

Fog disrupts ferry service

FROM PAGE 12
was recorded at 9 degree Celsius in Sreemangal, Moulvibazar.

Our correspondents in different districts reported suspension of ferry services and the resulting public suffering yesterday.

On the Shimulia-Banglabazar route, ferry services got suspended early yesterday.

"The fog was so thick that ferry operators could not see. So, we suspended the service around 2:00am to avoid accidents," said Abdur Nur Tusher, manager (commerce) at Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) office in Shimulia.

"The service resumed at around 9:00am in the morning," he told The Daily Star.

Passengers were stranded on both banks of the Padma, having to wait for hours to board ferries.

"I was heading towards Barishal from Dhaka on a bus that reached Shimulia around 3:00am. But I had to

wait for around seven hours to board a ferry," said Abdul Hai.

Trucks had to wait longer as other vehicles got priority when the services resumed.

"The ferry authorities first allowed passenger vehicles to board. I had to wait for around nine hours to board a ferry," said truck driver Jamal Hossain.

On the Paturia-Daulatdia route, ferry operations remained suspended for around six hours from 10:00pm on Friday.

"The lights that point to the ferry routes became invisible due to a thick fog," said Zillur Rahman, deputy general manager of BIWTC at Aricha, Manikganj.

"The service resumed around 4:00am early Saturday when the fog started clearing," he told The Daily Star.

Over 300 vehicles were stranded at Paturia terminal due to suspension of the ferry service, he added.

[Our Manikganj correspondent contributed to the report]



Law enforcement officers stand in front of participants during a rally in support of jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny in Saint Petersburg, Russia, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Pfizer offers 40m doses

FROM PAGE 12
the only one so far to have received emergency use approval from the WHO.

Developing countries should have "the same access to vaccines as the rest of the world", Pfizer chairman Albert Bourla told a virtual press conference.

"We will provide the vaccine to Covax for these countries at a not-for-profit basis.

"We are proud to have this opportunity to provide doses that will support Covax's efforts towards vaccinating health care workers at high risk of exposure in developing countries, and other vulnerable populations."

Set up last year, Covax initially aimed to secure enough Covid-19 vaccines this year for the most vulnerable 20 percent in participating countries.

Covax still needs to finalise a supply agreement for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said vaccines were offering the hope of ending the pandemic and repairing the global economy.

However, "to do that, we need every member state, every partner, and every vaccine producer on board," he added.

There were new signs of the depth of damage dealt to the global economy,

with the closely watched Purchasing Managers' Index showing that Europe was heading for a new recession, while Latin America suffered its steepest drop in foreign trade since the global financial crisis.

In Wuhan, a team of World Health Organization experts was still in hotel quarantine ahead of a mission to investigate the source of the virus, and the body said it was too early to conclude whether the pandemic actually started there.

"All hypotheses are on the table," WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan told a press conference in Geneva. "And it is definitely too early to come to a conclusion of exactly where this virus started, either within or without China."

Countries across the world were bringing in new measures yesterday, including the Netherlands, which was set to introduce its first curfew since World War II.

Until February 19, residents will have to stay home from 9 pm until 4:30 am, on pain of a 95-euro (\$115) fine.

And in the Colombian capital of Bogota, residents were under their third weekend quarantine in a row, meaning the closure of all non-essential shops in the city of eight million from Friday at 8:00 pm until Monday at 4:00 am.

Ocean Viking rescuers pick up hundreds of migrants off Libya

AFP, Marseille

Over 350 migrants have been rescued off the Libyan coast by the Ocean Viking humanitarian vessel in just two days, a French NGO running the boat said yesterday.

SOS Mediterranee said that "106 people were rescued ... in international waters 28 nautical miles (50 kms) from the Libyan coast" on Friday evening.

"The majority of the people aboard an inflatable rubber dinghy were found intoxicated by oil fumes," it said. They came from Guinea, Sudan and Sierra Leone.

On Friday morning, the Ocean Viking picked up 149 people from two boats following an SOS signal, including 58 minors and four babies -- one just a month old, it said.

Since Thursday, a total of 374 people have been rescued by the Ocean Viking, of whom 165 are children, SOS Mediterranee said.

A total of 131 minors are unaccompanied.

Libya has become a key route for irregular migration to Europe in the

chaotic years since the 2011 overthrow and killing of dictator Moamer Kadhafi in a NATO-backed uprising.

While many have drowned at sea, thousands have been intercepted by the Libyan coastguard, which has been backed by Italy and the European Union, and returned to Libya.

They mostly end up in detention, often in horrific conditions.

The Ocean Viking took to the seas on January 11 after being blocked in Italy for five months before being released in December. Authorities had cited alleged safety issues for the holdup.

