

Underpaid artisans losing interest in crafting idols

Turanur Islam

Durga Puja is celebrated every year with its own glory and splendour but the people who craft the idols for the festival are neglected and underpaid turning the next generation away from their hereditary art.

Astami, the most important and populous event of the festival, will be celebrated today. When Bengali Hindu community celebrates Kumari Puja artisans usually leave for home this day but this year they are returning home with a pale smile as they are out of pocket.

Idols of goddess Durga, her daughters and sons and Mahishasura are the main attraction of the festival.

Every year Puja celebration committees across the country strive to be the best at arranging the most magnificent and attractive puja and they commission idol artists to make idols around the country.

Ratan Pal, an idol artist for more than two eras, is currently working at the Ramna Kali Mandir, Dhaka. He takes about 10 orders from different temples and societies every season and earns up to Tk8 lakh.

But it takes three months to complete the process of idol making and needs more than 25 people. In the end, after paying for the raw materials and his employees, he can save around Tk1, 20, 000 to Tk1, 50, 000.

People are celebrating Puja more and more, especially in the city, but artisans are not earning enough to support their families amid soaring prices of essentials.

"The amount of labor and artistic skill needed to complete the process of idol making is immense and I love the work. But when I get paid I have a whole year ahead of me with such little money," he sighed.

Artisans usually take orders after the Rathayatra in the Bengali month of Sraban and the Puja celebration usually takes place in Ashwin.

This year the country saw a massive



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price hike of essentials and inflation half a month after the idol artisans had received orders. Now they cannot do anything as the orders were received much earlier putting them in big trouble.

Dilip Pal, an artisan from Kotwali, Chittagong, has been making idols for 23 years. He took orders from the Puja committee before the price hike like other artisans and when the prices of essentials increased, he demanded some extra money to compensate for some of the losses.

"They asked me to manage somehow this year and assured me of increased wages next year," Dilip said.

Artisans collect materials like clay, hay, straw, bamboo, woods and colors from

different parts of the country. As transportation cost has increased significantly and so has their expenditure.

"When the season starts, we become excited to take part in the centuries-old festival but when we receive the payment, all joys fade away," said one artisan.

However, local rural artisans are facing more problems as they cannot negotiate much due to their social status. Arun Pal, an artisan from the Bagerhat area, has been making idols for generations and his relatives are also involved in this profession. Artisans like him suffered more during the Covid-19 epidemic.

"I managed my family somehow with debt during the pandemic. Small artisans

like me don't get loans and government facilities."

In rural areas, family members of the artisans usually help in the idol making process and they do not employ other workers. This way, they try to keep the cost low but also lose the opportunity to pursue other professions.

Suresh Pal, another artisan from this area, also makes idol. His wife, son, daughter and son-in-law also pursue it as main profession but Suresh is not happy with it.

"I didn't want them to help me, rather I wanted my son to study and get a good job and good life. But I couldn't afford to pay for his education and during the pan-

demic he left his study and joined me permanently."

The next generation is losing interest in this hereditary art due to underpayment and less opportunities to expand business. Bappi Sarkar, a third generation artisan who works in different districts every year has two sons. One is studying in class 10 and the other is in class 6.

His sons do not want to take it as a profession, rather they want government jobs. On the other hand, Ratan Pal's youngest son wants to pursue this art form but Ratan does not want his son to face the problem he is facing right now.

According to Ramayana, Sharda Durga Puja or Akal Bodhan was initiated by Sri Ramachandra. But historical evidence says it probably started in the early 1500s. It is believed that the landlord of Maldar, Dinajpur first started this puja.

He received orders from the goddess in his dream and started celebrating the arrival of the goddess on earth. But that Goddess Durga had a different form. According to folklore, the vehicles of the goddess were a white tiger and a green lion.

The goddess got her present look during the British rule and got popularity throughout Bengal. Since then artisans have been playing a key role in the celebration. Artisans want patrons and the government's help to keep this ancient art alive. They also want to form a welfare society for the betterment of their condition.

The Puja celebration committees of different temples said they are trying their best to help the artisans but they have limitations too.

Ramana Kali Mandir Committee President Utpal Sarkar said, "We provide artisans with a place to work year round. But we cannot increase their payment significantly due to budget and market rate."

"If artisans want to form any welfare society or they need other administrative help, I will earnestly help them," he added.



Razzaque for enhanced use of modern agri-tech

Staff Correspondent

Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque urged for increased use of modern technologies linked with the fourth industrial revelation to boost the country's crops production.

"We have a target to double the country's agricultural productivity by 2030. But we are lagging behind due to the lack of use of those technologies," he said while speaking as the chief guest at a discussion marking the 'National Productivity Day', organised by the agriculture ministry at Osmani Memorial auditorium in the capital on Sunday, said a press release.

Mentioning that the use of artificial intelligence, robotics, and genetic engineering technologies in agriculture boosts production significantly, the minister said, "We need to learn the best use of those technologies to get maximum yield in agricultural production."

"Farmers across the globe have adopted different modern technologies. Now we have to evaluate how much benefit we are getting from these technologies," he added.

Razzaque said, "We have weakness in using technologies. A number of farmers cannot remember how much fertiliser, pesticides and irrigation is needed. Some are using more and some are using less than the required amount. Thus, we cannot harvest the maximum yield."

Exploring SME sector key to boosting economy

BSS . Rangpur

Flourishing the potential of the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector could create more jobs for youths to boost economic activities and growth in strengthening the economy.

