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Published by the Editor from  
Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejaon  
Industrial Area, Dhaka on behalf  
of Mediaworld Ltd., 52 Motijheel  
C.A., Dhaka-1000.

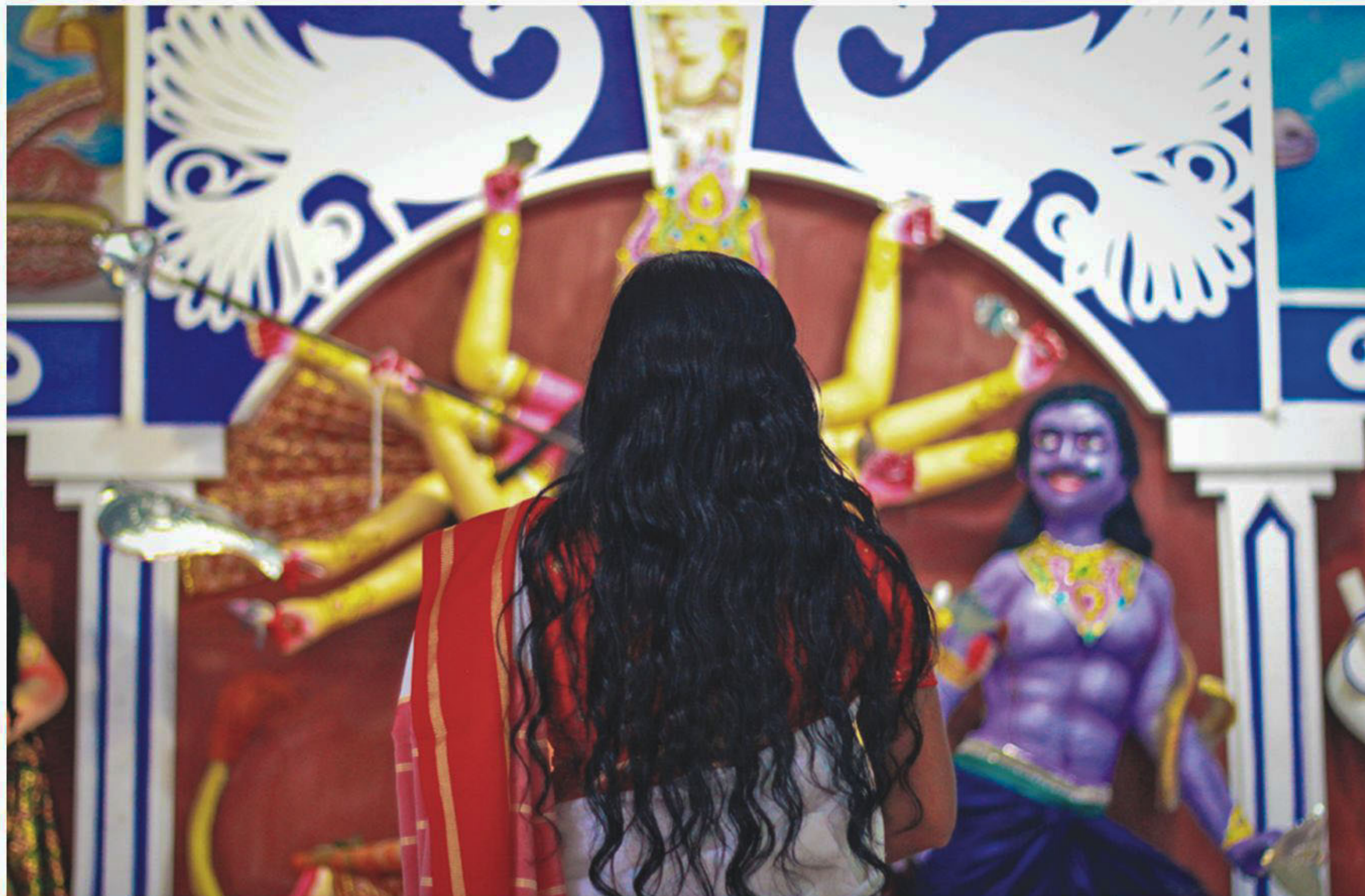


PHOTO: SHAMS SUHAIB

"She knew without question that she could sweep down on them and inflict upon all of them a terrible vengeance if she wished. She had the capacity for violence within her, residing beside her heart." – David Anthony Durham, *Acacia: The War with the Mein*

