

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Film Screening

Yasujiro Ozu retrospective
Organiser: Bangladesh Short Film Forum and Centre for Asian Art and Culture
Venue: Bangladesh Film Centre, Aziz Co-operative Super Market, Shahbag
Date: August 24-28
August 25
"Late Spring" at 4pm and "Early Summer" at 6pm



Solo Rabindra Sangeet Evening

Artist: Md. Anisur Rahman
Venue: National Theatre Stage, BSA
Date: August 28
Time: 7pm



Solo Exhibition

Title: The Intimate World of Colour
Artist: Hamiduzzaman Khan
Venue: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh Gallery of Fine Art, Nimtoli, Ramna
Date: August 23-September 9
Time: 12pm-8pm



Friendship Art Exhibition

Organiser: Chhobir Haat, Facebook
Venue: Drik Gallery, H 58, Rd 15A (new), Dhanmondi
Date: August 22-26
Time: 3pm-8pm



Indigenous culture needs a shot in the arm

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is home to 11 ethnic communities, each with a varied and amazing culture. Here one comes across the Chakma, Marma, Tangchangya, Pankhua, Tripura, Lusai, Bom, Mro, Khumi, Khyang and Chak.

However, despite their cultural wealth, the communities lag behind socially, politically, economically and on the development front. Indigenous cultural activists lament the lack of government initiatives to ameliorate their lot and emphasise the need to preserve their cultural heritage, lifestyles and customs.

On paper, the government is doing its bit on this front: It established the Tribal Culture Institute (TCI) in two hill districts in Rangamati and Bandarban simultaneously in 1978. The prime goal of these institutions is the preservation and development of ethnic culture.

In reality, the Rangamati TCI has proved a toothless tiger due to insufficient funds, shortage of staff, equipment and resources. The funds of TCI are mostly channelled into organising cultural functions geared to ministers, MPs and secretaries, allege cultural activists.

Moreover, the government is yet

to set up such an institution in Khagrachhari, a long standing demand of the indigenous people. Unfortunately, none of the past successive political governments paid heed to their demand. Neither do they have any assurances from the current caretaker government on the issue.

Even the existing cultural institutes have not played a positive role in the practice, preservation and development of the indigenous peoples, it is alleged.

Clearly there are lopsided priorities at work here: while the government at present allocates Taka 17 lakhs annually through the Cultural Affairs Ministry, one-third of the amount is spent on management. And the rest is spent in holding diverse cultural programmes, TCI sources said.

"We can't take more effective steps to develop and preserve ethnic culture due to fund constraints. We could make documentary films and dramas etc if the government allocated sufficient funds," said Runel Chakma, assistant director of TCI, Rangamati.

"It's very difficult as well as expensive to organise cultural functions and motivate people to preserve and promote their unique cultures. At the upazila level, inaccessibility is an obstacle and huge funds are needed,"



added Runel. He also observed that local cultural organisations do not get the chance to participate in national cultural programmes in Dhaka due to deliberate oversight by the higher authority.

There are only 31 staff members, including a director, an assistant director, a research officer and a cultural officer. Of them 25 are regular and six irregular employees, TCI sources said.

Teaching of songs, dances and painting under a 15-day short term training programme are the regular activities of the institute. So far, Rangamati TCI has published 50 books, audio-video-CDs based on

ethnic culture. Alongside these, it has organised film festivals, art and photography exhibitions.

Apart from these activities, cultural teams from TCI have been to India, Japan, Turkey and Nepal to participate in various cultural events. Multilingual training has been provided to some 440 primary school teachers in Rangamati and Khagrachhari, TCI sources said.

Making of video-CDs of Radhamon-Dhonpudi, a 100 year old legendary love story of the Chakma community has already been completed and very soon it will be in the market, TCI sources



A rare collection of traditional ornaments (R) and other items used by the ethnic communities on display at the museum.

PHOTO: STAR

said.

TCI also organises cultural functions in honour of government higher ups when they visit Rangamati.

Jhimit Jhimit Chakma, indigenous cultural activist and president of Jum Aesthetic Council

(JAC), an indigenous cultural organisation in CHT, blamed the officials of TCI for mismanagement. He said that the authorities of TCI only taught Bengali songs and dances, not indigenous songs, dances and music.

A magazine based on indige-

nous cultures used to be published under the auspices of TCI about 15 years back but now it's stopped, Jhimit lamented.

He also expressed doubts about the proper utilisation of allocated government funds. He also demanded the inclusion of the

TCIs under CHT affairs ministry outside the jurisdiction of the Cultural Affairs Ministry.

An indigenous museum was built at a cost of Taka 5 crores in Rangamati during the past four-party government to preserve and enhance indigenous cultural activities in CHT. The museum was inaugurated on March 13, 2003. The museum is a virtual treasure trove of indigenous artefacts such as ornaments, attire, musical instruments, dice sets, flutes, daily household items and spinning wheels. A visitor to this museum never ceases to be amazed by the rare display.

Meanwhile, ambassadors from different countries and the resident representatives of various UN organisations have visited the TCI Museum and commented on the dazzling craftsmanship of the indigenous communities.

When contacted, Sugata Chakma, director of Rangamati TCI, said a project proposal had been sent for setting up a "Tribal Music Training Centre cum Artists Hostel." The project now awaits clearance from the Planning Ministry. "We will immediately embark on training programmes to preserve ethnic culture, particularly those facets that are on the verge of extinction," he added.



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