

# YOUTH LENS

## on the Silk Roads



6<sup>th</sup> Edition

Best photos from the  
International Silk Roads  
Photo Contest



unesco

# YOUTH LENS

on the Silk Roads



**unesco**

Silk Roads Programme

## Life, laughter, and memories along the Silk Roads

For the sixth time, UNESCO presents the winners and best entries from the “**Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads**” international photo contest, centred this year on the theme of *Life Celebrations*. This edition highlights the traditions, festivals, and everyday moments that bring communities together along the Silk Roads, celebrating cultural diversity and shared human experience.

The Silk Roads played an important role in shaping life celebrations and traditions as they connected people across regions. As travelers moved along these routes, they exchanged customs, ideas, and practices, influencing how moments like births, weddings, harvests, and religious ceremonies were observed. This ongoing exchange helped traditions evolve and spread, creating a cultural fabric that reflects both diversity and connection.

Aimed at young photographers aged 14 to 25, the contest invites the next generation to explore and document how life is celebrated today across the Silk Roads. This focus encourages youth to engage creatively with their heritage and express their views on tradition and community.

The collection offers fresh insights into the Silk Roads’ role in fostering cultural dialogue and social connection. Through vivid images of life’s celebrations, the book invites photographers and enthusiasts alike to explore the ties that unite communities across time and space.

Over  
**4,500**  
submissions  
from **92** countries

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*‘Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed.’*

# Foreword



**Khaled El-Enany**  
Director-General of UNESCO

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For centuries, travellers transported silk, tea, perfume and porcelain along the historic Silk Roads of Eurasia, carrying with them knowledge, ideas, languages and beliefs.

Many extraordinary celebrations were also nurtured and exchanged across the 6,400-kilometre network – from festivals marking the seasons to intimate gatherings honouring life’s milestones.

Under the theme of “Life Celebrations”, the sixth edition of UNESCO’s Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads international photo contest aimed to capture these special moments, inviting young photographers to explore the diverse celebrations of the communities that live along the Silk Roads.

The rich diversity and shared legacies of these routes are reflected in the celebrations that occur from a person’s birth to their death. This is the case for Nowruz, a celebration that has encouraged friendship between communities for over 3,000 years, or falconry, a traditional practice uniting countries from Mongolia to Morocco.

For over 35 years, UNESCO has championed the mutual understanding and cultural appreciation embodied in past, present and future of these routes. At a time when conflicts threaten to divide and dehumanize, when cultural homogenization and social inequalities seem to define contemporary life, celebrating life in all its beauty is more important than ever.

From the rhythms of traditional dances to the solemn beauty of funerary ceremonies, these occasions tell stories of resilience, gratitude and hope. They mark the passage of time, strengthen social bonds and embody the values that unite and define us, serving as symbols of the strength of our plural identities.

The breathtaking moments that these talented young photographers have captured are a powerful reminder of why UNESCO works to safeguard traditions along these routes: so that shared cultural legacies can continue to cultivate mutual dialogue, trust and understanding from one generation to the next.

I hope that in pondering these pages you are inspired to reflect on the richness of these celebrations, and to uncover the connections that unite us through our shared heritage and human experience.

# Preface



**Dr Li Ruohong**  
Chairman of Beijing International  
Peace Culture Foundation

Dear friends,

The **Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads** international photo contest is a remarkable initiative that has captured the attention and support of people around the world. This sixth edition of the “**Youth Lens on the Silk Roads**” photo album invites us to immerse ourselves in the theme of **Life Celebrations**. The carefully curated collection highlights people, emotions, stories, and the beautiful scenery of nature. In sharing both tangible and intangible cultural heritage, we witness the values and heartfelt experiences of young people.

As reflected in these images, life bursts forth in many forms. It may appear in a national dance carnival during a traditional festival, where colourful costumes and radiant smiles enhance one another, reflecting the rich cultural heritage of diverse communities. Or it may be seen in the daily lives of adolescents pursuing their dreams, where effort and passion come together in a powerful expression of youthful vitality, accompanied by the quiet blossoming of new flowers in peaceful mountains and forests. These photographs go beyond technical skill in capturing light and shadow. They are sincere expressions of young people’s admiration for life. Transcending borders, they reflect a generation’s connection with history, their appreciation of the world, and their enduring pursuit of beauty. They carry a shared aspiration for peace, security, and common prosperity in a constantly evolving global landscape.

As an official partner of UNESCO, we are honoured to continue supporting this international youth photo contest. We extend our sincere appreciation to UNESCO, the International Selection Committee, and all young participants whose creativity and vision have made this initiative possible.

Together, let us engage with the world through the spirit of “Peace+1”.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'LR' followed by a stylized flourish.

# Travelling and Shaping the World

History has taught us many valuable lessons, not least that one can neither survive nor flourish without interacting with others. On a global scale these interactions can become prolonged cross-cultural exchanges playing a crucial role in the development of new ideas, bodies of knowledge, beliefs, gastronomies, and artistic expressions. By linking regions across Asia, the Pacific, Europe, and Africa, the Silk Roads have played a key role in connecting cultures beyond borders.

Today, the term 'Silk Roads' is used to refer to an expansive network of trade routes, methods of exchange, and channels of communication across both land and sea including the 'Spice Routes' and the 'Incense Routes'. For more than two millennia, travellers explored the Silk Roads in pursuit of commercial and intellectual goals. In doing so they participated in exchanges of scientific knowledge on medicine, mathematics, and chemistry, and contributed to many of the arts, including literature, painting, calligraphy, music, architecture, and craftsmanship. The cross-border fluidity of the production techniques of various crafts including textiles and ceramics resulted in the emergence of cosmopolitan workshops creating products that mixed stylistic elements, materials, and designs from the different cultures of the Silk Roads.

Along the Silk Roads, moments of gathering, rites of passage, and festive traditions stood as profound celebrations of life. From the joy of new births to the solemnity of farewells, from vibrant festivals to the beauty of weddings, communities marked the passage of time and honoured existence. Enriched by music, dance, poetry, and culinary traditions, these celebrations became spaces where cultures met, memories endured, and the human spirit shone across borders. The Silk Roads thus became a living thread, weaving together solidarity and hope.

The rituals and intangible heritage inherited from these exchanges remind us that life reaches its deepest meaning when celebrated together. Beyond the exchange of goods and ideas, the Silk Roads nurtured a deeper current: the universal human desire to gather, commemorate, and pass traditions from one generation to the next. This enduring legacy shows that our globalized world is sustained by the celebration of life, where unity, understanding, and respect flourish as communities come together across differences and honour the richness of our shared humanity.

**92 countries**  
**Some 4,500 submissions**

**2 age categories**  
**from 14 to 17 years old**  
**from 18 to 25 years old**

**1 theme**  
**Life Celebrations**

# List of the participating countries

- AFGHANISTAN
- ALGERIA
- ARMENIA
- AZERBAIJAN
- BANGLADESH
- BELGIUM
- BENIN
- BHUTAN
- BRAZIL
- BURKINA FASO
- BURUNDI
- CAMBODIA
- CAMEROON
- CANADA
- CHAD
- CHINA – PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA
- COLOMBIA
- CÔTE D'IVOIRE
- CUBA
- CZECHIA
- DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO
- ECUADOR
- EGYPT
- ETHIOPIA
- FRANCE
- GEORGIA
- GERMANY
- GHANA
- GREECE
- HUNGARY
- INDIA
- INDONESIA
- IRAN (ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF)
- IRAQ
- IRELAND
- ISRAEL
- ITALY
- JAPAN
- JORDAN
- KAZAKHSTAN
- KENYA
- KUWAIT
- KYRGYZSTAN
- LEBANON
- LIBERIA
- MADAGASCAR
- MALAYSIA
- MALDIVES
- MAURITIUS
- MEXICO
- MONGOLIA
- MOROCCO
- MYANMAR
- NEPAL
- NETHERLANDS (KINGDOM OF THE)
- NIGERIA
- OMAN
- PAKISTAN
- PERU
- PHILIPPINES
- POLAND
- PORTUGAL
- QATAR
- REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA
- ROMANIA
- RUSSIAN FEDERATION
- SAUDI ARABIA
- SENEGAL
- SINGAPORE
- SOMALIA
- SOUTH AFRICA
- SPAIN
- SRI LANKA
- STATE OF PALESTINE
- SUDAN
- SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
- TAJIKISTAN
- TIMOR-LESTE
- TOGO
- TUNISIA
- TÜRKIYE
- TURKMENISTAN
- UGANDA
- UKRAINE
- UNITED ARAB EMIRATES
- UNITED KINGDOM
- UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA
- UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
- UZBEKISTAN
- VIET NAM
- YEMEN
- ZAMBIA



# Selection Committee



## GMB Akash | Photographer

*Bangladesh*

GMB Akash is an award-winning Bangladeshi photographer whose work has been featured in over 100 major publications including Vogue, The Economist, Amnesty Journal and The Fader. His photographs have been exhibited all over the world with solo exhibitions in Bangladesh, Germany, Portugal, and the USA.

In 2002, he became the first Bangladeshi to be selected for the World Press Photo Joop Swart Masterclass in the Netherlands. In 2004, he received the Young Reporters Award from the Scope Photo Festival and in 2009, he was awarded the international "Travel photographer of the Year" title at the International Travel Photographer of the Year Competition.

