



The indigenous people of Khagrachhari bring out a colourful procession yesterday marking the Biju festival.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

# It's festival time in hills

SHANTIMOY CHAKMA, Rangamati

The indigenous people in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) are in a festive mood as their three-day long traditional 'Biju' festival begins today.

The hills people of Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari are making preparations to celebrate their biggest festival.

Different socio-cultural organisations have also chalked up elaborate programmes to this end.

The three-day festival starts from the penultimate day of the last month of the Bangla calendar and ends on the first day of the new year. The last two days of Chaitra, the last month of the calendar, is meant for shedding the sorrows of the year and the

first day of Baishakh is for celebrating the new year.

Although it is a cultural and religious festival of the indigenous people, it is now being enjoyed by the Bangalees as well.

Different indigenous communities call the festival by different names. The Chakmas call it Biju, the Tripuras Boisuk, the Marmas Sangrain and the Tangchangyas Bishu.

The first day of the festival is called 'Phul Biju', the second day 'Mul Biju' and the third day or the first day of the Bangla new year is called 'Gojya Pojya Din'.

On the first day, people float flowers on rivers or hilly springs, seeking divine blessing for peace, prosperity and health of the countrymen.

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## Export rise raises hope

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growers narrow down losses they suffered for selling the vegetable below the production cost of around Tk 6 a kilogram, according to an estimate by Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI).

Prices of the most consumed vegetable fell below Tk 2 a kg at farmers' end in January, and continued to slide.

Pest attacks and release of old stocks from cold storages created a supply glut in the market, causing potato prices to fall.

Frustrated over sliding prices, farmers in many of the northern districts staged protests and dumped their produce on highways.

Ferdousi Begum, general secretary of Bangladesh Potato Exporters Association, said low prices of potato

on local market encouraged many traders to look for market opportunities abroad.

Md Ahsan Ullah, quarantine entomologist at the DAE's Plant Protection Wing, said government initiatives created wider market opportunities for Bangladesh, especially in Russia.

The government's 20 percent cash incentives to exporters and measures to remove obstacles to shipment also contributed to the rise in potato exports.

"It is a good sign. It gives hope for increasing exports in the coming days," said BARI Director General Md Rafiqul Islam Mondal.

Increased exports helped potato prices to edge up and offset losses of farmers, he said.

Md Belayet Hossain, chief executive

of Global Agro Resources Inc, said, "Our shipments to Russian markets are on the rise mainly because of its ban on potato imports from Pakistan."

On September 30 last year, Russia's Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance slapped the ban on the entry of all agricultural products from Pakistan for inadequate compliance with sanitary rules and procedures by Pakistani exporters.

In February, Russia lifted the ban on Pakistani agricultural produce, except for potatoes, according to reports.

"It appears that exports to Russia will rise, but it depends on ensuring consistent quality in line with the country's requirements," said Belayet, who also exports potato to Russia.

Potato exports to Russia might be

affected if the ban is lifted, he noted.

The problem is that it takes 11 days for a consignment to reach Russia from Pakistan whereas it takes 39 days in the case of Bangladesh, said Belayet.

Potatoes are now sold at Tk 12 to Tk 14 a kg in retail market in Dhaka, up from Tk 8 to Tk 10 early last month, according to Trading Corporation of Bangladesh.

Potato exports started rising since fiscal 2009-10, mainly to cater to the demands of Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia, Singapore and the Middle East. The vegetable is also exported to Sri Lanka, Indonesia and several other countries.

Bangladesh produces 82 lakh tonnes of potato a year against an annual consumption of 60 to 65 lakh tonnes. Of the total produce, 10 lakh tonnes are used as seed, according to

## Pair of mangoes

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containing pairs of the fruit sold at a wholesale market in Miyazaki prefecture, in southern Kyushu.

The top-priced mangoes will now be airlifted for sale at a department store in nearby Fukuoka city where they will go on sale, complete with a hefty price tag.

"Producers had a hard time because of the low temperature this year, but we are happy that the mangoes fetched high prices," Yasukazu Matsuda, a member of a local fruit growers' association, told Kyodo news agency.

The prized mangoes were sold under the Taiyo no Tamago ("Egg of the Sun") label, which famously has rigorous criteria, with all fruits required to weigh at least 12oz and have high sugar content, according

to the Miyazaki Agricultural Economic Federation.

Fruit has long been famously expensive in Japan, a nation where beautifully packaged, blemish-free fruits at eye-watering prices are prized as a status symbol and often given as gifts.

It is not unusual to find single red and perfectly formed apples with a price tag of around £3 in supermarkets, or as much as three times as high in specialist fruit stores.

However, the highest prices are often reserved for regional auctions, in particular the first of the season for each type of fruit.

Among the most coveted – and expensive – of Japan's fruits include large round Ruby Grapes from Ishikawa prefecture, with bunches often selling for thousands of pounds.

## No conflict

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sudden on Thursday removed Hawlader and appointed Bablu as the JP secretary general. Without holding any party meeting, he made the decision unilaterally and informed the media about the decision through a release.

A presidium member of the JP, Bablu is known as loyal to Raushan, leader of the opposition in parliament, said party sources.

Bablu, who has been on good terms with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, had convinced Raushan to contest January 5 one-sided national election by defying Ershad's decision to boycott the polls.

Sources in the JP said there had

been conflicts between Raushan and Hawlader over taking part in the January 5 polls. Hawlader was against joining the polls race.

