

DGHS confirms 2 more deaths from measles

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two more patients died of confirmed cases of measles in the last 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

With this, the total confirmed measles deaths stand at 30, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

Both deaths were reported in the Dhaka division.

Besides, the DGHS recorded five additional deaths from suspected cases of measles in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of suspected measles deaths to 156.

Of the five, four were reported in the Dhaka division and one in the Rajshahi division.

In the last 24 hours, a total of 82 confirmed measles cases were recorded. Currently, the total confirmed cases in the country are 2,721.

Meanwhile, some 1,371 suspected measles cases were recorded during the same period, taking the total number of suspected cases to 17,024.



Family members pray at the grave of a relative buried alongside Hezbollah fighters killed in Israeli strikes, at a cemetery in Chouifat, south of Beirut, Lebanon yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Scores killed in airstrikes in northeast Nigeria

AFP, Maiduguri

Dozens of people in northeastern Nigeria died in airstrikes by the military, which claimed to be targeting jihadists, local residents, Amnesty International and a UN security report said Sunday.

Civilians have been caught in the crossfire and killed in military air strikes aimed at militants, though the authorities sometimes dispute hitting civilians.

Africa's most populous country has been fighting a jihadist insurgency for 17 years, since Boko Haram's 2009 uprising, which has seen the emergence of powerful splinter groups including Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP).

The latest airstrikes on the village of Jilli occurred on Saturday, with the death tolls differing according to the sources.

A UN security report said that "4 Nigerian Air Force (NAF) fighter jets launched airstrikes that mistakenly killed at least 56 people and injured 14 others at the Jilli market... on April 11."

"This occurred during a military operation targeting Boko Haram fighters who visited the market to conduct terrorism activities," it said.

Bhasan Char forest bears brunt

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firewood has become a matter of survival. But for the island, this poses serious environmental risks, exposing it to the dangers of storm surges and erosion.

Although the LPG crisis was anticipated months ago, the Office of the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC), responsible for managing the cluster villages for the refugees, could not make any alternative arrangements.

Between 2017 and 2019, a total of 120 cluster villages were built under a Tk 2,312 crore project for accommodating one lakh of the 10 lakh Rohingyas from Cox's Bazar. The first batch was transferred to the island in December 2020.

More than 7.5 lakh Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh in the months after August 2017 following the Myanmar military's brutal campaign in Rakhine State. They joined several lakh others, who had escaped earlier waves of violence, in cramped camps in Cox's Bazar.

Over four years since 2020, more than 8,000 refugee families were moved to the island from Cox's Bazar, according to the office of RRRC.

Before their relocation, the government carried out afforestation drives on around 15,000 acres of the island between 2010 and 2014, according to project records.

Dense plantations, including coastal species like kewra, later spread across parts of the island, then known as Thengarchar. These trees provide more than just shade; they serve as primary natural defence against cyclones and storm surges. They stabilise soil and mitigate erosion.

RRRC documents show that 22.35 lakh trees were planted on the island over the six years after the Rohingyas arrived there in 2020.

RRRC officials and aid workers said that around 2.55 lakh trees have been cut down since the LPG crisis began in September last year.

According to the Forest Act of 1927, tree felling in the island's forest is prohibited.

A CRISIS LONG IN THE MAKING

Since 2020, each Rohingya family received a 12 kg LPG cylinder at regular intervals, roughly every 36 days. The supply stopped in January this year after Islamic Relief Bangladesh, a non-governmental organisation, halted LPG distribution due to a fund crunch.

In a letter dated February 9, the Office of the RRRC informed the NGO Affairs Bureau that firewood collection from forest areas had increased amid the LPG crisis, and that the island's limited coastal vegetation could be depleted rapidly.

Internal correspondence shows the crisis had been anticipated much earlier.

On August 12 last year, the RRRC office in Bhasan Char warned the Cox's Bazar office of a looming LPG shortage.

In a letter, it said only 2,500 cylinders a month — half the requirement of 5,000 cylinders — were expected from August 2025 to June 2026 and that uninterrupted distribution would only be possible till August 26, 2025.

Two weeks later, the Cox's Bazar office wrote to the NGO Affairs Bureau and asked it to take steps urgently, saying around 5,000 cylinders were needed for the refugees each month. On September 9, the bureau asked the organisations concerned to arrange LPG supply immediately. However, the problem remains unresolved.

Several staffers at Islamic Relief Bangladesh said the funding for LPG cylinders had come through Islamic Relief USA, a Virginia-based nonprofit organisation. But there was a fund crunch after US President Donald Trump halted foreign aid last year, affecting support streams tied to Islamic Relief USA.

Between January and June last year, around 3,500 cylinders were distributed among the refugees per month, which fell to about 3,000 between July and December.

They said it would require over Tk 8 crore a year to ensure uninterrupted LPG supply to 8,000 Rohingya families. When contacted, RRRC

Commissioner Mohammed Mizanur Rahman said,

"There is actually no government fund for providing LPG cylinders to Rohingyas. The funds came from NGOs. The government did not spend any money."

He further said his office does not have the means to arrange government funding.

Seeking anonymity, an Islamic Relief Bangladesh official posted at Bhasan Char said, "We are uncertain when funding can be arranged. The RRRC has contacted us but we are unable to give any assurance because funding comes from abroad."

TREES FELLED ON A LARGE SCALE During visits to multiple sites near refugee clusters, embankments and forest patches, this correspondent found ample evidence of tree cutting.

More than a hundred tree stumps were seen in six locations near Cluster 75, the Bhasan Char Multipurpose Complex and outside the main project boundary. Near the Ghat area, more than 108 trees were found stripped of branches.

Elsewhere, firewood lay drying on the rooftops of many shelters, while stacks of branches were piled in front of many houses. Some families stored branches in bags while others kept them beside cooking spaces or under makeshift covers to keep them dry.

To understand the scale of tree felling, this correspondent talked to more than 50 families.

Households with two to three members cut about two trees a month, compared with five trees for families of four to five members and seven for those with six to seven members.

Families with eight to nine members cut 10 trees, while those with 10 or more members cut 11 trees a month.

Ibrahim Khalil, wildlife and biodiversity conservation officer in Noakhali, said the risks from deforestation goes beyond ecology.

If tree cutting continues, the island's inhabitants may be exposed to storm surges, erosion and temporary inundation, he said.

Invest in agro in the north

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and fruits, for better yield and improved management of agricultural produce and agro-processing industries.

The PM assured them that the government will reduce tax on the import of solar panels, as per their demand, so that they rely less on fossil fuels.

Tarique said that his government would reduce tolls on vehicles used for transporting goods via the Jamuna Bridge.

Seeking anonymity, another businessperson who was in the meeting said it was a business-friendly meeting, as the prime minister listened to them and assured them of resolving various challenges that can be addressed by the government.

He added that the PM wants the northern region to develop into an agricultural hub for products such as vegetables, fruits, and agro-processing industries.

The prime minister also suggested that businesspersons use LPG to meet the demand for gas, as it may take more time to extract additional gas from the fields.

Another businessperson who attended the meeting said the PM mainly discussed the future of agriculture and the agro-industries in the country.

He also wants Bangladesh to export more agricultural products and produce, the businessperson told The Daily Star over the phone, wishing not

to be named.

The PM added that he would support businesspersons in building cold chain facilities for preserving produce such as mangoes, potatoes, and other fruits for local consumption and export.

Yesterday's meeting was the second one between the PM and the businesspersons after Tarique assumed office.

He held the first meeting with another group of businesspersons on April 4, where they mainly demanded uninterrupted energy supply, easing of regulatory bottlenecks, lower bank interest rates, and the inauguration of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport's third terminal to improve investment climate.

Trawler 'with 250' Bangladeshis

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been lured with a job offer from Kutupalong Bazar on April 2. He was taken to a house in the Rajarchhara area of Teknaf's Kachhopia union, where he was confined with 20 to 25 others in inhumane conditions.

He alleged that victims were subjected to abuse whenever they attempted to escape, adding that multiple houses in the area were used to confine trafficked individuals.

On the night of April 4, they were taken to the Marine Drive adjacent coast near Rajarchhara and boarded onto small fishing boats. At one stage, they were forced to hide in nearby bushes as a Border Guard Bangladesh patrol passed.

"We were later transferred in stages to a larger fishing trawler near Myanmar waters, close to Saint Martin's Island," he said.

