

An unauthorised leguna stand operates beside the boundary wall of the 400-year-old Lalbagh Fort in the capital, while posters and banners plaster sections of the historic structure, undermining its heritage appeal. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: **FIROZ AHMED**

Mahalaya today

BSS, *Dhaka*

Mahalaya, an auspicious occasion that heralds the arrival of Goddess Durga, is being celebrated today through various rituals by members of the Hindu community across the country.

Mahalaya marks the end of Pitru Paksha (the dark fortnight dedicated to ancestors) and the beginning of Devi Paksha (the divine fortnight).

The countdown for Durga Puja, the largest religious festival of the Hindu community, begins with the celebration of Mahalaya.

On this day, Goddess Durga begins her journey from her matrimonial home in Mount Kailash to her paternal abode on Earth, marking the beginning of the Durga Puja festival.

Durga Puja will formally begin on October 16 with Maha Shashthi, followed by Maha Saptami, Maha Ashtami, Maha Nabami, and it will come to an end with the immersion of Durga idols on Bijoya Dashami on October 21.

Today, Dhakeshwari National Temple will host a one-hour-long special programme at 6:00am.

Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee general secretary Suvasish Kumar Biswas Sadhan said the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka, Dinesh Trivedi, is expected to attend the ceremony.

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Idol makers race against time as Durga Puja nears

Rising costs, worker shortage add to pressure; traders report sluggish sales

RAKIB MADBER

Artisans in Old Dhaka's Shankharibazar and Tantibazar are working round the clock to complete idols ahead of Durga Puja, the largest religious festival of Bangalee Hindus, amid rising production costs and a shortage of workers.

The festival begins with Mahalaya today, followed by Maha Panchami on October 15, and concludes with Bijoya Dashami on October 21.

During a recent visit, artisans were seen shaping, drying and painting idols, with some workshops hiring additional workers to meet deadlines.

Artisan Biplab Das said he had received orders for three puja mandaps this year, charging Tk 85,000-90,000 per set, compared to less than Tk 80,000 last year. "The prices of various materials used to make idols have gone up, increasing production costs. There are also fewer people working in this profession, so the workload is much heavier," he said.

Another artisan, Gopal Pal, said he was working day and night to complete orders. "The decoration process takes considerable time and effort. With only a few days left and limited manpower, we are in a race against time," he said.



PHOTO: **MEHEDI HASAN**

An artisan puts the finishing touches to an idol at Banglabazar in the capital.



Visitors browse stalls at a traditional fair at Ramna Kali Temple in the capital, organised to mark Durga Puja.

Meanwhile, traders selling puja decorations, including crowns, hairpieces, sarees and garlands, reported sluggish sales despite rising prices.

At Sajghar in Shankharibazar, crowns for idols now cost Tk 300-7,000 per set, up from Tk 200-6,000 last year. Hairpieces have risen from Tk 190 to Tk 250-260, while saree fabric costs Tk 60-100 per yard, against Tk 50-80 previously, depending on quality.

Single-strand garlands now sell for Tk 30-35, up from Tk 20, while better-quality full garlands cost Tk 500-600, up from Tk 400-500 last year.

Prices of idols' weapons have increased from Tk 80-750 to Tk 130-1,000, while beaded garlands have doubled to Tk 800 per kg.

Ratan Daptar, owner of Sajghar, said higher prices were affecting customers' purchases.

Dipak Dhar, owner of Dhakeshwari Shankha Shilpalaya and Basanalaya, also reported slower sales. "Shops used to be crowded at this time of the year. This year, the usual rush has been missing," he said.

He attributed the price increases to higher transportation costs driven by rising fuel prices, as most decorative items are imported from India. Financial constraints among customers have further affected sales, he added.

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MIGRATORY BIRD DAY

Shrinking habitats, fading flocks

Study finds 12 of 20 Arctic shorebird species in decline

KHENGSAPRUE MARMA

At least 12 of 20 monitored Arctic shorebird species suffered population declines between 2009 and 2023, with habitat degradation at coastal stopover sites identified as a major cause, according to a recent study.

