

39 top cops transferred

STAR REPORT

In a major reshuffle in the police department, the government yesterday transferred a total of 39 top police officers, including nine deputy inspectors general (DIGs) and 23 superintendents of police (SPs).

The home ministry issued separate notifications, signed by its Deputy Secretary Md Tausif Ahmed, in this regard.

All the transferred officers have been instructed to join their new stations as early as possible, added the notification.

Sylhet range DIG Md Mushfequr Rahman has been transferred to the police headquarters (PHQ) as DIG, while Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) Commissioner Md Zillur Rahman was made the Sylhet range DIG.

DIG of Special Branch (SB) Md Fayezul Kabir was transferred to the RMP as its commissioner.

Barishal Metropolitan Police (BMP) Commissioner Md Shafiqul Islam was posted to the Tourist Police as its DIG, and DIG of PHQ Md Ashik Sayeed was made the BMP commissioner.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

Thick black smoke billows as a truck is torched by agitated locals in Rajshahi's Puthiya upazila yesterday after a tailor, Akkas Ali, was struck and killed by the vehicle while crossing the Dhaka-Rajshahi Highway. Locals blocked the highway for around two hours, during which this truck, along with another, was set ablaze. Police later arrived and brought the situation under control.

Two more children die from measles

Four die with symptoms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six more children died from measles and measles-like symptoms in the 24 hours leading up to 8:00am yesterday, taking the total number of confirmed and suspected measles deaths to 317.

Of the six, two patients had tested positive for measles, while four died with symptoms, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The two confirmed deaths were reported from the Dhaka division, raising the total death toll to 54.

Four more suspected measles deaths were reported during the same period, bringing the total number of suspected deaths to 263.

Of these deaths, two were reported from the Sylhet division, while one each was reported from the Khulna and Rajshahi divisions.

During the same period, 259 new confirmed cases were reported, raising the total number of confirmed cases to 5,726.

Besides, the DGHS recorded 1,186 new suspected cases in 24 hours, bringing the total number of suspected cases to 42,979.

On Monday morning, the country logged its highest single-day death toll from measles and measles-like symptoms, with 17 child deaths reported in the preceding 24 hours.

So far, 89 percent of targeted children have been vaccinated as a nationwide measles-rubella campaign continues.

After 30 upazilas and four city corporations emerged as high-burden areas for the highly contagious disease, the health department launched the nationwide special drive on April 20.

Bangladesh drilling deep in hunt for gas

FROM PAGE 1

The deep drilling programme is critical at a time when domestic gas output is struggling to keep pace with demand, forcing Bangladesh to increasingly rely on imported liquefied natural gas, which now accounts for around 35 percent of total supply.

The country's current gas supply is around 2,600-2,700 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) against the demand of more than 3,800 mmcf, while the country is supplying around 950 mmcf from processed LNG, Petrobangla data shows.

"If successful, the wells could significantly add to the country's gas reserves," said Md Abdul Jalil Pramanik, managing director of Bangladesh Gas Fields Company.

The actual volume will be confirmed only after drilling and testing are completed, he said, adding that they expect about 2 trillion cubic feet (TCF) to be added to the national reserve.

Discovered in 1962, the Titas field is the country's first and largest gas field, with an initial proven reserve of 7.34 TCF of gas.

About 5.6 TCF has already been extracted, and the field is currently

producing around 330 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) from 22 active wells, contributing around 20 percent of total gas supply from domestic fields.

Despite its long production history, officials believe deeper layers beneath Titas may still hold significant volumes of gas.

"Usually, there is a possibility of huge gas resources in deeper formations — this drilling will take us closer to the source rock," Pramanik said.

Bangladesh's previous drilling record stood at 4,977 metres, achieved at Fenchuganj-1 between 1985 and 1988.

Most of the country's roughly 70 wells fall within depths of 3,000 to 3,500 metres, reflecting longstanding technical limitations.

A research article of the Bangladesh Journal of Geology published in 1984 advised deep drilling up to 5 kilometres in the Titas structure, Md Mahamudul Nawab, the project director, told reporters visiting the site.

"But we don't know why it took so much time. There was a lack of technological support as well as initiative from policymakers."

