

Riders on the storm

A peek into the lives of men performing inside ‘well of death’

MOSTOFA SABUI

A well-like structure, inside which a rider braces himself for what’s about to come. He starts his bike and goes around circling the well. Suddenly, he gains speed and goes higher up the structure. However, the show doesn’t end here.

Often times, he’s seen with his hands off the vehicle, sometimes even standing on it, leaving the spectators breathless and in awe.

In Bangladesh, this is a common show that is presented on regional fairs organised on different occasions. This popular show has gathered many names over the years -- metrodome, velodrome, bike stunts, etc. But the most popular and perhaps most dramatic one would be “Mrittu Koop”, which translates to the well of death.

The process consists of a silo- or barrel-shaped wooden cylinder, typically ranging from 20 to 30 feet in diameter and made of planks, inside which motorcyclists, drive along the vertical wall for the stunts.

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perform the manoeuvres, “Ma Babar Doa” is one such group, hailing from Bogura. This correspondent came across their performance during a recent visit to “Bogura Taat Bostro o Kutir Shilpa Panno Mela”, arranged by different organisations, including the district administration.

Md Sirajul Islam Panna (48) from Bogura’s Shibganj upazila is the group’s leader. He has been performing for 22 years.

According to Siraj, at one point, there were around 15-20 groups in the country which performed such feats. However, many wrapped up their activities during the pandemic, as no fairs were being arranged to contain the spread of coronavirus.

“I fell in love with this activity some 25 years ago, when I first saw it in Rajshahi. I know it was risky, but the adventure attracted me. I started learning the stunts and later formed a group to perform,” Siraj said.

“Initially we used to perform motorcycle stunts only. We added small cars to the routine some 10 years ago. Now, I have 12-15 people in my team, including two motorcyclists,” he added.

Abu Bokkor Siddik (27), Siraj’s nephew, said, “My parents passed away when I was very young. I had nowhere else to go, so uncle Siraj took me in. He trained me, and now I’m part of the team.”

When asked about the risks, he said, “In my 15-year career as a stuntman, I’ve never faced a serious accident. I fell twice or thrice from the track but didn’t get any serious injuries.”

Siraj now has other disciples too. One of them is 20-year-old Md Sohanur Rahman.

“I’m staying with Siraj bhai to learn the stunts. I get a little remuneration, but the thrill is what keeps me going,” said Sohan.

“We’ve performed in almost all the districts. But the charm has been lost,” said Siraj.

“During the pandemic, I incurred a loss of Tk 8-10 lakh. I pay Tk 80,000 to 1 lakh in total to all the staffers per month,” he added.

The group also faces extortion, bringing a drastic decrease to their income per show.

“When we travel to rural areas, local goons ask for a toll of Tk 500-1,000 each day. We have to pay the organisers 25 percent of the total earnings as well,” explained Siraj.

“But everything feels worth the trouble when people applaud and bless us after the show,” said Siraj, also a father of a 19-month-old baby boy, hoping that his son will follow in his footsteps.



A motorcyclist shows off his skills inside a barrel-shaped wooden cylinder, driving along its vertical walls. This dramatic stunt show, popularly known as “Mrittu Koop” used to be a common event in regional fairs. However due to the absence of fairs amid the pandemic, many had to shift professions to survive. At present, Bogura’s “Ma-Babar Doa” is one of the very few groups who still actively perform such stunts.

PHOTO: STAR

‘Don’t turn JU into a concrete jungle’

Students, teachers against constructing new buildings without central masterplan

SHEIKH TAJUL ISLAM TAJ

Jahangirnagar University (JU) is soon going to inaugurate construction works for 14 new establishments on the campus, under a Tk 1,445 crore mega project.

However, since the university has no definite or central master plan, JU takes up projects whenever a new budget is allocated. And so, stakeholders of the campus criticised the latest step, saying that the institution is not thinking long term and is building and demolishing structures without proper planning. Therefore, a significant part of money gets wasted.

The 14 establishments include library, administrative building, sports complex, lecture theatre/exam hall, guest house, playgrounds, living quarters. Besides, construction work for Shaheed Rafiq-Jabbar Hall would be completed for 152 students.

The cabinet committee on government purchase approved purchase orders for a 10-storey administrative building (around Tk 138 crore), six-storey library (around Tk 101 crore), and three-storey sports complex (around Tk 119 crore), said Md Nasir Uddin, director of planning and development at JU.

Mentionable, JU already has two administrative buildings, and authorities are planning to demolish the existing library to make the new one, a decision that many are against.

Besides, purchase orders for a six-storey lecture theatre (around Tk 64 crore), which will also be used as an exam hall, and a 10-storey guest house (around Tk 37 crore) for post-graduate researchers have been approved by the education minister, he informed.

Purchase orders for other establishments have been approved by JU’s vice chancellor as the head of Procuring Entity, Nasir said. “The work will start soon.”

Prof Rayhan Rhyne, a faculty member and convenor of the campaign “JU against Corruption”, said, “Jahangirnagar is becoming a

concrete jungle day by day, as the university has no definite central master plan. Our demand is to save Jahangirnagar from such unplanned activities.”

