

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 & Tomal
 Venue: Shipangan 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



Bangladeshi Cinema

Observations and propositions

TANVIR MOKAMMEL

To everyone's chagrin, cinema in Bangladesh has reached its nadir. When in 1956 as a young Minister for Industry, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib, and his inspired colleagues, with a vision to create a film-scene in East Bengal established Film Development Corporation (FDC), they hardly had any clue, that four decades later their patriotic zeal would end up in such a cul-de-sac! Cinema now is in a very dismal state in Bangladesh, and salvation of it warrants some bold and definitive measures.

First, cinema should not be under the aegis of the Ministry of Information any more. With such prioritised and politically sensitive sectors like newspaper and television being under it, the Information Ministry is one of the busiest and most stressed out ministry for any government in Bangladesh. In this ministry, cinema, not having any urgent political priority, receives inadequate care. Performance says it all. For example, the national film awards are supposed to be an annual affair. But to perform this simple duty, the Information Ministry once lagged five years behind schedule! Even with the best of intentions by the officials concerned, the endemic negligence to cinema is caused due to the amount of workload that the Information Ministry is burdened with.

There should be a separate ministry for cinema. If not, cinema should be under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture. There are a couple of reasons why. Firstly, cinema is an art form, a cultural expression, not an information tool. Secondly, in the Ministry of Culture, with its lesser and insipid workload, a glamourised medium like cinema is sure to receive prioritised treatment.

But the core problem relating to a betterment of cinema, ironically, seems to be the very organisation supposed to develop cinema in Bangladesh -- The Film Development Corporation (FDC). FDC is lagging thirty years behind the state-of-the-art in filmmaking, not only in the global context, but even to our subcontinent standard. The output of FDC film lab is simply sub-

standard.

In this age of market economy, the very concept that a government owns a film studio seems anachronistic. Why should the Bangladesh government own a film studio which churns out all these run-of-the-mill, if not plagiarised and vulgar films? The governments of France, USA and India do not own any film studio. But that never impeded cinema of those countries from flourishing. Film is a business, and business should be left to business people, to the law of demand and supply of the market. Any control by the government bureaucracy only creates potholes of corruption and anybody who has the experience to work with any department of

DFF's film department, in its purchase of exorbitantly price-tagged equipment has remained lucrative for ministry officials as well as ministers.

The government should rather invest resources to establish a proper film institute and a professional film archive in the country. Cinema is a high-tech art form, and to teach cinematography, sound recording and related technologies to the young, there is no alternative to a professionally run film institute. To preserve and sustain our heritage, it is imperative also to build a modern film archive with its own building, professional dehumidified vaults and trained personnel. Proper resources should also be

practise. Now with our national identity cards in place, there should not be any problem for cine-hall gatekeepers to know who is a minor and who is not. Regarding nomenclature, instead of Film Censor Board, the rating body should be renamed as "Film Classification Board".

Cinema is in a pathetic state now. Out of eleven hundred functioning cine-halls, more than three hundred and fifty have been closed down. More are on the way to being shut down soon. Cinema halls, to some extent, should blame themselves for their own decline. With their penchant to exhibit vulgar films or porno cut pieces, they successfully managed to hoot out well-meaning audiences from their

A clause can be imposed on the cine-halls by the government to exhibit award winning or 'Anudan' (government grant)-films for minimum ten weeks of the fifty-two week calendar. And this condition should be attached with their licensing obligations. The government can also waive the amusement tax from award winning or Anudan-films and thus by lowering the price of tickets can lure more people, especially the young, towards better cinema.

One endemic problem with Bangladesh cinema is its protectionism. Our cinema does not have to compete either with global or the sub-continental films. Protection for a child is required and recommended, but if protection is provided to a thirty-year old individual he will never grow up and will remain physically and mentally retarded. And that has exactly happened to the film industry of Bangladesh. But that does not mean that we should open the floodgates to Bollywood stuff in our country. Bangladesh cinema already produces enough garbage and we do not need to import further garbage from Mumbai! But each year five or ten selected award winning Indian and international films can be imported under some exchange programme with the pre-condition that an equal number of better made Bangladeshi films are exported to that country as well. Our film-industry should be able to sustain this much of competition!