The new deep-drilling initiative is expected to overcome the constraints

using advanced equipment and technology.

A high-capacity drilling rig operated by China's state-owned CNPC Chuanqing Drilling Engineering Company has been deployed for the project, he added.

Engineers involved say drilling beyond 3,750 metres will enter high-pressure zones, requiring advanced safety systems.

To manage the risk, a blowout preventer with a capacity of 15,000 PSI is being used, which is significantly higher than the previously used 10,000 PSI standard.

So far, Bangladesh has discovered 29.74 TCF of gas in 29 gas fields, of which 21.78 TCF has already been consumed, leaving around 7.97 TCF in remaining reserves. The country consumes about 1 TCF every year.

Since 2019, Bangladesh's local gas production has dropped sharply, reflecting the depletion of mature fields and limited new exploration.

Annual output declined from 965 billion cubic feet (bcf) in fiscal 2018-19 to around 640 bcf in fiscal 2024-25, highlighting a sustained fall in domestic supply.

Fund crunch squeezes free meds for poor

FROM PAGE 1

I will have to buy the rest from a pharmacy. This facility gave me some relief, but the [medicine] shortage has put me in trouble," said 70-year-old Moslem, who has been receiving services at the NCD Corner since February 2023.

Thousands of patients across Bangladesh are in a similar bind. NCD corners — dedicated points at every upazila health complex where health workers check blood pressure and blood sugar and dispense five types of free medicines — are running short of supplies due to a funding crunch.

As of March, 9.18 lakh patients with hypertension and 7.31 lakh diabetic patients were registered at these corners. Of them, 58 percent of hypertension patients and 28 percent of diabetic patients have their conditions under control, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

The DGHS launched the NCD corner programme in 2018 and now runs the services at 416 upazila health complexes and 30 district hospitals.

Though the health directorate does not have exact figures on how many NCD corners are affected, information collected from eight upazila health complexes in different districts shows that most are struggling with shortages. This correspondent learnt from health officials that at least 25 such facilities are unable to provide a month's supply of medicines to patients.

In a letter to the health ministry on March 16, the DGHS sought Tk 100 crore in emergency funding, mentioning that its stocks would be exhausted in 60 days. Since then, 50 days have passed but the request has yet to be fulfilled, said officials.

Health officials warn that the disruption may raise out-of-pocket costs for poor patients, forcing many to discontinue treatment. It may also undo years of progress by increasing the risk of life-threatening complications due to interrupted medication.

Talking to The Daily Star on April 23, Prof Halimur Rashid, director (disease control) of the DGHS, said the suspension of a sectoral programme is behind the current crisis at NCD corners.

"I cannot say exactly how many NCD corners are facing a shortage of medicines, but there is definitely a problem," he said, adding that chances are low that the DGHS will receive the Tk 100 crore allocation as requested.

He further said the government is likely to increase funds for hospitals in the next budget, instead of providing block allocations, so that they can procure medicines on their own from July.

Asked if the situation might

worsen, Halimur downplayed its gravity. He said around 70 percent of patients with hypertension and diabetes already buy medicines on their own, and the disruption in NCD corner services would push that figure up by at most 5 percent.

When contacted on April 22, Health Secretary Qamruzzaman Chowdhury said, "We will certainly take steps to mitigate the crisis if there is any."

A PROGRAMME UNDER STRAIN
Hypertension and diabetes are among the most prevalent non-communicable diseases in Bangladesh, accounting for over 70 percent of all deaths.

In 2018, the DGHS launched a

shortages began emerging at the NCD corners in early 2025. An allocation of Tk 100 crore in August last year provided temporary relief, but the crisis resurfaced after the programme was excluded from projects approved in November last year, and no regular revenue budget was allocated for medicine procurement.

The shortage of diabetes testing strips is particularly acute, with no procurement in the past two years.

SITUATION ON THE GROUND
This correspondent contacted officials of eight upazila health complexes, six of which reported shortages.

