



**MY DHAKA**

# New year, new festivals

## Dhaka celebrates Pahela Baishakh

RRB

Dhaka is in a festive mood today, dressed in colours so vibrant that even in this blistering Chaitra-Baishakh heat you feel a sense of joy around you. City dwellers are out and about, attending various programmes organised to usher in the Bangla new year.

"Rishka Festival", taking place at Aloki in Tejgaon, is a space where tradition meets creativity. It deserves a mandatory visit today unless you have already been there.

The event has that classic Baishakhi mela feel. It began last Friday, April 11, and ends today, April 14. Rishka Festival is a one-of-a-kind celebration of Bangladeshi heritage, empowering local artists and taking Bengal's rich culture to the global stage.

The organisers planned each



PHOTO: STAR

with young creators. Their sharp and different perception of tradition and local heritage lined with global exposure makes their crafts interesting. We all know how a Ghazi pot painting is usually painted on thick cloth, but bringing it in screen print on a 'gamcha' is unique. The red and blue colours of the 'potchitra' are used on two-dimensional characteristics portraits against the checkered background of a 'gamcha' making it a modern collectible," says Shahida Rahman, a schoolteacher, who loves artsy crafts.

Visitors can access all the available activities using the "All-Access Pass".

Interestingly, there were a lot of activities planned for each day, like Rishka concerts, movie screenings, workshops like Ikebana making and mask painting, and evocative theatre performances.

Classics like "Pather Panchali" and

"Matir Moyna" were already screened, but the iconic "Beder Meye Josna" will be shown today on the big screen around 3:00pm. The event's grand finale will feature a soulful acoustic performance by Firoze Jong.

Fairs like this are fun to visit on any day, but particularly during Pahela Baishakh.

Rishka Festival 2025 celebrates Pahela Baishakh in all its colours and experiences, filled with music, art, food, and everything that makes an event memorable – filled with joy, tradition, and unforgettable memories.

However, this is not the only festival of note happening today. We also have a colourful, lively, and unique Baishakhi Mela and Nogor Uthshob 1432, under the initiative of Dhaka North City Corporation, organised by Gulshan Society at Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed Park in Gulshan 2.

Aptly titled "Oligoli Halkhata", it is a three-day event, from April 13 to 15. The event is a cultural exchange organised by Dhaka North City Corporation in partnership with Catch Bangladesh Limited, supported by various sponsors and cultural organisations.

The event is full of activities like "Alpana" (traditional painting) and crafting clay toys for children. For shopping, there will be stalls featuring traditional handicrafts, ethnic attires, pitha puli, rural products, books, and much more.

Cultural performances of folk music and vibrant Baishakhi performances, along with a book launch on Dhaka's heritage and history will keep visitors busy. Besides there will also be food stalls and other fun activities.

The festival is open to all, ensuring a joyous Baishakhi experience for people of all ages.



activity to highlight the rich Bangla cultural essence and the timelessness of our heritage through the eyes of contemporary creators. They also told stories and evoked enchanting emotions and an experience that'll leave you astounded and happy to see how the new crop of creative minds are taking these age-old charms forward.

"I just visit these fairs to interact

with young creators. Their sharp and different perception of tradition and local heritage lined with global exposure makes their crafts interesting. We all know how a Ghazi pot painting is usually painted on thick cloth, but bringing it in screen print on a 'gamcha' is unique. The red and blue colours of the 'potchitra' are used on two-dimensional characteristics portraits against the checkered background of a 'gamcha' making it a modern collectible," says Shahida Rahman, a schoolteacher, who loves artsy crafts.

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## Power prices not going up anytime soon

FROM PAGE 1

However, the finance ministry informed the IMF team that the power sector's total expenditure could be trimmed by as much as Tk 11,000 crore by reducing the production costs.

So, about Tk 36,000 crore would be allocated as power subsidy in the next fiscal year's budget.

