

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Palli Kobi Jasimuddin Birth Anniversary
Organiser: Chhayana
Venue: Chhayana Sangskriti Shaban, Dhanmondi
Date: January 30
Time: 7pm



Madhu Mela '09
Celebrating 185th birth anniversary of Michael Madhusudan
Organiser: DC Office, Jessore
Venue: Sagardari, Jessore
Date: January 25-31
Time: 2pm onwards



Adibashi Mela '09
Organiser: Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation and Channel I
Venue: Shobal Shaikat, Cox's Bazar
Date: January 30
Time: 11.05-5pm



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



CHOBIMELA V

Dhaka has evolved into one of the photography capitals of the world, says Dr. Shahidul Alam

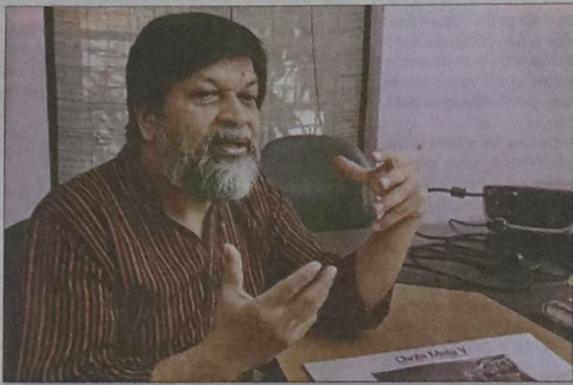
KARIM WAHEED

How does 'Chobi Mela' rate, compared to other international photography festivals? Festival director and acclaimed photographer, Dr. Shahidul Alam's response: "Chobi Mela has become one of the most important festivals of photography in the world. Historically, photography has been Euro-centric. So the festival culture developed in the west. 'Chobi Mela' is the first major photography festival in Asia and that's a significant achievement for us."

"International interest in Chobi Mela V has been overwhelming. Photographers and agencies from over 33 countries are participating. We couldn't accommodate Magnum Photos and Getty Images -- two of the major photo agencies in the world -- as they missed the deadline. That should give you an idea about the reputation this festival has earned," he adds.

The success of Chobi Mela is part of a bigger picture. Despite no assistance from the government and no department to study the medium at the public universities, Bangladeshi photographers over the last decade have managed to pull off a silent revolution. In the process, Dhaka has become one of the "photography capitals of the world," according to Dr. Alam.

"None of the other mediums, including cinema, art or music, can claim the magnitude of success at international level (going by the number of awards, of course) that Bangladeshi photography has earned in the last few years," argues Dr. Alam.



"There's a shocking indifference towards photography at the authoritative level in Bangladesh,"

PHOTO COURTESY: SHEHAB UDDIN / DRIK / MAJORITY WORLD

"There's a shocking indifference towards photography at the authoritative level in Bangladesh," he says. "Compared to others, photography is a more recent medium. Most of the decision-makers in our country are men of words and perhaps they don't comprehend the power of photography. The fact that photography has moved from being just a tool used in documenting incidents to a full-fledged art form hasn't dawned on many."

"A child grows up watching images, yet there is no provision in our schools and colleges to understand the science of photography. A

whole nation is left visually illiterate. It's embarrassing for us that BFA/MEA students in our public universities graduate without the slightest knowledge of photography."

"Pathshala, South Asian Institute of Photography (the educational wing of Drik) is the only institution in our country that offers basic, diploma and degree courses and is at par with the best of the world."

Going back to the subject of the festival, Dr. Alam says, "At the last Chobi Mela an open forum was held to discuss the possible theme of this year's festival. An online poll was also

held. Thus the theme 'freedom' was selected. Chobi Mela is not just another assortment of exhibitions. It includes lively debates, critique and discussions. There'll be mobile exhibitions for people who are not traditionally gallery-goers. In total, there'll be 63 print exhibitions at 11 venues in Dhaka."

Talking about up and coming Bangladeshi photographers, Dr. Alam says, "Western photographers are mostly driven by their editorial needs. For the most part, developing countries to them are poverty, diseases and natural disasters. Our photographers, like their comrades in other third world countries, tend to be more comprehensive. They are driven by motivation and they possess certain values that have become sort of passé in the western world."

"Of the eight Bangladeshi photographers participating at Chobi Mela V, six are under 30. This is certainly a promising sign."

Chobi Mela V opens at 4pm today at Bangladesh National Museum. Writer, activist and Magsaysay Award winner Mahasweta Devi will inaugurate an exhibition, titled "A Long Walk to Freedom", that recreates the life and history of Nelson Mandela at the museum.

Festival partners are Drik, Canon, Pathshala-South Asian Institute of Photography, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Goethe Institut, British Council, Alliance Francaise de Dacca and Prince Claus Fund. The Daily Star, Prothom Alo, Channel I, BDNews24.com and Ujala TV are media partners.

Ittyadi 21 years and still going strong

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

A wholesome family-oriented variety show, "Ittyadi", continues to come up with innovative ideas to convey social messages and generating awareness among the masses -- reminding them of their social responsibilities -- with a dash of entertainment.

With its latest episode, "Ittyadi" (to be aired on January 30 on BTV at 9 pm), will celebrate 21 years of successful run -- a milestone in the history of television in our country. "Ittyadi" is also the first programme to be aired on BTV under the "package programme" format.

The celebration coincides with the 400th anniversary of Dhaka City. Reasonably, this episode has been shot at the wide expanse of the Lalbagh Qilla in Old Dhaka. As always, this episode will feature issues to generate awareness.

For this episode, the "Ittyadi" team went off to far-flung areas such as Teknaf, Tetulia, Rajshahi, Nawgaon, Noakhali, Chapainawabganj and more. An altruistic nature lover, Goher Ali, 106, of Naogaon has been featured in this episode. Another segment highlights how age is never a bar to education. An unusual report involves hair trimming and slicing vegetables.

Noted folk singers Momtaz, Arif Dewan, Rustom Dewan and others will entertain the audience with their charged performances.

The grand show also includes actors Chatterjee, Masud Ali Khan, Fakhrul Hasan Boiragi, and others as well.

According to Fagun Audio Vision (maker of the show), each episode of "Ittyadi" is shot with utmost attention "Ittyadi" does not believe in celebrating anniversaries formally. Education, information and entertainment are the three basic concepts of the show.



Hanif Sanket hosts "Ittyadi", a show that has retained its popularity for over two decades.

Drama serial Bijlee Maholla on Banglavisision

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Centring on various areas and communities in the city, drama serial "Bijlee Maholla" will be aired tonight on Banglavisision. Written by Brindaban Das and directed by Quazi Amirul Islam, the serial is aired at 9:05 pm every Friday.

Bijlee Maholla is an old locality in the city. The residents include sisters Bijlee and

Nazlee. Their mother is short-tempered and father is quite the opposite. Hasan is another central character in the serial. A football fanatic, Hasan celebrates even when his team is defeated. His defiant temperament however generates hostility among some and Hasan is assaulted.

Cast of the serial includes Hasan Masud, Litu Anam, Anisur Rahman Milon, Pijush Bandopadhyay and Nadia.



A scene from the TV serial.

Gupta artefacts recovered in Bogra

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra



An artefact from the Gupta era -- depiction of a mythical animal.

Recently recovered sculptures from the Gupta period and ornate stones will go on display at the Mahastan Museum premises, according to museum sources.

Md. Mahabub-Ul-Alam, custodian, Mahastan Museum told The Daily Star yesterday that the recovered pieces include sculptures of mythical animal forms along with other Gupta artefacts.

The artefacts were recovered from the house of one Uzzal in the Mahastangarh area who was allegedly involved in embellishing the pieces, said sub-inspector Masum of Shibganj police station.

Archaeologists Md. Mahabub-Ul-Alam and Naheed Sultana recovered 16 artefacts with the help of Shibganj police last Wednesday.

Archaeologist Dr. Barbara Faticoni, member of the Bangladesh-France joint excavation team told this correspondent that the artefacts are archaeologically valuable.

According to Naheed Sultana, the artefacts are at least 1500 years old.

Winter weddings, filmi music and traffic jams

SADYA AFREEN MALICK

January being what it is, you probably have been to quite a number of weddings. Days prior to the wedding, your evening at the "gaye holud" probably ran something like this:

You fight traffic on the road for hours just to find a mile long queue at the venue gates. Fed up with waiting, you join the throngs of other guests braving the chill to walk the few last yards to the venue. Inside, the setting is picture perfect. The venue, menu, the grand setting of the wedding hall -- nothing seems amiss. Even the most critical guests can only nod in appreciation! The flower arrangement done by the professionals no doubt. Orchids were probably flown in. The tables set with candles in small wrought iron stands.

The party has the look of a fashion house. The petite young girls arrive in kamiz, styled in oriental designs, ethnic patterns, thick embroidered silks and in lahengas. Short kamiz is certainly in vogue. Ladies adorned in stylish jewellery sparkling from every nook and corner of the marquee. Everything is serene...that is, just before the entertainment starts.

Well, it'd be "entertainment" if you like having a mega speaker blaring inches from your ear, and love a shouting conversation with your neighbouring friend. Needless to say, all the catching up, juicy talks die a sudden death.

The music begins with an unearthly blast, the speakers on the brink of an imminent internal combustion. The guests exchange unhappy glances looking up to see if the Chinese lanterns are holding up. The hosts shrug cheerily -- "kids will be kids, they wanted to play some music." Some guests desperately put their fingers in their ears to avoid the violent sonic torture. Some comment that the songs aren't even in Bangla. When the band is requested to play some local songs, they are met by apologetic looks -- "a bit later maybe? We haven't practiced too many..."

What had happened to our good ol' wedding songs? When did it become necessary to adopt filmi music in weddings?

Just a few years back, the 'holud' script ran differently. A month before the wedding took place young boys and girls would gather at the bride's house and rehearse songs. "Lila balee," "Biyar shajoney," "Lal tuktuky bou jai go," "Orey shampanwala," "Holud bato mendi bato," "Holud beguni shobuj shada neel" and countless other songs were sung on 'gaye holud'. And the audience never failed to participate.



changing, has tried to evolve accordingly. But the crude concoction of the "deshi" and "bideshi" has clearly created confusion. Sentiments are of little value. Extreme sense of unequal competition has flared up to disproportionate degrees. The electronic media has been sending bizarre signals of latest trends and there has been a tendency to desperately copy rather than follow one's own heritage.

The songs, such an anticipated part of our wedding programmes, are icings on the cake, not something to be dreaded as some people feel now! A welcome scene is however slowly emerging where new talents are once more reviving the folklore and traditional songs, although often wrapped in "fusion". But even so, it's a start, and certainly people would like to see more of local traditions once more taking centre stage. Because, we'd rather listen to songs that are refreshingly lively and not something that makes you wish you had stayed back home.

On the day of 'holud' we had 'rangkhela'. We waited for this day impatiently, as it was a special day of merry making for us. The boys bought the coloured powder from the market and mixed it with water. As soon as the bridal party arrived with the traditional sweets and fish, the 'rangkhela' would begin.

No one was spared a good-humoured smearing. Often the colour lasted for weeks and washing for the nth time didn't help! This occasion was held mostly in houses with big gardens to avoid spoiling the interiors. Often that wasn't spared either. The cousins dyed a special sari for the bride on this day.

I remember holuds where there were 'Qawwali' sessions every night when great Qawwals came and performed. Special Kashmiri tea was served which was rich in aroma and content. Homemade 'halwa' and other sumptuous items were served. Then there were sessions of songs by the younger groups.

Then Feroze Shai appeared on the scene. He had a group of vocalists who performed at the wedding parties. The songs were all in Bangla. The instruments comprised dhol, harmonium, clarinets, percussions and so on. He had a tremendous impact on the audience, a grand success at the parties. After his sudden demise I have little idea of what happened to his band.

An enormous number of bands have now sprung up. But, except for a few, there is little originality among them. The leading groups have rightly taken the stage by storm. But most "other" groups are taking the easy route of copying chartbusters.