

A traditional toy for festivals

Toy-maker in Comilla pins hope on Baishakh sales of temtemi

KHALID BIN NAZRUL with ANDREW EAGLE

The vuvuzela, a plastic horn made famous around the world since the 2010 World Cup in South Africa has become ubiquitous, too, in Bangladesh. But while the bellow of the vuvuzela might feel right at home amongst the colour and joy of Pahela Baishakh celebrations, which mark the Bangla New Year on 14 April, it's not the season's original sound. That belongs to the rhythmic, swinging temtemi, a traditional toy sometimes called demdemi depending on the locality, which has featured at festivals and fairs for decades.

"Making temtemi as well as eyeglasses of coloured paper and paper crocodiles is a business inherited from my forefathers," says Khalilur Rahman from Old Moulovi Para in Comilla. Today he is the district's last craftsman of these festival items. "My

family originally came here from Bihar in India and I have been doing this business for the last 40 years."

Made of bamboo sticks, a thin tin sheet, coloured plastic and paper, rubber bands, string and small pieces of cardboard, a temtemi sells for just Tk 10.

"Once I ran this business year-round," says Khalil. "Nowadays I make temtemi only during the Baishakh season. Students and young people like this tradition and sometimes they ask me to make some. For children it is a favourite toy. Unlike the imported vuvuzela, the temtemi's rhythmic whirr isn't disturbing and because I don't use plastic it's better for the environment."

Each year around the time of Pahela Baishakh, Khalil earns around Tk 25,000 from temtemi sales.

But being a seasonal item these days, Khalil has had to change his

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A stock of temtemis, a traditional toy of Baishakh, in Comilla. The toy is in high demand ahead of Pahela Baishakh celebrations.

PHOTO: STAR

Qawmi degree recognised

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Pointing out that there are many criticisms and harsh comments by many people of other countries about Qawmi madrasa, Hasina said, "But, I always protested this and I always felt that the government needs to give recognition to Qawmi education."

Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury said the government decision to recognise the degree without improving the syllabus and curriculum was unexpected.

"The quality of their education has not improved and nobody knows the contents of their textbooks. Without improving the curriculum, this degree will not help them much in the job market either because they don't get proper education. Their education system is not comparable with the mainstream education," he told The Daily Star last night.

Asked, Maulana Farid Uddin Masuod, a key figure in the Qawmi education system, claimed the standard of Dawra degree was superior to even the master's degree in Islamic Studies offered by Dhaka University.

"A huge number of madrasa students of Bangladesh have long been deprived of this right. Today, they

got their rights through the announcement," Maulana Farid, also co-chairman of Bangladesh Qawmi Madrasa Education Commission, told this newspaper.

The government will soon issue a circular to make the PM's announcement effective. Later, it will formulate a law, he added.

Contacted, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said now that Hasina made the decision, the ministry would follow the due process for its implementation.

"A circular would be issued and a law would be made, if required," said Nahid, who was present at the meeting along with Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and Roads and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader.

The primary decision to this effect came at a meeting at the education ministry on March 28. At the meeting, ministry officials said the government would gradually start recognising Qawmi madrasa certificates from elementary level. But the madrasa authorities pressed that the government recognise Dawra certificate first to help madrasa students get jobs.

Finally, the ministry accepted the

proposals of the Qawmi madrasa authorities, backed by Chittagong-based Islamist group Hefajat-e-Islam, sources said.

According to their proposals, a committee with representatives from the six existing Qawmi madrasa boards will issue the certificate. There will be no government representatives on the committee.

The government had proposed that state-run Islamic Arabic University or Islami University issue the certificate, but the madrasa leaders rejected it, according to the sources.

The country's madrasa system is divided into two categories -- Alia and Qawmi. Alia madrasas, all registered with and supervised by Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board, offer a distinctive combination of modern and religious education.

Qawmi madrasas, on the other hand, have so far been an uncharted territory with no government monitoring, supervision or support. They run with private donations mostly.

Currently, some 14 lakh students study in about 14,000 Qawmi madrasas, according to last year's report of Bangladesh Bureau of

Educational Information and Statistics.

These madrasas operate under six boards namely Bangladesh Qawmi Madrasa Education Boards or Befaql Madarisil Arabia Bangladesh. They are said to follow the syllabus of Darul Uloom Deoband, a historic Islamic school of India, focusing mainly on Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages.

