

Ijtema cut short for inclement weather

3 die: Akheri Munajat held on opening day

KAILASH SARKAR

In an unprecedented incident, the three-day Biswa Ijtema, ostensibly the second largest yearly congregation of the Muslims, on the bank of Turag River at Tongi was cut short on its inaugural day yesterday due to an inclement weather that had caused deaths of at least three pilgrims.

The akheri munajat or the concluding prayers of this year's ijtema started at 7:55pm ending at 8:15pm yesterday instead of its schedule tomorrow.

Talking to The Daily Star, Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur Mohammad confirmed that the authorities took the decision considering the sufferings of several lakh pilgrims in a bitter cold weather.

The three elderly pilgrims died yesterday and on Thursday night due to the cold wave that has been

sweeping through the country. The deceased are Ali Ashraf, 55, from Bogra, and Raqibuddin, 70 and Glasuddin, 80 from Pabna.

Assistant Super of Police (ASP) of Gazipur Circle said, "The three pilgrims died due to the cold wave, their old age might also have contributed to the loss."

"Their namaz-e-janaza was held on the ijtema ground, and the bodies have been kept in Gazipur Hospital", he added.

Commander SMAK Azad, director of the Legal and Media Wing of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), said the decision to cut short this year's ijtema had been taken by the event's organising committee, which was then okayed by the Gazipur deputy commissioner.

He said, "As far as I know, this is the first time the ijtema has been cut short ending it on the inaugural day."

He also said after the akheri

munajat, several lakh pilgrims started leaving the ijtema ground heading home, soon to be gripped by panic as there was not enough transport to absorb the rush.

Many of them, however, decided to stay on the ground for the night despite its terrible condition.

Earlier, defying the bitter cold wave accompanied by a daylong drizzle, about two million people from across the country and abroad joined the jum'a prayer.

But, after the jum'a prayer, many of them were forced by the terrible weather to leave the ground.

The tents could not save them from the relentless drizzle that had started Thursday morning. The situation became worse as the entire 5 square kilometre ijtema ground turned muddy.

The tents and mats were

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Devotees at the Biswa Ijtema site use plastic sheets to take cover during the drizzle. Inclement weather and poor ground conditions led to the congregation's abrupt end last night. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Chilly wind and drizzles disrupt life for 2nd day

STAR REPORT

Life in the capital and elsewhere in the country was disrupted for the second day yesterday as chilly wind and drizzles continued with fog and clouds preventing sunlight.

The cold spell and inclement weather particularly affected people of the northern region and those living in the open and unable to afford warm clothes are the worst sufferers.

In most of the cities and towns, traffic was thin on streets, shopping malls and kitchen markets had a very bad day as people ventured to go out only on urgent needs.

The chilly weather also hampered farming as many peasants and farm labourers could not go out to work.

The meteorological office yesterday forecast the drizzle caused by a westerly low along with easterly trough is likely to continue for a couple of days more in different areas of the country. Temperature may further fall in Rajshahi Division.

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Khaleda gives green signal for contesting election

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Currently detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia advised her party leaders to start the groundwork for contesting in the upcoming 9th parliamentary election scheduled for the end of the year, party sources said.

Khandaker Delwar Hossain, secretary general of Khaleda backed faction of the party, will start having views exchange meetings with district level leaders soon to discuss what should be the party's position vis-à-vis the proposed political dialogues between the government and political parties, as well as its preparation for the upcoming election, party leaders said.

The party leaders, however, could not definitely say what position Khaleda Zia has regarding

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Gas supply restored as pipeline thru' Turag repaired

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gas supply in Ashulia and Aminbazar areas was restored yesterday night after the Titas Gas authorities repaired the damaged underwater gas pipeline on the bed of River Turag at Aminbazar in Savar.

Titas Gas officials with the help of Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) divers conducted restoration work of the gas pipeline till 7:30pm and restored gas supply at about 8:30pm.

But the restoration tasks of Palli Bidyut lines are yet to begin.

Any assessment of the loss wrought by the incident is yet to be made as the personnel of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd remain busy in repairing the pipeline.

Engineer Mohammad Aminur Rahman, director (Operation) of the company, said, "We are yet to assess the loss. But it is our responsibility and we shall do that after restoring gas supply."

Director (Admin) Engineer Mohammad Aminur Rahman said, "The trawler is responsible for damaging the pipeline and we are thinking of taking actions in this regard."

"Since we do not have divers, we requested the FSCD to provide us with divers for conducting repair work of the damaged pipeline", he said.

Nineteen divers of Savar branch of FSCD carried out the repair work under instructions of Titas Gas engineers.

Joinal Abedin, manager of Savar

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Leaders worried as economy passes thru' difficult time

SHAWKAT HOSSAIN MASUM, from Davos, Switzerland

Participants in the World Economic Forum (WEF) meet this year are not in a good mood. They are worried about the economy sliding towards a difficult time.

