

Covid claims two more lives

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two more people died from Covid-19 in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

Besides, 253 people were tested positive for the viral infection during the same period, said a press release of the Directorate General of Health Services.

The positivity rate was 5.06 percent against a total of 5,002 samples tested countrywide, said the DGHS.

The deceased were male and they were from Rajshahi and Mymensingh divisions.

With the latest count, the total number of fatalities rose to 29,302 and the cases to 2,00,6,899, the DGHS added.

Lenders could delay Sri Lanka bailout: president

AFP, Colombo

A potential International Monetary Fund bailout for Sri Lanka could be delayed if its creditors – the largest being China – do not agree on concessions, the island's president warned yesterday.

A crucial debt restructuring – with the countries to which it owes billions agreeing to write off some of their dues – is a pre-condition before the IMF will approve a bailout for the country, where inflation is rampant and shortages of essentials widespread.

“Until you come to an agreement among the official creditors, it is not possible to go to the London Club,” Ranil Wickremesinghe told a forum, referring to subsequent debt talks with commercial lenders.

Wickremesinghe did not name a single country, but analysts said he was referring to China, the largest single bilateral creditor, which is owed over 10 percent of Sri Lanka's foreign debt.

Officials say that clinching an agreement with Beijing is crucial, but China has not publicly shifted from its offer of more loans rather than taking a haircut on existing credit.

The IMF is likely to insist on painful reforms as part of any bailout, and Wickremesinghe warned: “It may be bitter, but any medicine for recovery is bitter. You have to take injections.”

Previous presidents, including his immediate predecessor who fled abroad and resigned last month, borrowed heavily from Beijing for infrastructure projects, most of which became white elephants.

Analyst Victor Ivan said debt talks could be leveraged by Beijing to extract concessions in the South Asian island, which has become a geopolitical hotspot.



Ukrainian servicemen fire with a BM27 Uragan multiple launch rocket system at a position in Kharkiv region, Ukraine, as Russia's offensive on Ukraine continues. The photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Three more grain ships sail from Ukraine ports

Kyiv seeks to extend shipping safe passage deal beyond grain; Russia ‘ready’ for prisoner swap talks with US

AGENCIES

Three grain ships left Ukrainian ports yesterday while the first inbound cargo vessel since Russia's invasion was due in Ukraine later in the day to load, as Kyiv called for the safe passage deal to be extended to other cargoes such as metals.

The July 22 deal marked a rare diplomatic breakthrough as war rages in eastern Ukraine, with Kyiv trying to rebuild its shattered economy after more than five months of conflict.

“We expect that the security guarantees of our partners from the UN and Turkey will continue to work, and food exports from our ports will become stable and predictable for all market participants,” Ukrainian Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said on Facebook after the ships set off.

The first grain ship left Odesa on Monday.

“This agreement is about logistics, about the movement of vessels through the Black Sea,” Ukrainian Deputy Economy Minister Taras Kachka told Financial Times. “What's the difference between grain and iron ore?”

The Kremlin said a solution for

extending safe passage deal can only be found if linked to lifting restrictions on Russian metal producers.

Yesterday, two grain ships set off from Chornomorsk and one from Odesa, carrying a total of about 58,000 tonnes of corn, the Turkish defence ministry said.

The Turkish bulk carrier Osprey S, flying the flag of Liberia, was expected to arrive

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in Chornomorsk later yesterday to load up with grain, the regional administration of Odesa said.

As the three vessels left Ukrainian ports, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was preparing with most of his top ministers for his second talks with President Vladimir Putin in 17 days in the Russian resort city of Sochi.

Erdogan wants to translate the success

into truce talks in Istanbul between Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Ukraine would like to include ports in the southern Mykolaiv region, to the east of Odesa, in the safe passage deal, though it has been frequently shelled throughout the invasion, reports Reuters.

The city of Mykolaiv itself was set to impose an unusually long curfew from later yesterday to early Monday as authorities try to catch people collaborating with Russia, the region's governor said.

After five months of fighting, President Zelensky spoke of fierce fighting around the town of Avdiivka in the eastern Donbas region and the fortified village of Pisky.

Russia's TASS news agency cited separatist forces as saying Russian and pro-Russian forces had taken full control of Pisky. They also said that fighting was taking place in the city of Bakhmut, north of Donetsk.

