

WHAT'S ON



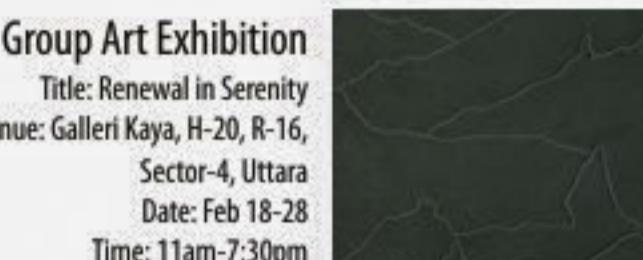
Amar Ekushey Book
Fair '12
Venue: Bangla Academy Premises
Date: February 1-29
Time: 9am onwards



Solo Art Exhibition
Title: Texture and Colour
Mindscape
Artist: Maksoza Iqbal Nipa
Venue: Bengal Art Lounge,
Gulshan-1
Date: Feb 15-Mar 1



Solo Photography
Exhibition
Title: Eclets De Bangladesh
Photographer: Dr. Pierre Claequin
Venue: Alliance Francaise de
Dhaka
Date: Feb 17-Mar 1



Group Art Exhibition
Title: Renewal in Serenity
Venue: Galleri Kaya, H-20, R-16,
Sector-4, Utrara
Date: Feb 18-28
Time: 11am-7:30pm



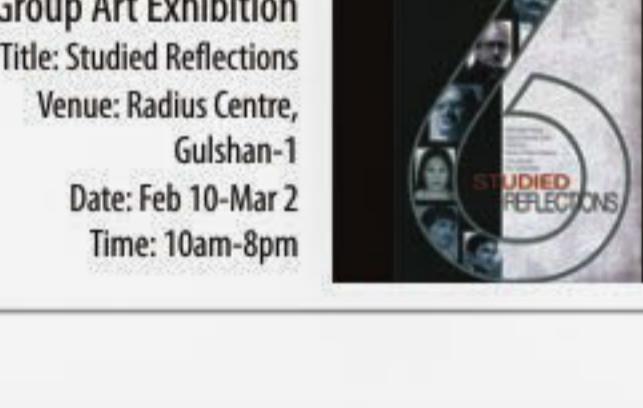
Solo Exhibition
Title: Philosophy of Man
Artist: Md. Annan Kajol
Venue: National Gallery of Fine Arts,
Dhakmohor
Date: Feb 9-21
Time: 12pm-8pm



