

# Man dies in gas cylinder explosion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narsingdi

A man died after a gas cylinder, used for inflating balloons, exploded in a house in Raipura upazila of Narsingdi last morning.

The deceased was identified as Md Nurul Islam, 40, from Bogdoriakandi village under Chanpur union of the upazila.

When the explosion occurred, the victim was standing close to the cylinder that was kept at one corner of his house, said Satyajit Kumar Ghosh, assistant superintendent of police (ASP) in Narsingdi (Raipura circle), quoting family.

The cylinder belonged to the victim's elder brother Ahmad Ali, 45, who is a balloon vendor.

The explosion caused the fire to spread throughout the house, killing Nurul on the spot, the police official added.

Informed, police recovered the victim's body and sent it to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

Gas cylinder explosions have now  
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## COVID IN US Omicron cases jump to 18pc

REUTERS

The highly-contagious Omicron subvariant XBB has surged to more than 50 percent of Covid-19 cases in the northeastern United States and risks spreading fast as millions of Americans begin holiday travel on Friday.

In the week ended Dec. 24, XBB was estimated to account for 18.3% of the Covid-19 cases in the United States, up from 11.2 percent in the previous week, according to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Friday.

The subvariant is currently dominant in the Northeast, but accounts for fewer than 10 percent of infections in many other parts of the country, the CDC said.



BNP activists yesterday brought out a protest procession from the port city's Wasa Mor onwards to press home their 10-point demand, including the release of their leaders from jail, the resignation of the Awami League government, and polls under a caretaker government. Story on Page 1.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

# Winter storm kills 13 in US

## Causes widespread Christmas travel chaos; 1.7m left without power

AFP, Washington

A fearsome winter storm that pummelled the United States with blinding snow and powerful Arctic winds left 1.7 million customers without power yesterday as thousands of cancelled flights stranded travellers making last-minute dashes for Christmas.

At least 13 storm-related deaths have been confirmed across six states as heavy snow, howling winds and dangerously frigid temperatures kept much of the nation, including the normally temperate south, in a frozen grip for a third straight day.

The "bomb cyclone" winter storm, one of the fiercest in decades, had already forced the cancellation of more than 1,900 US flights on Saturday, a day after

nearly 6,000 were scrapped, according to tracking website Flightaware.com.

Cancellations left stranded travelers at airports including Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Detroit and New York hoping for a pre-Christmas flight rebooking miracle.

Travellers like Zack Cuyler, whose flight to home to Houston on December 22 has been postponed then cancelled twice this week already, were "pretty steamed" about the chaos.

The 35-year-old, who lives in New York City, now hopes to reach his family by Christmas day.

"I'm just glad I'll get to see my family for Christmas," he told AFP.

In hard-hit New York state, Governor Kathy Hochul deployed the National Guard to Erie County and its main city

Buffalo, where authorities said emergency services have essentially collapsed in the face of extreme blizzard conditions.

"There are still likely hundreds of people still stuck in vehicles," Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz said early Saturday, adding that the National Guard was being sent "right into the city of Buffalo for these life-threatening rescues."

Road ice and white-out conditions also led to the closure of some of the nation's busiest transport routes, including the cross-country Interstate 70, parts of which were temporarily shut down in Colorado and Kansas.

Over 200 million Americans were under weather warnings Friday as wind chills sent temperatures plunging to as low as -55 Fahrenheit (-48 Celsius), according to the National Weather Service (NWS).

## Hasina banks on the same troops

FROM PAGE 1

practise democracy.

"Today, we bid you farewell. I want new leadership."

After that, Yusuf Hossain Humayun, chief of the election commission, took the microphone and asked the crowd to suggest names for the post of AL president. And thousands of leaders chanted "Sheikh Hasina".

Veteran leader Amir Hossain Amu then took the floor, saying there was no alternative to Hasina for the post. "We all want her for the post as long as she lives."

Dinajpur AL President Mostafizur Rahman Fizar endorsed Amu's proposal, and then the election commission announced Hasina as new AL president.

"I can't find words to express my gratitude. I accept your decision with my head bowed," Hasina said as her voice cracked with emotion.

"I have grown old. You elected me as the party president in 1981 in my absence. But I think a new leadership should come up."

Then came the post of general secretary. All eyes have been on the post for the last week and speculations were rife. Hasina's reelection was certain, but there were discussions everywhere about who would be the number two.

The AL election commission invited proposals for the general secretary.

Naogaon AL President Sadhan Chandra Majumder proposed Quader's name for the post, and

Dhaka district AL General Secretary Paniruzzaman Tarun seconded it.

The EC then announced Quader as the general secretary as there was no other candidate. Quader was first elected general secretary in 2016 and reelected in 2019.

After the election, councillors vested in Hasina the power to elect the other office-bearers.