The observation came on Sunday at the inaugural function of the month-long Rangpur Industry and Trade Fair-2022 being organized by the Rangpur Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RMCCI) at the Cricket Ground in the city.

The main objective of arranging the fair is to promote the local SME sector, enhance the production of international standard SME products, exhibition and introduction of SME goods for expanding business, trade and commerce and economic activities.

Private sector female and male entrepreneurs, industries, bodies and organizations have set up 120 stalls displaying a huge spectrum of locally produced high-quality SME goods at the fair.

Divisional Commissioner Sabirul Islam inaugurated the fair at a function as the chief guest with Deputy Commissioner Asib Ahsan.

Additional Commissioner of Police of Rangpur Metropolitan Police Saifuzzaman Farooque, RMCCI President Rezaul Islam Milon and Bangladesh Cricket Board Director Advocate Anwarul Islam addressed the event as special guests.

Jewellery shops to remain shut today

Staff Correspondent

Jewellers will keep their shops closed across the country on Monday on the occasion of celebrating Durga Puja, the largest religious festival of the Hindu community.

The Bangladesh Jewellers' Association (BAJUS) came up with the decision on Sunday, said a press release.

The association requested the jewellery traders to keep their shops shut on the day of Maha Ashtami which falls on Monday, read the release.

Sri Lanka cuts tax on female hygiene products

AFP . Colombo

Sri Lanka's government on Sunday cut taxes on female sanitary products in a bid to help women and girls unable to afford them because of the country's economic crisis.

Even before the downturn last year, many schoolgirls and women in Sri Lanka, like in other poor countries, would stay home when menstruating because they couldn't afford sanitary products.

A study this year by policy advocacy group Advocata said "period poverty" -- being unable to afford sanitary products -- among Sri Lanka's 5.3 million women of reproductive age was about 50 per cent.

Campaigners believe the situation has worsened with Sri Lanka suffering severe shortages of essential goods and inflation rates in excess of 70 per cent.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe's office said Sunday that customs duties, airport levies and other local taxes on raw materials imported to make female

hygiene products was waived with immediate effect.

Imported pads and tampons will also cost 20 per cent less due to a reduction in import duties, Wickremesinghe's office said in a statement.

The tax cut was to "make hygiene products more affordable in view of ensuring hygiene among women and school girls," the statement said.

Months of protests over economic hardships led to the resignation of president Gotabaya Rajapaksa in July.

The country defaulted on its \$51 billion foreign debt in April and is in talks with the International Monetary Fund to secure a \$2.9 billion bailout.

The new government of Wickremesinghe on Sunday began implementing a new turnover tax of 2.5 per cent on all goods and services in a bid to raise state revenue.

However, the government marginally reduced the price of petrol in line with global prices, but kept the price of diesel, commonly used in public transport, unchanged.

26 pilgrims killed as tractor crashes in India

AFP . Kanpur

A tractor pulling a trolley packed with religious pilgrims in India overturned and plunged into a pond, killing 26 and seriously injuring 16, officials said Sunday.

The trailer was carrying around 50 people, mostly women and children, when the incident happened in Kanpur in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh on Saturday, senior local official Sudheer Kumar said.

"Twenty-six people died in the incident," Kumar said.

Traffic accidents are frequent in India with more than 150,000 people killed last year, or over 400 per day, according to official statistics which are likely an underestimate. People being transported on tractor trailers is also common, particularly in rural areas, on often poorly maintained roads where there is scant regard for safety and traffic regulations.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered his condolences after the latest incident which happened as the tractor was on its way back from a Hindu temple.



Debris is seen in Fort Myers, Florida, in the aftermath of Hurricane Ian. Shocked Florida communities counted their dead on Saturday as the full scale of the devastation came into focus, two days after Hurricane Ian tore into the coastline as one of the most powerful storms ever to hit the United States



Govt to adopt modern tech to boost crop production in Dinajpur region

Mohammad Zakaria

The government is taking an initiative to boost high-value crop production in the Dinajpur region by 12 per cent using modern and eco-friendly technologies.

In this regard, the agriculture ministry has taken a project titled 'Sustainable Agricultural Development in Dinajpur Region' and sent a proposal to the planning commission for approval, a senior official of the planning ministry told The Business Post.

The project aims to create 1,440 agricultural entrepreneurs and guide them toward commercial agriculture. It also aims to increase crop density by 4 per cent through the extension of modern agricultural technology.

The cost of the project is estimated at Tk 65 crore which will come from the government exchequer.

The Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) will implement the project to be completed by June 2027.

The project will be implemented in Birol, Birganj, Kaharol, Bochaganj, Chirirbandar, Khansama, Parvatipur, Phulbari, Birampur, Nawabganj, Hakiampur, Ghoraghat and Sadar upazila of Dinajpur district; Pirganj, Balia-

dangi, Ranishankail, Haripur and Sadar upazila of Thakurgaon district; and Tetulia, Atwari, Boda, Debiganj and Sadar upazila of Panchagarh district.

Md Foyzul Islam, Chief of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Institutions Division of the Planning Commission said, "The project will play a vital role in the production of high-value crops, diversification of crop production, production of safe crops, processing of agricultural products, creation of women and young entrepreneurship, agro-commercialisation and expansion of modern technology in the Dinajpur region."

He also said the project area has been selected based on the agricultural nature of the region, agricultural diversity, agricultural environment and potential.

According to the project proposal, there is a great opportunity to increase the crop density as well as to increase crop production by adopting suitable agricultural technology capable of avoiding climate risks including the application of new crops and cultivation of high-value crops.

The main components of the project also include holding technology exhibitions.