



PHOTOS: STAR

Shakyamuni's Biju Mela brings the hills to Dhaka

RBR

Biju, Boisu, Sangrai, Bihu, Shangkran, and Bishu are different versions of a festival celebrating the New Year and the arrival of spring in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Each indigenous community has its own name for it in their dialect, and together they are often grouped under the umbrella term Boisabi.

We often say the grass is greener on the other side, but in truth, it is far more lush in our hills. So, in a "if the mountain won't come to..." kind of situation, when you cannot be in the CHT, you must find another way to bring the colours and sounds of the hills to Dhaka.

Last weekend, wandering through an indigenous Biju Mela at the Shakyamuni Buddhist Temple in Mirpur, I was mesmerised by the music, dance, flavours, and vibrant colours of the hills that had found their way to us, Dhakaites.

Stepping into the mela, I did not expect to discover rare edibles like the

humble shimul flower. I had always associated it with cotton pillows and childhood memories, never imagining it could be eaten. At one stall, baskets of dried shimul flowers were neatly packed, waiting to be sold. The vendors explained how they are softened in warm water, stir-fried, or mixed into spicy salads with fermented fish paste. My surprise quickly turned into fascination: something I had thought of only as ornamental was, in fact, a delicacy deeply rooted in indigenous cuisine.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts are full of such wonders. Rare delicacies like Rokto Gota, or Blood Fruit, found in the wild forests, are cherished for their deep-red colour and tangy flavour. I first heard of it from a celebrated Chakma chef and had always wanted to forage for it. Finding it in Dhaka was a treat.

Then there is Rangamati's turmeric, famed for its rich colour and earthy aroma. In Dhaka, people often seek it out at fairs and specialty shops, believing it to be purer and more potent than the turmeric sold in city markets.

Another treasure is the wild, native ginger of the CHT. The hilly climate is ideal for growing it through traditional jhum (slash-and-burn) agriculture in Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachhari. In Dhaka, we mostly find commercial hybrid ginger, bland and watery in taste, whereas the native variety is pungent, sharp, and aromatic — often described as earthy and peppery.

Binni chhal, our sticky rice, and jhum pumpkins, known for their starchy texture and sweet, nutty flavour, are already familiar to Dhaka residents. But the region's unique climate also

makes it a hub for high-value fruits like bananas, pineapples, and papayas, grown with organic fertilizers that enhance their taste.

These foods carry the essence of the hills into our urban kitchens, acting as a bridge between the forest and the capital. They are cuisines are cultural markers tied to festivals, rituals, and the rhythm of seasons.

Walking through the mela, surrounded by traditional dances and songs, I realised that food here is more than sustenance. It is memory, identity, and celebration. Each rare item — whether a dried flower, a crimson fruit, or a golden spice — tells a story of resilience and belonging, connecting the hills to the city through the shared joy of discovery.

Tasting them feels like stepping into a living archive — where every bite carries the wisdom of grandmothers, the resilience of indigenous communities, and the beauty of a land that still holds secrets in its trees and flowers, speaking of a cuisine rooted in the forest and river.



Govt to 'make all ordinances valid'

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before becoming law, and seven were repealed. "The remaining 16 ordinances will undergo further scrutiny and necessary action will be taken later," he said.

Asked about the referendum ordinance and the legality of the referendum held alongside the national election, Salahuddin said, "It is a factum valet, or valid by occurrence. The ordinance was issued, the referendum was held, and it has legitimacy. There is no need for a new law on this, as no further referendum will be held on this matter."

If in the future a referendum is required, it will either be a constitutional referendum under Article 142 or a separate law will have to be enacted. So there is no reason for threats. Its validity already exists. It is not illegal."

On opposition threats of agitation, he said there is no scope for confusion regarding the referendum, as the matter is pending before the court and its decision will be final.

He emphasised that the government is proceeding with transparency on constitutional matters and will

establish the necessary legal framework in due course.

The law minister alleged that certain quarters are spreading confusion by claiming the government has "discarded ordinances."

He argued that transparency and accountability are clearly stated in the preambles of the laws, including repeal bills, which explicitly mention the reasons.

As examples, he cited bills relating to the National Human Rights Commission, the appointment of Supreme Court judges, and the Supreme Court Secretariat, noting that these required further consultation with stakeholders.

On the law concerning enforced disappearances, Asaduzzaman said ambiguities in definitions and trial processes could cause future complications, requiring more detailed examination.

He also said there were gaps in the Human Rights Commission ordinance regarding investigation, fines, and compensation, adding that the government has already initiated discussions with stakeholders, and a

consultation meeting may be held after mid-May.

He compared the current government's approach with the one that came after the 2007-2009 caretaker government and converted only 54 of 122 ordinances into law, while the rest were annulled.

"In contrast, we have converted a larger number of ordinances into law. For those that have not yet become law, we also have a clear plan and genuine intent," he said.