Officials from Shailkupa (Jhenaidah), Zakiganj (Sylhet), Banaripara (Barishal), Boalkhali (Chattogram), and Lauhajang (Munshiganj) confirmed supply problems, while those from Akhaura (Brahmanbaria) and Badarganj (Rangpur) reported adequate stocks.

In Keraniganj, 2,781 hypertension and 2,724 diabetic patients are registered with the upazila health complex, and 130-190 patients visit it every day.

Upazila Health and Family Planning Officer Abdul Mokaddesh said they are currently providing medicines for only 10 days instead of a full month due to shortages.

He warned that if the supply disruption continues, there could be a fall in the blood pressure control rate of 56 percent among treated patients.

"We don't know when we will receive fresh supplies," he said on April 20.

A DGHS official involved in the programme said health complexes in Sylhet, Chattogram, and Barishal divisions are facing significant shortages of medicines. Patient numbers are higher in these divisions compared to others because NCD corners were launched there at an early stage of the programme.

Prof Sohel Reza Choudhury, the head of Epidemiology and Research at the National Heart Foundation Hospital and Research Institute, warned that supplies in most upazilas will run out within a month.

The National Heart Foundation provides technical support, drug forecasting, training for health workers and application-management assistance to 327 NCD corners across 47 districts under Bangladesh Hypertension Control Initiative.

"We have urged the health authorities to provide another block allocation immediately," he told this newspaper on April 22, adding that the disruption will hit low-income patients the hardest and jeopardise Bangladesh's target of achieving hypertension control in 65 percent of patients.

- Funding gap disrupts NCD services in many upazilas
- At least 26 upazilas are rationing medicine due to shortage
- Tk 100 crore sought for procuring medicine in mid-March
- Gains in hypertension, diabetes control at risk

programme to establish NCD corners at upazila health complexes. Staffed by a three-member team, including a medical officer, each corner provides five types of medicines free of cost. Initially introduced in four upazilas in Sylhet, the programme has since expanded to 416 upazila health complexes and 30 district hospitals.

In a report published in September last year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) praised the programme for "demonstrating a strong and scalable impact in improving hypertension management and control".

Between October 2018 and June 2024, 56 percent of 5.17 lakh treated patients achieved blood pressure control at the implementing facilities, said the Global Report on Hypertension 2025.

The programme was previously operated under the Non-Communicable Disease Control (NCDC) programme, a component of the Fourth Health, Population, and Nutrition Sector Programme (HPNSP), which expired in June 2024.

In March last year, the interim government scrapped the proposed Fifth HPNSP, deciding instead to take up projects to complete unfinished work under the previous programme.

In the absence of the programme and any new project, medicine

20 percent higher revenue target for next year

FROM PAGE 1

The NBR has already introduced some measures to boost revenue, such as making online filing of returns mandatory for individual taxpayers, which is expected to increase income tax collection.

The use of the ASYCUDA system data has been made mandatory for customs and income tax departments, enabling better information exchange and verification. This will make tax assessment and collection more transparent and efficient.

Additionally, with Tk 1,000 crore in World Bank funding, the "Strengthening Domestic Revenue Mobilisation" project has been launched to fully digitise NBR operations.

VAT registration thresholds have been lowered: the listing limit from Tk 50 lakh to Tk 30 lakh, and the registration limit from Tk 50 lakh to Tk 2.5 lakh.

Currently, 13 percent of government revenue comes from non-NBR taxes and non-tax revenue.

For the next fiscal year, the non-NBR tax target is expected to be set at Tk 25,000 crore, up from Tk 20,000 crore this year, though only Tk 5,786 crore was collected in the first eight months.

Non-tax revenue has performed better, with Tk 40,000 crore collected against a Tk 65,000 crore target. Next year's target is likely to be Tk 66,000 crore.

Bangladesh's tax-to-GDP ratio remains among the lowest globally. The government plans to raise the ratio to 9.2 percent in the next fiscal year.

The target was 8.6 percent in the revised budget for this fiscal year. Last fiscal year, the ratio stood at 6.8 percent. The focus in the upcoming budget

will be on expanding the scope of income tax and VAT, said NBR Chairman Abdur Rahman Khan.

There are about 1.28 crore income taxpayers but fewer than 800,000 VAT payers. Significant legal changes will be made to increase VAT collection, Khan said.