Ocean Viking is currently the sole rescue ship run by an NGO in the area, according to SOS Mediterranee's head, Sophie Beau, who said "the others have been blocked by Italian authorities like the Ocean Viking earlier".

Most migrants leave from Libya and Tunisia attempting a hazardous Mediterranean crossing to try and enter Europe through Italy.

More than 1,200 died last year while trying to cross the Mediterranean.

Virus mutations down to chance, in more ways than one

AFP, Paris

The emergence of several, more infectious strains of the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has worried governments and scientists, who are investigating how and why the virus became more transmissible.

Like all viruses, SARS-CoV-2 mutates in order to maximise its survival chances.

When it replicates, tiny errors in its genetic coding are introduced.

Most of these are inconsequential. But some -- as with the virus variants that emerged recently in Britain, South Africa and Brazil -- can give the virus a decisive new advantage.

"When we keep case numbers high, we are maximising the virus's opportunities to get into weird situations, that might be rare, and most of them might lead nowhere," said Emma Hodcroft, epidemiologist at the University of Bern.

More cases equal more transmissions, which maximises the chances that a significant mutation will occur, she said.

"If we keep case numbers lower, we essentially restrict the virus's playground."

Wendy Barclay, a virologist at London's Imperial College, said mutations were a result of several factors.

"It's a combination of how much virus is out there, the number of times

you roll the dice defines what happen, coupled with the environment the virus is currently in," she said.

It was not unexpected for the new variants to appear after a year of Covid-19 as levels of global immunity increase through vaccinations and natural infection, she added.

"In South Africa and Brazil there was already quite a high level of antibody response from people who had been infected and recovered from the virus."

- 'Immune pressure' -

Other experts expressed doubt that immunity levels directly influenced the current mutations.

Bjorn Meyer, a virologist at the Institut Pasteur in Paris, said it was more likely each mutation occurred in a single individual, who then passed it on to others.

He explained the possibility of a patient whose immune system was compromised, and therefore unable to clear the virus as quick as others.

"In this patient there might be something defective in the response so the virus can just stay around for a long time," Meyer told AFP.

While the Covid-19 virus typically infects individuals for around 10 days before being neutralised by the body, some studies have shown that certain patients may carry it for several weeks or longer -- maximising the window for mutations.

Deforestation unobstructed

FROM PAGE 12
on inside.

Going around two hundred yards into the forest, this correspondent saw two large hills -- once blanketed by trees, shrubs and bushes -- completely denuded. The trail of trees felled is evident from the numerous trunks strewn across the hills.

But as per the law, for trees to be felled even in private forests require permission, inspection, and inventory from the Forest Department. In this case, the department could not provide any documents to prove they issued permission for cutting trees in Udaliya.

According to the Forest Resources Transportation (control) Act, 2011, a permit dubbed the "free licence" obtained from the divisional forest officer (DFO) concerned is required before sourcing forest resources.

The procedure is to fill up a form with which a document of land ownership -- a tracing copy of the land -- must be submitted to the DFO to obtain permission for felling trees. Then, the DFO forwards it to his range office under which the land falls.

The range officer inspects the land, marks the trees, prepares a log list and then sends it back to the DFO. Finally, the DFO issues a permission letter for the intended trees to be felled.

The free licence is supposed to indicate all these -- the source of the trees, the tracing copy of the land, and

the species and size of trees cut.

But the documents seized from loggers by Hathazari upazila administration show the spot of sourcing trees to be in the Chattogram Hill Tracts while the transporter said the trees were felled from Udaliya forest in Hathazari. The trees felled include species such as Teak, Akasmoni, Arjun, and Gamari.

Udaliya forestland is disputed -- while locals say Udaliya has always been protected forest, the Forest Department claims the area comprises private forestland as well.

MINIMAL CHECKS BY FOREST DEPT
The 11-mile-area checkpoint under Chattogram Divisional Forest Office (north) largely allow the smuggled logs to pass through unobstructed. The loggers also carry false papers with them, said a local administration official.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Hathazari Ruhul Amin told The Daily Star, "If anyone is involved in timber trading, he must have a free licence issued by the forest department as well as a transport pass to carry the timber."

"But every day, around 20 to 25 log-laden vehicles come from Udaliya. When we seized these, they showed papers which later turned out to be false as they admitted to felling the trees from Udaliya," he said.

The Hathazari UNO said he seized around 700 cubic feet of logs in

October and 1,500 cubic feet of Arjun, Teak and other species from the forest in December last year.

Contacted on January 5, Ismail Hossen, range officer of Hathazari upazila under the Divisional Forest Office (north), declined to speak to The Daily Star over the phone.

"I want to talk to you but not over the phone, in a direct meeting," he said.

When pressed on how the logs passed through their stations, he remained silent and then repeated his previous words.

Top boss of the division, Mozammel Haque Shah Chowdhury, divisional forest officer (north), denied that there is any deforestation happening in Udaliya. "We don't know about it," he said.

"It is impossible that 20 to 25 truckloads of logs are being transported from the forest [every day]. The forest would not exist, if the logging spree you mentioned was true."

Though he denied the illegal logging, he said they seize the goods when they encounter any illegal transporting of trees. He also said they were talking with Rab to launch a drive against loggers.

When asked about false papers being shown at the Forest Department's checkpoints, he claimed there was no such thing as was being mentioned by this correspondent.

Talk show legend Larry King dies

FROM PAGE 12

the platforms of radio, television and digital media, Larry's many thousands of interviews, awards, and global acclaim stand as a testament to his unique and lasting talent as a broadcaster," it said.

Millions watched King interview world leaders, entertainers and other celebrities on CNN's "Larry King Live", which ran from 1985 to 2010. Hunched over his desk in rolled-up shirt sleeves and owl glasses, he made his show one of the network's prime attractions with a mix of interviews, political discussions, current event debates and phone calls from viewers.

Even in his heyday, critics accused King of doing little pre-interview research and tossing softball questions to guests who were free to give unchallenged, self-promoting answers. He responded by conceding he did not do much research so that he could learn along with his viewers. Besides, King said, he never wanted to be perceived as a journalist.

"My duty, as I see it, is I'm a conduit," King told the Hartford Courant in 2007. "I ask the best questions I can. I listen to the answers. I try to follow up. And hopefully the audience makes a conclusion. I'm not there to make a conclusion. I'm not a soapbox talk-show host... So what I try to do is present someone in the best light."

King's guests included US presidents dating back to Gerald Ford, international leaders such as PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, and entertainers ranging from Bob Hope

to Snoopy Dogg.

King never hid his old-fashioned proclivities and liked to reminisce about performers such as Frank Sinatra and Arthur Godfrey. In 2006 he admitted to a guest that he had never searched the internet, saying: "What do you do - punch little buttons and things?"

But by 2012 King was on the internet himself with his "Larry King Now" show on Ora TV, and later Hulu's streaming service. He also was a regular presence on Twitter, promoting his interviews and tossing out random thoughts - "I have no desire to eat an artichoke," "My favorite flavor of Jell-O is lime" and "I love to say 'sacre bleu!'" - in what was essentially an online version of the column he had once written for USA Today.

King was an established radio talk-show host when he made his first television broadcast for CNN from Washington on June 3, 1985, five years after Ted Turner started the network.

"Larry King Live" would become one of CNN's highest rated shows. He left CNN amid falling ratings in 2010 after 25 years with the news network, but stayed busy with his Ora TV show.

"I've known a lot of people who were experts in six or 12 things but Larry seems to be an expert in everything," Don Hewitt, creator of "60 Minutes", told the Hollywood Reporter. "He's also never confrontational, which is majorly important. In an age when so many people are miserable, he seems to be one of the happy ones."

King was born Lawrence Harvey Zeiger on Nov. 19, 1933, in the New York City borough of Brooklyn. He said at age 5 he knew he wanted to be on the radio and in 1957 he moved to

Miami, which he had been told had a burgeoning radio market.

King started doing odd jobs at a Miami station and one day was asked to fill in for an announcer who walked off the job. Before he went on the air, the station manager urged him to change his last name to King because it was easier to pronounce and less ethnic than Zeiger.

King became a fixture in Miami but as his reputation grew, so did his troubles.

In 1971 he was arrested on a grand larceny complaint filed by Miami financier Lou Wolfson, who had been in trouble with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Wolfson allegedly paid King in hopes of gaining influence on the administration of then-US President Richard Nixon.

The charge against King was dropped because the statute of limitations had expired, but the scandal knocked him off the air for some three years. He did public relations work for a Louisiana racetrack until station WIOD in Miami hired him.

King rebounded and the Mutual radio network gave him a nationwide audience in 1978. He relocated to Washington, a move that led to the CNN job.

He suffered a heart attack and had bypass surgery in 1987, prompting him to start the Larry King Cardiac Foundation a year later. He had surgery in 2007 to clear a blocked artery, was treated for prostate cancer in 2010 and said in 2017 that he had been treated for lung cancer.

King was married eight times to seven women, most recently to singer Shawn Southwick, who was 26 years younger. He had five children, two of whom died in 2020.

Foreign forces ignore Libya exit deadline under fragile truce

AFP, Tripoli

Foreign forces ignored a deadline to pull out of Libya as scheduled Saturday under a UN-backed ceasefire deal, highlighting the fragility of peace efforts after a decade of conflict.

Satellite images broadcast by CNN show a trench running tens of kilometres (miles) dug by "Russian mercenaries" near the frontline coastal city of Sirte, as main foreign protagonists Ankara and Moscow appear intent on defending their interests under any final settlement.

