

Sudan hospital attack toll rises to 70: WHO

AFP, Geneva

The death toll from a strike on a hospital in East Darfur has risen from 64 to 70, the WHO said yesterday, calling the hit an attack on survival in Sudan's devastating war.

The World Health Organization said the number of people injured in Friday's strike on the El-Daein Teaching Hospital in the state capital of East Darfur had also increased from 89 to 146, with the facility now out of action.

Hala Khudari, the deputy WHO representative in Sudan and the UN agency's health emergency lead in the country, called it an "atrocious attack".

She said the death toll included seven women and 13 children, one doctor and two nurses, while those injured included patients, their family members and eight health workers.

"The hospital sustained severe damage, particularly to the outpatient and emergency departments," she told a press briefing in Geneva, speaking from Port Sudan.



A plume of smoke and a fragment of concrete rise from the site of an Israeli airstrike on the eastern outskirts of Tyre in southern Lebanon yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Dhaka 'got green signal' for getting more diesel via pipeline

Khalilur likely to visit India

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman is likely to have a short trip to India in the second week of April on his way to or back from Mauritius, where he will attend the Indian Ocean Conference, diplomatic sources in Dhaka and New Delhi said.

"The stopover in India could be either before or after the Indian Ocean Conference in Mauritius. It is not fixed yet," a source told The Daily Star.

India Foundation, in association with Mauritius, will organise the 9th Indian Ocean Conference from April 10 to 12 on "Collective Stewardship for Indian Ocean Governance". It will bring together leaders, policymakers, and experts from across the Indian Ocean Region.

This will be the first foreign trip by Khalilur since the new government came to power in February.

After the BNP formed the government, Bangladesh and India are signaling positive gestures of mending bilateral relations that have been strained since the August 2024 political changeover.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi sent multiple messages to Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman and invited him along with his family to visit India.

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma has also called on several ministers, including Khalilur, and extended an invitation from Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

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Supply crunch worsens at fuel pumps

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Trading Labuan, declared force majeure due to the war.

Industry insiders say the April outlook appears even more fragile as disruptions persist in key sourcing regions.

Octane supply is emerging as one of the most vulnerable segments.

Bangladesh meets most of its roughly 4,00,000 tonne annual demand through domestic production using crude oil, with the rest sourced from gas-based processing.

But that balance has been disrupted by the absence of recent crude imports.

A scheduled shipment of 1,00,000 tonnes of crude from Saudi Arabia's Ras Tanura terminal was delayed earlier this month, while a charter arrangement with Abu Dhabi National Oil Company was cancelled. As a result, no fresh crude shipments are expected this month.

The country's only refinery, Eastern Refinery Ltd, now holds about 80,000 tonnes of crude – enough to run the refinery for just 17 to 18 days at the current pace.

With domestic production under pressure, the government plans to import around 25,000 tonnes of octane by the end of next month, an unusual step underscoring growing concern.

The strain was already evident during Eid travel, when many filling stations ran out of octane and, in some cases, petrol. Districts including Munshiganj, Khulna, Bagerhat, Mymensingh, Chattogram, Gazipur, Bogura, Gaibandha, Rajshahi, Natore, and Brahmanbaria reported outages.

Current stock levels offer only limited short-term relief.

Diesel reserves stand at around 1,85,000 tonnes, sufficient for roughly 14 days, while octane stocks of 11,090 tonnes may last about nine days. Petrol stocks of 16,605 tonnes are expected to last around 11 days, according to BPC data.

Furnace oil stocks are relatively higher at 70,833 tonnes – enough for about 29 days – while jet fuel reserves of 34,877 tonnes can meet demand for around 23 days.

However, furnace oil figures do not reflect the actual picture, as most furnace-oil power plants import their own fuel.

Bangladesh remains heavily import-dependent. BPC officials

Bangladesh seeks

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funds for energy imports.

The issue will be discussed in detail during the World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings in Washington DC in April, Khasru told reporters after the meeting.

The government is already talking unofficially with many development partners for additional funding. The Daily Star has learnt from finance ministry officials involved with the proceedings.

"We have talked about the IMF's requirements – what is feasible and what is not in Bangladesh's current economic context. Not everything can be implemented at once – these need to be phased, because given the current state of the economy, we must proceed in a way that suits our own realities," Khasru said.

