

STORIES OF INDEPENDENCE

ROBINA RASHID BHUIYAN

The 1971 war stands out in the annals of history for being a struggle for independence that exceeded borders and territories; it was a cultural struggle against a domination that threatened to erase our cultural identity. The brave fight of the Liberation Army was paralleled by the efforts of cultural activists that courageously ventured out to fight back with culture using dance and song. It is therefore only fitting that recently another 108 artistes of Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra have been recognised as

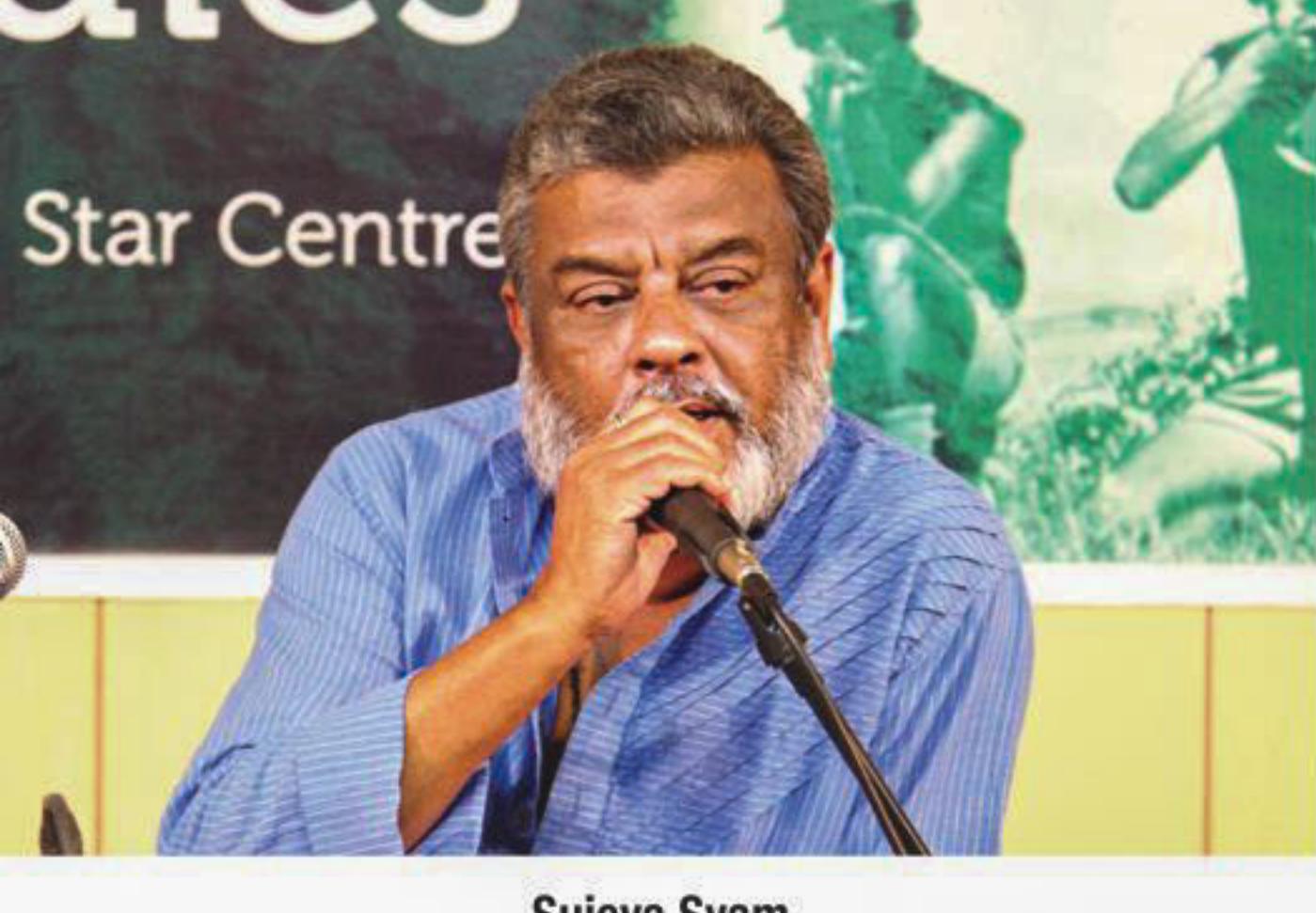
Freedom Fighters for their role in the Liberation War of Bangladesh, and on November 16, the government published a gazette featuring the names of artistes who have been rewarded with the status. The Daily Star has reached out to some of the awardees and other activists to share with our readers their stories of Victory Day.



