

Calcutta CHRONICLE



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The Enigma



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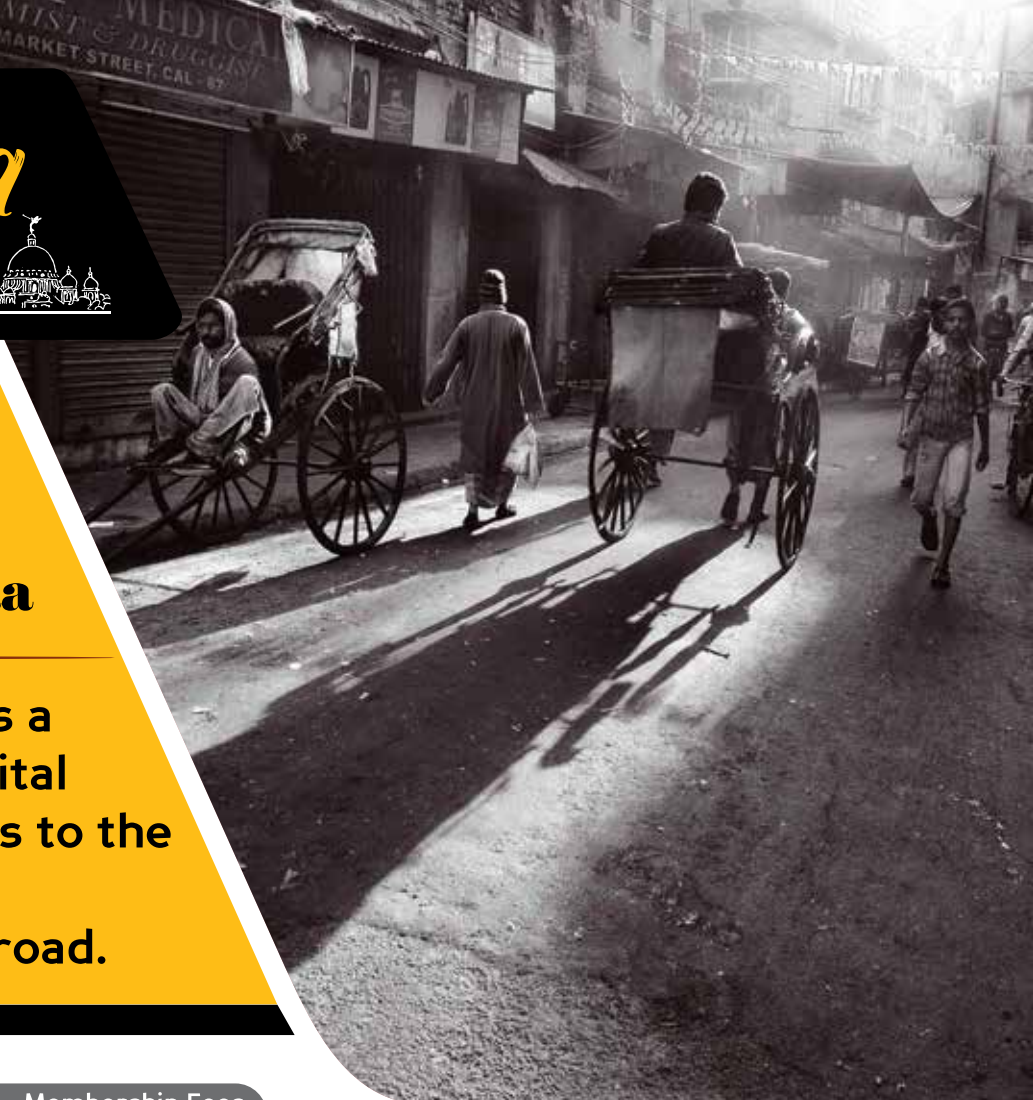
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Calcutta CHRONICLE



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EDIT ORIAL

Chances are if Suchitra Sen had heard herself being referred to as the “Greta Garbo of India” she would not have been amused at all. Nobody can accuse her of lacking originality; she lived life on her own terms till the very end. Hands on her hips, tilted chin, the ethereal but enigmatic beauty of Rina Brown of Saptapadi left a lasting impression on Bengali psyche which perhaps nothing could obliterate not even the decades of seclusion which she subjected herself to, after completing her last screen appearance, Pronoy Pasha. April happens to be the month of her 93rd birth anniversary. In edition's 'Potpourri' column, we have attempted to highlight Sen's love for automobiles and beyond.

At 19 Park Street, wedged between Park Hotel and Karnani Mansion, stands Freemasons' Hall, the home of Freemasonry in Bengal. A private, esoteric society, Freemasonry traces its origin to the stonemasons during the time of Solomon, King of Israel in the 10th century BC and later to the builders of churches and castles of medieval England, who fiercely guarded against any breach into their craft guilds by impostors and unqualified persons with elaborate checks and passwords. Later, grappling with dwindling numbers, they began co-opting non-operative "gentlemen masons" into their fold. More on this closely guarded secret society in this edition's 'Calcutta's Edifice' column.

Joydip Sur
Editor



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SHRUTISANDHYA

An Evening to Remember

Sukalpa, a Calcutta based voice drama group recently hosted a series of audio plays at Abanindra Sabhagriha, located within the Nandan premises, known as the cultural hub of the City of Joy.

 Joydip Sur

On Saturday, April 6, coinciding with the 93rd birth anniversary of the enigmatic actress Suchitra Sen and 34th memorial day of actor Shekhar Chatterjee, Sukalpa embraced the philosophy of 'let's walk together' as they presented an enchanting evening of recitations, audio plays, and songs at Abanindra Sabhagriha. This special event was curated and hosted by husband-wife duo Rina Bhattacharyya and Shankha Bhattacharyya of Sukalpa. Keeping the recent events like





Basantutsav (March 24th & 25th), World Poetry Day (March 21st), and World Drama Day (March 27th) in mind, Sukalpa chose to organize a mini audio drama festival called Shrutisandhya in collaborations with other esteemed audio play groups such as Anusha Cultural Academy, Kathashruti, Rashikeshu and Shalpiyal.

The event kicked off with a humorous theatrical presentation of "Dambol," a comedy play by Sanjib Chatterjee and audio scripted by Urmimala Basu. Bipasha Bhattacharya and Sushanu Goswami left a lasting impression with their performances in "Dambol," while the music was skilfully handled by Aritro Bhattacharya.

Following this, Purbasha Datta showcased her musical prowess and recited poetry with finesse leaving the audience yearning for more.





The second presentation came from "Shalpiyal." Led by Mauli Basu, the artistic group regularly presents theatrical performances across the city. Mauli Basu and Somnath Basu presented two delightful plays, "Toponbabu O Sei Indurta" and "Ki Mushkil," captivating the audience with their performances. The music was well assisted by Pranab Dutta.

The third presentation of the evening was the play "Bhut Bhavishyat" by Anusha Cultural Academy, based on the script written by Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay and directed by Anjanta Chakraborty. Swagata Bhattacharya, Moumita Banerjee, Alok Metia, and Rahul Raychowdhury performed in this remarkable play, with Swagata Bhattacharya leaving a lasting impression in her role as the mischievous ghost.

Next up were a recitation of original poems written by Alope Dutt, Anjana Dutt, and Sunita Srivastava, which were well-received by the audience. Alope Dutta, also known as today's Dadathakur, curated and presented the Poetry in a collage format with his fellow performers.





The fifth presentation was the play "Teen Prithibir Galpo" by Katha Shruti, written by Dhananjay Ghosal and performed by Kalyani Biswas, Mrinal Bandyopadhyay, and Sudipta Choudhury. It was a psychological exploration of a dramatist and his group theatre, with commendable performances by the entire cast which won them loads of accolades.

The final presentation was another entertaining play called "SO CUTE," written by Trina Mitra and performed by Smritimoy Ghosh, Chhanda Banerjee, and Pubali Ray. The play

depicted the dire need for domestic help in today's society and had the audiences in splits.

Distinguished personalities who attended the program and felicitated the performing groups included poet and playwright Chanchal Bhattacharya, doctor and literary figure Shankar Nath, and journalist Joydip Sur. The entire event was meticulously moderated by Rina Bhattacharya and Shankha Bhattacharya, the director-actor of Sukalpa.





Southern Avenue

The Green House of Calcutta

 Joydip Sur

- Russian born American Writer and
- Novelist, Ayn Rand had once remarked,
- “Throughout the centuries there
- were men who took first steps down
- new roads, armed with nothing but
- their spirit to explore new avenues”.
- With this wonderful thought in mind,
- this month we will take you on a
- trail to rediscover Southern Avenue
- – one of Calcutta’s most beautiful
- thoroughfares stretching from Gol
- Park in the east to S.P. Mukherjee Road
- in the west.

In the early 1920s, the Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT), a body responsible for developmental work in the Calcutta metropolitan area, acquired about 192 acres of marshy jungles. Their intention was to develop the area for residential use, which led them to improve the roads, raising and levelling some of the adjacent land and building lakes and parks.



As per the Calcutta Municipal Gazette dated December 24, 1932, the 120 feet road opposite Tollygunge Police Station was ready in 1932 and the corporation's vide notification dated December 20, 1932 proposed naming it as Southern Avenue. The proposal was approved and the road was officially named Southern Avenue on February 26, 1940. The road was 2567 yards in length, 150 feet in width and cost the government a sum of Rs. 1,35,30,430 to complete.

Southern Avenue was later renamed as Meghnad Saha Sarani in commemoration of the services rendered by the great scientist in the field of Nuclear Physics. He put

forward an "ionization formula" which explained the presence of the spectral lines. In 1952 he stood as an independent candidate for Parliament and was elected by a wide margin. He died on February 16, 1956 due to a heart attack. Meghnad Saha lived in Keyatala Lane by the side of Southern Avenue. Today a statue of the great scientist stands on the western fringe of Southern Avenue.

Shaded with russa, deodar, banyan, neem, coconut, beetle nut and eucalyptus trees on both the sides of the road, Southern Avenue is as beautiful and green as any road can get. As you begin your journey from Gol Park and walk westwards, on your left stands The Ramakrishna Mission Institute

of Culture (RKM). This branch of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, started functioning in 1938. The institute is well known for its philanthropic, educational and cultural activities. Based on the philosophy of the unity of human life, the institute endeavours to make people aware of the richness of different cultures all over the world and of the need for intercultural appreciation and understanding. The institute has grown over the years and is now housed at its present magnificent building which was completed in 1960. This is beyond doubt one of the most prominent landmarks of Southern Avenue.





Welcome To
LIONS SAFARI PARK
A Project Maintained By Lions Club of North Calcutta

Bang opposite to RKM are a number of small food joints. Nibble on a sandwich from Upper Crust, dig into chowmein and momos at The Grub Club and binge on rolls at Tongue Twister. Don't forget the fast food at Zaika. Tucked away next to all this food fare is the Golpark Guest House which offers accommodation to travellers. Indthalia, Whatsup Cafe are some of the other popular joints on Southern Avenue.

As you continue your journey westward, on your left lies Rabindra Sarobar more popularly known as Dhakuria Lake. A number of rowing and swimming clubs are situated within the Rabindra Sarobar complex. A large number of people come for a walk around the lake in the mornings to enjoy the fresh air. Many visit the sunrise point to offer their

prayers to the Sun God. During the day, the lake is visited by families on a picnic, or by young lovers and joggers.

In the winter, one can spot some migratory birds around the lake, though the numbers are dwindling because of the rise in pollution level. The lake itself is home to many varieties of fish. On the southern fringe of the Rabindra Sarobar lies the only Japanese Buddhist temple in Calcutta. The complex also contains Lions Safari Park, Nazrul Manch and an enclosed children's play park with a lily pool. A toy train, operational between 1985 and 1989, was a popular draw for children. Its tracks still circumscribe the lake.





As you continue with your journey westward, on your right is Viekananda Park. This park is home to a number of cricket clubs. Adjacent to the park is a very popular puchka and chaat joint. Hundreds throng this joint every evening to dig into lip smacking street fare. One very interesting feature of Southern Avenue is its string of high-rise apartment buildings. Some of the popular addresses are Green View, Abhisarika, Rajeswari, Ashoka, Avenue House, Shabari and Sarobar.

One of the important places on Southern Avenue is the Birla Academy of Art and Culture Museum which was established in 1966. Collections include paintings of

the mediaeval period as well as modern art and some archaeological specimens. The Museum holds regular exhibitions of modern Indian sculptors and painters. A few steps from here will bring you to the Lake Kalibari, a renowned Kali temple visited by hundreds of devotees every single day.

As you continue to walk westwards, on your left stands the Rabindra Sarobar Stadium with a seating capacity of approximately 26,000 people. It was established in the 1950s and is today, the city's first stadium to be fully equipped with audio-visual training facilities.

A few hundred metres from here will bring you to the Southern Avenue and S. P. Mukherjee Road crossing where the avenue ends. It was an amazing experience for us to explore this breathtaking thoroughfare and we urge you to go on this trail to experience the beauty of Southern Avenue.





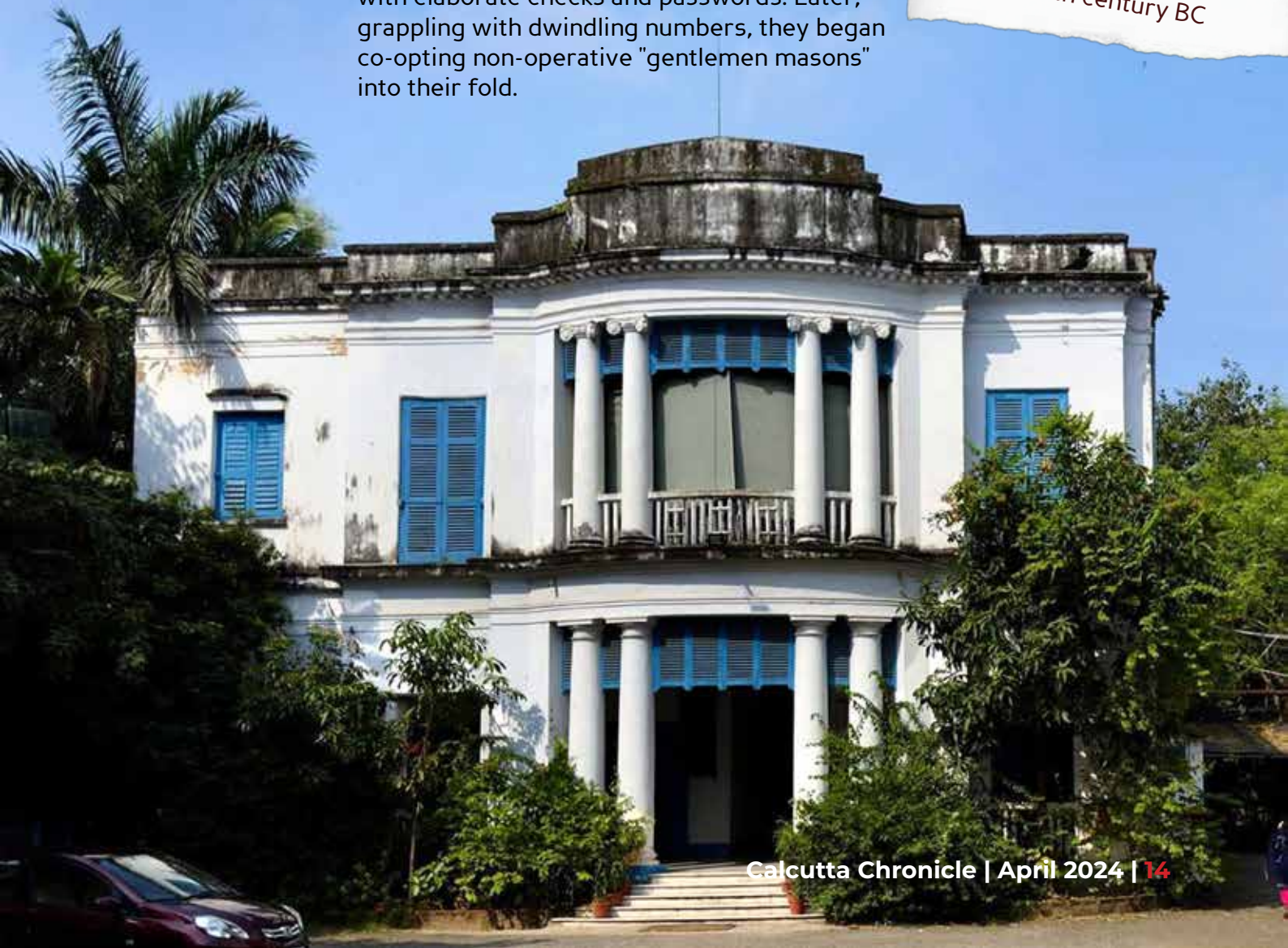
Freemasons Hall

Team Chronicle

At 19 Park Street, wedged between Park Hotel and Karnani Mansion, stands Freemasons' Hall, the home of Freemasonry in Bengal. A private, esoteric society, Freemasonry traces its origin to the stonemasons during the time of Solomon, King of Israel in the 10th century BC and later to the builders of churches and castles of medieval England, who fiercely guarded against any breach into their craft guilds by impostors and unqualified persons with elaborate checks and passwords. Later, grappling with dwindling numbers, they began co-opting non-operative "gentlemen masons" into their fold.



Solomon, King of Israel
in the 10th century BC



CALCUTTA'S EDIFICE



The term 'Freemason' has variously been attributed to freestones, fine-grained sandstones and lime stones that the skilful artist - a freestone mason - chiselled into ornamental structures; or to denote that the medieval masons were not bound in any manner or referred to the exemption enjoyed by the masons who built King Solomon's Temple from having to pay any tax and, in that sense, were "free". The rolls boast US and Indian Presidents, English monarchs, Maharajas and Nawabs of princely estates and eminent personalities from the religious, judicial, political, scientific and literary worlds.

A fitting tribute was paid to the organization when Freemasonry in India became the subject of doctoral research by the University of Calcutta in the not so distant past. And, nestled away from the public view, down a forty yard drive-way, sprawled

over two acres, overlooking a verdant lawn, proudly stands this edifice that few know exists. It is a magnificent two-storey art deco mansion harking back to the early 20th century, 1911, to be precise. That was when - Freemasonry, already after a two-hundred-year-old existence in Calcutta - decided to move to Park Street and the cornerstone was laid at the north-east corner of the building in accordance with Masonic rites by the Deputy District Grand Master, Worshipful Brother D. A. Dring, the then Agent of the Indian Railways. It may be mentioned that amongst Masons social titles are dispensed with. Instead, they address one another as brothers. And Masonic titles range from the Most Worshipful Grand

Master of the United Grand Lodge of England, the current incumbent being the Duke of Kent, to the Right Worshipful District Grand Master, on whom rests the mantle of governing the District, - in this case, Bengal, - to the plain Brother. In between, are other offices of the Order. The jurisdiction of the District Grand Lodge of Bengal, now much shrunken, stretches from Kanpur in the north to Jamshedpur in the south.

As one enters through the impressive porch, one faces a foyer leading to





four halls, two of titanic proportions on either flank. The floors are polished and chequered black and white while myriad rays reflect out of the crystalline prisms of the sparkling chandeliers above. An oriel in the Northampton Hall lying in the west, boasts a concert piano - the ivories rippling out Moonlight Sonatas and glissandos as waltzing couples gracefully sashay down and execute elegant whisks across the breadth of the hall, on ladies' nights. Banquets or festive boards in Masonic parlance are replete with gleaming cutlery, flatware and toasts and prosit to the distressed brother and serve to take you back to an era when this city was known for gracious living. Indeed, one gets the distinct impression of time

being frozen in these enormous halls. Where else would one get to see men moving around in dinner jackets, dress shirts, bow ties and spotless white gloves with the aplomb and casualness of regularity? The previous District Grand Master, since departed, wore morning suits! The Eastern Hall is an identical to the Northampton Hall, only bigger in size.

Though not as large, but the elegant Cozy Room, tucked away behind the Northampton hall and furnished with ornate chairs complementing a gleaming oak table, caters to smaller and more informal festive boards. Glistening stemware and silverware grace a tall glass-fronted cabinet at one end. Of the two smaller halls, the one on the left is called the "RGLEI" Room. The initials stand for Regional

Grand Lodge of Eastern India, a constituent of the Grand Lodge of India, which was established in 1961 when, by a concordat, many Lodges surrendered their charters to England and switched their affiliation to this new body. The wall serves as a gallery of the past Regional Grand Masters of Eastern India. The Scottish Room houses a second grand. The Masonic Montessori House is run by a staff of experienced teachers at the back of the building. An air-conditioned bar, next to the staircase, opens after sundown and allows slaking of parched throats.

