

## Ijtema extended by a day

UNB, Dhaka

Biswa Ijtema, one of the largest congregations of Muslims, will be held for four days in a single phase from February 15 this time.

Maulana Jubair Hassan will conduct the Ijtema in the first two days while Syed Wasif Islam the last two days, said State Minister for Religious Affairs Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah yesterday.

He made the announcement after holding a meeting with two feuding groups of Tabligh Jamaat.

The state minister added that Tabligh Jamaat leaders will decide who will conduct the Akheri Munajat.

"Earlier, we had decided to hold the Ijtema on February 15-17, but following discussions with the two groups today, we've extended the time to four days. Now, the Ijtema will be held on February 15-18," he said.

Additional law enforcers will be deployed at the venue to fend off any unwanted situation, he further said.

This time, the work on the ground for smooth holding of the congregation will be done under the supervision of Gazipur City Corporation Mayor Mohammad Jahangir Alam and State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russell, the state minister said.

The two-phase Biswa Ijtema was scheduled to be held on January 11-13 and January 18-20 last, but those were postponed due to December 30 general polls.

On December 1 last year, one person was killed and over 200 were injured in a series of clashes between two factions of Tabligh Jamaat for establishing control over Ijtema Maidan on the bank of the Turag River in Tongi.

## Man killed

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bullet from the spot, he added.

The body was sent to Cox's Bazar General Hospital for autopsy, the OC said, adding that a case was filed in this connection.

## Time running

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East hosts football's biggest tournament for the first time.

"Time is running out if the Qatari authorities want to deliver a legacy we can all cheer, namely a labour system that ends the abuse and misery inflicted upon so many migrant workers every day," said Amnesty's Stephen Cockburn.

Although the "Reality Check" report focuses on conditions for all of the two million migrant workers in Qatar, not just the 30,000 on direct World Cup projects, Amnesty said FIFA had an "ongoing responsibility" to prevent abuse.

In response, football's governing body said it welcomed Qatari labour reforms in recent months and its continued work with "stakeholders".

"We share the view of Amnesty International that additional progress is needed for the full implementation of the commitments for comprehensive labour reform," a FIFA spokesperson told AFP.

The Amnesty report stated that despite reforms, conditions "for many migrant workers in Qatar remain harsh".

Amnesty called on Qatar to strengthen and properly enforce current labour laws, tackle worker debt by increasing the minimum wage, stop passports being held by bosses and, crucially, to fundamentally overhaul the "kafala", or sponsorship, system.

This practice, which ties workers to their employers, restricts their ability to change jobs or leave the country, remains firmly in place, said Amnesty, despite Doha's pledge to end the system.

Amnesty also called for much better protection for some 175,000 domestic workers, who remain "out of sight and out of mind".

"Holes in the reforms to date mean many workers are still stuck in harsh conditions, vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, while those who return home do so empty handed, with no compensation and no justice," added Cockburn.

The report could temper the current jubilatory mood in Qatar, where there has been widespread celebration since the national team won its first ever Asian Cup at the weekend.

The gas-rich state has initiated a series of labour reforms in recent years following intense international pressure and at a time of deep political tension within the Gulf, which has seen Qatar isolated by former neighbouring allies.

Qatar has introduced a monthly minimum wage of 750 riyals (\$206), a system to ensure workers are paid electronically, and partially scrapped the exit visa system which meant workers had to seek employers' permission before leaving the country.

It also agreed in 2017 to work closely with the International Labour Organization (ILO), which now has a Doha office, to improve workers' conditions.



Illegal buildings, warehouses and shops on the Buriganga are razed to the ground by the BIWTA in Kamrangirchar's Ashrafabad area yesterday. The authorities conducted an eviction drive in the area to save the river from grabbers.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## New plan for saving 4 rivers

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four four-storey buildings, 11 two-storey buildings. The rest are semi-concrete and tin-shed structures," said AKM Arif Uddin, joint director of BIWTA.

The demolished structures include semi-concrete structures owned by Awami League lawmaker Haji Mohammad Selim and a warehouse of Shah Cement, owned by Bashundhara Group, he said.

But the BIWTA did not touch two multi-storey mosques built on the Buriganga land, citing religious sentiment.

The decision about their fate will be made by the government high-ups, said Arif.

"We will not bow down to anyone and will demolish every illegal structure as we are getting support from the administration, judiciary and people," he added.

Often, mosques are only an excuse to grab river land. In many cases, grabbers occupy river land around the mosques and set up other structures, including markets and business establishments,

officials said.

Meanwhile in Chittagong, the district administration demolished at least 30 structures along the Karnaphuli river. Another 40 structures were removed by the grabbers themselves on Monday.

### SAVING DHAKA RIVERS

A large number of rivers in the country, including the Buriganga, Shitalakkhya, Dhaleshwari, Turag and Balu, are in dire straits.

Exact data are not available, but environmentalists and journalists working on the issue say most of the around 450 rivers in the country face serious threats because of ruthless grabbing and pollution.

In a 2009 judgment, the HC detailed measures to recover the ailing Dhaka rivers from land grabbers and save them from pollution.

At the time, the court ordered the administration to demarcate the boundary of the Buriganga, Shitalakkhya, Dhaleshwari, Turag and Balu.

This apparently turned out to be the

"death warrant" for the rivers.

Demarcation pillars were set up along the river banks during the lean flow of dry season waterline, excluding some 2,500 acres of foreshores and wetlands of the five rivers.

Now, under a new project, the government will install some 12,000 demarcation pillars along the Dhaka rivers, said project director Nurul Alam.

Tender for the work is expected next week, and the work for pillar installation may begin in the next three months. The government has already appointed a consultant to implement the Tk 850 crore project.

"We are going to replace all the old pillars, as they were set up wrongly, excluding the river area," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Also, those pillars are not strong enough and many have been dismantled by the grabbers, he said.

Nurul claimed that the issue of foreshore exclusion was resolved through a joint survey by Dhaka district administra-

tion, BIWTA and the Department of Survey in 2017.

Under the new project, the government will build some 50km long walkways, plant trees along the walkways and set up three eco-parks at Shinnirtek, Tongi and Ashulia.

The authorities will also build 19 jetties, including at Amin Bazar, Gabtoli, Kanchpur, Tanbazar, Machuwa Bazar, and Khanpur.

About 10 years ago, the authorities built 20km walkways on both sides of the Buriganga and Shitalakkhya.

"Now in the second phase, we will set up another 50km walkways along with bank protection work. Then in the third phase, another 150km would be built," the project director said.

He said they would prepare a proposal for the third phase by this year.

"We have been carrying out eviction drive to free the rivers and will set up the boundary pillars and build walkways so that no one can grab river land again," Nurul said.

## Cops want land, a fleet of choppers

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districts and those working at Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.

Officials with ranks from SP to DIG attended the meeting at Rajarbagh Police Lines in the capital.

The home minister said the government is doing whatever necessary to increase the capacity of the police force.

"We will continue to do so in the future," he added.

Later at a meeting with the finance and land ministers, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Asaduzzaman Mia said they need land near the capital to set up four dumping stations.

Vehicles seized for violating traffic rules or for not having legal documents will be kept there.

He also demanded 10 acres of land in Keraniganj for the Armed Police Battalion (APBn)-12 tasked with providing security to judges.

In response, Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury said land would be allocated in Keraniganj for

APBn-12.

He also told the police officials to look for suitable places for setting up dumping stations.

### MEETING WITH PM

In the morning, top police officials attended a conference with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

They placed a set of demands, including appointment of police officials at Bangladesh missions abroad and setting up of special tribunals in all districts for quick disposal of narcotics-related cases, said meeting sources.

At the conference at the Prime Minister's Office, they also demanded that the government increase the number of police units and allocations for projects for the force.

The premier had responded positively to all the demands placed before her on Monday, the opening day of the Police Week.

Yesterday, the DMP commissioner called for creating new police units and increasing manpower in the force, said

meeting sources.

Deputy Inspector General (highway police) Atiqul Islam demanded that police officers be appointed at Bangladesh missions abroad.

DMP Deputy Commissioner (Tejgaon division) Biplob Kumar Sarkar stressed the need for setting up special tribunals at all districts for quick disposal of narcotics-related cases.

"If it takes a long time to complete trial of a narcotics-related case, evidence in such case is damaged and witnesses often cannot be found," Biplob told the conference.

Rajbari SP Asma Siddika Mily demanded an increase in development budget allocation for police.

She said that though development projects are approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnec), funds are not disbursed timely, resulting in delay in implementation of the projects.

The premier said police personnel should be appointed at missions

abroad to look into crimes such as money laundering, smuggling of drugs, and do the task of issuing police clearance to Bangladesh expatriates, according to the sources.

She also said manpower would be increased at various units of the police so that people can get the desired services.

The PM mentioned that her government is setting up 100 special economic zones where specialised industrial police will be deployed.

Besides, steps will be taken to establish a specialised training institute for the police, she added.

Meanwhile, Transparency International Bangladesh called upon the police to discharge duties without fear and favour showing respect for the law.

The people concerned have to be sincere so that the law enforcement agencies are not made controversial under any circumstances, TIB Executive Director Ifekharuzzaman said in a statement yesterday.

## Blame game is all they can offer

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link was the main challenge in offering better internet speed in the country and blamed those given the Nationwide Telecommunication Transmission Network (NTTN) licence for it.

The NTTN is a transmission network that works for establishing telecommunication network across the country. Currently, there are five licence holders for it. The two major players are Fiber@Home and Summit Communication Limited, while the three others are government-owned and provide very limited coverage.

"In Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet we are offering even 100 mbps speed but outside these three cities it is quite impossible for us to offer 10 mbps because of transmission links. Cost is also an issue," Hakim said.

He said the NTTN was the main bottleneck in the internet industry and unless this was dealt with, the quality of service would not improve for either them or mobile operators.

Previously, mobile operators could establish transmission networks like NTTN which the internet service providers (ISPs) could use. But this was stopped by the BTRC in 2013, Hakim added.

Taking this chance, the two NTTN operators created a duopoly and began charging a price which was 30 percent higher compared to that of five years ago, he alleged.

Using Singapore's example, -- which is the country that enjoys the fastest average broadband connection in the world at almost 191 mbps -- Hakim said it was down to the Singapore government spending billions of dollars to connect all the households with fibre

optic cable.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh government developed a network, after spending more than a thousand crore taka. However, this was now controlled by two NTTN operators who used it to boost their revenue and not benefit the citizens, he alleged.

Mobile operators also echoed ISPAB's views and said they also believed the NTTN was the bottleneck to offering better service.

A senior executive officer of a mobile operator said the issue of the transmission networking ecosystem was recently raised on January 23 by the top three mobile operators and they requested the telecom regulatory body to remove the challenges -- not being provided core fibre and high price.

Contacted, NTTN operators said mobile operators could not increase the data speed as they hadn't invested properly but they admitted that there were some issues regarding broadband connections.

"In about 70 percent cases, they are trying to use microwave [radio transmission] for their internet network instead of fibre optic cable. With the microwave dependent network, internet speed will never go up to the expected level," said Sumon Ahmed Sabir, chief technology officer of Fiber@Home.

For broadband connections, Sabir admitted that there were some challenges but it was not as big as it had been made out to be.

### WHAT THE REPORT SHOWS

The Digital 2019 report, created by social media management platform Hootsuite and digital marketing agency

We Are Social, shows that Iceland tops the mobile connection speed rankings with a speed of 72.77 mbps-- eight times higher than that in Bangladesh.

It also showed that most time spent online was done via mobile devices, with the greatest portion of it spent on social media.

It also charted an exponential increase in the number of new internet users. Bangladesh -- with a growth rate of 12% -- ranked ninth in the internet growth ranking while India, China and USA positioned first, second and third respectively.

The report revealed that 57% of the global population was now connected to the internet, spending an average of 6.5 hours online each day.

In terms of demographics, people aged between 18-24 years were the top social media users in Bangladesh, according to the report, adding that social media usage and people's age were inversely related.

A total of 47 percent of people aged between 18-24 years use social media in the country of whom 33 percent are male and only 14 percent are female.

Out of the total social media users, around 74 percent users are male.

The report said Bangladesh recorded one of the largest increase countries in terms of Facebook audience, coming after India and Philippines.

The percentage is also growing. In 2018, more than 360 million new users accessed the internet.

Globally, 57% of the population now uses the internet, according to the report, which is based on data from sources, including the United Nations, the US census, the World Bank, the

market research company Global Web Index and statistics site InternetWorldStats.

The country with the greatest connected percentage of the population is the United Arab Emirates, with 99%; at the other end of the scale is Ghana, where only 35% of the population uses the internet.

## 32pc children

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In the briefing, Mustafa Jabbar, post, telecommunication and information technology minister, said the government was working on the cyber security issue to ensure safe digitalisation.

He also urged the authorities to incorporate the digital safety matter into regular education curriculum.

Echoing the minister's comment, TIM Nurul Kabir, an independent analyst of digital service, requested the Unicef to formulate a global standard education curriculum for young people and children.

Edouard Beigbeder, Unicef Bangladesh representative, said, "We've heard from children and young people from Bangladesh and around the world and what they are saying is clear: The Internet has become a kindness desert."

"That's why this Safer Internet Day, Unicef is following young people's lead and inviting everyone to be kind online, and calling for greater action to make the Internet a safer place for everyone, especially children," he added.

Apart from publishing the survey result in Bangladesh, Unicef ran a poll worldwide on the issue where more than 1 million people responded over five weeks from more than 160 countries.

## Dispose of

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investigation officer and the public prosecutor concerned sincerely dealt with it, the bench observed.

The HC judges asked the district deputy commissioners and superintendents of police to ensure that the investigation officers of these cases produce the witnesses before trial courts on scheduled dates for their quick disposals.

The trial courts have been asked to inform the government authorities concerned about the negligence of the investigation officers and the public prosecutors in producing the witnesses before the courts and dealing with the cases, if there was any.

The HC also ordered the trial courts to submit reports to the Supreme Court committee which was formed to monitor if the lower courts failed to finish the trial proceedings in the cases within six months of taking cognisance of charges.

The trial courts in their reports would explain the reasons for not disposing of the cases in six months, the HC judges said.

The HC bench asked the law secretary and the SC registrar general to communicate its directives to the lower courts, DCs and SPs across the country.

The bench came up with the directives while hearing a bail petition filed by Md Mizanur Rahman Baroi, an accused in a drug-related case filed in Madaripur.

Examining the petition, the judges noticed that the Madaripur court concerned had taken cognisance of the charges in 2016, but the trial proceedings in the case was not finished yet as the investigation officer failed to produce witnesses before the court.

The HC granted six-month bail to Mizanur. The accused from Tambulkana area under Faridpur's Kotwali Police Station is now behind bars.

Bashir Ahmed, sub-inspector of Rajoir Police Station, had filed the case against Mizanur on December 1, 2015 under the Narcotics Control Act, 1990.

Advocate Fazlur Rahman appeared for Mizanur while Deputy Attorney General Farhad Ahmed and Assistant Attorney General Md Yusuf Mahmud Morshed represented the government.

## Sighs

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shook the country. Thousands of students from schools, colleges and universities took to the streets following the tragic death of two college students in the capital's Kurmitola due to reckless driving.

The government promised various actions, but deaths in road accidents continue as usual.

### YOUNG LIFE CUT SHORT

Faijul Islam, assistant editor of The Daily Ittefaq, his wife, their daughter Faija and son, six-year-old Borno, came out of their home at Sector-18 of Uttara around 7:50am.

They walked for some time and were crossing a road to take a rickshaw to Faija's school, said one of her cousins, Mostafizur Rahman Monti, quoting the victim's parents.

Suddenly, a microbus hit Faija. She was holding her father's fingers and was walking a bit ahead of him, he said. "The driver braked for a moment after hitting her and then ran her over," he said.

Other guardians and locals caught the driver and the microbus and took Faija to Uttara Adhunik Hospital in the vehicle. However, doctors there declared her dead, he said.

As the news spread, the driver fled from the hospital, leaving the vehicle in front of it.

The Daily Star correspondent found Faija's home full of sighs and cries. No words could console the grieving family.

Nurul Muktakim, officer-in-charge of Turag Police Station, said they seized the microbus and were trying to arrest the driver.

The body was taken to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

### BARIDHARA

Tea vendor Shahin Hawlader, 42, and night guard Kabir Sheikh, 45, were killed after a bus driver had lost control and drove the vehicle onto a pavement in Baridhara's Coca Cola bus stop area early yesterday.

The two were killed on the spot, said Inspector Bachchu Mia, in-charge of DMCH's police outpost.

Zahid Talukder, a relative of Shahin, told The Daily Star the Kuril-bound bus came through the median strip and hit the tea stall around 3:00am.

Police seized the bus but the driver fled.

The bodies were taken to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsies, the police official said.

### MALIBAGH

An unidentified woman, aged around 45 years, was run over and killed by another bus in Malibagh's Mouchak area around 5:00am.

She was declared dead after some pedestrians took her to the DMCH, Bachchu Mia said.