



Amid festivity, the Hindu community celebrated Saraswati Puja yesterday. *Top*, people gather at Jagannath Hall premises of Dhaka University, where students of almost every department set up mandaps -- the major attraction of the celebrations every year. *Bottom left*, devotees offer food (prasad) to pay obeisance to the goddess of knowledge, wisdom and culture at a mandap in Sylhet. Anjali (flower petals) being offered to the goddess at a temple in Barishal.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS, SHEIKH NASIR, TITU DAS

Country a role model for communal harmony

CJ tells Saraswati Puja event at SC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is a role model for communal harmony, said Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday.

Every year, the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) organises programmes to celebrate Saraswati Puja where all the judges of the Appellate and High Court divisions of the Supreme Court are invited and they attend the religious event, he said.

The chief justice was speaking at a programme organised by the SCBA to celebrate the puja in its auditorium on the SC premises in Dhaka.

Mahmud Hossain said the president and secretary to the SCBA extended their full support to successfully arrange Saraswati Puja every year.

"I hope they would continue their support in the years to come," he said.

Many judges of the High Court Division; Attorney General Mahbubey Alam; Bangladesh Bar Council's Vice Chairman Advocate Muhammad Yusuf Hossain Humayun; SCBA President Advocate AM Amin Uddin; Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru MP; former SCBA president Advocate Zainul Abedin and SCBA Secretary Barrister AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon, among others, attended the event.

ABRAR MURDER

Hearing on charge framing Feb 17

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday fixed February 17 for hearing on charge framing against 25 Buet students in Abrar Fahad murder case.

Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court of Dhaka set the date.

The case will be transferred to Speedy Trial Tribunal for quick disposal. That's why there are some formalities to follow, court sources said quoting the judge.

If the government issues a gazette at the end of the formalities, there will be a transfer order for the case, it added.

During yesterday's hearing, 22 of the accused were produced before the court.

Three accused -- Mustaba Rafid, Muhammad Morshed-Uz-Zaman Mondol alias Jishan and Ehtashamul Rabbi Tanim -- are still on the run.

On October 7 last year, Abrar, a second-year student of Buet, was beaten to death by a group of Bangladesh Chhatra League men at the university's Sher-e-Bangla Hall in Dhaka.

Abrar's father Barkatullah filed a murder case with Chawkbazar Police Station in this regard.

Earlier, eight of the accused made confessional statements before magistrates.

DoE destroys 2 brick kilns in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Department of Environment yesterday destroyed two brick fields at Swaraswati area of Golapganj upazila.

The brick fields -- 'Bashir Bricks' and 'Hafiz and Brothers' -- were being operated for years without clearance certificate from the department. They were polluting the environment and lifting soil from nearby river banks, Israt Jahan Panna, director of DoE in Sylhet, said.

Both the brick fields were also fined Tk 20 lakh each. DoE completely destroyed both the fields using excavator, Israt said.

Earlier on Wednesday, the DoE destroyed two other brick fields at Osmaninagar upazila in Sylhet. Such drives will continue, the DoE director said.

Brick kilns are the top air pollutant in major cities in the country, particularly during dry season when most bricks are made, turning the air quality of these metropolises "severely unhealthy", according to the DoE.

ZAHURUL HAQ HALL

DU probe body talks to tortured students, accused

DU CORRESPONDENT

Three of the four Dhaka University students, who were tortured allegedly by Chhatra League men at a university dormitory on January 21, yesterday spoke to the probe body formed over the incident.

The body, formed two days after the incident, also interviewed the accused Chhatra League activists.

BCL activists of Sergeant Zahurul Haq Hall allegedly tortured Mukim Chowdhury and three other students for nearly three hours before handing them to police on early January 22.

The three others are: Sanwar Hossain of political science department, Minhaz Uddin of Islamic History, and Afsar Uddin of Arabic. The trio was interviewed by the probe body yesterday.

After being released from the police station, Mukim had started a sit-in at the base of Raju Memorial Sculpture, but was compelled to call it off when his father fell ill.

Mukim and his father are now undergoing treatment at a hospital in Chattogram, his family said.

Talking to The Daily Star, Mukim's mother said, "My husband had a sudden brain stroke after hearing that our son was beaten up. Both Mukim and his father are sick; that is why Mukim could not respond to probe body's call for interview."

The three-member probe body, headed by senior house tutor Prof Muhammad Jahidul Islam, was formed on January 23 to investigate the incident. The body was asked to submit its report by seven working days.

Contacted, Prof Jahidul said they have interviewed three students and some accused BCL leaders.

"But it would not be possible to submit the report by the stipulated time if the victims do not cooperate," he added.

Cold-related ailments affect 4,631 in 24 hrs

UNB, Dhaka

Various cold-related ailments affected 4,631 people across the country in the last 24 hours until 8am yesterday, said the government.

Data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) control room showed that 980 of the patients received treatment for acute respiratory infection (ARI).

Another 2,088 were treated for diarrhoea, and 1,563 for diseases including jaundice, inflammation in the eye, skin diseases, and fever.

A total of 4,45,961 people were affected by various cold related ailments across the country between November 1 and January 30.

Fifty-seven deaths were reported during this period.

Due to foggy weather and cold wave, many people -- mostly children and the elderly -- are suffering from cold-related diseases.

The people especially from the northern part of the country are the worst sufferers.

BREXIT

UK sees opportunity to do more with Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

The United Kingdom (UK) sees a real opportunity to do more on trade, development and other areas in the longer term with Bangladesh, as the UK formally leaves the European Union (EU) today.