The landing of the sweeping wooden staircase leading to the upper floor, hosts an ashlar. It marks the transition from a rough-hewn stone, just

■ CALCUTTA'S EDIFICE ■



quarried, to a smooth and dressed building block, metaphorically representing a Freemason's progressive transformation, through diligence and application, into a just and upright man. The oil above portrays Angel Gabriel, the heavenly host jealously guarding the hallowed portals from torts and misdemeanours. Lambent sunlight filters in through a stained-glass cupola high above and the octagonal lantern it reposes on.

The stair head extends on either side into a wide corridor with the walls adorned with the portraits of past Grand Masters and a sketch of ancient Jerusalem, which leads to "Temples" or immense halls, where meetings of "Lodges" or branches of the order

are conducted. The word 'Lodge' borrows its name from the places where the medieval masons boarded and lodged and kept their working tools. The meetings comprise, apart from the administrative procedures, ritualistic dramas with parabolic messages. Arranged on a small table, beside a pedestal in front of the throne for the "Master", are the implements of a mason: a gauge, a chisel, gavel, square, level, plumb rule, skirret, pencil and compasses, all of which have allegoric allusions to the morals. Thus, for instance, while the square exhorts square conduct, the compasses are a reminder of God's impartial justice. These two instruments, incidentally, constitute the emblem of Freemasonry worldwide. What

particularly strikes the attention in one such Temple is what appears to the casual eye, four tassels pendent from the lofty ceiling. They emblematically represent the four cardinal virtues, namely, prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice. In another Temple are letter blocks forming the words FIAT LUX, Latin for "let there be light". It is the motto of this house of enlightenment referring to the benediction of the Almighty on a planet shrouded in darkness.



■ CALCUTTA'S EDIFICE ■



A robing room serves to clothe the members in Masonic regalia, comprising aprons, collars, chains and gauntlets. A library on the southern side, atop the portico, houses rows of bookcases. A repository of Masonic literature, the Athenaeum has, running down its length, a row of tables lined on either side with chairs to facilitate quiet research, as well as animated conferences. A second building to the left which is no less handsome, houses the offices of the District Grand Lodge of Bengal and its Indian counterpart, the Regional Grand Lodge of Eastern India. A short but wide perron, an even wider verandah supporting Tuscan columns and beyond, wainscoted rooms separated by a corridor leading to the respective back offices, make up the ground floor. The entire upper floor comprises the official residence of the District Grand Master. He does not live here, though; the sprawling quarters are used

occasionally for festive boards, as well as for putting up members from the outstation Lodges.

Such prime property located in the middle of a district steeped in glitter, is owned by the Bengal Freemasons' Trust Association, a Limited Company registered under the Indian Companies Act. Acknowledging its singular eminence, long and glorious past, and the values it enshrines, the Calcutta Municipal Corporation conferred on the Hall a richly-deserved heritage status in 2001. May it stand, thus blue-ribboned for generations to come, ensuring as ever ET LUX FIT - "and there was Light".



SWARALIPI

► a Rabindra Sangeet Academy of music in Wayland, Massachusetts ◀



Swaralipi Academy is a singing school that was founded in 2005 by Swapna Ray. Swapna is the disciple of Sm. Suchitra Mitra (doyen of Rabindra Sangeet) and Sm. Sumitra Chatterjee. Swapna is carrying on the tradition of Rabindra Sangeet as an academic and cultural practice in the United States and has graduated numerous students who have attained mastery of the style. The school also helps to connect American-born and immigrant Bengalis to their mother culture.

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A Street Romance for **Taste Buds**



Joydip Sur

Calcutta's romance with street food runs deep in its veins. The city has an amazing variety of street food and embraces influences right from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. From full meals to simple snacks to fast refreshers, the City of Joy has it all. Stroll down any of Calcutta's busy thoroughfares and you will find vendors conjuring up gastronomical magic through delicious roll, chowmein, dosa, idli, dahi vada, pav bhaji, mutton stew, phuchka, papri chaat, jhaal muri, bhel puri, batata puri, ghugni, telebhaja, sandwich, fresh fruit, sherbet and innumerable other eatables.





FOOD PUMP



A hot summer afternoon coming out of the GPO I was wandering where I can get to fill my tummy. For after a tedious queue at the General Post Office I was simply hungry. It was then that my taste buds awakened to the yummy aroma of spices. And much like Tom from the celebrated Toon show Tom and Jerry I was drawn towards the inevitable.

Open Sesame, what do I see! A wondrous land of lip-smacking delicacies, smack in the heart of the city. Much like the congested Arabian bazaar through which Aladdin made his numerous essays, I was introduced to canopies, tents and marquees under which one discovered everything from jhal muri to idli and dosa. This is

Dalhousie's Kiran  **Shankar Roy Road**. Home to innumerable food stall, this locale prides itself in its delicious dimmer devil, mutton chop, moghlai paratha and traditional Bengali mishti brought from Taki. The mouth-watering taste of that mishti still lingers on my tongue till this very day.





This led me to thinking what more heartwarming food does this city has in store for us. Like they say, where there is a will there is a way. I went to Esplanade during the lunch hours and after completing my work asked my friend if we could help ourselves to some street food and he took me to

Dacres Lane. Considered by many to be the Mecca of street food in Calcutta, Dacres Lane is a great destination for gulping down mutton and chicken stew along with bread toasts from morning till night all through the week. Hundreds of 'suitsors of this sensational stew' can be found queuing in front of the stall to satiate their gastronomical desires. We too had our share of the fill and the feeling was nothing short of orgasmic. I actually took a second helping and would soon go back for more. During my visit to Dacres Lane, I discovered that this place is also renowned for its Chinese gourmet with chili chicken, chowmein and fried rice being chart toppers. A must visit for food connoisseurs.





FOOD PUMP



This was the beginning of an addiction that grew in me as the insatiable desire to have street food struck root. One evening we were taking a drive along **E.M. Bypass** when my friend suggested we stop over for some cold coffee at the stalls diagonally across Mani Square Mall. Trust me folks, the cold coffee served here is truly among the very best that you would come across in any street food joint in the city and still remains a personal favourite.

I have always had a fetish for authentic Chinese delicacies. And this led me one Sunday morning through the by-lanes of Calcutta to the most

unlikely location in **Tiretta Bazar**.

One can find light soups—basic broths with a few greens and the odd chicken foot stirred in. There is also the heavier variety of spicier broths, including one in which the twin hammers of Sichuan chilies and pickled garlic drowned out the fish balls - popularly called Krakatoa soup because it carved out an instant lava-filled crater in your stomach. You can also taste the steamed pao - soft Chinese bread with a variety of fillings like minced pork, fish innards, a complex vegetable mix (which is basically trimmings from herbs) and Chinese greens mixed with fungus, sweet plum stuffing. Tiretta Bazar is also famous for its pork dumplings. The best you would find anywhere in the city. Authentically Chinese!



FOOD PUMP



I started taking information about the other places where we get quality street food. And the places that came to my mind in the first place were Russell Street, followed by Vardan Market. As I stepped out of my car, I bumped into a Gandhi-topi-clad man carrying a small basket, shouting “chana jor garam”. This is the Mumbai-style mixture of chana, sprinkled with chili powder and a dash of lime. Just the perfect way to start. Once done, make your way towards



the phuchkawala - **Russell Steet** is home to some of the city’s best phuchkas. Once you are through with the phuchkas proceed to lap up the lip-smacking ghugni chaat, spiced with shredded ginger and green chili with a tinge of lime. Yummy! After finishing my ghugni chaat, I

made my way towards **Vardaan Market** on Camac Street. The bhel puri, papri chaat and jhal muri here are worth the wait but the tongue tingling chillas and lip smacking moong dal vadas with pudina and chili-garlic chutney are a specialty of this place. Don’t miss any of them.

And when one speaks about bhel puri and papri chaat, how can anyone forget **Vivekanada Park** just off Southern Avenue. Once the evening set in, I thronged to this food hub to dig into the delicious papri chaat, bhel puri, batata puri, dahi vada, phuchka, alu dom, dahi phuchka and soda shikanji. Just the perfect place to munch on street fare in South Calcutta.



FOOD PUMPS

For years, Strand Road has been among the favourite destination for the romantic at heart. The sunset has never looked more beautiful than it does at the **Strands** when the tiring sun bids adieu for the day and sets against the backdrop of the flowing Hoogly River. But that's not all. The Strand (next to Scoop) has also emerged as a popular destination for an impressive variety of street fare with the amchi Mumbai style pav bhaji with an extra scoop of butter being the most popular of the lot. Help yourself with a glass of masala Thumps Up and you will be ready to gulp down some more eatables on offer.



The other day, after a tiring shopping spree at **New Market**, my tummy was craving for some food. I immediately made my way towards the string of stalls just beside the erstwhile Lighthouse and Globe cinema, which is renowned for churning out the most delicious chana batura, samosa chaat, raj kachori and dahi vada in the city. Hundreds queue up everyday to dig into this delicious offering and they just keep coming back for more for the mind-blowing taste.

Finally, when it comes to kulfi and syrups, the place to be is at the **Shakespeare Sarani and Wood Street intersection**. The sitafhal, chiku and kesari kulfi is simply superb. And if you want to quench your thirst, choose between a range of rose, green mango, khus and

several others syrups. So, desserts anyone? Beyond any reasonable doubt, Calcutta's street food culture is a subject of everyone's envy. The sheer variety and the delicious taste of street food available in Calcutta keep its populace blissfully happy. In fact, it is only fair to say, that most Calcuttans thrive on street food and on the little pleasures of life that comes with it.





■ POTPOURRI ■

Suchitra Sen

The Enigma



Tarun Goswami

Chances are if Suchitra Sen had heard herself being referred to as the “Greta Garbo of India” she would not have been amused at all. Nobody can accuse her of lacking originality; she lived life on her own terms till the very end. Hands on her hips, tilted chin, the ethereal but enigmatic beauty of Rina Brown of Saptapadi left a lasting impression on Bengali psyche which perhaps nothing could obliterate not even the decades of seclusion which she subjected herself to, after completing her last screen appearance, Pronoy Pasha.





Impala; Suchitra Sen rode a huge Plymouth, a 1960 Buick Super 8 and later bought a Cielo from Daewoo Motors. She took driving lessons from her husband Dibanath Sen and the duo were often seen speeding their Plymouth in the 1950s. In those days there were fewer cars on the streets of Calcutta and from Ballygunge Circular Road they often travelled as far as to Diamond Harbour.

Suchitra Sen was often seen driving her car to Tollygunge. Driving her blue and white

Throw back your mind to that famous scene of Saptapadi, where Krishnendu (Uttam Kumar), rides a Norton Dominator motor cycle with his heart-throb Rina Brown (Suchitra Sen) on the pillion, on a meandering road while the duo sings: Ei path Jodi na sesh hoi tobe kamon hoto tumi boloto. For generations to come, it turned out to be the iconic song of romance on celluloid.

