

A village of potters

Comilla's Bijoypur has carried on pottery tradition for decades

KHALID BIN NAZRUL with ANDREW EAGLE

Clay, water and sunshine: these ingredients constitute the heart of Bijoypur, a village a few kilometres from Comilla town. For decades locals there have pursued a pottery tradition, crafting all manner of wares from raw clay to fire in the kilns. They still do. Indeed, the distinctive red tones of fired pottery are surely the colour that best symbolises both heritage and hopes in Bijoypur.

Although the pottery tradition has long roots, in 1961 Dr Akhter Hamid Khan first formally organised the potters of Lalmai Hills. With the establishment of Bijoypur Rudro Pal Cooperative Society, Bijoypur's status as a flourishing pottery centre was

assured.

Nowadays, government-established Bijoypur Pottery Training Centre continues to recognise Bijoypur's claim to a place in the centre of an age-old industry that seeks to adapt and further develop to meet the demands of a modern era. About 50 potters work at the centre.

"At first I worked at the cooperative society," says potter Rabindar Chandra Paul.

"I served 28 years there before starting my own business. My pottery factory has been running for the last 17 years." This successful potter hopes that with further government support it will be possible to develop export markets for the products.

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Potters making wares from clay at Bijoypur Pottery Centre in Comilla Sadar Dakkhin upazila. About 50 potters work there and their products are sold nationwide. The photos were taken late last month.



PHOTO: STAR

No recruitment exams held at JS complex

Claims Opposition Chief Whip Tajul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party lawmaker Md Tajul Islam Chowdhury yesterday refuted the allegation that recruitment exams for the vice-principal and lecturer posts at Phulbari Mohila Degree College were held at the parliament building.

"The exams were held at my parliament office at the MP Hostel which is outside the parliament building complex," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Tajul is also the opposition chief whip in parliament.

A Bangla Daily in a report yesterday said the MP, also chairman of the governing body of the college, and Principal Sujat Hossain of the college

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Can Nelson inspire Tigers?

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beat England and go through to the quarterfinal.

Can Nelson once again prove to be a game-changer and shift the momentum towards Bangladesh's direction in this series? Ask the Bangladeshi players and they will tell you that they do not want to live in the past. However, many of them reckon that the Tigers will be a lot more comfortable at Nelson than at Christchurch where their bowlers, fielders and batsmen had failed to read the pitch.

"We did play a game against Scotland in the World Cup. But the wicket back then was a bit different. However, yes, we do have an idea about what we can expect here. A majority of the players have played here before, so they will be confident," said Tamim Iqbal, who had scored a brilliant 95 in that game against Scotland to pave the way for the middle-order batsmen to finish the game.

"From the last game, we know that if we can keep New Zealand to around 280 or 300, we have a good chance of winning. We will try our best," the opener added.

The second aspect that might encourage the Tigers is the fact that New Zealand lost the last time they played here in January 2016 as opposed to their flawless record in Christchurch.

The Lankans, backed by some brilliant performances from Tillakaratne Dilshan and Lahiru Thirimanne had comfortably chased down New Zealand's 276 in just 46.2 overs.

While these factors can doubtless help the Tigers focus on the brighter side, they unfortunately have a number of worries to contend with and Mushfiqur Rahim's injury tops that list.

The wicketkeeper-batsman who had suffered from a hamstring injury while taking a run in the last game remains unsure for the second ODI

tomorrow. The team management is waiting on Mushfiqur. If he is deemed unfit, he is likely to be replaced by Nurul Hasan, who is in New Zealand but is not in the 15-member squad. If Mushfiqur fails to make the cut, Nurul is likely to take his place.

While speaking to reporters yesterday, Tamim indicated that the management would not take any risk with regards to Mushfiqur.

"Honestly speaking, I don't know about his injury status. I hope he can play. But if he doesn't it will be so that his injury doesn't get worse. If he does play one or two games and the injury worsens, we could lose him for a longer time. He will play the next game only if he is doing perfectly well," said Tamim.

The other aspect that they should be worried about is their combination. With four bowlers in the team including Shakib Al Hasan, the role of the fifth bowler was completed by Soumya Sarkar and Mosaddek

Hossain in the last game.

