

A celebration that endures

In an age when global influences overpower local roots, and urbanisation hardens our mindsets, the spirit of Pahela Baishakh runs the risk of becoming obsolete. In an interview with Sarah Anjum Bari, renowned Nazrul sangeet exponent and Vice President of Chhayanaut Khairul Anam Shakil discusses why it is still an integral part of our culture.

Why is Pahela Baishakh an important practice? Why is it still relevant today?

It is necessary to understand the history and background of Pahela Baishakh to appreciate its importance. While the roots of Pahela Baishakh date far back, the cultural practice as we know it began during the Pakistan rule in 1961. The Pakistan government had objected to Tagore's centennial celebrations, arguing that Tagore wasn't "our" poet. The result was a revolt on the part of Bengalis, who viewed the objection as a blow dealt against our cultural identity. Sanjeeda Khatun and Waheedul Haque, among other intellectuals, decided to make a public show of solidarity to the Bengali culture.

programmes organised in people's homes.

In 1967, the noted botanist and photographer Dr Nawazish Ahmed Khan, during one of his meanderings through the Ramna Park, discovered the *Pakur gaach*. He came to Chhayanaut to tell us that he had found a beautiful place where we could celebrate Pahela Baishakh surrounded by our rich natural beauty. This *Pakur gaach*, a tree that belongs to the Banyan family, is what we have come to know as Ramna's *botomul*. Thus started the cultural programmes at the Ramna *botomul*, attracting a crowd of 100-150 people at that time. Over the years they have grown to gain national, and even international, popularity.

The songs that make up the Pahela

allows us to tell the world that we are Bengalis, a vibrant group of people who take pride in our distinctive style, taste, and heritage.

There have been objections to the Pahela Baishakh celebration on religious grounds. How valid are these objections?

I don't agree with them. A culture cannot be written today and tomorrow. It is practised over thousands of years in a particular land. Bengali culture has endured a long history, and it is natural that some of its elements will be shared by different parts of the world. But this should not be categorised according to religious boundaries. A person can be religious and cultural at the same time.



Khairul Anam Shakil

As I mentioned, Pahela Baishakh used to comprise of simple celebrations in the villages. Today, Chhayanaut's function at the Ramna *botomul* attracts thousands.

Chhayanaut has been organising Pahela Baishakh celebrations every year since it was first introduced, besides 1971 during the Liberation War. Every year, we plan the programme with a different theme. The cultural spirit remains consistent, but each programme seeks to convey a separate message, taking into account the events of the past year. We express the regrets and protests as well as the joys we may have felt the year-round through our music. This gives every Nababarsha a fresh outlook.

These celebrations also showcase our folk culture. We are able to highlight not only the folk influences on the seminal works of Tagore and Nazrul, but also the fresh and lesser known folk talents hidden in parts of the country. It reminds us how multifaceted the Bengali culture is, be it in music, art, or literature.

But not everyone can visit Ramna Park.

Today's urban life forces us to become very mechanised. We become busy with our work, studies, and our individual responsibilities. Meanwhile globalisation and the spread of the internet allow us to get swept up in elements of foreign cultures. We forget to retain our inherent Bengalianness.

However, I do not believe that these

are negative forces. It is through the modern media that Chhayanaut's Pahela Baishakh programme is broadcasted across the country – to those who cannot make it to Ramna and worldwide. BBC World allows the entire world to witness our vibrant new year's celebrations. Bengalis who live abroad are able to watch the programmes. We also get to know about the Pahela Baishakh celebrations taking place in different parts of the world. For instance, I was pleasantly surprised to know about the programmes organised in Sydney, where Bengalis put up colourful fairs and musical performances under the *botomul*, just like in Bangladesh.

It is through this exchange of experiences that we can keep the spirit of Pahela Baishakh alive. The point is to have fun, to enjoy ourselves in welcoming a new year. If we can encourage our youth to participate in this practice, and continue to remind them of its significance, then Pahela Baishakh will always be relevant. We simply have to remain engaged in this cultural practice.

But the responsibility also lies with the youth. Look at it this way – you introduce yourself by using your parents' names. If you think about your country as your motherland, then you can't deny that identity. It is important to know about the world; but it is only by embracing your own culture first, that you can truly be an internationalist.

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How has the celebration of Pahela Baishakh changed over the years? Is there really a disconnect between Bengali heritage and the younger generation? How can we bridge this gap?



PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHEDI

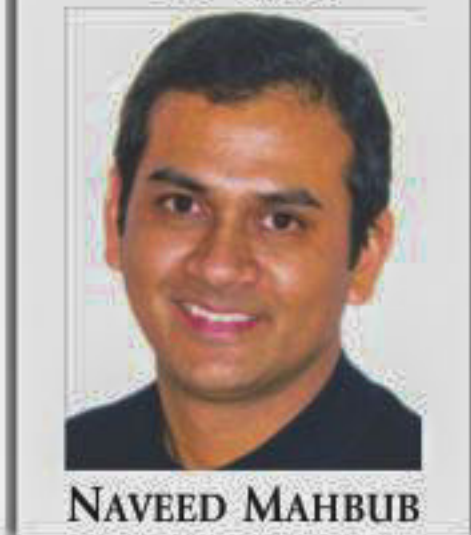
Initially, Pahela Baishakh was celebrated on a small scale in villages. Families would exchange sweets, decorate clay pots, and display them in fairs set up on streets. These practices began to grow and gain popularity after 1963, when Sanjeeda Khatun and Waheedul Haque realised the need to institutionalise musical education in the country, and Chhayanaut was born. Even then, Pahela Baishakh was confined within modest musical

Baishakh celebration reflect fundamental elements of the Bengali spirit – our lifestyle, our tastes, the faces of our seasons. These songs and poetry remind us of who we are as Bengalis.

We celebrate our religious occasions – Eid, Puja, Christmas or Buddha Purnima – which mark our respective identities as Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists, the year round. Pahela Baishakh unites us under our national and cultural identity. It

Big Sister is watching you

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

I have to admit that after all these years of marriage, I still haven't given my wife the legendary football sized, ok, cricket ball sized, ok, ping pong ball sized, ok, marble sized, ok, pellet sized diamond ring. But the longer I wait, the higher the risks for me because after 18 years of marriage and three kids, when she sports that giant diamond ring, all eyes will be on me, blaming me for the Kobe Bryant syndrome. That's Kobe of the Los Angeles Lakers who tried, but miserably failed to reconcile with his wife with a giant diamond ring after cheating on her. The legendary gigantic diamond comes in other shapes and forms. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi breaks protocol as he himself receives Bangladesh's PM Sheikh Hasina at a New Delhi airport. We

are elated. Park Street in Kolkata is renamed. We are thrilled and honoured, assuming the fate of the street's name doesn't end up with that of Bombay turned Mumbai.

Appreciate the diamonds. But what gives Saffron Kobe? Who is the mystery wife? No surprise. It's Mamata Banerjee. I wonder if the master of ceremonies at the Delhi event went through a Freudian slip with the West Bengal Chief Minister in mind, when he asked the two PMs on the dais to 'step down'.

What ends up stepping down is the Teesta Deal. After all, the Bangladeshi delegation didn't include the greatest 'deal maker' of all, Donald Trump. Then again, Trump and Banerjee together would have come up with the final solution – a wall-dam. Worse, he would (mis)interpret the stench near the Teesta Barrage area as sinister chemical emissions and order a Tomahawk strike.

No, no! We are pacifists. Our PM meets with the West Bengal Chief Minister one on one, to no avail, thus the latter turning Hyderabad House into Hyderabadada's House. "We have



no Teesta water to share." True that the Teesta has no water left for sharing as it's all used up for teary eyed scenes of Zee Bangla drama serials for which Bangladesh, as part of attaining full trade balance, exports over 100 million Bangladeshi viewers.

But wait, she has a solution, based on her recently acquired degree in Civil Engineering. She suggests the

use of water from the Dhanshiri River instead. I think our Dhanshiri Restaurant has more water than the Dhanshiri River.

We don't give up hope. Our PM herself cooks a savoury steamed hilsa at a dinner she hosts, only to be politely declined by Ms Banerjee as it being too early for dinner. But fear not, the hilsa junkie has promised to have hot hilsa to her cold heart's content when she and Godot visit Bangladesh. And when that happens, we will surely roll out the red carpet, though, thanks to dried up rivers, we can at that time offer, at best, *jatka shutki*. In all fairness, she has also

promised to reciprocate the hospitality with her own culinary concoction. My guess, that will be two salted biscuits ('*nonta bishku*') and a cup of tea ('*ek kaap chaa*') made from fresh Teesta water followed by the mandatory warmth of "Sis, you must finish the whole thing". Ok, that's my pathetic (lost in) translation of "*Didi, purota khetey hobey kintu!*"

Didi, I hope I don't come across as being of bad taste, though that is exactly what you leave in the mouths of millions who rely on agriculture and more. Didi, I hope I don't come across as being politically incorrect

for your incorrect politics. But Didi, I do have to say that you kind of remind me of the classic landlord living upstairs, shutting off the water pump at your will. Then again you only share what belongs to you completely.

But fear not Didi, the hilsa (*jatka*) awaits you. And from our side, we remain friends forever, through a dry Teesta and a bargain transit.

