

WHAT'S ON THIS WEEK

Group Art Exhibition

Organiser: Gallery Chittrak
Venue: Gallery Chittrak, H-21, R-4, Dhanmondi
Inauguration: April 3 at 6pm
Date: April 3-12
Time: 10am-8pm



Solo Painting Exhibition

Artist: Syeeduzzaman Sumon
Title: Rural Life
Venue: Alliance Francaise, 26, Mirpur Road, Dhanmondi
Date: April 3-17
Time: 3pm-9pm (except Sundays)



Solo Painting Exhibition

Artist: Murshida Arzu Alpana
Title: Drinking Bottle Water and Breathing Dust Only
Venue: Goethe Institut Bangladesh H-10, R-9, Dhanmondi
Date: April 5-22
Time: 10am-8pm



Boats Exhibition

Title: Traditional Boats of Bangladesh
Venue: Nalinikanta Bhattashah Gallery, Bangladesh National Museum
Date: March 23-April 19
Time: 10am-5pm



An author's environmental concerns

Catching up with Selina Hossain

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Major contemporary political and socio-economic issues have never failed to stir renowned Bangladeshi writer Selina Hossain ever since she penned her first novel in 1971. Be it Bangladesh's Liberation War or exploitation of the poor or the plight of women in a male-dominated society, she has dealt with such issues in her works, including 21 novels and seven collections of short stories.

And now when climate change is a major global concern, 63-year-old Hossain is engaged with it too, in roles ranging from that of a writer to a social activist distributing relief in cyclone-hit areas. She has not only written short stories on the effects of global warming-induced natural disasters on the rural poor, especially women, but also ventured to an area to disburse relief to survivors of the cyclone Sidr in 2007. One of the writer's upcoming literary projects -- a "big novel" on the

plight of indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) -- is partly prompted by the issue of environmental degradation and its effects on the lives of the locals.

Hossain stood out at the SAARC Literature Festival held recently at the India International Centre, as she was the only writer to talk about climate change issues and how literature can bring it into sharper focus among the masses.

At the Festival, she not only presented a paper on "Environment and Literature" but also submitted a short story "His Beloved Island" on the issue.

Hossain has written a moving short story "Death" on the devastating effect the cyclone Aila had on Bangladesh last year. Prior to that, she herself travelled to Barguna district of Bangladesh in 2007 soon after large parts of it were ravaged by another cyclone, Sidr, distributing relief collected by an NGO.

Hossain's belief in a holistic view of life is reflected in her views on environmental issues. That is why she says "environment and literature are not two different things and environment

could not be seen separately from state policy."

She believes South Asian writers have to speak up through their works against "the glaring injustice given by developed countries to developing countries in matters of climate change" because this region is the most vulnerable to climate change.

"The writers will have to speak in the language of the heart of the people who are victims of climate change, their pain and their protest and resistance so that there is a universal appeal," says Hossain.

It is this universalism one notices in her short story "Death" in which the protagonist Jabbar loses his home and entire family to the fury of cyclone Aila. After the natural disaster wreaks havoc in his village, Jabbar fails to recognise it as the village where he was born and brought up. The way the story has been presented by Hossain takes it out of the setting of a Bangladeshi village and places it in any cyclone-ravaged part of the world. The predicament of Jabbar in Hossain's story becomes the predicament of any victim of environmental disaster.

Her concern with environment is partly a core motive behind her writing a new novel on the plight of indigenous people in the CHT. Hossain believes that "Literature is not merely stories of people's life. In it is reflected the roles of the state and its rulers." The indigenous communities of CHT are facing the problem of environmental degradation as they go in search of new sources of drinking water as existing springs dry up due to deforestation, says the writer.

The recent unrest in the CHT as reflected in clashes between indigenous people and Bengali settlers in February this year has pained Hossain who says the story of her new novel on the subject will narrate not only the sorrow of the displaced indigenous people but also be a critique of the "unfavourable attitude of the state."

Besides environment, Hossain has turned her focus on completing work on poet Mirza Ghalib, which should hopefully be published in February 2011. Much of that book will be based on Indian Ambassador to Bhutan Pawan KVerma's book on the poet, says the Bangladeshi author who heaped fulsome praise on Verma's "positive analysis" of Ghalib.

She said she will dedicate her book on Ghalib to Indian lyricist-poet Gulzar. "I met Gulzar at the Literature Festival and conveyed my intention to him," said Hossain.



Selina Hossain

THEATRE

DU students bring Millington's "Riders to the Sea" to Natmandal

JAMIL MAHMUD

As part of their curriculum, the students of the Department of Theatre, Dhaka University (DU), have arranged a weeklong staging of the globally renowned play "Riders to the Sea". The premiere show was on April 6 at Natmandal, DU and the play will be staged everyday at the venue till April 11. Ashikur Rahman Leon has directed the play based on the translation by Kabir Chowdhury.

"Riders to the Sea" was written by Irish playwright John Millington Synge (1871-1909). A one-act tragedy, the play is acclaimed for capturing the poetic dialogue of rural Ireland.

The play features four characters -- Maurya, her daughters Cathleen and Nora, and her son Bartley. Maurya's deceased sons -- Shawn, Sheamus, Stephen, Patch, and Michael -- are also mentioned throughout the play.

