



Unesco lists Mangal Shobhajatra as cultural heritage

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Mangal Shobhajatra on Pahela Baishakh, a festival close to the hearts of Bangalis, has been inscribed on Unesco's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The decision was made at the 11th session of the Inter-governmental Committee on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia yesterday.

The committee in its decision noted

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that Mangal Shobhajatra, organised by teachers and students of Dhaka University's Faculty of Fine Arts to celebrate the Bangla New Year, symbolises the pride of the people of Bangladesh in their living heritage as well as their strength and courage to fight sinister forces, and their vindication of truth and justice.

Mangal Shobhajatra is a vibrant and colourful procession in which thousands of people from all walks of life join freely and spontaneously as part of their celebration of the Bangla New Year.

In 1980s, when several incidents, including devastating floods and imposition of military rule, put the people of the country in great distress, the students decided to fight creatively against the undemocratic rule and bring to the common people hope for

a better future.

In 1989, the students organised a colourful procession entitled "Mangal Shobhajatra" -- literally meaning wellbeing procession -- on Pahela Baishakh, the first day of the Bangla New Year. Since then, the students and teachers of the faculty have remained in the forefront for organising Mangal Shobhajatra every year.

The UN committee also recognised that the festival represents solidarity and shared value for democracy, uniting people irrespective of cast, creed, religion, gender or age, according to a press release from the Bangladesh embassy in Paris.

Ambassador and Permanent Representative to Unesco M Shahidul Islam is leading a four-member delegation to the committee's meeting at Addis Ababa.

The other members are Md Monirul

Islam, ambassador of Bangladesh to Ethiopia and African Union, Prof Nisar Hossain, dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts of Dhaka University, and Farhana Ahmed Chowdhury, first secretary of the Bangladesh embassy in Paris.

The inclusion of Mangal Shobhajatra in the list of cultural heritage of humanity is the result of the government's proactive cultural diplomacy. The enhanced visibility of Mangal Shobhajatra festival will help reinforce Bangladesh's image as a secular and inclusive society, added the release.

The initiative to inscribe the procession on the Unesco list began two years ago when a nomination file on the festival prepared by the Bangla Academy and approved by the cultural affairs ministry was submitted to Unesco.