

Biswa Ijtema ends today with Akheri Munajat

UNB, Dhaka

The second phase of Ijtema will end today with Akheri Munajat (final prayers).

A mass wedding ceremony will be held today at the ground after Asr prayers.

Devotees from different parts of the country are still coming to the Ijtema venue on the bank of the Turag.

On the second day of the second phase of 57th Biswa Ijtema, the devotees yesterday listened to scholars recitation and explanations of verses from the Quran.

Several lakhs of devotees including seven thousand foreigners have gathered on the Ijtema ground and continued spiritual activities.

The second phase of the Biswa Ijtema began on Friday with aam bayaan (general sermons) after Fajr prayers by Maulana Ilyas Bin Saad of India. The sermon was translated into Bangla by Maulana Munir Bin Yusuf.

Maulana Syed Bin Saad of India delivered sermons after Fajr prayer on Saturday and Maulana Mufli Osama Islam translated it into Bangla.

Meanwhile, more than 6,000 members of law enforcement have been deployed in the Ijtema area.

Myanmar junta enforces compulsory military service law

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's junta is enforcing a law requiring all men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27 to serve at least two years under military command, it said yesterday, as it struggles to crush opposition to its 2021 coup.

The country has been in turmoil since the military seized power that year, with massive pro-democracy protests morphing into widespread armed resistance.

The junta "issued the notification of the effectiveness of People's Military Service Law starting from February 10th, 2024," the junta's information team said in a statement.



Firefighters work at a site of a Russian drone strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kharkiv, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russian drone attack in Kharkiv kills 7

Biden accuses Congress of 'neglect' over Ukraine

REUTERS, Kharkiv/ Washington

A Ukrainian couple and their three small children were killed in a fire after a Russian drone attack on the northeastern city of Kharkiv hit an oil depot, triggering blazes and damaging residential houses, officials said yesterday.

An elderly couple living in the same street as the family were also killed, and three other people were wounded in the city.

The drones struck late on Friday, causing several large fires, and burning at least 15 residential houses in the east of Kharkiv, said Kharkiv regional governor Oleh Synchubov.

The family of five who were killed lived in one of the houses on Kotelnia street in the eastern part of the city, said Serhii Bolvinov, head of the investigative department of the National Police in the region.

Bolvinov, speaking to reporters in the street that was burnt down, said the

Deceased include children aged 7, 4 and 10 months

Ukrainian air force shot down 23 Russian-launched drones in Kharkiv, Odesa

children were aged 7, 4 and 10 months.

Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden said Congress would be guilty of "close to criminal neglect" if it failed to pass funding for Ukraine and thanked German Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Friday for his leadership in securing German military aid for Kyiv.

The Ukrainian air force said yesterday that air defence and mobile groups of drone hunters shot down 23 out of 31 Russian-launched drones, which were targeting the Kharkiv region and also the Odesa region in the south.

Oleh Kiper, governor of Odesa region, said the drone attack injured four people and damaged industrial facilities, cars, and some port infrastructure.

Russia did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Moscow has said its forces do not deliberately target civilian sites.

German Chancellor Scholz, who was making a whirlwind stop in Washington to lend his support to Biden's efforts to obtain funding for Ukraine, met with the president at the White House to discuss Russia's war with its smaller neighbor as well as the crisis in the Middle East on Friday.

Speaking to reporters before the meeting, Scholz said he had been encouraged by the US Senate's move on Thursday to advance a USD 95.34 billion bill that includes aid for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan after Republicans blocked compromise legislation that had included reforms to immigration policy.

4 Rohingyas held near Patgram border

UNB, Lalmonirhat

Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) detained four Rohingya refugees near Lalmonirhat's Patgram border on Friday afternoon.

The detainees are Abdullah, 24, his wife Sharifa Begum, 19, their daughter, 27-month-old Rinus Bibi, and Amena Begum, 15.

Ferdous Wahid, officer-in-charge (OC) of Patgram Police Station, said the Rohingyas were roaming near the corridor post area of Patgram upazila's Dahagram Union border on Friday afternoon.

Finding their movement suspicious, the patrol team of BGB-51 detained them.

Later, BGB handed them over to Patgram Police Station.

During the questioning, the detainees confessed that they were citizens of Myanmar and residents of Ukhiya camp in Cox's Bazar.

Earlier on Monday afternoon, the paramilitary force detained a Rohingya woman named Ramida Begum, 21, while she was roaming in the Panbari border area in Kuchlibari union of Patgram upazila.

"Necessary measures are being taken to send the Rohingyas in police custody to their respective camps," added the OC.

5 leaders of teen gangs arrested

UNB, Dhaka

Rab on Friday night arrested five men in Dhaka's Mohammadpur on the charge of operating teen gangs around the country.

They are Zulfikar Ali, 37, of Jamalpur, Harunor Rashid, 38 of Mymensingh, Shamsuddin Bepari, 48 of Bhola, Krishna Chandra Das, 28 of Munshiganj and Suruj Mia, 30 of Mymensingh.

Tipped off, a team of Rab-3 conducted a drive in Mohammadia Housing Society and arrested the five, said Azhar Hossain, assistant superintendent of police.

The elite force also seized a foreign-made pistol, one magazine, two sharp weapons and seven knives from the possession.

After primary interrogation, police came to know that they had long been involved in engaging drug addicts or teens in different criminal activities including arms and drug business, mugging, extortion, abduction, robbery and land occupation after alluring them of giving money, said Azhar.

'Independents'

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Asserting the fairness and transparency of the 12th parliamentary election, the AL chief challenged critics to present concrete evidence if they had doubts.

She pointed out that there have been elections in developed countries that have yet to receive acceptance from losing parties.

Hasina claimed, "There was an attempt to prevent the election from taking place so that questions could be raised after the election."

"But, the election in Bangladesh was fair. Public administration, the armed forces, law enforcement agencies, and all those involved in the election have performed their duties impartially."

The AL president urged everyone to put the rivalry between the party's nominated candidates and its independents behind them.

"Let's forget all that happened. Everyone must work together and move forward by keeping trust and faith in the people. We are here to solve any issues that may arise, and the central committee will take care of them."

Hasina said that her party has also opened the upcoming upazila elections for all her party members to make them participatory.

"We'll see who worked for the people while in power over the last 15 years and who failed to deliver. And we'll see who the people accept," she said.

The PM issued a warning against any sort of conflict in the upcoming local government elections.

"We do not want any type of confrontation. Those responsible, no matter who they are, will face severe consequences," she stated.

Criticising the opposition, Hasina said, "Earlier, BNP committed arson secretly. But they are now doing that publicly and even taking pictures of it."

"Make sure these cases go to trial and punishment be given accordingly," she added.

Family in fear

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School and College.

According to the case statement, on Wednesday afternoon, the accused abducted the girl from her sister's house in Gazipur, took her to an abandoned house and raped her there.

Later, he threatened the girl not to disclose the matter to anyone before dropping her off in front of her father's house.

Speaking to this newspaper, the girl's father said, "After I heard about what happened to my daughter, I immediately left for the police station to file a case."

"On my way, 10-15 people including the accused's uncles threatened me not to file a case. They said if I filed the case, they would kill me."

Bangladesh consulate in Switserland moved to Yangon

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Those living in Naikhongchhari of Bandarban and Ukhiya and Teknaf upazilas in Cox's Bazar are in constant fear due to conflicts just across the border.

In Teknaf's Whykong union, locals yesterday woke up to loud sounds of gunfire and mortar shell explosions at regular intervals.

The sounds went on for four hours until 9:00pm, while bullets from Myanmar landed inside homes on this side of the border.

Sirajul Mostafa, a member of ward-2 of Whykong Union Parishad, said, "Three of us were walking through Konarpara after Fajr prayers. At that time, I heard the sound of at least 100 gunshots from the other side of the border."

"Bullets have also landed in several houses in Uttarpara. However, no casualties have been reported so far."

Locals had also spotted a body on the Balukhali canal, which later floated away in the Naf river.

