

A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT BY

The Daily Star

# PAHELA BAISHAKH

DHAKA, SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 2026, CHAITRA 28, 1432 BS

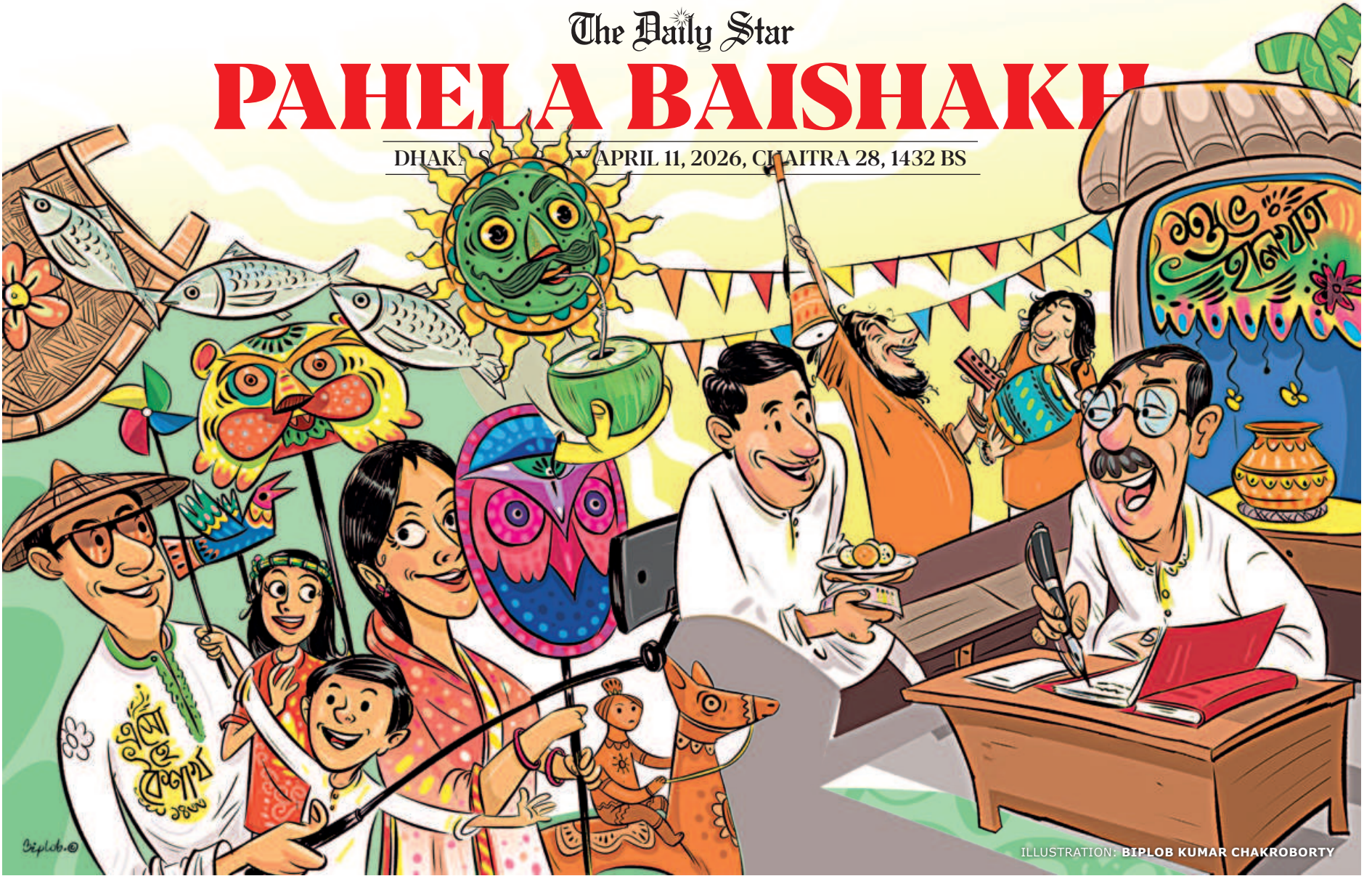


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# BAISHAKH

## Renew & Reconnect

Pahela Baishakh arrives like a quiet promise, that no matter how heavy the past year has been, we get to begin again. In the colours of red and white, in shared meals and familiar songs, we find our way back to each other. Across homes, cities, and cultures, the spirit of the day unfolds in different ways, yet somehow in unison. In these pages, we celebrate stories of renewal, resilience, and reconnection—of traditions carried forward, new bonds formed, and hopes rediscovered. Here's to fresh starts, fuller tables, and a year that feels just a little kinder.

# Tracing the timeless rituals of OUR BENGALI SOUL

**TAGABUN TAHARIM TITUN**

As the sun rises on the first day of the Bengali calendar, Bangladesh transforms into a vibrant canvas of crimson red and white. Pahela Baishakh stands as the rhythmic heartbeat of a nation that refuses to forget its roots. It is a secular holiday that brings together the rural farmer and the urban artist, weaving a tapestry of identity through song, art, and old traditions. To understand this day, one must explore its symbolism, from alpna strokes to melodies under the banyan tree.

**SYMPHONY OF RED AND WHITE**

Walking through the streets of Dhaka on Boishakh morning is like witnessing a sea of red and white. Historically, the red-bordered white saree represented a balance with white for the purity of a new beginning and red for the energy and fertility of the earth. While modern trends have introduced oranges, yellows, and greens to mirror the scorched summer sun and blooming nature, the classic combination remains the ultimate symbol of the day.

