

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR

At the Manipuri Raash Mela

To go to the Manipuri Raash Mela, you head towards Bhanugach from Sreemongol. After a right turn at the Komolganj intersection, the signs become unmistakable: CNGs and vans with brightly dressed people, colourful posters and arches, and a festive spirit in the air.

I reach the Mela at 3 PM on November 21st. Held during the first full moon of Agrahyon, the Raash festival celebrates the mythical love story of Radha and Krishna. It is the largest festival of Manipuris of Bangladesh.

How did people from Manipur, now a state in eastern India, end up in Bangladesh? Manipur was once an independent country. Their king and many others - took refuge in Sylhet after a war in the 1800s. Bangladeshi Manipuris are their descendants. Hindus by religion, they have distinctive facial features and their own culture and language.

One attraction of the Mela is Manipuri dance, performed during the day and late at night. The daytime dance proceeds on three separate arenas, with children and teenagers wearing colourful costumes to re-enact Krishna's role. Hundreds watch with admiration as the dancers play out parts of the popular story. For example, a giant stork appears and fights with Krishna, only to be vanquished rapidly. That would be Bogeshwar, a (somewhat inept) villain. In the story, Krishna's flute-playing wins over Radha; and so each dancer holds a flute and mimics playing it with flair. The colours and movement combine with hypnotic effect.

When the dance is over, anxious parents seek out their dancer children. One mother, peeling a banana for her hungry and tired son, tells me it took three hours to dress him for the dance. Happy fair-goers reward the performance by slipping cash into the dancers' hands. I know no one here, but people are friendly and quick with a smile. I meet an eighty-year-old man who



Dancer at the Manipuri Raash Mela

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

has travelled from Sylhet, seventy kilometres away. What brings him here? "I want to have fun," he replies, toothless but eyes twinkling. The women look beautifully exotic. Decked out in ornate Manipuri saris and elaborate jewellery, their lips are red from paan-chewing, a favourite Manipuri pastime. I see four young women sharing snacks behind the dance arena and approach them. One immediately warns the others: "Cameraman coming. Fix your hair!" They pose gracefully for my camera. Later, I make eye contact with two grandmother types. At first, they

stare back at me, tense. I ask them if I can take their photo. This breaks the ice as one says, "Oh, he speaks Bangla... he is one of us." I tell them they are looking very beautiful and they crack up, giggling like schoolgirls. Dusk arrives all too soon and the Mela winds down. I leave thinking about the people here. They are everyday Bangladeshis, living difficult, demanding lives. Yet they have invested much effort into this celebration, making it a magical and joyful experience. Bravo! ihtishamkabar@yahoo.com

Hasina for protecting democracy

UNB, Brussels

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged people to remain vigilant so that no "evil anti-democracy" force can foil the progress of democracy in Bangladesh. Addressing a meeting with Bangladeshi community at her hotel here on Thursday night, she said the anti-people force has been trying to hinder development activities in the country. "The evil force does not want change of people's fate... does not want to see Bangladesh as a country free from hunger and poverty." Hasina alleged that the last BNP-Jamaat alliance government during their five-year tenure only amassed illegal money, plundering public property and through moneylaundering. She said: "When our government is working hard to maintain peace and ensuring prosperity for the people, the BNP-Jamaat alliance does not like it." Calling upon the expatriate Bangladeshis for investing in the country's development sectors, the prime minister requested them not to do anything on foreign soils that would harm the country's image.

"Every one of you is a goodwill ambassador of your homeland. So, don't do anything that will tarnish the image of your homeland," she said. Hasina said that her government had to face many difficulties in restoring the country's image, as "during the BNP-Jamaat alliance government Bangladesh was known to the world as a country of militancy and corruption." She said: "During the last two years, Bangladesh has again started to be known as a country of peace and democracy. Now it is our duty to uphold this image." The prime minister said expatriates can make investment in Bangladesh through the Expatriates Welfare Bank. "We give top priority to Bangladeshi expatriates seeking to invest in the country. So, come and invest in your homeland." She said the government is giving special facilities, including easy banking, to the expatriate Bangladeshis. Hasina, in her address, also asked the followers of Awami League at home and abroad to work with utmost sincerity to implement the party's election manifesto. Showing the election manifesto to the expatriate audience, she said it is the government's sacred duty to implement

every pledge of the election manifesto. "We've to win the people's love by fulfilling their aspirations." The premier said democracy has been restored after so many sacrifices. "BNP tried to rig the last general election with 1.21 crore fake voters. But they failed in their bid." In this regard, she thanked the Bangladesh Army for making a flawless voter list for the December 29, 2008 election. She told the expatriates that her government is working to make Bangladesh a mid-level income country by 2021. "We are making our best efforts to create social-safety net. We will have to work hand in hand to make Bangladesh a modern digital and developed country." Hasina also informed the Bangladeshi community about the outcome of her visit to St. Petersburg in Russia, and her meeting with European Union leaders. She also told them about her government's activities to protect the people of Bangladesh from the disastrous impacts of the global warming. The expatriate Bangladeshis congratulated the prime minister for receiving an honorary doctorate degree from the State University of Saint Petersburg.

