

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Shalban Bihar. PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

Mainamati

My imagination runs away the moment I enter the immaculately restored Shalban Bihar in Mainamati. This was once a self-contained Buddhist monastery where, a thousand years ago, monks lived, studied and prayed. Its square shape - sides measuring 169 metres - was surrounded by a wall 3 metres thick with only one entrance. The monks lived in 115 tiny rooms laid out along the square's edges; they prayed at a central temple. Standing on top of the temple's remains, I could see all these and more.

An ancient Buddhist civilisation preceded Muslims, Hindus and British in Bangladesh. Remains of this civilisation are spread nationwide; the ones in Mainamati are probably closest to Dhaka.

We had started southbound on Chittagong highway at 8:30am on a Saturday. The ruins lie northwest of Comilla, to the right of the highway. It took us three hours from Dhaka to reach the main attraction: Shalban Bihar and its adjoining museum.

Originally, the monastery was called Bhavadev Bihar after the king, but today the Shalban name comes from a grove of Shal (*shorea robusta*) trees just outside. You can relax in this peaceful grove while sipping tea. The adventurous can even enjoy a horseback ride.

Behind Mainamati's idyllic setting is a sad story.

During the Second World War, the British military decided to build an airport in Comilla. Their contractors discovered an unexpected windfall: they could get all the bricks they needed for construction from ancient ruins in nearby Mainamati hills. Thus Comilla's airport and British military buildings were made from thousand year old bricks.

The plunder was stopped when a government Archaeology official heard about it but by then much damage was done.

Indeed, bricks intrude my thoughts as my friends and I explore Shalban Bihar. Their size and relatively new condition remind me that reconstruction has taken place. Reconstructing ancient structures to their original specification is common in many sites including Angkor Wat and even parts of Rome. This is called Anastylis. While I admire the splendid large-scale job done here, part of me longs for a few imperfections.

Near the temple, a dozen college boys and girls sit on the grass, talking. I photograph them and just as I turn towards other subjects, a girl breaks into a Nazrul song. Her voice is sweet and so my other subjects have to wait.

Stepping out of Shalban Bihar, we head towards two other nearby sites. Itakhola Mura is in two parts and somehow feels more authentic. The second site is Rupbaner Mura. Its large stupa dominates the surroundings. On one side, I peek into a tiny, pyramidal prayer room - reconstructed fully - and feel unsettled.

At least twenty other spots nearby can be visited given time. The closeness of the sites and their lush environment make Mainamati a perfect place to explore by bicycle.

For a late but delicious lunch, we stop at Highway Inn, half an hour south on the highway. The drive home takes four hours, making Mainamati a long - but richly rewarding - day-trip from Dhaka.

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Tribute paid to war heroes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a clarion call to expedite the ongoing trial of war criminals, different political and socio-cultural organisations observed the nation's 40th anniversary of Victory Day yesterday amid much enthusiasm and gaiety.

Several organisations celebrated the day with discussions, rallies, film screening on the War of Liberation, photo exhibitions and cultural programmes.

Early in the morning, they placed wreaths at the National Memorial in Savar to pay rich tributes to the heroes who sacrificed their lives for the nation.

The organisations are Sector Commanders Forum, Muktijoddha Sangsad, Udichi Shilpi Goshti, Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote, Dhaka Reporters Unity, Bangladesh Medical Association, Jatiya Press Club, Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Jagannath University, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Islamic Foundation.

Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Nari Mukti Andolan, Jatiya Gonotantrik League, Revolutionary Workers Party of Bangladesh, Amra Savarbashi and Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Mukti Andolan were also present.

The parties paying tribute include Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party, Workers Party of Bangladesh, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, Gono Forum and Bikolpodhara Bangladesh.

In the afternoon, AL senior leaders including the General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam, Matia Chowdhury and Suranjit Sengupta with thousands of leaders and activists placed wreaths at Shikha Chirantan in Suhrawardy Udyan at 4:21pm.

This is the very moment and place where General AAK Niazi, commanding the Pakistani occupation forces, surrendered with 93,000 troops to the joint forces of Mukti Bahini and Mitra Bahini on December 16, 1971.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stands in silence for a few moments to pay homage to the martyrs of the liberation war at National Memorial in Savar yesterday.

V-Day events at DU

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Teachers and students of Dhaka University (DU) yesterday celebrated the 40th anniversary of Victory Day amid much enthusiasm, festivity and the demand to speed up the trial of war criminals.

Hundreds of DU students thronged the campus streets just as the celebrations began at a minute past midnight with rockets illuminating the night sky and balloons being released and rising above Raju Bhaskorjo before Teacher-Student Centre (TSC).

While the usual candle-lit processions and cultural functions were held, a campus-based socio-cultural organisation's darts game caught everyone's attention as the targets were effigies of the accused war criminals.

Slogan 71, another cultural organisation, made a Bangladesh flag measuring around 54 feet by 26 feet. Another cultural group, Backbencher, made a huge map of Bangladesh using mud before the TSC gate.

The campus was decorated with colourful lights while the historic speech which Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman delivered at Race Course Maidan on March 7, 1971 and patriotic songs were played on loudspeakers in the student dormitories.

NEWS IN *brief*

Rights federation concerned over 'enforced disappearances'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD) expressed concern over the recent rise of "enforced disappearances" in Bangladesh.

AFAD urged the government to take immediate initiatives to search for and recover those who disappeared, take action against the perpetrators and cooperate with human rights organisations in this regard.

It also urged Bangladesh to abide by the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

"The recent spate of enforced disappearances is alarming and only adds to the disrespect for human rights, the long practice of impunity and a weak criminal justice system prevalent in Bangladesh," says a press release from AFAD.

AFAD, a federation of human rights organisations working directly on the issue of involuntary disappearances in Asia, was founded on June 4, 1998 in Manila, Philippines.

Youth 'commits suicide' in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered the hanging body of a youth from a roadside electric poll in the city's Mirpur section-10 yesterday.

On information, police recovered the body around 6:30am.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Kazi Wajed Ali, officer-in-charge of Mirpur Police Station, said they are investigating the matter.

The youth committed suicide, said morgue sources after the autopsy.

Outlaw leader arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Police arrested a regional leader of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) from his house at Maguradanga village in Tala upazila yesterday night.

Acting on a tip-off, Tala police arrested Bidyut Kumar Bachhar, 42, son of Kanai Lal Bachhar, from his house.

He is wanted in several cases, including murder and extortion, said police.

Domestic help dies after 'falling from roof'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A domestic help died after she allegedly fell from the roof of a four-storied building at Tallabagh in city's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar yesterday.

The deceased Rasheda Akhter, 22, hailing from Phulpur under Mymensingh, went to collect clothes left to dry on the roof around 4:30pm, said the officer-in-charge of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Police Station.

The locals rushed her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared her dead.

Hemayet Uddin, Rasheda's employer, said she stared working there around six years ago.

Dr QM Zaman passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent cardiologist Dr Quazi Mahbub-uz-Zaman, passed away at the Apollo Hospitals in the city last night due to old age complications. Hewas83.

He left behind his wife, three daughters, sons-in-law, grandchildren, a host of relatives, friends and well-wishers to mourn his death.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held after Asr prayers at old DOHS mosque in the city today.

He lived in UK for the last 30 years.

Chehlam

METRO DESK

Chehlam of Rahima Khatun (Bely), wife of Professor Nehal Karim of Dhaka University, will be held after Johr prayers at Dhanmondi in the city today.

All her relatives, friends and admirers are requested to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

Rahima died due to renal cancer on November 2 at the Saint Luke's Cancer Hospital at Kansas City of Missouri in USA. She was laid to rest at the graveyard of Islamic Centre of the city on the same day, said a press release.

She left behind her husband and two sons and a host of relatives.

Corrupt will not be allowed in politics

Says Syed Ashraf Islam

Corrupt people and money launderers will not be allowed to do politics in Bangladesh said Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashraf Islam yesterday.

"The current government is firm to return the money siphoned off to foreign countries and punish the offenders," he said.

Ashraf Islam, also the LGRD and Cooperatives minister, was speaking at a discussion before Engineers Institution, Bangladesh in the city. Dhaka city Awami League (AL) organised the discussion marking the 40th anniversary of Victory Day.

Syed Ashraf Islam accused the two sons of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia of indulging in widespread corruption and siphoning off crores of taka abroad. "But they will not go unpunished on Bangladesh soil."

Children's rights to media not protected

Says study

The country's existing media policies do not protect children's rights to media due to the absence of specific provisions ensuring children's participation in media and their right to information, says a study.

Though the government is obliged to protect children's right to freedom of expression according to international convention, it, alongside private television channels and radio stations, give less importance to children's programmes and related news.

Moreover, the present laws and policies in the country do not protect children's privacy and dignity, said the study.

The findings were revealed at a "Roundtable Discussion on Analysing Broadcast Media Policies in the Light of Child Rights", organised by Nari Moitree and Save the Children at Dhaka Reporters Unity in the city on Thursday.

Mobile photo exhibition on liberation war

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Brac, an NGO, yesterday launched a two-day long mobile photo exhibition in the city to uphold the spirit of liberation war and to inject vigour among the people to work for development of the society and the nation.

The exhibition that displayed dozens of large photos mainly focused on the resilience power of the Bangladeshi people who fought against Pakistani occupation forces in 1971 and have been struggling against poverty, natural disaster and many other adversities since the independence.

The organisation arranged the function styled "Glorious past, prosperous future" marking the 40th anniversary of Victory Day of the country.

On the first day, two rickshaw-vans carrying photographs visited different spots, including Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka University campus, Dhanmondi lake, martyred intellectuals' graveyard, National Parade Square and parliament.

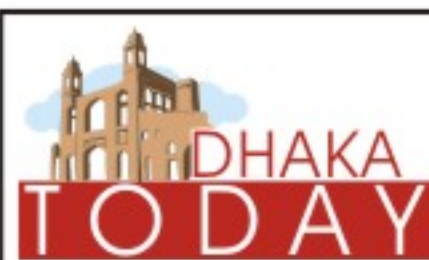
Today, these will visit Nilkhet, Tejgoan, Gulshan, Airport and old Dhaka.

Brac also organised day-long programmes, including film show, cultural programme and photo exhibition in Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet and Rangpur yesterday.



A man shows a child a photo taken during the War of Liberation in 1971 of women staging protests on the streets. The photo is a part of a 'mobile photo exhibition' organised by Brac before Central Shaheed Minar premises in the city yesterday marking the 40th anniversary of Victory Day.

PHOTO: STAR



Roundtable

Sammita Peshajibi Forum will organise a roundtable; Venue: Jatiya Press Club, Time: 3:00pm.

Discussion

Free-lance Journalist Association will organise a discussion; Venue: Hotel 71 (176 Bijoynagar), Time: 4:00pm.

Conference

Brac University will organise a confer-

ence; Venue: Brac Centre, Mohakhali, Time: 10:00am.

Token Hunger Strike

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) will stage a token hunger strike; Venue: Sangsad Bhaban premises, Time: 10:00am.

Roundtable

The Shaptahik will organise a roundtable; Venue: Bilia Auditorium, Dhanmondi.



WEATHER TODAY

Mild cold weave may continue

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain dry with temporary or partly cloudy sky over the country in 24 hours till 6:00pm today.

Moderate to thick fog may occur at places over the country during mid night till noon.

Mild cold wave is sweeping over the regions of Rajshahi, Pabna, Rangpur, Jessore, Kushtia and Srimangal and it may continue, Met office said.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country and night temperature may fall slightly over the northern part and remain nearly unchanged elsewhere over the country.

The sun sets in the capital today at 5:14 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:35 am. Country's highest temperature 26.6 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Cox's Bazar and lowest 07.7 degrees at Jessore.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	22.8	13.2	86	72
Chittagong	23.9	14.2	96	69
Rajshahi	20.0	10.5	93	89
Rangpur	15.0	10.8	97	94
Khulna	24.5	11.4	100	76
Barisal	25.5	11.4	97	83
Sylhet	24.8	13.8	94	88
Cox's Bazar	26.6	14.0	78	69