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Fighting for bare minimum
Students with disabilities struggling at JU



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Roses gone, dreams dead
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Shipment soars 41pc as RMG rebounds strongly



Kidney patients and their relatives waiting on the floor of Chattogram Medical College Hospital's kidney dialysis centre as the private firm that renders dialysis services to the hospital halted its operations for seven hours since 8:00am yesterday demanding arrears from the DGHS. Following negotiations, the services resumed around 3:00pm.

PHOTO: STAR

Schools to stay closed for two more weeks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Schools and colleges are set to be closed for two more weeks after February 6 due to the high Covid infection rate in the country.

In the 24 hours to 8:00am yesterday, the positivity rate was 27.43 percent, down from 29.17 percent the previous day.

"We have decided that in-person classes at educational institutions will remain closed for two more weeks based on the recommendation of experts as the coronavirus infection rate is still around 30 percent," said Education Minister Dipu Mani in a statement yesterday.

Earlier on January 21, the government had closed all schools, colleges and equivalent educational institutions for two weeks.

She hopes that the government will be able to restore normalcy in educational institutions and resume in-person classes as soon as the positivity rate drops.

Meanwhile, Unicef on January 28 urged governments across the world to keep schools open to avert a learning catastrophe and put children back on the learning track.

"As the Omicron variant of Covid-19 continues its spread all over the world, we urge governments to

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KIDNEY PATIENTS IN DHAKA, CTG HOSPITALS

Held hostage to public-pvt row

MOUDUH AHMED SUJAN, MD ASADUZ ZAMAN, and ARUN BIKASH DEY

Kidney patients suffered badly as dialysis services remained halted for seven hours at two public hospitals in the capital and Chattogram yesterday.

It happened after Sandor Dialysis Services Bangladesh (Pvt) Ltd, which provides the services under a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) agreement, suddenly stopped its operations at the hospitals around 8:00am, demanding dues from the Directorate General of Health Services.

Following hours of negotiations, the services resumed around 3:00pm.

Sandor officials, however, threatened they will completely shut down the services if the dues are not paid quickly.

According to the officials, the dues totalled Tk 23cr, but DGHS officials said it would be around Tk 8.34cr.

After the services were stopped yesterday morning, kidney patients gathered in front of the

National Institute of Kidney Diseases and Urology (NIKDU) near Shyamoli in protest around 1:00pm, blocking traffic on the Mirpur-Azimpur Road.

They left around half an hour later following requests by the police and the hospital authorities.

Speaking to The Daily Star, 30-year-old Asim Kumar Shil, a patient, said he needs to undergo kidney dialysis twice. "I came all the way from Munshiganj this morning for my dialysis. If I don't get it quickly, I might be in danger."

Asim said he cannot afford the treatment at any private hospital.

Fifty-year-old Prafulla Kumar Nath went to the dialysis centre at Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) from the district's Mirsharai upazila.

"I have been having dialysis at this hospital since 2018. I pay only Tk 486 for each session, whereas it will be around Tk 2,000 at any private hospital."

Sandor Dialysis Services Bangladesh, a concern of India's Sandor Medicaids Pvt Ltd, has been

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KILLING OF 3 MIRPUR BOYS

7 years on NO ANSWER

EMRUL HASAN BAPPI and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

On February 22, 2015, three adolescent boys were shot dead in the capital's Mirpur area during a violent political movement, on suspicion that they were arsonists linked to the opposition party.

The incident, at the height of months-long arson attacks on public transport across the country, made headlines as newspapers citing autopsy findings reported that their tender bodies bore at least 56 bullet injuries.

Seven years on, families of the victims were found in the dark about the fate of the two cases – one filed by the police after the incident and another by one family after they 'lost trust' in police investigation.

Police submitted the final report in May 2017, saying although it was a murder incident, they could not track down any of the perpetrators.

"The names and addresses of the perpetrators in connection with the incident could not be known and the possibility of finding their names and addresses and arresting them in the near future is very slim," said the final report submitted by Sub-Inspector Md Rafiquzzaman Mia of the Detective Branch (DB) of police, also the investigation officer.

The court subsequently accepted the report, which also said police would revive the case and press charges if they identified any of the suspects.

In the meantime, a Dhaka court "summarily dismissed" the murder case filed by one of the victims' family in April 2018, shows the court's register book. The family filed the case in December 2015 in the hope that the court would do justice.

However, none of the victims' families is aware of either of the two developments over the fate of the cases.

The three boys – Sumon, Robin and Jewel – were shot in a dark alley of Baishbari area in West Kazipara on the night of February 22, hours after some locals caught them on suspicion of preparing to firebomb public transport near Krishibid Bhaban on Begum Rokeya Sarani in Mirpur.

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Omicron sub-variant may be more contagious

Health officials say citing WHO, urge all to strictly maintain health rules

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health officials have urged people to follow health safety rules strictly as the World Health Organization said the new sub-variant of Omicron, already detected in 57 countries, may be even more contagious.

"There is no alternative to abiding by the health protocols to stay safe," DGHS spokesperson Dr Md Nazmul Islam said at the daily briefing on the Covid-19 situation yesterday.

In its weekly epidemiological update on Tuesday, the WHO said the variant, which accounts for over 93 percent of all coronavirus specimens collected in the past month, has several sub-lineages: BA.1, BA.1.1, BA.2 and BA.3.

The BA.1 and BA.1.1 – the first versions identified – still account for over 96 percent of all the Omicron sequences uploaded to the GISAID, a global science initiative based in Munich, it said.

There has, however, been a clear rise in cases involving BA.2, which counts several different mutations from the original, including on the spike protein that dots the virus' surface and is key to entering

human cells.

"BA.2 designated sequences have been submitted to GISAID from 57 countries to date," the WHO said, adding that in some countries, the sub-variant now accounted for over half of all the Omicron sequences together.

Pointing to the new sub-variant, Dr Nazmul said it is necessary to act responsibly.

The pressure on the ICUs, HDUs and oxygen supplies in hospitals will increase with the rise in the number of patients. "We're preparing to tackle this pressure."

Central oxygen lines have already been set up in 119 hospitals and more than 29,000 oxygen cylinders, 2,000 high-flow nasal cannulas and 2,300 oxygen concentrators are being used, he said.

"If we look at the Covid-linked deaths according to age, the highest number was reported among people aged 61-70."

Division-wise, the highest number of deaths – 12,451 – were reported in Dhaka – more than 43.80 percent of all Covid-related deaths.

Nazmul also said efforts are being made to find out how many among the

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The capital's New Market swarming with people, most of whom seem to be oblivious to health safety rules, including social distancing, while the third wave of Covid-19 rages on due to the Omicron variant. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN