

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Group Exhibition of Masks
 Title: Mukh O Mukhosh-2
 Venue: Galleri Kaya
 Date: January 16-25
 Time: 11am-8pm



Solo Ceramic Art Exhibition
 Title: Dissolved Past and Present
 Artist: Debashish Pal
 Venue: Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts, 275/F, Rd 27 (old), Dhanmondi
 Date: January 17-26
 Time: 12pm-8pm



Group Art Exhibition
 Artists: Mainul, Mehedi, Babu, Safin & Tonal
 Venue: Shilpakala Art Gallery, H-26, R-3, Dhanmondi
 Date: January 20-28
 Time: 10am-1pm and 5-8pm



2nd Children's Film Festival '09
 Organiser: Children's Film Society Bangladesh
 Venue: Shawkat Osman Auditorium, Central Public Library, Shahbag
 Date: January 24-30
 Time: 11am onwards



Call to end the culture of blacklisting and political manipulation

Information Minister meets with leading cultural personalities

KARIM WAHEED

Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad met with the leading cultural personalities at the conference room, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (BSA) yesterday morning. The objective was to get introduced to artists and cultural activists from all sections. Artists, in turn, had an opportunity to place their demands and grievances for the minister's consideration.

Bhuiyan Shafiqul Islam, director general of BSA, chaired the conference. Md. Sharful Alam, secretary to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, also attended the meeting.

Nasiruddin Yousuff, president of Sammito Sanskritik Jote, said, "This conference is way too big to address specific issues related to different areas of our cultural arena. We hope the Information Minister would meet with all major organisations, hear each of them out and consider their demands."

Yousuff briefly mentioned some major points, including initiation of a democratic format for running national establishments like BSA, Shishu Academy and so on (at present only Bangla Academy follows a democratic structure) and generating more funds for cultural activities on national level.

Ramendu Majumder, president of IIT, suggested that BSA should be led by a leading cultural figure, and not some random individual selected by a government in office.

"Additional funds should be allocated for the maintenance of BSA," Majumder added. He also pointed out



Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad speaks at the conference. Next to him (from left) are Bhuiyan Shafiqul Islam, Nasiruddin Yousuff and Mamunur Rashid.



An enraged Sadi Mohammad voices his grievances. (From left) Shibli Muhammad, Syed Abdul Hadi and Ferdausi Rahman are also seen in the photo.

that a vital aspect like cultural exchange has mostly been ignored over the last few years. "Renowned artistes from overseas are often barred from performing in Bangladesh. The current government should take this issue into account," Majumder said. Noted artist Qayyum

Chowdhury said that the Asian Art Biennale held in Bangladesh has become an internationally recognised festival. However, BSA doesn't have adequate space to display all artworks by artists from over 30 countries. "Government should seriously consider resuming

the extension of National Art Gallery at BSA," Chowdhury said. He also stressed the need for state-backed promotion of Bangladeshi artists overseas. Dancers Laila Hassan and Shibli Mohammad vented their frustrations and resentment when speaking on the rampant practice of 'blacklist-

ing' artistes for their respective political persuasions. Shibli said, "I'd been black-listed and couldn't perform on BTV for years. Certain former ministers and high-ups are being prosecuted for corruption; in the same way, legal actions should also be taken against officials at BTV, Bangladesh Betar (radio) and BSA who actively participated in the practice of blacklisting talented singers, dancers and actors."

Milon Kanti Dey of 'Jatra Shilpo Unnayan Parishad' articulated how the once-thriving 'jatra' has been gradually turned into a dying art form. "I'd like to acknowledge the initiatives by Ministry of Cultural Affairs under the caretaker government to promote this neglected art form through a 'jatra' festival. However, the overall situation is far from acceptable. When we make written requests to hold 'jatra' performances, law enforcement officials flat out refuse us," said Milon.