In 2012 he presented the results of his 10-year project "Survivors", with proceeds from the resulting publication going towards helping the subjects of the book establish their own small businesses.

In 2013, he founded the GMB Akash Institute of Photography in Bangladesh teaching students from all over the world. The proceeds from his photography workshops go towards the provision of basic education for street children, underprivileged talented students and child labourers.

GMB Akash has previously served as a jury member in international photo contests such as the Friends of the Earth International Photo Competition (The Netherlands) and the Worldwide Photography Gala Award (UK). In December 2017 he participated in the National Geographic Exodus Fest in Aveiro, Portugal where he exhibited, spoke, and gave a master class.



## Fatimah Hossaini | Photographer

*Afghanistan*

Fatimah Hossaini is an Afghan artist, photographer, curator, exhibitor, and the Founder of Mastooraat Organization. She has made significant contributions to the art world, specializing in staged photography. Her work revolves around powerful storytelling, mainly focusing on themes of identity and femininity in Afghanistan. With a diverse educational background that includes a Bachelor of Arts in Photography from the University of Tehran, she combines technical skills with a creative vision to produce captivating visual narratives. Fatimah was recognized as a Rising Talent Ambassador in 2022 and became one of the youngest recipients of the Hypatia International Award by CICOP, Italy.

Through her work, Fatimah Hossaini continues to inspire and engage audiences while impacting the global art community. Fatimah's artwork, characterized by vibrant colours and passionate expressions, has been featured in exhibitions and festivals around the globe, and her works and articles have been published in prestigious international publications. Beyond her artistic pursuits, Fatimah has advocated for women's and refugee rights on national and international platforms, collaborating with the United Nations.



## Liang Li | Photographer

*People's Republic of China*

Liang Li (Queenie) is a photographer, Asian culture recorder, and experienter. She received the distinction of Licentiate (LRPS) from the Royal Photographic Society and membership in the Photographic Society of America. She has won several international photography competition awards and used to travel alone to India, Bhutan, Nepal, and Myanmar to shoot.

With a female perspective, she takes a deep dive into various beliefs and local cultures and interprets the diversity of Asia civilization with traditional visual skills. In her works, she tries to demonstrate the similarities and differences between the origin of non-Western religion and philosophy.

# WINNERS of the photo contest



## Mustafa Seven | Photojournalist

*Türkiye*

Mustafa Seven started his career as a photojournalist at The Sabah Newspaper Magazine Group in 1995. He continued his career in Hürriyet Magazine Group, Gazete Pazar, Milliyet and finally Aksam newspaper, where he was the photo editor. Afterwards, Seven focused his work on street photography, which he described as "witnessing life". He opened his first solo exhibition named "Tek" in 2013 and participated in many joint exhibitions and festivals. Mustafa Seven is also involved in educational activities. He organizes workshops on street photography and mobile photography and produces joint projects for universities, independent photography associations, various educational institutions, and corporate brands.

Seven, a member of the Turkish Photojournalists Association, the International Federation of Journalists, The Turkish Journalists' Union and the FOTON Association, continues to independently produce photographs, describe the street, and document the period in which he lives, with projects he has done for local and global brands at home and abroad. His photographs have been exhibited all around the world.



## Osama Silwadi | Photojournalist

*State of Palestine*

Osama Silwadi is a Palestinian photojournalist, visual storyteller and folklorist. He began his career in 1991. At the age of nineteen, Silwadi worked as a freelance Photojournalist for various local newspapers and later worked for Agence France-Presse (AFP) and Reuters. Moreover, he was a permanent correspondent in Palestine for the GAMMA photography agency. Silwadi believes in using photography as a vehicle in which to archive Palestinian visual history. He prioritizes photography's broader importance by documenting significant events. Osama Silwadi has published 11 photo books documenting parts of Palestinian heritage and passionately engages in projects focused on meticulously documenting Palestinian heritage and folklore.

Silwadi's determination serves as an inspiration to his students. It reinforces photography's vital role in journalism within Palestine as he continues to enrich the field with his exceptional talent and unwavering dedication.

Category one  
14-17 years old



1<sup>ST</sup> PRIZE

Armaan Ahmad  
17 years old, India



Category two  
18-25 years old



2<sup>ND</sup> PRIZE

Haining Ma  
16 years old, People's Republic of China

3<sup>RD</sup> PRIZE

Adel Hikmatova  
17 years old, Uzbekistan



2<sup>ND</sup> PRIZE

Abadan Hamidulla  
25 years old, Afghanistan/Canada

1<sup>ST</sup> PRIZE

Yousef Naser  
21 years old, Egypt



3<sup>RD</sup> PRIZE

Tomal Das  
20 years old, Bangladesh



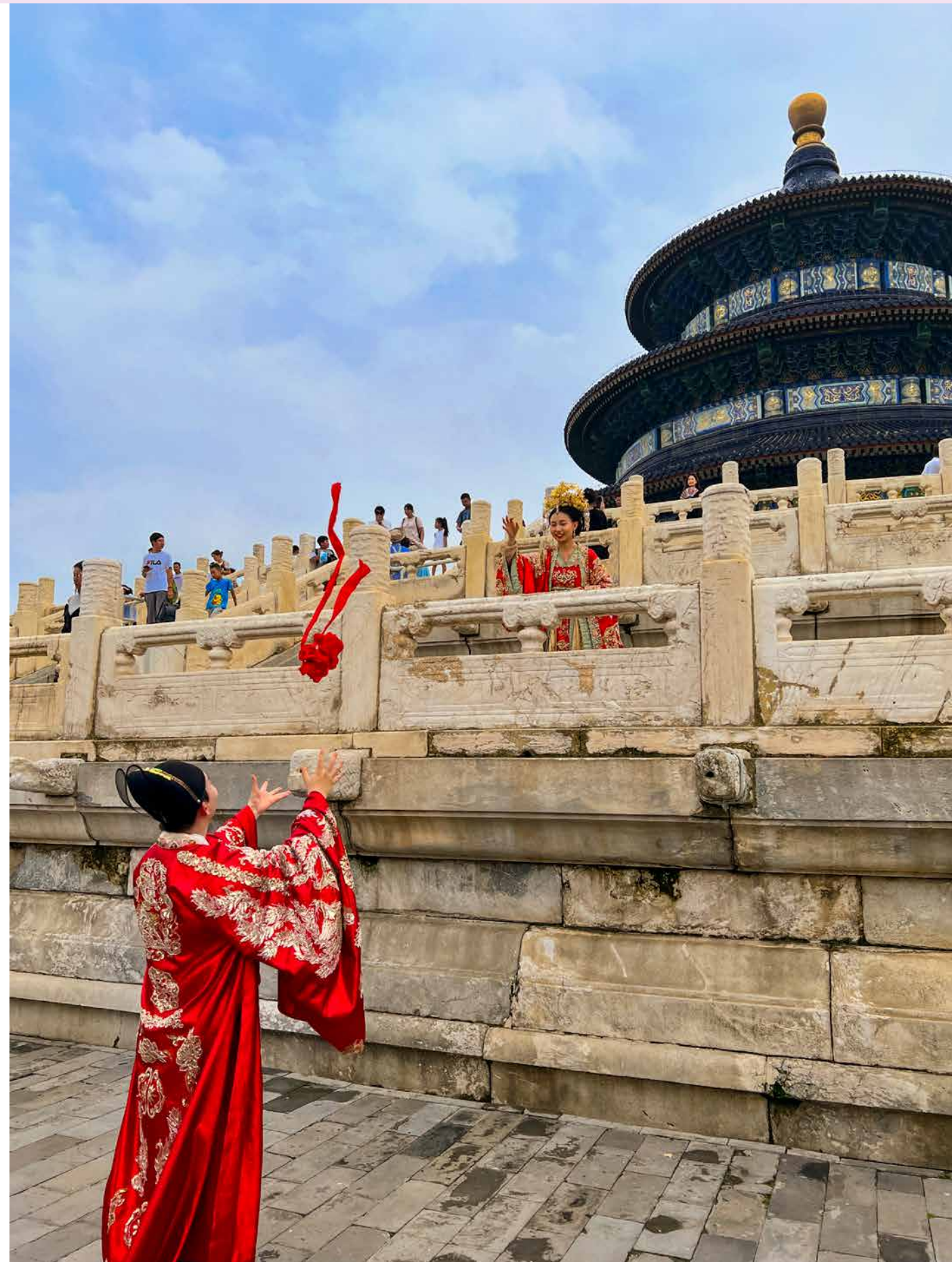
WINNER 1<sup>ST</sup> PRIZE | 14-17 YEARS OLD

**Armaan Ahmad**  
17 years old, India



## Illuminating joy

Celebrating the *Dev Deepawali* festival with a heart full of happiness marks the victory of light over darkness, bringing communities together in shared devotion and festivity. It strengthens social bonds as families, neighbours, and visitors gather to light lamps and offer prayers, creating a sense of unity and collective joy. Historically, festivals like *Dev Deepawali* are influenced by the cultural exchanges along the Silk Roads, where spiritual practices, rituals, and ideas still spread across India.



WINNER 2<sup>ND</sup> PRIZE | 14-17 YEARS OLD

**Haining Ma**

16 years old, People's Republic of China



## Love in the air

A young couple dressed in antique scarlet silk nuptial gowns for their engagement ceremony, to be staged in the Temple of Heaven, a World Heritage site in Dongcheng, Beijing, China. Their act of "throwing an embroidered ball" symbolizes the commencement of a promising future ahead. This ceremony reflects the deep-rooted prominence in family engagement in marriage, serving as a cornerstone of Chinese culture. Silk represents prosperity and elegance, and it has become an emblem of exchange, uniting customs of celebrations across the regions along the Silk Roads, where cultural and artistic influences intermingled.

