



The 2nd half of the 16th century, Catholics were prominent in Hosehepur in Mymensingh and Sripur near Sonargaon. Among the churches erected by the Augustinians were at Nagori (1675) and Tejgaon (1677). In 1834, the Vicariate Apostolic was created under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation for Propaganda Fide. In 1850 it was divided to the Vicariates Apostolic of Eastern and Western Bengal. Western Bengal's headquarters were in Dhaka.

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Pahela Boishak welcomed in style



One of many colourful rallies marches through the city street on the Pahela Boishak.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Thousands of men and women clad in red-and-white outfit thronged the Ramna Botomol in the city to celebrate the Pahela Boishak as the dawn broke heralding the New Year 1414.

The tight security had little effect on the enthusiastic and cheerful crowd who formed queues to enter Ramna Park, the traditional venue for Bangla New Year celebrations.

Chhayanaut's cultural programme started just after 6:00am, welcoming the dawn of the New Year with tabla recital followed by Tagore's Boishakhi song.

The crowd then gradually dispersed on the entire Dhaka University campus. They moved on to one stage from another to take part in the great celebrations of the Bangalees.

Students and teachers of the Fine Arts Institute brought out the colourful Mangal Shobhajatra at around 10:00am. The success of Bangladesh cricket team in the World Cup dominated the rally this year as the theme of the rally was a Royal Bengal Tiger. The rally was more vibrant and colourful than the last few years.

Puppet show and other traditional cultural programmes at Bakultala of the institute starting from 11:00am added more flavour to the celebrations. This was part of the Institute of Fine Arts' three-day programmes to celebrate the Bangla New Year.

Sammiliti Sangskritik Jote organised cultural programmes at the Rabindra Sarobar amphitheatre in Dhanmondi and the Central Shaheed Minar at around 5:00pm.

Rishiz Shilpi Gosthi organised a cultural programme at the Narkelbithi Chittar on Bhashani Road. Bangladesh Shishu Sangathan Oikya Jote organised "dress as you like" programme for children at Bangladesh Shishu Academy at around 9:00am.

Police and other law enforcement agencies put up a three-layer security measure to dispel concerns that stemmed from the deadly bomb blasts at the Chhayanaut Pahela Boishak programme in 2001 killing at least 10 people.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police declared the roads from Shahbagh to Matsya Bhaban, from TSC to Doel Chittar and Bangla Motor to Shahbag off-limits to vehicles.

People from all sections of life joined the merrymaking. Festivity continued till late in the evening. Like never before thousands of men, women and children from every nook and corner of the city thronged different spots of the city. Public parks, open spaces, city's wide roads, Sangsab Bhaban area broke into absolute festivities. At homes people cooked traditional meals to welcome yet another Bangla new year.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"If they [caretaker government] think that they can intimidate me by filing cases, then they would be living in a fool's paradise"



-- Sheikh Hasina
Awami League chief
Told BBC Bangla service from Florida in United States, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"Indigenous people coming from other parts of this region often use this gas fire to cook their food during picnics"

-- Devasis Roaza
Doilla village

Told a reporter as a natural gas triggered fire is burning near a remote Tripura village, which according to experts can be a source of natural gas, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"I have done my duty"

-- An on duty traffic constable
Chittagong

Told pedestrians when they asked why he allowed the truck to move forcing them to run and jump out frantically for the median to avoid getting crushed under the wheels, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"Unfortunately, we [BNP leaders] did not say or do anything to condemn the arrest of Tarique or decry the government's attitude towards the BNP chairperson"

-- A former BNP lawmaker

Told a reporter, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"Present caretaker government is doing the job of Fire Brigade trying to put out the fire"

-- Mainul Hosein
Law Adviser

Said at a meeting with lawyers at Jessor, on Wednesday. Source: Prothom Alo

"BTV can be shut down to revive its image"

-- Nasiruddin Yusuf Bacchu
Cultural personality

Told a reporter, on Sunday. Source: Bhoror Kagoj

Compiled by Durdana Ghias

CNG AUTO-RICKSHAW FARE HIKES

'Public suffering to increase'

Government's decision to increase CNG auto-rickshaw fares and fix owners' deposit may not help remove the prevailing chaos in the sector, say commuters and drivers

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

disorder while passengers remain hostage to the chaotic situation. However, the autorickshaw owners and transport workers have agreed on the new fare and deposit rates and promised to abide by the rules.

