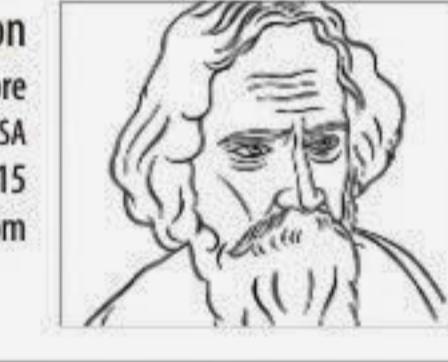
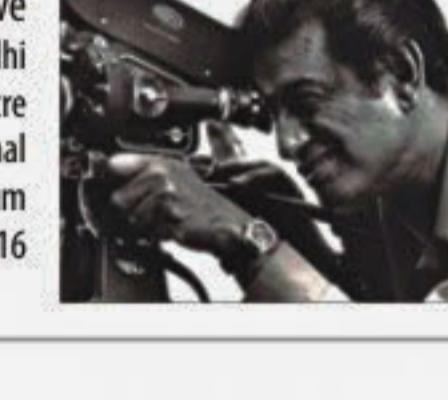


## WHAT'S ON



It seemed nothing short of the Bangladeshi Boishakhi Mela transplanted in the heart of London.

SADYA AFREEN MALLICK writes from London

Grim foggy London was finally waking up to spring. From my living room at Canary Wharf, the Thames sparkled like jewels. The seagulls perched lazily by the waterfront, thawing out after a cold winter. Young couples took to boating, cycling or jogging beside the river. Trees discarded their dead branches for lush green foliage, resembling huge roadside chandeliers.

On the way to the Royal London Hospital, appreciating the delightful change in nature, I caught a glimpse of the posters by the busy roads. Colourful picturesquesque masks like those that crop up at every Boishakhi Festival in Dhaka. Did I see it right? But this was London! I looked through the rear window and confirmed that Boishakhi Mela was to be held on the 8th of May on Brick Lane. Brick Lane in East London, referred to as Bangla Town, is an authentic area for Bangladeshi cuisine and the one place in the UK where street names are etched in Bengali.

"People have come from all over Europe," said poet Shameen Azad. "The Boishakhi Mela (New Year Festival), organised by the Tower Hamlet, has been held for the last 14 years," added Azad, the chairperson of the London Branch of Bishwa Shabtia Kendra.

At the entrance of the carnival, children were screaming in delight as the roller coasters soared perilously towards the sky. The stalls offering phuchka, chaptati, cotton candy, kulfis, khichuri, biriyani set all around the mela premises were packed with eager foodies. It seemed nothing short of the Bangladeshi Boishakhi Mela transplanted in the heart of London.

"We have come to introduce our children to the Boishakhi Mela that we miss so much," said a housewife, Rehana Perveen. "Our children love the deshi items such as phuchka and chaptati. Even though the price is exorbitant we want them to enjoy it," added her husband, Abu Hena Mustafa Kamal.

Unsure of what to expect, I finally decided to make the 10 minute walk and pay a short visit with friends. The mela had already started at 12 noon, marked by a colourful procession brought out by the local youth.

and community groups. I reached the massive park at 5pm, half expecting that the crowd had dispersed by then.

To my surprise, I watched the crowd in awe -- there must have been over 100,000 people munching, dancing, slurping and singing on a bright, sunny day.

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By 6pm we reached Oxford House where more surprise awaited us. Bishwa Shabtia Kendra UK had arranged a special programme celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Tagore and a Boishakhi Book fair. The beautiful brochure with a painting by

I watched from afar, the stream of ladies dressed gorgeously in white and red jamdani saris, and men in colourful panjabis, the toddlers clad in yellow, flowers bedecking their hair -- all rushing to the mela ground.

This was no different than what we see and experience back home in Bangladesh on

Pahela Boishakhi.

A huge stage at the furthest corner was set up for the cultural programme. Different organisations performed Bangla songs, starting from Tagore, Nazrul, Hason Raja to the contemporary hits. "Next year we plan to stage jatra," added one of the organisers.

Young girls and boys danced at will to the tune of "Bauli ke bauli re", a Hason Raja composition.

