2nd phase Ijtema begins today star report

The second phase of the Biswa Ijtema begins on the bank of the Turag in Tongi today.

Usually, the Ijtema begins with "Aam Bayan" (general sermons) by noted Islamic scholars after Fazr prayers and ends with Akheri Munajat (final prayers).

With the participation of the supporters of Maulana Saad Kandhalvi, the second phase of the Ijtema will end on February 11, reports BSS.

The government has taken security measures centring the second phase of Biswa Ijtema.

Meanwhile, thousands of pilgrims boarding buses, trucks and pick-ups from different parts of the country have arrived on the Ijtema ground.

The first phase of Biswa Ijtema ended on February 4 at the same venue. It had started on February 2. Religious Affairs Minister Faridul

Haque Khan yesterday inspected the Ijtema ground and talked to second phase Ijtema-organisers. Faridul said that a discussion is

going on to bring Maulana Saad Saheb in the country. Meanwhile, four worshippers died

ahead of the second phase of Ijtema as of 9:00pm yesterday. They were aged between 65 to 70, said Ijtema Media Coordinator Mohammad Sayem.

JUNTA-REBEL FIGHTING India to end free border movement with Myanmar

AFP, New Delhi

India's interior minister said yesterday that he had "recommended the immediate suspension" of a free movement border agreement with Myanmar, from where thousands have fled since fighting between the junta and its opponents surged last year.

Amit Shah said the foreign ministry was already "in the process of scrapping" the deal, which allows those living in border zones to venture a short distance into their neighbouring nation's territory without a visa.

Many in the border zones share

close cultural and religious ties.

Shah said it was necessary "to ensure the internal security of the country and to maintain the demographic structure" of regions bordering Myanmar.



Palestinians inspect the damage following Israeli bombardment of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

Israeli forces intensify strikes on Rafah

14 civilians, including five children, killed; aid agencies warn of humanitarian catastrophe

AGENCIES

Israeli forces yesterday bombed areas in the southern border city of Rafah where more than half of Gaza's population is sheltering, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a proposal to end offensive in the Palestinian enclave.

Netanyahu said later on Wednesday terms proposed by Hamas for a ceasefire that would also involve releasing hostages held by the Palestinian group were "delusional" and vowed to fight on, saying victory was in reach and just months

rejection followed intense diplomacy to end the four-and-a-halfmonth conflict before a threatened Israeli assault on Rafah, which is now home to over a million people, many of them in Netanyahu rejects proposal to end offensive

Hamas delegation in Cairo for ceasefire talks

Death toll in enclave now 27,840

makeshift tents and lacking food and

Aid agencies have warned of a humanitarian catastrophe if Israel follows through on its threat to enter one of the last remaining areas of the Gaza Strip that its troops have not moved into during its ground offensive.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said on Wednesday that pushing into Rafah on the border with Egypt would "increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold regional consequences."

Israel says it takes steps to avoid civilian casualties and accuses Hamas of hiding among civilians, including at school shelters and hospitals, leading to more civilian deaths. Hamas has denied

Israeli planes bombed areas in Rafah yesterday morning, residents said, killing at least 14 civilians, including five children, in strikes on houses. Tanks also shelled some areas in eastern Rafah, intensifying the residents' fears of an imminent ground

'We have our backs to the (border) fence and faces toward the Mediterranean. Where should we go?" said Emad, 55, a displaced person who is a father of six.

BANGLADESHIS IN MALAYSIA 733workers to get Tk 2.3cr in unpaid wages

733 stranded Bangladeshi workers, who were tricked into coming to Malaysia for non-existent jobs, yesterday successfully claimed more than Tk 2.38 crore (RM 1 million) in unpaid wages from their supposed employers.

The Human Resources Ministry of Malaysia

yesterday said the workers and their employers reached a mutual agreement in this regard following proceedings carried out by Johor Labour Department officers.

The ministry said the case's conclusion would serve as a precedent for future labour cases.

