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**SEEKING WARMTH ...** A young flower seller dozes off at the foot of the Raju Bhashkarja (memorial sculpture) in Dhaka University's TSC area while trying to soak in some sun on a chilly morning. Like him, children who live and work on the streets suffer immensely during the colder months due to a lack of warm clothes. The photo was taken yesterday around 10:00am.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Man dies in Rab custody

### Family claims he was 'tortured' to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, GAZIPUR

The family of a man who died after being detained by Rab in Gazipur's Tongi on Saturday has alleged that the law enforcement officials tortured him to death.

Rab denied the claim, saying the man was a drug dealer and died of cardiac arrest following a scuffle with the force's members after they had taken him with them to search his home for yaba tablets.

They detained him after recovering 600 yaba tablets from him earlier the same day, Rab officials claimed, adding that he died after they took him to Tongi's Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master General Hospital.

Police filed an unnatural death case in this connection with Tongi East Police Station yesterday.

The deceased is Asad Sheikh, 40, a resident of Ershadnagar area in Tongi.

The deceased's son, Hafizul Islam, said, "My father was a motor mechanic. He was not involved in drugs trade."

Hafizul, 19, said a 10-member Rab team raided their home around 1:00pm on Saturday saying Asad was involved in drugs trade.

"At that time, the Rab members physically tortured my father. As a result, my father became sick. Later, around 5:00pm, he was taken to the hospital where he died around 5:20pm," alleged Hafizul.

Hafizul made the allegations while talking to journalists at the family's home in Ershadnagar area yesterday.

Contacted, Rab-1 Commanding Officer Abdullah Al Momen said Asad was involved in drug peddling.

"Firstly, Rab recovered 600 pieces of yaba tablets from Asad. Then, the Rab team went to his home to check whether there were more yaba tablets there," said the Rab official.

"After reaching his home in the afternoon on Saturday, Asad started creating a nuisance and he had an altercation with Rab members. Following the scuffle both Asad and Rab members sustained minor injuries," he said.

"At one stage, Asad became sick and Rab officials took him to the hospital, where he died due to cardiac failure," said the commanding officer.

Contacted, both Gazipur Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Itutmish and Tongi East Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Zaved Masud said an investigation was going on to see whether Asad was accused in any drug case.

The investigation officer of the unnatural death case, Sheikh Sazal, also a sub-inspector of the same police station, prepared the inquest report.

Contacted, he said, "No severe injury mark was found on his body. There were some minor wounds and some black spots on the body, but it is not certain whether those were caused by torture. Details will be mentioned in the inquest report."

The deceased is from Munshiganj and used to live in a rented house at Tongi's Ershadnagar area, said the police officer.

Contacted, Tongi's Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master General Hospital's doctor Bodrunnessa told journalists that it was initially assumed that Asad Sheikh might have died due to cardiac failure.

## Covid cases jump 60pc in a week

'Omicron infecting more women than men globally'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The daily coronavirus infections have increased by 60 percent this week compared to the last.

Robed Amin, spokesperson for the Directorate General of Health Services, yesterday made the comment at a virtual press briefing.

He urged everyone to take coronavirus vaccines to keep themselves protected from the virus.

Around 82 percent of the 91 people who died of coronavirus infections in December were not vaccinated, mentioned a DGHS press release.

It is believed that the booster doses are effective against the Omicron variant and the doses increase the level of antibody to fight the virus, Robed Amin said.

Meanwhile, the number of new cases and positivity rate increased in the 24 hours ending at 8:00am yesterday.

The DGHS reported 557 cases, up from 370 the previous day.

Against 19,130 tests, the positivity rate was 2.9 percent, up from 2.4 percent the previous day.

On the other hand, the number of deaths due

to Covid-19 has decreased. The DGHS reported one death whereas it was four the previous day.

The country registered 28,077 deaths so far. At the briefing, Robed Amin yesterday said, "Face masks should be tight-fitting."

He urged everyone to properly wear medical-grade face masks.

Referring to the transmission trend from around the world, including South Africa, he said that the Omicron variant was infecting women more than men.

First reported in South Africa on November 18 last year, the fifth variant of coronavirus drove Covid-19 cases to record highs in Europe and the United States, with the daily global case count surpassing a million for the first time at the end of December.

The South African government, meanwhile, said on Thursday that data from its health department suggested that the country had passed its Omicron peak without a major spike in deaths, offering cautious hope to other countries grappling with the variant.

CURBS RETURN IN WEST BENGAL - PAGE 2

## EC FORMATION

# Call special JS session to enact law

## Gonoforum urges the president; Bikolpodhara names 3 for search body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

During a dialogue with President Abdul Hamid yesterday, Bikolpodhara Bangladesh proposed three names for the search committee to be constituted for the formation of a new election commission.

The search committee is expected to recommend names of candidates for the posts of chief election commissioner and other commissioners to the president.

Taking part in the discussion at the Bangabhaban, Gonoforum urged the president to call a special session in parliament to enact a law on the EC formation.

Mahi B Chowdhury, presidium member and spokesperson for Bikolpodhara, said they proposed names of Rokia Afzal Rahman, former adviser to a caretaker government, M Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, a former cabinet secretary, and Muhammed Zafar Iqbal, an educationist, for the search committee.

"We urged the president to take necessary steps to frame a law to constitute the Election Commission," he said.

But if it is not possible to enact the law, due to time constraints, all registered political parties should propose names for the appointment of the CEC and other commissioners to the search committee, he said.

A seven-member delegation, led by Maj (ret'd) MA Mannan, secretary general of Bikolpodhara, and Mahi B Chowdhury, took part in the dialogue.

In its written proposal, Gonoforum urged the president to summon a special session to enact a law on the EC formation. Party's Executive President Mokabbir Khan said people were disappointed with the way ECs were formed in the past.

"The commission failed to meet people's expectations as it was formed without enacting the law," he said.

He said his party's top leader Dr Kamal Hossain could not join the dialogue as he was ill, but Dr Kamal asked the Gonoforum committees to decide if they should join the dialogue with the president.

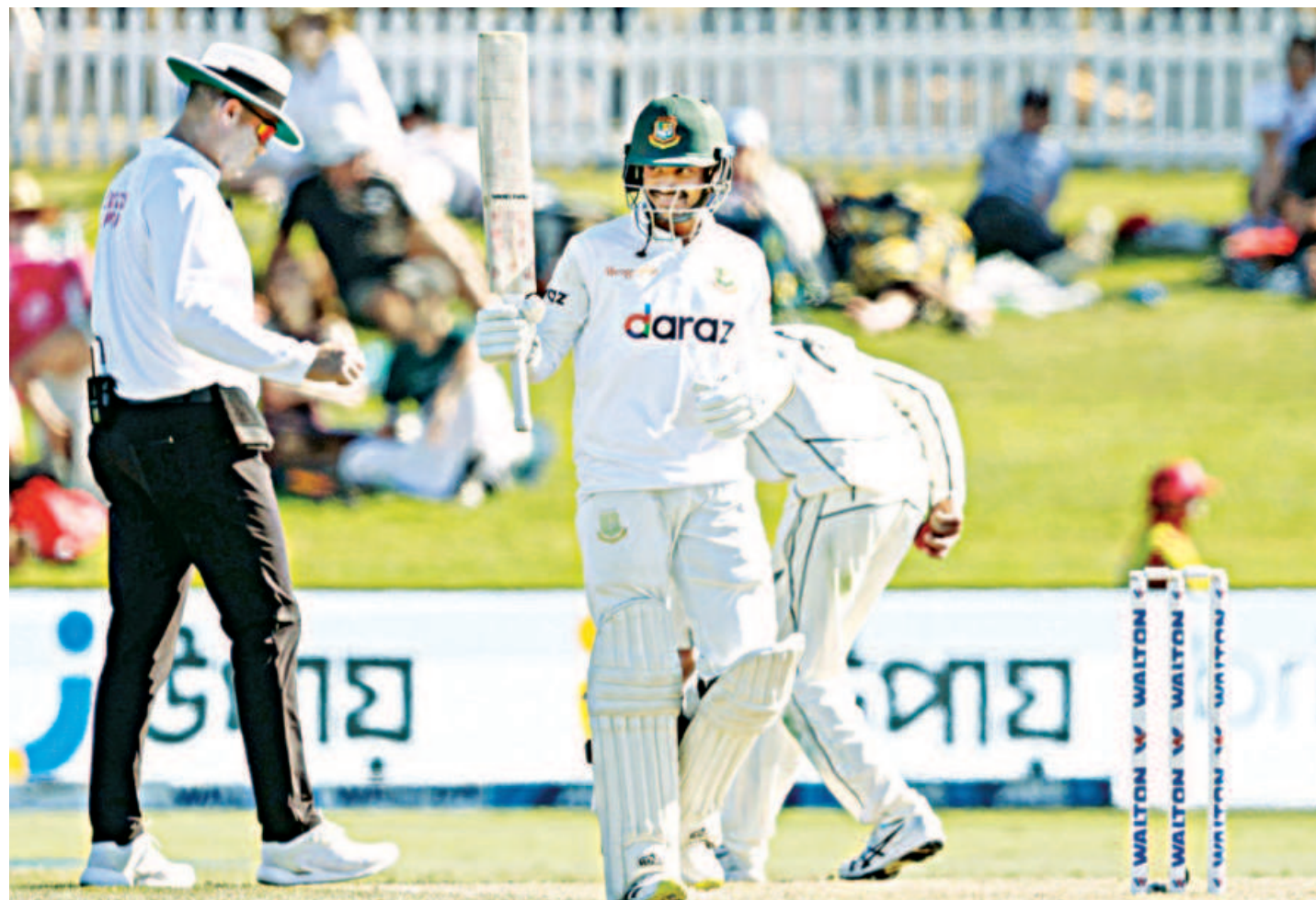
An eight-member delegation, led by Mokabbir, joined the hour-long dialogue.

The president started holding the dialogues with registered political parties late last month for the formation of the next EC as the current one's tenure expires on February 14.

So far, 10 political parties have joined the dialogue. Four political parties, including the BNP, are not taking part in the talks.

**"The commission failed to meet people's expectations as it was formed without enacting the law."**

Mokabbir Khan  
Gonoforum



**Bangladesh opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy raises his bat after reaching his half century on the second day of the first Test against New Zealand at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui on Sunday. The right-hander remained unbeaten on 70 as Bangladesh reached 175 for two at stumps.**

PHOTO: AFP



## Messi tests positive for Covid-19

AFP, PARIS

Lionel Messi has tested positive for Covid-19 and has entered self-isolation, his club Paris Saint-Germain announced on Sunday.

The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner was one of four PSG players to test positive for the virus ahead of a French Cup match against Vannes.

Messi will miss Monday's cup tie and will likely also be sidelined for PSG's first Ligue 1 match since the winter break, at Lyon next Sunday.

The other players to test positive were full-back Juan Bernat, back-up goalkeeper Sergio Rico and teenage midfielder Nathan Bitumazala.

They are in isolation.