Four more die from Covid

Positivity rate keeps rising

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least four people died of coronavirus in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, reported the Directorate General of Health Services.

According to a DGHS press release, this was the highest number of daily deaths after March 11.

Of 13,905 samples, 2,183 people tested positive for the virus in those 24 hours, read the release.

The positivity rate now stands at 15.70 percent.

The total number of confirmed cases rose to 1,973,785, and the fatalities to 29,149 with the latest count.

After the positivity rate remained below one percent between March and May, the transmission of the virus started rising early this month.

The cabinet division on Tuesday instructed all officials concerned to enforce the "no mask, no service" policy and ensure everyone maintains health safety guidelines.

Meanwhile, health officials, including Health Minister Zahid Maleque, urged people to take their second and third doses of Covid-19 vaccines.

1971 WAR CRIMES

One to walk gallows, three jailed till death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special court yesterday sentenced a man to death for committing war crimes in 1971.

The International Crimes Tribunal-1 handed down the verdict and sentenced three more men to jail for life for the same crimes.

The three-member tribunal, led by Justice Md Shahinur Islam, delivered the verdict.

Another accused was acquitted as the prosecution could not prove allegations against him, said prosecutor Rezia Sultana Chaman.

Among the convicts, Shafi Ahmed was awarded death penalty while Tajul Islam, Jahed Mia and Salek Mia were given jail until death.

Another accused, Sabbir Ahmed, has been acquitted.

Shafi and Sabbir are on the run while the three others are in jail, Rezia said.

All of them are from Habiganj's Lakhai upazila and were charged with abduction, torture and murders during the Liberation War.

A view shows a building of a car garage destroyed by a Russian missile strike, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, in Dnipro, Ukraine on Wednesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Russia pulls out troops from Snake Island

Terms the move 'goodwill gesture'; Moscow warns of new 'iron curtain'; Biden unveils new military aid for Kyiv

AGENCIES

Russian forces abandoned the strategic Black Sea outpost of Snake Island yesterday, in a major victory for Ukraine that could loosen the grip of Russia's blockade on Ukrainian ports.

The news from the Black Sea came as Nato leaders wrapped up their summit in Madrid, intent on demonstrating their unity and determination to back up Kyiv with advanced weapons in the face of Moscow's assault.

Snake Island became a symbol of Ukrainian resistance in the first days of the war, when the rocky outcrop's defenders told a Russian warship that called on them to surrender to "go f*** yourself", an incident that spurred a defiant meme.

It was also a strategic target, sitting aside shipping lanes near Ukraine's port of Odessa. Russia had attempted to install missile and air defence batteries while under fire from drones.

Now, however, Ukraine has begun to receive longer range missiles and military gear from its Western backers, and the Russian position on Snake Island seems to have become untenable.

"In the end, it will prove impossible for (President Vladimir) Putin to hold down a country that will not accept his rule," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said, stressing that any eventual peace deal would be on Ukraine's terms.

"We've seen what Ukraine can do to drive the Russians back. We've seen what they did around Kyiv and Kharkiv, now on Snake Island."

The Russian defence ministry statement described the retreat as "a gesture of goodwill" meant to demonstrate that Moscow will not interfere with UN efforts to organise protected grain exports from Ukraine.

But Kyiv claimed it as a win.

"They always downplay their defeats this way," Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Twitter.

In peacetime, Ukraine is a major agricultural exporter, but Russia's invasion has damaged farmland and seen Ukraine's ports seized, razed or blockaded -- threatening grain importers.

Western powers have accused Putin of using the trapped harvest as a weapon to increase pressure on the international community, and Russia has been accused of stealing grain.

The conflict in Ukraine has dominated the Nato summit in Madrid, where the leaders said Russia "is the most significant and direct threat to allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area".

This came as Nato officially invited Sweden and Finland to join the alliance, and US President Joe Biden announced new deployments of US troops, ships and planes to Europe.

Biden yesterday announced $800 million in new weapons for Ukraine and said the United States will support Kyiv "as long as it takes" in its war against Russian invasion.

Earlier, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused the alliance of seeking to assert its "supremacy", telling journalists in the Turkmenistan capital of Ashgabat that Ukraine and its people are "a means" for Nato to "defend their own interests."

PADMA BRIDGE

Another arrested for removing bolts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Counterterrorism officials arrested another man, who was seen in a video removing nuts and bolts from the railing of Padma Bridge.

Mahdi Hasan, 27, was arrested from Laxmipur's Ramganj upazila, Asaduzzaman, chief of DMP's Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit, told a press briefing yesterday.

Earlier, the CID arrested Bayezid Talha for also releasing a video of himself on TikTok showing he was removing nuts and bolts from the Bridge's railing.

Bayezid was put on a seven-day remand in a case filed with Padma Bridge North Police Station.

