



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: An artist paints artworks on cork sheets on School-Club Road in Chapainawabganj, a potter adds to the beauty of earthen toys at Basail Paulpara in Tangail, and an artist gives finishing touches to a mask made of cork sheets at Sadhutari village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila as the country prepares to celebrate Bangla New Year Pahela Baishakh on Saturday.

PHOTO: STAR

# Country prepares to celebrate Pahela Baishakh

## Heyday for potters, cork artisans ahead of Bangla New Year

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Traditional potters, mostly belonging to Pal community, are passing busy time making different earthen items ahead of Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla New Year.

Our Tangail Correspondent reports: The potters in different upazilas under the district are now giving final touch to their products for selling these at Baishakhi Mela (fair).

The local potters make the earthen items throughout the year but demands of their products sees a rise before the Pahela Baishakh.

This correspondent recently visited different potters' villages, locally called paulpara, including Basail, Rashora, Kashil and Karatia in Basail upazila.

The potters were seen painting their earthen toys, including dolls, birds, tigers, lions, elephants, deer, horses, ducks, mangoes, litchis, bananas, pots, banks and tubs, to make those attractive.

Many of the traditional potter families in the area have left the profession due to decreasing



PHOTO: STAR

A potter makes clay dolls at Palora Paulpara in Manikganj Sadar upazila for sale at the upcoming Baishakhi Mela.

demand of earthen items amid flooding of the market by plastic and aluminium items, said Babu Pal of Basail Paulpara.

"The works to make earthen items are hard while profits are low. However, we some families are still hanging on the ancestral profession as we do not know any other works," he added.

Our Manikganj Correspondent reports: Potters of Manikganj are passing busy time to make clay toys ahead of Baishakhi Mela. They have already made enough toys. Now is the drying job. Then there will be colour shade.

This correspondent visited Palora Paulpara of Manikganj Sadar upazila on Friday and talked to the potters about their preparations for Baishakhi Mela.

They said there are about one thousand potter families living in nearly one hundred paulparas in seven upazilas of Manikganj.

"We make and sell different earthen things round the year. However, the demand for various types of clay toys including dolls, horses, elephants, cats, rabbits, crane and lions increase centring the Baishakhi Mela held to receive Bangla New Year," said Bishnu Pal, 47.

"The new generation of the Pal community are leaving the parental profession due to not getting fair price and dignity. Government patronage is needed to save the tradition," said Nasir Uddin, chairman of Betila-Mitora union parishad of Manikganj Sadar upazila.

Our Lalmonirhat Correspondent reports: Dozens of cork artisans in Lalmonirhat are seen busy making different masks and portrait of beasts, birds, flowers ahead of Bangla New Year Pahela Baishakh.

They are happy to get around 20 percent more order than that of last year.

"I have got ten orders for supplying masks and portraits worth Tk 65 thousand this season while it was Tk 52 thousand last year. I am taking the help of my wife and daughter for making cork accessories at home," said Ramanus Chandra Barmon, 45, a cork artisan at Sadhutari village in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

Rashedul Islam, 22, a student of Lalmonirhat Government College, said he and

his friends have ordered for 250 pieces of cork goods include 100 pieces of masks and rest 150 pieces are portraits of beasts, birds and flowers to observe Pahela Baishakh with a different taste this year.

Our Nilphamari Correspondent adds: Prosanto Chandra Paul, 50, and his wife Shefali Rani Paul, 45, of Chawra Palpara village at Khata Modhupur union under Saidpur upazila of the district are working hard to make colourful earthen fancy goods ahead of Pahela Baishakh.

As they are skilled potters, wholesalers from the district town made unwritten agreement with him to supply them clay made fancy goods to sell those at Baishakhi Mela.

Like them, all the 360 potter families in the village, constituting their largest community in the district, are now passing busy time as their products are of great attraction to visitors.

Many members of the potters' community lamented that the demand of clay-made goods are declining day by day as people prefer plastic and steel goods.

## Goodbye gridlock

### Tangail town breathes sigh of relief as cop initiatives ease jams

MIRZA SHAKIL with ANDREW EAGLE

For several years Tangail town has been beset by traffic jams. Frustrated town-dwellers barely hoped that the situation would ever improve. Recent police initiatives are finally achieving success in lessening vehicle clutter on the town's roads, bringing much-needed relief to residents.

"Traffic was the town's most pressing problem," says Sujit Kumar Roy, the newly-assigned police superintendent who has been coordinating traffic reduction efforts. "With the help of municipal authorities and other stakeholders we have introduced restrictions on the movement of battery-run auto-rickshaws and it's making a difference."

The superintendent held several meetings with local authorities as well as auto-rickshaw owners' and workers' associations to negotiate a better system. The three thousand licensed auto-rickshaws have since been allocated

yellow or red stickers that permit them to operate either morning or afternoon shifts, rather than all day.

Police have meanwhile conducted a drive against the up-to-seven-thousand unlicensed vehicles, with around fourteen auto-rickshaw stands sealed by executive magistrate's order and unlicensed vehicles from other areas banned from entering the town. A team of forty police officers has been tasked with ongoing implementation of the changes.

"It used to be tough to go anywhere in the town because of acute gridlock at almost every intersection," says Saiful Islam, a resident of the Biswas Betka area. "The new system has noticeably alleviated the problem, even though the auto-rickshaw fares to some areas have increased."

"Traffic jams are much less common since the removal of illegal vehicles and the introduction of shifts," notes auto-rickshaw driver Abdul Kader. "But our

incomes have taken a hit from being restricted to working half-days, particularly because vehicle owners have not adjusted their rent charges."

"It used to be all but impossible for traffic police to maintain an orderly flow of traffic in the town," remarks one traffic inspector, Rafiqul Islam. "The new initiatives have brought about an almost magical improvement." Yet many Tangail residents say there is more to be done. In historic Tangail most roads have no footpaths and many shopping malls and high-rise complexes have been built without car parking facilities. Alongside footpath construction and the much-needed construction of connecting roads, residents have urged the authorities to remove haphazardly placed markets and shopping malls from the heart of the town; and to increase the size of the roads at key points like the Old Bus Stand and Nirala intersections.



Traffic in Tangail town has eased after the initiatives taken by the traffic police and the municipal authorities. Inset, the chaotic traffic in the town before the actions.

PHOTO: STAR



A woman takes care of her Napier grass field at Shalmarra village in Aditmari upazila of Lalmonirhat.

PHOTO: STAR

## Grass farming gets popular

### Farmers are encouraged as it brings profit to them in Lalmonirhat

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Unexpected profit and rise in the price of grass, the main fodder for cattle, have encouraged some farmers in the district to grow grass commercially.

Some farmers are growing grass as fodder for their cattle while some others are farming it commercially for earning good profit by selling it in the local market.

Sadar Upazila Livestock Officer Dr Maqbul Hossain told this correspondent that grass farming was not popular among the farmers four years ago, but it has become popular now. "Now, the farmers are highly interested in farming grass for earning good profit from it," he said, adding that fodder prices have increased as cattle rearing has increased in the district.

Grass farmer Subhas Chandra Barman, 56, of Shalmarra village in Aditmari upazila, said they get around 42 tonnes of grass from each bigha of land, spending around Tk 30,000 a

year. "We sell a five kg bundle of grass for Tk 10 in the field," he said, adding that they grow only Napier variety grass.

"There was not much demand for Napier grass three years ago and we did not get expected profit from farming grass," said Nazrul Islam, 48, of the

same village. "The demand for grass as fodder for cattle has increased now and we are earning good profit," he said, adding that he cultivated grass on three bighas of land this year.

Sandhya Bala, 46, of Bhelabari village said they never use chemical fertiliser or pesticide on the grass field,

adding that they use only compost fertiliser and uproot the weeds regularly. "After feeding our four cows, we sell the rest in the local market," she said, adding that she cultivated grass on two bighas.

Cattle farmer Abdus Samad, 52, of Kulaghat village in Sadar upazila, said he purchases Napier variety grass from the growers and uses it as fodder for his three cattle. "Napier grass is good for milk cows," he said, adding that 12 kg to 15 kg of grass are needed for each cow every day.

District Livestock Officer Dr Nasir Uddin Khan told this correspondent that they conduct awareness building campaigns among the cattle farmers for farming Napier variety grass and also give training in this regard. "Napier grass is a nourishing fodder item for cattle. Milk cows give good production if they are provided grass regularly," he added.

*Fodder prices have increased as cattle rearing has increased in Lalmonirhat.*