"In our time, a simple cotton *taant* saree with a thick red border was enough to feel the spirit," says Jahanara Begum, 72, a retired schoolteacher. "We didn't need designer labels. That red border felt like a badge of our Bengali identity, a silent rebellion during the years we fought for our culture."

For middle-aged celebrants, the colours represent a bridge between generations. "I wear red and white because it makes me feel connected to my mother," shares Rubaba Haque, a sales officer and a mother of two. "But I love that my daughter adds yellow flowers to her hair. It shows that while our traditions are rooted, they are also evolving with the joy of the youth."

**THE GRAND PROCESSION OF HOPE**

What began as a quiet creative protest in 1989 has now become a UNESCO-recognised Intangible Cultural Heritage. The *Baishakhi Shobhajatra*, originally known as the *Mangal Shobhajatra*, was initiated by students of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Dhaka University during a period of autocratic rule. They wanted to usher in a "mangal" (auspicious) start to the year while mocking the dark forces of society through giant masks and effigies.

The procession is a kaleidoscope of giant birds, tigers, and folk motifs, all handcrafted by students. This parade is a collective prayer in motion, where the masks of demons are paraded only to be symbolically

defeated by the spirit of the people. As the procession winds through the streets, it reminds every onlooker that no matter how harsh the previous year was, the new year brings the strength to face any predator.

**THE PAINTED SOUL OF THE STREETS**

The art of Alpna is a traditional pattern drawn with rice paste. It stands as the visual language of Bengali festivities. Once restricted to the courtyards of rural homes to welcome Goddess Lakshmi, it has now spilt onto the wide black pitch of city roads. These circular motifs, inspired by lotus flowers and vines, represent the continuity of life.

"There is a meditative quality to drawing an alpna," says Sumaiya Borsha, a second-year student from the faculty of Fine Arts, Dhaka University (DU). "When we paint the streets at midnight on the eve of Baishakh, we aren't just decorating; we are reclaiming the public space for our culture. Every curve of the brush is a wish for prosperity."

Ariful Islam, a cardiologist residing in Dhaka, proudly recalled

how he took his two-year-old daughter to Manik Mia Avenue back in 2024 for the street alpna festival. "Bringing her to these white motifs is like introducing her to the fact that beauty is handmade and our ancestors are still walking with us on these painted paths," he says.

**THE SWEET TRADITION OF COMMERCE**

While the cities celebrate with parades, the heart of the business community beats for the Halkhata. This tradition dates back to the Mughal Emperor Akbar, who reformed the tax year to align with the harvest. For traders, the first of Baishakh is the financial New Year.

Halkhata is the ritual of closing old ledgers and opening new ones. It is a beautiful blend of commerce and community. Shopkeepers invite their long-term customers, clear old debts, and offer traditional sweets. It is perhaps the only time a financial transaction is seasoned with such warmth. The red-bound book symbolises a fresh start, reminding us that relationships are more valuable than the numbers written in ink. It ensures that the year begins without the weight of the past.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



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PHOTO: STAR

## Tracing the timeless rituals of our Bengali soul

### CARNIVALS OF FOLK AND FOOD

The Boishakhi Mela is where the rural soul of Bengal meets the urban appetite for nostalgia. Whether it is the grand fairs in Dhaka or the smaller ones in Chittagong or Manikganj, the mela is a sanctuary of folk crafts, pottery, and the iconic traditional Ferris wheel.

“The first thing I look for is the Nagordola,” says Shahriar Sakib, a final-year private university student. “The creaking sound of the wood and the view from the top make you feel like a child again. And, naturally, the cuisine is unmatched, as nothing surpasses the crisp texture of a murali or khaja at the fair.

Food is the centrepiece of the Mela culture. While *Panta Ilish* has become a modern urban staple, the authentic experience lies in the street food. “For me, Baishakh is the smell of fried fish and the tang of green mangoes,” says Ishmam Rafiq Hasan, a university lecturer, who visits the fairs in Old Dhaka’s Shankhari Bazar and surrounding areas every year. “We sit on the grass, listen to the baul songs, and eat together. It’s the one day we aren’t concerned about our status; we are just Bangalis.”



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

### DEFYING DARKNESS IN THE DAWN

The celebration is incomplete without the dawn musical programme at Ramna Batamul. This tradition was started in 1967 by Chhayanaout, a leading cultural organisation. At a time when the Pakistani regime sought to suppress Bengali culture and banned the songs of Rabindranath Tagore, Chhayanaout took a stand. They gathered under the ancient banyan tree (Batamul) to greet the new year with Tagore’s “Esho Hey Baishakh”.

Ever since, the banyan tree has served as a sanctuary for the Bengali spirit. Despite the tragic bombing in 2001, the tradition has only grown stronger, proving that the melody of a nation cannot be silenced by fear. Every year, thousands gather in the dim light of dawn, waiting for the first notes of the flute to pierce the silence, signalling that another year of resilience, art, and unity has begun.

As the notes of “Esho Hey Baishakh” sweep away the old, we gather for the beloved tradition of panta ilish. Between this soulful melody and the shared meal, we find the enduring, vibrant spirit of our Bengali identity.

