

WHAT'S ON

**Art Exhibition**  
 Title: Serenading Suchitra  
 Venue: Shilpangan Gallery, H-7, R-13 (New), Dhanmondi  
 Date: April 6-19  
 Time: 12pm-8pm



**Art Exhibition**  
 Artist: Iffat Ara Dewan  
 Venue: Bengal Lounge, Gulshan  
 Date: April 13-27  
 Time: 12pm-8pm



**Commemorative Programme**  
 Poet Fazal Shahabuddin  
 Venue: Chhayanaut, Dhanmondi  
 Date: April 19  
 Time: 5pm



**Photography Exhibition**  
 Title: Exile in Calcutta  
 Photographer: Thomas Meyer  
 Venue: Drik Gallery  
 Date: April 15-21



**Photography Exhibition**  
 Title: Death Trap  
 Photographer: Abr Abdullah  
 Venue: Alliance Francaise de Dhaka, Dhanmondi  
 Date: April 10-24



# BEING BANGALEE

## Bangla year 1421 ushered in with fervour and festivities



Chhayanaut's choral songs at Ramna Botomul, Mongol Shobhajatra and just being celebratory: a typical Pahela Boishakh.

**FAHMIM FERDOUS**

As the first gleam of a soft light spread across the Dhaka sky, reflecting off the clouds even before sunrise, people were out in the streets. It was April 14, but far more importantly it was Pahela Boishakh; it was the festival of festivals for every Bangalee, the one celebration that is entirely our own as a nation and as a race.

And people were not just out; they were out to celebrate, to paint the streets of the town (literally; one of the widest avenues in the city, the Manik Miah, was painted in an alopna of bursting colours, as were quite a few others). Everyone -- servicemen, entrepreneurs, students, the toddler to the elderly -- were dressed for the occasion; panjabis and fatuas, sarees and kameez in all colours, with red and white being the majority, were headed towards their favourite Pahela Boishakh celebration spots.

And there is one venue that has become synonymous to Pahela Boishakh celebrations -- the Ramna Botomul. The shade under the banyan tree that has hosted the Pahela Boishakh celebrations for nearly half a century -- is still the prime favourite of the serious observers of the festival. The tranquil melody of Raga Ahir Bhairav on

Rajrupa Chowdhury's sarod as if opened the gates to a beautiful morning, as the year's theme "Swadesh O Samprity" continued in familiar solo and resonating choral voices -- be it the songs of Pancha-kobi, Lalon or Shah Abdul Karim, or recitation poems, queues formed at the entrances to Ramna in a disciplined manner as law-enforcers kept a sharp eye to ensure safety and organised proceedings. People sat, stood and leaned on trees on both sides of the lake; some even sat down with the entire family having breakfast while enjoying the performances -- that ended with a booming heartfelt rendition of the National Anthem, following a beautiful address by one of Chhayanaut's cornerstones, Dr. Sanjida Khatun.

Not far away from there, another crowd was gathering through, in a more youthful, exuberant mode of celebration. The Mongol Shobhajatra is the biggest parade the capital ever sees, and this time was no different. Students of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Dhaka University (Charukola) brought out their massive structures -- fishes, owls, deer, a man on a tiger, and a shikey (clay pots hanging from jute ropes; a symbol of a prosperous Bangalee household) -- and papier-mache masks as youngsters from all over the city joined in the bustle



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

with beats of the dhol. While city life takes its toll on citizens' 'Bangaliana' throughout the year, this was the day to feel our cultural roots without a hindrance.

Throughout the Dhaka University area -- be it the Hakim Chatter or the Chhobi'r Haat opposite to Charukola, people walked around merrily, ate the batasha and pitha on offer, gathered in circles as snake-charmers displayed their bag of tricks, and bought different kinds of folk musical instruments from the stalls set up. The Charukola premises itself took on the appearance of a village fair, with putul nakh house, various types of village carnival rides, and a jatrapala performance.

