

THE HINDU

Online edition of India's National Newspaper

Tuesday, Jan 31, 2006

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A cultural festival with a difference

Madhur Tankha

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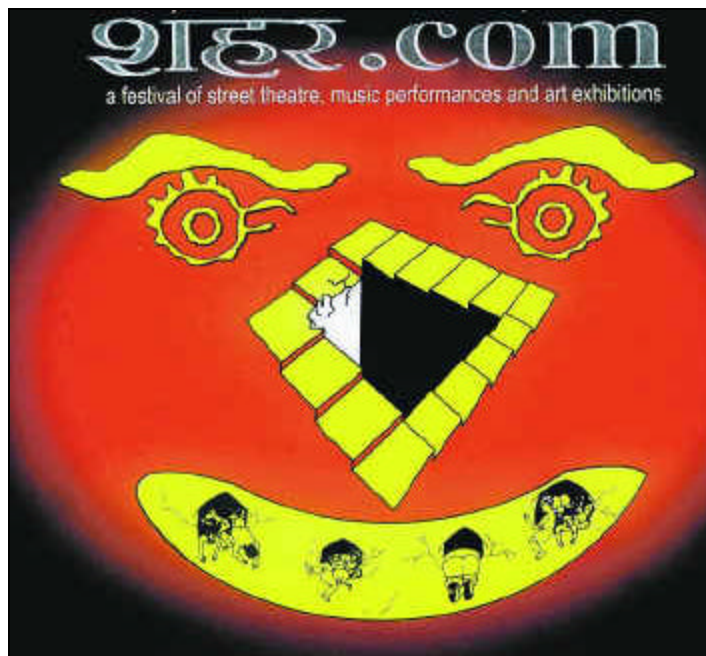
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EXPRESSIONS ON THE CITY: Constructed by those seldom counted as its citizen

NEW DELHI: A two-day cultural festival, "Shehar.com", showcasing street theatre, musical performances and exhibitions opens at India Habitat Centre here this coming Saturday.

Organised by the Hazards Centre, a group that helps develop alternative frameworks on issues of urban planning and practice, the festival's street theatre has been put together largely by groups from slums and resettlement colonies of Delhi, along with non-government organisations, independent groups as well as students from the Delhi University and JNU.

Exploring questions on whether world-class development was all about constructing commercialised spaces of malls, metro, flyovers and hotels or does it also include basic services for the majority citizens, Shehar.com's prime objective is to provide a platform to ordinary citizens so that they can tell their side of the story about life in big cities. Noted film actor and theatre personality Naseeruddin Shah will be giving the go-ahead to the

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festival that will show street theatre by children and young groups from mostly unprivileged backgrounds, depicting their lives.

During the festival, the Salaam Balak Trust will stage a play, "Main Bhi Ek Bachcha Hoon", illustrating the different types of exploitative situations faced by homeless children, while the students of Kirori Mal College will stage a play, "Nazar Andaz", dealing with deteriorating labour conditions in farm, domestic and industrial sectors.

Other events include folk songs by a group of workers engaged in ragpicking, a play by street children on their journey from coming to becoming of the streets. An interesting event is a solo play, "Hamlet in Faridabad", portraying Shakespeare's character Hamlet in encounter with working class realities through readings of documents from a library maintained by workers.

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