A deep sense of pride filled my heart. We were among a handful of artistes (as part of Chhayanaut) who had started celebrating Pahela Boishakhi in Dhaka. It has now

stretched far and wide and is being observed

with much festivity at the other side of the

world!

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Celebrating Home, Away from Home  
Boishakhi Mela in London

Khadija Rahman said much about the capabilities of the members. Bangladesh High Commissioner to London, Dr. M Sayeedur Rahman Khan, inaugurated the event. Former High Commissioner of UK to Bangladesh, Anwar Chowdhury, along with Sayeedur Rahman lit a mangan prodeep before declaring the festival open.

The welcome dance and song were followed by an interactive storytelling on the bard by poet Shameen Azad. Eminent writer Belal Mahmood, the man instrumental in sending out the message of independence immediately after the crackdown of Pakistan, later gave away the Tassaduk Ahmed Award to the best volunteer at the event.

This was followed by a theatre adaptation of Tagore's "Debotar Grash", directed by Saklain. The play began with Moitra, an affluent man, preparing for a pilgrimage. As a team sets out for the journey, a young widow, Mokkhoda, begs Moitra to take her along. But the story gets a twist when her only child Rakhal is fascinated by the idea of a sea voyage, and refuses to get off the boat. The play focuses on the defeat of humanity and logic at the hands of superstition.

The amateur cast fascinated the audience with their performances. "We performed a play at Edinborough to the Bengali commu-

nity recently," said one of the organisers, Zakir Hossain. Dia Chakravarty's (granddaughter of poet Sufia Kamal) performance of Tagore songs was highly appreciated by the audience. A book launching session followed next.

At the end of the programme, the audience was treated to Tagore's art and a fashion show. The show highlighted the "fashion statement" created by the Jorasanko Thakurbari during Tagore's time. The current style of wearing saris in pleats also evolved from the experiments made by the ladies of the Tagore family. One by one the characters Labanya and Amit of "Shesher Kabita"; Nikhlesh and Bimola from "Ghore Bairey"; Binodini from "Chokher Bali"; Nandini from "Roktokorobi" and more sprang to life attired in the style Tagore sketched himself. Ronny and Urme Mazhar narrated the background during the catwalk.

It was late and we had to return home. One could sense the feeling of pride rippling through in the audience, a quiet confidence that despite being miles away from home, the cultural roots had not withered away in neglect. This was home away from home, or as the saying goes "home is where the heart is".

Despite being hugely popular, this band has so far launched only two albums in almost three decades.

Winning's self-titled debut album (released in 1992) was the bestseller in 2002, and since then the band had become inactive, explained the members.

"We have a unique style of music, it's not for everyone," said Chandan. "We have a fan base that is accustomed to our style. We could not risk alienating them by experimenting with another vocalist after Chandan left," added Biplob, the keyboardist.

"Our fans are dedicated and they've patiently waited years to hear us live," said Ranjan, drummer and vocalist.

The band conveyed special thanks to Shojol, a long-term friend and well-wisher of the band, who initiated the idea of this reunion.

The crew said that they are all very excited about the musical reunion today. They promised an unforgettable show and an evening of melody dedicated to all their fans and well



## Winning Reunites

Grand concert celebrating 28th anniversary of the band

TANZIN CHOWDHURY

Winning, a band that has given contemporary music aficionados several hits, was formed in 1983 by five young men - Ranjan, Shelly, Haider, Mitul and Famiid. Over the years, musicians Babu, Chandan, Biplob, Tipu and Mobin joined in.

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wishes.

Chandan quickly added, "All our fans, who are abroad or can't make it to the reunion, can watch the show on Boishakhi TV or hear it on Radio Today."

"Don't miss it! This concert is going to be grand," said Tipu, drummer and percussionist of the band (also drummer of Warfaze).

The band members also broke the big news: Winning's third album will be launched by next year.

The crew said that the new album will feature Winning's familiar style of music. "However, on this album we're fusing some new flavours -- keeping young audiences in mind," said Babu, the senior-most guitarist of the band.

No compromise will be made with the lyrics though, because "that's what makes our songs complete and unique," Chandan said.

