

Amar Ekushey Granthamela '08 Off to a good start

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

THE queue to get in does not go all the way to Timbuktu, no stampede, and thus no resemblance to a sandstorm -- this year's 'Amar Ekushey Granthamela' or 'Boimela' (book fair) as it's popularly known, certainly seems more "appealing", said Trisha, a student of Dhaka University (DU). As the Boimela is held at the Bangla Academy premises, which is right next to the DU campus, the fair occupies a major share of the students' leisure.

The number of stalls is less than last year's arrangement and the crowd does not seem so formidable but the participating publishers seem quite content. Several of them agreed that considering this is the first week of the fair, sales have been pretty impressive. Bangla Academy sources, the organisers, verified the satisfactory book sales.

An avid bookworm has come from Sylhet and is going to stay in



A bird's-eye view of the crowd at the Boimela

PHOTO: STAR



Bookworms browsing new publications

Dhaka this month so that he can visit the 'Boimela' everyday.

New addition: A colour tabloid -- *Boimela Protidin* -- featuring the low-down on the everyday events, interviews, quotes and remarks of writers, poets, educationists, organisers and much more.

The discussions at the 'Boimela' in the afternoon/ evening up until yesterday covered achievements over the last three decades in music, dance, jatra, fine arts and publications. Noted personalities including Tamanna Rahman, Bhaswar Bandyopadhyay, Manzar-e-Hasin Murad, Soovas Dutta, Nisar Hossain, Selina Hossain and others took part in the discussions.

Latest arrivals: *Anuran Golok*, science fiction by Muhammad Zafar Iqbal (published by Bidya Prakash); *Kemon Achho Tumi*,

novel by Imdadul Haque Milan (published by Anya Prakash); *Tasmania Thekey Canberra*, travelogue by Rabeya Khatun (published by Anya Prakash); *Porshi Jodi Amaye Chhuto*, novel by Anisul Haque (published by Kakoli Prokashoni); *Himur Ekanto Shakkhatkar O Onyano*, short stories by Humayun Ahmed (published by Annesha Prokashoni).

Jibon Jey Rokom, memoirs of Ayesha Faiz -- mother of Humayun Ahmed, Muhammad Zafar Iqbal and cartoonist Ahsan Habib -- has triggered interest among readers as the book shares moments from the popular writers' childhood.

Seemingly, 'Boimela' 2008 is off to a good start. Hopefully it will satiate the hopes, desires and aspirations of the readers, authors, publishers and organisers.

Hard-knock life in a world of iron "Ironeaters" screened at Goethe-Institut

KARIM WAHEED

A local saying goes, "Have no fear of the sea, it will bring you fruits." And this is how the people lived their modest lives in Shitolpur, an area on the coast of Chittagong in southern Bangladesh.

Then one day the sea bore an unexpected gift. After a violent storm in 1960, a huge ship was found stuck deep in the sand. Initially the locals did not know what to do with the ship, but eventually they decided to take it apart and salvage the iron. This was the dawn of a new era for this region: the slaughtering of sea-giants brought an end to the tranquil life.

While the denizens of the southern region were blessed with the garbage of civilisation, populace of the north received a boon of the 'Monga' -- the annual famine that occurs in the dry season. Dire shortage of food and money forced many farmers to migrate to Chittagong and work at the ship-breaking yards.

Berlin-based Bangladeshi filmmaker Shaheen Dill-Riaz's documentary *Ironeaters* (Bangla title *Lohakhori*) takes a close look at the lives and working conditions of these ship-breakers. The title of the film hints at the almost superhuman endurance and drive that enables these destitute, desperate people to manually break apart colossal old ships, turning them into sheets of metal.

Press screening of the 85-minute documentary, produced by Lemme Film and Mayalok, was held yesterday at the Goethe-Institut Bangladesh. A press conference followed the screening. Dill-Riaz and Kathrin Lemme, producer of the film, attended the conference.

The feature-length documentary will have a public premier on February 15, as part of the Dhaka Short and Independent Film Festival organised by Bangladesh Short Film Forum.

Ironeaters has already been screened and generated much interest at several international film festivals and has been honoured with the Grand Prix at Le Festival International Du Film D'Environnement (Paris, France) in December 2007, First Prize at the One-World-Award NRW (Köln, Germany) in September 2007 and First Prize at the Film South Asia (Kathmandu, Nepal) in October 2007.

The film reveals a brutal cycle of exploitation. The ship-breaking yards in our third-world country are the graves of run-down, obsolete and most-often toxic chemical carrying ships from the west. The seasonal labourers play hide-and-seek with death everyday, working in inhuman conditions. The product of their labour is used in constructions all over the country. Certain individuals get richer. But lives of the ship-breakers



A scene from Ironeaters

never change. They do not get helmets. Out in the mud, amidst sharp metal objects, they work bare feet. They are surrounded with toxic chemicals and gasses but they get no masks. There is no doctor, no stretcher. Like mules they are subjected to carry big and heavy loads. Like an army of ants, these men bring down 75,000-ton ships -- images of slaves working on pyramids come to mind.

After backbreaking labour, a cable-puller gets around Tk80 (a little over \$1) per day. Exploited by owners and contractors, these workers at times find themselves without the money to return home in North Bengal.

But like Michael Moore, Dill-Riaz does not hammer his opinion in the film. He does not hound the owners or contractors. He lets the camera roll and the apparently "righteous" and "religious" factory owners reveal their "generosity".

Dill-Riaz and his crew filmed exclusively at the PHP yard. According to the filmmaker, "I had requested permission to shoot the film from the Bangladesh Shipbreakers Association (BSBA) and they suggested the location. PHP administration allowed us nearly four months of unrestricted shooting. It was a seven-member crew, with four or five of us on location at a time -- the camera assistant, the loader, the sound recordist and myself. We visited the workers in the north

several times. It was very important to show where the workers came from."

Regarding what inspired him to make this film, Dill-Riaz said, "The place where ships are dismantled is not far from my village home. Access to the yards was strictly forbidden for anyone who didn't work there. But we heard lots of stories about the colossal ships and the serious industrial accidents. My decision to make a documentary on ship-breakers was triggered by Brazilian photographer Sebastiao Salgado's remarkable photos on the subject. I started researching in 2001."

The film was shot between January and May 2005. The filmmaker and his crew lived with the workers and filmed them for a total of five months. *Ironeaters* was edited in Berlin by Andreas Zitzmann and post-production was done in Hamburg.

Though the film shows the protagonists returning home, jaded and disconsolate, and swearing that they would never go back to the ship-breaking yards, they cannot escape the system. Kholil and Gadu again recruit desperate young men from their village. Djabar still dreams of starting his own little business in between pulling cable. Osman still works as a gas-cutter and relies on his luck to avoid fatal accidents.

As one worker puts it, "If you're really hungry, you'd be able to eat anything, even if it's iron..."

Fine arts and handicrafts fair in Mymensingh

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

With a view to provide a platform for the artists of the greater Mymensingh region, a 15-day Fine Arts and Handicrafts fair has begun at Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Shangrahoshala (Art gallery) located at the Shaheb Quarter Park in the district town. The fair was inaugurated on February 1.

The fair has been organised under the banner of Greater Mymensingh Fine Arts Coordination Forum. A total of 125 paintings by 117 artists are on display at the fair.

The event also includes discussions, cultural shows, *baul* songs and screenings of documentary films. A 13-member convener committee was formed with artistes Hossain Mohammed Faruq and Md. Farhad Hossain Tarafder, acting Principal of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Fine Arts Institute in Mymensingh town, as convener and joint-convener respectively.

Chief guest Dr. M Shamsur Rahman, Vice-chancellor of Jatiya Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam Biswabidyalay, inaugurated the fair. Later, a discussion was held with artist Mir Md. Rezaul Karim in the chair. Among others, artists

Alok Roy and Amirul Islam attended the event as special guests.

The speakers said that such a fair outside Dhaka is a positive sign for the artistes who are not Dhaka-based, as well as for the art enthusiasts all over the country.

Noted artistes from the Mymensingh region -- Biren Shome, Abdul Qader Chakder,

Alokes Ghosh, Rezaul Karim, Retendra Sharma, Devashish Pal, Sujon Dey, Kalam Akhand, Amirul Islam, Saidul Islam, Enamul Hoque and Shahjahan Ahmed Bikash were present at the inaugural session of the fair.

A total of 20 stalls have been set up at the fair. The students of Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Fine Arts Institute are working as volunteers at the fair.



Visitors at the fair

PHOTO: STAR

Samay Natya Utsab begins



Actors of Dhaka Theatre in Nimojon

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

With the slogan 'Shubho Karno Pathay Dhoro Nirbhoye Gaan' a nine-day theatre festival begins today at the Experimental Theatre Stage, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy. The festival marks the 30th anniversary of theatre troupe Samay Sanskritik Goshthi.

Six Dhaka based troupes: Dhaka Theatre, Aranyak Natya Dal, Mahakal Natya Sampradaya, Theatre, Loko Natya Dal and Samay Sanskritik Goshthi will stage *Nimojon*, *Mayur Shinghashon*, *Shikhondi Katha*, *Meraj Fakirer Maa*, *Kanjush* and *Bhager Manush* respectively. Two troupes from India -- Anik and Hritik -- will stage three plays. Anik will stage *Punorjibon* and Hritik will stage *Deshdrohi* and *Meghoboti* at the festival.

Convener of the festival

Aktaruzzaman said, "On the occasion of our 30th anniversary, we hope to contribute more to the contemporary Bangladeshi theatre. We will stage our new production shortly."

The festival is dedicated to the memory of the recently deceased dramatist Selim Al Deen. On the opening day Dhaka Theatre will stage *Nimojon*. Selim Al Deen's play *Nimojon* does not follow any conventional structure; neither does it develop any particular storyline. Through narratives, the play presents a chronological look at genocides that have taken place around the world. According to the play, the history of civilisation and genocides are interwoven. And the repetition of these brutal incidents has brought down humans from the superior position.

"Monpura": An uncomplicated love story in an idyllic setting

JAMIL MAHMUD

Popular TV play-maker Giasuddin Selim's debut feature film *Monpura* is set to be released in April. In an interview with *The Daily Star*, Selim talked about the film, his experience and aspirations.

According to the filmmaker, shooting and dubbing for the film have already been done and at present they are working on the music. Popular musician Arnob has done the background scores. Rest of the production is expected to be completed within a month.

Monpura is an uncomplicated love story. The protagonist of the film, Shonai, is sent to an island called 'Monpura' against his will. Frustrated with unbearable solitude, Shonai comes across a boatman's daughter, Pori. The young man falls for the belle at first sight. Eventually a relationship blossoms. But does every relationship find its ultimate destination?

Chanchal Chowdhury and newcomer Farhana Mili play the lead roles. Veteran actor Mamunur Rashid and Fazlur Rahman Babu play other important roles.

"Love stories will never lose their appeal, hence for my debut film I wanted to depict one," said Selim.

Machhanga Production has produced the film along with Selim

and his associates.

A highlight of the film is its music. Four songs in the film have been rendered by Moimaj, Krishnokoli, Chandana Majumder and actor Fazlur Rahman Babu.

Most of the shooting was done in Dhunat, Bogra. Other locations in Kushtia and Dhaka were used as well. Selim reminisced several incidents that occurred while shooting the film.

Usually outdoor shooting is not done in the rainy season. But as my story demands it, I had to shoot

several outdoor sequences in the pouring rain. Once we even had to face the Nor'wester.

Shooting in Dhunat was challenging, as we had to work for sixteen days at a stretch.

The filmmaker has great hopes for a revival of the Bangladeshi cinema. He pointed out that our cinema had directors like Zahir Raihan and Khan Ataur Rahman. Selim wants to contribute to the process of making better Bangla films again.



Chanchal Chowdhury and Farhana Mili in Monpura

Bonya playbacks for Rituporno's upcoming film



Rezwana Chowdhury Bonya

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Noted Tagore singer Rezwana Chowdhury Bonya recently did playback for Indian filmmaker Rituporno Ghosh's upcoming Bengali film *Shob Chorito Kalponik*. Bonya also makes a brief appearance on screen -- singing the song, *Eporobashey robe ke*.

The film features a memorial programme held for a recently deceased poet. The protagonist of the film is played by popular Bollywood actor Prasenjit. Bollywood star Bipasha Basu will don the role of the deceased poet's wife. Poet Joy Goswami will also be seen doing a cameo.

Rezwana Chowdhury Bonya is quite popular in West Bengal. She frequently performs in programmes for several Bengali TV channels in India. Every year, different audio companies there release her albums as well.

"When Rituporno Ghosh asked me if I would sing for his film, I thought to myself, why not? It was a new experience for me, and I quite enjoyed it," said Bonya.

"In Bangladesh, I did playback for the film *Shasti*, directed by Chashi Nazrul Islam," the artiste added.

Are more playbacks on the cards? "If it is a Tagore song, I might consider it," Bonya smilingly answered.

Voicing against human trafficking Premier of radio jingles by Close Up 1 star Beauty

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

The Daywalka Foundation (TDF), a US-based human rights organisation that addresses human trafficking, safe migration and gender-based violence through culturally grounded solutions, recently produced

three radio jingles featuring the *Close Up 1* star Beauty. The singer is now the goodwill ambassador of TDF's public awareness campaign in Bangladesh.

The premier of the jingles was held recently. Among others, noted singer Fahmida Nabi; actress Tisha; Rosy Hossain, the

regional Director of TDF; Radab Fatima, regional representative of International Organisation for Migration and Md. Alamgir, deputy secretary to the Home Ministry were present at the event. Radio Today is airing the jingles everyday that carry messages against human trafficking.

Radab Fatima said, "TDF wants to engage the young generation in preventing human trafficking, since the teenagers often become victims of such crimes and are motivated or misguided very easily. But when they shoulder responsibilities or take part in campaigns, it always draws more attention from the young generation."

In her speech, Fahmida Nabi said that awareness is the best means to prevent human trafficking and this campaign can become a milestone in generating awareness. The guests expressed their contentment to be a part of the campaign.

Beauty said, "I haven't been a part of a public awareness campaign prior to this. I appreciate this opportunity and I will try my best to disseminate messages against human trafficking through my music."



Beauty

No smoking zone for Bollywood actors

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Bollywood superstars Amitabh Bachchan and Shahrukh Khan find themselves in the midst of a debate about smoking rekindled by Indian Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss who asked the duo to stop puffing away on screen.

Ramadoss said in an interview to a television news channel recently that "we have statistics to show that 52 percent of children have their first puff because of movie celebrities" and appealed to the two actors to stub out their smoke on screen lest their huge young fan following is inspired to pick up the habit.

Khan however is not impressed by Ramadoss' appeal saying actors should not be asked to curb "creative liberties". The actor, however, agreed with the Health Minister over an alarming rise in the number of youths taking to smoking.

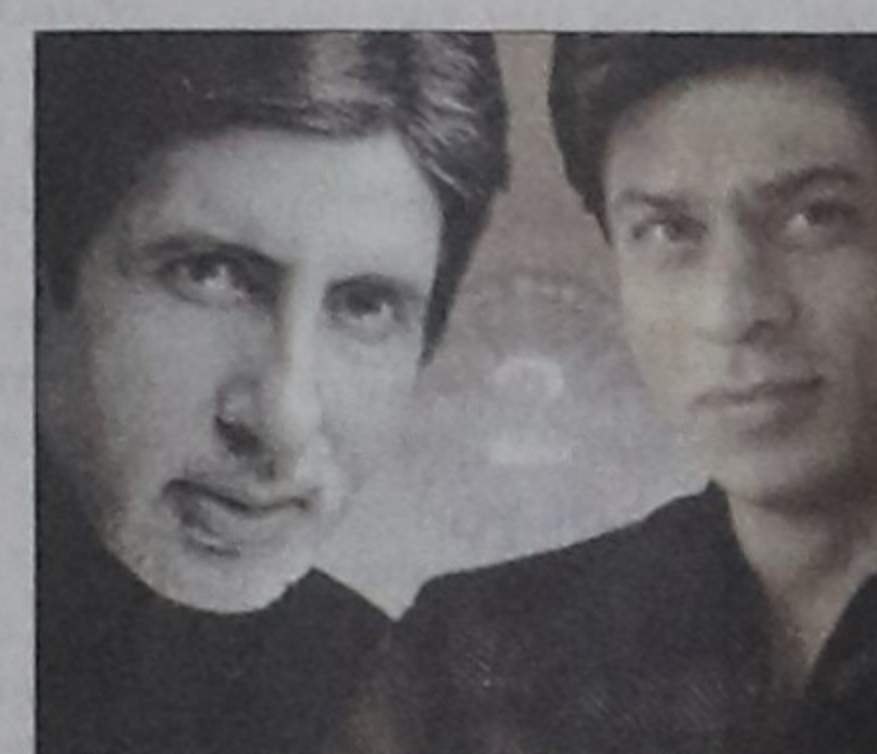
Ramadoss had said that Khan should not have smoked in the stand while watching a cricket match in Mumbai.

The Health Minister has helped a number of laws banning smoking in public places and a government move to introduce pictorial warnings about ill-effects of smoking has run into legal wrangling with tobacco companies fighting to keep it off cigarette packets.

Both Khan and Bachchan have earned the ire of anti-smoking outfits in the past for puffing on screen and in public.

In October last year, the National Organisation for Tobacco Eradication had slapped a legal notice on Khan asking him to explain his actions after he was seen smoking at a cricket match and at a seminar.

Khan said the cricket stadium where he was photographed smoking is a private club and there was no "No Smoking" sign in that area.



Amitabh Bachchan and Shahrukh Khan