He noted that the 15 percent VAT rate has not yet been effectively implemented, though work has begun to establish it as a standard, especially for marginal SMEs facing compliance issues.

If sufficient data is available, a fixed VAT system may be introduced for new and small entrepreneurs.

Digitisation will be prioritised to reduce tax evasion.

Globally, tax management is being improved through product tracking and tracing. Bangladesh plans to introduce this system first for tobacco products, ensuring each product is recorded at the factory.

Citizens will be able to scan items with smartphones to verify VAT payment. Whistleblowers will be rewarded and offenders fined. This system will gradually extend to other products, the NBR chief said.

He emphasised that the main goal is to expand the tax and VAT base. Non-filers will be identified through automated systems.

Among the 1.28 crore TIN holders, those with unnecessary registrations or no taxable income will be deregistered, and deceased persons' TINs will be closed.

E-return systems will automatically identify non-filers and issue notices, reducing disparities between regular taxpayers and non-filers.

"The key question is how realistic the revenue target is and what measures are needed to achieve it," said Selim Raihan, executive director of the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM).

He noted that NBR sets ambitious targets every year but rarely implements structural reforms.

Without major reforms, such goals cannot be achieved, Raihan said.

While discussions and research on tax reform have been ongoing, initiatives such as dividing NBR into policymaking and implementation bodies have stalled, Raihan said.

The government's next steps remain unclear, he said, adding that a strong commitment to reform is essential.

In practice, the lack of reform leads to increased pressure on existing taxpayers and greater reliance on indirect taxes, such as higher import duties and surcharges.

"These are not sustainable solutions." As a solution, he called for major restructuring of the tax system, including bringing untapped taxpayers into the net and reducing tax evasion.

Tax exemptions, which amount to five to six percent of GDP, must be reduced to achieve desired revenue levels.

He further emphasised the need for a single VAT rate, simplification of existing laws and reform of the income tax structure.

However, resistance from the business community remains a challenge.

"Strong political will is crucial; otherwise, the economy risks falling into a low-level equilibrium trap where ambitious targets are set but remain unattainable," Raihan added.

'Ceasefire still holds, but ready for combat'

FROM PAGE 1

very, very closely," he added.

On Monday, Iran also targeted the UAE, a key US regional ally, with missiles and drones. Shortly after Hegseth spoke yesterday, the UAE defence ministry said its air defences were again engaging incoming missile and drone attacks from Iran.

The Gulf state's foreign ministry said the strikes marked a serious escalation and posed a direct threat to national security, adding that the UAE reserved its "full and legitimate right" to respond.

Iran did not immediately comment on the latest accusations. Earlier, parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said breaches of the ceasefire by the US and its allies endangered shipping through the strait, which carries a large share of global oil and fertiliser supplies.

"We know well that the continuation of the current situation is unbearable for the United States, while we have not

even begun yet," he said in a social media post.

US President Donald Trump, meanwhile, dismissed Iran's military capability and said Tehran "should wave the white flag of surrender". Speaking in the Oval Office, Trump said Iran privately wanted a deal despite its public rhetoric.

Several merchant vessels in the Gulf reported explosions or fires on Monday, while an oil port in the UAE, which hosts a major US military base, was hit by Iranian missiles.

Despite the clashes, Denmark's freight giant Maersk yesterday said that one of its ships had successfully sailed through the Strait of Hormuz under US escort.

Iran's military had threatened to attack any US forces that approached or entered the trade route.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said peace talks were

progressing with Pakistan's mediation and warned the US and UAE against being drawn into a "quagmire". He was travelling to Beijing yesterday for talks with his Chinese counterpart, according to his ministry.

Iranian authorities also released a map showing an expanded maritime area they claimed was under Iranian control, extending beyond the strait to include parts of the UAE coastline, including Fujairah and Khorfakkan on the Gulf of Oman.

World leaders yesterday urged Tehran to return to diplomacy after renewed strikes in the region pushed the ceasefire to the brink.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz called on Iran to "return to the negotiating table and stop holding the region and the world hostage", echoing similar appeals from French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer.