

Covid cases rising

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of Covid-19 patients has been rising for 10 straight days with the health directorate reporting 71 new cases yesterday.

On June 2, the number of new cases declined to 22 from 34 the previous day.

Since then, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) reported an increasing number of new cases daily.

The positivity rate has also increased in the meantime.

On June 2, the positivity rate was 0.42 percent and it reached 1.14 percent yesterday.

No death, however, was reported after May 30 when one Covid-19 patient died.

"It has been a trend that a new wave emerges every three months. We saw that the last wave ended in March this year. So a new wave is obvious, though it may not be so serious," Mushtuq Hussain, consultant at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told The Daily Star yesterday.

Under this circumstances, he stressed on reminding people to maintain health safety guidelines including wearing masks outside home, wash hands frequently and take at least double dose Covid-19 shots.

The first cases of Covid-19 were reported on March 8, 2020. Since then, more than 19.54 lakh confirmed cases of Covid-19 were reported as of yesterday.

The virus claimed at least 29,131 lives in Bangladesh.

Covid-19 cases have also been rising in neighbouring India and Pakistan.

In India, there has been around 92 percent rise in new cases over the last week until Friday while Pakistan saw 18 percent rise during that period.



A man rides his bicycle between two destroyed military trucks in the city of Lysychansk, eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ukraine running out of ammo

Says officials; Zelensky remains defiant as fighting rages in the east and south

AGENCIES

Ukraine is running out of ammunition, officials said yesterday appealing for more arms, as fighting raged in the east and south of the country.

However, President Volodymyr Zelensky remained defiant and said Ukraine would prevail in its war with Russia.

"We are definitely going to prevail in this war that Russia has started," Zelensky told a conference in Singapore via videolink. "It is on the battlefields in Ukraine that the future rules of this world are being decided."

Ukraine has appealed for swifter deliveries of heavy weapons from the West to turn the tide of the war with Russian forces - which it says have at least 10 times more artillery pieces than Ukrainian forces.

"This is an artillery war now," said Vadym Skibitsky, deputy head of Ukraine's military intelligence. The frontlines were now where the future would be decided, he told the Guardian, "and we are losing in terms of artillery."

"Everything now depends on what [the west] gives us," said Skibitsky. "Ukraine has one artillery piece to 10 to 15 Russian artillery pieces. Our western partners have

given us about 10 percent of what they have."

Ukraine is using 5,000 to 6,000 artillery rounds a day, according to Skibitsky. "We have almost used up all of our [artillery] ammunition and are now using 155-calibre Nato standard shells," he said of the ammunition that is fired from artillery pieces.

"This is an artillery war now," said Vadym Skibitsky, deputy head of Ukraine's military intelligence.

Vitaly Kim, the governor of the Mykolaiv region on the southern frontline, made similar comments in an interview with BBC.

Meanwhile, making a surprise visit to Kyiv, the European Commission chief Von der Leyen yesterday said talks she held with Zelensky "will enable us to finalise our assessment by the end of next week" - the first time the bloc has publicly given a timing.

Zelensky has been pressing for rapid admission into the European Union as

a way of reducing Ukraine's geopolitical vulnerability, which was brutally exposed by Russia's February 24 invasion.

But officials and leaders in the bloc caution that, even with candidacy status, actual EU membership could take years or even decades.

Von der Leyen, appearing alongside Zelensky during her second visit to Kyiv since the war began, did not hold out any promises, noting further reforms were needed.

For his part, the Ukrainian president warned it was a "decisive time" for his country and the EU.

"Russia wants to ruin the European unity, wants to leave Europe divided and wants to leave it weak. The entire Europe is a target for Russia. Ukraine is only the first stage in this aggression, in these plans."

Despite reservations among some member states, EU leaders are expected to approve Ukraine's candidate status at a summit on June 23-24, though with stern conditions attached.

The EU and the United States have strongly backed Ukraine, sending weapons and cash to help it see off Russian forces, and punishing Moscow with unprecedented economic sanctions.

4 projects inaugurated on completion in Sylhet

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Four development projects, funded by the Indian government, were yesterday inaugurated on completion.

The projects aim to improve people's lives and livelihoods in Sylhet.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Vikram Kumar Doraiswami inaugurated a five-storey women's hostel on the premises of Umesh Chandra-Nirmalabala Chhatrabas at Chhalibandar. It was constructed with a financial assistance of Tk 4.35 crore from India.

The hostel, which will run on a not-for-profit basis by the Umesh Chandra-Nirmalabala Chhatrabas Trust, can accommodate 160 women students, according to a statement of the Indian High Commission.

Thereafter, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, IGRD and Cooperatives Minister Tazul Islam, Sylhet City Corporation Mayor Ariful Haque Chowdhury and Indian envoy Doraiswami jointly opened the three other projects.

