Five die of Nipah virus this year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five out of eight patients infected with Nipah virus have died this year, Health Minister Zahid Maleque said yesterday.

"We have so far detected eight patients this year; five have died. Anyone infected can also spread the infection to many others. This is concerning," he said while speaking at a press conference at his Secretariat office.

Urging people not to consume the raw date juice, the minister also said fruits half-eaten by birds should not be taken.

"There are no drugs or vaccines for Nipah virus infection. The primary treatment for humans is supportive care, similar to the treatment for Covid-19," the minister said.

The government has stepped up awareness campaign in this regard, Zahid said.

A special unit, equipped with ICU, has been prepared at the Infectious Disease Hospital in the capital's Mohakhali, he added.

Earlier this month, officials at the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) also advised people to not drink raw date juice, the main source of the Nipah virus in the country, following the first death of a woman.

According to the World Health Organization, the Nipah virus infection is a zoonotic illness that is transmitted to people from animals and can also be transmitted through contaminated food or directly from person to person.

It causes a range of illnesses from asymptomatic (subclinical) infection to acute respiratory illness and fatal encephalitis. The virus can also cause severe diseases in some animals.

In Bangladesh and India, consumption of fruits or fruit products (such as raw date palm juice) contaminated with the urine or saliva from infected fruit bats were the likeliest sources of the virus.

According to the IEDCR, infected people initially develop symptoms such as fever, headaches, myalgia (muscle pain), vomiting and sore throat. An undetected patient can even fall into a coma within 24 to 48 hours of contracting the virus.

The virus was first identified as the cause of an encephalitis outbreak in 2001 in Meherpur.

In 2006, the Nipah Surveillance and Laboratory was established at the IEDCR.

Since then, 337 cases of the infection were documented. Of those infected, 235 died, indicating a very high mortality rate -- 71 percent, according to the IEDCR.

Risking life and limb, Awami League leaders and activists from different districts of Rajshahi division sit on the front and roof of a locomotive on their way to Sheikh Hasina's rally in Rajshahi city yesterday. At least eight trains were arranged to help the AL men reach the event venue from Joypurhat, Bogura, Sirajganj, Natore, Rajshahi, and Chapainawabganj. PHOTO: ANWAR ALI

Fighting rages in Donetsk

Ukraine says repelled attack near Blahodatne, Russia's Wagner claims control

REUTERS

Ukraine's military yesterday said its forces repelled an attack in the area of Blahodatne in the eastern part of the Donetsk region, while Russia's Wagner private military group said it took control of the village.

Fighting has escalated in Ukraine's east and northeast after Western allies promised the Kyiv government it would send them tanks to repel the invaders.

After weeks of wrangling, Germany and the United States this week said they would send Ukraine dozens of modern tanks to help push back Russian forces, opening the way for other countries to follow suit.

A total of 321 heavy tanks have been promised to Ukraine by several countries.

Ukraine has also asked for US F16 fighter jets. The White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said the government was aware of Ukraine's request but added, "We don't have any additional weapons systems to speak to today."

On Saturday, Zelensky's top aide said that expedited talks were under way between Ukraine and its allies about its requests for long-range missiles to prevent Russia from destroying Ukrainian cities.

Both sides in the war are expected to launch spring offensives, though Washington has advised Ukraine to wait until the latest weapons are in place and training has been provided - a process expected to take several months.

"Units of Ukraine's Defence Forces repelled the attacks of the occupiers in the areas of ... Blahodatne ... in the Donetsk region," the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces said in its daily morning report, referring to fighting on Saturday.

It added that its forces repelled Russian attacks in the areas of 13 other settlements in the Donetsk region.

The Wagner Group, designated by the United States as transnational criminal organisation, said on the Telegram messaging app on Saturday that its units had taken control of Blahodatne.

Reuters was not able to independently verify the reports.

With fighting heating up in the Donetsk region, the exact line of contact has been unclear, especially around the town Bakhmut where some of the heaviest fighting of the war has been taking place in recent weeks. The Wagner Group has made premature success claims before.

Ukraine has said that the Russian offensive on Bakhmut has not culminated, but the situation along the front line there has been growingly difficult. President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Friday that it was acute.

Minor gang-raped, strangled to death

An accused confesses to court

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Moulvibazar*

The nine-year-old madrasa boy, killed on his way back home from a waz mehfil in Habiganj's Baniachong on Thursday, was gang-raped before death, said police.

Layek Ahmad Hridoy, 20, one of the accused, confessed to the crime, said Ajay Chandra Deb, officer-in-charge of Baniachong Police Station, yesterday.

Later, Habiganj Judicial Magistrate Fakhrul Islam recorded Layek's statement under Section 164 of Code of Criminal Procedure on Saturday night, he said.

Three teenage boys were also involved in the incident, the OC added.

According to the confessional statement, the victim boarded Layek's battery-run three-wheeler on Thursday evening. Layek's three cohorts were also with him.

Later, Layek took the victim to cropland and they gang-raped him.