The writer is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of ATN Bangla's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and ABC Radio's *Good Morning Bangladesh*, the founder of Naveed's Comedy Club. E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

QUOTABLE Quote

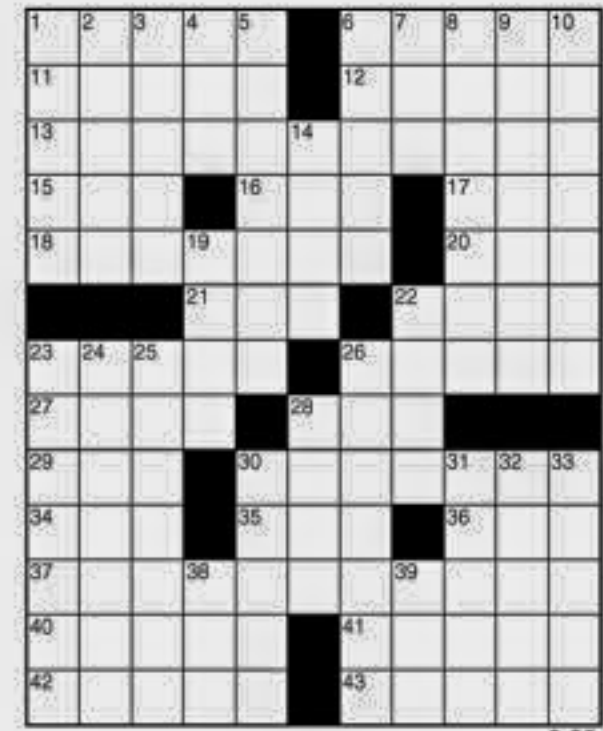


HAL BORLAND
American author, journalist and naturalist

Year's end is neither an end nor a beginning but a going on, with all the wisdom that experience can instill in us.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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| ACROSS | 28 Hamm of soccer | 6 Sentence subjects |
| 1 Bus units | 29 Many a time | 7 Resistance unit |
| 6 Nick of "48 HRS" | 30 Had a banquet | 8 Parody |
| 11 Playwright Edward | 34 For every | 9 Trample |
| 12 Tara family name | 35 Charged bit | 10 Check recipients |
| 13 "Last Dance" singer | 36 Gardner of movies | 14 Certain |
| 15 Gorilla or gibbon | 37 "Modern Family" cast member | 19 Decisive win |
| 16 Groan inducer | 40 Empire | 22 Casserole bits |
| 17 Bad review | 41 Paris river | 23 Like some miniseries |
| 18 Real brats | 42 Informs | 24 Game official |
| 20 Keats poem | 43 Scout shelters | 25 Facing charges |
| 21 Mine rock | | 26 Concert star |
| 22 Penniless | DOWN | 28 Cat call |
| 23 River catch | 1 Egypt's Anwar | 30 Movies |
| 26 Actors Sean and Christopher | 2 Wed in secret | 31 Tarte -- (apple dessert) |
| 27 Left | 3 Dogpatch boy | 32 News item |
| | 4 Hamilton's bill | 33 Is bold |
| | 5 Dock spot | |



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S C A R I S M E S S E D
H A B I T I N K E D
A M I G O L A Y E R
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T A L O N R A V E D
D E N Y S E E D S

Department of International Relations University of Dhaka

Admission Announcement

3rd Batch, Summer-2017

Professional Masters in International Relations (PMIR)

This eighteen-month accelerated professional degree programme features: (a) three-semester format, duration of each semester being six months; (b) 12 course units consisting of 48 credit hours; (c) research module on International Relations; and (d) classes from 6:30pm to 9:30pm on weekdays (Sunday through Thursday).

Application Requirements
Applications are invited from candidates holding Bachelor's degree in any discipline from any recognised university with at least 2nd class or a CGPA of 2.5 (on a 4.0 scale)/3.0 (on a 5.0 scale) in their academic career.

Applicants who have successfully completed Post-Graduate Diploma in International Relations (PGDIR) offered by the Department with a CGPA of at least 3.0 may qualify for direct admission into the programme.

Admission Procedure
Application forms to be collected from and submitted to the Office of the Department of International Relations on working days (10:00am-4:30pm) at a cost of Tk. 1,000 during **17 April – 18 May 2017**.
Written test for admission will be held on **26 May 2017 (Friday) at 10:00am**.

Contact Details
Office of the Chair, Department of International Relations, 5th Floor, Faculty of Social Sciences Building, University of Dhaka, Dhaka-1000. Phone: 9661920-734 Extn. 6541 & 6542. Mobile: 01855013014, 01911733662, 01913583625, 01780499839, 01715622891, 01713244243. Email: pmir.duir@gmail.com Website: http://www.duir.ac.bd

The Programme Coordination Committee reserves the right to make necessary changes to the above provisions

Professional Masters in International Relations (PMIR)