

# THE LOST CHILD OF CHITTAGONG

TOUFIQUR RAHAMAN TAMIM

French revolution is one of the incidents that changed the world's history decisively. It's far reaching social, political and cultural impact contributed a lot to shape the modern day's Europe and the western world. However, how many of us know that a Bangladeshi boy played a very significant role in this historic event? It may be surprising to many of us but it is quite true. In France he was known as Zamor and his Christianised name was Louis Benoit. Born in 1762 (not confirmed) at Chittagong, Zamor was kidnapped by the English slave traders when he was only eleven years old. The slave traders took Zamor to Madagascar and there he was sold to the French slave traders. After being trafficked to France, Zamor was sold to the France's royal palace as a palace slave. Entrance into royal palace changed Zamor's life.

aristocrats, Zamor and Countess Du Barry joined the revolutionary Jacobin Club. He used to maintain secret connections with the revolutionary leaders and helped them by providing information. For his contribution to the revolution, Zamor was made the office-bearer of the Committee of Public Safety which was the de facto executive government of France during the turbulent period after the onset of the revolution. Then in 1792 he was made secretary of the committee whose duty was to keep an eye on the aristocrats. However, Zamor's relationship with revolutionary, puritan leader George Grieve appalled Countess Du Barry and she ordered Zamor to leave her palace within three days if he had not severed his liaison with the revolutionary leader. Zamor was also aggrieved by Du Barry's secret connection with the French aristocrats who fled to London. Zamor



Jacques Bertaux, *Prise du palais des Tuileries*, 1793.

PHOTO: INTERNET

Zamor was educated by Countess Du Barry who was a mistress of the French monarch Louis XV and became her servant. However, the countess mistook him as an African boy and the impression of this mistake can easily be understood from Zamor's portrait where Jacques Antoine Marie Lemoine, the painter, portrayed him with African features. The countess wrote in her memoirs about Zamor, "The second object of my regard was Zamor, a young African boy, full of intelligence and mischief; simple and independent in his nature, yet wild as his country. Zamor fancied himself the equal of all he met, scarcely deigning to acknowledge the king himself as his superior." During his stay in the royal palace Zamor developed a keen interest on philosophy and literature. He secretly studied all the works of revolutionary philosopher and writer Jean Jack Rousseau and became deeply influenced by his philosophy. When the French revolution broke out against the oppressive rule of French

revealed this fact before the Revolutionary Tribunal and accused Du Barry of helping the aristocrats with money and shelter. There in the court while giving his witness statement, Zamor for the first time mentioned that he was actually from Chittagong in Bengal, not from Africa. Upon his statement Countess Du Barry was arrested and executed in guillotine. Later life of Zamor remained unknown. After Countess Du Barry's execution, he left the revolutionary group and maintained a solitary life in the old quarter of Paris. He died there in poverty on February 7, 1820. Zamor's contribution in French revolution was significant. He sacrificed the luxury of royal palace and safety provided by his countess only because of his faith on liberty, equality and fraternity. However, very few remember the contribution and sacrifice of this Bangladeshi boy who, far from his birthplace, sacrificed his life for a people's revolution against oppression and injustice. *The writer is a student of class 10 at Ta'mirul Millat Kamil Madrasah, Tongi branch.*