As the victim said he would share his experience with others, they strangled him to death.

On Friday, police found the body of victim Bilal Mia, a student of Kadupur Madrasa, in cropland.

The victim's father filed a murder case in this connection.

Police have arrested all four accused in the case.

B'BARIA BY-POLLS

Candidate 'missing' for 3 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Brahmanbaria*

Abu Asif Ahmed, an independent candidate in the Brahmanbaria-2 (Sarail-Ashuganj) by-polls, has been missing for the last three days.

The MP hopeful went out of his house in Ashuganj after lunch on Friday for campaigning, and he could not be reached over the phone since evening of that day, his wife Meherunnesa told The Daily Star.

Voters consider Asif, a former upazila chairman, to be the main rival of another independent runner Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan, an expelled BNP leader who is contesting the February 1 by-election "with blessings from the ruling Awami League".

Meherunnesa said they would lodge a complaint with police today if they failed to trace Asif by yesterday.

She alleged that police conducted searches at their home several times after Asif went missing.

"We are being harassed so that we cannot appoint polling agents."

Shakhawat Hossain, superintendent of Brahmanbaria police, said they didn't have any information that law enforcers picked up Asif.

"We have not received any complaint from Abu Asif Ahmed's family about harassment by police," he added.

Journalist Raghunath Kha released on bail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Satkhira*

Journalist Raghunath Kha, who was arrested last week on charges of sabotage and extortion in Satkhira, secured bail yesterday.

Satkhira Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Md Ziaul Islam granted him bail after police submitted the investigation report.

Family members claimed that Raghunath, the Satkhira correspondent of Deepto TV and Dainik Projonmo Ekattor, was detained by plainclothes police around 11:00am on January 23.

However, Debhata Police Station OC Sheikh Obaidullah, claimed, police arrested Raghunath and two others while they were trying to escape after detonating crude bombs in the Sapmara bridge area on January 23 around 5:45pm.

2 siblings die from 'food poisoning' in Gazipur

UNB, *Gazipur*

Two siblings died in Gazipur city's Salna yesterday, apparently from food poisoning.

The deceased -- Ashamoni, 6, and Alifa Akter, aged one and a half months, -- are daughters of Ashraful Islam of the same area.

Ehtesham, sub-inspector of Sadar Police Station, said Ashraful bought a cake and patties from a local shop, owned by one Saiful, adjacent to their house in the morning.

After eating the food, Ashamoni, Alifa and six-month old Siam, son of a neighbour of Ashraful, fell sick.

Later, they were taken to Shaheed Taj Uddin Ahmad Medical College Hospital where doctors declared the two siblings dead.

Police suspected that the two died from food poisoning.

Legal steps will be taken after getting a complaint from the victims' family, said Ehtesham.

AL never flees

FROM PAGE 1

At the Ghoshpara intersection near Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, some hospital-goers and ambulances were seen stuck in traffic.

Other than several hundred buses and trucks, the participants of the rally were brought to the city in some 40 boats through the Padma river.

The AL also hired at least eight trains to take activists from Joypurhat, Sirajganj, Bogura, Natore, Pabna and Chapainawabganj to Rajshahi city.

The trains were crammed and many were seen travelling on the roofs.

Due to the operations of these trains, several regular trains ran behind schedule, said witnesses.

On December 3 last year, the BNP held its Rajshahi divisional rally at the same venue. At that time, the opposition party leaders and activists from different districts faced difficulties in reaching the city amid a transport strike.

The BNP men stayed overnight under the open sky for two days ahead of the rally and arranged food for themselves.

Speaking to this newspaper yesterday, many AL men, especially youths, said they came to see Hasina and hear her development plans.

'NO YOUTH WILL REMAIN JOBLESS'

Addressing the rally, Hasina also said no youth would remain unemployed and no one would be left landless in the county.

"Every youth will get a job... You promise me that you will vote for 'boat'."

The audience in response raised hands assuring the prime minister.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, presidium members Jahangir Kabir Nanak and AHM Khairuzzaman Liton, also Rajshahi city mayor, Joint General Secretary Hasan Mahmud, Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md Shahriar Alam, State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak, and AL Organising Secretary SM Kamal also spoke at the rally.

The meeting was jointly organised by Rajshahi city and district units of the ruling party, with city unit President Mohammad Ali Kamal in the chair.

In the morning, Hasina addressed the passing out parade of assistant superintendents of police of the 38th BCS batch at Bangladesh Police Academy in Sardah, reports BSS.

She asked the officials to take police services to people's doorsteps.

The PM also advised the new officers to discharge their duties and responsibilities with the highest level of professionalism to build Sonar Bangladesh as envisioned by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Four dead after record flooding in New Zealand

AFP, *Wellington*

New Zealand police yesterday said a fourth body was found after deadly record torrential rain and flooding devastated Auckland.

The country's largest city saw 249 millimetres of rainfall on Friday, smashing the previous record of 161mm in a 24-hour period, and Auckland's 1.6 million residents remain under a state of emergency.

