

Nipah virus claims first life this year

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weakness, and vomiting, followed by hypersalivation, disorientation, and convulsions.

After six days, she lost consciousness and was referred by a local physician to a tertiary hospital. On January 28, she was admitted to hospital, and the Nipah surveillance team collected throat swabs and blood samples.

She died the same day.

The patient had reported repeated consumption of raw date palm sap between January 5 and 20.

Shamin said, following the confirmed diagnosis, an outbreak investigation team began investigations on January 30, and a

total of 35 persons she had come into contact with have been identified. All of them tested negative but are being kept under observation.

Since 2001, Bangladesh has documented 348 NiV cases, including 250 deaths, corresponding to an overall case fatality rate of 72 percent, according to WHO.

Nearly half of these were primary cases with a confirmed history of consuming raw date palm sap, or "tari" (fermented date palm sap), while 29 percent resulted from direct contact transmission.

Most cases in Bangladesh are reported from December to April, suggesting a seasonal pattern.

According to IEDCR data, five people were infected in 2024 – all of whom died. In 2023, 13 people were infected; ten of them died.

According to WHO, Nipah virus is a zoonotic pathogen with a high death rate and no licensed vaccine or treatment, though early supportive treatment can save lives.

It is transmitted to humans through infected animals such as bats, or via food contaminated with saliva, urine, or excreta of infected animals. It can also be transmitted directly from person to person through close contact with an infected individual. Fruit bats, also known as flying foxes, are the natural reservoir of the virus.

LPG supply crunch lingers

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26,000 tonnes were imported."

He added that consignments of large-scale importers such as Meghna Fresh LPG, Omera LPG, and United Ayzaz LPG are expected to increase this month. "The issue is related to business entities, but we still hope that the market will be stable before Ramadan."

This correspondent spoke to eight retail shops owners in the capital's Banasree, Mirpur, Tejgaon, and Dhanmondi areas over the past three days, and found that a 12-kg LPG cylinder was being sold at between Tk 1,800 and Tk 2,000. BERC fixed the rate at Tk 1,356 per cylinder for February – Tk 50 higher than last month.

However, the scarcity was less severe than in January, as none of the retailers refused to sell LPG cylinders yesterday, which had been a common scenario throughout the previous

month.

To ease the situation, the government had taken several initiatives, such as reducing value-added tax at different stages of LPG importing and bottling, as well as exempting advance income tax.

Moreover, the government announced it would facilitate LPG imports by easing the process of opening letters of credit (LCs) and withdrawing the import cap for companies.

An importer, wishing to remain anonymous, told this newspaper that the situation became complicated after the energy division allowed the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) to import LPG on its own last month.

He added that the state-owned company has no distribution mechanism and was supposed to distribute the imported LPG through private entities. "As a result,

some companies waited for BPC's consignments, and this discouraged them from importing."

However, BPC is yet to begin imports.

Its officials said they have received approval for imports but are now trying to procure LPG and have contacted different global suppliers. After receiving price quotations, it will take more time to negotiate and complete the imports.

"We are trying our best to increase imports, and the situation may ease before Ramadan if the crisis in the Middle East is resolved," said Mohammed Amirul Haque, president of the LPG Operators Association of Bangladesh.

He refused to comment on the increased prices, saying that the operators had not raised prices. "It's the law enforcement agencies who can easily identify who have increased prices. We urge them to intervene."

Subrata Bain's aide held

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yesterday, confirmed Sub-Inspector Sumon Mia, the investigation officer.

According to the first information report, the arrestee admitted during primary interrogation to his involvement in the illegal arms trade in the Badda and Bhatara areas.

The FIR adds that in addition to the arms and ammunition, the joint forces recovered a broken van from a nearby rickshaw garage.

The seized weapons include 11

foreign-made sophisticated firearms – revolvers and pistols manufactured in the USA, China, Turkey, and Germany; an automatic .22 calibre AK rifle; and two air guns.

Law enforcers also recovered 394 rounds of ammunition, including shotgun cartridges and bullets for .22 bore, 7.65mm, and 9mm weapons.

Other items seized include three Chinese axes, a large knife, two walkie-talkies, a pair of binoculars, and electronic devices.

According to police, Dipu is accused in multiple cases filed with Badda and Hatirjheel police stations in 2019 and 2024, on charges of murder, extortion, and unlawful assembly.

Meanwhile, the Bosila Army Camp arrested Md Jahirul Islam, 44, with two firearms in the capital's Mohammadpur area early yesterday.

Two USA-made 7.65mm pistols, six bullets, and two magazines were recovered from his residence and office.

BNP's trillion-dollar ambition

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investment, the necessary economic transformation would be a long-haul journey.