“In fact, this project has been prepared by an architect, not an urban planner. Such projects should be prepared by the country’s best planners. We need specialists in this sector, who know what’s best and will do the best for us,” he said.

“No such planner was allowed to assist in this development project. Plans were made with the help of only architects, which is an unwise decision,” he added.

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Rakibul Rony, president of JU Chhatra Union, said, “We don’t understand the validity of constructing a new administrative building, despite already having two.”

Akhtaruzzaman Sohel, president of JU Chhatra League, proposed not to demolish the existing library from the very beginning, rather do so after ensuring a part of the new library is already prepared.

Contacted, JU VC Prof Nurul Alam said, “Until all stakeholders are satisfied, we will continue to sit with them to discuss what we can modify. A new probe committee will be formed to monitor the project work.” About another administrative building, he said, “Since we have separate buildings for administrative works, a new building is required to include all offices in one building.”

Remembering Enamul Haque



SHAH ALAM SHAZU

Today would have been the 79th birthday of renowned actor, playwright, academician and Ekushey Padak awardee Dr Enamul Haque. This is the first time his family and friends are commemorating the day without him. He passed away on October 11, last year.

On his birth anniversary, we spoke to his loved ones and colleagues from the entertainment industry to know about their fond memories with him.

I miss laughing with him: Lucky Enam

I miss him every moment of my life. I walk across his writing table, sit on his chair and even browse through his stationaries, but I can’t laugh with him, can’t share my sorrows or meals with him. I miss laughing with him. He was my companion for life. We used to surprise him on his birthday every year but this time, no one will be waiting for us to walk through the door with cakes, balloons, and gifts.

He was a true gentleman: Abul Hayat

Enamul Haque was a true gentleman. He was well-known for his kind and humble nature. I met this man with a golden heart before the country’s independence was declared. We used to work together in theatre and remained good friends since then.

I have lots of fond memories with him. I never saw him lose his temper or be rude to anyone ever. We started our own theatre troupe after the Liberation War. This is the first time he won’t be around on his birthday. May he rest in peace.

Enamul Haque was a true patriot: Asaduzzaman Noor

Enamul Haque was emerged in the essence of our Liberation War. He was a believer in humanism,

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Litchi galore in Ishwardi

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

Sweet succulent flesh covered in a prickly red exterior -- litchis, the popular summer fruit have adorned the trees in Pabna’s Ishwardi.

Litchi farmers are likely to get record production this year, with a yield amounting to Tk 500 crore, sources said. Although litchi prices are less than previous year, that’s no issue to farmers as they’re expected to get double their usual production.

“Along with the traditional breed, we’re also cultivating a hybrid variety called as Bombay litchi (China-3), which has gained popularity among both growers and customers,” said Dr Md Saiful Alom, deputy director of Pabna Agriculture Extension Department (AED).

A total of 4,731-hectare land brought under litchi cultivation in the district this year is expecting to get 42,579 tonnes of litchi, he said. “We have the production target of 47,000 tonnes this year but the harvesting progress shows that the litchi output will reach more than 50,000 tonnes,” he said.

Sonju Pramanik, a litchi farmer said, “Last year I got 7,000-8,000 litchis from each tree. This year I’m getting 15,000 litchis from each tree. This is the highest ever production in the last few years.”



Ishwardi’s litchi farmers hard at work, sorting litchis in crates and shipping them to various wholesale markets of the region.

PHOTO: STAR

“Last year each 1,000 litchis was sold for Tk 3,000-3,200. This year I’m selling them at Tk 2,200-2,300, but that isn’t an issue due to bumper production,” he added.

“Litchi is the main cash crop for us. When harvesting begins, we invite our relatives for

getting a taste. It turns into a festival,” said Md Jamal Hossain, a litchi grower.

“Litchis loaded in over 150 trucks are supplied across the country from five to six wholesale markets in Ishwardi,” said another litchi grower Nayeb Ali.

Include them in govt census

Say speakers on under-represented minorities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Various under-represented minorities of the country have been facing discrimination and marginalisation. Due to lack of government census data on them and proper recognition, these people, most of whom are ultra-poor, are now in crisis.

Speakers expressed this concern yesterday in the launching ceremony of Brattayan Resource Centre (BRC), a centre dedicated to conduct research on exclusion and marginalisation challenges in Bangladesh.

On the same day, BRC and Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) published 11 books and monographs on Bangladesh’s marginalised communities.

Phillip Gain, director of SEHD, said, “Monthly salary of a cleaner from the Harijan community is only Tk 550 in Sreemangal municipality. They are

not even allowed to dine in the nearby restaurants.”

Gain said the government does not have reliable data on marginalised groups.

Eminent economist Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud said compared to neighbouring countries, income inequality is comparatively low in Bangladesh. However, this fact is not applicable for minorities.

“Even our development policies and plans do not include these communities. As a result, sometimes what we consider as development projects, turn out to be a threat to their survival,” he said.

Lilly Nicholls, high commissioner of Canada to Bangladesh; Prof Tanzimuddin Khan of international relations department at DU; Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairperson, Power and Participation Research Centre; activist Khushi Kabir; and Jeremy Opritesco, deputy head of diplomatic mission, EU Delegation, were also present.