Later, in Alo Amar Alo, UttamKumar, playing the role of a rich businessman drove a Buick Roadmaster with Sen by his side, singing a song, Ato alo ato akash. If she played the coy lady love in these films, enjoying the wind sweeping off her face, clinging to her beloved, in reality she was a keen driver who loved automobiles, revelling in the thrill of speed. While Uttam Kumar, her co-star in the 30 of the 60 films she featured in, had a Rambler, Buick and





Plymouth with her right hand on the steering wheel and smoking a king-size cigarette, she was a familiar sight in those days in the studio para. But despite all the familiarity she was always 'Mrs Sen' on the sets - such was her personality. This was true even on the sets of Aandhi which brought her a Filmfare nomination and the best actor award for her co-star, Sanjeev Kumar.

She then bought a Buick and often drove the car on Delhi Road along with her friends - PN Talukdar, Asit Sen and others. For maintenance she would take her vehicle to Walford Motors in Park Circus. The head mechanic, Mohammad Salauddin was a young man then and reminisced that she would wait in the manager's room till the servicing was over. The mechanic had to explain what spare parts had been changed and the condition of engine and gear oil. She was extremely fussy about her car and every fortnight it was given a

polish. On one occasion while driving the car on Delhi Road, there was a breakdown and her car had to be towed away to the workshop. She was extremely annoyed with the mechanics. The culprit was the oil pump which had to be replaced.

In 1995, well into her post retirement days she bought a Cielo. But by then she had given



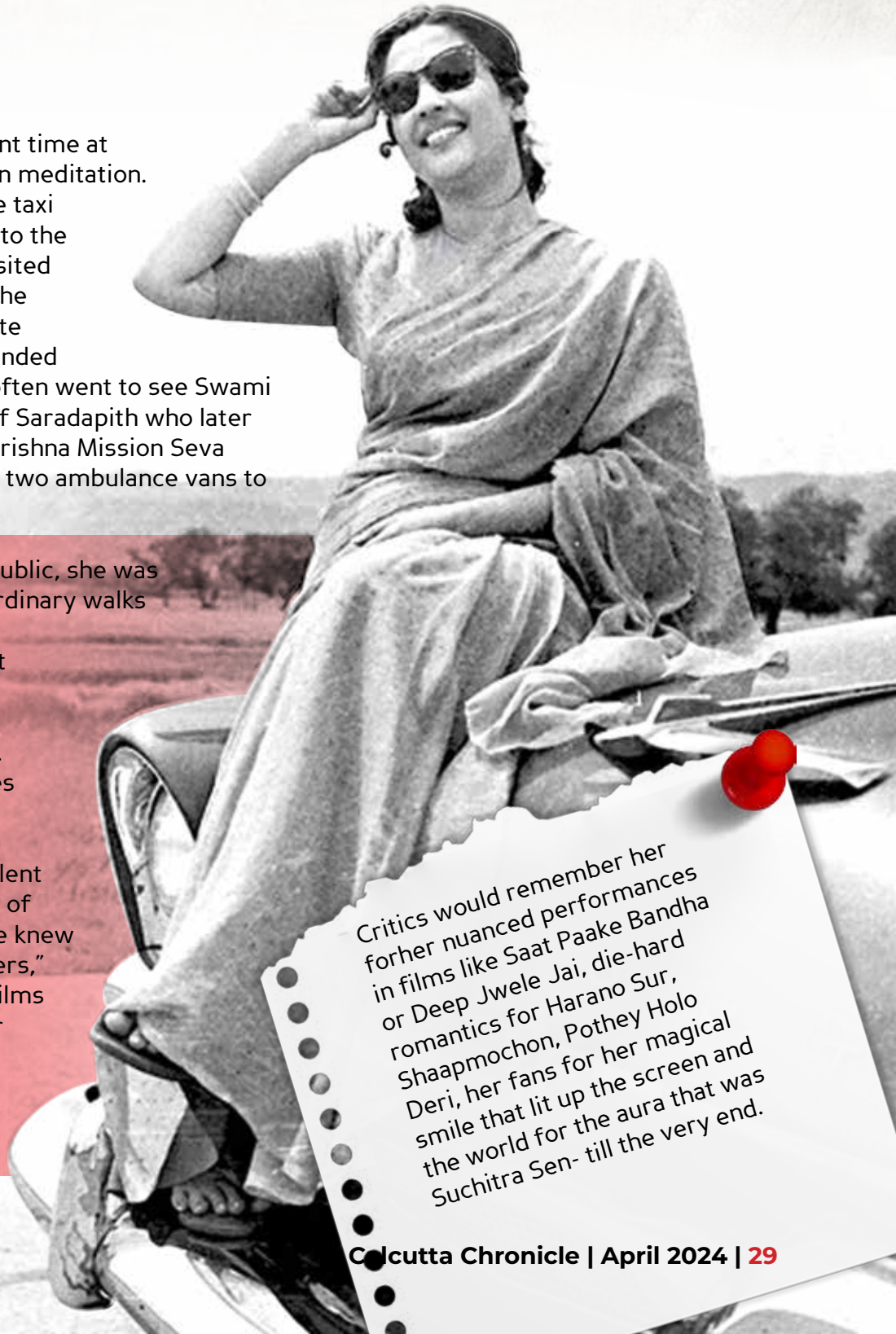
up driving. During those days she turned to religion and meditation for succour. Her doors were closed to even close friends like Sandhya Mukherjee. The only one who could break her veneer was Uttam Kumar but he died within two years of her decision to live a secluded life. She often visited Belur Math and Dakshineswar Temple in a taxi. A Sikh cab-driver was her trusted chauffeur on these occasions and they would leave for the temple early in the morning. Journalist Gopal Krishna Roy who was Sen's friend said even the taxi in which she travelled in was maintained immaculately. Once, in the mid-1980s, after offering puja at the Dakshineswar temple she asked Roy to get her tea. When Roy was about to reach the cab some people in the parking lot recognized Sen. Sardarji drove off fast leaving a cloud of dust and Roy, behind.



Sen's schoolmates from Pabna which is now in Bangladesh recollect even when she cycled to school and back home she rode it very fast. It gave her a lot of pleasure to see her friends lagging behind. Roy, who penned her biography had the opportunity to study her really close. According to him speed or swiftness was the essence of her enigmatic life. The decision to quit cinema was taken swiftly and there was no looking back thereafter. Uttam Kumar repeatedly urged her to reconsider the decision. He even threw a party where all her friends were invited to persuade her. But she decided to skip the party and it was cancelled. She had discussed her move with Bharat Maharaj who asked her not to pursue her career any more.

At Belur Math she often spent time at Maa Sarada's temple, deep in meditation. After getting down from the taxi she would walk bare footed to the Ramakrishna temple. Sen visited Swami Lokeswarananda at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park and attended devotees' conference. She often went to see Swami Ramananda, the secretary of Saradapith who later became secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratisthan. She had donated two ambulance vans to carry patients.

Despite her distance from public, she was friendly with people from ordinary walks of life including the staff of Vedanta- the apartment that came up after pulling down her old house -the liftman, the gardener and the driver. She sent saris for their wives during Durga Puja. "Rama was very simple and taught everyone how a quiet and silent life should be led. Her sense of dignity was amazing and she knew how to show respect to others," said Swami Ramananda. In films like Rajlakshmi O Srikanta or Uttar Falguni even when she played the fallen woman her quiet dignity came through.



Critics would remember her for her nuanced performances in films like Saat Paake Bandha or Deep Jwele Jai, die-hard romantics for Harano Sur, Shaapmochon, Pothey Holo Deri, her fans for her magical smile that lit up the screen and the world for the aura that was Suchitra Sen- till the very end.



■ NOSTALGIA ■

Calcutta's *First Hotel*

"Burra Poachkhana!" Immediately after coming ashore at the Landing Place near the old fort the latest visitor to arrive at the second city of the Empire would holler at the palki bearers and they would straight head towards the most luxurious abode of the time – **Spence's Hotel**



Anindita Mazumder





John Spence was thought to be the “originator” of hotels in Calcutta, at least of the opulent kind. One can well imagine the effect Spence’s, with all its fineries, had on the weary visitor who after a long sea voyage around the Cape, surviving solely on a diet of salt beef and hard biscuits and having seen only ‘one table cloth to last the voyage’, now beheld “a snow white table cloth on which was drawn up in beautiful array ham, eggs (fresh for a change), a superb kind of fish from the saltwater lakes called a beckett or cockup fried, boiled rice, muffins, tea, coffee etc. Plantains, radishes, small prints of butter in a handsome cut glass vessel of coldwater and a bouquet of flowers in the centre gave a most cool and refreshing appearance to the table. A khidmatgar or native bearer stood behind each of our chairs with a chauree (fly-fapper) to keep in awe the flies and a punkah waved pleasantly above our heads.”

It was well situated, just a stone throw away from Governor’s House— at first, where the treasury building stands today and when this was acquired by the government, it moved to a parcel of land opposite to the North Gate of Raj Bhavan, at the crossing of Wellesley Place and Fancy Lane. In those days the ugly looking Telephone Bhawan was yet to be built and one could see Writers’ Buildings straight from Governor’s Place. Charles D’ Oily had even drawn a painting of Writers’ Buildings from Spence’s hotel. The plot was bought by Spence cheaply, evidently taking advantage of the falling prices in real estate after Palmer Company failed. Park Street was yet to be the favoured destination of the well-heeled. Most of the hotels were within the limits of White Town - Bentinck Street, Rani Mudee Gully, Waterloo Street and Dhurramtola. Till the very end which came in late 1960s and before it was demolished and gave way to a bank, Spence’s Hotel was well served by a long line of excellent managers, barmen and stewards.





At the beginning, however, hotels were not so popular in India. There were hardly any lodging options for those visiting the city. At least the bachelors, particularly with some connection with the military could stay at the barracks. It was more difficult for couples or families who had to seek the hospitality of the denizens, and their availability was far outnumbered by the demand. Spence's Hotel opened three years after Bengal Club which offered members residential facilities, often taken as an indication of slow acceptance of hotels in the country.



Charles Dawson



John Spence arrived at Calcutta in the 1820s and by 1828 was working in a smaller establishment in Pollock Street along with Charles Dawson. In 1830, Dawson died and Spence probably opened his hotel in the same year. Miss Emma Roberts wrote: "Formerly strangers visiting Calcutta were dependent upon the hospitality of residents, or were compelled to take large unfurnished houses, there being neither lodging nor hotels for the reception of guests. But the capital of Bengal has become too large to admit the continuance of old customs so boarding and other houses of entertainment have been opened and being conducted in so respectable in manner that ... no person, however fastidious, can scruple to become an inmate of them".