A 10-member committee headed by the BRTA chairman was formed in February comprising owners, transport workers and representatives of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police to revise the fare. The committee submitted its report on March 18.

"Scrubbing the current cost per kilometre and other cost involved, including the maintenance cost, the committee proposed the raised fare and the daily deposit money in accordance with the estimation," he added.

"Both the owners and transport workers were present in the meeting with the communication adviser. They agreed on the

current terms," he said.

Communications Adviser Maj Gen (retd) M A Matin at a meeting on April 8 announced the government's decision to increase the fare.

Under the new fare structure, fare for the first two kilometres has been raised to Tk 13.50 from Tk 12 and fare for each extra kilometre would be Tk 5.50.

The new waiting charge would be Tk 0.75 per minute, which is Tk 0.50 at present.

The drivers will have to pay Tk 450 instead of the present Tk 300 to the CNG autorickshaw owners as daily deposit.

The owners say the current fare and deposit structure is unjust to them. A daily deposit of Tk 450 is unrealistic. They have to retrieve their investment, as the price of the autorickshaw was very high when they purchased it.

They also said that the condition of the vehicles is getting very bad. They require regular maintenance.

Cost of the auto parts are always on the rise. The number of autorickshaw needs to be increased as well, they said.

"We wanted Tk 485 as daily deposit. The technical committee formed by BRTA also suggested the amount," said HM Iqbal, general secretary, Dhaka CNG Auto-rickshaw Owners' Association.

"But we agreed on the current terms because the communications adviser has requested us to try out the new arrangement," he added.

Autorickshaw drivers on the other hand said the owners had retrieved their investment a long time ago. The high deposit and harassment by the owners forced them to charge passengers for extra money, they claimed.

Under the current structure fuel and garage expenses will be on the owner. Drivers however said in reality they bear the expenses and they don't see any

possibility that the rules will make any difference in the future.

Also long queue at the refuelling stations waste the drivers' time, which forces them to charge extra fare. They say without solving these issues the crisis will persist.

"We charge the passengers more money because we have to pay extra as daily deposit to the owner," said Mujibor Rahman Master, president, Dhaka District Auto-rickshaw, Auto-tempo, Mishuk Transport Workers Union.

"Earlier the owners used to take Tk 500 instead of the fixed government amount Tk 300 as daily deposit. Who is going to give us the guarantee now that they will not charge six or seven hundred taka instead of re-fixed amount?" he added.

"If our drivers complain against any owner that they are collecting more than Tk. 450 we will submit written complaints to

the BRTA and the police," said Master.

Asked HM Iqbal said: "Since we made a commitment we will make sure that our members abide by the rules. The adviser promised another meeting with us few months after if the arrangement does not work out for the best."

"We also want to bring discipline in the sector. We are discussing with member owners about how we can ensure that," he said.

BRTA officials say they will take strict measures against anyone who breaks the rule. "If any owner demands more money from the driver, then BRTA will take strict measures against them. We will cancel their registration," said the BRTA chairman.

"It will be the same for the drivers as well if they do not comply with the new rate. BRTA will take away their driving licence," he added.

RAJUK'S DETAILED AREA PLAN

Conveniently delayed to plunder environment, urban landscape

TAWFIQUE ALI

the DMDP uncertain resulting in the filling up of vast low-lying areas exposing the city to environmental hazards and flood and water logging, they said.

The DAP should have been in place within a year or two of the DMDP but it took more than 10 years, said honorary chairman of Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) Prof. Nazrul Islam.

The DMDP was initiated in 1992 and completed in 1995.