## Baishakh echoes across the nation

MOSHIUR RAHMAN SHAMS

Pahela Baishakh, the Bengali New Year, is one of the most widely celebrated cultural occasions in Bangladesh. While its essence lies in welcoming a new beginning through shared traditions, its expression varies from one city to another. The celebration is shaped by local institutions, cultural hubs, geography, as well as long-standing customs. From university campuses to riversides, each city adds its own flavour to the festivities.

### DHAKA

In Dhaka, the celebration is both symbolic and grand. The cultural core of Pahela Baishakh lies at Ramna Batamul, where Chhayanaout hosts its iconic musical programme. Another focal point of the day is the “Baishakhi Shobhajatra”, organised by the Faculty of Fine Arts at Dhaka University. The procession is recognised by UNESCO for its cultural significance. It moves through Shahbagh and surrounding areas, drawing massive crowds. Throughout the day, key hubs such as TSC, Suhrawardy Udyan, and Dhanmondi Lake host fairs, concerts, and food stalls, with festivities continuing well into the afternoon.

### CHATTOGRAM

In Chattogram, Pahela Baishakh centres around DC Hill, organised by local cultural alliances. DC Hill is widely regarded as the city’s cultural centre,

with programmes running throughout the day featuring music, dance, and recitation. The open hill setting creates a more relaxed atmosphere compared to Dhaka’s dense crowds. Additional events take place at venues such as the Shilpakala Academy and the CRB area, though DC Hill remains the symbolic heart of the celebration.

### RAJSHAHI

In Rajshahi, the celebration is strongly anchored within the University of Rajshahi campus. The university hosts rallies, cultural performances, and fairs, drawing both students and city residents. Beyond the campus, T-Dam and other banks of the Padma River serve as key gathering points, where people come together for traditional food, music, and socialising. Compared to larger cities, Rajshahi’s celebrations feel more community-driven and often extend into the afternoon.

### KHULNA

In Khulna, Pahela Baishakh is distinctly campus-centred, much like in Rajshahi. Celebrations largely revolve around Khulna University and KUET, where rallies, cultural programmes, and fairs are organised by students and faculty. These campus-based events define the city’s festive character. At the same time, areas such as Shibbari Mor and surrounding urban spaces host community fairs, linking academic celebrations with the wider public.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



# ফ্রেশ

## চিনিগুঁড়া চাল

## পোলাও, বিরিয়ানি, কিংবা পায়েস বৈশাখ এবার জন্মবে বেশ

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# PAHELA BAISHAKH

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**S6**

## The Diverse Colours of Indigenous New Year Festivities

AFRINA SULTANA

Pahela Baishakh in Dhaka is characterised by the colourful procession originally known as Mongol Shobhajatra, now officially named the Baishakhi Shobhajatra, Panta-Ilish (the famed fermented rice and Hilsa fish combination) and Halkhata—the opening of the new year's account books. However, the Chittagong Hill



Tracts reveal a different world where vibrant indigenous communities celebrate their New Year with unique, nature-connected traditions.

### BIZU: THE CHAKMA LEGACY OF GRATITUDE

Bizu is a festival intrinsically linked to the cycles of Joom cultivation. It serves as a way for the Chakma people the largest indigenous group in the hill tracts to express deep gratitude for the bountiful harvest of the previous year. They celebrate this three-day festival starting on April 12th.

The journey begins with Ful Bizu, a day defined by a quiet, spiritual grace. As the first light



of dawn breaks over the mountains, young men and women gather by mountain springs or riverbanks to float fresh flowers upon the water. This act is more than just a beautiful ritual; it is a symbolic letting go, an earnest plea for the flowing currents to wash away the sorrows, ailments, and frustrations of the past year. In the softness of these drifting petals lies the community's collective prayer for a new year filled with prosperity and peace.

The transition to the second day, April 13th, brings the vibrant heart of the celebration: Mul Bizu. On this day, the air in the hills becomes thick with the aroma of Pachon, a legendary vegetable medley that serves as the culinary soul of the festival. Hospitality reaches its peak during Mul Bizu; doors are thrown open, and every home becomes a sanctuary for friends and neighbours.

The festivities find their serene conclusion on April 14th, known as Gojjepojje. While the name translates to “taking rest,” it is truly a day for welcoming the New Year with a calm and reflective spirit. After the excitement of the previous days, the community gathers at Pagodas and temples to light lamps and engage in prayer. Reflecting on these



rituals, Arnab Chakma reminisced about the infectious energy of picking flowers at dawn and the late-night roaming with friends—a sense of freedom he misses dearly.

### SANGRAI: The Water Festivals of the Marma and Rakhine

The Marma people share a deep cultural bond with the Rakhine people of the coastal plains. Both communities celebrate Sangrai to welcome the New Year. The festivities begin with the ritual of bathing the Buddha, followed by a respectful bathing of the village elders.

The highlight of Sangrai is the Re Long Poye, or water festival. Specially decorated pandals are set up with separate sections for boys and girls to splash water on one another. An interesting myth adds a romantic layer to the fun: it is believed that a boy who splashes water on a specific girl might find a romantic connection leading to marriage. Organisers even facilitate “tactical” placements where boys can pay to stand in a specific line to face the girl they like. This splashing is followed by a feast of sweets like Payesh in the morning, while lunch features Bini Chal (sticky rice), Bash Koral (bamboo shoots), and fresh hill vegetables. Khing Mu,

a graduate student, noted the struggle of balancing these traditions with academics, expressing how she now cherishes the ability to travel home to dance and celebrate in the pandals with her loved ones.