WINNER 3<sup>RD</sup> PRIZE | 14-17 YEARS OLD

**Adel Hikmatova**

17 years old, Uzbekistan



## Autumn Festival

The Ark Fortress in Bukhara, Uzbekistan, an ancient monument dating back to the 6th-3rd centuries BCE tied to the legend of Siyavush, serves as the backdrop for the vibrant *Mehrjon* Festival, an age-old celebration of the harvest season. It unites the community through music, dancing, and shared joy, reflecting the deep social bonds in the region. Uzbek performers dress in traditional attire, with men in *kallapushi* – head coverings, and women wearing *kallapushi zarduzi* – skullcaps hand-embroidered with gold thread, symbolizing wealth. Specifically, the *doira* is also played, a tambourine-like instrument central to social gatherings and dances along the Silk Roads.





WINNER 1<sup>ST</sup> PRIZE | 18-25 YEARS OLD

**Yusef Naser**  
21 years old, Egypt



## Upper Egypt

The celebration of the people of Qena marks the birth of Abdul Rahim Al-Qinawi, where the knights display their skill in riding horses in a traditional game called *Al-Marmah*. This game displays individual prowess and is a symbol of community pride and cohesion. By bringing together people from various tribes and villages, it fosters social bonds, including feasts and cultural exchanges.

WINNER 2<sup>ND</sup> PRIZE | 18-25 YEARS OLD

**Abadan Hamidulla**

25 years old, Afghanistan/Canada



## Together in tradition

The bride's preparation to leave her family home is a tradition that blends rituals and heartfelt goodbyes, symbolizing the start of a new chapter. She is surrounded by women from her family and community who offer wisdom, support, and emotional strength. Celebrating life, culture, and unity embodies every Turkmen wedding through the historical Silk Roads where local customs merge with influences from surroundings and afar regions.



3<sup>RD</sup> PRIZE | 18-25 YEARS OLD

**Tomal Das**

20 years old, Bangladesh



## Festival of light faith and devotion

Devotees gather in Baradi Loknath Brahmachari Ashram, located in Narayanganj, Bangladesh, for *Rakher Upobash*, a festival of faith and devotion. As oil lamps and incense are lit while praying, the atmosphere is filled with a warm glow and a fragrant smoke. This tradition is a reminder of the cultural and religious exchanges that flourished along the historic Silk Roads, where ideas, beliefs, and practices travelled across regions, shaping communities and fostering connections.





HONOURABLE MENTION | 14-17 YEARS OLD

**Aung Khant Kyaw**

17 years old, Myanmar



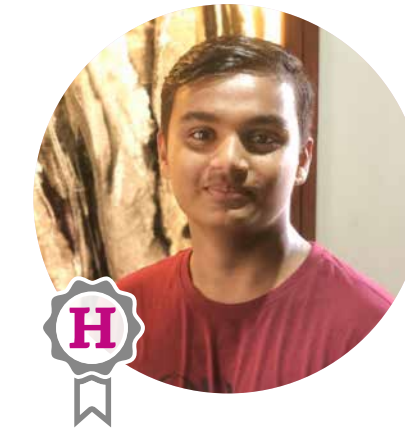
## Water Festival

Set amidst the tranquil surroundings of Inle Laken in Myanmar, this traditional gathering unites communities with playful festivities, lively music, and vibrant dance, celebrating togetherness and joy.



HONOURABLE MENTION | 14-17 YEARS OLD

**Abdul Wahab Sheikh**  
16 years old, Pakistan



### **The *Doodh Thali*, the small plate carrying a glass of milk**

The ritual of the *Doodh Pilai* is milk offered to the groom from the same glass the bride uses. The henna, roses, and milk reflect the rich cultural exchanges that once travelled along the Silk Roads, reaching Pakistan. This meaningful moment, filled with joy, symbolizes their new union, as the groom is invited to offer a token of appreciation, celebrating their first shared moment with the drink.

HONOURABLE MENTION | 18-25 YEARS OLD

**Dinesh Raj Upadhyay**  
24 years old, Nepal



## The joy of *Deuda* performance

The *Deuda* dance is a popular performance in regions along Western Nepal and Uttarakhand in India. During the Chaitali Festival, women join in dancing and singing. The performance is a central part of social celebrations in the region and strengthens communal bonds, often taking the form of a playful singing exchange between men, women, and generations. Through the exchange of song and laughter, the dance reinforces the rich cultural heritage shaped by the Silk Roads.



HONOURABLE MENTION | 18-25 YEARS OLD

**Mardin Ahmadi**

23 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)



## The Palangan Hezar Daf Festival

In Palangan village, in the Kurdistan region, in Iran, artistic groups use the *Daf* instrument to celebrate their ritual and spiritual heritage. Beyond its artistic and spiritual dimensions, the festival serves as an important social gathering where locals and visitors come together to commemorate shared cultural traditions. This village's cultural vibrancy strengthens ties and cohesion.



**BEST OF**  
**the photo**  
**contest**

**Moe Sett Wathone**  
23 years old, Myanmar

## **Yin Net people light the sky**

Lightning Festival of Yin Net people is a traditional celebration held in the southern part of Shan State, Myanmar. It features light displays and community gatherings that reflect the cultural heritage of the Yin Net people.



**Ankit Ghosh**  
*16 years old, India*

## Euphoria

On the streets of Kolkata during Holi, the festival celebrated across India, as well as Nepal and Mauritius, people gather with their loved ones to enjoy the splash of coloured powders. A girl gently helps her brother removing colour from his hair; a gesture of care and affection amid the chaos of the festival.





**Muhammad Bilal Ansari**  
20 years old, Pakistan

## Hand in hand

Hands adorned with red floral bracelets and intricate bangles come together, symbolizing unity and celebration. The hues of traditional attire complement the blossoms, reflecting the cultural significance and shared joy of the moment.

**Muhammad Amdad Hossain**  
*24 years old, Bangladesh*

## **Festival of lights**

The festival of lights held on the occasion of Prabarana Purnima sees thousands of Buddhists gather at Nandan Kanan Buddha Vihar temple in Chittagong, Bangladesh to celebrate one of the most important religious festivals in the Buddhist calendar. One of its festive aspects of the celebration is the hoisting of lanterns and illuminating the sky. This tradition echoes the spread of Buddhist culture along the Silk Roads, where light and illumination played a symbolic role in religious practices across Asia.





**Md. Ahnaf Al Yasir**  
19 years old, Bangladesh

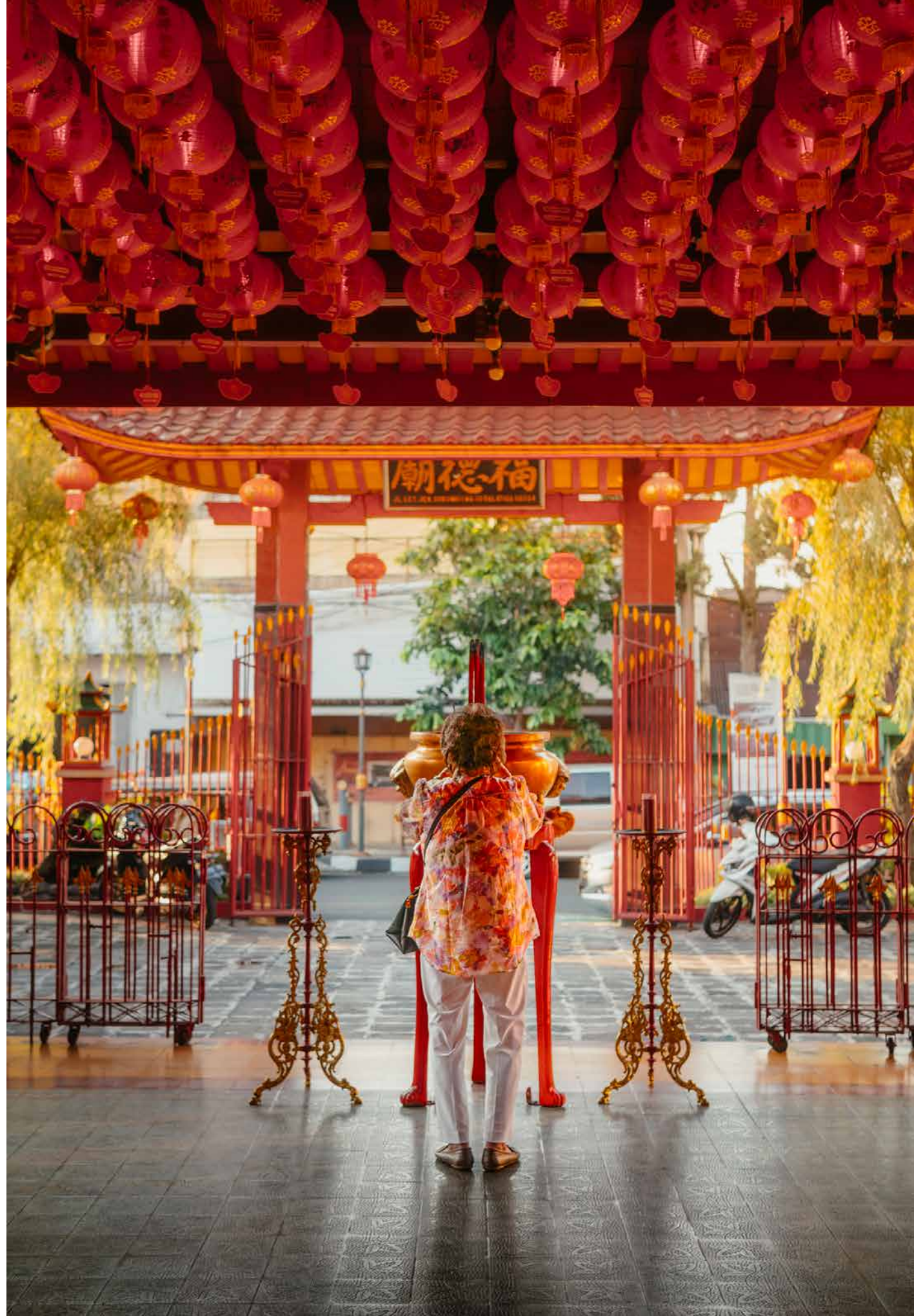
## **Celebrating Surya Puja**

Surya Puja is an ancient cultural festival celebrated on the sixth day of the bright lunar fortnight in the month of Kartik in the Hindu calendar. At sunrise and sunset, women worship the sun while standing in water.

