





A dhaki for 45 years, Shanti Ranjan Das (right), leads his troupe during Maha Shashthi of Durga Puja at Dhakeshwari National Temple on Friday evening. For musicians like him, devotion to tradition must contend with the hard realities of making a living in Dhaka.

PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

The beating heart of DURGA PUJA

For Dhaka's vanishing dhakis, devotion outlasts the pay

SUBRATA ROY *and* **DOWEL BISWAS**

Inside the dimly lit courtyard of the ancient Ramna Kali Mandir, the scent of burning incense, its smoke curling through the air, and the rhythmic beating of the dhak lend an ethereal quality to the atmosphere. Dusk settles on Maha Shashthi, and the priest begins offering the first Sandhya Aarti to Goddess Durga.

The slow, heavy thuds of the dhak initially match the measured arcs of the priest's panchapradip. Then the dhakis shift to mid-tempo patterns, alternating deep beats with sharp, wooden rim shots.

Suddenly, the drums explode into a deafening crescendo, transforming the solemn ritual into an electric celebration.

There is a saying among Bangalee Hindu devotees: "Dhak chhara Durga Puja hoy na" -- Durga Puja cannot take place without the dhak.

A large, barrel-shaped wooden drum wrapped in animal hide, the dhak is the literal heartbeat of the ritual. When dhakis strike its hide, the sound is not just heard but felt, vibrating through the chest. It is a sacred language, integral to Sharadiya Durga Puja celebrations.

Yet, this centuries-old craft is sustained by a class of traditional musicians who are navigating a modern world where legacy is fighting a losing battle against the cost of living in a megacity.

For Binoy Das, 35, the five days of the festival offer a brief, transcendent escape from his everyday life. A garment factory worker in Gazipur, he travels to the capital every autumn to perform as a seasonal drummer at Ramna Kali Mandir, bringing with him a seven-member troupe that includes a sanai (traditional oboe) player, a flautist, and a bell player.

None of them are full-time musicians. They are salon owners and agricultural labourers who put down their scissors and sickles and pick up their instruments when the festival arrives.

Binoy has been a dhaki for 14 years. This year, he will receive Tk 18,000 for his performance, an amount he says isn't enough for five days of intense physical labour in an inflation-weary economy.

"Considering the cost of living in Dhaka and the quality of my work,

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Trump waives key sanctions, tariffs on Russia

Zelensky says move emboldens Putin

AGENCIES

President Donald Trump waived key Russia-related US sanctions and tariffs days before they were to take effect under a law he signed last month, including duties on the country's goods and penalties for buying its oil and gas.

X yesterday, said Trump's latest action emboldens Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"A US sanctions blackout, easing pressure on the aggressor, financial rewards for Putin – all of this only encourages him to keep attacking. We must not give up ground," wrote Zelensky, who said Russia on Friday struck more than 15 Ukrainian power generation and transmission sites. "We must keep trying to end the war. To end it, not give Putin every reason to continue it indefinitely."

Weeks before US midterm elections in which Trump's Republicans are battling to maintain their narrow grip on both chambers of Congress, the new measures could have risked further raising oil prices as Americans

The law is meant to increase pressure on Russia for its invasion of Ukraine that began in 2022. Trump, however, has been warming toward Moscow while publicly criticising Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, including suggesting Kyiv needs a new leader.

In an executive order released by the White House on Friday, Trump said the waiver was in the national interests of the United States.

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Zelenskiy, in a message posted on

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Biman suspends Riyadh flights indefinitely

Plans to resume Dammam flights Oct 21

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has suspended Riyadh-bound flights indefinitely following attacks on Saudi airports.

Meanwhile, it plans to resume flights to Dammam in Saudi Arabia from October 21, subject to clearance from airport authorities.

In a press release yesterday, the national flag carrier said flights to Riyadh would remain suspended for passenger safety until further instructions from the airport authorities.

Meanwhile, Biman said its flights to Jeddah and Madinah are operating as usual, and passengers needing to travel urgently to Saudi Arabia can use these airports.

The airline said it would continue using higher-capacity aircraft on the Madinah route until October 18 before returning to Boeing 787 aircraft from October 19.

Biman is also arranging additional flights to Jeddah based on passenger demand, although it has not announced a schedule.

The airline said it would provide further updates on flight operations and schedules. Passengers have been advised to contact Biman sales offices for ticketing, bookings, and travel information.

17 killed in Kolkata Durga Puja stampede

At least 25 injured; 13 women, 1 child among the dead

AGENCIES

At least 17 people, including 13 women and a child, were killed and two dozen more injured yesterday in Kolkata after a stampede that was likely caused by sudden rainfall during a Hindu religious gathering, officials said.

West Bengal's Chief Minister Suvendhu Adhikari told reporters the fatalities included a seven-year-old girl, adding that 25 others were injured outside a pavilion "in a stampede" at the Hindu festival of Durga Puja.

"Six bodies have so far been identified," Adhikari said.

A senior police official at the scene told AFP an announcement caused "commotion" after it started raining at night and the "crowd waiting outside the pandal (pavilion) was pushing, pulling and rushing forward and fell on the ground, leading to the stampede."

"Today, around 19:40, a stampede occurred at the exit gate of the Sarada Park (Chor Bagan) Puja Pandal in the Girish Park Police Station area due to heavy crowds of pandal visitors amid rain. All injured persons were rescued and taken to MCH (Medical College and Hospital)," the Kolkata Police said in a statement.

A witness told news agency ANI that many people lost consciousness during the stampede. Many were rushed to the hospital on motorcycles.

Another witness blamed narrow entry and exit gates for the tragedy.

"The entrance was very narrow, and the exit gate was also narrow. There was no lighting in the area....My daughter and granddaughter are hospitalised," he said.



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi termed the incident extremely distressing. He has announced interim compensation of Rs 2 lakh for the families of those who died. The injured will receive Rs 50,000 each.

Deadly crowd incidents are a frequent occurrence at Indian mass events, such as religious festivals, due to poor management

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STRANDED IN CAMBODIA

Oct 31 deadline looms over 1,800

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Mohammad Sentu has been stranded in Cambodia for three and a half years. Jobless and with an expired visa, he has repeatedly tried to return to Bangladesh but failed.

"I have been cheated repeatedly. I bought tickets two or three times but lost the money," said Sentu, from Singair in Manikganj.

"I have no money left to buy a ticket," he said. He now occasionally cooks for other Bangladeshis in exchange for food.

The Bangkok mission had received requests concerning 1,796 Bangladeshis stranded in Cambodia through phone calls, emails, direct applications and community contacts.

Sentu is among hundreds of Bangladeshis stranded in Cambodia after being lured by promises of lucrative jobs. Some were allegedly forced to work in online scam centres and tortured when they tried to escape.

Government data show that around 1,300 to 1,400 Bangladeshis are awaiting return, while Anirban Survivor Voice Foundation, a survivor-led rights organisation, estimates that more than 2,000 remain stranded. Around 1,800 face uncertainty over an October 31 deadline linked to immigration overstay penalties, the organisation said.

The plight of those trying to return came into focus on September 3, when Cambodian immigration police detained

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Masked protesters react amid tear gas during clashes at Place de la République in Paris yesterday, as "Yellow Vests" protests over the cost of living and rising fuel prices spread across France. The demonstrations have drawn students, teachers, parents, workers, farmers, retirees and labour unions, with demands ranging from better school conditions to government action in addressing inequality.

PHOTO: REUTERS