



WEEKEND READ

DHAKA SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 27, 2025  
ASHWIN 12, 1432 BS  
The Daily Star

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# DURGA PUJA

## A symphony of faith and festivity



DIPAN NANDY

Under the autumn sky, sunlight and clouds play hide-and-seek as Kashful sway gently in the breeze. The morning air carries the soft scent of incense, while the city stirs to life to the rhythm of dhak drums.

climbing rooftops and gathering by riversides. Conch shells and dhak drums reverberated across the sky.

"Every Mahalaya morning brings new hope. The thought of Mother's arrival feels like a fountain of joy. All old fatigue washes away," said 65-year-old Ratna Devi.

Seven-year-old Riya Mitra, eyes sparkling, added, "I woke up early and went to the roof. Since Mother is

Temple, last year's idol was immersed to make way for the new one. The scent of clay and straw filled the air as artisans shaped her fingers and moulded her face. With the structure complete, final touches of colour were being added.

In Old Dhaka's Tantibazar and Shankharibazar, lanes brimmed with festive spirit. Neighbouring areas like Lakshibazar, Farashganj and Armanitola also glowed with anticipation.

beat of the dhak.

"Mother comes every year, but this joy feels different. We wait year after year for this moment," said Priyanka Sen in Shankharibazar. Her cousins Priyanti and Moumita added, "We come to the pandal every day after school. Seeing Mother's form brings peace to our hearts."

Outside, food stalls, lights and children's games created a festive air of

pandals and temples, including 258 in Dhaka city. Last year, 31,461 pandals hosted the festival nationwide, with 252 in the capital.

Security measures have been tightened. Home Affairs Adviser Lt Gen (retd) Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury stressed vigilance to prevent communal unrest during the festival.

**The heartbeat of celebration**  
In Dhaka, the joy of Durga Puja goes



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



It feels as though daily life is on the verge of transformation. From homes to pandals, one message echoes -- "Maa ashche" (Mother is coming).

Priests chant the verses of the Chandi Path with devotion as worshippers close their eyes, immersed in the sacred sounds. Prayers rise for loved ones, near and far: "Ya Devi Sarvabhuteshu Matri Rupena Samsthit, Namastasyai Namastasyai Namoh Namah."

Once again, Durga, the destroyer of evil, is returning. This is Sharadiya Puja, though this year she arrives not in autumn but in early winter. The wait has been longer, but her arrival brings joy to every Hindu household.

### Mahalaya: the moment of arrival

On September 21, Mahalaya marked her arrival. With dawn, Pitru Paksha ended and Devi Paksha began. Through the Chandi Path, Durga was invoked to descend to Earth, and her eyes were ceremonially painted. Sacred rituals and the installation of holy pots followed in temples and pandals.

Mahalaya morning saw people

coming, maybe she'll bless me."

That innocent joy spread through the crowd, touching all with its purity.

### Scenes of preparation

Preparations had begun weeks earlier in pandals across Dhaka. At Dhakeshwari

On Wednesday afternoon, little girls tugged at each other's hands, urging, "Come, let's see how Mother looks this year." Adults guided them through glowing lights and floral decorations. The air was filled with incense and the

their own. Thirty-two-year-old Anindya Chakraborty, visiting from Kolkata, reflected, "Visiting Dhaka during this time is special. The aura here is as vibrant as Kolkata's. The excitement is all because Mother is coming."

### The ritual

According to scriptures, this year Durga arrives on an elephant and departs on a palanquin. Arrival on an elephant is seen as auspicious, signifying prosperity and peace. Departure on a palanquin, however, is viewed as inauspicious, believed to foretell disease outbreaks.

The rituals begin with Mahashashthi on September 28, followed by Mahasaptami on September 29, Mahaashtami on September 30 with Sandhi Puja and Kumari Puja at Ramakrishna Mission, Mahanavami on October 1, and Bijaya Dashami on October 2 with mirror immersion and idol immersion.

Bangladesh Puja Uddjan Parishad President Basudev Dhar said the number of Durga Puja pandals has increased nationwide. Across the country, preparations are underway in 33,355

beyond rituals. It seeps into every home and street -- the glow of idols, the rhythm of the dhak, the scent of incense and the colours of pandals weaving a tapestry of celebration.

The festival is not just a religious event; it is a cultural heartbeat. Anticipation builds in quiet prayers and in the loud beat of drums, in the shaping of idols and in the innocent excitement of children tugging at their parents' hands.

"Religion is personal, but festivals are for all." This mantra seems to echo through every corner of the city. Dhaka, painted in vibrant hues, opens its heart not just to devotion but to celebration.

The arrival of the goddess is a reminder of resilience and tradition, of joy shared across generations. With the beat of the dhak and the glow of the lights, Sharadiya Durga Puja once again marks its place as the soul of the city.

Mother is coming, and with her arrival she brings hope, joy and a promise of peace.

