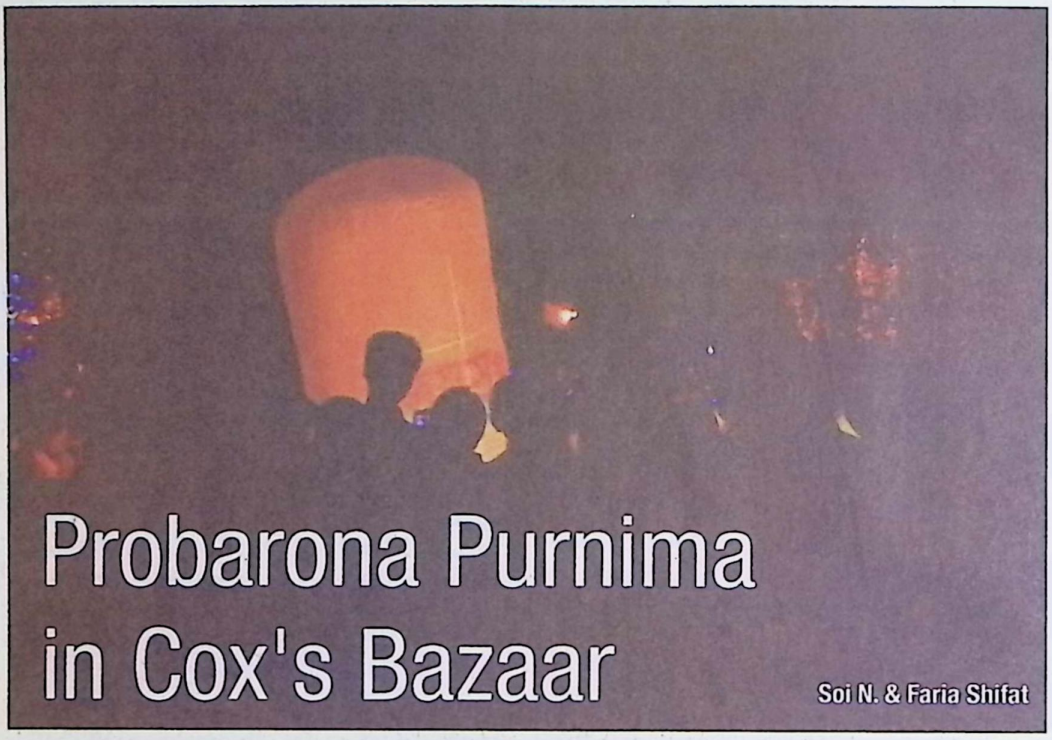


Probarona Purnima in Cox's Bazaar

Soi N. & Faria Shifat

AROUND 1.4 million indigenous people live in Bangladesh. There are almost 45 indigenous communities using 26 different languages. These communities, Garo, Mogh, Mande, Koch, Marma, Khasia, Rakhain, to name a few, live mostly in the rural areas of Chittagong Hill Tracks, Cox's Bazaar and in the regions of Mymensingh, Sylhet and Rajshahi. Indigenous communities have their own culture and lifestyle.

United Nations Human Rights Bodies, ILO, the World Bank and International Law apply three criterions to distinguish indigenous people, the first being, indigenous people who usually live within (or maintain attachments to) geographically distinct ancestral territories. They tend to maintain distinct social, economic, and political institutions within their territories. They typically aspire to remain distinct culturally, geographically and institutionally, rather than assimilate fully into a national society.

The term "indigenous" is applied to elucidate certain social communities that share comparable uniqueness a cultural and communal subsistence that is distinct from the leading or primary communities in a society. Each indigenous community regardless to its extent carries out a typical, distinctive culture and heritage on its own.

On October 22, as part of our internship assignment for Star Campus, we had the privilege to explore and experience the exclusive Rakhain Community in Cox's Bazaar - the Rakhain Polli. We attended the Rakhain Probarona Festival at the IBP field Kiang (Buddhist monastery) and the Fanush Festival at the Burmese Market local Kiang. The Probarona Purnima is the second largest festival for the Buddhists where they perform religious rituals on the days of full moon because it is stated that the most memorable events of Buddha's life took place on the days of full moon. Followers from all over the world have been observing the rituals and religious traditions on the same day for eons. On this very night of Purnima, Buddha showed the miracles of spiritual power to his followers, which is why it bears representation as a sacred festival for the Buddhists. On the morning of 22 October we went in to the kiang, where people of all ages from the entire area were present. They came to meet the current Vante (head bhikkhu of kiang) and other Vante's from other kiangs in and out of the country with the offerings of various food items. They start their day with Buddhist chants and then all pay respect to the Vante's and the Gautam Buddha figurine. After that all the Vante's sit together and eat the food, which followers have brought. Afterwards the Vante's from other monasteries start off their journey to new destination, within or beyond the border to visit other kiangs. Through a conversation with the current Vante with the help of a translator called Shamo, we asked him about his becoming a Vante. He told us that he was just a 12 year old boy when he had the thought of becoming a Bhikkhu and left his parents in Burma to come to this kiang.