



The six best-dressed women at a fashion show featuring dresses of six seasons at Hotel Agrabad in the city on April 25. The Chittagong Women Entrepreneurs' Association organised the show as part of the Baishakhi Festival.

A link between present & past

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD, Ctg

With the traditional fervour and enthusiasm the 'Jabbarer Boli Khela' (Jabber's wrestling), locally known as 'Jabboijyer Boli Khela' and a 2-day fair full of pomp and grandeur known as 'Baishakhi Mela' were duly held here at the historic Laldighi maidan on the 11th and 12th Baishakh (April 24-25).

To sway the Chittagong people with a characteristic sports events and remind them of a rich cultural heritage once again there came the century-old traditional wrestling competition cum Baishakhi Mela (fair) in the port city.

With the spontaneous participation of wrestlers (bolies) and thousands of sellers and buyers from different corners of the greater Chittagong Division, the wrestling competition and the fair turned the Laldighi and adjoining areas into a place of traditional merriment.

Since its introduction 93 years ago the wrestling is being held on the 12th Baishakh (the first month of

of the fair -- to wind up on the Friday next (April 26), a day after the tournament.

The makeshift shops were arrayed with a great variety of household items, handicrafts, nice toys and showpieces and wide collection of pottery. Homemade traditional sweetmeats and seasonal fruits were also there in plenty for sale. There were also arrangements for amusement with 'Nagordola' (merry-go-round), 'Putul Nach' (puppet show), circus and many other things.

As per tradition the wrestling competition, the main component of the occasion, was held on the second day on Baishakh 12 (April 25).

This year the defending hat-trick champion Siddique Boli shared the title in his fourth championship-battle and stubborn newcomer Didarul Alam stood joint-champion with him in the 94th occasion of the traditional competition.

The two wrestlers, Siddique Boli, 38, from Ukhiya and Didarul Alam,

of these wrestlers were immensely lauded and appreciated by the people while it brought pride for their masters.

Historian Abdul Haq Chowdhury says there was as many as 22 famous families of wrestlers in Chittagong region. All these families were the inhabitants of 20 villages in an area encircled by the river Karnaphuli and Shankha in the middle of Chittagong.

Long before the partition of the sub-continent some of around two lakh people of Chittagong who expatriated to Burma (now Myanmar), used to return home with handsome savings to arrange wrestling competitions in the months of Chaitra and Baishakh. Beating drums or tins, publicity of these 'Boli Khela' was made to reach even the remote corners of the neighbouring locality. People of different villages came in groups with band parties taking their respective wrestlers and gathered in the wrestling venues.

The competitions were held in

Chittagong, participate in the "Boli Khela" in a large number every year.

As the "Boli Khela" nears, festivity grips these coastal and off-shore areas when the young people start preparing for the wrestling with great enthusiasm. This preparation and festive mood bring in some pleasure and relax among the poor, hardworking people here.

Besides, wrestlers from other areas of the adjoining three hill districts and other neighbouring districts of Feni, Noakhali, Comilla and Chandpur also arrive in Chittagong for the competition.

The descendants of Abdul Jabbar with the support of the inhabitants of Badorpati and Bakshirhut areas have successfully kept their efforts continued to carry on this traditional wrestling and fair festival. Under the banner of Abdul Jabbar Memorial Wrestling Competition and Baishakhi Mela Committee they organise this festival every year without fail.

Local administration extends allout support to this traditional event. Chittagong City Corporation sees to providing the sellers and vendors with space and drinking water. Though failed this year, Chittagong City Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury introduced Mayor's gold medals for the winners last year.

This year the Minister for Food Abdullah Al Noman announced Tk. 50 thousand from his own fund for the competition every year as long as he is alive.

Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) also extended necessary cooperation in this regard ensuring law and order in and around the fair premises and wrestling venue area.

In this year's Boli Khela, 64 wrestlers out of the enlisted 55 turned up in the final rounds amid enthusiasm and excitement of the local people.

After the final rounds of different categories, three wrestlers including two former runners-up and one newcomer expressed their intention to face defending hat-trick champion in the challenge bout.

With the four wrestlers the challenge bouts were fought as the first and second semi-finals.