Meanwhile, Russia said yesterday it was “ready to discuss” a prisoner swap with Washington at the presidential level, a day after the drug conviction of US basketball star Brittney Griner.

MIRSARAI TRAGEDY

Another dies, death toll now 12

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Another victim of last month's Mirsarai train-microbus collision died at Chattogram Medical College Hospital yesterday, taking the toll from the tragedy to 12.

Mohammed Ayat, 17, of Khandakia village in Chattogram's Hathazari upazila, succumbed to his injuries at the ICU of the hospital, said a doctor.

Six other victims are still admitted at the hospital.

The tragedy happened after a train hit a HiAce on a level crossing in Mirsarai upazila on July 29.

Meanwhile, a Chattogram court yesterday sent the gateman of the level crossing, Saddam, to jail hours after railway police arrested him.

Woman's body found in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Police recovered the body of a woman at her home in Rajshahi city yesterday.

Victim Rupali Khatun, 25, wife of Saudi expatriate Haroon-or Rashid, used to live alone at a rented flat in Daspukur area.

The body bore cuts marks and bruises, said Jahangir Alam, officer-in-charge of Rajpara Model Police Station.

Rupali was Haroon's second wife. She often quarreled with her husband over the phone, said Rupali's brother Mohammad Rafiq.

“She was afraid of a divorce,” he added.

Police primarily suspected Rupali's death to be a murder, the OC said.

1-yr-old baby dies in Ctg fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A one-year-old girl was burned to death as her home caught fire at Ichakhali in Chattogram's Mirsarai upazila yesterday.

Lamia Akter, daughter of local Mohammad Rajib, and her mother were at home when their house caught fire, said Ichakhali Union Parishad Chairman Nurul Mostafa.

“The mother could not save her child as she was stranded in another room in the tin-shed house,” he said.

The fire originated from an electric short-circuit around 1:00pm, said Imam Hossain, station officer of Fire Service and Civil Defence in Mirsarai.

On information, firefighters rushed to the spot and brought the blaze under control in one hour.

Later, they recovered the charred body of the child from the spot, said the fire service official.

US declares monkeypox a public health emergency

AFP, Washington

US President Joe Biden's government on Thursday declared monkeypox a public health emergency, a move that should free up new funds, assist in data gathering and allow the deployment of additional personnel in the fight against the disease.

Waiting for the rain

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“In normal times, I would have prepared my land for transplanting Aman by now. But the situation is different this year as I am still waiting for rain,” he told The Daily Star.

He said they usually do not use deep tubewells for irrigation because it rains in this season every year. “So, farmers from our region did not have any preparation for irrigation. I do not know what will happen,” said a frustrated Sadek.

Abdul Halim from Gobindaganj of Gaibandha said he did not face such a problem last year as there were rains. But this year it is already late and he could not finish Aman transplantation.

“This year I have to irrigate my land with a deep tubewell to transplant Aman. I am transplanting slowly, still expecting rains,” said Halim, who is cultivating Aman on two acres. “The cost of irrigation will be a burden on me.”

Abdus Salam, a farmer of Hamchiapur village in Pabna, could not even start Aman cultivation on his two bighas due to the lack of water. The production is uncertain.

Md Abdul Mannan, a meteorologist,

said as rainfall is likely to be low and temperature will rise this month, the Aman management will be significantly hampered.

“Farmers will need irrigation which will increase the cost of production. On the other hand, delayed transplantation will reduce the life cycle of the plant. This will hamper production,” he added.

Habibur Rahaman Chowdhury, director of the field services wing of the DAE, said although the rate of transplantation was low due to poor rainfall in July, it would be completed by this month.

“In many areas, farmers are waiting for rains for Aman transplantation and in some areas, farmers are in fear of possible flooding. However, if everything remains in favour, the crucial part of Aman cultivation – that is transplantation – will be completed by this month,” he said.

A dry spell with low rainfall and rise of temperature have been prevailing in the country over the last two months. June's average rainfall is 439.9mm but this year it's 423.8mm – down by 3.6 percent.

The situation turned worse in July as the rainfall was 57.6 percent less

than the last 30 years' average for that month and lowest in the last 41 years in Bangladesh.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Experts suggested the government come up with a package of subsidies to ensure production of the rice in this critical time when the overall economy is under pressure.

AMM Shawkat Ali, a former food adviser to the caretaker government, said there are double troubles for Aman farmers – poor rainwater for the rain-fed crops and seedlings crisis.

“The government should focus on supplementary irrigation at free of cost to encourage farmers and ensure production. As floods have damaged seedlings in some places, the government should come up with agricultural rehabilitation programmes immediately.”

Otherwise, he said, there will be a shortfall in Aman production which is already predicted in a USDA report published recently. “Because of this, our dependence on the international market for rice import will increase which is risky in this crisis period.”

As Aman production will be hampered, policymakers should immediately sit together to find out the

strategy to fill up the production gap, he suggested.

Dr M Asaduzzaman, a former research director of BIDS, said another pressure on farmers is that the government has increased the price of Urea fertiliser.

“Farmers in our country waste irrigation water and fertiliser. The government has to work very proactively to reach out to farmers and make them understand about not wasting water and fertiliser. It will save their money,” he said.

Besides, he said, many farmers could not prepare their Aman seedbeds. “So, if possible, the government should provide them with the Aman variety with a shorter life span.”

The lack of rainfall not only creates a problem for farmers to cultivate Aman, also for the Boro, he told The Daily Star yesterday. “The low rain means our groundwater will not be recharged and farmers will face problems irrigating during the Boro season.”

As the adverse weather across top rice producing countries is threatening to reduce the output of rice, he said, the government should make a good stock of rice by imports before the international price goes up.

“substantially be damaged” if it did so.

During a meeting with Bangladesh Ambassador to China Mahub Uz Zaman on June 1 this year, Chinese foreign ministry's Department of Asian Affairs Director General Liu Jinsong said China believes that countries in the region, including Bangladesh, will bear in mind the fundamental interests of their own countries and the region, uphold independence, reject the Cold War mentality and bloc politics, safeguard true multilateralism and defend the hard-won environment for peace and development in the region.

Liu Jinsong said the logic behind the IPS, AUKUS, Quad and IPEF is US “centrism” and “exceptionalism” that China thinks will only bring disgrace to US and undermine the regional cooperation framework and create bloc confrontation.

Govt raises fuel prices

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prices, said the statement.

State Minister Nasrul Hamid yesterday said the government had no other choice but to raise fuel

prices. “When the situation becomes normal, fuel prices will be revised.”

Fuel prices are frequently “adjusted” in the neighbouring countries, said the ministry release.

China scraps key

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The world's two largest polluters last year pledged to work together to accelerate climate action this decade, and vowed to meet regularly to “address the climate crisis”.

But that deal looks shaky as relations sink to some of their lowest levels in years, as do agreements on everything from talks on military matters to anti-drug cooperation.

Pelosi yesterday defended her trip to Taiwan, saying that Washington would “not allow” China to isolate the island.

Taiwan has also condemned Beijing's response to the visit, with premier Su Tseng-chang calling for allies to push for de-escalation.

“(We) didn't expect that the evil neighbour next door would show off its power at our door and arbitrarily jeopardise the busiest waterways in the world with its military exercises,”

Kathmandu can use Ctg

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She said her government attaches great importance to maintaining good relations with the neighbouring countries, including Nepal.

The premier expressed her gratitude to the leadership and the people of Nepal for supporting Bangladesh during the Liberation War in 1971.

The Nepalese delegation said the two countries may further consolidate cooperation in sectors like power, hydroelectricity, tourism, education, ICT, connectivity, and people-to-people contact.

They noted with great satisfaction that Nepal and Bangladesh have been enjoying cordial relations over the years. They mentioned that this year

holds significant importance for both countries as they are celebrating the 50th year of establishing diplomatic relations.

The parliamentary delegation emphasised high-level visits on a regular basis to strengthen Bangladesh-Nepal friendly ties.

The visiting team appreciated Hasina for her visionary leadership and Bangladesh's recent socio-economic development, which they termed very impressive.

The meeting ended with handing over of gifts from both sides.

The visiting team also met the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs before travelling to Tungipara, Gopalganj, via the Padma Bridge yesterday.