

# Mahaa Wagyawai Powe celebrated in colour, chorus

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Indigenous Buddhists celebrated Mahaa Wagyawai Powe festival in the Chittagong Hill Tracts seeking blessings from Buddha to be on the path shown by him.

The three-day festival began on Tuesday. The main festival, Probarana Purnima was celebrated in the hilly districts -- Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari -- the day after marking the end of three-month-long seclusion of monks inside their monasteries for self-education.

Buddhists released thousands of colourful paper lanterns (Fanush) that evening from Puraton Raj Math and Raj Vihar in Bandarban. Bir Bahadur U Shwe Sing, state minister for Chittagong Hill Tract Affairs, attended the programme as chief guest.

On the auspicious day, monks of a temple go to their "Ordination Hall" and request one another to show the right path if they have done any mistake in their way of living instructed by Lord Buddha, said U Gunavaddhana Pannya Thera, senior monk of Raj Vihar.

As a legend says Buddha once clipped some strands of his hair and said that if he were qualified to attain supreme wisdom and enlightenment, the hair would not fall down, it would

rather go up. To mark the event, Buddhists ignite and release paper lanterns in the sky.

During the celebrations, indigenous Buddhists performed Pradeep (candle) puja and other rituals and organised traditional cultural programmes and cake festival. They prayed to Gautam Buddha, seeking divine blessings for peace, prosperity and communal harmony in the region.

Buddhists living in other districts, however, celebrated Probarana Purnima on Tuesday.

Yesterday, the festivities concluded in Bandarban with Ratha yatra, in which devotees pulled a chariot around the district town and then submerged it into the Sangu river.

Later, the month-long Kathin Chibor (clothes) Dan Utsab followed, when devotees present clothes to monks for welfare of every being and entire mankind.

Different organisations of indigenous people organised programmes to celebrate Mahaa Wagyawai Powe festival across the district.

This year the celebration was aimed at waging a social movement to avoid abuses of information and technology, said Mong Ching Nue Marma, president of Bandarban Utsab Udjapon Parishad.



Hundreds gather by the Bakkhali River in Ramu of Cox's Bazar yesterday to celebrate traditional Jahaj Bhasa (ship floating) Utsav on the occasion of Probarana Purnima, the second largest festival of Buddhists.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ALI ZINMAT

## Brutality personified

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Over the past four months, Riad had been asking for a raise, making the owner furious, added Ripon, who once worked at Ghoroa and was beaten up by Sohel when he decided to quit in 2013.

On May 1 this year, Ripon went Ghoroa to see his brother Riad. "The moment he [Sohel] saw me he flew into a rage and kicked me on the chest and threatened to shoot me if I didn't leave his restaurant immediately."

Jewel, a former staff of Ghoroa, told The Daily Star how the restaurant owner humiliated him when he decided to leave. "He [Sohel] forced me to wear only a small gamchha in front of all the other employees and make me walk in front of them for several minutes."

On Tuesday morning, Ripon called his younger brother but someone else answered the phone and said, "Riad stole a mobile phone and Tk 1,500 from a fellow staff."

Reaching Ghoroa in the evening, he found Riad tied with a rope in the store room. He offered to compensate for whatever was stolen or lost, but to no avail.

Sohel reached the restaurant on an SUV around 12:00am and took Riad away.

Two Ghoroa staff took Riad's body to Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 1:00am on Wednesday, and claimed that he was shot by a mugger at Motijheel, said police and hospital sources.

"I could not do anything. I could not save my younger brother because the owner is so powerful," Ripon said in a choked voice.

Riad was buried in a graveyard at his ancestral home in Chandpur yesterday.

His mother Rokeya Begum had been fainting every now and then since she heard about the killing. His father died when he was in his mother's womb and Rokeya raised her two sons by working as a domestic help in Chandpur.

One of these correspondents yesterday visited the under-construction building, where the shooting is said to have taken place.

Riad along with some 20 employees of Ghoroa lived in one room on the first

floor. Everything in the room was vandalised and there were patches of blood at one corner and also on the corridor leading to it.

The building's four levels have been completed and work for another four floors is going on.

Meanwhile, police have collected CCTV footage from an office on the first floor.