These are just a few suggestions to salvage an industry which, four decades back, was created with some lofty ideas. But due to the myopic vision and sheer inefficiency of subsequent rulers, the film industry in Bangladesh has come to its present moribund state. Whether there will be any light at the end of tunnel depends on how resolutely our new leaders can deal with the issues. To make a digital Bangladesh, cinema, the most modern of all art forms, needs to be digitised first, both in its hard and software technology, but more importantly, in mindsets.

Tanvir Mokammel is an internationally acclaimed Bangladeshi filmmaker.



Why should the Bangladesh government own a film studio which churns out all these run-of-the-mill, if not plagiarised and vulgar films?

FDC knows what I mean! Regarding modern day filmmaking, FDC has totally run out of ideas and outlived its purpose. In order to have digitally-equipped professional film labs in Bangladesh it is high time that Bangladesh government, after having its revenue guaranteed, disinvests FDC.

The condition of another film-related government body, the film division of the Department of Films and Publication (DFF), is even worse. One wonders about the raison d'etre of DFF's film department. Days are spent shooting expensive and cumbersome 35mm footages of ministers cutting tape! In this age of digital technology, BTW alone is good enough to handle that. Besides, it is alleged that

allotted to give the film archive a digitalised form. The government should also establish a national film centre in Dhaka similar to Nandan in Kolkata.

I am not trying to write another Aeropagica. One Milton was enough for that! But something has to be done with the censor system in Bangladesh. The ideal situation is not to have any censor at all in the realm of art. But given the socio-cultural reality of Bangladesh, if we have to concede to any censor, then the censor board should not have any right to ban or excise a piece of cinema. It should only rate films in different categories like, "U" (Universal), "PG" (Parental Guidance) or "A" (Adult), a rating system which most democratic countries

premises, especially women. Cinema halls in Bangladesh became lumpenised. And now, rows of empty seats, they are facing their nemesis! With other entertainment mediums becoming available to people the large cinema halls seem no longer economically viable. I am afraid big cinema halls may have to die their natural death as the big dinosaurs once did! May be the cineplex kind of film conglomerates, with small auditoriums to cater to different kinds of audiences, will become the future. But that is for Dhaka and other cities only. To reinvigorate cine-audience in the districts and upazilas, the government can establish or renovate mini-auditoriums with digital facilities.

Reflections Khaled Khan

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Though he is absent on the small screen of late, dynamic actor Khaled Khan is a familiar name to both TV and theatre audiences. He has displayed amazing versatility in his roles. The Daily Star recently caught up with the actor.

The Daily Star (TDS): Tell us about your current activities.

Khaled: I'm concentrating on theatre. I direct plays 'Shubachan Natya Goshthi'. I also perform in the play "Raktokarobi", a Nagarik production.

TDS: Do you believe in fate?
Khaled: I can't undermine the role of fate. Though sometimes we may claim that we don't believe in it, at desperate times, we tend to blame our fate.

TDS: Who is the ideal heroine to you?

Khaled: Definitely, Suchitra Sen. Whenever, I watch her movies I replace images of Uttam Kumar with mine next to her.

TDS: How do you view love?

Khaled: I'm traditional when it comes to love. Anything that's easily acquired loses its charm and thus becomes ephemeral. These days, I think, love has become a mundane persuasion. Back in the day, we had to put in extra efforts. Youngsters nowadays seem to lack that kind of passion.

TDS: What could be the reasons behind it?

Khaled: There could be many reasons -- improved standards of life, changing values and norms in the society, scientific advancements and so on.

TDS: How does science have



an adverse impact on love?

Khaled: Science has made everything easier and faster. For instance, back in the day, we waited eagerly for a love letter or a rose, or tried to fix a date to meet the objects of our affection. The real appeal of love belongs to that waiting, tension and efforts. Now thanks to the Internet and cell phones, the young can communicate with each other 24/7. Over-exposure often takes away the charms of love. Lovers rapidly lose their attraction for each other. Love has now become more mechanical.

