

Devotees pray

FROM PAGE 1
Many devotees, including women, took risks by boarding overcrowded buses and trains while others walked miles to reach the venue.
Scores of people joined the prayers standing on the roofs of trains and nearby houses, on boats and roads.
As many had to walk miles to join and return from the venue, different social organisations and individuals distributed juice, water and dry food at different points among the devotees.
Those who could not go to the Ijtima ground joined yesterday's munajat through their cell phones and other electronic media.
President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina participated in the prayers from Bangabhaban and Gano Bhaban.
The first phase of the Ijtima was organised for the devotees of 32 districts including those of Dhaka and other nearby districts. Around 10,000 foreigners from 50 countries joined the first phase that started Friday.
Around 50 government, private and volunteer organisations provided the devotees with free treatment.
Devotees from the other 32 districts will participate in the second phase of the Ijtima, beginning from January 16. It will conclude with another Akheri Munajat on January 18.
Tablighi Jamaat has been organising the congregation every year since 1946.
NINE DIE
At least nine devotees died of cardiac arrest and following other health related complications during the three days of Ijtima.
They are Makhbul Hossain, 75, and Toazzel Hossain, 50, of Chuadanga, Sadequr Rahman, 20, of Sylhet, Abdus Salam, 50, of Gazipur, Jahangir Alal Sarker, 65, of Dhaka, Kafil Uddin Mandol, 50, of Natore; and Khairul Kabir, 55, and Riaz Uddin, 52, of Kishoreganj.
A dead man was yet to be identified.

52 Buddhist

FROM PAGE 16
and Nipu Barua -- two members of the local unit of the ruling party -- had "managed the district administration" and forced them to leave. They allegedly brought in over 100 Rohingya people to force the villagers to leave.
"We left our village following threats from the police, Rohingya terrorists, land grabbers and criminals who vandalised our homes and beat us up," said Anushi Barua, a 55-year-old woman victim.
Paltu Barua, Arabindu Barua and Bishakha Barua, three other victims, told The Daily Star that Sugato Barua -- a local Awami League leader -- hired criminals from Ukiya upazila in Cox's Bazar to threaten the villagers and beat them up.
Mridul Barua, another victim, said, "We did not receive any notice from the court or the upazila administration."
Lt Col Khandakar Saiful Alam of BGB-17 Battalion in Cox's Bazar said 26 Buddhist families from Uttar Ghundum Barua Para gathered in Batunia check post area to try to enter Myanmar after they were evicted from their homes.
The deputy commissioner of the district was informed about the matter, he said.
Upazila Nirbahi Officer ASM Shahedul Islam said, "We evicted only 25 Buddhist families from the area on a notice from the district magistrate."
DC Mizanul Haque Chowdhury said, "We have ordered the district administration to take proper steps to rehabilitate the evicted families."
Superintendent of Police Devdas Bhattacharya said, "Police just followed the court order and only a few families were evicted."

Robot that draws

FROM PAGE 16
the beach by dragging seven pins in the sand a bit like a rake, reports TechCrunch.
The BeachBot is 60 cm in length and 40 cm in both width and height. It has a three wheel arrangement with differential drive back wheels and also has a steering wheel in the front.
What seems like it may be complicated drawing process takes just a few minutes to prepare.
The artist in charge of the robot sets down poles in the sand to tell the robot the space in which it may draw.
The robot may either be controlled manually or the artist can send it a file image to replicate.
Stichkingdom reports that the lines the rakes create can be as thin as 2 inches or as wide as 16 inches.
Using a mounted laser scanner and the special reflected poles the robot creates a map of its drawing field and then it begins to play.
Some previously drawn images are of a fish, a slower, and a variety of geometric shapes.
As long as the artist can draw it, BeachBot can draw it too.
"The BeachBot is not just a lifeless, mechanical being; it is a friendly looking creature with a soul," says the robot's official website.
There is currently no information on how to purchase a BeachBot but those interested in finding out more can do so on BeachBot's Facebook Page.