In the footage, shown to this correspondent by police, an SUV stops in front of the building and six men disembark. One of them was holding a stick.

After a while, a number of young men were seen taking a body to the SUV. A figure, which according to police was of Sohel, was seen with a shiny metallic object at his waist. Police said analysing the footage they found that it was a gun attached to the gun-belt.

'POLICENEGLIGENCE' Ripon alleged that Sohel managed to flee because of police negligence.

The family went to Wari Police Station on Wednesday morning as they heard media reports that "Riad was killed by muggers". They told police it was Sohel who shot him to death.

But police made no efforts to catch the killer and they also delayed filing the case, he alleged.

However, officials denied the allegations.

Ripon said Sohel's brother phoned him yesterday morning and asked him to meet in secret. But he showed no interest. "There is no scope for discussion with anybody. I want a trial similar to the one held after the killing of Rajon in Sylhet," he said.

Ripon filed the case on Wednesday evening, accusing Sohel two staff and four unnamed people of the murder.

Asked about the murder probe, Nurul Amin, assistant commissioner of DMP (Wari), said they sent pictures and other details of Sohel to all land, air and water ports so that he can't leave the country.

Muntasirul Islam, deputy commissioner (media) of DMP, said they were scrutinising whether the firearm used

## Third seaport at Payra

FROM PAGE 1 according to planning ministry sources.

China, India and some Middle Eastern and European countries among others want to invest in the project, said a ministry official, seeking anonymity.

The Payra Port Authority informed the Ecneec meeting that the countries have already submitted their investment proposals. The government will have to invest only \$400 million in the deep seaport if the proposals are accepted, the official told The Daily Star.

The planning minister also told journalists that there would be no deep seaport in Sonadia.

After considering the idea of building the port in Sonadia off Cox's Bazar for a few years, the government in 2013 turned to Payra. The prime minister inaugurated Payra deep seaport site on

November 19, 2013 and development work began soon after. Earlier in the same months, parliament enacted the Payra Port Authority Act.

"Some limited scale infrastructures such as pontoon, crane and security building have already been developed on a 16-acre piece of land. The necessary work for lightering from big vessels has also been completed. The [port's] operation can begin on a limited scale after some more constructions are completed in the next few months," Kamal said.

A one lakh square foot warehouse will be set up, a 6km-long four-lane road will be constructed to connect Payra with Barisal-Kuakata highway, and 94 lakh cubic meter dredging will be done to maintain navigability at the port, he said.

Initially, the port will handle loading and unloading of food grains,

fertiliser and cement.

"The full-fledged port activities in Payra will start by 2023. And then it will have the capacity to house 75,000 containers," Kamal said, referring to the existing capacity of only 1,500 containers at Chittagong Port. "So, the cargo handling cost will come down to one-third."

According to the project proposal, the government is readying the Payra port on its own funding to boost Bangladesh's international trade as Chittagong and Mongla ports are struggling to cope with increasing volumes of exports and imports.

UNDERGROUND METRO RAIL

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina instructed the planning ministry to conduct a feasibility study on constructing an underground rail network in the capital alongside the existing metro rail project.

"We will conduct a study on the

prime minister's directive and will prepare a project plan based on the findings," Kamal said.

"Visiting World Bank Senior Vice President Kyle Peters has told me that the World Bank would finance one such underground railway project," he said, responding to the question as to how the government intended to fund the project.

The Ecneec yesterday also approved a Tk 458-crore project to construct five 20-storey buildings in Mirpur's Paikpara for government officials. The buildings will have a total of 608 flats, each between 1,000 and 1,250 square feet.

Another project costing Tk 105 crore got the Ecneec's approval. Planning commission employees will get 224 flats, between 650 and 800 square feet, in Taltola of Sher-e-Bangla Nagar under the project.

## Apologise or face lawsuit

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unpardonable and part of a deep-rooted conspiracy. It will have to offer apology for its remarks, or legal action will be taken against it," said Nasim, also a presidium member of ruling Awami League.

He called upon the foreign ministry to investigate the sources of TIB's funding and its patrons.

The minister made the remarks while talking to reporters after a meeting of the AL-led 14-party alliance at the party President Sheikh Hasina's Dhanmondi office.