**Jansen Thoe**  
*14 years old, Indonesia*

## **The last to bow**

An elderly woman prays during a full moon at Hok Tek Bio, a temple located in Salatiga, Indonesia. It is believed that during the full moon, the doors of heaven open and prayers are more likely to be granted.





**Ahmed Mohamed**  
25 years old, Egypt

## The joy of a young boy

During the Mawlid, part of a religious tradition, all visitors come to celebrate the birth of Sayed Al Hussein in Cairo. While the elders eat together, children enjoy the festive atmosphere.

## **Haldi ceremony as a celebration of life's journey**

Dressed in traditional attire, a Bengali bride is blessed with rice pudding by her relatives during a lively pre-wedding ceremony. This dish is also shared in various regions like Central Asia, the Middle East and the Balkans as part of celebrations. As the family shares a joyful feast, the shadow falling on her face reflects the poignant sadness of leaving cherished loved ones behind.





**Naufal Ardi Santoso**  
22 years old, Indonesia

## Puppet dances at Thengul Festival

The Indonesia Thengul Folklore Festival is a cultural celebration that showcases Indonesia's rich traditional arts. Its focus is *wayang thengul*, a form of traditional puppet theatre from Bojonegoro, East Java, Indonesia, which narrates stories from ancient kings. The festival features participants from diverse backgrounds, through dance groups to elementary school students, who dress up as puppets and perform synchronized dances and movements characteristic of *wayang thengul* in an open field.

**Nazym Kozhuova**  
16 years old, Kazakhstan

## The first step

*Tusau keser* is one of Kazakhstan's oldest traditions. Symbolic objects are placed in front of children, who must pick one, determining their path. The child stands on a white carpet with ropes tied around their legs, representing infinity. The celebration gathers family, relatives, and friends.



**Nyamsuren Erdenebayar**  
23 years old, Mongolia

## Draped in pairs

Aunties wearing the *deel*, a traditional Mongolian garment, at a local wedding. These occasions also offer guests the opportunity to dress in traditional clothing and prepare for a special day. The textiles on display carry centuries of history and cultural exchange along the Silk Roads. They reflect the role of garments and fashion traditions across regions, blending styles and techniques that have connected cultures through time.



**Osama Hamood Almandhari**  
25 years old, Oman

## Omani riders

Showcasing skilled horsemanship during special occasions is a proud tradition in Omani culture. These performances trace back to the long-lasting exchanges along the Silk Roads, where sailors and camel-riders shared not only goods but also prized breeds like the Arabian horse, influencing equestrian culture across continents.





**Viktoria Sultanskaya**  
25 years old, Russian Federation

## Dancing along

This three-day-long festival, which takes place in the Perm region, Russian Federation, is held every summer to preserve the culture of the Kama region's indigenous peoples. Knightly fights take place alongside concerts and craft workshops, while fairs and round dances combine to create a unique atmosphere reminiscent of the past. Similar communal dances were also practiced along the Silk Roads, from Central Asia to the Caucasus, reflecting shared traditions of music, movement, and collective celebration. The region is located at the crossroads of water-carrying trade routes, used a lot in the 10th-12th centuries by travellers and merchants.



**Sharon U. Gano**  
25 years old, Philippines

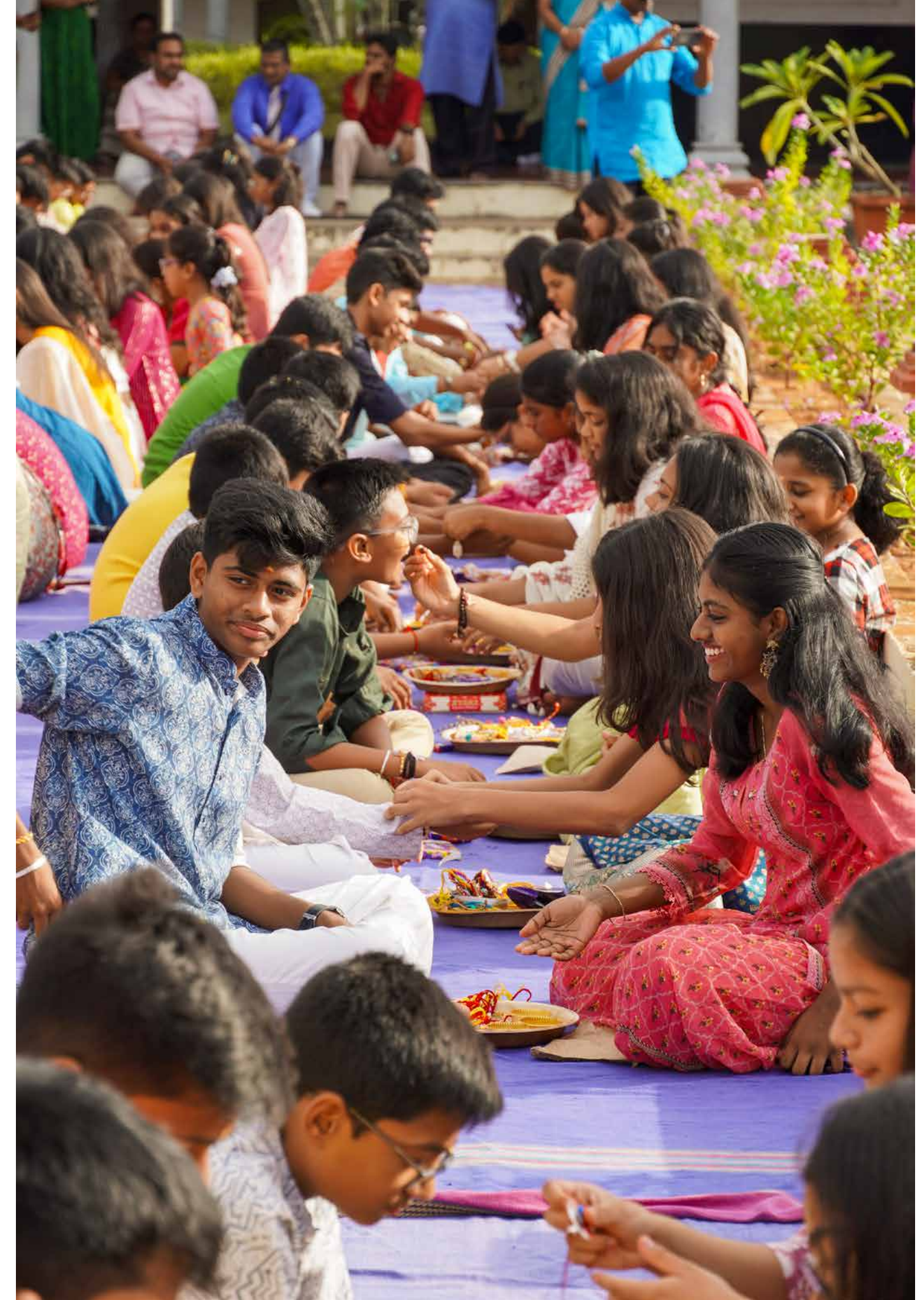
## **A gift from nature**

*Punnuk* is a tugging ritual in Hungduan, the Philippines, that marks the end of the agricultural cycle. Rooted in community spirit and cultural heritage, it symbolizes unity, gratitude for the harvest, and the end of the farming season.

**Shailesh Selvaraj Senthilkumar**  
16 years old, India

## A Rakhi for my brother

In Coimbatore, Raksha Bandhan, India, sisters tie Rakhi sacred bracelets or amulets for their brothers, while both wear traditional attire and feast. The tradition originates from Hindu legends that describe these celebrations as symbols of alliances between families and empires.





**Mohammad Sakiful Islam Bhunia**  
23 years old, Bangladesh

## ***Lathi khela***

*Lathi Khela* is a Bengali martial art involving stick fighting, practiced in Bangladesh. Every 10th of Muharram in Brahmanbaria, *lathials*, or traditional stick fighters, gather to celebrate their art and the ancestral knowledge of this traditional game. In Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran, the day is also commemorated through large processions, public recitations of religious poetry, and ceremonial drumming.