Actress and activist Tarana Halim urged the government to discourage and put an end to the trend of political manipulation in the cultural arena. Amidst rounds of applause, she said, "Politicisation of every state-run establishment has left our artistes divided -- crippling cultural practices. Tendencies like sycophancy and overzealous gloating of political manipulation should be shunned. A performer or an artist should be appreciated for his/her creative excellence and not judged for respective political persuasions. Artistes should always be politically aware, but politics must never overrun our cultural convictions."

Bhawaiya songs at Shilpakala Solo performance by Shafiu Alam Raja



PHOTO COURTESY: SAIKAT MOJUMDER

Shafiu Alam Raja performs Bhawaiya songs at Shilpakala Academy.

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy organised a solo musical soiree featuring Bhawaiya singer Shafiu Alam Raja. The programme was held at National Music and Dance Centre on January 19.

Director, Music and Dance Department; Sunil Chandra Das delivered the welcome speech. Renowned Bhawaiya singer and researcher, Nurul Islam Zahid was the main discussant while noted cultural personality Nasiruddin Yousuff was present as chief guest. Director General, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy; Bhuiyan Shafiqul Islam presided over the programme.

Sunil Chandra Das said, "Bhawaiya is derived from Baav (thought). Thought and contemplation are the key factors in this genre of music. Music symbolises peace and love.

This music represents spirituality and serenity. Unfortunately this branch of music is fast losing its popularity."

Nurul Islam Zahid said, "Bhawaiya comes from Bao or Baav. The music is mostly popular in the northern region of our country and some parts of India."

After the discussion, Shafiu Alam Raja entranced the audience with his popular songs such as "Phande poria boga kandere", "Tista parer konna tumi ha", "O mor kalare kala", "O ki Gharial bhai", "Tui kene dakilu nisha raiterey and more. The programme attracted many renowned singers, poets, musicians and cultural activists.

Shafiu Alam Raja was born in Chilmari, Kurigram district. His singing talent surfaced in his childhood. He was trained by Ustad Nurul Islam Zahid. He is an enlisted singer of Bangladesh Television and Radio and has participated in musical programmes abroad.

Pitha Utshab Delectable delights



PHOTO: STAR

Mouth-watering pithas at the festival in Faridpur. A tiny tot dances at the cultural show. Enthusiastic visitors throng the fair.

REZAUL KARIM, Faridpur

A two-day long Pitha Utshab (cake festival) and cultural programme was held in Faridpur recently, despite the biting winter.

Nakshi Kantha, a leading business organisation of the town, held the festival at Daffodil International School premises in Jhiltuli of the town.

The festival included a display and sale of an array of delectable traditional pithas, rendition of songs, recitation and dances. Housewives had a field day selling home made delicacies at the event.

Twenty two stalls named 'Istikutum'; 'Pithapuli'; 'Pithaghor'; 'Pitha Kutir'; 'Barisal Pithaghor'; 'Rahimon Pithaghor'; 'Shitol Pithaghor'; 'Partho Pithaghor'; 'Nakshi Pithaghor' and 'Daffodil Pithaghor' were set up the school premises to showcase the culinary delights.

According to the organisers, around 300 varieties of winter cakes were on sale at the

stalls. The most sought after were Bhaqa, Dhud-chittoi, Pakan, Pantoa, Andosha, Bhajapuli, Prem puli and Shemoy pithas, among others.

Some interestingly named pithas were Romeo-Juliet pitha, Jhagrajhati pitha (quarrelsome), Love pitha, Nakshi pitha, Bibkhan pitha, Hash pitha (duck) were also sold in the stalls that fetched high price.

Enthusiastic visitors thronged the fair. Other attractions were songs, recitation and dances performed by different young artistes of the town. Prizes and gifts were distributed to the winners and participants in the function.

'Barisal pithaghor' won Taka 5,000 as first prize, 'Pitha kutir' and 'Nakshi Pithaghor' jointly won Taka 4,000 as second prize and 'Pithapuli' and 'Partha pithaghor' together won the third prize amounting to Taka 3,000.