Initially, rates in Spence's hotel were in harmony with the times. In the later years of the 1830s the rent for rooms in the ground floor was Rs 250 and for second or third floor sit was Rs 350, not a low sum in those days. In contrast, Benton's Hotel, a lowly establishment in Rani Mudie Lane (British Indian Street) charged Rs 90 as monthly rent for a room. Its famed coffee room was quite popular among the captains of the

ships coming ashore. As business grew, Spence's dispensed the role of wine merchant, Commission agent and steward of the Town Hall Committee. He and his efficient staff were in charge of catering the ball given in honour of HRH Prince of Orange at the Town Hall in 1838. In addition, he had set up a refreshment room at Eden Gardens for "thirsty" sahibs and memsahibs though the cyclone of 1868 swept it away.



Following in the footsteps of its more illustrious neighbour Governor's House, it was the first hotel to install a lift as well as became one of first to be centrally air-conditioned. Apparently, its AC plant had come from a ship. It had a ball room and three opulent entrances (undoubtedly, a maze for patrons after too many pegs). The hotels agent in London booked cabarets (later years) and floor shows during the heydays when Calcutta was truly the flesh pot of the East and Spence's offered fine dining, the best wines and uninterrupted entertainment.

By 1860, however, the Great Eastern Hotel overtook it as the best hotel in the city. Spence ran the hotel till 1878 and the management then changed hands several times. During Second World War, it became

the officer's mess of Royal Air Force. The hotel was also known for its famous patrons – Michael Madhusudan Dutta stayed for two and a half years after returning from England and met other noted personalities such as Vidyasagar at Spence's. Field Marshal Earl Roberts of Kandahar, a much decorated soldier of the British Empire also chose to stay at Spence's whenever he was in town and finally barrister Noel Fredrick Barwell, immortalised by novelist Shankar in Kato Ajanare, made it his home till it closed shop. The novel "Chowringhee" was inspired by Spence's hotel where Shankar's mentor Barwell had resided.

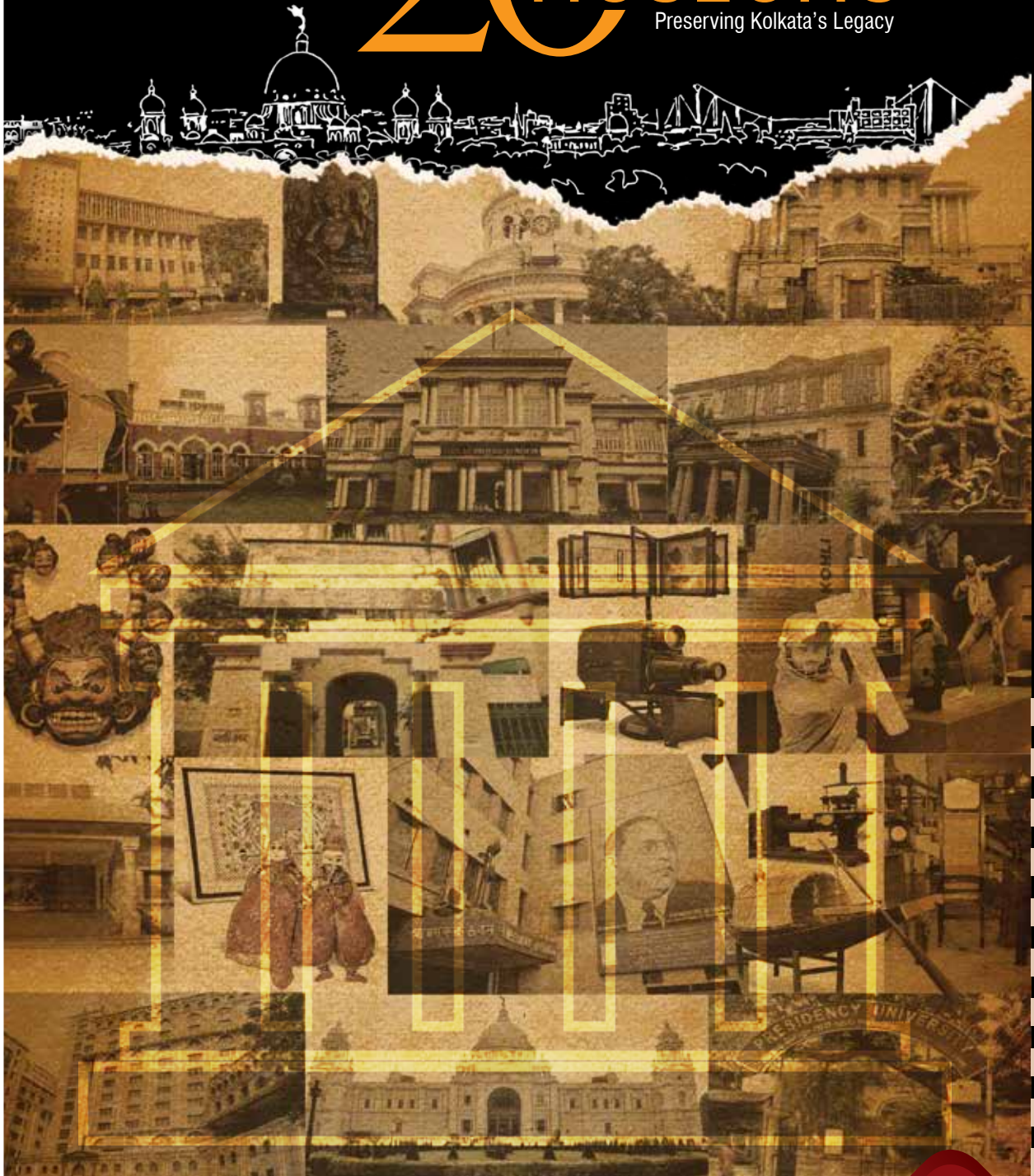
Another historical meeting - the one between Prince Duleep Singh (youngest son of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh) and his mother, Rani Jhingan took place at Spence's hotel on January 16, 1861, 13 years after they were separated following the conquest of Punjab. A reference made by Jules Verne in his novel, The Steam House in 1880 counting Spence's to be among the best hotels in Calcutta was truly another feather in the cap of one of the finest establishments of the City of Joy.



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■ SPECIAL FEATURE ■

VisitBritain Shines Spotlight on Bengal

The VisitBritain shone spotlight on heightened Bengal-Britain travel connect in their GREAT Tourism Roadshow in Calcutta.

The road shows are formed of one-day interactive trade workshops that familiarise trade with VisitBritain's new product tools and resources. More than 50 travel trade industry agents and tour operators attended the GREAT Tourism Roadshow in the city. The VisitBritain team held an interactive itinerary building workshop for the tourism industry.



Joydip Sur

British Deputy High Commissioner to East and Northeast India, Dr. Andrew Fleming along VisitBritain's Country Manager to India Mr. Vishal Bhatia addressed the tourism industry experts.





SPECIAL FEATURE

Visitors from India spent a record £764 million in the UK in 2022, exceeding 2019 levels. This growth continued in to 2023. India is forecast to be a billion-pound visitor market from 2025 with visits predicted recover to 2019 levels by 2024, making it one of the UK's fastest growing Asian visitor markets.

Airline seat capacity from India to the UK is also showing strong recovery and growth. Scheduled seat capacity on non-stop flights from India to the UK, when looking at the first eight months of 2024, is already 33% higher than in 2019 with capacity particularly ramping up from May.

VisitBritain Country Manager – India, Vishal Bhatia said: “It is wonderful to be bringing together tourism businesses from the region, to reconnect and do business. We are delighted to be back in ‘the city of joy’, Kolkata. It is a valuable opportunity for VisitBritain in India to showcase their products in front of the top agents in the region and promote tourism to Britain.

“India is one of our most important inbound visitor markets, forecast





to be a billion-pound visitor market for the UK from 2025. It boasts strong airline connectivity including to regional destinations, and we know there is pent up demand for travel. Working with the travel trade in Eastern India is crucial to ensuring they are ready to sell Britain, as well as broadening travel itineraries to encourage Indian visitors to explore further and stay longer.”

British Deputy High Commissioner to East and Northeast India, Dr. Andrew Fleming said: “I am delighted that VisitBritain is hosting their tourism roadshow in the City of Joy. Bengal and Britain are strongly connected through a shared passion for travel. The people to people flow between these two regions continues to grow. Tourism is an economic powerhouse and a major part of British trade, and it is great to see the build back in value post pandemic with spend already exceeding 2019. Our work



the travel trade in India is incredibly important in East and Northeast India. We had organized the Bengal-Britain Travel Friendship cricket tournament in January to harness connections with the travel industry in Kolkata. I believe this Great Tourism Roadshow supports us to boost visits across the seasons and across the Bengal-Britain corridor.”





Bheris of Calcutta

 Team Chronicle

The East Calcutta Wetlands, considered to be the 'kidneys' of the city has been home to a number of bheris or fish ponds, supplying fish to our kitchens from time immemorial. Some of these are freshwater ponds, others brackish and along with Dhapa Square Mile and vegetable fields make up the Ramsar Site. However, now the bheris, lending that rural touch to our urban existence, have opened their doors to visitors as well. After the closure of Nalban near Nicco Park, other bheries like Captain Bheri on EM Bypass have turned into ideal settings for picnics or day outs. Explore the rich eco-system of the bheris and take a close look at the fisher folk whose livelihood depends upon these fish ponds. It will perhaps be an experience of your lifetime, enjoying nature unadulterated so close to home.





FAST FACTS

Location: EM Bypass near Chingrighata

Timing: 9 am to 5 pm

Booking Procedure: On spot booking or from SFDC (Bikas Bhavan)

Picnic booking: Per picnic spot - Rs 5000

Refreshment: Snacks counter available
Cooking is allowed inside the premise

Parking: Available

Angling: Not allowed

Boating: Available

Captain Bheri

How to reach: On way to Science City from Chingrighata on EM Bypass, Captain Bheri is on the left side just before the Metropolitan bus stop. The entrance is from the main thoroughfare.

Far from the madding crowd, Captain Bheri projects an ideal escape destination from the hustle-bustle of the city life and boasts of an array of flora and fauna. Greeted by terracotta horse figurines and enchanting mermaid, visitors are bound to be enticed by the tranquillity of the settings. Numerous thatched decks outline the bheri where visitors can relax soothed by the gentle breeze. One of the prized attractions is the giant aquarium displaying a variety of colourful fishes. Quaint bamboo bridges on the smaller bheris add to the aesthetic appeal of the place. Boating facilities are also available for the visitors. The lush green, well maintained sprawling gardens of Captain Bheri offers to soothe your eyes and soul.