The hilly and white Davos, basically a ski resort, these days is more known as the venue for the WEF annual meeting, considered to be the biggest gathering of those holding the purse strings.

Based in Geneva, WEF is an independent international organisation committed to improving the state of the world by having leaders engaged in shaping the global, regional and industry agendas.

The theme of last year's meeting too was economy, but the world economy then was robust, just the opposite of this year's. The economic turmoil confronting the US

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Help Dhaka face 2 major issues, CA tells WEF

UNB, Davos, Switzerland

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday told leaders of World Economic Forum (WEF) that Bangladesh is facing two vitally important issues--access of Bangladeshi products to the markets of developed countries including the US, and adapting to the impact of global warming causing changes in the climate.

"We are pointing out to the business and political leaders here formally and informally to address these vital issues," he told an international press conference at the Congress Centre on the sidelines of the WEF Annual Meeting 2008 on Quest for Peace and Stability.

Fakhruddin said, "We are not asking for favour, we are asking for rewarding good market performance." Bangladesh is asking for access to the US market for its garment products as it was given to

the least developed countries of Africa for American and some EU markets.

On the adverse impact of climate change on Bangladesh, the chief adviser said one-third of Bangladesh would go under water affecting some 40 million people with one-metre rise of sea level. "It would be disastrous for the country if more waters flow from the Himalayan system and flow through the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers systems."

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He said Bangladesh has already been battered by two successive floods and cyclone Sidr within four months last year, causing huge losses to lives and property.

He said the world has to devote much to this issue and create a global fund for vulnerable countries like Bangladesh to finance adaptation and mitigation of suf-

ferings. "It is important to create the global fund quickly and access to this fund. Besides, necessary technology is required for strengthening adaptation to the climate changes," he added.

On the trade bill pending before the US Congress, the chief adviser said he hopes that the Congress would take a favourable decision on the bill so that Bangladesh could compete with others on a level-playing field.

Asked about external economic recession that could cast an impact on Bangladesh's economy, he said increased oil prices and the latest round of increase in prices of rice and edible oil have greatly affected the country's economy as Bangladesh has to import all these items.

Fakhruddin said improved economic and political relations with India are helping Bangladesh.

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Father, son murdered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ashulia police dug out the bodies of father and son from a farmland beside the Dhaka-Aricha Highway at Nayarhat yesterday.

The victims, Abdul Halim, 60, and his son Md Jewel, 25, of Dhanigram under Dhamri Police Station were maxi drivers. According to Dhaka Medical College Hospital sources, they were strangled.

The two, along with their maxi, remained missing since Monday night. The maxi was yet to be recovered.

Ashulia police said the body of Jewel was found by the employees of mobile phone company, Banglalink, when they were digging to install underground cable in Nayarhat area at 2:00am yesterday. They found a leg of Jewel and informed police who recovered the body.

Being informed of the recovery of Jewel's body, his relatives rushed to Ashulia Police Station. They

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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Inadequate water flow in rivers in the country's south-western region is increasing salinity in the Sundarbans, letting the World Heritage site go to ruin. The photo was taken at Kachikhali point near the Sundarbans.

Rivers dying as Ganges project remains in limbo

PINAKI ROY

Despite repeated recommendations from experts, the government has yet to take any tangible action towards realising Ganga Barrage Project.

The project was taken up and designed to harness water of the River Padma and to divert it to 24 big and small dying rivers in the south-western part of the country.

Although the foundation stone was laid and some land was also bought in 1980 to build the barrage, successive governments failed to finish even the feasibility study in about the last three decades. Since then successive governments sat on the files of the project, which

according to experts could change the lives of the people of the south-western region for the better.

If Ganga or Ganges Barrage were built, the experts said, it would increase navigability of the rivers in that region and decrease salinity in the rivers, ultimately saving the Sundarbans, a heritage of the world.

Besides, through producing hydro electricity the barrage would facilitate irrigation to almost 15,000 hectares of land in 10 districts, helping to produce extra cropworth

Tk 1,000 crore a year, said Mir Sazzad Hossain, a member of Bangladesh-India Joint Rivers Commission.

"River water up to 50 kilometres inland from the sea becomes saline during dry seasons. Ganges Barrage would increase flow of sweet water and also navigability of 24 big and small rivers," he said.

The proposed Ganges Barrage at Pangsha-Sujanagar point under Rajbari and Pabna districts could divert water to 24 big and small rivers through the Garai, Chandana, Bhairab, Kapotaksha, Mathabhangha, Madhumati, and Nabaganga rivers.

Dr Ainun Nishat, eminent river expert and the country director of the world conservation union IUCN, said the main concept of Ganges Barrage is not based on the

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