



"Our strategy with Omicron is to slow the spread, and our borders are part of that."
NZ PM Jacinda Ardern on delaying full reopening until Oct

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Army man, 3 criminals killed in a gunfight

Says ISPR release

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An army member and three criminals were killed during an exchange of fire in Bandarban's Ruma upazila on Wednesday night, an ISPR press release said yesterday.

Habibur Rahman, a senior warrant officer of the army, was shot in the head.

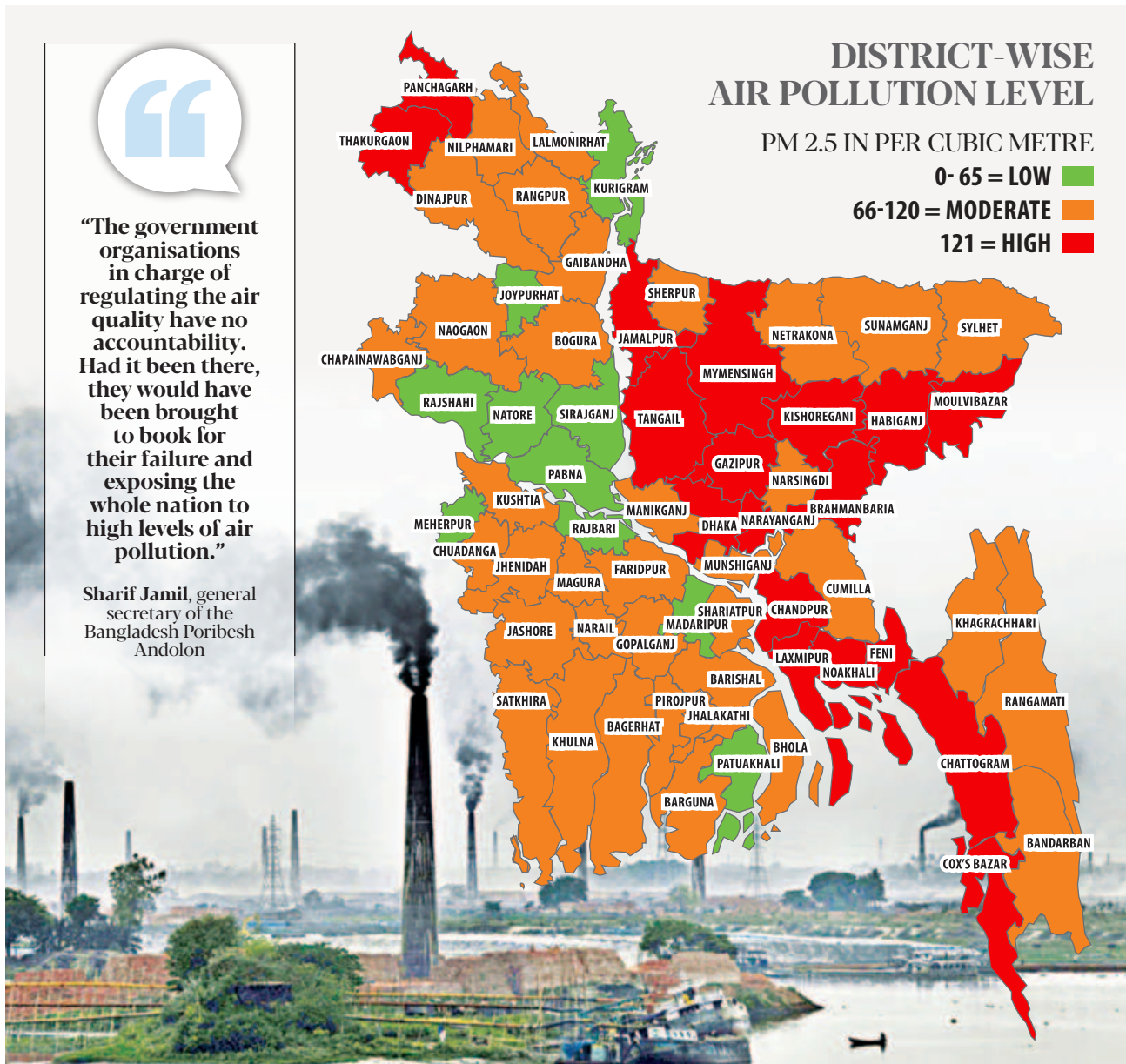
An army soldier also suffered bullet wounds in the incident. He was flown to the Combined Military Hospital in Chattogram yesterday morning.

Inter Services Public Relations Directorate (ISPR) said the three armed criminals belonged to Parbatya Chattogram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS).

It said the incident happened after a patrol team from Raing Khiam Lake army camp, led by Habibur, went to Bothipara area around 10:30pm on Wednesday, on information that a group of criminals would arrive there for extortion.

As soon as the team reached there, the criminals, holed up in a house, started firing at the army personnel. The patrol team acted promptly, launching a counter attack, which left three criminals shot.

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Pandemic end in sight for Europe: WHO

AFP, Copenhagen

Two years after the outbreak of Covid-19, Europe could soon enter a "long period of tranquility" due to high vaccination rates, the milder Omicron variant and the end of winter, the WHO said yesterday.

WHO Europe director Hans Kluge said the respite was "a ceasefire that could bring us enduring peace".

"This context leaves us with the possibility for a long period of tranquility," he told reporters yesterday.

Widespread immunity from vaccines and infections, combined with the change of season, also puts Europe in a better position to fend off any resurgence in transmission, he said.

"Even with a more virulent variant" than Omicron, Kluge said.

"It is possible to respond to new variants that will inevitably emerge -- without re-installing the kind of disruptive measures we needed before", Kluge said.