While cynics look down on the festivities as hypocritical, momentary excitement about our culture, Pahela Boishakh in essence is just the opposite. While it may be inconvenient to begin every morning with panta-ilish or wear futua-panjabi to a corporate office, it is the one day that reminds us who we are. Without it, the children who have grown up in Dhaka all their life and don't get too many chances to visit his village home -- wouldn't probably know the feeling of getting on a hand-pulled chorki or gotten to play an ektara or a dugdugi. Pahela Boishakh is the one day of the year that helps us recapitulate the tug of our roots.

## The spirit of Royal Bengal Tiger

### Nazir Hossain's solo exhibition at Gallery Chittrak

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

On the occasion of Baishakh, Gallery Chittrak in Dhanmondi has organised a solo art exhibition titled "Bagh-er Deshey Boishakh", featuring the works of artist Nazir Hossain.

The exhibition was inaugurated on April 14. Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Shiro Sadoshima inaugurated the exhibition as chief guest. Eminent artist Quayyum Chowdhury presided over the inaugural session. Art critic Moinuddin Khaled was present as special guest.

The subject of his paintings at the ongoing exhibition is the Royal Bengal tiger, and the style of depiction is motivated by indigenous art forms and traditional folk motifs. His works are largely based on rural themes, and his artistic fascination is clearly articulated.

Nazir has developed a style that is not exceptional in our art milieu, but the artist strives to carve out an individual hallmark through a realistic figurative style and diversity of colours. The paintings are raw in nature and at the same time modern in their mode of expressions. His canvas reveals the world of tigers, reptiles, fish, elephants, birds, owls, peacocks, mermaids and varied animal forms. Blue, black, yellow, white and crimson are used predominantly, giving an appealing approach to Nazir's characters.

At the exhibition, a number of his works depict flying birds, fish, flowers, dolls, betel leaves, our national flag and tiny birds next to men, women and tigers. The painter has used diverse kinds of lines and curves when portraying human figures, animal forms, flora and fauna and other objects. The treatment of lines is simple in nature, giving an illustrative expression to the paintings. Most of his paintings depict a complete story that bears our traditional identity. Men and women ride boats, men play flutes, women are in guise of mermaids and angels. The painter's works are closely related to local myths, beliefs and visions.

The exhibition will continue till April 20.



## Ushering in Noboborsho in a thousand voices

### Shurer Dhara celebrates Chaitra Sangkranti and Pahela Boishakh



Rezwana Chowdhury Banya leads Shurer Dhara to a chorus.

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Renowned music school Shurer Dhara, like previous years, bid adieu to the Bangla year 1420 and welcomed the New Year through elaborate programmes at the open premises of the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital, in association with Channel i. With the theme "Dosh-er Kotha Desher Gaan", the programme began at sundown on April 13, which marked Chaitra Sangkranti -- the last day of the Bangla calendar -- with five songs of Pancha-kobi (Rabindranath, Nazrul, DL Roy, Rajanikant and Atulprasad) rendered in chorus, led by the chairman and principal of the school, Rezwana Chowdhury Banya. The programme -- that went on till nearly midnight -- featured songs based on the Swadeshi movement, Language Movement, the mass-uprising on '69 and the Liberation War. The pianist Aly Zaker presented a part of Syed Shamsul Haq's iconic play "Nuroldiner Sharajibon", while Professor Emeritus Anisuzzaman also spoke on the occasion. Students of various batches of Shurer Dhara, along

with singers and dancers from all across the country then performed to an enthusiastic audience. The programme came to a close with "Byartho Pran'er Aborjona Puriye Fele".

On the next day -- Pahela Boishakh, the beginning of the Bangla New Year -- a thousand artistes including students of Shurer Dhara and singers from across the country, ushered in a new dawn in unison, at the stroke of sunrise. A vibrant cultural programme followed, featuring performances by renowned artistes of the country including Subir Nandi, Rafiqul Alam, Sujit Mostafa, Fahmida Nabi and Nashid Kamal. A crafts fair also held at the premises drew the attention of attendees. A fashion show was also held, followed by a performance of Ayub Bachchu and his band.