### BISHU: The Tanchangya Connection to the Land

The Tanchangya community celebrates Bishu from April 12th to 14th. On Phool Bishu, youth dressed in vibrant Ponchoposhak collect flowers at dawn to offer to the Goddess Ganga at the riverbank, seeking to wash away the frustrations of the past year. The second day, Mul Bishu, features Pachon, prepared with at least five types of Joom vegetables. The festivities culminate on April 14th with the Bishu Mela, a grand social affair filled with traditional music, dance, and theatre.

This cultural tapestry is personified in individuals like Rupaiya Srestha Tanchangya, who was raised by a Bengali mother and a Tanchangya father. She notes that the most striking difference lies in food. “Bengalis grew up in a riverine environment, which shaped their diet around fish and rice. This is quite distinct from the hill tracts, where the centrepiece is Pachon. This dish, crafted from a variety of Joom-grown vegetables, represents the bounty of the earth.”

In essence, these diverse celebrations remind us that while the rituals and flavors may differ, the heart of the New Year remains the same. Whether through the floating of flowers in a mountain stream or the sharing of a festive meal, it is a universal journey of gratitude, community, and the timeless hope for a peaceful beginning.



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA



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# The New Rules of BAISHAKH DRESSING

NUSRATH JAHAN

Dressing up for Pahela Baishakh is not easy, as there are a lot of considerations to be made. Baishakhi fashion was once synonymous with red and white, and while this timeless combo still holds a special place in our hearts, recent years have seen a delightful shift. The new year attire has to be practical and, in equal terms, befitting for the joyous nature of the celebrations. The events of the day shift range from outings to various soirees to homely dawats, and one must dress to shine on all occasions.

## REIMAGINING COLOUR

The events of the day are shedding their monochrome uniform, once considered auspicious, and embracing a new canvas of colours, prints, and playful styling. If there's one colour combination giving red and white a serious run for its money, it is white and magenta. The vibrancy of the hue brings in just the right amount of boldness without overwhelming the calmness of white. From handloom saris with magenta thread work to plain kameezes with printed or embroidered magenta dupattas that flow like a summer breeze, this pairing is fast becoming a crowd favourite, and for good reason! It is festive, fresh, and oh-so-flattering.

## POLKA DOTS, PLEASE!

Who would have thought that the old-school charm of polka dots would become a Pahela Baishakh staple? But here we are, living and loving it. Polka dots bring an instant burst of fun to any outfit.

Whether it's a retro sari with oversized dots or a breezy dress with tiny scattered ones, this peppy pattern adds movement,



PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

mischievousness, and a whole lot of personality. Bonus points if you pair it with chunky earrings and a messy bun.

## SUNSHINE AND TEAL DREAMS

Yellow is a classic for a reason. It is bright and sunny, and it practically radiates joy. Pair it with teal, and you have a combination that's equal parts cool and warm. Think of a teal kameez with yellow embroidery or a mustard sari with a teal blouse and accessories. It's perfect for that brunch-to-evening dinner transition.

## RISE OF PRINTS AND PASTELS

While bold colours are making a statement, pastels and soft florals are not far behind. Blush pinks, powder blues, and mint greens are showing up in cotton and Muslin saris, often paired with quirky blouses or contrasting accessories.

Digital prints, hand-painted florals, and abstract motifs are also finding fans among those who prefer subtle elegance over loud hues.

## STYLING IT YOUR WAY

Gone are the days of rigid outfit rules. Mix-and-match is the mood. Team your traditional sari with a crop top. Play with accessories: beads, silver jhumkas, glass bangles, or just a statement bag. The idea is to reflect the energy of the new year in your own way.

Pahela Baishakh has always been about the celebration of culture, of colour, and of community. And what better way to do that than by dressing in outfits that make you feel festive, fearless, and fabulous? Whether you are stepping out for the Baishakhi Shobhajatra or lounging at a home dawat, this year let your outfit be as joyful, vibrant, and diverse as the day itself.



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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## ADRIN SARWAR

Every year, the air in Bangladesh transforms as the sun rises on the first of Boishakh. Growing up, I took the books and TV programs literally. I once asked my mother if a brand-new sun would rise the next morning. She laughed and explained that while the sun remains the same, it is the spirit of the day, the air and our surroundings, that feels brand new.

For me, Pahela Baishakh meant a holiday, new clothes, and my mother bringing out fresh earthen utensils for a family meal of Panta-Ilish, Bhorta, and sweets. Although I wasn't a fan of the dish, I loved the togetherness; it was a meal meant for sharing. Our mornings were defined by red and white outfits and the echoes of "Esho He Baishakh" from the Ramna Batamul broadcast. We would spend the day at local fairs, club processions, and art competitions, usually ending with a dramatic Nor'wester storm. Today, the celebration has changed; while mornings still feel the same, the rest of the day is spent with friends across the city. Now it ends with a weary feet and a happy heart. This "new sun" I witnessed is part of a much older rhythm. For previous generations, Baishakh was a seasonal transformation rooted deeply in the soil of rural Bengal.

### A MONTH OF CHILDHOOD WONDER

For Ferdousi Akter Dolly, a homemaker from Comilla, Pahela Baishakh was a month-long marathon of joy. Her memories are anchored to the banks of the Meghna River. "Next to the temple, a fair was organised every Tuesday throughout the entire month of Boishakh," Dolly recalls. People arrived by launch and



trawler, with children playing flutes as they walked. It wasn't about fashion then; it was about the tang of jujube pickles and the sweetness of naru. While children bought bangles, the elders bought essential tools like winnowing fans and gail (wooden mortars). "It was a time of such excitement that students would skip school just to spend the day at the fair," she recalls with a smile.

This rural pulse is echoed by poet Dr. Bimal Guha, who remembers the transition in the village of Bajalia, Satkania. For Guha, the celebration began with Choitra Sangkranti, a time of purification. "Garlands of Neem leaves and Kathgolap were hung on every door to purify the air," he notes. He highlights the Saptopodi Shak, a medicinal meal of seven leafy greens like bitter Gimashak, believed to cure winter ailments. As the New Year dawned, the dry bed of the Shankha River hosted the Baruni Mela, where elders took ritual baths, and children flew kites, ignoring the heat in favour of watermelon and cantaloupe.

### THE ORIGIN OF PAHELA BAISHAKH

Pahela Baishakh began as a practical Mughal fiscal reform. To align tax



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

collection with harvest cycles, Emperor Akbar commissioned Fatehullah Shirazi to create the 'Tarikh-e-Elahi' in 1584, which eventually became the Bangabda. This birthed the 'Halkhata' (new ledger) tradition and the 'Punya' revenue festival. Bimal Guha notes these customs were so efficient that the British later adopted similar practices in Murshidabad.

### PURE JOY AND SMALL SAVINGS

In the mid-20th century, the festival remained a sanctuary of "pure, unadulterated joy." Kamrul Huda Pathik, a college principal from Munshiganj, recalls saving small coins for months. "We would buy knives to peel mangoes, toy drums, and toy pistols; we would eat watermelon and tokhma sherbet while watching puppet shows," he recalls.

For the young, the festival was a unifier where shared heritage was the only language spoken. However, Kamrul Huda laments the modern shift: "Now, the Baishakhi fair has become a luxury for the wealthy to eat Panta-Ilish, and the sincere warmth between families is gone." Bimal Guha agrees, noting that Panta-Ilish is an urban invention; in villages, the focus was always on the mela, the kites, and

communal sweets.

### KEEPING THE TRADITION ALIVE

The festival's most significant evolution occurred in the 1960s. When the Pakistani government tried to suppress Bengali culture, the gathering at Ramna Batamul became an act of peaceful resistance. By singing Tagore's songs, Bengalis asserted that their heritage was inseparable from their existence.

This spirit of defiance was inherited by the students of Fine Arts at Dhaka University, who in the 1980s launched the 'Baishakhi Shobhajatra', originally known as the "Mangal Shobhajatra". Today, student Atika Anjum Aurthy describes the two-week preparation as a "sleepless workshop" of mask-making and sora painting. Despite challenges, the struggle to protect this culture continues.

### A BRIDGE OF BELONGING

For Nepali student Pramila Pam Rai a student of Asian University for Women, Pahela Baishakh was a journey from observer to participant. "An April New Year felt strange at first," she says, but any sense of being an outsider quickly vanished. Dressed in red and white, she was moved by the festival's inclusivity: "No one asked where I was from; they simply welcomed me."

### A HERITAGE HELD CLOSE

From the bliss of riverbank melas to the medicinal greens of the village, Pahela Baishakh is a story of constant movement. It belongs to no single person, but to the collective memory of a nation. Whether celebrated with a sophisticated urban parade or a simple Halkhata tradition, the core remains: a "fresh start."



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## Bengali new year, near and far

TAGABUN TAHARIM TITUN AND ADRIN SARWAR

Pahela Baishakh is a sensory explosion of red and white, the rhythmic beat of the dhak, and the collective spirit of the Baishakh Shobhajatra, originally known as Mangal Shobhajatra. While Ramna Park remains the festival's heartbeat, the spirit of the Bengali New Year has long since transcended geographical borders. We spoke to five non-resident Bangladeshis and expats in our country to understand how this day serves as a cultural bridge and a reminder of a home that never truly leaves the heart.

### NEW YORK'S STREET CELEBRATIONS

Maheer Helal, an adjunct lecturer at BRAC University, celebrated Baishakh in New York's Queens last year. Usually indifferent back home, the almost 8,000-mile distance sparked a newfound excitement inside him. In Queens, the city closed major roads for the festivities, allowing a grand Mangal Shobhajatra to take place. "I didn't expect it to be so vibrant," Maheer admits. Since painting Alpona on streets is illegal there, organisers creatively attached handmade boards to decorated trucks. The parade featured district-based groups and even the NYPD, with many Bangladeshi officers in uniform participating. The abundance of bhaat-bhorta and the sight of thousands dancing on the sidewalks made the distance from home feel insignificant. For Maheer, the energy was even more intense than in Dhaka,

proving that heritage thrives abroad.

### THE REGISTRAR'S PANJABI

Dr David Dowland, Registrar of BRAC University, has spent seven years immersed in Bengali culture. As a British national, he has amassed a large collection of panjabis while attending countless festivals and weddings. For him, Pahela Baishakh is defined by the vibrant energy of the university community. He describes the "vibration of life" that the festival brings to the campus through flash mobs, folk music, and traditional food. "In the UK, we welcome spring with relief, but Bengali celebrations are far more energising and colorful," he observes. To Dr Dowland, the day represents a fresh start and a revitalisation of life. He views the inclusive

nature of these festivals as a vital way for international residents to truly appreciate the region's history.

### THE BLEND OF FUSION AND IDENTITY

In South Australia, Ahasanul Hoque Dipu, a Bangladeshi driving instructor and the owner of a driving school describes the emotional effort of celebrating without a public holiday.

The diaspora relies on community halls and weekend gatherings to keep traditions alive. Here, a unique fusion occurs as local elements blend into the feast. "It's common to see Australian BBQ and seafood alongside traditional dishes, with Pavlova appearing next to Bengali sweets," Dipu explains. The most rewarding aspect for him is watching the second generation connect with

their heritage. Seeing a child proudly wear a panjabi or ask curious questions about Bangladesh proves that their roots have taken hold. For the Australian diaspora, Baishakh encompasses a perfect celebration into forming a premise to stay grounded and ensure the culture continues.

### KEEPING BENGALI TRADITIONS ALIVE

In Canada, Nayeema Rahman, a resident of Montreal, describes the vibrant spirit of celebrating the Bengali New Year across North America. Every mid-April, the

diaspora gathers to keep their traditions alive through "melas" filled with folk music and traditional food. While cities like Toronto or New York host large outdoor parades, Nayeema explains that the experience is a bit more personal where she lives. "We go to community centres and celebrate Bengali New Year indoors," she says, noting that these gatherings are essential for staying connected to their roots. The celebrations are a sea of red and white traditional clothing, where food like Panta-Ilish and Rosogolla is shared with both the community and curious neighbours. For Nayeema, the heart of the festival is ensuring the next generation understands their identity.

### A NEPALI DOCTOR'S BAISHAKH IN DHAKA

In Bangladesh, Dr Manish Gurmaita, a Nepali MD Cardiology resident at Bangladesh Medical University, celebrates Pahela Baishakh with great enthusiasm. He finds that the New Year festivities in Bangladesh feel very similar to those back home in Nepal, with the day starting by following Baishakh customs and visiting various temples across the city.

In the past, Dr Gurmaita would join the celebrations at Dhaka University with his friends, but his busy medical career has changed his routine. This year, he plans to enjoy Bengali cuisine along with traditional Nepali food. For Dr Gurmaita, Baishakh is a special time to pause his busy life as a doctor and connect with the shared traditions of both Bangladesh and Nepal.



PHOTO: MAHEER HELAL



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## ELEVATE YOUR BAISHAKHI FEAST

A true Baishakhi spread is about balance and not extravagance. It requires something refreshing, something indulgent, something hearty, and plenty that can be shared.

From tangy drinks that cool the summer heat to deep-fried comforts and jaggery-laced sweets, this spread brings together dishes that define the spirit of the Bengali New Year.

### CHARRED GREEN MANGO SHERBET

No Baishakhi feast begins without something to cool the rising summer heat, and this smoky, tangy sherbet does just that. It awakens the appetite while offering instant relief.

#### Ingredients

4 large green mangoes  
tsp rock salt  
1 tbsp mint leaves  
4 glasses of water  
Sugar to taste  
Sea salt to taste  
1 tsp chaat masala  
Ice cubes

#### Method

Wash and burn the green mangoes in a gas oven at low heat. When done, peel off the skin and remove the seeds. Blend all ingredients except ice until smooth. Now pour in the glasses and



add ice to them. Garnish with the mint leaves and serve.

### ALOODOM

Whether paired with a golden puri or a flaky paratha, aloo dom is the ultimate culinary soulmate that brings a spiced, comforting finish to every meal.

#### Ingredients

kg baby potatoes  
cup mustard oil  
1 tsp chilli powder  
tsp turmeric powder  
tsp panch phoron  
1 tsp cumin powder  
1 tsp ginger paste  
3 tbsp yoghurt  
1 tsp sugar  
2 pcs cardamom  
Salt to taste

#### Method

Boil the potatoes and peel each one of them. In a heavy-bottomed pan, heat 2 tbsp oil. When the oil is hot, add a pinch



of salt and turmeric powder to it and shallow fry the potatoes till they are slightly roasted. Keep all potatoes aside. In the same pan, add 2 tbsp of oil. Add the panch phoron and let it splutter a little. Now add the rest of the turmeric powder, chilli powder, cumin powder, ginger paste and salt with a little water. Cook it for a few minutes. Now add roasted potatoes, sugar and a little more water. Bring to a boil. Cook for five minutes with the lid on. Finally, add the yoghurt and cardamom. Cook for a few minutes until it all comes together. Serve it with puri.

### MURALI

Crunchy, sweet, and perfect for nibbling long after the main meal, murali adds a playful texture to the festive spread.

#### Ingredients

2 cups all-purpose flour  
2 tbsp milk powder  
Water, as needed  
Oil, for deep frying  
2 cups sugar  
tsp baking powder  
Pinch of salt

#### Method

In a bowl, pour flour, milk, baking powder, and salt. Mix well and add water to it. Knead well and make the dough. Make four parts from the dough. Roll each part out with about inch thickness. Then cut

the slab into finger-long sticks. Now heat oil in a pan. Deep fry the sticks on low heat until crunchy. Make sure these do not turn red.