Abdur Rahman and Belayet Hossain, the programme organisers, told this correspondent that the festival had been held to boost Bangali traditions of rural Bangladesh. "In future we hope to arrange the event on a larger scale," they said.

Who owns Edgar Allan Poe?

Throughout January, the world is Edgar Allan Poe's stage, 200 years after his birth on January 19, 1809, and more than a century and a half after his mysterious demise in a Baltimore gutter. He's credited as the founding father of detective fiction, a master of the macabre, the namesake inspiration for the mystery world's premier annual award, and perhaps the first proper full-time freelance writer. This second son of an acting couple might well feel a mix of puffed-up pride and mystification at the celebratory atmosphere if he were alive to witness it. He spent most of his life cobbling together a living out of the scraps of poetic and prose publication, sporadically climbing the mountain of literary acclaim (as with "The Raven" in 1845) only to plunge anew into penury, a state he remained in until his death.

Poe's perilous financial state made him a man on the move, and two centuries later his itinerant status has a number of cities fighting for the honour to claim him as theirs and only theirs. Baltimore, by virtue of being his burial ground, has long had the inside track; after all, on every anniversary since 1949, a mysterious individual known as "The Poe Toaster" has left cognac and three red roses at Poe's graveside. But then a 2007 cover story in the Philadelphia City Paper depicted, in tongue-in-cheek fashion, the kidnapping of Poe's corpse to be spirited away to Philadelphia, where Poe produced a great deal of his literary output. "We're Taking Poe Back," the article proclaimed, launching a long-running debate between its author, Edward Pettit, and Poe House curator Jeff Jerome.

The battle to be Poe's primary residence is hardly a two-horse race. There are also justifiable claims from the Bronx, where Poe lived out the last years of his life; Boston, where he was born; and Richmond, Virginia, where he spent his early childhood under the foster care of the Allan family. In other words, it'll

be at least another 200 years before the Poe Wars reach a cease-fire.

But let's talk of love, for there's plenty of it in the air from a publishing industry eager to give Poe presents in the form of literary tributes, original stories and miniature biography. The last item in that list refers to

Life Cut Short", which recounts Poe's tumultuous and peripatetic personal and professional life in a tone equal parts crisp and Gothic. Ackroyd's prose assumes the reader has some familiarity with signature works like "William Wilson" or "The Raven," so don't look for new revelations or fresh insights. The book works best as a refresher course for the curious rather than as a definitive study of Poe's importance in cross-Atlantic culture.