Nuner Bheri

How to reach: While driving towards Science City from Chingrighata, turn left from the traffic signal at Metropolitan bus stop opposite Bypass Dhaba. Drive through the narrow road to reach Nuner Bheri which would be on your left.

Once you are inside Nuner Bheri you would feel you are miles away from the concrete city. Surrounded by thick vegetation all around, it turns out to be a perfect way to assuage your nerves jangled by the daily grind of urban life. There is a children's park which boasts of see-saws, swings, and slides. Visitors may go round the bheri in paddle boats which accommodate four people at a time. Adjacent to the bheri, there are vast stretches of farmland, growing leafy greens.

Nuner Bheri is also an ideal place for bird watchers as it is home to a different species of birds chirping away merrily, despite the close proximity of the city. The bheri has some twelve spots but most of them are out of bounds for visitors during off seasons. The ideal time is during the evenings when you are greeted by chirping birds, eager to return to their homes.

FAST FACTS

Location: Canal South Road, near Dhapa

Timing: 8 am to 5 pm

Booking Procedure: On spot

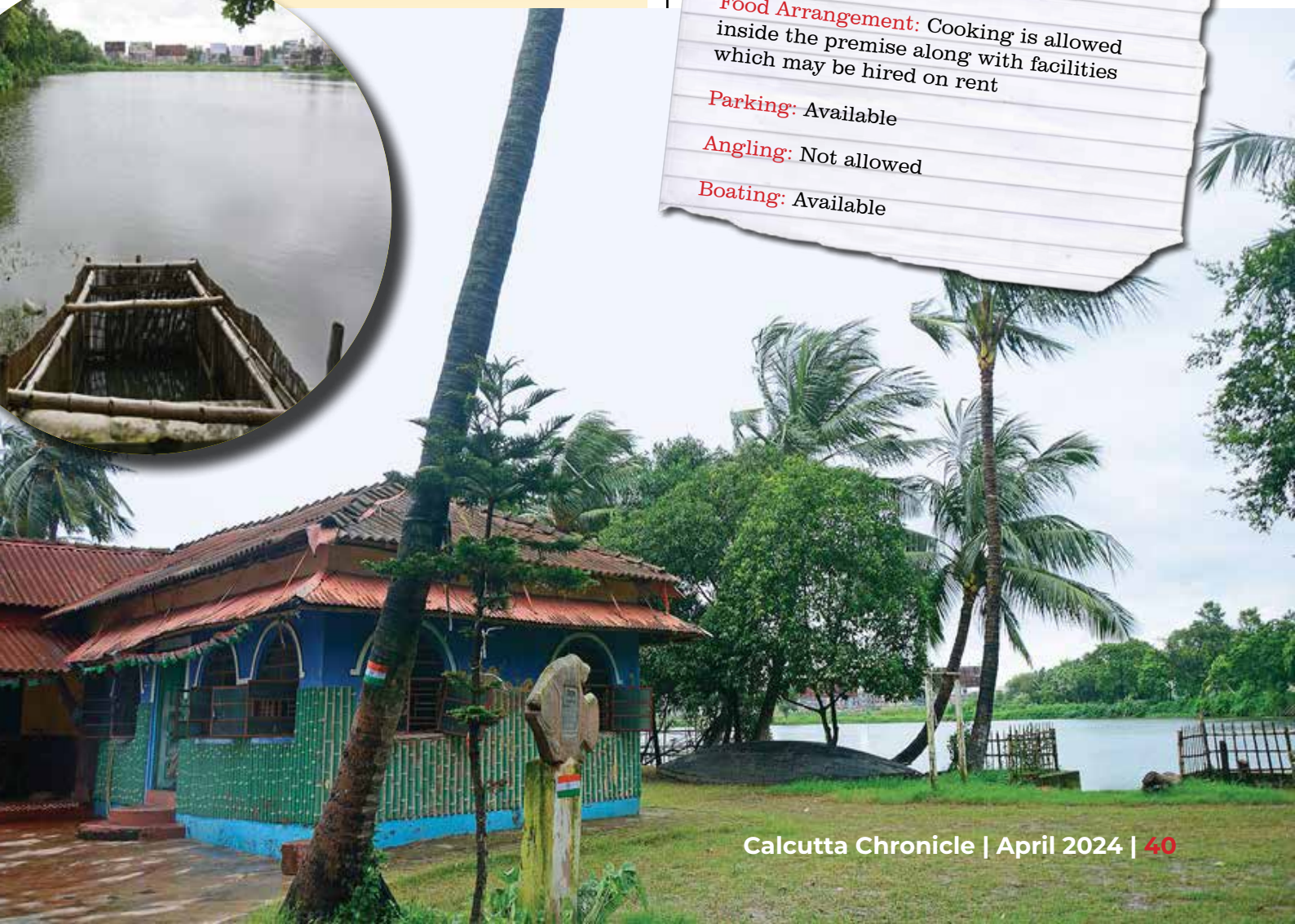
Picnic spot booking: Rs 4000 – Rs 6000 depending upon the choice of the spot and the season

Food Arrangement: Cooking is allowed inside the premise along with facilities which may be hired on rent

Parking: Available

Angling: Not allowed

Boating: Available





Location: Sukantanagar, near Chingrighata

Timing: 6 am to 5 pm

Booking Procedure: On spot booking

Picnic booking: 7 spots available between Rs 1000 - Rs 1500

Food Arrangement: Cooking is allowed inside the premise

Parking Fee: Available

Angling: Not allowed

Boating: Available

Sukantanagar Samity Bheri

How to reach: Driving from Nicco Park to Chingrighata, turn left from Sukantanagar bus stop, just before reaching Nabajyoti Sporting Club. Then drive straight to reach Sukantanagar Samity Bheri.

Located in the vicinity of Sector V, Sukantanagar Samity Bheri has the high rises of Sector V as the backdrop to its skyline and immediately reminds one of foreign shores. The bheri has strips of land separating the water bodies. On special request, visitors can take a tour across the bheri in small boats rowed by the fishermen. An ideal location for nature lovers and bird watchers, the illuminated skyscrapers of Sector V add to the sight during evenings. Sukantanagar Samity Bheri promises a cosy weekend destination for people who wish to spend time in the lap of nature.



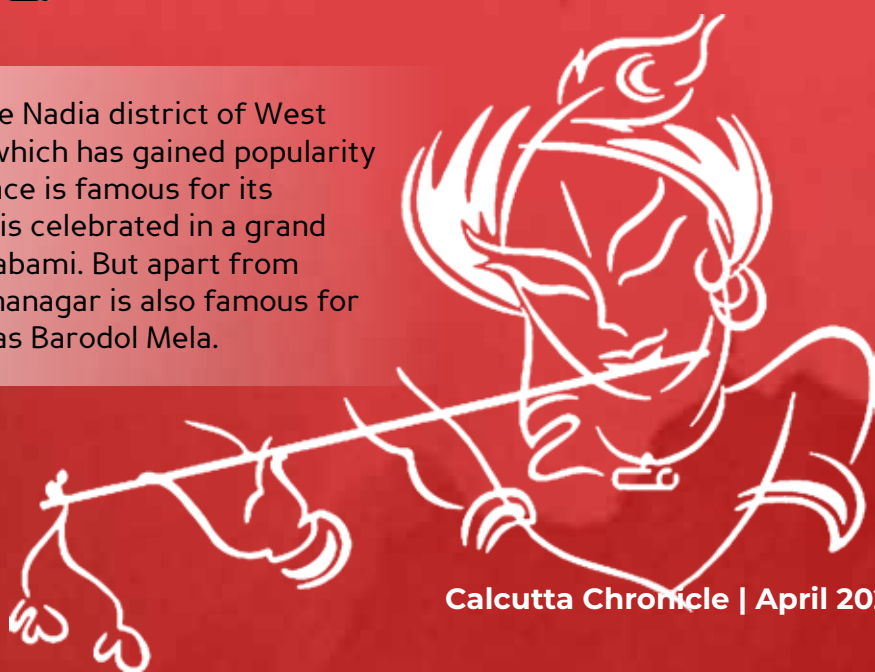


Barodol Mela



Kinjal Bose

Krishnanagar town in the Nadia district of West Bengal is a destination which has gained popularity for many things. The place is famous for its Jagaddhatri Puja which is celebrated in a grand manner on the day of Nabami. But apart from Jagaddhatri Puja, Krishnanagar is also famous for another festival known as Barodol Mela.





■ CULTURE ■

Barodol Mela is a month-long event, where one can get a unique opportunity of witnessing thirteen Radha Krishna idols (including that of Rajbari) each placed on separate wooden throne and worshipped in the eastern side of the puja mandap within the Rajbari compound in the first three days of the month. The festival is normally held after Dol Yatra on the Sukla ekadashi tithi. Here Krishna idols can be seen in three attires – Raj besh on the first day of the festival; Phul (flower) besh on the second day – and Rakhhal besh on the third day.

The month-long festival attracts a large number of people, not just from Nadia, but from other districts of West Bengal as well including Kolkata. There are many stalls which sell different types of items ranging from household commodities to home decor. One can even witness a circus and merry-go-round.

Barodol Mela has turned into a heritage fair which is still continuing without any interruption and every year the number of stalls keeps on increasing. This year the fair will begin from 19th April. All the photographs of the idols here are in Raj besh. A remarkable thing is people sprinkle abir (gula) at the deities. Alongwith that, tiny

green mangoes are offered to Lord Krishna by the worshippers. As the mango is the first fruit of the season, the worshippers dedicate it to Lord Krishna.

It was said that the festival was started in the year 1764 by Maharaja Krishnachandra. Since then, the fair has been held for more than two



■ CULTURE ■

and a half century. Though 'Barodol', one gets to witness thirteen Krishna idols here including that of Baronarayan Chandra of Krishnanagar Rajbari.

The other idols are brought from different areas to the Rajbari like Shree Shree Madangopal from Birohi; Shree Shree Gopal from Nabadwip; Shree Shree Garergopal from Shantipur. Instead of the idol of Shree Shree Gopinath of Agradwip, the photo of the same is worshipped at Barodol Mela.

There is a story connected with this famous mela. It was said that Choto Rani (the youngest queen) once requested Maharaja Krishnachandra to take her to Ula village fair; but he somehow forgot about it owing to his busy work. Later Krishnachandra brought the whole fair in the Rajbari itself, which is being continued till date as the famous Barodol Mela of Krishnanagar.



