Khajuraho temple replica, 6 lakh lamps draw crowds to Dak Bungalow pandal

Photos: Pramod Sharma

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An 80-ft-tall recreation of Madhya Pradesh's Khajuraho temple, adorned with handcrafted decorations made from 'hogla' leaves sourced from Bengal, is drawing visitors to the Dak Bungalow Chauraha Durga Puja pandal this year. One of Patna's biggest Durga Puja attractions, the pandal of Navyuvak Sangh Shri Durga Puja Samiti Trust on Dak Bungalow Road is celebrating its 63rd year.

The 55-ft-wide structure was planned nearly six months in advance and transported from Kolkata in eight trucks. Its intricate decorations were created by 18 artisans led by Bappa Barik from Medinipur in West Bengal. Barik said around 25 women worked on the handcrafted elements for five to six months, earning Rs 600 a day.

The designs, conceived by Kolkata Art College, use 'hogla patta', leaves processed and shaped into decorative elements. Barik said the leaves are first dried, varnished and cut into different shapes before being assembled into the final designs.

Committee treasurer Amit Kumar Barua said the centrepiece is a 21-ft idol of Goddess Durga in her 'Ashirwaadi' form, adorned with gold ornaments. The idol was crafted by Jagannath Pal, an artisan from West Bengal who has been making idols in Patna for more than three decades. The traditional chalchitra, once plain, is now sculpted to match the deity's theme.

Last year's idol

Navyuvak Sangh Shri Durga Puja Samiti Trust on Dak Bungalow Road is celebrating its 63rd year

Lighting is another major attraction after dusk. Bhola Electronics of Chandannagar, West Bengal, has illuminated the pandal and its surroundings with an estimated six to seven lakh tiny lamps. Displays include a recreation of the Jagannath Puri temple, a peacock-shaped gate, a mechanical Shiv temple where water appears to fall on the Shivling, and depictions of Lord Shiva playing the 'damru' and Lord Krishna playing the flute. A rotating backdrop showcases Vishwakarma, while a 16-ft ghost is expected to appeal to children.

Barua said the puja's estimated budget is around Rs 45 lakh. Committee president Sanjeev Prasad Tony said 'bhog' offerings would be made throughout the festival, with 'ghee halwa' after the evening aarti from 7pm on Saptami, followed by 'kheer' on Ashtami and 'khichdi' on Navami.

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Idol maker faces clay shortage

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The towering Durga idol at Dak Bungalow Chauraha is the work of 61-year-old Jagannath Pal, who has travelled from East Bardhaman in West Bengal to Patna for nearly 35 years to make idols. With limited assignments back home, Pal has also crafted idols for festivals in Hyderabad, Gujarat, Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai.

But this year, the artisan behind one of Patna's biggest Durga Puja attractions faced a hurdle even before work began: procuring clay.

Pal said restrictions on taking soil had made it difficult to source the quantities needed for idol-making. Artisans depend on areas such as Maner and Shahpur for clay, while suitable field soil is also sourced near Beur jail. He said the situation had been difficult in West Bengal too, but authorities there had extended help.

"Here, I did not find much help in procuring the clay. People are scared of being fined for taking soil, and the work got delayed," he said.

Navyuvak Sangh Shri Durga Puja Samiti Trust committee members

Pal usually makes around 14-15 idols in Patna but could not take up as many assignments this year because of delays in acquiring clay. More than 1,000kg of clay was needed for this year's idol alone, he said.

He arrived in Patna four months ago with 11 artisans. The delay has meant mounting expenses, with Pal paying around Rs 18,000 a month in rent. For artisans dependent on the festive season, even a month and a half without adequate work can mean significant financial losses.

Pal also said traditional idol makers receive little recognition in Bihar and urged the Bihar govt to support artisans who travel from other states to create idols for the city's pandals.

QUIZ WINNER

Amit Kumar Sinha

2k cops deployed in city for peaceful Puja

Faryal.Rumi@timesofindia.com

Patna: Around 2,000 police personnel have been deployed across Patna to ensure peaceful Durga Puja celebrations with CCTV cameras, drone surveillance and crowd management measures in place at pandals and sensitive locations.

Patna SSP Kartikeya K Sharma said on Saturday adequate forces had been deployed at Puja venues and other locations witnessing public gatherings and events. Police are monitoring pandals through CCTV cameras and drones, while local control rooms are being used to track the situation and coordinate responses to crowd pressure, he said.

"Preparations have been made to ensure that people can celebrate Puja peacefully and comfortably. Police personnel have been deployed at various locations, and CCTV cameras and drones are being used for surveillance," Sharma said.