In the first semi-final the defending champion Siddique Boli faced the challenger Nazrul Islam alias 'Nazu boli', the runner-up of 2000 of Sitakunda in Chittagong. The skillful wrestler Siddique Boli showed no mercy to give his opponent any scope for resistance and pinned him on the ground to knock out within less than two minutes of the very first round.

But the second semi-final between defending runner-up Abdul Malek alias 'Malek Boli' of Banshkhal and Didarul Alam of Cox's Bazar lasted for some time with both the wrestlers unwilling to give in. But after four minutes in the second round an aging Malek Boli felt pain in the chest and offered a walk-over to the youthful wrestler Didarul Alam.

After that the final bout of the day began between Siddique Boli and Didarul Boli at around 5pm. To the astonishment of Chittagong people these two wrestlers fought an unprecedented and ever most exciting wrestling of the traditional Jabbarer Boli Khela amid beats of drums and loud cheers.

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Concern over fresh unrest in Ctg port

Installation of proposed container terminal

NURUL ALAM, Chittagong

Business people and officials are concerned over the fresh unrest whipped up at Chittagong port, the main seaport of the country, centring the installation of proposed container port here by the American company Stevedoring Services of America (SSA).

"We are really worried again with the announcement of fresh agitations by the 22 trade union organisations of Chittagong port opposing the government move for allowing the installation of proposed container terminal by SSA", Farid Ahmed Chowdhury, President of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI), told this correspondent.

"We seek intervention of the Prime Minister and we are going to appeal to her in black and white soon for taking steps in this regard, Farid said., Farid said. We feel threatened to run economic activities through this premier port following unrest over SSA issue." "Such an unrest will definitely cause dislocation in economic activities of the country," CCCI president added. The 22 trade union bodies last week enforced four and a half-hour strike at Chittagong port and staged demonstration on April 28 hampering port activities. They also announced an 8-hour strike on May 6 at the port.

"We will enforce strike for an indefinite period at Chittagong port if any agreement is signed by the government with SSA", Mahfuzur Rahman Khan, president of port CBA and convener of 22 trade union bodies said.

Replying to a question CCCI president Farid said Chittagong Chamber had always taken stand against the installation of the proposed container terminal by SSA. "If SSA is allowed to set up a container terminal at the estuary of the river Karnaphuli, Chittagong port may turn into a simple 'fish harbour' as the river direction and wave may change", CCCI president said.

"Whether private or government, nobody should be allowed to install a container terminal at the river mouth of Karnaphuli as it may block the channel of Chittagong port causing navigational problems due to siltation", Farid said.

The studies required before allowing SSA, were not done at all by the experts, he said.

He said if SSA is allowed to install a terminal at the estuary of the Karnaphuli river, it would not only hamper interests of Chittagong port, rather it would threaten security of

the country in addition to causing defence problems in case of war or any conflict.

"But I wonder why the ruling party is playing double roles by taking up the process in favour of SSA now as it enforced hartal in the country and launched movement opposing the proposal while it was in the opposition," Farid said.

He also blamed the immediate past government for taking the move for unknown reason.

CCCI President urged the government to develop Chittagong port through expansion programmes to handle the growing traffic instead of allowing SSA.

"The capacity of Chittagong port can easily be raised by installing New Mooring container terminals and procuring more equipment", he said adding that "we don't need foreign investors for container installation which we can do on our

premier port can handle 44 lakh containers a year," Mahfuz said.

The proposed container port of SSA has the capacity to handle three lakh containers yearly while Chittagong port can now handle five lakh, port sources said.

Minister for Port and Shipping Akbar Hossain told this correspondent during his visit here recently that "the process in this regard will be fully transparent".

"Without proper study we won't allow anybody to set up a container terminal here," he said.

"Besides, whoever is allowed to set up a container terminal here, the interests of Chittagong port will surely be protected and looked into carefully," the minister said.

Deputy Managing Director of SSA (Bangladesh) Ashfaq Jamil said transparency was maintained in document negotiation and other process with the government.



PHOTO: A K M MOHSIN

Cargo vessels waiting to be unloaded at the Chittagong port.

own."

Mahfuz said, "no feasibility study was carried out by the government to allow installation of a container port at the river mouth." "Chittagong port will be destroyed if the container port is allowed at the entry point of the channel", he added.