It is understood they don't teach science, social science, maths and literature. Only a handful of Qawmi madrasas teach Bangla and English up to class eight.

The issue of recognising Qawmi madrasa education first came to the forefront during the BNP-Jamaat-led government's tenure.

On August 21, 2006, just three months before leaving office, the then PM Khaleda Zia said the government decided to recognise Dawra certificates. However, the decision could not be implemented because the required process could not be completed by the time the BNP left office.

But a section of Qawmi madrasa teachers and Islamic thinkers kept up the pressure.

In the face of their demand, the

Awami League-led grand alliance government took an initiative to recognise Qawmi madrasas and reform their education system.

On April 15, 2012, the education ministry formed a 17-member commission comprised of Qawmi scholars, with Shah Ahmed Shafi in the chair, to improve Qawmi education and provide students with knowledge and skills needed for the job market. Farid Uddin Masuod was co-chair of the commission.

On April 13 the next year, the commission submitted a draft policy, outlining the curriculum, evaluation system and six tiers of Qawmi education.

It also proposed introducing certificates for each tier -- primary, junior secondary, SSC, HSC, honours and master's -- and a syllabus, including Bangla, English, mathematics and social science up to at least the higher secondary level.

Based on the draft policy, the education ministry had prepared a proposal to make a law to set up a body -- Qawmi Madrasa Education Authority -- with government representatives and experts in it.

The proposal was scheduled to be

placed at the cabinet meeting on October 28, 2013, for approval.

But on October 27, Hefajat chief Shafi, also director general of Hathazari Darul Uloom Madrasa, called a press conference in Chittagong and warned of a "civil war" should the government try to "control" Qawmi madrasas.

Following the threat, the education ministry backed away from placing the draft before the cabinet.

Sources in the ministry said the government had shelved the initiative to keep the Islamist group from waging any street demonstration.

However, the education ministry later revived the plan. On September 27 last year, it formed a committee headed by Farid Uddin Masuod to find ways to recognise certificates of Qawmi madrasas. But the ministry faced opposition from Hefajat again.

Later, the government issued a circular reviving the commission led by Shafi. The commission was asked to come up with ways to recognise the certificates. In line with their suggestions, the government then proceeded to recognise the Qawmi madrasa certificates.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses a meeting with representatives from Qawmi madrasas at the Gono Bhaban last night.

PHOTO: PID

G7 backs US on Syria

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G7 meeting in Italy.

"The United States' priority in Syria and Iraq remains the defeat of ISIS," he added, referring to the so-called Islamic State (IS) group.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin yesterday warned of future chemical weapons "provocations" in Syria to frame President Bashar al-Assad.

"We have information from various sources that such provocations -- I cannot call them otherwise -- are being prepared in other regions of Syria, including in the southern outskirts of Damascus, where they are again planning to throw some kind of substance and accuse Syrian official authorities of using it," Putin said at a televised press conference.

NO CONSENSUS ON SANCTIONS

The G7 ministers failed to agree on whether fresh sanctions should be imposed on Damascus and Moscow.

"At the moment there is no consensus on new sanctions as an effective instrument," Italy's Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano said, after his British

counterpart Boris Johnson had raised the issue.

But after talks in the Tuscan city German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said: "All the G7 states want to avoid a military escalation and want a political solution without a new spiral of violence."

"We want to bring Russia around to supporting the political process for a peaceful resolution of the Syrian conflict."

The German diplomat said Tillerson had "all our support" for his talks in Moscow, where he will meet his counterpart Sergei Lavrov although the Kremlin has not said if there will be a meeting with President Vladimir Putin.

The US has warned Damascus that further use of chemical weapons could bring fresh retaliation.

US warships in the Mediterranean on Friday fired 59 Tomahawk missiles at the Shayrat air base near Homs, destroying an airfield from which Washington believes Assad's jets launched the deadly chemical attack.

The strike was the first time

Washington had intervened directly against the regime of Assad, who is fighting a six-year civil war with the backing of Russia and Iran.

While Moscow has suggested that civilians were poisoned by rebel weapons, Turkish Health Minister Recep Akdag said yesterday that tests proved the deadly nerve agent sarin was used in the suspected chemical attack in northwestern Syria.

"It has been identified that sarin gas was used," he said, quoted by state-run news agency Anadolu, after analysis of blood and urine samples of the casualties from the attack in Idlib province who were brought to Turkey.

BARREL BOMBS

"The United States will not passively stand by while Assad murders innocent people with chemical weapons, which are prohibited by international law and which were declared destroyed," Pentagon chief James Mattis said Monday.

"The Syrian government would be ill-advised ever again to use chemical weapons."

The warning came as White House spokesman Sean Spicer appeared to lower the threshold for new US action against Assad to include barrel bombs, a crude yet hugely destructive weapon of choice for the Syrian leader.

"If you gas a baby or drop a barrel bomb onto innocent people, you will see a response from" Trump, Spicer said.

But US officials later appeared to go back on Spicer's remarks.

"Nothing has changed in our posture," a senior administration official said.

Trump on Monday discussed Syria in separate telephone calls with British Prime Minister Theresa May and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Both May and Merkel "expressed support for the action of the United States and agreed with President Trump on the importance of holding Syrian President Bashar al-Assad accountable," the White House said.

Several rounds of UN-backed peace talks have failed to end the Syrian conflict, which has killed more than 320,000 people since March 2011.

They turned into animals

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The death-row convicts are Qamrul Islam, Zakir Hossain alias Pavel, Saddique Ahmed alias Boro Moyna and Taz Uddin alias Badal. Except for Zakir, all are in jail.

Zakir has been absconding since the incident, said Assistant Attorney General Atiqul Haque Salim.

Three convicts -- Quamrul's brother Muhid Alam alias Muhit, Shamim Ahmed and Ali Haider -- were sentenced to seven years in prison and two others -- Ayaz Ali and Dulal Ahmed -- to one year's imprisonment.

The bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim and Justice Md Jahangir Hossain, however, commuted the life sentence of Noor Ahmed alias Noor Mia, who had filmed the brutal incident, to six months' jail.

Rajon's father Sheikh Azizur Rahman Alam, who was present in the courtroom during the delivery of the judgment, said he got justice.

"I thank the government and judges for ensuring justice. I hope sentences of the convicts will be executed soon."

The video footage captured by Noor and confessional statements of two convicts proved the accusations brought in the murder case, Atiqul Haque told The Daily Star.

The HC upheld a lower court's verdict sentencing five convicts to different terms on the grounds that they had tried to hide the body of Rajon, he added.

SMAbul Hossain, a defence lawyer for Quamrul and Muhit, said his clients would appeal to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, challenging the HC verdict, after receiving the full text of the verdict.

On July 8, 2015, Rajon was beaten to death by a group of brutes in Kumargaon Bus Stand area of Sylhet sadar, allegedly for trying to steal a rickshaw van.

Noor Ahmed filmed the horrendous incident and shared it on Facebook.

The 28-minute video footage went viral on the social networking site, which shows prime accused Quamrul Islam hitting the boy with a stick on his feet, joints of legs, shoulders and head.

A Sylhet court in November 2015 sentenced the four accused, including Quamrul, to death.

HCOBSERVATIONS

The High Court observed that if anybody is apprehended by public other than police or legal force over an allegation of committing crimes, he must immediately be sent to the nearest police station or police must be informed so that they arrest him and bring him to book.

"Taking a sudden decision on a mere idea can never bring appropriate result. In this case, it is claimed by the defence against victim Rajon that he tried to steal a van and for that some angry people killed him by beating him but that has not been proved by the evidence of either party."

"When an unusual incident takes place beyond expectation, then it is difficult to retain the situation under control. We must control the environment of our society having awareness and applying basic law, since otherwise society will get a negative message and mass people will take the law into their own hands ignoring the appropriate legal process. In such a situation, innocent people may be victimised even after having no fault of any crime. People should acknowledge from the present case that for such crime committed by perpetrators they are going to meet the gallows and other punishments."

"All of us including the state must be alert to keep the society safe from any kind of untoward incidents like Rajon's one," Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim said.

The judge said, "Most of the people of the country do not have the knowledge of the basic law due to lack of education. To bring the people under awareness of law and how to apply it, state owned media, electronic and print media organisations including journalists, all religious leaders and teachers should come forward to play a significant role."

"Social movement is also a very important factor in this regard and this awareness of law should be incorporated in the primary education," the court observed.

Oil in a pond!

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Dhaka for tests."

Mir Abdul Hannan, a mining expert of Madhyapara Granite Mining Company Ltd (MGMCL) in Parbatipur, said, "This phenomenon needs to be examined by experts."