

Complimentary with Femina International Edition in Bangladesh

February-April 2007

# FEMINA

Bangladesh special

Taka 25

**DREAM WEAVER**  
AND HER INTERNATIONAL  
DREAMS FOR AARONG

SAVING BOATS,  
**RUNA KHAN STYLE**

DIPLOMAT  
WITH A DIFFERENCE

**LET'S FLY, GIRLS!**

GIRL MEETS BOY  
IT'S NORMAL!

**CHEFS**  
GOURMET SPECIAL

**PLUS**

Poster of  
ARJUN RAMPAL  
**ABSOLUTELY**  
**FREE**  
with this issue

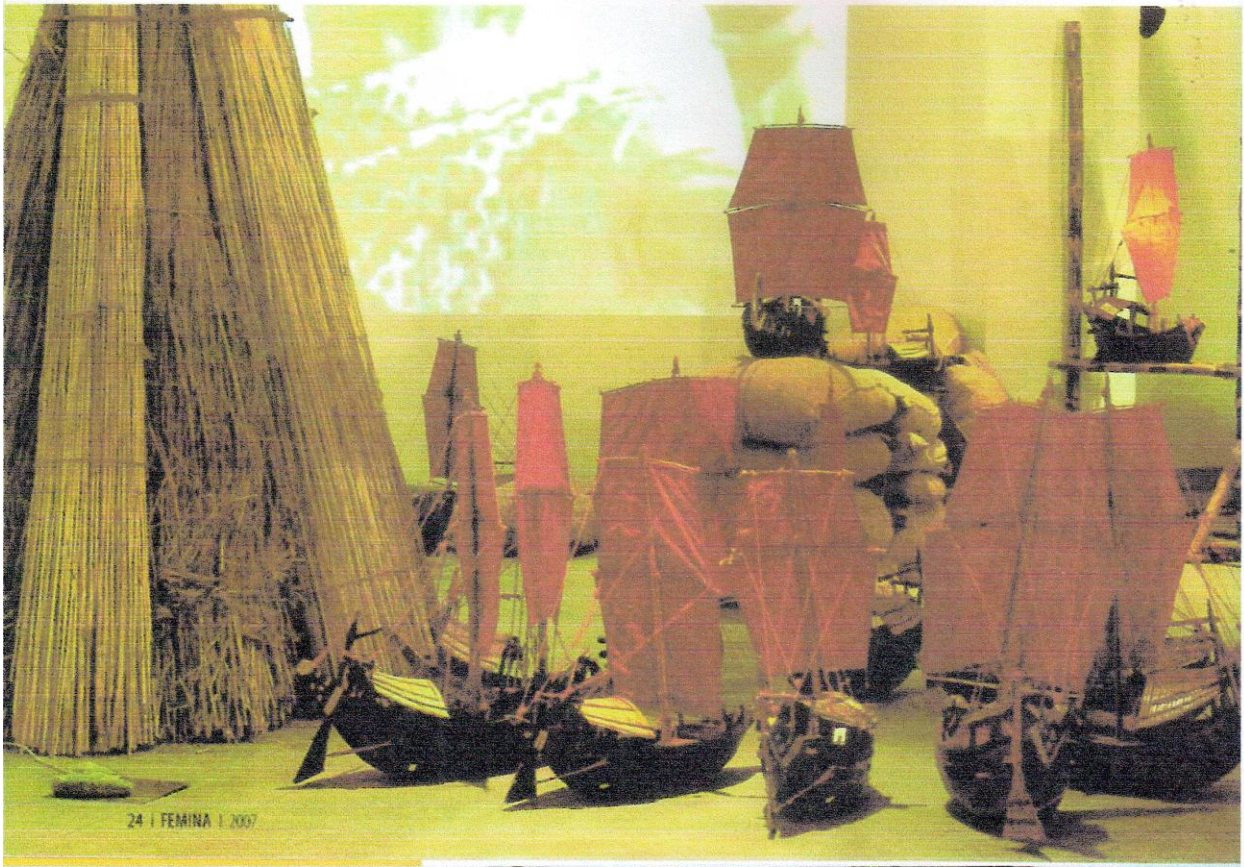


## SPOTLIGHT



# The Boatwoman of Bangladesh

Given half a chance, Runa Khan and her husband Yves Marre would like to go back in a time machine when traditional wooden boats plied Bangladesh's rivers. Those days sadly are gone, but the couple are hard at work to preserve the ancient art of boat-making. **Farid Ahmed** profiles the couple.