Another key pledge is to double the tax-to-GDP ratio to 15 percent – a goal that has eluded previous governments. Currently, Bangladesh's ratio languishes below 7 percent, one of the lowest in the world. Achieving such an increase would require profound reforms in tax policy, compliance, and administrative capacity, raising the question of whether the BNP, if elected, could succeed where others have not.

The manifesto coincides with Bangladesh's impending graduation from least developed country (LDC) status in November. This milestone means the nation will soon lose the duty-free market access and concessional loans that have long buoyed its economy. The aim is to transform these fading external privileges into permanent domestic strength by forging an industrial base robust enough to survive in the open global competition even without LDC benefits. This involves a suite of policies designed to overhaul the export sector by enforcing rigorous quality controls and developing new products for diversified markets.

A powerful political message runs through the manifesto: the "democratisation of the economy." The party frames this as the key to unlocking the productivity needed for faster economic growth. It promises a shift away from an economy shaped by "special privileges for specific groups" – a direct criticism of the current crony-capitalist structure – toward a system powered by ordinary citizens.

The manifesto assumes that dismantling "oligarchic" structures and creating a more level playing field would unleash entrepreneurship and innovation, widen the tax base, and produce a more resilient and diversified economy. It is an attempt to merge fairness with efficiency, suggesting that

economic justice and growth can go hand in hand.

Yet this argument has a core vulnerability. These powerful groups control significant portions of capital. A sudden or aggressive restructuring could trigger capital flight and tighten credit, undermining the manifesto's parallel goal of boosting private investment and sustaining high growth. Notably, the party intends to shift the economic model from debt-driven growth to investment-led expansion, where private investment would become the main engine of employment and wealth creation.

The strategy clearly depends on attracting strong foreign direct investment to finance major infrastructure expansion – including energy projects, transport networks, and potentially high-speed rail. "Efforts will be made to raise foreign direct investment from 0.45 percent to 2.5 percent of GDP," the BNP said.

"The main problem is financing and implementation," said Professor Mustafizur Rahman, a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

SUSTAINING BALANCE

The BNP promises to create 10 million new jobs, including one million in the ICT sector, particularly in fields such as artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. The plan for technology jobs signals a determination to move beyond labour-intensive garment manufacturing.

"Prioritising job creation and e-commerce is a sound approach," said M Masrur Reaz, chairman and CEO of Policy Exchange Bangladesh.

The party proposes to take combined allocations for health and education to 10 percent of GDP from 2.5 percent now, alongside expanded welfare programmes, including direct cash transfers. While socially appealing, these commitments raise concerns about fiscal sustainability. Without rapid growth in revenue, there is a risk of widening deficits and fiscal stress.

Masrur Reaz said that the plan acknowledges Bangladesh's current economic vulnerabilities, but does not clearly explain how it will address key macroeconomic challenges, particularly high inflation, a fragile balance of payments, and foreign exchange pressures.

The manifesto also sketches a cautious geopolitical vision. It highlights the development of a "Blue Economy" and expanded regional connectivity, alongside ambitions to position Bangladesh as an aviation hub for South and Southeast Asia. For that ambition, the BNP will confront current infrastructure limitations, including congestion at the country's main airport.

What the BNP has successfully done is shift political debate from street politics to spreadsheets. The manifesto offers a sharp critique of the present and a bold – though at times internally strained – outline of an alternative future. It correctly identifies a structural turning point Bangladesh faces as it exits the least developed country status.

The challenge for the BNP is not in defining ambition, but in sustaining balance. If the party can expand investment, grow revenues, and deliver social equity without triggering fiscal stress, the transformation could be significant. But if these competing pressures collide, the trillion-dollar dream will be overwhelmed by economic strain. The ambition has been declared. If entrusted with power this week, the BNP will have to ensure that the vision survives the weight of its own promises.

Ultimately, without adequate financing, the entire vision will prove fragile. The promise of a "just state" and a "trillion-dollar economy" is presented as mutually reinforcing, yet the two goals could strain the same fiscal space. As Prof Mustafizur observed, success will depend on whether the party has fully prepared the detailed framework needed to implement such reforms.

Takaichi talks tough on immigration on eve of vote

AFP, Tokyo

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi yesterday pledged to make Japan "more prosperous and safer", including through tougher immigration screening, in a final appeal to voters on the eve of snap elections.

Opinion polls suggest that Takaichi's ruling bloc, led by the Liberal Democratic Party, could romp home in Sunday's vote and secure a two-thirds majority in the powerful lower house.

"Pushing the button for growth is the Takaichi cabinet's job. Japan will become more and more prosperous and safer," Takaichi, 64, told a campaign rally attended by thousands in Tokyo.

"This is the year in which we want to turn the anxieties people feel about their lives today and about the future into hope," she said.

The arch-conservative Takaichi, a heavy metal drummer in her youth and an admirer of Margaret Thatcher,

became Japan's fifth premier in as many years in October.

This followed a string of calamitous elections for the once-mighty Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), leaving it short of a majority in both houses of parliament.

With ordinary Japanese, especially younger ones, Takaichi has enjoyed sky-high popularity ratings, becoming something of a fashion icon and a hit on social media.

Ctg port workers resume indefinite strike

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requesting the authorities, including the Anti-Corruption Commission, to investigate the assets of the 15 employees and impose a travel ban on them as they have indulged in anti-state acts like creating chaos at the port in the name of movement.

By issuing the letter, CPA Chairman M Moniruzzaman had provoked the protesters again, said leaders of the Chattogram Bandar Rakkha Parishad at a press conference yesterday.

"We believe that this Moniruzzaman, left behind by the ousted Awami League government, wants to create instability at the port at this critical juncture of the country in an attempt to put the state and the government in a difficult position and thereby sabotage the upcoming elections," said Parishad Coordinator Md Humayun Kabir while reading out a written statement.

Terming the port chairman a close aide of the AL leader Mahbul Hoque Hanif and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina's son Sajeeb Wazed Joy, he demanded an investigation into the Tk 500 crore corruption allegations in ship procurement during Moniruzzaman's tenure as the managing director of the Bangladesh Shipping Corporation.

He also expressed frustration that the shipping adviser did not take any steps despite assuring them that he would discuss the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT) deal issue with the government's higher authorities and get back to them by Saturday.

In this situation, he vowed to

enforce an all-out indefinite strike at the port until their four demands are met, including the cancellation of the proposed deal with the UAE-based DP World over the lease of NCT.

Their other demands include dismissal of the port chairman, withdrawal of punitive actions against the 15 employees and reinstating them in their previous posts, and assurance that no legal steps would be taken against them.

Moniruzzaman and Sakhawat could not be reached for comment despite several attempts.

Meanwhile, CPA called an emergency meeting with employees and workers from different departments at 9:30am today.

According to an official letter signed by the CPA secretary, the heads of different departments were asked to ensure the presence of around 200 officials and staff at the meeting, while the chief welfare officer was asked to ensure the presence of 100 port enlisted workers from various categories.

However, leaders of different employees and workers' organisations expressed unwillingness to attend the meeting.

The authority's recent actions have eroded trust and now it is inviting selective employees and workers in a bid to create division among the protesters, Humayun said.

Mentioning that they have declined to attend the meeting, he said they urged all the workers and employees not to attend.

"The CPA should stop the harassment and retract the move to lease out NCT

to a foreign operator – only then would we attend any meeting," said Ibrahim Khokon, general secretary of Bandar Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal and a leader of Parishad.

Port's busiest weekends Following the postponement of the work stoppage on Thursday afternoon, the port faced huge workloads as businesses rushed for quick clearance of imports and export shipments.

A record 26 inbound and outgoing vessels took berths and sailed out on a single day. In the last two days, the private off docks (ICDs) transferred around 5,000 TEUs of export containers to the port and brought more than 1,000 TEUs of imports from the port.

The ICDs were still lying with a huge pile up of more than 13,000 TEUs of exports until yesterday evening.

The direct and indirect damage caused by the port problem is significant and it cannot be allowed to continue for long, said Showkat Aziz Russell, president of the Bangladesh Textile Mills Association.

The government should take immediate action to resolve the impasse in the port, he said, adding that one of his buyers suspended his scheduled visit to Bangladesh because of the current situation of the country.

The international clothing retailers and brands that source garment items from Bangladesh are very concerned as they are worried about the timely delivery due to the Chattogram port impasse, said Faisal Samad, director of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

Lives hang in balance when inmates fall ill

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more died in custody in January this year, according to media reports.

In 2023, during Awami League rule, 290 inmate deaths were recorded, with 187 dying during treatment, 101 on the way to hospital, and two by suicide.

Iltekharruzzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said torture, deprivation of rights, and deaths in custody had taken an extreme form over the past 15 years.

"There had been an expectation of improvement after the fall of the previous government, but the situation continues."

He attributed this to a long-standing practice that persists even when individuals change, and to the link between custodial deaths and justice and state reform, which he described as a core responsibility of the post-fall government, alongside justice and elections.

"Questions have arisen over how much justice is being delivered and how much is being driven by vengeance, which is reflected in the deaths in custody."

'NEGLIGENCE' Babul Hossain, an elected member of Ward 3 of Garpara Union in Manikganj Sadar upazila, died at Manikganj Sadar Hospital while undergoing treatment on July 23 last year.

At the time, Sadar Police Station Officer in Charge SM Aman Ullah said Babul was an accused in a case over the burning of artist Manabendra Ghosh's house in Garpara and had been in Manikganj district jail for four months.

