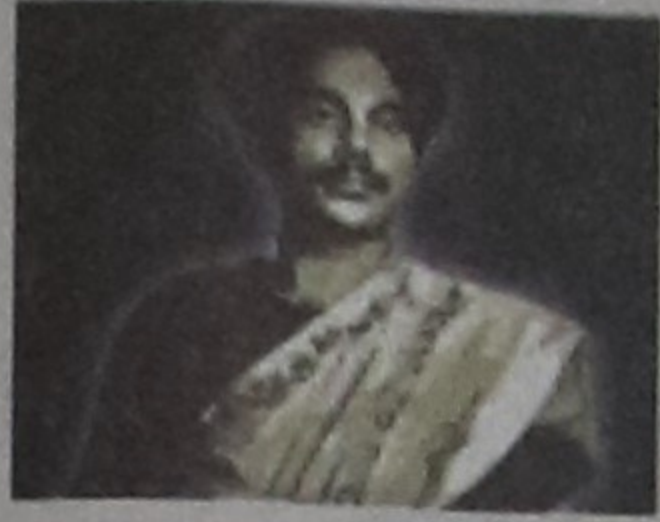
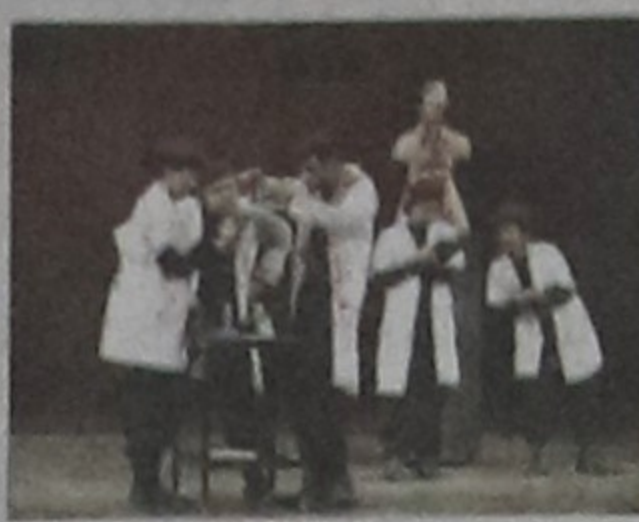


**WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK**

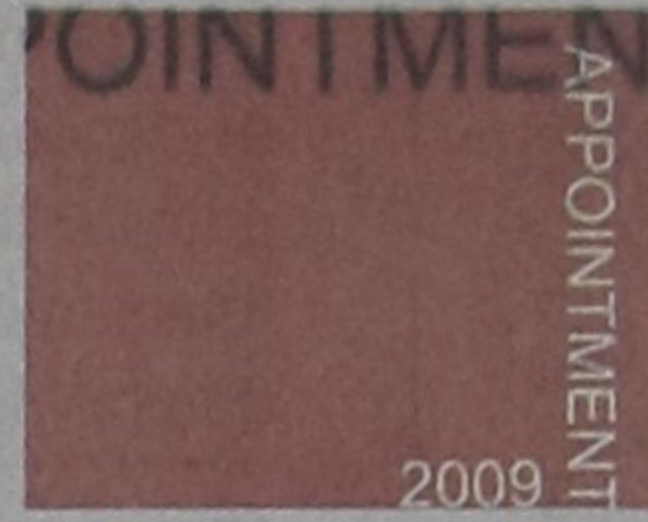
**Nazrul Birth Anniversary**  
Organiser: Chhayanaout  
Venue: Auditorium, Chhayanaout Sangskriti Bhaban  
Date: May 30  
Time: 7:30pm



**Theatre**  
Play: Amputation  
Troupe: Centre for Asian Theatre (CAT)  
Venue: National Theatre Hall, BSA  
Date: May 31 & June 1  
Time: 7pm



**Group Art Exhibition**  
Title: Appointment 2009  
Venue: Shilpangan Gallery, H 26, Rd 3, Dhanmondi  
Date: May 28-June 12  
Time: 12-8pm



**Recitation**  
Title: Nisharga Mati O Manusher Kobita  
Organiser: Kali O Koim  
Venue: Bengal Café, H 275/F, Rd 27 (Old), Dhanmondi  
Date: May 30  
Time: 6:30pm



## A walk to remember: Timeless Mughal magic

NIVEDITA RAITZ VON FRENTZ

In 1608, Dhaka was made the capital of the vast eastern provinces of the mighty Mughal Empire, then at the zenith of its power. From then on, the term "Puran (Old) Dhaka" frequently appeared in the journals of Mughal generals. Within 100 years, it was transformed from a garrison town, into a flourishing, cosmopolitan city with a population of approximately 700,000, and an impressive 11-mile long waterfront.

