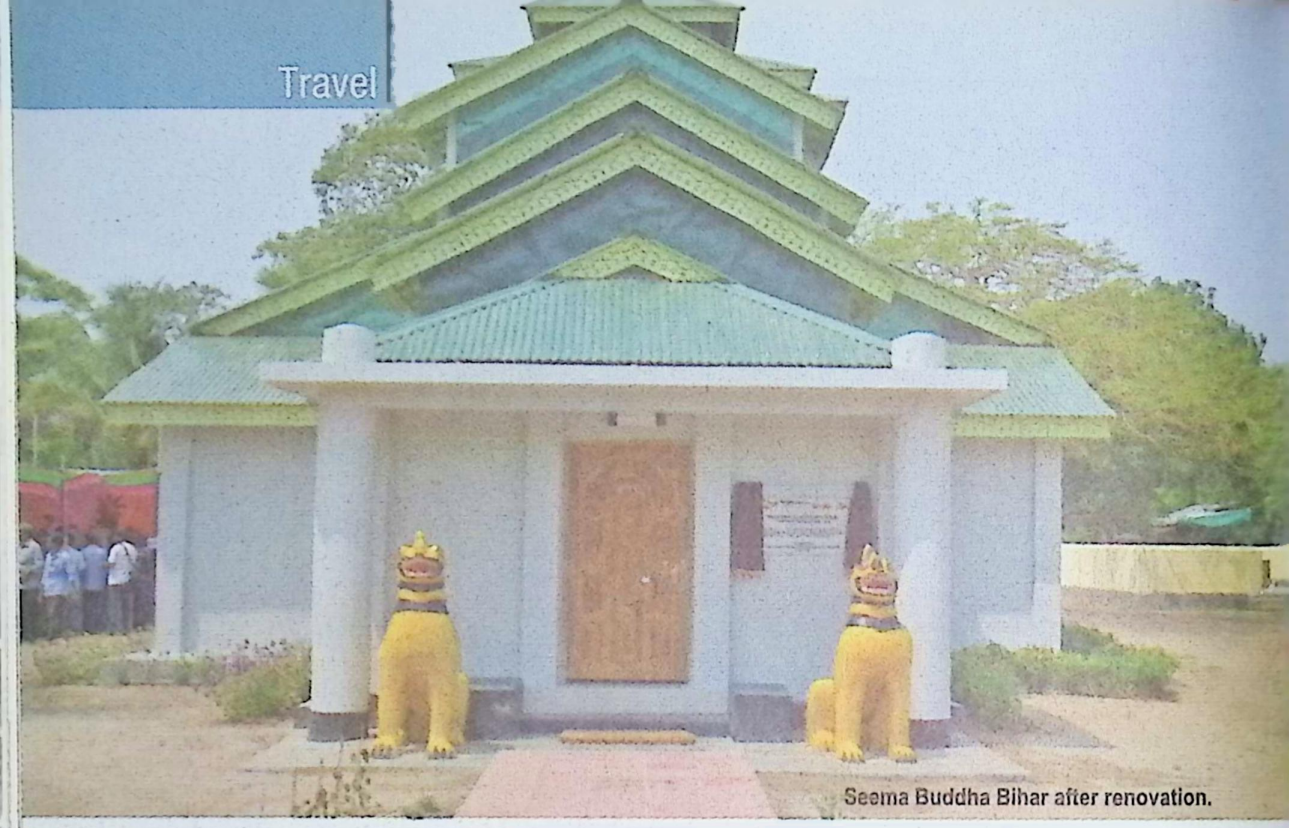


Seema Buddha Bihar after renovation.

Saving a Buddhist Temple

FARDAUS MOBAROK

It was a momentous day for the Rakhaine people in Misripara and nearby villagers in Kuakata. Their beloved temple known as Misripara Seema Buddha Bihar, had been saved. They had feared that the land of the ancient temple might be grabbed by influential people had it not been for the generosity of friends from another land.

Over the years, lack of proper maintenance and repair of the temple had left it in a state of decay. Then came two devastating natural disasters -- Cyclone Sidr in 2007 and Cyclone Aila in 2009 which battered the temple structure further. But this was not all. Influential locals who were not of Buddhist faith had their eye on the land where the temple resided.

Seventy-two-year-old Asio, who has lived his entire life in the village, says they had land but "frauds took away the land." For example, he says, frauds paid for five katha of land but made documents of five bighas.

A year ago, the German Ambassador to Bangladesh, Dr Albrecht Conze found the temple in a very bad shape while visiting it with his wife.

"It was raining through the roof, and the site was unprotected," said Dr Ferdinand von Weyhe, charge d' affairs of the German embassy, while inaugurating the renovated temple on April 2.



A Rakhaine woman sells clothes at her shop in Misripara.

"So, we decided to renovate this precious site of worship which stands as a symbol of the multi-religious heritage of Bangladesh," he added.

Speaking at the opening session, Tobias Becker, country director of GIZ (German cooperation), said the renovation of the temple premises will not only help preserve the country's cultural heritage, but also contribute to the development of the local economy. The German government provided