

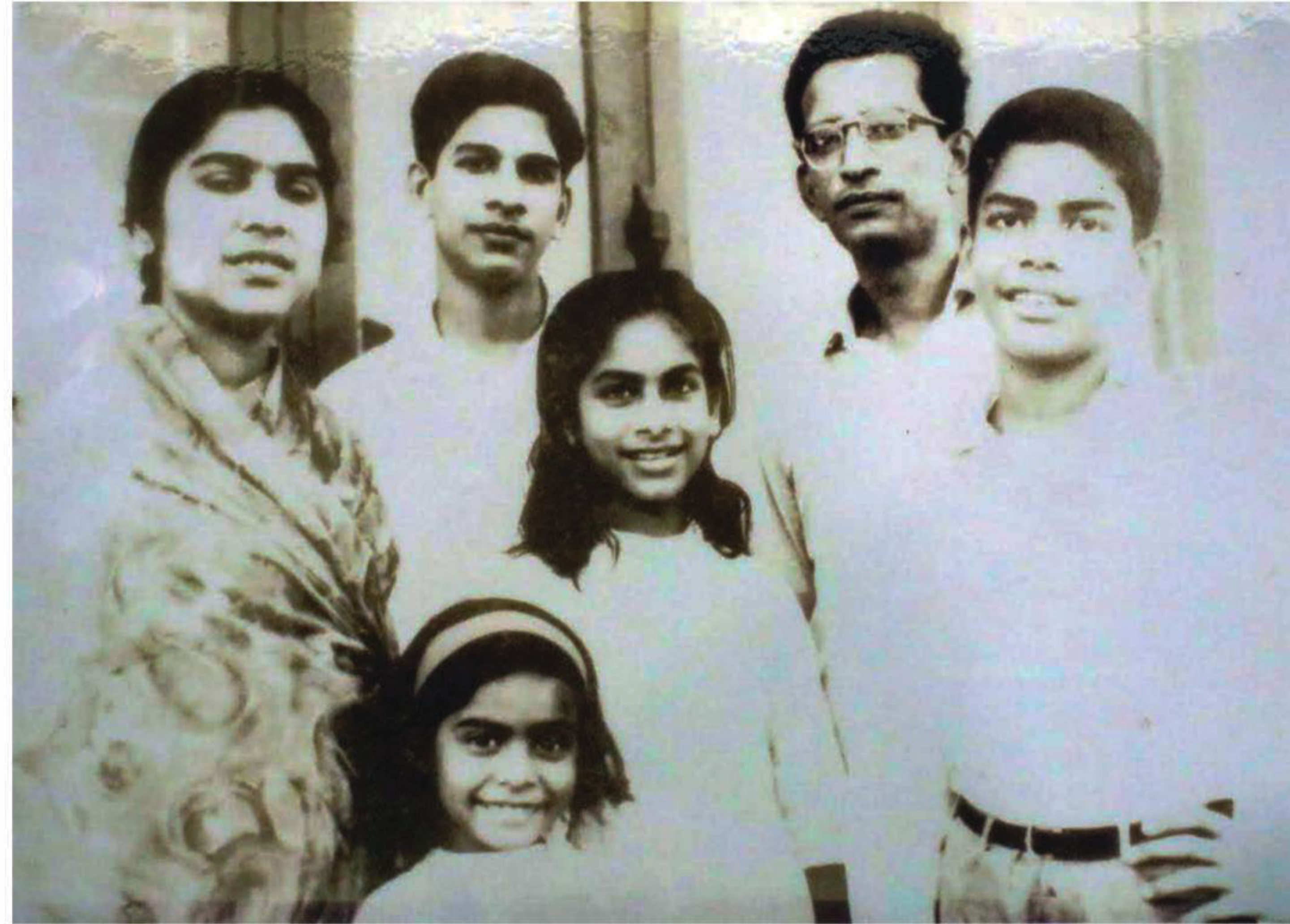


# A FAMILY PICTURE

I am not a writer. When I read some of the introductions of myself, I see that people see me as actor-director, TV personality, social activist, entrepreneur, etc. Yes, I wear many caps. And these are things I do. Recently, I've been trying my hand at writing. I have started a blog. For the most part, writing keeps me energised, though I am still learning "Creative Writing". Yes, I have just finished an online course on the subject. The name of my column, as you can see, is CROSS ROAD. I feel I am at a stage in life when I may be changing my path. From performance to writing. I know it's easier said than done, but who knows? I will not only write about my memories, as I do in today's column. I would like to share my experiences from the stage and the world of communication. And who knows, maybe someday I'll surprise you.