TDS: An interesting experience...

Khaled: In my early years in Tangail, one of my friends

was my co-actor in a stage play. He had to deliver one brief line -- "Ei kam ami parum na". He was probably nervous and left the stage without delivering his line. I was left awed. This experience helps me a lot these days when my co-actors miss cues. Another memorable incident: I had to work with a model-actress once in a TV play and her mother told the producer that she wouldn't allow anyone to touch her daughter throughout the shooting. There were romantic scenes in the play. We had to complete the shooting with close-up shots while standing at a distance.

TV Watch

Palolik Mon A story of rivalry between former friends

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Drama serial "Palolik Mon" will be aired tonight on ntv at 9:45 pm. Written jointly by Selim Taher and Bipul Raihan, and directed by the latter, the serial is aired every Monday and Thursday at the same time.

The plot centres on the rivalry between former friends Anis Chowdhury and Hasan Ahmed. They were classmates at the university. Hasan was in love with Lily, who was also in the same class. After a turn of events Lily had to marry Anis. Even after many years, a bond remains between Hasan and Lily. Both Hasan and Anis are now affluent entrepreneurs.



A scene from the TV serial.

The serial moves forward amidst internal tension between the two families. The cast includes Humayun Faridee, Mita Chowdhury, Shampa Reza, Srabonti, Elora Gauhar, Shams Sumon, Meem and others.

Obamas dance to At Last

"At Last" may have been just what US President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle were thinking Tuesday night as they glided through their first inaugural dance to the Etta James classic.

The Obamas were the star attraction at the Neighbourhood Ball, the first of 10 inaugural celebrations they were attending, going into the early hours of Wednesday. The celebrations marked the end of a long day of formal inaugural events and the two-year campaign that put them in the White House.

The president pulled his wife close and they danced a slow, dignified two-step while, offstage, Beyonce sang. The president spun first lady Michelle Obama once in a half-turn.

Obama cut loose in a faster groove a few minutes later, as Shakira, Mary J. Blige, Faith Hill and Mariah Carey sang along with Stevie Wonder to his "Sign, Sealed, Delivered." The song was played at nearly

all of Obama's rallies throughout the campaign. "You could tell that's a black president from the way he was moving," comedian Jamie Foxx joked following the dance.

Obama and Vice President Joe Biden each saluted the nation's military men and women at the Commander in Chief Ball via satellite. Biden said he wasn't looking forward to his moment in the spotlight -- the dancing, that is.

"The thing that frightens me the most (is) I'm going to have to stand in that circle and dance in a minute." At that, he laughed and did a quick sign of the cross.

In a sign, perhaps, of the tough economic times, guests who already paid anywhere from \$75 for a ticket to thousands more for a package deal had to buy their own drinks served in small plastic cups.

At the Obama Home States ball, the dance floor was dominated by two little girls



US President Barack Obama (left) and first lady Michelle Obama begin their first dance together at the Neighbourhood Inaugural Ball in Washington on January 20, 2009. At rear is singer Beyonce.

who skipped and twirled in matching red dresses while the grown-ups stood still,

crowded around the stage waiting for Obama to appear.

At the Youth Ball, Kid Rock

belted out songs as well-dressed 20-somethings mingled about.

The Obamas, following Kid Rock and Kanye West, got the real rock-star reception and launched into something of an awkward dance, laughing as they swayed. When they were done, the president grabbed a mike and said, "That's what's called old school."

And though the mood was celebratory, the reality that US remains at war hung over the festivities at the Commander in Chief ball and a separate Heroes Red White & Blue Ball.

"Please know that you are in our thoughts and prayers today, every day, forever," Obama told troops at the Commander in Chief ball. "Tonight, we celebrate. Tomorrow, the work begins... Together, I am confident we will write the next great chapter in America's story."

Source: Internet

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