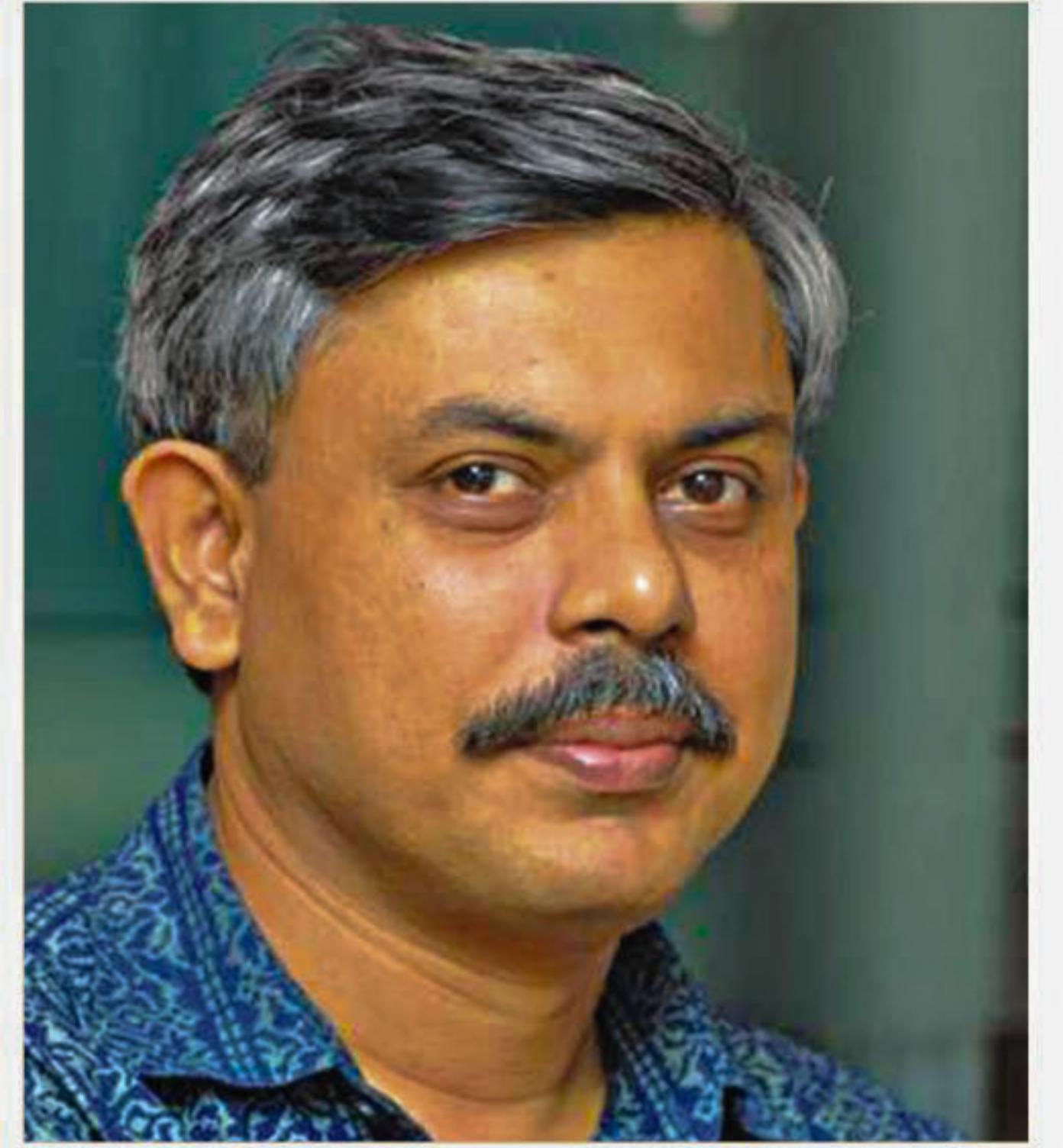
Cultural Programme
Title: Bush Maane-Muthi Bochhor
Organizer: Padabib-Bangladesh
Venue: Rammam Baitul
Date: Feb 21
Time: 10am



Group Art Exhibition
Title: A tribute to Panam Nagar
Organizer: The Arts Council Dhaka
Venue: Khazana Restaurant, R-55,
H-9, Gulshan-2
Date: Feb 9-10-Mar 3
Time: 12pm-10pm



Group Art Exhibition
Title: Studied Reflections
Venue: Radius Centre,
Gulshan-1
Date: Feb 10-Mar 2
Time: 10am-8pm



‘Our
publishers
need
to have
editors’

-- Anisul Hoque

SHAH ALAM SHAZU

started writing, I asked Sayeed Sir why he doesn't get awards. When my books started coming out, I thought to myself "who am I to get an award, when Sayeed Sir hasn't received one yet!". Then he received the Magsaysay Award for literature -- which we consider to be the Nobel Prize of Asia. But still Bangla Academy did not award him. So I started hoping that maybe Sayeed Sir and I would get the award the same year. It is a dream fulfilled. Having the chance to share the same stage with him while receiving the award is consolation enough.

What do you think of this year's book fair?

Hoque: I've been coming to the fair since 1984-85. Compared to

those times, Dhaka city and its population both have grown, but the space inside the Bangla Academy has shrunk. The fair used to

stretch near the pond inside; but buildings have been erected at

the spot. It is amazing how the authorities are being able to main-

tain the overwhelming pressure of the ever-growing literate crowd

in the capital. I believe a good stall arrangement has given the fair a better vibe.

Do you feel that the fair space should be extended?

Hoque: I feel that such a small venue cannot accommodate a book fair in a city of 20 million. However, Somoy Prokashoni proprietor Farid Ahmed disagrees. I think the fair should be moved to a larger venue -- with better access and car parking facilities. It should be a book fair of international standards. The Bangla Academy premises lack these necessities. We should rise above our sentiments. An alternative can be holding the fair at separate venues simultaneously throughout the month of February. At least two venues -- for North and South Dhaka -- should host the fair.