**Mayank Kapkoti**  
25 years old, India

## The Goddess of Uttarakhand

Held in Nainital, Uttarakhand, India, the Nanda Devi Festival takes place in late August or early September to honour the region's goddess with devotion and tradition. The celebrations feature a grand procession with decorated palanquins carrying the deity's idol, accompanied by traditional music, dance, and folk performances. The festival blends religious rituals with cultural expression, showing the strong traditions and community spirit of the people of Uttarakhand.





**Landry Junior Yawat Dounwou**  
*23 years old, Cameroon*

## **Wearing the memory**

A worshipper in Cameroon wears a traditional Bamileke mask during a tribute ceremony. Mask traditions are widespread across Africa, each reflecting a unique cultural expression.

**Kate Holland**  
25 years old, United States of America

## When flowers bloom, Nepal

During the Udhauri Festival, celebrated by the Kirat communities of Nepal, marigold petals are placed atop a man's topi cap. This act symbolizes gratitude for the harvest and a respectful farewell to the highlands as families begin their seasonal migration to warmer lowlands. The festival is also a time to honour nature and ancestors.





**Nakhim Chry**  
21 years old, Cambodia

## Dance with water

Bonn Phum Festival gathers people to enjoy traditional celebrations ahead of the Khmer New Year. Festivities and rituals in which water plays a central role are found throughout the Silk Roads.

## From the moon and back

Hindu women in India perform sacred morning rituals on the seashore during the auspicious month of Margashirsha. They observe Purnima (the full moon) by bathing, praying to Vishnu, fasting, and meditating, ending in a symphony of devotion. In contrast, families in China, Viet Nam, Republic of Korea, and parts of Central Asia celebrate the full moon during the Mid-Autumn Festival by gathering for shared meals, offering prayers, admiring the moon, and lighting lanterns, each act symbolizing unity, prosperity, and gratitude toward nature.





**Sourav Barua Shuva**  
23 years old, Bangladesh

## The lamp of divine faith

Lighting lamps to worship Ganga at the Sangu riverbank at Bandarban, Chittagong, Bangladesh. Ganga Puja is a festival observed across several countries of the Indian subcontinent between March and May, with the date determined by the Hindu lunisolar calendar. In Bangladesh, as well as in West Bengal, Assam, and other parts of eastern India, communities gather along rivers and tributaries associated with the Ganga to honour the sacred river. It is believed that bathing in or drinking the holy water washes away the sins and sufferings of many past lives.

**Muhammad Syarif. S**  
23 years old, Indonesia

## Lighting up the Borobudur Temple

Thousands of lanterns light up the sky above Borobudur in Indonesia, the world's largest Buddhist temple and a key site on the maritime Silk Roads. This spectacular display takes place during the peak of Vesak, marking the end of the national Tri Suci Vesak celebration. The event reflects centuries of cultural and spiritual exchange between South and Southeast Asia, shaped by the spread of Buddhism through shared artistic and architectural traditions. The lanterns symbolize inner peace, tranquillity, happiness, and the fulfilment of hopes and prayers, each carrying personal messages as they float into the night sky.



**Aashish Gautam**  
25 years old, Nepal

## Dipawali

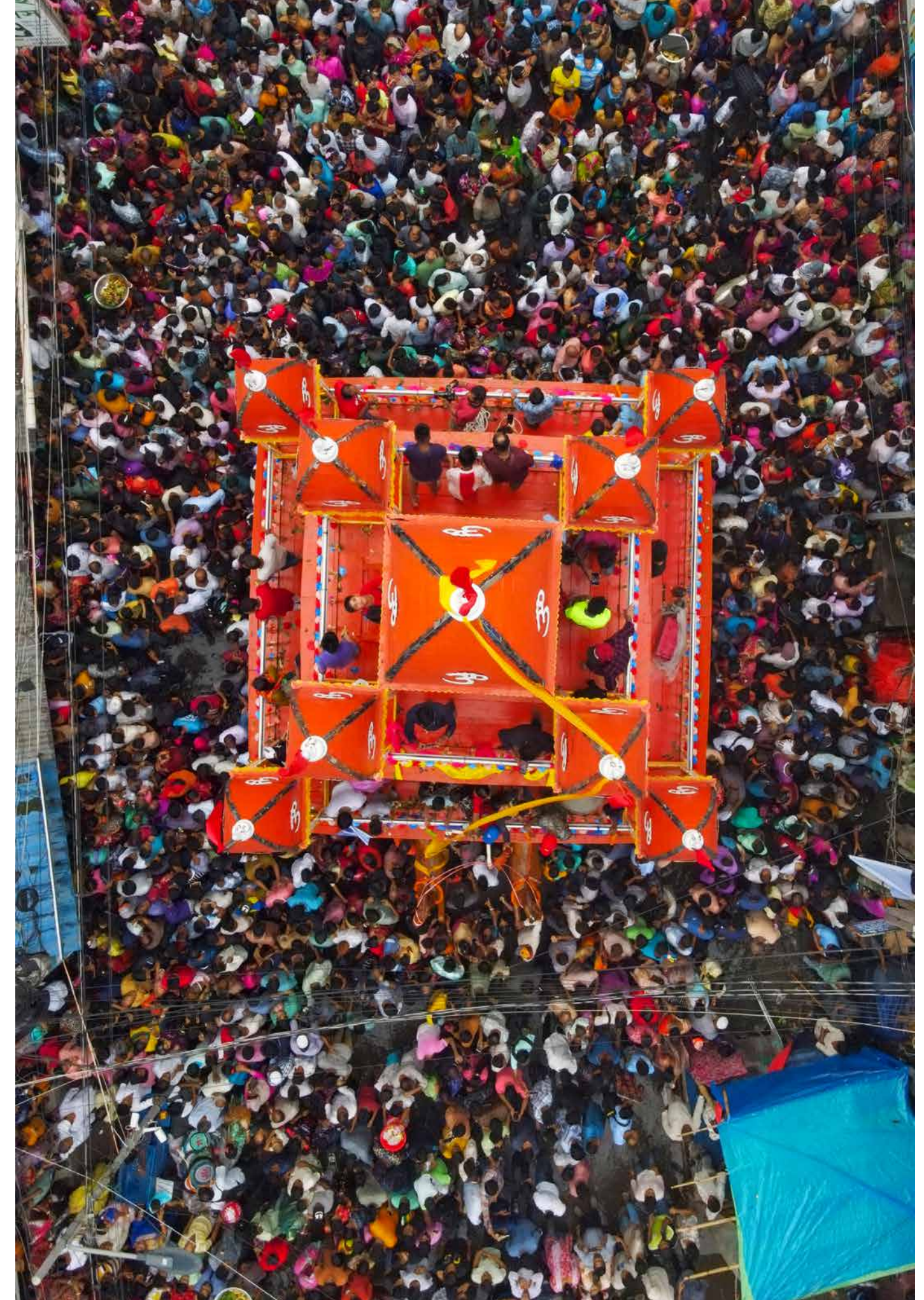
The festival of light is celebrated every year in Birgunj, Nepal. Across regions, light symbolizes purity and hope for families and communities along the Silk Roads.



**Ananto Biswas Utshow**  
*23 years old, Bangladesh*

## **The moving chariot of Janmashtami**

In celebration of Lord Krishna's birth, the Janmashtami Rath Yatra features large, decorated chariots pulled through the streets by devotees. The procession is filled with music and dancing creating a lively atmosphere.



**Yijia Zhang**  
23 years old, People's Republic of China

## Tradition meets modernity

The new Chinese-style wedding has become a popular choice among modern couples, blending contemporary tastes with traditional customs. Honouring their heritage while celebrating love inspired by ancient Chinese wedding rituals. The ceremony includes symbolic moments such as the Fan-Lowering Ceremony (*Que Shan*), Three Bows Ceremony (*San Bai Li*), Hand-Washing Ritual (*Wo Guan Li*), and the Union Wine Ceremony (*He Jin Li*). Each embodies respect, harmony, and the union of two families – reflecting mutual respect between the couple, and the hope of walking hand in hand through life.



**Baset Mahmoudi**  
25 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)

## The joy of people during Nowruz

Nowruz honours renewal, rebirth, and ancestral bonds, in the Kurdistan region, Iran. The celebration of the spring solstice embodies centuries of shared spiritual heritage across central Asia. In 2010, the “International Day of Nowruz” was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly, maintaining its role as an ancient tradition that unites countries along the Silk Roads.





**Md. Hasanur Rahman Maruf**  
*24 years old, Bangladesh*

## **Sindoor ceremony: a joyous celebration of Union**

At a Bangladeshi Hindu wedding, Sindoor is gently applied to the bride as part of her marriage rituals within the wedding house. This practice marks her transition into married life and symbolizes blessings, prosperity, and continuity of her new journey.

**Saneet Kumar Goud Konduri**  
*22 years old, India*

## Colours beat like drums

Drums unite the crowd as the ritual begins for Holi. Vibrant colours fill the air and the rhythm of the music guides the celebration throughout Hindu communities along the Silk Roads.





**Qian Wang**  
25 years old, People's Republic of China

## Holidays begin

In Pengshui Miao and Tujia Autonomous County, Chongqing, China, a unique drinking etiquette is practiced by the Miao ethnic group. During banquets, several hosts pour wine together for their guests, who must drink it all without touching the bowl with their hands. This act symbolizes the high mountains and flowing water. The tradition reflects the Miao people's warm hospitality and represents the shared spirit of welcome found along the Silk Roads.

