

No festivity in Ramu

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shares the joy of each other's religious festival, it is the first time that the Buddhist in Ramu has curtailed their most colourful programme, Prabarana Purnima.

Also for the first time, the Buddhist community refrained from flying paper lanterns (fanus) yesterday. The shell-shocked community will not float, as they do every year, decorated ships on the Bakkhali river in Ramu today. This festival is popularly known as Jahaj Bhasha Utsav.

Instead of flying those traditional "fanus" yesterday evening, Buddhists wore black badges to take to the streets in a procession, calling for peace. Organised by Central Ramu Buddha Jubo Parishad, some 7,000 people from 14 villages joined the march.

"We have postponed the programme in protest against the violence. The atmosphere is not favourable for the festival," said Swapan Barua, acting chairman of Rajar Kul union of Ramu and also the president of the central committee for the ship floating festival.

Eid-ul-Azha, the second biggest religious festival of the Muslim, also came and

went without much festivity, as there was no spontaneous participation of the people.

In Ramu's Buddhist neighbourhood, it was never an issue as to who eats beef and mutton and who does not. Ramu's was an age-old tradition of sharing the spirit of the festival, Buddhists visiting the Muslim homes on the eid day.

"Many Buddhists used to join the festival [eid] wearing dresses like the Muslims wear during their festival to share the joy," says Nitish Barua of Uttar Mithachari in Ramu.

Others say the Muslim and the Buddhist in Ramu have always spontaneously participated in each other's religious festivals and their relations have been so cordial that it was hard to separate them on occasions like eid, puja or Buddha Purnima.

"It was the first time in my life that I spent the eid without spontaneous participation of my Buddhist neighbours," Shamim Ahsan Bulu, a social activist and politician in Ramu, told The Daily Star.

"It was beyond imagining that our Buddhist neighbours and friends

refrained from visiting our home on the eid day, which was Ramu's age-old custom. Some of them did come to my house having been unable to turn down my invitation. But the usual cheerful spirit was missing," he added.

On the night of September 29, Muslim zealots in their dozens burned to ashes 12 Buddhist monasteries and vandalised six pagodas in Ramu. The unruly mob also damaged dozens of Buddhist homes.

It took several hours before the marauding fanatics could go on the rampage over a faked Facebook page insulting the Quran. All this while, the local police and intelligence personnel remained conspicuously inactive.

Nazibul Islam, who was the officer-in-charge of Ramu Police Station and was later closed, is one of those who acted mysteriously during the overnight mayhem. Some locals chased him when he went with a minister on October 1 to visit Shima Bihar, burned to ashes by the bigots.

Top police officials of Cox's Bazar and Ramu went to the Bihar on the eid day with some food to distribute

and float ships and offered to help arrange these programmes.

But Buddhist leaders said they were not in a mood to celebrate the occasion amid festivity and that they would only offer prayers in silence.

"We were mortified to witness the incident of September 29. We have lost words to describe our feelings," said Satya Priyo Mahathero, chief of Ramu Central Shima Bihar.

8 yrs in jail

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daughter's house in Khilgaon.

Police also sent some food to eight other Buddhist monasteries, much to the embarrassment of the priests.

Nurul Islam, a local Awami League leader and lawyer, doesn't take the police effort positively.

"I am sure the police have other motives for offering food to the priests at the temple," he said adding, "Looks like it was an attempt to soothe their anger against the police."

Police and local administration were also desperate to persuade the Buddhist community to fly "fanus"

and float ships and offered to help arrange these programmes.

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Major reshuffle

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change of some key portfolios, appointing Salman Khurshid as India's new foreign minister.

The 59-year-old lawmaker from India's largest state of Uttar Pradesh took the charge of the foreign ministry following the resignation of 80-year-old SM Krishna.

Krishna and six other cabinet and junior ministers had quit on Friday.

Harish Rawat, a veteran Congressman from the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, has been made the new water resources minister.

The portfolio was earlier held by Pawan Kumar Bansal who has been given the key portfolio of railway once held by Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee and later by her trusted aide Mukul Roy.

Khurshid had been the law minister, a post that has now gone to Ashwini Kumar, a suave and articulate Congress lawmaker from Punjab.

After the arrest, they were sent to jail after being produced before a court. The Indians detained with them, however, got bail within one and a half years.

Manmohan later told media persons that he would have been happy if Rahul had joined the government but the latter wanted to work for Congress party.

