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Bangla calendar to ease tax collection. Actually no one knows when and how this day of celebration began.

Baishakh is the first month of the Bangla calendar. Most of the events in rural Bangladesh still take place according to this calendar. Baishakh is considered to be the most auspicious month for undertaking any business venture.

The day starts with partaking of a heavy breakfast of *cheera*, *gur* and yogurt. Then people get dressed to go to the fairs which take place every year at an appointed place, it being inevitably either the cool shade of a banyan tree or a riverfront usually at the bend of a river. The fair brings commodities of every sort, food of every variety, and sweets of endless kinds. The sight of clay dolls and toys made of plastic and rubber delight the children. A small boy hanging on to his father's arm stubbornly insisting on buying a toy of his liking, his father cannot afford, is a common sight. But tears vanish as soon as the boy sees his favorite puppet show or a clown wearing a mask.

Each year the celebration of *Pahela Baishakh* turns into a human sea in parts of Dhaka. In the morning, processions called *Prabhat Pheri* come out with many fanfares. Cultural programs are organized to celebrate the New Year. *Baishakhi melas* (fairs) are held in the city. People of all ages throng these *melas* to buy toys, handicrafts, and sweets. Snake charmers, jugglers, and magicians mesmerize the enthusiastic crowd.

We are describing how *Pahela Baishakh* was celebrated in Dhaka in the last three years (2004, 2005 and 2006). In this living tradition the behavioral patterns of the residents of Dhaka, though very much similar, were not static. The process of tradition is not unchanging. People always want to see or do something different or new. Political tension, increasing cultural awareness, innovation, new organizations, new programs, new artists, and so on created differences or changes in the celebration.

#### **Celebration of Pahela Baisakh in Dhaka on 14 April 2004**

The people in Dhaka, on Wednesday, greeted *Pahela Baishakh*, the first day of the Bangla New Year 1411, with colorful festivities and a pledge to uphold this living tradition. They expressed their determination to move forward with a vision to build a prosperous future.

From the early morning, thousands of people thronged Ramna Park, Suhrawardy Udyan, Kendriya Shaheed Minar, the Dhaka University campus, Shahbagh, the Dhanmandi Lake, and other open spaces. The roads stretching from Matshya Bhavan to Shahbagh and from Shahbagh to Doyel Chattar were closed for all vehicles to ensure the easy and unfettered movement of teeming crowds.

Chhayanaut's trademark cultural program began at daybreak at Ramna Park. The students of the Dhaka University's Institute of Fine Arts brought out a rally called *Mangal Shobhajatra* with a white pigeon as the symbol of peace. These two events were the main attractions in the capital.

Colorful rallies, musical programs, *Baishakhi melas* (fairs), and cake festivals added vitality to the day. People from all walks of life, irrespective of religion and age, attired in traditional dresses, thronged *Baishakhi melas* in the capital. Various handicrafts, reflecting the living traditions of the Bengali culture, were on sale at *Baishakhi melas*.

Crowds of people in and around Ramna Park, Shahbagh, the Dhaka University campus and the Dhanmandi Lake virtually made the city traffic collapse. Youths painting their cheeks with Bangladesh's map and emblem lent a special tone to the celebration.

Proshika, an NGO, arranged *panta* and *hilish* at the sprawling green adjacent to the Dhanmandi Lake at 7:30 am. Various organizations held cultural functions: Sammilita Sangskritik Jote staged at Rabindra Sarobar, Jasad at TSC, Udichi and Khelaghar at Sarak Dwip, and Dhaka Swarokalpa at the Dhaka University Library. A festival of Bengali cakes and *jarigan* was opened at the Bangladesh National Museum, while a folk drama festival began at the Central Library. The Bangla Academy and the Nazrul Institute held special programs. The Shilpakala Academy organized a cultural program at the National Art Gallery in the evening, while the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) arranged a week-long *Baishakhi mela* at Dhanmandi Club. The Liberation War Museum organized a program for children and juveniles at its Café Theatre. Kochi-Kanchar Mela, the renowned juveniles' organization, held a *pitha utshab* and a cultural program at its headquarters. Various other organizations including the Bulbul Lalitkala Academy, Bangladesh Pathanatak Parishad, and Jatiyatabadi Samajik Sangskritik Sangstha also held various programs in celebration of the day.

#### **Celebration of Pahela Baishakh in Dhaka on 14 April 2005**

The city on Thursday greeted Pahela Baishakh, the first day of the Bangla New Year 1412, amid colorful festivities and a determination to move forward with its cultural heritage, leaving behind the gloom of the past year.

Thousands gathered at the city's Ramna Park, Suhrawardy Udyan, Kendriya Shaheed Minar, the Dhaka University campus, Shahbagh, the Dhanmandi Lake, and other open spaces from the early morning. Roads stretching from Matshya Bhaban to Shahbagh and to Doel Chattar were made off limits to all vehicles to accommodate the crowds. Streams of people in and around the Dhaka University, Ramna and the Dhanmandi Lake virtually made the city traffic network collapse.