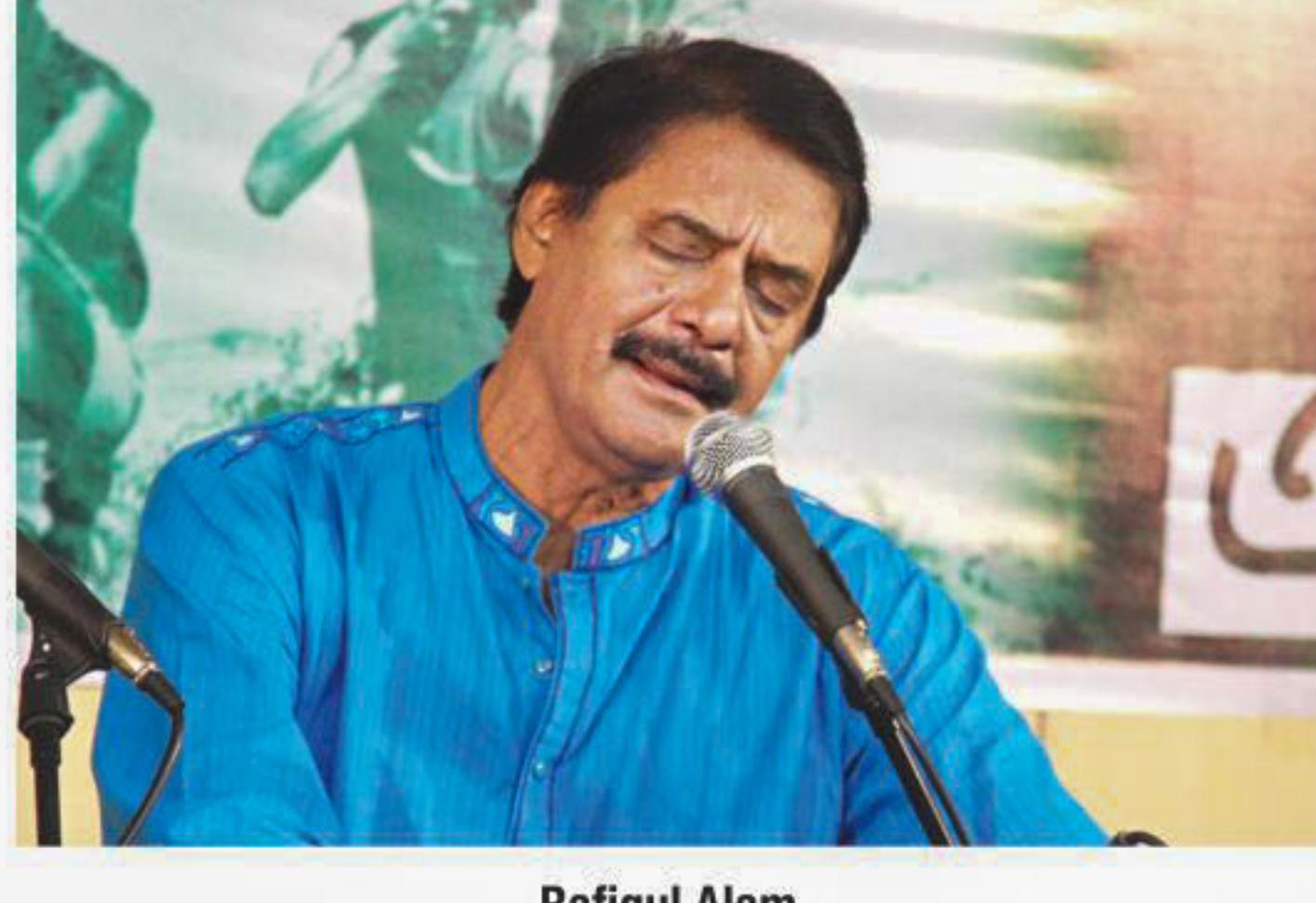
Shaheen Samad



Dalia Nausheen



Sujeya Syam



Rafiqul Alam

"As far as the recognition goes, it is a matter of pride, however, as it has been 45 years since Independence. Also it's a material issue because when we had gone to Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, we did not go in search of recognition. All we wanted was Freedom of our country, and when we attained victory we were very anxious to come back to our motherland. However, if our deeds had been completely disregarded after victory it would not have sat well with us, so we are grateful for this formal recognition, even though it was a little late in coming," said Dalia Nausheen.

"Decades have gone by since our time at Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, but I am elated by the fact that after 45 years of our nation's independence, we are recognised as artistes who have contributed to our victory. In the beginning, when some of the districts such as Jessor were freed from Pakistani dominance, it was then when I stepped in the land we could finally call our own. Nothing will ever beat the pride I had felt then. We traveled from one camp to another, performing in front of the Liberation Army," said Shaheen Samad.

"When we heard the occupation army was retreating from Jessor, hope surged in our hearts, making us believe we would finally have a nation of our own. On December 15, we recorded the last song at



Minu Haque

Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, titled "Bijoy Nishan Urchhe Oi," composed by Sujeya Syam. On the night of victory, we have never felt such joy – the noise of firecrackers celebrating our independence – is something I will always fondly remember. We had great fun that night," quipped Rafiqul Alam.

"I am proud to have witnessed those

glorious days, and to have been a part of the struggle. Our goal was to inspire the Freedom Fighters and the people of Bangladesh, and I recall one day we had received a message from a soldier that said our songs keep them alive, and give them strength to move on and fight. That was all we had wanted to do, and I am content because we had been able to achieve our goals," said Sujeya Syam.

"On Victory day I was at Agartala, and we were not even aware of our independence as there was a complete blackout in Calcutta (now Kolkata). I returned to Bangladesh on January 4, but we had started our journey three days ago on a refugee train. Everything had been ravaged by the war on our journey home, and it was long and arduous. We would wait for hours and hours by the Goalanda ghat in efforts to find transport to take us home. Before I left Calcutta, the Pakistan army had been looking for me to perform for them. My mother kept telling them I was sick, but they said they would search our home for me. When the liberation army went through our area, my mother sent me away with them. Her last words to me that day were, "We will meet again in the afterlife." That is something I will never forget, and the relief I felt upon our independence is unparalleled," said Minu Haque.

Mamunur Rashid looks back on Victory Day

ROBINA RASHID BHUIYAN

Eminent thespian Mamunur Rashid is a name that generates respect and admiration at home and abroad. An actor, director, playwright and cornerstone of reputed theatre troupe Aranyak, he currently holds another position in his expansive career as the leading member of Federation of Television Professionals Organisation (FTPO). His passion towards the cause of television professionals is testament to his passion for Bangladeshi culture and arts that he bravely demonstrated during the Liberation War of 1971. The artiste shared some significant memories of Independence Day with The Daily Star.

"When the War broke out, on March 25 and 26, I was in Dhaka. On the following evening I left the city to be with my family in Tangail. My family lived in the main town, but they weren't home when I reached. I then made my way to my uncle's house in the village, and found them all there. They were overjoyed upon seeing me make it safely from a city already ravaged by war. At Hamidpur, a village in the same district, I was approached by potters who told me that the Pakistani army had left



some weapons in their furnace, and that they wished to pass them onto the Freedom Fighters. I along with them took these weapons to Kader Siddique, and it was with these weapons the Kader bahini moved forward. Soon after, I left the country and traveled to Kolkata to join Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra in an effort to contribute to the war with our culture and music."

"I was still in Kolkata on Victory Day, and we finally had a country to call our own. A significant memory which I want to share occurred before Independence on December 6, when India gave recognition to Bangladesh as an independent state. I met Zahir Raihan in front of Bangladesh Mission and he clasped me in a joyous embrace, and that has remained crisp in my memory since the wake of independence. On Victory Day, we all listened to the live broadcasting of the day's events, with uncontained excitement. There were no telephone connection to our country, and we could not share the joy with the people we had left behind there. At Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, we had a celebratory programme on the radio where Sujeya Syam composed a song commemorating the day."

Victory day celebration programmes at Agartala



A scene from "Poramati".

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Assistant High Commission for the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Agartala, India has organised a Victory Day celebration programme at Rabindra Bhaban, Agartala on December 16. Deputy speaker of Tripura Parliament Pabitra Kar will inaugurate the celebration programme.

The programme will feature patriotic songs performance by Bangladeshi singers – Devdas Chowdhury, Habibur Rahman, AKM Sorwardi, Nargis Chowdhury and Azhar Kishor. Padatik Natya Sangsad Bangladesh will stage their acclaimed theatre production "Poramati" at the event.

A photography exhibition on Liberation War-based theatre productions and some selective theatre productions of post-independent Bangladesh will be on display at the venue. The displayed photos are from the collection of Bangladeshi playwright Babul Biswas.

Written by Babul Biswas, "Poramati" -- a

narrative from a torture camp of Pakistani Military during the Liberation War -- has been directed by Dr. Irin Pervin Lopa. Selim SH Chowdhury, Team Leader of Padatik, is the art director of the play.

The play depicts a tale of sheer horror narrated by a number of prisoners held by the Pakistani Army. The perpetrators insinuate the poison of betrayal into the prisoners and it leads to a crack in their unity. Betrayal poisons the mind of Bangladeshis during the war shattering their unity, and the play brings forth that tale of betrayal and killing by the Pakistani Military and their local collaborators.

"Poramati" fits well into the present socio-political context where people are running after personal interest instead of collective welfare of the society.

Omiyo Mizan, Kamruzzaman Pavel, Al Amin, Faruk Faysal Duke, Mahmuda Akter Lita and Kamal Hossain have played different roles in the play.

MEGA CONCERT

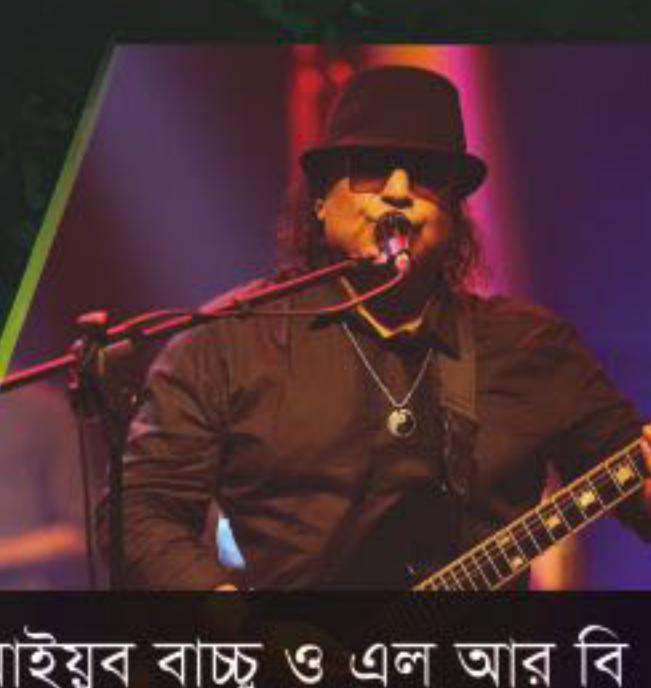
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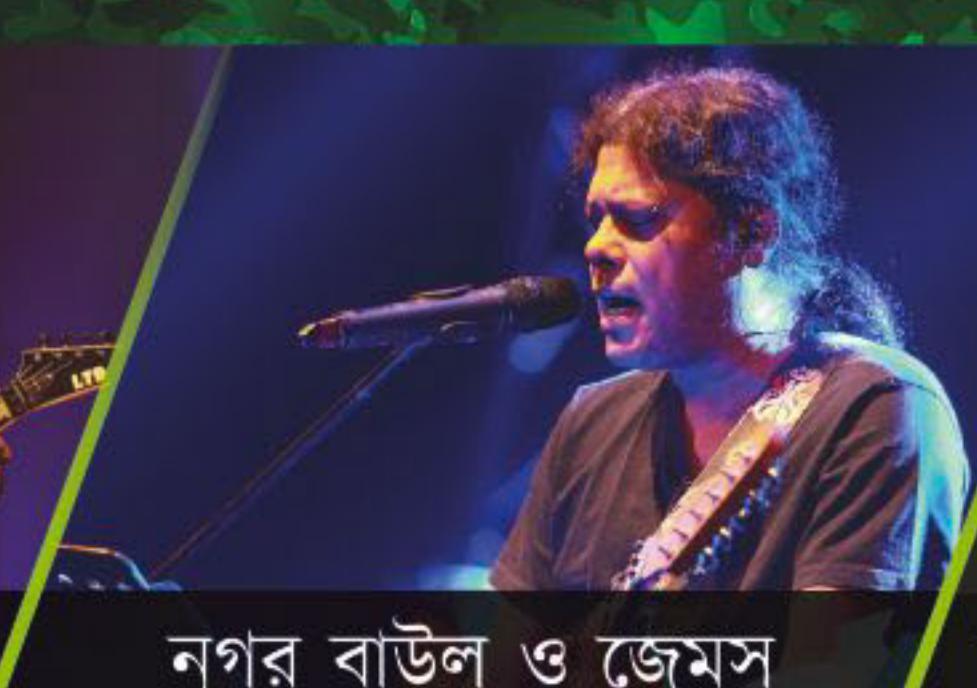


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