

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Exhibition

Title: Aloy Kaly Aanka
Organiser: Photographic Forum, Prism
Venue: Drik Gallery, H 58, Rd 15a (new), Dhanmondi
Date: August 15-21
Time: 3pm-8pm



Film Screening

Film: Chitra Nadir Pare
Director: Tanvir Mokammel
Venue: Bangladesh Film Centre, 160 (4th floor), Lake Circus, Kalabagan
Date: August 15-16
Time: 5pm, 7pm



Group Art Exhibition

Featuring works of 19 renowned artists
Title: Mukti
Venue: Liberation War Museum
Date: August 9-25
Time: 10am-7pm

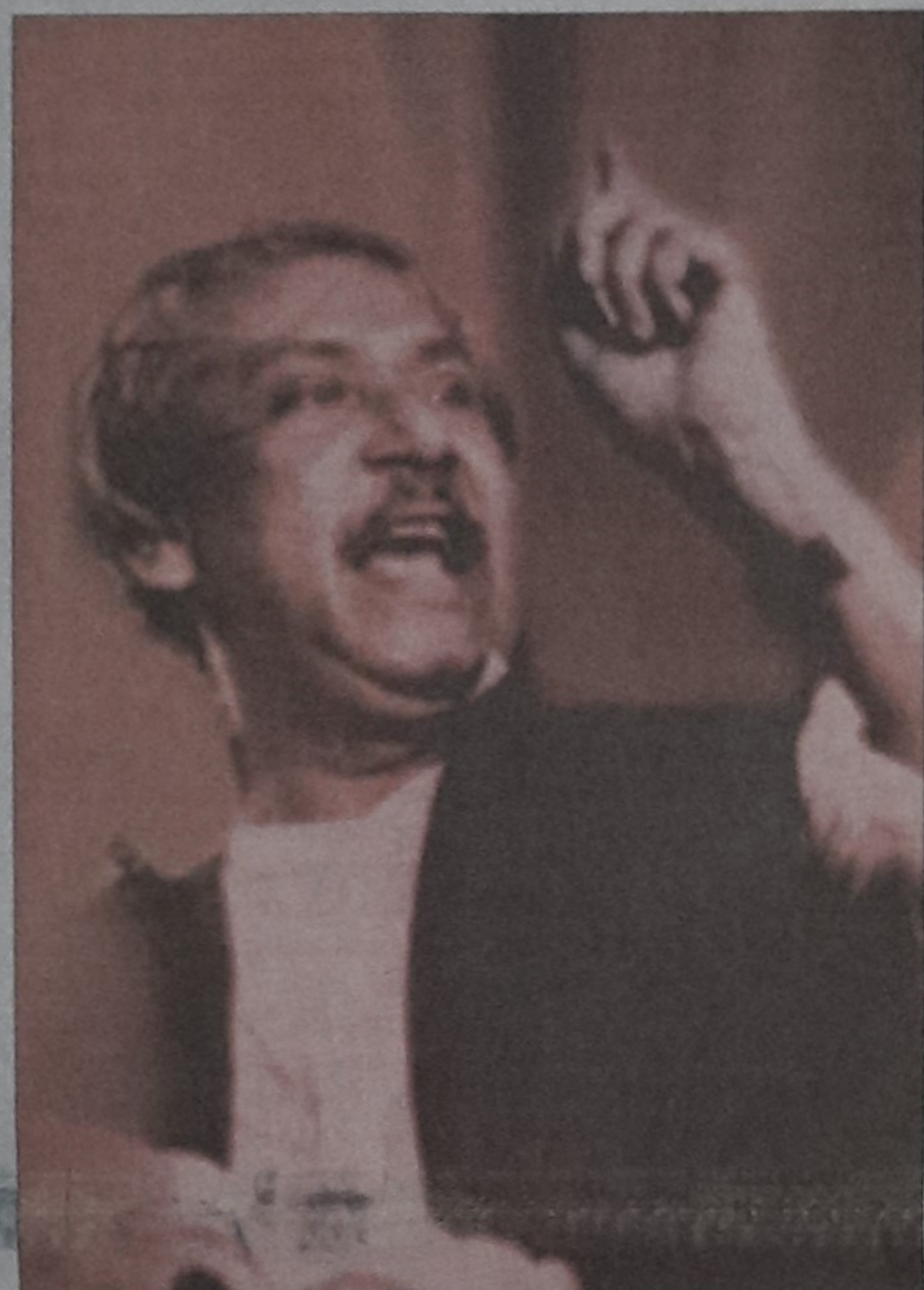


Oitijhya Boi Utsab

Celebrating 9th anniversary of the publication house Oitijhya
Venue: Central Public Library, Shahbagh, Dhaka
Date: August 10-25
Time: 10am-8pm

কবিতা

Special programmes on National Mourning Day



CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

August 15, the day Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated, will be observed as National Mourning Day. To mark the occasion satellite TV channel Ekushey TV will air special

programmes.

Recitation programme *Uchcharanguli Shok-er* will be aired at 6:10 pm. Produced by Ajay Poddar, the programme features recitation of poems on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by Quazi Abu Zafar

Siddiqui, Pragna Laboni, Mahidul Islam and Hasan Arif.

Mrityuheen Pran, a documentary on the assassination of Bangabandhu will be aired at 7:45 pm. Produced by Pranab Saha, the 18-minute documentary features some rare footage, photographs and speeches and the national as well as international perspectives behind the assassination.

Documentary programme *Itihashe Sheskrityo* will be aired at 10:10pm. The programme will feature interviews of the individuals who attended the funeral of Bangabandhu on August 16, 1975 at Tungipara, guarded by the military.

A special episode of *Mukto Khabor*, a news-based children's programme will be aired at 6:30 pm. Produced by Fatema Tuz-Zohra, this episode is based on the brutal assassination of Sheikh Russell, the youngest son of Bangabandhu who was only 10 at that time. The programme will feature interviews, telephone conversation with Sheikh Rehana and Sajib Wazed Joy. Abdur Razzaque and Tofael Ahmed will participate in the episode as guests.

A special episode of *Ekushey Raat* will be aired at 12:02 am. Theatre personality Professor Momotazuddin Ahmed and political leaders Tofael Ahmed, Abdur Razzaque, and Motia Choudhury will be present at the talk show. Sheikh Rehana and Sajib Wazed Joy will also participate in the show through telephone conversation. The show is produced by Anjan Ray.

Attack on our senses!

Television for the masses

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

We've developed a strange relationship with "cereals" and "serials" both rooted in the west and both marching towards us at a rapid pace on the streetways and airwaves. But which one is the more likely to leave its mark?

What was an uncommon sight even a year back is now an everyday matter on the streets. Just as the tender kernels burst into mouthwatering popcorns, street vendors of all ages with oily cellophane packets (or often suspicious looking packets) dart towards likely buyers in cars and buses waiting at the red lights. But the traditional "jhal muri" is putting up a strong fight, for who can resist huffing and puffing over the crunchy puffed rice with mustard oil (or what looks like some sort of a dark-coloured oily liquid), green chilies, tomatoes and fresh coriander leaves? Even as one wonders the exact contents of the two "cereals" it's quite clear that the only impact either is likely to leave on the consumer is probably going to be limited to the tummy.

That brings us to the "serials" the super-mega, marathon types on the popular channels. Where are we with those?

Acclaimed actor-director Abdullah Al Mamun is in two minds. On the one hand, it's a great opportunity for aspiring professionals to have such a platform where so much talent can find the right form of expression. On the other hand, are we stretching ourselves too thin by over-producing drama serials and shows in search of the "golden goose"? "My extensive experience with the media for forty years," he says, "endorses the fact that most of the people behind the production of such TV content have little or no technical credentials and grab at any opportunity without due thought or planning."

Eminent media personality Professor Momotazuddin Ahmed is equally gruff about the quality of TV plays telecast on the sprawling

TV channels. "It is extremely harmful for our culture," he says, "as TV plays have become commodities. Anything and everything is now for sale."

"The directors seem mostly detached from reality. The con-

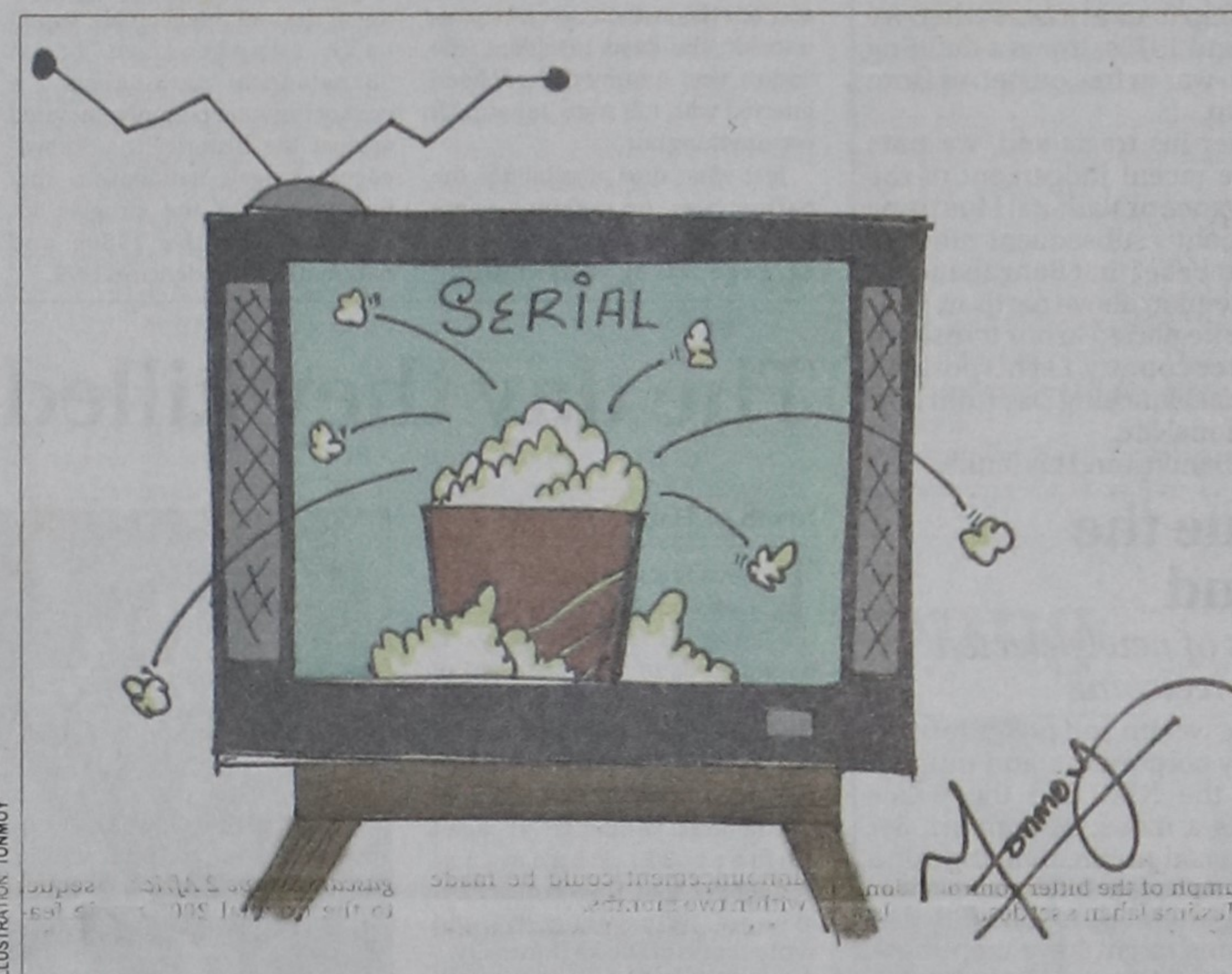
Manush, written by Masum Reza and the more recent Ghar Kutum (all directed by Salauddin Lavlu). Set up against a rural backdrop, depicting colourful lifestyles of people, these plays have gained wide popularity. With a simple

dash to finish the race to telecast the most, the best, the longest coverage of programmes. Many would be astonished to know that during Eid, viewers are treated to around 200 TV plays on different channels. Over a seven-day

Many feel that young directors are pressurised by the 24/7 culture, with an almost insatiable demand for TV content. As a result, most directors are forced to rush production, or in worse cases have inexperienced directors running the script in a bid to match the portfolio of programmes of competing networks. As a result, quality can languish and story-lines may turn monotonous. And the "need" to be hip, trendy and westernised can end up making the show look a strange hybrid of language and culture not a liberal and dynamic one as was probably intended. While many people would rightfully support the need for culture to be an "open-minded" one, a conscious director would also see the need to avoid an overdose.

