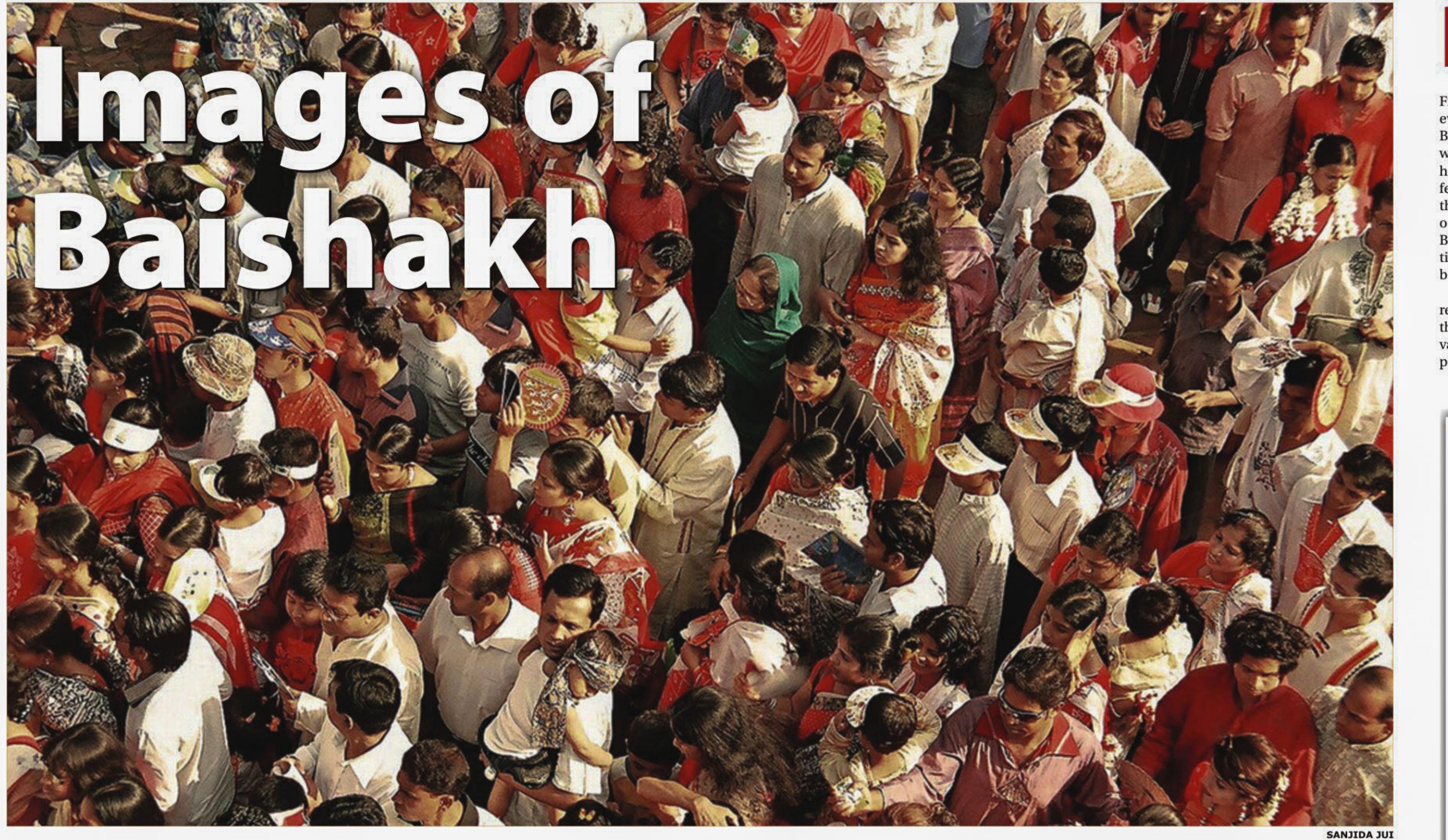


Defining Pahela Baishakh

The coming of Kalbaishakh (Nor'wester) is welcomed by the biggest secular festival of Bangladesh, Pahela Baishakh. Named after the star 'Bishakh', in line with the names of other Bengali months also named after constellations, romanticised notions of Baishakh were embedded in the hearts of millions, primarily due to

