

Bangladesh in tune with internationalism

Eminent literary critic, editor and translator, Dr. Fakrul Alam talks about the significance of Hay Festival in Bangladesh, the importance of translation and the practice of English literature in the country to The Daily Star's Shahriar Feroze.

Shahriar Feroze (SF): Is a platform like Hay important for Bangladeshi authors and readers?
Fakrul Alam (FA): The festival is important for Bangladeshi authors, readers and, we must add, publishers, because a lot of books are sold during the three days of the festival and the interest generated before it and during it gives some momentum afterwards for book buying and selling. But we must see the Hay Festival as important for a section of Bangladeshi authors and readers and not all of them at this time, for obviously the emphasis is on books published in English. However, every year the emphasis on Bangla writing has been growing and at this rate the Festival should become more and more important for an expanding number of authors, readers and publishers in general, in the years to come.

SF: There have been criticisms that Hay is promoting foreign literature/culture etc. at the expense of our own; we've even seen protests in front of Bangla Academy. What's your response to these critics?

FA: Since the question of linguistic colonialism has been such an emotive issue in our country for so long it would be surprising if there was no resistance to a book fair that initially at least concentrated so heavily on books published in English. That the Festival's move to Bangla Academy generated some resentment is, to me, understandable, but it is important to note how people have, on the whole, welcomed it in this venue. The fact that the festival is being held there for the third time shows that the organizers feel that the protests have not been that fierce or intimidating; on the contrary, they have been encouraging and supported by the turnout every year and convinced that more and more people are with them in the belief that the festival is good for literature in Bangladesh as a whole. I feel that the spirit of internationalism is winning over parochialism as Bangladesh itself is becoming more and more confident of its place in the world!

SF: How important is it that we translate our vast treasure-trove of Bangla literature? Is enough work being done in Bangladesh to do so?

FA: For sure, it is very important to let the world know that Bangla literature has endless delights for the world to offer. I say this especially because at the moment I am translating *Bishad Sindhu*, a work which I had read when I was growing up



without quite appreciating its brilliance and epical qualities. Now that I am reading it so closely, it seems to be such a pity that the world never even had a glimpse of its artistic and thematic excellence. Also, excellent writers like Akhtaruzaman Elias, Hassan Azizul Huq and Shahidul Zahir, to name only those who come to mind readily -- need to be introduced to the world.

It is easy to see that not enough work is being done to introduce these writers. One problem is the lack of translators but the other is the lack of publishers linked internationally to big publishing houses who can ensure distribution of these works. I also feel that because of the Bengali diaspora we should now have publishers venture into e-publishing of our classics -- of past masters such as Mir Mosharraf Husain and contemporary masters such as Elias, Huq and Zahir.

SF: What is your opinion of the way in which English literature is taught and practiced in this country?

FA: I feel that the teaching of English literature is going through a critical period in the country. On the one hand, there is a lot of interest in it and most universities—public or private—offer it, along with English language teaching. On the other hand, language policies of the decades after liberation have sapped the vitality out of teaching and have made it almost impossible for students coming to our universities to study English language and literature at the level in which it should be taught and learned. The results of the recent university

admission tests point to a real crisis bedeviling the teaching-learning situation as far as English literature is concerned. There is demand for it but the supply of good students is restricted. And so we need to find new ways of teaching it. I personally feel that we should restrict class sizes and concentrate on intensive teaching. We need to also update our syllabuses with contemporary authors, ensure that they are designed to move students from language learning through simple and imaginative fictional and non-prose pieces, plays and poems to more difficult ones, and strive to make classes more interactive for learners.

SF: What are your expectations from Hay this year? Any authors or sessions you are particularly looking forward to?

FA: Well, there is always a buzz before Hay and I hear it this time too. I particularly look forward to hearing Zia Haider Rahman talk and read at Hay and Joy Goswami too. And then there are writers such as William Dalrymple and Shashi Tharoor to look forward to and poets like Mimi Khalvati. I would have liked to see more poets though and more writers from USA, Australia, Canada, and come to think of it, from Africa and the Caribbean too. But I imagine that financial constraints play a part here; hopefully, the growing success of the Festival will encourage the organizers to invite at least a handful of writers from these areas in the future.