What is your reaction to winning the Bangla Academy Award?

Hoque: I'd say the award should've come earlier. But I can take consolation by looking at the other 9 recipients of the award who are all much senior to me, especially Abdullah Abu Sayeed Sir; Khalikuzzaman Ilia and my teacher from BUET, Ali Azgar Sir. I consider Abdullah Abu Sayeed to be my mentor. When I first

Roopkotha: The estranged and ignored kin

KARIM WAHEED

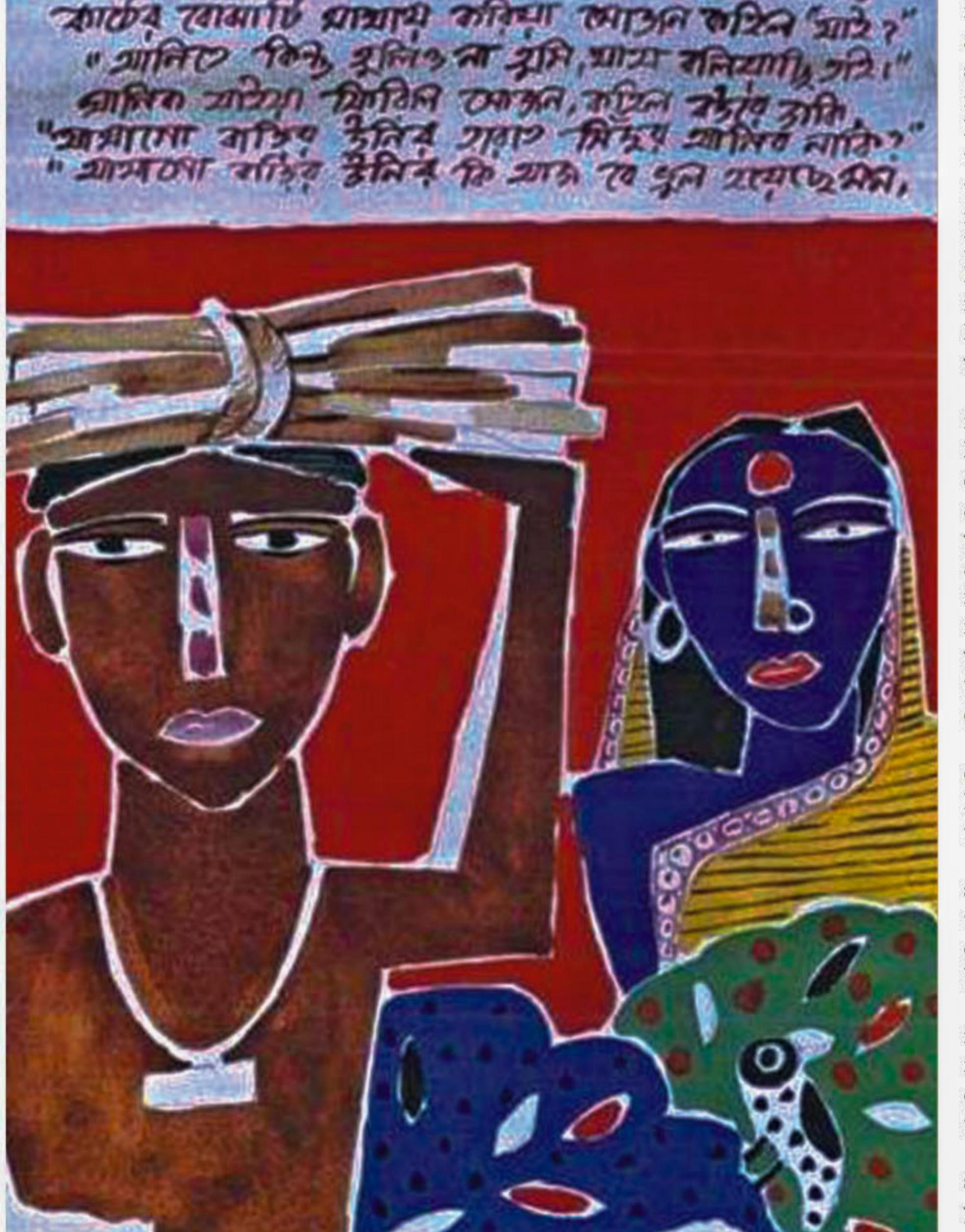
Once upon a time, in a land not so far away, mothers used to tell children bedtime stories: of clashes and palace politics between Shuarani and Duorani, blood-curdling accounts of Rakshas picking up the smell of humans before devouring them, seven childless queens giving birth simultaneously after eating a magic root/herb given by a sadhu, talking birds -- Bangoma and Bangomi -- leading princes to treasures guarded by vicious demons, a cursed Konkaboti awaiting her saviour and so on.