He also ruled out early parliamentary elections which are due in first half of 2014.

Rahul, the 42-year-old Congress general secretary and scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family and seen by many as future prime minister, is most likely to get a "bigger role" in the party as an internal reorganisation planned soon.

He is currently one of the dozen-odd general secretaries in the party.

Congress President Sonia Gandhi, who along with her son Rahul was present at the swearing-in ceremony in the evening, said after the ministerial reshuffle, Congress party's organisational revamp would take place but did not specify when.

Congress sources said Rahul could be given a much larger organisational role --

the party's working president, formalising his position as second-in-command after Sonia Gandhi ahead of 2014 general elections.

Khurshid's shift to foreign ministry came in the backdrop of charges of financial irregularities in his NGO for differently-abled people. The charges levelled by anti-corruption activist Arvind Kejriwal were stoutly denied by Khurshid.

The other key portfolio change is that M Veerappa Moily has been moved from corporate affairs ministry to petroleum ministry to replace S Jaipal Reddy.

The change took place in the midst of an on-going conflict between India's largest private company Reliance and the petroleum ministry over revising the cost of gas that the corporate giant is extracting from the Krishna Godavari basin.

Reddy has been shunted to relatively less important ministry of science and technology and earth sciences.

Of the 22 ministers sworn in by President Pranab Mukherjee at the Darbar Hall of Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi, seven are of cabinet rank, two junior ministers with independent charge and 13 junior ministers.

Manmohan later told reporters that this was hopefully the last reshuffle before the general elections in 2014.

Of the seven cabinet ministers, three are new faces -- K Rahman Khan, Chandresh Kumari Katot and Dinsshaw Patel -- while four current junior ministers Ajay Maken, Pallam Raju, Ashwini Kumar and Harish Rawat have been elevated to the cabinet rank.

Manish Tewari, 47-year-old Congress leader from Punjab and the party's most prominent face in the media, and actor-turned-politician K Chiranjeevi from southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh have been inducted into the ministerial council as junior ministers with independent charge.

Among the 13 junior ministers sworn in on Saturday is former UN under-secretary general Shashi Tharoor.

Tharoor had resigned two years ago in the wake of his controversial "cattle class"

remarks about air passengers travelling in economy class and allegations of a conflict of interest in his backing of an IPL cricket team linked to his wife Sunanda Pushkar.

Another prominent minister sworn in is Tariq Anwar, general secretary of Nationalist Congress Party, a constituent of Congress-led UPA. Anwar will be in the agriculture ministry headed by his party boss Sharad Pawar.

The three junior ministers from West Bengal Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Abu Hashem Khan Chowdhury and Deepa Dasmunshi are known staunch detractors of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her party Trinamool Congress.

Trinamool Congress snapped its alliance with Congress and pulled out of UPA in September this year protesting hike in diesel price and foreign investment in multi-brand retail decisions of the federal government.

Contrary to domestic media reports, Saturday's reshuffle had very little young faces as the two youngest ministers inducted were 47 years old Manish Tewari and Chiranjeevi.

However, Manmohan maintained his government is now a combination of youth and experience, and he has moved some "competent people" to the cabinet.

Six ministers of Trinamool Congress resigned in September when the party quit the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and the government.

A vacancy was created when senior Congress leader Vilasrao Deshmukh, who was minister for science and technology, died in August while two cabinet berths, vacated by another UPA constituent party DMK leaders A Raja and Dayanidhi Maran stepped down in the wake of the 2G telecom spectrum allocation issue, have not yet been filled up.

The cabinet reshuffle came at a time when the UPA government is buffeted by allegations of corruption and ahead of the winter session of parliament to be held November-December.

Sandy sweeps

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said at the White House.

State governors from Virginia to Massachusetts warned of the acute danger from the storm for the 60 million residents in its path. Ten states have declared a state of emergency.

"There will undoubtedly be some deaths that are caused by the intensity of this storm, by the floods, by the tidal surge, by the waves. The more responsibly citizens act, the fewer people will die," Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley told reporters.

Forecasters said Sandy could be the largest storm to hit the mainland in US history.

Earlier, in the beginning of this year, Bangladeshi and Indian hackers were engaged in a cyber war following the brutal killing of Felani by Border Security Force of India at the border.

The time of attack could not be known.

The hackers on the webpage identified themselves as "Whole Team Indishell Family and Indian Hackers World" with email address Destroyer@Indishell.in. They left no message.

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