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A man being helped up by a bus conductor after he tumbled down while trying to get off the vehicle on Hanif flyover's Gulistan exit ramp yesterday. While he narrowly escaped a major accident, two pedestrians were crushed under a Meghla Transport minibus in front of Toll Plaza on the same flyover just hours before and died on the spot. While accidents have become rampant there, the authorities concerned have not yet taken any measures to curb them.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Tigers eye rare feat

Face NZ in 2nd Test

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With a rare feat in sight, Bangladesh are taking on hosts New Zealand in the second Test at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch today.

Thanks to an emphatic eight-wicket victory in the first Test at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui, Bangladesh now lead the two-match series 1-0 and are eyeing for what any Bangladeshi sides have never done before -- a series win away to New Zealand, which in fact, is considered a rare feat for any side in cricket.

If Mominul Haque and Co go on to win or even draw this match, Bangladesh will not only have registered their first-ever Test series victory over New Zealand, the current holders of the World Test Championship (WTC) title, but will also be the first Asian country in 11 years to beat New Zealand in a Test series on Kiwi soil.

It will also be the first time since 2017 that New Zealand would be surrendering a Test series at home.

After a dominant showing in the first Test, the focus will once again be on Bangladesh's pace trio -- Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam and Ebadot Hossain -- on what is expected to be a grassy-top at the Hagley Oval.

New Zealand, aside from being desperate to level the series that is part of the latest WTC cycle, will also play with an additional incentive of providing a victorious farewell to senior batsman Ross Taylor in his final Test before international retirement.

## 6 held over gang rape of 2 Garo schoolgirls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, M Singh

Law enforcers yesterday arrested six people, including the prime accused, over the gang rape of two Garo schoolgirls in Mymensingh's Haluaghat upazila 11 days ago.

Shahidul Islam, inspector of Detective Branch of Mymensingh police, said they picked up five from different areas in the morning.

Three of them -- Sharif, Mizan and Rokon -- were arrested in Gazipur's Sreepur upazila, while Mia Hossain and Abdul Hamid in Mymensingh's Tarakanda and Haluaghat upazilas.

Rapid Action Battalion arrested Solaiman Hossain Riad, 22, the prime accused in a case filed over the incident, from Mymensingh's Gafargaon upazila early yesterday.

The two girls, both students of class 8 and aged about 14 years, were gang-raped by several youths beside a road in Haluaghat upazila early on December 28 when they were returning to their village home from a wedding party in an adjacent village, said police.

Three days later, one of the victims' fathers filed the case with Haluaghat Police Station, accusing 10 youths.

Briefing the media in the capital yesterday, Rab Director (legal and media wing) Khandaker Al Moin said Riad admitted that all the accused were present at the wedding party and they followed the victims on their way home.

Riad told Rab that six of the accused raped the girls while the four others stood guard, he said.

The prime accused, who led a gang of 10 to 13 youths, used to harass and abuse girls sexually, the Rab official said.

## Omicron keeps breaking records

World passes 300m Covid-19 cases; deaths drop despite 34 countries see record cases



A girl gives a thumb-up as she receives her first Covid shot at a hospital in Panama City yesterday.

AFP, Paris

The total number of Covid-19 cases registered worldwide passed 300 million on Friday, with the Omicron variant's rapid spread setting new infection records in dozens of countries over the last week.

In the past seven days, 34 countries have recorded their highest number of weekly cases since the start of the pandemic, including 18 nations in Europe and seven in Africa, according to an AFP count based on official figures.

While far more contagious than previous coronavirus variants, Omicron appears to cause less severe illness than its predecessors.

An average of 2,106,118 new daily infections were reported over the seven-day period, shortly after the one million case threshold was passed in the week of December 23-29, 2021, AFP data showed.

New global case numbers have soared by 270 percent since the highly contagious Omicron variant was discovered in South Africa in late November.

But Covid-related deaths were at their lowest level since October 2020, with an average of 6,237 per day recorded in the period between January 1 and 7, a decline of three percent.

France's public health authority said Friday that the risk of hospitalisation was about 70 percent lower for Omicron, citing data from the US, the UK, Canada and Israel.

However with a global average of two million new cases being detected daily, experts warn the sheer numbers threaten to overwhelm health systems.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said that Omicron should not be categorised as mild, as it "is hospitalising people and it is killing people".

"In fact, the tsunami of cases is so huge and quick, that it is overwhelming health systems around the world."

Omicron's dizzying spread since being detected six weeks ago has prompted many nations to push harder for more vaccinations and some to clamp down with restrictions.

Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Friday that access to the country's bars and restaurants will be limited to those who are fully vaccinated or have recovered from the virus and can also provide a negative test result.

NCC POLLS

## Osman's rallying support for Taimur

Alleges Ivy; Taimur claims people of all stripes supporting him

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA and SANAD SAHA

With just one week left for the Narayanganj City Corporation election, the political equations for the two major mayor contenders remain unclear.

AL nominated candidate Selina Hayat Ivy claimed grassroots party leaders and activists are with her, while independent candidate Taimur Alam Khandakar said people from all the political parties have been extending their support to him.

Nur Uddin, president of Amra Narayanganjbashi, a non-political and social organisation, however, said the political calculation is still a little complicated.

"A section of Awami League leaders is yet to join the campaign for Ivy. On the other hand, we saw many Selim Osman followers in support of Taimur on Friday. So, it will take a few more days to get a clearer picture of the equation."

Several locals and political party sources said both the candidates are finalising their election strategies ahead of the January 16 city polls, where five lakh voters are expected to choose their mayor for the next five years.

Ivy yesterday alleged that her main contender Taimur is "a candidate of Shamim and Selim Osman".

"He [Taimur] is neither a BNP nor an independent candidate. He is a candidate of the Osman family. On Friday, you [people] saw four Union Parishad members -- Selim's followers -- in Taimur's campaign. The rumour that the Osman family is backing Taimur has been proved true."

Taimur, however, said he is "the candidate of the people" of Narayanganj as he is contesting independently.

"I am contesting the election and not relying on any individual or quarter. I am a candidate of the

common people," said Taimur, who was recently removed from BNP as an adviser to the party chief after he violated the party's decision to boycott the city polls.

Earlier, he was removed as Narayanganj BNP convener.

Meanwhile, some local Jatiya Party leaders, who have urged their party members not to boycott the polls, have already joined Taimur's campaign.

However, the party is yet to officially extend support to any candidate.

Akram Ali, Narayanganj JP's member secretary, said none of the major contenders sought JP's support and neither is the party supporting anyone officially.

About JP activists and leaders joining Taimur's campaign, he said, "Any individual can work for anyone [candidate]. It is their personal choice. But the party has not made any official decision."

Since Ivy began her campaign,

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The charred remains of at least 70 shops in Kaptan Bazar in the capital's Gulistan after a fire broke out and killed at least one person early yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## One killed in Kaptan Bazar fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A youth was killed when a fire swept through a part of Kaptan Bazar in the capital's Gulistan early yesterday.

The blaze also burnt alive about 10,000 chickens, said traders.

The youth was identified as Md Yasin, 21, salesman of a shop.

Shahjahan Sikder, deputy assistant director (media cell) at the Fire Service and Civil Defense headquarters, said the fire started from a shop at Kaptan Bazar around 4:45am.

Firefighters with some 12 fire engines fought the blaze. They managed to bring the fire under control around 6:00am. It took them another two hours to put out the flames that burnt at least 70 shops.