An artisan at work on a Durga idol at Chhoto Gurgola Sarbojoneen Durga Puja mandap in Dinajpur. The photo was taken on Thursday. | PHOTO: **KONGKON KARMAKER**

DURGA PUJA

Dinajpur sees hike in number of mandaps

KONGKON KARMAKER

The Hindu community in Dinajpur starts celebrating Durga Puja, the largest religious festival of the Hindus in the country, with Shoshthi rituals at 1,281 mandaps in the district tomorrow.

Artisans are now busy putting the finishing touches to the Goddess Durga and other deities at the mandaps in all 13 upazilas of Dinajpur.

This year the festival is being organised at an additional 35 mandaps in the district where 1,246 mandaps were made last year, according to the Dinajpur chapter leaders of the 'Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad'.

Swarup Bakshi Bachchu, president of the Parishad's Dinajpur chapter, said Dinajpur has always been among one of the districts where highest number of mandaps was made in the country each year.

Artisans with multiple jobs at different mandaps have been running against time to finish their work at hand and start on the next ones before the Shoshthi rituals, a number of artisans told this correspondent.

Swapan Paul, an artisan who was making idols at Chanderhat temple in Dinajpur town, said he has been in the trade for the last 40 years.

This year he and his group of artisans are in contract to make idols for 15 mandaps -- at Tk 50,000 for each set of idols -- in Dinajpur and other districts.

"We stay extremely busy ahead of the festival every year," but this year the workload is much higher as the number of mandaps have increased, he said.

Another artisan, Bharat Chandra Paul, who has contracts for making idols at 12 different mandaps in Dinajpur, said the artisans were overloaded with jobs this time around as many of them have been leaving the ancestral profession.

Meanwhile, as a measure to beef up security in and around mandaps and temples in Dinajpur ahead of the Durga Puja, police said they deployed 7,744 ansar personnel and teams of police strike force.

Malta winning hearts of tobacco growers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Nilphamari*

Tobacco used to be the crop of choice among farmers in Gobindapur village of Sadar upazila.

But lately, the cultivation of tobacco, which is harmful for both human consumption and the soil, is showing signs of decline in the village -- thanks to pioneering efforts by Mohammad Shafiqul and a changed scenario in the age of Covid-19 pandemic.

Shafiqul said he wanted to do something to end tobacco cultivation in his village, where he returned in 2018 after serving at a ship building company in Singapore for 15 years.

"I took notice that agents from big tobacco companies allure farmers into cultivating the harmful crop by providing special incentives, interest free loan facilities, free fertilisers and tobacco seeds."

In order to sway the farmers off the vicious enticement, Shafiqul had been looking for ways to provide them with a substitute and a profitable crop that he would cultivate on his own land to set an example with.

Following subsequent discussions with the then sub-assistant agriculture officer of Department of Agricultural Extension in the village in 2018, the same year he came home, Shafiqul was convinced and collected 241 saplings of BARI Malta-1 (blood orange) variety from an orchard in Pirojpur.

He planted the saplings on his 0.62 acre of land and got the first batch of Malta from some of the plants the next year. The production of the fruit reached its peak the following year.

Harvested in the months of October and November, Malta from his orchard is selling for Tk 120 per kilogram at present, Shafiqul said.

Amid a heightened awareness on the need to consume Vitamin-C enriched produce to fight Covid-19, people not just from the village, but also from neighbouring areas have been contacting him on his Facebook page while many are visiting and buying freshly-plucked Malta from his orchard.

Aside from the handsome profit he is making, the most satisfaction out of his Malta venture is that the farm now motivates other farmers to give up tobacco farming for Malta, Shafiqul said, adding that he has also been selling Malta saplings to at affordable prices.

Some of them, including young entrepreneurs Anisur, Saiful and Mohsinul, said they also made Malta orchards as the plants yield fruit for 15 years with nominal investment and care.

Khokshabari Union Parishad Chairman Bodiuzzaman Sarker said Gobindapur is now recognised as a village of Malta and locals appreciate Shafiqul for helping them give up tobacco cultivation.

Abu Bakkar Siddiquee, deputy director of DAE in Nilphamari, said the success of Malta farming in Gobindapur has been motivating others to convert into Malta cultivation from tobacco. The DAE has been providing support to interested farmers in Nilphamari where Malta is being grown on 150 bighas of land, he added.

Mohammad Shafiqul at his Malta orchard in Gobindapur village of Nilphamari Sadar upazila. | PHOTO: **COLLECTED**

Jhenidah Malakar community busy crafting decorative flowers

The ornamental item is essential for Laxmi puja

AZIBOR RAHMAN

The malakar (garlanders) community is spending busy days making decorative flowers crafted with shola (Indian jointvetch) ahead of Laxmi and Durga Puja.

They are expecting a good yield on the occasion of the festivities, especially Laxmi puja in which the decorative flowers play an integral part.