BIWTA boss behind

FROM PAGE 16
to use 22.99 acres of foreshore of the Shitalakkhya river in Narayanganj in May 2012, and an individual 0.19 acres on the Turag in Savar in February last year.
Besides, it has "temporarily allocated" 4,400 square feet inside the Buckland Bund on the Buriganga, five acres near Amin Bazaar landing station and 0.67 acre at Showarighat to individuals illegally, according to the allegations submitted by a group of complainants.
Also, unspecified areas of shores and foreshores were leased out to two real estate companies at Basila in Mohammadpur.
The ACC officials, who provided the details of the allegations to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, chose to withhold the names of the complainants.
The commission has started inquiring into the allegations of corruption, amassing wealth illegally and money laundering against the chairman in September last year, said an ACC official.
Samsuddoha allegedly misappropriated a large amount of money from dredging projects on Takerhat to Madirpur route in the Kumar river, Mawa-Charjanajat and Paturia-Daulatdia routes in the Padma, and Mongla-Ghasiakhalhi channel.
He is also accused of recruiting people in the BIWTA either in exchange of money or through nepotism, the official said.
Besides, he allegedly indulged in corruption in establishing the Deck Engine Personnel Training Centre in Barisal and Ship Personnel Training Institute in Madaripur, procuring vehicles and dredgers, refurbishing BIWTA offices and appointing contractors for goods transportation at Sadarghat, Nayabazar and Kadamtoli terminals, he added.

Election pledges

FROM PAGE 16
upholding democratic process and ensuring uninterrupted development.
But after one year in office in their second consecutive term, it seems the policymakers of the government and the ruling party have forgotten that pledge. Some of them are even openly taking stance against holding talks with rival political parties including the BNP.
As a result, the political situation has apparently started getting back to square one with the BNP-led alliance enforcing countrywide indefinite blockade. In addition, confinement of BNP chief Khaleda Zia to her political office has undermined the democratic process, instead of upholding it.
Political unrests are diminishing the possibility of peace, discipline and stability in the country. This makes it difficult for the government to deliver on its pledges to establish peace and stability in all spheres of national and social life.
Moreover, a sharp rise in extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances allegedly by law enforcers in last one year has exposed the vulnerability of public security.
To cite an example as per an Ain O Salish Kendra report, 128 people died in "crossfire" as well as "gunfight" between law enforcers and "criminals" in 2014, while the number was 72 in 2013.
The law enforcement agencies in 2014 allegedly abducted 88 people; 42 of them never returned home, while bodies of 23 were found later. The ASK report demonstrates that instances of enforced disappearance were higher last year than the previous two years, the numbers being 53 in 2013 and 56 in 2012.
The rights situation could not be improved although the AL had promised to take necessary measures to that end.
The party's pledge for appointing an ombudsman remains only in papers with no move being visible in this regard as well.
The law enforcement agencies, especially police, were not made free from partisan influences though the AL had promised to do so.
The police and other law enforcement agencies have been used to foil the opposition's rallies and demonstrations. On the other side, they were seen remaining silent on many occasions when ruling AL men demonstrated with unruly activities.
The National Human Rights Commission looked helpless in the face of gross violation of rights, proving that the government either could not or did not turn the NHRC into an effective institution.
The AL had also promised to protect the constitution and independence of the judiciary. But it had hurriedly amended the constitution to empower parliament to remove a Supreme Court judge on grounds of misbehaviour and incapacity.
This had triggered widespread controversy as many critics labelled the government's move as an attempt to influence the apex court.
The AL had also pledged to take necessary measures to establish democracy and democratic institutions including the House on a more solid basis. But no effective move was visible in the last one year to achieve that goal.
No move was taken in line with another pledge to make rules and

Some aggrieved persons around five months ago submitted these allegations before the ACC and appealed for investigation into these, said the ACC sources.
Later on September 22 last year, the commission appointed its deputy director Farid Ahmed Patowary to investigate the allegations.
Patowary sent three letters between September 28 and November 6, requesting the BIWTA chairman to submit some documents, including his bank statements, tax documents and all records of movable and immovable properties belonging to him, his wife and other family members or dependants.
However, instead of providing those, Samsuddoha appealed to the ACC to change the inquiry officer, following which Assistant Director SK Abdus Salam of the commission replaced Patowary last December.
Salam wrote to the BIWTA chief towards the end of December to provide the documents on an urgent basis.
"But the chairman did not do it. Now, I will send a letter again tomorrow [today]," Salam told The Daily Star yesterday.
Samsuddoha, however, denied all the allegations and told The Daily Star that "some corrupt BIWTA officials", who got punishment for misdeeds, are out to tarnish the image of the government and the BIWTA.
"They [ACC] can investigate any allegations. We certainly will provide whatever documents they want," he added.
Meanwhile, environmental organisation National Committee to Protect Shipping, Roads and Railways at a discussion at Mukti Bhaban in the capital yesterday demanded proper investigation into the allegations and removal of the BIWTA chairman and other corrupt officials.

regulations to ensure accountability of the MPs on their collective and personal activities.

The House remains virtually dysfunctional with no genuine opposition bench. And the check and balance structure has apparently collapsed.
The fight against corruption could not get sufficient space thanks to the government's reluctance in delivering on the party's electoral pledges.
The AL had promised to strengthen legal, political, social and institutional initiatives to curb corruption. It had also promised to further improve the effectiveness of the Anti-Corruption Commission by increasing its power and efficiency.
Non-action worsens the situation. The Corruption Perception Index of the Transparency International last December said corruption rose in Bangladesh with the country sliding two notches to rank the 14th most corrupt country in the world.
Moreover, the way the ACC has given clean chits to some AL lawmakers from alleged graft charges has demonstrated the commission's inability to perform independently and effectively.
There were no visible signs in the last one year to empower the local government bodies in light of the AL's electoral pledges to decentralise power to ensure people's greater participation in governance and development activities.
The government has even made no move to hold elections to the zila parishads and the bifurcated Dhaka city corporations, let alone making efforts to strengthen those institutions. Ruling AL men and government officials have been running the zila parishads and the DCCs respectively since December 2011.
In terms of empowerment, the fate of upazila parishads is almost the same. The difference is there were elections in 2014. But the polls could not offer people sufficient scopes to elect their representatives as per their choices.
In those elections, ruling AL men resorting to widespread rigging and violence in their desperate bid to win the polls not only denied people their voting rights but also damaged the electoral system.
The AL had promised in its electoral manifesto to make the Election Commission more powerful and independent through reforms but could not prevent its own men from bulldozing the country's electoral system.
The EC was unable to take any strong measures in the face of widespread irregularities. Neither the government nor the EC has taken any move in the last one year to rebuild the electoral system to restore people's confidence in it.
The government, however, keeps continuing with the trial of war criminals as per its electoral pledge. Two international crimes tribunals have delivered a number of verdicts convicting war criminals including Matiur Rahman Nizami for their crimes against humanity.
It has kept implementing several development projects taken in the previous tenure and also initiated a number of major projects in the last one year. But the government's weakness in taking steps to ensure good governance keeps overshadowing its achievements so far.

Three bombs

FROM PAGE 16
assistant commissioner (Bomb Disposal Unit) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.
Those were sent to the Department of Explosives for further examination, he said.
In another unsettling development in the evening, a loaded pistol was recovered from a toilet of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) building.
Court staffs found two can-shaped objects inside two law books in courtroom-17 of the annex building around 4:50pm, as they were about to lock the room after the day's proceedings, a police officer, who was on duty, told The Daily Star.
Justice Md Nizamul Huq and Justice SH Md Nurul Huda Jaigirdar sit in that courtroom.
Another can-shaped object wrapped in red tape was found inside a book in courtroom-9 on the first floor of the same building around 2:00pm.
A bench officer noticed a law book on a bench of the courtroom. As the officer opened it, he found the object concealed inside the hollow book, and immediately informed the authorities.
Justice Zinat Ara and Justice Md Habibur Gani usually use the courtroom.
As the news spread, judges, lawyers, and court staffs got into a panic.
Later, experts of the Bomb Disposal Unit recovered the bomb.
Law enforcers then searched almost all courtrooms and office rooms at the SC, a police official told this correspondent.
SC Registrar SM Kuddus Zaman said his office filed a case with Shabbagh Police Station against unidentified criminals, mentioning that the bombs were kept at the courtrooms to harm judges, lawyers and litigants.
Attorney General Mahbubey Alam said BNP-Jamaat men, who are carrying out subversive activities, might have planted the bombs in the courtrooms.
Meanwhile, pro-Awami League lawyers, including M Amir-UL Islam and Sahara Khatun, demanded that the government tighten security on the SC premises.
They made the demand at a programme organised by Awami Ainjibi Parishad at the SCBA office to condemn the recent bomb blasts targeting the residences of the law minister and an HC judge, and the ancestral home of another HC judge.
PISTOL RECOVERED
At about 6:20pm, police recovered a pistol loaded with five bullets from a toilet on the second floor of the SCBA building.
SCBA Superintendent Nimesh Chandra Das said the pistol belonged to Sekendar Sheikh, former councillor of Ward-35 of Dhaka City Corporation, who had lost the licensed firearm on the SCBA premises on January 3.
Sekendar filed a case with Shabbagh Police Station in this connection the same day. Police later searched the SCBA premises but couldn't find the pistol, he said.
Yesterday evening, a visitor saw the pistol on the flush tank of a toilet, and notified Nimesh.
"I then informed police and Supreme Court Bar Association leaders," said the SCBA superintendent.
Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shabbagh Police Station, said the description of the pistol that the ex-ward councillor had lost matched with the one recovered from the SCBA building. They were yet to confirm it.