Continuing its efforts to inject passion into heritage awareness, the Urban Study Group (USG), led by passionate architects Homaira Zaman and Taimur Islam, has 90 percent of Old Dhaka monuments and buildings surveyed and listed. For yet another flavour of the old town, one doesn't regret taking their Mughal Walk early on a Friday morning.

Across the long-reclaimed Dholaikhal, at the edge of Tanti Bazaar, the narrow streets lead to the Bongshal Talaab. Making an appearance in the 1908 version of the Cadastral Survey map, the roughly 100-year-old water tank is one of the few remaining in Dhaka and maintained by the community. It costs Tk 2 for an unlimited stay in the water, but a local panchayat member laments that sewage is leaking into the pond, killing the fish. The USG dreams of beautifying the area by relocating the surrounding timber merchants (kathpatti), transforming the area with a pedestrian zone and cafes.

Totally modified buildings seem to be the norm in Kasaituli (butcher's

market), the next maholla (neighbourhood), but within the concrete jungle, the Kasaituli Jaam-e mosque stands out like a dull jewel. The 125-year-old edifice is known for its intricate chini tikri mosaics and boasts unique enamel work. While the façade is well preserved, some older portions were compromised when the interior was recently renovated, the main chamber too perfectly remodelled.

Homaira explained, "Tiles are now used for the mosaic, obliterating the 3D effect of the original chini tikri. The old imperfections are gone; the new surfaces appear flattened." Although built much later, the mosque displays typical Mughal period features, including a fluted dome sitting on an octagonal drum, flanked by two smaller side domes. Characteristic cusp arches divide the inner chamber into three. Several octagonal turrets are topped off with carved finials. Residents throw buckets of water against the outer walls to remove the dust, revealing amazing floral patterns in cobalt blue, emerald green, red and gold, glinting in the sunlight.

Turn back as you walk on to Mahuttuli to see the enormity of challenges the USG faces in the form of haphazard new construction. On the border of what used to be the elephant keepers' neighbourhood and the old Armenian quarter Armanitola, lies the Star Mosque, its large central and two lateral domes, as the name implies, covered in blue stars. Said to have been built in the early 19th century, a substantial veranda was added about 80 years ago. Pretty Japanese floral tiles, some of them identical to those seen in Tanti Bazaar



The south gate of Bara Katra

houses, were added at that time. The use of architectural ceramics became popular in Dhaka in the 1870s; today the insides of thermos flasks are used to create a modern version of chini tikri. In the 1980s, two further domes, one large and one small, were built as part of a northern extension, destroying the centrality of the Mughal-style mosque. The original main dome rests on the drum of a so-called half dome, typical of a genre of Mughal mosque architecture in Bengal.

Next door is the red-bricked Armanitola Boys' School, in 1904 Raj-style architecture. It was in the late 17th century that Armenian traders arrived and settled in Dhaka, gradually getting involved in politics, urban and social development. Affluent Armenian families built their own houses on marshy, reclaimed land, the jute industry flourishing under their beneficence in the mid 1800s.

On Noor Baksh Lane, clusters of houses with common courtyards can be seen, a regular feature of Dhaka's Muslim neighbourhoods. Among these lies landowner Abul Hasnat's 120-year-old mansion, with stained glass rose windows and wooden beamed ceilings, where two branches of his descendants still reside. From the swords displayed on the walls to the ornate, carved furniture, the once-upon-a-time grace of the house can be imagined.