While visiting Bhatpara village under Kaliganj upazila in Jhenidah, this correspndent found that the artisans were busy making shola-crafted flowers for the upcoming puja festivals.

Hundreds of decorative flowers are sold ahead of the religious festivals, the community people said.

This work starts in August and ends at the last week of October. In this time, they earn a good amount and buy new dress by doing a brisk business. It costs a little to make shola-made flowers and they make a hefty profit.

They collect the plant from nearby marsh lands and waterbodies. They dry it in the sun and cut it in different shapes. Later, they craft decorative items and sell them in the market. Its demand is very high in the market because each Hindu family must buy it for Laxmi puja.

PHOTO: **STAR**

Malakar community people in Malipara area under Kaliganj upazila of Jhenidah spends busy time making shola crafts and decorative plants, an ingredient of Hindu festival Laxmi puja. *Right,* a bunch of decorative flowers.

Santosh Kumar malakar, 65, said he has been in this profession for the last 40 years.

"We make cap, hand fan, birds, peacock and crocodile with shola and sell those in the fair. Its main ingredient is shola and it needs gum, paper, colour and thread. It costs Tk three only to make and we sell it at Tk 20 to Tk 25," he added.

He is expecting to sell earn Tk 15,000 this year.

A female student Bristi Malakar of Kaliganj Womens' College said that she earns a good amount per month by making flowers in the gap of her studies and on holidays. She can buy study materials and her dress with the income.

Sundarpur-Durgapur union Chairman Ilias Rahman Mitu said that malakar community people under this union make different items of shola and maintain their families. He assured of providing the community people all sorts of assistance.

Criminals uproot 3,000 tomato plants

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Moulvibazar*

Unidentified criminals uprooted 3,000 tomato plants, belonging to two farmers, on 45 acres of land in Kamalganj upazila of the district.

The affected farmers--Karim Mia, 62, and Khokon Mia, 25), of Homerjan village under Adampur union--filed a complaint with Kamalganj Police Station in this regard on Friday night.

"We went to the field on Friday morning and found all the 3,000 fruit bearing plants completely uprooted," Karim said.

"Those who have committed such a heinous crime should be brought to book," said another victim Khokon.

Local union parishad (UP) member Helal Uddin said the two sharecroppers earn their livelihood by cultivating other's land.

They have been cultivating tomatoes, taking lease of other people's land for years, he said.

Adampur UP Chairman Abdal Hossain assured that the affected farmers will get necessary assistance from the local administration.

Broken bridges woe for villagers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Pirojpur*

Six bridges over Badura canal in Shankorpasa union under Pirojpur Sadar upazila have been lying broken for over seven years, causing immense sufferings to people.

Of them, the most important bridge at Badura Fish Landing Station collapsed in 2017 disconnecting the fish landing station and Parerhat bazar.

As a result, the sea fish business is being hampered alarmingly as wholesale fish buyers have to use boat to reach the fish landing station amid risk of accident. This mood of transportation is costly too.

Other bridge at Mallik Bari Bus Stop also has remained damaged for over seven years. Several thousand people and students use the bridges every day but no step has been taken yet to repair it.

Finding no other alternative, the villagers have built bamboo bridge to cross the canal.

People built a bamboo bridge to cross Badura canal amid risk as the iron bridge over the waterbody in Pirojpur Sadar upazila has been lying broken for over seven years. PHOTO: **HABIBUR RAHMAN**

Another bridge at Shankorpasa village has been lying damaged for years, causing untold sufferings to locals. A bamboo bridge is the only means to cross the cannel there.

Two bridges in Jhawtala area have remained damaged for eight years. Thousands of people as well as students use the bridges to reach Pirojpour town and different schools daily.

"As the bridge on the seven-kilometre-long canal has been lying broken for long, we cannot drive our vehicles to home," said Mohammad Bellal from Badura village in the upazila.

"Although half of the union has remained disconnected for years, the authorities concerned don't pay any heed to our sufferings," said local resident Mohammad Mostofa.

Locals added that women, elderly people and children are the worst sufferers of the damaged bridges. They are facing difficulties to go to Pirojpur town and their other destinations.

Harashit Sarkar, Pirojpur Sadar upazila engineer, said the condition of mostly iron bridges in the upazila is the worst as they are over 20 years old.

He also said that 51 damaged iron bridges have been included in a development project proposal. Of them, the tender process of 19 bridges has been completed.

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Memo No. 38.01.6900.000.99.224.19-431 Date: 03.10.2021

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) for the procurement of the following works.

Sl. No.	Tender ID	Name of works	Closing date & time
01	ID- 606087, ID- 606088	Furniture supply for selected government primary school at different location of Natore district from Need Based Infrastructure Development of Govt. Primary School Project (Phase 1).	26 October 2021 15:00

This is an online tender, where only e-Tenderers will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (http://www.eprocure.gov.bd) is required. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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