

Ya poyu na bengal'skom ya-zyke... It might read like gibberish in English script but sung aloud, this is the Russian translation of Pratul Mukhopadhyay's ode to Bengali, *Ami Banglay gaan gai*.

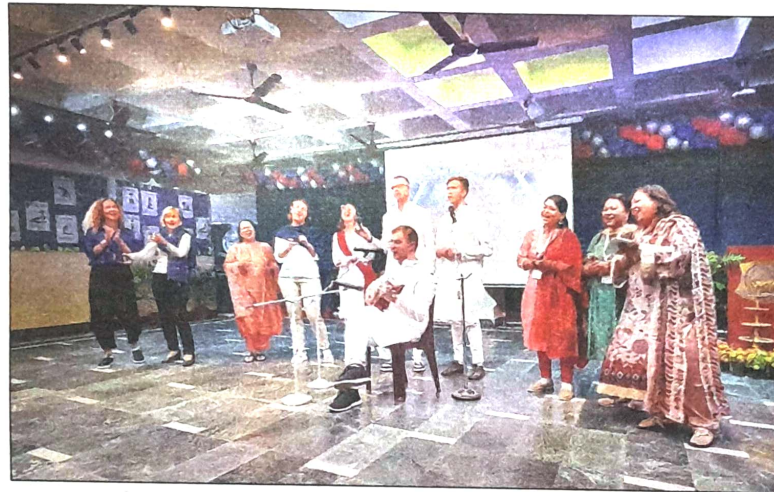
Students from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University) and their Bengali language teacher, Irina Prokofieva, made a pitstop at St. Joan's School earlier this year in course of their whirlwind India tour. And they presented this song before students and teachers of the school, to the accompaniment of a guitar strummed by one of them.

Before that, St. Joan's students presented a tuneful choric medley of ABBA songs, *Chiquitita*, *The winner takes it all*, *Dancing Queen* and ending with *Thank you for the music*. A group of five students also sang a Rabindrasangeet, *Aloker ei jhorna dharay*.

The two groups of students also briefly interacted. "They said they will also visit Puri, Bhubaneswar before returning via Delhi. We asked them to visit the Jagannath temple. Sofia, the girl in the group, said she loved my jacket," said Kaushiki Rakshit, a Class IX student.

"Marco, one of the three boys, asked me if I had any plans to go abroad for higher studies," said Kudrat Singh, from Class XII.

A Russian official accompanying the group told **The Telegraph Salt Lake**: "It is a unique and special tradition created by Professor Prokofieva. These 'study trips' are organised when students, who study Bengali, are in the third year, when they can already read, write and speak some Bengali. And Kolkata is traditionally



Russian students sing *Ami Banglay gaan gai* in their mother tongue as teachers and administrators of St. Joan's School join them in Bengali

on the list of the places the students visit along with Delhi, Agra and Bhubaneswar."

This tour, she explained, "significantly helps students as they finally see the country which they learnt so much about". "So they get another boost of motivation to continue working on their Bengali language skills," she added.

Sofia told **The Telegraph Salt Lake** that of the 52 languages the university teaches, she had narrowed down her choice to Indian languages. "I listened to some words, liked the sound and made my choice," she said.

They study by watching Bengali films and reading books. They also have to study the history of Bangla-

desh.

"*Ami Banglay gaan gai* is our favourite song. Every year, at our university, foreign language students have to present Indian languages and Arabic languages evenings. We chanced upon this song in our first year and fell in love with it. Our teacher helped us with the translation," Sofia said.

On reaching Calcutta, she said, it "felt like paradise". "Finally we could speak in Bengali. It felt like home!" said the girl, whose favourite singer is Anjan Dutt, and favourite author Humayun Ahmed, the Bangladeshi dramatist.

For Andrei, who had visited the Delhi-Agra-Jaipur golden triangle be-



Students of St. Joan's School perform a dance routine with the Russian students in the audience. Pictures by Sudeshna Banerjee

fore as tourist, Calcutta has not been much of a culture shock. "In terms of architecture, there are more old buildings than in Moscow. And more traffic and more people shouting. Moscow is calmer," he smiled. He was enjoying the fruits of his studies in Calcutta. "People understand me. I can practise and improve."

Their teacher, Prokofieva, believes Bengal has among the richest cultures anywhere in the world. The 55-year-old had joined the university as a Ph.D student. "I have visited

Calcutta several times, sometimes alone, sometimes with students," she smiled.

"*Ami onubhab kori ami goto jeebone Bangali chhilam*," said the admirer of Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray, whose favourite novels by each are *Ghare Baire* and *Sonar Kella* respectively.

"Such visits give our students a wonderful opportunity to broaden their horizons," said principal Debjani Ghosh.

Sudeshna Banerjee