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Your Right to Know

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"I don't launder money. I believe you [MPs] also do not launder money. How will I know who are laundering money if you don't give me the list."
FINANCE MINISTER AHM MUSTAFA KAMAL



"It's unfortunate that the ruling party leaders neither have any sense of political etiquette, nor human values."
BNP SECRETARY GENERAL
MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM ALAMGIR



"The news about this new variant should make clearer than ever why this pandemic will not end until we have global vaccinations."
BIDEN CALLS FOR INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY PROTECTION WAIVERS AFTER
OMICRON DISCOVERY



Alarm bells ring over new variant

World rushes to contain Omicron; govt plans travel ban for some countries, steps up screening at the airports

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

The government is preparing to introduce travel bans on South Africa and other countries where the Omicron variant of coronavirus has been found.

Screening at airports has already been stepped up, officials said.

As of last night, Omicron has been detected in Botswana, Belgium, Hong Kong, the UK and Israel.

Health Minister Zahid Maleque in a recorded video message yesterday said, "We are aware of the [Omicron] variant. This variant is aggressive. That is why air communications with South Africa will be suspended."

Health workers at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA) said they were asked to beef up screening, but were yet to receive any instruction regarding travel bans.

The National Technical Advisory Committee (NTAC) on Covid-19 will sit for a

SKY IS NOT FALLING

"This happens - viruses evolve and we pick up variants. It's not the end of the world, the sky is not falling in. There is this idea that we are just waiting for the next variant, and I don't want people to spend their lives worrying about that every day."

MICHAEL RYAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
WHO'S HEALTH EMERGENCIES
PROGRAMME

meeting this noon to assess the latest situation and make recommendations, president of the committee Prof Mohammad Shahidullah told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Until the travel bans are imposed, I suggest maintaining strict screening at the airports, especially where passengers arrive from those countries [where Omicron has been detected]," he said.

Omicron has created a concern worldwide with experts fearing it might be more transmissible than any other variants, including the Delta variant that caused havoc in the country earlier this year.

The World Health Organisation on Friday labeled Omicron as a variant of concern. "This variant has been detected at faster rates than previous surges in infection, suggesting that this variant may have a growth advantage."

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OMICRON NEW WORRY

ORIGIN

It was first identified in South Africa, and it is likely to have evolved during a chronic infection of an immuno-compromised person, possibly an untreated HIV/Aids patient.

The variant has also been detected in Botswana, Hong Kong, Israel and Belgium.

'VARIANT OF CONCERN'

The classification by WHO puts Omicron into the most-troubling category of coronavirus variants, along with the globally-dominant Delta, plus its weaker rivals Alpha, Beta and Gamma.

THE UNKNOWNNS

- Will protection from Covid-19 vaccines hold up?
- Will people previously infected with the coronavirus be immune from infection with Omicron?
- Will Omicron will cause more or less severe Covid-19 compared to other coronavirus strains?

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT?

- It has more than 30 mutations in the spike protein alone, double the number associated with the Delta variant.
- On the ACE2 receptor, it has 10 mutations. In comparison, the Delta variant has two.



Digital display boards show cancelled flights at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg on Friday.

WHO CAUTIONS AGAINST TRAVEL CURBS

- Despite countries scrambling to ban flights, the WHO earlier cautioned against imposing travel restrictions due to Omicron.
- The organisation said countries should take a risk-based and scientific approach when considering travel curbs in light of the variant-but cautioned against restrictions.
- "At this point, again, implementing travel measures is being cautioned against," said spokesman Christian Lindmeier.

SOURCE: REUTERS/ST/THE HINDU



Bleeding has put Khaleda's life at stake

Says Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia needs to be taken abroad immediately to stop her internal bleeding, which has put her life in balance, said BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

In the last few days, the best doctors in the country have been trying to identify the source of her bleeding but they could not make any headway for lack of

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FAKE INDIAN RUPEES: FROM PAKISTAN TO INDIA

Bangladesh a stopover

DMP investigation finds a syndicate prints the notes in Lahore, sends those to SL and then to Chattogram

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

A transnational currency forgery syndicate has been smuggling fake Indian rupees into India from Pakistan for a couple of years using Sri Lanka and Bangladesh as transit.

The syndicate prints fake Indian currency notes in Pakistan's Lahore and then sends those to Sri Lanka by sea in containers loaded with marble stones.

From Sri Lanka, the containers are shipped to Chattogram port in Bangladesh.

The consignments are then sent to Dhaka by trucks with other goods.

