

## Put your mask back on

### DGHS ADG tells people as Covid cases spike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With Covid cases rising every day, health officials have urged the people to wear a mask and take vaccines to keep the viral disease at bay.

The cases have gone up by around 308 percent on average in a week.

Yesterday, the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) reported 232 new cases, up from 162 the previous day.

The daily positivity rate was 3.88 percent, the highest since February 27 when the figure was 4.01 percent.

No death was reported for the day.

Prof Ahmedul Kabir, additional director general (administration) of DGHS, yesterday said the country has not seen the end of Covid yet. “You saw the striking report yesterday... [Tuesday’s positivity rate was] nearly four percent. We call it an epidemic when the rate goes over five percent.”

Addressing a roundtable on the health budget at the DGHS headquarters, he said only taking vaccines cannot give people full protection against the novel coronavirus.

“Taking vaccines will give you the benefit that you will not need to be hospitalised. But you have to wear a face covering [to be safe from Covid].”

Ahmedul called upon the media to create awareness in this regard.

The virus has so far claimed 29,131 lives in the country.

The first Covid cases were reported in Bangladesh on March 8, 2020. Since then, more than 19.55 lakh confirmed cases have been reported as of yesterday.

In neighbouring India, Covid cases have also been on the rise.

In 24 hours, the country logged a total of 8,822 new cases and 15 deaths, reports the Times of India.

## Sri Lankan navy stops Australia-bound migrant boat

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka’s navy said it stopped a fishing trawler transporting dozens of migrants to Australia yesterday, the fifth such attempt to be blocked in the last month.

The boat, crewed by five members, was detected near Trincomalee on the island nation’s east coast with 50 men, 11 women and three children aboard as passengers, navy spokesman Indika de Silva told AFP.

“The boat had just left from somewhere along the Trincomalee coast when it was detected by a navy craft,” he said.

“The suspects will be handed over to the police for further investigations.”



Ukrainian servicemen fire with a French self-propelled 155 mm/52-calibre gun Caesar towards Russian positions at a front line in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Nato-supplied arms depot destroyed

### Claims Russia as Ukraine fights for Severodonetsk

AGENCIES

Russia said yesterday its forces destroyed a depot containing Nato-supplied arms in western Ukraine as Kyiv showed no signs of obeying a Russian ultimatum to surrender the eastern city of Severodonetsk.

“Near the town of Zolochiv in Lviv region, high precision long range Kalibr missiles destroyed an ammunition depot of foreign weapons transferred to Ukraine by Nato countries, including 155-mm M777 howitzers,” the defence ministry said in a statement.

Ukraine said on Tuesday it had received just 10 percent of the weapons it requested from the West to deter Russia’s military intervention.

Earlier yesterday, Russia’s former president Dmitry Medvedev suggested that Ukraine may not exist in two years.

“I saw a report that Ukraine wants to receive LNG (liquefied natural gas) under a lend-lease agreement from its overseas masters with payment for delivery in two years,” Medvedev, who is now deputy head of the Security Council, wrote on Telegram

“And who said that in two years Ukraine will even exist on the world map?” said the close ally of President Vladimir Putin.

Russian forces are currently concentrating their firepower on the strategically important industrial hub of Severodonetsk as part of efforts to capture a swathe of eastern Ukraine.

Moscow had told Ukrainian forces holed up in a chemical plant in the shattered city to stop “senseless resistance and lay down arms” from yesterday morning, pressing its advantage in the battle for control of eastern Ukraine.

Plans announced by Moscow to open a humanitarian corridor for civilians holed up in the plant were disrupted, Russian-backed separatists said, blaming shelling by Ukraine.

More than 500 civilians are trapped alongside soldiers inside the Azot chemical factory where Ukrainian forces have resisted weeks of Russian assaults.

In Kyiv, President Volodymyr Zelensky has appealed for heavy weapons from the West, criticising the “restrained behaviour” of some European leaders which he said had

“slowed down arms supplies very much”.

Nato defence ministers yesterday gathered in Brussels to discuss sending more heavy weapons to replenish Kyiv’s dwindling stocks. At the meeting, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin urged allies not to “lose steam” on sending weapons to Ukraine, reports AFP.

Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg said the spike in global food prices was a direct consequence of the war, not of sanctions against Russia as Moscow claimed.

Meanwhile, Chinese President Xi Jinping yesterday told his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in a call that Beijing would keep backing Moscow on “sovereignty and security”, according to state media.

The two leaders also agreed to ramp up economic cooperation in the face of “unlawful” Western sanctions, the Kremlin said.

The UN’s Ukraine commission yesterday confirmed receiving multiple allegations of rights abuses by Russian forces, but said it was too early to say whether they constituted war crimes.

## Journos to be fined up to Tk 10 lakh for ‘illegal activity’

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The Press Council Act-1974 is being amended with a provision of fining a journalist up to Tk 10 lakh if found involved in any illegal or criminal activities, Bangladesh Press Council Chairman Justice Nizamul Huq Nasim said on Tuesday.

He was addressing a programme marking the handover of training certificates to journalists at the Rajshahi Circuit House.