Rabindranath Tagore's love for the month. Pahela Baishakh is a day that sees countless celebrations all across Bangladesh and worldwide, wherever Bengalis have thrived. Over the years the festival has become synonymous with certain images. On the first day of the Bangla year 1418, we take a look at these elements that go a long way in defining this spectacular

BY TAKIR HOSSAIN, JAMIL MAHMUD, ZAHANGIR ALOM, SHAH ALAM SHAZU AND AKRAM HOSEN MAMUN



Nagor Dola

Approaching a Baishakh mela in any district of the country, one is likely to hear a loud and incessant creaking, somewhat resembling the wailing of a monster in some movie. What makes that sound is *Nagor Dola*, a major attraction at a Baishakh mela. In its function, it may well resemble a small Ferris wheel, but *Nagor Dola* is powered solely by human exertion.

To give a simple account of its mechanism, one must begin with the two colourful wooden poles that are set upright in the ground to hold an axe, on which two pairs of massive shafts are positioned. As the two pairs of parallel shafts cross each other in the middle, they also get balance of a rotor mounted on an axe.

Four wooden carriages, each large enough to contain around four persons, are hung from four axes placed on the ends of the shafts. At a Baishakh mela, a couple of men are usually seen rotating the shafts by pushing the carriages. The vividly painted poles, carriages, shafts and the creaking sound give the whole contraption an appearance extravagant enough to astound children.

Riding a *Nagor Dola* is as exciting and wonderful as the apparatus appears to be. Sitting in a carriage, while the shafts are being rotated at a high velocity, the riders experience a tremendous centrifugal force that seems powerful enough to throw them to outer space. It also gives the strange sensation of defying gravity.



Mask

A mask is an article normally worn on the face, typically for protection, disguise, performance or entertainment. Masks have been used since antiquity for both ceremonial and practical purposes and have attained vast popularity for decades in Bangladesh, especially on Pahela Baishakh.

Masks are used almost universally and maintain their power and mystery both for their wearers and their viewers. The image of juxtaposed comedy and tragedy masks are widely used to represent the performing arts.

Artist Saidul Haque Juise, one of



the pioneers of reviving popularity of masks in Bangladesh, is well-known for his papier-mâché masks, often seen at Pahela Baishakh rallies or *Mangal Shobhajatra*.

"Keeping Bangaliana (Bengali) in mind, masks should be made meaningful so that traditional tastes find new magnitude," says the artist.

Putul Naach



The unprecedented growth of consumerism and the penetration of western and Indian entertainment into our culture have diminished the popularity of traditional entertainment like *putul naach* or puppet theatre in the country.

Talking about this art form, Mustafa Monwar, noted cultural personality of the country, also known as the 'Puppet King', says, "All art forms can be combined in puppetry -- painting and oratory skills, for example."

Puppets, usually made of clay, paper, wood, plastic and cloth, represent animals or humans. In a *putul naach*, puppeteers entertain the audience by making the puppets replicate actions. Enactment of popular tales by puppets amuses the audience much like a

theatre troupe. Watching the puppets come alive through the craft of a puppeteer is entertaining to children and grown-ups alike.

Monwar's adaptation of the American puppet show "Sesame Street" is now a favourite among Bangladeshi children.

Though *putul naach* used to be hugely popular in Bangladesh and was part of the entertainment at most celebrations, it often amuses the audience much like a

Red & White

From children to the elderly, everyone knows that Pahela Baishakh means wearing red and white. Although now fashion houses are producing attires featuring other colours as well for the festival, red and white still occupy a special place in the Baishakh celebration. The question is how did this tradition begin?