were drenched for seasoning when the house was made, was expanded to a swimming pool. The idea was to make sure all the cousins and their friends learned to swim. Chlorine was added to the water to make it look blue and to keep it bacteria-free. When I see the picture, I can smell chlorine, and as I said, I imagine my hair to be wet, because we were in the pool most of the time. I am amazed to see the exact same expression on my father and my elder brother: pursed lips and face. It was probably in the middle of 1965. Amma is smiling with downcast eyes. Alim (Pincho bhैया), my younger sister Sajeda (Pixie) and I are smiling freely. My younger sister is wearing a hair band of stretched material. We don't see those bands anymore. Amma is in a nylon saree. In those days, these light nylon sarees were considered fashionable. Probably the nylon saree and my sister's band were brought by my *chacha* as gifts from England.

Bhैया's shirt was cream coloured. It could not have been any other colour at that time. Why do my father and elder brother look smug? No reason for that, really. I guess in those days men did not smile or laugh as much. Though Abba was not at all the non-laughing type, sometimes he was angry and serious. My elder brother had an inverted snobbery, as his friends recall. But that was later. Here he is only 15 years of age. We were a family of six. Did we know that we would not be able to continue to stay in the new house for more than nine months? I used to go to "Ragrupa", a dance school in Dhanmondi. Moving to a rented house in Eskaton Garden from here meant that I would not be able to continue with the dance class and that was sad for me. Maybe Abba is looking stern because there was the stirring of the conflict which led to us to leave the house. Amma was detected with hypothyroid around

