

'Chose this land over my father'

Rajshahi freedom fighter narrates life-altering decisions

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

By June of 1971, Pakistani forces had occupied most of Rajshahi district's key installations and were expanding their control to remote areas through mass killings, rape and burning villages.

Guerrilla warfare was the only option for freedom fighters at that time.

They adopted a strategy to cross the Padma river from their camps in Indian territory, conduct operations in Rajshahi and return back to India. But freedom fighters noticed their guerrillas were facing resistance in some villages.

The villages had something in common: its dwellers migrated to the then East Pakistan from India following the 1947 partition.

Many of the villagers were followers of Jamaat-e-Islami and supported Pakistan during the war.

Gohomabona of Paba upazila was one such village identified by freedom fighters for launching an immediate operation.

Most villagers were members of the 'Shanti Committee' that was actively collaborating with the Pakistani forces.

They used to gather at a school and guard the village at night -- creating barriers for the freedom fighters. The operation at the village became

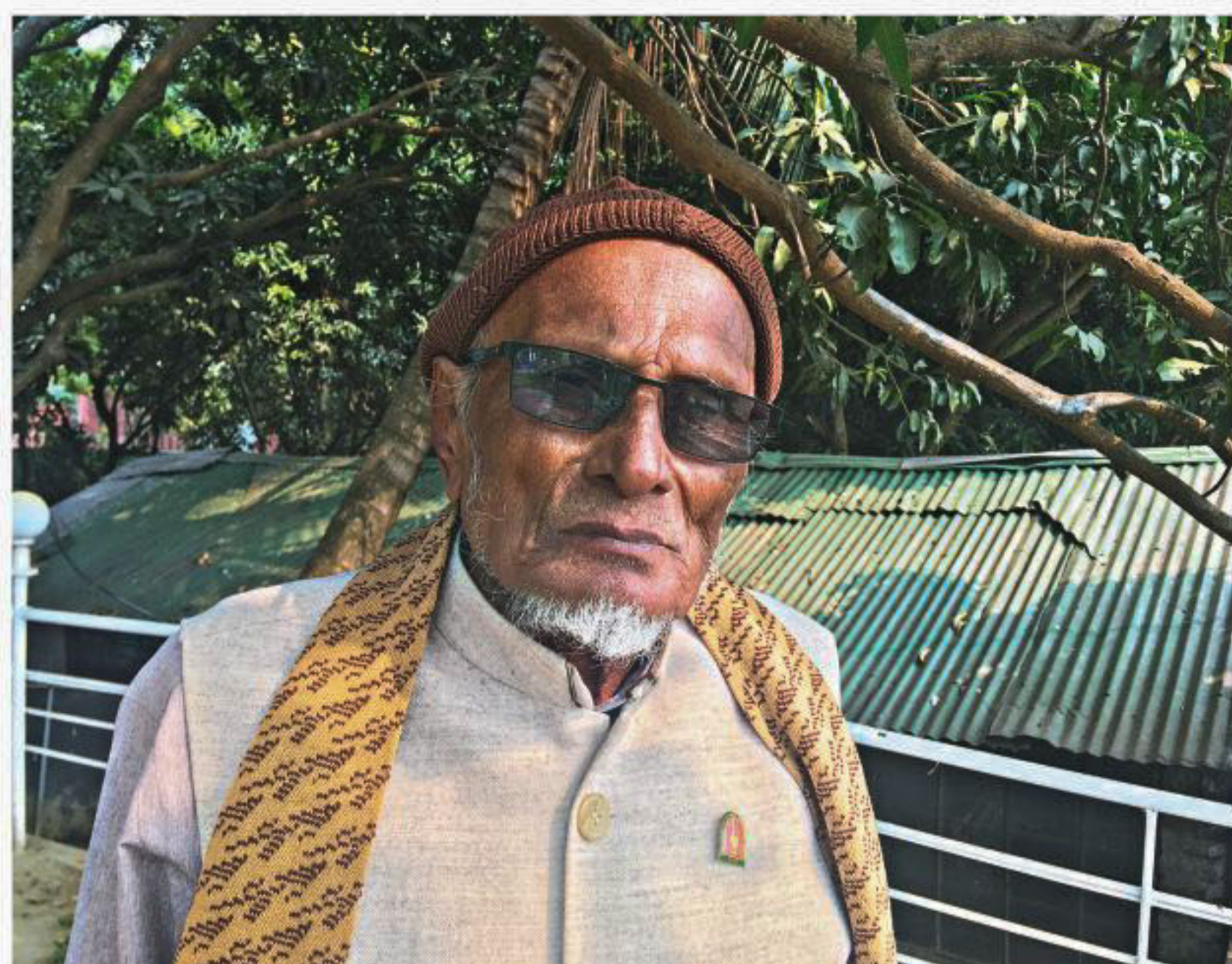
He also asked Malek what to do about his father.