But gone are those days. Blonde, blue-eyed Cinderellas and Harry Potters have invaded that special place in the hearts of urban Bengali children. Kajolrekkhas, Konkabotis and Dalmikumars are now just fond, fading memories of a generation that never bothered to introduce these tales to their successors. Trapped in some badly printed books, adorned with unimpressive illustration -- these stories now collect dust in someone's forsaken collection.

Talking about the dying tradition of Bangla fairy tales or 'roopkotha', educationist and founder of Bishwa Shahitya Kendra, Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed, says, 'Fairy tales and folklore are the most creative and powerful aspect of a culture. Their USP is the capability to inspire the masses. Take the reference of a kingdom going into a state of coma in several roopkotha for instance: 'Hatishayati hati ghumayi, ghorashayi ghora, Raja ghumayi, Rani ghumayi, ghumayi bon-er pakhira...'. Clearly a metaphor for death of conscience. Then comes a prince and saves the day. This theme of good overcoming evil is universal.'

'These tales are true to our roots, our heritage. Like the story of 'Monimala': Deep below the surface of water is the palace of a sea god and everything in that enchanted domain is made of snakes. This reference to snakes conveys what this species meant to the people living in this land; Monisha, the Bengal goddess, reigned supreme in medieval Bengal.'

This was more an oral tradition and between the late 19th and mid 20th century, this tradition reached its zenith. This period



A folk-themed painting by Abdus Shakoor Shah.

inseparable part of growing up.'

Why are these fables losing ground then? Professor Sayeed's response: 'For a number of reasons. First of all, I believe it is the responsibility of schools to get children acquainted

with their heritage, their culture. More and more middle and upper middle class families are sending their kids to English medium schools that don't see the necessity of familiarising their students with our traditions, literature, and these roopkotha. For the last two centuries, Bengalis have been known for their English skills in the subcontinent. Back in the cultural heyday of Bengal, there were less English medium schools. The educated urban Bengali knew the way of the world and yet maintained strong ties with his/her roots. Now it has become more like 'take everything western and discard your identity'.

'Then there's globalisation. In an open market, everything depends on capital, marketing and availability. The global media is controlled by the west. European fairy tales are being marketed in innumerable ingenious ways. These stories are maintaining their appeal in cartoons, TV shows and movies -- mediums that easily engage children. Amazing illustrations are used in the books. Why would a child want to rummage old, decaying termite shelters of books with a few badly drawn or no images?

'The most important factor: mothers. Mothers have become alienated from these stories. Hence, children don't get to hear these bedtime stories.'

Can these treasures of Bangla literature be saved? An optimistic Sayeed says, 'Yes. But these stories will have to compete with their counterparts from all over the world, and to be able to do that they need a facelift.'

'The language which today's children might find archaic has to be decoded. Fascinating illustrations should be included to draw young readers. Filmmakers and animators should get involved.'

'Most importantly, schools and parents should introduce children to these stories. If your grandparents had narrated these stories when you were a kid, you should pass them on to your next generation.'

Makes sense. If we can do that, Konkabotis and Kajolrekkhas won't be elbowed by Cinderellas and Little Mermaids. Shuarani, Duorani would take a break from their eternal bickering and smile at their newly gained and much deserved readership.'