Chhayanaut erected a huge podium at Ramna Batamul for its trademark cultural program that was witnessed by thousands of men, women and children. In the scorching heat, long queues were found at all entrances to the park because of high security measures. At the function, artistes of Chhayanaut sang songs, recited poems, and read essays. Chhayanaut chief Dr. Sanjida Khatun urged all to make a fresh beginning in the name of beauty and truth. The much-awaited function concluded with the singing of the national anthem.

Another main attraction was the rally called *Mangal Shobhajatra*, brought out by the students of the Dhaka University's Institute of Fine Arts. The students used the white pigeon as an emblem of peace in the rally.

The city's intellectuals, who had earlier formed a 1,001-member committee called Pahela Baishakh Udjapan Jatiya Parishad headed by renowned poet Shamsur Rahman, took part in a colorful procession from Kendriya Shaheed Minar to Rabindra Sarobar at Dhanmandi. The procession carrying a long broom, a black effigy of communalism, and an owl caught the attention of many as it made its way through the city streets.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia exchanged greetings with all sections of people on the day of *Pahela Baishakh*.

Different socio-cultural organizations arranged elaborate programs to celebrate *Pahela Baishakh* and turned Dhaka into a city of festivities. Sammilita Sangskritik Jote staged a cultural function at Rabindra Sarobar at Dhanmandi. The Bangla Academy, the Nazrul Institute, the Shilpakala Academy and Kochi-Kanchar Mela organized special cultural programs to mark the day.

A festive spirit gripped the capital. Young ladies in dazzling white saris with red borders and young men clad in punjabis of a wide variety appeared in large numbers on the streets to welcome the new year. People from all walks of life, irrespective of religion and age, attired in traditional dresses, thronged the Baishakhi melas (fairs)—showcasing various handicrafts and artifacts—in the capital. Colorful rallies, musical programs, and cake festivals added color to the festive day.

#### **Celebration of Pahela Baishakh on 14 April 2006**

Resolved to uphold the Bengali cultural heritage, thousands of people on Friday poured into the streets, parks and open spaces across the capital and elsewhere to celebrate *Pahela Baishakh*, the first day of the Bangla New Year. Irrespective of religion and age, they welcomed the first day of the Bangla year 1413 with fanfare and festivity, shrugging off the threat of militant attacks.

*The artists of  
Chhayanaut at  
Ramna Batamul*

The biggest cultural event of *Pahela Baishakh* began with Tagore's song, "*Esho hey Baishakh Esho Esho*," sung by the artistes of Chhayanaut at the city's Ramna



Batamul. Then they sang more songs, recited poems, and read essays eulogizing the traditional way of Bengali life. The function concluded peacefully with the singing of the national anthem.

The students of the Institute of Fine Arts of the Dhaka University took out *Mangal Shobhajatra* in the morning with thousands of revelers wearing vibrant masks.

Ramna Park, the Dhaka University campus, Kendriya Shaheed Minar, the Dhanmandi Lake, and the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban area were swarming with people throughout the day. Different organizations brought out processions and organized musical programs, fairs, and cake festivals to mark the day.

To accommodate vast numbers of people, vehicles were not allowed on the streets stretching from Kawran Bazar to Shahbagh, from Matshya Bhaban to Shahbagh and Doyel Chattar. Still, the traffic around the Dhaka University campus, Ramna and the Dhanmandi Lake came to a standstill.

Concern for security could not contain the wave of enthusiastic visitors as they rushed to the heart of celebration—Ramna and the Dhaka University campus. Thousands queued up at the entrance points of Ramna to get inside while artists standing across the area were busy painting motifs on the cheeks of visitors.

Different social and cultural organizations took up elaborate programs to welcome the Bangla New Year. These organizations included, besides Chhayanaut and among others, Alliance Française de Dhaka, Proshika, Oitijhya, and Nagar Samajik O Sangskritik Kendra.

The Awami League (AL) brought out a colorful procession in the city to mark the day. Starting from Bahadur Shah Park in Old Dhaka, the procession ended at Ramna Park after parading through Gulistan, Bangabandhu Avenue and the National Press Club. Thousands of party activists and common people participated in the vibrantly colored procession, carrying banners and festoons. Elegantly decorated elephants, horse carts, and the party's election symbol 'boat' on trucks and rickshaw vans caught the attention of the pedestrians. AL Presidium Member Tofail Ahmed and Acting General Secretary Obaidul Quader led the procession.

Earlier in the morning, AL President Sheikh Hasina exchanged New Year greetings with party leaders and workers at her Sudha Sadan residence in Dhanmandi. President Professor Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina, and other political leaders gave separate messages on the occasion. The national dailies brought out special supplements while Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and different private channels aired special programs.

The students of the Institute of Fine Arts (IFA) of the Dhaka University

*An artist is painting a kalka on the cheek of a girl.*

