Russia decries 'false' info as second plague case reported

AFP, *Moscow*

Russia yesterday warned against "false" information as reports emerged of a second suspected case of plague in Siberia, with Washington and Brussels calling for transparency and neighbouring Mongolia tightening health surveillance.

Russian news outlet People of Baikal reported last Friday that a 28-year-old woman employed at a plague research institute in Siberia's Irkutsk region had died of the disease, possibly after contracting it from a broken test tube.

International concern has meanwhile grown over the death and suspicions that a second employee at the institute fell ill.

Russian authorities have played down the reports, determining the woman died of pneumonia and insisting there was no risk of an outbreak.

Asked about reports of a second case, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that "the vast majority of what the media is reporting regarding this situation is false information".





Indian police detain lawmaker Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and opposition leader Rahul Gandhi during a protest in New Delhi yesterday. Several lawmakers, including Rahul and Priyanka, were detained for the third time in two days yesterday as they staged an unannounced protest demanding the election chief's resignation over a controversial revision of voter lists that excluded 130 million citizens. PHOTO: REUTERS

Trivedi meets Modi, 'talks about Tarique's possible visit'

STAR REPORT

Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Dinesh Trivedi met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Tuesday, the high commission confirmed yesterday.

Diplomatic sources said that alongside various issues concerning relations between the two neighbouring countries, Modi and Trivedi discussed Dhaka's current position on Prime Minister Tarique Rahman's possible visit to India.

However, there has been no official statement regarding this visit from the Indian High Commission in Bangladesh, Ministry of External Affairs, or the Office of India's Prime Minister.

On Monday, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Humaiun Kobir said the visit of Tarique Rahman would take place at a conducive time.

Besides, Trivedi sat with Indian Chief of Army Staff General Dhiraj Seth in New Delhi. The interaction focused on issues of Bangladesh-India bilateral cooperation and measures to strengthen defence ties, according to the Indian Army.

Chemistry Nobel awarded for solving 'life's asymmetry'

Japanese, French scientists receive award

REUTERS, *Stockholm*

Scientists Henri Kagan and Kenso Soai won the 2026 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for solving a long-standing riddle of asymmetric "mirror image" molecules, a discovery hugely important for pharmaceutical manufacturing, the award-giving body said yesterday.

Soai, 76, is Japanese, and Kagan, 95, is French, and their work built on a discovery by the 19th-century French chemist Louis Pasteur.

"This is the most exciting day in my life; I am very glad to share this prize with Professor Henri Kagan," Soai said, speaking by phone to the Nobel Prize press conference, adding he had been out shopping when receiving the news.

The Nobel committee was still trying to contact Kagan, the third-oldest person to be awarded a Nobel Prize, to inform him.

French President Emmanuel Macron congratulated the laureates on X, calling it an immense honour for the country. "A recognition suited to a lifetime of research," he said.

In fact, Kagan's work has long been seen as influential in the field, and the then-French research minister complained to the Nobel Foundation in 2001 when Kagan was left out that year. The prize instead went to two American and one Japanese scientists for work in the same field.



Henri Kagan



Kenso Soai

The chemistry Nobel, always the third prize to be awarded during Nobel week, followed those for medicine and physics announced on Monday and Tuesday.

Many of the molecules essential to life exist in two forms that are mirror images of each other, like left and right hands. Yet living organisms almost exclusively use only one version, a phenomenon known as "homochirality" – from the Greek word for hand – that has puzzled chemists for more than a century.

This year's prize was awarded for discoveries that showed how chemical reactions can be driven to favour a single molecular mirror image, work that has been key for chemists who design reactions for the manufacture of pharmaceuticals.

"The left-handed version of the drug can have one effect, and the right-handed version can have another effect, and then we need methods for selectively preparing them," Peter Somfai, a member of the Nobel Committee for Chemistry, said.

Biman places order for 10 Airbus planes

FROM PAGE 1

'HARD DECISION'

Biman Managing Director and CEO Kaizer Sohel Ahmed said,"This decision was not made lightly. It followed a rigorous evaluation of our fleet, our network and our financial strategy, under the guidance of our board and with independent expert advice.

"It is an investment in efficiency. It is an investment in sustainability, and it is an investment in the future of our national carrier."

Rumee said Biman was investing in engineering and maintenance capabilities and expanding training for pilots, cabin crew and ground staff.