A number of dignitaries -- including US Ambassador Dan Mozena, Tourism and Civil Aviation minister Rashed Khan Menon, Channel i Managing Director Faridur Reza Sagar and director and head of news Shykh Seraj, among others, attended the events. Both events were broadcast live by Channel i.

ZAHANGIR ALOM, writes from Bandarban

Boishakh is perhaps the sole festival that comes in every Bangalee's life living across the globe, with a call for linking the past with the present and welcoming the New Year with rapturous rhythms of rejuvenation, vibrant colours and new hopes.

Traditionally, Pahela Boishakh reminds us of ektara, dhak-dhol and shankhadhwani; the taste of panta-ilish and the daylong funfair in traditional attire.

Baishakh is celebrated with a difference in the hilly districts of Chittagong, though the theme of a fresh beginning is similar in every corner of Bangladesh. Here in the tranquil green hills, Boisabi -- as it is known -- is way different from Chhayanaut's Borshoboron and Charukola's Mongol Shobhajatra.

In CHT, the cultural co-existence and harmony in diversity is unique at Boisabi. Three predominant indigenous communities -- Chakma, Marma and Tripura -- celebrate the New Year in different ways and with different celebrations. The term 'Boisabi' originates from Tripura's festival 'Boisuk', the Marma's 'Sangrain' and the Chakma's 'Biju'.

Boisabi features time-honoured religious-cultural rituals: cultural events, children's painting competitions and traditional sports like



A dancer performs in a cultural programme; Marmas celebrate Sangrain in River Shangu.

## Shades of Boisabi

### Harmony, colour and verve in the hills

Bolikhela (wrestling) and colourful processions. People of all ages, attired in traditional indigenous dresses, delve into celebrations adding different shades to the occasion.

The Chakmas set off the three-day Biju Utsav with 'Phool Biju', where young girls float flowers in water-bodies on the penultimate morning of the outgoing year, seeking divine blessings. On the last day of the year, called "Mul Biju," they prepare a vast range of delicacies and offer these to the villagers. Their mixed vegetable curry -- called 'Pachan', and traditional pithas, served with 'Chuan' (locally brewed liquor) add to the celebrations.

The first day of the New Year called 'Gojjya Pojya Din' is the day to start anew and pray to Lord Buddha for yearlong peace and prosperity. The Chakmas throw their homes open to guests, irrespective of community.

Meanwhile, a number of socio-cultural organisations held celebrations across the hill districts. Rangamati district administration arranged a cultural programme on April 14 to welcome Pahela Boishakh at Shaheed Minar premises where Bangalees living in the town gathered with colourful processions.

The Marmas celebrate their Sangrain festival, welcoming New Year. In the run up to the celebrations, they clean and decorate their houses, prepare traditional food and participate in rituals. Their biggest event is the water festival.

People, mostly young boys and girls participate in the festival splashing water on each other. The Marmas, along with tourists and Bangalees gather at different points to take part in Sangrain.

They go to the pagoda, bathe Lord Buddha's statues in sandalwood-water and renew their commitment to Panchasheel (five precepts) and Ashtasheen (eight precepts). At the pagodas, monks remind them of the dharma -- the right path to living.

The Marmas render Sangrain songs while making their way peacefully to the predestined place for Punyosan (holy bath). Everyone in the procession sings Marma songs in unison.

The Marmas in Bandarban brought out a colourful procession from Puratan Rajar Math on their way to the banks of River Shankha, where they performed religious rituals that included Buddha's holy baths.

Apart from the celebrations by Chakmas and Marmas, other indigenous groups in the CHT including Tripura, Tangchanga, Bom, Mro, Khumi, Khyang and Chak celebrated the festival in their traditional way.

It is Boisabi that brings fresh hope, new possibilities and a renewed call to move on. And in the hilly districts, Boisabi is a festival that brings everyone together, celebrating harmony in heterogeneity.



PHOTO: RIDWAN ADID RUPO