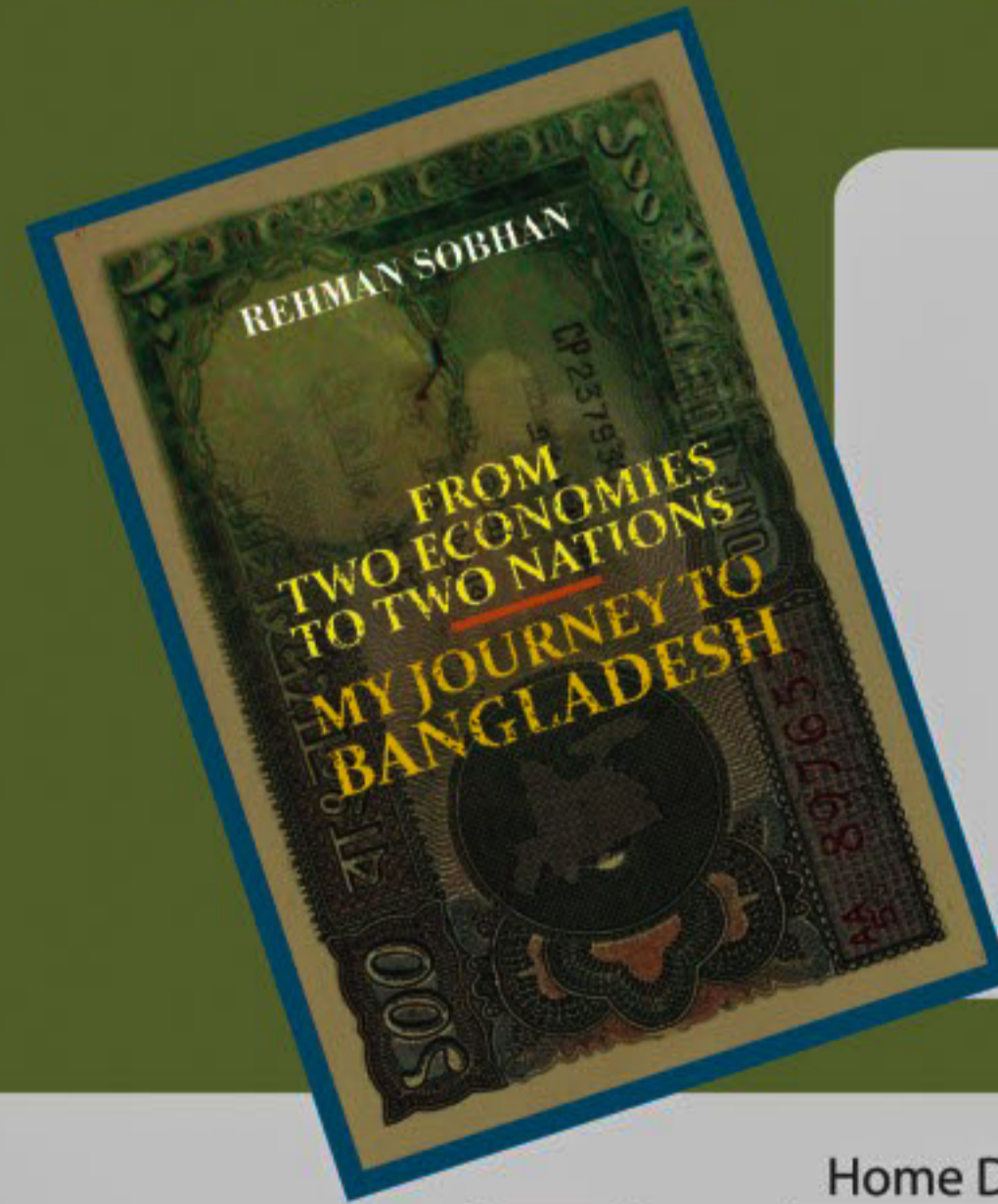
Zamor's portrait by Marie Lemoine.

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| STRIKING A CHORD |

# THE 'PAHELA BAISHAKH' INCIDENT

ELITA KARIM

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

The beginning of a new year comes with hope, a yearning to do better, to help others, to make the nation a better place to live in and of course, to fight for justice. In Bangladesh, we look forward to the month long Ekushey Boi Mela, one of the largest book fairs in Asia, in the month of February. We think of adorning ourselves in yellow, celebrating the first day of Phalgun on February 13, not to mention, the food, the pithas and songs that we will sing together on Pahela Baishakh in April. This is our tradition, our culture, the definition of celebrating as one in Bangladesh.