Malek replied, "Look for enemies and eliminate them, even if they are my blood relatives."

Eventually the troops took over the village, killing Malek's father that night.

Chhatra Union -- a leftist students' platform -- while in college. He later became a member of Communist Party and eventually joined Awami League.

"I closely observed how Pakistani rulers were discriminating and squandering our resources. They waged the war upon us to forcefully



Abdul Malek Chowdhury

PHOTO: STAR

Forty-eight years after the war, Malek -- now 73 -- shared the life-altering incidents with this newspaper.

"I was practically responsible for the death of my father," he told The Daily Star. "I did it for the country's independence."

"Out of us five brothers, four supported Pakistan (during the war)," Malek said. Two of his brothers were killed for actively collaborating with the Pakistani army, he said.

The other two escaped; one of them died a year ago while another is still alive.

Many settlers -- including his father -- migrated here from India to be Pakistani citizens. They did not believe in the idea of Bangladesh or secular values, he said.

"My father believed that Pakistan was a holy place for Muslims," he said, adding that he often debated with his father and argued that Pakistan was never good because of its brutal and discriminatory rulers.

Separating from his family was difficult for Malek, but his political ideologies helped.

Born on September 12, 1946, Abdul Malek Chowdhury got involved in

stay in power," he said.

Though his mother was not educated, she was a liberal and supported the Liberation War, Malek said.

When he finally bade farewell to his family members to join the war, his mother cooked his favourite dishes and advised him to rely on his conscience.

His elder brother told him that it might be their last meeting as the Pakistani army were going to eliminate all freedom fighters.

In high school, Malek Chowdhury had joined the Ansar force as a volleyball player and took advanced firearms training.

That training came in handy when he was motivated by the historic March 7 speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and formed his own group of freedom fighters.

"We looted firearms from Boalia Police Station. It was not actually a robbery. The police station in-charge Abdus Salam assisted us," he said.

He took part in several battles, including the one in Rajshahi Cantonment.

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CORRUPTION IN PROCUREMENT

ACC asks cabinet to blacklist 13 medical equipment suppliers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has requested the cabinet to take necessary steps to blacklist all medical equipment suppliers who are accused in corruption cases for misappropriation of about Tk 108 crore public money from different projects in the health sector.

ACC Secretary Dilwar Bakht, in a letter to the cabinet secretary, said allegations of irregularities and graft often surface over procurement of Medical and Surgical Requisites (MSR), heavy machinery and other goods for medical colleges, hospitals and institutions.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the letter sent to the cabinet on December 12.

"The letter was sent to the cabinet division on Thursday," said Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya, ACC's public relations officer.

The organisations are: Rahman Trade International, Anik Traders, Ahmed Enterprize, Manila Medicine, SK Traders, MH Pharma, Ovi Drugs, Albira Pharmacy, SM Traders, Mercantile Trade International, Bengal Scientific and Surgical, Universal Trade Corporation, ASL and Blair Aviation.

It was found during inquiry that a group of dishonest officials and

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TORCHING MOTORBIKES IN SC AREA

23 BNP leaders get anticipatory bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday granted anticipatory bail to 23 BNP leaders including its Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir for eight weeks in two separate arson cases.

The cases were filed with Shahbagh Police Station after three motorcycles were torched near Supreme Court on December 11.

The HC also ordered the accused to surrender before the trial court concerned in connection with the cases after eight weeks.

The HC bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim and Justice Riaz Uddin Khan came up with the order after hearing eight petitions filed by the BNP leaders, seeking bail in the cases.

Other BNP leaders who secured the anticipatory bail include Mirza Abbas, Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Abdullah Al Noman, Moazzem Hossain Alal, Khairul Kabir Khokan, Fazlul Haque Milan, Shimul Biswas and Shafiq Bari Babu.

Advocate Joyal Abedin, Advocate Sagir Hosain Leon and Barrister AKM Ehsanur appeared for the petitioners.

PHOTO OF THE DAY

ANISUR RAHMAN



With the nation celebrating Victory Day today, florists had been busy making wreaths and completing orders on time. People from all strata of life will pay respects to martyrs of the Liberation War by placing these floral tributes at memorials across the country. This photo was taken in front of Curzon Hall yesterday.

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necessary to free the area.

To that end, the then Sector-7 Sub-sector Commander Captain (later Brigadier) Giasuddin Ahmed Chowdhury sent two troops of freedom fighters to Rajshahi on June 4.