These include development of Dhupadighipar, construction of cleaner colony building in Kastoghar, and construction of a school building at Chara Dighi Par.

Sylhet City Corporation implemented the projects following an MOU on construction of the projects, signed in 2017 between the High Commission of India, Economic Relations Division of Bangladesh and Sylhet City Corporation.

Mild heat wave likely to sweep the southwest

BSS, Dhaka

A mild heat wave may sweep some areas in the country's southwest, said a Bangladesh Meteorological Department bulletin, which will remain valid for 24 hours till 9:00am today.

"Light to moderate rain or thundershower with temporary gusty or squally wind is likely to occur at many places in Rangpur, Mymensingh and Sylhet divisions and at one or two places in Rajshahi, Dhaka, Khulna, Barishal and Chattogram divisions," the bulletin added.

It said some isolated places in the country's north may experience moderately heavy to heavy rain.

However, the day temperature may rise slightly and night temperature may remain nearly unchanged.

25 homes go into the Jamuna in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

At least 25 houses were devoured by the Jamuna on Friday while nearly 50 establishments face the threat of erosion in Brammangacha village of Sirajganj's Shahzadpur.

Mulluk Chand, chairman of Khukni Union Parishad, said, "Erosion started about 10:00am and continued for two-three hours, devouring at least 25 homes."

Over 50 establishments, including house, educational institution and mosque, in the village are on the verge of going into the river, he added.

Talking to The Daily Star, Ranajit Kumar Sarkar, deputy assistant engineer of Sirajganj Water Development Board, said they started dumping GO bags on the spot to protect the village from further erosion.

Jerrycan hazard was warned

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"I am not in a position to talk as the doctor has advised me against it," he told The Daily Star over the phone.

Rahman, who is also a director of the BM Inland Container Depot and a treasurer of Awami League's Chattogram south unit, requested The Daily Star to contact the general manager of Smart Group, the parent company of Al-Razi and BM Inland Container Depot.

Shamsul Haider Siddiqui, general manager (admin) of Smart Group, termed the fire incident in Cambodian waters as nothing serious.

"Although I am not in charge of Al-Razi Chemical, from talking to the officials of the

company, I came to know that the accident was minor. They said that there was smoke from a container and not fire due to the chemical stacked for about 39 days at the vessel."

He, however, said Al-Razi officials were not aware of an investigation commissioned by Maersk or of any investigation report.

"These chemicals were being exported in the plastic jerrycans for a while now but there has been no incident before the one in Cambodia," Siddiqui added.

In the first 11 months of this fiscal year, Al-Razi Chemical exported about 9,635 tonnes of hydrogen peroxide to 12 countries using the BM depot, according to data from the

National Board of Revenue.

The consignment that caught fire and exploded had arrived at the depot at least five days before the accident on June 4, said an employee of BM Inland Container Depot on condition of anonymity.

"No shipping company was willing to transport the chemicals in plastic jars after the accident in Cambodia," he said.

As a result, the consignment remained in the depot alongside other non-hazardous containers, flaunting a rule of keeping chemical products in separate sheds.

"We did not find any fire extinguishing equipment for chemical-oriented fire at the depot and no warning sticker on any of the containers," said

Shahidul Islam, senior station officer at Agrabad Fire Service and Civil Defence.

The deadly explosion caused by the fire was due to a lack of adequate firefighting system at the depot, concealment of chemical information and keeping chemicals in unprotected conditions, he said.

After the incident, six separate investigation committees have been formed by different government bodies including the Chaghtogram Port Authority (CPA).

Asked if he was aware of the fire incident in Cambodia and a subsequent investigation report, CPA Chairman M Shahjahan replied in the negative.

No updated data on city buildings

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In a 2020 report presented to the Asian Disaster Reduction Center by the disaster management ministry, the government said that around 250,000 buildings in the three major cities of Dhaka, Chattogram, and Sylhet are extremely vulnerable to earthquakes.

The report said that 24 percent of the buildings in Dhaka, 46 percent in Sylhet and 79 percent in Chattogram were detected as risky.

But all of this data is from 2009. The capital city has been expanding at a rate of 3.3 percent every year for the last two decades.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha has checked 3,252 school buildings in the

city and found 90 percent of them to be not resilient to earthquakes.

This assessment is only a drop in the ocean.

In his budget speech for 2022-23, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal pointed out that an earthquake vulnerability assessment for buildings in Dhaka city is going on under the Urban Resilience Project.

Adil Mohammed Khan, the executive director of Institute of Planning and Development, said that under the project, a risk assessment of Dhaka is being done and will be completed by this year.

"The next challenge will be to turn this knowledge into a plan for the city," said

Adil. But time is ticking. When it comes to earthquakes, experts fear the calm.