Meanwhile, police yesterday recovered a man's bullet-ridden body that had been lying on the border area for the last two days from Rahmater Beel area in Ukhiya. No one has yet identified the victim.

In Ghumdhum of Bandarban's Naikhongchhari, another unexploded mortar shell was recovered from a

paddy field yesterday morning. It was first spotted by a local farmer around 8:30am.

The BGB kept the shell on an empty spot next to a road for safety purposes and restricted movement there.

The two previous days, another such mortar shell and a rocket-propelled grenade were recovered from two different fields in the same area.

Meanwhile, 23 displaced Rohingyas, who entered Bangladesh with firearms, were sent to jail upon a court order yesterday.

The BGB handed over the accused to the police with 12-15 weapons after a case was filed against them on Friday.

Meanwhile, pro-Rakhine newspaper The Irrawady on Friday reported that the Arakan Army (AA) seized the last remaining Myanmar junta stronghold in the historic city of Mrauk U in the Rakhine State.

AA fighters have captured over 200 installations, including both large and small camps, as well as many battalions.

The rebel group now controls Pautkaw, Minbya, Kyauktaw, Mrauk U and Paletwa townships.

Moreover, it has gained control over Taung Pyo Let Wae and Taung Pyo Let Yar towns of the Maungdaw locality, adjacent to the Bangladesh border.

The fighting in Rakhine State has forced at least 330 members of the country's Border Guard Police (BGP)

Negotiations start after hung verdict

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Till filing this report at 10:00pm, results were still not in for 9 of the 265 seats contested in the election. Polling in one seat of the 266 directly elected seats of the National Assembly was postponed due to the death of a candidate.

The latest tally, posted on the election commission's website, showed independent candidates had won 100 seats, with Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) taking 73 seats.

According to Dawn, one of the leading dailies in Pakistan, 93 of the victorious independent candidates were backed by Khan and his party.

Khan's supporters were running as independents because they had been barred from the polls by the election commission for not complying with electoral laws.

Despite the ban and Khan's imprisonment for convictions on charges ranging from leaking state secrets to corruption to an unlawful marriage, millions of the former cricketer's supporters came out to vote for him.

However, under Pakistan's electoral laws, independent candidates are not

eligible for 70 reserved seats, which are allotted according to the strength of each party in the house. Sharif's party could get up to 20 of these seats.

Khan's close aide and media adviser, Zulfi Bukhari, told Reuters the party would announce within the next day (Sunday) the party banner they will ask independents to join, in a bid to claim the rights to form the next government.

In Pakistan, independent candidates cannot form a government on their own and need to join a party.

Whoever seeks to form the next government would need support from other parties with no one close to the seat threshold for a simple majority in parliament.

Currently, there are a total of 336 seats in Pakistan's National Assembly. Of these, 266 are filled by direct elections. Besides, the Pakistan constitution reserves 10 seats for religious minorities and 60 seats for women. A party needs to win 134 seats to win a majority.

Besides Khan and Sharif, the Pakistan Peoples Party of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the son of assassinated premier Benazir Bhutto, remains a major player with at least 54 seats.

and Immigration, and their family members, to flee to Bangladesh early last week. This prompted the BGP to increase surveillance along the 270km-long Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

So far, two people in Bangladesh were killed as mortar shells landed on this side of the border from Myanmar. Sounds of mortar shell explosion and bullet firing along the border has caused panic among locals living near the border in Bandarban and Cox's Bazar.

Dhaka has issued strong protest letter against the spillover of the Myanmar conflicts into Bangladesh and urged Naypyidaw to take back the 330 members of Myanmar security forces.

Myanmar agreed to take them back through a Navy ship, which is ready to sail on the Bangladesh coast.

However, the process requires permission from Bangladesh's Armed Forces Division, BGB and Home Ministry.

"We are expecting that the Myanmar ship will come to Bangladesh this week after completing all the procedures," a foreign ministry official told The Daily Star yesterday.

Officials concerned said Bangladesh needs to find out the number of crew members on the ship and whether fuel or other logistics would be required when the ship is here.