"There's an increasing focus in the UK on the opportunities," British High Commissioner to Bangladesh Robert Chatterton Dickson told reporters at his residence yesterday, mentioning that they will explore how they can best trade with Bangladesh.

The High Commissioner said he wants to see it as an "opportunity" to do more, as the UK seeks to deepen its relationship with global partners in the future.

The UK will immediately enter into an 11-month transition period after Brexit, during which it will continue to obey EU rules and pay money to the EU.

As a least-developed country, Bangladesh benefits from the most favourable regime available under the EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP), namely the Everything but Arms (EBA) arrangement.

EBA grants the 48 LDCs -- including Bangladesh -- duty-free and quota-free access to the EU for exports of all products, except arms and ammunition.

Following Brexit, the UK will be able to

start talks with countries around the world about setting new rules for buying and selling goods and services.

In the long term, The British high commissioner said they will be doing more, noting there are numerous business and investment interests in Bangladesh.

Quoting British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Dickson said, "Next Friday [today] marks an important moment in the history of our United Kingdom. No matter how you voted in 2016, it's the time to look ahead with confidence to global, trailblazing country we'll become over the next decade and heal past divisions."

That is what, the British Prime Minister said, he will be doing on January 31. "I urge everyone across the UK to do the same."

The British High Commissioner yesterday said the historic moment will be marked through the commemorative 50p coin, which will come into circulation on the day the UK leaves the EU.

The public will see 3 million of these coins enter their banks, shops and restaurants from today, with a further 7 million entering circulation later this year, he said.

The British Prime Minister will be 'one of the first' to receive the new Brexit coin, which reads 'Peace prosperity and friendship with all nations'.

Two healthcare centres fined

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A mobile court of Chattogram District Administration yesterday fined a diagnostic centre and a private clinic in the port city Tk 2.50 lakh in total for violating law.

The mobile court led by Executive Magistrate Umar Faruque fined New Chandler Alo Diagnostic Centre at Mailer Matha Tk 1.5 lakh for delivering pathological reports through scanning the signature of a pathologist without his consent, says a press release.

In the same drive, the mobile court fined Holy Care Nursing Home and Diagnostic Centre Tk 1 lakh for running the diagnostic centre unit without any licence, it says.

Many unlicensed diagnostic centres and private hospitals in Chattogram are being operated without any trained medical workers.

In some cases, these institutions are starting operations just after applying to the Directorate General of Health Services for licence and not waiting for approval.

Nine 'Allahr Dal members' held in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU) of Police claimed to have arrested nine leaders of the banned militant outfit "Allahr Dal" from Arambagh area of Sylhet Sadar upazila on Wednesday night.

The specialised unit in association of Sylhet Metropolitan Police (SMP) conducted a drive at 10:25pm and arrested the nine while planning anti-state activities, Paritosh Ghosh, additional commissioner of SMP, told a press conference in Sylhet yesterday.

The arrestees are: Manik Akand alias Mehedy Hasan (32) of Bogura; Jahir Uddin Babar (20) of Noakhali; Rasel Ahmed (24) and Kamal Ahmed (25) of Zakiganj; Abul Kalam Azad (20) of Cumilla; Tomi Uddin Sumon (30) of Sunamganj; Ashrafal Islam (29) of Rajshahi; Jewel Ahmed (24) of Sylhet Sadar and Swapan Ahmed (21) of Golapganj.

ATU officials in Dhaka said Manik has been working as the head of Sylhet division since 2018. Earlier, he used to be the regional chief of Naogaon, Chattogram and Cumilla from 2013 to 2018. He is one of the key members of the group. He joined the group in 2005, said law enforcers.

Babar is working as Sylhet divisional

head of the outfit's "Dawah" wing since 2018 while Rasel is the Sylhet district chief since 2018. Among other arrestees, Ashrafal is Sunamganj district chief; Kamal chief; Abul Kalam Shahparan thana chief; and Jewel and Swapan are ward unit chiefs of Sylhet city.

MM Hasanul Zahid, superintendent of police (intelligence) of ATU, said in primary interrogation, the arrestees admitted that they were holding a clandestine meeting to take preparations for carrying out subversive activities.

"All the arrestees are followers of Matin Mehedy of Kurigram who founded the outfit," said Md Mahiduzzaman, ATU superintendent of police (legal and media).

The Public Security Division, under the home ministry, banned the militant group on November 5, through issuing a gazette notification. The notification mentioned that the government thinks activities of the militant outfit named "Allahr Dal" are against peace and a threat to public security.

The SP said they are investigating to find out details of their planning and capacity.

ATU also seized Tk 16,000, some mobile phones, a registry book, some documents and books. A case was filed.

Biker dead, two hurt in Dinaipur road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

A biker was killed and two others were injured after a speeding tractor hit a motorcycle in Chirirbandar upazila on Wednesday night.

The deceased was identified as Nazmul Haq (35), hailing from Majhapara village in the upazila. The injured are Manik Hossain (30) and Wahedul Islam (35).

The accident occurred as the three were coming to Chirirbandar on the bike from Dinaipur town on. As they arrived at Khuniadighi village on the Dinaipur-Chirirbandar road, the tractor hit them, leaving Nazmul dead on the spot.

The injured are recuperating at M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital in Dinaipur after locals rushed them there.



Most of BRTC's routes in Chattogram are being served by worndown buses like this one. Commuters of the city carry the risk of accidents every time they step out due to unfit vehicles like these. The photo was taken at Shah Amanat Bridge.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN