

Mazar vandalised in Thakurgaon

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

The Shah Sattyapir Mazar was vandalised, and several graves were damaged in the shrine compound in Sadar upazila of Thakurgaon early yesterday.

Local followers of Shah Sattyapir gathered at the site in the morning, expressed anger over the incident and demanded stern action against those responsible.

Enamul Haque, president of the shrine committee, said devotees regularly conduct religious activities at the shrine and that no "immoral activities" have ever taken place there.

"Yet unidentified miscreants vandalised the shrine and damaged several graves in the dead of night," he said, adding, "Those responsible must not be spared."

He also said preparations were underway to file a case in connection with the incident.

Thakurgaon Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Md Monir Hossain said police are investigating the incident.

Visiting the site, Upazila Nirbahi Officer Khairul Islam said the offenders will be identified soon.

Over 75,000 apply for SUST entry test

UNB, Sylhet

More than 75,000 students have applied online to sit for the first year, first semester undergraduate admission tests of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST) for the 2025-26 academic session.

Member Secretary of the Admission Committee Prof Mohammad Selim confirmed that a total of 75,023 applicants submitted their applications before the deadline. The applications were received for A, B and A2 (sub-unit for Architecture) units.

According to the admission committee, the entrance examination for Unit A will be held on January 13, while the test for Unit B is scheduled for January 14. The examinations will take place at designated centres in Sylhet and the capital, Dhaka.

As per the admission guidelines, merit lists will be prepared out of a total of 100 marks. The score will be calculated based on the marks obtained in the admission test (out of 80). For HSC 2025 candidates, the combined GPA of SSC and HSC examinations will be multiplied by two, while for HSC 2024 candidates, the combined GPA will be multiplied by 1.6.

Campaigning ends amid hope

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Abdul Alim Arif, GS candidate of the Chhatra Shibir-backed Odommo JnUjan Oikko panel, said their campaign had been strong from the beginning.

"We spoke regularly with

students, listened to their problems, and received positive feedback. However, we still have concerns about the fairness of the polls," he said, adding that they hope for a transparent election.

Shahin Mia, assistant general secretary (AGS) candidate of the Jatiya Chhatra Shakti-backed Oikoboddo JnUjan panel, said they received encouraging responses from students.

"Students have voiced

their support wherever we went, so we are optimistic. We want a fair election, but the election commission has disappointed us repeatedly. We hope those mistakes are not repeated on election day," he said.

According to the schedule announced on November 5, the election was initially set for December 22. However, following a campus closure due to earthquake-related panic, a revised schedule was announced on December 4.

"Students have voiced

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Members of the Crime Reporters Association of Bangladesh (CRAB) formed a human chain in front of its office, while the Bangladesh Photojournalists Association (BPJA) held another in front of Jatiya Press Club.

In Brahmanbaria, the Brahmanbaria Democratic Unity organised a protest in front of the district press club.

Speaking at the CRAB programme, Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) President Abu Saleh Akond said the attacks on Prothom Alo and The Daily Star were assaults on press freedom and democracy.

He said journalists had struggled for 16 years for media freedom and democratic restoration, during which more than 1,500 people were killed and thousands were injured. "The government in power today is the result of that struggle," he added.

Abu Saleh alleged that sections of the police and administration failed to act despite having prior information about the attacks, adding that timely intervention could have prevented the incidents.

He also said many officials still carried the mindset of the previous fascist regime.

Referring to the killing of 65 to 70 journalists over the years, including journalist couple Sagar Sarwar and Meherun Rumi, he said justice had not been served in most cases.

"We hoped for justice under the new government, but instead we saw media houses being set on fire," he said, urging journalists to remain united.

"Today it is Prothom Alo and The Daily Star. Tomorrow it could be any of us."

CRAB President Mirza Mehedi Tamal said attacks on media outlets were not new but described the recent incidents as unprecedented.

"Media cannot be silenced by attacks. It has always stood back up, and this time these two media houses did so," he said.

Lazzat Enab Mohsi, deputy editor of Prothom Alo, said not only the attackers but also those who instigated and encouraged the violence must be brought to justice.

The programme was moderated by CRAB Secretary MM Badsha. Former DRU president Shakhat Hossain Badsha; Prothom Alo Executive Editor Sazzad Sharif; Tipu Sultan, head of politics and crime at Prothom Alo; and The Daily Star's senior reporter, Tuhin Shubhra Adhikary also spoke.

Former CRAB presidents Kamruzzaman Khan, Modhusudhan Mandal and Khairuzzaman Kamal, along with current and former leaders of DRU and CRAB, were also present.

At the BPJA programme in front of the Jatiya Press Club, leaders of various journalist organisations

joined the protest.

Speaking there, Kader Gani Chowdhury, secretary general of a faction of the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, recalled scenes of flames engulfing The Daily Star and Prothom Alo.

"Today journalists were left helpless and desperate to save their lives.

"One sister had taken shelter on the rooftop of The Daily Star. Her pleas that day shook the conscience of the world," he said.

"What kind of civilisation is this? What kind of humanity? How can burning people alive be considered a part of civilisation or humanity?" he asked, describing the attacks as assaults on democracy.

He urged the government to take action against those responsible. "If justice is not ensured, such crimes will increase, and the government will bear a permanent stain."

Shawkat Hossain Masum,

deputy head (online) of Prothom Alo, said attackers this time came with their faces uncovered, believing they would face no consequences.

"There is not only a plan to silence us, but a plan to cut our throats," he said.

The rally, moderated by BPJA President AKM Mohsin, was also addressed by Dhaka Journalists Union President Shahidul Islam, The Daily Star Chief Photographer Anisur Rahman, and BPJA General Secretary Babul Talukder, among others.

In Brahmanbaria, a protest organised by the Brahmanbaria Democratic Unity demanded the immediate arrest of those involved in the attacks.

Leaders and activists of various social, cultural and professional organisations, along with students and journalists, joined the demonstration.

Rivals agree

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rocket fire and artillery barrages. The clashes were reignited early this month after a breakdown in a ceasefire that US President Donald Trump and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim had helped broker to halt a previous round of fighting. "Both sides agree to maintain current troop deployments without further movement," the ministers said in a joint statement on the ceasefire.

"Any reinforcement would heighten tensions and negatively affect long-term efforts to resolve the situation," according to the statement released on social media by Cambodia.

Cambodia's top diplomat, Prak Sokhonn, and his Thai counterpart, Sisarak Phuangketkeow, will meet with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in China's Yunnan province on Sunday and Monday to discuss the border situation, according to a statement from Cambodian foreign ministry and a Thai official.



PHOTO: COURTESY

The 8th convocation of United International University was held on its campus on Madani Avenue in Dhaka yesterday. Buet Vice-Chancellor Prof Abu Borhan Mohammad Badruzzaman presided over the ceremony. University Grants Commission member Prof Mohammad Anwar Hossain attended as the special guest, while Prof M Taher A Saif of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Illinois, USA, delivered the convocation speech. The ceremony was also addressed by UIU Chairman Hasan Mahmood Raja and Vice-Chancellor Prof Md Abul Kashem Mia.

Illegal topsoil trade threatens farming

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

Indiscriminate extraction of fertile topsoil from agricultural land during the dry season continues unabated in Habiganj, posing a serious threat to food security and environmental sustainability, warn environmentalists and locals.

Every winter, profit-driven soil traders allegedly remove topsoil from farmlands in Shayestaganj, Bahubal, Nabiganj and Chunarrughat upazilas, taking advantage of weak monitoring by the authorities.

Locals allege that organised middlemen buy topsoil from farmers at nominal prices and sell it at much higher rates to industrial and private establishments, rendering vast tracts of cropland less productive.

On December 25, residents of the Manman Haor area in Lakhai

upazila seized four soil-laden tractors allegedly linked to Chhota Mia, a Ward-3 member of Bamoi Union Parishad. The tractors were later handed over to Lakhai Police Station in the presence of Union Parishad Chairman Arif Ahmed Rupon.

Earlier, mobile courts fined several individuals for illegal soil extraction across the district. In Bahubal upazila, a man identified as Nanu Mia was fined Tk 50,000 for cutting fertile soil from agricultural land in the Joynabab area.

Residents of Brahmadora Union

in Shayestaganj alleged that soil is being extracted daily from the Sherpur, Keshabpur and Rishipara areas.

"Eight to ten tractors loaded with soil pass through our village every day. People remain silent because influential groups are involved," said Raju Mia of Zainabad village in Bahubal.

Lakhai Police Station Sub-inspector Masud Rana said preliminary findings indicate that the seized tractors belong to a local UP member, adding that authorities are considering filing a regular case or proceeding through a mobile court.

Bahubal Assistant Commissioner (Land) Mahbubul Islam said mobile court drives are conducted whenever information is received.

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