An unidentified US intelligence official, quoted by the American news network, said there was "no intent or movement by either Turkish or Russian forces to abide by the UN-brokered agreement".

"This has the potential to derail an already fragile peace process and ceasefire. It will be a really difficult year ahead," he said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Monday urged all "regional and international actors to respect the provisions" of the October 23 ceasefire accord that set out a withdrawal within three months of all foreign troops and mercenaries.

That deadline passed on Saturday, with no movement announced or observed on the ground.

The UN estimates there are still some 20,000 foreign troops and mercenaries in Libya helping the warring factions, the UN-recognised Government of National Accord in Tripoli and military strongman Khalifa Haftar in the east.

Nigeria tanker explosion kills four

AFP, Warri

A tanker explosion in southern Nigeria has killed a woman and three children while severely burning 11 others, an official said Saturday, the latest in a series of such incidents in the West African nation.

The tanker was delivering gas to a station in Agbor in Nigeria's Delta state, said state governor Ifeanyi Okowa.

The injured had burns covering 80 to 90 percent of their bodies, while several vehicles were also destroyed and nearby homes were damaged.

"It was an unfortunate fire incident involving a gas station where the tanker was trying to discharge gas," Okowa said in a statement.

"Obviously it's a sad situation and we thank God that this one wasn't close to a densely populated area, otherwise the damage would have been more."

Explosions involving tankers and pipelines occur regularly in Nigeria, Africa's largest oil producer but where infrastructure is lacking and most of its 200 million citizens live in poverty.

In early October, a tanker exploded and caused a fire in Lagos, Nigeria's biggest city, killing five people, wounding eight and damaging more than 100 homes and businesses.

Four die as trawler

FROM PAGE 12

Bangladesh Coast Guard rushed to the spot and started a rescue operation. Later, officials of Bangladesh Navy also joined them.

The survivors were scheduled to take Navy's Chattogram jetty to brief journalists about the accident, Lt Ronny said.

22 more die

FROM PAGE 12

daily infection rate at 4.90 percent on January 14, 8.29 percent on January 10, 7.52 percent on January 4, and 8.18 percent on January 1.

The fatality rate now stands at 1.51 percent, the DGHS said in a handout.

So far, 3,541,389 tests, including 11,007 new ones, have been carried out.

However, 475,899 patients -- 89.57 percent -- have recovered so far.

The country's infection number reached the 500,000-mark on December 20. The first cases were reported on March 8. The death toll exceeded 7,000 on December 12.

2 traffickers held

FROM PAGE 12

skin at the house. Killing such wild animals and selling their body parts are illegal and punishable crimes under the wildlife conservation act.

The hides were found at the ground floor of Monirul's house, the SP said, adding that Monirul and Elius were arrested from there.

He also said preparations were underway to file a case against the duo under the act.

After the filing of the case, the arrestees and the hides would be produced before a court for the passing of necessary order, he added.

On January 20, a team of Rab and forest guards arrested an alleged poacher named Gaus Fakir, 45, and recovered the skin of a tiger from his possession in Southkhali area of Sharankhola upazila, which is situated near the Sundarbans.

480m-year-old starfish unearthed

FROM PAGE 12

of Cambridge.

"If you went back in time and put your head under the sea in the Ordovician, then you wouldn't recognise any of the marine organisms -- except the starfish, they are one of the first modern animals."

According to the researchers, C. fezouataensis lacks around 60 per cent of the features of a modern starfish's body plan -- looking instead like a hybrid between a starfish and a crinoid, or 'sea lily'.

Sea lilies are wavy-armed filter-feeders that resemble plants in that they are attached to the seabed via a cylindrical 'stem'.

The level of detail in the fossil is

amazing -- its structure is so complex that it took us a while to unravel its significance," said Dr Hunter.

In their study, Dr Hunter and his colleague Javier Ortega-Hernandez -- previously also of Cambridge, now based at Harvard University in the US -- examined a catalogue of hundreds of starfish-like animals alongside C. fezouataensis.

They indexed all of their bodily features in order to assess how the fossil species was related to other members of the 'echinoderm' family -- a diverse group including sea cucumbers and starfish.

Like most modern species, the fossil has a five-fold symmetry -- but

this ancestral form had broad arms that had almost a pentagonal outline.

The team plan to expand their work in search of other early echinoderms.

"One thing we hope to answer in the future is why starfish developed their five arms," commented Dr Hunter.

"It seems to be a stable shape for them to adopt -- but we don't yet know why."

"We still need to keep searching for the fossil that gives us that particular connection -- but by going right back to the early ancestors like Cantabrigiaster, we are getting closer to that answer."

The full findings of the study were published in the journal Biology Letters.