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## **Crashes claim** 11 lives in two districts

STAR REPORT

Four female workers of Uttara EPZ died when a train hit a battery-run three-wheeler in Nilphamari Sadar upazila yesterday, while five people were killed as a bus rammed a CNG-run auto-rickshaw in Bogura's Sherpur.

Besides, crashes claimed two other lives in Bogura. In Nilphamari, the Chilahati-bound Rupsha intercity train from Khulna crashed into the three-wheeler when it was crossing an unauthorised level crossing in Sonarai Dhonipara village around 6:00am, locals said.

Three women were killed on the spot while five others and the driver of the three wheeler were critically injured. Locals said nine female workers of the nearby EPZ hired the three-wheeler, locally known as easy bike, to go

to work at different factories. The four critically injured women and the driver were rushed to Nilphamari Sadar Hospital, from there they were referred to Rangpur Medical College Hospital as their condition was very critical.

Later, another injured woman died at the medical

The deceased are Romana Akhtar, 25, Shefali Begum, 35, Sayra Banu, 24, Minara Begum, 25. They are from Sonarai Dhonipara and Koranipara villages.

Witness Afazuddin, 50, said the three-wheeler driver could not notice the approaching train as there was

Abdur Rahman Biswas, officer-in-charge of Saidpur Railway Police, said the level crossing is unauthorised and it has no gate and guard.

In Bogura, a bus rammed a CNG-run auto-rickshaw on the Bogura-Rangpur highway in Sherpur's Mirzapur around 5:00pm yesterday, killing five people, including a



woman, on the spot and injuring another.

AKM Baniul Anam, inspector of Sherpur highway police camp, said all the deceased were auto-rickshaw

There were six people in the vehicle, including the driver, he said, adding that the auto-rickshaw driver was also killed in the accident.

Pias Ahmed, a passenger of the Bogura-bound bus, aid "Near the accident spot the road condition is ba The auto-rickshaw came into the middle of the road. At the same time, our bus also overtook another vehicle. Hence the head-on-collision occurred."

Three of the deceased are Hridoy, 25, and his wife Sathia, 21, of Dhunat, and Anwar, 35, of Sherpur. The identities of two others could not be known.

In another accident, Motiur Rahman Mintu, 40, of Bogura's Kahalu, died when an intercity train hit him while he was crossing Belghoria level crossing on a motorcycle around noon.

Ashraful Haque, 55, an independent chairman candidate of Shukanpukur Union Parishad elections, was also killed in a crash around 4:00pm yesterday.

[Our correspondents in Nilphamari and Bogura contributed to this report.]



# US may lift Rab sanctions if given 'accurate info'

Foreign minister tells parliament

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government hopes the US will lift sanctions on Rab if it is provided with accurate information, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told parliament yesterday.

He came up with the remarks while delivering a statement in parliament under Section 300 of the parliamentary rules of procedures.

Momen informed the House that BNP and Jamaat had appointed eight lobbyist firms to ensure that the USA stops providing aid and development assistance to Bangladesh.

He also said the government has proof that the BNP, through appointing lobbyists, was linked to the slapping of the sanctions on Rab. He alleged the party also appealed to the United Nations Department of Peace Operations to ban the law enforcement agency from UN deployment.

Momen said the lobbyists have given statements that would offend the people of the country.

"BNP has told them [the US] that its security will be hindered due to Bangladesh. How can they write this? Shame on them [BNP]," the minister said amid thumping of desks by the treasury

He questioned how the BNP paid the lobbyists

and demanded an investigation in this regard.

He said there might be differences of opinion between the government and the BNP, but the country cannot be harmed by that.

Momen said hiring lobbyists in the United States is a legal process under the US law. India, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and other countries and organisations around the world appoint lobbyists to improve political and economic relations.

"But here the main issue is the purpose of hiring lobbyist [by BNP]," he said. He said that in 2014, Jamaat hired a firm to stop

the trial of war criminals, for which they paid one and a half lakh dollars. They hired another lobbyist firm to stop the trial process.

He said BNP had spent \$1.20 lakh each month as retainer fee and \$27 lakh each year from February 2015 to April 2017. The BNP had hired four lobbyist firms till 2017 and then one in 2019. And to prevent the trial of war criminals, Jamaat-BNP appointed three lobbyist firms.

The minister said some BNP members had written to the UN secretary general to declare Bangladesh's parliament illegal. SANCTION ON RAB

Saying that the government is working on the US

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## **Info minister** trashes TI graft report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Information Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday dismissed the 2021 Corruption Perception Index, in which Bangladesh ranked 147 out of 180, saying the report is based on wrong data.

"Many neighbouring countries including India and others do not give emphasis to such reports, he said at a press briefing at his secretariat. Bangladesh scored 26 out of 100 in the latest

edition of Transparency International's annual flagship report, which is more or less the same as in the past decade.

Among the eight South Asian countries, Bangladesh remains the second-lowest both in score and rank.

"When a report is based on wrong data or motivated, the image of the organisation gets damaged -- their recent report is biased and conventional," he added.

Meanwhile, Anti-Corruption Commission Chairman Mohammad Moinuddin Abdullah said the government agency does not have any reaction to the report.

"We don't have any reaction on the matter. It is not a matter to accept or refuse. We will go through the report. If the report has any recommendations for us, we will try to follow those for our improvement."

# **Updated Covid** guidelines to be published soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The health directorate will soon publish an updated version of the Covid-19 clinical guideline to combat the Omicron variant of the coronavirus as it is the main reason behind the ongoing surge in cases.

The symptoms of the Omicron variant have been included in the fresh guideline, said Md Nazmul Islam, a spokesperson of the Directorate General of Health Services, in a media briefing yesterday.

"If we follow the health guideline, we will be able to control the pandemic," he added. Meanwhile, 17 Covid-19 patients died and 15,527 tested for the viral infection in the 24

hours to 8 am yesterday, according to a press release from the DGHS. The DGHS reported a 31.64 percent positivity rate during the period, down from 32.40 percent

in the preceding 24 hours. Of the deceased yesterday, 13 were male and four female.

Of them, the highest deaths were recorded in the Dhaka division (10), followed by Chattogram (4). There were one death each in Rajshahi, Khulna, Barishal and Mymensingh divisions.

The fresh numbers took the country's total Covid fatalities to 28,273 while the caseload went up to 1,731,524 yesterday.

### Omicron risk remains very high: WHO

AFP, Geneva

The risk level related to the Omicron variant remains very high, the WHO said late Tuesday, with the numbers of new Covid-19 cases hitting another record high last week.

"Over 21 million new cases were reported, representing the highest number of weekly cases recorded since the beginning of the pandemic," the World Health Organization said in its weekly epidemiological coronavirus update.

The UN health agency said the number of new infections increased by five percent in the week to Sunday -- compared to the 20 percent rise registered the week before.

The WHO said, of the available data, Omicron accounted for 89.1 percent of the cases. Delta previously the world's dominant variant -- now makes up 10.7 percent.



Amid a chilly morning yesterday, farmers collecting seedlings of IRRI-49 from a partially-submerged seedbed in Bara Bayra Swashanghat area of Khulna city. The seedlings were then planted in a nearby paddy field. Local farmers say they always get a better yield of this variety. PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN