



The illustrious past of Aloobazar's band parties is on the wane today. With the groups getting fewer bookings by the day, their artists now find themselves in deep economic misery.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Now there's ONLY SILENCE

Overlooked and underpaid, Aloobazar's band party artists enduring tough times

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

It's a curious term. When you hear of a "band party", you know it's different from a musical band, although a band party accomplishes the same function: to provide entertainment through music.

This age-old, traditional group has been playing soundtracks for various events for close to a hundred years, from wedding events and birthdays to election campaigns.

In Old Dhaka's Aloobazar alone, there are four band parties carrying on with the craft, with over 100 artists associated with these troupes.

But for all the history and practitioners' passion, the form has been on the decline for years, especially in the aftermath of Covid-19, as economic hardship has pushed band party musicians to look for more stable incomes elsewhere.

The four band parties of Aloobazar are Bangladesh Band Party, Dhaka Band Party, National Band Party and New National Band Party.

The band parties of Aloobazar have a singular origin.

It all started with Mohammad Kha, who brought the culture to the old town in the '30s.

His four wives and five sons were band artists as well.

In 1948, his son Siraj Kha started the National Band Party. After Siraj died in 1993, it was handed down to his two sons, the younger of whom is Arman "band master".

Arman's eldest brother Mohammad Reaz founded New National Band Party in 1996.

He said business was at its peak

during and right after Pakistan period. But with the advent of portable audio players, speakers and DJ parties, band party culture in general started to diminish.

Back in the glory days, a band party used to get booked for three to four events a day, which even included playing for films at times. Nowadays, they're lucky to even get one.

Twenty years ago, they used to get Tk 5,000 for a gig, minus transportation



and costume.

But these days, they only get Tk 3,000-4,000.

New National Band Party completely shut down during 2020 due to the pandemic and only started operating at a small scale around eight months ago, he added.

Reaz said all the other band parties



in the area are run by his relatives, while some artists are from their family too. In addition, there are 20-30 regular artists, while others come in for gigs on a freelance basis.

This correspondent also spoke to Dhaka Band Party artist Mohammad Saeed.

His father was Rustam Kha, eldest son of Mohammad Kha.

The 60-year-old said he couldn't get married due to financial hardship, as his profession never paid well enough. But he persisted and continued his father's trade.

Asked why, he boldly said, "It's in our blood," mentioning that he started out at the young age of 11.

All five of his brothers used to be in

this profession, but he's the only one still at it today.

He said costs for band party include shop space rent, buying instruments and dresses and paying proprietor Arman Tk 200 per gig.

The rest of the money earned from a gig is split between the artists, he further said. Saeed said these days, they barely get one or at maximum two gigs per week, mentioning that they got no help during the hardest phases of the pandemic, when bookings ran out altogether.

Even as they bring this time-tested art form deeper into the new century, the band party artists of Aloobazar are spending their days in disappointment – dissatisfied over their economic condition and anxious about the gradual extinction of their craft.

SINHA MURDER Pradeep, Liaqat transferred to Ctg Central Jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The death row convicts in Maj (retd) Sinha murder case Pradeep Kumar Das and Liaqat Ali were transferred to Chattogram Central Jail from Cox's Bazar jail yesterday.

Jailer Dewan Md Tariqul Islam told The Daily Star that following the higher authorities' order, they were taken to the condemned cell at Chattogram jail around 1:30pm. "They will be kept here until further notice," he added.

A Cox's Bazar court on January 31 sentenced Liaqat Ali, inspector of Baharchhara Investigation Centre; and Pradeep Kumar Das, suspended officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station, to death and six others to life term imprisonment in the murder case. The court also acquitted seven others from the charges.

A case filed by ACC against Pradeep and his wife Chumki is also under trial at a Chattogram court. Chumki is on the run.

2 Russian workers die at Rooppur power plant

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Two Russian employees of Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant at Ishwardi upazila in Pabna died early yesterday.

The deceased are Chukin Pavel (59), an engineer of Russian company Trest Rossem, and Talmachev Vayachesluy (50), an employee of SMU Engineering-1, a construction firm. Paven died of cardiac arrest while Vayachesluy died after falling from the stairs of a dormitory in the Green City residential area, said OC Md Asaduzzaman of Ishwardi Police Station.

He said Pavel had chest pain for the last couple of days and was under treatment. Vayachesluy fell from the 7th floor stairs of the dormitory. He was declared dead at Ishwardi upazila health complex. The OC said both the bodies will be sent to Russia through the embassy after autopsy.

HOSPITAL AT CRB PM to make final decision

Says railways minister; suspends 2 officials for mismanagement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan yesterday said the prime minister will take the final decision to build a hospital in Chattogram's Central Railway Building (CRB) area.

He said this to journalists after visiting the construction site of a project – a multi-storey building for Railway Employees Welfare Trust – in Chattogram Railway Station area.

Meanwhile, the minister also ordered to suspend two officials of the project over mismanagement.

After going to the railway station around noon, Sujan expressed his displeasure at seeing parked vehicles and unplanned shops in the area.

This lead the minister to immediately direct Jahangir Hossain, general manager of railway (east zone), to temporarily suspend Shams Md Tushar, divisional railway manager, and Ratan Kumar Chowdhury, manager of Chattogram Railway Station.

Sujan also visited proposed ICD construction area at Goods Port Yard, where locals handed over a memorandum to him, demanding protection of graveyard and waterbodies on the site.

Pineapple season comes early

Rangamati growers all smiles

A CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

When it comes to growing pineapples, Rangamati is on the frontlines of the race. Due to the region's favourable weather, thousands of tonnes of pineapple is produced here alone.

Usually, pineapple is cultivated between June and July. But for the last seven years, its being cultivated in January and February as well.

The reason behind this early cultivation through the off-seasons is the introduction of added hormones to the process. On the eight to 11th month, when 30-40 leaves of the seedlings have sprouted, three cups of Rifin-15 mixed with 18 litres of water is sprinkled. Later, Ethrel hormones are used to fast-track the growth.

Tapan Kumar Paul, deputy director of Department of Agriculture Extension, said, "Pineapple is cultivated across 10 upazilas of Rangamati, Naniachar being

the most popular. Over 2,130 hectares in Rangamati is cultivated for pineapple, bearing a total production of 55,913 tonnes."

Nirmal Chakma, a farmer from Naniachar upazila, brings around 5,000 pineapples by boat to Banarupa Samata Ghat, selling each for Tk 13 on average. He said he cultivated around 41,000 saplings this year.

Nandini Chakma, from Naniachar, said she brings around 35,000 pineapples to the weekly market and sells each for Tk 12-15, depending on the size. Almost 17,000 saplings were grown by her family.

Local trader, Md Burhan said, "We purchase each pineapple for Tk 13-15 and sell them at Tk 20-25. We make very little profit due to transportation cost. Besides, we have to pay Tk 500 for every truck, along with Tk 300 toll charge."

"The drivers' association have also increased transport fares to cope with the



Although pineapples are commonly regarded as a summer fruit, the growers of Rangamati have found a way to speed up the cultivation process and make it available to consumers even in winter. The pineapple growers board large boats with thousands of the fruit, and make their way to Banarupa Samata Ghat. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

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