

RECOMMENDATIONS

Festival

To commemorate the completion of fifty years of Language Movement, Dhaka Theatre organises a series of programmes including Theatre Festival, Seminar, Village Theater Convention and Reception from March 16 to 22 at Mahila Samiti Auditorium in the city. A two-day seminar on the key notes like Art, Theatre, Poetry and Music will be held on March 21 and 22.

Solo exhibition

A solo art exhibition of Abdus Shakoor is being held at Bengal Art Gallery at Dhanmondi in the city. The exhibition features recent works of the artist who is inclined to pause and look back, to lift the fraying mantle and enquire a willing legacy. The exhibition will remain open for all from 12 p.m. to 8p.m. till March 29, 2002.

First Solo

The first solo art exhibition by Farah Deebea Zaman, a student of East West University is now being held at the university common-room (ground floor), Annex Building, EWU. The exhibition will continue till March 21.

Childrens' Drama Festival

The ongoing 5th National Childrens' Drama Festival comes to an end on March 22 at the Central Public Library Shawkat Osman auditorium with a cultural evening to be presented by child artists of national status. The festival is presenting 48 dramas of juvenile theatre groups from all over the country. In addition to theatrical productions, the festival has so far presented puppet shows, workshops and video shows since inauguration on March 11.

Sculpture exhibition

A weeklong sculpture exhibition titled 'Ghatoker protikriti' by artist Nisar Hossain starts at Gallery 21 in the city from March 25. Sculptor Ferdousi Priyobhashini and painter Abul Barq Alvi will inaugurate the exhibition at 6 p.m. on March 25.

Solo art


A solo exhibition of Ronni Ahmed starts at Alliance Francaise de dhaka art gallery in the city from March 22. Professor Abdus Shakur will inaugurate the exhibition and Andre Raynouard, Director of Alliance Francaise, will be present as special guest. The exhibition remains open for all from March 22 till April 5.

Theatre

The dialectics of tragedy and emotion

*Prachya, a play directed by Nasiruddin Yousuf, captivates the audience at Mahila Shamity auditorium*

AZIZ AMIRUL



Pijush and Shahiduzzaman in a dramatic scene from 'Prachya'

NASIRUDDIN Yousuf, one of the most talented theatre directors of the country, treats *Prachya* or *Orient* as one of his most complicated theatre productions he has directed in his theatre career. *Prachya* was staged by Dhaka Theatre to a large audience at Mahila Shamity auditorium on the evening of March 19.

Set in rural Bengal, *Prachya* is a tale of intense emotion. Selim Al-Deen, the playwright, selects Soifar Chan as the central male character and brings characters like Nolak, Jitu Matobbar to tell a story that brings into focus simple pastoral life as well as complex village politics.

As the story unfolds, a bride is seen seated in her wedding dress about to be carried on a Palki to the groom's home. A considerable portion of the play highlights the journey that starts from the bride's home of Kaljakanda and crosses through murky paths and obstructive waterways of remote Bangladeshi villages over a couple of days and nights to reach the groom's, Soifar Chan, home.

In between the journey, past occurrences, through flashback, show the first meeting of Soifar and Nolak at a village theatre or Bhashan Pala-ar ashore. A dreadful storm disrupts the setting and history shows how through some mean plot of the village head, Soifar was forced to loan for his forthcoming wedding and in the process, had to lose all his paternal belongings by mortgaging them to the sly son of Jitu Matobbar, the village head man.

As the palki journey comes to an end with lots of songs and dance numbers, the couple reaches the home of Soifar. The innocent and sincere husband becomes worried about proper care of the wife. Fortune robs happiness and on the very first night of their wedding the bride receives a deadly snakebite. Here the development seems to be quite symbolic referring to mythical Behula and Lakhindar.

Scores of village con men and witch doctors arrive at the courtyard of the home where Nolak lies numb and cold on the floor. As the story runs to a tragic end, the central male character Soifar expresses his protest and gets into destructive actions against the poisonous cobra that had apparently fanged his wife to death.

