



Plots afoot to foil the election

PM says at campaign rallies in 6 districts

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked her party members to work for making the January 7 polls festive, competitive, and peaceful as conspiracies are being hatched at home and abroad centring the election.

She was addressing campaign rallies in six districts — Sherpur, Jamalpur, Kishoreganj, Chandpur, Narsingdi and Bandarban — via video conferencing from the AL's Tejgaon Office in Dhaka.

The prime minister said she believes that the election will be participatory without the BNP taking part.

"The election will be participatory if the people and voters come out and take part in the polls."

Hasina said the BNP does not believe in elections and that it cannot do anything

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A homeless man sits still in the winter morning, wrapped in a worn-out shawl. Like him, many others in the city have no place to take shelter in this cold weather. The photo was taken near the High Court area yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Threat of Nipah virus looms large

Inadequate testing facilities, limited scale campaigns key hurdles

AHMED DEEPTO

In winter, people love to indulge in the season's delicacies, raw date juice being one of those.

However, most people are unaware of the danger it entails.

Consuming raw date juice, that might be contaminated, can get people infected with Nipah virus, which has a high case-fatality rate of around 71 percent and no vaccine.

In Bangladesh, the virus was first detected in 2001, and since then, a total of 339 patients have been diagnosed, of whom 240 died, said the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control, and Research (IEDCR), which started its surveillance on Nipah virus in 2006.

This year, teenagers were mostly infected as 36 recorded cases were among under-20 age groups. Besides, the virus was found in a mother's breast milk in Rajbari district this year for the first time, according to IEDCR.

Nipah virus usually spreads to humans from animals or through contaminated food, but it can also be transmitted directly between people.

Experts said basic hygiene measures can prevent spread of the disease.

"Before eating fruits and vegetables, we must wash them properly. Any fruit that was eaten by a bat or any animal or bird



AT A GLANCE

Cases detected this year: **14** in **7** districts

Deaths reported this year: **10**

Fatality rate: **71.4%**

Patients identified since 2001: **339**

Deaths since 2001: **240**

SYMPTOMS

Intense fever, nausea, headaches, cough, sore throat, muscle pain, fainting

RECOMMENDATIONS

Properly wash fruits, vegetables

Avoid fruits eaten by bat, animal or bird

Avoid consuming raw date juice

Develop awareness, testing facilities

should be avoided," said Mushtuq Hussain, a public health expert and an advisor to the IEDCR.

Symptoms of infection include intense fever, nausea, respiratory complication, headaches, cough, sore throat, muscle pain, and fainting, while severe cases

can involve seizures and brain inflammation that result in a coma.

Officials of the Directorate General of Health Services said they have been conducting an awareness programme for the virus among healthcare service providers, including physicians, in 10 active hotspots and two other passive hotspots, but admitted that those are not sufficient.

Tahmina Shireen, director of IEDCR, said, "We need community-level awareness. We are running campaigns, but we need to do more to make people aware."

"Unlike other diseases, there are no readily available testing facilities for Nipah virus, and awareness is the only key to remaining safe from it," said Shahadat Hossain, director (MIS) of DGHS.

Experts said the government's awareness campaign has been inadequate, mostly limited to publishing newspaper advertisements and notices on government websites.

Although the hotspots of the virus have been identified, screening systems are absent in some of those, while testing facilities have not been developed at upazila-level and most district-level hospitals.

"The health directorate should have campaigned across the country using innovative approaches, so that people do

not consume raw date juice under any circumstances," said Mushtuq Hussain.

"Many people don't even know about the disease. So, the more publicity is done in this regard, the less will be the risk of fatality," he added.

The IEDCR and icddr,b have been conducting Nipah virus surveillance programmes periodically at eight medical college hospitals to assess the spread and risk of the virus in Bangladesh.

According to IEDCR data, this year the virus spread in seven districts — Rajshahi, Naogaon, Rajbari, Shariatpur, Pabna, Natore, and for the first time in Narsingdi.

This correspondent talked with civil surgeons of seven districts, and some of them said besides inadequate awareness campaigns, testing facilities are also not up to the expected level.

The physicians said they provide symptomatic treatment to patients coming with suspected Nipah virus infection.

If any patient remains untreated, the person can fall into a coma within 24 to 48 hours of contracting the virus, they said.

"As we don't have any testing facilities, we treat patients based on symptoms, and suspected patients are sent to either Faridpur or Dhaka," said Mohammad Ibrahim, civil surgeon of Rajbari.

Despite winter abundance, VEGETABLE PRICES SOAR

AKANDA MUHAMMAD JAHIID

The prices of all vegetables have been spiraling unusually in the markets in Dhaka recently, despite being in adequate supply amid peak season in winter.

At Dhaka's Karwan Bazar wholesale market yesterday, each kilogramme of brinjal was sold at Tk 40-50, while beans at Tk 45-55, tomato at Tk 50-55, cauliflower at Tk 30-32, cabbage at Tk 25-30, potato at Tk 48-52 and local onion at Tk 70.

In Dhaka's retail markets, brinjal is being sold at Tk 80-100 per kg, tomato at Tk 100-120, beans at Tk 60-80, cauliflower (medium size) at Tk 60-70, potato (new and old) at Tk 80-100, onion (local) at Tk 90-100, Indian onion at Tk 120-130, cabbage at Tk 40-50, and radish at Tk 30-40.

An opposite scenario is present in the markets across rural regions, with the prices almost half or lower than half of the retail prices in the capital.

According to traders at Boro Bazar and Satmail Bazar wholesale markets in Jashore, the biggest vegetable production belt in the country, each kg of brinjal is being sold at Tk 35-40, while beans at Tk 35-36, tomato at Tk 50-60, cauliflower at Tk 20-25, cabbage at Tk 18-20, and radish at Tk 14-15.

The prices were almost similar in Dinajpur, another vegetable production zone, according to farmers and wholesale traders.



In Dhaka's retail markets, brinjal is being sold at Tk 80-100 per kg, tomato at Tk 100-120, beans at Tk 60-80, cauliflower (medium size) at Tk 60-70, potato (new and old) at Tk 80-100, onion (local) at Tk 90-100, Indian onion at Tk 120-130, cabbage at Tk 40-50, and radish at Tk 30-40.

Md Harun, a banker by profession, said the recent unusual hike in prices of vegetables is not acceptable since this is peak season with no scarcity of supply in the market. "It is an unbearable burden for the people created mainly because the government and other monitoring agencies have no control over the market," he added.

Al Amin, a security guard in Dhaka's Sukrabad area, said, "As prices of daily essentials are already high, soaring prices of vegetables compelled me to reduce my family's food intake."

"This is peak season of winter vegetables. The market has adequate supply. Why are the prices so high?" questioned Golam Moula, a security guard.

According to the Department of Agriculture Marketing, compared to the same time last year, the prices of cauliflower and cabbage are 33 and 80 percent higher respectively, while bottle gourd is higher by 50 percent, and brinjal almost doubled.

Kamrul Islam, a vegetable retailer in Dhanmondi, said he never witnessed such abnormal price hike of vegetables during winter in 30 years.

Md Imran Master, president of Bangladesh Kanchamal Arot Owners' Association, said although there is no supply crisis, the root-level prices of vegetables are comparatively higher this year due to higher production costs.

Besides, higher transport costs and extortion on the highways are also responsible for high vegetable prices, he added.

Farmers Sukumar Roy of Jashore and Azazul Islam of Dinajpur said the high prices are due to middlemen trying to make extra profit.

Shahbagh, Karwan Bazar stations to open Sunday



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All 16 stations of the Uttara-Motijheel section of the country's first metro rail service will be in operation from December 31, when the last remaining stations — Shahbagh and Karwan Bazar — open to the public.

However, all exits and entries at the Karwan Bazar station will not be open from Sunday.

MAN Siddique, the managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited (DMTCL), informed reporters of the opening at a press conference in the capital yesterday.

The duration of service will remain the same — 7:30am to 11:30am on the Agargaon-Motijheel section and 7:30am-8:30pm on the Uttara-Agargaon section.

The entire Uttara-Motijheel route will start running from morning to night within March next year.

Meanwhile, Siddique called upon everyone not to fly sky lanterns near the metro rail track during New Year's Eve and sent a letter to the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner to take measures in this regard.

"We had to suspend the metro rail's operation for two hours during last year's New Year's eve as sky lanterns got stuck on the rail track's electric wire," he said.



To showcase the socio-economic development of the country, a photography contest "Tomar Chokhe Bangladesh" was organised by National Telecommunication and Monitoring Centre. Photographers of all ages from across the country participated in the competition. The grand finale of the event was hosted at Army Golf Club in the capital yesterday. The cabinet secretary, chiefs of all three armed forces and celebrities were present at the event. A musical programme was also held as part of the event.

PHOTO: STAR

DU Chhatra Dal leader among 11 remanded

UNB, Dhaka

A Dhaka court yesterday placed 11 people, including president of Dhaka University Chhatra Dal unit Md Khorshed Alam Sohel, on a four-day remand in a case filed under the Special Powers Act.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Tahmina Haque passed the order when a DB inspector and also the case's investigating officer produced them with a seven-day remand prayer each.

Those remanded were identified as Mehedi Hasan Palash, joint convener of Krishak Dal, Bahauddin Nobel, Jakir Hossain, Khandaker Nazrul Islam, Sumon, Rakibul Islam, Nurul Amin Payel, Kaikobad Hossain Kabir, Liton Hossain and Jahangir Alam.

Police arrested them from different parts of the capital on charges

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