Sylhet Geetabitan holds musical programme

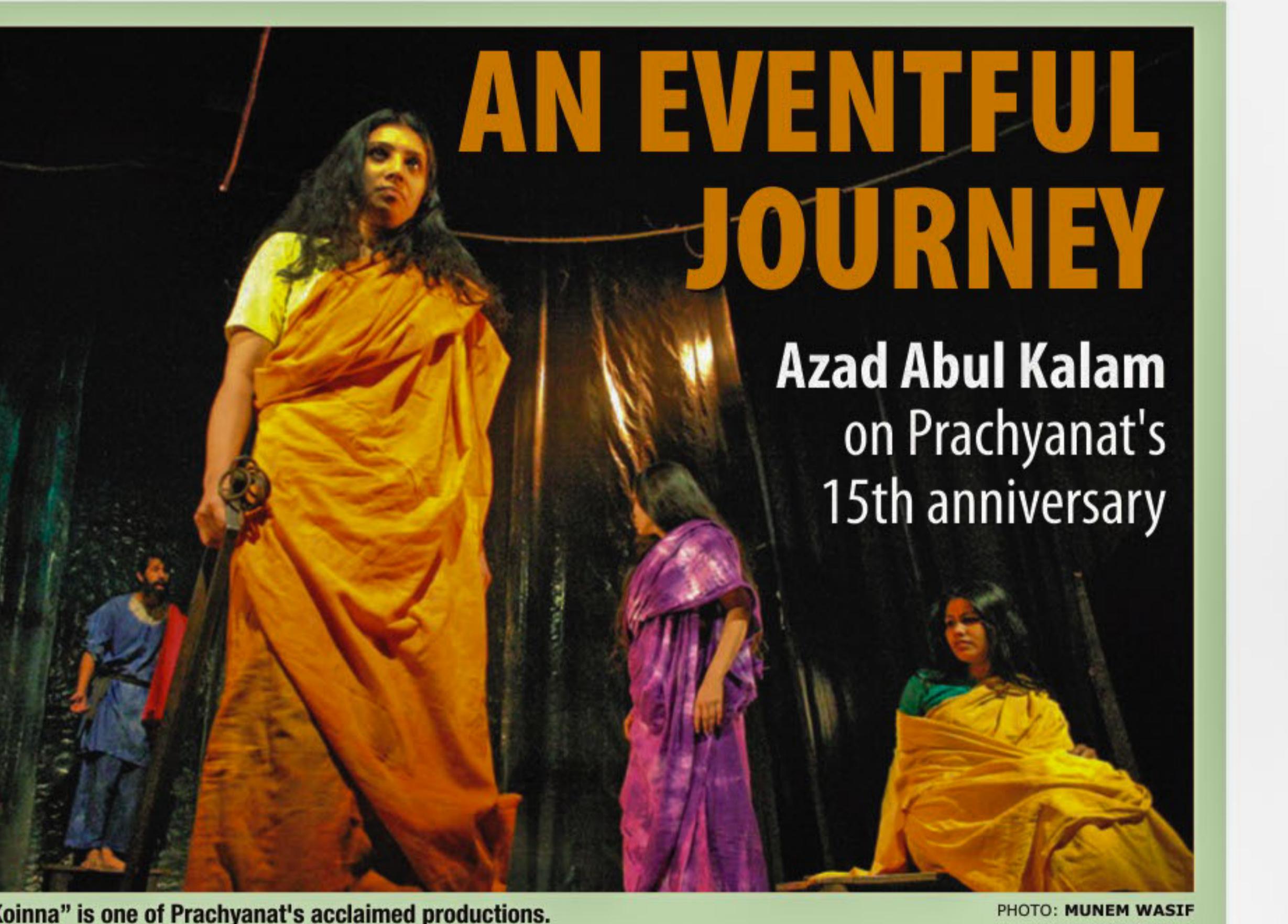
IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Anandojogee*.

To coincide with the distribution of certificates among its students, the Sylhet chapter of Geetabitan Bangladesh recently organised a melodious session of Tagore songs at a Sylhet auditorium.

Tagore researcher Agnibha Bandopadhyay, also Associate Professor of Rabindra Bharati, kept the audience enthralled with the rendition of songs such as, "Aguner Porosmoni Chhao Praney", "Darley Achho Tumi Amar Gaan-er Oparey" and "Jogoter

The guests later handed over certificates to the students of Geetabitan.



"Koinna" is one of Prachyanat's acclaimed productions.

PHOTO: MUNEM WASIF

JAMIL MAHMUD

Theatre troupe Prachyanat has produced some acclaimed plays over the last one and a half decade. The troupe is celebrating its 15th anniversary today through a two-day show, titled "Andorjatra" (literary, "journey within") at the Experimental Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. Before introducing the audience to the world of Prachyanat, the troupe's leader Azad Abul Kalam talked about its early days, ideology and achievements.

