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Market running out of IV saline

Patients hit hard as supply shortages reach new high

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Abdur Rob, from Khulna's Rupsha, started a frantic search for intravenous (IV) saline after his daughter, aged 13, was admitted to a local private hospital with dengue on Monday.

He did not find even a single bag of the saline, which is essential in dengue treatment, at the hospital's drug store and 14-15 large medicine shops in a wholesale medicine market in the southern city for two days. The desperate father then approached a middleman.

"The broker managed a one-litre saline bag for Tk 210. I tipped him Tk 30," Rob told The Daily Star.

Amid rising dengue cases, a similar shortage of IV saline has been affecting patients in different districts of Dhaka, Chattogram, Rajshahi, Barishal, Mymensingh, Rangpur and Sylhet divisions. Retail prices have also gone up from Tk 85-89 to Tk 150-300 in different districts, including Dhaka.

Four salespersons of as many drug stores in the capital's Shahbagh said the demand for IV saline has skyrocketed, but supplies from manufacturing companies are inadequate.

In Chattogram, some medicine shops were receiving up to 10 percent of their orders, while it is as low as 5 percent in Barishal in some cases,



Construction of the third terminal of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport is nearing completion. The terminal is expected to have a soft opening on October 7. Around 16 million passengers will be able to use the airport every year after the third terminal is fully operational by May next year. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: NAIMUR RAHMAN

CSA to become a weapon to muzzle press

Says Editors' Council

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

If the much-talked-about Cyber Security Act, 2023, comes into force, police, under section 42, will have the power to search, seize, and arrest journalists without a warrant, which the Sampadak Parishad (Editors' Council) rejects.

The Editors' Council expressed grave concern as the CSA has been passed by the Jatiya Sangsad recently amid strong objections.

Through the passage of the law, the concerns expressed by media stakeholders, including the Editors' Council, for so long have been proven justified, it said in a statement yesterday.

Scrapping the Digital Security Act, the new law has been enacted by reducing some penalties and amending some sections of the DSA. Apart from packaging, there is no qualitative or significant changes. Many elements that curtail freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and freedom of the press still remain in the CSA, the council said.

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7TH TICFA TALKS

US wants labour law reforms by November

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United States Trade Representative (USTR) yesterday urged Bangladesh to reform the labour law by November as per the recommendations of the International Labour Organisation's technical committee.

The ILO's International Labour Conference will be held in November and that would be the perfect platform for Bangladesh to showcase the progress in its labour law reforms, said Commerce Secretary Tapan Kanti Ghosh.

Ghosh's comment came at a press briefing after the seventh round of talks on the Trade and Investment Cooperation Forum Agreement (Ticfa), a negotiation platform for removing trade barriers between Bangladesh and the US.

The US sought a quick and fair trial of the murder of Shahidul Islam, who was the president of the Gazipur unit of

the Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers Federation. He was beaten to death outside Prince Jacquard Sweater in Tongi on June 25.

In response, Md Ehsan E Elahi, labour secretary, informed the USTR that police arrested five suspects.

The USTR called for the filing of the charge sheet soon.

The USTR wanted the minimum percentage of workers' consent needed to form a trade union in a factory to be brought down from 20 percent.

However, it did not suggest any specific percentage like the EU, which wants the threshold to be lowered to 10 percent, said Ghosh, who led the Bangladesh side in the talks.

This year, the USTR did not ask for reform of the labour law for the export processing zones separately; rather, it sought reforms in the labour law as a whole.

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ECONOMIC CRISIS

PM calls for restructuring int'l financial system



BSS, New York

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has stressed the need for reorganising international financial mechanism to address the ongoing global economic crisis.

Speaking at a high-level roundtable at the UN headquarters on Tuesday, she also called for reviewing the global credit rating system stating that the current one has restricted access to funds for many low- and middle-income countries.

The event titled "Towards a Fair International Financial Architecture" was organised by Spain and the European Council on the sidelines of 78th United Nations General Assembly.

