

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Solo Art Exhibition

Title: Ochin Pakhi
Artist: Afroza Jamil
Venue: Radius Centre, Bay's Galleria (5th Floor), 57, Gulshan Avenue, Gulshan-1
Date: May 15-June 15
Time: 11am-11pm (Fridays 3-11pm)



Exhibition

Title: Sound of Weaving
Organiser: Anjans
Venue: Nalinikanta Bhattacharya Gallery, National Museum
Date: June 8-16



Barsha Utsab

Organiser: Satyen Sen Shilpi Sangstha
Venue: Hakim Chatter, Central Library premise, Dhaka University
Date: June 15
Time: 7am onwards



Album Launch

Title: Amar E Poth
Artist: Chanchal Khan
Venue: Music and Dance Auditorium, BSA
Date: June 28
Time: 7:15pm



The deliverance of Sita

Simon Zakaria and Avereer Chaurey see an epic heroine in a new light



Avereer Chaurey as Ram (left) and Sita in "Sitar Agni-Parikkha."

KARIM WAHEED

As the torrential downpour drenched many on the way, and some formed little groups at the lobby of Experimental Theatre Hall, Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy on June 12, the last bell rang. The show was about to start right on time: 7:30 pm.

The event, premiere show of Shadhona's latest production, "Sitar Agni-Parikkha," had the packed audience -- including the who's who in the theatre circuit -- waiting in anticipation. The team of 'dohar' (accompanying musicians and singers in an indigenous performing art form) seemed ready. The lead character (who was to eventually enact all characters) emerged in focus and the play started with an 'ashon bandona' (devotional intro, usually seeking blessings from Divinity, and paying



homage to the writer of the play).

The monodrama, following the 'Kushan Gaan' (a tradition indigenous to northern Bangladesh) style, has been written by Simon Zakaria. Zakaria won the 'HSBC-Kali O Kalom' award (2008) for "Bangladesh-er Lokonatok: Bishoy O Aangik Baichitra," a research-based book on the indigenous performing arts of rural Bengal.

All characters were enacted by Avereer Chaurey, an accomplished actor from Delhi, who has worked with leading Indian theatre houses like Bohurup and Naya Theatre (of the late Habib Tanvir). Chaurey was supported by a chorus of young and talented Bangladeshi artists.

The play begins at the 'ashok-kanan' in Ravan's Lanka palace. A dishevelled Sita laments her abduction and captivity. In a

flash Chaurey becomes Mandodari, Ravan's queen consort, who blames Sita for "seducing her husband with her looks," and curses her with "eternal misery." An unwilling "home wrecker," Sita shakes in fear.

Everyday, Ravan, the demon king, terrorises Sita -- sometimes with threats, and with illusions at others. But Sita, the epitome of fidelity, never budges an inch. She awaits her saviour, her husband, the love of her life -- Ram -- like a desert awaits rain.

The war over Sita ends. Ram smites Ravan. The heroine is ecstatic in anticipation. She picks the most exotic flowers and makes lei to greet her beloved. She hears footsteps and rushes, soon to be disappointed. Ram has not come; he has sent Vibhishan -- an ally and the new King of Lanka -- to bring Sita. As she tries to hurry to her husband, Sita is ordered to gussy up. Though annoyed, she obeys, as a good, dutiful wife would. She is made to walk to Ram's camp. Instead of her husband's loving arms, she finds belittlement and accusations of being "unchaste."

Ram explains that the war with Ravan was not about her; it was about rescuing his machismo and heroism under threat from Ravan. The hero even goes to the extent of giving Sita away to one of his half brothers or Vibhishan. And this is what breaks Sita's all-enduring patience. She comes of age. She realises Ram doesn't love her any more and her presence supposedly "tarnishes" his nobility. A dejected Sita asks her brother in law, Lakshman, to set up a 'chita' (pyre) for her. Ram delightfully encourages this idea of 'agni-parikkha' (the test of going through fire to prove one's chastity to the world). But hasn't Sita undergone 'agni-parikkha' repeatedly?

Soon after her wedding, when Ram was exiled (for fourteen years), Sita willingly renounced comforts of the palace and joined her husband in braving the travails, even living in forests. Throughout her captivity, she didn't give in to Ravan. Her dignity, her sense of self have been burnt time and again. What harm can fire do to her earthly body?

This post-feminist approach to the fire ordeal of Sita has the essence of secular indigenous performing art forms (still practised in rural Bangladesh), tailored to stir the sensitivities of an urban audience. Abdul Halim Pramanik's able direction fortifies the production.

Avereer Chaurey was a revelation. With just a turn or glare, this seasoned actor can summon an epitome of femininity, a bullying demon king, a gossiping resident of Lanka and a contemptuous Ram.

The group of 'dohar' (comprising Monir Ahmed Shakil, Zahedul Kabir Liton, Taskin Binte Siddique Sumi and Shompa Rani Bala) deserve special mention for creating an apt ambience. Music direction was by Monir Ahmed Shakil and Zahedul Kabir Liton. Reza Shahrir is the light designer and Enamrata Saki, the costume designer.

According to Lubna Mariam, general secretary of Shadhona, this production (a joint effort by Bangladeshi and Indian theatre activists) will be staged in major Indian cities as well as North America and the UK. As theatre personalities Aly Zaker and Ramendu Majumder put it, the audience will be eagerly waiting for more quality productions by Shadhona.

Tanvir Mokammel on Rabat Int'l Film Festival jury



Noted filmmaker Tanvir Mokammel has been invited as a jury member for the 15th Rabat International Film Festival, says a press release. One of the most important international film festivals in North Africa, the 10-day event begins on June 20 in Morocco.

Director of acclaimed films such as "Chitra Nadir Parey," (1999), "Lalsalu," (2001), and many others, Tanvir has also made several documentary films. He is the proud recipient of several awards for his stellar contributions to the film world. A major force behind the alternative film movement, Tanvir runs a film institute named Bangladesh Film Institute.

Fruit fiesta in Barisal

RAFIQUL ISLAM, Barisal

Uttaron, a cultural body, organised an unusual event -- a Fruit Festival at the BM College campus on June 12. The festival aimed at tickling the tastebuds of Bengalis who go for juicy varieties of *modhu-mash* (summer months).

Professor Nani Gopal Das, principal of BM College, along with several cultural personalities, inaugurated the festival. On display were 30 kinds of local fruits, including mangos, litchis, jackfruits, bananas and pineapples.

However, this does not present an entirely pretty picture. Says Professor Nani Gopal Das: "The application of formalin to fruits, as is the trend nowadays in Bangladesh, can pose serious health hazards to our people." He called upon the concerned authorities to take stern action against unscrupulous elements who use toxic chemicals to ripen fruits.

However, he also called upon the government to green the country by planting fruit trees in various places and in traffic intersections in Barisal city.

Bangladeshi films to be screened at South Asian Film Festival

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Bangladesh will have a sizable representation at the next edition of South Asian Film Festival, to be held in the tourist paradise of Goa from June 26 to 29 this year.

Eight feature and documentary films by leading Bangladeshi directors are to be screened including Humayun Ahmed's "Shyamol Chhaya," a film on the Liberation War, and Tanvir Mokammel's "Swapnabhumi" and "Bastro Balikara".

Among other films by Bangladeshi directors are "Aha!" and "Megher Por Megh."

Fifty-three films from eight SAARC member-countries -- Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives --

will be screened at four venues in Goa.

The films for the coming festival have been chosen by two separate committees -- including a review committee that included leading Indian directors like Goutam Ghosh and Sudhir Mishra. The films have been selected with an eye on the countries' socio-cultural-political tones, said festival secretary Rahul Barua.

Afghanistan will have two films -- "The Roots," which is about an Afghan expatriate who returns to the country after a long time and stays back, and "Opium War" directed by Siddik Barmak, which tells the story of an American soldier and the Taliban.

The Indian films in the festival include veteran director Shyam Benegal's latest film "Welcome to Sajjanpur," Madhur Bhandarkar's "Fashion," "A Wednesday" starring



A scene from "Aha!" -- one of the Bangladeshi films to be screened at the upcoming South Asian Film Festival.

Naseeruddin Shah and Anupam Kher, "Little Zizou," "Anuragan" and "My Brother Nikhil."

Among the five Pakistani films are, "Ramchand Pakistani" and "Mohabbatun Sachian." Six Sri Lankan movies include, "Young Monk," "Flooded River," "Death on a Full Moon Night" and "The Dark Night of the Soul."

The festival will also have 14 films from Iran including, "The Wooden Carpet," "Sound of Soil," "In An Iranian Market," "Life," "War and Nothing More," "The Empty Fish Bowl" and "Two Cups of Coffee."

Drama serial

Karo Kono Neeti Nai on ATN Bangla

Drama serial "Karo Kono Neeti Nai" will be aired tonight on ATN Bangla at 8pm.

Written and directed by Saiful Islam Mannu, the cast of the serial includes Ferdousi Majumder, Subarna Mustafa, Humayun Faridee, Al Mamun, Saberi Alam, Zakia Bari Mamo, Tinni, Shams Sumon, Mita Nur, Dolly Zahur, Mita Chowdhury, Dilara Zaman and others.

Mamota is a middle-aged woman from a well-off family. A widow, Mamota has two sons and three daughters. The eldest son lives



Tinni (centre) and Al Mamun (right) in a scene from the serial.

abroad. The other son, Babu, lives with her. Mamota does not particularly get along with Babu's wife Mariam, who is from a less affluent background. Ruhi, the eldest of Mamota's daughters, is married to a police officer, Mira, another of Mamota's daughters, is also married

and has two children. The serial begins with the wedding of Ripa, the youngest of Mamota's daughters.

Tonight, the tenth episode of the serial will be aired.

Drama serial

Cornet on Desh TV



A scene from "Cornet."

CULTURAL CORRESPONDENT

Written by Pantha Shahriar and directed by Shahiduzzaman Selim, drama serial "Cornet" will be aired tonight at 10 pm on Desh TV. The serial focuses on an aged cornet player by the name of Abdul Latif.

The 70-year-old Latif lives in extreme penury and is often denigrated with the name Lutu. Now Latif can't even play the cornet, for which he had an innate and remarkable talent in his younger days. However, his early life got derailed when he encountered Antara, a young and beautiful courtesan. Soon even his musical skills became mediocre. A nostalgic Latif hopes to retrieve his lost talent and gain public recognition once more.

Shahiduzzaman Selim, Azizul Hakim, Shams Shumon, Wahida Mallik Jolly, Rosy Siddiqui, Farzana Chumki, Najmul Huda Bachchu and Shatabdi Wadud play the lead roles in the serial.

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