

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Photography Exhibition

Title: Nodi o Jibon: Life in Island Chars

Photographer: Sayed Badrul Karim

Venue: Bengal Gallery, House 275/F, Road 27 (Old), Dhanmondi

Date: April 12-21

Time: 12pm-8pm

Group Exhibition of Crafts

Medium: Woodcarving, Batik and Appliqué

Venue: Zainul Gallery 11, Institute of Fine Arts, DU

Date: April 17-23

Time: 11am-7:00 pm

Film Screening

Title: 2nd Int'l Film Week '08

Organiser: Jahangirnagar Students' Film Society (JSFS)

Venue: Central Auditorium, JU April 21

3:00 pm Paradise Now (Palestine)

5:30 pm Il Postino (Italy)

6:30 pm Fight Club (USA)

Int'l Inter University Short Film Festival

Organiser: DUPS

Venue: Goethe-Institut Bangladesh, H 10, R 9, Dhanmondi

Date: April 21-23

Time: 4pm onwards

Making do with little on the shoals

Contemplating "Bangaliaana"

Photos of char dwellers by Sayed Badrul Karim



Sayed Badrul Karim's photos highlight life on chars



FAYZA HAQ

"It may not be anything to rave about from the technical point of view but as a theme it is something to treasure," says Sayed Badrul Karim about his photographs on display at the exhibition "Nodi o Jibon". The exhibition is currently on at the Bengal Gallery.

The photographer has dealt with the various aspects of life on "chars" (river islands) and how the island dwellers constantly face adversities.

"These people," Karim says, "cannot live on fish alone and the river is not always teeming with fish. Sometimes there is not enough water in the rivers. Their lives are not stable, as they often leave their homes and move on to fresh land when the waves come marauding. I have photographed them for a year and four months at a stretch, staying with them for five to eight days at a time."

"I have not focused so much on the trials and tribulations of the people as they struggle despite all obstacles," he says. "They press on ahead and smile through their days."

Some of the chars, says Karim, are disconnected from the mainland for more than half a year and these are called "island chars".

"These are highly unstable landscapes that change frequently. These island chars are extremely vulnerable to erosion and flood," he says. A piece of land seen today may disappear tomorrow. The physical attributes of the island chars dictate the lives of people living there. But the vulnerability is not the only aspect of life there. And it is this indomitable spirit that has been highlighted in Karim's photographs.

In one photograph one sees homes on the verge of destruction by the river. The people have moved out and all that is left on the island is a cloth-hanger, which is yet to be removed. Further away banana trees, the sky and water are visible.

Another picture shows Char Deonai. Everything has been removed except some bottles hanging from the corrugated tin roof, supported by bamboo poles. In the distance are weeds and broken bamboos from empty houses. Farmers holding on to large rats and snakes, which they have killed before they can begin life again is on focus in another photo.

"Children in the char areas are much more deprived than their mainland counterparts," says Karim. They lack proper diet, education, and carefree childhood. Yet they are seen making balls and other toys from tree branches and shells. The contented children with their make do toys are caught in the frame, with their beaming faces.

The exhibition with its 50 photographs ends today.



ILLUSTRATION: TONMOY

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK

This was a sea of white and red. Aromatic leis swaying to soft melody. From a distance a jubilant, roaring crowd -- red and white mingling with bursts of colour, jeans and sunglasses -- rocking to the beat of the *dhol*. Further out, swarms of people oblivious to the beat, eyeing the stands of *pitha* and *panta bhat* hungrily. And still further away -- far from the security stands and a bit difficult to spot -- small groups of people huddled together, fists shaking, oblivious to all else, and clearly venting their angst over something or the other.

The scene is so typical of Pahela Baishakh, homogeneity melting into variety...I heard a friend tout it as "Bangaliaana". What is this Bangaliaana?