**Abdelghani Rhalid**  
21 years old, Morocco

## Chaimae, the horsewoman

A young rider from Sidi Bennour in Morocco, and her steed "Yaqin". *Tbourida*, is a traditional Moroccan equestrian performance that dates to the 16th century and is inscribed in the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Based on Arab-Amazigh rituals, *Tbourida* reflects a heritage shaped by centuries of exchange across North Africa and the Silk Roads, where cultures and traditions flowed along ancient caravan routes.



Suresh Meena  
21 years old, India

## In the grip of celebration

A playful struggle inside a temple during Holi celebrations, as friends pull each other through coloured water.



**Debashis Mondal**  
22 years old, Bangladesh

## Sacred mist

Draped in red veils, women stand quietly in the water, in a moment of reflection. The vivid reds set against the soft grey of incense smoke create a striking contrast, highlighting the importance of fabrics and rich colours in Bangladeshi tradition. These colours also evoke the exchanges along the Silk Roads, where indigo from India, madder from Central Asia, silk from China, and pigments from the Middle East moved toward the Mediterranean, shaping trade and cultural expression across regions.





**Rushal Anap**  
22 years old, India

## Sacred red

The *Veer Mhaskoba Yatra* pilgrimage is held during the month of Magh at the Veer village temple, in India. This annual event is a symbol of pride and cultural identity in the Maharashtra region.

**Matthew Run Yao Lam**  
*18 years old, Singapore*

## Holy week in Leshan, China

New members are baptized on Holy Saturday as the Leshan Diocese welcomes them for the Holy Eucharist. Christianity reached China centuries ago via the Silk Roads. This ceremony is a vibrant celebration of that enduring legacy, one of life's sacred milestones in a land shaped by centuries of faith and exchange.





**Iulia Antonciuc**  
*21 years old, Republic of Moldova*

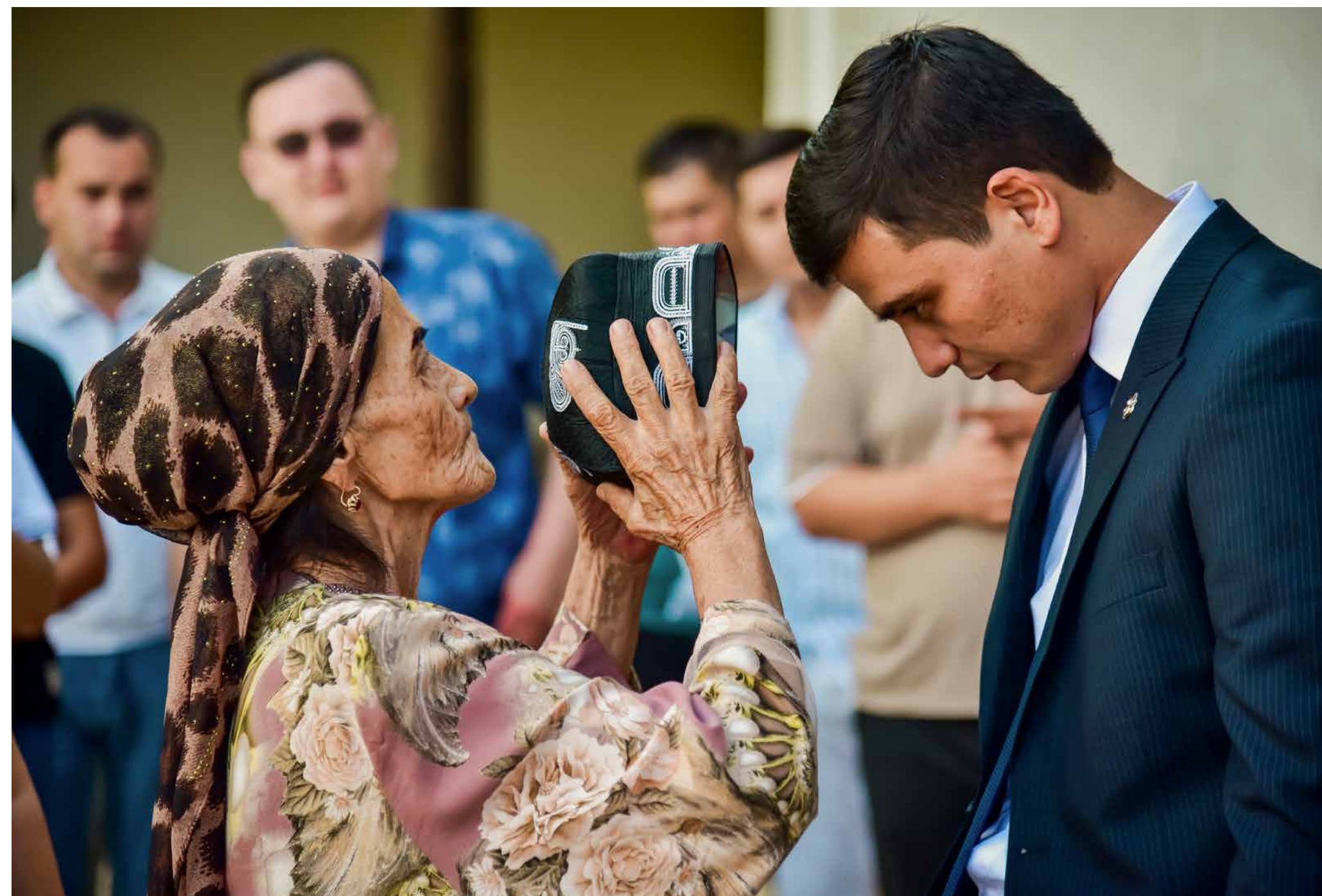
## **The Sacrament of Baptism**

A child is lifted from the water by a priest, symbolizing a new beginning and formal entry into the faith community. The priest's gesture reflects the deep cultural and spiritual significance of baptism in many Christian traditions celebrated across the vast regions along the Silk Roads in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

**Gulnoza Shermamatova**  
25 years old, Uzbekistan

## Wedding in the Navoi region, Uzbekistan

Parents escort the groom to the bride's house with prayers, in keeping with Uzbek wedding traditions where family, community, and symbolic gestures play a central role. Such moments reflect centuries of cultural exchange, where hospitality, ritual, and community celebrations remain deeply rooted in everyday life throughout Central Asia and beyond.



**Piset Keo**  
23 years old, Cambodia

## The path towards remembrance

Monks in Cambodia meditate in silent remembrance of the late Samdech Sang, a revered spiritual leader who preserved Khmer culture and language. The spread of Buddhism to Cambodia was deeply influenced by the Silk Roads, where monks and traders carried religious teachings across Asia.



**Shakhnoza Kurbonmamadova**  
24 years old, Tajikistan

## Music ties the knot

The echo of music and traditional instruments is inseparable from weddings in the Pamir mountains of Tajikistan. The *Pamiri Rubab*, a traditional lute native to the region, travelled the Silk Roads with traders and musicians, spreading its unique sound and enriching musical traditions across the region.



**Saida Nabieva**  
23 years old, Uzbekistan

## Wearing its history

Malak is dressed in traditional Uzbek wedding attire: a silk atlas scarf and handwoven cloths, luxurious fabrics prized across Central Asia. These textiles, often made from ikat silk, were traded along the Silk Roads. They are deeply rooted in the heritage of Uzbekistan and out countries in Central Asia, where they have become symbols of elegance.



**Hosna Fazily**  
24 years old, Afghanistan



## **Yalda Night, the winter solstice**

Celebrated on the first night of winter, Afghan families gather to mark the occasion by eating fruits such as watermelons, pomegranates, and oranges, while also reading poetry books such as from the poet Hafez. This festival is celebrated in many regions and countries along the Silk Roads including Afghanistan, Iran, and Tajikistan to mark the winter solstice, with traditions passed down through generations.

**Hayrunnisa Altınata**  
*20 years old, Türkiye*

## **St. George's Cathedral, Istanbul, Türkiye**

Guided by priests, this prayer reflects the deep spiritual heritage of Eastern Orthodoxy, a tradition that journeyed along the Silk Roads. These ancient routes not only connected distant lands but also facilitated the movement of religious emissaries, missionaries, monks, and pilgrims who carried their faiths across continents, fostering spiritual exchange and dialogue between diverse cultures.



**Amir Abbas Bastami**  
19 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)

## Nowruz

Nowruz, an ancient celebration, is the most significant annual festival in Iran and is celebrated across the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and the Balkans. While different regions have preserved or developed their own traditions, the celebration continues to embody the core message of rebirth and renewal of nature. One of the symbolic items placed on the *Haft Sin* table during Nowruz is *sabzeh* (sprouted wheat), representing greenness and regrowth during spring. In this photo, during Nowruz, a village child in Kurdistan region in Iran is carrying *Sabzeh* for the Haft Sin table.



**Sephora Etienne**  
16 years old, Mauritius

## Mauritianism

A young girl holds a ravann, a lively percussion instrument with deep, rhythmic beats that bring energy and life throughout Mauritius. Central to many festive celebrations, it embodies the island's vibrant spirit and rich culture, known for its diversity and the harmonious coexistence of its people. Positioned along the maritime Silk Roads, the island was a key port where travellers stopped to rest, trade goods, and share traditions, weaving cultures together through commerce, stories, music, and customs.



