

# City braces for Durga festivities today

BISHAWJIT DAS

Devi Durga is swings into town today and the capital is enthusiastically preparing to greet her. Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of Bangali Hindu community, is expected to be celebrated by people of all communities.

Durga Puja will be observed in 132 mandaps in and around the city this year. The number of mandaps has increased by two more than the previous year. Durga Puja starts from the 6<sup>th</sup> lunar day of new moon of Aashwin (6<sup>th</sup> Bengali month)

**The goddess is believed to descend on a swing, bringing in drought, famine and destruction to the fields. The ten-handed goddess would return home on Gaja (elephant) leaving good fortune with the devotees and plentiful harvests in the plain.**

and ends on the 10<sup>th</sup> lunar day.

The festival begins with *aarjali*, (offerings) made to the goddess on the first day, which includes the burning of incense bringing in about fragrant odours of various flowers.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> lunar day, Kumari puja (virgin goddess) is observed and the Ramakrishna Mission Temple is very famous and popular spot for this celebration. Every year a virgin of 6 to 12 is selected and worshipped as the goddess.

The finale of this festival is the immersing of the

statue of the goddess in the waters of Buriganga, by the thousands of devotees, who flock to the site in song and dance, and the glamour of the festival then comes to an end.

According to the belief of the community, the goddess descends from the *Kailash* (a mountain) together with her children to visit her father's home. The goddess of strength stays in her father's residence for five days, and this is the duration of the puja. With the immersing of the statue of the goddess in the river, she goes back to the Himalayas.

The goddess is believed to descend on a swing, bringing in drought, famine and destruction to the fields. The ten-handed goddess would return home on *Gaja* (elephant) leaving good fortune with the devotees and plentiful harvests in the plain.

Many incidents of damages to the idols of the goddess in various parts of the country, Dhaka has not suffered any communal disturbances.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police is prepared to tackle any sort of trouble in the capital. It has engaged a fleet of 2,300 law enforcing agents from different sectors. "Apart from 1500 policemen, 550 personnel of Bangladesh Rifles and 300 Ansars, there will be law enforcing agents in civil dress around the puja mandaps," said SM Mijanur Rahman, additional deputy commissioner, Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

"We have identified 83 sensitive mandaps out of the 132 in the city some in the Katwali thana, most of them in Lalbagh and Hazaribagh thanas and some belonging to the Ramna thana," added Rahman.

People of the community were shopping till late hours of last evening. There was a rush of purchasers for many new arrivals of attire in the latest trend.

The entire old Dhaka was in a festive mood since last week. Shankari Bazar lane alone has arranged seven mandaps one along side the other, and thousands of people from in and around Dhaka are expected to flow in to see the decoration of the mandaps and the elegant lighting in the pandals.

Tantibazar is also very famous for its decoration and paintings of the different phases of the *Devi*. Competitions too are arranged to draw out the best portrayal of the goddess.



ALASDAIR MACDONALD



READY TO BE REVERED:

The many facets of the images of a dazzling Devi as portrayed by Santosh Pal are all ready and waiting to be put on the Puja Mandap at the Battala Mandir at Agriculture University at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in Dhaka. The artist put the finishing touches on the goddess yesterday.



ALASDAIR MACDONALD

## DCC markets trade no oxygen

Traders, businessmen and labourers face serious health hazards every day



Lack of ventilation causes health hazards to thousands of people.

SULTANA RAHMAN

Serious lack of ventilation in four DCC markets in Karwan Bazar is causing oppressive heat and exposing thousands of traders, businessmen, labourers and customers to health hazards.

Shop owners said the atmosphere inside the cramped markets housing about 2,500 stores turns suffocating during power cuts. Lack of fresh air inside the markets often makes the shopkeepers and workers gasp for air. When all lights of the shops are turned on, even the air produced by electric fans becomes overheated, they said.

