



**P3** Homes flooded, lives miserable



**P5** JU waste management in a shambles



**P7** The demise of a cultural pillar



**B1** Millers irked by high jute prices



Fishing boats lie idle at the scenic Kalitola Ghat in Bogura's Sariakandi upazila as fish have become scarce in this dried-up part of the Jamuna amid winter. Due to poor navigability, nearly one lakh people of seven unions on Jamuna chars also can no longer use the terminal to reach Sariakandi town. Besides, illegal sand-lifting on a massive scale damaged a nearby embankment, posing risks of floods during the rainy season. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

## DCs now want power to oversee projects in dists

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

The deputy commissioners have asked for the power to supervise project implementation in their districts, which experts have termed "inappropriate" for mega projects.

According to a proposal, they requested a separate wing, led by an additional deputy commissioner (ADC), at the DC office in this regard.

"The officer will supervise and check whether the work is being implemented in time and if the quality is maintained," said a cabinet division official.

"People consider DCs as guardians of a district. When a road or bridge is damaged, people knock on DCs doors. So, there should be a third party to watch over project implementations."

However, former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumdar observed that the proposal will not be applicable to mega projects.

"They can look after small projects like road construction and embankments. But

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## EC FORMATION LAW

# Search committee getting legal cover

If JS fails to frame the law in time, ordinance may be at use

WASIM BIN HABIB, MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA and PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Nearly 50 years after the constitution prescribed enacting a specific law for forming Election Commission, the government has finally approved the draft of a law to appoint the chief election commissioner and other commissioners through a search committee.

The six-member committee, to be headed by a judge of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division, will recommend names to the president for the appointments, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said, adding that the judge would be nominated by the chief justice.

The law, once in use, would give legal protection to ECs formed through search committees in the past. It would be considered that those were formed under the law, Anwarul said while talking to reporters after the cabinet meeting yesterday.

The tenure of the current EC, led by CEC KM Nurul Huda, expires next month.

The secretary did not make it clear whether the next EC would be formed under the proposed law, but sources in the ruling Awami League said the upcoming search committee would be constituted under it.

If the proposed law is not passed in the ongoing session of parliament,

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## PRESIDENT'S TALKS

# AL proposes passing law among other measures

STAR REPORT

The ruling Awami League yesterday placed four proposals to President Abdul Hamid including one for enacting law to form the Election Commission in line with article 118 of the constitution.

The party gave the proposals hours after the cabinet approved the draft of the "Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners Appointment Act 2022".

The party also proposed that the president will appoint the CEC and other ECs in accordance with article 118 of the constitution, or appoint

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## BUSES AT HALF CAPACITY

# Transport lobby prevails again

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government has taken 180 turn on its directive regarding buses running at half capacity to curb Covid-19 transmission, bending again to the pressure from transport workers and owners.

Buses were supposed to carry only half the people against the number of seats from Saturday but transport operators disregarded the decision saying they got "verbal directives" from the authorities concerned to run buses at full capacity.

Yesterday, 6,676 new Covid infections were recorded, an indication that another wave is heading this way.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) on Sunday informed the transport associations in writing about the government changing its mind, but did not make it public until last night.

Including this case of bowing to pressure, the government in the last 30 days has made at least three decisions according to the demands of transport associations, mostly led by influential people linked to political parties, including the ruling Awami League.

Last week, the authorities, following pressure, waived the fines for vehicle owners and drivers who failed to renew their documents on time.

On December 19, the government once again relaxed the experience requirements for obtaining driving licences for heavy and medium vehicles.

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# Hospitals will soon be full to the brim

Health minister rings alarm over rising Covid transmission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The coronavirus transmission is galloping at such an "alarming" rate that there will be no space left in the hospitals in the next one to one-and-a-half months for Covid-19 patients, said Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday.

"We are worried and panicking a bit — we do not want the transmission to rise like this," Maleque told reporters following a meeting on the Covid-19 vaccine with the Russian ambassador at the secretariat.

He came up with the statement hours before the health directorate reported 6,676 new cases, the highest in six months and an increase of 28 percent from the preceding 24 hours. The positivity rate is 20.88 percent positivity rate, up from 17.82 percent the previous day.

The genomic sequence data showed that 69 percent of the Covid-19 cases are caused by the highly transmissible Omicron variant of the coronavirus in Dhaka city, according to Maleque.

"We do think the situation will be

similar outside."

Officially, 55 cases of Omicron variant of the coronavirus have been detected in Bangladesh as of Sunday, according to GISAIID, the global database for genomic data on the coronavirus.

Maleque went on urge mask wear at all times.

"We have seen fairs and political programmes where people are not wearing masks. They are putting themselves and others in danger. The 11-point restriction of the government has to be followed. Otherwise, the Omicron cases will increase further," he added.

The transmission trend is highlighting a "bad sign", said Khurshid Alam, the director-general of the health directorate, in a virtual press briefing yesterday.

Omicron is more prevalent in Dhaka, but in other areas, the Delta variant is still dominant, he said.

Asked why the latest directives of the government are not being enforced properly, he said: "All we can do is make the suggestions — there are other

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Taimur Alam Khandakar giving Selina Hayat Ivy his blessings after she went to meet him at his residence in Narayanganj's Chashara area yesterday. Awami League's Ivy beat independent candidate Taimur by a big margin in the NCC polls on Sunday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED