



Devotees inside their tents on the bank of the Turag in Tongi yesterday. The second phase of three-day Biswa Ijtema will end today with Akheri Munajat. PHOTO: STAR

2nd phase of Ijtema ends today

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prayers) sometime between 10:00am and 11:00am, said organisers.
The first phase of the Ijtema started on January 13 and concluded on January 15.
Several million devotees, including over 5,000 foreigners from around 90 countries, are likely to turn up for the Akheri Munajat on the banks of the Turag in Tongi of Gazipur.
On the second day yesterday, thousands of devotees joined the congregation braving the cold. Religious scholars delivered sermons on Islamic philosophy in the light of the holy Quran and Hadith.
Additional security measures have meanwhile been put in place ahead of today's Akheri Munajat.
Around 11,000 uniformed and plainclothes police, Rab, and members of intelligence agencies are deployed in and around the Ijtema ground to avert any untoward situation.
Five-layer security measures have been taken and CCTV cameras have been set up at each of the 17 entrances to the venue, said police sources.
The district administration has

deployed 10 mobile courts to check selling adulterated, stale or sub-standard food at the restaurants adjacent to the venue.
Devotee Joynal Abedin, 70, from Kishoreganj died of old-age complications on Friday night. With Joynal, nine devotees have so far died at the Ijtema venue this year.
In Dhaka city, vehicular movement would remain suspended from Chandrahal to Abdullahpur and Dhour Bridge to Abdullahpur from 4:00am, said a press release of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).
In Gazipur, vehicular movement would be suspended from Chandrahal intersection on Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway to the Ijtema venue, Mirerbazar intersection of Dhaka-Kaliganj Highway to the venue and Baipail intersection of Dhaka-Tangail Highway to the venue from early morning to noon, reports our correspondent quoting police.
However, vehicles carrying officials relating to plane operations, firefighting vehicles, ambulance and vehicles of the law-enforcement agencies will remain out of the purview of this restriction.

The DMP have arranged four minibuses, which would be kept waiting at Nikunja-1 residential area's gate from 4:00am to carry passengers travelling abroad or returning home.
Anyone can contact the cellphone numbers 01713398498 or 01711366561 for any traffic related information.
The railway authorities would operate 29 trains on different routes including Gazipur to Akhaura, Comilla and Mymensingh to cope with the rush of devotees.
The Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) would also operate 50 buses from Savar, Gabtali, Jatrabari, Gazipur and other areas to the Ijtema venue, said officials.
Gazipur police have arranged 50 free shuttle buses from Bhogra bypass area to the venue to help the devotees cross their way easily.
Tablighi Jamaat has been organising Biswa Ijtema, also called the World Muslims' Congregation, every year since 1946. In 2011, the organisers split the congregation into two phases to deal with overcrowding and ensure better management and security.

Farmers frown at fungal attack

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to stop fungi from making further inroads.
Jahangir Hossain, director of Tuber Crops Research Centre at Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute, said, "I'm receiving phone calls every day from the northern potato growers who seek advice on protecting their produce from blight attacks."
Farmers now have to spray costly fungicides on their fields several times to save their crops, he said.
Official of an agro-input company, however, noted that due to price slump very early into the production season this year, potato growers could not bear the cost of fungicides.
Market sources said encouraged by last year's buoyant price, farmers in the northern districts expanded potato acreage this season, and some even preferred cultivating potato rather than maize. But early harvesters are not getting the price benefit.
M Abdur Rashid, general manager of country's leading seed company Lal

Teer Seed Ltd, has put emphasis on farmers' spending some money on spraying effective fungicides to save potatoes and tomatoes, otherwise they will have to incur more losses if their whole crop is damaged.
According to the US Department of Agriculture, late blight is arguably one of the most infamous diseases in agriculture that spurred the emergence of the field of plant pathology. "Historically, it is best known as the cause of the Irish potato famine of the 1840s, which resulted in the death or emigration of over 2 million people from Ireland."
Late blight is caused by the pathogen *Phytophthora infestans*. It can infect and destroy the leaves, stems, fruits, and tubers of potato and tomato plants. *Phytophthora infestans* affects several different plant species and has the potential to cause devastating disease almost everywhere potatoes are grown. It is also a serious pathogen on tomatoes in cool, wet climates.
Officials at DAE, Dhaka, said they

heard about the news of blight attacks in potatoes and in some cases in tomatoes, but said the situation was not that serious yet.
Talking to this newspaper recently, Satyabrata Saha, deputy director of Naogaon DAE, said around 30 percent of potatoes had already been harvested in the district. He confirmed the late blight infection in potato fields, but still hoped for getting good yields this year as the blight damage was not so widespread.
Jalal Uddin, a potato grower in Shyampur village of Naogaon Sadar upazila, said he cultivated potato on four acres. "Situation turned worse after the recent rain, and the antifungal dose remained ineffective against the disease," he complained.
Plant Pathologist Bahadur explained that certain fungicides might lose effectiveness over time as the disease became resistant. So, the farmers must spray the effective one in consultation with the agricultural extension workers.

Electricity connection

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"I think households don't need to submit land documents to avail electricity connections."
The remarks were made at a time when Bangladesh sees itself at the bottom of a list of 187 countries in the latest report of the World Bank's Ease of Doing published in October last year. The ranking was done in consideration of how easy it is in countries to get electricity connections.
At present, getting power connections for commercial or industrial purposes involves a lengthy procedure and it takes 428 days, according to WB.
The applicants in these cases will get connections within a month or two, the state minister said.
"We are also looking how we can bring it down."
Electricity generation has remained below the capacity because of gas shortage and shutdown of plants for

maintenance.
Bangladesh has increased its installed power generation capacity to 15,000 megawatts in the last eight years.
However, the country now generates on an average about 7,500 MW, catering to about two-thirds of the population, due to lack of adequate transmission lines.
The access to electricity went up to 80 percent from 52 percent in 2009, with power generation from solar home systems taken into account.
"Had we had transmission lines in place, we would have been able to generate and supply 11,000MW of electricity," Hamid said.
The government is working to construct more and more transmission lines to ensure uninterrupted power supply. The Chinese loans, committed during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Bangladesh, will be used to expand the transmission network, the

state minister said.
The government is providing 5.5 lakh electricity connections every month. The government will boost up electricity generation significantly before the upcoming irrigation season when power demand goes up by about 2,000MW.
The ongoing gas crisis will be solved to an extent in June next year as the first liquefied natural gas terminal starts its commercial operation, Hamid also said.
The government has awarded contracts to two companies to set up LNG terminal, process imported gas and supply to the national grid.
Regarding the government's backtracking on cutting fuel prices, Hamid said the government had been working to reduce the prices but postponed the plan for the time being as the price of oil was increasing in the international market.
"If the prices become stable the government will again consider it."

Two others show up

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microbus from Sadullapur and brought them back home," said Tariqul.
Talking to The Daily Star, Prince said some unidentified men picked them up from Naldanga on January 10 and got them into in a microbus blindfolded.
Around 1:00am yesterday, some people dropped them in a lonely place. "Your motorcycle is a little ahead. Take it and go home," Prince quoted one of the men as saying.
"After reaching Taxer Bazar, we felt sick. I phoned my elder brother and

asked him to send a microbus," said the AL leader.
During captivity they were blindfolded. However, the abductors gave them food and medicine, added Prince.
Chhatra Dal leader Shafiu said: "We could not comprehend where we had been staying. I was handcuffed and blindfolded in a room."
Shafiu's father Aminul Islam said his family was worried about the disappearances. "Thank God we have got our son back."
Addressing a press conference at Gaibandha Press Club on Wednesday,

Shafiu's wife Sathi Begum claimed that some plainclothes men picked up her husband from Naldanga at 11:00am on January 10. Since then, her husband's phone was switched off.
A tense situation had been prevailing in Sadullapur over their going missing. Local people staged demonstrations, including meetings, laying siege to Sadullapur Police Station, blocking rail lines and forming human chains, demanding the authorities trace the missing people.
The four families had lodged complaints with the police station.

President Abbas likely to arrive in Dhaka in Feb

UNB, Dhaka
Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is likely to arrive here on a three-day state visit next month to advance the "special relations" with Bangladesh.
The Palestinian side has proposed February 1-3 for the visit but the date is yet to be finalised, a diplomat told UNB yesterday.
A delegation, including Palestinian Foreign Minister Dr Reyad Al Malki, will accompany the Palestinian president during the visit if it takes place.
The Palestinian President had made a stopover in Dhaka in February last year. Charge d' Affaires of Palestine Embassy in Dhaka Yousef SY Ramadan told UNB that they are in discussion on the proposed visit but nothing is finalised yet.
Bangladesh supports the Palestinian people for their struggle for an independent homeland, especially the capital -- the holy city of Jerusalem -- and Bangladesh remains always vocal in the UN, OIC, NAM over Palestinian issues.

House goes into session today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
The Jatiya Sangsad goes into its 14th session, also the first in the new year, this afternoon with the president scheduled to deliver his speech.
The president is likely to talk about the government's development activities along with other important national and international issues, said sources at the Parliament Secretariat.
Duration of the session usually becomes long as lawmakers are supposed to take part in a thanksgiving motion on the president's speech, which is approved by the cabinet.
The business advisory committee of parliament headed by Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury would sit at 3:00pm to finalise the duration and other businesses of the session before the JS session begins at 4:00 pm, the sources added.
The sitting of the House would be adjourned for an hour after its start in honour of Awami League MP Manzurul Islam Liton, who was killed at his house recently by unidentified assailants.
The last session of parliament ended on December 8 last year with five working days.
According to the Constitution, there can be maximum 60 days' gap between the end of a session and the beginning of the next one.
The 10th parliament was formed through January 5, 2014 national election, which was boycotted by the BNP-led alliance and most of the other political parties.

Trump says will renegotiate, may exit NAFTA

AFP, Washington
President Donald Trump announced Friday he will demand renegotiation of the free trade agreement linking North America's economies, and will abandon the pact unless the United States gets "a fair deal."
The statement on the White House website, posted less than two hours after Trump took the oath of office, said the new administration will seek to change the terms of the 23-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico.
Trump condemned NAFTA on the campaign trail, claiming it had contributed to job losses, lost manufacturing and economic decline, and threatened to impose big tariffs on imports from Mexico.
"President Trump is committed to renegotiating NAFTA," the White House said. "If our partners refuse a renegotiation that gives American workers a fair deal, then the President will give notice of the United States' intent to withdraw from NAFTA."
Following the stark nationalist tones of Trump's inaugural address, the swift announcement was another sign the new administration intended to make good on a central theme of the campaign, which had attracted supporters in the industrial US Midwest.
The rules established for free trade agreements like NAFTA allow the president to withdraw simply by notifying other parties. This would start a 180-day clock to allow for new negotiations.
But without a new agreement approved by the legislatures of all member states, the trade agreement would be dissolved.
The United States currently runs trade deficits with all major trade partners, Canada, Mexico and China, with the latter amounting to more than \$30 billion a month, which helps fuel Trump's case.

Patients suffer

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VC Prof Kamrul claimed that healthcare services were not disrupted at the hospital yesterday.
"Patients got services as usual. A total of 4,155 patients took services at the outdoor section before 2:30pm," he said, adding that the number of patients in winter usually remains lower than that of the summer.
Talking to The Daily Star, several outdoor section staff, however, said around 4,500 to 5,000 patients have treatment at the hospital every day but the number was fewer yesterday.
Replying to reporters' queries on the alleged corruption in the nurse's recruitment process, the VC said the allegation was raised 20 days after the written examinations for the recruitment.
"The nurses are being recruited as per the rules of the university. There was no deviation from due procedure," he said.
He denied assaulting the pro-VC and said the conflict which was being termed "VC versus pro-VC" was unexpected.
However, in a press statement issued later in the night, the pro-VC again said he was indeed assaulted by the VC on Thursday.
"The VC pushed me and pressed me against a wall at a meeting at his conference room where the proctor of the university also verbally abused me," Prof ASM Zakaria Swapan had said earlier.
The VC said, "I will sit with the university's senior teachers to discuss the issue tomorrow [today]. He said he would also sit with Health Minister Mohammed Nasim soon.
Before the emergency briefing, the VC held a meeting with the deans committee at the room of pro-VC (administration).
At the meeting, Prof Iqbal Arsal, president of Swadhinata Chikitsak Parishad (Swachip) and also a dean at the university, told the VC that they

were in the dark about the recruitment of nurses, sources said.
Prof Iqbal also criticised the university administration for failing to solve the problem and bringing in "outsiders to handle the situation".
According to the report of the Bangla daily, 76 of the candidates who passed the written test got over 80 percent marks and all of them were from Tangail. Twenty-three of them were from Ghatail upazila of the district, which is also the upazila the VC is from.
The candidates who passed are going through viva-voce test. On Wednesday, 80 selected candidates appeared before the viva boards.
The controversy ensued on January 4 when the university authorities formed a 10-member selection committee, led by the VC, for the nurses recruitment, according to the report of the Bangla daily.
The results of the written examinations were posted on the university's website on January 2.

It's made

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purchase on Trump's official campaign website are made in the United States and cost between \$25 and \$30, according to the label inside those caps.
But they are also more expensive than the \$20 versions sold by street vendors in Washington on Friday.
Joshua Rojas, 25 and Alyssa Young, 28, had travelled from Texas to watch the inauguration. Young was wearing a pink "Make America Great Again" hat.
"I loved it as soon as I saw it. I bought it right over there from one of the vendors for \$20," she said.
"So was it made in America?"
"I don't know where it was made actually," Young said. "Let me check." She took off the hat to check the label. "Oh no," she cried. "It's made in Vietnam!"

Tigers push Kiwis

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The bowling was so controlled and inspiring that it could have easily taken the ten Black Caps wickets had the butterfingers fielders not dropped as many as four catches.
The home side moved to 45 for no loss but it could have been easily 4 for 1 had Mahmudullah grabbed a sharp chance offered by Jeet Raval in the fourth over of the day. The left-hander went on to score 29 but he was dropped again in the slips by Sabbir Rahman while batting on 12.
Ross Taylor scored 77. The right-hander, who featured in a valuable 124-run stand with Latham for the third wicket, could have been out for 4 had Mahmudullah clung on to a low catch at square leg. Taylor was dropped again on 75 and this time the fielder was Kamrul Islam Rabbi at deep mid-wicket.
Henry Nicholls, unbeaten on 56, was the beneficiary of a judgmental error from umpire Nigel Llong while he was on 45. Although the Bangladesh fielders appealed in unison for a caught behind off Taskin, the English umpire was unmoved. Replays later showed that the ball deviated off the bat. Unfortunately Bangladesh had no reviews left at that time.
But despite all those missed opportunities, the three pace bowlers -- Kamrul, Taskin and Rubel Hossain -- bowled their hearts out.
Kamrul served the first blow an hour into the first session when he had Raval bowled with the second ball of his very first over. Two balls later he removed New Zealand captain Kane Williamson with a pitched up delivery

that the right-hander edged behind the wicket to Nurul Hasan.
The Black Caps, at 47 for two, were in all sorts of trouble against the twin attack of Kamrul and Rubel. It was arguably the best bowling partnership in the tour so far. Rubel might have failed to get a wicket but he was at his hostile best, leaving an experienced batsman like Taylor dancing to tune of his bouncing deliveries. He also struck Latham on the grill with a vicious bouncer.
Kamrul, at the other end, also bowled fast and straight. Taskin also came in hard and more importantly hardly erred in line and length. It was also a day when the pacers did not bowl an odd bad ball in an over, which has been a feature of their bowling for a long time.
And after all the good work in two and a half sessions, Bangladesh got their rewards when the home team were looking like taking a considerable lead.
Mitchell Santner, who put on 75 runs for the fifth wicket with Nicholls, became the first victim of Shakib. He was trapped in front of the wicket for 29. The left-hander asked for a review but the decision was upheld, reducing the home side to 252 for five. It soon turned 256 for 7 when wicketkeeper-batsman BJ Watling dragged an attempted cut on to his stump for one and Colin de Grandhomme was out for a three-ball duck by a clever arm ball from Shakib in the same over. New Zealand added four more runs before rain intervened and the umpires called it a day with 19 overs remaining.

Farmers using

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production [of crops] by making visits to the fields."
Nearly 15 lakh tonnes of beans are likely to be harvested from 4,380 hectares of land in Pabna this year, Bivutipushon said.
Julfikar Hyder, principal scientific officer at the regional research centre of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute in Pabna, said indiscriminate use of pesticides increases the risk of a high level of toxic residues in crops and vegetables, especially in beans, thus making them hazardous to public health.
Aside from consumers, agricultural farm workers are also affected because of their exposure to the deadly chemicals.
"Each season is suitable for growing a particular crop. Although bean is a winter crop, some farmers want to multiply their profits by growing it in summer when the weather is most favourable to insect infestation."
Most farmers are already aware of the fact that early varieties of winter crops are prone to massive pest attacks but still a large number of them grow these varieties using high doses of pesticides, only to make exorbitant profits before low-priced regular winter crops hit the market, Julfikar observed.
A number of farmers in Pabna, the largest bean-producing belt in the country, said they were using excessive volumes of pesticides on the crops in fear of losing their investment due to pest attacks.
Some farmers blamed the weather change for the severity of pest attacks while experts said farmers' excessive use of pesticides might have caused insects to grow resistance to the chemicals.

"The overuse of pesticides year after year is killing beneficial insects, but the harmful ones are developing resistance to the substance," Julfikar said.
A large number of farmers of the early-variety winter crops start cultivation in mid-August with a target to harvest crops in early November before the regular winter crops start reaching the markets. Turning a blind eye to the risk to human health and the ecology, they continue spraying the crops with toxic chemicals until the day they send out those to markets.
With this early harvest "we can reap a profit of Tk 1 lakh to Tk 1.2 lakh from one bigha of land as opposed to only Tk 50,000 to Tk 70,000 profit from the same size of land," said Abu Taher, a bean farmer from Muladuli in Ishwardi.
Since the negative impacts of these toxic vegetables on human bodies are not immediately visible, most consumers are overlooking the risk, said Iftekhar Mahamud, professor of medicine and former principal of Kushtia Medical College.
"The toxic chemicals in these vegetables slowly affect many of our organs such as kidneys, lungs, eyes, stomach and even the brain."
Legal actions need to be taken against the farmers who endanger public health, Iftekhar added.
Hazards of the rampant use of chemicals -- be it pesticides or herbicides -- also include contamination of air, soil, water, turf and other vegetation and thus these toxic substances pose risks to a host of other organisms including soil microorganisms, beneficial insects, non-target plants, fish, birds and other wildlife, according to experts.