



PHOTO: SHADAB SHAHROKH HAI

# DURGA PUJA at Dhaka University

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If you happen to find yourself at Dhaka University during the Durga Puja vacation, you won't witness the quiet solitude that comes along with most universities in vacations. Rather, you will find a crowd dressed up in new clothes and shoes, braving whatever weather it is, hopping about here and there around the campus.

Even during this time, the heart of Dhaka doesn't pause for a breath. The university has its own kind of dynamic with the festival, being both the host and witness to the gathering of faith, festivity, and inclusivity.

## Jagannath Hall's Durga Puja

Jagannath Hall is known for hosting the grand Saraswati Puja. It has also become a key centre for Durga Puja celebrations over the decades.

From the entrance of the hall to the towering trees and shimmering ponds

within, everything is lit up in red, blue, and green lights, draping the buildings with a festive look. Each year, a new Puja Celebration Committee is formed, under the guidance of the hall provost, ensuring the strategic organisation and successful celebration of the puja.

## Shiv Bari Durga Puja

Though Jagannath Hall may take the spotlight, it's not the only place on campus where the festival is arranged. While walking past through Jagannath Hall towards Shahid Minar, you will spot an entrance of a narrow lane, lit with festive lights, just beside the Bangabandhu Tower. Follow that path, and it will lead you towards one of the ancient temples -- Shiv Bari -- where tradition, history, and celebration converge each year, creating an atmosphere both sacred and vibrant.

## Nearby Attractions

The Dhaka University campus sits

in close proximity to two of the city's most important temples, Dhakeshwari Mandir, and Ramna Kali Mandir, both attracting thousands of devotees every year. While Dhakeshwari, the national temple of Bangladesh, draws people from all corners of the city, Ramna Kali Mandir, located near the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC), also becomes another focal point, because of its historical value and unique structural design. Together, these temples form a triad with Jagannath Hall, pulling the faithful and the curious alike into their orbits.

## Delicacies of Puja

Visiting the puja mandaps, you'll find the rhythmic sound of Dhak, the call of Shankha echoing through the air, and puja music provoking you to join the dance with the crowd. Don't hold yourself back from strolling with a muse. And if you see a long queue

of crowds, especially on Ashtami afternoon, most likely, they are waiting for the Bhoger Khichuri, synonymous with Durga Puja. Nearby food stalls, offering sweets and treats, adds another layer to the puja feast.

This year, however, the celebration comes with added caution and safety measurements. Considering the current political climate, the campus has implemented stricter action, by reactivating six surveillance boxes at entry points.

Despite the increased surveillance, the heart of Durga Puja beats strong at University of Dhaka, where the goddess is not just a symbol of strength and power, but of resilience, indicating a belief that even amidst change and challenge, some things shall remain constant. Durga Puja at Dhaka University is one such constant festival, year after year, pulling crowds towards the celebration.

## Years of hard work

FROM PAGE 1

"I sold products worth Bangladeshi four to five lakh taka on credit. I am totally hopeless about my future now."

Shahadat invested Tk 8-10 lakh in the grocery store.

"All my dreams have now been crushed by the war."

About 3,000 Bangladeshi migrants have been displaced by the Israeli-Hezbollah war, according to Bangladeshi embassy officials in Lebanon.

A few thousand others who were displaced may have taken shelter in their relatives' or friends' homes, according to Bangladeshi community leaders.

There are about one lakh Bangladeshi migrants, and almost 50 percent of them are women.

However, the political crisis in Lebanon in 1988-20, the dollar crisis and the pandemic caused havoc to the migrants. The Israeli attacks pushed them into another spate of uncertainty.

Bangladeshis spend Tk 4-4.5 lakh each to go to Lebanon, and their minimum monthly monthly wage is \$350, according to Abdul Karim, president of Lebanon Probashi Bangladeshi Sramik Union in Beirut.

Since it takes a while for a migrant to recoup the recruitment fees, many of them change jobs for better-paid ones and thus become irregular.

"In fact, most of the Bangladeshis in Lebanon are now irregular. That's why many of those who are facing security threats for the Israeli attacks are unwilling to return home," Karim added.

The Bangladesh embassy in Beirut on

Wednesday announced that those willing to return home should send their information through a prescribed form to the embassy there.

The decision came after the International Organisation for Migration agreed to the Bangladesh government's request to arrange the evacuation of Bangladeshis willing to return home.

"We are still weighing the options of evacuation," said the Bangladesh embassy official in Lebanon asking not to be named.

Out of 250 Bangladeshis, as of yesterday, only 35 are willing to return home, said Rabbol Mia, one of the Bangladesh community leaders who arranged the shelter in Saïda.

"I don't have a single penny in my pocket. My employer is fleeing because of the war. I don't know when he will return and pay me," said Rubel, another migrant at the shelter centre of Saïda.

Those not going home are worried about what they would be doing in Bangladesh.

"We spent big amounts to come to Lebanon. How can we go home now penniless?" he said.

