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## AL rank and file confused who's top joint GS

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Among the ruling Awami League rank and file, confusion reigned about who actually tops the list of joint general secretaries.

It arose after AL President Sheikh Hasina announced the names of the joint general secretaries at Saturday's national council. She said, "Those who were the joint general secretaries will continue to be so... Dr Hasan Mahmud, Mabubul Alam Hanif, AFM Bahauddin Nasim and Dipu Moni..."

Following the announcement, Hasan Mahmud, who was previously the third on the list of joint general secretaries, climbed to the top, pushing Mahabubul Alam Hanif to the second position.

The official website of AL uploaded the names of leaders of the full-fledged committee around

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## Accepted AL leadership considering economy: PM



UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said she accepted the leadership of the party this time considering the volatile global economic situation.

"One must not take the [leadership] responsibility so many times. But I accepted the responsibility considering the current global situation. You have

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A toddler playing with the plush stuffed nose of Santa Claus on the Christmas Day at Sonargaon hotel in the capital. The annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated by people across the world.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Guards up as new Omicron strain looms

DGHS says new variant 4 times more transmissible

MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

The new coronavirus subvariant that is ripping through China has compelled the government to step up guard.

Health officials are urging people to take caution including taking booster jabs and wearing masks in crowded areas, while the Directorate General of Health Services has instructed the officials concerned to strengthen screening at all entry points.

The hospitals have been instructed to be on standby in case of a fresh surge.

The new subvariant of Omicron, the BF.7, is said to be much more transmissible than earlier coronavirus strains, has more immune escape capability and a shorter incubation period.

China is witnessing a surge in infections and deaths after the government abandoned its "zero Covid" strategy two weeks ago in face of protests against the draconian controls. On Friday, the country reported 28,493 cases and 76 deaths, according to the World Health Organisation.

The BF.7 strain of the Omicron variant has also been detected in India, prompting the authorities to put in place preventive measures.

In light of the situation, the National Technical

### MEASURES TO FIGHT BF.7 STRAIN

- Scaling up booster jab administration
- Wearing masks in public places
- Stricter screening for arrivals from China, India, Japan, South Korea, the US, France, Brazil, Germany
- Rapid antigen test on standby at airports to test suspected cases
- Digital thermal scanner, hand-held infrared thermometer must be kept on hand

Advisory Committee (NTAC) sat on Saturday and came up with a set of recommendations including accelerating the government's campaign for booster doses and ensuring everyone maintains personal protective measures.

The reproduction number of the BF.7 subvariant is 18, while the previous subvariant BA.5 had only 4, said Ahmedul Kabir, additional director general (administration) of DGHS.

"It means the new variant has four times higher transmissibility. More importantly, the incubation period is shorter, enabling it to infect many people at a time," he said in a virtual briefing yesterday.

The BF.7 infection poses symptoms similar to other Omicron variants, he said. The common symptoms of the previous subvariant include fever, sore throat, runny nose and cough.

So, taking a booster and wearing masks is a must to stay safe, he added.

"It is a reality worldwide that people have forgotten the practice of maintaining health and safety rules,"

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## DHAKA METRO RAIL DMP to ensure security until dedicated force formed

Authorities expect MRT police within a month

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Dhaka Metropolitan Police will ensure security at the country's first metro rail, set to be inaugurated on Wednesday, until a dedicated force is available.

The DMP, however, said it may be difficult for it to provide security "for too long".

The Cabinet Division will hold a meeting in this regard today, and a proposed organogram for an Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) police force will be placed there, officials said.

MAN Siddique, managing director of the Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd (DMTCL), the implementing and operating agency of the metro rail projects, said they hope the 357-post organogram would be approved at the meeting.

"After completing other necessary processes, they will

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## GCC ex-mayor embezzled Tk 2.6cr from GCC coffer

SHARIFUL ISLAM and ABU BAKAR SIDDIQUE AKAND

Suspended Gazipur mayor Jahangir Alam embezzled Tk 2.6 crore of city corporation money using a fake city corporation bank account.

The irregularities were mentioned in a letter submitted to the senior secretary of the local government division in January this year.

The account was opened with Premier Bank's Konabari branch on February 25, 2020, with Jahangir as the sole signatory. The ex-mayor and his accomplices withdrew the money deposited by four companies in GCC fees and taxes.

The amounts were deposited between February 25, 2020, and December 22, 2021, and the money — Tk 2.6 crore — was withdrawn with six

cheques by December 22, 2021.

The GCC registrar, however, has no record of the money, said the letter.

The corporation never opened any account with that branch, the letter said, adding that it was opened in violation of the rules.



A city corporation account has to be jointly accessed by the mayor and its chief executive officer (CEO). And the opening of the account requires the resolution of a meeting attended by the mayor and all ward councillors.

The letter, a copy of which was recently obtained by this newspaper, said a bank statement revealed that pay orders issued to the GCC mayor were deposited into an account bearing the number 03511100000578.

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## RCC POLLS Campaign ends amid fears of violence

KONGKON KARMAKER

As election campaigns for Rangpur City Corporation ended at midnight, the Election Commission said there were concerns over violence at almost one-third of the 229 polling centres.

There will be a five-tier security arrangement and additional law enforcement at those 86 centres "for the sake of fair election", Abdul Baten, the returning officer to oversee the RCC election, told reporters in Rangpur yesterday.

Electronic voting machines will be used at all the centres covered by CCTV cameras, said Baten, also the director general of the Electoral Training Institute.

Police, the Border Guard Bangladesh and Rab will be deployed during the polls on December 27. Besides, 33 executive magistrates and 16 judicial magistrates will be deployed to take legal actions against rule violators, he added.

On the last day of the 17-day electoral campaign yesterday, the mayor and councillor aspirant made pledges of development among the 4.26 lakh voters.

Nine individuals are running for mayor, including ruling Awami League nominee Hosne Ara Lutfia Dalia and Jatiya Party nominee Mostafizar Rahman. AL leader Latifur Rahman is running as an independent. The BNP boycotted the election. Besides, 251 people are running for the 44 councillor posts, according to EC.

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Thandu Matbor and his three sons are picking red spinach on a piece of land in Pinepara area of Janjira, Shariatpur. Thandu said his ancestors lost this land to the Padma three decades ago. Due to siltation, the land became arable again at the end of monsoon this year. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: JAHID HASAN

## Metro rail to initially run for 4hrs from 8am

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Metro rail will initially run for four hours a day from 8:00am and the duration will be increased as passengers get habituated with the new mode of public transport.

In the beginning, the trains will run between

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