One of the earliest definitions was quite simple -- "Poetry and politics" -- that's what defines Bengalis. In a way that's not entirely untrue. This region had produced creative geniuses and visionaries. Nazrul's fiery words came to inspire rebellion as much as Tagore's renunciation of the Knighthood. Though brutally tortured in jail, Mukunda Das did

not refrain from generating his anti-Raj compositions. During the Swadeshi Movement in 1905, Dwijendralal Roy started composing patriotic songs rather than the witty ones he became known for.

Songs aired on the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra during the Liberation War and on Bangladesh Betar in the post-war years, saw an inspiring level of patriotism and fine demonstrations of poetry. Some point out that in the last two decades the leading politicians of our country -- who are adept at mobilising the masses with their powerful speeches -- had demonstrated their artistic (poetry and singing) skills on TV. This year the audience surely missed those "heartfelt" performances.

Then again some old sayings such as, "Baro mashey tero parbon", "Machhey bhathey Bangalee" or "Dudhey bhathey Bangalee" highlight the festivity and food in the typical Bengali lifestyle. Apparently there's a saying for each type of food -- from main course to desserts! Case in point: Jogindranath Sarkar's popular rhyme --

*Daad khani chal mushurer daal,
Duti paka bel,
Shorishar tel,*

Chini pata doi, dim bhora koi...

And who can argue this gastronomic obsession of the Bengalis? As a national daily ran the news that in Dhaka city alone 40,000 kgs of sweets and 20,000 kgs of *doi* (sweet yoghurt) were sold on Pahela Baishakh this year.

Take any narrow Old Dhaka *gali* (alley), any time of the day, and a foodie will find scrumptious *alu puri*, *daal puri*, *paratha*, *gilapi*, *beguni* and *bora* sizzling in the oil, next to a plethora of spicy curries, accompanied by mounds of desserts ranging from *Rasgolla*, *Lalmohon*, *Sandesh*, *Mohonbhog* and so much more.

Bengali hospitality? Second to none! How else can one explain the British staying back for nearly two centuries? Jokes aside, the devotion Bengalis have towards entertaining guests is legendary. The smallest gathering turns into a feast. Treating guests to just a cup of tea is unheard of (nothing but a full-scale banquet will do). Of course sometimes we take advantage of it too, visiting good hosts without warnings (during dinner), squeezing into wedding invitation lists...

Romanticism? For sure! Who came up with tear jerking love

stories like *Deydas* and *Parineeta*? On the flip side of romanticism comes absentmindedness, and unbridled emotion -- emotion that often leads to tiffs over triviality, or *obhiman* for eternity!

Laid back, perhaps. Who doesn't enjoy the siesta, or the record number of national holidays? Tagore's words have an alarming ring of truth in this regard --

*Toilo dhala snighdho tonu
Nidra roshay bhora
Mathaye khato bohorey boro
Bangalee shontan
Kobiguru simultaneously*

*reproaches --
Shath koti shontanerey hey
Bongo jononi,
Rekhecho Bangalee korey,
manush koroni...*

Easy going, perhaps. Pushovers? Never! As history is the witness, no nation on earth has sacrificed lives to secure the right to speak its own language. Very few nations have confronted and survived repeated adversities in the forms of war and natural calamities.

So what is Bangaliaana? A combination of all of the above and more. Who knows? But it feels great to be part of it -- a vibrant culture that embraces one and all.

"Close Up 1" audition in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Rajshahi

The two-day regional audition round of the talent hunt *Close Up 1: Tomakei Khujchhey Bangladesh* ended in Rajshahi city last Thursday.

Some 16 participants received the much coveted "yes card" that will enable them to compete in the selection round -- to be held in Dhaka.

Around 3000 aspiring young artistes registered for the audition round in Rajshahi region while around 2020 took part.

Twelve judges -- Anup Bhattacharya, Jalal Ahmed, Shujeo Shyam, Mohammad Shahnewaz, Anisur Rahman Tanu, Asit Dey, Syed Hasan Tipu, Sujit Mustafa, M Zahid Hossain, Selim Ashraf, Anup Barua and Bappi -- evaluated the contend-



Aspiring singers wait for their turn at the Rajshahi audition

ers' performances.

Those who received the "yes cards" include -- Farhana Yasmin of Naogaon district; Noor-e Jannat of Pabna; Moshir Rahman of Rajshahi; Shantana Mondol of Kusia; Apurba Sarker,

Tahmina Parvin and Ananya Ahmed of Sirajganj; Jalil Nahar of Nilphamari; Abdur Rahman of Chapainawabganj and Mukul Roy of Narail.

The auditions will be aired soon on ntv.



Ankur Cultural Academy recently celebrated its 12th anniversary along with the Bengali New Year, says a press release. A cultural programme was arranged on this occasion at the Dhaka Kalyanpur Girls' School and College premises. Former and current students of the academy participated at the programme.

150th episode of "Mahanagar" tonight

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

The 150th episode of popular drama serial *Mahanagar* will be aired tonight on Banglavisat at 8:25 pm. The serial is written by Ferdaus Hasan and jointly directed by Sajjad Sumon and Ferdaus Hasan.

The serial revolves around the affluent family of Anfar Miah from Old Dhaka. Anfar Miah has been a successful businessman. His grandson Raj is troubled by the

gradual disintegration of the heritage and culture. He learns about his family history from his uncle Akhrot Miah. The serial depicts the bonding and ups and downs that the family has to endure together.

The cast includes Khairul Alam Sabuj, Afroza Banu, Sumaiya Shimu, Apurbo, Arman Parvez Murad, Sharmin Shila, Probal, Mahmud Sajjad, Lina Ahmed, Lutfur Rahman George, Rafiqullah Selim, Mahmudul Islam Mithu, Alif, Nova, Sanjay, Hridi, Usama, Sohan Khan and Shormi.



Apurbo (left) and Sumaiya Shimu in *Mahanagar*

Brett Lee: Crossing boundaries between cricket and Bollywood

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Australian fast bowler Brett Lee can easily consider life in Bollywood after retirement from cricket.

In fact, Lee has already made the entry into Hindi film by appearing in ad filmmaker Ajitpal Mangat's directorial debut *Victory*, a feature film, which tells the story of a small town boy rising to stardom in cricket.

Lee is among a host of other cricketers from Australia, England, South Africa and India who have been shot in *Victory*, which stars newcomer Harman Baweja and actress Amrita Rao.

Ajitpal, who was here recently for the shooting of the film along with Lee, told media persons that he is also trying to persuade the Australian player to sing a song that will be used in title track.

Lee says he has a "full-fledged" role as a player who is in a team rival of Harman's side. In some sequences, Lee is shown reflecting the aggressiveness and sledging so typical of an Australian cricketer.

Among the cricketers playing "vital roles" in *Victory* are Lee, his compatriot cricketer Brad Hogg and Indian medium pacer R.P. Singh, the director says.

Some of the cricketing sequences involving Lee and other cricketers were shot under floodlight at the Swai Mansingh Stadium in the Pink City Jaipur recently.

Ajitpal says while he did not have to tell Lee much about acting in the movie, the other cricketers had to be guided a little. The reason, the director adds, is that Lee has already braced himself for Bollywood.

Singing for *Victory* should not be much of a problem for Lee, himself a guitarist, who has already lent his voice in an album with legendary Indian singer Asha Bhonsle. In fact, music is one of the major reasons for his love for Bollywood whose films are replete with songs.

Superstar Amitabh Bachchan is Lee's favourite actor in Bollywood and actress is Preity Zinta who owns the Mohali team in the Indian Premier League



Brett Lee

Twenty20 competition.

Lee is very impressed by his meeting with Amitabh whom he describes as a "humble and down-to-earth man".

When in Australia, Lee says he keeps surfing Indian television channels waiting for a chance to watch Bollywood films but does not remember their titles.

Asked if he is learning Hindi to act in Bollywood, Lee flashes a broad smile and replies "thora thora".