



Members of Bhasa O Chetana Samiti draw *path-alpana* (street art) near Rabindra Sadan on Tuesday, ahead of Poila Baisakh. Picture by Sanat Kr Sinha



Artists prepare masks and decorative installations on the eve of the Bengali New Year. (PTI picture)

Cultures converge in festive harmony

JHINUK MAZUMDAR

Calcutta: As multiple communities marked their New Year and harvest festivals, the city came alive with prayers, rituals and celebrations, reflecting its enduring spirit of cultural harmony on Tuesday.

The Sikh and Punjabi communities marked Khalsa Sajna Diwas, which coincides with the first day of Baisakhi — a festival that also celebrates the harvest and the promise of prosperity.

In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa, not merely as a community but as a symbol of equality and a call to rise above divisions.

"This year marks the 327th Khalsa Sajna Diwas, and since morning, people have been visiting the gurdwara. Most gurdwaras are crowded, and many participate in the langar," said Avtar Singh, general secretary of Gurdwara Sant Kutiya in Bhowanipore.

"Tuesday marks the beginning of the harvest, a time when farmers are generally happy as it symbolises prosperity," said Avtar Singh.

"It's not just the Sikhs but Bengalis, Sindhis and many others who came to the gurdwara today. This is the fabric of India. I am so thankful and proud that I stay in a state where there is no cultural divide," said Satnam Singh Ahluwalia, general secretary, Gurdwara Behala.

These are the values we must pass on to the next generation. As citizens of India and Bengal, it is our responsibility to preserve this fabric of togetherness. There will be



Devotees at Gurdwara Sant Kutiya on Tuesday

ups and downs, but India will remain the same, and I hope to continue living in a country that celebrates cultural diversity, said Ahluwalia.

Bohag Bihu, also known as Rongali Bihu, will be celebrated by the Assamese community in the city. The festival on Wednesday marks the beginning of the New Year in the Assamese calendar.

The precursor to the celebration was the Goru Bihu on Tuesday, when the cow is bathed, decorated and worshipped.

On Tuesday, the Assamese community gathered in the evening to begin the festivities.

"Marking the arrival of spring, the festival begins officially on April 15 and is symbolised by the melodious calls of the cuckoo and the traditional adornment of *Kopou Phool* (foxtail orchid). Despite being away from their homeland, the Assamese community in the city continues to uphold its rich cultural heritage through traditional rituals and community gatherings,"

said Swapnanil Kashyap, cultural secretary of Kolkata Assamese Cultural Association.

As part of its ongoing festivities, the association will organise a Bihu dance workshop at the Assam Bhavan at the end of the month.

"The workshop aims to promote and preserve the traditional dance form among enthusiasts and the younger generation," said Kashyap.

The Tamil community celebrated the new year on Tuesday with *kolam* (*alpana*) and prayers.

"Each year has a distinct name. People make *payesham* and *vadai* (*vada*) at home. The younger ones seek the blessings of the elders, and we visit the temple," said Padma Ray Bardhan, a member of the city's Tamil community.

Most people draw large *alpanas* at the entrance of their homes.

Bengali New Year, Poila Baisakh, falls on Wednesday this year.

People from Kerala in the city will celebrate Vishu on



A family prepares for Bohag Bihu celebrations



Kolam at the entrance of a TAMILIAN home

Wednesday, the state's harvest festival.

"It's a ritual to see the fruits and vegetables (*Vishukanani*) first thing in the morning and then a visit to the temple," said Subhas Chandran,

honorary secretary of Sree Guruvayurappan Temple in Kalighat.

"On this day, each devotee who visits the temple is given coins as a blessing from the Lord," he said.