The Bangladesh government should consider rehabilitation and integration programmes for those returning from Lebanon, said Shakirul Islam, chairman of Ovbashi Karmi Unnayan Programme.

"They are not responsible for the war. They are also not responsible for the political or dollar crisis of Lebanon in the last few years. The international community should also consider support for these migrants," he said.

## Nadal to hang up racket

FROM PAGE 1

The Davis Cup knockout phase will be played from Nov. 19-24.

Nadal's career has been hampered by injuries and he missed the 2023 French Open and was beaten in the first round by German Alexander Zverev this year.

The 'King of Clay' won his last Roland Garros title in 2022 and left Paris on a jaw-dropping 112-4 win-loss record.

Nadal played only 23 matches in the last two seasons.

He will hang up his racket two years after his great rival Roger Federer, leaving 24-time major winner Novak Djokovic of Serbia as the only member of the 'Big Three' still active.

Nadal thanked his family and his team for his stellar

career, with a special word for his uncle Toni, who was his coach for most of his time on court.

"I believe that thanks to him, I have also been able to overcome many situations that have been difficult in my sporting career," he said.

To his fans, Nadal said: "I can't thank you enough for what you have made me feel. Everything I have experienced has been a dream come true."

"I leave with the absolute peace of mind having given my best," he added.

After refusing any special event after his French Open first round loss this year, Nadal said he would be back and he is now expected to receive what promises to be an emotional tribute at Roland Garros next year.

## WB cuts FY25 growth forecast to 4 percent

FROM PAGE 1

However, Bangladesh saw a significant fall in the forecast, compared to the Maldives' 0.5 percentage point.

In the short term, political uncertainties are expected to keep investment and industrial growth subdued, the WB said about downsizing Bangladesh's growth forecast.

It said recent floods are expected to set back agricultural production modestly.

In the medium to long term, growth is expected to pick up gradually, benefiting from critical reforms in the financial sector, increased domestic resource mobilisation, improved business climate, and increased trade, the report added.

Responding to a query during the virtual press conference, Franziska Ohnsorge, World Bank chief economist for South Asia, mentioned the recent floods as one of the reasons for downsizing the growth forecast.

She also said the WB's Dhaka office will release a separate and more elaborated report on Bangladesh's economic update next week.

The WB also highlighted that an interim government took office after the resignation of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina amid widespread student

led protests in early August.

For FY 2025-26, the WB forecasts Bangladesh's economy to grow by 5.5 percent.

This revision comes two weeks after the Asian Development Bank lowered its growth forecast for Bangladesh to 5.1 percent from 6.6 percent for the ongoing fiscal year, citing supply chain disruptions caused by political unrest in July and August.

On inflation across South Asian countries, the WB report said the key index has fallen to within or below target ranges in most inflation-targeting countries in South Asia, the exception being Bangladesh.

Food inflation continues to account for half or more of consumer price inflation in most countries in the region, it said.

In Bangladesh, inflation has remained elevated and above Bangladesh Bank's target since June 2022, it added.

Inflation averaged 9.7 percent in FY23 and FY24, driven by a steady depreciation of the currency and increases in domestic prices of gas, electricity, and fuel.

General inflation surged to 11.7 percent in July 2024 due to supply chain disruptions and political tensions, said the WB report.

In response to

inflationary pressures, the monetary policy rate has been increased by 2.5 percentage points since July 2023, to 9 percent in August 2024.

The WB also said despite further increases in the nominal policy rate, persistently high inflation has kept real (net of actual inflation) policy rates negative.

For the banking system as a whole, the non-performing loan ratio has been about 10 percent since the first quarter of 2023. For state-owned banks, the ratio rose to 27 percent in June 2024, signalling persistent challenges in the financial sector and among borrowers.

Growth of credit to the private sector has been below the pre-pandemic (2015-19) average. Financial conditions tightened during the unrest in July and August, and remain tight amid heightened uncertainty.

In a media statement issued yesterday, the World Bank said growth in South Asia is expected to increase to 6.4 percent this year.

"South Asia's outlook is undoubtedly promising, but the region could do more to realise its full economic potential," Martin Raiser, World Bank vice president for South Asia, said in the statement.

"Key policy reforms to integrate more women

into the workforce and remove barriers to global investment and trade can accelerate growth. Our research shows that raising female labour force participation rates in the region to those of men would increase regional GDP by up to 51 percent."

Female labour force participation in South Asia is among the lowest in the world, the statement said. Only 32 percent of working-age women were in the labour force in 2023, compared to 77 percent of working-age men in the region.

For all South Asian countries except Bhutan, female labour force participation rates in 2023 were 5 to 25 percentage points lower than in countries at similar levels of development, the WB statement said.

This shortfall in the female labour force is most pronounced after marriage. On average, once married, women in South Asia reduce their participation in the workforce by 12 percentage points, even before they have children, it added.

"South Asia's female labour force participation rate of 32 percent is well below the 54 percent average in emerging market and developing economies," WB economist Ohnsorge said in the statement.