Here come a number of similarities in scenes and motives as the audience observe a symbolic resemblance between different characters. The snake, like the ill-motivated Jitu Matabbar and his associates, is a destructive force in lives of simple village peasants. In an earlier scene, Soifar sees the spirit of the dead Matabbar behind a bamboo bush and later on in the closing scenes, faces the deadly cobra at the same spot.

The closing moments show the helpless and startling moods of the grandmother and Soifar as the evil snake leaves for safety using its captivating beauty and influential capacity. Once again, an earlier scene of the drama comes up in the audiences' minds as they recollect a scene where Jitu matobbar, in his deathbed, had in a sly manner kept the enraged Soifar calm through providing false promise about the captured property.

With elements of emotion, love, comedy and tragic consequences, the play is a critical and emotional statement of our rural society.

Anniversary

Commemorating March 26

*A host of cultural events will take place at Chittagong from March 22 to 26, marking the Independence Day*

CULTURE DESK

SHWADHINATA-R Boi Mela-2002, a five-day event of book fair accompanied by a daylong poetry festival, writers' meet, poetry contest, recitation and a number of other cultural events will take place at Chittagong from March 22 to 26, marking the Independence Day.

The 5-daylong festival will be inaugurated at 4 p.m. on March 22 attended by Dr. Alamgir Mohammad Sirajuddin, Dr. Anupam Sen, M.A. Malek and Niloufar Jahur. It will be followed by a cultural programme at 5:30 p.m.

On March 23 there will be a Meet the Writer programme to be inaugurated by Nurul Islam. Chowdhury Jahurul Haque and Mohammad Khaled will be present at special guests.

A cultural event will be presented at 7 p.m. on the evening of March 23.

A poetry festival will be held on March 24 at the premises of Enayet Bazaar Womens' College. The formal inauguration will take place at 4:30 p.m. with the presence of veteran journalist and poet Arun Das Gupta and Chief guest Poet Mohammad Nurul Huda. A poetry recitation event will be held at 5:30 p.m., which will be presided over by Swapan Dutta.

A seminar titled, 'Recent trend of Chittagonian poems', will be held at 6 in the evening. Abul Momen will preside over the meeting while Harishankar Jaladas will present the key-paper. Mohitul Alam, Omar Kaiser and Ejaj Eusufy will be present on the scene as discussants.

An event of recitation and musical soiree will follow at 7:00 p.m.

Professor Maniuzzaman and Ali Imam will inaugurate the proceedings of March 25 at 4:30 p.m. Bipul Barua will preside over a meeting at 5:00 p.m. that will present recitation of rhymes by poets themselves. A seminar will be held at 5:30 p.m. with a key paper from Jasim Mehboob. Begum Mushtari Shafi will preside over the meet and discussants will be Sujan Barua, Bishwanath Chowdhury and Alam Talukdar.

The day's proceedings will come to a close with a cultural ceremony that will commence from 7:00 p.m.

The last day of the festival on March 26 will feature a detailed seminar on the topic 'Publication of war-related books in Chittagong'. The keynote will be presented by Dr. Dilip Dey and to be presided over by Dr. Mahbulul Haque. Subrata Barua will stay as Chief guest while discussion will be done by Dr. Mahfuzur Rahman, Nasiruddin Chowdhury and Dr. Obaidul Karim.

The concluding ceremony will start at 7:30 p.m. to be presided over by Binod Bihari Chowdhury. Lion Rupam Kishore Barua will be present as Chief guest.

Event

And the winner is...

*Pantene and Head & Shoulders 'You Got The Look 2002' to be held today*

NAFID IMRAN AHMED

WHO is the owner of the 'Best Look' of 2002? This is only a matter of time when the 'Best Look' and 'Best Hair' awards of the beauty pageant extravaganza Pantene and Head & Shoulders 'You Got The Look 2002' will be crowned today at the Sheraton Winter Garden.