Maurya has lost her husband, father-in-law, and five sons to the sea. As the play begins, Nora and Cathleen receive news that a body has washed up on the shore and it might be their brother Michael.

Meanwhile Bartley is planning to sail and ignores Maurya's pleas to stay.

As he leaves, Maurya predicts that by nightfall she will have no living sons. Her daughters scold her for allowing Bartley to go. Maurya goes after Bartley to bless his voyage.

Maurya returns home claiming to have seen the ghost of Michael riding behind Bartley and begins lamenting the loss of the men in her family to the sea.

The whole play takes place in Maurya's house, where the tragic story is narrated through the conversations between the mother and her offspring.

Nusrat Sharmin played the role of Maurya. Sharmin's performance would have been more credible if she could effectively incorporate the emotions of a woman who is coming to terms with colossal losses. Syeda Iffat Ara as Nora did seemingly well. Mahzabeen Islam played Cathleen, while Khan Mohammad Rafiqul Islam donned the role of Bartley.

The stage, light, costume designs and music direction were done by the students of fifth semester.

The play starts at 7pm every evening.



The play will be staged everyday at Natmandal, DU till April 11.

PHOTO: MUMIT M.

Promoting dance and recitation

Sharmila and Bhaswar on "Dhrupadi Kahini"

A CORRESPONDENT

"Dhrupadi Kahini" on Rtv features artistes who have struggled to reach their respective positions and goals. Their stories of success and dedication to the arts are also highlighted on the show.

Noted dancer Sharmila Bandyopadhyay and reciter Bhaswar Bandyopadhyay are the featured guests on tomorrow's episode of the programme.

Apart from providing insights into the artistes' careers, the show will also shed light on their personal lives.



Sharmila and Bhaswar Bandyopadhyay on the show.

"Dhrupadi Kahini" is programme will be aired compiled, directed and tomorrow evening at hosted by Shanta Islam. The 6:45pm.

Whitney Houston admitted to hospital



Singer Whitney Houston has been admitted to a hospital in Paris suffering from nose and throat problems, it has been reported.

News agency Agence France-Presse (AFP) said a member of the star's entourage had revealed she was also suffering from an infection.

Houston, 46, had already postponed the first date of her European tour because of a respiratory infection.

The news agency source said she was being treated for a swelling of the mucus membranes in the nose and pharynx.

Houston, one of the world's most successful music artistes -- who has sold more than 170 million records, has been dogged by ill-health as she attempts a major comeback.

After a battle with drug addiction and the break-up of her 14-year marriage to singer Bobby Brown, she released a new album "I Look to You" in 2009.

The album was well received by critics, topping the US chart and charting at number three in the UK.

But a lacklustre performance at a recent show in Australia had fans questioning whether the singer could still match the range of her early vocal performances.

Source: BBC

Relics that had seen better days

Ramsundar Estate in Shaikupa



The ancestral house of Ramsundar Shikdar.

PHOTO: STAR

AZIBOR RAHMAN, Jhenidah

There are some reminders of Shikdar estate (of the 18th century) in Shaikupa upazila. Originally owned by Ramsundar Shikdar, the property and landownership rights have changed hands. His successors, however, have managed to safeguard some relics: an obsolete gramophone; an *esraj*; two temples made of *Shal* timber; *Sreemodbhabatam*, a sword; a *hookah* and the vestiges of a *saree* made of silver thread.

Ramsundar established the Shikdar estate in the 18th century. The basic title of the clan was Tilikundu. Ramsundar's grandfather Kartik Chandra was a rice trader at the time and owned a vast estate. He acquired the title Shikdar from the Nawab's court of Murshidabad. Unfortunately Chandra's assistant made off with all of Chandra's cash and valuables. After losing his entire wealth Chandra was reduced to the status of a day labourer.

Kartik Chandra had a son named Baneshwar Shikdar. He had four sons: Ramchand, Ramsundar, Radhamohon and Krishnomohon, who could not continue education due to financial constraints. Of them Ramsundar was very intelligent and hard working.

Ramsundar had to sustain hardship to provide for his family. Ramsundar embarked on his trade with a single coin given by his aunt. On the first day, the astute Ramsundar managed to make a profit of two and half *paisa*. Encouraged by this modest success, his business grew by leaps and bounds and he became a wealthy businessman in the southwestern region. Later, he commissioned a grand palace on 400 *bigha* land which included 350 rooms. He also built a theatre hall on the estate.

On Baishakh 25, 1270 (Bengali calendar) Ramsundar breathed his last. He left behind seven sons. In 1304 his sons began to deal in jute. By 1339 (Bengali year) they had reached the pinnacle of their success. Viceroy Lord Curzon conferred the title "Prince of Jute Belarus" on Shikdar & Company. Later, Ramsundar's descendants divided the business and settled in different parts of the then undivided India and beyond. After Ramsundar's demise, his sons established the Ramsundar Institute in Abhaipur village. The Shikdar estate eventually lost all its glory and went downhill from this point.

Abhaipur is situated 17 kms away from Shaikupa upazila town. Here the relics of Ramsundar's ancestral two-storied house remain. Avaricious people have taken away all valuables from the house. In one old part of the building live the descendants of Ramsundar Shikdar and maintain what is left of the estate.



Rajkumar Shikdar, a descendant of Ramsundar, with some of the relics.