



With the main festival of Durga Puja beginning today (Shashthi), all preparations are nearly complete at different places across Dhaka city. The premises of Krishibid Institution Bangladesh hosts an elaborately decorated mandap, left and top right. At Kalabagan playground, artisans giving finishing touches to the mandap, bottom right. The festival will end on October 19 (Bijaya Dashami) through the immersion of idols. The photos were taken yesterday.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

# Durga Puja begins today

BSS, Dhaka

Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Bengali Hindu community, begins today with Maha Sashthi, at temples across the country amid festive fervour and stringent security.

Preparations at all Puja mandaps have nearly been completed, as devotees and artisans were busy giving final touches on idols and mandaps yesterday.

In separate messages, President M Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina conveyed greetings to the members of the country's Hindu community, marking the festival.

The five-day festival starts with 'Bodhon' of the Goddess Durga today, and will come to an end with the immersion of idols of Durga in rivers and water bodies across the country on October 19, marking 'Dashami'.

To mark 'Shashthi' today, recitation of verses from the Holy Chandi blowing of shankha (conch shells) and beating of dhak-dhol (drums) will be heard in temples and mandaps throughout the day. The Shashthi puja will begin through Kalparombha at 6:30am.

Maha Saptami puja will be held tomorrow; Maha Ashtami, Kumari Puja and Sandhi Puja on Wednesday; Maha Nabami Puja on Thursday and Bijoya Dashami on Friday.

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## Unpaid work by women needs recognition

Speakers tell press conference marking Int'l Day of Rural Women

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Recognition of women's unpaid work will upgrade their social status, a step towards ensuring economic independence and justice, rights activists said yesterday.

On the occasion of International Day of Rural Women (today), they urged the government to ensure women's rights to family income and involvement in decision making process.

The demand came at a press conference organised by the National Committee on International Rural Women's Day Celebrations at Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka, said an EquityBD press release. EquityBD works as secretariat of the committee.

The day, being observed in the country since 2000, will be celebrated in more than 40 districts.

The role of rural women is not limited to their homes. They have significant contributions to agriculture, fisheries, forestry and livestock

farming, but most of it remains invisible and unrecognised because of their unpaid labour.

Besides, there is a pay gap in agriculture. While men's daily wages hover between Tk 300 and Tk 600 for processing crops, women get Tk 350.

To ensure women's empowerment, their efforts must be recognised at family and state levels, said Shamima Akhter, president of the committee.

Morzina Ahmed, executive director of Disable Welfare Society, said, "Women's labour is not considered a source of household income in rural agriculture, rather it's seen as means to reduce crop production cost."

"Since women's invisible works don't have any monetary value, they're not allowed to make decisions," said Ferdous Ara Rume, secretariat coordinator of the committee.

Women's increasing participation in agriculture is considered result of their empowerment, but it is actually an exploitation by paying them less, added the press release.

## 114 photographers demand Shahidul Alam's release

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over a hundred photographers of the country yesterday demanded unconditional release of internationally-renowned photographer Shahidul Alam, who is currently in jail in a case filed under section 57 of the ICT Act, over "spreading rumours" during the student demonstrations for safe roads.

In a statement, 114 photographers condemned keeping Shahidul in prison for more than two months, based on "false accusations".

Freedom of expression is a constitutional right of every citizen, said the statement.

The photographers expressed concerns that if photojournalists cannot express their opinion properly through their work, it is a bad sign for the country.

They further called on the government and the administration to provide Shahidul necessary medical support.

The signatories include Sayeeda Khanam, Nasir Ali Mamun, Abir Abdullah, Shafiqul Alam Kiron, David Barikder, Andrew Biraj, Monirul Alam, Munem Wasif, and Taslima Akhter.

Many notable personalities and international organisations, including Amartya Sen and 11 other Nobel laureates, have called for immediate release of Shahidul.

## Physically challenged protesters postpone Shahbagh blockade

STAR REPORT

Physically challenged protesters demanding reservation of five percent quota for them in class-I and class-II government jobs yesterday postponed their Shahbagh blockade programme temporarily, following the "Administration's Assurance".

Ali Hossain, convener of the platform spearheading the protest, made the announcement from a press conference held at the Shahbagh intersection in Dhaka at around 5:30pm, according to our Dhaka University correspondent.

"Many of us have fallen ill. People in the administration have told us that the government is considering our demands with priority. We will discontinue the sit-in and continue our protest through different programmes," said Ali Hossain.

They said they would also submit a memorandum to the prime minister today and hold a roundtable over their demands later

this month.

Last Thursday, some 100 students with disabilities, under the banner of "Bangladesh Pratibandhi Shikharthi Oikya Parishad", blocked Shahbagh intersection by putting up barriers. The protestors sat in the middle of the road to press home their demands. They also vowed to continue their blockade programme until their demands are met.

The blockade caused severe traffic congestion in many areas in the city in the last four days. People were stuck in long tailbacks on adjacent roads. Transports were hard to come by, and many were seen walking to their destinations.

Though Thursday's programme saw participation of over a hundred people but in the last couple of days, the number of protesters came down to around 30.

At the press conference, Ali Hossain also said at least 15 protestors fell sick due to the unfavourable weather. Of them, six took

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## EU opposes death penalty in Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The European Union (EU) has opposed death penalty in Bangladesh and called on the authorities to introduce a moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition of capital punishment.

In a joint statement yesterday, the heads of mission of the EU member states and the EU delegation in Bangladesh said October 10 was World Day Against the Death Penalty and on that same day, 19 death sentences were issued in Bangladesh.

"The European Union and its member states reiterate their absolute opposition to capital punishment in all circumstances and restate their commitment to the worldwide abolition of death penalty. Death penalty violates the inalienable right to life enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is a cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. Furthermore, death penalty does not act as a deterrent to crime and any error of judgment is impossible to correct," the statement read.

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## DIGITAL SECURITY ACT Law minister addresses diplomats' concerns

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Responding to the newly-enacted Digital Security Act which has drawn serious concerns of foreign diplomats over press freedom and the right to freedom of expression, the government yesterday assured that it has no plans to curb freedom of expression.

"The government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has no intention to curb freedom of expression which lays foundation of its democratic governance and the law would rather ensure people's right to safe digital space," Law Minister Anisul Huq said at a diplomatic briefing in the capital.

The minister referred to concerns raised by certain members of diplomatic corps and informed that the law has been finalised after intensive consultation with the Editors' Council and other journalist groups, as well as diplomats, said a foreign ministry press release.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali and the law minister briefed the diplomatic corps at State Guest House Padma, on recent political developments in Bangladesh, particularly on the verdict in the case of the August 21 grenade attack and the Digital Security Act.

The foreign minister, referring to provisions of International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and European Convention Human Rights, explained why such law is necessary to ensure public safety and order.

The law minister narrated the incidents of the grenade attack that took place on August 21, 2004 in a political rally organised by the then opposition party Awami League, where terrorists sponsored by the government of Khaleda Zia hurled grenades on Sheikh Hasina, president of Awami League and erstwhile opposition leader. The attack killed 24 individuals

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A structure being set up on the traffic island at Karwan Bazar in Dhaka yesterday. According to the construction workers, it is a police box.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

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