#### 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 SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

#### **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 Moyen Uddin, 44, Azadul Islam, 37, Forkan Ali, 45, Afzar Uddin, 56, Nurul Islam, 50, Babul Fakir, SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



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

# 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

"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,"

But he stressed that "we should not forget we are still in a pandemic", noting the huge burden on healthcare from the

e 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 efficiency 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 luesday the United States is approaching the "threshold" of transitioning to living

with the coronavirus as a manageable disease, despite soaring cases and recordhigh 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.

#### Form polls-time govt under Hasina: NPP

At a dialogue with President Abdul Hamid, National People's Party yesterday suggested an "election-time" government, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, comprising all registered pro-liberation political parties.

It also urged the president to take measures to enact a permanent law in line with the constitution on EC formation.

Led by Chairman Sheikh Salauddin Salu, an NPP delegation, at the meeting in the Bangabhaban, placed a five-point proposal, including forming an independent and neutral

### Sinha murder verdict on January 31

The verdict in the Major (retd) Sinha Rashed Khan murder case is scheduled to be delivered on January 31, Public Prosecutor Faridul Alam told our Cox's Bazar correspondent yesterday

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

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.

#### 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

Bridge over the Chengi river in Rangamati's Naniarchar.

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.

she said, Because, students are reluctant about paying heed to the Hasina laid the foundation 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 follow students 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 in Chief of Bangladesh lead to further accidents when the driver would try to escape the attack.

"There's a tendency to do that in our country. If implemented by the army.

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

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

On August 12, 2018, of the underpass after Diya Khanam Mim and Abdul Karim Rajib, firstvear 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 rather cut it down," officials PM's Principal Secretary

Ahmad Kaikaus. Chief of Army Staff SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, two currently working Secretary of Road Transport under the road design and and Highways Division Nazrul Islam and Engineer technical services wing. Army Major General Ibne engineer is the chief of a Fazal Shayekhuzzaman

spoke on the occasion. projects were and a superintendent

#### 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

The development came just

a month before the country

once again witnessed road

safety movements after

the death of two college

students in the span of a

organogram has to go

through a long procedure

and needs approval from

different bodies, including

the finance ministry, before

do not add manpower, they

ROAD SAFETY DIVISION

The division is one of the

safety circle of the RHD's

wing, while an executive

engineer leads a division

engineer leads a circle.

An additional chief

"But these bodies usually

However, the revised

week in November.

coming into effect.

FROM PAGE 1

gone up eight times since January 1.

A massive surge round the corner

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 vesterday 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. Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, Jashore and Dinajpur have been labelled "yellow zones",

Formed in 1992, the road

safety division was created

to conduct road safety

audits on national, regional

and major feeder roads, and

bridge projects; prepare

annual accident reports

and recommend road safety

countermeasure designs

of identified road accident

has some 10 people,

demanding changes within

the existing organogram

manpower to deal with the

workload and changes in

of the RHD, 4,536 remained

several thousand temporary

workers, mostly fourth-class

employees, working in the

department's lower tiers.

Following

proposal,

vacant, document shows.

Of the existing 9,431 posts

However, there are

Road

including five officials.

and an increase

work patterns.

Currently, the division

The RHD has long been

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

Speaking 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 Dropped when needed most?

Transport and Highway

Division had suggested the

creation of around 14,000

new posts and abolish 1,850

old ones such as that of

stenographers, who are no

the

in October approved only

2,608 posts, including 383

for cadres, and abolished

1,850 posts, RHD sources

DROPPING THE DIVISION

As road accidents have

become a major concern

over the last few years and

their workload has also

increased, RHD authorities

wanted to expand the road

safety division into a circle.

It wanted to create a

and take out the road

Under the new wing,

new wing -- Road Network

Operation and Safety Wing

safety division from the

road safety issues would

be dealt with by a circle

Technical Service Wing.

minister

longer required.

administration

But,

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

"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

comprising three divisions

instead of one.

administration dropped the entire wing, and thus, once the new force, there would be no road safety division at all,"

Contacted, RHD Chief government is

ministry organogram comes into an RHD official said.

Engineer Abdus Sabur, said they would raise the matter before the authorities concerned because the emphasis on road safety.

"Through the [road transport and bridges] ministry, we will send a proposal to the Public Administration Ministry again to include [the safety division in the new organogram]," he told The Daily Star on January 9.

The Daily Star could not reach KM Ali Azam, senior secretary of the public administration ministry, over phone for comments.

#### Voters fear chaos FROM PAGE 1

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.

candidates "Some are intimidating voters into casting their ballots favour of them and also obstructing their opponents from

campaigning," she alleged. Yesterday, League mayoral nominee Selina Havat Ivv 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 police that alleged raided the houses of his supporters and created a panic situation, which one can create chaos.

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. want the prime minister's intervention so that the election in Narayanganj is not manipulated," he told iournalists vesterday 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

Asked about 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 vou.' Jayedul 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