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Carnival Events, an event management firm run by Tipu and Emon, has taken the initiative to host the concert.



## Female Perspectives

Zahir Raihan Film Society celebrates 25th anniversary with festival featuring women filmmakers



Clara Law's "Temptation of a Monk" is one of the featured films at the festival.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Zahir Raihan Film Society is celebrating its 25th anniversary on May 16. On the occasion, the film society is holding a festival, titled "A Tribute to Women Filmmakers of the World" -- screening 38 films by 34 female filmmakers from around the world.

The screening -- divided into two sessions -- started yesterday at the auditorium of Alliance Francaise de Dhaka, Dharmundi. The first session features 21 films by filmmakers from Asia, Africa, Australia and the Americas. This session will continue till May 21. Some of the filmmakers featured in this session are: Shamim Akhtar and Yasmine Kabir (Bangladesh), Deepa Mehta (India), Clara Law (Hong Kong), Cheren Dabis (Palestine), Tahmineh Milani (Iran), Lucrecia Martel (Argentina), Jane Campion (New Zealand), Meouda Tlalit (Tunisia) and Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez (Cuba).

The second session will begin on June 17 at the same venue and will feature 17 films and will continue till June 25. Featured filmmakers in the session

include Susanne Bier (Denmark), Christine Croke (Greece), Lynne Ramsay (Scotland), Nana Dzordzadze (Georgia), Jessica Hausner (Austria), Anna Melikyan (Russia) and Doris Dörrie (Germany).

Sabbir Ahmed Chowdhury, president of Zahir Raihan Film Society, informed that this initiative is a remarkable effort in the history of the film society movement in Bangladesh. It gives the film enthusiasts of Bangladesh a rare opportunity of watching films made by women, dealing with (in most cases) women's issues.

In a testament to the festival's pull-

ing power, Hollywood stars Robert De Niro, Uma Thurman, Salma Hayek and Antonio Banderas twirled and smiled for a legion of tuxedo-wearing photog-

raphers on the red carpet leading to the festival palace.

Blockbusters "Kung Fu Panda 2" starring Angelina Jolie and "Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides" with Johnny Depp and Penelope Cruz both launch in Cannes, as studios return en masse after avoiding the notoriously costly trip to France due to the financial crisis over the past couple of years.

And De Niro is in town as head of this year's jury. "For me to see 20 movies in this amount of time is unusual and it's kind of a bit of a vacation, because I can focus on the films, (and) not have any distractions that I normally would have in my everyday life, so this is a terrific thing for me," he said.

A seminar marking the 25th anniversary of the film society will be held on May 16 at Alliance Francaise.

Zahir Raihan Film Society has so far screened about 4,000 films, and organised

seminars and workshops for a better

understanding and appreciation of cinema. It has also brought out publications and posters for the betterment of the film society movement in Bangladesh.

Festivals and screenings by the organisa-

tions, the distinction or hierarchy between artists and viewers are

superfluous and viewers' reaction

determines the art piece, making each

"happening" a unique experience.

Blurring the lines among different

genres, the installations usually

involve different mediums of art at a

single event.

Walking into the age-old premises of Beauty Boarding, one could hear the voices of opera legends Enrico Caruso and Maria Callas. Ronni Ahmed's fairly large installation, titled "The golden days of the golden nights..." was set at the yard. The blackened bamboo structure, holding

a lot of objects, wrapped up in flashy

golden paper created a spectacular

effect by echoing the yellowish dis-

temper of the surrounding building.

Back in '60s and '70s, most of the

progressive writers and thinkers of

our country used to hang out in this

area. "The golden days of the golden

nights..." reflected the spirit of that

period, according to the artist. Nostalgia and retro (without arguing for a

possible future) are some of the many

defining characteristics of post-

modernism. Like some of his earlier

works, this one was also post-modern

in essence.

Wakilur Rahman's installation was



Woody Allen film charms Cannes, Lady Gaga surprises

Woody Allen delighted the crowds at

the start of the Cannes film festival on

Wednesday with "Midnight in Paris".

There was laughter and applause from famously fussy Cannes critics at the press screening, which opened 11 days of red carpets, media interviews, lounging on luxury yachts and late night partying in the glamorous Riviera resort.

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