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# Omicron may overwhelm healthcare

Warns WHO; China, Europe impose new Covid curbs

AFP, Berlin

The WHO yesterday warned that the Omicron coronavirus variant could lead to overwhelmed healthcare systems even though early studies suggest it leads to milder disease, as China and Germany brought back tough restrictions to stamp out new infection surges.

China put hundreds of thousands more people under lockdown, while infections hit new highs in multiple US states and European countries.

Covid-19 surges have wreaked havoc around the world, with many nations trying to strike a balance between economically punishing restrictions and controlling the spread of the virus.

The United States has halved the isolation period for asymptomatic cases to try and blunt the disruption, while France has ordered firms to have employees work from home at least three days a week.

Contact restrictions were in place in Germany for the second year in a row heading into the New Year, as Europe's biggest economy shuttered nightclubs and forced sports competitions behind closed doors.

Despite facing a much smaller outbreak compared with global virus hotspots, China has not relaxed its "zero Covid" strategy, imposing stay-at-home orders in many parts of the city of Yan'an.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3



A bus of Ena Paribahan breaks through the median, made to keep crashing vehicles on respective sides, and hits an oncoming microbus on the capital's Airport Road yesterday. There were no casualties reported.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## BUSINESS

### BB not to extend relaxed loan policy

The Bangladesh Bank yesterday decided not to extend the tenure of the current relaxed policy on loan classification despite pleas from the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI). The deadline expires on December 31. The central bank came up with the decision at a bankers' meeting at the BB headquarters. Recently, the FBCCI requested the central bank to extend the tenure of the policy to June next year.

STORY ON B1

## LAUNCH FIRE TRAGEDY

### BIWTA officials, vessel authorities negligent

Observes HC bench while hearing writs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority officials had negligence in examining the fitness of MV Abhijan-10, observed the High Court yesterday.

BIWTA cleared the vessel for operations that caught fire in Jhalakathi on December 23, leaving at least 44 people killed and around 100 others injured, the HC mentioned.

During the hearing of two separate writ petitions, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman told Deputy Attorney General Bepul Bagmar that officials of BIWTA and the launch management had negligence.

"You are saying that the government had no negligence. But, the BIWTA officials have given the clearance to operate the launch. Didn't the officials have any responsibility?" it asked.

"We have seen earlier that the Supreme Court Bar Association giving financial assistance from its fund to the victims of tragic incidents. Nowadays, we do not

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

## Post-polls violence claims 3 lives

STAR REPORT

At least three men got killed and many others were injured in post-polls violence in several districts over the last two days.

In Pabna, Shamim Hossain, 35, publicity affairs secretary of Hemayetpur Union Awami League, was shot dead last night over rivalry between AL chairman nominee Monjurul Islam Modhu and Tarikul Islam Nilu who ran as an independent after failing to get the ruling party's nomination.

None of them won in the election. Yesterday evening, Modhu was talking to his supporter Shamim in Nazirpur Bazar area when several gunmen opened fire on them.

"Shamim came forward to protect me and got shot. The attackers fled the scene quickly. Shamim died on the way to a hospital," said Modhu.

The AL candidate alleged that the attackers were Nilu's supporters. Nilu could not be reached over the phone for comment.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Rokonzaman said the matter was being investigated.

In Cumilla, Farhad Hossain, 20, who was a supporter of the Awami League chairman nominee, was stabbed dead by supporters of an independent in Chaudagram on Monday evening.

The AL nominee was Syed Ahmed Khokon. He lost to Mostafa Kamal who ran as an independent after the AL didn't pick him.

Khokon's supporter Farhad was attacked by Kamal's supporters in Doshbaha area, locals said.

He was taken to Feni General Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead around 9:00pm.

Contacted, Mostafa said none of his supporters were involved in the incident.

Suvoranjana Chakma, officer-in-charge of Chaudagram Police Station, said police were investigating the incident.

In Gaibandha, Shaharul Islam, 40, who lost the bid to be a general

SEE PAGE 5 COL 3

## OMICRON VARIANT

### Country logs 4 new cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four new Omicron Covid cases were reported in the country yesterday.

With this, the total number of confirmed Omicron variant cases in Bangladesh went up to seven, according to the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) -- a Germany based web database.

The new patients infected with Omicron include a 33-year-old woman from the capital's Basabo area. The three others, including two women aged 30 and 47, and a man aged 84, are from Banani.

The GISAID said International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (icddr,b) collected the nasopharyngeal swab from the 33-year-old while the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research collected samples

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6

## 130-year-old time capsule found in US



AFP, Washington

Workers dismantling the pedestal of a statue of a Confederate general discovered a copper box on Monday believed to have been buried 130 years ago, the second apparent time capsule unearthed at the site.

"They found it!" tweeted Virginia Governor Ralph Northam along with pictures of the box. "This is likely the time capsule everyone was looking for."

According to an 1887 newspaper article, a

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

## Limited-scale booster dose drive begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health directorate yesterday launched the campaign for administering Covid-19 vaccine booster doses "on a limited scale" in Dhaka.

Around 120 people were jabbed on the first day in Kurmitola General Hospital from 10:00am to 3:00pm.

Other hospitals where booster shots were given are Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Dhaka Medical College and Hospital, Shaikh Hasina National Institute

SEE PAGE 5 COL 6



### PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 29

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha  
AZAN 5:30 12:45 4:00 5:27 7:00  
JAMAAT 6:05 1:15 4:15 5:30 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## TOURIST RAPE

### Another key accused arrested

Two women raped in 2 districts

STAR REPORT

One of the main accused in the Cox's Bazar tourist rape case was arrested yesterday, while two women, including a voter, were raped in two separate incidents in Noakhali and Chudanga.

The arrestee, Israfil Huda Joy, was arrested from Chakaria Bus Stand in Chakaria upazila of Cox's Bazar. Six of the seven accused have so far been arrested, including three named in the First Information Report, in the Cox's Bazar gangrape incident.

Mohammad Muslim, additional deputy inspector general of Chattogram Tourist Police, which is investigating the case, in a press conference yesterday said they were conducting the probe with utmost importance and will seek remand for Israfil Huda Joy in court today.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



Two men are repairing a billboard at Chairmanbari in the capital's Banani area yesterday. They neither have any safety gears nor any safety harness. A little slip and a tumble from that height could be fatal.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## Indonesia rejects Rohingyas

Sends stricken boat with 120 on board to Malaysia

AFP, Bireun

Dozens of Rohingya refugees intercepted after their boat ran into trouble off the coast of Indonesia's Aceh province were being sent into Malaysian waters, authorities said yesterday.

At least 100 mostly women and children aboard a wooden vessel said to be taking on water were denied refuge in Indonesia and instead pushed into the neighbouring Southeast Asian country.

Despite calls from non-governmental organisations and the United Nations agency for refugees, Indonesian authorities are attempting to send the group back after providing supplies, clothes and fuel, as well as a technician to fix their damaged boat.

"We hope (the supplies) can help the Rohingyas to continue their journey to Malaysia as they planned and intended," Winardy, an Aceh police spokesman who, like many Indonesians, goes by only one name, told AFP.

"We will monitor them until they reach their destination," he said.

The wooden boat was first sighted two days ago, stranded about 70 nautical miles off the Indonesian coast, according to a local navy commander.

Indonesian authorities have not pushed back Rohingya refugees as strongly as Malaysia or Thailand, instead reluctantly accepting them upon arrival by sea.

But Amnesty International and the UNHCR have called on the government to let the stranded group of Rohingya refugees land.

"This is about life and death. There are women and

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1