According to Rafiqul, more passengers were loaded onto the vessel, bringing the total to around 280, including 13 crew members and traffickers, 21 Rohingya women, and four children. Around 150 of the passengers were Rohingya, while the rest were Bangladeshis.

After leaving waters near Shamila in Myanmar (near St Martin's Island) on April 4, the trawler reached near the

Andaman Islands on April 8.

Due to rough seas, traffickers allegedly forced passengers into four cramped storage compartments meant for fish and nets.

Rafiqul claimed that 25 to 30 people died from suffocation and overcrowding.

He further alleged that traffickers threatened to sink the vessel if those on deck refused to move into the compartments.

The trawler eventually capsized after being hit by large waves, Rafiqul said. He survived by clinging to a two-litre water bottle but could not say what happened to the others. He was rescued along with eight others on April 9.

Another survivor, Md Imran from a Rohingya camp in Kutupalong, said he had joined the journey hoping to escape camp life.

"When we reached near the Andaman Sea, the trawler sank. I held onto a water tank and fought for my life for two days before being rescued by a Bangladeshi ship," he said. "I still cannot process how many people died. Living with this memory is extremely painful."

The coast guard members filed a case under the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act, 2012 with Teknaf Model Police Station on Sunday

in connection with the incident.

According to the case statement, the victims were being transported illegally to Malaysia on a boat named "Tanjina Sultana" when it sank due to adverse weather.

Officer-in-Charge Saiful Islam said the nine rescued individuals were brought to the police station. Legal action has been taken against six alleged traffickers among them.

Among the rescued, six are Bangladeshi nationals and three are Rohingya, the OC said, adding that three victims have been sent home following court orders after initial questioning, while the suspected traffickers were sent to jail on Sunday.

The officer said investigators have yet to determine the exact number of passengers on board or the fate of the missing.

"The rescued persons are not clearly describing what happened to the trawler or how they survived at sea," he said, adding that the total number of victims remains uncertain.

At one stage, he declined to comment further. The rescued individuals were identified as Md Imran, Rahela Begum, Hridoy, Sohan Uddin, Md Akbar, Rafiqul Islam, Tofayel, Sayad Alam, and Md Hamid.

Govt's rationale for repeal flawed

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about the NHRC-related ordinances presented in parliament. It also outlined the government's perceived objections and offered proposals for future legislation.

The letter noted that the government in parliament claimed that an ordinance ensured necessary protection for those involved in the July uprising.

However, the commissioners said that under the July Mass Uprising (Protection and Liability Determination) Ordinance, 2026, ratified by parliament, participants would be protected if deaths occurred due to political resistance during the uprising. If murders were committed by exploiting the chaos, cases would be filed.

To avoid conflicts of interest, the NHRC was tasked with determining which category a death fell into through investigation. However, under the reinstated 2009 act, the commission, now under the law ministry, will require prior government permission to investigate officials of security forces.

They said investigations would instead be carried out by the same security forces involved during the uprising.

"If a government agency is accused, an investigation subject to that same government's permission is meaningless.

"Consequently, July warriors from

all political parties may be at risk in the future."

The letter systematically addressed what the commissioners called "incorrect information" presented in parliament to justify the repeal.

Contrary to the law minister's earlier claim that the punishment for enforced disappearance is limited to 10 years, the commissioners said the 2025 Enforced Disappearance Ordinance provides for the death penalty and life imprisonment, depending on the severity of the crime.

They also rejected the government's assertion that the International Crimes Tribunal Act is sufficient to handle such cases.

"The ICT can only try 'mass' disappearances as crimes against humanity. It cannot adjudicate isolated criminal cases of disappearance," the letter stated.

It added that as of April 11, new cases of enforced disappearance are no longer defined as criminal offences under the reinstated legal framework.

The commissioners further criticised the new selection committee structure, expressing fears of a return to the "politicisation of appointments". They added that under the reinstated act, 60 percent of the selection committee is executive-leaning, including the home and law ministers.

While the government has promised a "stronger" law after further scrutiny, the outgoing commissioners expressed scepticism, arguing that

the 2025 ordinances were already the result of consultations with over 600 stakeholders.

They also noted that it was argued in parliament that the commission was autonomous under both the 2009 and 2025 laws, and therefore equally strong.

However, under the 2009 act, the commission cannot investigate allegations against security forces (section 18), while it could do so under the 2025 ordinance. "Therefore, autonomy does not equate to having effective power," the letter read.

Referring to the points raised in the letter, Law Minister Md Asaduzzaman said the NHRC's arguments on punishment under the Enforced Disappearance Prevention and Redress Ordinance are "totally incorrect".

"If you look at the law, it [in section 4] clearly says punishment can be life imprisonment or up to 10 years. Now what does 'up to 10 years' mean? It means not exceeding 10 years. So, 'up to 10 years' means the court has the discretion to give even one hour, one day, one month, or any period within that limit. So how can this be contradictory? They [NHRC] have clearly misinterpreted this.

"Secondly, I have said in all press conferences and elsewhere that there is a timeframe within which the report must be submitted. But there is no guideline stating how long they will take to make a decision after receiving the report."

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instability in global energy security.

Nato allies, including Britain and France, said they would not be drawn into the conflict by taking part in the blockade, stressing instead the need to reopen the waterway, through which about one-fifth of the world's oil normally passes.

China, Washington's great power rival and a big importer of Iranian oil, also criticised the plan.

"The Strait of Hormuz is an important international trade route for goods and energy, and maintaining its security, stability, and unimpeded flow is in the common interest of the international community," foreign ministry spokesman Guo Jiakun said, urging Iran and the US not to reignite the war.

Spain's Defence Minister Margarita Robles said the planned naval blockade "makes no sense".

And in a BBC radio interview, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Britain would not join the blockade, adding the UK "is not getting dragged in".

French President Emmanuel Macron said that France and Britain would host a conference with countries prepared to join a "peaceful multinational mission" to secure the strait, but it would be "strictly defensive" and only operational once circumstances permit.

Last Wednesday, the US and Iran agreed a two-week truce to allow the negotiations to go ahead, and mediator Pakistan and Gulf state Qatar were still calling yesterday for it to be respected as diplomatic efforts continue.

"The ceasefire is still holding and,

as I speak, full efforts are underway to resolve the outstanding issues," Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif of Pakistan told a cabinet meeting.

The head of the International Maritime Organization, Secretary General Arsenio Dominguez, said no country could "prohibit the right of innocent passage or the freedom of navigation through international straits that are used for international transit".

The US military's regional Central Command said the blockade would be "enforced impartially against vessels of all nations" entering or leaving Iranian ports in the Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

"The blockade will not impede neutral transit passage through the Strait of Hormuz to or from non-Iranian destinations," Central Command said in a note to seafarers seen by Reuters yesterday.

The US leader's latest change of tack left some observers perplexed.

"Presumably, Trump's intent is to try to starve Iran of export revenue and compel Iran's main oil customers, particularly China, to pressure Tehran to end its blockade of the strait," think tank The Soufan Center said in its daily note.

Two Iranian-linked tankers, the Aurora and New Future, laden with oil products, left the strait yesterday before the deadline, according to ISEEG data.

An Iranian military spokesperson called any US restrictions on international shipping "piracy," warning that if Iranian ports were threatened, no port in the Gulf or Gulf of Oman would be secure. Any military vessels approaching the strait would violate the ceasefire, Iran's

Revolutionary Guards said.

The US delegation in Islamabad — led by US Vice-President JD Vance, special envoy Steve Witkoff and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner — was frustrated by Iran's refusal to give up what it insists is a civilian nuclear programme.

In the talks, Iran brought new demands, including recognition of its control of the waterway, lifting of sanctions and the withdrawal of forces from US military bases across the Middle East.

Russia has offered to hold Iran's enriched uranium safely as part of any deal.

"The offer still stands, but has not been acted upon," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

Trump has declared victory, despite failing to achieve the objectives he set out at the start of the war: to eliminate Iran's ability to strike its neighbours, end its nuclear programme and make it easier for Iranians to topple their government.

On Sunday, Trump said the price of oil and gasoline may remain high through November's midterm elections, a rare acknowledgement of the potential political fallout from his decision to attack Iran six weeks ago.

"It could be, or it should be, maybe a little bit higher, but it would be around the same," Trump told Fox News. The average price for regular gas at US service stations has exceeded \$4 per gallon for most of April, according to data from GasBuddy. Average US gas prices in February hovered just below \$3 per gallon, and over the past year, never exceeded \$3.25 per gallon, according to GasBuddy.