

## FridaySpecial

## Traditional fine pottery making a comeback

Turanur Islam

Bangali culture, for thousands of years, has been recognised for its exuberant fine arts and crafts all over the world.

Pottery, pots, dishes, and other articles made of earthenware or baked clay – a tangible and iconic element of our history and once a famous art form – is now getting lost in the crowds of modern synthetic products.

In Bangladesh, clay items have become out of fashion day by day. But after 2015, clay-made items and terracotta art are getting popular, especially in urban households.

Vases and wall hangings made using clay give a modern and aesthetic look in the drawing-room. Clay utensils are the most selling items according to artisans and sellers. People are not only buying such items for their dining room, but restaurants and tea/coffee shops too are using these to give their restaurants a more traditional look and attract more customers.

Aarong, a leading lifestyle retail chain in our country that works with rural artisans, has been trying to popularise our ethnic cultural heritage since 1976. There is an earthenware and terracotta crafts section in every Aarong retail shop, where they sell locally produced clay-made utensils and decorative items that match the modern urban taste.

Alongside popular retail chains, earthenware and decorative clay items can be found everywhere in Dhaka city. Small vendors sell clay-made items using vans on the street. Some vendors set up temporary shops on the footpath at important places throughout the city.

Rezwan, a pottery seller near Mirpur Stadium, said, “Business is not bad at this time. I get my items from different places. Most of them come



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from Barishal and Cumilla, and some come from Savar and other regions. Earthen tubs and vases are the most sold items here.”

Ananda Pal, a wholesaler and third-generation potter at the capital's Rayer Bazaar area, told The Business Post, “Demand is very high, and during the lockdown, many online shops had bought from us.

“However, business is not that good here. Nowadays, many people are joining wholesale businesses, and competition is hard. The potters are not getting fair prices and many are leaving their business.”

Clay Station Dhaka, an initiative for urban people to experience the pottery-making process as well as making them with their own hands, has been organising workshops at the Banani area for some years. They also offer customised pottery printing services.

Abu Sayeed Chowdhury, co-founder of Clay Station Dhaka, said, “Clay Station is inspired from a clay studio we visited in the USA. Anyone can join our workshops and make clay crafts. They can experience all the fun processes involved in creating clay items.”

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are sold all over the country comes from Bauphal, Patuakhali. Bauphal has a long tradition of making countries some of the best pottery items.

During the late '90s, NCCB Lifetime Achievement Award winner Shri Vishweshwar Pal took the initiative to popularize the artistry of Bauphal's potters.

At present, more than 500 families are involved in this industry in Madanpura, Konkadia and Boga Unions of Bauphal and Bilbilas area of Bauphal Union. In addition, more than 500 families are involved in the industry as co-artisans.

Komol Paul, a Golden Jubilee of Independence Honors Award winner, took responsibility for his father's ancestral pottery business in Bauphal back in 2016.

Komol used to be a construction security worker in Singapore, Brunei, and Malaysia before he took over his father's business. Since then, he is working hard to improve his business, as well as other families of potters in the Bauphal area.

Speaking about the difficulties he faced in the first few years, he said, “At first I couldn't get any loans because I did not meet the lenders' criteria. Potters do not get loans from banks. So, many of them take loans at high-interest rates from money lenders.”

Komol slowly saved up money and grew his business. At present, he is shipping earthenware all over the country, and retail chains such as Aarong are buying from him every month.

But still, potters are facing difficulties sourcing raw materials. For some years, they could not dig out clay from khas lands. After a long time, last year they came to an agreement with the authorities to get clay from khas lands.

Lack of modern machinery and techniques, the production was slow and they could not get fair profit. Komol, with the help of YouTube, came to know about machines that could increase the quantity of earthenware they produce and ease some of their laborious processes.

So he went to India to learn how to build those machines and brought a small one with him. After some trial and error, he was able to make a working machine. At present, the wedging and bisque firing process is done using machines.

He also replaced the hand-operated wheel with motorized wheels. This has increased production with less

labor. Many potters are now making machinery with the help of Komol.

“This is our ancestral heritage. Better a poor horse than no horse at all,” he said.

At present, Komol has 35 permanent artisans and workers, and during festivals, he employs about 100 more to meet the demand. He also ensures a strict no-child labor policy at his workshop.

In 2020, he organised a tour for his employees and their families at the Cox's Bazar with his own money.

“I wish the pottery industry will flourish just as it did in the past. The government and concerned organizations should take more initiatives for the betterment of the potters,” he added.

Rahul Barua, Assistant General Manager, Small and Medium Enterprise Foundation of the government said, “Our relationships with the artisans of small and medium entrepreneurs are better than any other industry. We visit and arrange seminars and workshops at their houses.

