

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Ekushey Boi Mela '09
Organiser: Bangla Academy
Venue: Bangla Academy premises
Date: February 01-28



Chobi Mela V

Int'l Festival of Photography, Bangladesh '09
Theme: Freedom
Venues: National Museum, BSA, Drik Gallery, Bengal Gallery, AF, GIB, British Council, Asiatic Gallery, Kalpana Boarding and Karwan Bazar underpass
Date: Jan 30-Feb 20



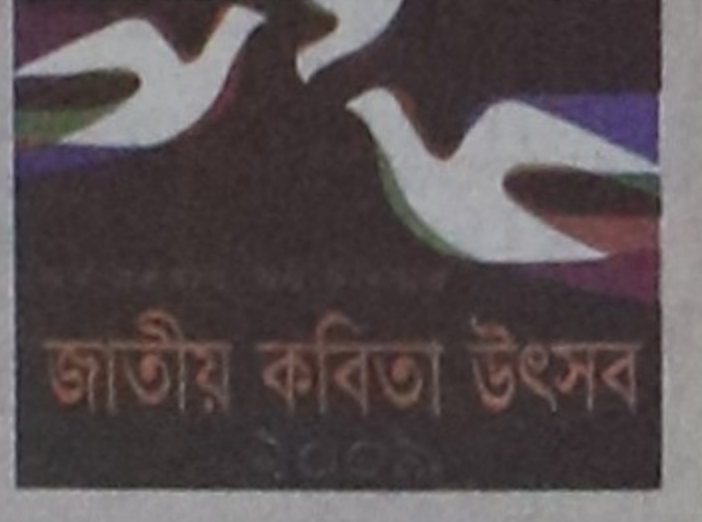
Solo Photography Exhibition

Title: Kalo Teep
Photographer: Shah Sazzad
Venue: Chhobir Haat, opposite of Charukala, DU
Date: February 13-20



National Poetry Festival

Organiser: Jaliyo Kabita Parishad
Venue: Central Public Library, Dhaka University
Date: February 18-20
Time: Inauguration On February 18 at 10am



Shanto-Mariam Foundation honours Amala Shankar



Along with Amala Shankar (front row-3rd right), 10 veteran Bangladeshi dance artistes were honoured by Shanto-Mariam Foundation.

NADIA SARWAT

In 1929, Amala was born in a remote village of Narail district (part of the then Greater Jessore). A trader by profession, her father Akshay Kumar Nandi was an enlightened man involved in journalism and politics and a strong supporter of women's rights. At the age of 11, Amala was sent to Paris to participate in a cultural programme. There she met the iconic Indian dancer Uday Shankar and his family. A talented young girl, Amala received tutelage in dance from the maestro. In course of time she herself became an internationally renowned dance artiste and guru. She got married to Pandit Uday Shankar in 1942, thus adapting the last name Shankar.

Amala Shankar is currently visiting Bangladesh. The artiste was honoured by leading dance organisations of the country at an event organised by the Shanto-Mariam

Foundation. The programme also marked the inauguration of Honours and Masters degrees on dance at the Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology. This will be the first Honours and Masters degrees on dance in our country.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister G.M. Kader was present at the event as chief guest. Professor Nazrul Islam, chairman, Bangladesh University Grants Commission; Sharful Alam, secretary to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs and Mukta D' Tomar, deputy high commissioner, Indian High Commission, Dhaka, were present as special guests.

Eminent dances Laila Hasan (representing Nataraj), Shamim Ara Nipa (Nrityanchal), Sharmila Bandopadhyay (Chhayanat), Tamanna Rahman (Nrityam), Anisul Islam Hiru (Srishti Cultural Centre), Likhon Roy (Benuka Lalitokala Kendra), Saju Ahmed (Bangladeshi

On behalf of the foundation, 10 veteran dance artistes of the country were also awarded at the event. Anjana Roy Joba, Amanul Haque, Kamal Lohani, Golam Mustafa Khan, Babu Barendra Kumar Nath, Oja Kanu Sinha, Bazlur Rahman Badal, Laila Hasan, Dolly Iqbal and Rahiza Khanam Jhunu were among the award recipients.

Overwhelmed by the cordial reception, 'Padmabibhushan' Amala Shankar expressed her gratitude, saying, "I've received many awards and felicitations around the world, but this is a heartening experience to receive so much love from the people of my country of origin. I feel like that little girl from a small village who is just taken aback to receive such an honour."

"I've just been sincere to my art, and practiced it with passion. The



A dance performance at the programme.

PHOTO: MUMIT M

Nritya Shilpi Sangstha), Belayet Hossain Khan (Jago Art Centre), Padatik Natya Sangsad, Sukanya, Nritya Nandan and Shanto Mariam Foundation felicitated the veteran artiste at the event.

art of dancing is not just for mere entertainment; it is the language of the life itself. If you are to express yourself with this language, you have to understand it, and feel it within your heart."

Soaeb | Saga of an actor

MAINUL HASSAN

"I strive to be at my best when I am acting. To me every act should be better than the previous one," says Mohammad Soaebul Islam, speaking to The Daily Star recently.

A talented artiste, Soaeb began his acting career with Tareque Masud's critically acclaimed, award winning film, "Matir Moina" in 2000. In the film he slipped with ease into the role of Milan, one of the central characters. "I consider 'Matir Moina' a major leap in my career. To me, Milan represents a socially aware youth and the role gave me much needed exposure," says Soaeb.

Going back to his early days, Soaeb says that in 1997 he joined the Theatre Centre, a troupe run by Shahidul Alam Sachchu. At the time he was in his second year as a post graduate student.

"I always had this intrigue about theatre since childhood. At university, one of my classmates was a member of Theatre Centre. I went to watch their sessions. After several visits, I had a gut feeling that this was something which I had to do and I joined the troupe. I never had a second thought," he says.

After "Matir Moina," Soaeb took a hiatus (2000-2006) from the screen. At that time he did some ads.

From 2007 onwards, he began working fulltime: First with "High Tension," a 13-episode drama serial



directed by Taher Shipon. Aired on Channel i, the short serial was an immediate hit. The play was a major watershed for Soaeb, his first break in the genre.

After "High Tension," Soaeb

began working with Aruna Biswas. The serial, "Boro Didi," was directed by Aruna Biswas and aired on ATN Bangla.

"Working with Aruna Biswas was a critical point in my acting career.

Through her, I learnt the necessary elements of TV acting," said Soaeb.

To date Soaeb has worked in many TV plays and serials under the direction of Aruna Biswas, including "Malyodaan," "Drishti Daan" and "Nupur."

Among other noteworthy serials in which Soaeb has acted are "Dainik Tolpaar" directed by Asrafi Mithu and aired on Channel i; "Priodarshini" directed by Arun Chowdhury, aired on Rtv; "Apon Ghorey Porobash" on Rtv and "Neer" on ntv.

Others works of Soaeb include "Shada Megh Kalo Megh," directed by Taher Shipon; "Amongol", directed by Hassan Sikhdar; single episode TV play "Othocho Bhalobasha" directed by Mithu Bishwas and "Holud Pora" directed by Alam Shikdar.

Talking about the importance of acting on stage and TV, Soaeb says, "For a professional actor, TV is certainly an important medium. However, to learn the ropes of acting, theatre is a must." Soaeb has been an active member of theatre troupe Desh Natok since 2001.

The actor now looks forward to a career in films, along with TV plays. He recently finished shooting for "Dui Purush," a film directed by Chashi Nazrul Islam. His next work will be "Ashombhob," a film jointly directed by Aruna Biswas and Mithu Biswas. Shooting for the movie is scheduled to begin in April.

The French connection

Fifty years of Alliance Francaise de Dacca



Salih Lefevre, director of Alliance Francaise de Dacca, speaks at the press conference yesterday.

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

French cultural wing Alliance Francaise de Dacca (AFD), which started its journey in 1959, celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. To mark this very special occasion, the organisation has planned special cultural programmes throughout the year. At a press conference held yesterday at its main centre in Dhanmondi, director of AFD Salih Lefevre briefed the media on the yearlong programme.

The celebration starts tomorrow with a photography exhibition titled, "Dhaka, a City and its People." Two French photographers Julien Pannetier and Bruno Valentin worked on a three-year project on Dhaka city. The exhibition will feature their works. The French Ambassador Charley Causeret will inaugurate the exhibition. The exhibition also marks the 400th anniversary of Dhaka city as a capital.

Two of AFD's regular programmes, Francophonie Festival (scheduled to take place from March 16 to 23) and Fete de la Musique (scheduled for June 21), are also part of the celebration. Francophonie will feature films, sports, French language contest and sponsorship operation towards orphans while Fete de la Musique will highlight a grand concert featuring renowned local artistes.

Several other grand musical programmes

are also part of the planned celebration. French pop-reggae artiste Simeo and a western classical music troupe from Calcutta, String Quartet, will perform respectively in April and May.

France based Bengali artiste Paban Das Baul's concert in October will certainly add to the lure of the programme. The celebration programme also includes an open-air concert, to be held in November, which will feature popular Bangladeshi bands and artistes.

An 11-day theatre festival would be held from April 3 to 13. Local theatre troupes will perform nine Bangla adaptations of French plays. A special workshop conducted by a French director is also part of the theatre festival.

French hip-hop company Accrorap will stage an exclusive dance show in July. A photography exhibition titled "Indian Princes and Parisian Jewellers" will take place from October 22 to November 4. The photographs will feature exclusive jewellery collections by the world-renowned brands Cartier, Van Cleef and Arpels.

At present there are two Alliances Francaise in Bangladesh, one in Dhaka and the other in Chittagong. Alliance Francaise de Dacca is one of the oldest in Asia. AFD also has two branches -- one in Baridhara and the other in Uttara.

Sneak Peek

Sita Sings the Blues

The greatest break-up story ever told

What do a 3,000-year-old Sanskrit epic, a '20s-era jazz singer and Indonesian shadow puppets have in common? They're all part of the eclectic cultural tapestry that is "Sita Sings the Blues," an 82-minute animated feature that combines autobiography with a retelling of the classic Indian myth, the "Ramayana," and that required its creator, the syndicated comic-strip artist Nina Paley, to spend three years transforming herself into a one-woman moving-picture studio.

"At some point everything went through my computer," said Paley, who is self-taught and whose longest animated film before this clocked in at just over four minutes. Her decision to do it herself may have satisfied her creative urges, but it also put her more than \$20,000 in debt. "That's why not everyone does it," she said.

numbers featuring Sita in voluptuous Betty Boop-like form -- almond-shaped head, saucer eyes and swaying hips -- accompanied by the warbling voice of a real-life flapper-era singer named Annette Hanshaw.

At other points Paley weaves in the story of her own collapsing marriage. She starts the film living happily in a San Francisco apartment with her husband and cat. Her husband then accepts an offer of working in Trivandrum, India, and moves there alone to take up the position. After several months of very little contact, he finally calls Nina to inform her that the contract has been extended.

Bewildered by his callous indifference to their separation, Nina takes the initiative to join her husband in India. Upon her arrival he



Crying a river: a scene from the animated feature "Sita Sings the Blues."

The film brilliantly intersperses diverse styles and elements and establishes a parallel between the epic and Paley's own story. Episodes with dialogue from the Ramayana are enacted using painted figures of the characters in profile, which strongly resemble the 18th-century Indian tradition of Rajput painting. They serve as a more traditional style of dramatic narrative, although the dialogue is frequently ironic, inappropriately modern or otherwise humorous. Three silhouettes, traditional Indonesian shadow puppets, dispute the details of the Ramayana's tragic saga of its lead female character Sita, who is exiled by her husband, Rama, who fears she has been unfaithful after she is abducted by a demon king.

appears deeply unenthusiastic to be reunited with her and demonstrates neither affection nor interest. A while later, Nina flies to a meeting in New York. In New York, she receives a brief e-mail from her husband telling her not to return to India, that their relationship is over. Sad and alone, she stays in New York, finding comfort in a new cat and her study of the Ramayana.

"Sita Sings the Blues" was awarded the Crystal Grand Prix for Best Feature at the Annecy International Animated Film Festival and the "Crystal Bear Special Mention" in the category of Best Feature Film (Generation 14plus) at the 2008 Berlin International Film Festival.

In between are flash-animation musical. Compiled by Cultural Correspondent