When the four three-storey structures were built in 1984 (the regime of HM Ershad), the building designers did not take the ventilation aspect into consider-

ation, traders alleged. The structures were built, with all sides closed, almost totally preventing the flow of fresh air from outside.

In the early 1980s when Rajuk handed the Karwan Bazar area over to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) for maintenance, the DCC grabbed the opportunity quickly and built the markets 'without Rajuk approval, Rajuk sources said.

Now, most of the 10,000 businessmen and workers in the Karwan Bazar markets, who worked under these intolerable circumstances, commonly complain of asthma, jaundice, skin diseases, headache and chest pain.

"I have been suffering from chest pain since I started working here three years ago," said Hazrat, a grocer.

"Doctors in Dhaka Medical College Hospital last year suggested I work in open places to cure the pain," he added. Hazrat now comes out of the market for fresh air whenever he gets a break.

The traders said building additional structures has worsened the problem. The ground floor of the kitchen market is the most suffocating because of a one-storey extension to the building, Sarkar Rafi Uddin, general secretary of Karwan Bazar Shopkeepers and Hawkers Association.

"We talked to the mayor about their ventilation problem in the markets, but the mayor said it was unnecessary to do anything now as the entire Karwan Bazar would be shifted elsewhere," Rafi Uddin said.

## Top RHD engineer faces the music

In a meeting at the PMO the Principal Secretary blasted top RHD engineer

SOHEL ISLAM

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Kamal Uddin Siddiqui ordered the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) to submit a report within a month, explaining the reasons behind the dismantling of the medians on the Airport Road.

Siddiqui also warned the representatives of the RHD, present in the meeting, of serious consequences and monetary punishment if any anomalies were found, said meeting sources. The meeting titled Good Governance and Beautification of Dhaka, was held at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on Sunday.

The Principal Secretary also wanted to know why the RMD went into such dismantling. It was not included in the beautification project conceived by the PMO, he said.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia too, had

recently expressed her displeasure at dismantling the medians on the Airport Road and ordered the stoppage of the work immediately.

The controversy arisen from dismantling the medians on the Airport Road made the principal secretary cautious of breaking down the roundabout at Hotel Sonargaon and relocation of SAARC fountain.

Representatives from different utility service providers, police, armed forces, the Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB), the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), the Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED) and many more attended the meeting which was chaired by the Principal Secretary.

The meeting at a DTCB office last July decided to relocate the SAARC fountain to improve the smooth flow of traffic at the Hotel Sonargaon roundabout within the next six months. Kamal Uddin

Siddiqui had given his approval to proceed with the work.

"We are now asked to seek opinions from the members of the civil society. Afterwards, we may have to seek approval from the Prime Minister as well," said an insider of the DTCB, requesting to be anonymous.

"The DCC was instructed to evict the illegal occupiers at the Gulshan South Park and to hand it to us within a month. We will develop it as a park under the Lake Development Project," said another member of the meeting seeking anonymity.

The meeting discussed the final draft of Dhaka Metropolitan High Rise Building Construction Rule 2003 and Private Housing and Land Development Rule 2003.

Many suggested that the provision of seeking permission from ten different government organisations to erect buildings created a time hassle for the

builders. "One Stop Window Service comprising different government organisations was to relieve the builders from this hassle. Nothing concrete has been discussed as yet," said the member.

"The proposed one window service will be discussed in the next meeting," added the member.

The 1200 illegal rickshaws at the graveyard waiting for transportation to the thanas and district towns will be distributed to unemployed persons within a month.

The Dhaka Divisional Commissioner was given the responsibility of transportation and distribution. The transportation cost of each rickshaw will be Tk 312.

"The transportation cost will be recovered from the persons who are interested in availing the opportunity," sources said at the meeting.

The sudden decision to dismantle airport road medians surprised the city dwellers as well as many officials involved in development works. The PMO has asked the top RHD engineer to show cause why such an own-risk decision was taken at the cost of public funds.



STAR PHOTO