

EVERYONE CAN MAKE ROOFS, BUT  
**THERE'S ONLY 1 EXPERT**  
SO CHOOSE BSRM TO BUILD SAFER HOMES

COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT

**BSRM**  
building a safer nation

**MATARBARI POWER PLANT**  
Cox's Bazar

PROUD CONSTRUCTION PARTNER

**SHAH CEMENT**

# WHO warns of 'very high' Omicron risk

Covid cases surge 11pc in a week globally

AGENCIES

Omicron still poses "very high" risk and could overwhelm healthcare systems, the WHO warned yesterday, as the highly transmissible coronavirus variant fuelled record outbreaks in many countries.

Almost two years after China first reported a cluster of "viral pneumonia" cases in the city of Wuhan, the regularly mutating coronavirus is wreaking havoc in many parts of the world, forcing governments to rethink quarantine and test rules.

Case numbers have shot up 11 percent globally in the last week, forcing governments from China to Germany and France to find a difficult balance between anti-virus restrictions and the need to keep economies and societies open.

The Netherlands and Switzerland said Omicron had become the dominant strain in their countries, and while some studies suggested it causes milder Covid-19, the World Health Organization urged caution.

"The overall risk related to the new variant of concern Omicron remains very high," the UN health agency said in its Covid-19 weekly epidemiological update.

"Consistent evidence shows that the Omicron variant has a growth advantage over the Delta variant with a doubling time of two to three days."

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2



Hasan Ali attaching an earthen pot to a palm tree to extract date juice in Khulna's Batiaghata upazila yesterday. The process requires one to shave the bark and some pith of tree trunks very delicately to make the juice or sap flow. Hasan has been working for date juice extraction over 30 years and earns Tk 70-80,000 per year by extracting juice from almost 400 trees.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## TREATMENT ABROAD Khaleda needs to reapply

Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

If BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia refuses her conditional bail and returns to jail, she would be able to reapply seeking permission for going abroad, said Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday.

"There is no provision in the Criminal Procedure Code that we can make arrangements for her to go abroad based on the previous application," the minister said.

"Section 401 of the Criminal Procedure Code does not provide the scope to reconsider an application once disposed of," he added.

The minister made the statements while addressing a programme at Shegunbagicha in the capital.

He said the Evercare Hospital was treating Khaleda with the latest technologies. "As far as I know, her condition has improved a bit."

He said, "She is getting the best possible treatment there. The government has no interference in it. They are receiving treatment as they wish."

Meanwhile, about the formation of the Election Commission, he said Article 118 of the constitution states that the president would form the EC.

He said an act to form the EC is needed and the law will be enacted, but due to the Covid-19 situation, all parliament members are not called in parliament.

"I was told to issue an ordinance. It would not be right to issue an ordinance in this regard, bypassing the parliament," the law minister said.

## Girl confined, raped for a month

Another kills herself after public harassment

STAR REPORT

A case was filed on Tuesday over a teenager being held hostage and raped for a month in Barguna, while an eighth grader died by suicide on Saturday after being publicly harassed by a group of youths in Kishoreganj.

In Barguna's Amtali upazila, AKM Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Amtali Police Station, said the case was filed under the Women and Child Repression Prevention Act.

Police have already launched an operation to nab the five accused -- Mahbubur Rahman, 65, a resident of Amtali, his wife Shefali Begum, 58, their son Maruf Hossain Jisan, 25, Zahidul Islam Shaon, 35, and his wife Mahmuda Akter Nipa, 30.

According to the case statement, Jisan had been making advances on the victim for long and trying to force her into a relationship with him.

As she refused, Jisan and his accomplices on November 21 used

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

## SECONDARY, HIGHER EDUCATION DIRECTORATE 184 allegations, action zero

ACC now summons director general

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission has received over 100 allegations of anomalies, mostly related to recruitment and admission, against officials of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education in the last three years.

The ACC has dealt with 184 such allegations and asked the DSHE to carry out investigations into those. The ACC also urged the DSHE to take departmental actions if anyone was found guilty.

Yesterday, the anti-graft watchdog summoned the DSHE director general as the latter organisation did not comply with the directives.

A six-member team of DSHE, led by its Director General Syed Md Golam Faruk, met the ACC at the latter's headquarters in the capital's Shegunbagicha area yesterday.

In the meeting, the ACC asked the DSHE to submit the updated reports on the 184 allegations by February 2022.

Talking to The Daily Star, ACC Secretary Anwar Hossain Howlader said not all the 184 allegations were beyond the jurisdictions of the ACC.

"Many allegations came against many officers. Most of these are related to the appointment of teachers and admission charges," he said.

After primary enquiries, the ACC decided not to pursue some cases and ordered the DSHE to take necessary measures into these matters and apprise the anti-graft watchdog from time to time.

The commission also asked the DSHE to submit their findings in some other cases.

"We have given the directives at different times but they did not give any feedback. That is why the commission gave the directives again at the

SEE PAGE 5 COL 4

## MV ABHIJAN-10 FIRE Locals blame staffers for loss of lives

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Locals, who rescued many passengers after MV Abhijan-10 caught fire early on December 24 in Jhalakathi, said most of the lives perished in the tragedy could have been saved had the launch staffers acted responsibly.

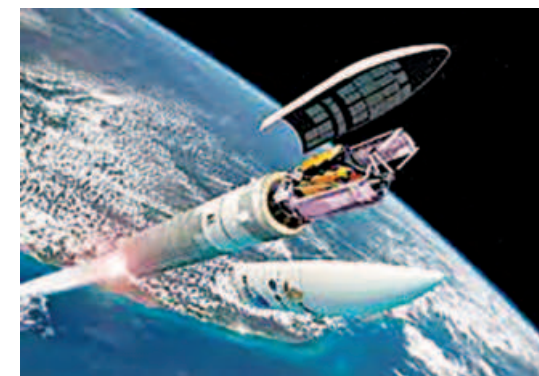
They said after the fire broke out, the driver anchored the launch in Char Bhatarakanda around 2:45am, but the staffers did not tie it with any trees although there were plenty of them within 10 yards. They abandoned the vessel right there, leaving all passengers in danger.

Due to currents, the launch then drifted back into the river and the fire spread.

It happened so fast that only a few passengers could get down or swim ashore, locals of the char told The Daily Star yesterday.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1

## New space telescope gets surprise breakthrough



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Nasa's new James Webb Space Telescope, the most powerful in the world, has seen its first major breakthrough, with the agency announcing it will last "significantly" longer than previously expected.

The provision of the launch last week, and its flight since, mean that it will have enough fuel to "allow support of science operations for significantly more than a 10-year science lifetime", Nasa said. The minimum timeline for the mission is five years.

The science work of the space telescope is

SEE PAGE 5 COL 1



PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 30

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



A signboard at Cox's Bazar Laboni Point demarcates a "reserved area for women and children", inaugurated by the district administration yesterday. The measure drew criticism from certain quarters and later at night it was cancelled. On December 22, a woman visiting the town with her husband and small child was raped after being abducted by a gang, raising serious security concerns for tourists.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAT

## No turning back now

AFP, Paris

Across a quarter century of UN climate conferences tasked with saving humanity from itself, one was deemed a chaotic failure (Copenhagen/2009), another a stunning success (Paris/2015), and the rest landed somewhere in between.

This year's COP26 inspired all these reactions at once.

Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, leading a 100,000-strong march through the streets of Glasgow, dismissed the two-week meet as a "greenwashing festival".

But dedicated experts in the negotiating arena hailed solid -- even historic -- advances in beating back the existential threat of global warming.

More often than not, observers vacillated between approval and criticism, hope and despair.

"The Glasgow Climate Pact is more than we expected, but less than we hoped for," Dann Mitchell, head of climate hazards at Britain's Met Office, said with haiku-like economy.

Gauging the efficacy of measures announced at the COP26 summit largely depends on the yardstick used to measure them.

Compared to what came before, the first-ever call by 196 countries to draw down coal-fired power, or a promise to double financial aid each year -- to roughly \$40 billion -- so poor nations can brace for climate impacts, are giant steps forward.

Likewise a provision obliging countries to consider setting more ambitious targets for reducing carbon pollution every year rather than once every five years.

But all these hard-won gains at COP26 shrivel in significance when stacked up against hard science.

An unbroken cascade in 2021 of deadly floods, heatwaves and wildfires across four continents, combined with ever more detailed projections,

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