"Our contract with Airbus extends their specific commitments to support all these goals," he said.

Acknowledging that aircraft purchases alone would not transform the airline, he said, "We are not just acquiring advanced hardware. We are preparing our human capital to operate it safely and efficiently well before the ordered aircraft start arriving."

Westermeier said Airbus's involvement would extend beyond deliveries to areas including air traffic management, flight-operation services, performance-based navigation and data integration.

Millat said the government was also seeking investors to set up a maintenance, repair and overhaul facility under a public-private partnership, as part of its ambition to make Bangladesh a regional aviation hub.

FINANCING

Rumee said the procurement programme was based on financial calculations. "Biman finances its growth as a self-sustaining and viable business enterprise," he said.

British High Commissioner Sarah Cooke said European export credit agencies, including those of the UK, France and Germany, had also backed the agreement.

She said up to £2 billion was available through UK Export Finance to support UK goods and services in Bangladesh, including in aviation. The £2 billion was not specified as financing for Biman's order.

BEYOND AIRCRAFT

EU Ambassador Michael Miller told The Daily Star that the agreement could open new opportunities in Bangladesh-EU relations.

"This is much more than a purchasing decision. We see this as a strategic step to integrate more with the European Union," he said.

Asked about a potential free trade agreement (FTA), he stressed that the FTA and the Airbus purchase were separate processes but confirmed that exploratory talks were under way.

"We are looking for those exploratory talks to be successful in as short a time as possible," he said.

"The message from us is that we are ready to go as fast and as far as your administration will take us on the FTA."

Speaking separately to The Daily Star, French Ambassador Jean-Marc Séré-Charlet called the Airbus purchase a business-to-business transaction based on Biman's requirements.

He said European companies also needed a level playing field in Bangladesh, and 61 areas for improvement, including non-tariff barriers, had been identified for discussion with the commerce ministry.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Humaiun Kobir, however, said Bangladesh made commercial decisions according to its own needs rather than to favour any partner.

Cancer queues long, families stretched

FROM PAGE 1

Five-year prevalence, the number of people living with a diagnosis, grew to 3,58,818 from 3,46,373, though Johirul says it is often said that Bangladesh has between 1 million and 1.5 million cancer patients.

The age-standardised incidence rate, which adjusts for differences in population age structure so that rates can be compared across populations and over time, reached 117.5 per 1 lakh people in 2024, up from 105.6 in 2022, a rise of about 11 percent. Among South Asian countries, only Sri Lanka's is higher.

"These are certainly alarming figures," Johirul says.

COST OF DIAGNOSIS

For Sabuj, a mason from Karimganj in Kishoreganj, life was modest but stable until about 10 months ago, when his voice suddenly changed. Treatment in Kishoreganj did not help, and as he worsened, he went to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital. Tests there pointed to cancer, and doctors sent him to Ahsania Mission Cancer and General Hospital in Dhaka's Uttara, where he was diagnosed with tracheal cancer.

Two rounds of chemotherapy there cost more than Tk 1 lakh. Back home, three more rounds at a private hospital cost another Tk 36,000. As the bills mounted, the family sought an appointment at NICRH. He was lucky that the wait for a spot in the queue was only three months.

By mid-September, Sabuj had received 15 of 35 planned radiotherapy sessions and three of seven rounds of chemotherapy. The radiotherapy course has cost the family Tk 37,000, and a surgery after the first round of chemotherapy cost him more than Tk 60,000. They now rent a house in Mirpur-14 for Tk 7,000 a month and travel to the hospital five days a week.

They are paying for it with Tk 5 lakh they got after selling their homestead, their only land. "I don't know where we will live going home," Nurunnahar says.

Nur Ahmed's story follows a similar arc. The 60-year-old from Patuakhali Sadar earned Tk 12,000 a month as a cook at a local madrasa and had long suffered from pain in bones. Treatment at public and private hospitals in Patuakhali and Barishal failed, and he spent as much as Tk 4 lakh, selling off a piece of land. About four months ago, doctors at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in Dhaka found cancer that had spread to at least four parts of his body.

The family had no money and went home. The madrasa gave them Tk 25,000, which brought them to NICRH, where Nur waited for a test, accompanied by his wife, Rahela Begum.

Then there is Tanisha, aged one and a half. She walks and talks like any child her age, though a closer look shows that one eye is slightly abnormal. About four months ago, doctors at Lions Hospital in Dhaka removed her left eye, replacing it with a prosthetic, after detecting cancer.

Her path there was circuitous. Doctors at an eye camp near the family's home in Kishoreganj Sadar referred her to Lions Hospital, which in turn referred her to NICRH. She received chemotherapy there, but doctors later advised surgery at the National Institute of Ophthalmology and Hospital in Dhaka, having found no cancer in the eye at that point.

The institute declined to operate because of other health problems, including fever and coughing. Several months passed. When the family returned to Lions Hospital, cancer was detected again, and the eye was removed. "The delay in the operation might have caused the harm," says her aunt, Sharmin Akhter.

Tanisha has had 23 sessions of radiotherapy and three cycles of chemotherapy, with six more cycles to come. Her father, Golap Mia, was paralysed from the waist down by a stroke around four years ago and cannot move without assistance. The family spent Tk 5 lakh on his treatment and has already spent at least Tk 3 lakh on Tanisha's.

SHORTAGE OF FACILITIES, DOCTORS

Behind these stories lies a shortage of capacity. Citing the WHO, cancer specialists say a country needs at least one radiotherapy machine per 1 million people, which would require Bangladesh to have at least 170. It has 30, public and private combined.

As per recent NICRH document, public hospitals under health ministry had 23 radiotherapy machines or arrangements for setting up machines, but only seven are functional. Of the seven, four are in Dhaka and one each in Chattogram, Sylhet and Rajshahi.

Besides, there are one radiotherapy machine each in Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka and Institute of Nuclear Medical Physics in Savar.

On the other hand, among 21 functional radiotherapy machines under private management, 14 are in Dhaka and the others are in Chattogram, Sylhet, Bogura, and Sirajganj.

The shortage of trained staff is stark too. The International Atomic Energy Agency recommends one radiation oncologist for every 250 to 350 cancer patients, implying a need for 700 to 800 in Bangladesh against roughly 260 today. The WHO recommends five technologists per 1,000 patients; the country has around 200 against a need of about 1,000. Medical physicists and oncology nurses are also in short supply.

The result is a vast backlog. NICRH receives up to 100 new patients seeking radiotherapy a day, while as many as 8,000 are already waiting, some for as long as a year.

"The reality is that even by 2028, we will not be able to provide radiotherapy to all patients who need it," Prof Mostafa Aziz Sumon, director of NICRH, told The Daily Star.

The hospital runs two radiotherapy machines from 8:00 am to midnight, treating around 250 patients a day. But a course of treatment takes about six weeks, so the machines are tied up for long stretches. At that pace, he says, clearing the backlog would take a "very long time".

And the queue keeps growing, as new patients arrive from across the country every day. "As a result, patients' conditions deteriorate further while they wait for treatment," he says.

Each 4-week delay in radical head-and-neck radiotherapy was associated with nine percent higher mortality hazard, according to research.

Health Minister Sardar Md Sakhawat Husain yesterday at a press briefing said that the government plans to install 17 new radiotherapy machines at public hospitals by June next year.

Six of them, all linear accelerators, will go to hospitals in Dhaka and the rest to hospitals outside the capital.

"The number of cancer patients is rising sharply, so we have taken steps to ease people's suffering," the minister said.

Four of the 17 machines will be installed at NICRH. The hospital has seven bunker facilities, of which two hold working machines. A third machine is being procured and installed.

WORLD 2026 SIGHT DAY

ARISTOPHARMA LTD.

HOW WELL DO YOUR EYES SEE?

DISTANCE VISION TEST

Cut and tape this chart to a wall at eye-level in a well-lit hallway or room and step exactly 10 feet back. Read the lines below with both eyes open, then cover your left eye, read the lines below, then switch to your right eye. If you're unable to read the 20/20 line clearly from 10 feet away, please consult an eye specialist.



NEAR VISION TEST

Hold this chart exactly 14 inches away from your face in a well-lit room. Read the lines below with both eyes open, then cover your left eye, read the lines below, then switch to your right eye.

This chart is only for an eye test, if you can read this easily

then your eyes are fine. But if you have difficulty reading this

paragraph till the last few lines, no need to worry as you may need to

visit an eye specialist and get diagnosed today.

Disclaimer: This test is for general awareness only and is not a substitute for an eye examination. If you have difficulty reading the chart or concerns about your vision, please consult an eye specialist.