

Seven more die from measles, with symptoms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seven more children died from measles and measles like symptoms in the 24 hours to 8:00am yesterday, taking the total number of confirmed and suspected measles deaths to 324.

Two deaths were confirmed as being from measles, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). With these, both reported from the Chattogram division, confirmed deaths rose to 56.

Meanwhile, five more suspected measles deaths were reported during the same period, the DGHS said, pushing suspected deaths from measles to 268. Two were reported from the Rajshahi division, while one death each was reported from the Sylhet, Barishal, and Khulna divisions.

During the same period, 373 new confirmed cases were reported, bringing the total to 6,099.

Besides, the DGHS recorded 1,281 new suspected cases in 24 hours, bringing the total to 44,260.



Biplobi Chhatra Maitree activists, carrying symbolic bodies of children, demonstrate at Raju Bhashkorjo on Dhaka University campus yesterday, demanding the trial of interim government's advisers for the deaths of children from measles. PHOTO: MEHEDI HASAN

Troops to head to barracks from early June

Decides core committee on law and order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The armed forces, deployed in July 2024 to assist the civil administration during the quota reform protests, are set to return to the barracks from June 6 in phases.

The personnel, who remained in the field throughout the tenure of the interim administration, will be withdrawn following the formation of an elected government.

Troops will be pulled out first from remote districts, followed by divisional cities and larger districts in subsequent phases. The process is expected to be completed by the end of June, according to the decision made by the core committee on law and order.

The committee held its first meeting on Tuesday after the BNP formed the government following the 13th parliamentary election. The committee, reconstituted on April 21 with Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed as the chair, has been tasked with reviewing law and order, and setting operational priorities.

The meeting was also attended by the inspector general of police, Dhaka Metropolitan Police commissioner, director general of Border Guard Bangladesh, and senior officials from relevant agencies.

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Bangladesh staring at \$1.07b extra

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The report identified LNG as a major source of fiscal stress, with March spot shipments procured at \$19.77-\$28.28 per MMBtu, far above historical averages.

These purchases required subsidies of about Tk 67.50 per cubic metre, excluding terminal costs, the report said. The cost of per cubic metre of imported LNG was Tk 91.3 that month, whereas the average domestic gas price was Tk 23.82.

If imports during April-June match last year's 74.7 million MMBtu, the subsidy burden could swell dramatically. While the IEEFA report projected LNG import subsidy in April-June at Tk 13,134 crore, Petrobangla estimated Tk 11,996 crore will be required during the quarter.

The estimated quarterly subsidy for LNG has far exceeded the annual target. The government has allocated Tk 9,000 crore for entire FY2025-26.

The government plans to import 30 LNG shipments in this quarter, including at least 24 from the spot market at an average \$19 per MMBtu.

Officials at the power and energy ministry said they are assessing the evolving market situation.

"We are monitoring the developments closely and evaluating available options to minimise pressure on consumers," a Petrobangla official told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

Attempts to reach Petrobangla Chairman Md Arfanul Hoque were unsuccessful.

Prof M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, warned that rising LNG import costs could trigger another round of gas tariff hikes. "Gas prices will certainly be increased. The current trend clearly points in that direction."

He questioned the rationale of importing LNG at such high prices.

"Despite importing expensive LNG, there is no meaningful improvement in electricity supply. Then what is the justification for this additional

expenditure?" He criticised repeated failures to accelerate domestic gas exploration, citing reserves such as Chattak East that remain untapped. "The previous Awami League government said it would increase domestic gas exploration. The caretaker administration said the same thing. The current government is also saying it. But where are the results?"

Consumers, he noted, have long contributed around Tk 1,500 crore annually to energy development

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funds intended to boost domestic production and shield against global volatility. "These funds were created so that when international prices rise, consumers would receive temporary protection. But none of that has happened. Instead, our market has become increasingly tied to volatile import dependence."

POWER UNDER PRESSURE
Coal and oil prices have also spiked amid fears of prolonged international instability.

This is likely to further raise Bangladesh's electricity generation costs, as imported coal fuels most large plants and expensive furnace oil continues to play a major role during peak demand.

But analysts argue that Bangladesh's

own power sector inefficiencies are magnifying the impact of every external shock. The country currently maintains far more generation capacity than required. Its reserve margin reached 61.3 percent in FY2024-25, meaning a large portion of installed power plants remains underutilised while still receiving contractual capacity payments.

These payments continue regardless of electricity generated.

According to the IEEFA analysis, private oil-fired plants received average capacity payments of around Tk 9.5 per kilowatt-hour (kWh), while private coal-fired plants received around Tk 5.9 per kWh, significantly inflating average generation costs.

This overcapacity has contributed to a sharp rise in generation costs.

Bangladesh's average grid-based electricity generation cost has climbed from Tk 6.61 per unit in FY2020-21 to Tk 12.1 in FY2024-25.

"Renewable energy contributes only 2.3 percent of Bangladesh's total power generation, far below the global average of 33.8 percent, leaving the country heavily exposed to imported fuel volatility," reads the IEEFA report.

The report recommended rapidly scaling up solar generation, reducing dependence on costly oil-fired plants and expanding regional hydropower imports to lower LNG demand.

It also urges policymakers to rationalise future power expansion plans and reduce reserve margins to contain subsidy costs.

Shaheerul Alam, IEEFA's lead energy analyst for South Asia who conducted the study, noted that Bangladesh is under pressure from international lenders to reduce subsidy burdens under ongoing reform commitments.

"A prolonged spike in fuel import costs could complicate those efforts and force difficult policy decisions, including fresh tariff adjustments," he told this newspaper.

Measles deaths more than reported

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collect data from civil surgeon's office and medical college hospital but they do not send the data to the headquarters.

The civil surgeon's office sends data to the headquarters, he told The Daily Star yesterday. "But our data is accurate."

Contacted, Mymensingh Civil Surgeon Faisal Ahmed asked this correspondent to contact with a staffer of his office as he could not recall the number immediately.

The staffer said they have collected the total number of suspected deaths at MMCH and found 12 of them were from Mymensingh district.

Both said they send the data to the DGHS headquarters every day.

On the other hand, central data show 11 suspected and five confirmed deaths in Barishal division, whereas divisional

data indicate 22 suspected deaths and three confirmed deaths since March.

This means at least 34 more suspected measles deaths – 25 in Mymensingh and nine in Barishal – are yet to be added to the official tally.

Of the suspected measles deaths in Barishal, 14 occurred at Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in Barishal, six in Bhola and two in Jhalakathi. Three confirmed deaths were recorded in Barguna.

Of the deaths, eight, including three confirmed deaths, were recorded in March, 14 in April and three in May, Abdullah Al Mamun, an official of the divisional health office, told our Barishal correspondent.

Contacted, DGHS Barishal Director Lokman Hakim said they collected the data from the civil surgeon's office and medical college hospitals and compiled

it.

"There might be a communication gap resulting in the number mismatch – we will look into the matter," Abu Ahammad Al Mamun, DGHS's director for management information system (MIS) that compiles and publishes the data, told The Daily Star last night.

The data from civil surgeons' offices across the country is collected and then compiled.

Mamun said that they have no intention to suppress death figures.

The Integrated Control Cell of DGHS has been publishing measles data, including suspected cases and deaths, confirmed cases and deaths, division-wise suspected cases and deaths, and confirmed cases and deaths on a daily basis on its website.

[Our correspondents in Barishal and Mymensingh contributed to the report]

Mamata to challenge poll results in SC

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not step down under any circumstances and was prepared to face dismissal if required.

She said even the imposition of President's Rule would not deter her, framing her stance as a form of political protest intended to leave a lasting institutional record.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP defeated TMC, which has ruled West Bengal since 2011, securing 206 of 294 seats. The TMC tally fell to 80 from 215, with Mamata herself losing her seat.

Under the constitution, the state's governor can seek Mamata's resignation or wait for her term to expire, after which newly elected lawmakers will be sworn in, and the process of forming a new government will begin.

Mamata's term is set to end on Thursday.

The BJP-led government will be sworn in on Saturday (May 9) in the presence of Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP West Bengal President Samik Bhattacharya said yesterday.

Mamata's challenge to the outcome is rooted in allegations of widespread irregularities. According to her, nearly 100 assembly seats witnessed what she described as systematic manipulation, leading to the defeat of her party's candidates. A key element of her argument centres on technical anomalies during counting.

