


## Raj Punnah festival on Feb 17

UNB, Bandarban

The 119th Raj Punnah festival begins here on February 17. Bomang chief Ongsoipru Chowdhury announced the date of Raj Punnah festival at the royal palace on Wednesday. During the three-day Raj Punnah, 15th king of Bomang circle will receive land tax formally from 109 mouza and 870 area headmen.

The king will ascend the throne wearing royal clothes on February 17 where royal advisors and supervisors will welcome him in a traditional way. Apart from tax payment, the local people will also bring different kinds of gift for the king during the festival. A three-day fair will also be held on the premises of the royal palace.



### Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka, Khulna and Sylhet divisions during the next 12 hours till 6.00pm today.

Met office said weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country.

Light fog may occur over the river basins in the early morning. Night temperature may rise by 1-2 degree Celsius. Met office added.

Yesterday's highest temperature of 27.3 degree Celsius was recorded at Teknaf and the lowest of 6.6 degree at Srimongal.

**The sun sets in the capital at 5:48pm today and rises at 6:37am tomorrow.**

The highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature In Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	23.4	10.5	64	43
Chittagong	23.0	12.4	54	49
Rajshahi	24.3	08.6	89	60
Khulna	20.6	13.2	73	65
Barisal	21.5	11.2	89	60
Sylhet	24.3	10.3	76	54
Cox's Bazar	23.5	15.5	64	64

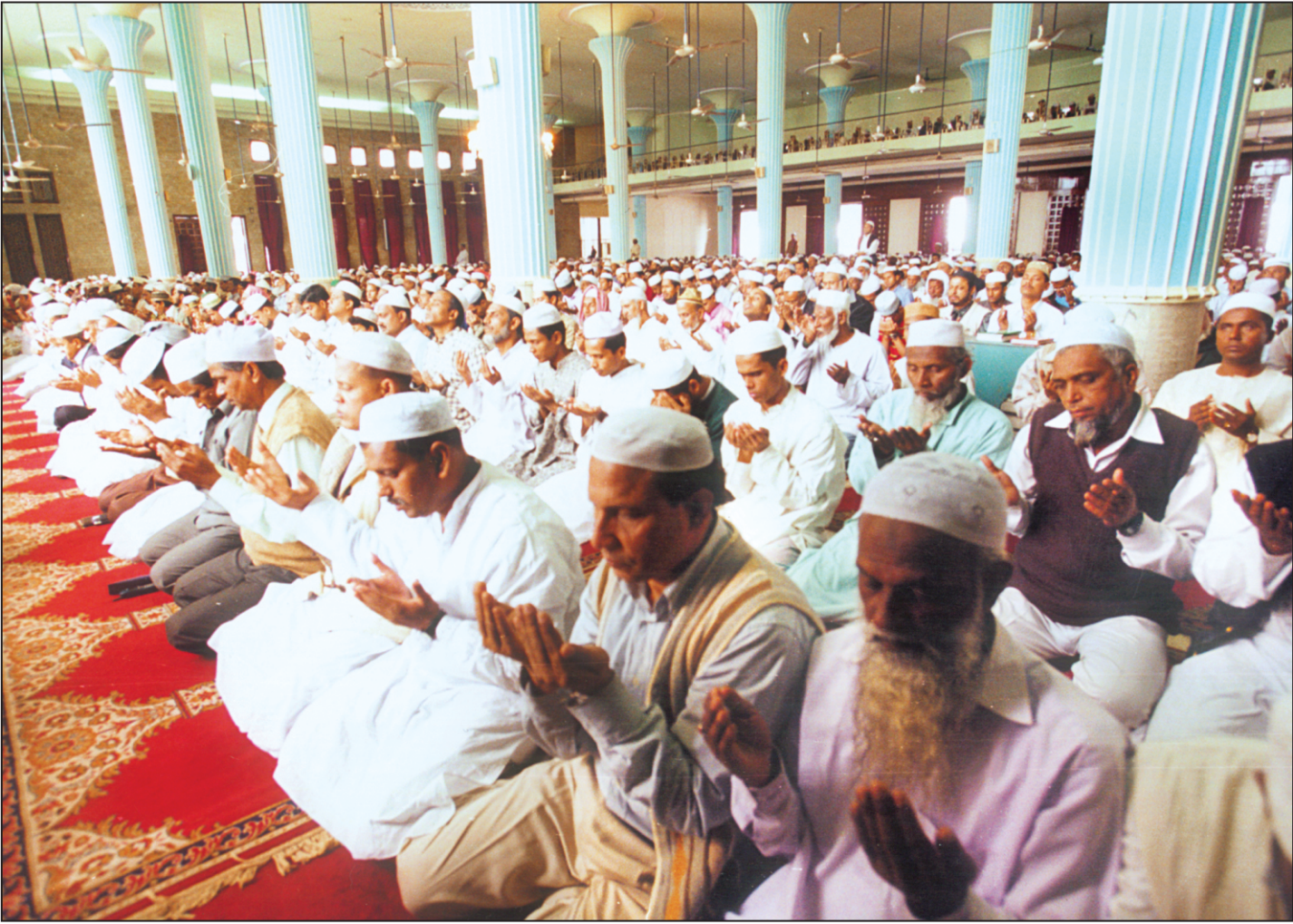


PHOTO: STAR

Special prayers were offered at Baitul Mokarram Mosque in the city after Juma prayers yesterday for the salvation of the departed souls of the Hajis killed in February 1 stampede in Mina.

## Malaysian PM vows 'no favours' probe into son's alleged nuclear link

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has told police to investigate "without fear or favour" allegations that a company controlled by his son was involved in supplying parts for Libya's nuclear weapons programme. Abdullah was quoted by the New Straits Times yesterday as saying he would "not interfere" in the probe of Scomi Precision Engineering Sdn. Bhd. (SCOPE), which allegedly supplied centrifuge components for Libya's uranium-enrichment programme. SCOPE is a unit of listed oil and gas firm Scomi Group, in which the premier's son, Kamaluddin Abdullah, is the biggest shareholder. "I have directed the police to carry out the investigations without

fear or favour," Abdullah said. He noted that the components produced by SCOPE were "generic" and could be used for a multitude of non-nuclear purposes. Abdullah said he was not worried about Malaysia being linked to an international black-market nuclear weapons proliferation syndicate exposed by the admission of Pakistan's top nuclear scientist, Abdul Qadeer Khan, that he transferred know-how to Iran, Libya and North Korea. "If we know the truth, we should not be worried. I hope that the investigations will reveal the truth. The police are working with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)," he added. The premier said he did not know whether reports that Khan had visited Malaysia were true but had ordered police to investigate.

Scomi, which has said it was never told of the end-use of the components, on Friday invited the media to visit its factory in central Selangor state. The company has said the contract to manufacture 14 semi-finished components for Gulf Technical Industries LLC (GTI) in Dubai was arranged by Dubai-based Sri Lankan businessman B.S.A. Tahir in 2001. It said the last consignment was shipped in August last year and there had been no order since. Police late Wednesday said they had launched a probe after US and British intelligence services told them last November about SCOPE's role and identified Tahir as the middleman.