Dr Milon's death anniversary today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 20th death anniversary of Shaheed Dr Shamsul Alam Khan Milon. On this day in 1990, the armed cadres of the then autocratic ruler HM Ershad killed Dr Milon, a joint secretary of Bangladesh Medical Association, near the Teachers Students Centre on Dhaka University campus to foil an imminent mass upsurge. His death, however, facilitated the movement and the autocratic regime fell after just eight days of his death. Different political and socio-cultural organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes to mark the day. The programmes include placing of wreaths at Milon's grave on the premises of Dhaka Medical College and Milon Memorial at Teachers Students Centre intersection on DU campus.

Suchitra Sen Film Festival begins

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The second Suchitra Sen Film Festival, in memory of Suchitra Sen, the screen legend of Bangla films, began in Pabna yesterday. Film director Amzad Hossain inaugurated the 8-day festival, organised by Suchitra Sen Smriti Sangrakhon Parishad, on the town hall premises of Pabna, the hometown of the actress, around 7:00pm. Speaking on the occasion, Amzad said, "Suchitra Sen is the only actress who is called the screen legend of Bangla films. She contributed her best performances for Bangla films and is the pride of the film industries in this sub-continent." Convener of the parishad Md Saiful Haque Chunnunna chaired the programme while Deputy Commissioner of Pabna Md Mostafizur Rahman spoke as the special guest.

PROTHOM ALO'S 12TH ANNIVERSARY Vow to build enlightened Bangladesh

CU CORRESPONDENT

With a commitment to build the country in the same way love is felt towards a mother, the daily Prothom Alo celebrated its 12 years in Chittagong on Thursday. People from all walks of life and professions including politicians, artists, litterateurs, intellectuals, teachers, journalists, lawyers, engineers, players and physicians participated in the celebration programme held at the city's Engineers Institution. Chairman and Managing Director of Tracom Group and Media Star Limited Latifur Rahman said Prothom Alo is conducting various social activities alongside journalism. Bangladesh has huge potential, he said, adding that we all have to build up the country with our united efforts. Prothom Alo Editor Matiuur Rahman said we love Bangladesh as much as we love our mother. We are working to build up an enlightened and glorious Bangladesh, he said.

He said we feel proud of our War of Liberation and have huge achievements along with some failures. The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam said Prothom Alo shows dreams and teaches to love the country. There is no value of individual success if we do not work together for the welfare of the country, he said. Prothom Alo Resident Editor Abul Momen in his welcome speech said we are making efforts to build up a modern, non-communal and progressive society and state with the cooperation from readers. Lawmakers Nurul Islam BSC, MA Latif, Zafrul Islam Chowdhury, former mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, BNP leader Abdullah Al Noman, Mir Mohammad Nasir Uddin, Professor Emeritus of Chittagong University Jamal Nazrul Islam, CPB leader Mrinal Chowdhury, Dainik Azadi Editor M A Malek, Police Commissioner Md Abul Kashem, Customs Commissioner Syed Golam Kibria and Chittagong Press Club President Abu Sufiyan were also present.



The two 100-metre long ice class vessels Grona Ammersum and Grona Biessum built by Western Marine Shipyard of Bangladesh at Chittagong Dry Dock Limited. The ships were handed over to Grona Shipping GmbH of Germany yesterday.

Locally made vessels handed over to German company

Tk 200cr scheme for shipbuilding on cards

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Industries Minister Dilip Barua yesterday announced to start funding the growing shipbuilding industry under a Tk 200 crore refining scheme at a single digit interest rate to boost up the sector. Bangladesh Bank is awaiting green signal from the finance ministry in this regard, said Dilip. He was addressing as the chief guest at the handing over ceremony of two of the largest ice class vessels ever built in the country by Western Marine Shipyard (WMS) to a German company at Chittagong Dry Dock Limited (CDDL). Dilip said the government is actively considering to establish a special shipbuilding zone. WMS Chairman Hossain formally handed over the two vessels to Markku Veder, owner of the German company Grona Shipping GmbH. State Secretary of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany Martin Biesal said on showing this great technical and engineering achievement, Bangladesh has come out of the group of least developed countries. He said it would encourage the potential German investors to invest in Bangladesh. German Ambassador to Bangladesh Holger