"This case involves foreign workers who were legally brought into the country but were not provided with employment.... Any employers found guilty of this will be blacklisted by the authorities, and their quotas for foreign workers will be cancelled," it warned.

On January 16, Malaysia's Human Resources Minister Steven Sim said that 751 Bangladeshi workers in Pengerang had been left stranded and jobless in the country after they were duped by employers to enter the country.

Khaleda visits Evercare for regular check-up

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday visited the Evercare Hospital in Dhaka for a regular health

"Khaleda Zia reached the hospital at 6:48pm," BNP media cell member Shayrul Kabir Khan told

It was not clear whether the BNP chief will return to her home after her check-up. Her medical board will decide on that, said Khaleda's personal physician AZM Zahid Hossain.

Khaleda Zia was discharged from hospital last month after staying there for treatment for five

Khaleda returns home after check-up

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday underwent health checkups at Evercare Hospital in the capital.

She arrived at the hospital from her Gulshan residence around 6:48pm and stayed there for nearly five hours, said BNP media cell member Sayrul Kabir Khan.

He said that the BNP chairperson underwent several tests at the hospital. Later, the BNP chief left the hospital and reached her residence around

Irregularities

FROM PAGE 1

Despite the heightened security, nine people, including two children, were killed in bomb blasts, grenade attacks

At least 26 people were killed in two explosions near electoral candidates' offices in the southwestern province of Balochistan on Wednesday. Islamic State later claimed responsibility for those attacks. Yesterday's victims included five police killed in a bomb blast and firing

on a patrol in the Kulachi area of Dera Ismail Khan district in the northwest, authorities said. Two children died in a blast outside a women's polling station in Balochistan. Except for Pakistan Muslim League (N), mainstream political parties

such as the Pakistan People's Party, Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf have reported vote rigging at polling stations across the country, reports Dawn. The PTI also claimed that election

results across the country are being delayed after ousted PM Imran Khan's candidate emerged victorious. "Despite a few isolated incidents,

the overall situation remained control, demonstrating the effectiveness of our security measures," caretaker Interior Minister Gohar Ejaz said in a statement.

Mobile phone services suspended for security reasons were being partially resumed, the Interior

Ministry said late yesterday. The move to suspend mobile networks sparked criticism from leaders of opposition parties, with the Pakistan Peoples Party's Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the 35-year-old son of assassinated former premier Benazir Bhutto, calling for its "immediate restoration".

Amnesty International called it "a blunt attack on the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly". Chief Election Commissioner

Sikandar Sultan Raja said the decision on mobile networks was made by "law and order agencies" following Wednesday's violence. PTI, in a post on X, called on

people to remove passwords from their personal Wifi accounts "so anyone in the vicinity" could have internet access.

However, Nawaz Sharif dismissed talk of an unclear result.

"Don't talk about a coalition government. It is very important for a government to get a clear majority... It should not be relying on others," he told reporters after casting his vote in the eastern city of Lahore.

dominated The military has the nuclear-armed country either directly or indirectly in its 76 years of independence but for several years it has maintained it does not interfere in politics.

Taxes cut for better supply in Ramadan

To ensure adequate supply to the be able to import rice from Thailand markets, the revenue authority lifted 25 percent customs duty on rice imports, apart from slashing regulatory duty to 5 percent from 25

total import tax on rice to 15.25 percent from 62.5 percent. The reduced import tariff on rice will remain valid until May 15 and the importers will require approval from the food ministry to bring the grains from abroad.

Two rice millers and traders, however, expressed doubt whether the cut will inspire imports of the staple given that neighbouring India maintains 20 percent tax on rice exports to discourage shipment from

Imports from India may not be profitable because of India's imposition of export duty, according

Nirod Boron Saha, president of the Paddy and Rice Stockists and Wholesalers' Association in Naogaon. a major rice market in the north, said prices of the grain usually increase in India after duty reduction by Bangladesh.