One new dimension to local TV is that many of the programmes including shows and TV plays are now packaged into DVDs and distributed globally. This by itself is a fantastic initiative to reach out to Bangladeshis spread far and wide. But if the quality of the programmes is questionable, both in terms of content, depiction of values and language it poses a big question. In that case, it exposes not only the expatriates but also the next generation of Bangladeshis with minimum exposure to Bangladesh to a whole new barrage of ideology, one which can leave them in limbo when trying to understand their identity.

There can be many steps towards addressing this issue. Setting up training programmes for directors, tracking audience response, popularity ranking to attract the most advertisers for the leading programmes are some of the many choices the networks can work on. As a member of the audience, my choice would be to hit the "Off" button on my remote when sub-par shows are aired. And when the quality shows are on? I'm happy to go with either the popcorn or the jhal-muri.



torted use of language is incomprehensible and has a damaging effect on our culture. Even the repetitive actors or (monotonous) roles can have a negative effect on viewers. Many people could see this as cultural infiltration and a creeping attack on the audience in an attempt to fill up screen time, which often fails to please audiences," he says.

On the positives, there have been a number of serials with a dash of *deshi* spices that have achieved wide audience support such as *Bhober Haat*, *Ronger*

story line, the serials convey powerful messages on values and folklore.

At the other end of the spectrum (non-mega serials), short and crisp TV play such as *Dadima O Kichhu Shalik*, written by Masum Reza and directed by Arif Khan, also had a positive impact on the audience by conveying the culture of "old home" and its devastating effect on our society.

Besides regular programmes, Eid provides another event-driven bonanza of shows, with directors and promoters making a frenzied

period, that's nearly a choice of over 30 plays a day.

That's not to say that Eid doesn't produce some of the more innovative and creative productions. One example was last year's show, planned and directed by Shykh Seraj, and based entirely on the farmers of Sirajganj. Nothing could match the innocent smiles on the faces of 10,000 farmers as they competed against one another in traditional games such as swimming, *hadudu* and more. It is easy to see how it won the hearts of viewers across the country.

"Channel i Shera Kontho" Down to Six

MAINUL HASSAN

Md. Mahmudul Haque Imran, Champa Banik, Md. Yousuf Ahmed Khan, Zanita Ahmed Zhilik, Md. Animul Islam Romel and Sharmin Siddiqui are the *Shera Chhoy* -- the six finalists of *Channel i Shera Kontho 2008*. This popular talent hunt features two living legends of the country, Sabina Yasmin and Runa Laila together for the first time as judges.

The *Daily Star* talked to the six finalists on their musical journey, their aspirations and more.

Md. Yusuf Ahmed Khan: After his rejection from the first instalment of *Closeup 1*, he gave up singing and took a vow to never appear again in any contest.

"A very close friend of mine registered me for *Shera Kontho*. I was unaware of this and only got to know when my audition date approached," Yousuf continued.

"I kept it a secret from everyone, even from my parents. On the night when the results for the Dhaka division were to be announced, my father got nervous when he realised that I was missing from home at 11:30 pm. It was then that they found out where I was -- at the Channel i office. I had topped in the Dhaka division."

After having reached this far, Yousuf is confident about winning the contest.

Md. Mahmudul Haque Imran: *Shera Kontho* is more than just a contest for Imran. A student of Engineering University School & College, Imran was an HSC examinee this year. He didn't appear in the exams so that he could participate in the contest.

Imran says, "My aim is to become a successful music composer. I aspire to have a career in music."

About choosing the contest over his HSC exams, Imran said, "I really didn't want to miss the exams but it was already too late. I scored GPA 5 in SSC; I certainly



The contestants (front row) with judges and the host of the show.

didn't welcome a break in my studies. However, because of the competition, my studies were disrupted and I couldn't prepare properly." Nevertheless, Imran hopes to study seriously next year and score GPA 5 in HSC.

Zanita Ahmed Zhilik: Zhilik is a student of class IX at Mohammadpur Preparatory High School. One of the youngest contestants in *Shera Kontho*, Zhilik is optimistic about winning the competition.

"I am grateful for the support of my teachers. I couldn't attend my classes regularly and missed my exams. My teachers have assured me that they would make special arrangements for me -- allowing me to take the exams after the contest so that I don't lag behind," she said.

Champa Banik: Champa is the most experienced of the contestants. She is an enlisted artiste in BTV and also a trainer at Chhayarat.

Champa gives all the credit to her family. "Without my family I would have never been where I am today," said Champa.

