

BOISABI 2010 MESSAGE FROM SYDNEY AUSTRALIA

While celebration of Boisabi 2010 has been boycotted by many in Bangladesh to protest against February 2010 Baghaihat and Khagrachari atrocities in CHT, we Jummas in Australia celebrated Boisabi on 10 April in Sydney. We celebrated Boisabi with many eminent Australian friends, as it was the time to renew our relationship and friendship, and to recollect the violent incidents last February and to remember the survivors and victims of the violence. We also took effort and tried to take a great care to show the diversely rich cultures of the indigenous Jummas to the Australians who have had a little opportunity to learn about Jummas' cultures.

A number of distinguished guests were present at the event.

It was attended by the Hon. Laurie Ferguson MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, and his wife Maureen Walsh, ex-Councilor of the Parramatta City Council.

Laurie is well known to all the CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) communities in Australia, whether it is a large well established or an emerging community. Numerous communities have benefited from Laurie's tireless effort and commitment to social justice, equity, multiculturalism and human rights over his distinguished 26 year career in the New South Wales and national Parliament.

Laurie Ferguson has discussed CHT issues passionately at the parliament and encouraged Jumma activists not to be disheartened and to carry out their struggle for peace. He has discussed CHT issues with his parliamentary colleagues and community leaders to raise awareness of the CHT situation, and has written many letters to High Commissioners, Ministers and so on. Laurie's passion and commitment for human rights has encouraged and strengthened us. We thanked Laurie Ferguson for his continuous support.

The Hon. Bruce Baird AM and his wife Jodie Baird attended the Boisabi celebration. He has recently been awarded the Member of the Order of Australia for his services to the Parliament of Australia and to the community of New South Wales.

As a long serving Member for Cook, Bruce made many contributions to our Australian community. One of the most significant was his effort to heal the wounds caused by the turmoil in Cronulla in December 2005. After retiring from Parliamentary services, Bruce continues to work as the Chair of the Refugee Resettlement Advisory Council and is currently

reviewing international education in Australia.

Bruce has raised the CHT issue and the importance of full implementation of the 1997 CHT Peace Accord in the Australian Parliament. (It is nice to remember that Laurie Ferguson from the other side of politics also supported this.) Bruce has empowered us to carry out our campaign for peace in the CHT.

The Hon. Ian Cohen MLC and his partner Dian were there to celebrate Boisabi with us. Our thanks go to Ian for his support for our CHT Peace Rally, against the February Baghaihat and Khagrachari violence, at the Opera House steps on 26 February this year and for raising the CHT Jumma peoples plight in the New South Wales Parliament on the Harmony Day debate.

Councilor Prabir Maitra of the Parramatta City council, the first Bangladeshi political representative in Australia, a founder member of the Australian Forum for Minorities of Bangladesh (AFMB), honoured us by attending and delivering a speech at the event. He has also been supporting the CHT issues in many different ways.

David Bitel, who fortunately does not need an introduction in an event held by Bangladeshis – everyone knows him, was with us. He is the Secretary General of the International Commission of Jurists and the immediate past President of the Refugee Council of Australia. We thank David for being a good friend of the Jummas and of all Bangladeshis.

There was also noteworthy support from the Garo community in Sydney and support from Nepalese Indigenous Nationalities Forum Australia (NINFA) at our CHT Peace Rally and in many other events. Our thanks go to Australian Garo indigenous community in Australia and to NINFA of which Ganesh Tamang and Sonali Tamang attended the event.

There was enormous support from the members of AFMB and Bangladesh Australia Buddhist Society in holding the CHT Harmony Day event early this year. From these organizations, Dr Samir Sarkar, Dr Ashit Maitra, Sanjib Mahajan, Dr Atish Barua, Uday Shankar Barua and Nitish Barua were also present at the event. AFMB also lent us their projector and screen for the event.

Time of Boisabi is also to mention the work of Social Justice Group Coogee, which held fund raising event for the rat flood victims of Baghaihat in 2008. Many of them were again victims of the recent February arson at Baghihat. Dianne and Eddy Mullin, who played major

role in organizing the fund raising event, have kept their doors open, for days and nights, to many young Jumma new comers. We thank them very much for their generosity.

We thank Fiona and Andrew McGlynn for supporting a primary school teacher at Hazachara, a remote part of CHT, and Emma Quay, a talented illustrator and author of children's books, who donated her autographed books to the CHT children at Moanoghar school, primarily established for the CHT orphans.

I want to thank BODHI Australia for supporting a number of mobile clinics in CHT, including PBM, Moanoghar and supporting the Sneha School for Hajongs and Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh, India and Chakma Mahila Samity in Mizoram, India. Kulottam Chakma presented BODHI's work at the event. Pramila Chakma, a student of Sydney University, shared her experience at Moanoghar early this year.

A number of peace activists, including Jan Todd, Trish Harrison, Sara Ahamed, Prashanthi who are members of Initiatives of Change and Creators of Peace, were also present at the event. We hope to share these organizations insight and understanding into the power of peace in the often turmoiled world. It was lovely to have Malavika Asthana and her family. Anisur Rahman, editor of bangla-sydney.com, and his wife Aurelia Rahman of MRC Baulkham Hills were present, and we thank him for regularly publishing our events for CHT in the bangla-sydney.com.

There were many apologies but to mention a few, apologies from the Hon. John Dowd AO QC, the Hon. Bob McMullan MP, the Hon. Philip Ruddack MP, the Hon. Scott Morrison MP, Sunny Lee, AusAID Director – South Asia Section, Eliane Ward, Immediate past AusAID Director – South Asia Section, Dr. Colin Butler and Susan Butler of BODHI Australia, journalists Ajoy Dashgupta and Tanveer Ahamed and apologies from Amnesty International, Diplomacy Training Program, University of NSW, and many other well wishers of CHT. They all sent their best wishes for the event.

Finally, I want to thank our community members and friends, without their enthusasistic support and hard work it wouldn't have been possible for us to hold the Boisabi celebration.

Saikat Khisa was the MC for the Boisabi 2010 celebration. He formally started the program acknowledging the traditional custodians of the indigenous Dharawal peoples' land on which we met, and welcoming the guests with an introduction to Boisabi, informing boycotting of the celebration by many Jummas in the CHT protesting against the recent

Baghahat and Khagrachari violence by settlers and the military.

A short documentary on the February 2010 Baghahat and Khagrachari massacre made by Dibos Dewan captured the thoughts and imagination of the audience.

A cultural program, directed by Tanu Murang, and a fashion show, choreographed by Augustina Dewan, were superb. We were blessed with talented singers, guitarists, dancers and young, teen and children models.

The stage backdrop was designed by Ajoy Chakma, Boisabi Flyer 2010 was by Pallab Chakma, and lunch menu was by Dibos Dewan.

Our thank goes to Muna for organizing games for male participants and Tally for organizing games for females and children. We also thank the talented people who were behind the cameras, sound system and computers etc.

Boisabi, also as a festival of food, was celebrated with many different dishes, vegetarian and non-vegetarian, including traditional deserts like kalaa pidhe, bini haghaa, bini pidhe etc. Food preparation was well coordinated by Taposi Chakma and Mittra Chakma, and home cooked by our community members were a great success. A lot of thanks to the volunteers and members who worked hard in setting up and packing up the Grays Point Community Centre where the event was held.

It is a celebration at the renewal of time and a celebrating for renewing all relationships - to make weak relationship stronger and already strong relationship even stronger.

I ardently hope that our collective friendship in Australia with people from diverse background will flourish in a healthy manner. We would like to oppose any form of discrimination where Jummas or any other community are the target.

I hope Boisabi will bring peace to us all in CHT, in Bangladesh, in Australia and in this world which we all share and in which we depend on each other.

Happy Boisabi,

Kabita Chakma
CHT Indigenous Jumma Association Australia
CHT Jumma Peoples Network of the Asia Pacific
13 April 2010 Sydney