"If the New Mooring container terminals are constructed at Chittagong port and three jetties from jetty No. 11 are turned into container yards with the procurement of necessary equipment, this

Ashfaq dismissed the possibility of destruction of Chittagong port. Chittagong port would rather earn Tk 100 crore from SSA port yearly against port dues, he added.

Moreover, jobs of 4,000 workers will be generated in this port if installed, Ashfaq said. Replying to a question he said, "we will dredge up if there is any siltation".

Some vested quarters were influencing the port's labour leaders

expected to be completed by the year 2006 to handle five lakh containers as per Chittagong port's expansion programmes.

Chairman of the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) Commodore Golam Rabbani said the 1000-meter container terminal project at New Mooring would cost Tk. 750 crore.

"By the end of this year we hope to begin the construction works of the New Mooring container terminal," Commodore Rabbani said.

Ctg and political rhetoric

MOHIT UL ALAM

Is Chittagong to the fore? The answer to the question is no. Politically Chittagong has been brought to the fore because of the anti-British armed struggle in the thirties led by 'Master Da' Surya Sen and because of the War of Liberation in 1971 that started from Chittagong.

Economically too, Chittagong should have been to the fore, but it is not. Political rhetoric is the way with our leaders, and it was nothing but one such when the Prime Minister in the past regime came to this port city and amid much fanfare proudly declared Chittagong as the business capital of the country. We, the Chittagonians, simple-hearted, generous, brave and non-duplicitous, believed in her words and watched ruefully all major commercial concerns like the Lever Brothers shifting their headquarters to Dhaka. The headquarters of railway had long been moved to Dhaka, and I am sure, if it were physically possible there would be an attempt to uproot the whole port along with its bay, anchors, ships and offices, and transplant on the Buriganga. This depriving Chittagong, or for that matter any place, of its essential business potential is nothing but an index of sick economy. Imagine the cost that the country's exchequer now bears for every file to move to Dhaka for an authoritative approval. My point is that if Chittagong is to be the commercial capital then all executive powers in conducting trade and business should lie absolutely with Chittagong offices. My second point is that the administrative set in Chittagong should be redesigned, it should be empowered more, and at least the secretary for commerce should be based in Chittagong.

Chittagong is the country's second city, but look at its development, and to label it as snail-speed would be an overstatement. The people of Chittagong would like to know, if it is

the country's greatest revenue-earning city, then why should it not have more money allocated from the national budget for development. The physical shape of the city of Chittagong is like a mango leaf, tapering down at the two ends and fat in the middle. The ends connect Patenga airport in the west and Bahadderhut in the east, a stretch spreading over 20 miles. The city widens at the middle part the nexus comprising areas like Muradpur and Agrabad, with Kazir Dewry and Anderkilla as two central points. From north to south the city has about five to six miles to boast. The long road from Patenga to Bahadderhut snakes along the river Karnaphuli for about five miles from the airport and then near Berek Building it takes a turn away from the river and shoots off straight to Bahadderhut for the rest of the distance. This is the one highway that really dominates the landscape of Chittagong city, and one only wishes that there were more roads like this. There are not many detours in Chittagong can be attributed to the constraint created by the hills. Chittagong hills, though Buddhadev Bose did not fancy them as they were neither awe-inspiring high nor small like mounds, are yet the most beautiful aspect of the city. But we are technologically deficient and are yet to have roads around hills. A bitter critic would say we never have had the money. One of my relatives who toured America in the late fifties came back finding much similarity between Chittagong and Sanfrancisco. He told us that he was impressed by the way the Americans had kept the hills intact and still made the city. On the other hand our method is crude and simple -- cut down the hills. A nature-loving person, an environmentalist, and a human civil engineer cannot but shed tears seeing the speed at which hills are being daily levelled.

Another aspect of beauty that has fallen to neglect is the Patenga Sea-

beach. Recently I went to Thailand and drove down from Bangkok to Pattaya, a tourist city with a small strip of beach, for a bath. Believe me, it is much smaller and less exciting than Patenga as a beach. But what has the government not provided there! Towering five-star hotels, speedboats, fish harbour, restaurants, bathing facilities and what not. The Thais earn a lot of revenues from tourism. We have God's gifts here, and still do not move a finger. A French proverb says, there are cows everywhere but you have to do the milking. The Patenga beach today is what it was forty years back -- an untended strip of sand washed by the indifferent waves of the sea. Or worse, because as an eyesore to the expansive arrangement of nature where the river Karnaphuli is meeting with the Bay of Bengal, a naval base has been created there and its very rampart rounds off the tip that provides the most vantage point to see the scene. The visitors who go there to watch the sunset are denied this privilege and feel like lame ducks as their thirst for enjoying nature remains unquenched.