The rest were won by small parties and other independents. This sets up a period of intense political negotiations over the next few days before a parliamentary vote to elect a new prime minister and government can take place.

The horse-trading has already begun, with Nawaz Sharif's younger brother, Shehbaz Sharif meeting late on Friday kingmaker and former president, Asif Ali Zardari, and his son, Bilawal.

'STABLE HANDS'
Pakistan's army chief congratulated the country yesterday for the "successful conduct" of the election, saying the nation needed "stable hands" to move on from the politics of "anarchy and polarisation".

The military remains the country's most powerful institution and has for decades had a huge role in making and breaking governments. Khan accuses the military of a crackdown on him and his party. The military denies this.

The United States, Britain and the European Union on Friday each expressed concerns about the electoral process, urging a probe into reported irregularities.

120km Dhaka canals

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Abdullahpur and Katsur canals were connected to the Konai river while Hatirijheel Lake, Begunbari, Rampura and Norai canals were part of the Norai river.

The Dholai river is now a canal known in different areas as Nasirabad, Nandipara, and Dakhsingaon while the Atir river is now the Atir canal due to severe pollution and encroachment, the study says.

Azaz said the government has taken steps to free the Buriganga's old channel, "But no restoration has been done. More participatory and collective efforts are needed to save the waterbodies."

Sharif Jamil, member secretary of environment group Dhoritri Rokhlay Amra, said, "The canals that disappeared were necessary to protect the groundwater table and drainage system of Dhaka. Government officials responsible for protecting the canals did not do their

jobs.

"In cases, the land grabbers, officials and politicians in collusion legalised encroachment."

Dhaka District Commissioner's Office is the owner of all the land of the canals. The government recently ordered the two city corporations to maintain 26 canals.

According to a report of the National River Conservation Commission, Dhaka District Administration, Wasa, Department of Environment, and BIWTA, there are no specific authority for the maintenance of 12 canals.

Malik Fida A Khan, a member of the National River Conservation Commission, said, "It is still possible to save the existing canals. The mayors can take steps."

He added that in recent years, canals have disappeared due to lack of water flow caused by garbage dumping. Then someone fills up the land and build structures.

Palestinians brace for Rafah assault

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destroying swathes of towns with air strikes, artillery fire and controlled detonations, leaving more than 85 percent of Gaza's 2.3 million inhabitants homeless.

Most of the displaced have sought shelter in Rafah, in the far south on the border with Egypt, but after ceasefire talks failed, Netanyahu this week said Israeli forces would fight on until "total victory", including in Rafah.

On Friday night an air strike on one Rafah house killed 11 people and wounded dozens more, while a second strike killed six people in another house, medical officials said.

Meanwhile, Gaza's health ministry yesterday said, at least 28,064 Palestinians have been killed and 67,611 others injured in Israeli strikes since October 7.

Israeli forces killed at least 117 Palestinians and injured 152 others over the past 24 hours in Gaza, the statement added.

In the other main southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, where many displaced people initially fled before an Israeli offensive there last month, the Palestinian Health Ministry voiced alarm at Israeli operations around the main Nasser Hospital.

The ministry said Israeli forces had surrounded the hospital and were shooting in the vicinity, and it was concerned about the fate of 300 medical staff, 450 patients and 10,000 people sheltering there.

Footage circulating on social media, which Reuters could not independently verify, showed tanks at the hospital gates.

Israel's military said in an update on fighting yesterday that its forces were continuing "intensive" activities in Khan Younis as well as northern and central Gaza, killing militants, seizing weapons and striking infrastructure.

It did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the situation at Nasser hospital.

In Gaza City, the first major population centre that Israel's operation targeted after ground forces invaded in late October, residents reported fierce fighting on Saturday.

An Israeli official who declined to be named said that Israel would try to organise for people in Rafah to be moved back northwards ahead of any assault.

Egypt has said it will not allow any mass displacement of Palestinians into its territory. Palestinians fear that Israel means to drive them from their homeland then forbid their return.

"There is limited space and great risk in putting Rafah under further military escalation due to the growing number of Palestinians there," Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said on Saturday, warning that an escalation would have "dire consequences".