

RAMMALA LIBRARY

a heritage left to decay

RARE BOOKS, PUNTHIS AT RISK FOR LACK OF PRESERVATION

KHALID BIN NAZRUL, Cumilla

The century-old Rammala Library in Cumilla, home to thousands of ancient manuscripts and rare books, has been left languishing in neglect, with its invaluable collection gradually decaying for lack of proper preservation.

One of the oldest libraries in Bangladesh, it was established in 1912 at Maheshangan on the outskirts of Cumilla city, opposite the current Education Board office there.

The library houses around 12,000 printed books on literature, culture, history, geography, philosophy, religion and other branches of knowledge, along with over 8,000 ancient manuscripts, known as punthi in Bangla. Most of the manuscripts are on literature from the medieval and early modern periods, roughly 1700-1900 AD.

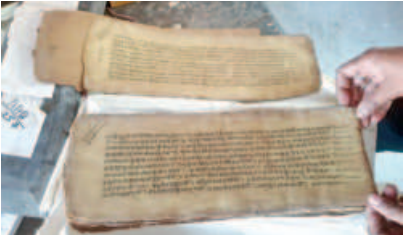
"The Rammala Library and Maheshangan were once referred to as

After the library was founded, Dr Rashmohan Chatterjee and Mahesh worked together to expand it. The library became a centre for researchers of ancient manuscripts, many of which were donated by local families.

In 1926, the students of Rammala Hostel accorded a reception to Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Mahatma Gandhi and Subhas Chandra Bose also visited the place, among other eminent figures of the subcontinent.

At present, the library's Manuscript Section preserves more than 8,000 ancient handwritten scriptures and cultural texts related to Sanatan faith and philosophy, covering topics such as the Vedas, Kabya, Byakaran, Astrology, History, Purana, Religion, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Satyanarayan Panchali, Satya Pirer Punthi, Shanir Panchali and others.

These manuscripts, written in Sanskrit and Bangla on palmyra palm leaves, bhojpatra, or bark of Himalayan



the Santiniketan of East Bengal. This library has a vast collection of rare and invaluable books and manuscripts that need to be preserved at any cost," said Ahsanul Kabir, a local cultural figure.

"The library's gradual decline began after the demise of scholar Dr Rashmohan Chatterjee in 1982. It has remained closed since the death of its in-charge Indukumar Singh in 2022," he said.

Mahesh Chandra Bhattacharya (1858-1944), a noted scholar and philanthropist, founded the library in 1912 and named it after his mother Rammala Devi.

He also established the Rammala Hostel in 1916 for male students and the Nibedita Girls Hostel in 1919 for female students.

Mahesh died on February 10, 1944, in Varanasi, then British India, at the age of 86. Before his death, the childless philanthropist formed the Mahesh Charitable Trust to run his various institutions.

birch trees, and Tulot, or cotton paper, have been collected from Tripura, Cumilla, Noakhali and Sylhet.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found the manuscripts in a dusty and derelict condition, putting them at risk of being lost forever.

Advocate Sarojendu Roy Kanu, chairperson of the trust, said he had heard that about 2,500 manuscripts had been preserved at Dhaka University through microfilms. However, it remains unknown where and how those are being kept, or whether any work is being carried out on them.

Sarojendu said the trust was trying to appoint a librarian but could not afford further renovation or development of the library.

"If the government takes initiatives to preserve and develop the invaluable assets of the library and to build a museum, we will welcome it," he said.

"However, it must be done here in Cumilla, as this library is a part of our heritage," he added.



A man splashes water on his face to cool off as the temperature in Dhaka reached 36.3 degrees Celsius yesterday. The photo was taken in the TSC area of Dhaka University.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Dengue corners' planned at upazila health complexes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is setting up "dengue corners" across upazila health complexes in preparation of a possible rise in dengue cases, Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain said yesterday.

"We are taking all-out preparations to face the dengue outbreak. Dengue corners are being set up. A field hospital is ready at DMCH and more will be established in different parts of the country if needed," he said at a meeting on dengue preparedness at the health ministry conference room.

The Society of Medicine, an organisation of medicine specialists, will provide detailed training, including clinical management plans, while others such as Unicef are also extending support, he said.

He also said training programmes for doctors and nurses will begin today in all divisions and at district-level facilities. The government already has stocks of reagents, testing kits, intravenous fluids and other essential supplies, and has decided to procure additional quantities based on demand.

Asked about controlling mosquito breeding, he said the health ministry started working with city corporations on the issue two months ago.

"We will hold another meeting with city corporations and other relevant stakeholders tomorrow [today]," he added.

Meanwhile, at least one dengue patient died and 110 others were hospitalised across the country in the 24 hours till yesterday morning.

The latest death was reported in Khulna.

With the new fatality and infections, the total number of dengue-related deaths this year has risen to six, while the cumulative number of cases has reached 3,307.



Dengue-related deaths this year now stand at six, while cases have reached 3,307.

Don't defend Ramisa case accused Jamaat ameer urges lawyers after visiting child's father at hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Leader and Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Shafiqur Rahman yesterday called on lawyers not to represent the accused in the Ramisa rape and murder case, urging swift justice and rejection of any form of leniency.

He spoke with reporters after meeting Ramisa's father, Abdul Hannan Mollah, who was receiving treatment at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases and Hospital in Dhaka.

"The trial of confessed rapists and killers must not be delayed. Delay in justice only deepens injustice," he said the trial must be completed quickly as the evidence is "clear", adding that there was no justification for delay.



'A piece of my heart is gone'

Ramisa's family spent Eid surrounded by her belongings, memories

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

For Abdul Hannan Mollah and his family, this Eid was marked not by celebration, but by an overwhelming sense of loss.

"Ramisa was a piece of my heart. Eid without her was unbearable," he said, struggling to hold back tears as memories of his daughter came flooding back.

Ramisa was also fascinated by the metro rail. Sometimes, her father would take her on metro rides to Diabari, where the two spent time together, walking and exploring the area. Those cherished moments have now become painful memories.

One memory, in particular, has haunted him since her death.

Just four days before she was killed, Ramisa brought home a picture of the Holy Kaaba that she had received at school.

"She showed me the picture and asked, 'Baba, when will you take me to Hajj?'" Hannan recalled. "Since her death, those words keep echoing in my mind. On Eid, I remembered them even more."

He said he spent much of Eid looking through Ramisa's school report cards, certificates, and test papers.

"Whenever I look at them, it feels as if I can still see her," he said.

Ramisa Akhter, a Class II student of Popular Model High School, was allegedly raped and murdered on May 19 in the house of her neighbour, Soheli Rana.

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Zero tolerance for obstruction to journalists Says info minister

BSS, Dhaka

The government will pursue a "zero tolerance" policy against any form of unethical obstruction or interference in the professional activities of mainstream media personnel, said Information Minister Zahir Uddin Swapon yesterday.

Replying to a query from reporters at the Secretariat, he stressed that ensuring a fully independent and transparent media environment remains one of the key objectives of the government.

Regarding a recent incident in which mainstream media workers were allegedly subjected to an attack by security guards and cleaners while collecting news at a private institution, Swapon said, "I am gathering more



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Farmers selling off-season cauliflowers at Boro Deopur village in Rajshahi's Mohanpur upazila yesterday. They said prices of cauliflower and cabbage have dropped sharply after Eid, from Tk 2,500-2,600 per maund to Tk 1,000-1,200, leaving growers struggling despite the consistent demand for the winter vegetable.

PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Man, son among eight killed in road crashes

STAR REPORT

At least eight persons were killed and several others injured in road accidents in Chattogram, Natore and Patuakhali yesterday.

In Chattogram, a man and his teenage son died as their motorcycle was hit by a BRTC passenger bus coming from the

agitated locals blocked the road and set the bus on fire. Police and fire service personnel went to the scene and brought the situation under control, the OC added.

In a separate incident, two people were killed and two others injured after a fish-laden mini truck collided head-on with a CNG-run auto-rickshaw



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Agitated locals set fire to a bus that hit a motorcycle and killed a father and his son in Chattogram's Fatikchhari yesterday.

opposite direction in Bibirhat area under Fatikchhari upazila around 9:50am.

The deceased are Mohammad Shahjahan, 46, and his son Arif, 16. They died at Fatikchhari Upazila Health Complex, said Rabiul Alam Khan, officer-in-charge of Fatikchhari Police Station.

Following the accident, in Banshkhalhi upazila around 7:30am on the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway, said OC Md Mahabubur Rahman of Jhalmalia Highway Police Station.

The deceased are Bir Bahadur Alam, 28, and Noim Uddin Mohammad Noman, 34, from Maheshkhali upazila.

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