Nasim said not even political parties would make such comments that the TIB did. He said the watchdog was "more dangerous" than the BNP and Jamaat.

Raising questions about TIB's authority to comment on parliament, the AL leader said the TIB had defamed the people and the constitution by terming the current parliament "a puppet theatre". It also insulted every parliament member, he added.

"TIB demanded fresh polls. Who has given it the right to come up with that demand?" the minister asked.

"TIB didn't want January 5 election and wanted an unconstitutional government. Now they are attacking Parliament as their desire was not fulfilled," Nasim said.

On Sunday, the TIB unveiled a study based on parliament's second to sixth session from June 2014 to July this year. The study has found

that the current parliament has not been able to function effectively. Terming the main opposition Jatiya Party "B-team of the government", it says the JP has failed to play its due role in parliament.

It says only 29 of 350 lawmakers of the current parliament participated in the process of enactment of 30 laws in 14 months, indicating their lack of interest in lawmaking.

It also says 41 MPs did not take part in any parliament proceedings in the 14-month period, and mentions the absence of the Speaker's strong role in stopping the use of un-parliamentary words in the House.

According to the study, quorum crisis ate up 48 hours and 41 minutes

from the second to sixth session, causing a waste of around Tk 32.42 crore in 112 working days. When parliament is in session, about Tk 1,11,000 is spent a minute for running it.

The TIB also suggested passing a bill on lawmakers' conduct and urged the opposition to play its due role in the House.

A day later, Chief Whip of Parliament ASM Feroz said the TIB study "is part of an international conspiracy" and the organisation was working as "a paid agent to defame parliament". He also said the TIB had no right to say anything on parliament and it had crossed the limit by making comments on last year's January 5 election.

## A claim that does not add up

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bombings on the Shia site to IS, the Sunni group.

The attack on the Shia community is perplexing to all. It has aggrieved people regardless of their affiliations, be it Sunni or Shia. There is no record of any attack on the Shia community in the last 400 years since the Hossaini Dalan was built as an Imambara, known as a shrine, for mourning the events of Muharram.

In fact, every year, a large number of people belonging to the Sunni community join the Tazia parade as remembrance of the battle of Karbala when Imam Hussein (RA), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), was killed by the forces of Yazid. The boy who was killed in the blast on Hossaini Dalan that day was a Sunni.

Both communities in Dhaka have been living with each other for long. No feelings of hatred exist between them. The conflicts and rivalries between the Sunnis and the Shias in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries have never affected the Sunnis and the Shias in Bangladesh.

Even though this schism within Islam has been in existence for around 1400 years, many of us were not acutely aware of it.

The sectarianism has not been, however, deep or bloody for centuries in other Muslim countries as well, it is a rather recent phenomenon. The modern day's struggle between the

Sunni and Shia had begun in 1979 following the Islamic revolution in Iran. The Shias had come to power through the revolution and their subsequent adoption of a theological staidhood made the world nervous.

The rise of the Shia in Iran had left conservative Sunni countries like Saudi Arabia and others in Middle East worried. Since then Saudi Arabia and Iran have started extending financial and armed supports to the Sunnis and the Shias in other countries to fight proxy wars to establish their political supremacy.

The Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s has intensified the sectarian schism as most of the Arab countries supported Saddam Hussein's Sunni dominated regime in Iraq against the Shias in Iran. Saudi Arabia had reportedly provided huge financial support to Saddam to fight Iran.

Now lets look at how IS was born and how it reasons.

The invasion of Iraq by the USA in 2003 has sown the seeds of IS, a claim by many. It has even been acknowledged by Tony Blair who had committed his country in the Iraq war. The invasion ousted Saddam along with the Arab Sunni camp from power. Their ouster put the Shia in state power.

The Shia-led government has however failed to build a democratic consensus following the overthrow of the Sunni-dominated regime. The Sunnis feeling excluded and marginalized, gradually turned to radicalisation and mobilisation to

fight back. In June 2014, the group formally declared the establishment of a "caliphate" - a state governed in accordance with Islamic law, or Sharia, or caliph.