**SNAPSHOT**

**OPINION**



PHOTOS: COURTESY

# ACCEPTING IDENTITIES

ELITA KARIM

When in 2014, the government officially declared the hijras to be the third gender in Bangladesh, the hijra community did the victory dance. They took to the streets and celebrated the first Hijra Pride Parade in Bangladesh. "Yes I celebrated too," says Rani, a member of the hijra community who performs for a living and also begs at signals occasionally when need rises. "It was indeed a great day for us. But still, we are looked upon as outcasts in society. We are not given jobs or provided with training of any sort. If we are not provided with any education, how can we be expected to do something worthwhile with our lives? At the end of the day, we are still stigmatised."

There are many different kinds of identities in the world. Particularly in Bangladesh or in other parts of South Asia, we have finally come to accept hijras, especially after the government declared them to be the third gender, officially, in Bangladesh. The hijra community in Bangladesh or in South Asia, is more of a culture rather than a gender. According to reports, the government says that there are around 10,000-15,000 hijras in the country. However, rights groups put the number of hijras in the country at around half a million, according to another report.

With more than thousands of hijras in Dhaka alone, the term 'hijra' refers to the long standing culture – where it comprises transgenders and also those who feel that they are trapped inside the bodies of another gender – transsexuals. Nowadays, in other parts of the world, many are changing their genders with the help of surgery and hence trying to live a normal, decent life.

Earlier this year, the annual Stockholm Pride was organised in the capital city of



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Sweden, where members of the LGBT groups swarmed in from all over the world to attend and voice out. Much more than a parade, the idea of organising the Stockholm Pride week is to bring together people from all walks of society and

educate them about the LGBT community. Pride is observed through out the whole week, where people greet each other with a 'Happy Pride' along with the usual hellos and also sign off their emails with a 'Happy Pride' as well!

The week was also well spent by educating international journalists about ways to make others aware through subtly, diplomatically, academically, yet assertively. For instance, a meeting with writers from the LGBT group revealed how they were trying to make children aware of the different sexual identities through picture books. "Our stories mirror the contemporary society. The children's every-day reality shows a magnificent diversity in ways of being and ways of living," says Karin Salmson from Olika förlag (Different Publishing), a

multi awarded independent publishing house specialised in children literature with focus on gender equality and diversity. "By broadening the scope of children's literature and including new ways of life, more children will be able to find identification and thereby increase their self-esteem."

The unique picture books Salmson shared with the journalists showcased the idea of a child having two mothers or two fathers, as nothing but a normal element of society. "Our stories both challenge and broaden the narrow gender stereotypes so often found in children's literature. We are also aware of how we portray different ways of forming a family, ethnicity and disabilities."

Clearly, the society in Bangladesh and also South Asia will require more time to accept the different identities and that we see around us everyday. Despite the official recognition of the third gender, thousands from the hijra communities are still unable to live decent lives in Bangladesh. The fact that it might take a few generations to stop being ostriches and accept the age old concept of the existence of different identities and genders, is truly a scary one. ■

## MAILBOX

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### The Guardian Angel

The article of Idrakpur fort was a very well written piece. It was so well written that I felt like I was travelling in the days of Mir Jumla, the pioneer of Dhaka's days of glory. Idrakpur fort is quite a neglected and less highlighted piece of Mughal architecture. However, if we consider its strategic location and massive defensive power, we can easily assume that it was a very important Mughal garrison at that time. It has protected hundreds and thousands of inhabitants of this part of Bengal from the marauding Arakanese and Portuguese pirates and slave traders. Steps should be taken to preserve and renovate this important archaeological site.