“Last year, we arranged a discussion meeting at Bauphal. We know their problems and have been working to solve them. Finance is a major issue and we are trying to provide assistance to help them get loans.”

Archeologists have found evidence of clay-made items dating back to the Mesolithic period, indicating their durability. Pottery has been found at its earliest form in India among Vindhya hunter-gatherers – a group of people who lived in west-central India during 7,000-6,000 BC – during the Mesolithic period.

Over time, India's simple style of molding clay went into evolution and created some of the best clay-made items in the world like West Bengal's Terracotta pottery or Gujarat's Khavda Pottery.

Indian couple  
sues son for  
\$650,000 or  
‘grandchild’

AFP . Dehradun

An Indian couple are taking their son to court demanding that he and his wife produce either a grandchild within a year or cough up almost \$650,000.

Sanjeev and Sadhana Prasad say that they exhausted their savings raising and educating their pilot son and paying for a lavish wedding.

Now they want payback.

“My son has been married for six years but they are still not planning a baby. At least if we have a grandchild to spend time with, our pain will become bearable,” the couple said in their petition filed with a court in Haridwar last week.

The compensation they are demanding -- 50 million rupees -- includes the cost of a wedding reception in a five-star hotel, a luxury car worth \$80,000 and paying for the couple's honeymoon abroad, the Times of India reported Thursday.

The parents also forked out \$65,000 to get their son trained as a pilot in the United States only for him to return to India unemployed, the paper said.

“We also had to take a loan to build our house and now we are going through a lot of financial hardships. Mentally too we are quite disturbed because we are living alone,” the couple said in their petition. The couple's lawyer Arvind Kumar said the petition will be taken up for hearing by the court in northern India on May 17.

India has a strong joint family system with many generations including grandparents, nephews, aunts and uncles often living in the same household.

However, in recent years the trend has shifted, with young couples preferring to move away from their parents or siblings, and wives -- such as in this case -- opting to work rather than focus on having children and staying at home.

HAAB announces Hajj  
package of Tk4,63,744

Staff Correspondent

The Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (HAAB) has announced its general Hajj pilgrimage package of Tk4,63,744 for this year.

The HAAB announced this Hajj package as a private arrangement at a press briefing in a hotel of the capital city on Thursday.

But the cost for sacrificing animals was not included in the package. Every pilgrim has to spend an extra Tk19,683 for sacrificing animals in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, M Shahadat Hossain Taslim, Secretary General of the HAAB told the briefing.

He said the total airfare had been set at Tk1,40,000, house rent at Tk1,58,056, service and domestic transport in Saudi Arabia at Tk42,635 while the remaining would be added for other charges accordingly. Shahadat Hossain said the residential arrangement will be made 1000 to 1500 metre away from Masjid al-Haram ground, the mosque that surrounds the Kaaba in Mecca, for Bangladeshi Hajj pilgrims.

He also mentioned that the money for the Hajj package to be deposited by May 18. On Wednesday State Minister for Religious Affairs Md Faridul Haque Khan announced three Hajj packages.

He said the government's package-1 plan would cost Tk5,27,340, package-2 would cost Tk 4,62,150, while Tk 4,56,530 had been proposed for the private Hajj package.

Flights will carry Bangladeshi pilgrims to Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj on May 31, according to the Civil Aviation

and Tourism Ministry. Shahadat Hossain Taslim told The Business Post they had requested the Religious Affairs Ministry and the Ministry of Civil Aviation to fix the Hajj fare at Tk 1.25 lakh to make it affordable for the pilgrims.

However, the government did not play any role in regulating airfare and other expenditures.

This year, the government has fixed the fare for the round trip at Tk.4 lakh.

Airfare is a bit higher due to the increase in fuel prices but the government has set a reasonable price for Hajj pilgrims, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mahbub Ali has recently told the media at a meeting on Hajj management at the secretariat.

Over the last two years, the biggest annual congregation of the Muslims has been held on a very limited scale with no one allowed to perform Hajj from outside Saudi Arabia.

In 2019, a total of 1.27 lakh Bangladeshis were allowed to perform Hajj and the airfare was Tk 1.28 lakh.

This year, a total of 57,856 pilgrims will be able to perform Hajj from Bangladesh.

Biman Bangladeshi Airlines will carry 31,000 pilgrims through 75 dedicated flights, while Saudi Arabian airlines will carry the rest of the passengers.

Earlier, Saudi Arabia raised the number of Hajj pilgrims from inside and outside the kingdom to one million in 2022, the authorities announced in a statement on April 9.

Hajj is open to those who are fully vaccinated against Covid-19 and are under the age of 65, added the statement.

TO AVOID CONGESTION AT CTG PORT  
Berthed container ships getting priority

Saleh Noman

The authorities of the Chattogram Port, the country's prime way of export and import, are now giving priority to container ships rather than bulk cargoes to bring the chaotic situation to an end at the port.