This was "not to say that (the pandemic) is now all over", but "there is a singular

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AIR QUALITY IN DISTRICTS Cleanest in Madaripur, worst in Gazipur

Finds first-of-its-kind study

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Gazipur has the most polluted air out of 64 districts in Bangladesh and Madaripur the least, found a recent study.

The permissible limit set by the Department of Environment for fine particulate matter (PM 2.5) -- which refers to the tiny particles or droplets in the air that reduce visibility and cause the air to appear hazy when levels are elevated -- is 65 micrograms per cubic metre.

Gazipur's PM 2.5 level was found to be 263.51 micrograms per cubic metre, according to the study conducted by the Stamford University's Centre for Atmospheric Pollution Study last year on air quality from 3,163 spots across the country.

On average, Bangladesh's PM 2.5 level was 102.41 micrograms per cubic metre, according to the study, which was unveiled yesterday.

Other than the obvious respiratory ailments, high levels of PM 2.5 affect the kidney and liver too.

"In Bangladesh, kidney problem is becoming acute, with eight lakh patients currently requiring dialysis," said Lenin Chowdhury, a public health expert.

Gazipur was followed by Dhaka and Narayanganj

respectively.

Hundreds of brick kilns, thousands of industries, excavation for development works, unfit vehicles, burning of wastage account for the high concentration of PM 2.5 in Gazipur, Dhaka and Narayanganj's air, the study said.

As many as 18 districts including Habiganj, Noakhali, Cox's Bazar and Moulvibazar have high levels of PM 2.5.

Madaripur, the district with the healthiest air quality in Bangladesh, had a PM of 49.08 micrograms per cubic metre thanks to thousands of water bodies, ponds, ditches and greenery.

Nine other districts have similar air quality including Kurigram, Natore, Rajshahi, Pabna, Sirajganj and Patuakhali.

As many as 36 districts including Jessore, Gopalganj, Narsingdi, Gaibanda, Rangamati and Cumilla have moderate air quality.

Among the divisional cities, Rajshahi performed the best with a PM 2.5 level of 56.41 micrograms per cubic metre and Dhaka the worst (252.93 micrograms per cubic metre).

The government organisations in charge of regulating the air quality have no accountability, Sharif Jamil, general

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

Covid curbs extended till February 21

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has extended the coronavirus restrictions to February 21 as over 10,000 cases were detected every day for the last 10 days.

In-person classes at schools, colleges and equivalent educational institutions were also ordered to be suspended until February 21.

Despite restrictions on public gatherings and movement, Bangla Academy is holding the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela from February 15, said Jalal Ahmed, member secretary of the book fair management committee. He added that the health safety guidelines would be followed at the fair.

Health officials yesterday reported 11,596 new cases of Covid-19 and 33 dead from the disease. The positivity rate was 25.86 percent, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). The new cases were detected after testing 44,843 individuals.

The Cabinet Division in a notification yesterday banned gatherings of more than 100 people in social, political, religious and state events.

Besides, anyone participating in such an event must have a Covid vaccination certificate or a Covid negative report of a PCR test done not more than 24 hours before the event.

The number of deaths confirmed to be caused by Covid-19 was 28,494 as of yesterday.

Of the 33 reported dead yesterday, 22 were male and 11 were female. One was aged between 21 and 30, one between 31 and 40, two between 41 and 50, four between 51 and 60, and the rest are above 60, said a DGHS release.

Bangladesh has so far confirmed 18,35,776 cases of the coronavirus.

The new restrictions were announced as the Omicron variant of coronavirus caused major spikes in the number of daily new cases.

Bangladesh detected its first Omicron case on December 10 last year. A month later, the government had issued an 11-point restriction amid rising number of infections.

Classrooms of schools and colleges were closed on January 21.

BANGLA ACADEMY

Everyone concerned with the Mela must possess Covid-19 vaccine certificates, the academy said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina agreed to inaugurate the fair, said Jalal Ahmed, adding that all preparations were taken at the Suhrawardy Udyan.

The fair that was set to begin on February 1 was postponed for two weeks amid rising new cases.

Earlier, Bangla Academy Director General Mohammad Nurul Huda said the academy has contacted the DGHS to establish a Covid-19 vaccine booth. "They agreed that they will provide necessary support."

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Now a lioness dies at Gazipur safari park

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

After the deaths of 11 zebras and a tiger last month, an African lioness died at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park in Gazipur's Sreepur yesterday.

Amir Hossain Chowdhury, chief conservator of forests (CCF), confirmed this to The Daily Star.

The 11-year-old lioness fell ill on August 11 last year. Since then, the animal was provided treatment by veterinary doctors from the safari park, National Zoo, Bangladesh Agriculture University, and Mymensingh Veterinary Teaching Hospital, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change said in a press release.

The female lion had been suffering from various complications, including bleeding from mouth and respiratory problems, it added.

Around 4:15pm on Wednesday, the lioness started trembling. The surgeon of the safari park, Dr Md Mostafizur Rahman, gave her treatment, the release said.

Around 7:30am yesterday, she was given treatment for breathing problems. The lioness

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44th Death Anniversary

(Abul Company) The founder of Abul Khair Group
noted industrialist and social worker
Late Janab ABUL KHAIR

Death: 4th February, 1978

In accordance with the will of Almighty Allah the Beneficent, you left this mundane world, leaving us and many of your relations overwhelmed by grief. In our everyday life your bright ideals serve as beacon. You are immortal in your death. We pray to Almighty Allah for the salvation of your departed soul.

May Allah the Beneficent bless you with the eternal bliss of paradise. Ameen.

Your loving
Sons, Daughters and Relatives