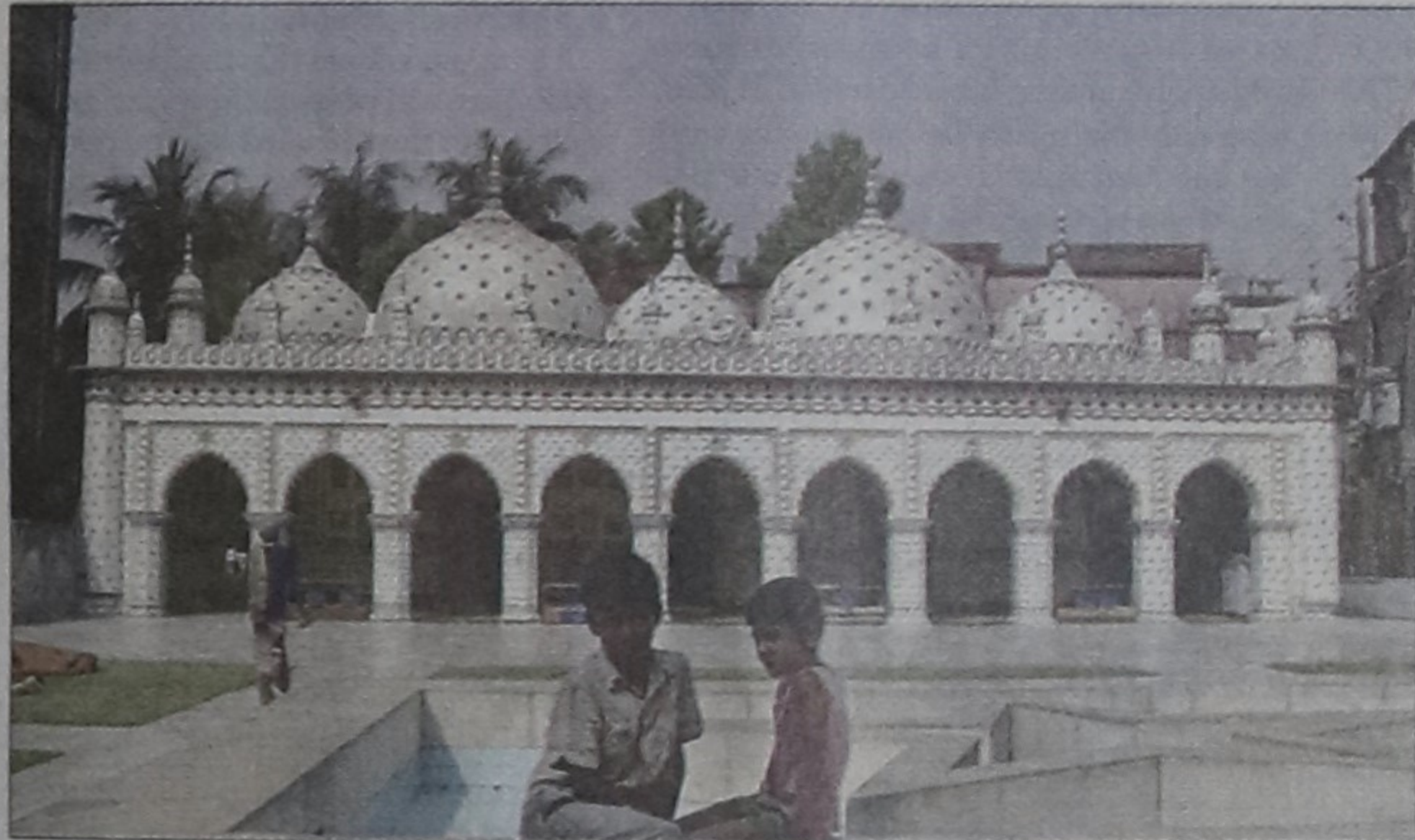
Of the few remaining Mughal period structures is the 250-year-old Taqui House, once belonging to Syed Taqui Mohammed of Mughal elite lineage. The multi-cusp arched building serves as Mohammadi Begum's Imambara (Shia shrine), where the local Ashura

(Muharram mourning) procession begins. Unlike other parts of Old Dhaka, Taimur and Homaira don't need to persuade the owners to preserve the houses here; happily, the awareness to save some part of the past lies ingrained in these old-world families.

Then quickly pass through Maulvi Bazaar, built on the untraceable ruins of Mukim Katra caravanserai, constructed in the 1600s, into further caravanserai territory. Built in 1644 during the Mughal glory days, for Shah Jahan's son Shah Shuja, Subedar (Governor) of Bengal, the highlight of the trip is the Bara Katra. Ensclosed in a jumble of buildings, it could easily be missed. The South Gate is quietly imposing and only two of the four turrets remain. "It's comparable to many of the structures that were built in Delhi or Agra during Shah Jahan's time," Taimur is pleased to add. Local merchants have set up shop in the cavernous side rooms that were once used for goods storage.

Through the gatehouse, walkers are able to pass under the dome, a steep, jagged climb to the very top for a view of the Buriganga in the distance. Seeing that heritage conservation was a sensitive issue, the USG organised an art exhibition at a local school, which helped building bridges all around. Leaving via the Jail Gate, back out to colourful Chawk Bazaar, the largest fresh produce market in town, the walk is over after four hours. Endless permutations of the route are possible; email usg.dhaka@gmail.com for more information.

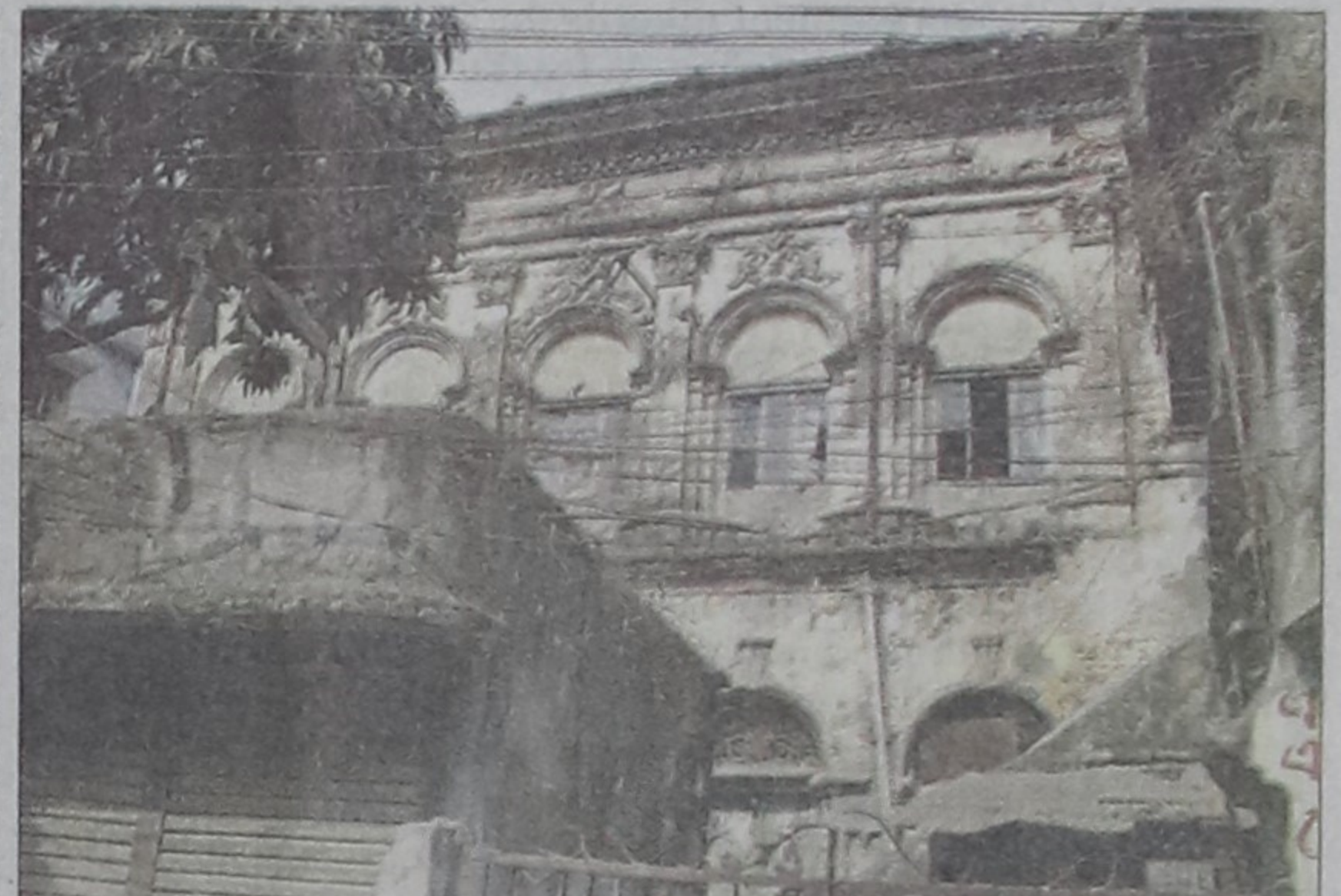
The writer is a freelance contributor



Star Mosque at Armanitola



The Bongshal Talaab



A historic residence at Armanitola

## Baul Pagla Bablu: Living, breathing and performing Lalon's songs

REZAUL KARIM, Faridpur

Baul Pagla Bablu's reputation as an accomplished artiste transcends his native Faridpur, the Lalon singer is now a familiar name across the country. Bablu not only renders the songs of Lalon but also believes in and preaches the philosophy of the bard as an effort to uphold humanity.

Through Lalon's timeless songs, this renowned baul wants to show the frustrated and lost youth the way to enlightenment. He dreams of a society free of inequalities, injustice, repression, deprivation and anarchy; his motto, "Shatya bol, shupathey chal" (stay on the track of truth and virtue).

Pagla Bablu was born as Hafizur Rahman Khan. His grandmother used to affectionately call him "pagla," for his childish whims and his mother's pet name for him is "Bablu." Eventually Hafizur became "Pagla Bablu" in his circle of friends.

Pagla Bablu was born at Kamlapur, in Faridpur town, in 1955. His father Aatur Rahman Khan was an SDO of sub divisional agriculture department. His mother Rahima Khan was a housewife as well as an enthusiastic singer. Bablu's mother and siblings were all devoted to music. Bablu received his first music lessons from his mother.

In 1971, Bablu took part in the Liberation War and encouraged the freedom fighters of Faridpur with his rendition of patriotic and inspirational songs.

After the war, he passed the SSC examination in 1973 from Faridpur High School. After SSC, Bablu decided to dedicate himself to music and showed eagerness in several genres. But his mother advised him to become a disciple of Lalon. Following that advice, Bablu sought tutelage from Lalon singer Khoda Bakhsh Shai of Kororajahapur in 1984. In the same year he along with Lalon singers, the late Sri Binay Kumar Nath, the late Tapan Kumar Goswami,

Fakir Ajmal Biswas and Salmat Hossein Khan set up Lalon Parishad in Faridpur.

Bablu married Hafiza Begum who is very supportive of her 'baul' husband. The couple has two sons and a daughter.



Bablu went to work in Saudi Arabia in 1987. But the baul in him made him come back home and continue his musical journey. As an artiste he was enlisted in Bangladesh Betar in 1989. He completed a three-year course titled "Mentor Fellowship in Music of Lalon and Baul," a project of Folk Foundation, Kushtia in 1995.

Bablu became an enlisted artiste of Bangladesh Television in 1994. At Ramna Batomul Baishakhi celebration in 1995, Pagla Bablu rendered songs. Hearing his songs, poet Shamsur Rahman wrote a poem titled "Pagla Bablu Gaan." This was a definitive moment for the singer.

Next year Bablu attended a programme in Delhi in compliance with the request of Dev Mukherjee. He also visited Krishna Nagar, Barasat, Bhimpur, Rabindra Sadan, Nazrul Mancha and Hooghly to present Lalon songs.

Bablu has done his share of acting as well. He had performed in drama serials "Bishakha Resort" and "Ghor-er Khobor Por-er Khobor." Another memorable experience is playing the role of Duddu Shah in Tanvir Mokammel's film "Lalon." Bablu sang 18 songs for the film.

Three albums of Pagla Bablu are available in the market -- "Pancham," "Ki Jaadu Bangla Gaaney" and "Tribhuban." Among his upcoming works are "Shubho Sadhu Sangha" and "Achin Pakhi."

Bablu is also active in social reform. Together with his friends and fellow Lalon enthusiasts, he has set up 'Lalon Nagar,' an area in Faridpur town adjacent to Alimuzzaman Bridge. Around 100 underprivileged families live in Lalon Nagar. Bablu is also one of the initiators of Lalon Bidyapith, Lalon Samiti and Lalon Parishad in Faridpur. Not only this, as a demonstration of upholding Lalon's philosophy of humanism, he and his associates in Faridpur arranged marriages of 69 sex workers.

Talking to The Daily Star, Bablu said, "I want to change the society with Lalon's philosophy. Lalon's songs and messages should be included in school curriculum and every sphere of life."

Bablu has another wish: "I want to sing at all the prisons in the country. I'm eager to find out if Lalon's words of peace and enlightenment can touch the hearts of the inmates."

