

‘AMAR MUKTI ALOY ALOY’

The spirit of defiance and freedom fuels Pahela Baishakh

DOWEL BISWAS


As the nation now stands on the cusp of renewal, Pahela Baishakh 1432 arrives at a time when the people of Bangladesh are eager to reclaim their cultural voice—seeking a deeper connection to its identity, heritage, and hope. For centuries, it has been an occasion of collective celebration, resilience, and unity.

One of the country’s most revered cultural institutions, Chhayanaaut, will usher in Pahela Baishakh 1432 with its signature early morning celebration *Borsho Boron Onusthan* at the Ramna Batamul. The event will begin at 6:15am with Rabindranath Tagore’s *Amar Mukti Aloy Aloy*, beckoning the first light of the new year as it rises over Dhaka.

Now in its 58th year, the tradition continues with 150 vocalists and instrumentalists—prepared since January—to offer a deeply rooted presentation of music and poetry.



PHOTOS: STAR & COLLECTED



Swapnada’s production of ‘Chitrangada’.

The structure will remain true to its origins, opening with classical ragas and concluding with an address from Chhayanaaut’s president and the national anthem.

Despite political shifts, Chhayanaaut holds firm in its mission. “The spirit of the programme—awakening the Bengali consciousness through music at dawn—remains unchanged,” said Dr Sarwar Ali, vice president and a Chhayanaaut trustee. “It

is through this atmosphere that our cultural identity is reaffirmed.”

This year’s lineup includes 12 solo songs, nine group performances, and three poetry recitations. The programme will end by 8:30am.

At the break of dawn today, crowds will gather in Shahbagh, ready for the year’s most symbolic procession—Borsho Boron Anondo Shobhajatra. Following Chhayanaut’s Borsho Boron at Ramna Batamul, the Faculty of Fine Arts at Dhaka University (Charukola) will lead the colourful march with the national anthem. First launched in the 1980s as a defiant cultural act against military rule, the procession has since grown into a nationwide emblem of unity, joy, and resistance—recognised by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage in 2016.

This year, Charukola promises the grandest, most inclusive Shobhajatra yet, themed “Nabobarsh-er Oikhyatan, Fascibaad-

er Oboshan” (in harmony with the new year, towards the fall of fascism). Featuring six major installations and hundreds of handcrafted motifs—tigers, fish, masks, traditional tools, and a bold depiction of “the face of fascism”—the event will highlight Bangladesh’s rich folk traditions and voices of resistance. With participation from 28 ethnic communities and symbolic solidarity with Palestine through a watermelon motif, the procession aims to send a message of peace, inclusivity, and defiance.

This year’s Shobhajatra is set to resonate with powerful new voices, as over 200 musicians—including members of popular bands like Miles, Warfaze, Lalon, Vikings, AvoidRafa, and Dalchhut, alongside ethnic bands like F Minor (Garro), Laa Rong (Marma), Emang (Tripura), Unity (Khasi), and Invocation (Chakma)—will join to sing *From the river to sea, Palestine will be free* in a dedicated segment of solidarity. Musicians will carry

the Palestinian flag and perform songs of resistance as part of the procession.

A drone show, themed “New Bangladesh in New Year” and sponsored by the Chinese Embassy, will illuminate the sky over Manik Mia Avenue as part of this year’s Pahela Baishakh celebrations at 3pm. Meanwhile, Bangla Academy will host a vibrant Baishakhi fair, adding to the spirit of the national festivities.

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy is arranging a cultural programme titled “Baishakhi Sangskritik Onusthan” from 4:30pm today at the National Theatre Hall where seasoned artistes will welcome the new year with songs, dances and poetry recitals.

In celebration of the Bengali New Year,

various departments of the University of Dhaka and Rabindra Sarobar are hosting cultural programmes. Dhaka North City Corporation is organising a Baishakhi Fair at Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Smriti Park, featuring diverse stalls with traditional handicrafts, ethnic clothing, *pitha-puli*, and cultural performances of folk songs and Baishakhi music from 10am to 10pm for three days.

Popular theatre troupes Shwapnadal and Prangonemor will showcase their revered plays titled, *Chitrangada* and *Shesher Kobita* at 5pm and 7pm at BSA’s Experimental Theatre Hall and Bangladesh Mohila Samity, respectively.

Yet, as Pahela Baishakh dawns with its usual splendour—bursting with colour, music, and collective energy—it arrives this year with a shadow of unease. The recent decision by Dhaka University authorities to rename the iconic “Mangal Shobhajatra” as “Borsho Boron Anondo Shobhajatra” has sparked widespread criticism. For many, the change feels like more than just a name—it is seen as a symbolic erosion of a cultural landmark born out of defiance during military rule in the 1980s. That unease deepened when the fascism-themed motif at Charukola was set ablaze by an arsonist, leaving behind a charred emblem of protest and a lingering question about the future of this beloved tradition.

Still, the Bangalee spirit is not easily dimmed. We are a people who sing the same songs to express both celebration and dissent. As thousands gather beneath the Ramna Batamul and march through Shahbagh, the name on the banner matters less than the spirit in the steps. The procession—whatever it may be called—remains a powerful testament to cultural memory, resilience, and unity. It is a living, breathing archive of our collective struggle for expression, shaped through centuries of resistance.

NEWS

Most parties want changes in basic principles

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amendment of 1979 during the rule of BNP founder Ziaur Rahman.

BNP proposed that the section enshrining the ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism be reverted to the form as prescribed by the fifth amendment. Currently the section reads, “Pledging that the high ideals of nationalism, socialism, democracy and secularism, which inspired our heroic people to dedicate themselves to, and our brave martyrs to sacrifice their lives in, the national liberation struggle, shall be the fundamental principles of the constitution...”

The party suggested that it should read, “...Pledging that the high ideals of absolute trust and faith in the almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice, which inspired our heroic people to dedicate themselves to, and our brave martyrs to sacrifice their lives in, the war for national independence, shall be the fundamental principles of the constitution...”

Jamaat called for significant changes to the preamble, saying that the “July revolution” should be recognised in the preamble.

It proposed that the first paragraph should read: “We, the people of Bangladesh, have established the independent and sovereign People’s Republic of Bangladesh declaring independence on March 26, 1971, through the historic struggle for national liberation; and are making all-out efforts to safeguard democracy in the country through different democratic movements, including the July Revolution of 2024.”

The Islamist party also said that nationalism, democracy, economic and social justice, full trust and faith in almighty Allah, and multiculturalism should be the basic principles of this constitution.

Jatiya Nagorik Committee proposed drafting a fresh constitution, forming a constituent assembly, and recognising the July uprising in the new constitution.

The proclamation of the Liberation War should be included as a proposal of the first republic, while a proclamation of the second republic should be included as a preamble to the new constitution, said the civic platform comprising the July uprising leaders.

Ganosamhati Andolon suggested that the proclamation of the Liberation War in 1971, the long struggle against fascism and dictatorship, and people’s aspirations expressed in the 2024

mass uprising become the basis of a democratic constitution.

According to Islami Andolan Bangladesh’s proposal, in the preamble, “the legitimate judgment of the people” must be recognised as the basis for government formation.

Khelafat Majlish sought the inclusion of two sentences in the preamble: “We, the people of Bangladesh, having declared independence on March 26, 1971, have established the independent and sovereign people’s democratic Bangladesh through the historic struggle for national liberation.

“We, the people of Bangladesh, established a democratic Bangladesh by overthrowing the erstwhile regime on August 5 [through a historic uprising for the formation of a non-discriminatory state] in July-August 2024.”

Rastro Sangskar Andolan and AB party proposed significant changes to the preamble.

AB party advocated rewriting the constitution and making sweeping changes in the preamble to read: “After the independence, the old system of the republic based on the three principles of the proclamation of 1971 independence—equality, human dignity and social justice—has failed and become ineffective.