In Bangladesh, the fake notes are stashed in "special chambers" at homes of syndicate members before smuggling those into India in small portions using land routes.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) officials involved in the investigation into fake currency smuggling yesterday



disclosed this to The Daily Star, a day after the arrest of the syndicate's two Bangladeshi members - Fatema Akter Opy and Sheikh Md Abu Taleb.

Police also recovered fake Indian rupees worth around Rs 7.30 crore from Fatema's home in the capital's Dakshinkhan.

A high official of DMP (Gulshan Division) said Fatema married Pakistan national Danesh over a decade ago.

Danesh was arrested in 2010 over his involvement in note forgery, the official told this newspaper yesterday.

Fatema was also arrested before in a note forgery case filed with Motijheel Police Station.

"After coming out of jail, Danesh suffered a heart attack and became bedridden. Fatema then took over the illegal business and started controlling the syndicate's Bangladesh operations," said the DMP official, requesting anonymity.

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ROAD SAFETY Quader draws flak in House

Students issue 48hr ultimatum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition MPs yesterday blasted Road, Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader for his failure to bring discipline on roads and for reducing the punishment for errant drivers by amending the Road Safety Bill.

They alleged Quader took the decision under the pressure of transport owners and workers.

"You have to make so many compromises when sitting in my chair," Quader said, while acknowledging that bringing discipline on roads and the transport sector is imperative.

In the face of the strong criticism of the MPs over the fatal road accidents, the minister said the drivers were not always

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THIRD-PHASE UP ELECTIONS

2 crore head to polls today

Many fearful of violence

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

About two crore people in 1,000 union parishads are expected to cast their votes in the elections to the lowest tier of local governments today amid heightened fears of violence.

This will be the third phase, in which the highest number of union parishads will go to polls.

At least 45 people were killed and several hundred injured, during and after the first two phases of the polls.

Nine were killed ahead of the third phase, and 30 in pre- and post-polls violence centring the second phase held on November 11.

Six people died in the first phase, held in two parts on June 21 and September 21, according to the media reports.

The situation remained tense in the unions ahead of the election due to clashes mainly between supporters of the Awami League and its rebel candidates. According to AL sources, around 1,070 party rebels are contesting the polls.

Elections to the chairman posts of 100 UPs will not be required as candidates have already been elected unopposed.

In the absence of the BNP, the contest would presumably be between the AL, its "rebel groups" and the Jatiya Party.

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Tigresses seal maiden WC berth

SPORTS REPORTER

A long wait for Bangladesh ended earlier than anticipated as the Tigresses earned entry to the 12th edition of the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup, to be held next year in New Zealand in March and April.

Nigar Sultana and her troops were already well on way to a maiden appearance in the World Cup after impressive wins against Pakistan and USA in the World Cup qualifiers in Zimbabwe.

However, the International Cricket Council (ICC) had no choice but to intervene and cancel the tournament after a member of the Sri Lankan support staff tested positive for Covid-19 yesterday amid the discovery of a new coronavirus variant in South Africa.

According to an ICC statement issued yesterday, all teams who were ranked 8th or above until September 30 will qualify directly for the upcoming World Cup.

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School and college students on Dhanmondi-27 write "no licence" on the bonnet of a car after finding the driver without a valid licence yesterday. Students demonstrating for safer roads have been stopping vehicles to check the registration and licence for the last few days.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

'Friendship' gave him steering wheel

Rab finds 'DNCC garbage truck driver' of three years not even its employee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Even though he was not appointed by Dhaka North City Corporation, Md Hanif alias Fatik, had been illegally driving the corporations' vehicles for around three years, taking advantage of "friendships" with DNCC staffers.

He was arrested in Chandpur by the the Rapid Action Battalion on Friday after Ahsan Kabir Khan, 48, was run over by his vehicle in the capital's Panthapath area on Thursday.

According to Rab, Fatik earned money by selling fuel allotted for the vehicles he drove.

Following the arrest, law enforcers yesterday said that Fatik was driving the compactor vehicle that hit Kabir, a pillion rider of a motorcycle.

Around eight years ago, Fatik used to work as the assistant of technician who repaired DNCC vehicles, said Khandaker Al Moin, director of Rab's legal and media wing.

In 2019, Fatik got his licence to drive light vehicles. He drove light vehicles for around two years and then started driving heavy vehicles since, while working as a mechanic, he established "good relations" with the staffers and drivers of the DNCC, who he would take the keys from to drive heavy DNCC vehicles, he said during a briefing at the Rab media centre in Karwan Bazar.

Fatik, however, did not disclose the names of those he maintained friendships with.

"We will check with the department concerned of the DNCC for names and then verify them."

During primary interrogation, Fatik told Rab he did not know who the designated driver of the vehicles was.

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