Curfew clamped

FROM PAGE 16
Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) said it wants full implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) peace accord before the academic activities of the medical college begins.
To contain the situation, the local administration imposed Section 144 in Rangamati municipality for an indefinite period from 11:30am on Saturday.
However, around 9:30am yesterday, some Bangalee youths beat up two ethnic youths named Pronoy Chakma and Pintu Chakma at Banarupa in Rangamati town.
Around 12 noon, a school student named Puran Tanchanga was also beaten up in the same area. There were also unconfirmed reports of attacks on indigenous homes in the Bangalee-dominated areas of Rangamati.
As the situation was heating up, DC Shamsul Arefin sat in a meeting with local MP Ushatan Talukder, MP Feroza Begum Chinu, Rangamati District Council Chairman Nikhil Kumar Chakma, army commander of Rangamati zone Lt Col Malik Shamsuddin Muhammad Moeyen, acting police superintendent Abul Kalam Azad and others at 3:30pm.
About an hour after the meeting began, it was reported that some Bangalees were trying to set fire to Advasi settlements around Banarupa Bazar, prompting the officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station and the army zone commander and the SP to rush to the spot.
More such reports from Art Council Colony, Ananda Bihar and Vedvedi areas came in.
However, none of the reports could be confirmed.
And at 7:20pm, the deputy commissioner declared the curfew upon the prime minister's permission.

World unites

FROM PAGE 16
The mourning families of those who died in the shootings led the march, alongside the representatives of around 50 countries.
With dozens of world leaders present, security in the jittery French capital was beefed up, with police snipers stationed on rooftops and plain-clothes officers among the crowd in a city still reeling from the Islamist attacks.
"Today, Paris is the capital of the world," Hollande said. "The entire country will rise up."
Hundreds of thousands of people turned out in other French cities and marches were held in several European capitals, including Berlin, Brussels and Madrid.
The crowd in Paris was also mourning four Jews killed when an Islamist gunman stormed a kosher supermarket, after earlier gunning down a policeman.
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu joined Hollande at Paris' main synagogue after the march to honour the victims.
However, France's Channel 2 reported that the French government didn't want Netanyahu to attend the march, because his presence would be divisive.
But as he expressed his intention to attend the rally, the Elysee Palace extended an invitation to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, it added.
British Prime Minister David Cameron predicted Europe would face the threat of extremism "for many years to come", but his Italian counterpart Matteo Renzi pledged that Europe "will win the challenge against terrorism".
Earlier Renzi had tweeted using the hashtag #jesuischarlie (I am Charlie), which has been used more than five million times.
Before the march, interior and security ministers met to discuss Islamic extremism.
They urged a strengthening of the EU external borders to limit the movement of extremists between Europe and the Middle East and said there was an "urgent need" to share air passenger information.
All three of the gunmen in the attacks had a history of extremism and were known previously to French intelligence. Hollande has warned his traumatised country not to drop its guard in the face of possible new assaults.

Child burnt to death

FROM PAGE 16
mid-October last year at Tk 2,000 per month.
"She was crying the previous night, asking for money. I gave her Tk 5 before I left home. She was so happy that she showed her delight by saying assalamu alaikum..." said a heartbroken Zainal. That was the last time he had seen Fatema.
Fatema was sleeping inside the room in the morning while her mother Asma Begum took her elder sister Joynad to school. Zainal too was outside as he was returning home after work.
"When I came back it was all gone. Everything was reduced to ashes," said the father in a soft but shell-shocked voice.
Fatema's mother had been repeatedly fainting since her body was found.
Fire Service sources said the body was found beneath the ravages around 12:30pm.
Witnesses said the fire had started around 8:30am from a house on the southern corner. It spread with the help of wind and soon gutted the other parts of the slum, mostly two and three-storey houses made of bamboos, woods and corrugated iron sheets.
It took over an hour for 11 fire engines to douse the flames, said Jahurul Amin Mian, deputy director of Fire Service and Civil Defence.
Neither fire service sources nor locals could confirm the origin of the fire.
Abdur Rahim, who lives at a nearby slum, said he heard someone announcing on a mike from the local mosque that a fire started from Abdur Rahman's shanty.

Ordeal of truck

FROM PAGE 16
8:30pm yesterday amid the nationwide blockade enforced by the opposition since January 6 and spent whatever he had with him to buy food for himself and the helper.
"Is it possible for people like us to buy food from hotels in Gulshan three times [a day]? We are also suffering from cold in winter and mosquito bites," he told The Daily Star.
His ordeal did not end there. He has to look after a four-member family living in Dhaka.
"I have to bear my family's expenditure with my income. I didn't get any money from the police."
The driver of the truck owned by Akij Transport was supposed to go to Panchagarh with egg cases from Ashulia. But the police seized his truck from the capital's Abdullahpur with four other trucks on Saturday evening.
The vehicles were then brought to Gulshan Police Station and placed at the intersections of the roads leading to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office around 11:00am yesterday.
Requesting not to be named, another

The rampage by the gunmen who claimed to be members of the Al-Qaeda and Islamic State extremist groups was followed by a chilling new threat from the Yemen-based al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula that France faced more attacks.
France's three days of terror started Wednesday when the Kouachi brothers burst into Charlie Hebdo's offices in central Paris and sprayed bullets into the editorial meeting, killing some of France's best-known cartoonists.
They then slaughtered a Muslim policeman as he lay helpless on the ground before fleeing in a car, sparking a manhunt that lasted more than 48 hours.
A day later, a third gunman, Amedy Coulibaly, shot dead a policewoman in a Paris suburb.
In a video posted online Sunday, a man who appeared to be Coulibaly said the gunmen had coordinated their efforts.
The massive hunt for the attackers culminated in twin hostage dramas that gripped the world.
Coulibaly stormed into a Jewish supermarket in eastern Paris and seized terrified shoppers. The two brothers took one person hostage in a printing firm northeast of Paris. After a tense stand-off police shot them dead as they charged out of the building all guns blazing.
Moments later, security forces stormed the kosher supermarket in eastern Paris, killing Coulibaly but making the grisly discovery that four innocent Jews had died during the hostage-taking.
Investigators have been trying to hunt down Coulibaly's partner, 26-year-old Hayat Boumeddiene, but a security source in Turkey told AFP she arrived there on January 2, before the attacks, and has probably travelled on to Syria.
The attacks have raised mounting questions about how the gunmen could have slipped through the net of the intelligence services.
Coulibaly's mother and sisters condemned his actions.
"We absolutely do not share these extreme ideas. We hope there will not be any confusion between these odious acts and the Muslim religion," they said.
French Prime Minister Manuel Valls admitted there had been "clear failings" in intelligence after it emerged that the brothers had been on a US terror watch list "for years".

Most of the slum-dwellers are working class people who mainly work a domestic helpers, rickshaw pullers or tea stall vendors.
Locals said the slum was built on a water body at least 15 years ago. Back then, the tin-shed, multi-storey houses did not have any ground floors, as water was everywhere. They used to call the houses "tongghar".
In 2007 local ward commissioner Jasimuddin filled the water body with earth, said Rahim, adding that several persons now collect rents from the slum-dwellers.
Amid the ravages, Minara Begum and her husband Akram Hossain were seen desperately searching for whatever could be retrieved from the gutted remains. To their despair, all they could retrieve was some iron objects like small knives and aluminium pots.
Akram said he had sown Aman paddy in a small patch of land at his village home in Nokla, Mymensingh four months back, which cost him Tk 25,000.
But the land drowned under flood water. Finding no other way, he along with his wife and three children migrated to Dhaka for a living.
"First flood water made me destitute. Now fire took everything from me. How will I survive now?" asked Akram, who now lives by selling tea in Mohammadpur.
Meanwhile, Rapid Action Battalion members were seen distributing food among the helpless families yesterday noon at a local school.
Fatema's father Zainal said local lawmaker Jahangir Kabir Nanak had given him Tk 20,000 as compensation.

truck driver said his soil-laden vehicle heading to Mirpur-12 in the capital had been stopped at Abdullahpur and then all his papers were taken away and handed over to airport police.
He and his helper held their bad luck responsible for the situation.
"I cannot move anywhere leaving the truck because anybody can set it ablaze or vandalise it [during the blockade]," said a helper.
A payment of Tk 7,000 is made for each trip. Masum said, adding that 10 percent of the amount went to the driver and 4 percent to the helper.
The police kept at least seven trucks -- five of them were private trucks and two of Dhaka North City Corporation -- around the BNP chief's office where she has allegedly been confined since January 4.
The private trucks were released at night.
The city corporation's trucks were, however, still there but their drivers and helpers were not seen around.
Such a scene he saw on television but never thought that he could be part of it, another helper said.