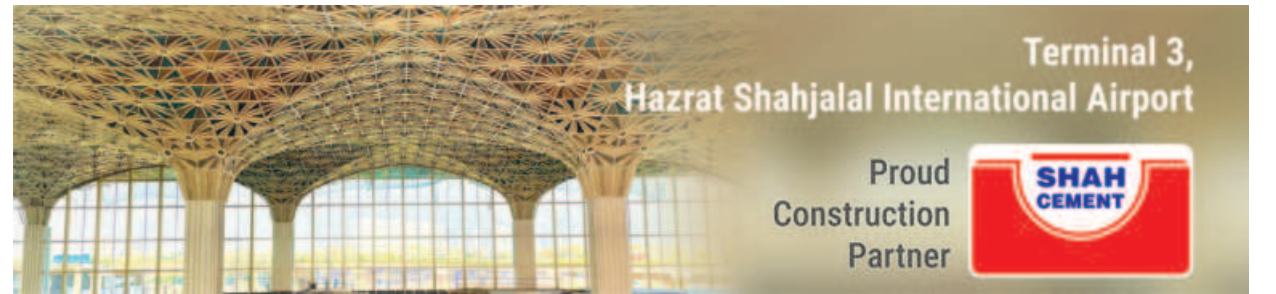




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SHAH CEMENT

First phase of Ijtema ends

Devotees seek forgiveness, blessings from Almighty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The first phase of Biswa Ijtema, one of the largest congregations of Muslims, ended yesterday with Akheri Munajat (concluding prayers).

Devotees, who joined the religious gathering on the banks of Turag in Tongi from home and abroad, sought forgiveness and blessings from the Almighty for Muslims around the world.

Maulana Hafez Zobair Ahmad, leader of Bangladesh Tablighi Jamaat and head imam of Kakrail Jame Masjid in Dhaka, conducted the 24-minute munajat that began at 10:42am.

The second phase of the Ijtema will begin on February 9 at the same venue and will conclude with Akheri Munajat on February 11.

The gathering of devotees of all ages spilled onto roads and areas around the Ijtema venue as Akheri Munajat started.

People who could not reach the venue joined the prayers at home, office or other places through phones and other electronic devices.

Many devotees had to walk miles to reach near the venue while many others stopped on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway.

As part of the rationalised traffic system
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Many people risked their lives by occupying almost every inch of the train roof and even the coupler at the front of the locomotive, as they left Tongi after the first phase of the 57th Biswa Ijtema ended yesterday. The photo was taken near Tongi Rail Station.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Newspaper owners want cut in tax, customs duty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The newspaper industry has been passing through tough times because of the fast expansion of digital and electronic media, high tax and increased import cost of newsprint due to the depreciation of the local currency against the US dollar, newspaper owners said yesterday.

The members of the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab) made the comment while sharing the existing problems of the industry, at a meeting with the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

To help the sector sustain and advance against the headwinds, the Noab said the total tax incidence on newspaper import stands at nearly 30 percent since newspapers have to pay 15 percent value-added tax (VAT), advance income tax, transport, insurance apart from counting 5 percent customs duty.

To reduce the burden, the association demanded reducing customs tariff to 2 percent for the next fiscal year.

It proposed lowering the VAT to 5 percent from the existing 15.

The association also urged the government for either exempting the

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Russian cosmonaut sets record for most time in space

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko yesterday set a world record for total time spent in space, surpassing his compatriot Gennady Padalka who logged more than 878 days in orbit, Russia's space corporation said.

At 0830 GMT Kononenko broke the record, Roscosmos said. Kononenko is expected to reach a total of 1,000 days in space on June 5 and by late September he will have clocked 1,110 days.

"I fly into space to do my favourite thing, not to set records," Kononenko told TASS in an interview from the International Space Station (ISS) where he is orbiting about 263 miles (423 km) from the earth.

"I am proud of all my achievements, but I am more proud that the record for the total duration of human stay in space is still held by a Russian cosmonaut."

The 59-year-old took the top spot from Padalka, who accumulated a total of 878 days, 11 hours, 29 minutes and 48 seconds, Roscosmos said.



Child mortality on the rise, SDG efforts suffer setback

NILIMA JAHAN

In a rather grim development, the child mortality rate in Bangladesh saw a rise in 2022 compared to the previous four years, as per the latest data available.

This means the government will have to drastically scale up its efforts to bring down preventable deaths of newborns and children under five as per the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A summary of Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2022, prepared by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, published last June, shows the number of infants dying before turning one has risen to 24 per 1,000 live births.

It was 22 in 2021, 21 in 2020 and 2019, and 22 in 2018.

Meanwhile, the number of children under five dying for every 1,000 live births has also gone up to 31 in 2022 from 28 in 2021, 2020, and 2019, and 29 in 2018.

Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (2022) prepared by National Institute of Population

"We've noticed an increase in neonatal deaths due to factors such as prematurity, low birth weight, intrauterine growth restriction, infections, and perinatal asphyxia."

Professor Dr Jahangir Alam
Director of Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute

Research and Training also showed similar data regarding the mortality rate of children under five.

According to the SDG 3.2 indicators, the government has a target to cut the under-5 mortality rate down to 25 per 1,000 live births.

BBS's detailed report was released on January 31 this year. According to it, the number of neonates dying before turning one month has remained 16 in 2022, like in 2021. It was 15 in 2019 and 2020.

As per the SDG, the target is to reduce neonatal mortality to as low as 12 per 1,000 live births.

Further analysis also revealed that the number of infants dying between one to 11 months has increased to eight per 1,000 births. It was six in the previous four years.

Simultaneously, the death rate for children aged 1-4, against every 1,000 children in that age group, has also risen to 1.8 in 2022 from 1.6 in 2021.

The BBS report also shows that male children face greater health risks and vulnerabilities compared to female children, resulting in a higher mortality rate among them.

No analysis of the reasons behind the rise in mortality rate was done.

However, in 2021, the major causes for child mortality were reported to be pneumonia, jaundice, fever, diarrhoea, malnutrition, acute respiratory infection and drowning.

Dr Md Muniruzzaman Siddiqui, director of the Directorate General of Family Planning (DGFP)'s maternal and child health (MCH)

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92 Palestinians killed overnight in Israeli strikes

Two children among dead; Hamas weighs truce proposal

AGENCIES

Scores of Palestinians were killed in Israeli strikes across the Gaza Strip yesterday, after Hamas said it needed more time to consider a proposal that would halt Israel's offensive in the besieged Palestinian territory.

Gaza's Hamas-run health ministry said yesterday at least 92 Palestinians had been killed overnight, including in what the group's media office said was an Israeli bombardment of a kindergarten in Rafah where displaced people were sheltering. Two children were killed in the bombardment.

Israeli snipers killed one person in the vicinity of al-Shifa Hospital, while many Palestinians were wounded in shooting by Israeli snipers at the Baptist Hospital.

Israeli troops also continued strikes in Khan Younis and northern Gaza. In a statement on X, the military claimed to have found rifles, RPG ammunition, military equipment and technological assets in a compound of Khan Younis.

A total of 27,365 Palestinians have been killed and 66,630 have been injured in Israeli strikes on the enclave since October 7, the Gaza health ministry said in a statement yesterday. At least 127 people were killed in 24 hours, it said.

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2 'UPDF' men shot dead in Rangamati

Police yet to identify victims

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Police yesterday recovered the bullet-hit bodies of two people from Baghaichhari upazila of Rangamati.

United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) claimed that the victims were members of the organisation while police could not identify the two till yesterday evening.

Around 2:00pm, the two were shot dead by criminals in Machalong Bridgepara area. On information, police recovered the bodies around 6:00pm, said police.

"The identities of the killers could not be known immediately as they fled the scene quickly after the incident. The motive behind the murder is also yet to be ascertained. We are investigating the incident," Mir Abu Touhid, superintendent of Rangamati police, told The Daily Star.

However, UPDF, in a press release, claimed that
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Bangladesh players celebrate their 1-0 win over India, which took them to the final of the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship, at the Birshreshtho Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. Story on page 11.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

THREATENING PM Two held in Dhaka after Saudi Arabia deports them

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit of DMP has arrested two people for threatening to kill Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in an email from Saudi Arabia.

The arrestees are Deen Islam and Kabir Hossain, said Additional Commissioner of Police and CTTC Chief Md Asaduzzaman at a press briefing at Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) media centre today.

Asaduzzaman said DMP's Media and Public Relations Centre received the mail at 4:59pm on April 17 last year.

In the subject line of the email, it was written: "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be shot at 4:00am on April 27. Bangladesh police do not have the power to prevent this attack," the CTTC official said, adding that the same message was written in the body of the email as well.

After the matter was
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