He said police teams were inspecting puja pandals and conducting flag marches in sensitive and previously identified areas. Fire safety arrangements, including fire extinguishers, have also been made at the venues.

"Personnel have been instructed to remain alert and take prompt action to prevent any untoward incident," the SSP said.

The police have also made arrangements for traffic regulation and crowd management, with diversions coming into effect from Saturday evening. Officials will monitor congestion and crowd movement and take steps to manage pressure at busy locations.

Addressing the reporters, Sharma said different units, including specialised forces, had been deployed as part of the security arrangements. Police personnel in plain clothes and women police personnel would also be deployed at locations where necessary to ensure the safety of visitors and manage crowds. The SSP appealed to residents to celebrate the festival peacefully, maintain communal harmony and refrain from paying attention to rumours.

Pramod Sharma
Dhakis perform at a Durga Puja pandal in Patna on Saturday

Girl lies on bed of nails during Puja, draws crowds in Vaishali

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Patna: A 17-year-old girl in Vaishali district has drawn crowds during Durga Puja for an unusual religious ritual in which she is lying on a bed of nails with a kalash on her chest and a sword in her hand.

Nisha Kumari, a resident of Bajitpur Chakasturi village under Sahdei Buzurg block, began the ritual on the first day of Puja. The practice is scheduled to continue until Navami, with Nisha appearing in the attire of Goddess Kali.

According to her family, a specially designed wooden board was prepared using around 35 kg of nails, each approximately 2.5 inches long. Villagers said four people took four days to make the bed. Nisha claimed she feels no pain while lying on the nails.

Nisha Kumari lies on a bed of nails with a 'kalash' on her chest

Nisha claimed she had a dream after the month of Shrawan in which she saw Goddess Kali, who, according to her, told her she would have to undergo a test if she wished to attain the deity. She said she decided to perform the ritual as a test of her faith, courage and patience. "I want to continue worshipping and devoting myself to Goddess Kali," she said.

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Gujarat cops bust cyberfraud racket, arrest 1

K Kamlesh | TNN

Buxar: Cybercrime police in Gujarat's Dahod district have busted an interstate fraud racket accused of duping people through fake stock market investments and arrested alleged mastermind Shailesh Kumar Lalan Mishra, 27, from Buxar.

The case began after Jhalod resident Pritamkumar Kantubhai Sangada was added to a WhatsApp group, 'India Republic Venture', on June 18. Members shared trading tips and fake profit screenshots before persuading him to download the 'BR Nova' investment app.

After an initial Rs 20,000 investment showed a Rs 1,291 profit, Sangada transferred Rs 10 lakh to accounts provided by the fraudsters. The app showed his investment and purported earnings at over Rs 12 lakh, but he was asked to deposit another Rs 2 lakh when he sought withdrawal. Police traced Rs 4 lakh to an account held by Pandey Traders in Buxar and arrested three account holders on Sept 29.

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Puja panel denies political angle to cockroach theme

▶Continued from P 1

They insist the theme has no connection with any political party or ideology and was designed purely to entertain visitors, especially children.

"Vinodpur Puja Samiti has been organising Durga Puja continuously since 1935. This year's cockroach theme is not intended to support or oppose any political party or ideology. There may be political discussions about cockroaches in the country, but the committee has nothing to do with them. The theme is entirely fictional and has been created for entertainment," said committee president Naveen Kumar Goenka.

So there is no political punchline hidden among the thermocol insects. Instead, there is a festive one: while real cockroaches usually run for cover when the lights come on, these oversized ones are under the spotlight.

Giant cockroach figures adorn a Durga Puja pandal at Vinodpur in Katihar

The pandal took around a month to prepare with specialised artisans brought in from Nabadwip in West Bengal.

"It took approximately a month to prepare the pandal. We brought in specialised artisans from Nabadwip, who used their creativity and hard work to bring the cockroach theme to life," said committee secretary Amar Pratap. The combined budget for the pandal and the Durga idol is around Rs 5 lakh, he said.

90 spl trains to make 3k trips

Kumod Verma | TNN

Patna: Despite operating more than 90 pairs of festival special trains, the railways is facing a major challenge in managing the passenger rush during the Durga Puja festivities. With people travelling to their hometowns and popular destinations for the celebrations, stations across the East Central Railway (ECR) jurisdiction, particularly Patna Junction, have witnessed a significant rise in passenger footfall.

FESTIVAL RUSH

The railways has anticipated an additional movement of 15 lakh to 20 lakh passengers during the festive season. While special trains have added to its carrying capacity, managing the rush remains a challenge, especially at major stations across the ECR jurisdiction. Patna Junction, a major railway hub, has emerged as a key congestion point, with large crowds gathering on platforms, at ticket counters, in waiting halls and in station circulation areas.

Samrat visits Puja pandals, prays for peace and prosperity in state

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Patna: Chief minister Samrat Choudhary on the occasion of Mahasaptami on Saturday visited several Durga Puja pandals here, offering prayers to Goddess Durga and extending festive greetings to the people of Bihar. He prayed for the state's happiness, peace and prosperity and said the blessings of the Goddess should remain on everyone as Bihar continues to move ahead on the path of development and prosperity.

Choudhary first visited Moon Club pandal in the Jagdeo Path area; then he took a tour of Shri Krishnapuri Durga Puja Samiti, Bhadrakali Mandir in front of Krishna Apartment on Boring Road, and Shri Durga Puja Samiti at Boring Road Chauraha.

BJP national president Nitin Nabin and the party's state president Sanjay Saraogi joined him in offering prayers at Shri Krishnapuri Durga Puja Samiti pandal at Bhadrakali Mandir.

BJP MLC Sanjay Mayukh, Bihar State Child Labour Commission vice-chairperson Arvind Kumar Singh, Patna district magistrate Kundan Kumar, senior superintendent of police Kartikeya K Sharma, organisers, eminent citizens and devotees were present during the visit. In the afternoon, the CM undertook a second round of pandal visits in other parts of the state capital. He visited the puja pandals at Shiv Mandir, Khajpura; Raja Bazaar, Mahavir Sthan, Pillar No. 60; Durga Ashram Mandir Puja Samiti, Sheikhpura, Pillar No. 80; and Gardanibagh Thakurbari. At each venue, he had darshan of Goddess Durga, offered prayers and again conveyed Durga Puja greetings to the people of Bihar. MLA Sanjeev Chaurasia, Bihar State Religious Trust Board chairperson Ranbir Nandan, SSP, organisers, others and devotees attended these programmes.

Ranjeet Kumar
CM Samrat Choudhary offers prayer at a Puja pandal on Boring Road in Patna on Saturday

Nabin also visited several pandals on Mahasaptami. He had darshan of Jagat Janani Maa Jagdambe, sought her blessings and prayed for the happiness and prosperity of the country and society. His itinerary included pandals at Shivpuri; Shri Durga Puja Samiti organised by Ram Navami Sena on Atal Path; Panchmukhi Hanuman Mandir Durga Puja Samiti on Boring Canal Road; Shri Vijay Vahini Durga Puja Samiti at Himgiri Chauraha in Anandpuri; among others.

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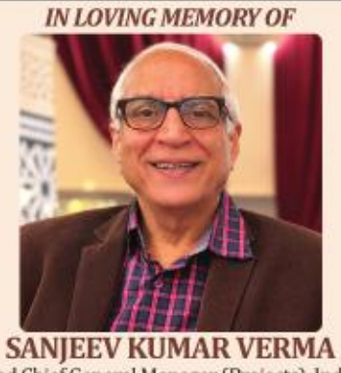

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Above all, he was a devoted husband, father, grandfather and friend. His family was his greatest joy, and he leaves behind a lifetime of laughter, stories and memories to cherish.

He is deeply missed by his wife, Manishi Verma; his children, Akshay and Tanya, and Akhil and Sinchita; his grandchildren, Nyra and Kabir; and his extended family and many friends.

His vibrant spirit and zest for life will continue to inspire us to live fully, love deeply and give generously.

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₹50cr for wildlife plan along Varanasi-Kolkata expressway

Alok Kumar | TNN

Gaya: The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has provided around Rs 50 crore to the Bihar environment, forest and climate change department to implement an environmental conservation and wildlife mitigation plan along the Varanasi-Ranchi-Kolkata Expressway.

The project aims to protect wildlife habitats, conserve endangered species, ensure passenger safety and improve connectivity to major religious and tourist destinations, including Bodh Gaya in Gaya district and the Sun temple at Deo in neighbouring Aurangabad district.

The conservation plan covers wildlife habitat improvement, conservation of selected Schedule I species, soil and water conservation, forest fire management, and monitoring and evaluation. NHAI's regional office in Patna organised a media tour on Friday to showcase the project's progress, engineering features and regional significance. Project director Devendra Kumar Bansal said, "The expressway's 33-km Package VII, being constructed in Gaya district at a cost of Rs1,248 crore, has achieved around 36% physical progress."

Manish Bhandari
NHAI officials at the expressway site in Gaya

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