"I am not much aware of how the DAP is being prepared because the authorities have not invited us to it," said Prof. Islam, who is an urban expert, a researcher and a member of the Urban Development Committee.

It is Rajuk that has conveniently delayed preparing the DAP ever since the DMDP was gazetted 11 years back, despite the fact that Rajuk is the custodian of the DMDP, said Iqbal Habib.

The Tk 23.22-crore DAP for 1,528 square kilometre area of the capital, is a major component of the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) popularly known as master plan.

The DMDP was drawn at a cost of over Tk 200 million provided by the UNDP and gazetted in 1997.

The DAP should have been completed in 1997 along with its two other components -- Structural Plan and Urban Area

Plan, said experts. DAP is a document crucially needed for implementation of DMDP and planned urbanisation of the capital city.

There are serious doubts whether DAP will contain original and detailed positions of flood

flow zones, retention ponds, lakes, rivers, canals and Strategic Planning Zones (SPZ), as earmarked in the DMDP, said advocate Afruza Shihuly, a lawyer of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA).

For example, a private housing developer has earth filled retention pond in Matuail mouza.

"Now, what if DAP authorities show the said earth-filled areas as developed land and not as they originally had been in the structural plan," she pointed out.

Rajuk hired four local consulting firms Shelteltech, DDC, EPC and Gani Bangla to prepare the DAP in November 2004 with a two-year time limit.

The terms of reference obliges to consult with interested parties, local communities and stakeholders at all stages of preparing DAP.

The entire study area has been divided into five groups. Group-A covers northeast part, Group-B southeast part, Group-C central part, Group-D southwest part and Group-E northwest part.

Leaders of Dhamondi Poribagh Unnyon Jote (DPUJ), an environmentalist group, said that they wrote to Ghani Bangla, assigned to prepare group-C of the DAP, several times with the first one in February 2005 but the firm did not reply to any of the correspondences.

Convenor of DPUJ Sultan Alam said, "When we first met head of the firm RA Ghani, he told that they had enough experts to draw up the plan and that they did not need to consult with a group like DPUJ."

In another example, a housing



By delaying completion of DAP Rajuk has destroyed the landscape of the city.

"The plan must ensure a balance between population and nature of land use," said convenor of DPUJ architect Salma A Shafi, "It has to have directions on how to retain the residential character of now-crammed Dhamondi area."

They said they did not know what planning the firm has made for localities like Jhigatola, Rayerbazar and Hazaribagh.

RA Ghani first refused to talk saying "It is a technical matter."

Later, he said his firm consulted with some community groups of the area.

"We will consult with the DPUJ later," he said.

Damages would have not taken place at ground level had the DAP been prepared immediately after the DMDP, said Dr. Toufiq M Seraj, managing director of Shelteltech and president of Bangladesh Institute of Planners.

"Failure behind long-delay in preparing DAP is particularly of Rajuk," Toufiq said. "It (Rajuk) undertook the job only two years back."

Shelteltech, which is carrying out Group-E of DAP, is going to submit its interim report by April 17, the first among four firms, Toufiq said.

It is difficult to expedite DAP if Rajuk does not give its technical feedback on time and cannot

coordinate all four consultants effectively, he said.

"Shelteltech may be a real estate builder but it has no conflict of interest with DAP at micro level," said Toufiq who is a former president of Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab).

"The land developers however may have a vested interest and ethical clash with the DAP to some extent."

Project director of DAP Nayeema Khatun said that the plan would be completed by June 2007, as fixed by the government. She claimed that interim reports have been completed with the consulting firms now working on draft final and final reports.

Nayeema said that there is no monetary allocation for public discourse and the plan is yet to reach a stage for public to know it." She said that she would make the draft report public once it is completed.

Chairman of Rajuk KAM Haroon said that it might take up to December to finalise the DAP, as it has been delayed for various reasons.

Replies to the allegation that it has been a connivance between the Rajuk and the private developers that delayed initiation and completion of DAP, Haroon said, "I cannot say why it was undertaken so late at the initial stage."