

# Chittagong to bridge

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amongst historians about the actual location and features of Harikela, a geographical entity in ancient Bengal, scholars like Abdul Karim Sahityavisharad played important roles to find out the linkage between Harikela and neighbouring places like Arakan, former name of Rakhine state of Burma.

Chittagong gradually emerged as a prominent region in the South Asian sub-continent since the 4th century with its unique features in political, economic and socio-cultural history, he said. The region developed as a centre of bridging people like traders from neighbouring and far away areas with its sea port in the zone.

Previous Harikela now Chittagong slowly came into such considerable prominence with its deep-rooted own regional entity during early medieval Bengal (c.500 to 1500CE) but the region had a strong bond with the neighbouring land, people and the cultural arena, he said.

Prof Ranabir said the history of Chittagong is the history of communication between people from different regions.

Before the formation of nation-state, the undivided medieval Bengal, which embraced the present states of West Bengal and parts of Tripura and India and Bangladesh, actually consisted of five sub-regions like Pundra, Radha, Vanga, Samatata and Harikela, he said, adding that Harikela comprised the southeastern part of Bangladesh and present Chittagong.

Many historians in the past believed that Harikela, Samatata and Vanga were not different regions but the same, he said, adding that the idea later changed.

Prof Ranabir in his lecture showed how the Buddhist network contributed to the eminence of the maritime profile of Harikela.

Referring to the accounts of Buddhist scholar Ijing, who travelled the region for Nalanda University in the 7th century, Prof Ranabir said the name Holoikal was first found in the accounts of Ijing who spoke of the maritime linkages between Harikela and the Malay Peninsula.

Historian BN Mukherjee by his numismatic

researches at first incontrovertibly established that Harikela referred to an area around Chattagram (Chittagong), he said.

Mukherjee claimed that the uninterrupted issuance of fine quality silver coins bearing the name of Harikela, using Arakan type, is perhaps the surest index of the region's commercial profile during that period, said Ranabir.

The coins with the fine quality it had, the purity and the weight were also used as currency in Arakan, Sreehatta (Sylhet) and Asam, he said.

The kings of Chandrabangsha in the 10th century changed the scenario of Harikela when they spread their kingdom towards Samatata, Vanga, Sreehatta (Sylhet) and Kamrup and for this spread of power the distinction between Vanga and Harikela later reduced, Ranabir said.

With the gradual disappearance and final eclipse of Tamralipta since the 8th century, Harikela emerged as the pre-eminent zone of the maritime activities in the then Bengal, Ranabir said, adding that this explains why in the Arabic and Persian texts on travel and geography the eastern Indian ocean was called the sea of Harikela.

Depicting the rich history of Chittagong Port, Prof Ranabir said Arab traders in their accounts mentioned a port named as Samandar, which was closed to an island. He said Samandar is the Chittagong Port and the island was Sandwip.

Due to the existence of several inland river ports in the eastern Ganges delta, a good river-route communication was built between Harikela and other parts of Bengal while a maritime linkage was set up with the rest of the world through Chittagong port, he said.

"To discuss the history of Chittagong, we must take into account the hinterland and the foreland of Chittagong Port of pre-1500 times," he said.

Trustee Secretary of AK Khan Foundation, Salauddin Kashem Khan, said long-term cordial relations and the existence of people from various religious and ethnic communities have given a unique feature to Chittagong. The region with its great port remained the richest part in

India, he said.

Thanking The Daily Star for the initiative, Salauddin said people of Chittagong do not know about its very rich and ancient history.

Prof Abdul Momin Chowdhury said Chittagong's history is about prosperity and heritage and Ranabir's lecture would make the people of Chittagong more proud.

"If The Daily Star continues this sort of programmes nationwide, the entire nation would know about their heritage and be inspired...I think regionalism is not anti-nationalism, rather regionalism is the first ingredient of nationalism," he said.

Making the welcome address, The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam said the history conference is part of the upcoming "The Daily Star Odmmo Chattagram" festival scheduled to be held from March 30 to April 10. It aims at disseminating Chittagong rich past amongst all.

"We feel so proud with our recent history like our language movement, the glorious Liberation War and fight for democracy but our ancient history is still neglected as we seldom think about our history which is so old and rich, Mahfuz Anam said.

The Daily Star has taken the initiative to gradually project local histories of regions so that people could be familiar with the holistic picture of the rich heritage and history of the country, he said.

Shamsul Hossain, former curator of Chittagong University Museum, presented a PowerPoint presentation on Andarkillah area of the port city.

Around 6:00pm, cultural group Raktakabi enchanted the audience with performances paying tribute to Rabindranath Tagore. This was part of The Daily Star's homage to the poet to mark his 150th birth anniversary.

The second day of the conference, titled "Pre-historic and pre-mediaeval Chittagong" begins at 10:00am in the port city. Comprises of three sessions, noted academics would provide presentations on their research papers during the day. A cultural programme would follow paying tributes to National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam.

## Libya dismantles trafficking ring

AFP, Benghazi

Libyan security forces said on Thursday they had dismantled a human trafficking network smuggling illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Somalia.

Hussein al-Sahli, who headed the investigation, said five members of the network were arrested at a farm on the outskirts of the eastern city of Benghazi, where 52 people were being held captive.

"The network was bringing illegal immigrants across the Egyptian-Libyan border with the help of Libyan drivers and the owner of the farm," he said.

The gang lured its victims with promises of safe passage and employment opportunities in the North African nation only to kidnap them in the hope of obtaining ransom payments from their relatives, he added.

## BGB-BSF talks

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The 22-member Bangladesh delegation, led by its director general, handed over a list of phensidyl factories allegedly set up in India's border areas and asked New Delhi to crack down on them.

India, however, denied the charge that phensidyl factories existed on its border with Bangladesh, but said it would check and take necessary actions if such units were found.

While Maj Gen Anwar Hussain is leading the BGB side at the talks, the other side is led by UK Bansal.

The meeting also discussed sharing real-time information regarding cross-border movement of smugglers, drug and human traffickers.

Earlier, the Bangladeshi delegation called on Indian Home Minister P Chidambaram and Home Secretary RK Singh.

During the meetings with Chidambaram and Singh, the visiting delegation pressed for handing over the killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who are believed to be hiding in India.

Both Chidambaram and Singh were understood to have assured the Bangladeshi delegation that efforts were on to trace them and once that happens, they would be handed over to Bangladesh to face trial.

## 'Carjacker'

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"The car, with four youths on board, defied the signal and sped away, prompting the police team to be in its pursuit," said Senior Assistant Commissioner Mashiur Rahman of Detective Branch.

Soon, separate teams of DB and Rapid Action Battalion received calls for backup and joined the chase. The car finally came to a halt when it crashed into a power pole near the Basila Bridge.

Mashiur said the criminals opened fire on the police as soon as they got out of the car, forcing the law enforcers to respond in kind.

Mahmudul Islam, officer in charge of Mohammadpur Police Station, said at least 30 rounds of ammunition were fired during the hour-long gunfight.

The law enforcers found one carjacker dead at the scene and recovered a pistol, two knives and a police signal light. The other three hijackers, however, managed to flee the area.

The deceased, Nazrul Islam, was accused in at least seven cases including four on murder charges, police claimed.

On March 8, Additional DIG Abu Musa Md Fakhru Islam and some relatives were returning home after visiting a family member at a city hospital. They were stopped on Khilji Road in Mohammadpur by a group of men posing as policemen. After forcing the passengers to exit the vehicle, the gang snatched their valuables and made off with the car.

# Advisers of Mujib, Yahya

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tributes paid to him by such leading national newspapers as the Karachi-based Dawn. His sagacity and his vision were all remarked upon. That said, it was for the first time in the Bengali leader's life that his birthday was being observed in the two wings of Pakistan.

In the morning, Bangabandhu drove down once more to President's House for another round of talks with President Yahya Khan. At the meeting, he reiterated his demand that power be transferred immediately to the elected representatives of the people if the crisis were not to be prolonged. For his part, General Yahya Khan repeated his old argument

that a withdrawal of martial law and transfer of power at that stage would create a constitutional vacuum in the country. Yahya also informed Mujib that he had summoned his constitutional advisor, Justice AR Cornelius, for consultations on the issue.

A meeting between an Awami League team and the president's advisors took place in the evening. The Awami League was represented by Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed and Dr Kamal Hossain. Speaking for the regime were Justice Cornelius, Lt Gen SGMM Peerzada and Col Hasan, judge advocate general of the army.

According to Kamal Hossain, Yahya's advisors

told the Awami League team that in light of the president's meeting with the Awami League chief, a proclamation would be issued by the president. They also noted that Mujib had proposed to the president that the national assembly sit in session in two segments, that is, members elected from East and West Pakistan convene in session separately, with each side empowered to prepare a draft of a future constitution of Pakistan. Following the preparation of the two drafts, the national assembly would meet as one body and thrash out the details of the constitution to be eventually adopted for Pakistan.

# Bangabandhu's birthday

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National Children's Day today.

The government, ruling Awami League (AL), various socio-cultural and political organisations have planned elaborate programmes to mark the day.

Paying rich tributes to Bangabandhu, President Zillur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the president of AL, gave separate messages on the occasion.

Both the president and prime minister will visit Tungipara, the birthplace of Bangabandhu, this morning, and will place wreaths at the special prayers at his mazar there.

The premier will address a children's rally on the mazar premises, open a library and distribute sewing machines amongst the distressed.

After returning from Tungipara, the president will inaugurate the National Children's Day programme to be arranged by Bangabandhu Shishu Kishore Mela at Bangabhaban at 12:00 noon.

The ruling AL will hoist the national and party flags at Bangabandhu Bhaban in the capital and party offices across the country at 6:30 am, place wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu in front of Bangabandhu Bhaban at 7:00am.

A discussion on the life of Bangabandhu will be held tomorrow at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital at 3:30pm where the AL chief will address as the chief guest.

Besides playing the recorded historic March 7 speech of Bangabandhu throughout the day, special prayers and milad mahfil seeking peace of the departed souls of Bangabandhu and his family members, will be held across the country.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and private TV and radio stations will air special programmes, while national dailies will publish special supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

On this day in 1920,

# Russian soft loan

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Under the deal, Yeafesh said, Russia would extend full support in forming a regulatory body to handle the safety issue of the 1,000-megawatt project.

In another major outcome of his weeklong visit late last month, Bangladeshi students will get scholarships to study nuclear science and technology at a specialised university in Russia.

Besides, teachers from the Russian university will visit Bangladesh to teach students at Dhaka University and Buet.

DU and Buet will sign separate Memorandums of Understanding with Russian National Research Nuclear University.

"These programmes are essential to create local expertise," Yeafesh said.

He added that the government was also planning to establish an info-centre like the one in Russia to inform people everything about a nuclear power plant. The centre may be set up at the Russian Culture Centre in Dhaka.

According to official sources, Bangladesh has made a considerable progress in the last three years in meeting the requirements

specified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for building a nuclear plant to resolve the country's energy crisis.

A number of deals, framework agreements and MoUs have already been signed with Russia for peaceful use of nuclear power, technology transfer, development of human resources, and supply of required fuel and taking spent fuel back.

The government will pass a law and form an independent regulatory body to carry out IAEA suggestion to form a legal structure for implementing a nuclear project, the sources add.

Yeafesh said the draft Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Act would be placed in a coming parliament session.

Managing the huge cost to set up the plant was a major hurdle to overcome. Russian financial assurance has ended that uncertainty.

A final deal on the plant is expected to be signed within this year, aiming to commission it by 2017.

The state minister said, "We are trying to complete all preparatory work in a quickest possible time so that the deal can be struck during the prime minister's

Bangabandhu was born at Tungipara in Gopalganj. He led all the important movements including the language and independence movements in the country.

The Father of the Nation delivered his historic speech to unite and prepare the whole nation for the Liberation War on this day in 1971.

On March 25 the same year, Pakistani army pounced on the unarmed Bengali people killing hundreds and arrested Bangabandhu from his Dhanmondi residence.

Prior to the arrest, Sheikh Mujib declared independence of the country. The entire nation, except few collaborators of Pakistani forces, fought unitedly against the Pakistan army, and after nine months of bloodshed the country was liberated.

Throughout his life, the Father of the Nation struggled for the rights and freedom of the people of Bangladesh.

## 5 robbers

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The law enforcers also recovered 11 arms including a single barrel shotgun, three rifles, one pistol and two airguns and 250 bullets from the spot.

Acting on a tip-off, a joint team of Rab-8 and Rab headquarters led by Maj Sabbir Rahman Osmani conducted a drive at the canal under Sharankhola range of the mangrove forest around 9:00am, said Rab.

The Rab team for the first time in such a drive used a chopper to trace the robbers promptly, mentioned Maj Sabbir.

Sensing the presence of the law enforcers, the dacoits opened fire on them. The Rab members retaliated triggering the hour-long "gunfight."

At one stage the gang members were forced to retreat.

The Rab men then searched the spot and found the five dead bodies.

A team of Sharankhola police reached the scene at noon and had been on their way back to Sharankhola with the five bodies and recovered arms.

Police sources said at least 10 gangs in the area are currently involved in abducting fishermen for ransom and looting their valuables.

## Ex-ISI chief

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of the apex court headed by Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary grilled the former spy boss on Inter Services Intelligence's funding for politicians both in and outside Pakistan.

Recently a UAE-based daily had alleged that ISI paid Rs 50 crore to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia ahead of the 1991 elections in which the party won and formed the government.

There are allegations that the ISI has been active in Bangladesh whenever BNP has been in power (1991-96) and later during 2001-06.

The spy agency was also alleged to have launched a campaign from Bangladesh to destabilise the Northeast by patronising and providing logistic support, including funds, to the insurgent groups operating from Bangladesh.

The ISI is alleged to have supported a network in Bangladesh, which includes Jamaat-e-Islami, BNP and Northeast rebel groups during the BNP's rule.