

## Day one of Durga Puja, and revellers hit streets

Thousands of people dressed in all their finery, traffic moving at a snail's pace, crowded marquees... That heady, unmistakable spirit of Durga Puja descended on this city as the biggest festival of West Bengal kicked off Sunday.

Be it residents or celebrities from outside like Shah Rukh Khan, people came in hordes to join the festivities for Mahashasti, even though it was just the first day of the five-day festival during which Hindu goddess Durga is worshipped in 'pandals' or marquees all over the city.

'I decided to visit puja pandals with my family today to avoid the crowds in the next few days. But like me, thousands of people were also out visiting the pandals on Mahashasti,' said Mainakh Bhattacharya of Howrah.

The celebrations formally started with 'Devi Bodhon', a ritual to propitiate and welcome goddess Durga and her four children. While the idols of the goddess were a huge attraction, so was the craftsmanship of the numerous marquees under which they were housed.

The puja, besides being a religious festival, provides a common platform for people cutting across religious lines to immerse themselves in cultural activities.

A [Kolkata](#) Police official told IANS from the control room: 'Traffic movement is quite slow on the city roads because of the heavy crowd of pandal-hoppers. The footfalls are high, especially at major marquis in and around Kolkata.'

He said traffic was moving at a snail's pace in the central and eastern parts of the city. 'Many police booths have been set up to take care of the traffic situation during Durga Puja.'

Many politicians, including External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Information and Broadcasting Minister Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, were busy inaugurating various puja pandals in Kolkata.

While most communist leaders stayed away from the rituals, party workers did put up stalls selling Marxist literature near the big puja pandals.

Matinee idols like Shah Rukh and cricketer Harbhajan Singh were also seen inaugurating community pujas.

The oldest community puja is being celebrated at Balaram Bose Ghat Road in the southern part of the city. The puja here was started in 1910.

India Blooms, a newly launched reference portal on India, is bringing alive the sights and sounds of Kolkata's famous Durga Puja for netizens across the globe.

'Bengalis across the world miss Kolkata like anything during Durga Puja. But they can savour the delights of pandal-hopping at the click of the mouse at [www.indiablooms.com](http://www.indiablooms.com),' said an India Blooms spokesman.

'The site also captures everything in visuals, from the making of the goddess to the famous Kolkata pujas, in all their splendour. Our elaborate section titled Durga Darshan is a visual treat for all those Indians scattered outside Kolkata. Kolkatans can also enjoy the flavour of puja online and even take part in a photo contest,' he said.

According to Hindu mythology, the festivities and prayers begin with the symbolic arrival of the goddess on earth on the sixth day of the first quarter of the moon and ends on Dashami or the tenth day.

However, the puja rituals begin from Mahasaptami, which falls on Monday.

Traditionally, every pandal has an idol of Goddess Durga depicting her as slaying the demon Mahishashur. She is shown astride a lion and wields an array of weapons in her 10 arms.

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