Ambubachi Mela, a four-day fair to mark the annual menstruation of the goddess at Kamakhya temple in Guwahati, began on Friday.

Kamakhya, atop Nilachal Hills in Guwahati, is one of 51 shaktipeeths or seat of Shakti followers, each representing a body part of Sati, Lord Shiva's companion. The temple's sanctum sanctorum houses the yoni – female genital – symbolised by a rock.

Priests at the temple said doors of the temple were shut for visitors at 4 p.m. on Friday to let the goddess go through her period.

“The temple doors will be reopened at 4.30 p.m. from Tuesday (June 26). All Hindu temples across the region will remain closed during this period,” Kabindra Sarma, a senior priest, said.

Temple priests said the ritualistic fair celebrating the goddess' period is one of the reasons why the taboo associated with menstruation is less in Assam compared with other parts of India. The attainment of womanhood of girls in Assam is celebrated with a ritual called ‘Tuloni Biya’, meaning small wedding. Officials said Ambubachi Mela is also an occasion to promote awareness on menstrual hygiene.

Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal inspected the arrangements for pilgrims as well as security in the complex before the fair began.

Devotees make a beeline for Kamakhya during Ambubachi Mela. The only ones that avoid the temple are the descendants of the medieval Koch royalty, who had reconstructed the Kamakhya temple in 1565.

Pranab Narayan Deb, a descendant of Koch king Naranarayan, said this is because the goddess is believed to have cursed the royalty after the king and his brother Chilarai – one of Assam's revered generals – had secretly watched her dance.

Researchers at the Guwahati-based Centre for Koch-Rajbongshi Studies and Development said there are legends about the goddess dancing when Kendukoli, a priest during Naranarayan's reign, performed puja with his eyes shut.