Two bodies were found in floodwater at separate locations Friday night in the northern suburb of Wairau Valley, and a third was discovered Saturday after a landslide brought down a home in central Auckland.

On Sunday a drone operator discovered the body of a man about a kilometre from where he was swept away Friday at Onewhero, south of Auckland.

Japanese mother gets custody

FROM PAGE 1

February last year, seeking the custody of the children.

While delivering the verdict, the court observed that the mother was the only person who looked after her children with care and that the children were safe under her custody.

Moreover, Eriko was a physician, who practised in Japan, and that's why, the children would be safe in her custody, the judge said.

Meanwhile, the other hand, the plaintiff failed to prove that the children would be safe in their father's custody, she added.

In 2008, Eriko married Imran in Japan. They had three children there.

In 2021, Eriko filed a divorce petition with a Japanese court, following which Imran took two of their daughters with him and came to Bangladesh.

Eriko too came to Bangladesh and filed a petition with the apex court for the custody of the children.

On August 31, 2021, the High Court ordered Sharif and Eriko to live at a Gulshan flat together for 15 days with their two daughters.

The court had asked the Department of Social Services to look over the matter and the commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police was asked to ensure the safety of the family.

The court finally came up with its order as the estranged couple failed to reach a consensus on where and with whom their two daughters would live, in spite of repeated instructions from the court.

The Supreme Court, however, on February 13, 2022, said, until the disposal of the case by the family court, the two children would remain in the custody of their mother, while their father can visit them in the house.

On January 17 this year, the High Court in the full text of a verdict observed that the children's welfare should be considered first, and law should not be applied in relevant cases without their welfare and wellbeing.

Come June, reserves will hit $37.7b

FROM PAGE 1

percent remittance growth, which would offset the 12 percent increase in imports. Subsequently, foreign reserves would soar to $45.3 billion.

Although the export growth last fiscal year was more than 36 percent, the percentage increase in export receipts would be comparatively lower this fiscal year because of the global economic situation, the elevated inflation levels around the world and a recession in the EU and the US, the main shipment destinations, the finance division said while making its new projections.

The government has taken several steps to bring down imports given the pressure on foreign exchange reserves and a widening current account deficit. As a result, imports will drop substantially.

The continuation of the 2.5 percent cash incentive for sending remittance through the official channel, lowering the cost of sending remittance and an uptick in fresh migrant workers will ensure positive remittance growth.

Besides, substantial budget support is expected from development partners such as the International Monetary Fund.

Subsequently, there will be an improvement in the foreign currency reserves and current account deficit situation, the finance division added.

Economists though deem the forecasts to be too good to be true.

"This is unrealistic," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

If the reserves have to increase to that extent, the balance of payment (BoP) must be in surplus: the surplus in the financial account must overcome the deficit in the current account.

"But both are in deficit at the moment. So how the overall BoP will turn surplus is not clear."

The financial account shows the net acquisition and disposal of financial assets and liabilities.

The amount of budget support being expected is not realistic, Hussain said, adding that at best $1.5 billion can come in.

"That would not turn the financial account into surplus."

The finance division is expecting more than $2 billion in budget support, according to officials who were involved in making the projections.

Besides, there is no policy action on the government's part to boost the reserves, he said.

"What might happen is that the current account deficit will narrow. The unrealistic part is that the financial account surplus will overcome the current account deficit," Hussain added.

In the first five months of the fiscal year, the current account was $5.7 billion in the deficit, according to data from the BB.

The statistic so far from this fiscal year does indicate that the current account deficit may contract later on.

In the first six months of the fiscal year, the export growth was 10.58 percent and the remittance growth 1.66 percent.

The import growth in the first five months of fiscal 2022-23 was 4.41 percent.

"It is highly optimistic to assume that the reserves will increase," said Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

He went on to predict that the reserves will be hovering around the $32 billion mark by the end of the fiscal year.

"The major issue in the government's forecasts is the import curtail. A 9 percent drop in imports is too much -- it will have a major effect on the economy."

Graft worsened business climate in 2022

FROM PAGE 1

director of CPD, while presenting the findings of the survey at an event yesterday.

The majority of the respondents faced corruption in paying taxes (48 percent), receiving licences (54 percent) and securing the connections for utilities like gas, electricity and water (49 percent) as well as during export-import (75 percent).

However, the level of severity of problems is different for different categories of enterprises.

About 53 percent of small and micro enterprises have considered corruption as the most problematic factor; 71 percent of medium-sized firms and 59 percent of large firms found corruption a nuisance.

The challenges have been multiplied through new factors such as higher inflation, volatility in the foreign currency market and policy instability.

Due to corruption, the cost of production is more, said Fahmida Khatun, executive director of CPD.

Due to the latest hike in fuel price, the production cost will be higher.

"As a result, the general people have to suffer from this extra price. Corruption at various levels is harming the business environment and the economy."

The global economy is going through a recession, she said.

Many global organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have forecasted that this recession may persist until 2024, Khatun added.