Chittagong has all the potential to be developed into a 21st-century mega-city. Chittagonians have always felt that the centre's attitude to this port city is step-motherly if not outright niggardly. I know of many organisations now emerging with a view to raising awareness of the people about the deprivation that the city has been subject to and also to putting pressure on the government for more allocation of development budget. I hope all their efforts will be successful. C

Mohit UIAlam is a professor of the Department of English, Chittagong University.

Separate chamber for business women soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President of Chittagong Women Entrepreneurs Association (CWEA), Monwara Hakim Ali said she was planning to float a separate chamber for the business women in Chittagong to look after their interests.

Monwara while talking to The Daily Star said "I do feel the necessity of a separate chamber for business women in Chittagong for a long time as they are always neglected in their efforts to rise".

"Now I want to fight for the cause of business women in Chittagong to help them avail the facilities available in different fields," she added with a note of firmness and confidence.

"Why our cause should be



Monwara Hakim Ali

downplayed by the administration and the people concentrated in the capital Dhaka, she questioned. "We must have our individual position and entity with the formation of separate chamber for business women in Chittagong to take part in economic development of the country," said Monwara who had her experience in hotel management and social activities here.

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PHOTO: STAR

Wrestlers Siddique (right) and Didar at the final round of the Abdul Jabbar Memorial Wrestling competition at Laldighi Maidan. Bout of them were declared joint champion.

Bengali year) of every year and centring which a 2-day fair is held starting from the previous day (11th Baishakh) drawing people from far flung areas of the greater Chittagong Division.

A prominent local merchant Abdul Jabbar Sawdagor of Andorkilla Badorpati Road of the city introduced this competition of wrestling as a part of tradition of Chittagong people, back in 1909 AD (Bengali year 1316).

The aim was to inspire and organise the youths for anti-British movement.

Like other occasions this time also the pompous fair sat on a place stretching some two kms surrounding the wrestling venue up to the Badarpati and Andorkilla Bakshirhut intersection to the Loyal Road and KC Dey Road.

The officially 2-day fair continued for four days as the sellers and vendors from different parts of the region started thronging at the fair premises opening up makeshift shops since Tuesday (April 23) -- one day before the formal opening

23, from Omkhali of Ramu -- both from Cox's Bazar, became joint-champions presenting a breathtaking thirty-six-minute grappling at the historic Laldighi Maidan.

A comparatively old and defending runner-up Malek Boli of Banshkhal of Chittagong was declared runner-up for decency and fairness.

Apart from the joint-champions and runner-up 27 other bolies, winners of the final rounds of different categories, were also awarded in the competition.

Minister for Food Abdullah Al Noman gave away the prizes among the winners as the chief guest while Chittagong Metropolitan Police Commissioner Shahidullah Khan was the special guest.

The history of the popular wrestling (Boli Khela) of Chittagong people dates back to the Muslim and Arakani rulers when the aristocratic and rich families, particularly the zamindars (landlords) here used to employ healthy and strong wrestlers to counter their rivals.

The physical power and strength

two phases. In the first rounds the 'Sahabs' (Juniors) took part while the seniors or the 'Bolies' fought in the second or final rounds.

After the finals the defeated crowned the winners with the medals. Then started the exotic and rhythmic dance of the winners with the beat of drums when their supporters as well as the people started scrambling for them.

But excepting the Jabbarer Boli Khela, all other wrestling competitions have gone into oblivion in course of time.

However, at the initial stage of Jabbarer Boli Khela, before the wrestling competition there used to held ox-fights and these oxen were slaughtered to offer a grand feast to the wrestlers and the visiting people.

Now 'Bolies' from different areas of the district, particularly those from the far-flung coastal areas of Ukhiya, Teknaf, Chakoria and off-shore islands of Moheskhal, Kutubdia in Cox's Bazar and the coastal areas of Banshkhal, Anowara and Satkania in