**Hussaini Hassan**  
23 years old, Nigeria

## Kalgwai Fishing Festival

The Kalgwai Fishing Festival, a traditional celebration held in Nigeria, showcases the rich cultural heritage of the Kalgwai people. Here, the women's floating contest draws the attention of the audience.



**Sumaya Humaid Alhaini**  
*25 years old, Oman*

## Horse show

Horse competitions are held in the village of Dawa Jabreen, Oman, during Eid celebrations and national occasions. Riders elegantly guide their Arabian horses through ceremonial display. Various horseback riding sports and traditions are significant elements of the shared legacies of the Silk Roads.



**Amir Hossein Abazarian**  
23 years old, Iran (Islamic Republic of)



## Songs from Khorasan, Iran

Bakhshis musicians perform traditional music from the Khorasan region in Iran, known for their mastery of the dotâr, a two-stringed, long-necked lute. Passed down through master-pupil training, Bakhshi music carries the history and cultural traditions of their people. More than storytellers, Bakhshis play a vital social role as guardians of their community's heritage. The music of the Bakhshis of Khorasan is inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

**Kestrel Andrei Mamawag**  
17 years old, Philippines

## Arms raised, feet aligned

*Kaamulan* is a festival where the seven tribes of the province of Bukidnon in the Philippines come together to celebrate their shared heritage through traditional stories, chants, music, and rituals. Deeply rooted in ancestral customs, the festival echoes centuries of cultural exchange shaped by ancient connections forged through the maritime Silk Roads.





**Shubhodeep Roy**  
*23 years old, India*

## **Embracing the end**

The sacred fires of Varanasi never cease, symbolizing the cycle of death and rebirth as they consume the physical form, releasing the soul to its next journey. Ideas about the afterlife also travelled along the Silk Roads, from Hindu and Buddhist notions of reincarnation in South Asia to Zoroastrian rituals in the Iranian Plateau and burial traditions in Central Asia and China, reflecting a shared search for meaning beyond life.



**Azamat Bolzhurov**  
22 years old, Kyrgyzstan

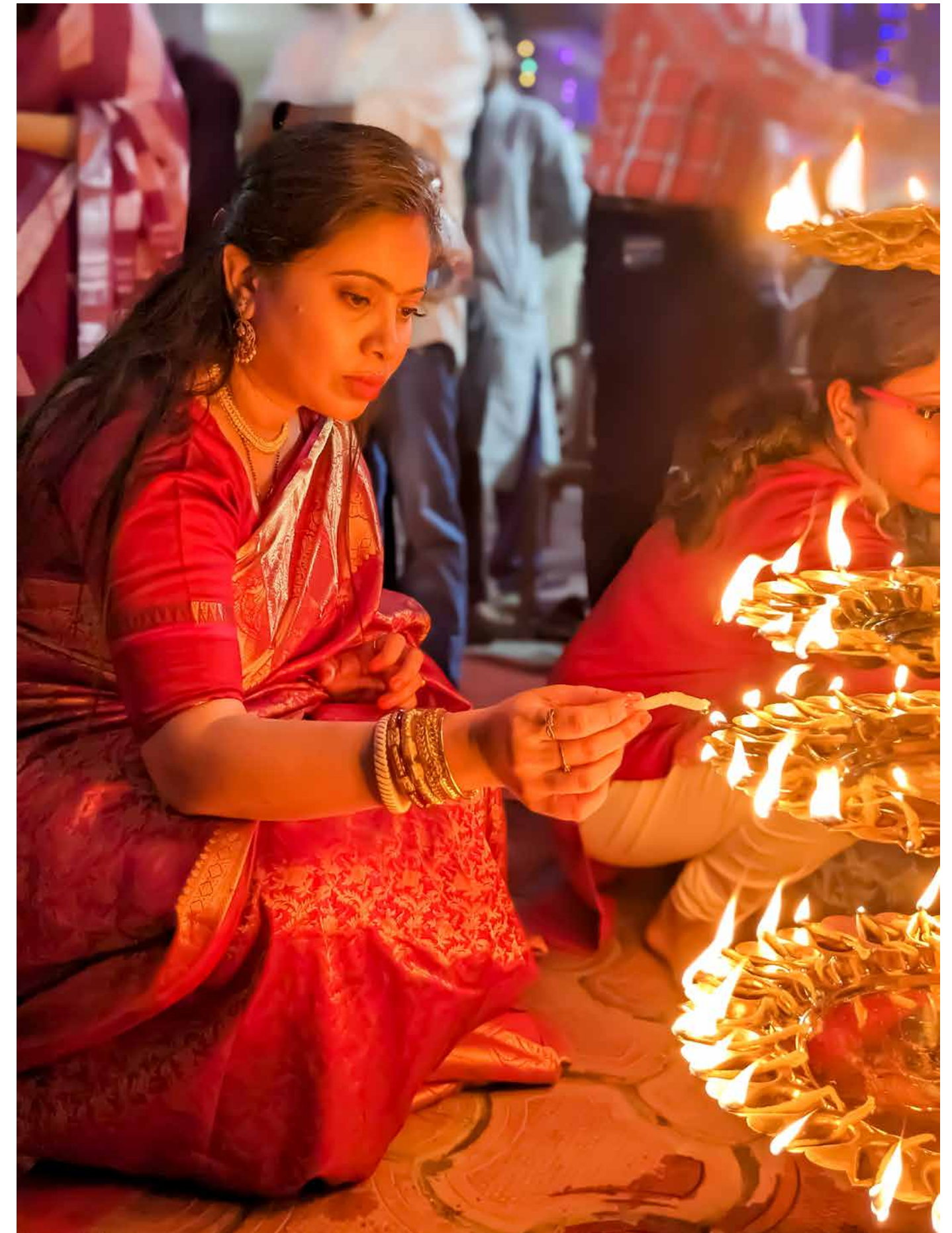
## **Songs around the campfire**

The musical group performs an evening song around a campfire in the mountain village of Gelon, Uzbekistan. Music along the Silk Roads has long brought communities together, creating bonds through shared melodies and stories.

**Soudeep Mahapatra**  
15 years old, India

## In silk and flame

Lighting the *Hazar Bati*, meaning “thousands of flames”, during Diwali, surrounded by the warm glow of ceremonial lamps, reflects the essence of the festival’s joyful and spiritual atmosphere. Across the Silk Roads, fire and light play a central role in numerous rituals and festivals.



**Vanessa Azzahra**  
21 years old, Indonesia

## Holi in full bloom

The city of Nandgaon, India, bursts with colour and energy during Lathmar Holi Festival, celebrating with love and laughter. The various pigments reflect centuries of trade, spreading natural dyes and shaping cultural traditions across Asia. These hues recall how merchants exchanged indigo, saffron, madder, and other precious colourants across the Silk Roads.





**Thu Kha Aung**  
24 years old, Myanmar

## A Shan wedding

The Shan people in Myanmar celebrate weddings with a variety of rich customs and cultural practices. The silk threads around the wrists of the groom and bride symbolize love, unity, stability, and prosperity. Along with Myanmar, similar traditions can be found at weddings across other Silk Roads communities, reflecting shared cultural themes of unity and harmony.

**Ziad El Fiqy**  
23 years old, Egypt

## Two even worlds

A wonderful contrast unfolds during Sayeda Zeinab's Moulid, a religious celebration held with great fervour in Egypt. On one side, a large gathering of adults engages in a spiritual commemoration full of energy and movement, while on the other, children enjoy a calm moment away from the noise. The scene highlights the diversity of the celebration and the beautiful balance between activity and stillness.



**Ayan Mondal**  
19 years old, India

## Gajon ritual

In Murshidabad, West Bengal, India, communities unite through dance, music, and devotion to Shiva, who represents both destruction and renewal. Celebrating spring and spiritual cleansing, this tradition reflects ancient customs of cultural and religious exchange carried along the Silk Roads across Asia.





**Nazokat Yusupova**  
23 years old, Uzbekistan

## Nowruz festivities

During Nowruz, which is celebrated across several vast regions along the Silk Roads, Uzbek women adorn themselves in white dresses, symbolizing purity and renewal. Their heads are crowned with traditional headdresses, such as the *kimeshek*, a white cloth with intricate patterns, signifying maturity and respect within the community.