Shahriar Feroze is Current Affairs Analyst at The Daily Star.

HAY FESTIVAL 2014 It's that time of the year

AMIYA HALDER

Hay Festival is back in town for its fourth year in a row, featuring yet another line-up of some of the greatest minds the world of literature has to offer. Be a part of the magic as the festival unfolds on the historic grounds of Bangla Academy today. Join celebrated writers William Dalrymple and Syed Shamsul Haq on the lawn, as PEN International's President John Ralston Saul inaugurates the three-day long festival.

The diverse list of participants just on day one ranges from an intrepid traveler to a freedom fighter to the world's finest editors, journalists and critics. In "Cities", young novelists Rana Dasgupta, Javed Jahangir and Somnath Batabyal talk about capitals, big money and globalisation, and award-winning historian Patrick French recounts his extensive body of work on South Asia in "The Great Adventurer". Take a seat at the Cosmic Tent where Selina Hussein contemplates the world of short stories, or stroll over to BotTala and hear languages nearing extinction before they are lost forever. Eminent journalists from The New Yorker and LA Times discuss the future of journalism "In the Age of the Aggregator", while editors from Bloomsbury and Random House share what they look for in new writers in "Lessons from the Slushpile".

The book festival sets off in style, with new releases by Aamer Hussein, Asif Farrukhi, Neeman

Unwind and connect with your spiritual side on day two with "A Love Divine"; listen to the beautiful devotional songs of Gofur Hali, and the mystical verses of spiritual transformation at BotTala. Indian politician Shashi Tharoor and critically acclaimed novelist Zia Haider Rahman discuss their multiple identities in "Past Lives", while Aamer Hussein and Fakrul Alam explore the possibility of a South Asian identity in "Writing the Region". Indian writers Manju Kapur and Nilanjana Roy sit with Tahmima Anam to reflect on "The Woman as a Writer". Hear the musings of celebrated writers and poets of the subcontinent, including Asad Chowdhury, Kaiser Haq and Muneza Shamsie in "A Connected Past", and enjoy the recitations of young breakthrough poets Kosal Khiev, Laksmi Pamuntjak and TJ Dema, as well some of our favourite Bangladeshi poets.

In "Science Matters", listen to Professor Muhammed Zafar Iqbal and Lucy Hawking, daughter of Stephen Hawking, talk about making science popular. Drop by the Cosmic Tent and rediscover the enchanting world of science -- like never before, with interactive sessions that will run all day long. Hay also has exciting children's events, ranging from adventures in folk myths all the way to different galaxies. End day two on a lighter note with the comedy of Naveed Mahbub, and Shadhona's production of Tagore.



Sobhan, Javed Jahangir, Salil Tripathi and Drik. For the lover of poetry, there are countless sessions throughout day one, including "Powerful Voices" featuring Iranian-born poet Mimi Khalvati, "Revisiting Razia Khan" with Kaiser Haq, and "Without Borders" where Urdu poet Fatema Hassan and French-Indian poet Karthika Nair recite from their works. End the day with an evening of delightful music and song, as Vidya Shah takes us back to the splendour of a bygone era.

That Which Cannot be Said", inspired by the Vagina Monologues, is a production by Naripokkho and a must-see on the third and final day of Hay. Be sure to join Syed Shamsul Haq and Aly Zaker as they celebrate 450 years of Shakespeare in Bangladesh with performances by Firdousi Majumdar. With its stages bursting into songs, the weather deliciously cool, and the list of its literary credentials too long to read out, don't miss out on the literary event of the season.

MEGHMALLAR Where silence speaks louder than words



SAURAV DEY

Full-length feature film "Meghmallar" premiered on Tuesday evening at Star Cineplex in the capital. The film, written and directed by Zahidur Rahim Anjan, is the maiden production of Bengal Entertainment Limited and received a National Filmmaking Grant last year. Set during the monsoon of 1971, "Meghmallar" -- based on Akhtaruzaman Elias' short story "Raincoat" -- depicts the interplay between fear and courage, hope and despair. On the opening evening, Finance Minister AMA Muhith was present as chief guest, while Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu inaugurated the premiere in the presence of distinguished guests, including the chairman of Bengal Foundation, Abul Khair. The film stars Shahiduzzaman Selim, Aparna, Jayanta Chattopadhyay, Mosharraf Karim, Aditi and child artiste Zara. The plot is set in a time when the nation had just begun armed struggles for liberation. A middle class family -- college lecturer Nurul Huda, his wife Asma, daughter Sudha and Asma's brother Mintu -- go through a life-altering experience when Mintu leaves family to join the Freedom Fighters. The middle class existence of Huda, centres on his family and he even tries to pander to his pro-Pakistani colleagues to stay safe. However, the Pakistani Army catches him and takes him to their torture cell accusing Huda of assisting freedom fighters. After bearing torture by the military, an ordinary Huda imagines himself as a freedom fighter who does not hesitate to sacrifice his life for the country. All dilemma, confusion and fear of Huda go away in the epiphany when he utters "I know the whereabouts of them (freedom fighters) but won't tell a word. Joy Bangla, Joy Bangla!" "Meghmallar" boasts beautiful landscapes captured in Indian cinematographer Shudhir Palsane's camerawork. Silence serves the purpose of words in the film and incessant rain, idylls, solitary railroad, uninhabited forests and use of imagery are aptly fitted to classical ragas used in the background score. Abhijit Basu, from Kolkata has done the music. "Meghmallar" is quiet unconventional as a tale of war and instead of portraying violence, it depicts the close, personal story of a middle-class family that makes a difference.

Comprehending the art of Kathak dance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bengal Foundation organised the second episode of its monthly series of programmes titled "Understanding Classical Dance", curated and presented by celebrated artiste, choreographer and educator, Sharmila Banerjee.

The session, at the Daily Star-Bengal Arts Precinct on November 18, featured audio-visual content, demonstrations and Kathak dance performances. Kazi Rakibul Haque Ripon, a student of Pandit Birju Maharaj, assisted Sharmila Banerjee.

Accomplished Kathak dancers -Tahnina Islam, Aupee Karim, Snata Shahreen, Monira Parveen Happy and Mehraj Haque Tushar performed in the evening. Syed Meher Hossain accompanied on the tabla. The event set off with Guru Vandana and Ganesh Vandana. The history and background of Kathak dance, its evolution were discussed highlighting three phases -- Mandir or Temple phase, Darbar or Court phase and Stage or present phase. Monira Parveen Happy danced to a Meera Bhajan. Aupee Karim beautifully pre-

sented panghat, while Snata Shahreen and Mehraj Haque Tushar performed a duet. At the end Snata, Tahnina, Happy and Tushar presented a jugalbandi style with tabla sawal jawab by Syed Meher Hossain. Kathak is one of the eight forms of Indian classical dance. This dance form traces its origins to the nomadic bards of ancient northern, known as Kathakars or storytellers. From the 16th century onwards it absorbed certain features of Persian dance and central Asian dance which were imported by the royal courts of the Mughal era.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Star Melodies' tribute to FEROZA BEGUM

STAR ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK
Star Melodies will hold a special musical programme on the legendary singer Feroza Begum on November 23. Eminent singers Fahmida Nabi, Nasima Shaheen, Sharmin Shathi Islam, Anupoma Mukti and Sushmita Anis will perform popular Nazrul and Adhunik songs immortalised by the singer. The event will begin at 6 pm at the AS Mahmud Seminar Hall of The Daily Star Centre. Those interested in the event may collect cards from the Administration Department of The Daily Star between 11 am-5 pm depending on availability. Seats are limited.