



The Holy Rosary Church in Tejgaon is all set to welcome people on Christmas.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



# CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS

## A TAPESTRY OF faith, tradition and unity



**We must remember that all sects of Christians celebrate the birth of Christ and hold the nine-day prayers called novena, the tradition of devotional praying in Christianity. Novena in churches commences from December 17.**

**FATHER ROZARIO**  
Registrar, Notre Dame University  
Bangladesh

RBR

The mud huts on the foothills of the Garo Pahar are covered with bashor lota (lady's slipper vine) at this time of the year. The vine with a large, pendant blossom of rich yellow, maroon, to brownish-red colour, crept up on every hut in this quaint Garo village in Haluaghat, Mymensingh. It feels as if nature has lit Christmas lights in the community comprising only 15 to 20 families.

It is the home of Shizata Rema, a Garo girl working in Dhaka, who cannot wait to get back home for Christmas. Boro Din, as Christmas is known here, is a community affair in this small, Christian township. The people sing into the wee hours of Christmas eve only to wake up early next morning for the mass in their



Every year, children wait eagerly for the arrival of the season, as it also brings them joy and cheer, especially in the form of gifts.

remains by its side.

**CHRISTIANITY IN BANGLADESH**  
Christianity came to Bengal in 1600, when Portuguese missionaries, chaplains, and Fathers came along with the merchants and sailors.

The Portuguese called it the Bengal mission and made entry at the grassroots through business in leather, spice, tea, and religion. Later, when the East India Company came the local zamindars started to connect with Christianity.

The names D'Rozario, D'Costa, Rodricks, Purification are all Portuguese titles or surnames. It has been a tradition to recognise Catholics by name. The missionaries used to give one Christian name and one of their surnames to the newly baptised person. Thus, the new converts were recognised by the surnames of the

Santa Claus will bring for children.

This year, the festival of love, joy, and sharing will also have events like gospel choirs, scrumptious buffet dinners and gala nights in Dhaka hotels.

The ones unable to go home for Christmas opt to visit Nagari Mission in Kaliganj upazila of Gazipur. The church of St Nicholas is the second oldest church in Bangladesh. It was built in 1695 by Portuguese Saint Nicholas and the church premises are dotted with gardens, schools, and a cemetery.

You may go there from Dhaka by Purbachal highway or Kanchan bridge to Nagori. The Ramna Cathedral Church is another one where Christians in Dhaka prefer to pray on Christmas Day. The beautiful white



A statue of baby Jesus in Mother Mary's arms at the Holy Rosary Church in Tejgaon.



People in Dhaka are busy buying decorations for Christmas trees.



Christmas celebrations are never complete without cakes. PHOTO: SARIA SAGUARO

small village church.

After prayers, youngsters go house hopping, singing kirtans – joyful hymns or carols celebrating the birth of Christ. People host them with tea and pithas.

People light up their homes with

strings of white fairy lights. Later, the entire township gathers around for an elaborate Christmas lunch at a designated household. It is the custom of the village to nominate a single household to host the Christmas feast; every year it rotates so that everyone gets an opportunity to host the special lunch.

What makes Christmas a happy occasion for them is the special sermons given by priests from the Dhaka diocese, who travel to remote villages to spread the Christmas cheer. This year, Father Leonard Shankar Rozario will travel to one such village as part of his religious duties.

**THE FESTIVAL OF LOVE, JOY AND SHARING**  
Only 0.03 percent of the Bangladeshi population is Christian, which makes for 5.5 lakh Christians, including the different sects. Of them, around 4 lakhs are Catholics, said Fr Rozario who currently serves as the registrar of Notre Dame University Bangladesh.

"We must remember that all sects of Christians celebrate the birth of Christ and hold the nine-day prayers called novena, the tradition of devotional praying in Christianity."

"Novena in churches commences from December 17, leading to Christmas eve and continues to the first hour of the night or the hour of the birth as it is said. The spiritual devotion consists of the recitation of a set form of prayer venerating and placing Jesus in the manger."

A church choir goes on before and

after the liturgy. The choir symbolises the multitude of singing of angels when Jesus was born and children go carolling from house to house to give the news of the birth of Jesus and the peace he brought to humanity.

"This year Ramna Cathedral Church, also known as Kakrail Church, in Dhaka, will hold Christmas masses in Bangla at 9:00pm instead of midnight due to political unrest. The English prayers will commence at 11:00pm.

"The church will have refreshments for the devotees. Over 4,000 people are expected to join the celebrations this year. At midnight, President Mohammed Shahabuddin will exchange greetings with the leaders of the Christian community at Bangabhaban on the occasion of Christmas, the main religious festival of the Christian community," informed Father Albert of Ramna Cathedral Church.

"For generations, Christians celebrate and enact the birth of Christ. The birth of Jesus is very important because we must understand why our God became human. Jesus was born poor in a manger; he was insecure; he was born in times of societal turmoil and ill-feeling. He brought justice, peace, and tranquility and showed us to care and look out for the poor, the needy, and the hungry as he was born," Father Rozario explained.

The Christmas season is a reminder to Christians that despite hardships, God chose to join humanity and still



A decorated church in Kakrail

priests they followed.

The villages on the shores, which are now part of Noakhali, were the first point of entry for the merchants and priests, then they went for Chattogram and later Christianity spread towards Dhaka.

**CHRISTMAS IN THE CITY**  
Christmas in Dhaka, though limited, is filled with joy and cheer.

All the homes will be lit up and decorated with fairy lights. The main highlight will of course be the Christmas tree.

Besides, Christmas is never complete without a sweet finale. After a family dinner, a cake is a must.

But the best part of this joyous occasion is the Christmas gifts that

building in an open courtyard has etched a certain spiritual fondness in all. The long hall with wooden pews, images of Jesus, lit candles offered for worship and the humming of the choir, the kirtans and prayers all have a peaceful impact on you.

There are Gothic and Renaissance motifs both inside and outside the structure and it is considered to be a fine example of post-colonial fusion architecture. The serenity of the interiors of any place of worship has an unexplained sombreness that calms the mind and brings you close to divinity.

Let the Christmas cheer light up your spirit this year.