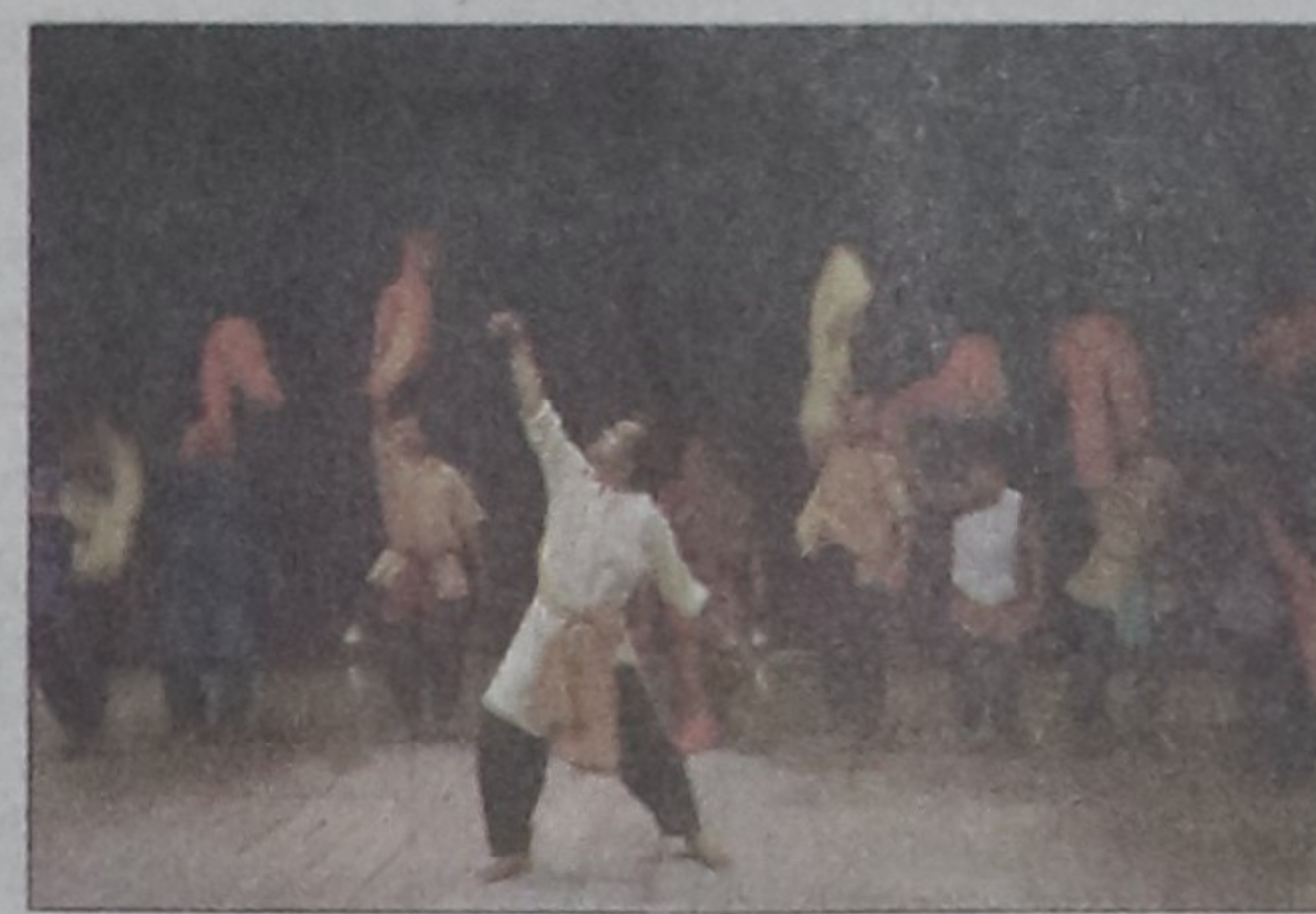


PHOTO: MUMIT M

### Hyder Husyn and Pathik Nabi on Amar Ami

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Musicians Hyder Husyn and Pathik Nabi are the guests on tonight's "Amar Ami," Banglavisyon's popular talk show.

On the programme, the duo will share many untold stories with the audience, thus providing an insight into their lives. They will also perform some of their popular songs, a treat for the fans.

"Amar Ami" is produced by Ushnish Chakrabarti and hosted by Munmun. The show is aired every Saturday at 9:05 pm.

Theatre troupe Natya Kendra staged its production "Aroj Charitamrita" at the Experimental Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy on May 28. The play narrates the life and struggles of Aroj Ali Matubbar, the self-educated philosopher from a remote village Lamchhari of Barisal district. The play has been written by Masum Reza and directed by Tarik Anam Khan.



Hyder Husyn (R) and Pathik Nabi (C) on tonight's "Amar Ami."

**Admission Going On**

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- Garment Manufacturing
- Marketing & Merchandising
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