However with Soumya out of form with the bat and unthreatening with the ball, the question remains as to whether the left-armer deserves to be in the team. There are other problems as well. Taskin Ahmed seemed completely out of sorts in the last game and Mustafizur Rahman is yet to reach his full intensity.

Under these circumstances, it will not be illogical if Bangladesh decide to include an extra bowler in the team in place of Soumya.

The Tigers did not practise yesterday, choosing to stay away from cricket. It is something that they perhaps needed in order to get their minds off the devastating defeat in the first game. It is a strategy that they had followed during the home series as well and it paid dividends. For the sake of Bangladesh's fans, one hopes that the same series of events takes place in New Zealand as well.

ATTACK ON HINDUS Nasirnagar AL leader arrested

A CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Police yesterday arrested ruling Awami League leader Abdul Ahad over the October 30 attack on the Hindus in Nasirnagar upazila.

Ahad is a former chairman of Nasirnagar Sadar Union and ex-joint organising secretary of the upazila AL.

Md Abdul Karim, assistant superintendent of Brahmanbaria (Nasirnagar Sadar circle) police, said the arrestee was under surveillance for a long time and was arrested from his house in the upazila yesterday afternoon.

On October 30, unruly mobs and zealots vandalised many Hindu houses and temples in five villages of the upazila over a Facebook post.

Police lodged six cases in connection with the attack, Karim told The Daily Star.

Law enforcers have so far arrested 103 people in the cases.

Jica-funded projects

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for resuming project activities," said an additional secretary of Economic Relations Division (ERD).

The government took representatives of Japanese embassy in Dhaka to several project areas to show them the security arrangements. Security personnel have been deployed at project sites while police protection was given during the movement of foreigners.

A delegation led by Finance Minister AMA Muhith flew to Tokyo on December 7 to highlight the measures. On return, Muhith announced at a press conference that Japan decided to lift the travel alert issued for Japanese nationals regarding visits to Bangladesh.

Senior ERD Secretary Mohammad Mejbahuddin told journalists that Japan was now fully satisfied with the security of their officials in Bangladesh. A little time was needed for everything to be normal, he said.

Foolproof security measures have been taken in the projects for building new bridges in Kanchpur, Meghna and Meghna-Gumti on Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

The projects are worth Tk 8,487 crore and Japan is providing Tk 6,429 crore as soft loan.

Apart from deploying about 400 policemen and Ansar personnel, a 24-hour surveillance system has been put in place with close-circuit and night vision cameras. Walls, watch towers and archways had been built.

"There are also patrol teams in the rivers," Project Director Saidul Haq told The Daily Star, adding that all foreigners in the projects were working.

Saidul, an additional chief engineer of Roads and Highways Department, said they regularly hold meetings with police and foreign

experts to discuss security.

The metro rail project has also gained pace after a few months of slow going. All the Japanese involved in the project had left before and after the July 1 Gulshan cafe attack but most of them returned in September.

They have returned also to show that they are sincere and professional and that they intend to finish the 20km Metro Rail project, named Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Line-6, said a project official, adding that 12 Ansar members were deployed at the project's depot, and deployment of 40 others was underway.

Japan is providing Tk 16,594 crore as soft loan for the Tk 21,985 crore project.

An official of Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority, which looks after the mass transport projects, said Jica had been pressing for holding the negotiation meetings for MRT Line-6 project in Thailand instead of Bangladesh.

However, they changed their mind recently due to improvement in law and order. The meetings were being held in Dhaka, the official said.

"But they come for a short visit, hold the meeting, and leave," said the official seeking anonymity.

The 20km MRT Line-6 will connect Airport and Kamalapur via Kuril, Pragati Sarani, Malibagh and the eastern side of Rajarbagh Police Lines.

The terror attacks seriously hampered the Tk 2,943 crore City Governance Project under which streets, drainage systems and street lights were being improved in five city corporations -- Gazipur, Rangpur, Chittagong, Narayanganj, and Comilla.