Freedom fighter Nur Hamim Rizvi Bir Protik led one of the troops.

The other troop was led by Abdul Malek Chowdhury, who hailed from that village.

Malek's father Abdus Sattar Chowdhury, however, headed the village's Shanti Committee.

Before the operation started, Nur Hamim asked Malek to refrain from entering the village with his troop.

NARCOTICS CASE

Charges against Samrat accepted

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday accepted the charges against Ismail Hossain Chowdhury Samrat, a former Jubo League leader and an alleged kingpin of the illegal casino business, in a case filed under the Narcotics Control Act.

The court also accepted charges against Samrat's alleged accomplice Enamul Haque Arman in the same case.

Metropolitan Magistrate Masud-Ur-Rahman gave the order after scrutinising the case dockets and other relevant documents. The court also ordered to transfer the case to the Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court for trial.

On December 9, Rab Sub-inspector Abdul Halim, the case's investigation officer, submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka, showing 20 people as prosecution witnesses.

On October 15, Samrat was placed on remand for 10 days while Arman was remanded for five days.

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ROHINGYA CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

Int'l community must share responsibility: Amnesty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The international community must not avoid its responsibility to the education of Rohingya children in Cox's Bazar camps, Amnesty International said ahead of the first Global Refugee Forum.

More than half a million children have yet to see the inside of a classroom since they arrived in the refugee camps more than two years ago, the global rights body said in a press statement on Saturday.

The Global Refugee Forum -- which is being hosted by the UN's refugee agency in Geneva and takes place between December 16-18 -- has made education of one its six key themes.

"The Rohingya children in the camps in Cox's Bazar must not become a lost generation. The international community must accept that they will not be able to return home to Myanmar anytime soon. And they cannot continue to see their futures slowly stolen from them in conditions where they are being denied their right to education," said Saad Hammadi, South Asia Campaigner at Amnesty International.

"When a child receives an education, everyone benefits. Both Bangladesh and the international community must step up and share the responsibility of educating all children in Cox's Bazar, Rohingya refugees and the host community as well. The Bangladesh government can start by lifting the restrictions on education for refugees currently in place," the statement said.

According to a multi-sector needs assessment released by the Inter Sector Coordination Group in October 2019, nearly third of 1,311 households

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Increase allocation for women's sanitary facilities

Speakers tell Nari Progati Sangha roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government needs to increase allocations to improve sanitary facilities for women across the country, speakers said at a discussion yesterday.

They were speaking at a discussion on increasing budget allocation for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) at schools organised by Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) at Azimur Rahman Auditorium in the capital's The Daily Star Centre.

Speakers also called for creating awareness to break the social stigma surrounding menstruation.

Kazi AKM Mohiul Islam, director general of Directorate General of Family Planning, said, "Women's health is under threat from the lack of proper sanitation facilities."

"The government has already distribute 8 lakh sanitary pads last fiscal year. This time around, we'll distribute another 15 lakh pads. But this is far less than the actual requirement," he added.

Speaking about the stigma on menstruation, he said a movement needs to be organised to raise awareness on the

matter.

Monjun Nahar, manager of advocacy and communication at Marie Stopes Bangladesh, quoted a survey of ICDDR,B mentioned that about 57 percent of adolescents and 65 percent adult women were not informed about menstruation before their menarche.

"About 80 percent women still use old rags instead of sanitary napkins," she added.

Quoting another research, Nahar said the apparel sector loses around 215 million workdays each year because of workers' absence due to menstrual hygiene related problems. However, these issues are overlooked by the sector, she lamented.

Pointing out the menstrual hygiene problems faced by students, Rokeya Kabir, executive director of BNPS, said "It does not take much money to build infrastructure to facilitate female students' hygiene needs." She asked the government to take steps in this regard.

Sheikh Momena Moni, joint secretary of the finance ministry, suggested the inclusion of female representatives at all school managing committees as a way to ensure proper attention for WASH.

Collaborate to flourish Bengali art

State minister urges experts of Bangladesh and West Bengal

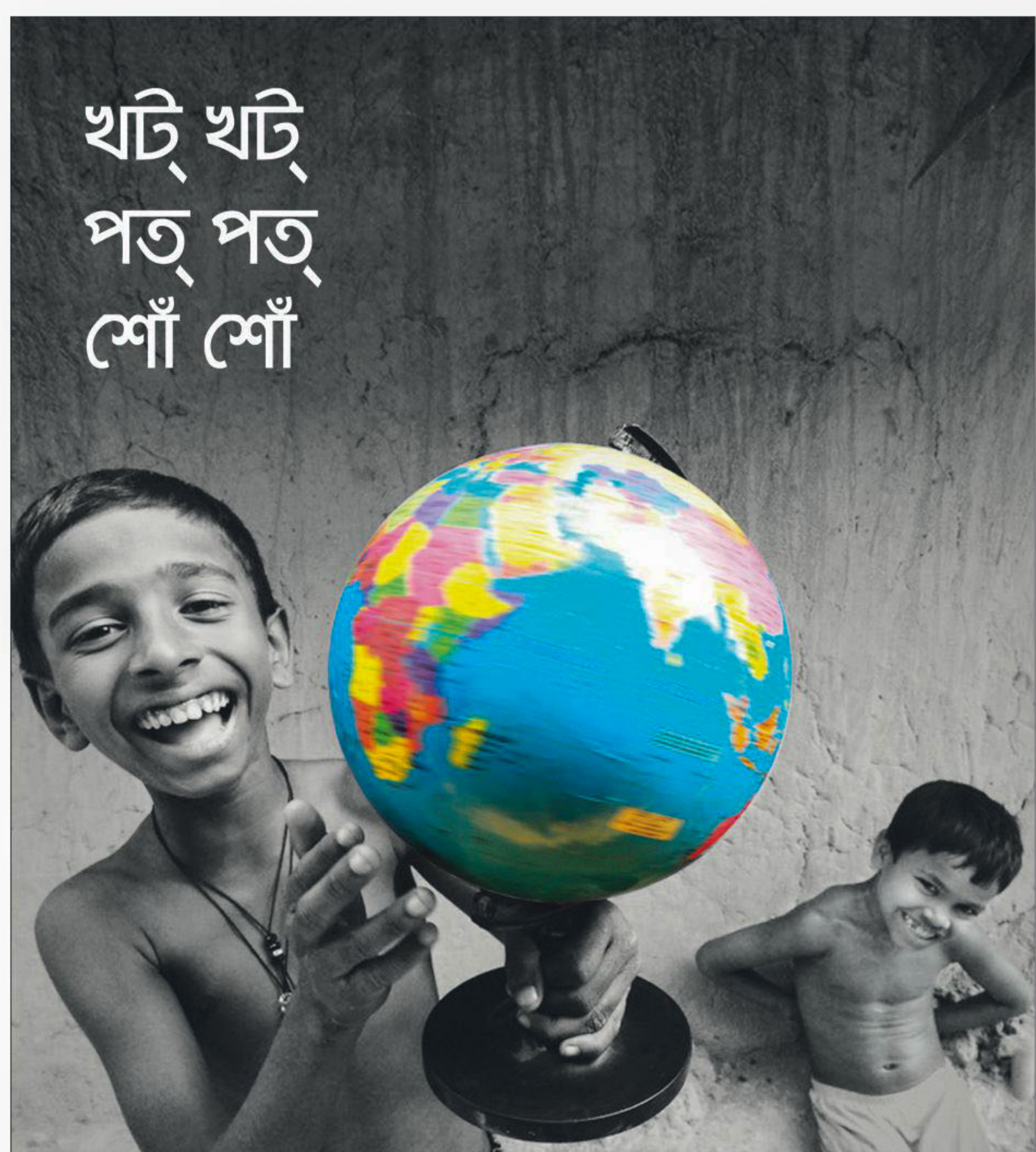
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bengali art and culture can flourish further if experts of Bangladesh and India's West Bengal work together, State Minister for Cultural Affairs KM Khalid said yesterday.

He made the remark while speaking at a ceremony, held at National Museum in the capital. International Centre for Study of Bengal Art (ICSBA), a research organisation, arranged the event to mark its 25th founding anniversary.

Several researchers, academicians, artists and cultural personalities -- working on Bengali art -- from home and abroad took part in the three-day

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একদিন ছিলো পতাকা,
তারপর দেশ আর এখন পুরো পৃথিবী।

একদিন পতাকা আঁকা হয়েছিল মনে। একজন নেতা সন্তর্পনে বানিয়েছিলেন সে পতাকা। সেই খট্ খট্ শব্দে রাতের আঁধার ফুঁড়ে জন্ম নেয় স্বাধীন বাংলাদেশ। এরপর পত্ পত্ করে ওড়া পতাকার সঙ্গে যুরে দাঁড়ায় গর্বিত এক জাতি। আজ অর্থনৈতিক সমৃদ্ধি আর জীবনের মানে শোঁ শোঁ শব্দে ওড়া জাতীয় পতাকা জানান দিচ্ছে বিশ্বের সবাইকে। সময় এখন আমাদের। এ এক নতুন বিজয়।



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