With this mission, the IS has kicked off military operations and has captured a large chunk of territory in Iraq. This has sharpened the sectarian conflicts between the Sunni and the Shia. The Shia militia moved quickly to fight the Sunni-IS to retain their powers.

The uprising against President Bashar Al-Assad in Syria started a new chapter in the sectarian conflicts. Iran and the rest of the Shias in the Middle East have backed Assad's Alawite dominated regime. [Alawites follow a belief system similar to the Shias]. Sunni Arabs have extended supports to the country's Sunnis in Syria.

The war in Syria has affected the residents of Alawite and Sunni villages and towns with massive atrocities and sectarian point-scoring. IS launched operation in support of the Sunnis and has been successful in seizing large swathes of territory in Syria.

Thus, IS burst on to the international scene in 2014. And it has also become notorious for its brutality, including mass killings, abductions and beheadings.

A US-led coalition began air strikes against IS positions in Iraq and Syria last year to destroy it. But it did not make much progress.

Now Russia has stepped in with air strikes in Syria at the end of last month, saying it wants to help President Bashar al-Assad defeat IS and other extremists. In Syria, the IS is going through a tough time -- facing the joint onslaught of Russian air strikes and the forces and supporters of Assad.

So the question now is, why would IS be interested in going into operations in Bangladesh where there is no apparent aim of the Shias to capture state power by defeating the Sunnis and the Sunnis are not being repressed by the Shias?

If IS does not have any link to the attack on the Shia community, then who are behind the blasts and what are their motives? What do they want to gain by destabilizing the country? Do they want to generate a sectarian hatred in Bangladesh as the peaceful relation between Sunni and Shia community is not helping them?

Sectarian unrest will give people nothing better. The ongoing sectarian conflicts in the Middle East countries have become glaring example of this. The conflicts in Iraq and Syria have generated a surge of refugees. More than seven lakh refugees, most of them from Syria and Iraq, have crossed into Europe this year.

So, the government should take it seriously to unearth the mystery behind the bombings on the Shia community and bring the perpetrators to book. A fair investigation can play an immense role in foiling any con-

## Never say over

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for the simple reason that Tuhin refuses to let it be.

"I never think of myself as disabled," Tuhin says. "I work hard all day long as though I am physically strong."

It was while studying in class three in 1981 that Tuhin contracted polio, the disease that would take control of his body and leave him bedridden within two years. Born into a family of village farmers who could little afford treatment, Tuhin's parents nonetheless took him to numerous hospitals, scouring the country for renowned doctors, hoping for his recovery.

Although in 1987 there seemed to be a little improvement, with Tuhin after treatment able to sit and move slightly without standing, hopes were ultimately dashed. Tuhin lost his ability to stand and walk permanently. "I became fully dependent on others," says Tuhin, "My parents and sisters used to take me from one place to another in their arms."

Despite his physical impairment, Tuhin's mental condition remained as sharp as ever. "Villagers laughed when I took readmission to class 5 in 1989," he recalls, "They called me mad. But I was determined nothing could stop me completing my education."

After passing his Secondary School Certificate in 1995 and Alim in 1997, Tuhin graduated from Mollar Hat Degree College under the National

University in 2001. He started teaching in 2010 and currently works at Paschim Citki Government Primary School.

"Tuhin Sir's classes are always enjoyable," says class-five student, Hasib. "He always inspires us to study."

"If we miss school, Tuhin Sir will phone our parents to see if anything is wrong," says another student, Monami, "and if ever he is absent, we know the day will be boring."

The school's head teacher Reba Rani Howlader has nothing but praise for Tuhin's efforts. "He is certainly punctual, usually arriving at school early in the morning and often leaving late into the evening, taking time to care for the trees in our school grounds."

"The students will follow any kind of instruction given by Tuhin," she adds. "Really his success and contribution to school life is extraordinary. Despite his physical condition, I have to say, I've never seen in him anything to be called disability."

Tuhin's wife Hafsa Yeasmin is justifiably proud. "He takes good care of me and provides for our household," she says, "A better husband no wife could want."

With the ambition of one day working for people with disabilities, Tuhin continues to live his life to the full. "Physical disability is not really disability at all," he says, "The only true disability a man can have is idleness."