Speaking to The Daily Star on January 25, Babul's brother-in-law Md Nazrul Islam claimed that "some anti-Awami League people" took Babul, general secretary of the AL ward unit, and handed him over to the police.

Nazrul alleged that Babul, who regularly took heart medication and suffered from other illnesses, did not receive proper treatment in jail.

Trump refuses to apologise

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video promoting conspiracies about Republican Trump's 2020 election loss to Joe Biden, the Obamas were shown with their faces on the bodies of monkeys for about one second.

The video, uploaded late Thursday amid a flurry of other posts, repeated false allegations that ballot-counting company Dominion Voting Systems helped steal the election from Trump.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt initially played down the row, saying the images were "from an internet meme video depicting

President Trump as the King of the Jungle and Democrats as characters from The Lion King."

"Please stop the fake outrage and report on something today that actually matters to the American public," Leavitt said in a statement to AFP.

But almost exactly 12 hours after the post appeared on Trump's account there was an unusual concession from an administration that normally refuses to admit the slightest mistake.

"A White House staffer erroneously

Polls results unlikely

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Meanwhile, Mohammad Aslam Molla, Kishoreganj returning officer (RO) and deputy commissioner, through a circular on February 5 requested the contesting candidates and their agents for six constituencies be present at 10:00am on February 13 for the announcement of election results.

Later that day, he issued a revised circular asking candidates and agents to be present at his office as soon as the unofficial results are available, without mentioning any specific time.

Election Commission's Senior Secretary Akhtar Ahmed had earlier flagged the issue of delays in ballot counting.

On average, one polling centre will serve around 3,000 voters. Even after the counting is

completed at the centre level, the final tabulation at the returning officer's office could take longer.

"In some centres, voters from five or six areas will cast ballots together. If a returning officer oversees multiple constituencies, delays may increase further," Akhtar said.

Asked how much time the process might take, he said: "It depends on how many ballots are returned. Predicting in advance is very difficult."

A total of 2,017 candidates are contesting across 300 constituencies for the February 12 polls. The number of registered voters stands at 127.7 million.

On January 28, the EC added 18 polling centres, raising the total to 2,779. It also increased the number of polling booths by 2,743, bringing the figure to 247,482.

guards trained in medical care perform nursing duties.

Although all prisons are supposed to have ambulances, only 27 do. In other prisons, sick inmates are taken to hospital in hired vehicles.

Nur Khan Liton, a human rights activist, said he learned of extremely inadequate facilities inside prisons – particularly in medical care – after speaking to several individuals recently released from jail.

He also cited poor-quality food, overcrowding, and allegations that many detainees are beaten at the time of arrest, saying the situation is deteriorating and the death rate is gradually increasing.

"The state must ensure detainees receive the services they are entitled to," he said.

Brig Gen Syed Md Motaheer Hossain, inspector general of the Prisons Directorate, told The Daily Star on January 26 that no death in custody is acceptable or desirable, and that authorities investigate every custodial death to determine the cause and punish negligence.

He said 270 deaths in prison in a year is a "large number", but a significant portion occurred while inmates were under treatment, meaning they were taken to hospitals and received medical care.

He acknowledged shortages of doctors and ambulances and said such limitations affect the level of support prisons can provide, but authorities offer as much assistance as possible.

Asked about examples of punishment, he cited disciplinary action against a diploma nurse who arrived 10 to 15 minutes late during a late-night incident. The nurse was dismissed, a departmental case was filed, and the punishment process is ongoing.

He also said post-mortems are conducted and the reports clearly state the causes of death.

made the post. It has been taken down," a White House official told AFP.

Speaking to reporters on board Air Force One on Friday, Trump stood by the thrust of the video's claims about election fraud, but said he had not seen the offensive clip.

"I just looked at the first part... and I didn't see the whole thing," Trump said, adding that he "gave it" to staffers to post and they also didn't watch the full video.

There was no immediate comment from the Obamas.

Ex-minister

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son, who is currently on the run after the political changeover.

During his cremation yesterday, Anjali performed the ritual of lighting the funeral pyre.

The Daily Star spoke to two relatives of Ramesh by phone yesterday. Seeking anonymity, both alleged he was arrested in false and fabricated cases and died due to a lack of proper medical treatment.

They also claimed that close family members were not allowed to meet him in jail.

When contacted, Forhad denied the allegations, telling The Daily Star that relatives had visited Ramesh as per jail code and that treatment was provided by the jail physician.

Replying to a query, he said he joined the jail last November and, since then, had not received any medical advice indicating that Ramesh required specialised treatment, although he acknowledged that Ramesh had been suffering from various ailments, including renal complications.