Discussions with Bangladesh are primarily focused on policy measures, Srinivasan said, adding that IMF financing is fundamentally anchored in policy dialogue.

Key issues are being discussed with both the finance minister and the prime minister, with further engagements planned in the coming days.

Bangladesh, like many other countries, is facing uncertainty due to

warn that any prolonged disruption in global supply chains could quickly erode the existing buffer, putting pressure on power generation, transport, and industrial production.

LONG QUEUES

At the retail level, the strain is already visible.

Panic buying has further intensified the pressure. Supplies at many pumps are exhausted within hours, with some customers attempting to stockpile fuel amid fears of worsening shortages.

Tensions have flared in some areas, with reports of arguments between customers and staffers and law enforcement stepping in to manage crowds. Pump operators also raised safety concerns over handling volatile fuel under such pressure.

In Dhaka, Trust Filling Station on Bijoy Sarani, considered a reliable source, which had been supplying fuel continuously before Eid, ran out of fuel yesterday and the day before.

Motorists faced long waits, with queues stretching up to Jahangir Gate from Bijoy Sarani.

"I waited in line for more than three hours, but in the end I didn't get a drop of fuel," said motorcyclist Rafiqul Islam. "It's really frustrating and makes it hard for people to go about their daily lives."

Most other filling stations in the Tejgaon and Mohakhali areas also ran dry yesterday.

Across several other districts, many filling stations struggling with long queues continued informal restrictions, citing limited supply, although the government imposed rationing between March 6 and March 15. They resorted to limiting sales to around Tk 300 for motorcycles and Tk 1,500 for cars.

In Khulna, several filling stations ran out of octane and petrol on the first working day after Eid. Motorists reported visiting multiple pumps in vain, while some stations cordoned off dispensing units due to security fears after stocks ran dry.

In Noakhali, customers queued for two to three hours, often receiving less than two litres of fuel. In Munshiganj, many stations displayed "No Octane" signs, while others provided only a fraction of usual supplies. Similar disruptions were reported in Narayanganj.

The situation appears more severe

in the north. In Bogura, pumps have begun self-imposed rationing, while in neighbouring Gaibandha several stations shut down temporarily due to stock shortages.

In Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, and Panchagarh, only a handful of stations were operating at times, supplying limited fuel as hundreds of motorcyclists queued for hours.

Pump owners say they are receiving far less fuel than required, often only a fraction of daily demand, forcing them to restrict sales. They also point to a sharp rise in demand following Eid travel and increased agricultural activity during the ongoing Boro harvest.

Syed Sajjadul Karim Kabul, a president of a faction of the Petrol Pump Owners Association, blamed logistical disruptions during the Eid holidays, when depots and banks remained closed, for difficulties in procuring fuel.

"A lack of coordination across the supply chain further complicated the situation," he said.

Despite the situation on the ground, authorities maintain that there is no overall supply crisis.

Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Iqbal Hassan Mahmood said the disruption is driven mainly by an unexpected surge in demand.

"Earlier, tank lorries would be filled in the morning, and even after selling fuel throughout the day, there would be some surplus," he told reporters at the Secretariat yesterday. "But now, due to long queues, the fuel runs out quickly."

He also cited delays in transporting fuel from depots to stations, particularly in the early hours. "There is a shortage in the morning, but fuel becomes available later," he said.

Urging restraint, the minister asked consumers not to purchase beyond immediate needs. "There is enough fuel. People will get it, but they should not buy more than necessary," he said.

Officials added that distribution is being calibrated based on previous consumption patterns to prevent hoarding and market manipulation, warning that excess release could allow syndicates to create artificial scarcity.

BPC Chairman Md Rezanur Rahman could not be reached over the phone for the last two days.

After the Spring Meeting, a regular mission led by IMF Mission Chief for Bangladesh Chris Papageorgiou will come to review the \$5.5 billion loan programme.

The government has asked the IMF to release the next \$1.3 billion tranche of the loan by June, said a finance ministry official.

If the IMF mission can place it before the board in June, it may be possible to release the tranche that month. Otherwise, it may be released in July.

Earlier, two instalments were released together in June last year, but no further disbursement followed the fifth review in November last year.

Approved in January 2023, the IMF programme was initially worth \$4.7 billion and was designed to be disbursed in seven instalments following periodic reviews.

The then Awami League government sought IMF support in 2022 as foreign exchange reserves came under pressure amid the fallout from the Ukraine war. By June last year, Bangladesh had received \$3.65 billion in five tranches.

The Washington-based lender later expanded the programme to \$5.5 billion in May last year following a request from the interim government.

Jet fuel prices hiked by 80%

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Under the revised structure, the price of jet fuel for domestic flights has been set at Tk 202.29 per litre, up from Tk 112.41. Meanwhile, jet fuel for international flights will cost \$1.3216 (Tk 162.21) per litre, up from the current \$0.738 (Tk 90.58).

Aviation experts and top officials of different private air operators said that if the decision is implemented, airlines in the country will face severe financial pressure, and passengers will ultimately bear the burden.

They said the increase in taxes on jet fuel will further raise overall operating costs, hindering the sustainable development of the aviation industry. They also warned that the price hike could lead to a situation where flight operations on domestic routes may be completely suspended.

According to a BERC notification, the new rates were determined based on the average international market price, particularly Platts rates, between March 5 and 22.

On March 8, BERC raised the price from Tk 95.12 to Tk 112.41 per litre. Within 16 days, the price was increased again by around 80 percent to Tk 202.29 per litre.

Similarly, for international routes, jet fuel prices have been increased in two phases over the same period from \$0.6257 (Tk 76.80) to \$0.738 and then \$1.3216 per litre.

Over the past 16 days, prices have gone up by about 115 percent, pushing the aviation sector towards a severe crisis.

For domestic flights, air operators will have to pay Tk 1,200 as duties and VAT, up from Tk 150, said Mofizur Rahman, secretary general of Aviation Operators Association of Bangladesh.

BERC said the latest adjustment was made in line with its legal mandate under the BERC Act 2003, and follows a pricing framework introduced

in May 2025 that allows periodic revisions in response to global fuel price movements.

The new rates came into effect from yesterday midnight and will remain in force until further notice.

Jet fuel prices in Bangladesh are significantly higher than in regional and global markets.

Data from different airports show prices at around \$0.62 per litre in Kolkata, \$0.603 in Muscat, \$0.587 in Dubai, \$0.581 in Jeddah and \$0.584 in Doha. In other regional hubs, prices stand at \$1.098 in Bangkok and \$0.586 in Singapore – all substantially lower than in Bangladesh.

Immediately after the BERC's announcement, Aviation Operators Association of Bangladesh (AOAB), a platform of private air operators' owners, expressed deep concern over the 80 percent price hike – terming it harmful and unjustified for the country's aviation sector.

Contacted by The Daily Star, AOAB Secretary General Mofizur Rahman said, "The relevant ministry has already stated that there is no shortage of fuel oil in the country. Around 25 oil-carrying vessels have arrived in the past 22 days and the oil was purchased at predetermined prices. At the same time, oil prices have declined in the international market in recent times."

"In this context, increasing jet fuel prices on such a large scale based on the apprehension of future price hikes is not justified in any way."

Mofizur, also managing director of private airline Novoair, added that the jet fuel price increase is unusually high compared to neighbouring countries.

"While India and Nepal have kept jet fuel prices unchanged, Pakistan increased prices by 24.49 percent and the Maldives by 18.54 percent, whereas the increase in Bangladesh is around 80 percent."

"Despite incurring loss, we will have

to operate flights for those who have already bought tickets. But at one stage, we will have no alternative to grounding flights."

AOAB urged the government to urgently review the decision and set a realistic and acceptable price to ensure stability and growth in the country's aviation sector.

Contacted, Kazi Wahidul Islam, an aviation expert and editor of The Bangladesh Monitor, a weekly publication on aviation and tourism, said, "The aviation industry of Bangladesh has already been struggling for long for multiple reasons. They are crawling to survive. The latest decision of huge increase of jet fuel at one go will give a severe blow to the private air operators."

Alam, also a former board member of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, said it will also impact the country's tourism, economic and other sectors related to the aviation industry.

Another aviation expert, ATM Nazrul Islam, who is also former managing director of the now defunct United Airways, said, "After the US-Israel imposed war on Iran, we could assume that the price of jet fuel will increase ... But such a large-scale hike at one go will have serious adverse impacts ... and it is the passengers who will have to ultimately pay for it."

Kamrul Islam, general manager (public relations) of US Bangla Airlines, a private air operator, said, "We will not be able to sustain under the present situation.... If local airlines lose sustainability, the aviation market will be fully controlled by the foreign carriers."

"Jet fuel accounts for around 50 percent of an airline's operating costs on any route... It is the passengers who will have to bear the additional cost, for which air traffic volume might decline."

55 years on, the scars are still fresh

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targeting civilians, students, intellectuals, and members of the security forces.

Eyewitness accounts and historical research indicate that thousands of unarmed civilians were killed in a single night. Homes were burned, and entire neighbourhoods were reduced to rubble. The scale and intensity of the violence shocked the world.

Dhaka University, being a bastion of protracted struggle of the repressed of the country, faced severe wrath of the Pakistan army. Armed with heavy weapons such as tanks, automatic rifles, rocket launchers, heavy mortars and light machine guns, Pakistan soldiers encircled the campus from east, south and north.

They stormed Iqbal Hall, now Sergeant Zahurul Haq Hall, as the Non-Cooperation Movement had been organised from the dormitory under the banner of the "Independent Bangladesh Students Movement Council".

After midnight, the army attacked Jagannath Hall, a dormitory of non-Muslim students, with mortar shelling and continuous gunfire. Troops entered through north and south gates and killed students indiscriminately in each room. Around 34 students were killed.

The Pakistani forces also launched crackdowns on Bangalee police personnel and members of the East Pakistan Rifles (EPR), cordoning off Pilkhana, the EPR headquarters, Rajarbagh Police Lines, and the Ansar headquarters in Khilgaon to prevent them from joining the armed struggle for freedom.

That same night, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of Awami League and the independence movement, was arrested by Pakistani forces. He was later taken to the then West Pakistan and kept in prison for

nine months.

The events of March 25 are widely regarded as the beginning of the 1971 genocide, which ignited the nine-month Liberation War. Bangladesh was ultimately liberated on December 16, 1971, when Pakistani forces surrendered to the Bangladesh-India Allied Forces at the Race Course Maidan, now called Suhrawardy Udyan.

Today, Bangladesh observes March 25 as Genocide Day. The day was officially recognised in 2017 to honour the victims of the atrocities and to raise global awareness about the genocide.

President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Prime Minister Tarique Rahman issued separate messages on the eve of the day, paying tribute to the victims and urging the nation to uphold the spirit of the Liberation War.

In his message, President Shahabuddin called upon all, irrespective of religions, caste, party or opinion to work together being imbued by patriotism to fulfill the spirit and expectations of the martyrs of the Liberation War, reports BSS.

"The hope, aspiration and dream of the martyrs in the Liberation War was to build a humane, democratic and real state - where there will be no discrimination, deprivation, misrule, corruption and injustice," he said.

"The declaration of independence by the then Major Ziaur Rahman from the Kalurghat radio station united the confused and hesitant entire nation, made it braver than ever, and inspired it to jump into armed struggle and sacrifice life," Shahabuddin said, reports BSS.

"The younger generation should clearly know about this cruel barbarity of history, on the other hand, about our glorious story and heroism as a nation," he added.

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman said

March 25, 1971, remains one of the most disgraceful and brutal days in the history of freedom-loving Bangladesh, reports BSS.

The genocide of March 25 was a pre-planned massacre, he said, adding: "Why this organised killing spree could not be resisted remains a matter of historical research regarding the visible role of the political leadership of that time."

However, on the night of March 25, the 8th East Bengal Regiment in Chattogram formally initiated armed resistance against the genocide by declaring "We Revolt," he said.

"Let us all strive to honour the sacrifices of the martyrs by establishing in the state and society the spirit of the great Liberation War – equality, human dignity and social justice. Let us work together to build a just, developed, prosperous, self-reliant and democratic Bangladesh," he added.

The government has planned various programmes at the state level to mark the day with due respect.

Discussion and memorial programmes will be held at educational institutions including schools, colleges, madrasas, and technical institutes with participation from eminent personalities and valiant freedom fighters, highlighting the genocide and the Liberation War, according to the BSS report.

Documentary screenings and rare photographic exhibitions on the genocide will be arranged at selected locations in all city corporation areas, including Dhaka, starting from 12:00 noon.

Special prayers will be offered at mosques after Zuhr prayers or at convenient times, while prayers will also be held at other places of worship across the country in memory of the massacre victims. No illumination will be allowed on the night.