisholoy Kochi-Kachar Mela, presided over the programme.

After the discussion, the guests handed over the prizes and certificates among the 200 winners.

In group A, (age 3-6), Awohona Rahman of Bangladesh received the gold medal. In group B (age 6-9), Anushka Agarwal of India received the gold medal.

In group C (age 9-12), Nur Islam Ripon of Bangladesh received the gold medal. Ripon is a student of class seven at the Dhaka Bodhir High School. His sister informed



Group B gold medal: Anushka Agrawal (India)

that he attended painting classes at Bangladesh Shishu Academy.

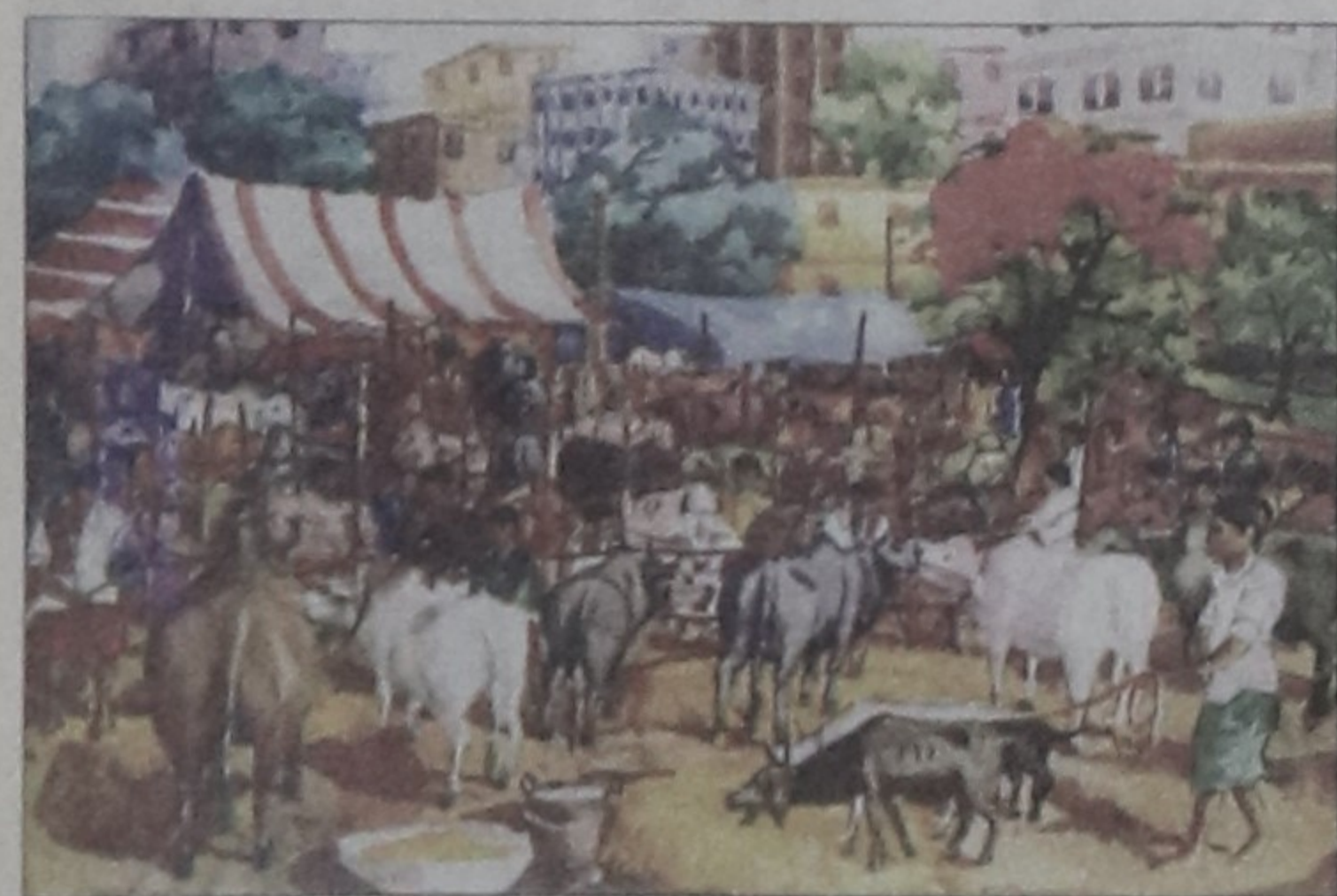
In Group D (aged between 12 to 16), Najmun Nahar Mitu won the gold medal. Mita, a student of class nine at the Motijhil Govt. Girls' High School, also attended painting classes at Bangladesh Shishu Academy.

This year 4490 children from 24 countries (between 3 to 16 years of age) submitted a total of 8500 paintings in four groups. A three-member Jury Committee that included Professor Mahmudul Haque, Professor Abul Barq Alvi and T.A. Kamal Kabir, selected 200 paintings for the prizes. The prizes included a gold medal, ten silver medals, ten bronze medals and 29

certificates in each group. An exhibition of the 200 prize-winning paintings was held at the National Art Gallery, BSA from January 13 to 16.

One hundred and forty-four children from Bangladesh received prizes and certificates. Among other countries, 28 children from Sri Lanka, ten from Indonesia, nine from India, four from Turkey, three from Malaysia and one from Belarus and Romania each, received awards.

A colourful cultural programme was also held at the venue. Members of the Gandaria Kisholoy Kochi-Kachar Mela performed music, dance and a short play at the programme.



Group C gold medal: Nur Islam Ripon (Bangladesh)



Group D gold medal: Najmun Nahar (Bangladesh)

*Putul Naacher Itikotha*, a TV adaptation of the renowned novel by Manik Bandyopadhyay, will be aired tonight on ATN Bangla at 8 pm. The play is directed by Fuad Chowdhury.

The story follows a young, idealistic village-doctor, Shashi. Kushum is the wife of Shashi's childhood friend, Paran. To Kushum, Shashi is the quintessential prince charming and she does not hesitate to express her feelings to him. However, Shashi never responds to her attention. He tries to make Kushum see the futility of her impractical love. Nevertheless, Kushum cannot renounce her feelings. One day, she loses her patience and decides to go to her father's village. Only then Shashi realises that he is in love too. He asks Kushum to elope with him.

Ishita, Shahed and Pijush Bandyopadhyay play the lead roles.



Shahed and Ishita in the TV play

### Tania to become a radio jockey for a day

Popular actress Tania Ahmed will be a radio jockey for a day on Radio Foorti, says a press release.

Tania will be hosting Radio Foorti's special programme titled "Tania Ahmed on the Hot Seat" which will be aired live on January 19, from 7 to 10 pm. Listeners will be treated to some of Tania's favourite songs and will also get to know interesting facts about her acting career. There will be some surprises for the listeners in the show.

Listeners can also send in their questions, comments and opinions through SMS to 9840 during the show. Two lucky listeners will be selected to meet Tania and take part in the show, adds the press release.