"I miss my daughter Shreyoti the most, she is only two-and-a-half years old," she said.

Md. Animul Islam Romel: Romel was supposed to be at the HSC exams, but instead he is at the *Shera Chhoy* of *Shera Kontho*. Like Imran, Romel also had to choose between HSC exams and the talent hunt.

"Making the choice was very hard. However, this is the biggest opportunity of my life; besides I will be able to attend exams next year but I won't get a second chance in *Shera Kontho*," said Romel.

Sharmin Siddiqui: Probably the youngest participant in the contest, Sharmin is a student of class nine. She is from Madaripur and studies at Donovan Govt. Girls High School.

"When I first saw the posters of *Shera Kontho*, I went to my uncle and asked if I could go for an audition."

"The thing that caught my eyes wasn't the colourful posters but the pictures of Sabina Yasmin and Runa Laila, the two main judges of the contest. For an aspiring singer to have both as judges, is like a dream come true," said an excited Sharmin.

Channel i Shera Kontho is aired on Fridays and Tuesdays at 7:50 pm. The grand finale of the contest will be held on July 29.

Music Review

"Monpura": Rustic soul wrapped in urban sensitivity

KARIM WAHEED

As a singer/musician/composer, Arnob has made a name for himself in the contemporary music scene. With *Monpura* (directed by Giasuddin Selim), Arnob has made his debut in film music direction.

Being an adept music composer doesn't necessarily equate to being a successful film music director. Soundtracks have often been credited for providing films with that extra edge. In particular when it comes to sub-continental films, soundtrack is considered the soul of the film. Music also lures in audiences thanks to promos and teasers. So, how does *Monpura* (album produced by Laser Vision) fare as a soundtrack?

The album features nine tracks. The opening song, *Nithhua patharey* (lyrics and tune "collected", according to the album), is a relaxed stroll on notes by actor Fazlur Rahman Babu. It's not a difficult tune; neither is it pretentious and Babu sounds at ease, in fact passable as a professional singer.

The next track, *Jao pakhi bolo tarey* (lyrics and tune by Krishnokoli Islam) is all that and then some. The lyricist has taken the ever familiar saying often stitched on *nakshi kanthal* hand-held fan or painted on the back of a rickshaw and used it as a refrain in the song. The result: outstanding.

Shonar-o palanker gharey -- likhey rekhey chhilam duarey

Jao pakhi bolo tarey -- shey jeno bholey na morey.



sensitivity. And that's exactly what this song does. As Chandana Majumder croons the intro, accompanied by harmonium and *ektara*, the vision of an impassioned

baulani (female *baul*) singing under the canopy of an old Banyan tree at a crowded *haat* emerges.

The "pakhi" is not literally a bird

in this case, but refers to the idea of "soul-bird" -- familiar in Sufism or Lalan's songs -- singing night and day of its unfulfilled longing and union, suffering without com-

plaint the sting of solitude. It is this longing that inspires the soul-bird to sing.

And when Krishnokoli takes over, rendering "Megher upor aakash ore, nodir opar pakhir basha, mon-e bondhu boro aasha...", aided by the *banshi* the song does take off.

The "uncrowned queen of popular folk music" Momtaz renders a ballad, *Agey jodi jantamrey bondhu* (lyrics and tune by Krishnokoli Islam), with utmost empathy. The asset of the song is vocals, uninterrupted by unnecessary intrusion of instruments. This seems to be the USP of the album. Arnob has deftly utilised the vocalists in all songs and they are the strong suit.

The music director himself does a cover of a familiar folk song *Shonar Moina pakhi* (lyrics and tune by Mohammad Osman Khan). The fact that the song is easy to the ear shouldn't come as a surprise to those who have heard Arnob's rendition of *Shona diya bandhayasi ghor o Amar haar kala korlam rey*.

Fazlur Rahman Babu returns with *Shonar hai hai rey* (lyrics by Giasuddin Selim and tune inspired by Mymensingh *Geetika*). The song has that unmistakable feel of *punthi-path*. Sample:

Phool kande, pakhi kande, kande gang-er paar
Kandiya kandiya Shonar hoilo jaarey jaar.

It has been a recurring complaint from the urban audience that there has not been much worth listening to in recent years when it comes to film music in Bangladesh. With Arnob and other talented contemporary musicians venturing into film music, hopefully this drought would be over.