

closeup
WHAT'S IN!

Dark nail-polishes. Tap into the gothic look with dark nail-polishes that provide a stark contrast.

lifestyle

closeup
WHAT'S OUT!

Heavy sweaters. Winter that flighty temptress has spread its wings and taken flight so rid yourself of those turtlenecks and heavy cardigans.



rooftop battles

In a Bangladeshi life there is seemingly no end to festivals. Be it for religious or family reasons, there seems to be a new festival every month. The major occasions are celebrated in a big way but in between you will find lurking some ancient rituals. One such occasion was celebrated a few days ago. It was the end of Poush.

The Bangla month of Poush is brought to an end by some people through the act of puja. Others on the other hand celebrate it by spending the entire day flying kites. This is especially celebrated in Old Dhaka where almost every single household brings out their choice of flying contraptions. This celebration takes place from dawn to dusk. The rivalries between different households bring out colourful stories. All this is complemented by the famous mouthwatering menus of Old Dhaka accompanied by loud music. This celebration used to take place for decades although in present times there is a telltale sign of something missing. It seems that the glitter exists only on the surface.

Stringing it out

The kite flying function was something that held no age barriers. Men as old as 40-50 years would engage in this activity for the sheer fun of it. Of course, preparations begin several days in advance. The first stage is known as 'maanja' where the string is prepared. The string is coloured and special additives are used to make it strong as well as sharp to battle it out with other kite flyers. You see, the objective in a kite flying contest is to snap the mooring off your competitor's kite.

A mixture of barley, flour and grounded glass is used to brush over the string. This requires two people. One person holds the reel and rolls the string while another gently applies the mixture over the sur-

face. This is later kept in the hot sun so that it hardens and strengthens. Sometimes the string ends up sharp enough to cut hands.

Calling Wright brothers

Next comes the part of building the kite itself. These come in many different shapes and sizes and of course in every single colour of the rainbow. The names are quite varied too for example, chokhdaar, kochhop daar, shaap daar, chumki daar, peti daar etc. The kites are recognized by their shape. Shaap daar is just like a snake with a long tail behind it. Chokh daar on the other hand is just like big 'chokh' or eyes.

The battle weapon

The roller upon which the string is wrapped is called lathai and it is made of bamboo. In many families the lathai is something akin to a family heirloom where old lathais are brought out during each festival. Similarly when the show is over the lathai is carefully stored to be used next year. It's as if the lathai is being stored as a weapon to be used in battle the coming year.

War cries

And a battle it is as all this preparation lead to the day of reckoning. It's a chaotic situation as kites fight overhead and blaring music plays below. It's a chaotic but lively scene. Microphones are used to announce the wins and losses of battle. When a kite is lost due to a snapped string everyone shouts 'bho-katta'. Of course a battle cannot continue long without nourishment and for this feasts are prepared right up there on the rooftops. In some cases the young boys collect money through donations and buy their food. Of course the battle takes a very literal turn at times between households or even neigh-

bourhoods. Altercations erupt at times when a kite is lost.

Blaze of glory

The best part is at sundown when the kites are laid to rest. The lathais or rollers are used to create huge bonfires. The firework is kept alive by the act of some brave (and maybe crazy) firebrands who take a mouthful of flammable liquid and spit it out at the fire. It's a recipe for disaster if inexperienced participants join in.

This celebration has gradually grown into a major festival that everyone looks forward to each year. But somewhere along the way a bit of the intimacy has been lost and it has become another one of those heavily participated although lifeless occasions.

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