**T**here are two loves in Runa Khan's life: water and Yves Marre, her Frenchman husband. Runa is a child of Bangladesh, often known as a land of thousand rivers; hence, the love for water is a lasting one.

Water has been a passion with Runa for all her life. She carried it after her marriage to France but even there her dalliance and dreams with water continued. So, when she came to know that the ancient art of boat-making was dying a slow death in her country, she dragged Yves back to Bangladesh with her one-point programme: revive Bangladesh's traditional art of boatmaking.

The Runa Khan story began ten years ago when the Bangladeshi girl got married to the Frenchman. Their intense desire to recreate - indeed resurrect the Bangladeshi boat - saw them begin with two small traditional wooden boats: a 93-ft long Malar and a 72-ft Panshi. Then they began their long journey of discovery. Over the years, they realised that different types of wooden boats were slowly disappearing from the rivers.

"Even a few years ago when Yves and I travelled by boat, we saw quite a number of traditional boats plying across the country but these days we hardly see them, which is very alarming," Runa said explaining the idea of preserving the dying art of boat-making. "Basically it was the brainchild of Yves," she said.

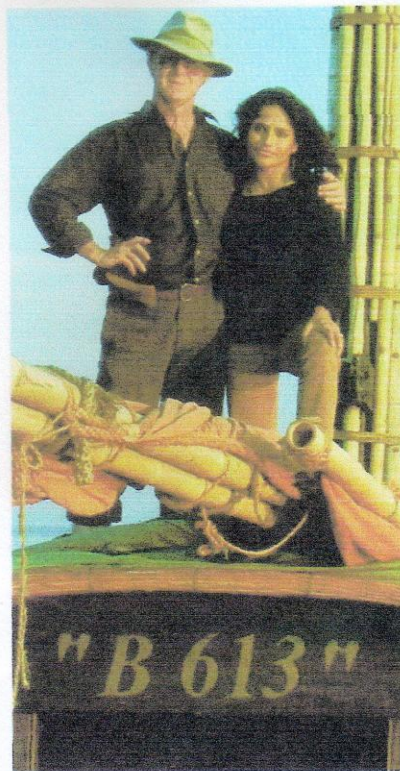
The venture brought them the prestigious Rolex Award. "It's a recognition of our work and helps us to move further," Runa said. "The master-carpenters of Bengal have laboured at their craft for over a thousand years in their quest for the best and without realising the carpenters have become artists. Their ceaseless



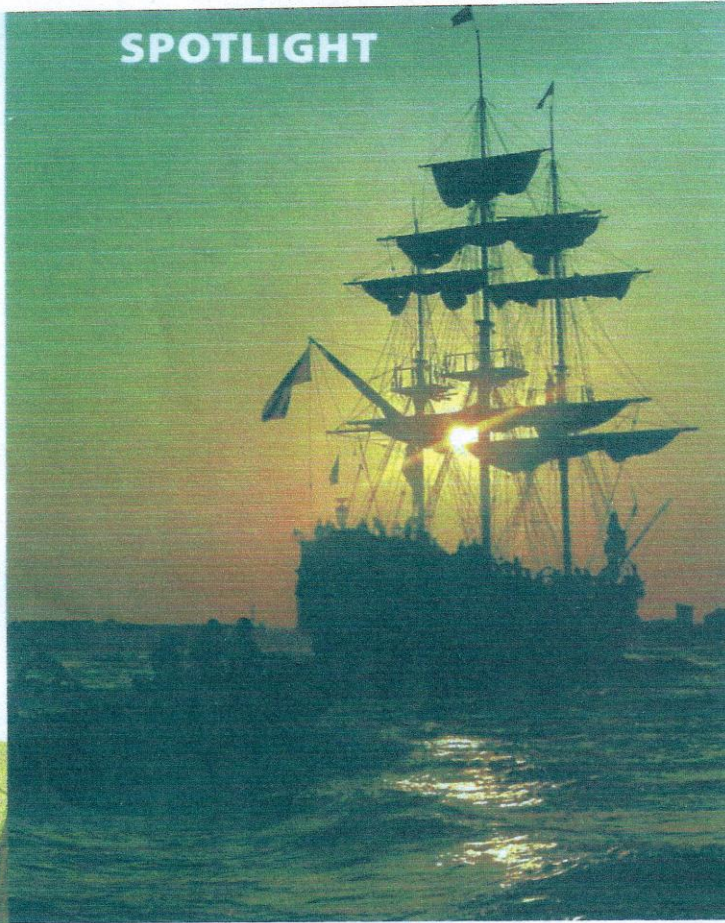
**RUNA KHAN'S STORY BEGAN TEN YEARS AGO WHEN THE BANGLADESHI GIRL GOT MARRIED TO THE FRENCHMAN. THE COUPLE'S INTENSE DESIRE TO RECREATE THE BANGLADESHI BOAT SAW THEM BEGIN A LONG JOURNEY ON THE RIVERS OF THE LAND.**

search for excellence and their love for their task have guided them towards beauty," Runa said.

"This craftsmanship is disappearing as the woodcraft for traditional boats are being replaced by cheaper steel sheets," said Yves Marre who began his career as an airplane pilot. Marre came to Bangladesh from France by boat 12 years ago and got married to a



## SPOTLIGHT



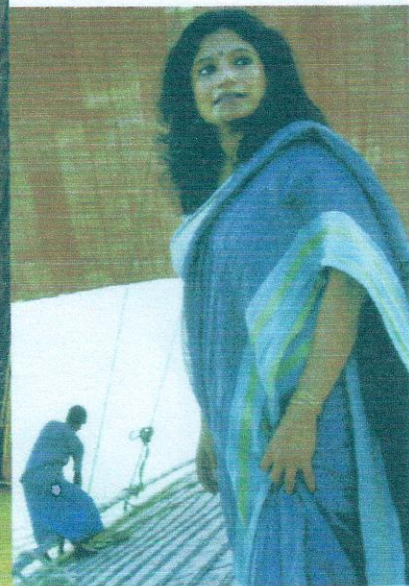
### AS RUNA AND MARRE TRAVELLED ACROSS BANGLADESH, THEY CAME ACROSS RARE WOODEN BOATS OF DIFFERENT TYPES AND DESIGNS

rare wooden boats of different types and designs and the carpenters who had been making boats for generations. "I thought of preserving the waning heritage," Marre said.

Runa and Marre first started searching for carpenters who had their expertise in making wooden boats. "We thought if these few carpenters disappeared, all these boats would never be seen again," Runa said. To ensure that the craft never dies, the couple are hard at work. "In fact we're now working to set up a living museum of traditional boats of Bangladesh at Savar on the outskirts of Dhaka," Runa said. "Anyone visiting the museum can see craftsmen from different parts of the country

making different kinds of boats like dingy, kosha, panshi, khehna, and sampan, and near-extinct types such as ghugi and horonga and others. The two have organised exhibitions on traditional boats of Bengal in Dhaka and Berlin and are planning to organise a big exhibition in Paris next year.

He said the technology being used by the traditional carpenters for joining the planks of the hulls with steel-staples were used in Egypt a few thousand years ago. Runa and Marre plan to have actual boats, a research centre and a library on the craftsmanship of boat-making. Besides, there would be 40 types of traditional wooden boats.



Bangladeshi girl. "It's really shocking that the traditional wooden boats designed beautifully are disappearing with the advent of steel and engine boats. The beauty of the art of making traditional boats of Bangladesh has moved me to save the craft," he said.

Born in Toulouse in France in 1951, Marre said he always dreamt of flying in his childhood. After all, his city is well known as the home of Airbus. That dream saw Marre becoming a pilot at the age of 18. But later, the love for the skies gave way to an intense desire for the vast expanses of water. His first adventure was a voyage by a boat from France to America crossing the Atlantic in 1984.

As Runa and Marre travelled across Bangladesh, they came across