“Time and again, the people were shackled by one-party, military-civilian and dynastic dictatorships over the last 53 years, and the first republic fell in July-August 2024, ending a long period of fascist oppression in a student-led uprising.

“In the light of the Declaration of Independence, and since the first republic failed, the establishment of a second democratic state [second republic] has become imperative to build Bangladesh 2.0.”

Jatiya Gonofront demanded abolishing the 1972 constitution.

NDM proposed that the preamble should uphold the three principles of equality, human dignity and social justice, and reflect the dreams of the 2024 mass uprising.

REFORM COMMISSION’S PROPOSED PREAMBLE

The Constitution Reform Commission proposed rewriting the first two sentences to read: “We, the people of Bangladesh, who achieved independence through a people’s war as a continuation of the historic struggle for the liberation of the people of this land, and united in resistance against autocratic and fascist regimes to establish democracy;

“We, in solemn memory of all the

martyrs’ sacrifices, pledge to uphold the ideals of equality, human dignity and social justice that inspired the people of Bangladesh during the 1971 Liberation War and the ideals of democracy and equality that united us in 2024 against fascist rule, aiming to establish these noble principles within the state and society.”

BASIC PRINCIPLES

BNP said the current principles of the constitution were added through the 15th amendment and should be repealed.

Islami Andolan Bangladesh is of the view that full trust and faith in almighty Allah should be the basis of all activities of the state.

The party proposed that the principles of the constitution should include equality, human dignity, social justice, government accountability, the abolition of fascism and hegemony, the elimination of bad culture, and good education aimed at creating ideal citizens.

Gono Odhikar Parishad (Nur) and Bhashani Anusari Parishad demanded that equality, human dignity and social justice be included as basic principles.

The 12-party alliance wants “religious freedom for all people” instead of “secularism”, and “social justice and equitable distribution of wealth” in place of “socialism”.

Khelafat Majlish suggested that steadfast trust and faith in Allah, active participation of the people, creation of a society free from exploitation, oppression and discrimination and ensuring public representation in all aspects of the state should be the basic principles.

Jamaat proposed that “nationalism, democracy, and economic and social justice, full trust and faith in almighty Allah and multicultural society” should be the principles.

Ganosamhati Andolon called for a non-discriminatory and democratic state that upholds the 2024 aspirations of students, workers as well as the masses, in the light of equality, human dignity, and social justice as stated in the Proclamation of the War of Independence in 1971.

AB Party recommended “equality, human dignity and justice” as the basic principles.

Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal proposed incorporating equality, human dignity, and social justice, as mentioned in the Proclamation of Independence, into the preamble, in line with the spirit of the 1971 Liberation War and the 2024 mass uprising.

It also suggested keeping democracy, socialism, secularism intact, and qualified nationalism, “as being free from

the influence of imperialism to ensure independent national development”.

Jatiya Nagorik Committee advocates five new fundamental principles—equality, human dignity, social justice, citizen rights and democracy.

Insaniyat Biplab Bangladesh proposed removing nationalism and socialism as basic principles, and suggested that they be replaced with religious values, state ownership by the people, freedom of life, and universal human rights.

The existing preamble contains the principles of nationalism, secularism, socialism, and democracy, while the Constitution Reform Commission proposes equality, human dignity, social justice, pluralism and democracy.

The commission also recommends the deletion of articles 8, 9, 10, and 12, which elaborate on these key principles.

PROPOSALS ON STATE RELIGION

BNP and Rastro Sangskar Andolon don’t want any changes in the Article 2A as it stood after the 15th amendment. This article deals with state religion. It says, “The state religion of the Republic is Islam, but the State shall ensure equal status and equal right in the practice of the Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and other religions.”

The eighth amendment, made during dictator HM Ershad’s regime in 1988, declared that Islam would be the state religion.

BNP also wants articles 8, 9, 10, and 12 on nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism to be reverted to the versions prior to the 15th amendment.