Beauty pageants in Bangladesh were a rarity even few years back. But not anymore. Events like Pantene and Head & Shoulders 'You Got The Look' has proved it all wrong. Last year's the first Pantene and Head & Shoulders 'You Got The Look 2001' was held in February 2001 and was quite an exciting event that proved that such events are also possible in our country.

The idea of the contest was to promote not just beauty but also the intellect of the participants. The contest was also different in the way that it was open both to men and women; moreover it was open to anyone who wanted to apply. The contest was sponsored by Procter & Gamble Bangladesh.

Alike the previous year 9 men and 9 women will be participating the show this year. These finalist were selected from 400 entries. They have also been put through a three-week training session where they were groomed in the basics of walking, talking and presentation.

This year's show will be hosted by Urfi Ahmed and Kawshiki Tupa Nasser. Awards will be given for the Best Look and Best Hair among both men and women. Apart from the contest local artists will also be invited to perform. The show is an invitation-only and will be telecasted on the local television stations at a later date.

Liberation War Museum turns six
Liberation war museum has drawn up weeklong elaborate programmes to mark its 6 <sup>th</sup> founding anniversary and 31 <sup>st</sup> Independence Day beginning on March 21. Below is the programme schedule.
<b>March 21: at 6:30 p.m. at Osmany Memorial Hall</b> The Concert in Bangladesh – A tribute to George Harrison and Pandit Ravi Shankar. This concert participated by the popular musicians is a remake of the 1971 'The Concert for Bangladesh' held in the Madison Square Garden to raise funds for the refugees of Bangladesh. The concert will be held at the Osmany Memorial Hall with the collaboration of the musician community to raise fund for the museum. Card for this concert is available from the Museum/Astra Club in Gulshan; the Travel House and Cyber Cafe at Dolce Vita in Banani.
<b>March 22: at 10:00 a.m. at Museum's Cafe Theater</b> The 6 <sup>th</sup> anniversary programme of the museum begins with the children's programme. At 5:00 pm eminent cultural researcher Shamsuzzaman Khan will present anniversary speech to be followed by <i>Baul</i> presented by different groups of Bauls from various regions of Bangladesh.
<b>March 23: at 6:30 p.m. at Museum's Cafe Theater</b> Banglar Gaan (Music of Bengal) by Shubir Nandi to be followed by dance performance by Nitrom Dance Troupe under the direction of renowned dancer Tamanna Rahman.
<b>March 24: at 6:30 p.m. Sunday at Museum's Cafe Theater</b> The Chayanaut cultural group will present gongs.
<b>March 25: at 6:30 p.m. Monday at Museum's Cafe Theater</b> Lightning of Candles in remembrance of the martyrs of the dark night of 1971 when Pakistan Army began the massacre of Banglaees. Poetry recitation by leading Poetry Recitation Groups.
<b>March 26: at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday at Museum's Cafe Theater</b> People's song by Protul Mukhopaddya, original singer and lyricist of the well known song 'Ami Banglar Gan Gai. Ami Banglar Gan Gai...'

Heritage

Time travel in Bengal

*New findings at Mahastan are providing valuable clues to archaeologists about Bengal's past*

EMILE CHABAL

**A**MIDST the rolling countryside and paddy fields near Bogra lie the remains of the ancient citadel Mahastan (literally, 'Great Place'). It consists primarily of a fortified, walled enclosure of approximately 5,000 square feet. Around this citadel there are also numerous other ruins and mounds which testify to the existence of an extensive city stretching out for at least 5



Shafiqul Alam is seen in conversation with guests at Mahastan

Dhaka Theatre Utsav			
Date	Time	Drama	
March 21	7:00 p.m.	Mrittyu na hottya	Nandipaati
March 22	7:00 p.m.	Mrittyu na hottya	

miles.

Today, the visitor can see the outline of the old walled fortress and several mounds and monasteries that were all part of the ancient city. Despite the fact that there are now many small settlements and roads which hide the remains, Mahastan is one of the most important sites on the subcontinent.

Given the size of the site it is hardly surprising that its pre-Mauryan history is still unclear. Recent findings have been carbon-dated at 2200 BC and these came only from the top-most layer of excavation; there could be older fragments in the lower layers. However, we do know that it was occupied from the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD by a variety of civilisations. Buddhist and Hindu invaders both helped to expand Mahastan from the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup>-century citadel it was, to the vast city it became.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it came under Muslim control and by the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was being used by Fakir Majnu Shah Mastana Burhana as a base for his raids on the British. Subsequently abandoned, excavations at the site began under the British administration in 1928, during which many of the ancient remains were discovered and documented.

Since the 1920s, work has been conducted in the 1960s and the latest Franco-Bangladeshi project aims to update all the previous findings. It is a monumental task by any standards; to date, only 0.5% of the area of Mahastan has been excavated! Though this new project, started in 1993, can hardly hope to cover every square inch of Mahastan, it will no doubt greatly enrich our understanding of the social history of the periods during which it was occupied.

Moreover, it is hoped that this project will increase awareness of Bangladesh's archaeological heritage and encourage non-specialists to visit Mahastan and other sites like it, such as Bagerhat or Paharpur.

Md. Shafiqul Alam, Regional Director at the Dept. of Archaeology and Field Director of the Mahastan Mission, and his colleague, Md. Abdul Khaleque, Asstt. Director at the Dept. of Archaeology, sounded upbeat about the possibilities. "We could develop a form of 'cultural tourism' here. We have to make Mahastan lively", they suggest.



Ruins with trees

Already, they have made an application to UNESCO for Mahastan and other sites to be covered in the World Heritage scheme and they have requested some form of agreement with Parjatan to develop the guesthouse on the site. Though the latter suggestion has, so far, garnered a lukewarm response, the application to UNESCO is likely to be successful and a great publicity boost. Other suggestions in the pipeline are a web-site and partnerships with BTV and ETV. Through history and archaeology programmes, Mahastan could easily be brought to a wider audience. As Mr. Alam points out, "there is no point having a wonderful site if no-one knows about it."

Of course, it is not only in

tourism that there is huge potential. "Most of the other sites excavated in Bangladesh are religious sites, but this is a secular site. Here we can find out how people actually lived", explains Mr. Alam.

Despite the enormity of this task, the joint Franco-Bangladeshi venture has already produced one hefty report on its findings between



A big, tall mound site

1993 and 1999. In it, many of the questions about the site are answered. For example, it seems the shifting courses of the rivers made Mahastan a less desirable trading location over time and this is one of the reasons it was abandoned.

With the continuing technical assistance and expertise of the French, there is a huge scope for further discoveries of this kind. In addition, this latest project aims to preserve the photos and films of past excavations by using the latest film preservation techniques.



A site of heritage at Mahastan

Although Mahastan lacks the immediate appeal of a grandiose site like Paharpur, it is a much more fertile ground for archaeologists because there is still so much to discover. Mr. Alam described it as "the most promising site in Bangladesh". Unfortunately, Mr. Alam and Mr. Khaleque have worries about how the project will continue to operate in the future.

"It is not so much money that is required but skilled manpower to do the excavations. You cannot just let anybody do the digging. The money is particularly useful in the preserva-

tion stage once the remains have been excavated", clarify the two project co-ordinators.

It is perhaps hardly surprising that there is a shortage of qualified personnel seeing as there is only one university department in Bangladesh dedicated to archaeology at Jahangir Nagar University. Many departments offer archaeology papers as part of history courses but they are not usually specialised enough to allow students to proceed directly onto sites.

As for funding, it is rarely

forthcoming for this type of archaeological task. The French input has been much appreciated but they only provide technical advice. Extra backing would have to come from the central government. Nevertheless, Mr. Alam feels the whole project is moving "in a positive direction".

Certainly, this new project has given much-needed impetus to the site. One hopes that, henceforth, Mahastan gets its fully-deserved place in the list of great archaeological discoveries.