Michael said a new phase of Bangladesh has been marked with the emergence of the new export industry of building ocean-going ships. WMS Chairman Saiful Islam said Bangladesh is once again retracing her glorious past by building international class ships and exporting those to Europe. Shipbuilding sector could increase the country's GDP by at least 3 percent within the next six years as the sector has been showing great potential to become the country's largest foreign exchange earning sector, he said. Markku Veder, Managing Director of East Wind Project Management GmbH Lars Brennek, who has carried out over 300 sea trials of ships, expressed satisfaction over the quality of the two vessels. The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam thanked WMS management team for achieving its target amidst all difficulties and challenges like electricity shortages and others. "With this, in a way a small achievement, we are looking forward to a bigger horizon," he said. Three local lawmakers Mainuddin Khan Badal, MA Latif and Shamsul Hoque Chowdhury were also present. Vice President of Germanischer Lloyd (GL) Frank Rothe, and AB Bank Managing Director Kaiser A Chowdhury also spoke at the function.

'Stop dam construction on Brahmaputra River'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Green activists yesterday demanded that the dam construction on the Brahmaputra River by China be stopped saying such a project would adversely impact on environment and agriculture in downstream Bangladesh and India. China has started building a dam on the river to set up Zangmu Hydropower Station in Tibet, said Tibet Online, a Chinese media outlet, on November 17. "The power plant project is a bad news for

several crore people in Bangladesh and India," said a statement issued by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) which held a rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday in protest at the dam construction. China wants to dam most of the rivers flowing through the region to generate hydropower and sell electricity to Myanmar and Bangladesh. Representatives of Green Voice, Sheba, Citizens' Rights Movements, Sundar Jibon, Khilgaon Samajik Sangstha, Osmani Udyan Rokkha Andolon and Sammilito Jaladhar Rokkha Andolon were also present at the rally.

PHOTO EXHIBITION ON EVEREST MISSION Musa wants to plant 16cr saplings to fight climate change

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"When the Bangladesh national flag was flying high on Everest on May 23, 2010 at 5:16am, for the first time, I instantly wanted to jump back to Bangladesh and say look we have done it," said Musa Ibrahim, the first Bangladeshi to conquer the Everest. He was sharing his experience on the ascent to the highest peak of the earth at the inaugural ceremony of a photo exhibition titled "Bangladesh on top of the Everest" at Alliance Francaise de Dhaka yesterday. The photos featured his road to the Everest. "It was a tough task. There were a lot of obstacles on the way to the Everest. But no obstacle is a barrier indeed for any good job," he said. "When we established the North Alpine Club in 2007, we had set a goal 'Vision 2010, Mission Everest' and with everyone's help we have achieved our goal," he said, adding that now he wants to accomplish the 'Seventh Summit',

conquering the highest peaks of the seven continents, by 2013. Musa said he wants to help a female climber from Bangladesh to conquer the Everest and has already started working on it. He also said he wants to plant 16 crore plants on behalf of the 16 crore Bangladeshis to fight the adverse effects of climate change. "I first climbed the Keokradang of Bandarban in 2000, went to trek at the Annapurna in 2002 and obtained a training on mountaineering in 2004. "But I did not imagine at that time that I would conquer the world's largest peak," said Musa. Former chief adviser to a caretaker government Justice Habibur Rahman inaugurated the exhibition. The exhibition will remain open for all on weekdays from 3:00pm to 9:00pm, on Friday from 9:00am to 12:00pm and on Saturday from 5:00pm to 8:00pm, till December 9. Justice Habibur said Musa dreamt of

conquering the Everest and has done it. "I hope that his future dreams will come true," he said. The temperature of the whole exhibition room was maintained at 8 to 10 degree celsius while the floor had a snow like substance, taking the atmosphere close to the Himalayas, to give the audience a touch of the Everest. A man on a dress worn by mountaineers while climbing up the mountains was in front of a makeshift tent at the exhibition room where visitors were roaming and enjoying the moments of Bangladesh's Everest victory. Speaking at the inaugural session, Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Professor AAMS Arefin Siddique said Musa has the courage to dream and so all the youths of Bangladesh should have that courage. Director of Alliance Francaise Salihia Lefevre, Managing Director of Orion Group Salman Obaidul Karim and President of North Alpine Club Anisul Haque also spoke at the programme.



PHOTO: STAR

Musa Ibrahim, the first Bangladeshi to conquer the Everest, shows around photos of his journey to the Himalayan peak to Justice Habibur Rahman and Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Professor AAMS Arefin Siddique at the exhibition in Alliance Francaise de Dhaka yesterday.