

## Qawwali event at DU foiled BCL activists behind it, allege organisers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, DU

A Qawwali performance at TSC on Dhaka University campus yesterday was foiled allegedly by Bangladesh Chhatra League activists.

A group of BCL men vandalised the stage, chairs and beat up the programme organisers and some students, said witnesses.

They also barred journalists from taking footage of the incident with their mobile phones.

Seeking anonymity, a DU student said, “The programme was scheduled to start at 6:00pm today. But a group of Chhatra League activists earlier asked the organisers to stop it.”

The organisers alleged that the attack was carried

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## ORGAN TRADE

## Nine held in Joypurhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, DINAJPUR

Nine members of an organ trafficking gang were sent to jail by a court in Joypurhat yesterday following their arrest by Rab from the district’s Kalai upazila on Tuesday night, said law enforcement officials.

Rab officials in Joypurhat confirmed the arrests at a press conference yesterday and sources at the Kalai Police Station said the nine were sent to jail in the afternoon yesterday after they were produced before a Joypurhat court.

Kalai upazila is the largest source of kidney for acute patients who need the organ for transplant, Lt Col Ziaur Rahman of Joypurhat Rab camp said at the press conference.

The arrestees are Khaza Momen Uddin, 44, Azadul Islam, 37, Forkan Ali, 45, Afzar Uddin, 56, Nurul Islam, 50, Babul Fakir, 52, Sobhan Mondal, 52,

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A view of a damaged stage at Dhaka University’s TSC where a Qawwali programme was taking place yesterday. Witnesses and organisers of the event said Bangladesh Chhatra League activists assaulted students, organisers and also vandalised the stage and chairs.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

# Omicron pushing Covid out of pandemic phase

Say experts; Germany, Austria set new daily case records

## AGENCIES

The spread of the Omicron variant is pushing Covid towards being an endemic disease that humanity can live with, although it remains a pandemic for now, the EU’s drug watchdog said.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) also expressed doubts about giving a fourth vaccine shot to the general population, saying repeated boosters were not a “sustainable” strategy.

“Nobody knows exactly when we will be at the end of the tunnel but we will be there,” Marco Cavaleri, head of vaccine strategy at the Amsterdam-based regulator, told journalists on Tuesday evening.

“With the increase of immunity in population – and with Omicron, there will be a lot of natural immunity taking place on top of vaccination – we will be fast moving towards a scenario that will be closer to endemicity,” he added.

But he stressed that “we should not forget we are still in a pandemic”, noting the huge burden on healthcare from the surge in Omicron.

“If we have a strategy in which we give

boosters every four months, we will end up potentially having problems with immune response,” Cavaleri said. “And secondly of course there is the risk of fatigue in the population with continuous administration of boosters.”

**“Omicron, with its extraordinary, unprecedented degree of transmissibility, will ultimately find just about everybody. There’s no way we’re going to eradicate this.”**

Anthony Fauci top US infectious disease official

Countries should instead start thinking about spacing out boosters at longer intervals, Cavaleri said.

Top US scientist Anthony Fauci said on Tuesday the United States is approaching the “threshold” of transitioning to living

with the coronavirus as a manageable disease, despite soaring cases and record-high hospitalisations, reports AFP.

Meanwhile, Germany has reported more than 80,000 new daily Covid-19 infections, marking a new daily record.

Austria’s daily new infections have risen to a new record of 18,427, newspaper Kronen Zeitung reported yesterday as cases have been surging because of the spread of the Omicron variant.

India reported 194,720 new cases yesterday, the most since late May, health ministry data showed.

Saudi Arabia has registered its highest daily number of new infections so far, health ministry data showed, breaking through 5,000 cases yesterday.

President Vladimir Putin said yesterday Russia had two weeks to prepare for a fresh wave of coronavirus infections driven by the Omicron variant after the WHO warned of a surge in Europe.

Indonesia opened its coronavirus booster campaign to the public as the country records rising infections driven by the Omicron variant.

The free shots will be given to the elderly and at-risk residents as a priority, but will be available to everyone who received their second dose six months prior, President Joko Widodo said on Tuesday after announcing the decision.



## 16 burnt to death in South Africa mini-bus crash

AFP, JOHANNESBURG

Sixteen people were burnt to death on Tuesday when a minibus taxi and an SUV collided on a highway in South Africa’s northeastern Limpopo province, a local official said. The SUV driver lost control after a tyre burst and collided head-on with a 22-seater Mercedes-Benz bus, provincial transport ministry spokesman Mike Maringa told AFP yesterday.

## Assign staff

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Bridge over the Chengri river in Rangamati’s Naniarchar.

The PM asked the education ministry to take initiatives for directing every educational institution up to higher secondary level to keep its staff on adjacent road points to help students and prevent the loss of lives to accidents.

Because, she said, students are reluctant about paying heed to the instructions of others in many cases. “If there’s anyone from the school authorities, they’ll follow his or her instructions,” she said, adding that every school will take the initiative on their own.

Hasina asked the students to follow traffic rules during their movement on roads. “In every school and college, students should be taught about traffic rules from their very childhood. Every school, college and university will have to take this step.”

She asked people not to attack car drivers soon after any accident. It might lead to further accidents when the driver would try to escape the attack.

“There’s a tendency to do that in our country. If

any accident takes place, all start beating the driver and, in some cases, drivers are killed in such mob attacks,” she said, adding that it needs to be considered and found out the reasons behind an accident.

Pointing at the pedestrians, the PM said everyone needs to have knowledge about traffic rules and follow those.

On August 12, 2018, Hasina laid the foundation of the underpass after Diya Khanam Mim and Abdul Karim Rajib, first-year students of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College, were killed as a bus ploughed into some students in front of Kurmitola General Hospital in the capital on July 29.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader was present at the virtual event conducted by PM’s Principal Secretary Ahmad Kaikaus.

Chief of Army Staff SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, Secretary of Road Transport and Highways Division Nazrul Islam and Engineer in Chief of Bangladesh Army Major General Ibne Fazal Shayekhuzzaman spoke on the occasion.

The projects were implemented by the army.

## A massive surge round the corner

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He said the transmission has been rising “progressively” since the beginning of this month because of the Omicron variant. “This is alarming for us.”

With three new cases reported yesterday, 33 Omicron cases have so far been confirmed in the country. The first two cases were reported on December 9.

First reported in South Africa, the variant can transmit 70 times faster than the original novel coronavirus that emerged in China’s Wuhan in December 2019, studies show.

DGHS data shows the

Covid transmission has gone up eight times since January 1.

A total of 4,558 cases were detected last month, whereas 15,766 cases have already been confirmed so far this month.

Most of the fresh cases reported yesterday were detected in Dhaka.

Referring to the latest DGHS weekly analysis as of Sunday, Robed said Dhaka and Rangamati were being considered “red zones” with positivity rates higher than 10 percent each.

Rajshahi, Natore, Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Jashore and Dinajpur have been labelled “yellow zones”,

with transmission rates between 5 and 10 percent, he said.

Speaking at the event yesterday, the health minister said the government would step in to curb the Covid infection.

“Anyone outside home without a mask will be fined from tomorrow [today].”

He also said no public event would be allowed from today.

Asked how they would enforce the Covid curbs, he said, “These are government directives. The health ministry can only make suggestions. It is the job of the other ministries to make sure that the suggestions are

followed.”

The minister also said around 65 lakh students have so far been jabbed against the targetted 1.28 crore.

“People don’t go [to the vaccination centres] unless they are forced. Earlier, students showed reluctance to get the shots, but they are now swarming the centres after we told them that they must be vaccinated to attend classes.”

He added the government has a stock of some 6-7 crore vaccines. “We have enough vaccines. Along with our hospitals, we too are prepared. But hospitals have a limit.”

## Voters fear chaos

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Ashir Baran Biswas, councillor hopeful in ward-15, alleged that some candidates were trying to purchase votes. “A group of people are trying to create chaos so that voters cannot go to polling centres. I will write to the Election Commission and the local administration informing them about my concerns.”

Ishrat Jahan Khan Smrity, who is running for councillor in ward-22, said there is a chance of chaos as some Awami League and BNP leaders are taking part in the polls.

“Some candidates are intimidating voters into casting their ballots in favour of them and also obstructing their opponents from campaigning,” she alleged.

Yesterday, Awami League mayoral nominee Selina Hayat Ivy said the overall election atmosphere in the city was good till date.

She said she wants that this atmosphere remains unchanged on the voting day so that voters can exercise their franchise without fear.

Stating that the last two NCC polls were held peacefully, Ivy said, “I urge the administration to create an atmosphere in which people don’t feel afraid of going to polling centres.”

On the other hand, independent candidate Taimur Alam Khandakar alleged that police raided the houses of his supporters and created a panic situation, which

remains as a barrier to holding of polls peacefully.

“Police did not arrest anyone from the ruling party, but they are harassing my supporters. I want nothing but a level playing field so that people can cast their ballots. I want the prime minister’s intervention so that the election in Narayanganj is not manipulated,” he told journalists yesterday during electioneering.

Also yesterday, the CEC held a meeting with the presiding officers in Narayanganj polls. He talked to journalists after the meeting at a school in the city.

Asked about the violation of the electoral code of conduct by local AL lawmaker Shamim Osman, Huda said, “He [lawmaker] violated the electoral code of conduct, but he did not flout it to such an extent which would warrant issuing a notice, handing out punishment or bringing to book.”

Talking about presiding officers, he said, “As an individual, one may be prejudiced against a person or a particular party, but when you are on election duty, you will have to carry out your duties bestowed on you.”

Jayedul Alam, Narayanganj superintendent of police, said tensions are there in some wards and special measures have been taken for those.

He said an adequate number of law enforcers will be deployed at the polling centres so that no one can create chaos.



He added that Judge Mohammad Ismail of Cox’s Bazar District and Sessions Judge’s Court set the date.

Sinha was shot dead at a police check-post in Teknaf on July 31.

## Indian student found dead in Jashore

An Indian student of Jashore Ad-din Sakina Medical College and Hospital was found dead in a dormitory bathroom of the college yesterday.

Sheema Johra, 21, from Jammu and Kashmir, was found hanging from the bathroom ceiling after authorities, being informed by a cleaner, broke open the door, said Prof Dr Kamal Uddin, principal of the college.

Doctors of Jashore General Hospital, where the body was taken, said the reason behind her death could not yet be known.

## TDS reports picked for GIJN top 10 list

Two reports of The Daily Star made it to The Global Investigative Journalism Network’s top 10 “Best Investigative Stories in 2021” from Bangladesh.

The report titled “Built to crumble” by Partha Pratim Bhattacharjee and Zyma Islam – on the Ashrayan-2 project – was published on July 25.

The other – “Rogue IPTVs on the prowl” – by Zyma Islam, which, according to GIJN, “exposed internet television outlets not paying reporters’ salaries, with journalists instead taking a cut from sponsored content”, was published on September 22.