"Most of the foreigners in this project were Japanese. They left Bangladesh in June and July last but have started coming back," Project

Director Shahjahan Molla told The Daily Star, adding that the project, for which Japan was providing Tk 2,398 crore as soft loan, was getting back its momentum.

He, however, said the team leader of the foreigners had resigned and left.

Senior officials of the finance ministry, chiefs of police and the coast guard along with top officials of Japanese embassy visited the site of Matarbari power plant near Maheshkhali in November. Japanese representatives were pleased to see the deployment of police personnel and members of Ansar and the coast guard at the site, said an official concerned.

Officials of the Tk 34,984 crore project, for which Japan is providing Tk 28,939 crore, said additional security personnel would be deployed there considering the vast area and duration of the project.

Some foreign consultants were working but staying in Dhaka. They and others were expected to visit the site areas soon, added the officials.

Most other projects have already been brought under new security arrangements, according to officials concerned.

Inspector General of Police Shahidul Hoque said police were providing all sorts of support to ensure security in project sites and for those working there.

"Police and project officials are meeting time to time to determine what kind of security measures should be taken," the police boss told The Daily Star last night.

Since Bangladesh's independence, Japan has consistently been providing soft loans and grants. The amount of annual commitment was about \$700 million a year. It was likely to become about \$1 billion a year from this year.

Not much enthusiasm

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Alongside police, members of Border Guard Bangladesh have been deployed in at least 25 districts to maintain law and order.

"Returning officers and SPs of the 25 districts have sought BGB deployment," EC Secretary Muhammad Abdullah told The Daily Star yesterday evening.

Twenty members of the law enforcement agencies and one executive magistrate will be deployed in each polling station.

None will be allowed to enter a polling station with mobile phone or any other electronic device, he said.

Meanwhile, the superintendent of police in Jamalpur was withdrawn last evening for his "biased role" ahead of the district council elections.

"The home ministry has come up with the directive following a recommendation by the Election Commission," Deputy Commissioner of Jamalpur Shahbuddin Khan told The Daily Star.

SM Asaduzzaman, director (public relations) of EC, also confirmed it.

VIOLATION OF CODE OF CONDUCT

Some AL lawmakers have campaigned for their preferred candidates for the chairman posts, violating the electoral code of conduct which bars MPs, who are advisers to the zila parishads, from electioneering.

Their roles forced the Election Commission to write to the Speaker to take steps so that MPs stay off their electoral areas on the polling day. The EC took the move on Monday fearing MPs might further interfere in the polls.

On receipt of the EC's letter, Speaker Shirin Sharmin Choudhury asked Chief Whip ASM Feroz to take necessary steps in this regard.

"We have contacted all the MPs

through letters and SMS. We also sent them the electoral code of conduct requesting them to abide by it," the chief whip told The Daily Star yesterday.

Still three AL lawmakers of Chittagong have been found staying in the district as of 4:00pm yesterday. They are Mahfuzur Rahman Mita of Chittagong-3, Shamsul Haque Chowdhury of Chittagong-12 and Didarul Alam of Chittagong-4.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mita and Shamsul Haque said they were in Chittagong but outside their constituencies. Didarul could not be contacted.

AL lawmaker AKMA Awal from Pirojpur-1 was staying in his electoral area as of 5:00pm yesterday.

Contacted, Awal admitted that he was in Pirojpur for personal reasons. He claimed he did not know the EC's bar on lawmakers on staying in their constituencies.

In many areas, the ruling party men contesting for chairman and member posts have allegedly been distributing money and gift items to buy votes.

So far 22 out of 61 chairmen in as many zila parishads have been elected uncontested.

Feni and Jhalakathi will have no voting today as chairmen and all members of the two zila parishads have been elected unopposed.

So, polls will be held today in 59 districts.

Voting for the chairman post in Kushtia is postponed as a case remains pending with the High Court over cancellation of nomination paper of a chairman candidate.

Moreover, a writ petition challenging legality of the indirect election to zila parishad remains pending with the High Court.

'NOT A HEALTHY COMPETITION'

"The most negative aspect of the polls

is that it has appeared as one-party elections because only the ruling AL men are contesting," said local government expert Dr Tofail Ahmed.

"AL men are fighting against their party men. It is not a healthy competition. Rather, it would be better, if candidates of other major political parties would contest," he told The Daily Star.

Such intra-party competition may cause violence, influence on voters and use of black money in the polls, he noted.

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said money and muscle have unfortunately become a part of our political and electoral culture.

"Office of power and public representation is perceived as a gateway to profit making and self-enrichment. That is why, a section of political leaders invest money so desperately for being elected. Openings will therefore be sought to make profit which is likely to open the floodgate for abuse of power and corruption," Iftekharuzzaman thinks.

Tofail Ahmed, however, said the maiden election will play a positive role in strengthening the zila parishad, the top tier of the local government system.

Since the country's independence in 1971, elections to zila parishads were never held. Either leaders of the party in power or the bureaucrats were empowered to run the zila parishads in violation of the spirit of the constitutional provision for the formation of the zila parishads through elections.

The AL-led government in December 2011 appointed its party men as administrators to run the district councils. They are still at the helm of the parishads.

Defiant Israel pushes for more settlements

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discussions in response to the UN vote. The hundreds of building permits were on the agenda before the resolution was passed.

"I'm not concerned by the UN or anything else trying to dictate our actions in Jerusalem," Turjeman wrote on his Facebook page.

Israel has already taken diplomatic steps in response to what it calls the "shameful" resolution, which passed with support from all the remaining members of the 15-strong Security Council.

Yesterday, the foreign ministry said it was "temporarily reducing" visits and work with embassies of nations that voted for it.

"Until further notice, we'll limit our contacts with the embassies here in

Israel and refrain from visits of Israeli officials to those states, and of visits of officials from those states here," foreign ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon told AFP.

On Christmas Day, Israel summoned ambassadors of countries that voted for the resolution while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met US ambassador Daniel Shapiro on Sunday.

Meanwhile, President-elect Donald Trump yesterday dismissed the United Nations as a "club" for people to "have a good time". He, however, did not specifically mention the UN Security Council resolution.

He wrote: "The United Nations has such great potential but right now it is just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time. So sad!"

Trump, who last week said Washington should have used its veto to block the resolution, has chosen as ambassador to Israel the hardliner David Friedman, who has said Washington will not pressure Israel to curtail settlement building in the occupied West Bank.

Israel has already called back its ambassadors to New Zealand and Senegal for consultations, and cancelled aid programmes with the African state.

Yesterday, Israel informed Angola it would be freezing its aid programme there.

At least two trips have been cancelled or postponed, including this week's visit to Israel by Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman and an upcoming visit by the

Senegalese foreign minister.

There have also been reports that Netanyahu was calling off a meeting with British Prime Minister Theresa May at next month's World Economic Forum in Davos, but there has been no official confirmation.

CNN reports that two senior Israeli officials claim Israel is curtailing business with 12 of the 14 member states that helped pass the resolution. The states are listed as Britain, France, Russia, Japan, Angola, Uruguay, Senegal, China, Ukraine, Egypt, Spain and New Zealand.

Security Council members such as Russia, China and Britain are key to Israeli diplomacy or trade and some analysts suggested the measures being taken were more symbolic than substantive.

Washington is Israel's most important ally and provides it with more than \$3 billion per year in defence aid.

By declining to use its veto, the US enabled the adoption of the first UN resolution since 1979 to condemn Israel over its settlement policy.

Obama's administration has been frustrated with settlement building in east Jerusalem and the West Bank, which Israel occupied in 1967. Israel later annexed east Jerusalem in a move never recognised by the international community.

Settlements are built on land the Palestinians view as part of their future state and seen as illegal under international law.

Some 430,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank and 200,000 Israelis live in east Jerusalem, which Palestinians

see as the capital of their future state.

The UN resolution demands "Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem."

It says settlements have "no legal validity" and are "dangerously imperilling the viability of the two-state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the basis of years of negotiations.

The resolution contains no sanctions but Israeli officials are concerned it could widen the possibility of prosecution at the International Criminal Court. They are also worried it could encourage some countries to impose sanctions against Israeli settlers and goods produced in the settlements.