The findings underscore Bangladesh's importance as a wintering ground for threatened migratory birds, including the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the endangered Great Knot and Nordmann's Greenshank.

Every winter, millions of shorebirds travel around 9,000 kilometres from the Arctic tundra and Siberia to Bangladesh's coastal mudflats and wetlands. The country hosts around 60 shorebird species, including 47 winter visitors.

Research based on 14 years of monitoring data, including satellite tracking from Sonadia Island, has revealed threats facing these birds along their migration routes.

A three-year tracking study at Nijhum Dwip National Park, launched in the winter of 2021-22, examined how shorebirds use the Bay of Bengal.



PHOTO: **SAYAM U CHOWDHURY**

A flock of Indian Skimmers. The entire population of this species depend on the south central coast of Bangladesh.

Led by Dr Sayam U Chowdhury, researchers affiliated with the University of Cambridge, the SCOPE Foundation and the Bangladesh Forest Department tracked selected species using lightweight GPS-GSM tags and colour leg-flags.

The findings showed strong site fidelity, with birds repeatedly returning to familiar tidal flats.

Common Redshanks and Whimbrels remained within small areas, while Black-tailed Godwits returned to the same feeding grounds after short trips.

A broader study by Dr Chowdhury and colleagues, published in Proceedings of the Royal Society B, found that 60 percent of monitored species declined between 2009 and 2023.

It also found that 64 percent of inland stopover sites along winter migration routes across the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau lie outside protected areas.

The birds face threats from illegal trapping, hunting, entanglement in fishing nets and unplanned coastal development.

In Bangladesh, mangrove plantations on natural tidal flats are shrinking feeding grounds, while pollution and human disturbance further threaten their habitats.

Conservationists warn that losing even one key stopover site along China's Yellow Sea or the Himalayan corridor could disrupt migration, regardless of protection efforts in Bangladesh.

Dr Chowdhury urged permanent legal protection for key feeding grounds and high-tide roosts, including Sonadia Island, Nijhum Dwip, Ganguirar Char near Sandwip and Jahajja Char.

He also called for using tracking data to designate protected areas, banning hunting and stopping mangrove plantations on natural tidal flats.

2.2km cycle track opens in port city

BSS, *Chattogram*

A 2.2km cycle track was inaugurated on Airport Road in Chattogram city yesterday, which the city corporation describes as "Bangladesh's first dedicated cycling track".

The project aims to ease traffic congestion and promote environment-friendly transport in the port city.

Finance and Planning Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury inaugurated the track.

Chattogram City Corporation Mayor Shahadat Hossain and Chattogram-9 MP Abu Sufian were also present.

Built under the city corporation's "Chattogram Airport Road Expansion and Other Physical Infrastructure Development" project, the four-lane road runs from Shah Amanat International Airport to the elevated expressway.

Footpaths line both sides, and a central median separated by kerbstones divides the carriageways. The cycle track runs alongside a landscaped walkway on one side.

Following the inauguration, the finance minister, mayor, local lawmaker, guests and cyclists rode along the new track.

Honouring literary legacies, nurturing new voices

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, Selina Hossain receive BRAC Bank-Samakal Literary Award for lifetime achievement; six others honoured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury and novelist Selina Hossain received the Lifetime Achievement Award for 2024 and 2025, respectively, at the BRAC Bank-Samakal Literary Award ceremony in Dhaka yesterday.

The awards were presented at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel, where six other writers were recognised in three categories for their contributions to Bangla literature.

Attending the event as chief guest, eminent economist and former interim government adviser Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud described the BRAC Bank-Samakal Literary Award as the most important literary award given by public and private institutions.

"They judged without hesitation and honoured those who deserved the awards. That is where the award's success lies," he said.

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Awardees at the BRAC Bank-Samakal Literary Award ceremony in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: **STAR**