Sarah Farhana  
Niketan, Dhaka

### A Marvel Unleashed

The story of the child prodigy Wasik Farhan Roopkotha was really amazing. His god gifted talent and intense passion for computer programming has made him an international figure. However, before this article on *Star Weekend*, I did not hear about him at all in Bangladesh. We should be proud of him. We should encourage this young talent so that he can get the best education in his field of interest from Bangladesh. Future talents like Wasik will build a better Bangladesh.

Arman Azim  
Mahakhali, Dhaka



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

### Screaming....Hazaribagh

A big round of appreciation goes out to the *Star Weekend* for turning the spotlight to Hazaribagh tannery industry. Its pollution has become such an imperative issue that needs to be heard and solved in no time. This industry has been killing the environment and having a detrimental impact on the lives of the people living in and around the area ever since its establishment. The writer pointed it out very well that this industry waiting to be relocated cannot be an excuse that is destroying the environment every second. The government and the respective authority cannot turn a blind eye to this matter anymore. They have procrastinated a lot. It is high time they became serious and relocated the industry to Savar.

Samiul Rajjul  
North South University, Dhaka

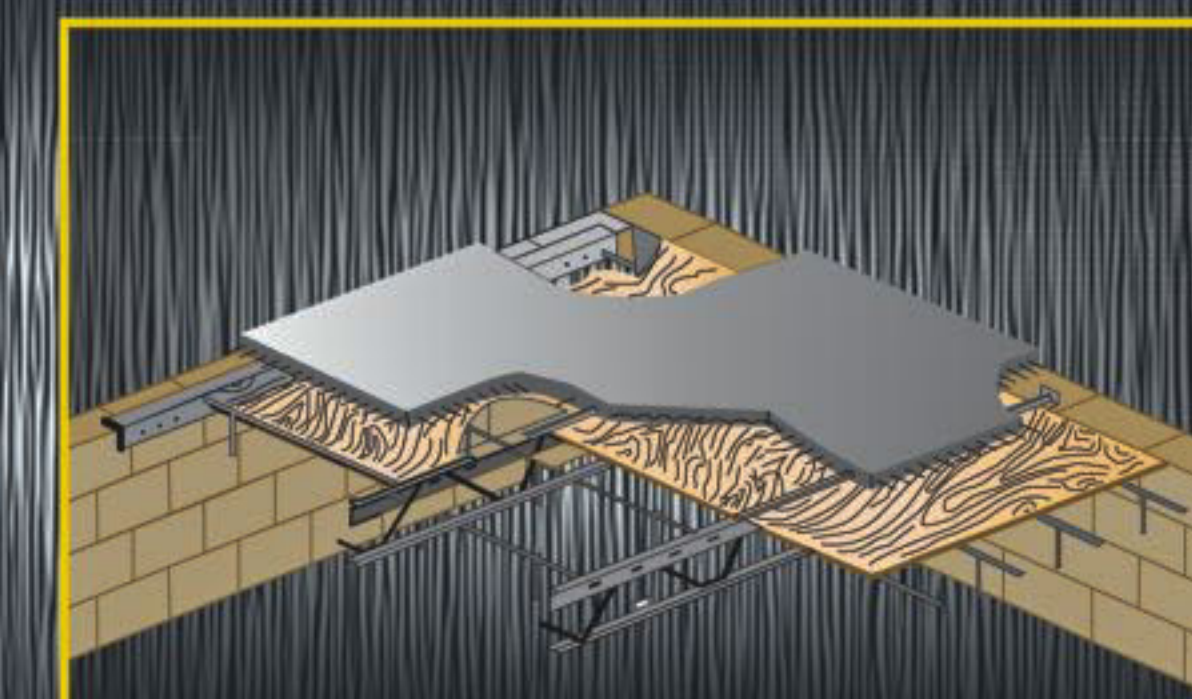


PHOTO: KAZI TAHNIN AGAZ APURBO

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