However, the recent report submitted by the authorities on last year's Pahela Baishakh sexual assault incident is absolutely disheartening, not to mention outright disgusting. Last month, detectives submitted the final report in the case over sexual assault on women during last year's Pahela Baishakh celebrations, saying that none of the culprits could be identified or arrested.

Reported by *The Daily Star*, sub-inspector Dipak Kumar Das of Detective Branch (DB) of police, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case gave the report to Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court in the afternoon. "The incidents of sexual assault [on women] took place during the Pahela Baishakh celebrations on the Dhaka University campus. We have submitted the final report but could not identify or arrest any of the offenders," court sources quoted the IO as saying in the report.

More than 20 women were sexually assaulted in the evening of Pahela Baishakh (April 14, 2015), on the DU campus for over an hour. At least 27 CCTV cameras were installed all over the area along with several police check points in every corner to ensure security on the day when everyone comes together to celebrate. Although a number of police personnel were standing nearby, they did not do anything to stop it. Moreover, one officer released two of the culprits caught and handed over to him by the public. For



a long time, the police kept denying that the women were sexually assaulted, despite a huge public outcry.

In fact, we remember the authorities being very confused for weeks. Strange statements were issued every few days. At one point the authorities were also blaming the few rescuers, Liton Nandi,

Suman Sengupta and Amit Dey, at that point of time, of lying to the media for attention. "We were returning from a meeting and happened to be at the TSC area," says Liton Nandi, President of Chhatra Union. "There were thousands of people in the area. Even then, we could figure out that a group of men were

deliberately trying to create a gridlock. I sensed that something was terribly wrong. We could only hear someone screaming. As soon as we reached the spot, we saw that the group of men was gnawing at the girl, while her husband or boyfriend was trying to protect her." According to Nandi, the girl did not have any clothes on her. Her sari had come off. The men were groping and grabbing at her. "We tried to stop the men from attacking; at one point we also began to hit the men to make them stop," Nandi remembers. "Eventually, I took off my Panjabi and gave it to the girl so that she could cover herself. The girl got on a rickshaw, fixed her clothes and returned my Panjabi to me."

A few feet away, the rescuers found yet another group of men attacking a young girl of not more than 16-18 years of age. "She fell to the ground because of all the gnawing and groping," says Nandi. "I realised that the girl would die under the stampede. We ran to the spot and were literally begging the men to stop. "She is going to die" - I shouted to the men. "Please let her go!"

It's a wonder why the authorities suddenly claim that none of the culprits could be identified when they, themselves had identified them months ago. On April 18, the police for the first time admitted that the women were indeed sexually harassed. They had also released photos of eight youths who allegedly carried out the assault and declared a reward of Tk 1 lakh for information on each of them. They were identified from the combined footages of the CCTV cameras installed around the scene.

It is time for yet another revolution. We know what had happened at the DU premises last year and that the authorities are well aware of the incident as well. If the culprits are not taken in and punished, there will be no more of the Pahela Baishakh celebrations; the beauty of Phalgun will go unnoticed and the Bengali dream, as we know it, will slowly wither away.

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Workshop on Social Scientific Writing  
CHAIR OF THE PROGRAM  
KEYNOTE SPEAKER: Habibul Khondoker  
SPEAKER: Md. Saiful Islam

**WORKSHOP ON SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC WRITING**  
January 2, 9am - 1pm  
R C Majumdar Arts Auditorium, DU  
Registration fee: 100 TK  
Contacts: 01676617846, 01832592933, 01736318044

Kid's Camp on Photography  
ORGANISED BY TTL  
January 8, 9am - 1pm  
House 33, Road 64, Gulshan 2  
Registration: Send an SMS with child's name, age, your full name and phone number to 01711507894 or 01713426518

DO YOU EVEN COLOUR?  
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EMK Centre, House 5, Road 16, 9th Floor, Midas Centre, Dhanmondi, Dhaka  
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