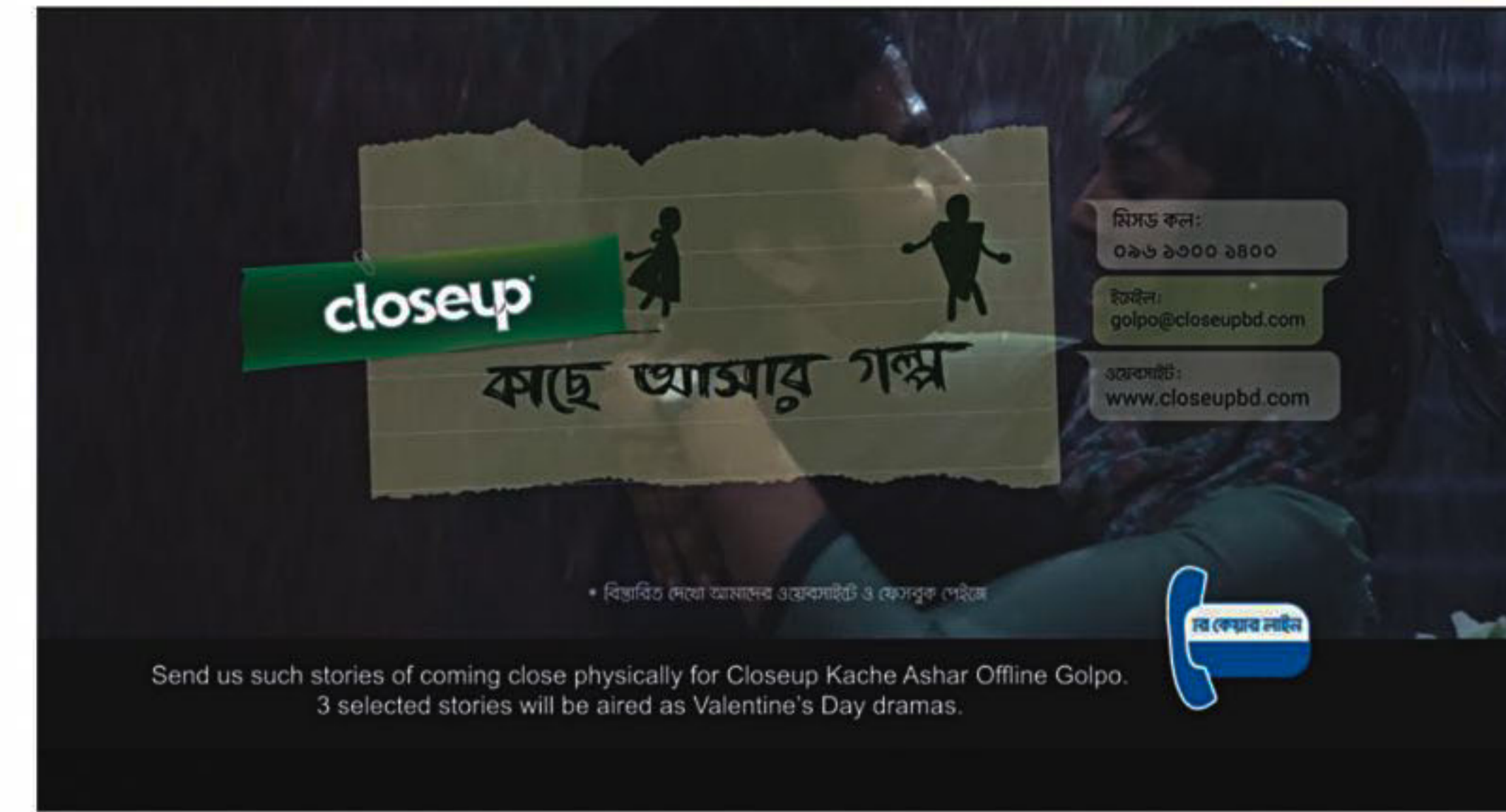


I cannot see the colours as it is a black and white picture. But I remember the frocks that my sister and I are wearing. They were made of netlike material of salmon pink colour. My dress is not attached to the lining; Sajeda's is. My boat-necked frock looks more fairylike than hers. I am pretty sure my two brothers and my father are wearing white shirts. At the most, Pincho bhैया's shirt was light blue, and Chinku

this time which is why she looks bloated. But the most tragic part is the story of Chinku Bhैया. Five years from the time of this photo, Chinku bhैया went off to the war in '71. On his way to the war, en route, he and his friend were held up on suspicion of being non-Bengalis. In a very tragic situation, both were killed.

Sara Zaker is theatre activist, media personality and Group Managing Director, Asiatic 360.

## ENTERTAINMENT



# CORPORATISATION OF THE TELEVISION INDUSTRY ARE WE VIEWERS OR CONSUMERS?

NAZIBA BASHER

The corporate media, through advertising agencies and their association with television channels, has taken over the entertainment sector by storm, with drama-serials focusing more on product placement and content-marketing, than the story itself, direction and/or acting. It's a truth universally, and perhaps, grudgingly acknowledged, that a production does not work without its corporate sponsors; and that is precisely where the corporations play their big hands. Beginning from picking the director, producer and actors, they also influence how their products are integrated into the story. The question then is – where has the standard of entertainment fallen due this intrusion? And does acting have any real value anymore?

The business corporations, the corporate media (advertising agencies), the television channels and the industry itself – each has a role to play in the decline of quality programming. "Well, of course the quality of entertainment would fall. They are making drama-fictions in vast numbers – 60, 70, 80 per season. There is one producer who is making 60 just for this upcoming Eid – each with a budget of Tk. 80,000 to 1-2 lakhs at most. It is impossible to make a quality 1-hour drama fiction with that kind of money," says Mamunur Rashid, President of the Producer's Guild, prominent actor and theatre activist. With a budget like that, either the corporations and agencies choose which actors must be cast to suit their brand agendas, or the productions end up choosing 'affordable' actors instead of skilled ones.



