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'Another storm coming'

WHO warns of Omicron surge in Europe; China puts 13m residents in lockdown over Covid outbreak

AGENCIES

The World Health Organization's top official in Europe urged governments to prepare for a "significant surge" in coronavirus cases across the continent due to the Omicron variant, which is already dominant in several countries.

"We can see another storm coming," WHO Europe regional director Dr Hans Kluge said at a press conference in Vienna on Tuesday evening. "Within weeks, Omicron will dominate in more countries of the region, pushing already stretched health systems further to the brink."

Omicron has been detected in at least 38 of the WHO European region's 53 members, Kluge added, noting that it is already the dominant variant in the United Kingdom, Denmark and Portugal.

Last week, 27,000 people died from coronavirus in the region and an additional 2.6 million cases were reported, Kluge said. Although these cases include all variants, not just Omicron, he noted this figure is 40% higher than during the same period last year.

"The sheer volume of new Covid-19 infections could lead to more hospitalisations and widespread disruption to health systems and other critical services," he said.

Thus far, Kluge said 89% of those with confirmed Omicron infections in Europe reported symptoms common with other coronavirus variants, including cough, sore throat, fever. The variant has mostly been spread by young people in their 20s and 30s in the region, he added.

Although much remains unknown about Omicron, Kluge said it appears to be more infectious than previous

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BNP men, with fists in the air, take position during a clash with police, who obstructed the party's procession in Habiganj yesterday. The BNP had organised a protest rally demanding the release of its Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

'Hundred BNP men' hurt in clash with police

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

At least 100 leaders and activists of the BNP were injured in a clash with policemen in Habiganj town yesterday, claimed the party.

The BNP called for a procession demanding the release of the party Chairperson Khaleda Zia at Shayestanagar point in the town that was also attended by the central leaders.

According to locals, in the afternoon, the BNP men hurled brickbats aiming at police from the procession and police shot teargas and rubber bullets.

Police also clashed with the BNP men at different points of the town including Poil road, Chirakhana road, and Babystand yesterday.

The injured policemen and BNP activists were admitted to a local hospital.

In critical condition,

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UNSC adopts resolution to ease aid to Afghanistan

AFP, United Nations

The UN Security Council yesterday unanimously adopted a US-proposed resolution that facilitates humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, which is on the verge of economic collapse, while keeping funds out of Taliban hands.

The resolution states that "payment of funds, other financial assets or economic resources, and the provision of goods and services necessary to ensure the timely delivery of such assistance or to support such activities are permitted."

Such assistance supports "basic human needs in Afghanistan" and is "not a violation" of sanctions imposed on entities linked to the Taliban, it adds.

The international community has struggled over how to avert a humanitarian catastrophe amid economic meltdown in Afghanistan since the Taliban swept back to power in mid-August, prompting the United States to freeze \$9.5 billion in assets belonging to the Afghan central bank.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

Well-preserved dinosaur embryo found in China



AFP, Washington

Scientists on Tuesday announced the discovery of an exquisitely preserved dinosaur embryo from at least 66 million years ago that was preparing to hatch from its egg just like a chicken.

The fossil was discovered in Ganzhou, southern China and belonged to a toothless theropod dinosaur, or oviraptorosaur, which the researchers dubbed "Baby Yingliang."

"It is one of the best dinosaur embryos ever found in history," University of Birmingham researcher Fion Waisum Ma, who co-authored a paper in the journal iScience, told AFP. Ma and colleagues found Baby Yingliang's head lay below its body, with the feet on either side and back curled -- a posture that was previously unseen in dinosaurs, but similar to modern birds.

In birds, the behavior is controlled by the central nervous system and called "tucking." Chicks preparing to hatch tuck their head under their right wing in order to stabilise the head while they crack the shell with their beak.

Embryos that fail to tuck have a higher chance of death from an unsuccessful hatching.

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Bangladeshi killed in 'BSF shooting'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

A Bangladeshi national was allegedly shot dead by Border Security Forces (BSF) on Indian Territory along the Azmatpur border of Chapainawabganj's Shibganj upazila early yesterday.

The dead was identified as, Ibrahim Ali, 25, son of Abu Taher of Azmatpr-Dhulipara village.

Monirul Islam, a ward member of Shabbajpur union, and locals said Ibrahim was crossing the border through the area at midnight to collect smuggled goods. When he reached Indian territory around 2:00am, BSF men opened fire and killed him.

Ibrahim's cousin Shariful Islam said Ibrahim went to the border without informing his family. "In the morning, we came know that he died after BSF shot him."

Lt Col Amir Hossain Molla, commanding officer of Rohanpur-59 BGB Battalion in Chapainawabganj, said they got the news of a Bangladeshi being shot dead.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

6-DAY MALDIVES VISIT Red carpet rolled out for Hasina



Bss, Male

Maldives yesterday rolled out the red carpet to welcome Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina when she reached there on her maiden six-day bilateral visit at the invitation of the country's President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih. Maldivian state minister for foreign affairs received the PM after she landed around 3:00pm local time and a static guard of honour was given to her. Later, she was escorted in a ceremonial motorcade to where she would be staying. Hasina will be formally received by Maldivian President Solih today and a guard of honour and other ceremonies will be accorded to the Bangladesh's head of the government. Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, Health and Family Welfare Minister Zahid Maleque and Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Imran Ahmad are accompanying the prime minister. Four instruments, including two Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), are likely to be signed today. The four instruments are -- agreement on avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income; agreement on the transfer of prisoners; MoU in the areas of healthcare and medical science between Bangladesh and the Maldives (renewal); and MoU between Bangladesh and the Maldives on cooperation in the area of youth and sports development.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

'Don't go against boat, no one can save you'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Voters will have to face dire consequences if they do not cast their votes for boat. List is being prepared. No one of you will be spared after elections, a union-level Awami League leader in Kushtia warned.

"Votes will only be cast for boat," said Milon Mandal, president of Haripur union unit AL of Kushtia Sadar upazila, while addressing an election rally for party-nominated chairman candidate on Tuesday night.

In a video clip, AL chairman nominee for Haripur union elections Shampa Mahmud was seen holding the meeting with union AL leaders and activists. Milon was speaking there.

Milon said no one will dare to come to play with the boat, electoral symbol of the ruling AL. Any disrespect to the party will not be tolerated.

"I don't think it is right for you [other candidates] to race against the AL candidate. Haripur union is developed only by Hanif Bhai [AL Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif and local lawmaker]. What have you given that you take part in polls against the AL candidate? You don't have the power to give anything."

"We want to say that it is a matter of great fortune for those living in Haripur ... sleeping in peace ... despite your stance against the Awami League candidate. It is



Milon Mandal

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Myanmar rebel group calls for no-fly zone

REUTERS, Mae Sot

Myanmar's oldest rebel force wants international help to establish a "no-fly zone" near the Thai border, after warning there was a danger of clashes with the army resulting in civilians being targeted by air strikes.

There has been an escalation in fighting recently between the army and the Karen National Union (KNU), prompting thousands of people to seek refuge in Thailand.



PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 23

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:25 12:45 3:45 5:24 7:00
JAMAAT 6:00 1:15 4:00 5:27 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

3,000 granted Indian citizenship since 2018

They were non-Muslims from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, minister tells Rajya Sabha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Altogether 8,244 non-Muslim people from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan had applied for Indian citizenship in the last four years and 3,117 of them were granted the citizenship, India's Junior Minister for Home Nityanand Rai told the Rajya Sabha yesterday.

"The number of citizenship applications received from Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Christian minority groups from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan during the years of 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 is 8,244," he said in a written reply.

He said all foreign nationals in India are governed by the Foreigners Act, 1946, the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939, the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and the Citizenship Act, 1955.

Rai gave the figures on the last day of the winter session of parliament in response to Telangana Rashttra Samithi (TRS) lawmaker K Keshava Rao's question regarding the total number of citizenship applications

received from people belonging to minority groups -- Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Christian -- in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan between 2018 and 2021.

Replying to a separate question by lawmaker Abdul Wahab on the pending applicants for Indian citizenship, Rai said there were 161 applications pending from Bangladesh, 1,152 from Afghanistan, 428 from stateless people, 223 from Sri Lanka and the US, and 189 from Nepal till December 14 this year.

He also said 10 individuals from China had applied for Indian citizenship.

The Indian government in 2019 introduced in parliament the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to grant citizenship to persecuted minorities belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan and who entered India on or before December 31, 2014.

The CAA had sparked violent street protests in Assam, other north-eastern

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