In all likelihood, no extensive research has been carried out on this subject as the experts have varied opinions. "Tradition is a phenomenon created over a

course of time," says artist Mustafa Monwar. The veteran artist believes that the rural tradition of using primary colours such as red would be the main reason behind this trend.

"Red symbolises prosperity and white stands for purity," says Monwar. The artist also says that the tradition originated long ago but Chhayanaut's musical programme and Charukala's rally on Pahela Baishakh have further popularised it.

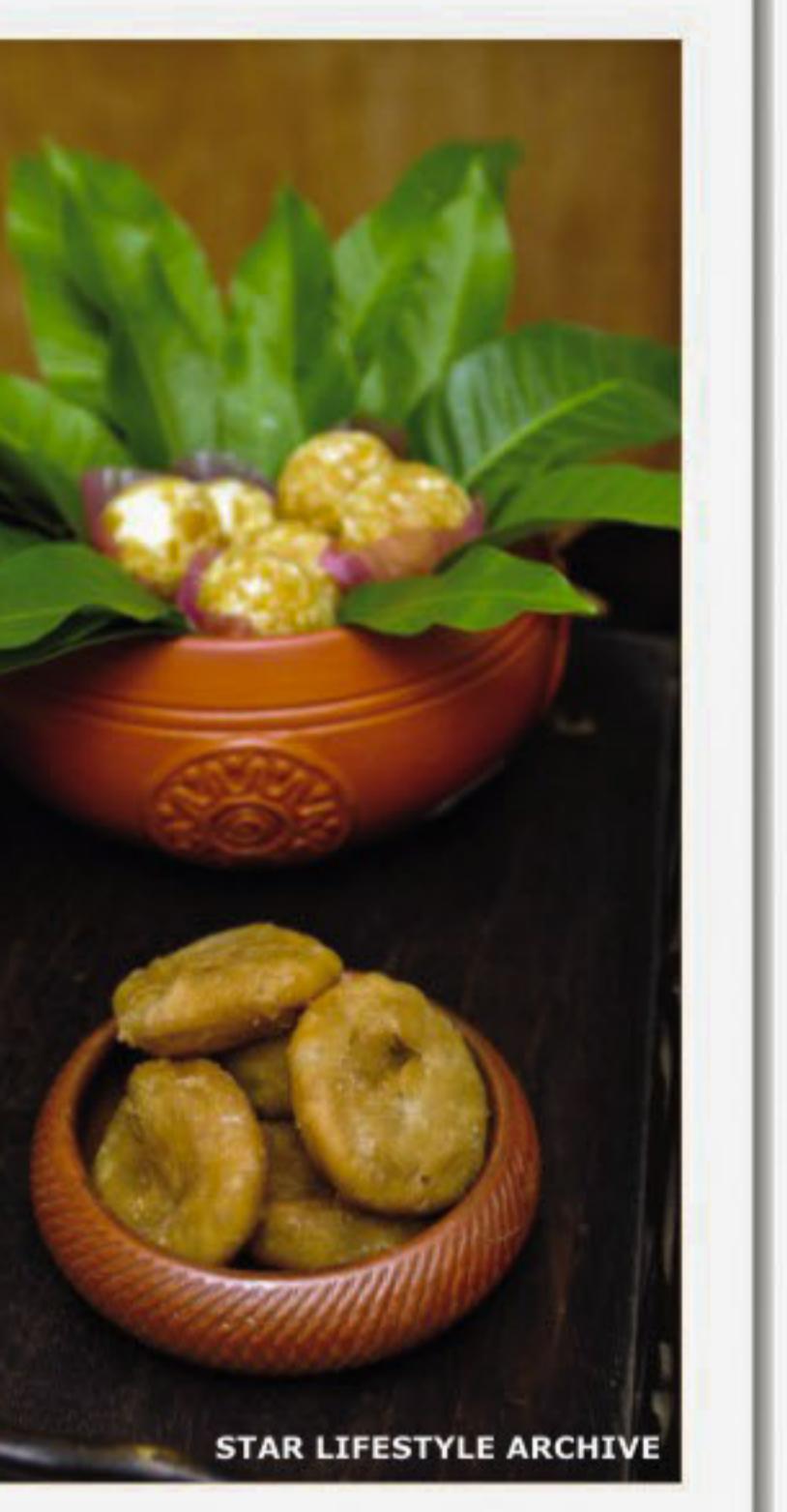
Folk researcher Saymon Zakaria believes that like many other pio-

neering endeavours, women of the Jorashakha Tagore family might have initiated this tradition. Zakaria thinks that the trend of wearing red and white is more apparent in the cities than in rural areas.

Artist Abdus Shakoor Shah, who mainly works on folk motifs, says that the phenomenon may have occurred because city artists took ideas from the rural artisans' use of bright colours such as red. Considering the heat of Baishakh they also opted for white as a soothing colour," says Shah.

Mishti

Those behind the art of making *mishti* (sweets) are known as *moira* and *modok*. The history of the *modok* also holds the origin of *deshi* sweet-making techniques. *Laddu* is considered to have originated before other sweets in this part of the world. The Baishakh community supposedly developed the art of making *chhana* based sweets. The arrival of Madan Mohan Jiu in Kolkata marked a rise in the popularity of *chhana*. The traditional menu of sweets for farmers included *gur-chira* and coconut. But since the advent of the 19th century, different areas in the then undivided Bengal attained reputation for their unique sweets. Natore became famous for its *Kachagolla*; Comilla for its *Roshmalai*; Gouronodi's yogurt; Netrokona's *Balish mishti*, Tangail for *Chamcham*, Chapainawabganj and Rajshahi for *Roshkodom* and many more. *Roshogolla* -- arguably the most popular among sweet connoisseurs -- gave birth to several varieties of sweets, such as *Rajbhog*, *Roshmalai*, *Khirmohan*, *Indranibhog*, Lady Kenny and *Chhanamukhi*. *Monda* is a version of the popular *Shondesh*. Bengalis are known for their hospitality and always take sweets when visiting friends and relatives. Feasting on sweets on the first day of the year is an integral part of the celebration.



Dhol

If there is any festival that unites all Bengalis, it is Pahela Baishakh. Heraldng the day are the pulsating beats of Bengali *dhol* (drum) with the timeless song "Ami Takdum Tak Dum Bajai Bangladeshi-Dhol" (popularised by Sachin Dev Burman).

Bengali *dhol* is a must have instrument in folk songs such as *Jari*, *Shari* and *Kobi Gaan*. During Chaitra, the last month of the Bengali year, *dhulis* (dhol players) all over the country wake up from their cultural hibernation of sorts. Pahela Baishakh is always the busiest time for them and they are booked much in advance by numerous cultural organisations.

"*Dhol* comes first, then *dhol*. No traditional festivity like Chaitra Shangranti, Sangkranti, Borshi Banam or Pahela Baishakh, is complete without *dhol*. When the *dhol* ushers in the new day, all Bengalis, regardless of caste and creed, get united. After all, we are the sons and daughters of the

same mother, Bangladesh," says noted *dhuli*, Dashedar Das.

Dhol is one of the oldest musical instruments of Bengal and is made of a big wooden shell with two parchment heads tightened by leather straps. It is hung in a slanted position on the shoulder when played.

The *dhol* dates back to 15th century. It was probably



Haal Khata



The tradition of opening *haal khata* -- which was on the verge of extinction in the urban areas -- is now being resurrected and gaining popularity among young entrepreneurs. Until recent times, only shops in the Old Dhaka area kept the tradition alive. However, more and more people are opening new account books on Pahela Baishakh after closing the previous ones. This year will be no different in the Old Dhaka areas. Most *arot* or wholesale stores have taken on a festive look, while invitations have been sent out to all the regular buyers. Festivities are most vibrant among traders from Shakhari Bazar, Shamay Bazar and Bangla Bazaar, as they print invitation cards and arrange sweets and Biryani to serve to their clientele on the day. Muslim traders usually hold *milad*, while Hindu traders offer *puja* to begin the *haal khata* celebrations.

| | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|
| 11:15 | Nobo Anone jago | Boishakh TV |
| 03:20 | Telefilm: Akash Bondhi | |
| 08:00 | Phang Phoran | |
| | Drama: Oshovo | |
| 08:45 | Porinoti | |
| 11:00 | Bihongo Kotha | |
| | Baishakh-er Rong | |
| | Legeche Mone | |
| 10:30 | Baishakhe Phulshakhe | |
| 03:30 | Sports Week | |
| 08:00 | Drama: Milonmela | |
| 09:25 | Portey Prantore | |
| 11:05 | Diganta Music | |
| | Hour (Live) | |
| 11:30 | Invincible | |
| 01:30 | Today's Adha | |
| Part VI | | |

| | | |
|-------|---------------------------|-------|
| 09:30 | Baishakhi Rong | RADIO |
| 11:05 | Baishakhi Mela 1418 | |
| 04:05 | Telefilm: Shan | |
| | Baishakhi Nouka | |
| | Baich | |
| 07:50 | Drama: Shopno Ebong | |
| | Shopno Bongho | |
| 11:30 | Jibon Chole Katter Ghoray | |

| | | | |
|-------|------------------|-------|--------------------|
| 06:00 | Bhorer Janay | 10:00 | Morning Express |
| 09:00 | Mukhboro Joneoy | 01:00 | No Tension |
| 12:00 | Duranto Dupurey | 04:00 | Dhaka Calling |
| 03:00 | Duranto Bilekey | 09:00 | Back to Back Music |
| 05:00 | Shondhatarika | 10:00 | Today's Adha |
| 07:00 | Shager Maya | 10:30 | ROB TUNI FM 89.9 |
| 09:00 | Raat-er Akashay | 11:00 | Good Morning Dhaka |
| 11:00 | Galper Shech Nei | 12:00 | Today's Adha |
| | Radio Foorti | 04:00 | U Turn |

| | | | |
|-------------------|-------|------------------------------------|-------|
| Chhobir Desh-e | 10:00 | Chhobir Desh-e | 10:00 |
| Kabitar Desh-e | 10:30 | Kabitar Desh-e | 10:30 |
| On ETV at 10:10pm | | Single Episode TV | |
| | | Play | |
| | | Cast: Mir Sabbir, Afsana Ara Bindu | |

| | | | |
|-------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|
| Airtel Presents | 10:00 | Bhobashi Tai | 10:00 |
| On ETV at 11:30pm | | Tele-film | |
| | | Cast: Hillol, Bidya Sinha Mim | |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|-------------------|-------|----------------------|-------|
| Epar Opar | 10:00 | On Rtv at 09:55pm | 10:00 |
| On Rtv at 09:55pm | | Single Episode TV | |
| | | Play | |
| | | Cast: Shojol, Sarika | |

| | | | |
|-------|----------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|
| 12:00 | Ajker Shongbadpotro | 03:30 | Unbreakable |
| 09:00 | Concert: Baishakhi | 06:50 | Breaking and Entering |
| | Utsab | 09:30 | The Sum of All Fears |
| 12:10 | Baishakhi Kabir Shong | 12:10 | Friday the 13th: A New Beginning |
| 01:15 | Trisna | | |
| 02:40 | Concert: Baishakhi | | |
| | Utsab | | |
| 09:00 | Drama: Chhayachokh | | |
| | Jolchhup | | |
| 11:30 | Television: Bhalobashi Tai | | |
| 01:45 | Gazikuti Champabati | | |
| 07:50 | Gaan-er Pakhi | | |
| 09:30 | Nache Moni Dhinak | | |