Was "Raja...ebong Onnano" a challenge for you?

Azad: The play was an experiment; a test to judge our abilities to absorb the concept I've talked about earlier. There is use of metaphors in the play, and I wanted to see Tagore's "Raja" from a more realistic angle.

Many consider Prachyanat to be an ideal troupe. Your thoughts?

Azad: If you say so, then I must say that this happened because of the sacrifices made by some people. These members refrained from lures, loved the troupe and seldom thought about their own interests -- knowing well that they won't earn anything from it.

How much do you think Bangladeshi theatre has progressed over the last 15 years?

Azad: A change in quality, precisely in the sense of application, is apparent in recent plays. Theatre is more engaging nowadays. However, we are still in need of able playwrights. Prachyanat is not an anomaly in this sense.

When you look back, what do you recall?

Azad: Before forming the troupe, we, the founder members, had tug-of-war regarding what we were really going to do or what we wanted to do. Each session was full of arguments. When I look back, I realise that it was this kind of brainstorming that helped us find our way. Most of us had no source of income; we went through struggles, yet we were determined to do something new.

What was the audiences' impression after the first show?

Azad: Our first play, "Circus Circus", was staged at Mahila Shamiti. We were tensed. We were rehearsing at a school. At a technical show, we invited some parents, one of whom appreciated the play a lot. That appreciation actually boosted our confidence. To be honest, before that we were unsure about our abilities. After the premiere, the play received a mixed response. Our first street play was "Kandite Mana". It was staged at TSC, Dhaka University premises.

"Circus Circus", "A Man for All Seasons" and "Koinna" -- the early plays had rather larger canvases. The recent plays, such as "Punorjomo" and "Mayer Mukhi", seem significant smaller, production-wise. What is the reason behind this?

Azad: Theatre is a journey. We are growing older and our thoughts regarding arts have been

transformed.

Then there's globalisation. In an open market, everything depends on capital, marketing and availability. The global media is controlled by the west. European fairy tales are being marketed in innumerable ingenious ways. These stories are maintaining their appeal in cartoons, TV shows and movies -- mediums that easily engage children. Amazing illustrations are used in the books. Why would a child want to rummage old, decaying termite shelters of books with a few badly drawn or no images?

The most important factor: mothers. Mothers have become alienated from these stories. Hence, children don't get to hear these bedtime stories.'

Can these treasures of Bangla literature be saved? An optimistic Sayeed says, 'Yes. But these stories will have to compete with their counterparts from all over the world, and to be able to do that they need a facelift.'