The chaotic situation created by insufficient delivery of goods during the Eid is yet to come to normalcy even after one week of the Eid holiday.

Usually ships and containers were stuck at the port due to lack of other activities including delivery of goods during the Eid holidays.

At least 26 container ships were found at the port on Thursday, 12 container vessels at the jetty inside the port and 14 more waiting at the outer anchorage.

On the day, there were more than 42,000 TEUS containers at the yard with a capacity of 49,000 TEUS.

Generally, containers are unloaded at 10 jetties inside the port and bulk cargo is unloaded at six jetties. But to handle the situation, containers are now being unloaded at 12 jetties of the port whereas bulk cargo unloading at the jetty has been reduced.

Mohammad Omar Faruq, Secretary of

the port authority, said special measures had been taken to reduce the congestion at the port due to lack of work during the Eid holidays so that normalcy could be restored soon. If the delivery of goods is high, the situation will improve quickly, he said, adding, “We urge importers and the persons concerned to take timely delivery of goods.”

At least a quarter of the yard space had to be left vacant to keep the port activities normal but only 12-13 percent of the port yard had been open for the last week. Despite the disruption of normal activities, on Thursday container delivery was 51.00 TEUS, which port sources say is quite normal.

Sources said now container ships have to wait for 3-4 days for berthing at the port and bulk cargoes have to wait for 5-6 days. On Thursday out of 88 ships loaded with imported goods work was going on in 47 ships including 12 container ships.

However, Syed Mohammad Arif, President of the Shipping Agents Association, said all carriers needed to be given equal importance, noting that bulk cargo could be hit hard if priority was given to container shipping schedules.

Seventy-five percent of the cargo

transported through the port of Chittagong is bulk cargo, most of which is unloaded from mother vessels by lighterage vessels and only 25 percent are carried in containers but more than 90 percent exports are carried by containers.

**Impact of instability at Sri Lankan ports on exports**

Due to ongoing political instability in Sri Lanka unrest at the transshipment port in Colombo has multiplied the chaotic situation created at the port of Chittagong during the Eid holidays.

Traders and port officials say all this will complicate the situation, creating a major barrier to import and export of goods at the right time.

With the unrest at the transshipment port of Colombo, Sri Lanka is creating more complicated situation for Bangladeshi exporters.

Sources said due to non-functional Colombo port last Monday and Tuesday, there was a 3 to 4-day pandemonium.

However, those concerned are hoping that the situation will improve as works started there on Wednesday. About 40 percent of the container goods exported through Chittagong port is used at Colombo as transshipment port.

## First image of black hole at Milky Way's centre

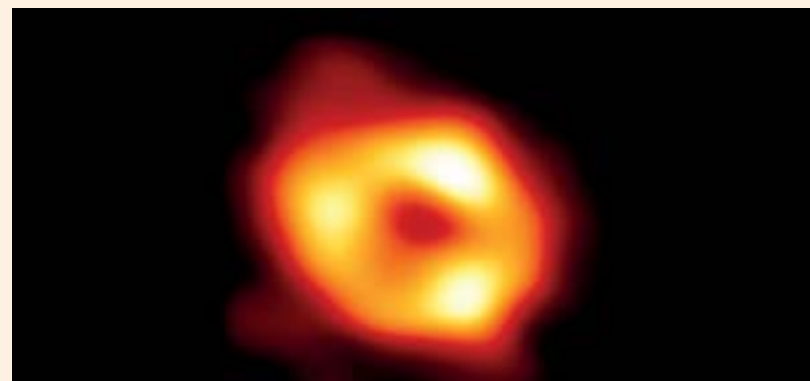
AFP . Paris

An international team of astronomers on Thursday unveiled the first image of a supermassive black hole at the centre of our own Milky Way galaxy – a cosmic body known as Sagittarius A\*.

The image – produced by a global team of scientists known as the Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) Collaboration – is the first, direct visual confirmation of the presence of this invisible object, and comes three years after the very first image of a black hole from a distant galaxy.

Black holes are regions of space where the pull of gravity is so intense that nothing can escape, including light.

The image thus depicts not the black hole itself, because it is completely dark, but the glowing gas that encircles the phenomenon – which is four million times more massive than our Sun – in a bright ring of bending light.



**This is the first image of Sagittarius A (or Sgr A for short), the supermassive black hole at the center of our galaxy**

— Reuters Photo

“These unprecedented observations have greatly improved our understanding of what happens at the very centre of our galaxy,” said EHT project scientist Geoffrey Bower, of Taiwan's Academia Sinica.

Bower also said in a statement provided by the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) that the observations had offered “new insights on how these giant black holes interact with their surroundings”.