

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 distrib-

ute among the Buddhist. In their efforts to show things were all right again, the law enforcers had a meal there with some Buddhist priests, including the chief of the burned down monastery.

While locals take it for a "drama," it was an embarrassment for the Buddhist priests.

Progyananda Bhikshu, a priest of Shima Bihar, said they had some restrictions on taking food.

"And we told the superintendent of police [who went there] about it," he said, adding that they still had to share the meal avoiding the chicken just to show courtesy.

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.

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.

The morning after the altercation, officials of Department of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) arrested them and two Indian citizens at the hotel on charge of possessing counterfeit Indian currency, said the sculptor, claiming that they had not had any fake rupees with them.

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.

"I don't have words to describe the last eight years," said Rashid, adding that his health had deteriorated by this time. He had been suffering from hypertension, heart problem, asthma and diabetes. "But the torment of not being able to work beats everything," he added.

Lovely, who lost her daughter on August 29, 2005, said they had not received any legal help at the beginning.

"As we had no money, we couldn't engage any lawyer of our own. On top of that, the government counsel never took our case seriously," she alleged.

"We experienced that the legal system of India works differently for natives and outsiders. Though we were being produced before the court, it refused to hear our case," Lovely said.

Rashid alleged that he got no support from the Bangladesh High Commission though he wrote to them on several occasions.

"A Bangladesh High Commission official named Asafuddoula came to meet me in the prison five months after the arrest. He recognised me and told me to have patience and wait three to four years," said Rashid, adding that nobody from the embassy had contacted him until July this year.

He said he had, in the meantime, appealed to the Indian High Court to expedite their case proceedings, but to no avail. "When my health deteriorated further I shared the concern with the jail superintendent, who later contacted the Bangladesh High Commission and the media," Rashid said.

He said a consular named Md Nazibur Rahman had met him last July.

After several reminders to the Indian foreign ministry by the Bangladesh High Commission since the meet and media reports in both the countries, the Delhi court dealing with their case expedite the trial procedure.

On October 10 this year, the court sentenced them seven years' imprisonment and fined Rs 1.5 lakh each. Although they had served more than the term, the two were not released from prison for not paying their fines.

They were released on October 26, when three Indians came to there help and paid the fines and gave them money to get back home. The very day Rashid and Lovely took a flight to Kolkata to catch a Dhaka-bound flight the next morning.

Lipi Rahman, Rashid's youngest daughter, said they had heard about the detention after about a month of the arrest. She said they had visited her father and sister-in-law twice, in March and June in 2005, selling their property.

Rashid, now broke and ill, urged the government to provide him with a house.

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.

Contrary to media speculation, Rahul Gandhi did not join the government in this reshuffle.

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 in 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 Katoch and Dinshaw 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 junior 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 Hashme Khan Chowdhury and Deepa Dasgupta 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.

Foreign ministry website hacked

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The official website of the foreign ministry was hacked yesterday.

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.

The time of attack could not be known.

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 boarder.

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.

Off North Carolina, the US Coast Guard rescued 14 of the 16 crew members who abandoned the replica tall ship HMS Bounty, using helicopters to lift them from life rafts. The Coast Guard continued to search for two missing crew

members.

In New York, a crane atop a building on 57th Street in Manhattan had partially collapsed, leaving it dangling high above the street. Police said they were closing the area to pedestrians.

Sandy picked up speed as it raced northwest toward the US coast at 28 miles per hour (45 km per hour) on Monday afternoon, with top sustained winds at 90 mph, the US National Hurricane Center said.

"The centre of Sandy is expected to make landfall along or just south of the southern New Jersey coast by early evening," NHC forecasters said, adding they expected little change in strength before then.

Forecasters said Sandy was a rare, hybrid "super storm" created by an Arctic jet stream wrapping itself around a tropical storm.

The combination of those two storms would have been bad enough, but meteorologists said there was a third storm at play - a system coming down from Canada that would effectively trap the hurricane-nor'easter combo and hold it in place.

5 beaten

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eight alleged gangsters and beat five of them to death on the spot. The three others fled.

There were no police personnel at the spot during the incident, locals said.

Mohammad Emran Ali, officer-in-charge of Companyganj Police Station, confirmed the deaths.

He said police recovered the bodies around 8:30pm and sent those to Noakhali Hospital morgue for autopsy.

