

# 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 Holaikal 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 Chittagong do not know about its very rich and ancient history.

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, Srekhata (Sylhet) and Assam, he said.

The kings of Chandrabangsha in the 10th century changed the scenario of Harikela when they spread their kingdom towards Samatata, Vanga, Srekhata (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... 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 Odhamo in Chittagong" festival scheduled to be held from March 30 to April 10. It aims at disseminating Chittagong rich past among 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 Rakta Karabi 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.

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.

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.

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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.

Mashir 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 scene.

In the end it was a fantastic day for cricket.

**ZILLUR HASINA, KHALEDA**

**CONGRATULATE**

President Mohammad Zillur

Rahman, Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina and Leader of

the Opposition Begum

Khaleda Zia congratulated

the Bangladesh national

cricket team on their victory

over India in the Asia Cup

yesterday.

In an instant reaction, Sheikh Hasina said: "It's a new milestone for Bangladesh cricket as the Tigers defeated the team who are the current world champions."

Prime minister's special assistant (medial) Mahabubul Hoque Shakil informed that Sheikh Hasina along with her sister Sheikh

Rehana watched the match on TV at her Gono Bhaban residence.

She later celebrated the victory by distributing sweets among officials and staff of Gono Bhaban.

Khaleda Zia congratulated the team and also thanked the coach and other officials of the team in her message.

It was one of his slower

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balls to reach the three digit

mark and he looked subdued

after achieving the rare feat

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