# Best photographers of the contest

## A

**Abazarian, Amir Hossein** | 135  
23 years old – Iran (Islamic Rep. of)

**Ahmad, Armaan** | 21  
17 years old – India

**Ahmadi, Mardin** | 38  
23 years old – Iran (Islamic Rep. of)

**Alhaini, Sumaya Humaid** | 132  
25 years old – Oman

**Almandhari, Osama Hamood** | 64  
25 years old – Oman

**Altınata, Hayrunnisa** | 124  
20 years old – Türkiye

**Anap, Rushal** | 109  
22 years old – India

**Ansari, Muhammad Bilal** | 47  
20 years old – Pakistan

**Antonciuc, Iulia** | 113  
21 years old – Republic of Moldova

**Azzahra, Vanessa** | 144  
21 years old – Indonesia

## B

**Bastami, Amir Abbas** | 126  
19 years old – Iran (Islamic Rep. of)

**Bhunia, Mohammad Sakiful Islam** | 73  
23 years old – Bangladesh

**Bolzhurov, Azamat** | 141  
25 years old – Kyrgyzstan

## C

**Chry, Nakhim** | 81  
21 years old – Cambodia

## D

**Das, Tomal** | 30  
20 years old, Bangladesh

## E

**El Fiyy, Ziad** | 148  
23 years old, Egypt

**Erdenebayar, Nyamsuren** | 63  
23 years old, Mongolia

**Etiennette, Sephora** | 128  
16 years old, Mauritius

## F

**Fazily, Hosna** | 123  
24 years old – Afghanistan

## G

**Gano, Sharon U.** | 69  
25 years old – Philippines

**Gautam, Aashish** | 89  
25 years old – Nepal

**Ghosh, Ankit** | 44  
16 years old – India

## H

**Hamidulla, Abadan** | 28  
25 years old – Afghanistan/Canada

**Hassan, Hussaini** | 130  
23 years old – Nigeria

**Hikmatova, Adel** | 24  
17 years old – Uzbekistan

**Holland, Kate** | 78  
25 years old – United States of America

**Hossain, Muhammad Amdad** | 48  
24 years old – Bangladesh

## K

**Kapkti, Mayank** | 74  
25 years old – India

**Keo, Piset** | 116  
23 years old – Cambodia

**Khant Kyaw, Aung** | 33  
17 years old, Myanmar

**Konduri, Saneet Kumar Goud** | 98  
22 years old – India

**Kozhuova, Nazym** | 60  
16 years old – Kazakhstan

**Kurbonmamadova, Shakhnoza** | 118  
24 years old – Tajikistan

## L

**Lam, Matthew Run Yao** | 110  
18 years old – Singapore

## M

**Ma, Haining** | 23  
16 years old – People's Rep. of China

**Mahapatra, Soudeep** | 142  
15 years old, India

**Mahmoudi, Baset** | 94  
25 years old – Iran (Islamic Rep. of)

**Mamawag, Kestrel Andrei** | 136  
17 years old – Philippines

**Maruf, Md. Hasanur Rahman** | 97  
24 years old – Bangladesh

**Meena, Suresh** | 104  
21 years old – India

**Mohamed, Ahmed** | 55  
25 years old – Egypt

**Mondal, Debashis** | 106  
22 years old – Bangladesh

**Mondal, Ayan** | 150  
19 years old – India

## N

**Nabieva, Saida** | 120  
23 years old – Uzbekistan

**Naser, Yousef** | 27  
21 years old – Egypt

## Q

**Quadery, Aziza Ayesha** | 56  
18 years old – Bangladesh

## R

**Rhalid, Abdelghani** | 102  
21 years old – Morocco

**Roy, Shubhdeep** | 139  
23 years old – India

## S

**Santoso, Naufal Ardi** | 59  
22 years old, Indonesia

**Selvaraj Senthilkumar, Shailesh** | 70  
16 years old – India

**Sett Wathone, Moe** | 43  
23 years old, Myanmar

**Sheikh, Abdul Wahab** | 35  
16 years old, Pakistan

**Shermatova, Gulnoza** | 114  
25 years old, Uzbekistan

**Shuva, Sourav Barua** | 85  
23 years old, Bangladesh

**Sirvi, Rakesh** | 82  
16 years old, India

**Sultanskaya, Victoria** | 67  
25 years old, Russian Federation

**Syarif, S. Muhammad** | 86  
23 years old, Indonesia

## T

**Thoe, Jansen** | 53  
14 years old – Indonesia

**Thu Kha, Aung** | 147  
24 years old – Myanmar

## U

**Upadhyay, Dinesh Raj** | 36  
24 years old – Nepal

**Utshow, Ananto Biswas** | 90  
23 years old – Bangladesh

## W

**Wang, Qian** | 101  
25 years old – People's Rep. of China

## Y

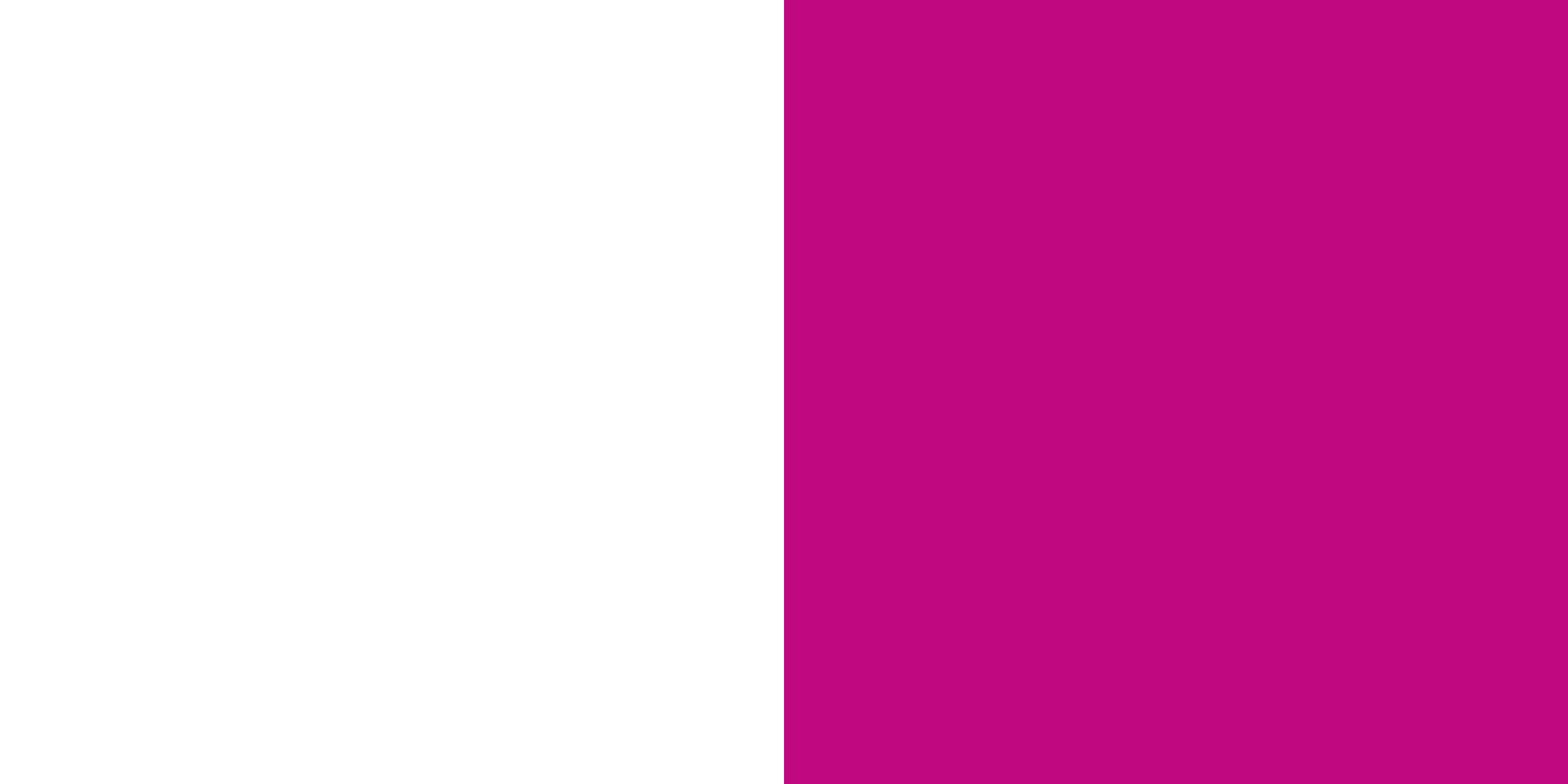
**Yasir, Md. Ahnaf Al** | 51  
19 years old – Bangladesh

**Yawat Dounwou, Landry Junior** | 77  
23 years old – Cameroon

**Yusupova, Nazokat** | 153  
23 years old – Uzbekistan

## Z

**Zhang, Yijia** | 92  
23 years old – People's Rep. of China



This album presents the sixth edition of UNESCO's *Youth Eyes on the Silk Roads* international photo contest. Organized by the UNESCO Silk Roads Programme, with the support of the *Beijing International Peace Culture Foundation*, this annual initiative invites talented young photographers from across the globe to explore the vibrant cultural heritage and diversity that thrive along these historic routes.

The term "Silk Roads" symbolizes the vast network of historical trade routes linking East, South, and Southeast Asia with Central Asia, the Russian Steppes, the Indian Subcontinent, the Iranian and Anatolian Plateaus, and the Arabian Peninsula. These routes also extended into North and Northeast Africa and Europe, eventually reaching Western Europe and the Iberian Peninsula. Over centuries, these routes served as pathways for trade and vital corridors for cultural exchange, the dissemination of knowledge, and the blending of diverse traditions and practices. This intercultural exchange has significantly shaped contemporary societies, enriched identities, and fostered dialogue and mutual understanding among cultures.

In this sixth edition, held under the theme '*Life Celebrations*', young photographers have vividly documented festivities and cultural moments that highlight joy, unity, and shared heritage along the Silk Roads. Their powerful images capture how these celebrations and rituals continue to reflect and strengthen centuries-old connections between communities.

The ***Youth Lens on the Silk Roads*** album presents 66 striking photographs from two age categories (14-17 and 18-25), illustrating the vibrant mosaic of cultural celebrations that unite communities across landscapes. Each image reveals the energy, resilience, and profound cultural richness of contemporary Silk Road societies. Together, these photographs celebrate the enduring legacy and dynamic spirit of the Silk Roads today.



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Silk Roads Programme

