Ebola Resurfaces

What is the issue?

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- Ebola crisis in 2014 had a severe effect on multiple African governments.
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- The disease has returned in parts of “Democratic Republic of Congo” (DRC) with new outbreaks getting reported recently.
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How is the current outbreak playing out in Congo?

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- Recently, just days after World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that the Ebola crisis had ended in DRC, newer incidences were reported again.
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- The current outbreak in Northern Province of Kivu appears to be unrelated to the previous occurrence about 2,500 km away at Equateur Province.
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- While Ebola is a constant threat in DRC, the detection of incidences is said to be an indicator of a properly functional health surveillance system.
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- Importantly, the response of the DRC government to the current episode was praised as prompt and skilful (having learnt from previous events).
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- On its part, the WHO too released $1 million from its Contingency Fund for Emergencies immediately after the outbreak was reported.
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- Its multidisciplinary team began an active search for cases and people who had come in contact with those who were infected.
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- Then, treatment facilities and mobile laboratories were set up and the community educated on safe practices.
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How is the current episode in contrast with the 2014 one?

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- In 2014, Ebola had struck three West African countries namely – “Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone” and caused high mortality.
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- At that time, local and international health initiatives to counter the outbreak were slow and resultantly the disease spread widely.
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- Notably, in contrast to the current WHO response, its “Emergency Committee” convened in 2014 only after some 1,000 people had died.
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- Further, the current episode has not been declared as a ‘Public Health Emergency of International Concern’, by the WHO.
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- This is mainly because, the swift response by the DRC government, WHO team and other partners is felt to have averted any major risk.
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At what stage is the vaccine development at?

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- “VSV-EBOV” vaccine, which was developed recently by Canadian researchers, is now under testing, and holds considerable promise to curtail Ebola.
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- Notably, pending comprehensive trial results, the vaccine has already been approved for compassionate use in case of emergencies.
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- Currently, the first batch of more than 4,000 doses of vaccine was recently dispatched to DRC through a WHO monitored project chain.
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- Health workers and vulnerable populations are being selectively administered the vaccine to curtail the spread of the disease.
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Source: The Hindu

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