The Rajbari gates are opened for the general public during the first three days of the festival. People from several far-off places visit Krishnanagar to witness this famous mela. After the end of three days, all the Krishna idols were sent to their respective temples from where they came.



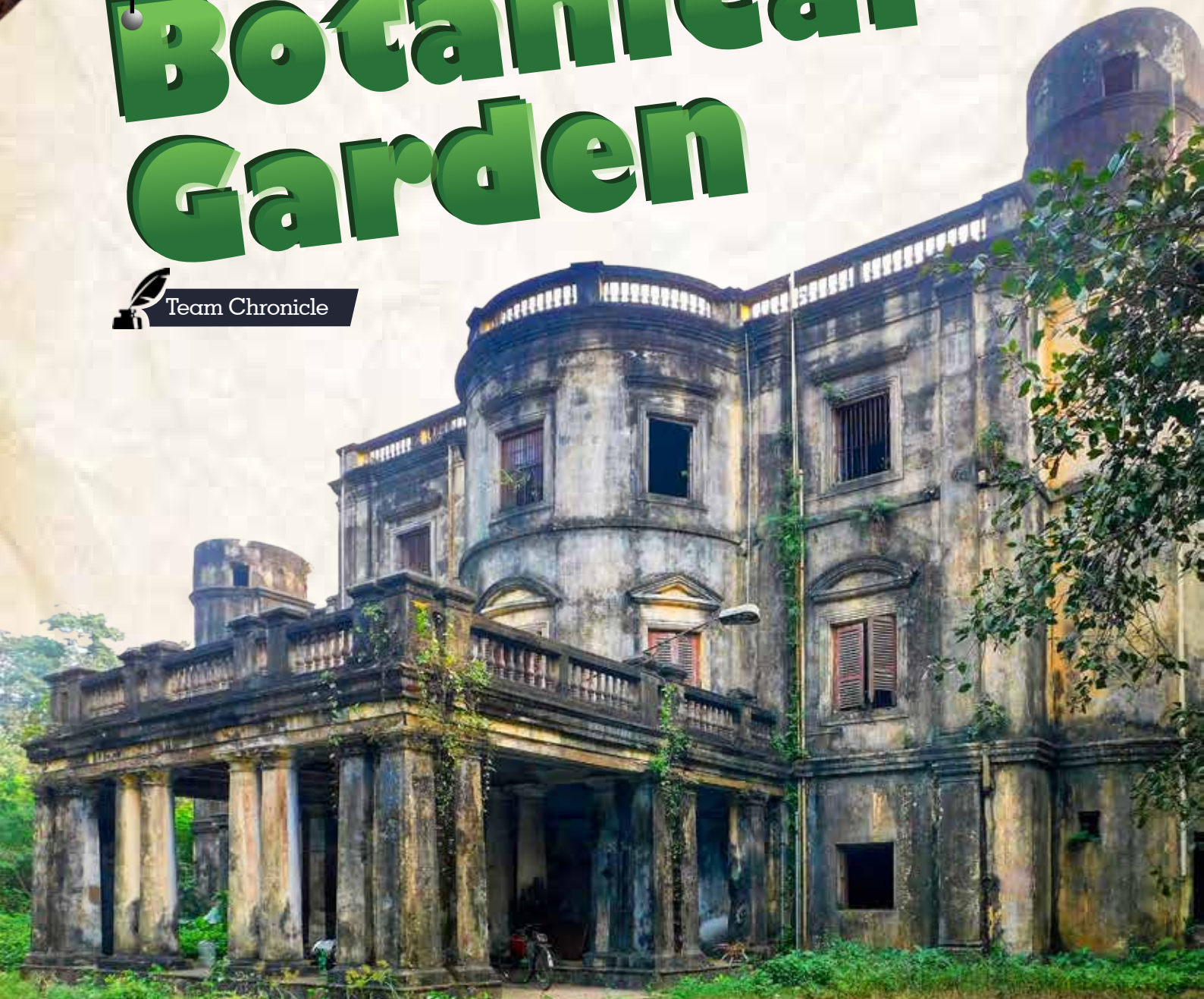


LET'S EXPLORE CALCUTTA



Botanical Garden

 Team Chronicle



■ LET'S EXPLORE CALCUTTA ■



Undeniably the city of Calcutta is deficient in fresh air, not unlike the country's other metropolices. But thankfully the place where one can breathe in unsullied air and spend a day in the cozy lap of nature lies in the vicinity of the city.

Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Indian Botanical Garden, a sprawling 273 acre verdant land, by the west bank of river Ganges makes an idyllic refuge for a jaded soul to escape into.

Established in 1778 by Col. Robert Kyd, the rambling botanical garden embraces 24 lakes, with waters changed at regular intervals, filled afresh with water from the Ganges.

To the delight of the nature lovers, the garden comprises 12,000 trees, shrubs, climbers, which altogether represent 1,400 species.

Spot: Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose Botanical Garden

Address: Shibpur, Howrah 711103

Route: Drive down AJC Bose Road and cross Vidyasagar Setu. Take the extreme left channel, and pay Rs. 10 as toll tax. After the toll plaza, take the Andul Road exit lane to the left of the flyover. Follow the Andul Road for 3 km from the toll plaza to reach the Botanical Garden adjacent to the road.

Food and beverage options: Snack joints and restaurants outside the College gate and Howrah gate (main entrance)

Open: All days

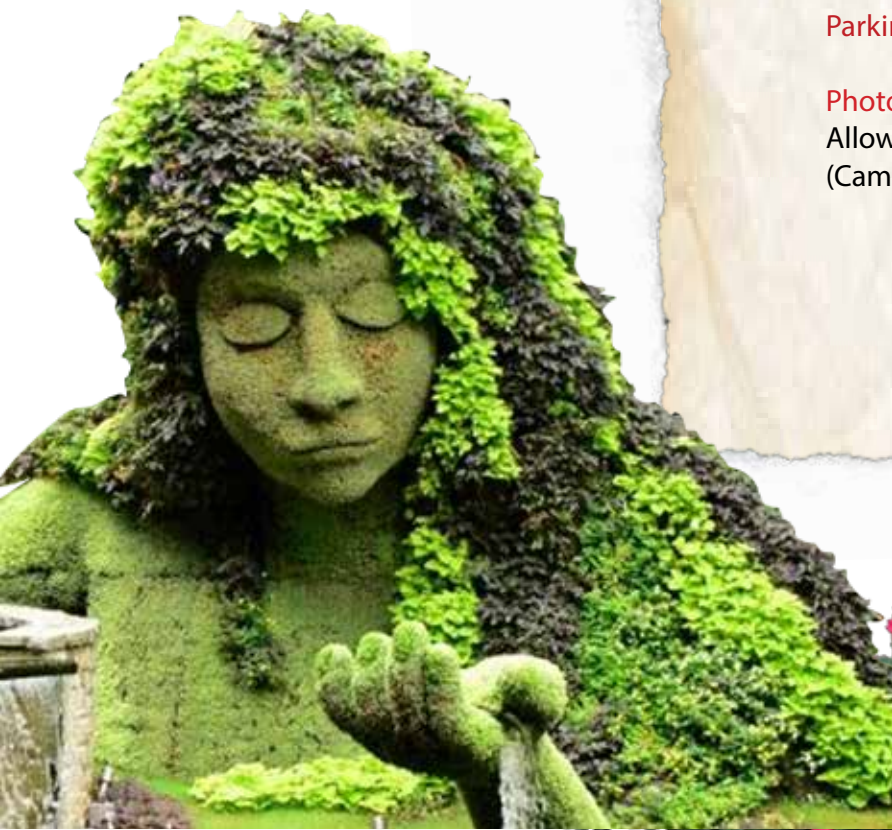
Time: March – September
8.00 am – 5.30 pm /
October - February : 8.00 am – 5.00 pm

Entry Fee: Rs. 10/- per head for Indian nationals and Rs 100/- for foreign nationals

Car parking: Available in the surrounding areas of the main entrance

Parking fee: Nil

Photography:
Allowed
(Camera fee - Rs.20)



■ LET'S EXPLORE CALCUTTA ■



The centre of attraction quite literally is the Great Banyan tree- estimated to be about 250 years old. After being struck by lightning back in 1925, the main trunk of the tree was reinforced to support the remaining parts.

One might confuse the expanse of the Great Banyan tree, about 14,500 sq metres, with a forest- it has been rightly named 'one seeded forest'- for the single seed that gave rise to this wonder.



■ LET'S EXPLORE CALCUTTA ■



Spending some close and candid time with your near ones is aided by the boat ride available in one of the lakes.

Roxburgh Building -the vantage point of the garden offers a splendid view of the river Ganges. Things might change in near future as the West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation is planning to turn it into a tourist hotspot with a proposal of a jetty as the tourist entrance.



The well maintained lawns offer a perfect place for the visitors to sit and relax. Just choose a cozy corner and enjoy the natural splendor.





LET'S EXPLORE CALCUTTA



The garden is a 'no plastic zone'. Thus a brief snack before entering isn't a bad idea.

The boulevards are named after erstwhile staff members of the garden, most of them British. Time to get aboard the time machine!

The Kyd in remembrance of the founder- the 1st superintendent of the Botanic Garden- Colonel Robert Kyd. It is said that the crew on British vessels used to give formal salute to this structure, every time they passed by the garden, down the river Ganges.