Bangladeshi finds money, returns it to fellow pilgrim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladeshi haji is being lauded for finding and returning around seven lakh CFA francs to its owner -- a pilgrim from Burkina Faso -- in Saudi Arabia's Medina city.

The Bangladeshi was identified as Abdur Rahman Prodhan, from Dhaka's Demra.

In a Facebook post, he wrote that he found a bundle of foreign currency on Monday.

He hung a handwritten sign around his neck, saying "Some African France [franc] found", and searched for the owner near Al-Masjid an-Nabawi.

A citizen of Burkina Faso claimed it was his money, and gave proof in favour of his claim.

An official of Bangladesh Hajj Mission in Medina said that such a noble gesture by a Bangladeshi certainly brightens the country's image in Saudi Arabia.

"We are trying to locate the Bangladeshi haji to appreciate his great deed," he added.

Man dies after being hit by train

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Moulvibazar*

Police yesterday recovered the body of a man who was killed after being hit by a train in Shamshernagar Keshuluti area of Moulvibazar's Kamalganj upazila yesterday morning.

The victim could not yet be identified. However, police are assuming he was around 45-years-old, Mollah Selimuzzaman, OC of Srimangal Railway Police, told The Daily Star, adding that an unnatural death case was filed with the station in this regard.

SI Abdur Rahman, of Shamshernagar police outpost, said the man died on the spot when the Dhaka-Sylhet-bound intercity Kalni Express hit him at the Keshuluti railway crossing.

The body was sent to Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

Key tools not there

FROM PAGE 1

Fazle Kabir said the global economy is now facing an uncertainty due to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, prompting the International Monetary Fund to cut the global growth projection.

The prices of major commodities, including petroleum, have been on the rise in the global market due to the war, he said.

Amid such a situation, the country's import payment has shot up in recent months.

Between July and April in FY22, imports went up by 41 percent to $68.66 billion, bringing the reserves down to $41.7 billion on June 28. The figure was $46.15 billion on December 31 last year.

The BB governor said, "The major challenge of the monetary policy is to contain inflation and keep the exchange rate stable."

The exchange rate of the taka stood at Tk 93.45 a dollar yesterday compared to Tk 84.80 a year ago.

Ahsan said that if the lending rate cap is withdrawn, the interest rate on import financing, now a maximum of 9 percent, will go up substantially, and this will help bring stability to the foreign exchange market.

He further said the latest monetary policy will not bring any good to depositors as inflation continues to rise,.

Zahid Hussain, former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, said the BB termed the monetary policy for FY23 "tight" and "cautious".

"The tightness can be found only in the increase in the policy rate by 50 basis points."

Zahid said some of the measures announced in the policy are, in fact, likely to be inflationary.

"Further increases in LC [letter of credit] margins on non-essential imports will push up prices even if they are effective in reducing the demand for foreign exchange."

He said the monetary policy includes some expansionary measures such as new refinance scheme to boost production of import-substituting products and continued support for stimulus packages.

Monzur Hossain, research director at Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said the monetary policy appeared to be cautionary and slightly contractionary.

However, the increase in policy rate will not help contain inflation as the lending rate cap remains unchanged, he pointed out.

"The big challenge for the policy is that the monetary instruments would not be effective if the government controls interest rates, ignoring the spirit of the interest rate deregulations."

This means the monetary policy's role in controlling inflation and stabilising volatile exchange rates would be limited, he said.

Fahmida Khatun, executive director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said it's fine that the BB reduced the credit growth target in private sector to contain inflation.

"It's an unusually stressful year. It's not expected that private investment will rise at a high rate," she said.

But the market will not function properly since the interest rate on lending has not been changed, she said.

"Interest rate should automatically adjust with supply and demand for funds in the market. In its absence, the whole mechanism will not function properly," she added.

Eid-ul-Azha

FROM PAGE 12

across the world slaughter sacrificial animals and draw inspiration from the unique example of sacrifice to please Allah.

On this occasion, the Muslims in Bangladesh will offer prayers in congregations and sacrifice animals to seek Allah's blessing.

They will offer munajat seeking divine blessings for peace, progress and prosperity of the country as well as for the welfare of the Muslim Ummah.

Neo JMB on the wane, some groups active online

FROM PAGE 1

Monirul Islam, former CTTC chief and current additional inspector general of the special branch of police, wrote in an article published in Counter Terrorism Journal last year that militants were using the cyber space to disseminate extremist messages and spread hatred toward their targets, make recruitment, collect funds, provide training to new members and prepare for terror attacks.

Just like many other countries, Bangladesh was seeing a rise in radicalisation. Counterterrorism is a complex and lengthy task that requires the involvement of the whole of society, he observed.

Security analyst Maj Gen ANM Muniruzzaman (retd) said the periodic arrest of suspects and recovery of arms and ammunition were an indication that the militants were active.