Hasina said, "We agree with the UN secretary-general that the global credit rating system must be reviewed."

The limits on the voting rights, quotas, and representation in multilateral development banks (MDBs) and international financial institutions (IFIs) of those low- and middle-income countries also undermine their bargaining power, she said.

"We often find international public finances to be costly and out-of-reach. We try to stay clear of high-interest-rate loans to avoid debt distress. Bangladesh has never defaulted on its loan repayment, and we hope to maintain that record."

The premier said it is critical for the international financial architecture to be inclusive and representative of the Global South.

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"If we place an order for 100 bags, supplying companies provide 20-30 bags. We are buying saline from other sources and wholesale medicine market at Mitford at higher prices."

Dr MH Choudhury Lelin

our correspondents report.

However, government hospital authorities in Dhaka downplayed the crisis.

Ashrafal Alam, assistant director at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said demands for IV saline has increased greatly. But so far, they have been able to meet the demand.

But private hospitals and pharmacies in and outside the capital have reported serious dearth of saline, which helps maintain the fluid balance in the body.

Public health expert Dr MH Choudhury Lelin, also chairman of Health and Hope Hospital in the capital, said the hospital has been facing a severe crisis of the item due to supply shortages.

"If we place an order for 100 bags, suppliers provide only 20-30 bags. We are buying saline from the wholesale medicine market at Mitford and other sources at higher prices," he said.

The demand-supply gap has been affecting other patients as well.

Naseema Akhtar of Narayanganj has cancer. Doctors at Narayanganj General Hospital where she is being treated advised that she be injected two litres of saline every day. On Tuesday, Naseema's son Al Amin said he could not find any saline bag even after visiting 10-12 drug stores.

Md Nurul Alam, deputy director of Directorate General of Drug Administration, acknowledged the crisis, but blamed it on the syndicates of hoarders.

The situation did not improve even after the drug administration recently asked the six drug companies to increase saline production. Against this backdrop, the government has decided to import 2 million bags of IV saline, officials said.

Prof Ehsanul Kabir, managing director & CEO, Essential Drugs Company Limited, which supplies saline to government hospitals, said his company placed an order to import 7 lakh bags of saline from India. They received 70,000 bags until Tuesday.

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SPORT

Tamim back as BD-NZ ODIs kick off today

Tamim Iqbal will play his first match since his 'retirement saga' and stepping down from the captaincy in July-August as Bangladesh begin a three-match ODI series against New Zealand in Mirpur today. The match will get underway at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium at 2:00pm. Having rested majority of their key players ahead of the World Cup, this series will be an opportunity for both sides to make their final calls for the World Cup and help get the out-of-form players get back in form.

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Cargo vessels moored in Narayanganj's Tarabo area are putting the walkway on the Shitalakkhya at risk. A makeshift jetty and lines tying the vessels to the shore also obstruct pedestrians. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

DENGUE OUTBREAK

This month already deadlier than August

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



Health experts had termed August the deadliest month in terms of dengue cases and fatalities. But the numbers have climbed even higher this month.

Throughout August, nearly 11 people with confirmed dengue infection died on an average every day.

The average in the first 20 days of this month has been 13.7, according to the data from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

This month's daily average of new cases is 2,650, up from last month's 2,321.48.

The DGHS yesterday reported the loss of 21 lives in a 24-hour period, which equals the highest deaths in a day since the outbreak began this year.

Ten of those reported dead yesterday were in the capital and the rest were elsewhere. This takes the number of fatalities to 867 this year.

At least 857 people were admitted to hospitals with the mosquito-borne disease in Dhaka yesterday, and 2,158 in different districts.

This year, more than 1.76 lakh people have been admitted to hospitals with dengue. Of them, 75,833 were in Dhaka and 100,977 outside.

As per DGHS data, 281 people died of dengue last year, 105 in 2021, seven in 2020, and 179 in 2019.