Asked about judicial independence and show-cause notices against lower court judges, the law minister said steps were taken because their names were used by coaching centres, and due to misconduct on social media.

The home minister then added, "We also want the judiciary's independence. But that independence means independence in conducting trials."

Salahuddin, however, questioned whether making the judiciary "super-independent or sovereign" would serve the welfare of the state, stressing the need for harmonious cooperation among all organs of government.

Armed forces must remain apolitical

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he outlined plans to modernise them into technology-driven, fully integrated, and rapidly responsive forces capable of credible deterrence, while developing the army, navy, and air force into faster, more coordinated units.

He said the government will reshape the forces and defence policy, and formulate a modern national security strategy reflecting Bangladesh's realities, national interests, and future threats, ensuring a Bangladesh-centric, people-centric, and state dignity-oriented security framework. Tarique also assured that past grievances or injustices involving service members will be addressed through due legal and institutional processes, adding that such incidents will not occur in the future.

He said, "We want such an Army that is smart, technology-driven, rapidly responsive and time-befitting, where our fighting arms are modern, well equipped, highly sophisticated, manoeuvre-capable and quickly deployable. At the same time, we aim to make our artillery force more precise, long range and technology-based, and to develop a modern, multi-layered and effective air defence system."

Tarique said the government aims to enhance defence capabilities through drone technology, satellite surveillance, electronic warfare, and strengthened cyber systems to ensure digital security and data integrity, while advancing the Army with modern, smart combat systems.

He said special emphasis is being

placed on naval security, including the Bay of Bengal, maritime routes, marine resources, and the blue economy, adding that protecting coastal areas and maritime communication is a key national priority. He added that the modernisation of the air force will continue to strengthen air surveillance, rapid deployment, airspace security, and technology-based capabilities, including the induction of advanced multi-role combat aircraft and a multi-layered integrated air defence system.

Tarique said a modern joint operations doctrine among the three services, along with an upgraded C4I system — command, control, communication, computer, and intelligence — will ensure rapid decision-making and effective deployment in any crisis. "This will also ensure optimal use of limited resources so that our armed forces can protect national sovereignty, respond to disasters, and uphold Bangladesh's dignity in the international arena."

He said the government plans to build a self-reliant defence capability by developing a domestic defence industry and to strengthen military-to-military partnerships to deepen regional and international cooperation.

He highlighted the difficult realities of the past one and a half decades. Referring to the 2009 BDR mutiny at Palkhona, Tarique said a planned massacre was carried out to weaken the army, adding that during the subsequent one and a half decades under Awami League rule, there were

attempts to undermine and tarnish the image of the armed forces.

He said the role of Bangladesh's armed forces has been globally recognised not merely as a wartime force, but as a protector of independence and sovereignty, and highlighted their contributions to tackling natural disasters and serving in United Nations peacekeeping missions to help war-torn countries achieve stability.

He lauded the military's role in safeguarding the country and its people in 2024, saying their actions gave hope to freedom-loving citizens. "In the unstable period following August 5, 2024, amid visible administrative paralysis, the armed forces played an extraordinary role."

Tarique said the armed forces' support to the interim government in holding the February 12 election in a free, fair, and credible manner reflected their trust in democratic principles and commitment to the people. He reaffirmed the government's commitment to justice, saying any injustice done to members of the armed forces for political or other reasons will be addressed in accordance with due process.

Earlier, upon his arrival at the venue, the prime minister was received by his Defence Adviser Brig Gen (ret'd) AKM Shamsul Islam, Chief of Army Staff General Waker Uz Zaman, Chief of Naval Staff Admiral M Nazmul Hassan, and Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan, along with the principal staff officer of the Armed Forces Division.

Trump orders blockade of Hormuz

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for friendly countries, such as China, to pass. There have been unconfirmed reports that Tehran plans to charge tolls.

"THIS IS WORLD EXTORTION," Trump said. "I have also instructed our Navy to seek and interdict every vessel in International Waters that has paid a toll to Iran. No one who pays an illegal toll will have safe passage on the high seas. We will also begin destroying the mines the Iranians laid in the Straits."

Later, in a Fox News interview, Trump threatened to impose a 50 percent tariff on Chinese imports if Beijing tries to help the Iranian military and added, "I could take out Iran in one day. I could have their entire energy everything, every one of their plants, their electric generating plants, which is a big deal."

Iran's Parliamentary Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who led his country's delegation along with Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi, blamed the US for not winning Tehran's trust despite his team offering "forward-looking initiatives".

"The U.S. has understood Iran's logic

and principles and it's time for them to decide whether they can earn our trust or not," Qalibaf said on X.

Vance said Iran had chosen not to accept American terms, including not to build nuclear weapons.

"I could go into great detail, and talk about much that has been gotten but, there is only one thing that matters — IRAN IS UNWILLING TO GIVE UP ITS NUCLEAR AMBITIONS!" Trump said later.

Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency said "excessive" US demands had hindered reaching a deal. Other Iranian media said there was agreement on a number of issues, but the Strait of Hormuz and Iran's nuclear programme were the main points of difference.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said it was "imperative" to preserve the ceasefire that was agreed last Tuesday as the sides attempt to wind down a war that began on February 28 with air strikes by the US and Israel on Iran.

Israeli security cabinet minister Zeev Elkin told Army Radio that more talks were still an option but added, "The Iranians are playing with fire."

Golden voice goes silent

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Her passing marks the loss of not just a singer, but a presence so indelibly present in the cultural memory of the subcontinent that it feels impossible to separate her voice from the moments it came to define.

Indian media reported that she had been admitted to a hospital in Mumbai, due to extreme exhaustion and a chest infection. Her granddaughter, Zana Bhosle, had earlier said she was undergoing treatment for the condition.

For over seven decades, Asha Bhosle's voice moved effortlessly across genres, languages, and moods. She holds a Guinness record for singing over 12,000 songs in more than 20 Indian and foreign languages; a staggering body of work that places her among the most recorded artistes in history.

From the playful lilt of cabaret numbers to the aching tenderness of ghazals, from folk-inspired melodies to experimental fusions, her catalogue has come to resemble a cultural archive in its scale and depth. Celebrated for timeless hits such as "Piya Tu Ab To Aaja", "Kajra Mohabbat Wala", "Rangeela Re", and "Dil Cheez Kya Hai", she would have turned 93 on September 8 this year. News of her passing has deeply affected generations of listeners who grew up with her music.

Born on September 8, 1933, in Goar, Maharashtra, Asha Bhosle was raised in the culturally rich Mangeshkar household. Her father, Deenanath Mangeshkar, was a respected classical singer and theatre actor, and it was within this environment that her

musical journey began early.

The younger sister of Lata Mangeshkar, Bhosle's rise to prominence was far from inevitable. In an industry that initially typecast her into lighter, more playful numbers, she gradually built a distinct identity, one defined by bold versatility and a constant instinct to evolve.

Asha Bhosle's marriage to composer Rahul Dev Burman gave Indian music one of its most iconic creative duos. Her collaborations with R D Burman marked a defining phase in her career, as the duo reimagined the sound of Hindi cinema by blending Western influences with Indian sensibilities. Songs such as "Dum Maro Dum" and "Chura Liya Hai Tumhe Jo Dil Ko" emerged as defining anthems; bold, sensuous, and strikingly modern for their time.

Yet Bhosle was never confined to a single style. She brought equal mastery to the delicate intricacies of ghazals, most notably in her work with Khayyam for films like Umrao Jaan. Songs such as "Dil Cheez Kya Hai" and "In Aankhon Ki Masti" revealed a different register — restrained, haunting, and steeped in classical depth.

Her repertoire extended further still; from folk-inspired melodies to devotional songs, from pop experiments to international collaborations. She recorded in languages ranging from Hindi and Bengali to English, Russian, and Malay, reflecting a global reach rare for her era.

Recognition followed, though it stood in the shadow of the affection she inspired. Bhosle was the recipient

MEASLES-RUBELLA VACCINE Special drive to inoculate 12 lakh children in 3 cities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special measles-rubella vaccination drive in the four city corporations — Dhaka North, Dhaka South, Mymensingh, and Barishal — began yesterday, amid a surge in measles cases and deaths.

Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Hossain inaugurated the campaign at Nagar Bhaban in the capital's Gulistan area around 11:00am. Earlier in the day, MA Muhit, state minister for health, launched it at the Karail slum.

Around 12.20 lakh children aged six months to under five years are expected to be vaccinated under this initiative, according to Shahriar Sajjad, deputy director of the Expanded Programme on Immunization.

In Dhaka, the month-long campaign was launched through separate programmes by Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) and Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC).

DSCC officials said 540 vaccination centres — 90 permanent and 450 temporary — have been established for the drive. The targeted children will receive the vaccine daily from 9:00am to 4:00pm.

DNCC officials said they have set up 558 permanent and temporary centres, supported by 35 evening centres and eight Friday-only centres.

Meanwhile, the Directorate General of Health Services recorded four more confirmed measles deaths in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, taking the total confirmed measles deaths to 28.

Besides, the directorate recorded six more suspected deaths in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of suspected measles deaths to 151.

Haiti's historic fort stampede kills 30

AFP, Port-Au-Prince

A stampede at an historical fortress in Haiti has killed at least 30 people, a government minister told AFP yesterday, with the crush reportedly involving several young visitors.

"The Minister of Culture and Communication has confirmed the deaths of 30 people at the Citadelle Henri on Saturday, April 11, 2026," culture minister Emmanuel Menard told AFP in a written message.

"The injured are currently receiving the necessary medical care, and a rescue team is searching for any missing persons," Menard said, without giving an exact figure of those injured.

Citadelle Henri, also known as Citadelle Laferriere, is a 19th-century fortress and popular tourist spot.