She then started announcing the names of the office-bearers. No new faces are in the committee; there was only a light reshuffle.

Nurul Islam Nahid, Ramesh Chandra Sen and Abdul Mannan Khan were stripped of their presidium membership. The presidium is the highest policy-making body of the party.

The three leaders are now members of the advisory council.

AL central committee member Mostofa Jalal Mohiuddin was promoted to the party presidium.

Hasina didn't bring any changes in the four joint general secretary posts. She, however, brought changes in the order of the names on the list.

Hasan Mahmud, who was the third on the list of joint general secretaries, is now at the top replacing Mahabubul Alam Hanif, who is now second.

According to the AL charter, if the general secretary is "absent for work", his responsibilities shall be vested in the joint general secretary by the order of the names on the list.

Sakhawat Hossain, who was the organising secretary, was dropped

from the new committee. Sujit Roy Nandi, who was the relief and social welfare secretary, has been promoted as organising secretary.

The new relief and social welfare secretary is Aminul Islam who was the deputy publicity and publication secretary.

Harunur Rashid and Habibur Rahman Siraj are in the advisory council. They were the youth and labour secretaries of the past committee.

So, three posts -- deputy publicity and publication secretary, youth and sports secretary and labour and manpower secretary -- fell vacant, and Hasina announced those will be filled later.

The AL chief also didn't announce the name of members of Awami League Central Working Committee (ALCWC), the highest decision making body, and said the presidium will meet to elect the central committee members.

Sources said several new faces, mostly former student leaders and immediate-past leaders of AL's front organisations, might be inducted as AL's apex body members.

Hasina also reconstituted Awami League's Parliamentary Board and the Local Government Representative Nomination Board. She also announced 44 members of AL advisory council, the thinktank of the party.

After announcing the names, she sought approval from the councillors,

and they endorsed it loudly.

The council session also adopted some amendments to the party's charter and declaration.

At the beginning of the second session, AL chief gave scope to eight grassroots leaders from eight divisions to talk about the organisation.

Jamalpur district AL President Baki Billah demanded Hasina's image on the bank notes. Hasina then turned down his proposal saying, "Only the picture of the Father of the Nation will be on the bank notes."

In a lighter vein, she said, "I will beat you up, go away from here."

Faridpur district AL President Shamim Haque alleged that conspiracies are afoot against the government at home and abroad and demanded strengthening AL's publicity cell to counter the propaganda against the government.

Bogura district AL President Mojibar Rahman alleged that some leaders are still dedicated to the party, while some are out to put up the party for sale.

He urged the high command to pick the party's tested leaders for the next national election.

Patuakhali district AL President Kazi Alamgir demanded party nominations for the grassroots leaders whose dedications for the party is beyond doubt.

Wrapping up the session, Hasina recited a line from Jibanananda Das: "Shall resurrect and return again", and left the venue.

## Clashes in Sudan kill 11

AFP, Khartoum

At least 11 people have been killed in ongoing clashes between Arab and non-Arab groups in Sudan's restive Darfur region, a doctor said yesterday.

Violence erupted on Wednesday around 20 kilometres (12 miles) from the South Darfur state capital Nyala pitting Arab herders against farmers from the Daju minority and other non-Arab ethnic groups, witnesses said.

It was not immediately clear what sparked the fighting which has shown no signs of abating.

"The number of bodies that have arrived at the hospital has reached 11," the doctor at Nyala hospital told AFP, adding at least 20 people were treated for gunshot wounds.

Adam Regal, spokesman for the General Coordination for Refugees and Displaced in Darfur, said the death toll was "likely to be much higher as the fighting is still ongoing".

## Man held over rape of fifth-grader

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

A fifth-grader was raped in Gaibandha's Gobindganj upazila and admitted to the Bogura Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College in critical condition.

Police on Friday night arrested Mehedi Hasan, 25, accused of aiding the rape.

Meanwhile, they are yet to arrest the alleged rapist Sumon Prodhan, 30.

According to the case statement, the duo abducted the girl from outside her house on Thursday evening. They took her to a field, where Sumon raped her and Mehedi assisted him.

When the girl fell unconscious, the youths left her there and fled. As she regained her senses, she went home and disclosed the matter to her parents.

Her parents immediately took her to a hospital and later filed a case with Gobindganj Police Station, said its OC Ezar Uddin.

## Body of man, who jumped into Padma to save his wife, found

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Divers of Fire Service and Civil Defence recovered the body of a bank official yesterday, a day after he went missing in the Padma River in Chapainawabganj when he jumped in to rescue his wife from drowning.

The body of Salauddin Kader, 38, an officer of Uttara Bank at Kishoreganj bank, was found at Balugram village around 11:30am, Nomir Uddin, a diver of Godagari Fire Station, said.

On Friday, Kader's wife Manjuri Khatun Nishi, 32, drowned while taking bath in the river. When Kader went to rescue her, he went missing.

On information, divers started the rescue operation but they suspended it in the evening.

When they resumed the operation in the morning, they found Kader's body.

## Suu Kyi to hear final verdicts in junta trial

AFP, Yangon

A Myanmar junta court could hand down the final verdicts in an 18-month trial of Aung San Suu Kyi next week, closing the latest chapter in the military's decades-long battle with the democracy figurehead.

The Nobel laureate, 77, has already been found guilty on 14 charges ranging from corruption to illegally importing walkie-talkies and breaching the official secrets act.

## One dies as cops

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acting office secretary Syed Emran Saleh Prince at a press conference at Naya Paltan central office.

At least seven BNP leaders and activists have reportedly been killed in police firing during political rallies in different districts since late July this year.

The party held countrywide mass processions (except in Dhaka and Rangpur) yesterday to press home their 10-point demand, which includes the resignation of the government and a general election under a neutral caretaker government.

During clashes in different districts yesterday, police opened fire, lobbed tear gas shells and charged batons at the BNP activists. Many of the BNP workers were arrested on the spot.

In some places, ruling party activists also attacked the BNP activists, the party alleged.

In Panchagarh, apart from the death, at least 30 people, including BNP activists and police, were injured in the clash. Police detained at least 10 people on the spot.

Witnesses said that when the leaders and activists attempted to bring out a procession from the party office, police obstructed them, which led to the clash.

At one point, police started to charge batons while the activists hurled brickbats.

To disperse the activists, police fired several teargas canisters and rubber bullets.

Local AL men took out a protest procession from the district AL office after the clash.

Shops were shut down and vehicular movement was halted till 4:30pm as panic gripped the town.

Contacted, the Panchagarh SP said the BNP activists gathered in the town from noon and wanted to bring out a procession with sticks around 3:30pm, aiming to disrupt law and order.

As police asked them to conduct a peaceful procession, they launched an attack, he claimed.

The SP said legal steps would be taken against those who obstructed police.

**CLASHES, ARRESTS IN OTHER DISTRICTS**

At least 30 BNP leaders and activists were injured in a clash with Chhatra League men in Pirojpur town yesterday.

Police said 11 men were detained after the clash.

Around 11:00am, a group led by Aniruzzaman Anik, president of district BCL, attacked the BNP procession and vandalised its office, alleged Alamgir Hossain, convener of Pirojpur district BNP.

Contacted, Anik said they took position on the streets to prevent "BNP-

Jamaat's anarchy", claiming that four of the BCL men were also injured.

Mohammad Saidur Rahman, superintendent of Pirojpur police, said the clash broke out as the BNP activists attacked the BCL gathering first.

"Police recovered four crude bombs and detained 11 people from the spot."

In Gazipur, BNP leaders and activists clashed with the police on the local court premises yesterday afternoon when they went to join a rally. At that time, police dispersed them by firing teargas shells and charging batons.

Some 11 BNP men and two policemen were injured in the clash.

Ziaul Islam, officer-in-charge of Gazipur Metropolitan Police, said 20 BNP leaders and activists were arrested on charges of vandalism, obstructing police and assault.

In Khulna, police put up barricades in front of the BNP office.

Khulna BNP alleged that 17 leaders and activists have been arrested.

Besides, police carried out raids on the houses of the BNP activists to create panic, alleged Shafiqul Alam Mana, convener of Khulna City BNP.

Molla Jahangir Hossain, the deputy commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner (North), told The Daily Star that those who have been arrested already had cases against them and nobody was arrested in connection with the mass procession.

In Noakhali, Sudharam police detained eight BNP men, who were on their way to the procession, from the New Bus Stand area, local party leaders alleged.

Meanwhile, police allegedly foiled the BNP processions in Faridpur and Munshiganj.

In Bagerhat, at least 21 activists of BNP and Jamaat were arrested following a case filed against them, said Alimuzzaman, OC of Fakirhat police station.

Apart from this, the house of Bagerhat district BNP convener ATM Akram Hossain Talim, the party office in Sarui of the town and the business establishment of Sardar Liaquat Hossain, the former district president of Sramik Dal, were vandalised by BCL men, local BNP leaders alleged.

KM Azizul Islam, OC of Bagerhat Sadar Model Police Station, said no one came to file any complaint in this regard.

In Narsingdi, at least 17 BNP men were arrested before and after the procession.

Abul Kashem Bhuiyan, OC of Narsingdi Model Police Station, said most of the arrestees were accused in previous cases.

(Our correspondents in Thakurgaon, Pirojpur, Khulna, Bagerhat, Gazipur and Munshiganj contributed to this report.)