She cited reports from party agents present at counting centres, alleging Electronic Voting Machines retained unusually high battery levels – around 90 to 92 percent by the end of counting. She suggested such figures are inconsistent with normal operations, raising questions about potential tampering of the machines.

While these claims remain contentious and subject to verification, they form a central pillar of the legal case her party intends to present before the apex court.

Meanwhile, the political atmosphere in the state has remained tense since the results were announced on Monday, with sporadic violence reported across several districts. At least four deaths

have been confirmed so far.

In Kolkata, tensions flared in the New Market area during victory processions, with reports of damage to local establishments. Elsewhere, districts such as South 24 Parganas, Nadia, Murshidabad, Howrah, and parts of North 24 Parganas, including Barasat, witnessed clashes between rival groups.

In several instances, party offices were targeted, and residential properties were reportedly damaged.

BJP state leader Samik told AFP two of the party's workers were killed after the results were announced, insisting the party is "for peace".

The TMC, in a social media statement, reported the killing of two party workers. "Our party offices were attacked in several areas of the state," TMC spokesperson Narendranath Chakraborty told AFP.

A senior police officer, who was not authorised to speak to reporters, confirmed four deaths in clashes and said one officer had been shot in the leg.

DCs told to recover nearly 10,000 guns

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committees were formed to review whether those licences had been issued on political consideration or outside policy guidelines.

"Based on the committee's assessment, firearms under licences that appear to have been issued in violation of policy or on political consideration will be excluded from return, while the rest will be returned."

About the cases filed after August 5, 2024, he said district wise lists have been sought.

"We are reviewing all the cases to see how many have been filed in each district," Salahuddin said, adding that the numbers may be lower in peripheral districts but higher in metropolitan areas.

"Thousands have been accused in these cases. Steps have been taken to complete the investigations quickly so that the real offenders are identified."

Responding to a query, he said the government has formed a committee to review the post-August 5 murder cases in which journalists have been named as accused.

On law and order, the minister said the government's "zero tolerance" policy against drugs, extortion, and online gambling remains in place.

Asked whether "push ins" along the border could increase following political developments in India and recent rhetoric referring to Muslims as Bangladesh infiltrators, he said he did not see any such possibility after the BJP's victory in West Bengal.

"We have instructed the BGB to stay alert along borders. Although we do not see such a possibility, we have taken precautions in advance so that we can address the situation if it arises."

Meanwhile, during the four-day conference – the first under the BNP government – top policymakers instructed DCs to maintain professionalism, honesty, dedication, and sincerity in performing their official duties.

IGRD Minister Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir and Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman, among others, also praised the DCs' professionalism and leadership in skillfully conducting the

13th National Parliamentary Election on February 12.

Speaking to this correspondent, a DC from Mymensingh Division said being praised for election duties was very rewarding.

The conference featured discussions on more than 500 proposals, including both written and verbal ones.

DCs requested the government to bring the Land Office and the Registry Office under the same ministry. Currently, the Land Office is under the land ministry, while the Registry Office falls under the law ministry.

A DC from Dhaka Division told The Daily Star that if both offices operated under the land ministry, land-related

corruption would drop by more than half.

Meanwhile, ministers and secretaries from various ministries sought the DCs' cooperation in expediting land acquisition issues for development projects.

To prevent corruption and mismanagement in the process, DCs suggested introducing an online system for land-related compensation payments.

Policymakers emphasised the importance of coordination among the district administration, district judge courts, and the police department to maintain law and order at the local level.

DCs also urged the government to take special measures to reduce digital device addiction among children and teenagers, while the government highlighted the importance of increasing the number of playgrounds, libraries, and cultural events to tackle both drug and device addiction.

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Power tariff hike looms

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distribution utilities, seeking electricity price increases of between 17 and 21 percent.

The regulator yesterday announced two separate public hearings on bulk and retail electricity prices on May 20 and May 21, respectively, at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh Auditorium in Dhaka.

BERC has asked those interested in participating to register by May 17.

The move comes as the power sector is battling mounting financial pressure from capacity payments for underutilised plants, higher import costs of primary fuels, and inefficiencies in the gas transmission and distribution system.

The proposed tariff adjustments aim to narrow the widening gap between electricity generation costs and existing consumer-end tariffs, which have increasingly been distorted by rising input costs and subsidy dependence, according to power sector insiders.

The technical committee will scrutinise all cost components and determine whether the proposed adjustments are justified, said BERC Chairman Jalal Ahmed.

According to the PDB proposal, the wholesale electricity prices may rise by Tk 1.2 to Tk 1.5 per kilowatt-hour (kWh), while retail tariffs would increase proportionately.

Currently, PDB sells electricity at Tk 7.04 per kWh at the wholesale level, while the average retail tariff stands at Tk 8.95 per kWh.

Distribution utilities have proposed similar proportional increases, Jalal said. "I have not seen the retail-level proposals in detail. But I have reviewed the main PDB proposal. It includes a ratio-based adjustment between

wholesale and retail tariffs. It appears that the distributors have proposed similar structures," he said.

If approved, this would mark the first major electricity tariff revision under the current government.

Retail tariffs could rise at varying rates depending on consumption levels, with higher consumption brackets likely to face steeper increases, said energy sector officials.

Transmission companies have also proposed raising wheeling charges, potentially adding another layer of cost escalation.

The move marks a significant policy reversal.

Following the ouster of the Awami League government, both the interim administration and the current elected government had pledged not to raise electricity prices, instead promising to cut unnecessary and excessive costs in the sector.

In January this year, a national committee, formed by the interim government to review unsolicited power contracts signed during the Awami League regime, found that inflated capacity charges had been costing Bangladesh up to \$1.5 billion annually.

The committee warned that unless contracts involving at least 41 power plants are renegotiated, the country could face about \$7.2 billion in excess payments over the remaining lifespan of the deals.

Following the findings, the government initiated efforts to renegotiate several power purchase agreements.

On February 26, Minister for Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources Iqbal Hassan Mahmood Tuku also announced that electricity prices would not be increased for at least two years, with

Additionally, DCs were instructed to conduct regular mobile courts to prevent syndicates and hoarding of essential goods during peak seasons. In turn, the DCs suggested building the necessary storage facilities to preserve locally produced goods.

Policymakers also instructed DCs to re-verify the list of beneficiaries to ensure transparency in social safety net programmes.

Following discussions on preventing workplace sexual harassment, the government said work is underway to place a draft of a strict law in this regard before the Cabinet soon.

Regarding healthcare, DCs urged the government to fill vacant doctor positions in district and upazila health centres and ensure the regular attendance of existing medical staffers.

Speaking at the Annual Gathering 2026 of the Bangladesh Administrative Service Association at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Agargaon yesterday, Prime Minister Tarique Rahman urged the DCs to make the administration more people-oriented, reports UNB.

The event was held marking the conclusion of the four-day DC conference.

"The administration must be made people-oriented, and much of that depends on your role," Tarique said.

"Our government wants an administration where ordinary people receive services at government offices with respect, quickly, transparently and without harassment. It is you who must ensure this."

He also called upon deputy commissioners and divisional commissioners to work impartially and without fear for the welfare of the country and its people.

The PM described public trust as the state's greatest asset, saying it grows gradually through transparency and accountability in government and administration.

"I strongly believe you will remain careful about this. We must remember that the administration is not just a tool for enforcing the law; rather, it is a means of serving the people."

efforts instead focused on reducing generation costs and system losses.

However, officials say the Middle East war that began on February 28 has since disrupted fuel supply chains and sharply increased the import costs of LNG, coal, and furnace oil – all key inputs for electricity generation.

PDB Chairman Rezaul Karim told The Daily Star that tariff adjustment alone cannot address the overall deficit in the sector.

"We are working on several measures simultaneously. Some are already being implemented, while others are in the pipeline."

At the same time, groundwork is being done on multiple fronts to reduce costs, including reviewing power purchase agreements and improving efficiency.

"These are running in parallel," he said.

MShamsul Alam, energy adviser to the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB), sharply criticised the proposed tariff hike, saying the government continues to protect inefficiencies and unjustified expenditures instead of addressing structural weaknesses.

"We have been saying for a long time, both before and after the fall of the previous government, that this sector has witnessed extensive plundering through inflated costs and excessive profits."

Calling the public hearing process ineffective, he said CAB would boycott the upcoming hearings.

"There is no possibility of our participation," he said, adding that the BERC simply raises prices based on the costs placed before it.

It does not independently examine whether those costs are justified, he added.