From 2020 till now, there were 27 small earthquakes in Bangladesh and its immediate surrounding regions of Meghalaya, Tripura, West Bengal and Assam. Not one of them was above 5.3 on the Richter Scale.

"The effect of high-slip-rate of Duaki fault could be observed as the largest seismic hazard in Bangladesh," said the report.

According to an article published in The Daily Star by Shashanka Saadi, the head of emergency preparedness & response programme, Brac International, it

is Bangladesh's unique position at the juncture of three tectonic plates that puts it at risk. This includes the Indian plate to the west and southwest, the Tibet sub-plate to the north, and the Burma plate to the east.

"Moreover, the plate boundary between India and Burma passes through Bangladesh and these tectonic blocks were responsible for many earthquakes in the past. For us, some major faults should be noted due to their potential for giving way to devastating earthquakes: Bogra Fault, Tripura Fault, Dauki Fault and Assam Fault Zone. All of these can produce earthquakes of a magnitude of 7 to 8.5," said the article.

Australia agrees payout, ending France submarine spat

AFP, Sydney

Australia unveiled a substantial compensation deal with French submarine maker Naval Group yesterday, ending a contract dispute that soured relations between Canberra and Paris for almost a year.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the French firm had agreed to a "fair and an equitable settlement" of 555 million euros (US\$584 million) for Australia ending a decade-old multi-billion-dollar submarine contract.

The agreement drew a line under a spat that caused leader-level recriminations and threatened to torpedo talks on an EU-Australia trade agreement.

Khaleda Zia suffers mild heart attack

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party chief's Gulshan office.

"Doctors successfully removed the blockage by ballooning," he said, adding the physicians hoped the treatment would temporarily relieve her of existing heart-related issues.

He also said Khaleda's life will be in danger if she is not sent abroad for advanced treatment.

"The government will have to bear all the responsibilities if any unwanted event takes place," he said.

She had suffocation and shortness of breath after the mild heart attack, he said quoting Khaleda's medical board.

Khaleda's personal physician Zahid Hossain said, "Khaleda Zia was diagnosed with several blockages in her heart. One of these blockages was 95 percent. A ring has been put

on it."

He also said Khaleda's condition was not critical but still "unstable".

Khaleda was taken from her Gulshan residence to Evercare Hospital early yesterday.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said, "If Khaleda Zia wants to go abroad, it will have to be as per the law."

"The court has directed that Khaleda can get treatment in the country only. So, if she wants something more, it has to be reported to the court. The court will then decide about that," he said.

Khaleda, a former prime minister, has been suffering from various ailments, including liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, kidney, lung and eye problems.

The 76-year-old was last admitted to Evercare on

November 13 last year where she was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis.

On February 1, Khaleda returned home after an 81-day stay at the hospital as she was suffering from internal bleeding caused by liver cirrhosis.

The former prime minister was sent to the Old Dhaka Central Jail as a lower court sentenced her to five years imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case on February 8, 2018.

Later, she was found guilty in another corruption case the same year.

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the government temporarily freed Khaleda from jail through an executive order suspending her sentence on March 25, 2020, with conditions that she will stay at her Gulshan home and not leave the country.

No scope for debate over broadcast

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After a meeting with the leaders of the Association of Television Channel Owners (ATCO) at the Secretariat on June 8, the minister said newspapers as per their declarations are not allowed to hold talk shows and publish videos on their websites. He said that streaming news on IPTVs also goes against the government's policy.

The government will take actions soon against those newspapers who hold talk shows and run videos on their websites, he added.

At the meeting, ATCO demanded enforcement of law to stop such activities by the IPTVs and newspaper

websites.

The Editors' Council yesterday said it thinks that advancement of the newspapers lies in the coordination between print and digital platforms because the industry is facing new challenges due to digital revolution worldwide.

In line with the new developments, the newspapers across the world are trying to incorporate innovative digital contents to retain the readers and also create new readers, the Council said.

The Bangladesh government has also started the process of "registration for online news portals"

for the newspapers under the National Online Media Policy-2017 (A m e n d e d - 2 0 2 0), considering the importance of digital platform.

Already, the government has approved more than 100 online news portals, including online editions of newspapers, the statement said.

Also, the print media is moving forward braving challenges created by the pandemic. Although the print media remains relevant, there is no way of denying the rise of digital platforms. Now, the readers cannot be satisfied only with the newspaper or the e-paper; they want

new contents in audio-video formats -- news, interviews, features and news analysis, the Editors' Council said.

It said the government is committed to building a Digital Bangladesh. Though the print media is the last resort of readers, web portals of the print media outlets and social media should be taken into consideration with equal importance in the age of digital revolution.

Therefore, it is now necessary for the dailies to present news interpretation, analysis, research and opinions through online or social media, read the statement.