No place for insurgents

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prime minister hosted in honour of the BNP chairperson.

The BNP has always been known for its anti-India stance, and it concerns New Delhi that anti-India insurgents get shelter and support in Bangladesh with this party in office, BBC Bangla adds. Analysts say Khaleda's assurance at the meeting could be an indication of change in her anti-india policy.

Responding to Khaleda's concern over border killings by BSF, Manmohan told her that he doesn't condone a single death at the border and India will put in place every possible mechanism to ensure that there is not a single death, BNP Vice Chairman Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury said at a media briefing at Taj Palace Hotel in New Delhi.

Khaleda is on a week-long India visit following an invitation from the Indian government.

The BNP chief said even a single border killing can have negative impact on India-Bangladesh relations.

Senior BJP leader LK Advani was among those who were present at the lunch hosted by the Indian prime minister, along with India's new External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid, Home Minister Sushilkumar Shinde, and two new junior ministers from West Bengal Abu Hashem Khan Chowdhury and Deepa Dasgupta.

According to senior BNP leader Tariqul Islam, the BNP chairperson said she wanted a "new era" to begin in Bangladesh's relations with India.

Khaleda conveyed to Manmohan that Bangladesh would never be allowed to be a happy hunting ground for

terrorists, said Tariqul.

"Begum Zia assured Prime Minister Singh that she or BNP will never allow the territory of Bangladesh to be used for any activities to harm India or do anything which is against India's security," said Mobin, who was present in the meeting without the two leaders.

Expressing her desire to work with India to combat terrorism, Khaleda said there is enough comprehensive mechanism under the Saarc to combat terror and "we must make full use of it".

Manmohan thanked Khaleda for her assurances, and said he has every reason to believe her and that they have a solid foundation to work on, Mobin told the briefing.

The Indian prime minister made it clear that India believes in engaging with all parties in Bangladesh and its people, and not with just one party or individual, said Mobin.

Manmohan said a stable, moderate and democratic Bangladesh was in India's interests.

Referring to the proposed Tipaimukh project in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur, Khaleda told Manmohan that she already conveyed her concern, and also welcomed the setting up of a sub-committee under the JRC to examine the project.

She stressed that "acceptable and credible" experts should be included in the sub-committee to solve the issue, said Mobin.

Khaleda also welcomed Manmohan's assurance that India would not do anything that will harm Bangladesh's interests.

Answering a question on BNP's stand on the land boundary agreement

signed during Manmohan's Dhaka visit last year to implement the 1974 Indira-Mujib accord on land boundary demarcation and exchange of enclaves, Khaleda expressed satisfaction that some progress has been made and wanted an early resolution of the issue without "displacing the people".

An early implementation of the agreement would help address trust deficit between the two nations, Khaleda told Manmohan. The Indian parliament, where Congress-led UPA lacks two-thirds majority, is yet to ratify the agreement.

On sharing of waters of Teesta and other common rivers flowing through India and Bangladesh, Khaleda said Bangladesh wanted a "fair" share of the waters because it was of question of livelihood for Bangladeshi people.

Khaleda welcomed India's decision to allow more duty-free goods from Bangladesh and hoped that a positive decision by India to remove non-tariff and para-tariff barriers would facilitate entry of more goods from Bangladesh and narrow the bilateral trade gap heavily in favour of India.

"Begum Zia recalled with gratitude India's contribution to Bangladesh's Liberation War and the fact that her late husband Ziaur Rahman had taken active part in it," said the BNP vice chairman.

She said India and Bangladesh "have a shared history and therefore we have a shared future".

Manmohan, according to Mobin, recalled Khaleda's "tremendous contribution in not only strengthening democracy in Bangladesh but also in cementing India-

Bangladesh relations".

Khaleda recalled Mahatma Gandhi's role in India's independence struggle, and said "even today, he remains in the heart of every man and based on his ideals India-Bangladesh relationship should be developed".

The BNP vice chairman quoted Manmohan as saying to Khaleda, "I thank you for your warm and sincere sentiments. We have a shared history and we have a bright future".

Manmohan said if India and Bangladesh work together, they can meet the demands of the people of the two countries.

Khaleda invited Manmohan to visit Bangladesh and the Indian prime minister accepted it.

During a 15-minute conversation with Khaleda during the lunch, Advani said they were happy to have her there and look forward to working with her, according to Mobin.

Khurshid, Dasgupta and Abu Hashem also spoke to Khaleda.

The Indian foreign minister will meet the BNP chief today at Hyderabad House and host a lunch for her. Before that, the Indian national security adviser will call on Khaleda in the morning.

There was no official word yet about when Khaleda will meet Indian President Pranab Mukherjee, who was out of Delhi yesterday.

Tariqul, Mobin and Sabiuddin Ahmed assisted Khaleda during her talks with Manmohan.

Indian National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon, Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai and Indian PM's Principal Secretary Pulok Chatterjee were present at the meeting.

Myanmar unrest

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The government has beefed up security measures in Shah Parir Dwip, Teknaf, Ukhaia and Saint Martins' Island and adjacent areas to check Rohingya influx and avoid any untoward situation, said the sources. The Coast Guard and Bangladesh Navy have been carrying out tight vigil apart from the BGB.

In the recent incidents, at least 80 people have been killed and 26,000 -- mostly Rohingya minorities -- have been displaced while around 4,600 houses burnt to ashes.

During the sectarian violence in June in the same state bordering Bangladesh, the government did not allow any Rohingya to enter into Bangladesh. They were sent back by law enforcers after providing them with food and medicine.

Meanwhile, in separate drives, the BGB personnel yesterday detained 16 Rohingyas and later sent them back following short detention, said a press release of BGB 17 Battalion

in Cox's Bazar.

Of the detainees, nine were held from the bordering area of Palangkhali while the rest from Balukhali area in Cox's Bazar district.

A total of 232 Rohingyas were pushed back to Myanmar so far in this month, the press release added.

The BGB officials said in the face of the clashes, around 40 boats carrying Rohingyas tried to enter into Bangladesh in the last few days, Commanding Officer Lt Col Md Zahid Hasan of BGB 42-battalion in Teknaf told The Daily Star.

Four days earlier, they had information from Bangladeshi fishermen that about 30 to 40 boats were floating in the Bay. "We were also informed that the boats carrying Rohingyas were rescued by Nasaka and Myanmar Navy and taken to shelter centres," he said.

"Being informed, we have increased our surveillance. The naval forces are also continuing search through radars," said the BGB official adding that no boat or

trawler carrying Rohingyas was seen in the Bangladesh territory.

Coast Guard's Station Commander Lt Badruddoza says Rohingyas generally enter into Bangladesh to visit their relatives on religious occasions or when violence takes place.

But after the violence had broken out, no occurrence of illegal entering of Rohingyas was reported, he told The Daily Star.

The Coast Guard on October 23 and 25 sent back 14 Rohingyas who were detained at the time of crossing river Naff, he added.

Meanwhile, Police Superintendent Selim Mohammad Jahangir of Cox's Bazar told The Daily Star that police detained 25 Rohingyas people from Whykhang of Teknaf in the last two days. Of them, at least 10 people entered into Bangladesh during the Eid-ul-Azha.

He said additional check posts were set up in the border areas to check fresh intrusion.

Eid-ul-Azha celebrated

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held at the Jatiya Eidgah Maidan in the capital at 8:30am Saturday. The congregation was attended by President Zillur Rahman, among others. Separate arrangements were made there for diplomats, their wives and other women.

Besides, five more eid congregations were held at the capital's Baitul Mokarram National Mosque at 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00 and 10:45am.

The biggest eid congregation took place at the historic Sholakia Eidgah Maidan in Kishoreganj.

Important buildings and thoroughfares of the capital were decorated with minia-

ture flags and banners with "Eid Mubarak" written on them.

President Zillur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia issued separate messages to greet the nation on the occasion.

The three-day public holiday for the eid began on Friday. Newspaper offices remained closed on those days. From the onset of the holiday, the city looked almost deserted. Millions of people had left the city to enjoy the time with their near and dear ones.

City dwellers along with their families flocked to different parks, lakes, the Sangsad Bhaban area, the

Mirpur zoo and many other spots of the city the day after eid.

The state-run Bangladesh Betar and BTV and private television and radio channels aired special programmes on the occasion. National dailies brought out special supplements on Friday, highlighting the significance of the festival.

Special meals were served at jails, orphanages, homeless shelters and dormitories across the country on the day.

Additional contingents of law enforcers were deployed at different points in the capital to ensure safe celebration of the festival.