Besides, inflation has been on a declining trend, so the government is unwilling to take any measure that could reverse the trend.

Inflation dropped for three consecutive months before slightly picking up in March to 9.35 percent, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

The state of inflation, which has continued to stay above 9 percent for years, would inform whether the government will hike electricity

prices in the next fiscal year.

However, the government has been planning to increase subsidy allocation for LNG imports as it will increase the use of LNG for electricity production. The revised allocation for the overhead is about Tk 8,000 crore, up from Tk 6,000 crore in the original budget.

In the next fiscal year, about Tk 7,000 crore could be set aside as subsidy for LNG imports.

Alongside the power sector subsidy, the IMF mission also placed importance on the progress made in ramping up revenue collection, implementing market-based exchange rate, and keeping budget deficit low by lowering the budget size.

The IMF mission has stipulated raising the tax revenue-GDP ratio to 9 percent next fiscal year and 7.9

percent this fiscal year. Last fiscal year, the ratio was 7.4 percent.

The finance ministry though maintains the targets are ambitious and sought concessions from the IMF.

The issues will be discussed during tomorrow's meeting, officials said. Besides, further discussions would be held on the sidelines of the World Bank-IMF Spring Meeting in Washington DC later this month. Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed is expected to attend the meeting.

The IMF mission has also recommended going for a full market-based exchange rate, which the central bank has been resistant to given the precarious state of the country's foreign exchange reserves.

As of April 10, gross foreign reserves stood at \$20.9 billion, enough to meet about a little over three months of import bills.

### Main accused

FROM PAGE 1

Sadar Police Station Md Alauddin, also the case's investigation officer, told The Daily Star.

The prime accused, Hitu Sheikh, father-in-law of the victim's sister, has been charged with rape and murder. The other three – Hitu's wife Jaheda Begum, his son and victim's brother-in-law Sajib Sheikh, and Sajib's brother Ratul Sheikh – have been charged with destruction of evidence of the crime and intimidation, he added.

Contacted, Superintendent of Police Mina Mahmuda said the charge sheet was submitted to the court at 9:10pm.

Police said they had already received the DNA and autopsy reports of the victim.

"The DNA samples collected from the victim's body match with the prime accused, Hitu Sheikh," said Md Aiyub Ali, officer-in-charge of Magura Sadar Police Station.

Earlier yesterday, speaking to reporters at the Secretariat, Law Adviser Asif Nazrul said the charge sheet would be submitted "by the end of the day" and expressed hope that the trial would be completed within 90 days.

"It's unbelievable and tragic that the BERC took the side of corrupt businesses [gas distributors] whereas they are mandated to create a level playing field and transparency," Asif Nazrul said.

The rape of minors is punishable by death in Bangladesh, as per a law that was passed in 2020.

All four accused have been arrested and are in jail now. The prime accused has already confessed to his crime before a magistrate.

The distributor companies are set to earn another Tk 1,100 crore thanks to the new tariffs, he added.

## Due process was not followed

FROM PAGE 1

regard. We are aware of the comments by various human rights activists. The police are currently investigating the matter."

Meghna, the winner of Miss Earth Bangladesh 2020, was picked up by police from her flat in the capital's Bashundhara on Wednesday evening. Law enforcers produced her before a Dhaka court around 10:30pm the next day, and the court ordered that she be detained for 30 days. Meghna was sent to Kashimpur jail by a Dhaka court.

Asked whether the Special Powers Act should be abolished, Asif the adviser said, "There should be no repressive laws.... However, there are political considerations.... Suppose we do away with the Special Powers Act. Then a political government assumes power and does away with our decision. Wouldn't that be pointless?"

Police on Friday said Meghna was arrested on charges of spreading lies about an important individual to deteriorate relations between countries. It was later known that the individual in question was a diplomat of Saudi Arabia.

When a reporter asked Prof Asif whether the issue could affect recruitment of Bangladeshi workers in the Middle Eastern country, he said the labour market in Saudi Arabia was of crucial importance.

"When I was an activist, I used to think, 'Why are they applying the Digital Security Act or the Special Powers Act?' Now that I am in the government, should I not consider the interests of the expatriate workers in Saudi Arabia? Should I not worry about whether that market can shrink for some reason?"

The statement added that she had harmed national security and was involved in a conspiracy to damage the economy.

### HC ISSUES RULE

The High Court yesterday issued a rule asking the government to explain in two weeks why Meghna's detention should not be declared illegal.

The HC bench led by Justice Razik Al-Jalil issued the rule following a writ petition filed by Meghna's father Badru Alam, said his lawyer Qazi Zahed Iqbal.

Rights activist and lawyer Sara Hossain placed arguments as principal lawyer for the petitioner.

### RIGHTS BODIES DEMAND RELEASE

Two separate bodies issued statements demanding Meghna's immediate release.

Human Rights Forum Bangladesh's 19 members strongly condemned the arrest, calling it a clear violation of constitutional rights.

"The Special Powers Act is a tool to violate human rights and we firmly demand that it be repealed," said the statement.

The forum consists of Ain o Salish Kendra, Acid Survivors Foundation, Association for Land Reform and Development, Bandhu Social Welfare Society, Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movements, Bangladesh Institute of Labor Studies, Bangladesh Legal Aid & Services Trust, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, FAIR, Kapaeeng Foundation, Karmojibi Nari, Manusher Jonno Foundation, Nagarik Uddyog, Naripokkho, National Alliance of Disabled Peoples' Organizations, Nijera Kori, Steps Towards Development, Transparency International Bangladesh and Women with Disabilities Development Foundation.

Another statement sent by 38 notable signatories said, "This draconian legislation, with its vague and overly broad provisions, has a troubling history of being used to arbitrarily detain individuals for extended periods without formal charges or judicial oversight."

The statement was signed by Meghna's lawyers Barrister Sara Hossain and Dr Qazi Zahed Iqbal as well as Dr Sharif Bhuiyan, member of the constitutional reform commission, Barrister Rashna Imam, Barrister Jyotirmoy Barua among others.

## Govt to reinstate 'except Israel' on passports

UNB, Dhaka

The government has instructed the immigration authorities to reinstate the words "except Israel" on Bangladeshi passports, reversing a 2021 decision that had removed those.

The home ministry's Security Services Division sent a letter in this regard to the director general of the Department of Immigration and Passports on April 7.

Earlier, Bangladeshi passports contained the declaration: "This passport is valid for all countries of the world except Israel."

In May 2021, the government removed the "except Israel" words from e-passports, citing international compliance.

On Saturday, speakers at a mammoth rally organised by the Palestine Solidarity Movement, Bangladesh demanded the restoration of the "except Israel" words on the passports and the cancellation of all agreements with Israel.

Tens of thousands of people gathered in the capital's Suhrawardy Uyan for the rally as part of a March for Gaza programme to express solidarity with Palestine and to protest against Israel's atrocities.

## 'PORTRAIT OF FASCISM' FIRE Fellow DU students 'identify' suspect

STAR REPORT

The suspect who set fire to two motifs prepared for the Borsho Boron Anondo Shobhajatra at the Faculty of Fine Arts (Charukola) at Dhaka University (DU) has reportedly been identified.

Students of the Department of Arabic at DU claim the individual is Rabiu Islam Rakib, a student of the department and reportedly an activist of the banned student organisation Bangladesh Chhatra League. He is a resident of Surja Sen Hall.

"After the video [of the motifs being set on fire] circulated, students from his department and close associates posted on social media identifying the suspect. They also provided us with some screenshots confirming his identity," DU Proctor Prof Saifuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star.

"We have sent the evidence to the police," he added.

Ramna Division Deputy Commissioner (DC) Masud Alam told The Daily Star that drives are underway to apprehend the suspect.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 3