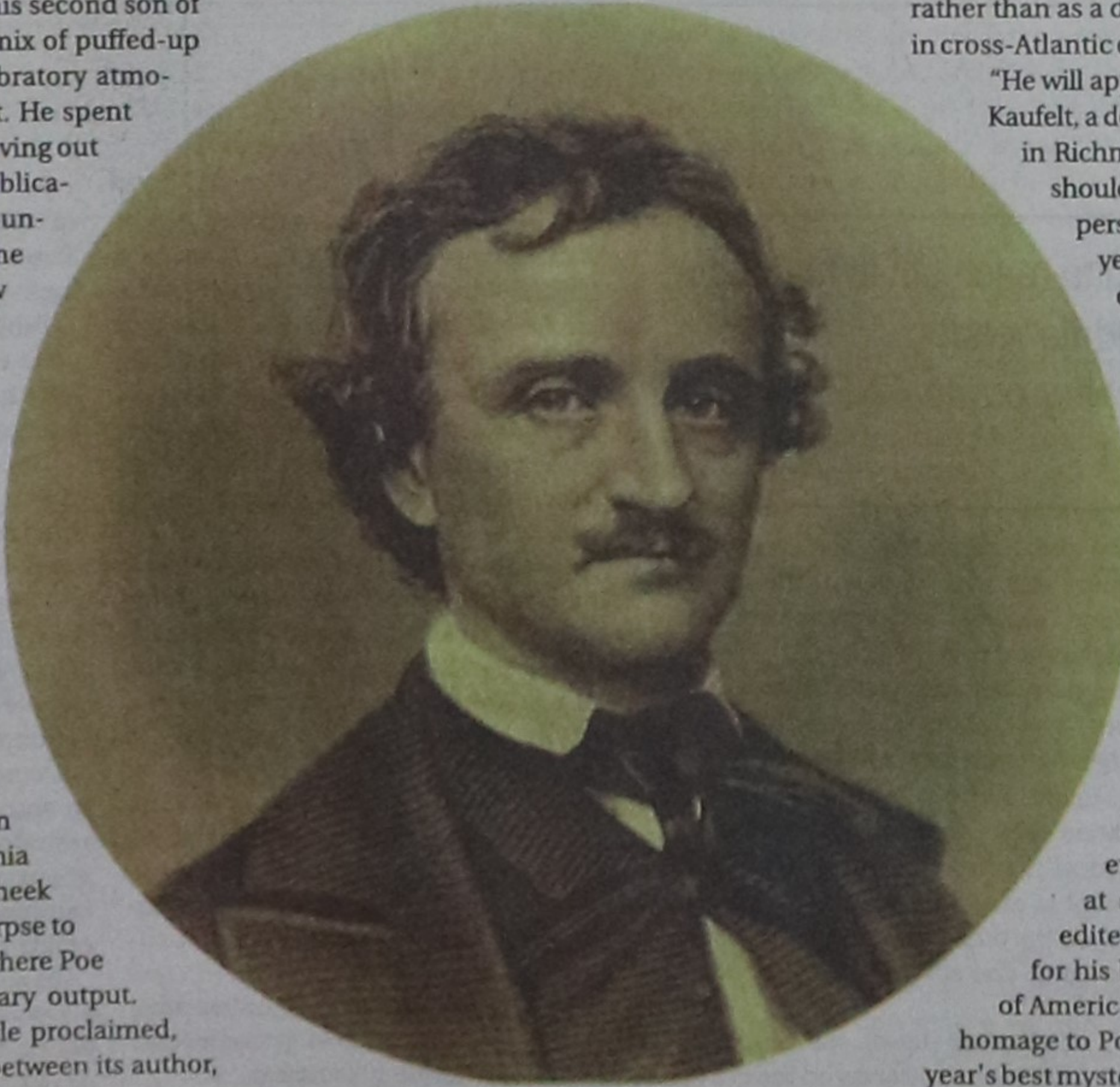
"He will appear in the enchanted garden," Keith Kaufelt, a docent at the Edgar Allan Poe Museum in Richmond, says with more certainty than should be warranted (seeing as how the person in question has been dead for 160 years). But on the bicentennial birthday of Edgar Allan Poe, the museum hoped to bring the master of mystery, king of rhyme-scheme and inventor of the detective-fiction genre back from the dead.

Boston College is holding its first ever Poe celebration, and Boston's mayor recently announced that the major intersection at South Charles and Boylston will soon be renamed Poe Square.

"His stories are universal," says crime writer Michael Connelly. "They come from a place of loneliness and longing, and everybody can probably tap into that at some point in their life." Connelly edited the collection of Poe stories put out for his bicentennial by the Mystery Writers of America, the organisation that pays annual homage to Poe by bestowing Edgar awards to the year's best mystery writers.

Connelly points out that while Poe had success late in his short life with the poem "The Raven," during the majority of his 40 years he was broke and under-appreciated. "The full acknowledgment and accolades came after he died," says Connelly.

Compiled by Cultural Correspondent



the work of Peter Ackroyd, the British novelist and non-fiction writer who's made a career out of documenting the history of London and the complicated lives of notable figures like Chaucer, Shakespeare and Newton with assured brevity. Now he's done it again with "Poe: A