The giant lilies—another marvel



■ EVENT ■

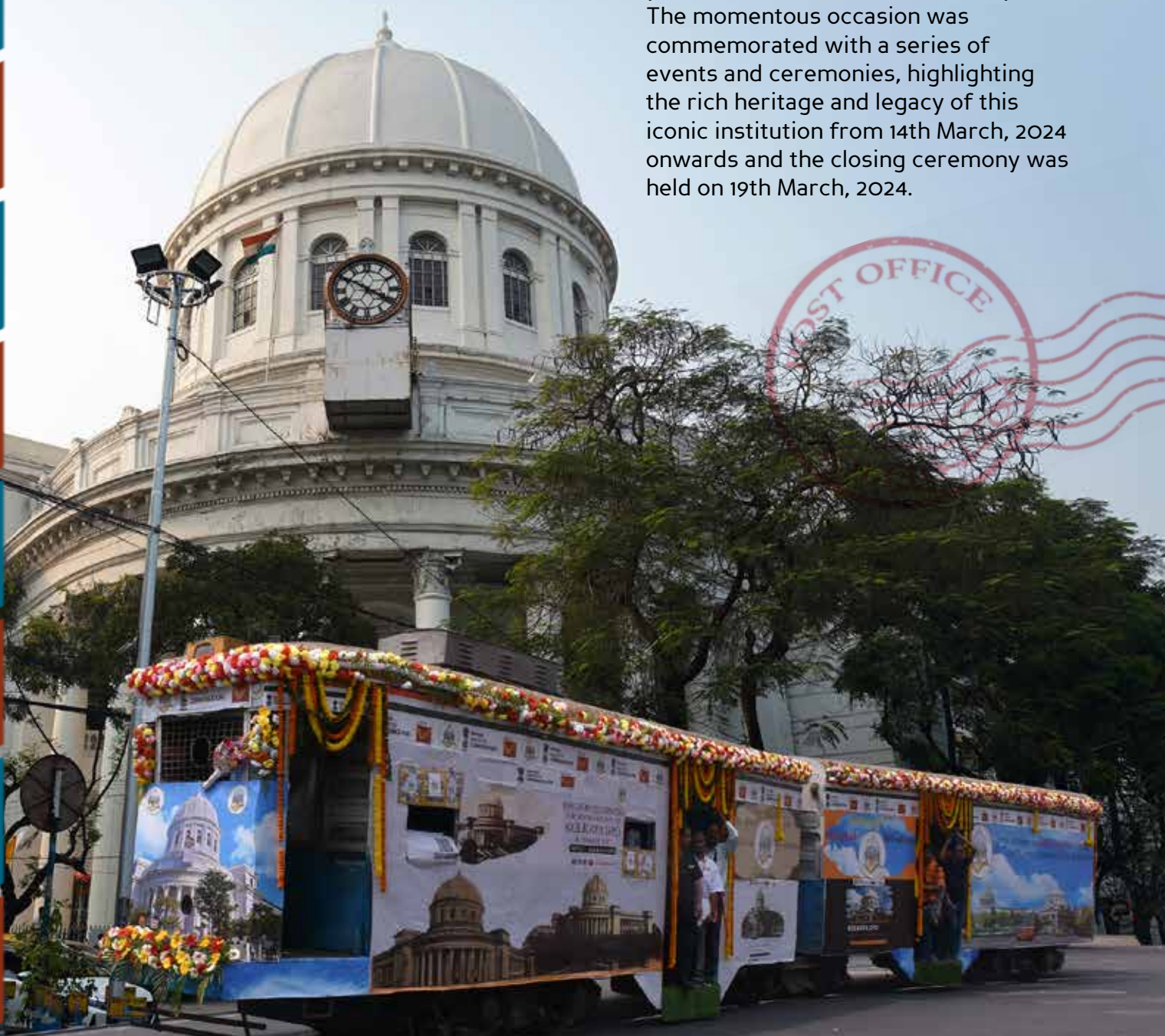
250 Years

Celebration of Kolkata GPO



Team Chronicle

The historic Kolkata General Post Office (GPO) marked a significant milestone as it completed 250 glorious years of service to the community. The momentous occasion was commemorated with a series of events and ceremonies, highlighting the rich heritage and legacy of this iconic institution from 14th March, 2024 onwards and the closing ceremony was held on 19th March, 2024.





EVENT

An unforgettable moment unfolded with the release of a Special Cover commemorating the “Badges of Kolkata GPO” by the Chief Guest - Ms. Smita Kumar, Director General Postal Services, Government of India in presence of Shri Niraj Kumar, the Chief Postmaster General of West Bengal Circle. This gesture underscored the significance of preserving the cultural artifacts associated with the postal service.

The highlight of the event was the address by the Chief Guest, Ms. Smita Kumar, Director General Postal Services, Government of India, who reminisced about the rich history and heritage of the Kolkata GPO, emphasising its pivotal role in facilitating communication and connectivity over the past two and a half centuries.



The results of the Painting, Photography and Sculpture Designing contests organised in commemoration of 250 years of Kolkata GPO were also declared and awards were distributed to the winners.

A documentary on the journey of Kolkata GPO named Time Stamp was released by the Chief Guest, Ms. Smita Kumar, Director General Postal Services, Government of India. The celebration was further elevated with a mesmerising cultural programme captivating the audience with its artistic brilliance.

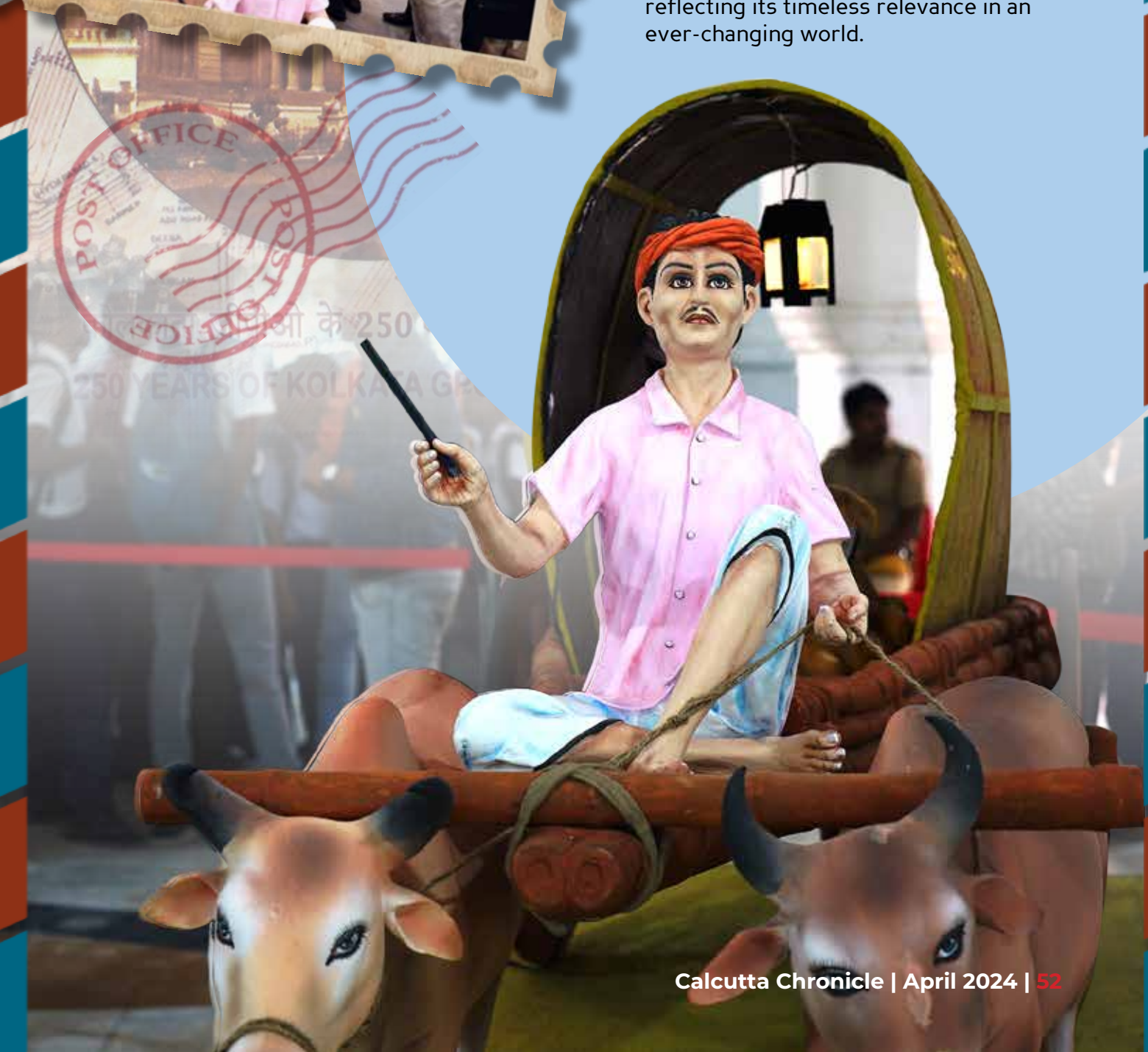


डाक परिवहन/Transportation of Mails



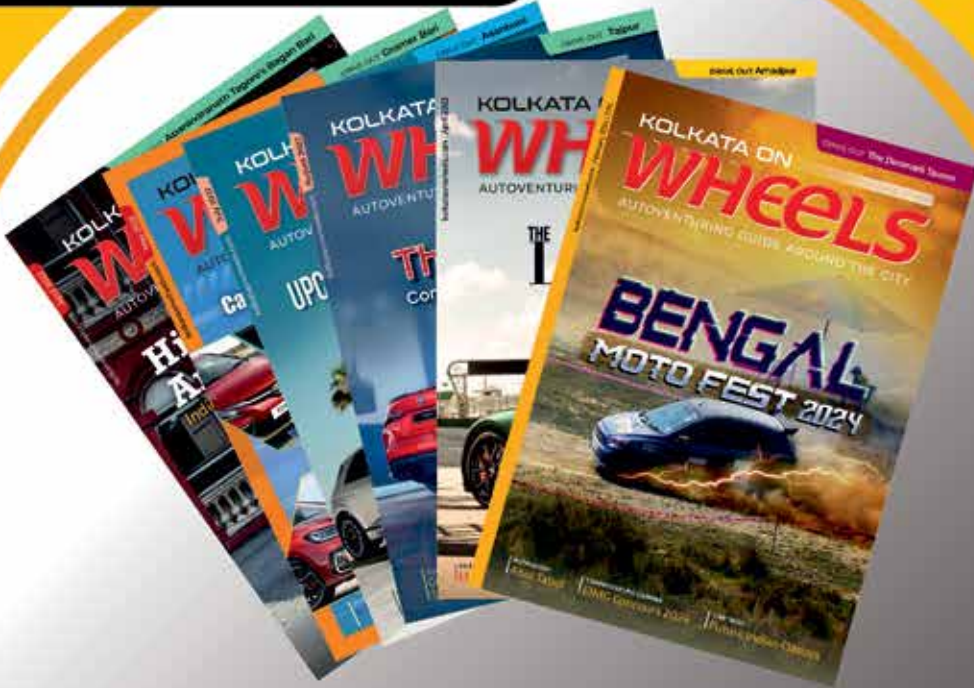
As a fitting conclusion to the evening, guests were treated to a captivating exhibition at the Rotunda, offering a glimpse into the modes of mail transmission depicted through 3D models of palanquin, bullock cart, railway mail coach and aircraft.

The 250th anniversary celebration of the Kolkata GPO was a testament to its enduring legacy and unwavering commitment to serving the community, reflecting its timeless relevance in an ever-changing world.



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