## Primary schools

FROM PAGE 1

to certain components". "We hope everything will be sorted out by this month," he said.

In 2020 and 2021, the implementation made less than 10 percent progress due to Covid-19 restrictions, he said.

The unimplemented components of the PEDP-4 project will be included in PEDP-5, he added.

Educationists often say a lack of proper teaching, crowded classrooms, poor student-teacher interaction, and inadequate infrastructure are affecting the quality of primary education.

According to the Directorate of Primary Education's latest National Student Assessment published in August 2023, 61 percent of the third graders and 70 percent of the fifth graders do not have the maths proficiency appropriate in their grades.

Besides, 51 percent of the third graders and 50 percent of the fifth graders lack competence in Bangla.

Of the PEDP-4's Tk 38,291 crore budget, the government is funding Tk 25,561 crore, and development partners are lending Tk 12,730 crore.

The objective of the project is to improve the quality of teaching-learning in schools so that students acquire competencies.

It also aims to recruit 61,000 teachers, train 1.40 lakh current teachers, build 50,000 classrooms, 10,500 rooms for head teachers, 58,000 WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) blocks with washroom facilities, and renovate 42,000 primary schools.

Farid said around 37,000

teachers were appointed last year and the process of appointing another 14,000 was going on.

As per a report on the PEDP-4 project, as of May, only 36 percent of the components for quality education were implemented. The implementation rate was 49 percent of the components for access and participation, and 57 percent for management and governance.

Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said ensuring the quality of education is far from what is desired.

"If we do not ensure quality, we will fall behind in fulfilling the desire of elevation to a middle income country. We can make big structures, but there will be a dearth of people to run them," she added.

The PEDP-4 report by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division says there were 342 activities under the broader categories of access and participation, quality education, and management and governance. As of May, the implementation of 132 of the activities was yet to start.

Of the classrooms, 21,668 are done and 17,192 are being constructed; tenders for building 3,365 head teacher's rooms have been invited, 2,222 contracts signed, 250 constructions are completed, and 1,972 being constructed.

Of the WASH blocks, tenders for 50,704 have been invited, 40,071 contracts signed, and 23,172 constructions are done.

Secretary Farid said, "We hope the work will pick up pace in the coming months."

He added that teachers' training will be prioritised in PEDP-5.

## Tragedy wipes out 2 families

FROM PAGE 1

around 2:00am yesterday.

"On information, police and a rescue team of Pirojpur fire service rushed to the spot, took the victims out of the car and to Pirojpur district hospital. There, duty doctors declared all eight of them dead."

Shawon's cousin Mohammad Murad said Shawon and Motalab used to live in Dhaka's Bhasantek area.

The two families went on a trip in Kuakata on Tuesday. "On their way back to Dhaka, Shawon lost control over the steering and the car plunged into the canal," he said.

Distraught, Jakia asked, "How will I forget the innocent faces of my grandchildren?" Among her five daughters and a son, Amina was the youngest.

Besides renting out his car, Shawon used to work at a CNG filling station in the capital and Motalab

was a cleaner at Dhaka cantonment.

Shawon's elder brother Mohammad Sumon, a teacher, said that Shawon was the youngest of three brothers.

"We had been living in Dhaka since childhood. Our father, Asaduzzaman Mridha died just a few years ago. Our mother has now fallen ill after hearing the news of Shawon's death."

"I never thought we'd have to face such a situation."

Motalab, from Ramnathpur village in Sherpur Sadar upazila, used to belong to a poor family and he was the sole breadwinner.

His close friend Mohammad Abbas said Motalab has only one sister, who lives with their parents in their village home. "Now that he is gone, there is no one to look after his elderly parents."

Brother of Motalab's wife Sabina, Mohammad

Mokaddes, said Sabina was the eldest of four sisters. Mokaddes is the only brother.

"To help the family financially, she was trying to find a job in Dhaka. She even applied for some correction on her NID just three days ago so that she could apply for jobs."

The bodies of all the victims were handed over to the families without autopsy upon their request to the district magistrate. Shawon and his family

members will be laid to rest in his village home in Pirojpur's Nazirpur, and Motalab and his family will be buried in Sherpur.

Meanwhile, the Pirojpur district administration and district police have provided financial aid to the families of the deceased. Md Manjur Morshed Alam, deputy inspector general in Barishal range, met the grieving families at the Pirojpur district hospital yesterday afternoon.

## It didn't imply erasing

FROM PAGE 1

the mass uprising in July-Augusts the "Second Independence", with the first being Bangladesh's triumphant Liberation War.

Prior to the war, Yunus served as an assistant professor at Middle Tennessee State University. After Bangladesh's

independence was declared, he formed the Bangladesh Citizens Committee and spearheaded a US-wide campaign to persuade the US government to recognise Bangladesh.

He also published the Bangladesh Newsletter to raise global awareness about the genocide committed by the Pakistani army.