There should be a national counter militancy strategic policy in which the government, police, and other stakeholders of the society will have specific roles to play, he said.

CTTC chief Asaduzzaman said police have been intervening in online activities of suspects, adding that it had become increasingly difficult for militants to make new recruits as people were more aware now.

HOLEY ARTISAN ATTACK AND NEO-JMB

Neo-JMB was formed after late Bangladeshi-Canadian Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury, who was inspired by the global terror organisation Islamic State, came to Bangladesh in October 2013.

The group was behind the attack on Holey Artisan, killing 22 people, including 17 foreigners and two police officers, on July 1, 2016.

In 2016, Neo-JMB and Al Qaeda inspired Ansar Al Islam (AAI) killed a total of 60 people in 53 attacks. The following year, neo-JMB carried out an attack killing five people, including three police officers, in Sylhet.

After the Holey Artisan attack, the CTTC started countrywide intelligence operations and led preemptive operations.

Rab and different units of police also strengthened their efforts against terrorism.

Since the Holey Artisan attack, the CTTC has arrested 512 suspects. Law enforcers carried out 28 operations at militant dens where 79 militants were killed and large stashes of explosives were destroyed or seized.

Northeast braces for another blow

FROM PAGE 1

Chhatak, Dowarabazar, Tahirpur, Bishwambarpur and Sunamganj Sadar upazilas, including the district municipality.

Shafique Ali, a member of Chhatak's Islampur union parishad, said, "As it has been raining heavily, the water level has been rising and people are fearing yet another devastating flood."

Dowarabazar's Banglabazar union sits just downhill of the world's wettest place Mawsynram and the second wettest Cherrapunji of India's Meghalaya.

The rainwater from the hills enters Bangladesh through four transboundary rivers, which flow through the union and cause damage every time.

However, the people of the area have never seen a flood such as the one that began on June 15.

"The water rushing through the rivers has flooded all the villages in the upazila and affected 9,000 people so far. All roads have also been damaged," said Mohammad Abul Kashem, chairman of the union.

"Since the flash floods began, we have been detached from the rest of the country."

The floods in Sylhet have by now already damaged 8,033km of roads in four districts.

Md Mahbub Alam, executive engineer of Sunamganj LGED, said, "We are experiencing massive destruction. Not a single road was spared and it will take us years to repair them."

In Sylhet, around 4,000km of roads under the LGED and 160km of roads under the RHD were damaged in the floods.

In Sunamganj, LGED roads spanning around 2,000km and RHD roads around 184km were destroyed.

Meanwhile, in Moulvibazar, 381km roads under the RHD and 93km under the LGED have been damaged. In Habiganj, around 186km of LGED roads and 29km of RHD roads have been destroyed.

According to RHD and LGED officials, the monetary loss from the damages will be more than Tk 4,000 crore. This might increase after the final assessment of the flood fallout.

Md Mostafizur Rahman, executive engineer of Sylhet RHD, said, "All major roads, including highways, were affected and the loss is too huge to recover from soon."

These damages took place while both departments were planning the recovery from the May floods.

Meanwhile, the rising of floods threaten to cause further damage.

The Department of Public Health Engineering had initially assessed that 45,976 water points and 50,885 latrines have been damaged.

In a report published on Sunday, the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office's Humanitarian Coordination Task Team said at least $8.5 million will be needed to provide hygiene, safe drinking water and sanitation services to the victims.

The floods claimed four more lives in the 24 hours till yesterday morning, raising the number of fatalities to 92.

All of the latest victims died by drowning in Sherpur, Sunamganj and Habiganj districts, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Of the deaths recorded from May 17 till yesterday, 66 people died by drowning in floodwater.

Meanwhile, at least 14 died from lightning strikes, two from snake bites, one from diarrhoea, and nine due to other reasons.

On Wednesday, two children of the same family drowned in floodwaters in Uttar Godbha village of Durgapur union in Lalmonirhat's Aditmari upazila.

They were identified as two-year-old Ayesha Khatun, daughter of Rashedul Islam, and two-year-old Labiba Akter, daughter of Rubel Miah.

Moktarul Islam, officer-in-charge of Aditmari Police Station, said the two children were playing in the backyard and fell into the waters near the house.

Meanwhile, at a meeting of Paribesh O Haor Unnayan Sangstha in Sylhet city yesterday, citizens demanded a special allocation of Tk 1,000 crore from the government for the victims.

Kashmir Reza, president of the organisation, said students will need education materials and clothes, businesses will need loans without interest and a rebate from instalments of previous loans, and the farmers free seed and fertilizer.

He also stated that all flood-hit families should be given 30kgs of rice, 500 taka every month for a year, fodder for the cattle, and Tk10,000 for the 70,000 families whose homes were destroyed.

(Our Lalmonirhat correspondent contributed to the report.)