#### For the sugar coating —

In a saucepan, mix 1 cup of water with sugar. Stir on medium heat to make a thick syrup. Then add the fried sticks. Mix well. Allow the sticks to cool. Store and serve.

### MURKI

Light, crisp, and delicately sweet, murki offers an airy take on jaggery-based treats, making it an essential festive snack.

#### Ingredients

250g khoi (popped rice)  
250g grated jaggery  
1 cup water  
1 tbsp ginger juice

#### Method

Pour 1 cup of water into a pan and add jaggery. Keep the pan on medium flame. Keep on stirring until the jaggery becomes sticky. Now switch off the gas and after three minutes add khoi and ginger juice. Mix continuously with a spatula for the proper coating of jaggery. Allow it to cool down. After cooling, store murki in an airtight container.

### GOJA

Crisp, flaky, and coated in glossy sugar syrup, goja is a festive indulgence that adds a touch of celebratory sweetness to the spread.

#### Ingredients

2 cups refined flour  
1 cup sugar  
A pinch of baking powder  
2 tbsp ghee  
2 green cardamom  
1 tbsp lemon juice  
Salt to taste  
Oil for deep frying

#### Method

Combine sugar, water and cardamom pods in a heavy-bottomed pan. Bring to a boil. Stir frequently. As the syrup thickens, reduce the heat and test the consistency. Once the sugar syrup has reached a two-string consistency, turn off the heat and add lemon juice (this prevents the syrup from crystallising). Keep warm.

In a bowl, mix flour, salt and baking powder. Add ghee and work it well into the mixture. Add water little by little and knead until a stiff dough is formed. Divide the dough into equal portions and, using a rolling pin, roll out into ovals. Make several slashes on the ovals with a knife or a fork. Heat sufficient ghee or oil in a pan and deep fry the gojas until light brown and crisp. Remove with a slotted spoon and place on an absorbent paper to remove excess oil or ghee. Dip the fried gojas in sugar syrup. Coat rapidly and remove quickly. Toss till dry and crisp.

**Recipe by Selina Parvin**  
**Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed**

# CELEBRATING NEW YEAR The Bengali way

## RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

From early morning visits to Ramna Batamul to taking part in the vibrant and colourful Mangal Shobhajatra, our beloved celebrities carry countless cherished memories of Pahela Baishakh.

Free from divisions of religion or race, Bangalis everywhere come together to welcome the first day of the Bengali New Year with music, colours, and joyous celebrations. The Daily Star spoke to these stars, who fondly shared their personal stories on what makes Pahela Baishakh such a special celebration of Bengali culture and tradition.



## TARIQ ANAM KHAN

Noted actor Tariq Anam Khan has some of the fondest memories of early Pahela Baishakh celebrations. "My fondest memory goes back to my childhood and teenage years, when we more or less treated it as halkhata—the opening of new ledgers," he recalls. Small shopping trips, a few coins from his father, sweets, and visits to local cloth stores—all set against a backdrop of banana trees and pots—made the day feel uniquely Bengali.

Before that, he remembers being fascinated by Chaitra Sankranti rituals, like Charak Puja, which sparked his curiosity about local traditions. By the late 1960s, Pahela Baishakh had grown into a grand festival, with schools and families organising music and decorating stages with Bakul branches and flowers to

create a distinctly Bengali atmosphere.

For Khan, the heart of the celebration was always Ramna Batamul in Dhaka. "I would go there early in the morning, whether staying at my sister's house in Azimpur or later with my own family—my wife Nima and our young son. We would listen to music, enjoy sweets, and watch the celebrations unfold under the open sky."

He emphasises that Pahela Baishakh is not just a festival; it is a celebration of Bengali identity. Tied to the calendar instituted during Emperor Akbar's reign, the day is marked by sunrise, not midnight, and is a time for sharing food, music, and joy.

"Even learning songs like 'Esho he Boishakh, esho esho' was a lesson in renewal: breaking the old to build anew."

## AFSANA MIMI

For the talented actress Afsana Mimi, Pahela Baishakh is an essential



part of her life. Though she hasn't been able to participate in Mangal Shobhajatra over the past ten years, she continues the tradition with the children at her cultural centre, Ichchhetola.

"One of my most cherished memories was being part of the Mangal Shobhajatra during the Bengali year 1400 (Choddosho)," Mimi recalls. "It was magical walking along Ramna, holding a mask made by Charukola, while Rabindranath's words echoed in my mind: 'Aji hote shotoborsho pore. Ke tumi poricho boshi amar kobitakhani...'"

Knowing that poem was written over a hundred years ago made the moment so joyful."

She also treasures simpler, personal memories. "My first Pahela Baishakh with my mother, when I was in my first year of college, is unforgettable. She even bought me a red-bordered off-white saree. After a day of celebration, we returned home to eat together—it was pure joy."

## KHAIRUL ANAM SHAKIL

For Khairul Anam Shakil, Nazrul Sangeet exponent and vice president of Chhayanaaut, Pahela Baishakh

is a living expression of Bangali identity. "Pahela Baishakh is not just about marking a date on the calendar," he says. "It is a declaration: 'I am Bangali, I have my own culture, and I am proud of it.'"

Chhayanaaut's event at Ramna Batamul has been central to his life since the mid-1960s. The day begins with classical morning ragas—Bhairav, Bhairavi, and Todi—performed vocally or with instruments like the sitar, sarod, and flute. "Over time, what started as a few hundred people has grown into a massive gathering," Shakil explains.

## QUAZI NAWSHABA AHMED

For actress Quazi Nawshaba Ahmed, the festival is about love and unity.



"My desire to celebrate is always there," she says. "Given my work, I usually collaborate with friends from Charukola, theatre colleagues, and younger artists from Gen Z."

Her love for Charukola began in childhood. "I would see it only on TV. Even my family didn't allow me inside at first. But the colours and the energy drew me in." Becoming a student at Charukola added a sense of responsibility, from preparing alpna to organising the Mangal Shobhajatra.

Now a mother and art therapist, she finds joy in sharing the experience with differently-abled participants. "Explaining the songs 'Mela Jaire' or 'Esho He Boishakh' to visually impaired friends is a very special feeling," she says.



## DOLA RAHMAN

Singer Dola Rahman remembers celebrating Baishakh indoors with games, singing, and dancing—activities deeply rooted in Bengali culture. "Since childhood, I was always at the centre—'Dola, start singing,'" she laughs.

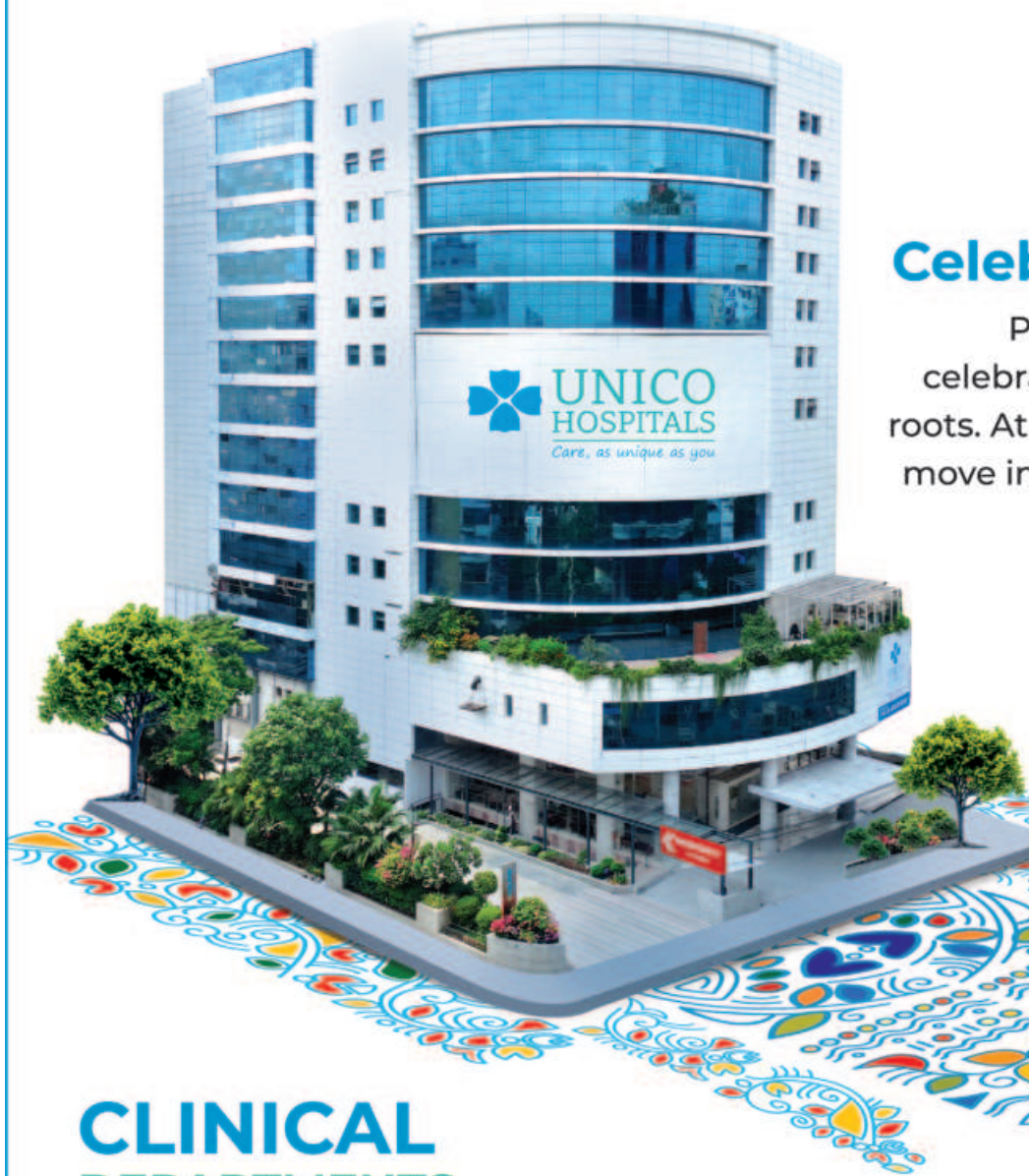
For Dola, performing during Pahela Baishakh carries a special energy. "It truly feels like a colourful festival. Everyone comes to listen, we perform together, and wear traditional outfits." Her repertoire often includes special Baishakh songs like "Banglami" or folk tracks like "Komolay Nitto Kore."

Despite a busy schedule, her love for festive food remains. "Porabari's chomchom or rosogolla—Pahela Baishakh morning isn't complete without them. I'm a total sweets freak, trust me."



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