### Iraqi leader Sistani targeted by assassins

AFP, Baghdad

The spiritual leader of Iraq's Shiite Muslim majority escaped an apparent assassination bid, as two young Iraqis accused by insurgent groups of collaborating with US occupiers were shot dead by masked men in the restive town of Fallujah west of Baghdad. Initial reports of the assassination attempt on Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani were sketchy. But a source close to Sistani told AFP a man was intercepted by bodyguards as he tried to break into the ayatollah's office to carry out "a criminal act targeting" the ayatollah. Asked whether Sistani's insistence on elections could have been behind the assassination attempt, Sunni member of the Iraq Governing Council Nasir Chaderchi said: "Everyone wants elections in Iraq, some want them before the transfer of power and some after." The foiled attack came a day before a team of UN experts was due in Baghdad to assess the feasibility of Sistani's demand for direct elections for Iraq's first post-occupation government to properly reflect his community's demographic weight. The evaluation team -- the first full-scale UN mission to the country since it pulled out its international staff after a deadly bombing last year -- was due to arrive Friday and stay for about 10 days. The two Iraqis shot dead in Fallujah were identified as Saadun Shukr and Mustafa Zoubai, both 25 and unemployed. Flyers distributed by masked men in the city after the killings said "two master spies who were denouncing the sons of Fallujah have been shot dead."

## Secret of homing pigeons revealed

REUTERS, London

The secret of carrier pigeons' uncanny ability to find their way home has been discovered by British scientists: the feathered navigators follow the roads just like we do. Researchers at Oxford University spent 10 years studying homing pigeons using global positioning satellite (GPS) and were stunned to find the birds often don't

navigate by taking bearing from the sun. Instead they fly along motorways, turn at junctions and even go around roundabouts, adding miles to their journeys, British newspapers reported on Thursday. "It really has knocked our research team sideways," Professor Tim Guilford said in the Daily Telegraph. "It is striking to see the pigeons fly straight down the A34 Oxford

bypass, and then sharply curve off at the traffic lights before curving off again at the roundabout," he said in The Times. Guilford said pigeons use their own navigational system when doing long-distance trips or when a bird does a journey for the first time. But when they have flown a journey more than once they home in on an habitual route home.

### NEW IMAGES OF 'BLACK EYE' GALAXY



PHOTO: REUTERS

The Hubble Space Telescope has snapped a new image of the 'Black Eye' galaxy, so named because an ancient cosmic smashup produced a dark ring and a roiling, conflicted interior. What looks like a black eye in the Hubble picture is actually a dark band of dust that stands out vividly in front of the galaxy's bright nucleus, Hubble scientists said in a statement on Thursday. The image shows an area where hot blue stars have just formed, along with pink clouds of hydrogen gas that glow when exposed to ultraviolet light from the infant stars.

## Antibody could block SARS infection: Study

REUTERS, Washington

US researchers said they had found an antibody that could help prevent infection with the SARS virus. They found the monoclonal antibody -- a specialised immune system protein -- by looking through a library of existing antibodies. They said their approach, described in this week's issue of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, might be used against other newly emerging diseases as well. "This is really a proof of principle for responding to emerging infectious diseases," Dr. Wayne Marasco of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Harvard Medical School in Boston, said in a statement. "If the international community works together, it can make a serious dent in the time it takes to develop protective treatments against these threats." SARS first was seen in November 2002 in southern China and between then and June 2003 infected more than 8,000 people globally and killed nearly 800. This year, four people have been diagnosed with SARS in China. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome is caused by a new virus

from the family of coronaviruses that cause the common cold and a range of animal illnesses. Marasco and colleagues at Dana-Farber, Brigham and Women's Hospital, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Children's Hospital Boston tested the antibody in lab dishes of cells and found it blocked the virus from infecting cells. "It was one of those Eureka experiences," Marasco said. "It was pretty dramatic." Antibodies are proteins that either flag or outright destroy invaders such as viruses and bacteria. Monoclonal antibodies are used to treat disease, including cancer, but have not been developed to protect against disease. It would take years more work to develop this protein as a weapon against SARS, but the researchers said studying its structure may offer a shortcut to developing a drug or vaccine to fight SARS. Passive immunization -- in which antibodies are infused into a patient's blood -- may also offer a short-term treatment for those sickest with SARS, they said.

## Over 1,000 arrested

UNB, Dhaka

Police arrested a total of 1,044 people during their ongoing countrywide drive in the last 24 hours till 6.00am yesterday.

They also recovered four firearms and four rounds of bullet and filed three cases against three people, said a press release issued by the police headquarters.