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

According to Rashid, we are stuck in a vicious cycle. "It all begins with the channels which have their own political backing, support and campaigns. Their focus is not on providing quality entertainment anymore, but to keep their channels running to push their agendas." The producers who link themselves with these agencies and channels, or even belong to the agencies themselves, work on very low budgets, which, most of the time, do not get distributed proportionately among the cast and crew later on. "They target directors who are desperate for work and also choose which artists they want, to push their brand agenda. Singers and models are now taking over the acting scene due to these personal motives, which is really hampering the art and tradition of acting itself," continues Rashid. "How do media buying houses become producers themselves? Does it not tug at their ethics?" he asks.

On the other hand, media corporations believe that the quality of entertainment had been falling for a while now, and the reason for their intervention is to produce better content. "Our involvement in the entertainment industry has been recognised for around two years now. What about before that? Was the quality not falling then? Just in one Eid, say two-three years ago, around 700 television dramas were produced. They weren't branded content, but was the quality something to boast of? On the other hand, our branded content like *Close-up kache ashar golpo* has one of the highest TRPs," argues Iresh Zaker, actor, television personality and managing director at Asiatic 360, one of the biggest corporate media houses in the country right now. Iresh believes that the drop in quality entertainment and intervention of the corporate media are indicative of a much bigger problem, which should be recognised first and foremost. "We have around 30 television channels, with 30 different owners. Why are they there? What is their motivation? It goes back to their personal agendas," he claims. For most of these owners, these channels are not their primary source of income – and so their lack of concern regarding quality programming is evident, Iresh thinks. None of these

channels run on proper business models, unlike advanced markets abroad. "To bring back our viewers from foreign channels will be a gargantuan task—but someone needs to step in and enforce proper business models and drive better content. While there is still hope to bounce back to quality entertainment, the window of time is getting smaller still." There are also those who believe that the current system itself, where corporate media and television media are intertwined, may also work if more skilled and experienced people were employed to produce entertainment content. "Advertising agencies and corporations can choose which actors, directors or script they want, but only if they understand what they want them for. Pushing their brand agenda should take a back seat and actual skills must be recognised by skilled people. If a script is sold, the producers, the sponsors and everyone involved must understand the

story before they accept it and forget about how they can market their products and brands through it first," says Matiya Banu Shuku, a television director and filmmaker. "We have guilds and associations who need to enforce rules and regulations; they must set standards that we need to follow. Without proper regulations, anyone can intervene in any manner they choose." Even if a little bit, due to the intervention of corporate media and traditional business corporations, the quality of entertainment is ultimately overlooked. Audiences are switching off drama-serials/fictions mid-air, due to the massive amounts of advertisements in between. And even while the drama-serials/fictions are on air, it is not uncommon to find banners and pop-ups of sponsored products surrounding the screen, making the actual content almost irrelevant. "The tradition of acting, of growing into learned actors is dying out; good filmmakers are going out of business because they don't want to involve themselves in money games and politics; the channel proprietors are not cooperating, and ultimately it is the industry and its people who are being affected. Our standards have lowered and keep lowering, and it is the state's responsibility to nurture a taste for good

### ABOUT TOWN

**রাওয়া বই মেলা ২০১৭**

প্রধান অতিথি: অধ্যাপক ডক্টর এ.এফ. সিরাজুল ইসলাম চৌধুরী

বিশেষ অতিথি: সৌম্য জেনারেল মোঃ মাহফুজুর রহমান

০৫ মে শুক্রবার ও ০৬ মে শনিবার সকাল ১০টা থেকে রাত ৯টা

রাওয়া কনভেনশন হল, রাওয়া ডবন, মহাখালী

**BOOK FAIR 2017**

Organiser: Retired Armed Forces Officer's Welfare Association (Raowa)

May 5-6, 10 am - 8 pm, Raowa Convention Hall, Mohakhali DOHS

4th and 5th Show of Dhaka Puppet Theater

**Puppet Show**

Coming on Stage Again on 05 May at Mohila Samity

**PUPPET SHOW AT MOHILA SAMITY MONCHO**

Organiser: Puppet Show: Dhaka Puppet Theatre

May 5, 5-8 pm, Bangladesh Mohila Samity, Baily Road

**PROJECT DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP FOR DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKERS**

Organiser: Dhaka Doclab

May 5-7, 12- 8 pm, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Segun Bagicha