We need to wait for at least a day to observe how the market reacts there. In case of hike in coarse rice prices there, the possibility of import is low."

However, fine rice may be imported as the current prices in Bangladesh may encourage some importers, he

Other than India, Bangladesh will which also produces parboiled rice,

A large rice miller and importer, seeking anonymity, said import of coarse and medium grains is unlikely The reduction will bring down because of the export curbs by India.

However, consumers may get some benefit from the removal of VAT from domestic processing and trading of soybean and palm oil.

The NBR also cut VAT on import of both refined and unrefined edible oil -- soybean and palm oil -- which Bangladesh has to import to meet 90 percent of its domestic requirement. A top official of a leading

commodity importer and processor said prices of edible oil may drop by Tk 5-Tk 6 a litre once the new consignment of edible oil, imported at the reduced VAT rate, reaches the

Bottled soybean oil was selling for Tk 158-Tk 165 a litre in Dhaka yesterday.

The current prices are higher than a month ago but lower than the same day a year ago, according to data from the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh. Bangladesh consumes about 1.5

lakh tonnes of edible oil a month. During Ramadan, demand for the essential commodity, used to

make traditional snacks, rises to 2 lakh tonnes, according to estimates by the Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission (BTTC). The VAT benefit will remain effective

until April 15, according to the NBR.

Sugar may become a little cheaper following the reduction in specific duty for import of raw sugar to Tk

1,000 per tonne from Tk 1,500. The official, however, said the impact may be negligible - Tk 0.50 per kg – as other taxes on sugar remain unchanged.

Yesterday, unpackaged sugar was Tk 140 per kg in Dhaka, showed TCB data.

The price of sugar, consumption of which doubles to 3 lakh tonnes in Ramadan, was 3.5 percent lower from a month ago.

The NBR said the reduced specific duty will remain effective until March In case of dates, the revenue

authority also cut import duty to 15 percent from 25 percent. BTTC estimates that Ramadan

accounts for half of the 1 lakh tonnes annual requirement of dates. Following the duty cut, the total tax on dates import stands at 43 percent from 58.6 percent.

The new duty rates for import of dates have already become effective and will remain in force until March 30.

Fahmida Khatun. executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said the import tariff cut and VAT removal should lead to a decline in prices but "our past experience tells us that the price does not fall to the extent of tariff and VAT reduction".

She said market surveillance by the government is good now.

"If it continues in the supply chain

from Myanmar.

session at

of the commodities, prices may fall."

"In recent weeks, hundreds of

people fled from Myanmar to India

and Bangladesh. That is why the

Indian government decided to go

for it," he said during an interactive

the

On the Rohingya issue in

Bangladesh, the foreign minister

said Bangladesh has been discussing

Residents start returning

including small children and women were forced to spend nights at Uttar Ghumdhum Govt Primary School.

Mohammad Nabi, a resident of Tumbru, said he and his three children and wife went to a relative's home on Sunday February 4. "We suffered a lot. The children

are traumatised," he said while returning to his home yesterday. Amina Begum and Farid Uddin,

two farmers of Tumbru, said as they could not tend to their vegetable farm, the plants have almost dried due to lack of water.

In Nayapara area, children found an unexploded mortar shell around midday, officials said, adding

that they have taken cautionary measures.

Last week, 330 members of Myanmar army, border guards, police, immigration and other officials took refuge in Bangladesh, said a statement from the Border Guard Bangladesh yesterday.

Meanwhile, Asia-based rights body Fortify Rights has called on the Bangladesh government to probe the recent influx of Myanmar Border Guard Police (BGP) for their potential involvement in atrocities and to align with the International Criminal Court's (ICC) investigation into crimes against the Rohingya population.

Vice-chancellors should

FROM PAGE 1

consideration, UGC acting Chairman Prof Muhammed Alamgir said, "We want qualified persons appointed to the top administrative positions.'

"If someone can fulfil the criteria, like having a sound academic track, having experience in teaching, research and administrative work, integrity, they should be appointed as VC or to other important positions," he added.

Until now, respective laws of four public universities-Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, and Jahangirnagar universities-have provisions that VCs of these universities would be appointed by the president after getting elected by the senate of the respective universities.

But, in most cases, un-elected VCs run the universities.

However, there is no criteria for the appointment of VCs to other

As per the rules of those universities, the president appoints a VC but he does so following the consent of the prime minister after the education ministry sends a list of potential candidates.

The UGC prepared a Strategic Plan for Higher Education for 2006 to 2026 which recommended that the existing system of appointing VCs needed to be

changed, as it left "scope for political maneuvering".

The chancellor could form a national search committee, giving it adequate legal backing to recommend the appointment of VCs, it proposed. "Subsequent governments did not

implementanyoftherecommendations

choosing, instead, to appoint loyalists",

said a UGC member. Former UGC chairman Prof Abdul Mannan said, "Political identity should not be the only criterion for

appointment as VC." In its "Annual Report 2022", the UGC recommended increasing budgetary allocation for higher education and suggested ranking universities. It also recommended academic master plans for all universities and institutional quality assurance cell and a guideline to stop plagiarism.

According to the UGC report, there are 163 universities - 53 public and 110 private.

There are 47.56 lakh students in higher education, of whom 22.14 lakh are girls. The private universities have 3.41 lakh students, about one lakh

Public universities have 36,399 teachers while private universities have 16.508 teachers.

Falling container kills man

them back but they are adopting

Rahman said Shamim was the sole breadwinner of his five-member family and had been working in the project for three years.

months ago ... How will his family survive now?" he asked, demanded proper compensation for the family.

Shamim's body was sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Rahman, 50, a hawker, was killed after a steel frame from the expressway fell on him in Dhaka's Moghbazar area. On May 29 last year, a 12-year-

him from the under-construction expressway in the capital's Mohakhali.

old boy died after an iron rod fell on

The Daily Star visited the Tejkunipara spot yesterday and tried to contact the expressway officials. They however declined to make any comments regarding the accident.

Dhaka to buy defence equipment from Delhi

India granted a \$500 million soft loan to Bangladesh during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to New Delhi in 2017. On the second day of his three-

day visit, Hasan yesterday delivered

lecture at the Vivekananda

International Foundation where he described the current state of relations between India and Bangladesh as a "golden chapter". He said the two countries are now giving highest priority to -- enhancing mutual three aspects

connectivity, and ensuring all round economic cooperation. Hasan said Bangladesh would not allow any terrorist activities on its

trust and confidence, promoting

Bangladesh earlier ensured that no insurgents from the northeastern India could take shelter here policy that was highly lauded by Indian leadership for keeping the northeast stable.

"While assuming power in 2009, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had declared a zero-tolerance policy against terrorism. She declared that our land would not be allowed for any terrorist activities to destabilise any neighbouring country or the region and we have been following that," he said. In the wake of escalating civil

war in Myanmar that shares borders both with India and Bangladesh, New Delhi has decided to fence its border with Myanmar, saying that it will help prevent spread of insurgency from troubled Myanmar.

Hasan said he backs India's decision.

A foreign ministry official on Wednesday told The Daily Star that Bangladesh is not considering fencing its border with Myanmar at this moment. Hasan said it was for India to make

decision on fencing the India-

possibility of insurgency flowing

Myanmar border and it would be

good for India and the region as there

with Myanmar for the last seven years so that it takes them back with full dignity and honour. Myanmar has been saying that they would take

International Foundation.

delaying tactics, he said. Hasan said the current situation in Myanmar is an "obstacle" to sending back the refugees. He expected assistance and cooperation from the Indian side for Rohingya repatriation.

About 1.2 million Rohingyas Bangladesh are creating environmental and security problems besides other difficulties Bangladesh.

Vivekananda

Just the day before, Matiur The victim's cousin Habibur

"He had twin baby girls just three