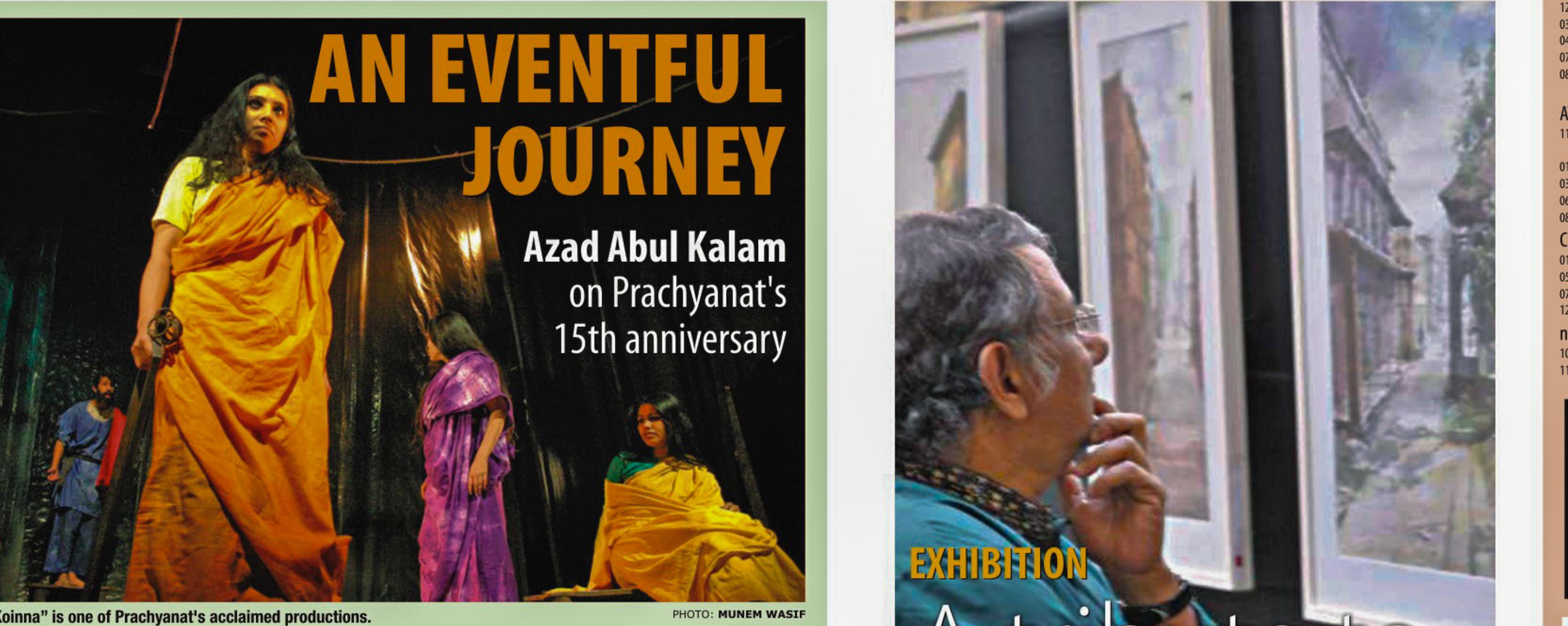
'The language which today's children might find archaic has to be decoded. Fascinating illustrations should be included to draw young readers. Filmmakers and animators should get involved.'

"Most importantly, schools and parents should introduce children to these stories. If your grandparents had narrated these stories when you were a kid, you should pass them on to your next generation."

Makes sense. If we can do that, Konkabotis and Kajolrekkhas won't be elbowed by Cinderellas and Little Mermaids. Shuarani, Duorani would take a break from their eternal bickering and smile at their newly gained and much deserved readership.'

The guests later handed over certificates to the students of Geetabitan.

PHOTO: MUNEM WASIF



The exhibition was an effort to build awareness on our heritage.

MAHEEN KHAN

On February 18, an exhibition was held as a tribute to Panam Nagar, the magnificent old township. Painters were inspired to draw upon the distinct extraordinary remnant of this architectural gem in Bangladesh. This 19th century relic of British renaissance is a unique historical site that connects us to the colonial past. A large audience viewed the beautiful paintings -- at Khazana Restaurant in Dhaka -- that rekindled memories of a bygone era.

Organised by the Arts Council Dhaka, it was an effort to build awareness on our heritage.

Panam Nagar is a unique example of an early urban settlement of Bengal. The residences are close to each other with the central road being the major access and the canals serving as the secondary or service access. The architectural style of the buildings is 'English Renaissance' or the 'British Raj', used throughout the cities of British India during the 19th century. It is a coherent neighbourhood of richly detailed buildings, which tell us about the life, and culture of our past. Its

fortunate location in the tourist city of Sonargazi -- surrounded by the ruins of the old capital, Mughal and pre-Mughal monuments, tombs and palaces -- gives it a good chance of being a successful educational and recreational centre. Since the township is owned by the Government of Bangladesh and is mostly unoccupied, renovating the structures to accommodate new uses should not be difficult

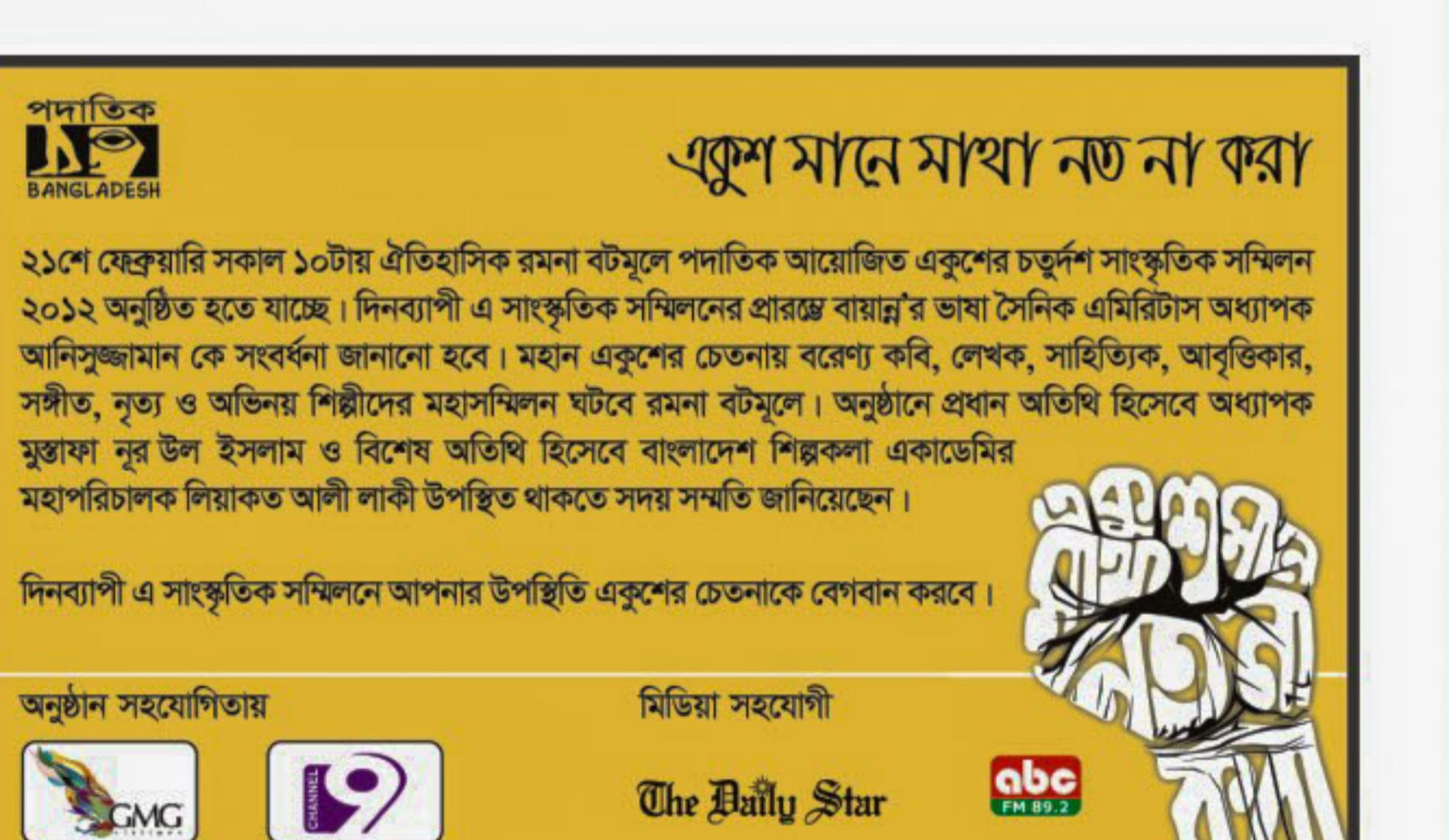
Panam village became prominent during the British period, when a cloth-trading centre grew up under the influential zamindars (landlords). The cloth merchants came from various places such as Calcutta, Patna or Bombay. These wealthy Hindu merchants, the Shahas and Poddars, built their exquisite residences in a beautiful setting in Panam village.

At present about 250 people live in Panam Nagar. Some of them are the staff of the Folk Arts Museum and of the local school. The rest are unauthorised occupants consisting of shopkeepers and spice-vendors.

The writer is a renowned designer.



PHOTOGRAPH BY AMIRUL RAJIV



PHOTOGRAPH BY AMIRUL RAJIV

Get Him to the Greek

Inception

Bangkok Dangerous

Invictus

The King of Fighters

Transporter 3

Star World

Desperate Housewives

Supernatural

Panam

The Big Bang Theory

The Shield

Two And A Half Men

National Geographic Channel

Animals Gone Crazy

Big, Bigger, Biggest

Cat Wars

Animal Megas

Macro Structures

Mad Scientists

Discovery Channel

Prehistoric

My Secret

Deception with Keith Barry

</div