Nizamul said the draft of the law, now with the Cabinet, may be passed in the next session of parliament.

There has been a rise in reports of journalists being involved in illegal activities, he said, adding that the current law does not have any provision for punishing journalists except for rebuking them for wrongdoings.

“We want proper journalism which would earn journalists respect.”

Nizamul said the Press Council and the PIB are preparing a list of journalists. Names of journalists will be collected from media outlets, but their information will be verified, he added.

## One held over raping schoolgirl in Jashore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Police arrested a youth in Jashore’s Lebutala village early yesterday over raping a schoolgirl.

The arrestee, Mahim Mollah, 30, is a resident of Battala village.

Mahim raped the eighth grader in a jute field on Tuesday evening when she went out to look for their ducks in a pond near her house, said Moniruzaman, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police station, quoting the victim’s father.

He said the victim’s father filed a case with the police station on Tuesday night accusing Mahim. She was later admitted to Jashore Medical College Hospital.

## BSF arrests six Bangladeshis over smuggling Phensedyl

STAR REPORT

Indian Border Security Force arrested six Bangladeshis with Phensedyl bottles and packets of fish feed from the border area in West Bengal’s North 24 Parganas district on Monday night.

The arrestees – Abdul Mujit, 45, Md Ashikar Rehman, 24, Sk Wahidul Zaman, 27, Mohammad Sagar Hussain, 21, Robiul Ghazi, 27, and Liton Sardar, 19 – were trying to smuggle the items to Bangladesh.

BSF personnel picked up the six with 221 Phensedyl bottles and 10 packets of fish feed, a BSF statement said, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

During primary interrogation, they admitted that they work as labourers to smuggle goods into Bangladesh from India, the statement added.

The six went to India to collect items and each of them was supposed to get Tk 3,000 for taking the items to Bangladesh.

## Dramatic win for Rifat

FROM PAGE 1

He said a phone call came when the results of 101 polling centres had been announced. “They [EC officials] then stopped declaring results for 45 minutes. I was ahead by 980 votes then. They took it by engineering.”

He termed the Election Commission spineless, and said he would decide on his next course of action after talking to lawyers.

In his instant reaction, Rifat said he would release a “white paper” on corruption that took place in the city corporation in the past.

Regarding the election results, local Awami League MP Bahauddin Bahar, who is said to be backing Rifat, said, “We have won. It doesn’t matter who accepts the result or who does not. Many councillor candidates will not accept the result.”

He added, “Just watched a drama.”

The third Cumilla City Corporation election was otherwise exceptionally quiet, calm and mostly uneventful. There has been no report of violence during the polling yesterday.

In recent years, almost all local government polls were tainted by clashes, allegations of ballot-box stuffing, use of muscle power, and other forms of election anomalies.

The turnout yesterday was 58.74 percent, Returning Officer Shahedunnabi Chowdhury said last night.

The voting process was, however, slow. Some voters alleged mismanagement by election officials in troubleshooting EVMs.

There was rain

interruption on an otherwise hot and humid day. It started to rain at 9:00am, just an hour after the voting began. When there was no rain, most polling stations saw voters queuing up.

Around 11:00am at Cumilla Modern School, one of these correspondents found hundreds of women waiting to cast their votes.

Some, mostly elderly people, became sick standing in line for hours. Some went home without voting.

Habiba Sulhana, of Thakurpara, said, “I have been standing here for an hour. And now, I am returning home. What kind of preparation has the government made that I couldn’t cast my vote?”

People were seen splashing water on the heads of the elderly people to help them cool down.

Presiding Officer Mofizul Haque said there were 5,000 voters at the school. “It was raining since morning, so there was no pressure of voters. But after the rain stopped, a huge number of people started to come in.”

These correspondents visited 25 centres and found that the pace picked up in the afternoon.

Rifat expressed satisfaction over the voting atmosphere.

Sakku alleged that EVMs slowed down the voting rate and in some centres the machines malfunctioned.

Lawmaker Bahauddin alleged that in some places people could not cast vote as they did not take voter slips with them.

Talking to voters it was found that elderly people had issues with fingerprints

while using the EVMs, which were used in all voting centres.

Glitches and people’s inexperience in using the machine caused trouble polling at many centres, making voter lines outside grow longer.

One key feature of the polls was that female voters noticeably made up a significant portion of the crowds.

There were positive reactions from voters as well.

“I cast my vote without any hassle. The queue was long but the process was smooth,” Bithi Begum, who cast her vote in Cumilla Collegiate School, said.

This time all the polling centres were under surveillance of CCTV cameras installed by the Election Commission.

Visiting polling centres, it was found that there were gatherings outside the polling stations, mostly by the supporters and activists of the ruling party wearing badges of “boat”, the electoral symbol of AL.

Even the ruling party men were seen inside some polling centres.

The election has been much-talked in the political sphere as this is the first major task of the newly formed Election Commission that began its journey in February.

The last election to Cumilla City Corporation, formed in 2011, was held in March 2017. It saw Sakku winning a second term with the party support.

But this time he ran as an independent candidate as his party BNP expelled him and also boycotted the polls.

Five candidates, including Rashedul Islam from Islami Andolon Bangladesh and independents Kamrul Ahsan Babul and Nizamuddin Kaiser, vied for mayor while 106 for councillor posts and 36 for reserved posts.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal yesterday said the election was peaceful and an estimated 60 percent of

## 2,100km roads

FROM PAGE 1

The Highway Development and Maintenance of the RHD carries out the survey every year to project the total maintenance costs for its road network.

It also conducts the survey to prioritise the roads for maintenance, as it does not get enough allocation.

The latest was conducted between November 2021 and March this year.

According to the report, released on Tuesday on the RHD website, 20,072km (89.50 percent) of roads were surveyed this year, excluding those roads under rehabilitation or reconstruction work.

The survey found 1,128km of road (5.62 percent) in poor condition, 493km (2.46 percent) in bad condition and 457km (2.28 percent) in very bad condition.

The remaining 89.64 percent were found in “good” or “fair” condition.

The department classified the roads in five categories on the basis of their roughness, said an RHD engineer.

Once a road is classified as “very bad”, it needs immediate attention. While a “bad” road also needs attention, without which it

votes were casted.

Talking to reporters after the election at the EC office in the capital, he also said on some occasions some elderly people faced some problems while casting votes using EVM and general appraisal was that voting through EVM was good.

He said that heavy rain caused some disruption and slowed down voting.

would turn into a very bad one next year, he said.

If anyone travels on a “poor road”, they would take a relatively longer time to reach their destination and be less comfortable during travel, he added.

The previous survey in June last year found some 3,005.72km (16.26 percent) of roads in “poor, bad or very bad” condition.

THE REASONS

Transport expert Prof Hadiuzzaman said the RHD conducts the survey once in a year. “But such surveys should be done at least four times a year and the roads should be repaired immediately on the basis of the report.”

He added, “Delays in detecting poor roads will increase maintenance cost.”

Termining overloading of vehicles a major cause behind the damage of roads, he said the authorities should execute the relevant laws strictly.

RHD Chief Engineer AKM Manir Hossain Pathan said if the ongoing development projects are completed within two three years, they hope to turn 98 percent of the roads into good to fair condition.

He also said that on

## Largely without hassles

FROM PAGE 1

in 2012 and 2017, but not exclusively.

“It’s easy and quick, no hassle,” Momotaz Akter said after casting her vote at the Victoria Government College polling centre.

“This is not the first time. I cast my vote through EVM last time too.”

Akter, a homemaker, said there were three buttons for three posts – mayor, general ward councillor and reserved ward councillor – and it took less than a minute to complete the process.

Another female voter, Rahima Khatun, said initially she was puzzled but she found her way when election officials made the process clear to her.

“I never cast my vote on a machine. I was a bit puzzled but election officials taught me what to do. I just followed the directives. It’s easy,” she said after casting her vote in Ishak Government Primary School.

Like them, many female voters expressed satisfaction after casting votes through EVM. In previous elections across the country, it was reported that female and elderly voters had difficulty voting with EVMs.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal said the polls were peaceful and estimated that there was about 60 percent turnout.

He also said that on

some occasions, elderly people faced a few problems while casting votes using EVMs, but the general response was good.

Some voters said as people had previous experience of using the machines and there were enough mock voting exercises, the voting was more or less smooth.

But there were some allegations of fingerprint mismatches, wrong press of buttons and long waiting times to cast votes.

Election officials said mostly elderly people faced problems as they were not familiar with the process and did not take part in mock exercises.

Arshad Ali cast his vote at the Chowara Islamia Fazil Madrassa polling centre.

“Initially, my fingerprint did not match but eventually it did. Then I pressed the wrong button,” he said, ruling that he could not vote for his preferred candidate.

Md Mominul Islam, the centre’s presiding officer, said the assistant presiding officers and other election officials helped voters from outside the secret room.

“We guide them before they enter the booth. But many still faced problems doing it correctly, and in those cases we asked them to follow our instructions,” he said.

Islam said this was one of the reasons for long queues.

There were some reports

in some centres that the EVM was not working but it was addressed immediately, these correspondents found.

Some voters of ward-19 alleged that the EVMs displayed only the “Boat” – the electoral symbol of the ruling Awami League candidate.

Following the complaint, Judicial Magistrate Omar Faruk visited Neura MI High School polling centre, but the magistrate claimed that he was not allowed to enter the booth.

“I came here to verify the allegations. When I entered the polling booth and wanted to see the EVM, the presiding officer obstructed me.”

Nazmul Amin, presiding officer of the centre, confirmed the development to The Daily Star and said, “I told the magistrate that I cannot allow him to enter a ‘secret room’. It is not legal.”

He also claimed that the machines were okay and had been inspected by the technical team. He said there were mixed reactions on using EVMs and many voters had said it slowed down the voting.

Contacted, Returning Officer Shahedunnabi Chowdhury said the reason for slow casting is not the use of EVMs but that each voter had to cast three votes.

“In some cases, it might be that EVM was a factor in slow casting, but overall it was not the case,” he said.