Facing continued pressure from Raushan, Ershad finally replaced Hawlader with Bablu.

Meanwhile, speaking at a press conference at his Gulshan residence, Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu yesterday said Ershad appointed him as the party's secretary general as per party constitution.

He rejected the allegation that he was made the JP secretary general due to his good terms with the ruling Awami League.

Different associated organisations of the JP yesterday greeted Bablu for taking over as the secretary general of the party.

## Married Modi little shaky?

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elections find Modi-led BJP falling short of majority and go for coalition.

Modi's principal challenger 43-year-old Rahul Gandhi, who is leading the campaign of the Congress party, belongs to the most charismatic political Nehru-Gandhi clan. He reportedly has girlfriends, and for years, the question of whether he would get married followed him almost everywhere he went. He has almost always brushed aside questions about his marriage plan with a smile.

Politically, Modi and Rahul may be poles apart, but both have an argument for maintaining single status.

At an election rally earlier this year, Modi contended he could not possibly be corrupt because he is a bachelor. "Why would I indulge in corruption? For whom [I would]? There is no one behind or in front of me."

Last year, Rahul told supporters that he did not plan to get married.

"I will become status-quo-ist, and I will like my children to take my place," he added.

It remains to be seen if Modi's ending the ambiguity over his marriage and his moving away from his wife Jashodaben, now a retired school teacher almost of his age, would damage or help him electorally in a country where women constitute nearly half the 814 million voters.

But Modi's rivals have already started attacking him on the issue. Leaders of Congress accused Modi of deceiving the public about his marital status. Congress spokeswoman Shobha Oza on Thursday said, "How a person who fought shy of his duty as a husband could be entrusted the responsibility of a country?"

Oza also used this opportunity to rake up earlier allegations that Modi, with the help of his close aide Amit Shah, had ordered the stalking of a young woman.

Senior Congress leader Digvijay Singh in a Twitter post questioned, "Can women of this country trust a

man who stalks a woman, deprives his wife of her right?"

Indian newspapers yesterday quoted family members of Modi's wife as saying that Jashodaben has gone on a pilgrimage praying success for her husband to become India's next prime minister.

The media had rushed to her house in a village in Gujarat, but failed to find her there and were told that she is out on a pilgrimage with a group of women.

The Times of India in a report said Jashodaben had told her colleagues on her retirement as a school teacher that she did not expect anything from her husband and just wanted him to acknowledge once as his wife.

Newspapers also said quoting her close relatives that Jashodaben has stopped eating rice for some months now as a vow to see Modi as PM.

**COMPLAINT LODGED**  
Senior Congress leader Kapil Sibal said, "I have filed a petition with the Election Commission today [yesterday] seeking action against Modi

under various provisions of the IPC for hiding facts in his election affidavits regarding his marriage."

Kapil was talking to reporters in New Delhi after meeting the polls panel.

Between 2002 and 2012, Modi had filed election affidavits while contesting Gujarat assembly elections, where he had not mentioned his marital status, he mentioned.

"He has not informed the country about this fact. Now, while contesting from Vadodara Lok Sabha seat, he has mentioned that he is married," added Kapil.

He said the EC has assured him of examining his plea.

Also yesterday, Congress Vice-president Rahul Gandhi raked up the issue of Modi's marriage, saying while the BJP made claims of ensuring safety of women, it took several elections for its prime ministerial candidate to mention the name of his wife in the polls affidavit.

"In Delhi, he talks about honour of women but his own wife's name doesn't reach the affidavit," said

## Good IMF grades to Bangladesh

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The economic outlook for Asia is one of steady growth, Rhee said as the Spring Meetings of the IMF and World Bank took off yesterday in Washington.

Bangladesh's GDP growth prospects are slightly brighter than its Asian peers: the IMF expects Asian growth to improve to 5.4 percent in 2014 and 5.5 percent in 2015, up from 5.2 percent last year.

Asia will remain the global growth leader, as Rhee said the main growth drivers are improved external demand, which has lifted exports, healthy labour markets and robust credit growth.

"The latter has helped keep financial conditions relatively accommodative despite the rise in interest rates in many economies."

"But this general trend masks increasing sub-regional diversity across Asia-Pacific," he said.

In China, growth is expected to slowly decelerate to a more sustainable path but should still reach 7.5 percent this year, with investment still remaining a major driver, according to an IMF forecast.

Japan's growth is expected to remain above the trend as a whole, despite the increase in consumption tax in April.

Economic growth in India will

remain below the trend but should improve to 5.4 percent in 2014, as exports benefit from improved competitiveness and global growth. India's inflation will remain relatively high at 8 percent this year, but price pressures have already receded and may remain on a downward path.

For the Asean region, growth is expected to be broadly stable at 5 percent this year, with the Philippines and Malaysia doing relatively well.

Thailand is an exception: political tensions have hurt sentiments and the economy may slow to 2.5 percent in 2014 as private demand

weakens and public investment plans are delayed, the IMF said.

The balance of downside risks has shifted away from acute external risks toward domestic, idiosyncratic risks, Rhee said.

"As in the past, the region should continue to capitalise on stronger growth in advanced economies. But the outlook for the region will also be influenced by how successfully policymakers continue to tackle vulnerabilities and by how effectively reforms are implemented," he said.

"In our view, Asia's growth momentum is set to continue with vigilance and reform."










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