Jatiya Gonofront proposed that people of all religions in Bangladesh shall have full freedom and equal rights, and religions should not be used in politics.

CPB, Bangladesh Jashod and Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal sought scrapping of state religion and also proposed repealing the article.

Khelafat Majlish said Islam should remain the state religion, but the state will ensure dignity and equal rights for those practising other religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity.

The party also suggested that the state should take effective measures to protect the dignity of Prophet Muhammad (SM) and this should be included in the constitution.

Bangladesh Jatiya Party (BJP) said respect for Prophet Muhammad (SM) should be an integral part of the moral and spiritual foundation of the state. Any intentional insult to the prophet should be regarded as an offence and punishable under the law for protecting public order and religious sentiment.

BNP questions Yunus’ repeated ‘shifts’

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Salahuddin said that whenever the BNP demands a roadmap for an election by December from the chief adviser, it hears statements from government advisers that the people supposedly want them to stay for five years.

Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury made a similar remark recently, the BNP leader said. “But we have seen numerous comments [on social media] calling for his [the home adviser’s] resignation. Hasn’t he seen those?”

Salahuddin said he wanted to criticise Fisheries and Livestock Adviser Farida Akhter less than others because he has a “very good relationship” with her.

“Now she has said the people elected them through the mass uprising. Then why does this country have an Election Commission?”

“If governments are changed through street protests, that perhaps reflects the will of the people. But you [interim government] cannot be an alternative to an elected government. You are definitely unelected. And you will be reminded of that every single day.

“And her husband, our Bhai Saheb Farhad Mazhar [poet, writer, and thinker] gave a speech two or three days ago that a realm of looters, not democracy, is created through elections. What more can I say?” Salahuddin said.

He asked why the advisers and their allies were denying the right to vote after thousands of people sacrificed their lives and mounted a mass uprising for the restoration of their democratic and constitutional rights.

Recalling Yunus’s remarks at a meeting with the BNP, Salahuddin said the chief adviser assured them that all the activities of the government were aimed at holding the election with December as the possible time in mind.

“We also sat with the Election Commission, and it said all preparations for the polls would be completed by June. It said it was very eager to hold the election by December.”

The BNP leader also said he has seen criticism on Facebook whenever the topic of the election is raised. “Is it good for democracy when you speak about democracy but create confusion over the election?”

Salahuddin said that the BNP appreciate the work of some people holding top positions in the government who dedicate their talent to the service of the state. “But can you do that without democracy?” he asked.

The BNP leader said those who orchestrated 1/11 also made various attempts to remain in power for two years.

“I’m not suggesting that similar measures are currently visible. But don’t you remember Moeen U and Fakhruddin of 1/11? Didn’t they make significant efforts toward depoliticisation?”

Cancel reciprocal tariffs

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The new exemptions will benefit US tech companies like Nvidia and Dell, as well as Apple, which makes iPhones and other premium products in China.

US Customs data suggests the exempted items account for more than 20 percent of those Chinese imports, according to senior RAND researcher Gerard DiPippo.

However, semiconductors could still become a target of industry-specific tariffs Trump has suggested placing on imports from all countries.

Trump said Saturday that he would give a “very specific” answer to the question of any future semiconductor levies today.

Facing steep tariffs, China has sought to present itself as a stable alternative to an erratic Washington, courting countries spooked by the global economic storm.

Trump’s reciprocal tariffs have “not only failed to solve any of the United States’ own problems but have seriously undermined the global economic and trade order”, Beijing’s commerce ministry said in the statement yesterday.

Commerce Minister Wang Wentao on Friday warned that tariffs would “inflict serious harm” on developing nations in a call with the head of the World Trade Organization.

Chinese President Xi Jinping kicks off a five-day Southeast Asia tour today for talks with the leaders of Vietnam, a manufacturing powerhouse, as well as Malaysia and Cambodia.

It comes after Xi said China and Europe should “jointly resist unilateral bullying practices,” state media quoted the leader as saying in a meeting with the Spanish prime minister.